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Utilization and Impact of Wellness Programs on Correction Officers' Stress

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Walden University
2022

Abstract

Utilization and Impact of Wellness Programs on Corrections Officers' Stress

by

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MS, Ashford University, 2018

BA, Keiser University, 2007

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Criminal Justice

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Abstract

Correction officers experience a high level of trauma in their daily job functions and often suffer from mental health disorders. Leaders of correctional organizations have begun to create internal wellness programs to assist correction officers manage the stress they endure, but the effectiveness of these programs on alleviating employee stress is unknown. The purpose of the present research was to explore the utilization and implementation of wellness programs on correction officer stress. A phenomenological qualitative approach was used. Data was collected from 13 correctional employees who have all experienced stress while working as a correction officer. Each of these employees have utilized the wellness program. Participants completed anonymous surveys that included open-ended questions on occupational stress, how the wellness program was used, and if it was beneficial to addressing their stress. The data from the surveys was analyzed. Themes and codes were identified. Once these themes and codes were placed in categories, they help address the research questions. The findings indicate that the wellness program is beneficial to addressing the stress of correction officers but can be improved. The study also revealed the importance of having policies and procedures in place to help guide not only correction officers but their supervisors on how to properly use and access the wellness program. Improving usage of and access to such programs may improve correction officers' mental and physical health and assist them in living healthier and more productive lives both on and off their jobs. This will assist in communicating with the prisoners which can lead to them being a positive example that can improve their lives once released from prison.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to correction officers, who are often forgotten and who put their lives on the line every day. I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Robert, who has made many sacrifices and has supported me the entire way. Without your support, this study would not have been possible. You encouraged me to follow my dreams of obtaining my PhD and helped me succeed. You always believed in me even when I wanted to throw in the towel. I will forever be grateful for your words of encouragement and never-ending support.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Stress among correction officers has been an issue for all correctional organizations. Some of the stress experienced by correction officers is occupational. There are also stressors that stem from a correction officer's personal life. Family conflict among correction employees, for instance, can influence their work-related stress (Mack & Rhineberger-Dunn, 2019). All stress experienced by correction officers must be addressed, according to experts. U.S. correction officers' suicide rates have been on the rise. Stress could be one key reason for the rise in suicide rates. According to a study reported on in *Mental Health Weekly*, Michigan prison workers face a mental health crisis that includes much higher rates of posttraumatic stress disorder, suicidal thoughts, and alcohol abuse than the general public ("Study: Michigan Prison Workers Facing Mental Health Crisis," 2019). Nearly 140 prison workers in the state, or 1.1%, stated that they were currently and actively planning to kill themselves, according to the study. This statistic is not surprising, as research has revealed that correction officers suffer from a higher stress rate than individuals in other occupations.

Compounding this issue, correction officers could have a more challenging time addressing stress because seeking help may make them look weak. There are policies and procedures that regulate correctional organizations. But there is few policies regarding correction officers' stress and well-being. There are no official guidelines or standards that can be followed that will require correction officers to address their stress. Therefore, it is up to each officer to determine if their stress level is a priority.

In response, the leaders of a Midwestern correctional organization in the United States have created a wellness program to assist correction officers in managing stress. Because most full-time employees in the United States spend more than one third of their days at work, the workplace is viewed as an ideal setting to provide easy and regular access to positive peer and organizational supports toward wellness (Cheon et al., 2020). A wellness program can be one of those supports to help accomplish this goal for correction officers.

For the program to be successful in helping correction officers to manage their stress, officers' perceptions of their stress levels must first be understood. Local and state officials have not yet examined the impact of the wellness program on officers' perceived stress. Correction officers have a first-hand perspective on the stress they endure. In this research, I sought to understand correction officers' experiences concerning the impact of the wellness program on their stress. I employed a phenomenological approach that was qualitative in nature. The data collection consisted of anonymous surveys from correction officers at the study organization.

The main goal of this research was to examine the effectiveness of a wellness program within a Midwestern correctional organization. This research may promote positive social change by providing correctional administrators with knowledge of the impacts of having policies to address correction officers' stress. These policies may ensure that all staff have the same access to services to address stress. Access to these services may benefit employees' overall health. According to Elia and Rouse (2016), wellness programs improve workforce health and well-being, increase engagement and

productivity, and control absence- and disability-related costs. Implementing such a program in a correctional setting could thus be beneficial.

In this chapter, I will outline the background of the study, research problem and purpose, and research questions (RQs) that I sought to answer. I will also provide overviews of the study's theoretical framework and methodology and define key terms. The chapter will also include discussion of the assumptions, limitations, scope, delimitations and significance of the study.

Background

Wellness programs may be common in many contemporary organizations. The Healthy Prisons Agenda was first established by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2007 which adopted a whole-prison approach to promoting health and welfare in prisons. Correction officers are a part of this approach. The creation of wellness programs provides correction officers the opportunity to share their stress experiences with wellness coordinators. By addressing the stigma that correction officers may perceive by using wellness program offerings and by creating policies and procedures, correctional leaders may be able to lower correction officers' stress. According to the Ohio Department of Administrative Services, state agencies shall provide strong and visible leadership to encourage employee participation in wellness programs such as the Take Charge! Live Well! initiative (Employee Health and Wellness Policy, 2013). The agencies' wellness initiatives should encourage and reduce barriers to employee participation in activities.

To obtain background information on wellness programs, it was necessary to examine wellness programs from various organizations outside of corrections organizations. This research may fill the gap by yielding knowledge on the overall impact of wellness programs on correction officers' stress, the stigma in using the programs, and the impacts of creating policies and procedures to address correction officers' stress. In doing so, the study may also contribute to the broader effort to change the culture of corrections when dealing with stress. This could be critical in helping to decrease the number of suicides in the correction community.

Problem Statement

U.S. correctional organizations currently have no standard regarding implementing and maintaining wellness programs for correction officers. The lack of policy is concerning because the suicide rate for correction officers is 39 percent higher than that of other occupations (DeAmicis, 2016). Correctional staff also experience more significant home strains than staff in many other professions (May et al., 2020). Correction officers endure a tremendous amount of stress. They are at risk for posttraumatic stress disorder, primarily because of the frequency with which they find themselves having to deal with critical events such as being assaulted by a prisoner or witnessing a prisoner suicide (Viotti 2016). Stress is, thus, a key issue for correctional staff, particularly correction officers. In response, the leaders of a Midwestern correctional organization created their own wellness program.

