FORMER CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS AND THEIR PERCEIVED STRESS RELATED TO THE WORK ENVIRONMENT WHILE EMPLOYED IN A GEORGIA PRISON FACILITY FOR MALE INMATES: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

MAYA ROOKARD McPHERSON

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DEDICATION

A special feeling of gratitude to my loving husband, Nashon I. McPherson whose words of encouragement and push for tenacity ring in my ears daily. My beautiful daughter Margo, while she's still young, has no idea how her presence has ignited me to be better, stronger, and faster. To my parents, Kenneth and Lou Jessie Rookard, for raising me with grit and the determination to stop a train, if needed.

Last, I dedicate this dissertation, and give special thanks to Dr. Karen Rowland, my dissertation committee chair. Dr. Rowland believed in me when I was on the brink of not believing in myself, and for that, I am grateful.
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ABSTRACT

MAYA ROOKARD McPHERSON
FORMER CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS AND THEIR PERCEIVED STRESS RELATED TO THE WORK ENVIRONMENT WHILE EMPLOYED IN A GEORGIA PRISON FACILITY FOR MALE INMATES: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY
Under the direction of Karen D. Rowland, Ph.D.

The researcher’s dissertation explored the lived experiences and perceived stress of former correctional officers who have worked with male inmates to identify their perceived work-related stress. The dissertation also explored the impact stress had on the correctional officers’ job performance and post-corrections adaptation. While some existing literature focuses on the psychiatrist’s, prisoner, and case manager’s perspectives, research invested in the perspective of the correctional officers within the correctional environment pales in comparison. Bureau of Justice Statistics, statisticians Kaeble and Cowhig (2016) noted that data was gathered based on persons supervised by U.S. adult correctional systems at year-end 2016, including persons supervised in the community on probation or parole and those incarcerated in state or federal prison or local jail. According to the data collected (2016) an estimated 6,613,500 persons were supervised by U.S. adult correctional systems. There are approximately 53,064 incarcerated men and women within the state of Georgia (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2018). According to the sentencing project, the state of Georgia is currently No 1. in the nation for the number of persons under supervision, whether that is in prison, jail, parole, or probation This study will investigate the lived experiences of former correctional officers’ perceptions of work related stress and how this stress may have impacted them in their post- employment. Optimistically, the results of this phenomenological study will
add to current research on work environment stress, with a special focus within correctional settings and from the perspective of those who maintain balance, safety, and order within a prison fence.

**KEYWORDS:** Inmates, correctional officers, work environment stress
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Correctional officers work within a highly stressful and potentially dangerous environment, (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017), and, as a result, face numerous challenges—both personally and professionally (Brower, 2013; Denhof, Spinaris, & Morton, 2014). Corrections is a unique part of the criminal justice system tasked with continual management of an “unwilling and potentially violent population” (Armstrong & Griffin, 2004, p. 577). Such an unpredictable and often hazardous work environment has resulted in the profession ranking among the highest of all professions in non-fatal job-related injuries and illnesses, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) (2017).

Introduction of the Problem

Confrontations with inmates and exposure to contagious diseases are the leading causes of injuries and illnesses for correctional officers (BLS, 2017), although these do not cover the full scope of job-related hazards (Griffin, Hogan, Lambert, Tucker-Gail, & Baker, 2010). In addition to potentially violent inmates, correctional officers also manage those with gang involvement, mental illness, suicide risk, substance abuse, and trauma victimization (Brower, 2013). Correctional officers usually work a minimum of 8 hours per day, 5 days per week, on rotating shifts. Because jail and prison security must be provided around the clock, officers work all hours of the day and night, weekends, and holidays. Some correctional facilities have longer shifts and require officers to work overtime (Misis, Kim, Cheeseman, Hogan & Lambert, 2013). Working as a correctional officer may involve exposure to adverse and stressful situations (Brower, 2013). In their
employment, correctional officers often deal with a range of potentially stressful experiences including being victims of (or observing) verbal and physical abuse, witnessing graphic and distressing events and functioning (often as first responders) to difficult and potentially dangerous incidents (Spinaris, Denhof, & Kellaway, 2012).

According to the Bureau of Labor and Statistics occupational data handbook, correctional officers, also called guards, in accordance with established regulations and procedures guard prisoners, conducts headcounts, monitor conduct, and maintain records and whereabouts, including during lock down, meals, hygiene, recreation time, and spiritual activities. Administrative investigations, disciplinary processes, and scrutiny from the public and media take a toll on morale among correctional officers (Brower, 2013). Correctional officers also juggle shift work with mandatory overtime, staffing shortages, and high rates of peer absenteeism (Gilmartin, 2002; Trounson, Pfeiffer, & Critchley, 2016; Violanti, Burchfiel, Hartley, Mnatsakanova, Fekedulegn, & Andrew, 2009). The stress associated with the job results in higher than average turnover rates in comparison to other government agency jobs (BLS, 2017; Bonham & Crews, 2007). As a result, despite slower than average job growth projections, many departments are finding it difficult to maintain stable staffing levels (BLS, 2017; Bonham & Crews, 2007).

Stress has significantly negative impacts on the mental and physical health of correctional officers (Anderson, Litzenberger, & Plecas, 2002; Arial, Gonik, Wild & Danuser, 2010; Brower, 2013; Denhof et al., 2014; Spinaris, Denhof & Kellaway, 2012; Violanti et al., 2009). Correctional officers have higher rates of heart disease (Brower, 2013), hypertension (Dowden & Tellier, 2004), and obesity than the general population (Violanti et al., 2009). The impact on overall health is significant; by age 59 the lifespan
of a correctional officer is 16 years lower than the national average of their working peers (Brower, 2013; Cheek, 1983. Correctional officers are reported to have rates of “mental disorders, depressive symptoms, anxiety, stress, and job dissatisfaction” (Tiesman, Hendricks, Bell & Amandus, 2010, p.941) higher than any other occupation, with reported depression rates between 24 to 33% (Denhof & Spinaris, 2013). Also, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms have been found in 27 to 35% of correctional officers (Brower, 2013; Denhof & Spinaris, 2013; Spinaris et al., 2012). These findings highlight the need for effective intervention, as the combination of depression and PTSD symptoms is correlated with an increased risk for suicide (Denhof, Spinaris & Morton, 2014). Tiesman and her associates’ (2010) study of incarceration rehabilitation revealed correctional officers are four times more likely to die by their own hands than by a felonious act (Tiesman et al., 2010). Due to the unique hazards of corrections, the suicide rate among correctional officers is 39% higher than others in the same age group and twice that of police officers (New Jersey Police Suicide Task Force, 2009; Stack & Tsoudis, 1997). The toll on those who take the oath to “serve and protect” is substantial.

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, more than 4.6 million adults nationally were under community supervision at the end of 2015 (Kaeble & Bonczar, 2016). Public platforms like The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) and Prison Policy Initiatives (PPI), both national platforms for community awareness and research, are dedicated to understanding the offender populations, their criminality, success rate of supervision, and the potential to recidivate. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the Georgia Department of Corrections (2018) housed 36,876 inmates with 20,000 new
offenders entering into the prison system or needing a level of community supervision annually. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the Georgia Department of Corrections (2019), the state of Georgia employs 13,000 corrections staff, including correctional officers, to help ensure the safety and best outcomes of the inmates and the surrounding communities.

Nationally, the need for correctional space has increased by 5% annually since 2011, requiring an increase in the number of personnel hired (Suliman & Einat, 2018). Georgia alone graduated approximately 1900 correctional officers in 2018, in keeping with the Georgia Peace Officers Standard of Training initiative which requires all correctional officers to participate in 240 mandatory hours of training over 5 weeks. Georgia’s Uniform Crime Reporting Program (UCR), compiles data on the successful or unsuccessful reentry and recidivism of inmates. This data is used to identify or change the security level of a facility, identify staffing needs, and stratify inmate intakes (Georgia Department of Corrections, 2016). In 2016, the UCR reported 38,893 violent crimes took place within the state of Georgia, thus estimating 377 crimes took place per 100,000 people (Georgia Department of Corrections, 2016). According to the Congressional Research Service Report (CRS), while the number of people incarcerated in the United States grew steadily for 30 years, the number of those incarcerated has been slowly decreasing since 2008. The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) reports that since 1990 an average of 590, 400 inmates have been released annually from state and federal prisons. Nearly all prisoners will return to their communities at some point (CRS, 2015). In 2017, the Georgia Department of Corrections compared data on the retirement eligibility of their employees, the report suggested employees who retire from state
correctional services within the state of Georgia have decreased from 57% to 46% over the last six years. In 2016, slightly less than 6 out of every 20 correctional officers resigned from duty with less than 3 years of service (2016).

Exit interview data indicated work-related stress was the leading cause for resignation among correctional officers (Suliman & Einat, 2018). The Georgia Department of Corrections (GDOC) is made up of 33 state prison sites. Each site can accommodate 700-2300 offenders (GDOC, 2016). According to the department of corrections, “state prisons house violent, repeat, or nonviolent offenders who have exhausted all other forms of punishment” (GDOC, 2016, p.2). The state identifies the needs of the offender and assigns them to a prison site. Convicted inmates are then assigned to a security level by the classification committee designees, at the facility assigned. Each site is classified as medium security, minimum security, special movement, or close security (Georgia Department of Corrections, 2016).

Harding (2018) described the state's definition of each level of security. A close security prison accommodates inmates who “pose a possible escape risk, may have assaultive histories, and may have detainers for other serious crimes on file” (p.42). These offenders never leave the prison and require supervision at all times by a correctional officer. There are currently seven close security prisons within the state of Georgia housing approximately 10,000 inmates (GDOC, 2016). Medium security prisons make up the largest number of prison sites within the state of Georgia (Suliman & Einat, 2018). Inmates housed in medium security sites are identified as having no major adjustment problems and most may even work outside the prison fence but must be under constant supervision. Currently, there are fourteen medium security prison sites within
the state of Georgia, housing approximately 21,000 inmates. Minimum security prisons accommodate inmates who have been identified as “a minimal risk of escape and have been judged to be a minimal threat to the community based on the crime, time in prison, and overall adjustment while incarcerated” (Harding, 2018, p.23).

Although research is limited on staffing, the 2007 annual corrections report under the direction of Commissioner James E. Donald reports Georgia ranked fifth in the nation with the largest adult prison population. Nationally, 1 in 38 adults were under some level of correctional supervision, e.g., probation, transitional reentry, drug and rehabilitation programming (Schiraldi, 2018). The nation employs approximately 65,000 full-time prison corrections employees (Gifford, 2017). Wright & Gifford’s (2017) review of human resources and staffing data reflects of the 65,000 people employed, 20,877 are responsible for direct supervision and contact with inmates in a correctional officer capacity.

According to Georgia line of duty report data, 709 police officers were killed in the line of duty. Although their job duties are related to public protection and supporting the successful reentry of inmates, correctional officer deaths are not quantified like police officer deaths (Ferdik & Hills, 2018). In the state of Georgia, there were 3 correctional officer deaths in the line of duty (Brunetto, Teo, Farr-Wharton, Shacklock, & Shriberg, 2017). According to the Georgia Department of Corrections (2016; p 3-6), while police officer deaths and correctional officer deaths differ in comparison, retention of correctional officers continues to be a challenge, despite the state’s efforts to introduce competitive pay rates, extensive training and support, and promotion. Overall, about 15 out of 30 correctional officers resign within the first 12 months of being hired (2016).
According to the exit questionnaires taken in 2011 from correctional officers who resigned from a Virginia state prison, most correctional officers cited stress, low pay, and overall discomfort working with inmates as their reason(s) for resigning (Brunetto et al., 2017).

Feeley & Simon (1992) suggest corrections is not as effective as it should be. Inmate self-report and more objective measurements i.e. post incarceration adaptation data indicate correctional practices are somewhat dated. For certain crimes, such as murder or rape, some evidence suggests the institutionalizing methods of corrections, such as long-term isolation, can negatively affect inmates; in other words, non-methodological isolation makes the inmate more prone to violent behaviors and recidivism.

Because of the high-stress nature of their positions, correctional officers are prone to burnout and stress. This study examines the perceptions of former correctional officers regarding their perceived stress when working with male inmates. The research explored the perceptions of former correctional officers regarding their greatest source(s) of work-related stress. The research explored the lived experiences and perceived stress of former female and male correctional officers working with male inmates to identify their perceived stress and the impact that stress has had on their job performance and post retirement adaptation.

Background of the Study

When a person is presented with the term “corrections” or “prison,” the initial image that typically comes to mind is a man dressed in a black and white striped uniform glaring out from behind a set of iron bars. There are published research articles
concentrating on inmates; however, only a limited number of research articles have been written about correctional employees (Thurston-Snoha & Mora, 2011). The modest amount of prior research conducted with correctional officers has focused exclusively on the intense amount of job stress and burnout experienced by this population (e.g., Archambault & Archambault, 1982; Armstrong & Griffin, 2004; Carlson & Thomas, 2006; Hurst & Hurst, 1997; Thurston-Snoha & Mora, 2011; Triplett, Mullings, & Scarborough, 1996; Whitehead & Linquist, 1987). Three studies have examined the work-home conflicts with which correctional employees typically struggle. However, the sole focus of these articles was to determine the ways in which work-home conflicts affect the employees’ level of job stress, job satisfaction, and burnout (Lambert, Hogan, & Altheimer, 2010; Lambert, Hogan, Camp, & Ventura, 2006; Triplett, Mullings, & Scarborough, 1999).

Correctional officers’ stress originates from many sources, such as inmates, administration, organizational factors, media portrayal, and lack of community support (Worley, Worley, & Hsu, (2018); Tewksbury & Higgins, 2006; Morgan, Van Haveren, Pearson, 2002). According to Crawley (2004) and Worley et al. (2018), detachment and depersonalization occur from emotional dissonance, which is reflective of organizational objectivity (e.g., displayed emotions) versus the role conflict of real emotions internal to the individual, referred to as expressed and experienced emotions. The conflict occurs when correctional officers must act professionally and therefore must restrain their true feelings associated with aspects of the job. Emotional dissonance is the result of several competing sources (e.g., inmates, administration, organization, and outside sources) that create stress for the correctional officer (Worley et al., 2018).
Emotional dissonance creates stress for correctional officers because they must act objectively and professionally. They also must withhold feelings regarding inmates, administrators, and co-workers, and feelings about work-related issues such as violent, demanding, or manipulative inmates (Worley et al., 2018; Welch, 2001). Administrator-created policies that generate role ambiguity may unintentionally also generate stress (Worley et al., 2018; Black, 2001; Finn, 2000, Tracy, 2004). Furthermore, organization stressors, such as mandatory overtime, role-conflict, problems with co-workers, understaffing, shift work, and low pay contribute to the phenomenon (Worley et al., 2018; Anson, Carlson, & Thomas, 2003; Anson et al., 2003; Paoline, Lambert, & Hogan, 2006; Tewksbury & Higgins, 2006). A final source of stress branches from outside sources, such as stigma attached to the job title of correctional officer, the news media demonization of officers, and the Hollywood-driven misconceptions of correctional officers as incompetents, brutes, and oppressors (Worley et al., 2018; Richard, 2004). Emotional dissonance that leads to stress can create job burnout or lack of job satisfaction, which can further lead to serious health problems and high turnover (Worley et al., 2018; Auerbach, Quick, & Pegg, 2003; Garland, 2002; Lambert, 2006, 2004; Morgan et al., 2002). Additionally, the literature addresses how correctional administrations can assist officers in dealing with stress (Worley et al., 2018; Cornelius, 2001).

The former correctional employees may have partners and children who are affected by the intense level of stress associated with working in a correctional institution (Worley et al., 2018). The correctional employee population experiences unique challenges due to the dangerous nature of their occupation. These challenges can spill
over and negatively affect employees’ home lives and personal relationships. The purpose of this study is to determine the perceived work environment stress in former correctional employees towards male inmates while working in a Georgia prison facility.

Statement of the Problem

There are many reasons why the job of correctional officers in a prison setting can be stressful. Workload responsibilities, the danger of the job, interaction with inmates, the culture of prisons in terms of following rules and regulations, organizational factors that suppress officer autonomy and discretion, and the changing nature of the workplace with the influx of correctional officers into the field, can lead to a high rate of burnout. (Chessemman & Worley, 2006; Doran & Almost, 2010; Kanoff, 2009; Lovrich & Stohr, 1993). This study considered all of these factors in terms of their impact on worker stress and the high rate of correctional officer burnout (Delprino, 2002; Lariviere, 2001; Senter, 2006; Skvore, 2001).

While there are 31 state prisons within Georgia, only 3 are designated to the female population. The remaining 28 house only male prisoners (Georgia Prison Statistic, 2018). A large amount of the male prisoner population resides in medium and maximum level prisons for heinous crimes, escape history, or gang affiliation (Georgia Prison Statistics, 2017). With the need for continuous supervision, programs, and security in high-need prisons (i.e. medium and maximum level), correctional officers are relocated for coverage and pulled for extra duty to these locations (Georgia Prison Statistics, 2018).

This research is driven by the underrepresented review of the raw experiences of former correctional officers, specifically those who have worked with male inmates and may have coped with work-related stress officers normally experience and the often-
unnoticed, special stresses stemming from contact with that population (Cornelius, 2001). Noticeably, extensive research can be found on organization commitment among prison staff (Lambert, 2005), occupational stress and coping (Cornelius, 2001), and burnout among correctional officers (Schaufeli & Peeters 2000). While Lambert (2008) examined fluctuating temperatures and occupational stress, absent from the literature is Georgia-specific research on former correctional officers, the stress that occurred in working with male inmates, and the officers’ ability to adapt while being security-minded after retirement. There is also a lack of qualitative design emphasizing the perspective of previously employed correctional officers (a valuable perspective because they no longer fear reprimand or repercussion). Stakeholders affected by this problem include the current correctional officers, because stress may negatively affect the quality of the officers’ work, retention, personal life, and interpersonal communications.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of former correctional officers regarding their greatest source of work-related stress while “inside” the prison environment. In exploring the lived experience of former correctional officers, the researcher sought to better understand the occurrence of stress, triggers of stress, and officers’ adaptability when working with inmates. This study set out to understand any effects, either positive or negative, after retirement. This research study will explore the former correctional officers’ perceived experiences around stress and danger when working with inmates adding to what is already known about the topic, in the words of those who have personally experienced the phenomenon.
Participant Interview Questions

RQ1: What, if any, work-related stress did you encounter while working inside of the prison environment?

RQ2: While at work, following a stressful encounter with an inmate, how did you overcome the stress and return to same environment?

RQ3: After a stressful day of work inside of a prison, once at home, how did you cope?

RQ4: What was the main source of stress for you, while working in the prison?

RQ5: What stress support resources were made available to you by your employer, while employed in the prison?

RQ6: Being security focused, how did you adapt post-employment?

RQ7: What, if any, aspects of your former job as a correctional officer do you miss?

Significance of the Study

It is crucial to understand the stress correctional officer’s experience in work with male inmates that may lead to burnout, low morale, and a low quality of work life. Additionally, a study of this significance will demonstrate how correctional officers subjectively cope with work-related stress. This information will assist correctional administrations in understanding the origins of stress and help them change policies and create stress reduction techniques at the local level. The reduction of correctional officer stress may have benefits for officers, correctional administrators, and inmates, and may save money and/or improve the overall quality of life for correctional officers.
Those professionals with the task of habilitating/rehabilitating offenders and securing prisons or jails should have the peace of mind that their well-being is supported (Crawley, 2004). The study outcome may lead to an understanding of job burnout, high turnover, family problems, health concerns, and premature death resulting from stress.

Definition of Terms

The following are conceptual definitions relating to correctional officer stress. The sources for this section include the Merriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary (2010), peer-reviewed journal articles, and correctional texts.

Burnout. Burnout is the result of occupational stress for correctional officers (Morgan et al., 2002). Fatigue, frustration, depersonalization, reduced personal accomplishment, or apathy resulting from prolonged stress, overwork or intense activity may result (Garland, 2002; Griffin, et al., 2010; Merriam-Webster’s, 2010). People that work in direct services experience burnout through a process of depersonalization, reduced personal accomplishment, and emotional exhaustion (Morgan et al., 2002). According to Garland (2002), stress always precedes burnout when long and intense periods of stress occur and interfere with employee work requirements; low levels of job satisfaction from being under-challenged or overstressed are related to job burnout (Lambert, Hogan, & Barton, 2002). In the area of corrections, burnout is a real possibility and, “If left unaddressed, burnout can be harmful and costly to the employee, the clients, coworkers, the organization, and society” (Griffin et al., 2010, p. 239).
Correctional facility. “A prison, especially for long-term confinement or a building for the confinement of persons held while awaiting trial, persons sentenced after conviction; any place of confinement or involuntary restraint” (Merriam-Webster, 2010).

Correctional officer/Former correctional officer. A jail or prison custody officer who has previously worked in correctional settings and has now resigned or retired from their duty (Mays & Winfree, 2005).

Emotional dissonance. The role conflict between experience and expressed emotions internally confined to the individual that fail to mirror the true feelings of workers in direct care services or security (Abraham, 2000; Tewksbury & Higgins, 2006). According to Crawley (2004), detachment and depersonalization occur from emotional dissonance, which is reflective of organizational objectivity e.g., displayed emotions. These conflicts occur when correctional officers must act in a professional manner and, therefore, restrain their true feelings associated with aspects of the job.

Inmate. A person confined in a prison (Merriam-Webster, 2010).

Jail. “A correctional facility that is administered by a local law enforcement agency, such as a county sheriff’s office or local department of corrections. Jails house mainly adults, but under certain circumstances may confine juvenile offenders” (Cornelius, 2008).

Job stress. “An employee’s feelings of job-related hardness, tension, anxiety, frustration, worry, emotional exhaustion, and distress” (Hogan, Lambert, Jenkins, & Wambold, 2006, p.1). A person can feel that they are effective at their job but still experience job stress (Griffin et al., 2010).
Prison. A penitentiary or correctional facility for the confinement of convicted felons serving a sentence in excess of one year and operated by a governmental agency (Birzer & Roberson, 2004; Mays & Winfree, 2005).

Outside stress sources. “Any source outside the facility that creates stress for correctional officers such as the media or the public” (Griffin et al., 2010, p.5).

Stress. Several descriptions have been made of stress, such as the interaction between the environment and the individual, an environmental characteristic, a stimulus, an individual attribute, and a response (Dowden & Tellier, 2004). The term stress was further defined by Lambert (2004, p. 210) “in the correctional literature as an employee’s feelings of job-related hardness, tension, anxiety, frustration, worry, emotional exhaustion, and distress.” Furthermore, “the action on a body of any system of balanced force whereby strain or deformation results; a specific response by the body to a stimulus, as fear or pain, that disturbs or interferes with the normal physiological equilibrium of an organism” (Black, 2001, p.52) or “physical or psychological responses to a demand or threat” (Griffin & Bernard, 2003, p.12). Several consequences of stress to correctional personnel include health problems, social problems, and mental health problems (Wells, Colbert, & Slate, 2006). Inwald (1982) noted that a distinction must be made between debilitating, work-related stress and stress that is simply job dissatisfaction.

Delimitations

Delimitation are the limitations placed on the study by the researcher. Those delimitations are: 1) Use of former correctional officers (resigned or retired) from the state of Georgia only and 2) A requirement participants have had a minimum of ten years’ experience in corrections. No other corrections staff, such as counselors or medical
staff, will be included in the study. While intentionally selected, focus on the former
correctional officer perceived work environment stress phenomenon compared to those
actively employed or even across titles can limit data (Rhineberger-Dunn & Mack, 2018).

Research Questions

To bridge the gap of the current research available, this study seeks to identify the
following at its conclusion.

1. What were the specific stressors identified by the former correctional officers?
2. How was stress handled outside of work and did the effect of stress challenge
   your home life? How were interpersonal relationships affected?
3. Were resources offered to you to assist you with coping with the identified stress
during and/or after employment?

Summary

The purpose of this study was to discover the type of stress former correctional
officers experienced and the extent to which stress was experienced, if any. More
specifically, the purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of former Georgia
correctional officers who worked with male inmates, and their responses to coping with
work-related stress. Correctional officers are the backbone of the correctional facility, but
their voices are rarely heard about situations that cause stress. Hearing their voices may
result in a better understanding of stress in relation to working with male inmates.
Understanding the stress former correctional officers experienced in working with male
inmates may be important to correctional performance training for the current
correctional officers. Furthermore, this study may add to the theory correctional officers
experience stress on different levels in the correctional paradigm.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Stress is a broad topic, in this study correctional officer stress, dimensions of burnout, and occupational coping, along with other related phenomena, are reviewed both separately and thoroughly. Perceived job stress within corrections, retainability, and adaptability was cross analyzed to identify the differences and similarities in how correctional officers within the prison environment who work with male inmates perceive job stress.

Person-Environment Fit Theory

The Person-Environment fit theory originates from the work of French (French & R. Kahn, 1962; French et al., 1974) with later developments and refinements by Caplan (1983, 1987a,b), Harrison (1978, 1985), and Edwards (1996; Edwards & Cooper, 1990). Caplan (1998) documented that theories of stress have long recognized the importance of both the person and environment in understanding the nature and consequences of stress. Person theories relevant to stress research include Type-A behavior (Friedman & Rosenman, 1959), locus of control (Rotter, 1966), hardiness (Kobasa, 1979), and coping styles (Menaghan, 1983). The environment has been interpreted as stressful life events (Rabkin & Struening, 1976), daily hassles (DeLongis, Coyne, Dakof, Folkman, & Lazarus, 1982), and chronic stressors such as role conflict and ambiguity (Kahn, Wolf, Quinn, Snoeck, & Rosenthal, 1964; Jackson & Schuler, 1985), role overload and underload (French & Caplan, 1972), and job demands and decision latitude (Karasek &
The emphasis on the person and environment in stress research is characteristic of the interactive perspective in psychology (Lewin, 1951; Magnusson & Endler, 1977; Murray, 1951; Pervin, 1989), which indicates that behavior, attitudes, and well-being are determined jointly by the person and environment. Person Environment Fit (PE) theory pertains to the degree to which an individual’s characteristics harmonize with their environment (Salami, 2011).

