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Correctional Officers: Attitudes and Training

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Correctional Officers: Attitudes and Training

By: Madison Meiser
&
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Our Background

- ❖ Our previous research was on solitary confinement & its effects on inmates
 - Came into SCARP wanting to conduct further research
 - Through more research became interested in correctional officers and mental health training
 - Major gap in research about guards
 - Pulled together threads of past research on inmates and some current research on correctional officers to figure out where to go with our ideas

If we can gain insight into different aspects of correctional officers attitudes, training, and well-being, then we will be able to better support them as well as inmates.

Who are Correctional Officers?

- ❖ Responsible for the command of inmates
 - Enforce rules
 - Supervise inmates and activities
 - Perform safety inspections
 - Deal with contraband violations
 - Break up conflict
- ❖ Conditions are intense
 - Indoor and outdoor
 - Long hours, 24-hour coverage
 - Weekends and holidays
 - Overtime
- ❖ Officers are 62.8% White, 21.5% AfricanAmerican, and 15.7% other
- ❖ 72.7% are male, 27.3% female

Job Satisfaction

- ❖ When a correctional officer thinks they are doing what they believe they should, they have higher levels of job satisfaction (Leip & Stinchcomb, 2013; Stinchcomb & Leip, 2013; Udechukwu, 2009)
 - Includes their like/dis like of their job
- ❖ Role conflict, peer support, promotion opportunities, and salary affect job satisfaction (Leip & Stinchcomb, 2013; Roy & Avdija, 2012; Stinchcomb & Leip, 2013)
 - Role conflict shows itself in correctional officers when they are expected to remain socially distant while also building supportive relationships with the inmates
- ❖ ~80% of correctional officers are satisfied with their job (Leip & Stinchcomb, 2013)

Burnout

- ❖ Burnout presents itself in 3 dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced sense of personal accomplishment (Carlson & Thomas, 2006; Leip & Stinchcomb, 2013; Roy & Avdija, 2012)
 - Burnout occurs when someone isn't in control of their job or the ways they have to deal with things occurring within their job
- ❖ Burnout affects ~37% of correctional officers as opposed to ~19%-30% of the general working population (Finney et al., 2018)
- ❖ Role ambiguity, role conflict, workload, understaffing, lack of environmental control, lack of participation, decision making, inmate contact, and confrontation concerning the safety of their job may predict burnout (Roy & Avdija, 2012)

Turnover

- ❖ Corrections has one of the highest rates of turnover (Leip & Stinchcomb, 2013)
 - Causes large losses financially for the prison due to the loss of money and experience invested in the employee (Udechukwu, 2009)
 - Causes excess stress for remaining employees having to cover for them (Roy & Avdija, 2012)
- ❖ Correctional officers with higher levels of education are more likely to leave their job in corrections (Leip & Stinchcomb, 2013)
 - Also higher levels of turnover reported within those who have less social support (Ghaddar, Ronda & Nolasco, 2011)
- ❖ The turnover rate among correctional officers is ~16.2%-40% (Carlson & Thomas, 2006)

Power and Safety Dynamics within Prisons

- ❖ “Ability of one party to determine the actions of another” (Hepburn, 1985)
- ❖ Poole & Regoli (1981) define relationship between officers and inmates as “structured conflict”
- ❖ Low levels of teamwork led to high levels of work alienation for officers (Poole & Regoli, 1981)
- ❖ Guards perceive a lack of power and authority over inmates
- ❖ Negative interactions with inmates lead to increased feelings of powerlessness (Ferdik & Hills, 2018)
- ❖ Officers feel a lack of support from administrators (Poole & Regoli, 1981)
- ❖ Lower rates of self efficacy are found when officers feel as though they must defer to superiors (Poole & Regoli, 1981)

Attitudes Towards Solitary Confinement

- ❖ Solitary confinement is the isolation of an inmate for 23 -24 hours a day, inmates usually being sent here for various infractions (Halvorsen, 2018)
- ❖ Correctional officers have full control of the inmates assignment to solitary confinement (Campbell, 2016)
- ❖ Through the research we did for SCAD we found a lot of data on inmates and their perceptions of solitary confinement
 - Very minimal on correctional officers views
- ❖ According to Martin Horn, “If you’re a correctional officer, your ideal prison is one where every inmate is locked down 100% of the time.” (Heffernan & Wood, 2015)

Do Correctional Officers Receive Training?

- ❖ No standardized training (Holyda & Scott, 2016)
 - Officers are expected to know and handle treatment protocols (Parker, 2009).
 - Many jurisdictions train in mental health for 2 -3 hours of a 3-week basic training (Parker, 2009)
- ❖ Many officers favor rehabilitation over punitive prisons (Parker, 2009).
- ❖ Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training is becoming widespread within police departments
 - Application to correctional officers?

CIT Training

Brief Overview of the Memphis Model

“40 hour specialized curriculum for police officers where presentations from mental health professionals and legal experts will be given and officers will be given a tour of a local mental health facility and the opportunity to interact with those suffering from mental illness.”

- Davidson (2016)

Trends in Efficacy

- ❖ Before CIT Training female officers had lower efficacy measures than the male officers that were studied (Davidson, 2016)
- ❖ After the training female officers had a 22% increase in self-efficacy measures, while male officers only had a 15% increase (Davidson, 2016)
- ❖ Voluntary participation in the CIT Training, led to gaining more knowledge (Davidson, 2016)
- ❖ These volunteers also had higher scores on thoughts/perceptions of mental illness treatments, self-efficacy, stigma, de-escalation, and referral skills (Compton et al., 2011; Compton et al., 2017)
- ❖ Officers with CIT Training have the lowest arrest rate due to their ability to correctly refer those in crisis to social or mental health services (Davidson, 2016; Hails & Borum, 2003).

Social Distance and Mental Health Stigma

- ❖ Defined as “comfort level within interactions with those suffering from mental illness” (Compton et al. 2006; Davidson, 2016)
- ❖ Officers who have completed CIT training tend to have a lower preference for social distance than those who have not (Compton et al., 2008).
- ❖ Officers with higher social distance preferences tend to express less emotional support for inmates because they feel it is not their job (Ferdik & Hills, 2018).
- ❖ Stigma is strong, and still holds back those with mental illness (Coleman & Cotton, 2010)

Looking Ahead...

❖ Our survey

- Questions about job satisfaction, burnout, stress levels in officers, attitudes towards treatment and solitary confinement, social distance, and training in preparation for employment
 - Job Satisfaction Survey (Spector, 1994)
 - Professional Quality of Life – Burnout/Secondary Traumatic Stress (Stamm, 2016)
 - Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983)
 - Attitudes Towards Treatment (Lambert & Hogan, 2009) & Solitary Confinement
 - Training Questions
 - Modification of Bogardus (1924) Social Distance Scale
 - Demographics

Hypotheses

- I. We think significant predictors of rehabilitative attitudes in officers will be:
 - A. Low levels of burnout
 - B. High job satisfaction
 - C. Higher levels of training
 - D. Little/no preference for solitary
 - E. Lower social distance
- II. We think significant predictors of officers who are likely to use solitary confinement are:
 - A. Less support from superiors and administrators
 - B. Higher social distance
 - C. Higher levels of burnout

Conducting our Survey

❖ Participants

- Will recruit from professional organizations (e.g., American Correctional Association, American Jail Association)
- Distribute survey through professional organization's Listserv
- All participation will be voluntary

❖ Method

- Send survey link out to possible participants throughout the United States via SurveyMonkey
- SurveyMonkey will guide participants through the questions
- Survey will take around 30 minutes

QUESTIONS?

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