The wellness program is voluntary and does not have a mandate requiring participation. This means that the correction officers themselves make the decision to use

the program. The institution of a mandate could help decrease the stigma related to using the wellness program. Deciding whether to institute a mandate would also mean that the Midwestern correctional organization's leaders would need to determine whether to take a proactive or reactive approach to correction officers' stress. Thus far, there is no study on the relationship between using the wellness program and correction officers' stress. There has also been no study on the importance of creating policies and procedures that apply to the wellness program. Knowledge of correction officers' perceptions of the program, the benefits of the wellness program, and the risk of not having policies and procedures for the wellness program may be helpful to policy makers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the utilization and implementation of wellness programs on correction officer stress. I obtained feedback from correction officers to understand how wellness programs can address officers' stress levels officers by. I sought to gain insight into several related themes. These themes included (a) ways to reducing the stigma associated with using wellness programs, (b) whether talking to wellness coordinators reduced overall stress, (c) issues regarding a lack of standards to address the causes of stress, and (d) issues regarding a lack policies and procedures for wellness programs. The participants of this study are correctional staff from a Midwestern correctional organization who had 5 or more years of service, had experience working as a correction officer, and had used the wellness program.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do correction officers perceive the wellness program's impact on correction officers' stress?

RQ2: What are the implications of not having mandated guidelines for the creation and maintenance of wellness programs within corrections organization?

Theoretical Framework

I used the phenomenological qualitative approach. Researchers who use this approach look at the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of a person or group (Patton, 2015). In using this approach, I sought to understand the impact of utilization of the wellness program on correction officers' stress. I explored the perceptions and lived experiences of stress and if the wellness program addresses these issues. As part of my research, I explored the challenges correction officers have in managing their stress. To gather data, I administered anonymous surveys to correctional staff who had experienced working as a correction officer. I explored the perception of the correction officers related to the stigma of using the wellness program.

The organizational culture perspective is a set of theories with their own assumptions about organizational realities and relationships (Shafritz et al., 2015). By using the organizational culture perspective, I sought to generate relevant findings for organizational leaders at the study organization. The findings may enrich organizational leaders' ability to self-correct issues within their organization and to create policies and procedures that address correction officers' stress. Some would say that correctional organizations have the responsibility of ensuring that policies and procedures are in place

to address the stress of correction officers. The policies and procedures are there to protect all correction officers working in the department. Creating or maintaining policies that address the wellness program could change the stigma associated with correction officers seeking assistance in dealing with stress.

Nature of the Study

I employed a phenomenological approach for the study, which was qualitative in nature. A primary aim was to better understand the impact of the wellness programs on corrections officers' stress. Data were collected through anonymous surveys using open and closed ended questions. The sample participants were correctional staff who had experienced working as a correction officer and who had used their wellness program. The survey was shared with a group of over 5,000 participants who have worked or are currently working with the Midwestern correctional organization. The participants of this study had the opportunity to detail their experience using the wellness program and the impact it had on them.

Definitions

Employee Service Program: A resource that assists active state employees and their eligible family members who may be experiencing work-related problems or personal problems that affect their work.

Traumatic Incident Stress Management Program (TISM): A resource that provides services to employees who have experienced a traumatic workplace incident.

TISM program coordinators: A designee responsible for the overall management and coordination of the Department of Correction's TISM program in conjunction with the TISM coordinator from ESP.

Traumatic incident: An incident involving death, violence, or severe injury that significantly impacts the work environment and may cause employees to experience stress, either immediately or later.

Wellness coordinators: Licensed psychologists, counselors, and chaplains who provide professional and confidential wellness services to employees, retirees, and eligible family members.

Wellness program: An offering that provides 24/7 crisis response, confidential consultation, brief confidential counseling, wellness training, and educational opportunities to employees, retirees, and eligible family members of the Michigan Department of Corrections who seek wellness services.

Assumptions

Strength is a positive attribute in correction culture, and officers who are perceived as being weak could possibly experience being stigmatized . The stigma of perceived weakness may have an impact on those who reach out for help to manage stress. They are perceived as being weak to their coworkers. Correction officers are expected to continually manage an array of stressful and often unpredictable workplace difficulties unique to their profession (Trounson & Pfeifer, 2017). Therefore, I had the following assumptions when conducting this study. First, I assumed that correction culture creates an environment of strength, which may contribute to the stigma perceived

by those seeking help in managing stress. I also assumed that correction officers would rather speak to their peers than seek help through the wellness program. Correction officers who seek help risk jeopardizing their careers was another assumption. Furthermore, I assumed not having policies and procedures to address correctional officer stress to be risky.

Limitations

A key study limitation was that data was only collected from one Midwestern correctional organization. Another is that I am currently an employee of the study organization and may show biases because of my employment. I collected study data from correctional employees about their experiences using the wellness program. The anonymous nature of the surveys may have helped to address some potential biases.

Scope and Delimitations

The social problem addressed in this study was the stress endured by correction officers and the importance of policies and procedures of implementing a wellness program to help deal with their stress. Focusing on the stress of correction officers allowed me to create a more in depth understanding of what stress correction officer experience. It also allowed me to create a better understanding on how a wellness program can assist with their stress. However, this study was limited because it focused on one Midwestern correctional organization.

Significance

This research may address the gap in the literature by generating knowledge on the overall impact of wellness programs in correctional settings. Wellness programs may

promote the idea that it is not a sign of weakness for correction officers to seek help in managing stress. The implementation of these program in correctional organizations may provide correction officers the opportunity to speak with those who understand their experiences. According to Martin (2021), organizational stressors among correction officers contribute to correction officer stress. The study also revealed that social networks and support systems for correction officers are particularly important to their overall health and well-being. I attempted to create a better understanding of the department's leadership related to stress management and the level of support required for correction officers. Developing policies and procedures, that allow and encourage correction officers to seek the help they need, may improve officer health and work performance.

Summary

Past research has shown that wellness programs have worked in the general population. Wellness programs improve workforce health and well-being, increase engagement and productivity, and control absence- and disability-related costs (Elia & Rouse, 2016). However, little research could be found about wellness programs in a correctional setting. This study helped to fill this literature gap by examining a Midwestern correctional organization's wellness program. Study findings provide insight on the effects of the program as well as on officers' program-related experiences. Specifically, I explored the stigma associated with correction officers seeking help to manage stress, the impact of wellness program participation on correction officer's stress, and the importance of having policies and procedures to regulate wellness programs. In

this chapter, I outlined the background and topic of the study. This chapter also included the problem and purpose of the study, RQs, and overviews of the theoretical framework and nature of the study. Chapter 2 contains the relevant literature supporting this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

In the study, there are no policies or procedures regulating the implementation and maintenance of the wellness program. Correction officers face stressful situations every day. Correction officers are a branch of service who often suffers from high substance abuse rates, posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, and suicide (Grohs, 2016). Understanding that their correction officers are under more stress than the public, the leaders of the Midwestern correctional organization created a wellness program, which is voluntary, to assist correction officers in navigating the stress they are under. There are no policies or procedures that make this program mandatory. Because the program being voluntary, each correction officer must determine whether they will use the service.

The literature review for this study revealed that previous research had been conducted on wellness programs. Wellness programs have been shown to promote a more favorable work environment (Jacobs et al., 2017). Wellness programs can also assist correction officers in dealing with stress. According to Curd et al. (2007), the implementation of wellness programs in a corrections environment can maximize its investment return. I did not find studies on the impact of wellness programs on correction officer stress in the literature I reviewed. No study has been conducted to assess the effects, if any, of the study organization's wellness program on correction officer stress.