PE fit theory is instrumental to stress and burnout research because it focuses on individual adjustment to work environment in addition to reaction to stressors. PE theory suggests a person and the environment work together to determine an employee’s well-being. If there is disharmony between person and environment, then it increases the possibility of stress and strain (Yang, Che, & Spector, 2008). Person characteristics may include areas such as values, goals, personality, and other biological and psychological characteristics (Salami, 2011). Environment characteristics include areas such as job and family demands, cultural values, work expectations, benefits and rewards, and environmental conditions such as temperature or support (Salami, 2011; Yang et al., 2008). In the context of the workplace, the degree of harmony between the person and the work environment determines whether a situation is interpreted as stressful for a person.

Stress or perceived stress on the job

Stress first began to be conceptualized as a cause for physical and psychological problems at work in the 1960s, but only in the 1970s did the concept transfer to the human services field, with the development of a sense of burnout linked to the emotional stressors of the field (Millson, 2002). While the pre-service training (PST) began to be conceptualized as a cause for job stress and job burnout problems at work in the 1960s,
only in the 1980s did the concepts transfer to the human services field. With the
development of other risk factors, such as psychological, physiological, and behavioral
damages, pre-service (on-going) training may also be linked to the emotional stressors of
the field (Millson, 2002).

Since the late 1970s, research on stress and burnout has received considerable
attention (Lambert, Hogan, Jiang, & Jenkins, 2009). Stress, which is the precursor to
burnout, has been broadly defined as an individual’s response to threatening situations.
The response to a stressor can be either singular or a combination of physiological,
psychological, and behavioral reactions (Burke & Mikkelsen, 2004). The World Health
Organization has identified stress-related disorders as one of the leading causes of
premature death, and prolonged exposure to stress can lead to burnout (Rhineberger-
Dunn & Mack, 2018). Burnout is a response to extended stress and defined by three
components: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal achievement
(Alarcon, Eschleman, & Bowling, 2009; Lambert, Hogan & Altheimer, 2010; Maslach,
Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001). This literature review discusses the development of stress and
burnout syndrome. The review showed that continued research on burnout among
correctional personnel is needed to better identify individuals who are at risk and to
identify possible intervention strategies.

Stress Response

Stress response is the normal way for the body to react to perceived threats and
danger because it activates the high-gear, instinctive, survival response of an individual
(Kendall, Murphy, O’Neill, & Bursnall, 2000). For example, desirable stress is like an
individual’s immediate response of stepping on the brakes or slightly swerving to avoid
an accident. In addition, when functioning properly, an individual’s response to job stress can help an individual rise to meet a challenge (i.e. meeting extremely tight deadlines). Distress or undesirable stress is the individual’s negative response to situations and will most likely result in a loss of productivity and a decline in an individual’s overall well-being. For example, extended exposure to work stress may lead to increased work absences, decreased quality of work and loss of morale (Kendall et al., 2000).

Negative Consequences of Stress

Research has shown stress can result in negative consequences for individuals, their families, and organizations (Vladut & Kallay, 2010; Wu, Zhu, Li, Wang, & Wang 2008). The Centers for Disease Control (1999) reported one-fourth of employees viewed their jobs as the major cause of stress in their lives. Work stress pertains to the psychological, and the behavioral responses to pressures directly related to work. The American Psychological Association (2009) reported sixty-nine percent of employees identified work as a significant source of stress. In addition, forty-one percent reported their work productivity was reduced as a result of stress. Work stress not only affects the individuals’ psychological and physical health, but work stress can have a detrimental impact on an organization’s overall effectiveness. For example, thirty-nine percent of employees experiencing high levels of overwork say they feel very angry towards their employer (Belsky & Pluess, 2009). This feeling of anger can lead to a loss in morale and a lower level of organizational commitment.

Work Stressors

Work stressors can be categorized as exogenous or endogenous (Keinan & Malach-Pines, 2007). Exogenous stressors are things such as problematic relationship
with superiors, inadequate pay, excessive workload, and unfavorable working conditions. Endogenous stressors are more internal, including individual personality characteristics, disappointment and frustration, and negative attitudes (Lambert et al., 2017). Exogenous and endogenous stressors can be further identified as task-related stressors, such as physical danger, workload, and role problems; organizational stressors, such as shift work, insufficient work space and inadequate work materials; and external stressors, such as home-work conflict and negative attitudes held by the community and the media (Lambert et al., 2017).

Chronic Stress

Stress is a normal fact of everyday life, yet some people experience and react to stress more severely than others (Wu et al., 2008; James & Todak, 2018). Chronic stress affects the individual, their families, and their organizations. The American Psychological Association reported job stress has caused the U.S. labor force more than $300 billion per year in absenteeism, turnover, decreased productivity, and medical, legal and insurance expenses (Gould, Watson, Price, & Valliant, 2013). In addition, 41% of employees reported feeling tense or stressed out during their workday. Chronic stress can increase the wear and tear to biological systems by disrupting sleep patterns, causing upset stomachs and headaches, and disturbing relationships with family and friends. Chronic stress has also been linked to psychosomatic symptoms, musculoskeletal disorders, high blood pressure, recurrent coronary heart disease, and burnout (Ogińska-Bulik, 2006; James & Todak, 2018).
Three Dimensions of Burnout

Stress

Stress and burnout are often linked together because both symptoms are a response to prolonged conditions. Job stress is the result of a mismatch between the individual and their capabilities, resources, and work needs (De Jonge & Dormann, 2017). Burnout is an individual’s negative response to work demands that is characterized by three components: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishments (Alarcon, Eschleman, & Bowling, 2009; Lambert, Hogan & Altheimer, 2010; Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001).

Emotional Exhaustion

Most researchers agree that burnout encompasses three dimensions: “emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and decreased personal accomplishment” (Alarcon, Eschleman, & Bowling, 2009; Lambert, Hogan & Altheimer, 2010; Maslach & Leiter, 2008; Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001). “Emotional exhaustion, which is the first dimension of burnout, refers to feelings of being overextended and depleted of one’s emotional and physical resources” (Maslach & Leiter, 2008, p.12). Emotional exhaustion is further described as the feeling of not being able to offer of one’s self emotionally, being emotionally drained (Montero-Marin & Garcia-Campayo, 2010; Richardsen & Martinussen, 2004). Interpersonal conflict, excessive work load, and prolonged use of emotional and physical resources of the individual are some of the major causes of emotional exhaustion (Vladut & Kallay, 2010). Of the three dimensions, emotional exhaustion is the most widely researched and is usually the first indicator of pending burnout (Maslach & Jackson, 1980; Maslach et al., 2001).
Depersonalization

As the second dimension of burnout, depersonalization occurs when the individual distances themselves and their services from those around them (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; Senter, Morgan, Serna-Mcdonald, & Bewley, 2010). Depersonalization first begins when a person becomes frustrated with their job, feels less concerned about their clients, and experiences an increase in negative attitudes towards their job (Roy, Novak, & Miksay-Todorovic, 2010). Research conducted by Bakker, Van Der Zee, Lewing, and Dollard (2006) on volunteer counselors indicated the depersonalization dimension could be predicted by personality constructs of emotional stability, extraversion, and intellect/autonomy. Further analysis of this dimension indicated depersonalization can lead the individual to develop negative cynical attitudes towards the person in need of their services; which in turn may cause them to treat their clients as objects rather than individuals (Bakker et al., 2006).

A meta-analysis conducted by Alarcon, Eschleman and Bowling (2009) found a positive association between negative affectivity and depersonalization. Negative affectivity is associated with anxiety/neuroticism on the personality factor scale (Alarcon et al., 2009; Smits, Dolan, Vorst, Wicherts, & Timmerman, 2011). The findings were consistent with the researchers’ hypothesis that individuals who were predisposed to negative attitudes about their work environment would be more susceptible to stress and burnout. The researchers indicated additional research is needed to examine the correlation between personality and burnout (Smits et al., 2011).
Reduced Personal Accomplishment

Vladut and Kallay (2010) characterized exhaustion as the hallmark syndrome, depersonalization as the contextual dimension, and reduced personal accomplishment as the evaluative dimension of burnout. Reduced personal accomplishment (inefficacy) is characterized by a decrease in one’s perceived professional efficacy (Alarcon, Eschleman, & Bowling, 2009). The relationship between inefficacy and burnout is slightly more complex than the other two dimensions. Some researchers view inefficacy as a function or a combination of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Alarcon et al., 2009; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; Vladut & Kallay, 2010). Inefficacy is usually coupled with feelings of incompetence generated from a perceived or actual lack of resources and opportunities in the workplace, and perceived or actual lack of social support, both stemming from the fit between the individual and organizational values about work (Burke & Mikkelsen, 2005; Maslach et al., 2001; Vladut & Kallay, 2010).

Law Enforcement and Burnout

The field of law enforcement encompasses any job operating in an organized manner to promote adherence to a set of rules governing a society. Law enforcement includes identifying and punishing individuals who break the law of the land. Law enforcement also includes protecting those who adhere to the law and remanding those who have been found guilty of breaking the law. Judges, police officers, correctional officers, and state troopers are just a few of the types of occupations that have been authorized to uphold and promote justice. Correctional personnel, specifically, must preside over a population that is for the most part unwilling and uncooperative. The weight of responsibility associated with safely guarding the guilty while incarcerated may
cause stress and lead to burnout (Lambert, Hogan, & Altheimer, 2010). Stress and burnout for correctional personnel may result from things such as uncooperative prisoners, poor relationships with supervisors and co-workers, bullying and harassment from both prisoners and coworkers, and inadequate, inconsiderate or unsupportive supervision (Burke & Mikkelsen, 2004; Roy, Novak, & Miksaj-Todorovic, 2010).

Correctional Officer Burnout

Previous research has demonstrated correctional work is a stressful occupation (e.g., Ashton & Bloom, 1988; Cheek & Miller, 1983; Harris, 1983). Whitehead (1986) found 68% of correctional officers felt their jobs to be at least moderately stressful while roughly 33% experienced some level of burnout. Morgan et al.’s (2002) research outlined several factors uniquely related to correctional officer burnout: role conflict (Whitehead, 1986), understaffing (Rutter & Fielding, 1988), inmate contact (Cheek & Miller, 1983), and confrontations with inmates (Smith, 1988). The National Institute of Justice (NIJ, 2018), in a two-part wellness publication on correctional staff, identified the job of the correctional officer as risky, noting that responsibility falls heaviest on the shoulders of front-line correctional officers (COs) working within facilities on a day-to-day basis. As correctional officers work to maintain peaceful order within facilities and between inmates with histories of mental illness, substance abuse, and violence, they also routinely put themselves in harm’s way. Therefore, correctional officers may experience a higher level of burnout and stress while attempting to maintain the safety and the security of not only themselves, but also the community.
History of Occupational Stress/Burnout

As previously noted, much of the research conducted on correctional employees concentrates on job stress and burnout. Stress is the result of a discrepancy between situational demands and available resources, whether they are physical, mental, or emotional (Benetti et al., 2018). Burnout is a form of job-related stress. It is a state of being physically and emotionally depleted or exhausted from excessive demands in a working environment (Lambert, Hogan, & Altheimer, 2010; Benetti et al., 2018). The terms “stress” and “burnout” are consistently used interchangeably in research on correctional employees due to the strong and direct connection between their respective definitions (Whitehead, Linquist & Klofas, 1987).

The term “occupational or job stress/burnout,” which is credited to Freudenberg (1977), was first brought to public awareness in 1973 (Freudenberg, 1977; Lambert, Altheimer, & Hogan; 2010). Freudenberg’s (1977) initial definition of burnout was characterized by an individual becoming psychologically worn out and exhausted because of excessive work demands. As a psychoanalyst, Freudenberg (1977) observed men and women in a variety of positions who had become fatigued, depressed, irritable, stressed and overworked. Freudenberg (1977) observed that nothing drastic had happened in their lives or their occupations; yet there was a significant change in attitude, mood and motivation. These observations were the basis of Freudenberg’s (1977) initial research into job burnout.

Although burnout has been studied for the past four decades, there is no single standard definition for burnout syndrome (Swider & Zimmerman, 2010). For example, some have characterized stress, strain or depression as burnout (Pines & Keinan, 2005;
Swider & Zimmerman, 2010) While stress is a result of demands that exceed an individual’s abilities to perform at work, burnout is the individual’s pattern of response to chronic work stress (Pines & Keinan, 2005; Swider & Zimmerman, 2010) Burnout is usually psychological in nature. It involves feelings, attitudes, motives, and expectations resulting in negative consequences for the individual, the population the individual serves, and the organization (Lambert, Altheimer, & Hogan; 2010). Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001) have stated burnout is not a unitary construct but manifests itself through three dimensions: exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Unlike stress, which is the result of a mismatch between worker and work demands, burnout is a much more internalized process that may cause the individual to feel detached and displaced from those around them (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001). Burnout may also influence attitudes, behaviors, and physical and mental health, resulting in weak performance in the workplace and erosion of relationships both in and out of the workplace (Anvari, Kalali & Gholipour, 2011).

Burnout has been attributed to the relationship between people and their work. The interaction that results in burnout is usually fueled by a myriad of factors falling into two categories: situational and personal characteristics (Keinan & Pines, 2007; Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001; Vladut & Kallay, 2010). Situational characteristics can be related to work demands such as lack of adequate information or resources to do the job well, role conflict and ambiguity, and severity of client needs. Personal characteristics encompass areas specific to the individual, such as marital status, health, and personality (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). To understand the nature of burnout, various researchers have examined different aspects that might contribute to burnout syndrome.
For example, some researchers have explored the lack of social support as a catalyst for workers feeling isolated and succumbing to workplace stressors (Lambert, Altheimer, & Hogan; 2010). Keinan & Pines (2007) examined how organizational stressors such as inadequate pay, workforce shortage, problematic relationships with superiors, shift work, and excessive workload could lead to job burnout. Another study examined the relationship between two dimensions of organizational justice, distributive and procedural justice, and its impact on burnout (Lambert et al., 2009).

Much of the literature on burnout deals with the interaction between the individual and the organizational and interpersonal dimensions of the job (Alarcon, Eschleman & Bowling, 2009). Bakker, Van Der Zee, Lewig and Dollard’s (2006) study of volunteer counselors found a correlation between basic personality factors and burnout. The researchers’ findings indicated the three dimensions of burnout were predicated by emotional stability. In addition, Alarcon et al.’s meta-analysis of the relationship between personality traits and burnout found individual-level predictors of personality traits were strong predictors of burnout. Their findings suggest personality may help to not only predict but to protect against situations that can lead to burnout. More specifically, their research found personality traits such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, locus of control, emotional stability, extraversion, positive and negative affectivity, optimism and hardiness each showed a significant relationship with burnout. In addition, the researchers performed a regression analysis and found that significant variance in each of the burnout dimensions of emotional exhaustion, reduced personal achievement, and depersonalization could be explained by positive and negative affectivity.
Occupational Stress and Coping Models

Work stress specifically has been studied within the research as it has been shown to have a strong influence on mental and physical health (Chen, Wong & Yu, 2001; Tennant, 2001). Some studies have shown adverse effects from job stress can result in mental illness such as depression and anxiety (Patterson, 2003). Additional studies have found outcomes including job burnout and substance abuse (Muchinsky, 1997). Therefore, recognizing the reasons for job stress is paramount in creating and modifying programs that target stress and coping. Conversely, increased stress and coping may then result in higher job satisfaction which may then lead to increased productivity at the workplace (Stanton, Balzer, Smith, Parra, & Ironson, 2001).

Within the literature, specific job variables have been studied to help determine primary causal factors of stress such as lack of control, role confusion and conflict, increased demands of the job, and feelings of incompetence, security of job, and relationships with co-workers (Lu, Siu, & Cooper, 2005). Significantly, each job is unique in that it may encompass varying levels of stress-related factors. Some specific job roles have been found to encompass higher levels of stress, such as police officers, lawyers, bus drivers, and correctional officers (Armstrong & Griffin, 2004). Organizational stressors can be viewed as factors caused by management and may concern policy, procedures, and other organizational principles. Again, environmental stressors are those that are the result of the physical environment such as inmate behaviors and co-worker relations (Schaufeli & Peters, 2000). One important finding was that organizational stressors were found to be the largest stressors for correctional
officers. This finding is of interest because these stressors were found to be higher than those concerning inmate behaviors (Schaufeli & Peters, 2000).

The Transactional Model of Stress

The above researchers propose stress does not automatically result from an event that happens, but rather from everyone perhaps coping with the situation differently based on their available resources or coping mechanisms (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This research has demonstrated it is not specific situations that result in excess stress, but one’s ability to balance one’s stress response. Therefore, stress is a response that can be managed if one were to receive guidance or training (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

There have been numerous attempts to formulate a model that describes the construct of stress. Some research has attempted to operationalize stress as a person’s reaction to a distressing event; therefore, the psychological response to a situation is what is focused on. Other models have focused more on situational factors; therefore, the stressors that are present have been viewed as the defining characteristic of stress. Still other models have attempted to define stress as a combination of factors, such as a person’s appraisal of the situation, the current factors in the specific situation, and other variables such as health and social support; these factors have been thought to determine the prevalence of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

The transactional model of stress holds that stress results when the demands of a specific situation exceed one’s resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This model hypothesizes the relationship between a person and their environmental stressors will ultimately define the stress response. A key element to this model is everyone’s unique
cognitive appraisal of the event. Therefore, a person needs to appraise the situation at hand to determine if their resources exceed the demand (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Within the above model, two processes may occur. First, a person may engage in primary appraisal (Lazarus, 1966). Within this context, a person is in a situation and decides if it is non-distressing; if so, the appraisal process stops here. However, if a person determines a threat or potential harm exists, the process of secondary appraisal will begin (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Within this context, the person evaluates the existing resources to cope with the situational stressor. These resources can be viewed as coping mechanisms, because they will determine how a person will respond to the stressor or stressful situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Within their transactional model of stress, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) have highlighted coping resources they believe will determine how a person responds to a situation. They propose there are five different resources a person will use to cope with stressors (Lazarus et al., 1974). The first resource involves utilitarian sources; this category includes monetary supply. The second resource includes health; this category encompasses a person’s psychiatric or medical illnesses that may inhibit them from coping adequately with a stressor (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The next category is a person’s existing social supports. One’s beliefs constitute the fourth category; this encompasses the perception of one’s own abilities and the confidence to carry out the demand (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The final resource includes problem-solving skills, which include one’s ability to analyze and reason about options to reduce demand and therefore to cope adequately.
The Demand-Control/ Support Model of Occupational Stress

The demand-control/ support model of occupational stress has been well-received within the research community (Johnson, 1986). This theory suggests that the psychological well-being of workers is directly related to their functioning at the workplace. Within this framework are further hypotheses. The psychological strain hypothesis states that psychological well-being is at its lowest when demands of a job are increased and the worker’s task orientation is low (Karasek, 1979). The outcome is increased physical symptoms within the body in order to meet the new demands. Furthermore, if the worker’s task orientation is low, demands will surpass the available resources to perform the task at hand. Therefore, the physical symptoms that arise are not put towards the new demands; instead they are converted into a stress response, which may be short or long-lived potentially leading to prolonged physical illness (Karasek, 1979).

The above model proposes that strain would be most severe at one’s employment if one’s role involved demands that surpassed one’s resources (Karasek, 1979), as increased demands may result in a feeling of lack of control. Consequently, jobs that do not result in psychological strain can allow workers to meet demands comfortably and exercise more control (Karasek, 1979).

Last, the dynamic demand-control hypothesis discusses the influence a job may have over the long-term (Karasek & Theorell, 1990). This hypothesis states that when a worker maintains high control, and is able to meet demands, they may feel accomplished and content, therefore preventing strain. Conversely, if a worker is having trouble meeting demands, this may result in a feeling of lack of control, which may then lead to
long-term consequences such as poor psychological well-being and physical health (Karasek & Theorell, 1990).

Research has found the demand-control model is a valid theory for predicting stress (Theorell & Karasek, 1996). Studies that have examined teachers (Payne & Fletcher, 1983), correctional officers (Morrison, Dunne, Fitzgerald, & Cloghan, D. (1992), and clerical workers (Spector, 1987) have found the main effects of demand and control when examining stress. One ongoing frustration of correctional officers is their perceived ability to control the processes that occur on the job. This lack of power often results in their role being dominated by protecting the fortress, as opposed to participating in decision-making. One past study which focused on the demand-control hypothesis found those correctional officers who had participated the least in decision-making showed increased levels of noradrenalin (Harenstam, Palm, & Theorell, 1988). This study is of interest, as it used physiological measures to examine stress levels, therefore adding tangible evidence of stress. However, the reliability of this study may be questionable as it used a small sample. Furthermore, it may be necessary to examine the active-passive element within the demand-control model. Some previous research has found workers who reported more activity and participation within processes in their organizations reported a more positive attributional style in comparison to workers who had more passive jobs. These workers reported feelings of less control and increased levels of anxiety (Badru, Ogunlesi, Ogunwale, Abdulmalik, & Yusuf, 2018). This research highlights the importance of some degree of control within the workplace to reduce anxiety.
Conservation of Resources Model

The conservation of resources (COR) model proposes stress can be the outcome of three predicaments (Hobfoll, 2001). The first scenario states stress is the result of fear of lack of resources. Therefore, stress occurs when one believes that one may not have enough resources to meet the demands of a task. Second, this theory states stress may also result from the dissolution of a resource, such as being laid off from employment (Hobfoll, 2001). Last, this model proposes stress may also occur if one were to devote additional resources for the advancement but not achieve that advancement (Hobfoll, 2001). For example, one may choose to continue their education to gain higher-level employment but failed to obtain a promotion; therefore, devoting resources to further employment but not obtaining higher-level employment may result in stress. From an employment stance, the outcome of any of these three scenarios may lead to employee burnout (Hobfoll, 2001).

Furthermore, the COR model suggests social support is a key determinant in predicting burnout. Social support can act as a buffer against the effects of stressors (Hobfoll, 1988). In doing so, social support can substitute for loss of other resources that have occurred. Hobfoll (1988) outlined an inventory of 74 resources he believed were pertinent to the COR model. Included in these resources was social support from co-workers, as well as support from other resources such as family or spouses. Practical support (i.e., with housework) was also included in this inventory. It is suggested lack of the above resources contribute to job burnout (Hobfoll, 2001). Furthermore, Hobfoll (2001) states social support acts as a positive aspect for oneself when demands may cause strain and feelings of defeat (Hobfoll, 2001). Social support may result in one
experiencing a feeling of fulfillment in this area which may then lessen the strain caused by stressors. A further conclusion of the COR theory is losses result in much higher anxiety and stress than gains do (Hobfoll, 2001). More importantly, when losses do occur it has been found that gains are negatively correlated with anxiety. Therefore, this model proposes the number and extent of gains are important when loss does occur (Hobfoll, 2001).

**Correctional System in United States**

Only 5% of the world’s population resides in the United States, yet one-fourth of the world’s prisoners reside in United States’ prisons (Kirchhoff, 2012). This ranks the United States as the nation with the highest incarceration percentage in the world. By 2007, 2.3 million inmates were incarcerated in the United States’ criminal justice and correctional system with approximately 5 million more individuals in some part of the correctional system through community services or community corrections (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2012).

According to the U.S. Department of Justice (2011), jails are a locally administered confinement or detention facility, which are authorized to hold individuals who are awaiting adjudication and/or those committed after adjudication to serve short sentences typically less than one year. In addition, jails hold individuals who are awaiting transfers to prison for longer sentences and offenders who have violated their parole or probation (Hall, 2006). In prisons, the inmate is there to serve the length of their sentence; however, in jails, the average length of stay is 18.3 days (San Diego Sheriff’s Department, 2012). Another difference between jails and prisons is jails experience a high rate of admissions, as the primary function of a jail is to process people who have
been arrested. Jails within the U.S. have experienced enormous growth over the last decade, reaching an overall peak of 785,533 inmates confined in midyear 2008 (U.S. Department of Justice, 2014). A significant increase in the incarcerated population became dramatic in the summer of 2002, as the nation’s jail and prison population surpassed two million inmates for the first time in history (U.S. Department of Justice, 2014). During a year-long period ending in June 2013, nearly 11.7 million people were admitted to local jails (U.S. Department of Justice, 2014). In the San Diego County Sheriff’s Department (2012), the seven detention facilities in the county had 92,124 total bookings for the year of 2011.

According to the American Jail Association (2014), there are currently 3,163 jails within the U.S. Approximately 731,208 inmates make up the inmate population within these facilities (Minton & Golinelli, 2014), while there are only about 151,200 correctional officers employed to manage these inmates daily (Stephan, 2001). Within the state of California, the Public Safety Realignment Act (PSRA) of 2011, also known as AB 109 realignment of the prison system, became effective on October 1, 2011. Under this act, those who are convicted locally of nonviolent, non-serious, nonsexual crimes serve their time within locally operated detention facilities, regardless of the length of their sentence. As a result, county jails are now housing inmates who are serving longer sentences. Consequently, the San Diego Grand Jury (2014) found in their investigation that the average daily population for the San Diego County adult detention facilities has seen an increase from 4,672 to 5,694 since the realignment period went into effect, with approximately 31% of the total population made up of realigned offenders. Since the realignment bill became effective in 2011, the average daily population has increased.
According to the San Diego Sheriff’s Department (2012), at the San Diego Central Jail, the average daily population is currently 872 inmates; overall within the seven detention facilities, San Diego County holds a daily inmate population of 4,629. The average length of stay within the San Diego Central Jail is 76 days for those sentenced and 5.9 days for those being held pretrial.