Along with not reviewing the program's impact, organizational leaders have not instituted policies or procedures related to the wellness program. The current study may contribute to the previous literature by providing administrators and policy makers insight into the wellness program's benefits through correction officers' lived experiences. The study provides insight into the importance of creating policies and procedures to maintain the program.

The literature includes numerous studies that focus on the cause of correction officer stress. For example, researchers have found that the work environment affects staff, in part, because corrections is dangerous work (May et al., 2020). The literature also features numerous studies of wellness programs within organizations. This literature revealed that the organizational environment in which wellness programs are implemented could influence employees' perceptions and engagement over time (Abraham, 2019).

Although correction officers work with prisoners daily, they may not need services from a wellness program daily. Some services for correction officers may be reactive to situations or events experienced. A reactive response to traumatic situations may seem reasonable because of the nature of the work. However, because a correction officer experiences different situations that could be traumatic daily, it may be better to have a proactive program to address the stress of correction officers. One of the requirements to becoming a correction officer is passing a physical fitness test. Correction officers have incentives for maintaining their physical fitness but there are none in relation to maintaining their mental health. A correction officer's mental health is

also essential. Both are important in helping correction officers address stress, allowing them to do their job safely and efficiently without the long-term adverse effects on their bodies. Correction officers report feeling weak and maintaining their own stereotypes regarding mental health; these perceptions lead officers being less likely to receive treatment for their stress and trauma (Heffren and Hausdorf, 2016; Morgan et al., 2002).

Nationally, the number of correction officer's suicides is on the rise. There is no different in this Midwestern state was on the rise at the time of the study. The mental health of correction officers has become an issue nationally. The leaders of the Midwestern correctional organization created its wellness program based on the findings of a survey that was distributed to employees of one Midwestern correctional organization. The surveys allowed the department to see how its employees' mental health was affected by their daily job duties and how internal and external stress contribute to their stress. In this chapter, I review key literature. Before doing so, I review the literature search strategy and provide an overview of the theoretical framework.

Literature Search Strategy

The wellness program within this Midwestern correctional organization is relatively new. To understand wellness programs, it is necessary to examine wellness programs within other organizations. To gain a better perspective on wellness programs, I sought to understand how wellness programs assist correction officers through wellness coordinators. Although most literature for this study was published after 2017, there are some older references that were used. Most of the literature consists of peer-reviewed articles, government documents, and credible scholarly websites.

I searched the following databases: Criminal Justice Database, Directory of Open Access Journal (DOAJ), ProQuest Criminal Justice, ProQuest Central Justice, ProQuest Criminal Justice, Sage Journals, and Sage Publications. I also searched Google Scholar and the Walden University Library. These searches yielded minimal research on the effectiveness of wellness programs within correctional organizations. I expanded the search to include terms related to correctional officers' physical and mental well-being and the support offered. I used the following terms in my searches: *burnout, correction officer causes of stress, correction officer depression, correction officer stress, correction officer stress management, correction officer suicide, correction officer wellness, management, mental health, leadership, occupational stress, organizational support, stigma, and wellness programs.*

Theoretical Framework

The suicide rate of correction officers who work for this Midwestern correctional organization is alarming to officials and others associated with the institution. According to the union of this organization, 17 active and recently retired corrections officers have died by suicide since 2015. The high suicide rate motivated the leaders of this Midwestern correctional organization to scrutinize their employees' mental health. Use of this framework may yield insights that inform how department leaders can identify and address officer stress and change their policies and procedures to create an environment where correctional officers will use the wellness program for their stress issues. The organizational culture perspective was vital to this study because it allowed for the capturing participants' own assumptions about organizational realities and relationships.

With this knowledge, organizational leaders may be better able to develop meaningful policies.

Leaders of study organization have policies and procedures in place to guide the agency. The director uses these policies and procedures to administer the department. Current policy directives fall into seven categories: (a) administration and organization, (b) human resources, (c) general operations, (d) institutional Operations, (e) institutional placement and programs, (f) field operations, and (g) Director's Office memorandum. Human Services is responsible for providing employment services such as the TISM Program and the Employee Service Program. There is currently no policy as it relates to the department's newly added wellness program.

The organizational culture perspective helps foster understanding of the correction culture, specifically when in regard to seeking assistance due to being overly stressed. Regardless of region, country, or sector, every organization has its own culture (Rus & Rusu, 2015). Adopting an organizational culture perspective may enable department leaders to create a policy or procedure for the wellness program that can benefit their employees, specifically correction officers. The policy can be developed based on the organization's specific culture. A culture-specific policy may allow the correction officers an easier way to access the program without being identified as looking weak because they asked for help.

Creating a policy or procedure for the wellness program could change how the department addresses the stress experienced by their correction officers. Resistance to change could also be an issue. The culture in correctional organizations has shifted over

time, causing employees to experience transformation (CITE). Modifications can be helpful. In the example of the wellness program, changing the organizational culture to encourage correction officers to seek assistance in managing their stress may promote positive growth in the work environment and the correction culture.

Literature Review of Key Variables and/or Concepts

Types of Stress Faced by Correction Officers

Correction officers negotiate a tremendous amount of stress when performing their job duties. In a study of the psychosocial risks associated with prison service, Ferrari (2016) found that organizational structure and climate were significantly associated with correctional officer job stress and burnout. Some issues experienced by correction officers are out of their control. Unexpected situations occur daily in the life of a correction officer. Although there may be a set schedule that the prison population follows every day, unexpected issues can arise. For example, no schedule sets a specific time for a prison riot. There are policies to respond to such an event, but it is not on the daily schedule as this event would not be typical. Traumatic events may cause extreme stress for correction officers. Each day, therefore, may bring forth a different set of problems and other circumstances that correction officers must manage. Correction officers are expected to do their jobs professionally while working under a tremendous amount of stress. According to Goldring & Bolger (2021), stressors lead to psychological distress which, in turn, leads to physical symptoms. To effectively manage the stressors they experience, correction officers must have the support of their upper administration.

Operational Stress

Operational stressors constitute one of the main stressors for correction officers. These stressors are specifically related to their job position. There are many different job positions within correctional organizations. For example, a correction officer may have a different set of stressors than an institutional chaplain . The job of a correction officer could be emotionally draining. Correction officers should be taught how to effectively cope with and process emotionally demanding interactions (Shepherd et al., 2019). This could help them when processing or eliminating some of the stress they experience.

Occupational stress can affect the psychological well-being of correction officers. Psychological contract violation is the primary mechanism for associating psychological contract with negative outcomes (Duran et al., 2021). Correction officers can experience occupational stressors that can be directly related to their workplace stressors. Some of these stressors are not controllable by correction officers. Sometimes this may make a correction officer feel as if their obligations are not being met. This may cause them to lose their self-efficacy. This may also lead to strong negative emotions like anger and frustration.