There are several members that make up the correctional community besides the inmates who inhabit the facility, such as the line staff, administrators, medical and clinical personnel, and other contractual employees (Dvoskin & Spiers, 2004). Each member plays a crucial role in the operation of the correctional facility. However, it is the line/custodial staff, or the correctional officers, who are primarily interacting with the inmates in the local jails or prisons daily (San Diego Sheriff’s Department, 2012). Additionally, it is these unique differences between jails and prisons that may contribute to a distinctive work environment and influence the correctional officer’s perceptions about their job (Castle, 2008).

Correctional officers have been identified as being an integral part of ensuring the safety and security of correctional facilities. They have a significant role in the lives of the inmates they interact with daily (Griffin, 2001). Correctional officers are responsible for the countless tasks and duties required to maintain a safe, secure, and humane environment (Lambert et al., 2009). Correctional facilities hold and control the inmates within them, who are usually not willing participants, which adds to the challenges of the job.

Pollock et al. (2012) emphasized that correctional officers work in a volatile environment. They listed statistics showing between 10 to 25% of inmates are victims of
physical attack and 10 to 40% are victims of sexual attack. Correctional officers have one of the most dangerous, volatile jobs in the United States; many spend their shifts on the front line with dangerous criminals and gang members (Pollock et al., 2012).

Correctional officers’ “sense of fairness in the workplace is likely to influence their attitudes and their perceptions of the leadership, their commitment to the organization, and their job frustration” (Taxman & Gordon, 2009, p. 698). Taxman and Gordon (2009) researched using three hypotheses and one state’s correctional system with 1,200 correctional officers and inmates. Taxman and Gordon (2009) found, “Officers who perceive fairness in the distribution and procedures at the prison and organization are more likely to report a higher sense of positive organizational climate, indicate a higher commitment to the organization, and identify their supervisors as role models” (p. 698). In turn, officers were less likely to experience job stress or be fearful of inmate or officer victimization and were more likely to perceive their personal risk as being low.

**Correctional Officers**

Correctional employees are often the overlooked backbone of the correctional system. Correctional employees are “the single most important resource available to any correctional agency or institution” (Archambeault & Archambeault, 1982, p.XXII). These employees “are charged with the task of supervising and securing unwilling and potentially violent populations” (Armstrong & Griffin, 2004, p. 577). The importance of this work notwithstanding, correctional employees are frequently forgotten, ignored, or viewed in a negative light (Finn, 2000). The majority of news stories featuring correctional employees focus on transgressions committed by correctional officers (Finn, 2000). Approximately 30 years ago the first research articles about the stress experienced
by correctional officers were published (Blevins, Cullen, & Sundt, 2007). Since that time, the amount of research on this population has gradually increased (Blevins, Cullen, & Sundt, 2007).

Before reviewing the published literature on correctional employees, specific concepts must be clarified. Several research articles on correctional employees concentrate on correctional officers. A correctional officer is commonly known as a ‘prison guard.’ The primary focus of correctional officers is security and order. It is their responsibility to ensure that inmates do not escape or harm themselves, other inmates, or employees (Cullen, Link, Wolfe, & Frank, 1985). Correctional officers undergo extensive training lasting approximately six months, depending on the state and department of employment. This training must be completed prior to beginning their work within a correctional institution (McCombs, 2010). Correctional officers have direct contact with inmates daily. Each correctional institution is required to have a set number of correctional officers on duty 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Correctional officers can be ordered to return to work at any moment. Officers are routinely required to work double shifts when an incident makes it necessary. Research concentrates on correctional officers because they account for approximately 65% of institutional employees. In addition to constituting a large portion of the employee population, correctional officers are considered the face of correctional employment (Armstrong & Griffin, 2004).

Another term for correctional officers is ‘custody staff.’ This term is commonly used within correctional institutions because inmates are in the custody of the correctional officers. All other employees would then be classified as non-custody. This includes medical personnel, administration, clerical, maintenance, and treatment staff
members. Except for treatment staff members, many non-custody personnel have only a passing interaction with inmates. Treatment staff members include caseworkers and clinicians (Armstrong & Griffin, 2004). It is the duty of treatment staff members to provide mental health treatment to inmates. This treatment includes developing and implementing treatment plans, providing group and individual therapy, and monitoring the progress of each inmate within the institution (Carlson & Thomas, 2006). Even though treatment staff members expend the majority of their time interacting with inmates, they receive minimal training prior to beginning employment in a correctional institution.

Lived Experiences of Correctional Officers and/or Former Correctional Officers

Taxman and Gordon (2009) listed the correctional environment as one of the most stressful recorded work environments and noted rates of employee retention between 12% and 15%. One reason was the sheer volume of inmates. Correctional officers work in a “people business that requires intense and frequent interactions with offenders,” according to Chessman and Downey (2012, p. 40). This constant interaction with hostile or dangerous inmates can result in high levels of stress resulting in both physical and psychological ailments. Correctional officers who attempt to ignore this stress typically have higher levels of job turnover, health problems, and absenteeism (Chessman & Downey, 2012).

Research is available on correctional officers and stress related to maintaining role identity and role ambiguity, job dangerousness, and the stressors (Lambert & Hogan, 2007; Lambert, Clusse-Tolar, Hogan (2007). Literature also exists on correctional officers and job turnover and burnout (Dowden & Tellier, 2004; Lambert, Clusse-Tolar
(2007) as well as the problems correctional officers have maintaining a marriage because of the stress they bring into the relationship (Cheek & Miller, 1983). Yargo (2012) stated anger is an understood part of the life of a correctional officer. The anger and activities these officers witness on a daily basis create the necessity of finding ways to cope with stresses of the job. Yargo (2012) stated officers face three major dangers: (a) risks to self and other, (b) bringing the stress of being a correctional officer into one’s personal life, and (c) losing respect from inmates. The stress levels intensify when officers realize their physical health is constantly in jeopardy on the job. Physically fit inmates who often outnumber correctional officers also increase the officers’ stress levels. Yargo (2012) noted some officers question if following protocol will be enough to guarantee their safety. Yargo (2012) stated that because of close quarters and being outnumbered, “Keeping respect is one way to maintain authority and keep secure” (para. 5).

Yargo (2012) suggested another reason an officer’s personal life is stressful is that it is difficult for them to leave the witnessed traumatic events at work. Witnessing and breaking up violent fights is not easy emotional baggage to release. Bringing home, the emotional toll of their work, officers endure additional stress in personal relationships, whether with a spouse, children, or extended family and friends. Yargo (2012) said, “Confronting these emotional problems openly is the first step and counseling is an option” (para. 4). According to Yargo (2012), losing the respect of inmates is a legitimate fear among officers. Tracy (2003) wrote, “While officers can physically escape the workplace, they regularly face public misunderstanding and denigration. As such, many officers find it difficult to talk meaningfully about their work with friends, family, or others outside the field of corrections” (p. 93).
Correctional officers often form close relationships with inmates. Pollock, Hogan, Lambert, Ross, and Sundt (2012) noted that correctional officers often affect the lives of inmates, positively or negatively, because of the prolonged interaction they have with them. Stress is heightened close to an inmate’s release date (Pollock et al., 2012). Tracy (2003) reported the contradictory terms and situations led to stress for correctional officers. Tracy (2003) reported many correctional officers have a “literalistic” or “just tell me what to do attitude” and certain contradictory terms cause them undo stress (p. 90). For example, correctional officers are told to respect the inmates, yet they are told to always suspect the action of the inmates (respect versus suspect). They are told the inmates are dangerous and they must maintain detachment, yet they are told to nurture the inmates (nurture versus discipline). The correctional officers are told to follow all rules and document every infraction, yet they are told to be flexible (consistency versus flexibility). Correctional officers are told to rely upon their fellow officers and depend upon their friends, yet they are to tell their superiors whenever their partners break any rules (solidarity versus autonomy). They are rewarded for their intellectual ability, yet they are told, “Thinking too much in this job will get you in trouble” (Tracy, 2003, p. 90).

Dowden and Tellier (2004) conducted a meta-analysis on predicting the work-related stress with correctional officers and found that, in fact, they do experience a high degree of stress. Summerlin and Oehme (2010) conducted a pilot study on the levels of stress in police and correctional officers whereby they compared the levels of stress between the two professions regarding the 2009 budget cuts. Their study reported significant differences in job stress of Florida correctional officers when compared to the state’s police officers who took the same surveys. Correctional officers’ levels of stress,
as reported on the surveys, were significantly higher than the police officers’ levels of stress (Summerlin & Oehme, 2010). However, researchers noted no direct causal relationship between job stress, budget cuts, and officer-involved domestic violence.

Hooley (2010) presented reasons for the shortened life expectancy and high suicide rate of correctional officers. Hooley (2010), a prison captain in charge of a 506-bed facility, listed several concerns that correctional officers must face on top of the violence, threats, and degradation witnessed daily. For example, the typical correctional officer cannot eat in a restaurant for fear an ex-inmate might retaliate against him by spitting in his food. Even going out in their own neighborhood is a risk. The typical correctional officer is constantly at risk of encountering a released inmate or a relative of a current inmate (Hooley, 2010). Toch (1981) noted that correctional officers were locked into their own caricatures. “Officers are imprisoned by our ignorance of who they are and what they do, which is the price they pay for working behind walls” (Forward). When no other work was available, according to Philiber (1987), a qualified man or woman would reluctantly accept a position as a correctional officer. After failure at police work or the end of a military career, but with a desire to be part of law enforcement, the position of a correctional officer was the last possible position, the last hope. Philiber stated prison work was viewed as dirty work with high levels of stress, danger, frustration, and emotionality. Those working as correctional officers expressed dissatisfaction with their jobs, noting a burnout rate of one of the highest in any profession (Philiber, 1987).

Osofsky and Osofsky (2009), father and son psychoanalysts and mental health consultants for the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola, discussed countertransference issues, erroneous opinions of correctional officers, and prison life. Angola was once well
known as one of the toughest prisons in the country but now stands as a model for other institutions. The Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola is the only maximum-security prison in the state of Louisiana with approximately 5,100 inmates and 1,500 correctional officers. M. Osofsky, the son, wrote his first impressions of Angola, “Initially even evoked feelings of a concentration camp. Identifying with the inmates, I was struck with its being a place where individuals were condemned for a life sentence or death. There was something ominous about the place” (Osofsky & Osofsky, 2009, p. 536). As he gained comfort with the prison environment, Osofsky, the son, noted how his initial feelings contrasted with the correctional officers. “They [correctional officers] frequently describe their fear of city life in New Orleans, the relative safety of the prison, and the sense of community among those who live there” (Osofsky & Osofsky 2009, p. 537).

Tully and Morris (1998) conducted one of the few studies that examined the public’s attitudes about correctional officers for the Florida Department of Corrections. Tully and Morris (1998) asked Floridians to describe correctional officers. Some of the descriptors used included “tough,” “brave,” “underpaid,” “dedicated,” and “strong.” Floridians in the study felt correctional officers should receive the same pay as police officers. Sundt (2009) conducted a telephone survey in Illinois to assess public attitudes of prisons and correctional officers. The 101 respondents were adamantly against building a prison in their neighborhood, but their opinion of correctional officer was an improvement from those of earlier studies (Philiber, 1987; Toch, 1981). The respondents listed characteristics of a correctional officer’s job that underlined the dangers involved in the work, the stress and tension, the boredom, the exactness, the pressures, “a more
generalized quality of hopelessness, negativity, moral and ethical ambiguity” (Sundt, 2009, p. 42).

In the past, Osofsky and Osofsky (2009) explained, literature typically pictured correctional officers as rural, illiterate, brutal, sadistic, and unfeeling buffoons. Osofsky and Osofsky noted their experiences were opposite of these; their experiences were that correctional officers were professionals who showed concern for the inmates and performed their jobs efficiently, humanly, and ethically. Osofsky and Osofsky noted they had encountered a few unsavory correctional officers or bad apples, but all organizations have difficult employees. Generally, the correctional officers were concerned for the prisoners and the prisoners’ families; the officers were respectful, conscientious, and fostered a sense of security. When officers failed to live up to standards, they were disciplined or the administration encouraged them to seek employment elsewhere (Osofsky & Osofsky, 2009).

Although “reluctant to discuss their feelings, readily defensive about their jobs, and reluctant to open up to outsiders” (Osofsky & Osofsky, 2009, p. 532), 50 correctional officers were interviewed to determine the psychological impact on correctional officers after assisting in executions. Osofsky and Osofsky stated, “In addition to gaining valuable insight and vignettes. . . we offered a chance for the officer to have a cathartic release” (p. 532). They also noted: “Some officers who acted tough professionally broke down and cried when talking to us behind closed doors. A number discussed deep fears and concerns about being involved in the execution process, especially their involvement with the families of the inmate and the inmate himself” (Osofsky & Osofsky, 2009, p. 532).
Osofsky and Osofsky (2009) found the officers to be caring individuals who did in fact struggle with the emotional weight of the executions. Counter-transference and transference were concerns. They found that the correctional officers, inmates, and setting provoked counter-transference feelings and transference feelings. According to Reidbord (2010), counter-transference occurs “when the therapist projects his or her own repressed or unconscious” feelings through identification with the emotions, experiences, or problems of a person undergoing treatment (para. 1). Transference occurs when a patient “transfers his or her feelings from some important person onto the therapist. The patient naturally makes assumptions about the therapist's likes and dislikes, attitude toward the patient, life outside the office, and so forth” (Reidbord, 2010, para. 2).

Scant literature addressed the brutality directed toward inmates by correctional officers. Marquart (1986) wrote of his firsthand knowledge of the use of unofficial force against inmates in the Texas prison system including serious beatings and assaults directed against offenders. Beck, Harrison, and Adams (2007) wrote about the Bureau of Justice Statistics’ prison sexual assault data that was collected between 2004 and 2006. Worley and Worley (2011) noted no definitive self-report study addressed the divergent acts committed by correctional officers prior to their study. The purpose of their study was to “examine correctional officers’ self-reported deviance and perceptions of deviance committed by their co-workers” within the Texas Department of Criminal Justice—Institutional Division (Worley & Worley, 2011, p. 301). The instrument used was designed to measure self-reported misconduct. “Many of the items in the scale involved behaviors that can potentially lead to strong disciplinary actions, including termination” (Worley & Worley, 2011, p. 303). Five hundred and one prison employees participated in
this study: 335 (66.9%) Caucasians; 104 (20.8%) Blacks; 30 (6%) Hispanics; 25 (5%) other races; and 7 (1.4%) unknown. Results indicated fellow employees perceived that other staff members were engaged in inappropriate and possibly illegal behavior (Worley & Worley, 2011). Examples of statement used in their study included:

- “A supervisor would never give tobacco to an inmate.”
- “Most supervisors do not flirt with their employees.”
- “Some employees ‘call-in’ sick even when they are not ill.”
- “Some employees let inmates do their jobs for them.”
- “A correctional employee would never live with or marry an inmate.”
- “Most correctional employees are faithful to their spouses or significant others (e.g., girlfriend or boyfriend).”
- “Most employees have had an inmate ask them to ‘bring-in’ contraband.”
- “Most correctional officers do not ‘paper cut’ or take shortcuts.”
- “Some employees let inmates break the rules.”
- “Some employees have inappropriate relationships with inmates.”
- “In my workplace, sexual harassment seldom occurs” (Worley & Worley, 2011, p. 301)

The Duties of a Correctional Officer

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2017), correctional officers are responsible for overseeing arrested individuals who are awaiting trial or those sentenced to time in jail, reformatory, or prison. Occupations within correctional institutions are known to be stressful and hazardous. “Working in a correctional institution can be stressful and dangerous. Every year, correctional officers are injured in confrontations
with inmates” (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012, para. 2). Correctional officers are often injured in inmate confrontations; they work in an industry that reports one of the highest rates of nonfatal, job-related injuries. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2017) lists the following typical responsibilities for correctional officers: (a) enforce rules and regulations, (b) keep order, (c) supervise inmates, (d) assist with rehabilitation and counseling of inmates, (e) inspect all areas, and (f) search inmates and the environment. The Bureau of Labor Statistics provided a comprehensive list of correctional officers’ responsibilities, but this short list does not adequately delineate the responsibilities of a correctional officer. The list fails to mention that the responsibilities of the job can create stress, health problems, family problems, and a shortened life expectancy (Heibutzki, 2012).

The United States Department of Labor (2012) reported that in 2010, there were 493,100 correctional officers employed within the United States. The median hourly pay for a correctional officer was $18.76 in 2010 (United States Department of Labor, 2012). Newly hired correctional officers “undergo 200 hours of formal training in their first year of employment and received 120 hours of specialized training at the United States Federal Bureau of Prisons training centers” (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012, para. 3). Experienced officers attend in-service training for new procedures. The bureau provides special training to officers who become “members of tactical response teams, and trains officers to address disturbances such as riots, hostage situations and other dangerous confrontations. The officers practice disarming prisoners and other tactics to restore order and maintain safety for inmates and other officers” (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012, para. 4).
According to Goutam (2012), in some states, a correctional officer candidate must pass a three-hour written test, sometimes called a Jailer’s Test. Some states may require a video section as well. The test has sections to gauge different areas of competency. The wardens that use the test expect candidates to possess the “(a) ability to judge and solve problems; (b) motivation and interest for the job; (c) communication skills; and (d) ability to work under hostile situations and co-operate with a variety of people” (Goutam, 2012, p. 1).

Much of what officials have learned on how to run prisons occurred after September 1971 from the prisoner riot at Attica State Correctional Facility in Attica, New York. Inmates controlled the prison for five days, took correctional officers’ hostage, and killed three men, two inmates and one officer in the initial mêlée. The prisoners risked everything during a five-day standoff to bring awareness to the inhumane treatment of prisoners. Historians finally attributed 43 deaths to the events from September 9 through 13 (Wicker, 2011). One result of the Attica riot was a classification (C) system of prison inmates and ranking of the officers who supervise those inmates. Administrators and wardens typically predicate pay on occupational hazard. The pay is attractive enough to some officers, especially in first-line supervisory or management positions. Correctional officer jobs are appealing to some because of a median salary over $38,000 in 2008, but it is a dangerous line of work with the highest documented suicide rate among professions (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). Correctional officers have similar duties to the police officer but with significant differences. Police officers interact with both law-abiding and law-breaking citizens. Correctional officers only deal with individuals who have broken the law and are deemed dangerous enough to be incarcerated (Chenault, 2010). At one
time, public perception of correctional officers grouped all officers with prisoners only with more privileges. Chenault (2010) explained how the attempts to reform prisoners have required correctional officers to be supervisors, educators, and role models while fulfilling the job of correctional officer.

Haney, Banks, and Zimbardo (1973) conducted a study to determine the source of reported brutality among correctional officers in United States prisons. Haney et al. (1973) desired to know if this reported brutality was because of the officers’ sadistic dispositions or because of the prison environment. Zimbardo, one of the three researchers, transformed an old section of Stanford University’s psychology building into a simulated prison. He then offered $15 per day to Stanford students to play the roles of prisoners or officers. Seventy-five students volunteered. Zimbardo selected 21 male college students from the group of volunteers and gave them psychological tests for normality. Zimbardo made every effort to replicate a prison from the physical environment to the dress of the participants. He even had the prisoners strip-searched and fingerprinted. Altogether, Zimbardo’s study used three officers to nine prisoners, taking shifts of eight hours each with one officer remaining on call. McLeod (2008) described what occurred in the following: “Within hours of beginning the experiment, some guards began to harass prisoners. They behaved in a brutal and sadistic manner, apparently enjoying it. Other guards joined in, and other prisoners were also tormented. The prisoners were taunted with insults and petty orders, they were given pointless and boring tasks to accomplish, and they were generally dehumanized. The prisoners soon adopted prisoner-like behavior too. They talked about prison issues a great deal of the time. They
told tales on each other to the guards ... Some even began siding with the guards against prisoners who did not conform to the rules” (para. 9-10).

Zimbardo’s Stanford Prison Study is controversial. He did not inform participants of the objectives of the study; he only told them it would be a study on the psychological effects of prison life. Zimbardo used a payment as an inducement—$15 a day in 1973 for a college student was a considerable fee (McLeod, 2008). He did not use proper consent forms detailing the purpose and schedule of events. He has attempted to explain and justify many of these mistakes in his book, The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil (2008), but many find those explanations and justifications to be unsatisfactory.

**Correctional Officers and Stress or Perceived Stress**

In the literature, job stress is often defined as the feelings of work-related tension, anxiety, frustration, and distress (Cullen, Link, Wolfe, & Frank, 1985). Job stress is an important factor to examine in correctional work due to the stressful nature of working within a correctional facility (Armstrong & Griffin, 2004). Previous research on job stress has primarily focused on correctional officers working within prison facilities. However, different aspects of the work environment can cause stress for employees working within a correctional facility (Dowden & Tellier, 2004). Cheek’s (1982) study of the consequences of job stress in correctional officers revealed that the life expectancy of a correctional officer is 59 years, compared to 75 years for the national average. In the same study, Cheek (1983) reviewed the physical manifestation of stress by noting that stress can produce many physical illnesses including hypertension (New York State Department of Corrections, 1975), heart attacks, and ulcers (Wynne, 1977). Additionally,
alcoholism and divorce rates were noticeably higher for correctional officers than for the population in general (Miller, 1982). As a result, correctional organizations spend enormous sums annually for sick leave, compensation, and liability claims (Miller, 1982).

The role requirements of correctional officers often involve encountering events that are not normally observed within daily life. These events may result in severe stress and lead to adverse health consequences for the correctional officer. Furthermore, correctional officers are also put in situations where effects from institutional stressors may become prominent and trickle into their lives outside their workplace; these effects may cause psychological distress. Daily occurrences of violence, high-risk incidents, and safety concerns may result in persistent feelings of stress (Burke, 1994). Conversely, routine and standard practices within the role of being a correctional officer, which include inconsistent shift schedules (evening and day), may result in unusual and interrupted sleeping schedules that further exacerbate existing stressors. Lastly, various other institutional dynamics may exist within the correctional officers’ workplace such as conflict in relationships with coworkers/ supervisors, conflict with organizational policy/standards, and absence of acknowledgement for performing well on the job (Brown & Campbell, 1994). Numerous factors can contribute to the perceived high levels of stress that correctional officers encounter. Issues to do with inmate crowding may cause safety and risk concerns for correctional officers working within these facilities (Stephan, 1997). Assaults on staff have increased in the past decade as in the 1990’s; assaults on correctional officers rose almost one-third between 1990 and 1995 (Stephan, 1997). This finding can be concerning not only for this population, but for the organization, because risks to safety are now at an increased level.
Research has found correctional officers not only experience stressors just as the general population does, but this group experiences specific job-related stress factors as well (Triplett & Scarborough, 1996). Therefore, it is imperative researchers are aware of these specific stressors that correctional officers may endure at the workplace as well as in their personal lives. One study found correctional officer stress was most predicted by opportunities for advancement, feedback from supervisors, and perceived organizational fairness (Lambert et al., 2002). This study found demographic and other personal variables were not significant in predicting stress levels. Furthermore, the incidence of gang members as well as gangs in prison has resulted in increased violence towards correctional officers within correctional facilities (Finn, 1998).

Research has found that in the past two decades, inmates are serving longer sentences, and therefore they may believe there are no repercussions to violent behavior. As a result, violence may be escalated (Martinez, 1997). Correctional officers are in a role where the initial environment reflects a negative energy that can shift to unsafe, or to even severely violent in a matter of seconds. Furthermore, past studies have found correctional officers face frustration and hopelessness in a large population of released inmates where the reality is a large number eventually become part of the system again; prison often becomes a revolving door for repeat offenders (O’Brien & Gustafson, 1985). The officers may then view their roles as unable to produce any change for society. As a result, they feel no positive reinforcement for their work. Nevertheless, existing research has yet to understand the specific factors which contribute to increased stress levels among correctional officers (Grossi, E. L., Keil, T. J., & Vito, G. F., 1996).
The turnover rate of correctional officers is generally high, and appears to be increasing (Castlebury, 2002; Daly, 2010; Geiman, 2010; Gillan, 2001; Lommel, 2004; Millson, 2002; & Parker, 2007). One study found that in 2007, 44 state correctional systems reported recruiting and retention problems for correctional officers (Geiman, 2010). Moreover, the turnover rate of first year correctional officers was a staggering 35% to 67% in some states. As a result, most officials concede their prisons are rarely fully staffed (Geiman, 2010). The chronic shortage in correctional officers is likely to get worse in the coming decade as the Baby Boomers retire, and there is no one behind them to take their place.

In the research, five general categories of sources of stress in the correctional officer’s job have emerged, including the inherent danger involved in the job, demographic factors, internal organizational factors (ranging from training to career progression factors), external organizational factors (including public perception of the job and the low pay), and officer attitudes towards correctional work (including whether or not they have a correctional orientation) (Millson, 2002). Millson (2002), in surveying the research, however, found most studies had made use of a limited number of factors and made more descriptive than predictive reports. To introduce a more comprehensive approach to the problem, 17 factors were studied in surveys of correctional officers in 46 federal correctional facilities (Millson, 2002). The data was drawn from a 1996 survey of the Correctional Service of Canada. The results found a quarter of all officers had been at work more than 12 years, over half worked in minimum security and a third in maximum security prisons, the average age was 40, 79.1% were men and 46.1% had university degrees. Nine of twenty-seven factors were identified as statistically significant in leading
to job stress, including the “dangerousness” of the job, staff empowerment issues, shift work, employment security issues, and understanding work procedures. Focusing on dangerousness of the job in officers working in medium and maximum-security prisons, Millson (2002) further broke down the results to find a correlation between job stress and negative perceptions of job safety.