Organizational Stress

Organizational structure, styles and quality of leadership and the overloaded responsibilities are the main reasons for organizational stressing (Haussain et al., 2021) . Organizational stressors can occur for various reasons. Stressors for correction officers can come from levels of job stress and burn out, inmate overcrowding, and the absence of enrichment (Klinoff et al., 2018). Some of these factors are not controllable. However,

some organizational stress factors can be addressed. Some of these include the amount of voluntary overtime worked, the amount of mandatory overtime worked, traumatic occupational exposure, the length of time employed in corrections, job role, and facility security level (Spinaris & Brocato, 2019). Each of these stressors can be addressed to lower the organizational stress experienced by a correction officer. To have a significant change, each priority needs the support of leadership. This support needs to be consistent. Inconsistent leadership could cause more occupational stress for correction officers. Some leaders like to alternate between leadership styles. However, according to Mullen et al. (2018), when leaders alternate leadership styles, they are perceived as being inconsistent. This perceived inconsistency will undermine positive effects for the employee. Furthermore, Zapata's (2018) research suggests the structure or design within an institution describes the form of institutional organization. Structure will give the employees of the organization more clarity when performing their job duties.

Personal Stress

Operational and organizational stressors of correction officers are out of their control. However, they must deal with them on a daily basis during their duties. In addition to those stressors, correction officers also have personal stressors. These personal stressors may influence their stress level as well as affect their job performance. Some of the individual stressors that correction officers have may be health issues, financial problems, or family problems. Adding these stressors to the stress they experience at work could aggravate matters for correction officers. Personal stress is something that everyone will most likely encounter in their lives. However, it may be

higher among correction officers due to the nature of their job. The adverse effects of stress could include job dissatisfaction, mental health problems, and drug and alcohol abuse (Sayed et al., 2019). The leaders of the study organization established the organization's wellness program after realizing that some of the correction officers' mental health was not healthy.

There is a relationship between the personal stressors of correction officers and their work performance and behaviors. According to Abraham (2019), there is a deleterious impact of the correctional work environment on the family domain. This means that the job of a correction officer will have a considerable effect on their personal life. They can bring the stress of their jobs home to their everyday lives. And the stress of their personal lives can influence their stress at work.

Additional Effects of Correction Officer Stress

Burnout

Many studies focus on first responders' occupational resilience; however, few studies focus on the occupational resilience of correction officers. The prevalence of stress in correction officers often leads to job burnout (i.e., exhaustion, cynicism, diminished professional and personal efficacy), a silent problem in the correctional field (Klinoff et al., 2018). When a correction officer gestures to experiencing burnout, they are at a place of exhaustion from their work-related stress. Job stress occurs when a person feels job-related hardness. They are exhausted from their job. Burnout appears when a person is psychologically worn out and exhausted from the job (Lambert et al., 2018). Many correction officers could experience burnout. They are being exposed to the

trauma experienced by correction officers, such as being a witness to assaults or being assaulted themselves. Correction officers can also experience being a witness to a prisoner's suicide. These experiences may cause a correction officer to have low self-efficacy in their beliefs about their job.

Some trauma experienced by correction officers is due to events that are out of their control and the resulting stress affects individuals differently. However, according to a study by Alessandri et al. (2018), individuals with higher self-efficacy beliefs in managing negative emotions report less negative affect, anxiety, and depression. The stress they share that will make correction officers experience burnout could come from outside stressors as well. Physicians have cited other reasons for burnout. Some reasons include but are not limited to attitude, turnover, decreased satisfaction, and reduced productivity (Nanda, Wasan, & Sussman, 2017). There can be negative outcomes for correction officers suffering from burnout, such as taking out their frustration on inmates (Lambert et al., 2015). Several factors contribute to a correction officer reaching burn out than just the traumatic experience they go through at work.

Morale

The morale of the staff in prison's work environment could be very negative, due to burnout. Although some of the trauma experienced by correction officers are out of their control, they still must respond. For example, when there is a fight between prisoners, it is the correction officer's responsibility to respond and maintain order. While doing this, they may be seen using excessive force. When a correction officer is accused

of using excessive force, when they feel that they were doing their jobs, could lead to low morale.

Morale in the workplace contributes to how employees handle stressful situations. Support from co-workers is essential to confidence in the workplace. When employees have support and cooperation from their co-workers, more ideas with creative solutions (Dash & Mohnanty, 2019). Creating solutions with co-workers will allow employees to be proactive in situations that come up daily. Being proactive may help correction officers alleviate stress when responding to issues that arise while conducting their daily duties.

COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought additional stress to the law enforcement community, of which corrections is a part. Correction officers are not immune to the stress of COVID-19. It is more likely that the COVID-19 pandemic could amplify the stress among correctional officers. For example, it will be challenging to implement social distancing in a prison environment. The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic has impacted corrections supervising strategies and mental health in criminal justice settings (Stogner et al., 2020). It is unclear how COVID-19 can affect correction officers' stress and behavior. The combination of the stress of the pandemic and the stress of working in a prison setting can be astronomical. According to Barnert et al., (2020), prison, jails, juvenile detention, and immigrant detention facilities in the United States are highly vulnerable to the global COVID-19 pandemic. The accessibility to wellness coordinators should be readily available during these times. be readily available during these times.

Correction Officer Suicide

The death of a loved one affects individuals differently. A close co-worker's death affects those who worked around them, especially they died by suicide. Moreover, according to Mental Health Weekly (2019), nearly 140 workers of this mid-western correctional organization employees, or 1.1%, are currently and actively planning to kill themselves. According to a study by Frost (2020), most correction officers that committed suicide were not known to have a history of mental health struggles. However, the officers were known to be experiencing particularly acute personal struggles when they died. Correction officers commit suicide 39 percent higher than the average of other occupations (DeAmicis, 2016). The stress of a correction officer's job can lead to suicidal thoughts.

Lack of Support From Management

Dealing with issues in a prison environment can have a massive effect on correction officers. However, dealing with the problems without support from their management can create even more stress. Managers could help their employees deal with their stress. Just the way they approach their employee can make a huge difference. The Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) approach allows a manager to increase awareness, provide a more vertical perception, reduce negative emotions, and improve coping methods. (Schulte & Verkuil, 2016). This may allow the employee to feel more comfortable discussing issues they are experiencing with their managers. The support of managers can help correction officers address their stress more effectively. Managers' role is imperative in dealing with organizational stress,

occupational stress, burnout, morale, and family stressors on correction officers. These stressors do not affect the manager's role, but the manager can affect each of these stressors. A manager's role can assist in addressing the stress and give the correction officer a sense of support and the security of not being alone in their job.