Millson (2002) concluded perceptions of personal security were the most important factor in job stress among correctional officers. While confirming earlier research, the fact that this one factor emerged from a study of 27 factors established dangerousness perceptions as a leading cause of job stress amongst correctional officers. The study also provided organizational leaders with a target for improvement. The reasons for the high rate of stress, job dissatisfaction, burnout and attrition among correctional officers would seem obvious to the any outside observer: correctional officers work in prisons and have to deal with dangerous inmates on a daily basis. Gillan (2001) made use of data derived from the study Addressing Correctional Officer Stress, conducted by the National Institute of Justice and Corrections Program, which reinforced these beliefs. In the report, prisons were described as places of tensions and danger due to overcrowding, which could lead to riots, hostage situations and danger for officers.

At the time Gillan (2001) wrote his report, the situation was getting worse, with the inmate-to-officer ratio in most prisons having risen from 4.2 to 1 to 4.6 to 1 in the previous decade. Assaults against officers had increased by half, which, measured against an only 14% increase in the number of officers, meant more officers were in danger. The trend toward longer sentences made inmates unafraid of the consequences of assault, and the increasing presence of gangs in prison greatly increased danger levels. It was also
found that during the 1990s the demographic nature of the correctional officers changed (Gillan, 2001). Previously, most correctional officers came into the system from a career in the military, meaning they were hardened for the experience and thus coped better. By 2000, more officers came to the work from civilian life, meaning they were less prepared and less well trained for the work. Poor public image and poor pay only exacerbated these problems. In the context of this approach to stress, stress is described as resulting from dealing with criminals.

For example, Gillan (2001) argued the reason why correctional officers experience decline in the quality of their non-work relationships is that they are “dealing with people they do not trust 8 to 10 hours per day,” and this enforced lack of emotion and distrust bleeds into their everyday life (p. 112). Stress also resulted from being constantly on call, working long hours, witnessing marriages collapse, and experiencing ongoing health problems. Overall, Gillan (2001) suggested an awareness program must be developed so all stakeholders involved in the lives of correctional officers are aware of stress and its consequences. Lommel (2004) reported on a study undertaken by the American Correctional Association, *Building a Correctional Workforce for the 21st Century*, which reported that at that point the average turnover rate among correctional officers nationally was 16.1%, up from 12.6% in 1995. That is, the problem of attrition in correctional work is getting worse. That said, the study also determined the turnover rate of officers varied greatly from state to state, with New York, for example, only having a 3.8% turnover rate while Louisiana had a 41% turnover rate.

Still, 34% of states reported a turnover rate of over 20%, which is unacceptable due to the costs involved in replacing turned-over correctional officers. The study argued
the primary reason for high turnover was money, that is, most officers reported they had to leave the job because they were not getting paid enough to make a living. States that paid correctional officers more had lower turnover rates (Lommel, 2004). Four other reasons were also commonly cited as reasons for turnover, including the demanding nature of shift work, inadequate benefits, stress and burnout, and wrong initial selection, that is, some candidates trained to enter the job and then quickly realized it was not for them.

A larger reason discovered by the survey is that when the general employment rate of the population is high, turnover rate is higher. This means when correctional officers have other options, in terms of better-paying jobs, they usually act on them. High turnover rates were cited as a problem in need of a quick solution because in addition to reducing the overall morale of the existing workforce, replacement costs are high. It also places extra burden on existing personnel, leading to more burnout among them. Overall, then, while noting that the correctional officer turnover rate is a serious cyclical and escalating problem with numerous hidden costs, all of which must be stemmed, Lommel essentially believed in an agency reform solution to the problem, concluding it all starts with improvements in recruitment.

It has also long been known correctional officers in prisons face several health risks from stress and exposure to disease through the inmate population (Wright & Northrup, 2001). In dealing with inmate altercations, correctional officers report being worried they are being exposed to diseases like HIV and hepatitis, which is more common among inmate populations. Because of these concerns, protocols have been developed for how to restrain inmates with visible scars, wounds, bruises or other
potentially contagious conditions, and the use of safe-search and self-sheathing
techniques have also been developed. But Wright and Northrup (2001) noted that in
addition to this, correctional officers themselves, undoubtedly due to stress, suffer from
lack of physical conditioning, obesity, and smoking problems, which must be prevented
to avoid further health problems. In most cases, stress has been linked to the onset and
worsening of many of these conditions, which are in turn side effects of inappropriate
coping. Overall, then, Wright and Northrup (2001) painted a picture of a worker
population of correctional officers, who, in addition to experiencing more stress, deal
with stress in ways that then place them in double jeopardy by compromising their health.

In many states, powerful unions protect prison guards. Whether or not this is a
good or a bad thing, or will remain so, has become a contested issue. In California, for
example, the prison guard union is credited with having twenty additional prisons built in
the state, electing two Republican governors, and pushing for the death penalty. Because
of union pressure on the state legislature, moreover, prison guards receive generous
benefits and can make, with overtime, as much as $100,000 per year (Economist, 2010).

Categories of Stressors for Correctional Officers

While the focus of the study is specifically on correctional officers, emerging
studies on stress and burnout among all employees at prisons strongly suggests some
common problems associated with working in prisons generally (Delprino, 2002;
Lariviere, 2001; Senter, 2006; Skvore, 2001). For example, Senter (2006), remarking that
only three studies existed to specifically examine the burnout of correctional
psychologists, found they suffered from burnout at rates equal to correctional officers.
203 psychologists working full time in criminal justice settings, veteran’s affairs settings,
and prisons were surveyed. They reported low to moderate level of burnout, moderate levels of job satisfaction, and yet higher levels of life satisfaction. The fact that those who worked in hospitals or visited prisons often reported lower satisfaction indicates a source of problems at the institutional level. Moreover, in a survey of their job satisfaction, they cited administrative responsibilities, limited opportunities for advancement, and lack of influence with decision-making as reasons for stress and potential burnout. These findings suggested that generally, in prisons and large institutions such as hospitals associated with them, sharing of leadership and providing all jobs with ladders of potential promotion appears to be a common problem (Senter, 2006). Without detailing this study, such research supports the idea that institutional issues are the predominant source of burnout in correctional workers.

While a considerable number of studies have attempted to link specific factors and correctional officer burnout, other studies continue to seek a broader approach and repeatedly seek to parse from several factors the varied degree of impact the factors have on burnout. Lambert, Cluse-Tolar, and Hogan (2005), for example, studied a few factors related to the characteristic of the job of correctional officer as factors leading to occupational stress and burnout. That is, they examined the characteristics of the job itself that led to job stress. The study was based on previous research, which found highly stressed employees led to a poorly run correctional facility.

Studies of job stress have focused on the organizational structure and the job characteristics. In this context, stressors are defined as “conditions that place excessive/unusual demands on a person and are capable of engendering psychological discomfort” (Lambert et al., p. 119). They examined the effects of supervision, the
perceived dangerousness of the job itself, the variety of tasks involved in the job, the amount of feedback provided, role stress, and job involvement. It was hypothesized that harsh supervisors, lack of involvement in the job (meaning it does have emotional significance for employees), poor feedback and ambiguity about roles would all lead to job stress. A survey was made of the correctional staff at a Midwestern state prison using a job stress survey created by the researchers. The results found the perceived dangerousness of the job, feedback, role stress and job involvement as they were mediated by gender and age led to the most job stress in correctional officers. Overall, the study found the job characteristics of correctional jobs in this study influenced the amount of job stress experienced by officers directly. Moreover, variables related to the job characteristics had a much greater negative impact on officers than any personal characteristics, though women reported more stress on the job than did men. The most damaging aspect of the job characteristic was role stress, that is, unclear and conflicting directions and assignments (Lambert Edwards, Camp & Saylor 2005). As a result, Lambert et al., (2005) concluded clearer and more frequent job feedback will itself reduce the level of stress experienced on the job by correctional officers.

According to Brower (2013), stressors for correctional officers can be divided into four types: “inmate-related, such as threat of violence or injury, inmate mental illness, substance abuse, suicide, etc.; occupational/inherent to the profession, such as closed work environment, hypervigilance, etc.; organizational and administrative, such as mismanagement, poor leadership, inadequate resources/pay, understaffing etc.; and psychosocial, such as life stressors, work/family conflict, etc.” (p.35). However, some other researchers classified stressors by physical safety, job classification, personal
characteristics, and tenure of correctional officers. In addition, organizational factors also play a significant role in the stress of correctional officers.

Inmate-related Stress

A contributing factor to the job stress of correctional officers has been inmate contact and/or confrontations with inmates. Increased contact and confrontations with inmates can impair job safety, thereby increasing correctional officers’ perception of dangerousness of the inmates (Whitehead & Lindquist, 1986; Triplett et al., 1996). The U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012) found the rate of fatal occupational injuries within correctional facilities was higher than most other occupations, although it was less than first responders, such as police officers and firemen. Triplett et al. (1996) found correctional officers themselves perceive the work environment to be dangerous and believe they are in constant threat of danger from inmates. Consequently, correctional officers’ safety concerns are significant in correlating with job stress (Armstrong & Griffin, 2004; Auerbach et al., 2003; Castle & Martin, 2006; Cullen et al., 1985; Lambert & Paoline, 2008; Whitehead & Lindquist, 1986).

The fact that correctional officers must work in close contact with inmates, of course, makes their job more dangerous than most other jobs. Skvore (2001) examined, for example, the amount of injury suffered by federal correctional officers, compared to any other kind of federal law enforcement personnel. The rate of occupational injuries experienced by up to 30,000 federal correctional workers was calculated through surveyed workers with the Perception of Personal Well-being instrument. The study was undertaken on the hypothesis that federal correctional officers would report less personal
well-being because of having a higher rate of personal injuries due to inmate contact. The results found correctional officers did indeed have higher rates of occupational injuries than non-correctional officers, males experienced a higher injury rate than females, and staff working at maximum-security prisons had the highest rates of occupational injury. Overall, this study established that a higher rate of occupational injury due to contact with dangerous inmates can indeed be construed as a basis for correctional officers experiencing stress on the job, leading to burnout. Moreover, gender was factored into this equation earlier as Stohr, Mays, Lovrich, and Gallegos (1997) studied the degree to which the variable of gender as related to inmates impacted the rate of injury and encounters with danger experienced by correctional officers. That is, they studied work satisfaction of male and female correctional officers working in women’s jails, to determine if working in women’s jails was less dangerous and thus construed more positively by correctional officers. Insofar as female correctional officers also report sexual harassment and other workplace problems that contribute negatively to burnout, measured in terms of hygienic factors, the degree to which this is mitigated in a women’s prison was also studied. The Job Diagnostic Survey was used to measure job satisfaction among the correctional workers at jails identified as holding only women. This scale focused on task identification, autonomy, skill variety, task significance, and feedback.

Overcrowding within correctional facilities has also exacerbated the job stressors experienced by correctional officers (Swenson et al., 2008). Correctional officers reported recently that overcrowding led to increased stress, problems with safety, increased violence, and impaired job performance. Additionally, correctional officers who worked within the most overcrowded environments reported significantly more
increased job stress and fear of inmates than their counterparts (Martin, Lichtenstein, Jenkot, & Forde, 2012). With overcrowding come inmates who are suffering from mental health issues. However, the research on working with mentally ill inmates and the impact it has on correctional officers’ job stress has been limited, as has the research on the effect on correctional officers’ job stress when working on a special unit for mentally ill inmates.

Impairment of functioning often occurs when an individual is experiencing symptoms of mental illness. While incarcerated, impairment of functioning can often result in problematic behaviors, which could possibly jeopardize the operation of the facility and the safety of the staff; therefore, working with inmates who have mental health issues and/or who are displaying dysfunctional behaviors could result in increased stress for correctional officers (Applebaum, Hickey, & Packer, 2001). Kropp, Cox, Roesch, and Eaves, (1989) found correctional officers perceived working with mentally ill inmates as adding more stress to their jobs, despite their feelings of confidence in their abilities to manage the general population. Lavoie, Connolly, and Roesch (2006) found 81% of correctional officers surveyed agreed that working with mentally ill inmates added to the stress of their job. Additionally, some scholars speculate that the influx of mentally ill inmates has increased the job stress experienced by correctional officers (Berkley Journal of Criminal Law, 2009).

Stohr et al. (1997) found male and female correctional officers working at women’s jails had comparable perceptions of the stressors and enriching factors connected to their jobs. Nonetheless, all correctional officers in the study generally had job perceptions far below the norms recorded for most public service jobs. Some support
was found for the idea that female staff bring a more social service-focused orientation to their work. The fact that all correctional workers were working with women inmates, however, did not significantly impact their job satisfaction, suggesting the gender of the inmate also makes little difference in officer appraisal of job satisfaction. Because of these studies of over a decade ago, it continues to be commonly believed that a primary reason for correctional officer stress is daily contact with dangerous inmates. Other more recent studies have found this may not be entirely true. To differentiate these factors, Getahun, Sims, and Hummer (2006) examined the stress and burnout rates of community corrections officers, that is, parole officers, who work with inmates but outside of prison contexts. The study was based on a broad view of the field of corrections, where organizational commitment has been long connected with institutional performance. Getahun et al. (2006) made use of a job satisfaction measure which examined five dimensions: skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and feedback. Those five dimensions were correlated with satisfaction, though other studies found only task significance, role ambiguity and skill variety led to satisfaction issues. In the corrections field, most research on job satisfaction has focused on demographic variables and work environment issues, focusing on the abovementioned dimensions of the work performed.

Herzberg’s two-factor theory of motivation has also been extensively used in studying police officer job satisfaction, finding that job satisfaction results from the work itself, the responsibility one has in the work and recognition received from performing the work. Getahun et al. (2006) argued the findings in the police officer literature would also apply to correctional officers, at least insofar as the two branches both have frequent contact with criminals, and subsequently community corrections officers as well. Since
policing generally is going through a similar change of management philosophy as corrections, moving toward a model of community policing, police response to change has also been frequently factored in to measures of job satisfaction. In previous studies of correctional officer job satisfaction, job variety was found to improve correctional staff morale. Studies have also found that emotional dissonance is associated with work-related stress and may result from management style. Wardens generally reported higher rates of job satisfaction than line officers, with social context, organizational conditions and individual variables found to have a significant relationship with job satisfaction. It has also been found that more satisfied employees interact with inmates more productively and effectively, improving the overall atmosphere of the prison. Regarding non-institutional corrections employees, it was found job stressors were less due to context and more due to organizational factors, such as low pay, court leniency toward offenders, lack of promotional opportunities, too much paperwork, and lack of recognition. These job stressors were exacerbated by the overall ineffectiveness of the correctional system and lack of community resources to help inmates once released from prison.

Overall, Getahun et al. (2006) concluded from a review of the literature that in the corrections field as a whole, systemic problems, supervisory problems, and employee autonomy problems outweigh the popular perception that the primary problem in contributing to burnout is the prison and its inmates. To test this idea, 68 field probation and parole officers in a county department of probation and parole were surveyed about job satisfaction issues. They were asked to comment on their training, the role of supervisors, the level of input they have into policy, the meaningfulness of their job,
work stress, the reward system and perception of communicated directives. The results found these officers were most satisfied on the job and least likely to leave if they have meaningful experiences and a high degree of autonomy in carrying out their tasks. Collaborative efforts with supervisors were also believed to be extremely important for them. Job stress and problems with the meaningfulness of the job had important negative impacts on job satisfaction as well. As such, organizational culture and management style emerged as the primary reason for community corrections officers’ burnout. As a result, Getahun et al. (2006) concluded in the overall prison system as broadly conceived, the primary problem with burnout and turnover is not so much the prison itself or contact with inmates but the organizational culture and management style.

Vuolo and Kruttschnitt (2008) argued that in addition to being important go-betweens for institution-inmate contact, correctional officers at the front line of the system were important players in determining whether any reform to the system was carried out. They became still more important in light of findings that prison culture is extremely difficult to change. For example, while theoretically espousing a new rehabilitative purpose for prison, too many prisons continue to be structured according to a punitive framework in their daily procedures. Thus, when a reform occurs, it is primarily the nexus of the relationship between correctional officers and inmates that determines the degree to which it will be translated into practice. Not only are correctional officers the primary contact most inmates have with the outside world, but they become representatives of the entire penal system. If a new penal policy is emerging, then it will emerge through changes in behavior on the part of the correctional officer. For this reason, Vuolo and Kruttschnitt (2008) examined the effects of correctional
officers’ behavior on women prisoners’ adjustment to prison life. Results indicated that while managerialism, bureaucratization and risk management thrive in prison, other reform processes continue to flounder.

The application of reform ideas to individual correctional officer practice was varied and even erratic, with micro processes in many interactions undermining reform. The study found correctional officers had a profound impact on whether a woman prisoner can adjust to prison life, independent of any demographic or other characteristic of the prisoner. By and large, at present, correctional officer contact with female prisoners was deemed by the officers to have a negative effect on their adjustment to prison life. These findings suggested correctional officers remain limited in their ability to relate to inmates in ways mandated by a newer rehabilitative regime.

Occupational Stress

The primary cause of high burnout rates for correctional officers is stress on the job. Officers face several challenges not faced by most other employees in other jobs. Their work is also regimented in nature. As a result, they work in shifts, are often understaffed, face the threat of assault daily, and have a poor public image (Delprino, 2002). Delprino (2002) was also concerned that the stress experienced by correctional officers was then taken home with them and negatively influenced their families as well. Stress on the job, in studies of most employees in other fields, leads to job dissatisfaction and eventually absenteeism, burnout and attrition. In a survey of 57 agencies managing correctional officers, an average turnover rate of 18.35% was found.

In addition to the well-studied predictors of job stress for correctional officers, other occupational factors such as shift work and prison security level could have an
impact. However, shift work and prison security level often result in inconsistencies as to the influence those factors have had on job stress. For instance, the research conducted on the shift of the officer (day, evening, night) found shift work was a commonly identified stressor among the correctional staff (Hughes & Zamble, 1993; Swenson, Waseleski, & Harti, 2008). Whitehead and Lindquist (1986) found day shift officers were more likely to report higher levels of stress because of role conflict. However, no significant difference among the stress levels was found when comparing which shift the officer worked (Morgan et al., 2002; Van Voorhis et al., 1991). When examining the security level (i.e., minimum, medium, or maximum) of the prison in which the officer works as a source of stress, officers working in higher security levels (maximum) experience a greater level of stress (Van Voorhis et al., 1991). However, no comparative study was found on the job stress experienced by correctional officers working within a prison versus a jail.

While turnover can benefit an organization by weeding out those unqualified or unfit for the job, it is also true turnover brings with its separation, replacement and training costs to the organization. Another survey found 71% of turned-over officers leave during the first two years of the job, with the most common reasons cited being poor pay, inadequate retirement plans, too much overtime, relocation to another part of the country, dislike of the shifts assigned, and lack of career opportunities. A survey of correctional officers, however, found interventions targeting the interaction between them and their families have been effective in reducing stress both on the job and at home. The reason why Delprino (2002) believed family-oriented services would help officers best is
because families can serve as an early warning system when something is wrong with the officer.

These could be added to formal career development programs and other “relatively simple actions” prisons can take to reduce the stress and high turnover rate of correctional officers’ jobs (Delprino, 2002, p. 5). A major finding in the stress literature has been that employees who feel like they have more input into decisions are generally more content at work, which suggests participative leadership as one way to reduce stress and turnover (Delprino, 2002). This was found to be true in a survey of 31 organizations, with lower turnover rates where employees had a say in company policy. Delprino (2002) also argued more attention can be given to potential stress and turnover issues when the officers are being trained at the training academy. Supervisors can also be retrained to perform more coaching and counseling tasks relative to officers to reduce their stress on the job. Leadership training of supervisors was also found to be an effective, if indirect way, to reduce correctional officer stress. In reviewing the overall research into ways in which prisons can reduce officer stress, Delprino (2002) appeared to come down on peer support on the job as the best way to implement stress-reducing reform.

Organizational and Administrative Induced Stress

Several institutional factors have been significantly predicted as contributing factors to job stress among correctional officers. Some of these organizational factors include: role ambiguity, or uncertainty about how to perform one’s job duties (Lambert et al., 2013; Lambert & Paoline, 2008; Morgan et al., 2002), and role conflict, or conflicting demands on an employee (Armstrong & Griffin, 2004; Lambert & Paoline, 2008; Whitehead & Lindquist, 1986). Lack of environmental control has been significantly
predicted to be a contributing factor for job stress (Morgan et al., 2002; Triplett et al., 1996). Moreover, correctional officers’ perceived lack of participation within the decision-making process significantly contributed to job stress (Whitehead & Lindquist, 1986). Castle and Martin (2006) found correctional officers needed to experience the perception of control over their work environment to reduce job stress. The correctional officers benefited from having the autonomy to make suggestions to supervisors and feeling as if their suggestions and input on the job were taken seriously. Additionally, being able to have input on the decisions being made within the jail and feeling as if they had influence on changes being made contributed to reduced job stress. This demonstrates the importance of correctional officers feeling supported by their supervisors.

Having the support of the administration, supervisors, and fellow correctional officers is important to the workplace environment. Lambert and Hogan (2009) reported that feeling supported at the workplace led to experiencing one’s work as less demanding and difficult; relatedly, Armstrong and Griffin (2004) found lack of support can often result in feelings of frustration and stress from the job. Lambert and Paoline (2012) found that feeling supported on the job increased the correctional officers’ job involvement and dedication to the agency where they work. Those who perceived a lack of support from the correctional facility and supervisors reported higher levels of stress (Auerbach et al., 2003). The role of training and the impact it has on correctional officers’ job stress has been limited. According to Castle and Martin (2006), the amount of training a correctional officer receives is dependent on the local jail facility’s warden and not dependent on the Department of Corrections. Therefore, the amount of training for each
correctional officer differs depending on where they are employed. Training is important because it prepares officers for their job and typically covers safety and general operations of the facility. Lambert, et al., (2009) researched how the work environment impacts job stress, but most importantly examined the correctional staff’s perceptions of training received at the institution. They found employees who felt as if they were provided an adequate level of useful training experienced lower stress levels. The researchers concluded the training staff received provided them with the proper skills and confidence to effectively complete their jobs.

Psychosocial Stress

Studies have also examined the impact of life stressors on the stress correctional officers experienced at the workplace. Stress at home can be a result of intrinsic features of the job itself, such as shift work, the dual roles at home and at work, personality characteristics like pessimism or cynicism, and exposure to trauma and disturbing behaviors (Triplett et al., 1996). Obidoa, Reeves, Warren, Reisine, and Cherniak (2011) examined depressive symptoms in correctional officers resulting from conflict experienced at home and the workplace. Correctional officers who had trouble dealing with work and home demands had difficulty with performing their job. These factors caused significant depressive symptoms in the correctional officers. Similarly, Sam Houston State University (2014) found correctional officers’ most significant work-home issues were the demands and tensions from work that impacted home life. Additionally, the incompatibility of the dual role between home and work, along with family circumstances, places a strain on the work experience and significantly influenced job stress. Increased stress at home led to higher levels of job stress (Triplett et al., 1999),
whereas the more supported the correctional officer felt by their family members, the less they reported feeling job stress (Sam Houston State University, 2014).

Individual characteristics and the relationship they have with job stress have also been studied in correctional officers. These individual characteristics include gender, age, tenure, and race. While some of these individual characteristics have had inconsistent correlations within the literature, their influence on job stress still has some significant findings. These individual characteristics of the correctional officer can have an influence on the stress experienced while at work.

The gender of the correctional officers has been found to be a significant predictor of job stress in numerous studies. Within a traditionally male dominated field, female officers have reported experiencing more stress in the workplace trying to compete with their male counterparts (Auerbach, Quick, & Pegg, 2003; Castle & Martin, 2006; Cullen, Link, Wolfe, & Frank, 1985; Zupan, 1986). Triplett et al. (1999) found female officers experienced more job stress when they reported more stress and conflict at home. However, it is important to note some researchers found conflicting evidence, which reported no significant differences in reported stress between male and female officers (Britton, 1997; Morgan, et al., 2002). It is possible no difference was found in job stress within these studies as the female officers were employed for long periods of time at the facility, which could possibly allow them to acclimate to the stress of the work environment and feel as if they have proven themselves with their male counterparts.

Another individual characteristic researched has been age of the correctional officers in relation to job stress. Older correctional officers typically report more job stress than their younger counterparts (Dowden & Tellier, 2004; Whitehead & Lindquist,
Whitehead and Lindquist (1986) suggest perhaps older officers experience more job stress because of prolonged exposure to stressors on the job and are beginning to experience burnout.

Tenure, or length of employment, is another individual factor, which could impact job stress. However, age and tenure have often been confounded in research. Van Voorhis, Cullen, Link, and Wolfe (1991) found younger correctional officers were more likely to experience job stress and life stress, while older correctional officers were able to focus more on the rehabilitation focus of the job, when the researchers had age and tenure as two separate variables. When just looking at tenure, the longer length of employment produced greater levels of job stress (Auerbach et al., 2003; Lambert & Paoline, 2008; Morgan et al., 2002; Triplett et al., 1996). Armstrong and Griffin (2004) found tenure to be the most significant individual characteristic that influenced job stress. Additionally, the longer an employee’s tenure, the less effective commitment, or psychological bond, they felt toward the correctional facility employing the correctional officer (Lambert, Kelley, & Hogan, 2013).

The relationship between job stress and race has been examined. The evidence for race has been contradictory within the literature. Dowden and Tellier (2004) conducted a meta-analysis and found correctional officers who were minorities reported lower stress from work than their Caucasian counterparts. However, other research suggests a non-significant relationship between race and job stress (Auerbach et al., 2003; Cullen et al., 1985; Lambert, Hogan, & Allen, 2006; Triplett et al., 1996; Van Voorhis et al., 1991). Britton (1997) discusses this contradiction in the literature as possibly a result of the “identification” hypothesis; minority correctional officers perceive the work environment
differently due to being able to relate more to the inmate population, which is often disproportionately represented by minorities. Therefore, it is possible the perceptions of job stress for correctional officers is experienced differently. Individual characteristics have been shown to have some effect on correctional officers’ job stress. However, the findings suggest individual characteristics of the officers are not significant predictors of job stress (Dowden & Tellier, 2004). Gerstein, Topp, and Correll (1987) found institutional factors or working environment was more significantly related to job stress than the individual characteristics of the correctional officer.