Figure 1

Common Forms of Stress Experienced by Correction Officers



Correction Culture and Stress

Being a correction officer comes with its own culture. You can best describe the culture of corrections as an organizational culture. Organizational culture is a behavior that can influence the way people behave (Hendri, 2019). Because correction officers keep control over the facility prisoners, there is a culture of them versus us. This could stress correction officers because they may always be worried about what prisoners may

do to them. Going home safe every day is a correction officer's primary concern. When a person must worry about their safety every day, it will create stress for them. Although Correction Officers have no management responsibilities over other employees, they are the prison population's managers.

Stigma

There is a stigma in the corrections world about seeking help for issues. Correction officers that ask for help are sometimes seen as weak by their peers. They are supposed to be able to handle stress. Many correction officers often don't report that they need help with stress. This may be because they do not want to be singled out. They may fear that their coworkers may lose confidence in their job abilities. They can be viewed as a person they don't want to work with.

Correction officers must use their professional judgment when supervising inmates. Working as a correction officer builds solidarity with their coworkers, which means a strong commonality of practices and values, such as rejecting all identifications with prisoners and avoiding all sorts of collaboration (D'Angelo et al., 2018). If an officer's judgment is seen as being affected by stress, other officers may feel that they cannot confidently conduct their job duties. If a correction officer admits to having issues with stress, they may fear being isolated from their coworkers because of the stigma it brings.

There is a vast difference in stigma among correction officers who wish to discuss their job-related stress than the public. For example, if a correction officer seeks help for their stress, they may be forced to take a day off or even complete mental health

treatment or support before returning to work. When a correction officer asks for assistance, it is often seen as a cry for help negatively. Correction officers should seek assistance without the stigma of being so overwhelmed that they can no longer handle their job. They should be able to utilize services without this stigma and given the ability to request help when they feel overwhelmed without the fear of being pressured by their employer.

Value of the Wellness Program

In any work environment, it is crucial that the health of its employees is taken care of. This is even more important in a correctional setting. Stress can cause the health of an employee to diminish. Among other professions, the work environment may have the ability to be controlled. In a correctional setting, the correction officers may not have the ability to control their environment as easily. Correction officers are often reactive to instances. One of the main goals of the mid-western correctional organizations' wellness program's is to address its employees' mental health. Stress is one of the leading causes that can cause an officer to have mental health issues. The wellness program will help the correction officers address the stress of the job without feeling alone.

The mid-western correctional organization wellness program may be looked at as a safe place at which correction officers can get help with their fellow brothers and sisters. For example, Boudoukha et al., (2016) studied that the psychological support of correction officers is necessary, not just following a traumatic event. The stigma of using the wellness program may also be lessened because it will be seen as a program used by many correction officers. Wellness and self-care practices work as protective factors and

proactive behaviors (Gleason & Hays, 2019). Having the ability to take care of your mental health could lead to dealing with the stress faced by correction officers.

Employee Service Program (ESP)

The state employer for the study organization offers all state employees access to its employee service program. Leaders of the Midwestern correctional organization teamed up with the state to provide these services to their employees. This is not a department of corrections service, but it offers its employees services just the same. The purpose of the ESP is to help state employees deal with stress. And unlike the wellness program, their counselor will refer them to a specialist in the community. The employee service program, the state government's in-house behavioral health team, has been around since the 1980s.

Traumatic Incident Stress Management Program (TISM)

All employees of this Midwestern correctional organization who have experienced a traumatic event can use the TISM program. This program is offered through the ESP in the office of the state employer. Leaders of the study organization does not supervise it. The TISM program provides services to all employees who have experienced a traumatic incident at the workplace who wishes to take advantage of the program. There is no mandate that employees use the TISM program even if they have been involved in a traumatic incident.

Family Support

Not all support of correction officers come from their job. Family support is also vital to help them deal with stress. However, a lot of their family do not understand the

stress of being a correction officer. When a correction officer has low family support levels, it could increase the odds of them seeking help through other means. This could lead to them making negative choices such as the use of alcohol or drugs. The use of alcohol and stressful events can produce a long-lasting change in an individual's psychology known as alcohol use disorder (AUD) (Pucci et al., 2019). The wellness program provides services to both the correction officer and their families. If they both participate in counseling together, it could be very informative to correction officers' families.

Wellness Program

The main objective of study organization's wellness program is to provide professional and confidential wellness services to employees, retirees, and eligible family members. The program offers guidance for their employees can address their mental health. A person's mental health can be affected by all different types of issues. One issue that can affect a person's mental health is the stress they endure. The wellness program can provide healthy ways to cope with stress before becoming too overwhelming for a person to address. This study's findings could guide the leaders of the Midwestern correctional organization in creating policies that can benefit the wellness program. Chapter 3 will discuss the methodology of this qualitative study.

Wellness Providers

Wellness providers are beneficial to those participants that take advantage of the wellness program. Wellness providers can give employees a sense of not being alone during stressful times. Stress can take a toll on a person's emotional status. Individuals

with higher emotional intelligence (EI) are thought to perceive, process, and regulate emotions more effectively (Lin et al., 2016). Correction officers need to be emotionally healthy to deal with the everyday stressors in their daily job duties. Wellness providers are a critical part of the wellness program that can help correction officers develop strategies to help regulate their emotions to be more productive employees.

Policies and Procedures Regarding the Wellness Program

It will be challenging to measure the effectiveness of the Midwestern correctional organization's wellness program without specific policies and procedures to set the program's standards. Standards need to be adapted. The program was created with good intentions in mind, but no requirement to regulate the program has been generated. Understanding the attitude of the wellness program, participants may be a key component in encouraging enrollment. While attitude may influence behavior, the policy can influence attitude (DeAngelo & Nielsen, 2017). Policies and procedures should be written with the attitude of the participants who will be utilizing the program.

The policies and procedures should also address the barriers that come with a new program within the department of corrections. This can include stigma, trust, and fear of retaliation for using the program. The policies should also create clear guidelines for addressing high-risk situations, such as what actions to take when an officer is suicidal or if they have a firearm that may need to be removed. These are situations that require more focus when establishing policies. This is when organizational support is needed. There is a significant negative correlation between perceived organizational support and young employees' suicidal ideation (Sang et. al., 2017). Not only are older employees

affected by these events, but younger employees may also be experiencing such events for the first time.

Summary

This qualitative research approach attempted to understand the overall effectiveness of the wellness program related to correction officer stress who are employed with the Midwestern correctional organization. It will also illustrate the importance of having policies and procedures to give guidance on how to implement the program. Stress experienced by correction officers can affect them. More specifically, their personality. Long-term personality changes in correction officers have been extensively documented over the years (Suliman, & Einat, 2018). The role of correction officers has changed over the years, adding additional stress to address. The director of the Midwestern correctional organization has recognized the need to support employees' mental health. This awareness was the impetus for the creation of the wellness program.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

To address the stress experienced by correction officers, leaders of the Midwestern correctional organization have implemented a wellness program. Although the program has become popular among correction organizations, there is little to no research on its overall effectiveness. To address this gap in knowledge, I evaluated the effectiveness of the overall program through interviews with correctional employees. In my interviews, I examined their experiences with the program. Specifically, I was focused on the stigma associated with using the wellness program and whether talking to wellness coordinators reduces overall stress. I also explored the impacts, if any, of not having policies and procedures to address stress.