Stress Associated with Physical Safety

Numerous articles have noted the significant amount of stress placed on correctional employees, partially due to the dangerous nature of their occupation (e.g., Armstrong & Griffin, 2004; Cullen, Link, Wolfe, & Frank, 1985; Hurst & Hurst, 1997; Lambert, Hogan & Altheimer, 2010; Thurston-Snoha & Mora, 2011; Triplett, Mullings, & Scarborough, 1996; Whitehead & Linquist, 1986). Correctional employees are surrounded by potentially violent individuals who have been convicted of crimes and are being held against their will. These crimes range from drug possession to rape and murder. The danger presented by having to supervise and control a population such as this is increased exponentially when the inmate to employee ratio is considered. In 1995 inmates outnumbered employees by a ratio of five to one (Gillan, 2001). That ratio increased to seven to one in 2005 (Petersilia, 2006). When employees are significantly outnumbered it poses greater safety risks not just for correctional officers but for all correctional employees. Previous research has determined safety is a unique source of stress for correctional employees (Thurston-Snoha & Mora, 2011). However, these
studies have been unable to reach a consensus on the degree to which safety concerns contribute to an employees’ level of stress and burnout (Armstrong & Griffin, 2004; Carlson & Thomas, 2006; Thurston-Snoha & Mora, 2011).

One possible explanation for the lack of consensus between research studies is the different samples obtained for the various studies. A lack of consistency exists within the samples used for the previous studies. The security level of the correctional institution, the type of inmates housed within the correctional institution, and the job classifications of the employees surveyed varied between the previous studies. Several studies surveyed employees from minimum-security institutions while other studies recruited participants from medium or maximum-security institutions. The security level of a correctional institution has been shown to have a significant effect on the level of stress of its employees (Armstrong & Griffin, 2004). Research found as the security level of the correctional institution increased, so did the employees’ level of stress. There are numerous factors determining the level of security necessary to contain an inmate. These factors include the nature of the inmate’s crime(s), their behavior while incarcerated, their education level, any military experience, the presence of significant familial relationships, and the proximity of their parole date. Minimum-security institutions house inmates who pose a lower risk of violence and escape. Maximum security institutions house inmates who have been convicted of violent crimes prior to being incarcerated, have committed additional violent acts against staff and/or other inmates, and/or have attempted to escape while incarcerated. Inmates in maximum security institutions have typically been given longer sentences and have little chance of being paroled or discharged from an institution. Maximum-security inmates pose a greater risk to
employee safety as many of them are serving long-term or life sentences without the possibility of parole and have little consideration for the consequences of committing additional crimes while incarcerated. These inmates know they will not be released from the correctional institution in their lifetime so the repercussions of committing added or greater violent acts within the institution are irrelevant. The intensity of the safety concerns of employees also vary based on the general age of the inmates incarcerated within each institution. Employees who work within juvenile institutions report a lower level of safety concerns. Juvenile “wards” are often immature and tend to be less physically able to harm employees compared to inmates in adult institutions (Auerbach et al., 2003).

Suggesting that in many cases correctional officers quit their jobs because they are not physically fit and capable of undertaking the critical tasks demanded by their jobs, Jamnik, Thomas, Shaw, and Gledhill (2010) sought to identify the critical tasks of the correctional officers’ job, and the physical demands of these tasks. The study was in line with a growing trend to apply exercise science methodology to the development of occupational fitness screening tests, with the goal of ensuring hired workers are physically able to carry out their jobs. Prominent examples of such tests, such as the Physical Readiness Evaluation for Police, the Fitness York fire fighter fitness test and the physical readiness evaluation conducted by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, have already been used extensively. These tests were developed to reduce turnover, to decrease the gap between job expectations and experience, to ensure the safety of employees and those served by them, and to improve the overall health of employees.
Some 190 correctional officers working in front-line jobs were surveyed using a physical demand analysis of their work, focusing on oxygen consumption and forces exerted when responding to problems, and controlling and even constraining inmates. The results found that endurance or cardiovascular fitness was the most important physical ability for effective job performance by correctional officers. Muscular endurance, upper-lower body strength, total core strength, understanding of use-of-force techniques, good peripheral vision, strong voice, hand grip strength, strong back, good balance and bending skills, and overall flexibility were found to be required of tasks such as preventing an assault, intervening in an inmate fight, escorting uncooperative inmates, cell searches, preventing attempted escape, and institutional fire alarm. The results also found that while new correctional officers tended to emphasize the physical demands and think they must expend all of their energy in tasks, more experienced correctional officers had found ways to economize the physical demand in the performance of tasks, preserving some of their energy levels. As a result, a new correctional officer who eventually found they are not physically equipped to carry out the job may experience stress, resulting in turnover. Jamnik et al. (2010) also found that by and large the physical demands of the correctional officer’s job are well within the scope of the physical capabilities of a physically fit woman, meaning that the stereotype of correctional officer needing brute force to control unruly inmates is not validated by a physical demands’ analysis of the correctional officer job.

Stress Associated with Job Classification

Employees’ job classifications can make a significant difference regarding the intensity of their safety concerns and the stress associated with those concerns. Research
has found correctional officers and treatment staff members have the highest levels of stress associated with safety concerns (Armstrong & Griffin, 2004; Carlson & Thomas, 2006). This is primarily due to their daily interactions with inmates. Armstrong and Griffin (2004) surveyed all employees at ten adult institutions in a Southwestern state, inquiring about stress levels. The researchers found stress was present across the various job classifications working within correctional institutions. On average, correctional officers and treatment staff members considered their jobs to be moderately to severely stressful, while clerical staff considered their jobs only mildly to moderately stressful.

Carlson and Thomas (2006) surveyed treatment staff members and correctional officers in two Midwestern medium- to maximum-security institutions. The purpose of their study was to determine if there was a difference in the reported burnout and stress levels between treatment staff members and correctional officers. The researchers found treatment staff members reported similar levels of burnout as those reported by correctional officers. The researchers also found correctional officers had higher levels of overall stress related directly to safety concerns (Carlson & Thomas, 2006). One possible explanation for the difference in reported levels of stress related to safety concerns is that treatment staff members may not be as concerned or stressed about safety because they depend on correctional officers to protect them. All employees depend on correctional officers to protect them from physical harm at the hands of the inmates, which adds an additional burden to those correctional officers. Correctional officers rely solely on themselves and each other for protection from inmate violence. Researchers also surveyed clerical staff members and determined they have the lowest level of stress and burnout (Armstrong & Griffin, 2004; Carlson & Thomas, 2006). One possible
explanation for this finding is that clerical staff members have limited contact with inmates.

An additional explanation for the discrepancies in stress and burnout among the participants in the three job classifications surveyed (correctional officers, clerical staff, and treatment staff) could be the concentration of their occupation. As previously discussed, the sole focus of correctional officers’ job is security. Treatment staff members are concerned with the rehabilitation of the inmates rather than inmate security or safety. Focusing on rehabilitation can quickly lead to burnout because of two factors: (1) treatment staff members may notice a lack of progress and personal accomplishment due to high recidivism rates, and (2) inmates who are required to undergo treatment often fail to participate (Carlson & Thomas, 2006). There are several variables to consider when determining the role of safety concerns in employees’ level of job stress. Regardless of job classification, the security level of the institution, and the type of inmate housed within that institution, personal safety is a constant concern for all correctional employees.

Stress Associated with Personal Characteristics

Research has studied various personal characteristics that may increase job stress and burnout for correctional employees. The three most commonly examined characteristics are gender, age, and tenure. Initial research concluded female correctional employees suffered from a significantly higher level of job stress when compared to their male counterparts (Whitehead & Lindquist, 1986). Recent studies have found this discrepancy in level of job stress between men and women has significantly decreased or disappeared altogether (Armstrong & Griffin, 2004; Auerbach et al., 2003; Hurst &
Hurst, 1997; Keinan & Malach-Pines, 2007; Lambert, Hogan & Altheimer 2007; Lambert, Hogan, & Jiang, 2010). One explanation for this shift in research findings may be because many of the earlier studies were conducted in the 1980’s. During the 1980’s women were entering new fields of employment to which they had previously been denied entry. Among these new fields of employment was the Department of Corrections. As women entered this new field of employment, they were faced a great deal of adversity from men who considered the work in a correctional institution to be a man’s job and not a place for women (Hurst & Hurst, 1997). The lack of support from male coworkers and experiencing harassment from those same coworkers were sources of stress for female correctional employees during the 1980’s and early 1990’s (Keinan & Malach-Pines, 2007). Thirty years later, it is common to see women in all areas of correctional work, and they do not face the same adversity and prejudice they once did. This may be a contributing factor to the decrease in women’s level of stress working in correctional institutions (Cheeseman, Mullings, & Marquart, 2001).

The effect of a correctional employee’s age on their level of job stress is inconsistent across studies. A few studies have found younger employees have higher levels of stress and burnout due to a lack of preparation and understanding of the danger involved in working in correctional institutions, while other studies find older employees face more burnout and job stress (Lambert et al., 2007; Lambert, et al., 2010; Whitehead & Lindquest, 1986). One explanation for why some studies found older employees experience higher levels of stress and burnout is the cumulative effect of the number of years they have been working in the stressful environment of a correctional institution (their tenure).
Stress Associated with Tenure

Tenure is one variable that has consistently been found to affect the level of job stress and burnout among correctional employees. There is a consensus within the research that tenure is positively associated with both job stress and burnout (Armstrong & Griffin, 2004; Auerbach et al., 2003; Keinan & Malach-Pines, 2007; Lambert et al., 2007; Lambert, et al., 2010). This connection may go against common-sense beliefs that the longer employees work in a certain occupation the more they would become accustomed to the stressors associated with their job (Armstrong & Griffin, 2004). The opposite seems to occur among correctional employees. Studies have shown that the longer employees have been working in an institution, the higher their stress level and likelihood of burnout is (Lambert, Hogan, & Jiang, 2010). This may occur because the longer employees work within a correctional institution the more violence they have been exposed to, and it becomes increasingly probable they, or someone they know, has become a victim of violence. Conventional wisdom would suggest employees should leave such an occupation because of the increased stress. While this does occur, turnover rates for correctional employees’ range between 16% and 40%, and the longer the employee has worked within correctional institutions, the harder it becomes to leave (Armstrong & Griffin, 2004). Many correctional employees work for the federal or state governments. This implies that the longer they have been employed by the government the more they have to lose if they leave. In California, it is difficult for employees with the skills of a correctional officer to find another job that will pay them $100,000 a year and provide the same level of benefits and job security the government provides (Petersilia, 2006).
Organizational factors

While the research on correctional officer burnout continues to find sources of problems in officer demographics and the experience of the job itself, the trend of research gives a strong impression of moving toward a focus on organizational-level issues as the primary causes for burnout (Dennis, 1998; Gordon, 2007; King & Bartholomew, 2005; Udechukwu, 2009; Vuolo & Kruttschnitt, 2008). For example, a “fit” between correctional officer beliefs about the purpose of prison can enhance their job satisfaction, while disagreement can reduce it. Thus, the overall philosophy of the system as to the purpose of incarceration is an important organizational factor contributing to satisfaction or attrition.

King and Bartholomew (2005) examined precisely the problem of a gap between overall system philosophy and correctional officer behavior in the prison system of Trinidad and Tobago. The system has adopted a rehabilitative philosophy focused on restraint in treatment of inmates and rehabilitation for quick return to society. However, among prison guards there was a recidivism rate of 50% in resorting to punitive and violent responses to inmate behavior.

King and Bartholomew (2005) therefore sought to study the problem of correctional officers’ views, focusing on their overall philosophy, that is, whether they favor punitive or rehabilitative imprisonment. Efforts were made in the system to retrain correctional officers, so they functioned more as human service-oriented professionals as opposed to a hack or turn-key guarding prisoners. Previous studies have found most officers generally support a more rehabilitative view of prison, but King and Bartholomew (2005) noted that in addition to none of the studies having been conducted
in the Caribbean, demographic and other factors were not factored in. Several risk and protective factors for a rehabilitative attitude have emerged, including being of an older age, years of service, previous overall education levels, and supervisory support.

Lack of supervision tended to make officers revert to a punitive view, and role conflict and ambiguity have also been found to put officers in situations that force them to revert to punitive approaches towards inmates. King and Bartholomew (2005) therefore examined the issue in a sample of Trinidadian and Tobagonian correctional officers, finding that in fact gaps remain between philosophy and practice in the current prison system. Overall, the study suggested organizational support is a significant factor contributing to various kinds of role ambiguity problems as cited. Early studies indicate, for various reasons, a high turnover rate of correctional officers (12.9% in 1996, for example), and the management style of the prison has been cited as a major reason for employee dissatisfaction.

Dennis (1998) reported on research conducted by the Kentucky Department of Corrections, based on surveys distributed to almost 2,500 prison employees in the state, to determine the reasons behind the state’s high correctional officer attrition rate. The survey reiterated a long-held managerial idea: those employees who felt more empowered on the job were more satisfied with their jobs, and those who felt all power had been taken out of their hands were less satisfied. The strongest positive correlation in the study was found between the variable of empowerment and job satisfaction. Management issues also came into play with other issues causing stress, such as working night as opposed to day shifts. In terms of demographics, nonwhite employees felt less empowered than white employees, and gender was also negatively correlated with
supervisory status and shift work. Employee empowerment was also correlated with a higher degree of organizational commitment.

As a result of the study, Dennis (1998) argued all policies of correctional agencies should be focused on employee participation in decision-making and employee empowerment. The use of the so-called mushroom theory of management, where management makes all the decisions and then keeps employees in the dark, must be reversed. Employees must be allowed to participate in important decision-making, or at least be respected by giving them all the information they need to know so they are aware of all management decisions being made about their jobs or the organization. Management should therefore delegate more responsibility to officers. They must develop a vision whereby all officers share in the realization of the goal. They can involve all employees in writing the mission statement, provide interactive management training for wardens, promote team building and the use of self-managed work teams on the job, and create a process to identify officers who may be leadership material and promote them. Wardens also must make themselves available to officers by walking around the facility and getting to know all personnel in a direct way. Dennis (1998) found that by implementing these changes, empowered correctional officers will experience less stress on the job, and turnover rates will be reduced.

Udechukwu, Harrington, Manyak, Segal, and Graham (2007) sought to determine the various reasons for the high turnover rate of correctional officers at the Georgia Department of Corrections, which exceeds 20% per year. The report was commissioned as a proactive effort to stem the rising costs connected with such a high turnover rate. One secondary goal of the study was to determine if compensation was a major reason
for turnover, due to mixed results from prior research into the issue. General turnover theory was synthesized for the study. Developing a model involving job satisfaction and organizational commitment combined with perceptions of alternative means of employment all contributed to high levels of intent to quit among correctional officers. The tenure level and age of the officer was also found to be an important variable in the research. The model of organizational commitment used three types of commitment—affective, continuance and normative—involving emotional commitment to the organization, awareness of the costs of leaving the organization and the feeling that one has an obligation to continue working for the organization respectively.

A model for job satisfaction developed for the study included variety of tasks, social status, supervision, moral values, security, social services, authority, compensation, recognition, creativity and working conditions, among other factors. A sample of predominantly female correctional officers working for Metro State Prison were surveyed with a questionnaire package including the Human Resources Information System survey, the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire, the organizational commitment scale (measuring the three types of commitment), an intention to quit and a perceived alternative employment survey. The overall results found job satisfaction and organizational commitment combined to result in a high rate of attrition.

They also broke down organizational commitment into affective and normative commitment and found these predicted only an intention to quit. Finally, intention to quit data was a better predictor of actual turnover than the turnover data collected by the department previously. More specifically, correctional officers placed inadequate recognition for their work at the top of the list of why they were dissatisfied with their
jobs, while salary was second. As a result, an awards recognition program previously discontinued in 2007 was reinstated. Lack of input into managerial decisions emerged as an important factor contributing to intention to quit. In sum, Udechukwu et al. (2007) found several organizational factors had contributed to the intention to quit among correctional officers, leading to the state of Georgia taking action to reduce the attrition rate focused on specific factors. Following up on this study, Udechukwu (2009) also considered the degree to which two traditional models of employee satisfaction and retention, Maslow’s hierarchy of needs models and Herzberg’s motivation-hygiene theory, applied to the work situations of correctional officers in the state of Georgia.

Udechukwu (2009) only sought to apply the models in order to gain a better perspective on the degree to which different factors influence the turnover intentions of correctional officers. His attention was focused on correctional officers because of the perception that “the job of a correctional officer (is) a thankless one, replete with many reasons for an officer to remain infinitely unhappy while working in less-than-hospitable conditions” (Udechukwu (2009), p. 74). Conceding the research on job satisfaction has moved beyond these models, he still believed they might offer insight into turnover problems. He reviewed process theories of job satisfaction, such as expectancy theory or reinforcement theory, where expectations influence performance and satisfaction, but focused on content theories, which specify particular needs required by jobs in order for workers to be happy at work. Maslow and Herzberg’s theories are the leading content theories. According to Maslow, who took a humanistic psychological approach to satisfaction, human beings were focused on self-actualization, with the needs of this goal being self-actualization, esteem, love or belongingness, safety and physiology.
In terms of jobs, met or unmet needs usually determine whether the employee is satisfied. Moreover, as lower needs are met, this drives a desire for meeting higher needs. Correctional officers would fare poorly using Maslow’s model because the job rarely offers opportunities for esteem and self-actualization. Applying the model to correctional officers, as one need is met, the next need presents itself. Correctional officers face steep challenges in this because as their physiological needs are met, safety needs emerge, and as these are met, then a sense of belonging is needed, all of which are difficult to obtain in the military-style atmosphere of most prisons. The very limited possibilities of promotion create a survival-of-the-fittest mentality in officers, which interferes with developing a sense of belonging. Thus, esteem and self-actualization needs are rarely met in the context of correctional officer jobs. While the pyramid of Maslow (1943) needs could be helpful in determining why officers leave, Udechukwu (2009) argued that because it does not clarify what type of need was involved, the model needs Herzberg (1964) motivation-hygiene model to augment it. According to Herzberg, who also focused on positive human development, satisfaction results from motivation factors, while dissatisfaction results from hygienic factors. Motivation factors are intrinsic to the job; hygienic factors are extrinsic to the job. Specifically, in work contexts, motivators are aspects of the work itself, including promotion, achievement responsibility and recognition. By contrast, hygienic conditions are the working conditions, interpersonal relations, company politics, salary and supervision. The focus in the article was on voluntary turnover, which in George accounts for 76% of all turnovers by correctional officers. Though he did not make use of the models to conduct a case study, Udechukwu (2009) argued that together these two traditional models of job satisfaction might provide
a complete inventory of the various factors leading to the high turnover rate of correctional officers.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this chapter, the selected research design, nature of study, and methodology of the research is discussed. The participants, procedures of data collection and the nature of the analysis are discussed. The sample method, and data procedures are described, in this chapter.

Study Rationale

This phenomenological study sought to add information to the current literature available on corrections, incarceration, and support. In conducting this research study, the researcher identified implications for corrections programming, correctional officer training and preparation, counseling practice, and counselor education and supervision, in an effort to prepare students entering into the counseling field as well as provide professional development for correctional officers currently in the field. Good correctional officers continue to learn and grow personally and professionally each day on the job; therefore, understanding work environment stress may assist wardens in feeling more prepared to train and prepare new correctional officers entering the field (Altendorf, 2018). With the use of phenomenological research, it has been discovered how correctional officers deal with work-related stress from inmates, organizations, administration, and outside entities using former correctional officers as storytellers. The essence of how correctional officers cope with work-related stress has been discovered through semi-structured interviews with former correctional officers who have worked in a Georgia prison facility. Existing correctional officers who work in correctional facilities
of Georgia prison facility may find this study useful through an understanding of the experiences of other former male and female correctional officers.

Nature of the Study

The nature of the study is phenomenological research which sought after the participant’s honest personal responses to open-ended questions and interpreted the findings of patterns, themes, and subjective thoughts of participants with the use of ethno-methodology and conversational analysis. According to Creswell (2009), several assumptions were made based on the subjective interpretations of participants. Creswell (2009) identified these assumptions as “the qualitative researcher allows participants to express views based on the world they interpret [with] open-ended questions (ontology)” (p.9) Mertens (2010) said the qualitative researcher obtains information about the social and historical world by gathering the data personally from their own experiences and backgrounds, so they are “interlocked into an interactive process” (p. 14) (epistemology). Furthermore, observations, documents, and interviews are the predominant methods for inductive inquiry because multiple realities exist, and the meaning is always social. The axiological assumption of qualitative data is that data is not value-free; because the researcher brings personal values, experiences, and knowledge to the data, it is impossible for the data to be value-free or objective (Fuchs, 1993).

The subjective answers provided the essence of occupational stress experienced by former correctional officers who worked with male inmates and added insight into the ways they handled work-related stress, when employed. As the study progressed, the researcher was flexible in the data collection process to accommodate the schedules of the participants.
The research was based on the theoretical framework of Husserlian phenomenology through a characterization provided by Crowell (2006) and is a distinctive feature of phenomenology. First, because phenomenology is not based on theory construction, but is descriptive in nature, it is necessary to provide a clear and careful description of what the phenomenon is and how one is to explain the perception. Second, Crowell (2006) mentioned that phenomenological descriptions do not try to explain causal laws, but to clarify descriptions and mark distinctions to understand “what it is to be a thing of this or that sort” (p. 10). Third, the horizon or co-given background of phenomenology is not factual inquiry, but eidetic, where a concrete act of perception seeks to describe the properties to the person. Finally, the reflective inquiry of phenomenology is concerned with our experiences of entities and not concerned with the entities themselves, unlike the natural sciences. As Crowell (2006) stated, “This allows phenomenology to break decisively with concepts and representation and explore meaning as encountered directly in the world of our practical and perceptual life” (p. 11), giving justice to meaning, and breaking free from the traditional rigors of science.

Researcher’s Philosophy

According to Creswell (2009), several assumptions have been made based on the subjective interpretations of participants. Creswell (2009) indicated, “…the qualitative researcher allows participants to express views based on the world they interpret [with] open-ended questions (ontology)”( p. 9). The qualitative researcher obtains information about the social and historical world by gathering the data personally from his or her own experiences and background, so they are “interlocked into an interactive process” [epistemology] (Mertens, 2010, p. 14). Furthermore, observations and interviews were
the predominant methods for inductive inquiry because multiple realities exist, and the meaning is always social. The axiological assumption of qualitative data is that data is not value-free; because the researcher brings personal values, experiences, and knowledge to the data, it is impossible for the data to be truly value-free or objective (Fuchs, 1993).

The philosophy of this researcher found that only through the subjective thoughts and interpretations of those who work in the field or no longer work in the field can it be understood how correctional officers experience work-related stress. The subjective answers provided the rich, transparent essence of how occupational stress affected former correctional officers in their past work with male inmates and their experiences of managing work-related stress.

Researcher’s Guide

The researcher was influenced by personal experience, personal interactions, and personal knowledge that guided both the understanding and knowledge of the human experience in this qualitative research (Estabrooks, et al., 2005). Fuchs (1993) further suggested the rigor of normal science (i.e., positivism and, somewhat, eidetic phenomenology) did not encourage change or alternative approaches from the time-honored, established methods of research and methodology. Chessick (1990) proposed that alternative paradigms, such as hermeneutics, are suitable to studies of human sciences. He further noted investigators used the methodological hermeneutics approach to strive for qualitative descriptions in the sociohistorical setting. Heidegger was concerned with the human experience and ontological hermeneutics, so he was more involved with the subjective (Chessick, 1990). One subject discussed by these authors is
how researchers and practitioners strive for rigor and structure in daily practice and research.

Dowling (2004) discussed the philosophies of hermeneutics and phenomenology interchangeability and subsequent confusion due to the perceived interconnectedness. The two paradigms were related because hermeneutics is a form of phenomenology; the main difference is that hermeneutics was more interpretive and subjective while phenomenology tends to point more to the objective, traditional, and scientific point of view. However, Dowling (2004) alluded to the idea that phenomenology could be a philosophical paradigm as well. For example, Benton and Craib (2001, p. 166) suggested “hermeneutics is not a method of scientific study, but a philosophical methodology...to uncover the meaning of being for human beings.”

Philosophers such as Gadamer (Benton & Craib, 2001; Creswell, 2009; Dowling, 2004), a critic of objectivity, believed one’s prejudices, history, and culture guides understanding; it was an understanding of the human experience. Conversely, a process known as “bracketing” (an objective process where biases and beliefs of the researcher are suspended prior to data collection) in phenomenology makes this a scientific method of study rather than a philosophical paragon. Furthermore, Priest (2002) referred to Husserl as a phenomenologist who believed in the concept of eidetic or descriptive phenomenology to relate to human consciousness and experiences of the essence of moods, abstract thoughts, or physical objects.

Research Design

The Husserlian approach to phenomenology was used to guide the research design through the essences of how former correctional officers dealt with work-related
stress when working with male inmates, as explained by Spiegelberg (1975, p. 171), which “can be obtained only by a specified kind of abstraction…or eidetic reduction…but never by simple sense perception.” As a first step in this project, the researcher used phenomenology using eidetic reduction that does not seek generalizations of the lived experience. Instead, it moves past the cognitive to the ambiguity of the phenomenon (van Manen, 2002). Bracketing, therefore, is an essential method in vivid recall by asking what some of the non-changing aspects of the phenomenon are and grouping all incidental meanings and trends.

A second step of the phenomenological approach is the use of narrative analysis, specifically ethnomethodology or conversational analysis, which was used to analyze the subjective thoughts of former correctional officers for their sources of stress and their personal strategies used to deal with work-related stress as a research design. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 former correctional officers (a cross-sectional approach based on the criteria of race, gender, and time-in-service) who were previously active correctional officers and had a minimum of ten years’ experience in a Georgia prison facility. Because no other statewide qualitative study, conducted using former correctional officers’ addresses has been in literature, the essence of how work-related stress was managed, their perceptions and interpretations of stress were most important. Furthermore, the auditory observations of the former correctional officers during the phone interview process was difficult. The researcher did not make provisions to record the interviews. The researcher did however document specific pauses, detailed responses, discussion, and deviations from the topic.
Finally, the researcher did employ purposive sampling for this project, which is described by Leedy and Ormrod (2009) as research for a particular purpose where the research participants are selected based on criteria fitting the research agenda. According to Berg (2008, p. 36), “…researchers use their special knowledge or expertise about some group to select subjects who represent this population.” In addition, the researcher used snowball sampling where an initial contact provided leads to other potential participants. Because this research cannot be generalized to the entire correctional officer population, the former correctional officers were chosen based on their time-in-service and gender. The research examined the former correctional officer’s perspective while working with male inmates and the essence of their stress experiences at work.

Sampling Design

The population from which the participants for this study were drawn are former correctional officers who were previously active correctional officers and had a minimum of ten years’ experience in a Georgia prison facility in the United States. The former correctional officers who participated in the interview gave the researcher permission to interview them. The researcher contacted the former correctional officers through purposive and snowball methods. Once the participants expressed interest and a willingness to participate, a copy of the letter defining the purpose of the study, interview process, and assurance of anonymity of participants was provided to participants. As mentioned, Snowball sampling was used for the research, as indicated by Neuman (2006) “[that] begins with one or a few people or cases and spreads out on the basis of links to the initial cases” (p. 223); an initial contact may provide leads to other potential participants. This contact collected the names and email addresses of participants who
were then emailed a recruitment letter, and some contacted personally by the researcher, if an email address was not valid, and then asked questions about their demographics to determine the best cross-section of participants. The query includes: (a) race (for future analysis); (b) verified full-time employment as a correctional officer; (c) work proximity to male inmates; (d) time in served as a correctional officer; (e) year served overall in corrections. Former correctional officers were notified of their inclusion in the study via email or by phone to ensure privacy and confidentiality. All the data collected will remain private and confidential.

The researcher contacted a former correctional officer known to the researcher (who had an equal opportunity to be selected for this study) to aid in developing the sample via snowball sampling. The researcher contacted that former correctional officer and asked him for the contact information of the participants i.e. telephone numbers and/or email addresses. The researcher contacted each participant by email or phone about their participation. The officers that were excluded were those active employees of Georgia Department of Corrections, and also who had less than ten years’ experience in a Georgia prison facility along with those who did not work with male inmates (for example, tower officers, arsenal officers, or outside patrol officers), as these jobs within any correctional facility severely limit contact with inmates. According to Mertens (2010), approximately six participants are needed to conduct phenomenological research, but it may require more than eight participants depending on when theoretical saturation is met. In this regard, the researcher attempted to conduct interviews with at least 20 former correctional officers, however only 12 responded with interest to participate. The former correctional officers that did not meet the criteria were excluded from this study.
because the focus was that of the former correctional officer’s perspective specifically those who have worked with male inmates and have enough experience in that job to provide valid, honest responses.

The researcher did find most of the participants to be transparent and willing to openly share stress triggers experienced, and their view on work-related stress. In summary, 12 former correctional officers were included in the semi-structured interview on work-stress and adaptability. The researcher was able to include the race of the officers for a diverse picture of how former correctional officers viewed work-related stress daily when working with male inmates in an effort discover commonalities and dissimilar experiences.

Measures

The essence of how former correctional officers coped with work related stress was discovered through semi-structured interviews with former correctional officers who have worked with male inmates, and who were previously on-duty correctional officers in a Georgia prison facility in the United States. Interview questions were developed with the assistance of the dissertation committee. The interview questions were worded to provide information in the discovery process about how former correctional officers did view their chosen occupation and their past stresses (See Chapter One). Semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions asked former correctional officers occupational questions and questions about their beliefs and feelings about correctional work. Former officers were asked how they dealt with work-related stress in and outside of the correctional environment, what self-taught stress reduction techniques or hobbies officers participated in, and whether resources were made available as a proactive coping method.
Data Collection Procedures

The research interviews were conducted via telephone, to encourage more participation and a higher sample size; the data collection procedures included the documented responses of participants. The telephone interviews took place in the Henry County Library in a private area that provided confidentiality and privacy, for the interviewer. The participants were described by a penname (e.g., Dan, Natalee, and so on) post interview so no personal identifiers or shared information could be tied back to the interview by outside readers. The observation of themes and response notes were reviewed following each interview to ensure accuracy. The researcher kept an open mind as to the potential for this qualitative study as an emerging design (Leedy & Ormrod, 2009). The role of the researcher was to ask questions and allow the participants to answer freely and without interference (Mertens, 2010). Mertens further explains the researcher must monitor beliefs, biases, values, or assumptions he or she brings to into the study as the primary data collection instrument. The themes noticed in reviewing the notes from the interviews was, in this study, former correctional officers consistently identified the same stress source.

Data Analysis Procedures

The essence of how former correctional officers dealt with work-related stress while working with male inmates was accomplished with the use of narrative analysis, or the condition of social life in the lived experience (Neuman, 2006). This was accomplished with the former correctional officers as the storytellers providing their personal work experiences and subjective observations through semi-structured interviews. Through conversational analysis of phenomenology, the research focused on
emotional management/emotional regulation, or how former correctional officers “recognized, described, explained, and accounted for their work experiences.” It also focused on how they coped with work-related stresses (Mertens, 2010) and applied meaning to their subjective lived experiences.

Assumptions of Study

There were three assumptions for this study. First, it was assumed phenomenological that while research seeks descriptions of the lived experiences of the participants (former correctional officers) in daily work with male inmates, a transparent understanding of work with male inmates could only come from former officers who worked in these types of facilities, because an extensive review of the literature failed to find studies from the perspective of former officers and their stress in working with male inmates. Second, it was assumed that all participants would provide honest responses in answering open-ended interview questions to discover the extent of officer stress as they dealt with male inmates. It was assumed that the correctional officers who volunteered had knowledge, experience, and the ability to contribute to this study, answer questions, and provide feedback. Third, it was assumed that a semi-structured interview would promote more depth from the participant responses due to the dynamic nature of questioning. For example, questions were reworded/rephrased, and probing questions were asked of participants (Berg, 2004) to accommodate more discussion.

Authenticity

Authenticity in a qualitative study, according to Neuman (2006), is more important to researchers than validity in seeking social realities as they exist. Neuman further found qualitative researchers seek to explore the subjective thoughts and feelings
of subjects on a topic and Mertens (2010) suggested judging positivist research is like that of qualitative research. As written by Mertens; Creswell (2009), external validity in a qualitative study requires full explanations of the data, or “thick descriptions,” and it is the responsibility of the researcher to provide the reader with enough information to make judgments and identify similarities between the context and site of the study.

Creswell (2009) and Leedy and Ormrod (2009) proposed several different methods to assure validity in a qualitative study, such as clarifying any bias the researcher brings to the study, peer debriefing, the use of external auditors, and member checks. For example, in a qualitative study by Peterson-Armour (2002), where the researcher was a family member of a homicide victim, independent consultants were used to monitor subjectivity in the data, and many hours were spent interviewing and recording subjective responses of families of homicide victims. Authenticity in this research came from interviews as the primary source of data and quotations from participants. The external reviewers will be professors at Mercer University.

Preliminary Findings

The researcher found former correctional officers experienced high levels of stress while working with male inmates that interrupted both their work and personal lives even after they retired or quit working in corrections. As expected, the participants verbalized openly, to the researcher, the problems encountered, and consistent patterns within the culture of corrections, and resources, made somewhat available to officers. More importantly, the researcher discovered what work-related stress means to former correctional officers and how they managed to cope with stress when/if it occurred. The researcher also discovered whether resources were proactively made available to the
correctional officers, and why the resources went underused. A rich and thick description of the nature of former correctional officers’ experiences was gained in this research study.

Researcher Position Statement

The researcher was a Doctoral candidate of Mercer University. Through her exposure to Georgia Department of Corrections, the researcher found that stress is an overwhelming influence in the daily work environment and a calculated risk for those who work on the front line with inmates. Stress is unavoidable for correctional officers and is many times dependent upon the demeanor of inmates, supervisors, and administration. However, the researcher is aware not everyone practices self-care, has resources available, or deals/views stress in the same manner. The goal of this research was to discover how former correctional officers dealt both positively and negatively with work-related stress in their work with male inmates. A conflict of interest was not anticipated, because the researcher classified personal perspectives and strategies as a research student.

Ethical Issues in the Study

The researcher followed guidelines in respect to the field of study (Creswell, 2009). For example, the American Psychological Association (APA) (2010) exhibited general principles for members under the topics of beneficence and non-maleficence, fidelity and responsibility, integrity, justice, and respect for people’s rights and dignity when dealing with human subjects. Furthermore, the APA lists were extensive in the quest for ethical behavior expected by the membership. Headings under ethical guidelines included topics such as: resolving ethical issues, competence, human relations, privacy
and confidentiality, advertising and other public statements, record keeping and other
fees, education and training, research and publication, assessment, and therapy. For
example, Neuman (2006) listed scientific misconduct as plagiarism or research fraud
while Mertens (2010) found ethical standards are needed to guard against great atrocities,
such as those committed by the Nazis and the U.S. government, and “…less obvious, yet
still harmful, effects of research” (p. 33). Neuman (2006) demonstrated how research
could be legal but clearly immoral or unethical. Participants were asked to complete a
consent form prior to being interviewed.

Protection from Harm

Due to the sensitive nature of the study, all efforts were made to protect
participants from physical, psychological, and/or legal harm. The participants’ interviews
were used for the purpose of research only. Probing questions about how certain work-
related stress factors and strategies to deal with work-related stress made the officer think
or feel were the only cause, if any, of manipulation. The participants did not express
feelings of distress or emotional difficulties, at the close of the interview. Although no
difficulties of this nature were expected, a therapeutic resource list was readily available
to all participants.

Voluntary Participation

To protect the participant rights for participation in human subject research, the
following information was provided to assist in the decision-making process to
participate in this study. Participants were made aware upon agreement to participate that
they were free to withdraw at any time, or they could refuse to sign the participation form
and not participate in the study; participation was completely voluntary, and no
compensation or gifts were given for participation. There were no repercussions, for the 8 participants that opted not to move forward in the study and there were no repercussions for dropping out at any point during the research process.

Rights and Limits to Privacy, Anonymity, Confidentiality

Complete confidentiality and anonymity were ensured to participants and any personal or identifying information was not disclosed in any part of the study, to include specific prison locations. To avoid disclosing personal information post-interviews, the researcher identified participants in the study by a penname, thereby ensuring privacy. Participants’ names and other information were not disclosed to anyone who will benefit from this study. The data will be kept in a secure and locked location known only to the researcher for seven years after completion of the study. Any information relating to the study may be incinerated, after seven years. Because the researcher cannot anticipate the thoughts of others, it is possible those participants that did opt out may discuss inclusion and may disclose information on the study purpose; on the contrary, those selected may also disclose that they were included in the study.

Chapter 3 Conclusion

The research was guided by Husserlian phenomenology, which was based not on theory construction but was descriptive in nature, thus, a clear and careful description of what the phenomenon is and how one is to explain the perception. Second, Crowell (2006) found that phenomenological descriptions did not try to explain causal laws, but to clarify descriptions and mark distinctions. Third, the horizon or co-given background of phenomenology was not factual inquiry, but eidetic, where a concrete act of perception seeks to describe the properties to the person. Finally, the reflective inquiry of
phenomenology is concerned with our experiences of entities and not concerned with the entities themselves, unlike the natural sciences. The data was collected and reviewed for trends from semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions, using ethnomethodology and conversational analysis of phenomenology. The research focused on how former correctional officers explained, recognized, described, and accounted for their everyday lives and the essence of how they coped with work-related stresses.
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to examine the perceptions of former correctional officers who worked with male inmates and their identified sources of work-related stress. An exhaustive review of the literature reveals that while there are many prison environments studies, the transparent perspective of former correctional officers is underrepresented. A phenomenological research design was chosen for this study to seek participant subjective responses to open-ended questions and interpret the findings of patterns, themes, with the use of ethno-methodology and conversational analysis. The qualitative research study used open-ended questions to gather descriptive data from respondents. Furthermore, this research design was chosen so that readers may gain a clear understanding of the stress that former correctional officers experienced while working with male inmates; the researcher, to gather descriptive data from participants, conducted 12 private interview sessions.

Research Questions

RQ1: What, if any, work-related stress did you encounter while working inside of the prison environment?

RQ2: While at work, following a stressful encounter with an inmate, how did you overcome the stress and return to same environment?

RQ3: After a stressful day of work inside of a prison, once at home, how did you cope?

RQ4: What was the main source of stress for you, while working in the prison?
RQ5: What stress support resources were made available to you by your employer, while employed in the prison?

RQ6: Being security focused, how did you adapt post-employment?

RQ7: What, if any, aspects of your former job as a correctional officer do you miss?

Chapter 4 presents the data collection and analysis for the study to include demographic data of the participants. The data collected is presented along with results of data analysis. There were 7-interview questions for the study that were grouped in three themes: identified stressors in a prison environment, prison stress, at home, and stress focused resources. The chapter also ties the data analysis to the methodological approach of the study. A summary of the main findings is then presented at the conclusion of the chapter.

Due to the researcher’s current exposure to the prison environment, as a state employee, the researcher became interested in the stories and experiences of former correctional officers who worked with male inmates. In addition, an exhaustive review of the literature did reveal stress focused research, administration challenges to stress, and stress adaptation, as trendy literature, however resources tend to advance more in the plight of the inmate versus the staff who have the responsibility of maintaining peace and order within the prison gate. Therefore, the researcher was empowered to not only discover the potential stress that correctional officers may experience, but to also add to the knowledge and literature of correctional officers, and possibly develop stress reducing focused training modules for new correctional officers.
The researcher had no predetermined notions for the outcome of this study. The researcher had to read many recent and past studies about correctional officer stress to understand the process of becoming a correctional officer, as well as, employment responsibilities, and stress exposure to gain a decent understanding of the process of phenomenological research. The researcher wanted to understand the subcategory of the lived experiences of former correctional officers who worked in a correctional facility with male inmates.

Participant Demographic Overview

This research study was designed to explain the lived experiences of former correctional officers and their identified source of stress, if any, while working with or around male inmates. The research study focused solely on former correctional officers. The participants were both male and female; with an overall goal of 20 participants, the researcher was able to successfully interview 12 total participants, of which, 7 women and 5 men. Aside from the gender of the participant, the researcher also noted the race breakdown: 3 White participants in total (1 White woman and 2 White men); 9 Black (5 Black women and 4 Black men). The age range of the participants were 48-67 years of age with 23 years of employment in corrections being the most amongst the participants. Surprisingly, the longest tenure in corrections belonged to the youngest participant who started in corrections, as a correctional officer, at 25 years of age. Collectively, the participants have worked a total of 214 years in corrections. Due to the qualitative nature of the research study, the viewpoints, experiences, and opinions of participants may not be indicative of the gender of the former correctional officers, however time employed did yield themes not anticipated at the start of the research study.
Population Access Process. This research study used snowball sampling because the population of former correctional officers who have worked with male inmates are a specialized population that is often difficult to access (Neuman, 2006) or may often avoid sharing information or details to a person they view as an outsider. Furthermore, this research utilized snowball sampling where a former correctional officer, known to the researcher (who had an equal opportunity to be selected for this study), was contacted to inform about other possible former correctional officers who may be willing to take part in the study. The researcher then sent an email to all 20 potential participants along with recruitment letter, demographic questionnaire, consent form and a statement that by responding to the survey, participants are consenting to being contacted for potential participation. Therefore, purposive and snowball sampling methods fit best with the researcher’s purpose to obtain potential participants to collect data on the self-perceived stress of former correctional officer who have worked with male inmates, without bias.

All potential participants \((n=19)\) responded that they were once employed full time as a correctional officer and nine responded that their race is white and 11 responded their race as black with one nonresponse. Out of the 20 contacted to participate, there were a total of 15 scheduled and 12 conducted telephone interviews. All 12 participants reported that their job as a correctional officer, when employed, was versatile depending
on the needs of the facility meaning that there was not just one specific job or list of responsibilities. The correctional officers could work the tower, cellblock, mess hall, perimeter, rounds, walkway, recreation, or infirmary, at any given moment. Three participants reported that they had specific relief jobs that require them to fill jobs when officers in those positions have days off; these jobs consist of cellblocks, walkways, recreation, sally ports (entrances) and mess halls. The perspective of the participants suggest that these areas were considered most dangerous due to the staff/inmate interaction, at any given time. Only two participants reported working on a cellblock as their sole responsibility. Therefore, all these jobs require significant contact with male inmates. Ten participants reported that they have 15+ years of experience as a correctional officer and 2 participants reported that they have less than 15 years of experience as a correctional officer within the prison, however they completed their tenure in leadership at Central Office. None of the participants had less than 10 years of experience as a correctional officer.

In all, twenty officers were contacted to participate in the study, 16 responded to the invitation email, and were invited to participate in the interview portion of the study to express their viewpoints in work with male inmates. Only 12 individuals were asked to participate because they were the only individuals who answered the questionnaire, signed the consent form, and volunteered to participate timely. Due to the small population of former correctional officers who worked with male inmates and the even smaller sample who wanted to participate, there were no choices for alternate participant selection.
Figure 2. *Population Age*
Participant Overview

The researcher used the snowball method to spark interest and identify viable participants for this study. The research study was dynamic in its participants be it post career challenges, or swift career changes; the 12 participants were both memorable and vivid in their descriptions. For the sake of honoring the confidentiality agreement, the researcher has changed the names of each participant.

Participant 1. Dorothy is a 63-year-old Black woman that spent 19 years employed in corrections as a correctional officer. Dorothy resigned after being injured in a gang related fight amongst inmates, and Dorothy is not considered disabled by the state of Georgia. While corrections is in Dorothy’s rearview, she was animated and energetic during the interview.

Participant 2. Lynn is a 61-year-old Black woman that spent 20 years employed in corrections as a correctional officer. Dorothy retired recently after a doting career of accolades and promotions. Lynn began her career in corrections, at 30 years of age, after she became pregnant with no support from family. Lynn’s participation and responses were somewhat indifferent. While she expressed experienced stress and fear along with other memories, she referred to her time employed as “bittersweet” and continued expressing how appreciative she was for her time with corrections and how it helped her as a mother financially.
Participant 3. Nancy is a 59-year-old White woman that spent 15 years employed in corrections as a correctional officer. Nancy left corrections in 2010 for a career change for more suitable hours to support her children’s needs and activities. Out of all the participants, Nancy was more vocal about her unchanging dislike for the correctional system, the danger, and working with inmates.

Participant 4. Janie is a 57-year-old Black woman that spent 18 years employed in corrections as a correctional officer. Janie grew up with parents that also worked in the correctional system. Her father retired as a Deputy Warden and her mother a nurse that was killed in a car accident leaving a facility in 1983. Janie was possibly the most positive about her experiences even though her personal life has been most effected by the penal system.

Participant 5. Jeff is a 60-year-old White man that spent 21 years employed in corrections as both a correctional officer and correctional officer supervisor. While Jeff was one of the first to respond to my need for participants, he was also the most reserved and seemingly skeptical during the entire interview except for the last 10 minutes. While Jeff is retired from corrections, he has built a legacy supporting inmates upon re-entry into society. Jeff’s sister was killed in 2000, during a robbery, in another state.
Participant 6. Pam is a 47-year-old Black woman that has spent 13 years employed in corrections as a correctional officer. Pam recently left corrections to pursue a law degree. Pam attributes her decision to going back to school to her time spent as a correctional officer. Her conversations with inmates over the time employed, pushed her to want to help more. Pam was the most vocal on inmate issues more so than correctional officer stress. In a way, Pam believes that inmate conditions were the root of the stressful situations correctional officers were and are placed in.

Participant 7. Elaine is a 40-year-old Black woman that has spent 12 years employed in corrections as a correctional officer. Elaine took on another state position in 2015 that would allow her more time at home with her son that has special needs. Elaine’s vivid shared memories of moments of danger and the exact time she knew it was time for a career change is one of the reasons the researcher choose this population.

Participant 8. Natelie is a 50-year-old Black woman that has spent 20 years employed in corrections as a correctional officer. Natelie retired in 2017 and volunteers with women’s groups to assist women that have struggled to rejoin society successfully after incarceration especially those with drug use history. Natelie shared that her interest in joining corrections took place after her sister was incarcerated for drug trafficking in 1999. Natelie shared that she never recovered from being incarcerated. Natelie even took in her nephew to raise to assist her sister with her uphill battle post incarceration.

Participant 9. Cole is a 53-year-old Black man that spent 23 years employed in corrections as a correctional officer. While Cole retired in 2015, he remains connected with volunteer services and employee aid programs to assist correctional officers.
Participant 10. Gary is a 52-year-old Black man that spent 15 years employed in corrections as a correctional officer. Interestingly, Gary was employed in another state as a correctional officer then moved to Georgia after getting his girlfriend pregnant in 1995. Gary left his previous state to be closer to his daughter, at the time. Gary’s insight was rich and more colorful than the other participants. Gary held no details back to include language when describing his perception of stress.

Participant 11. Dean is a 69-year-old Black man that spent 22 years employed in corrections as a correctional officer. Dean began his correctional career after his return from war. Dean’s memories added depth to the interview process. Dean’s lens was both that of war and peace within the prison environment.

Participant 12. Glenn is a 50-year-old Black man that spent 15 years employed in corrections as a correctional officer. Glenn, also a minister, left corrections in 2014 due to feelings of burnout and lack of connection with his family. Glenn shared that he was on his way to a high position and promotion but choose his family instead.

![Figure 3. Sample by race](image)

Data Collection

The research interviews were conducted during five separate days, each participant (n=12) being interviewed once, via telephone. The researcher conducted the
calls in a private sitting area at the Henry County Library for comfort and privacy. This location was selected because the space provided confidentiality, privacy, and comfort away from outside influences or the distractions of the correctional environment and home setting. The research interviews were conducted to accommodate and coordinate the participants free time, times available, or vacation schedules which began August 2019. The telephone interviews lasted 30-to-60 minutes in duration. During the call, participants were addressed by their names, however for note taking and transcribing each participant was given pen names like (Gary, Glen, to Natelie) to promote confidentiality and anonymity during the transcription and trend review post interview. During the interview the responses were handwritten, however the researcher typed the research question responses collectively, at the completion of the last interview. After typing the responses for the interviews, the researcher completed the data analysis, compared the interview responses, and formulated meaning to thematic analysis. All transcriptions were then placed in a sealed envelope then locked away in a fireproof safe; the location of this safe is known only to the researcher.

Creswell (2009) and Leedy and Ormrod (2009) proposed several different methods to assure validity in a qualitative study, such as clarifying any bias the researcher brings to the study, the use of external auditors, and member checks. The participants were emailed a watermarked copy of their transcribed interview to the email address they provided and asked to review them for accuracy, to revise their statements as necessary, and return and revisions by way of email to the researcher; participants were given two weeks to make revisions or clarifications. No participants made revisions or clarifications although some emailed the researcher to express concerns about how
they may have spoken about the Department of Corrections, the facility discussed, and infamous inmates and if any of that information would be included in the final research. It was explained to the participants that no identifying information about them, the state, inmates, or the facility would be exposed.

Results of the Data Analysis

During the research study, initially general questions about how the former correctional officer became interested or began working with the Department of Corrections were asked to break the ice. This was done to create an atmosphere that would allow participants to express more freely. The general question at the start of the interview also gave the participants a chance to share their concerns, if any prior to more specific questions that may have made participants feel more uncomfortable. Each participant was asked to respond to 7 questions on their lived experiences and perceived stress sources while working in a correctional facility for male offenders. To answer the research questions, the researcher conducted one on one interviews with former correctional officers via telephone. Below are the grouped themes based on the participant’s responses during the interview process. The response trends to interview questions were grouped into the following themes: a) inmate behavior/manipulation; (b) leadership and/or administration; (c) hours and responsibilities and (e) family needs as an outlier or secondary source of stress which was directly affected by (c) hours and responsibilities.

Workplace Stress/Environment

This response theme was based on interview question 1 (see Appendix A) “What, if any, work-related stress did you encounter while working inside of the prison environment?” Overall the participants believe that during their tenure as the correctional
officer, the stress was present in the facility in which they were employed. While the participants expressed that stress came from various sources on the inside, such as inmates, supervisors, administration, and prison protocols, most retired correctional officers expressed that stress came from administration, who scrutinized the video cameras present in the facility for officer behavior rather than inmate behavior and the terror of working in some of the dorms especially lock down. Participants also recalled the level of stress they remember feeling when an inmate would make false accusations regarding violence and sexual misconduct by male and female officers for attention or extended privileges, doctor visits, or counselor contact; for these participants, any accusations made by male inmates were false. One participant recalled the stress and depression they experienced while being placed on administrative leave without pay pending the investigation, and how they went without pay for 45 days, while they had to willingly wait on the investigative outcome knowing the falsehood of the story. In relation to the overall stress, one participant described stress as, “That’s what we deal with every minute, every time you walk in the gates.” While it's certain that the workplace environment itself was a main source of stress for many of the participants, the researcher noticed that the participants in this research study were split on what within the “workplace environment” was the main source of stress. Five participants expressed that while inmates can pose their own unique level of stress to a correctional officer, the administration/leadership was the main source of stress while five participants believed that inmates were the main source of stress. There was a synthesis of these two stress sources as it appeared from the participants’ viewpoints that administration seemed to scrutinize their every move in relation to interpersonal communications based on
accusations from the inmate population and didn’t buy into moral and skill building. One participant was expressive in their concerns,

The stress of working in a setting where the inmates have more rights than you as an officer. Its complete accountability: [the facility] has cameras everywhere. They have them inside the rec area and pointing towards the officer’s desk area, which is located inside the dorm area where the inmates are housed. It’s almost like you are constantly under the microscope for what you say, the tone of voice you say it, and any actions that you take towards an inmate.