In this chapter, I will explain the research design and rationale; my role as the researcher; and the methodology, including the instrumentation and interviewing protocol. I will also provide details about the data collection and the ethical procedures of the research. The methods of recruitment and participation will also be explained.

Research Design and Rationale

I sought to answer the following RQs:

RQ1: How do correction officers perceive the wellness program's impact on correction officers' stress?

RQ2: What are the implications of not having mandated guidelines for the creation and maintenance of wellness programs within corrections organization?

I used the qualitative phenomenology approach to explore correction officers' lived experiences of stress. According to Creswell and Poth (2017), qualitative research allows individuals to share stories and researchers to hear their voices. As described by Moustakas (1994), researchers using transcendental phenomenological research methods aim to reveal the descriptive essence of a phenomenon, in this case the study organization's wellness program. I collected the data sample for this research by conducting anonymous surveys of correctional employees who had experience as correction officers and who had used the wellness program.

Some correction officers may think that sharing their experiences within their profession is discouraged and that there is a stigma associated with asking for help. By asking for help, they may be perceived as weak, and this stigma may prevent them from using the wellness program. Understanding these perceptions may help the leaders of correction organizations to create policies and procedures that promote use of wellness programs. This can make leaders proactive instead of reactive in responding to correction officer stress. I conducted qualitative research to gain insight into the study topic. Anonymous surveys were used to elicit correction officers' perspectives on the helpfulness of the wellness program.

Role of the Researcher

At the beginning of this study, I had 22 years of experience in corrections. I have worked in two different state departments of corrections, Florida and Michigan. I have 8 years of experience as a correction officer, 2 years as a sergeant, 10 years as a probation/parole officer, 3 years as a resident unit manager. I currently hold the position

of Assistant Deputy Warden . During my career, I have never seen a program implemented to directly assist correction officers in managing stress. In my current position, I am responsible for supervising staff of a correctional organization. I am third in charge of the prison based on our facilities hierarchy.

Although I have authority over correction officers, I have not used my position to influence anyone's participation in the wellness program. Although the wellness providers provide services for correction officers, they are not under my jurisdiction, and I do not have any supervisor authority over them. I further controlled the potential for research bias by using anonymous surveys for the study. Doing so was also another way to protect participants' identities. At no time did I ask for participants to identify themselves. Those who have experienced working as a correction officer and using the wellness program gave their first-hand perspective on whether the program was beneficial to them. Each participant understood that participating in the study was voluntary. They were not compensated, and there were no threats or coercion to compel their participation.

As a person with experience as a correction officer, I did not use my own experiences to interpret the data. I only used the descriptions of those participating in the surveys. It was my job to analyze and interpret the data correctly. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), the skilled questioner and attentive listener know how to enter another's experience. I did not use my interpretation of the wellness program but the participant's own experiences.

One way of achieving impartiality was to use in-depth qualitative interview questions. When using in-depth qualitative interviewing, one of the critical naturalistic research methods, researchers talk to those who have knowledge of or experience with the problem of interest (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I focused on the participant's experience and not my own. I set aside my perceptions and beliefs. Remaining unbiased allowed me to properly understand and analyzing qualitative data.

Correctly analyzing data allows researchers to better understand the phenomena being studied. In this research, the study phenomenon was the impact and utilization of the wellness program on correction officers' stress. The data were collected from employees of one Midwestern correctional organization. Each had experience with the wellness program. Each participant read a consent form and agreed to engage in the study prior to taking the survey.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

I used purposeful sampling to choose the participants in this study. The inclusion criteria were as follows: (a) each participant had first-hand experience working as a correction officer, (b) each participant had 5 or more years working with this Midwestern correctional organization, and (c) each had used the wellness program. Qualitative research features a set of interpretive activities and does not privilege a single methodological practice over another (Patton, 2015). In this phenomenological research, I sought to understand the experiences that correction officers had using the wellness

program to address some of their stress. Phenomenological research is carried out to understand a person's lived experience(s) of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

I collected data from a large purposeful sample of correctional employees. The anonymous surveys were shared with a group of correction employees who were currently employed, or had been employed, by the Midwestern correctional organization. Each had used the wellness program and had experience stress while working as a correction officer. The target number of participants was 5 to 25. All participants who met the criteria agreed to sign the consent form prior to participating in the anonymous survey.

Instrumentation

I used anonymous surveys as the method of instrumentation for this study. Using open-ended questions in the survey allowed me to understand what the participating correction employees felt and why. Correction officers were purposefully chosen to allow them to share their experience related the wellness unit. I shared a link to a web-based survey through a private Facebook page. This page members were all employees or former employees of this Midwestern correction organization. One notable advantage to web-based surveys, which have become increasingly prevalent, is that data collected are immediately recorded by the online software, potentially permitting greater measurement of mid survey attrition (McInroy, 2016). Using surveys also eliminated any potential exposure to COVID-19 due to there being no need to enforce social distancing. Appendix B contains the interview protocol for the study.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I purposely chose correctional staff from the Midwestern correctional organization who had used the wellness program for this study. The participants were sent an invitation via-Facebook in a closed group that is restricted to current and past correctional employees of the Midwestern correctional organization. I explained the purpose of the research and the implications of the findings. I made sure that the participants knew that their participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Each participant was provided an informed consent that they were required to sign before they could access the anonymous survey.

The informed consent explained to the participants that their participation was voluntary, that there was no compensation for their participation, and that I was seeking 5-25 participants. Each participant was informed that correctional volunteers were being recruited who (a) had correction officer experience, (b) had at least 5 years of experience with a correctional organization, and (c) who had used the wellness program. Each participant was asked to complete an anonymous online survey lasting up to 20 minutes. The participants were also informed that the study would pose minimal risk to their well-being and that the data would be kept secure using password protection for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Data Analysis Plan

The anonymous survey contained four closed-ended questions and six open-ended questions. I included the open-ended questions to gather additional clarification about participant responses. The first step in data analysis was to review qualitative data from

closed-ended questions. Next, I reviewed the data from the open-ended questions. Each participant's open-ended questions narrative was read to understand the similarities and differences in each participant's individual experience. After reviewing the data, it was coded and separated into categories and themes. Although this survey was anonymous, it was still important to make the participant feel comfortable with me. Qualitative research methods are strengthened when both the participant's and researcher's relationships and positions are part of the analysis (Trainor, 2018). The platform used to conduct the surveys was JotForm.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in research is critical. It is one of the essential qualities in research. Reliability and validity are terms used to validate quantitative analysis (Amankwaa, 2016). A research study can be used in future studies. For that to be helpful, it must be reliable. For a study to be valid, it must be replicable. This study will use several techniques to validate the analysis. Deep saturation in the data will help validate the research study. This study will address the validity, transferability, and dependability of the study.