It’s very stressful. Working in the male facility your accountability will always be under the microscope. If they [the inmates] wanna fabricate a story because you caught their lover doing something that was illegal inside the facility, they can make allegations where they’ll try to get it so it’s not going to happen.

However, another inquiry affirmed that correctional administration was the main cause of stress in the correctional environment followed by inmates according to the participants. The stress reported was due to the investigation that followed an inmate accusation of any type of conduct on the part of the officer. The main concerns that stem from these investigations were whether the officer will be fined or fired for misconduct.

I have to say the inmates would be the primary source but then the way that it is resolved. If you have a situation with an inmate, it all comes down to accountability with the administrators. It’s all about accountability; it’s not about right or wrong, it’s about how it was handled. That’s really a big stress factor because not only are you dealing the inmate on a one to one basis, for every action you take, there’s going to be a reaction with administration.
Participants of both genders described inmates as manipulative, such as telling personal stories, and trying to entice officers into making them restrain from violence and sexual advances as a source of stress.

“I don’t know if it’s too much from the inmates…stupidity usually. Inmates curse at you. Then you got the ones who want to fight with you and have sex with you, the males are brutal. ‘Oh you look hot.’ It’s stupid comments like that and at first you think it’s funny as a young guy or girl but after a while it wears on you. So that’s a lot of stress too, the way the inmates are looking at you.”

Other sources of stress that originate from correctional administration according to the participants was that participants believed that correctional administration failed to enforce the rules as they were written, the rules changed constantly, and front line officers were not consulted as to what may or may not work with male inmates. A second theme was the issue of cameras and microphones and participants believed that are used to scrutinize their every action. As one participant articulated,

Most of the stress that I feel from administration is right now, it’s obviously the cameras and the microphones. They always make you think about what you are saying or doing. Obviously for some people and in some situations that I think is a good thing because it will make people think before they act because they gotta think that someone is going to be reviewing this. But it also adds to the stress because you don’t feel as free to say what you really feel like you should say; you have to very careful how you word things. And sometimes these inmates just don’t get it unless you use some terms that they understand. You know, you try to be politically correct in a lot of ways in how you say things. Granted, that’s
probably the right way to do it but sometimes they just don’t get it. You know the cameras are going to be used to review things if there is any kind of accusation or any kind of incident. That’s where they [administration] go. The only other stress I get is the different policies that they come up with that seem to just make sense from them, from their point of view behind their desk. But if they ever actually asked a correction officer that works the job what their opinion is if this policy will work or that policy will work, or some input that will be useful. It’s like they don’t seem to care, they don’t want to know.

Participants conveyed that there were organization concerns, such as mandatory overtime, understaffing, or being underpaid. One concern was what participants called “getting stuck” or forced mandatory overtime. Participants related that it was not the overtime but the stress that they were on the mandatory overtime list that day and the possibility that they may have to work that extra time. For example,

I think it adds to stress when they start coming around with the numbers for the stuck list and, oh, your number 3 today, check in. Sometimes that lasts for a couple of days and you get stuck and get it out of the way and you’re done for a year. And other times that will lasts for months and they will call you: your number three or number 5, and you gotta check in. You check in and it’s like what day am I going to get stuck? You just want to do it and get it over with but that’s a little bit of stress when that time comes around.

Surprisingly, a few participants said that outside sources were a source of stress. There were issues such as reluctance to tell people in their community what they do for a living and how correctional officers, especially females, who work with male inmates are
looked down upon in society. All participants articulated that the media has a lot of input into how correctional officers are portrayed in the movies, newspapers, and the news.

Yeah, I think we are always perceived in the media as we’re always the bullies and the people who are mistreating the inmates. I think that’s a common theme throughout the media, the press, even the movies. It seems that we are always on the losing end of that stick. We’re the ones who are always abusing them or mistreating them in some way. I think it’s rare to find that we are painted with a good light. It’s usually that we are doing something wrong or we’re misusing the inmates. Now that is a form of stress. Also, the questions that people would ask about working with inmates. I didn’t like to go around and advertise the fact that I am a correctional officer to people.

The participants all said that there were cameras on the cellblocks/dorms. Perceptions were that the technology sometimes hindered interpersonal communications with inmates but can be used to clear officers of accusations that inmates may make. Officers were also concerned that correctional administration scrutinized video tapes for the actions of officers, such as talking abruptly to inmates, calling them names, or using expletives. Participants noted that there were advantages and disadvantages to the numerous cameras in the facility:

There are cameras and microphones all over the place, sometimes they hinder you from doing your job the correct way, absolutely. That’s another thing that’s big, those cameras and mikes they are at every corner, you don’t know what to say or do, if I say something do I get in trouble, can I say this, it’s just the mikes and cameras are nuts, just nuts. I do understand why they have them, but I wish they
didn’t have them, you know what I mean, cause if you just do your job it’s no problems, it doesn’t happen, we wouldn’t have mikes and cameras if they just did their job. I used them for my advantage. Inmate screaming out his cell, in keep lock, screaming out his cell, so I told him to keep it down, stop it. ‘I don’t have to stop anything.’ So I went back over there, told him again, keep it down, stop it, enough is enough, start calling me names and whatever, whatever, so I looked at the camera, cameras and mikes, mike was on my left side by my head. So, I looked at the camera and said as you have seen or observed I have given Inmate [blank] several warnings to stop doing such and such this will be followed up with a misbehavior report. “You motherfucker, dah dah dah.” I used the camera for my advantage, and I never saw that inmate again. I wrote him up, they sent him to solitary confinement, and I don’t know what the heck happened to her.

The participants also asserted male and female correctional officers were also provided with the same opportunities for working voluntary and involuntary overtime. Participant 1 asserted before the correctional culture change; male correctional officers worked much more overtime than their female counterparts. The participants also indicated after the correctional culture change, the ability for male correctional officers to work overtime decreased while overtime opportunities for female corrections officers increased. According to Participant 1, a decline in overtime opportunities for male corrections officers had an adverse effect on the officer’s retirement pension. Participant 1 also contended an increase in the correctional officers’ salary would also increase their monthly pension amount upon retirement. However, a decrease in a correctional officer’s salary would in turn decrease the amount of pension received each month upon
retirement. Participant 2 contended after the correctional culture change; male corrections officers’ pay decreased once prohibited from working inside female prisoner housing units. Participant 5 asserted after the correctional culture change, female corrections officers received voluntary and involuntary overtime opportunities more often.

Working with Male Inmates

This grouped theme was based on interview question 4 (see Appendix A) “What was the main source of stress for you, while working in the prison?” All participants have worked with male inmates at some time during their careers. Surprisingly, each participant noted that they preferred working with female inmates over male inmates. Participants added that the violence and tension levels are lower with female inmates, particularly in violence against staff. However, the physical and emotional demands of working with female inmates are greater as well as an escalation of issues in the correctional environment. All participants expressed that working with male inmates is more challenging, unpredictable, and stress-inducing compared to working with female inmates.

With female inmates, the threat of violence is lower, towards you, as far as being assaulted as an officer, and cleanliness, the men are a lot cleaner. It is surprising the men are very, very clean, you will see men cleaning cells out maybe twice a day, you have to tell a female inmate clean your cube, clean your cell, she might keep her clothes clean but her area is dirty. A male inmate you might never have to tell him that, he’ll take care of everything, no arguing. Females want to argue with you, talk back to you, why, why, why, why when you tell them to do something, that’s not my job, they don’t want to do nothing. A male is gonna be
upset about it but he’s gonna do the job just so he can shut up cause you know ‘I
better do the job cause I might not get cracked out for yard later or I might get
extra ice’ because, little things, with men little things will go very far, women
don’t care about that. You don’t have to worry about weapons with women – they
won’t make them, they may pick up a chair, the men you gotta worry about
weapons, the threat of violence, you gotta go from 0 to 60 like that with the men.
With the women, it might go 0 to 25 then it might escalate slowly but surely, with
the men you gotta be on the ready.

All participants worked near male inmates. While their responsibilities in the
facility vary, most of the participants report working on cellblock where approximately
60 inmates live. Two of the participants said they work outdoors on a walkway, where
approximately 50-100 inmates move from place to place at a time. One participant
described working on a cellblock in a prison for male inmates:

They are right there. I have kitchen dorm for two days. My desk is right inside the
dorm area, it sits up about 4 feet, so you are high and you can see, and they got
their cubicles, so if you stand up you can see their heads from their shoulders up.
And when you walk around, they have to put a curtain up, and you have to go into
the bathrooms and showers to make sure they aren’t having inappropriate contact,
smoking in the bathrooms, hanging themselves up in the bathrooms. So you walk
through the bathrooms constantly, very close to them, it’s how you conduct
yourself. There are inmates who want you to make an announcement before you
go through the bathroom and it’s totally untrue – they want you to make
announcements, they’ll flush stuff down the toilet if I do that. We are constantly up on the inmates all the time.

According to most of the participants, most male inmates specifically lifers (inmates that will serve 60+ years in prison) conduct themselves well on a daily basis and do not cause problems. The male inmates with 5-10 years, gang relativity, or mental illness were the time bombs and it was only a matter of time for a fight or confrontation to take place. Two of the participants stated that the inmate/correctional officer confrontations were the worst, because the other inmates would side with the inmate, and create a hostile environment for the officer(s). A prevailing source of stress that each participant expressed was inmates exposing themselves or talking about what they like sexually loud enough to be heard for comedy, or to make female offices uncomfortable. Only one participant said that most of the male inmates’ conduct was inappropriate,

Poor, shitty. I think you could qualify some of them as behaved. The confinement promoted their animal like behavior. They are very openly sexual with their male inmate friends, gay-ism is unbelievable. Every day I was on the walkway, and I hear ‘honey,’ ‘I love you’ and they blow kisses. If they allowed them to have physical contact, they’d be holding hands and singing down the walkway. As a matter of fact, they do sing. They just behave crazy. I can’t believe men act that way, if that’s what you want to call them. The gay part is the biggest issue. I’ve seen some terrible shit, as a man. I started in corrections at 25. My mind was blown.

Four participants reported being accused by an inmate of sexual misconduct or improper conduct with a male inmate, while employed, with the investigations lasting
from three days to one year. All participants were cleared of the allegations. The same four participants stated that the event was very stressful, the accusations were inmate generated, and not from cameras or eyewitness accounts. It was embarrassing and humiliating to be walked to the parking lot by HR. A marginal issue is that inmates are not punished when false accusations are made. One female participant stated that she was never officially accused or investigated but she was accused by other officers jokingly almost like hazing, when she first joined,

You get the guys ‘you’re having sex with [the inmate], blah, blah, blah.’ Well, after a while, that sort of got on my nerves and one day I just lit them all up. I said yes, I’m having sex with him I lied and said yeah, I’m having sex with him now leave me the fuck alone and yeah he’s good. That pretty much put all the female officers in check and that’s what it was about. But I’ve never been officially accused. That pretty much died after that, I think they just wanted to see how much they could get under my skin. The state made him such an infamous prisoner that every time he moved or walked everybody knew where he was. And if he was on your unit, I’d get a hundred calls a day, what does he look like, what’s he doing? Like there was a 24 hour a day want to know where [he] is. Participants thought about the media and the stigmatizing of officers is that the media insinuates that officers abuse male inmates both physically and sexually. As one participant stated,

Anytime a correction officer gets in trouble for the slightest thing, an inmate accuses you and the accusation might be false, but if it gets to the newspaper, it’s all over the newspaper. Officer accused of having a sexual relationship with an
inmate and if you’re innocent, it’s too late because it’s already in the paper and now you have your wife, and family, and friends stigmatize you as ‘look at this guy, he’s in there having sex.’ As far as I can see, it’s not as blatant as people think it is, they think it you know the TV and the movies that we’re all in there having sex and it’s a regular orgy fest and it’s not, it’s very professional as far as I know.

All participants answered that male inmates manipulate the correctional system to get what they want for various reasons. The main reasons stated are that inmates are “hustlers” and try to play on the emotions of officers, supervisors, or correctional administrators. One participant shared his memory of how ineffective his head of security administrator was during his employment. The participant added, “He was very inmate friendly and openly against the decisions of the officers, and the inmates knew it.” As stated by that participant, “If they don’t get what they want they know who to contact, write to, if you are new or too scared to do your job, they can threaten you with going to administration.” Three participants reported that they were not surprised that officers would engage misconduct with inmates. As one participant stated,

It was laughable when facilities started making stories of misconduct public through the wall of shame. Another officer would say, “did you hear about______”. It had got so bad, the veteran officers started placing bets on who wouldn’t last. It was almost like you could tell by their face.

One participant related a story of female staff member misconduct when he worked inside the prison:
When I was _______, a female officer was suspected of sleeping with an inmate at the facility, so they were watching her. She ended up bringing in drugs for the inmate she was sleeping with, gave him the drugs, and she had a urine test the next day, came up positive, he tells. So, they watch her, and they asked her to resign, they gave her the option to resign or be fired, she resigned, which I thought was bullshit. I mean I didn’t want her to go to jail or nothing but what’s good for the goose is good for the gander, come on, let’s have equality.

Consequence of Stress/Outcomes

Emotional Dissonance

The theme of emotional conflict was based on interview questions 3, 5, and 6 (see Appendix A). The participants asserted that they would withhold their true feelings when involved with stressful situations involving both administration and inmates. The main concern was how situations would escalate, and how administration would side with the inmate without a seemingly fair assessment of the situation. When dealing with stressful situations involving the media (outside sources) or organization factors (inadequate staffing or mandatory overtime), the participants were free to complain amongst one another. However, making statements to the press about any situation or people inside the correctional facility was not allowed. According to the participants, emotional dissonance/conflict is present for correctional officers who work in a prison facility. As one participant conveyed:

You really must hide your true feelings because if you really let your true feelings out, you would probably be dismissed, you would probably be terminated, or judged. There’s time where if you’re a fair individual and you have fair sense
towards a person and humanity, there are times you want to be compassionate and if you were to tell your fellow officers or supervisors that you feel sorry for that inmate you would be looked down upon as someone who is weak, soft. You are a soft officer.

Most participants never had a personal problem with another officer but at least two have had at least one conflict. The analysis confirmed that at least three participants have had a personal conflict with both a civilian staff and a security supervisor. None of the participants have had a personal run in or an exchange of words with administration. The personal problems with security and civilian staff in the correctional environment appear to be minimal as reported by participants. A participant noted one incident that they had with another correctional officer:

I’d come in, I was working nights, and they would make comments. Little comments about me kissing ass with supervisors because I had a nice easy job that night. I constantly heard my name come out of their mouth and this went on for months. I let it go and let it go. I talked to other officers about what I should do and they said I should let it go and ignore him. Well it wasn’t going away. So, it literally went down in line up one day and short of grabbing him off his ass, I threatened to kill him on the spot. I told the officer they had one more time to say my name out of their mouth, and I would beat them to death. I literally threatened their job and life, because I had had enough.

Many participants believed that the public views them as they are portrayed in the movies: as abusers of inmates, both sexually and physically. Only one participant did not
bring up abuse as a subject but related several other issues as they recalled how officers are viewed by the public. These views included both family members and strangers.

I think the public thinks we are overpaid babysitters. That we get paid too much to watch prisoners. That’s pretty much what all the public believes, my father in law included. They think you got it easy. But they don’t understand what goes on there. I mean, they’ve already been arrested, there’s nothing to worry about. Well, you know, it’s a society within a society. It’s animal house in there. They do have weapons, they do have drugs, they do have that nonsense. Everybody thinks they’ve been arrested, and their weapons are all gone, the police took care of that and all you must do is watch them. And that’s not the way it goes in there.

Honestly, I don’t get too concerned cause over the years you learn to tune it out. But yeah, I think people are offended cause taxpayers are offended that we get paid too much. You know, like a lot of times when I go into the store and I have my uniform on, I sort of get looked at funny. Some people will call me sir and some people make a sarcastic comment, “babysitter” or you get paid too much or geez, oh yeah, congratulations, you’re the only one who’s got a job in this state. You know, that type of thing.

Five of the participants believed that there were both role conflict and role ambiguity in their jobs as correctional officers. In terms of role conflict, many said that over time their jobs have been expanded from security to the roles of counselors. Not only do they have to be security minded but expected to be nurturing and understanding. Role ambiguity was reported by participants as the rules constantly changing to suit the inmates and the administration agenda and all participants found that they couldn’t keep
up the numerous changes that occur on a frequent basis some of the changes sparked retirement and a career change for a few participants. One participant communicated their views on role conflict and male inmates in the correctional environment:

A counselor, yeah. Yes, you must discipline them, and you have to listen to them. They want you to listen to them more now a days. I mean, back in the old days when I first got there it’s, oh yeah, you’re going to lockdown, boom, boom, boom we’re done with you. Its now, you must find out why they’re upset. I’ve had situations where an inmate gets off the phone and he’s freaking out, screaming, crying, carrying on. Normally, I’d say, you’re creating a disturbance. Now, you can’t do that…it’s you must listen to them. Oh, what’s the matter? CO, I had a death in the family, then you have to say, you try to talk to them nicely, ok well, can I send you to the chaplain, whatever so on and so forth. You try to ask, was it a son, a daughter and you almost must be sympathetic because they did lose someone in their family. Now they want you to listen to them. You’re expected to do more with less training. They don’t train us to be counselors. I’m sorry I’m not a counselor. If that was the case, I’d go to school to become a counselor. I don’t know what to say to inmates.

Another participant articulated his views about role ambiguity and the constant rule changes as it works in the correctional facility in which he is employed:

It would happen all the time. You’ll have rules that are supposed to be set in concrete and the next week they change them; it was a constant changing all the time as far as rules and regulations. New Warden/New rules. They want you to enforce them, they don’t want you to enforce them. That inmate they want you to
enforce them, that inmate they don’t want because he’s giving information. So, there’s a lot of double standards in the department of corrections.

Participant seven asserted after the correctional culture change, he became dissatisfied with his job as a correctional officer because he could not perform all his duties and responsibilities. Participant 10 contended he gave up his job as a correctional officer and time served to go back to school, after he endured a divorce and a health scare. Participant 11 also asserted the correctional culture change and his dissatisfaction with his role as a corrections officer was the main determination in his decision to retire.

Health and Stress

This grouped theme was based on interview questions 3, 5, and 6 (see Appendix A). The participants related that they experienced some sign of physiological stress at work that are manifested in tempers being raised, which raises the blood pressure, makes the heart race, sweating, and the pulse racing. Participants said that these manifestations resulted from incidents such as breaking up fights, inmate demands, and inmates being too loud, and concerned about how their actions are perceived. Over half of the participants even added that they saw significant weight gain within 12 months of being employed as a correctional officer. The other participants shared they saw significant weight loss that was considered unhealthy by their medical doctor.

Yes, heart palpitations and my blood pressure was as high as 250 over 150. For some reason, as soon as you walk in those gates and those gates close and you hit your timecard, I think that’s an automatic surge of adrenaline or stress that goes into your system that you cannot control. There are certain things outside that you can do to control that stress, such as meditation or physical things. As I say to this
day, I have uncontrollable high blood pressure and borderline diabetes. I was always healthy, always physically fit. I never had any of these medical ailments. Of course, doctors prescribed all kinds of medication for me, which really did not end the stress level inside the prison because stress will always be there. There are medications that you can take but that stress will always be there when you enter that facility.

Five of the participants stated that they did not use sick time, while employed, due to work related stress but use sick time for other activities i.e. family events or travel. However, three participants said that they used sick time for a ‘mental health day’ due to work related stress, almost annually, when employed. One participant said that upon retirement after over 20 years on the job, he had no sick time.

After 20 years, I had no sick time at all. I use all my sick time for what I would call mental health days, stress relief. There were days when I just don’t wanna go in there, I don’t wanna say I was shaking up, but I’m wise enough now to say that was exactly what it was. After year 5, I walked in to find an inmate nonresponsive. It looked like a suicide, but I was still new. I remember that day like it was yesterday, and it was over 15 years ago. After that incident, I made no apologies for taking time away to do nothing. I was a newlywed, when I joined the Department of Corrections. I remember my wife telling me “don’t bring that stuff home.” Even she was shaken by the stories that I would share.

Stress Relief

This grouped theme was based on interview questions 5 and 6 (see Appendix A). Half of the participants said that they did not bring work home and “leave work at work”
while the other participants stated that they did bring work home sometimes indirectly through attitudes, mood, and lack of energy. Participants reported various activities that helped them, while employed, to relieve stress or take their minds off their jobs, weekend socializing, drinking with friends/neighbors, and vacationing. Spending time with their families, having a progression plan, or home improvement were also described. One participant described his activities that he used to relieve stress,

Yeah, I would shoot guns, at the gun range. I like to work with my hands. I do odd construction jobs, around the house, on the side and make some extra cash to relieve my stress. That’s what I use to do to clear my head.

Three of the participants recalled that there was an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) where they could talk to someone about stress i.e. counseling at little to no cost, however there was a fear or stigma surrounding EAP resources. Many employed would worry that the use the EAP would get around the facility. All the participants noted that they generally kept discussions about work related stress amongst other officers and to a family member, generally a spouse or significant other.

Mostly during carpool, there were several officers I’d ride with and several I’d talk to at work and I think the majority of the time, I thought, those were the only people I could relate to about it, you know, dealing with the same thing. We would use the car ride to talk about changes taking place, annoying inmates, or even leadership calls.

Conclusion

In summary, the twelve former correctional officer participants interviewed for this study consistently identified stress sources, while working inside of a facility, that
affected both their jobs and personal lives. The findings of the study indicated that participants viewed inmate behavior, leadership inconsistencies, and job responsibilities, while identified out of order, all equally stressful. The findings of the study indicated that while there are many sources of stress, the participants specify that correctional administration was the main source of their work-related stress followed by, or coupled with, inmate behavior/safety, and job demands. Participants indicated that work-related stress was a part of their everyday lives, while on the inside. Many added that the intensity of working with inmates was regular and desensitizing to most. The identified post-employment challenges were reconnecting with family and disconnecting from a security mindset. When looking at the consequences of stress in corrections, the participants attributed those results to health issues, feeling emotionally disconnected, and lackluster self-care practices and effectiveness.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This study, using phenomenological research methodology, examined the perceived stress sources of former correctional officers that have worked with male inmates in the Georgia prison system. Twelve correctional officers who met the prescribed criteria of; (a) worked as a correctional officer in a Georgia prison facility; (b) work in direct proximity to male inmates; (c) at least 10 years of experience time in service described their lived experiences and views of working with male inmates. This chapter will present a summary of the results, limitations, recommendations, and conclusions of this study.

Data Collection Overview

While literature on prison corrections is vast, an exhaustive review of the literature examined general correctional officer stress and found numerous published qualitative studies on correctional officer stress between, however national qualitative literature from the perspective of formerly employed correctional officers was difficult to capture. In addition, the literature review did not reveal any studies found that examined the stress of former correctional officers that worked with male inmates. The goal of this study was to identify the perceptions of, and to discover without bias, what former correctional officers who previously worked with male inmates believed were their sources of stress in the correctional environment and how they coped with that stress. Twelve former correctional officers brought their unrestricted perceptions about work with male inmates and stress in the correctional environment, to the phone interview that
lasted 45-60 minutes in length. There were seven open-ended research questions that guided this study.

This phenomenological qualitative study used open-ended interview questions; participants were encouraged to speak freely, and the researcher took notes for each question to ensure details were not lost, to collect data, and gain their perceptions of work stress in the prison environment. Since all of the interviews were conducted via telephone (participant choice) the sessions were not audiotaped, however thorough note taking gave the researcher an opportunity to review answers and analyze for thematic analysis which provided several emergent themes; the most frequent emerging themes for the study were correctional administration, stress of responsibilities and work hours, and male inmates’ manipulation. All the participants (n=12) have been a correctional officer at a median range of 17-years with 12 years employed being the least time employed. The first few interviews in the research process seemed to let former correctional officers who worked with male inmates vent their frustrations and concerns about stress in the correctional environment at the time of their tenure as correctional officer, and express themselves without influence from the facility, other officers, or administration. However, once they vented their frustrated memories, a shift took place during the interview. Seemingly, the participants felt a sense of responsibility to share the hurdles they’ve faced, to help those correctional officers in the future. One very significant finding of participant characteristics brought out during the interview process was that participants with 20 + years employed seemed to have more stress and more opinions about the sources of stress.
A few auditory observations about the participants, during the call, from the researcher’s perspective were that the participants were all initially nervous and skeptical yet intrigued by the opportunity to just talk about their experiences with stress while working in corrections. Most participants had professional demeanors and generally did not refer to any person they encountered in corrections rudely, however a couple participants gave their uncensored account of incidents using profanity, and their speech escalated as they recalled a stressful incident. Escalated speech or hypersensitivity was a general theme. There were instances where a few former correctional officers referred to inmates, supervisors, or administration negatively. One participant (participant 11) was seemingly distracted during most of the interview: his responses were delayed, and he needed reminding of the original question several times throughout the interview. The same participant placed the researcher on hold twice during the 60-minute interview. This interview was the most difficult. Despite many efforts on behalf of the researcher to keep the participant engaged, he began chatting off topic almost like a defense mechanism. During the first part of the interview when general icebreaking questions were asked, participants seemed relaxed. When research specific questions about work related stress in a correctional facility were asked, it seemed that participants tended to talk more hesitantly and, in many instances, at least one participant seemed agitated when discussing stressful experiences. Many times, participants’ voices were raised slightly as they described their stresses and experiences working with male inmates, in a correctional facility. Participants sometimes laughed when describing their past experiences and stressors, but the laughter seemed nervous. The more experienced participants resulted in longer interviews and was richer in their descriptions of work
with male inmates. It is the researcher’s opinion that this rich and lengthy dialog was due to the longer and more diverse experiences and time spent in corrections by the former correctional officers.