Ethical Procedures

There are procedures set by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) that must have to be followed during my research. If these procedures are followed, the ethics of the study should not be in question. Qualitative research is not designed to produce pre-determined results; it is intended to help understand the research findings. All research should be undertaken with integrity to ensure that it is honestly reported and used to its

maximum benefit. According to the Carpenter (2018), ethics approval processes scrutinize the familiar ethical principles of protection, informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity. I ensured that my ethical concerns related to this study was addressed through the IRB. My research study was approved by IRB on May 21, 2021. Prior to accessing the anonymous survey, each participant must read and agree to the informed consent. One they agree, they will be taken right to the survey. All data collected from this research are presently stored on my personal computer which is password protected. I will destroy data 5 years from the dissertation approval date.

Summary

Chapter three detailed the study's methodology, the approach, and the participants selected. The analysis process was to be provided to the IRB. The purposeful sample was selected from employees of the Midwestern correctional organization in which anonymous surveys were utilized. The data analysis and results will be explained in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the effectiveness of the wellness program on correction officer stress. I analyzed the experiences of correction officers who are members of a Midwestern correctional organization. I also sought to understand the importance of creating policies and procedures to regulate such a program. Another aim was to understand the stigma, if any, that correction officers have when utilizing the wellness program.

I explain the findings from the data collection and analysis in this chapter. I used the qualitative research method. Anonymous surveys were used to understand the impact of wellness programs related to correction officer stress. The study survey also included questions to help identify the stigma, if any, of using wellness programs as well as the importance of having policies and procedures to regulate such a program. I administered the surveys to a purposeful sample of correctional employees working for a Midwestern correctional organization. Each participant received an invitation through a Facebook private group. Prior to taking the survey, each participant had to review and complete a consent form. Along with the results of the study, I will discuss issues of trustworthiness and conclude with a summary. This study's two qualitative RQs were as follows:

RQ1: How do correction officers perceive the wellness program's impact on correction officers' stress?

RQ2: What are the implications of not having mandated guidelines for the creation and maintenance of wellness programs within corrections organization?

Setting

There are no known personal or organizational conditions that influenced the participants or their experience at the time of the study that may influence the interpretation of study results. Each participant was able to assess the anonymous survey through a private group Facebook page. Upon acknowledgement of the consent form, each participant was taken directly to the survey. There was not a mandatory setting for the participants. The surveys were made easily accessible and could be completed where and when the participant felt most comfortable.

Demographics

The sample of the study was made up of 13 correctional employees of one Midwestern correctional organization who took the anonymous survey. At the time of the study, each participant had 5 or more years of experience with the organization. Each had experienced working as a correction officer. To become a correction officer for this Midwestern correctional organization, each employee is required to successfully complete the Department of Corrections Officer Recruit Training program. The training consists of 8 weeks of academy training and 2 months of on-the-job training. Upon completing the training, each employee is assigned to a correctional facility located throughout the state. Each of the participants had experienced the stress of working as a correction officer and each had used the wellness program.

The wellness program features licensed wellness coordinators who assist employees, and their family members identify strategies for addressing issues that impact their work and personal lives. They also provide eligible employees wellness services.

Department leaders designed the wellness program to help employees who are concerned for the welfare of others and to promote positive health and mental wellness in their facilities.

Data Collection

On July 29, 2021, I shared an invitation to the study with the members of a private group consisting of correctional employees of one Midwestern correctional organization. The invitation informed the participants that they could participate in a phenomenological doctoral study to examine the effects of the wellness program on correction officers' stress. Each member indicated that were currently or previously employed at this Midwestern correctional organization. In the invitation, I explained that the purpose of the study was to gain insight from correction officers about the impact of the wellness program on correction officers' stress and the importance of creating policies and procedures of regulating such a program. The participants were informed that I was seeking 5-25 participants for the study. The survey was available until August 13, 2021. Thirteen employees responded to the anonymous survey. Because anonymous surveys were being utilized, there were no geographical constraints.

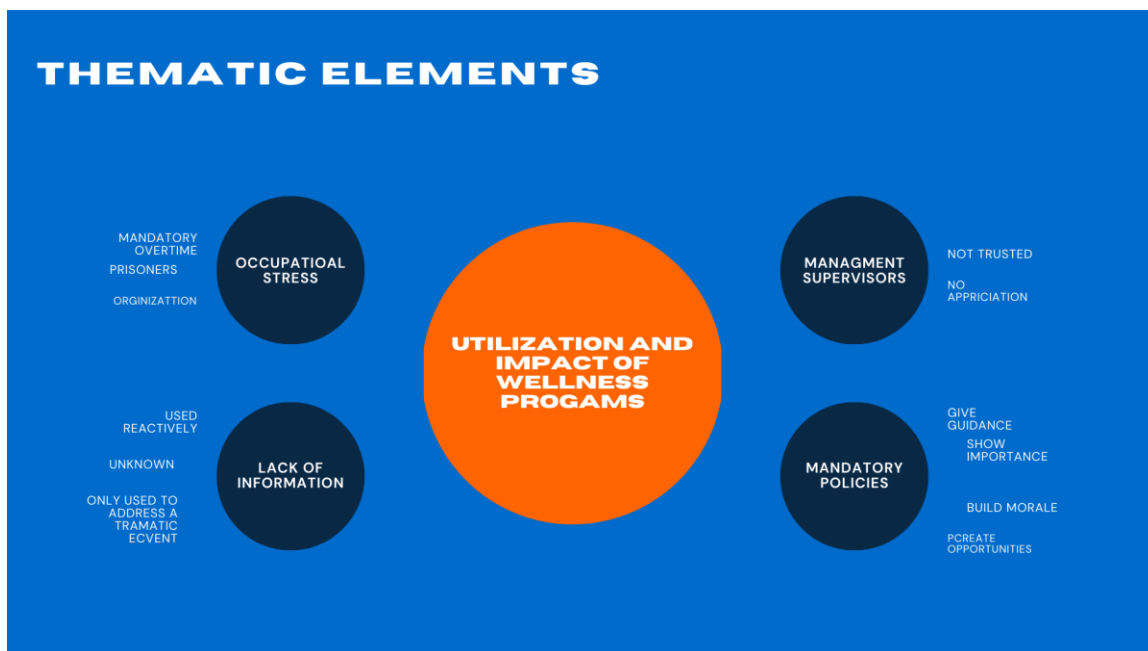
Before being able to access the anonymous survey, the participant indicated they understood the consent attached to the survey. To ensure confidentiality, I collected no personal information from the participants. I did not ask for their current job placement, rank, or gender.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data collected for this phenomenological study, I first reviewed the responses to the 13 anonymous surveys. The data information was transcribed and placed on a spreadsheet to identify codes, themes, and categories. Figure 2 shows the coding categories and key themes that emerged from data analysis. I created the illustration using Canvas software.