Summary of the Results

Work Stress Theme

The results of this research study showed there are a variety of sources that affect correctional officers. Participants viewed work environment stress not from one source, but a collection of stress sources. While the results are consistent with previous research on the correctional officer’s experience, inmates’ manipulation/safety, correctional administration, and the workload/responsibilities of the correctional officer were a reoccurring theme throughout (Black, 2001; Finn, 2000, 1998; Garland, 2002; Hogan, et al., 2006; Tewksbury & Higgins, 2006; Morgan et al., 2002). The participants in this research study described many sources of stress during interviews and said that correctional administration was their greatest source of stress in the correctional environment followed by inmate manipulation. One of the most significant findings was that all participants communicated that their main source of stress, surprisingly, came from correctional administration, as they believed that their actions or lack thereof were scrutinized, or that administration would often side with the inmate without thorough consideration, or as one participant recalled “lack of support” in incidents of allegation or safety with male inmates.

As indicated by Tracy (2004), “The regularities of correction officers included “…identities marked by paranoia, withdrawal, detachment, and an ‘us-them’ approach toward inmates,” as indicated by an emotional construction of officers is a detachment
from inmates as ‘part and parcel’ of the job” (p. 529). In relation to work stress, the current research study found that participants who worked with male inmates had an ‘us v. them’ mentality and the detachment can be extended to correctional administration as well. Additional issues for participants were workload responsibilities, last minute call ins, feelings of being overworked, and low morale. The recall of low morale seemed to come from those participants that reported working 15+ years or more, in corrections. The participants with more time served in corrections recalled moments of burnout, and lower self-care practices due to workload and hours. Conversely, the participants with less time served expressed concerns about male inmates’ accusations and the manipulation of both administration and the correctional officers.

Working with Male Inmates Theme

The research study supported that participant’s view on inmate manipulation. Many participants expressed the memory of stress following an untrue allegation from an inmate that was upset with a correctional officer, or “just wanted to be entertained”. While cameras are now highly prevalent in the facility, inmate accusations, in most cases, require a level of investigation which would send the alleged correctional officer home with no pay, pending the investigation outcome. Participants remarked that they were expected to play many roles of custodian, counselor, social worker, psychologist and the constant rule changes made their job particularly difficult and stressful. Participants described how the “mission” would often change with the leadership.

Several authors (Alarid & Marquart, 2009; Black; 2001; Camp, Gaes, Langan, & Saylor, 2003); Cornelius, 2001; Finn, 2000; Keinan & Malach-Pines, 2005; MTC Institute, 2004) discussed the inmate role in correctional officer stress in terms of
violence, manipulation, and infectious diseases. According to the participants, many of
the male inmates pose unique challenges both young and old. Participants related that
while they remember most inmates being respectful and did not cause problems such as
fights or loud behavior, it was the same very few who caused many of the problems: “you
would celebrate their transfers”. All participants stated that they worked very closely as
front-line officers and worked in housing units or walkways daily, with male inmates.
However, one problem especially noted by female participants is male inmates exposing
their private body parts to female officers on the cellblocks; on occasion, male inmates
accused female officers of leering or looking at their exposed bodies.

Additionally, all participants previously worked in facilities for male inmates and
noted that the tension in the male facilities was, at times, greater than a correctional
facility for female inmates, as far as the threat of violence against other inmates or staff.
The participants also noted that male inmates are easier to work with as the male inmate
is more compliant, and cleaner compared to female inmates. Participants reported that the
tension in a prison for female inmates was not as high and suggested that female inmates
are more disrespectful, louder, and complain more often than the males. As one
participant stated,

Male inmates were easier. When you tell a male inmate to do something, they do
it, they know their place. They know what they’re supposed to do you tell them to
do it and they do it. They may complain under their breath, but they continue and
do what they have to do. Females are always looking for excuses. ‘Oh, I’m not
feeling well’ and they give you a whole list on why they can’t mop a floor or pick
something up. So, its constant you must use your mind to trick them to get them
to do something, so you don’t have to listen to it.

Participants said that male inmates attempted to manipulate officers where
inmates try to get know their personal business and the male inmates are not so
inquisitive. Additionally, participants felt that male inmates manipulated the correctional
system to get what they want or to circumvent the rules. Participants described that much
of this was attributed to poor correctional management not addressing negative inmate
behavior, and fear that not addressing inmate complaints, might negatively affect their
jobs. One participant aptly stated, “Every single day, every minute of the day and it’s
allowed because I think they play on the administrations fear of them being put on the
stand. ‘Why didn’t you do anything about it?’ It’s about their accountability. That’s what
I think.” Participants viewed inmate manipulation as a negative factor that did not allow
correctional officers to be as effective. “Administration gave into inmate demands, which
negated the authority of the front-line staff, causing stress.”

Emotional Dissonance Theme

Some participants described experiencing an emotional disconnect from
corrections, post-employment. Several authors suggest that correctional officers
experience emotional dissonance as a part of daily work life based on dealings with
inmates, correctional administration, organizational factors, and sources outside the
correctional environment (Dowden & Tellier, 2004; Finn, 2000; Garland, 2004; Gillan,
2001; Gray, 2002; Hogan et al., 2006; Lambert, 2004, 2006; Lambert et al., 2009;
Morgan et al., 2002; Paoline et al., 2006; Schaufeli & Peeters, 2000; Tewksbury &
Higgins, 2006; Tracy, 2004). Based on their experiences as former correctional officers,
the participants reported that they often would withhold true feelings when confronted with a stressful situation (emotional dissonance) at work. One participant spoke about the perceived danger in being vulnerable and outspoken around inmates. Participants suggested that inmates would use emotional responses as ammo and some even would view as a weakness.

Further findings were that participants reported no real connection with other correctional officers aside from professional colleagues. Conversely, the participants said that they were free to complain to other officers about inmates, administration, or outside forms of stress, but would run the risk of the other office sharing their comments with leadership, or other correctional officers. Participants noted that they were not free to speak their minds about people or situations in the correctional facility even if simply to point out misconceptions because they said that the correctional facility did not support venting by employees.

In terms of role doubt and role conflict, both were present according to the participants and part of emotional dissonance. According to the participants, working to keep inmates safe that were convicted of heinous crimes like: murder, rape, and kidnapping was always a battle. Most participants stated that they are expected to wear many hats of security, counselor, social worker, and psychologist and said that this was a role conflict, because there are people in the prison that have these jobs and believed that it was in direct contradiction to their security role. Most participants said that they should not be made to fill these roles because they are not trained for these positions and should not be expected to perform more than roles than their job title and duties. Furthermore, the participants described role ambiguity is a major problem with constant rule changes,
correctional administration not reinforcing the rules as written, and not backing officers when they write a misbehavior report. Participants believed that when these changes occurred, it was because correctional administration was codling inmates; participants suggested that it was very difficult to keep up with the constant rule changes and, because the rules changed too often, rule changes were often ignored by officers.

One participant stated, “We always get a bad rap, state officers in general and I’ve read on the Internet where people who don’t have the whole story will start making things up and slamming the officers and they have no idea what they are talking about, or grouping all officers together for the choices of a few: “Completely blown out of the water.” This type of negative stereotyping, participants felt, led to an overall negative public perception of interactions between correctional officers and inmates, and is in part why most correctional officers can’t share their experiences openly with the community. One participant cited the following perceptions:

I think right away the media and the public think and we’re guilty until proven innocent and it goes back to that we’re the bullies that are making them do things they don’t want to do, and they forget they’re felons and that’s pretty much it. You almost feel like you got to prove your innocence before that’ll change rather than they must prove you guilty.

Cause and Effect Health and Stress Theme

Participants described that they have experienced work-related stress from a number of sources, while working with male inmates: inmates/inmate manipulation, leadership, and role responsibilities/feeling over worked, the participants described that their work stress did extend beyond the correctional environment and into their personal
and home life and through their physical and mental health. This point seemed particularly true with participants who served more time employed as correctional officers. The senior participants were very frank when describing how they felt their job as a correctional officer effected their family life as their family members had to deal with their displaced frustration, as an officer. The participants that served less than 20 years said they experienced physiological signs of stress at work, but they denied bringing the stress and frustration home.

The academic literature is replete with the effects of stress and work in law enforcement, to include corrections, and the physiological and psychological effects of diabetes, heart disease, a shorter life span, drug or alcohol use, avoiding social activities, misplaced aggression, domestic abuse, and divorce (Abdollahi, 2002; Brough & Williams, 2006; Gillan, 2001; Janik, 1995; Lambert et al., 2006; Stinchcomb, 2004; Stock & Skultety, 1994; Wells et al., 2006; Whiteacre, 2006). The three most senior participants described how they used sick time for “mental health days” while the junior participants said they did not use sick time due to job stress. The participant with the longest time in service to the Department of Corrections as a correctional officer said that they used sick time because they experience work stress due to inmates, feeling over worked, and supervisors. The participants with less time served denied using sick time for stress related incidents; however, stress seemed to weigh on the mental well-being of the shorter tenured where senior participants said they were burned out and used sick time for ‘mental health days” as stated by one participant:

If you’re just burned out, you feel like you’ve had that long week, that four-days straight and you’ve had nothing but problems at the prison, yeah, it’s frustrating. I
call it a mental health day. You need to get away from it and if you don’t take one every now and then you’re really going to snap; you need to take a break. Unfortunately, they don’t give us enough time off in between but you know what? It’s our job and that’s what we took but you also need that break and every now and then it nice to have that time to take a mental health break, so yes, I did (laughter).

All participants noted that they have experienced physiological signs of stress at work such as racing pulse, sweating, and feeling their blood pressure rise, following an intense interaction with an inmate or a take down or restraint. The main influence seemed to be when inmate’s voices were raised, breaking inmates apart during fights, or incidents (arguments) that involve two or more inmates. The participants described that these issues take a toll on the physical well-being of officers over time.

In describing their physical and mental stress, participants with more time served seemed to suffer greater levels of stress compared to the participants with 10-15 years who said they did not suffer from work stress.

Stress Relief Theme

Participants described that correctional officers who previously worked in a correctional facility for male inmates’ cope with work related stress in various ways. The positive ways that participants described for coping with stress is participation in athletic activities, vacationing, spending time with their families, or outside employment. The three participants described that they felt their loved ones, especially young children, did experience secondhand stress when they would bring the job home with them and isolate from family activities. Four participants described an overwhelming effort to not bring
job stress home with them, to leave problems at work. While talking to colleagues was not considerably popular amongst the twelve participants, a few participants described talking to other officers with the same job roles and stresses, to unwind. Talking to a significant other about work stress was also a common theme. Only one participant reported spending significant time talking with a therapist, post-employment.

As indicated by Keinan and Malach-Pines (2007), there is little written in the literature about the alleviation of correctional officer stress; several suggestions have been made to help correctional officers relieve stress, such as officers seeking outside assistance/counseling, improving physical fitness, mentoring by a senior officer, and changing the work environment at the organizational level. While the outcome of this research study demonstrated several methods that participants used to relieve stress associated with their job, most of the participants in this study reported, during their employment, that there was an ‘in house’ form for assistance where officers can informally talk to an off-site peer about personal or work-related issues, known as the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The volunteer peer employee (who is specially trained to talk with officers experiencing work or personal stress) may then refer the officer to outside resources for help in these areas. However, all the participants noted that they never used the EAP, because they feared their personal problems would get around the facility although the counseling is confidential. When questioned about their lack of using EAP as a resource, participants stated that the reason they were apprehensive to speak to EAP was because the volunteer was a fellow employee and they were afraid that people would talk if it was known they were seeking help. Rather, the participants expressed that they preferred to talk with other officers privately or in small
groups about work-related stress that is either casual or jokingly, or to internalize work problems or issues. Participants with more years of service in corrections described relying on a spouse or significant other they could speak to about work-related stress.

Other stress relieving activities were working around the house or extra-curricular jobs that required a hands-on approach; only one participant mentioned spending time with his family as a stress reliever. A participant described that while working in corrections, they were in the best physical shape since the participant used exercise to relieve stress, “Exercise, I exercised, I’d go to the gym every day, after work. That was my release, except for weekends. My relief.” No participants described socializing in activities with large groups of people; however, it was noticed that most participants tended to engage only with small groups of friends or family. For all participants, the overriding theme was that most of these activities were solitary in nature or in small groups.

The research indicated that work as a correctional officer, including those with less than 20 years on the job, perhaps moved officers towards solitary activities or at least a lowering of social interaction. Perhaps participants with less than 20 years of experience had difficulty placing their stress/stress relief into context or were apathetic in their early careers, which may have led to burnout, cynicism, or lack of job satisfaction resulting from prolonged stress in later career.

Discussion of the Results

All participants in this research study described that they did experience work stress. The participant’s perception of work-related stress, within this research study, described several stress sources within the correctional environment to include inmate
manipulation, job responsibilities/hours, and leadership demands/changes. While the
inmates were reported as a significant source of stress, job responsibilities was the
highest reported. The results of this research study also identified that participants
believed that correctional leadership did not back them in situations involving male
inmates. For example, whenever an inmate files a complaint against an officer or an
unusual incident occurs, such as a fight between two inmates, correctional officers would
be sent home with no pay pending an investigation.

Many participants described specific incidents involving both coworkers and
inmates and situations they believed contributed to their stress in the correctional
environment that pervaded their personal lives and made the post corrections adjustment
difficult. The participants, with less than 20 years of service with male inmates, described
similar situations of fear and danger, but denied long-suffering from stress, post-
employment. The work stress that participants believed they experienced came from
correctional leadership, inmates, and job demands/responsibilities that, in some cases, led
to decreased work performance or hindered them from doing their jobs effectively.
Because of work stress, the participants described that they experienced the marginal
results of job burnout and paranoia.

According to the participants, work stress in the prison environment was
unavoidable. All the participants believed that their actions were often scrutinized by
correctional administration when inmates file complaints against officers. The
participants also believed that most of these complaints were baseless and that inmates
would file complaints to manipulate the correctional environment meanwhile, the
correctional officer would be sent home without pay, pending an investigation. Another
source of stress that participants described was role ambiguity where officers experienced the many rule changes when new Wardens or administrators would get hired or transfer to a new facility. The participants also described that they experienced burn out when they were expected to perform many jobs some that they were not trained for, nor equipped, to handle daily. The participants described their jobs as particularly stressful because of the workday hours, mandatory overtime, and added shifts.

The results of this research study were consistent for participants for sources of stress and how they would relieve stress. The participants in this research study described the positive ways that they would find stress relief such as spending time with family, exercising, or working a second job. Most participants said that they found a sense of stress relief talking with their significant other about the stresses at work, a challenging event, or long hours, but that talking to other officers with similar experiences was more helpful because they believed that these people understood their stresses better than talking to a significant other. The participants with more time served as a correctional officer described that they participated in activities that did not involve many friends and liked to work alone, because of the stress that they suffer due to work as a correction officer. Shorter tenured (10-15 yrs.) participants described that they experienced stress, continue to socialize normally, and socialize with other officers. Therefore, senior participants described avoiding social activities and participated with few friends or only with other officers that they trust. The senior participants also said that they used accumulated sick time due to work stress as a mental health day or break. In comparison, the junior participants described that they did experience work stress but did not use accumulated sick time as a method of stress relief. The use of sick time for stress relief is
a theme where the participants differed as well as the denial from those participants that worked 10-15 years, in corrections, that while they experienced stress on a daily, they did not consider it suffering.

Study Limitations

Following the study, the researcher was able to do an appraisal of the overall process to collect viable information from the participants while still ensuring their confidentiality and anonymity. In promising such a tall order in both authenticity and discretion, the researcher avoided audio taping each interview. Each interview question response was captured through writing. While the researcher was sure to remain “in the moment” with each participant, a lot of details may have become lost to guarantee the experiences shared were written correctly. Audio recording and transcribing would have lengthened the data collection process, however some details that may have been overlooked i.e. how often certain terms were used and distinguishing tone from one question to the other may have been captured, which may have expanded the outcomes of the study. Another noticeable limitation of the research study was the self-reported data. During the interview, the researcher relied solely on the memory and the responses of the participants which can rarely be independently verified. With the self-reported data, the researcher had to contend with: exaggeration, telescoping, and selective memory. While some stories were rich and entertaining, they cannot be verified. Last, using the snowball method to gain participants, the access was somewhat limited and bias in demographics. The researcher would have preferred an equal ratio of men to women as well as other ethnicities reporting “…because the technique itself reduces the likelihood that the
sample would represent a good cross-section from the population” (“Sampling Methods,” 2009).

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Local, State, and Federal correctional agencies should understand the stress that pervades the correctional officer’s life and provide mandatory proactive, reactive, and reoccurring training in Basic Correctional Officer Training, annual in-service training, and adequate anonymous resources to aid officers in understanding the job related stressors, and how it may affect their families, physical health, and mental health. In addition, correctional agencies must revisit their current programs designed for officer stress relief to ensure they are realistic and overall useful to the correctional officers hired. While correctional agencies provide officers with a few exercise facilities free of charge, as a way to relieve stress positively, an annual mental health evaluation should also be considered. Furthermore, it is imperative that counseling independent of the correctional facility be made available for former correctional officers who may be wary of speaking about personal or work-related problems, or having a difficult time adjusting post-employment.

Recommendations for Future Research

While conducting research on actively employed state government employees can be a challenge to get approved and accomplished, the first recommendation for future research is to continue this study with different respondents in order to build on the findings; specifically, those that are actively employed or even those that were released from their employment. This group may yield issues not brought out in the current study. Second, this research should be replicated in other states, or even at correctional facilities
to compare and validate the findings or to see if different participants may yield different results. Furthermore, future studies may also examine the emergent themes and patterns found in this research study either separately or collectively. Additionally, it is recommended that future studies focus on active correctional officer’s stress in working with inmates not specifically male inmates. Finally, it is recommended that a follow-up with the participants that worked 10-15 years as a correctional officer, in this study, to discover if the stressors affected their reason to leave corrections solely. The results of this study showed that more research is needed to examine former correctional officer stress in working with male inmates to benefit or aid resources geared toward their overall success.

Conclusion

Most of the research previously conducted, while vast, has focused on issues and problems that correctional officers face within the prison environment with emphasis on job security, inmate safety, and physical health. This research study examined and identified the stressors from the perspective of the former correctional officer experience. A review of the literature on correctional officer stress failed to capture the perspective of those far removed. This research found that former correctional officer stress, while unavoidable, showed consistent patterns and themes discovered from interviews based on the narrative responses of the participants who were also former correctional officers. More importantly, the research discovered what work-related stress means to former correctional officers who worked with male inmates and how they coped with stress as it occurred. The responses also gave insight on ways to prepare future correctional officers as well as protect the wellbeing of those currently employed. The results of this research
study supported previous studies of correctional officer stress (Dowden & Tellier, 2004; Finn, 2000; Garland, 2004; Gillan, 2001; Gray, 2002; Hogan et al., 2006; Lambert, 2004, 2006; Lambert et al., 2009; Morgan et al., 2002; Paoline et al., 2006; Schaufeli & Peeters, 2000; Tewksbury & Higgins, 2006; Tracy, 2004) and added to the literature on how correctional officers view stress in working inside of the prison facility with male inmates. The following paragraphs provide answers to the seven research questions and provide conclusions and recommendations of this research study.

Former correction officers who worked with male inmates in this research study perceived the main issues in work-related stress for them were (a) leadership changes, (b) inmate manipulation, and (c) job responsibilities, hours worked, mandatory overtime, impromptu shifts.

The results of this research study showed the main source of work stress that former correctional officer’s experienced derived from changes in leadership. The participants reported that administration at times went to extreme measures to cater to male inmates in order to give the perception that they are protecting and helping the inmates. In addition, this research support that many times correctional administration would fail to support officers in incidents involving male inmates, which is also related to role ambiguity and emotional dissonance (Schaufeli & Peeters, 2000). Furthermore, participants noted that they would withhold true feelings when talking to any person in leadership about any issue they believe would facilitate the smooth running of the facility or male inmates. Participants believed that the male inmates would manipulate leadership by making allegations, to get the rules changed to suit them, or to even prove a point to correctional officers.
The results of this research study supported the works of both Cornelius (2001) and Finn (2000) that participants experience stress when inmates are demanding, manipulative, loud, or violent and extends to male inmates. Most participants reported that the fear of inmates especially large groups of inmates would sometimes hinder them from doing their jobs effectively because male inmates draw officers near a camera to start a verbal incident to attempt to get them in trouble. The participants said that it is not that something improper occurs but cited the interpretation by leadership gathered from the videotapes that was more important. Participants said that many times they must withhold true feelings and cannot say what is on their minds to an inmate because the inmate may file a grievance; participants noted that an inmate might file a grievance although no incident occurred. Participants believed that they experience role conflicts with male inmates because they are expected to perform a security role and a nurturing role (social worker, counselor, and psychologist). The participants said that they were not trained for and ill-equipped to perform these jobs and the facility had people trained and educated to perform those duties to suit the inmate’s needs, however it was cheaper to encourage correctional officers to take on more responsibilities. The participants said that stress from male inmates was also found in sexual advances and or making comments of a sexual nature. Most of the participants noted that they have been accused more than once of improper sexual conduct with a male inmate, that they were exonerated of the charges, and the questioning in these situations occurred from leadership, or correctional investigator. However, the participants said these were very stressful events and the investigation lasted from a few days up to a year with no pay. Overall, participants said that male inmates are demanding, manipulative, loud, can become violent, and the
accusations of sexual advances by inmates is stressful. Although leadership was aware that male inmates engage in these behaviors, it is thought that they do not empathize with this stress that officer’s experience. The public was only aware of male inmates by stories in the media and movies and supports the work of Tracy (2004) and Finn (1998) that officers were portrayed in a negative manner.

The participants in this research study said that stress would disturb their health and mental well-being. During the interview, participants remarked that demanding, assaultive, and manipulative inmates have brought about racing pulses, rapid heartbeats, raising blood pressure, and sweating. One participant noted that while employed they were prescribed stress relieving medication that did not help and said that they were diagnosed as a borderline diabetic. The participants with 20+ years of service said they experience stress to the point where they use sick time for what they call a mental health day and one participant went so far as to say they used sick time to the point to where he had no accumulated sick days left upon retirement. The participants with <15 years of service believed that while stressful encounters were unavoidable, sick days were only used for illness. However, the same participants cited the identical sources of stress that the 20+ year participants described. Further insight into this theme suggests that participants may be denying stress early in their career, therefore, may have suffered from ill-managed stress in their later career.

All participants found various ways to relieve stress outside of the correctional environment, such as physical activity, a second job, or spending time with family. All participants said that they had a significant other to talk to about work stress or can talk to other officers. However, the participants said that they never used the Employee
Assistance Program (EAP) to talk to a trained, volunteer, correctional employees about their stress in and out of the correctional facility. In lieu of seeking professional assistance, it seems that the participants did often internalize work stress and try to deal with it in their own way, which sometimes involves taking their stress out on family members, or even recreational drugs and alcohol.

The results of this research study supported the work of Tewksbury and Higgins (2006) that correctional officers experience emotional dissonance from correctional administration, inmates, organizational factors, the media, and the public (Gillan, 2001; Keinan & Malach-Pines, 2007; Tracy, 2004). Some participants noted that they had ideas that would make the facility run better and their ideas would be dismissed. When talking with inmates, the participants said they experience emotional dissonance in daily work life. Independent of the correctional facility, the participants related they have emotional dissonance with the public and the media who often times paint correctional officers in a negative light due to a lack of understanding of what their job entails. They were not permitted to make statements to the media or public without permission even to clarify about the facility, inmates, or administration. The participants in this research study did not have emotional conflict with other officers, or the only people they can talk to negatively in the facility with impunity; some participants noted that they have had problems with other officers in the facility, some of which were potentially violent. Furthermore, this research study allowed participants to express their experiences and stress with impunity and to talk freely with a person who is protecting all information of a personal nature, protects the facility, correctional agency, and the state. Stress is a part of the correctional officer role although many people are unaware of the phenomenon that
occurs in many occupations, albeit, not from as many sources that correctional officers’ experience. The results of this research study concluded that former correctional officers have an ‘us v. them’ mentality, which is a consequence of work in corrections. In conclusion, correctional officers in the United States walk one of the toughest beats in America and stress is a part of their daily work life. It is not one source that create stress but a compilation that creates unavoidable stress for correctional officers. The sources of former correctional officer stress were interrelated and complex: male inmates cause stress for correctional officers through their manipulation and violence, correctional leadership often would scrutinize the officer’s behavior and grievances that inmates file. While the work being done by correctional officers is meaningful, the hours and mandatory overtime along with impromptu shifts affect the correctional officer negatively. This repetitious stress cycle can be doomed to repeat if correctional agencies are willingly avoiding a proactive approach to address the stress that correctional officers endure while working in a male correctional setting.
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Appendix A

Figure 1. Female study participant years employed with the Department of Corrections

Figure 2. Male study participant years employed with the Department of Corrections
Appendix B

Figure 3. *Study participant response to research questions 1 and 4 stress source identification by gender*

Figure 4. *Study participant response to research questions 1 and 4 stress source identification by gender*
Appendix B

Figure 5. Study participant response to research questions 1 and 4 stress source identification by gender
Appendix C

Figure 6. Study participant response to research question 2 post stress encounter coping

Figure 7. Study participant response to research question 3 at-home stress coping
Appendix D

Figure 8. Study participant response to research question 6 on post-employment adaptation