Figure 2

Codes and Themes



I sorted the collected data by grouping all responses with the corresponding questions. For example, Question 1 responses were grouped with answers from Question 1 and so forth. There were several themes identified. These included (a) occupational stress of correction officers, (b) lack of information, (c) management and supervisors, and (d) mandatory policies. In addition, the need to have a wellness coordinator at each

worksite was a response that appeared in responses regarding ways to improve the effectiveness of the wellness program.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

I followed all the credibility strategies that were outlined in Chapter 3. Proper selection of the study participants is of the utmost importance to the credibility of a study (Yin, 2013). It was important to understand the impact of the wellness program on correction officers' stress. To understand the perception of correction officers, each participant needed to have experience working as a correction officer. Each participant had a range of unique experiences utilizing the wellness program. Ensuring proper identification of themes and patterns during data analysis also helps with the credibility of my research. Each participant had the chance to share their experiences. Although I have experience in this field of corrections, I strove to not insert my own self-knowledge, opinions, or beliefs.

Results

Occupational Stress

There is a difference between occupational stress in all professions. In the corrections context, there are different forms of stress that most correction officers experience. Supervising inmates in prisons creates stress levels that are unknown to many individuals who are employed in other public positions. Understanding and seeking assistance to address the occupational stress they experience was important to correction officers' ability to respond and manage it. Many correction officers in the study expressed that their experience of stress was created by their employers. Occupational

stress may be easily controlled or lessened by the agency. There were different issues identified that participating correction officers felt raised their level of occupational stress. Those include management, supervisors, mandatory overtime, fellow coworkers, and not following policies and procedures. Very few participants referenced prisoners as a part of their occupational stress.

Ten out of 13 participants reported that the stress of their job comes from some form of manager (e.g., a shift commander, administrator, or management). They pointed out that there is a lack of support from those in these positions. They also pointed out that there was a lack of training for those who take a leadership role in regard on how to treat staff as a manager. Respondent 4 stated, “My occupational stress only comes from staff and administration. I don't think this stress can be changed until our administration is trained to take on leadership roles and staff are corrected or praised properly.” Similarly, Respondent 9 said, “As an officer I daily have to put up with constant attacks by shift commanders whether they do it knowingly or not.”

Respondent 1, who has over 25 years of service with this Midwestern correctional organization, stated, “The toll twenty-five plus years in the department is not easy to explain in a paragraph or two. However, seeing fellow coworkers die, the anxiety of being in a constant negative environment, administration and coworkers being inept in their duties are just a few things that create stress.” Additionally, another main source of occupational stress that participants reported was mandatory overtime. Many reported that this creates additional stress that they must deal with. Not only does it cause stress in their work life, but it takes a toll on their personal life as well. Respondent 7 said, “I am

constantly getting mandated with 20 plus years.” Additionally, respondent 8 stated “Over worked, mandatories a couple of time a week, safety concerns are being ignored due to not having enough people to fill positions along the unexpected passing and leaving of coworkers.” Respondent 9 agreed, stating “Staff are constantly mandated (forced to work after their shift is complete) multiple times a week and I mean 4-5 times being told you can’t go home.”

Ninety two percent of the participants state that the issues they utilized the wellness program for was created from their occupational stress. Respondent 1 reported that “If I was not a corrections officer then I would not have been there when the prisoner dropped dead”. Similarly, respondent 3 stated that “If I didn't work here. I'd probably have no stress at all. I'm stuck for five more years until I retire.” Further, respondent 7 explained; “the first thing this department took from me was my wife, my family. Everything else followed suit. I am a shell of who I once was, strictly because of this department.”

Lack of Information

The wellness program may be there to assist correction officers in dealing with their stress. However, if they are unaware of the program, it can be of no assistance to them. Lack of information will aid in the failure of this program. Awareness of the program should be created that provide all staff the ability to utilize the program. Stress management is important to building the reliance of correction officers to have a long and healthy career. Leaders and managers should have open communication with their subordinates to communicate information that will help their job performance. This

information should be clear and easy to understand Taking away unnecessary stress of correction officers will help them be more productive and allow their professional judgement make decisions in their daily lives, both personally and professionally.

When there is a lack of information on a program, there is no way to make a proper decision on when it would be beneficial to utilize the program. Based on the responses from the participants, there was very little information shared about the wellness program. Several participants stated that an email was sent out about the wellness program. Others stated they only heard about the wellness program when a representative came to visit their facility or when they came to the facility to respond to an incident.

Ninety eight percent of the participants stated that the wellness program is used reactively. The following is a selection of responses on how the program is utilized provided by some of the participants: Respondent 1 reported “The program has no power or the correct influence to be anything but reactive”. Respondent 3 stated “I'm not sure what they do, but they showed up afterwards”. Respondent 4 reported “They are only talked about this year during a crisis. Prior years I hadn't heard anything else about them after leaving the academy several years ago”. Similarly, respondent 6 reported “You only see or hear about them when something negative happens”.

Management/Supervisors

A good leader sets the environment of a workplace. There needs to be trust between staff and their leaders. This trust will be a rapport and create a positive work environment. The lack of trust between supervisory and line staff, coupled with long

shifts exacerbated by a lack of adequate staffing, may be particularly debilitating (Johnson, 2015). As a leader, understanding your staff is critical. Management sets the tone for workplace behavior. The subordinates will follow the example set by management. No matter where you work, people want to feel valued and respected. When asked to explain their occupational stress, many mentioned supervisors, administration, or management. Here are some selected responses on the topic: Respondent 1 reported “The anxiety of being in a constant negative environment, administration and coworkers being inept in their duties are just a few things that create stress”. Respondent 6 reported “You can have stress from various supervisors who may not think you are worth much”. Similarly, Respondent 9 reported that “Administration knows that staff are treated this way and they allow their shift commanders to do what they want without regard to the staff’s feelings or effects that they (staff) must deal with.”

Mandatory Policies

Organizations are governed by policies and procedures to give direction on to accomplish the goals of the organization. This is true for this Midwestern correction organization. Policies and procedures are there to give direction. When a staff member of this Midwestern correction organization needs direction, they can read the policies and procedures and if they are not understood, get clarification from their supervisors. The staff of this mid-correction organization is used to having policies and procedures to help guide them. However, there are no policies and procedures to assist them in how, when, or why they should utilize the wellness program.

Many of the participants of this study think that it would be positive to have policies and procedures to address the wellness program. When asked, what are the benefits of creating policies and procedures to address the wellness program, the participants made the following remarks: Respondent 1 reported “Creating policy and procedures is only a bunch of words on paper if it is not utilized”. Respondent 2 reported that “Morale, work production, workplace safety and satisfaction”. Respondent 4 stated “I’m not sure what the benefits of policies and procedure would be to address the wellness program. I do think staff should be made aware of and reminded regularly that they are here for us”. It was clear that employees felt policies and procedures were important regarding the wellness program. Respondent 5 reported “The Wellness Program staff can assist employees as needed. Creating policies and procedures shows that upper management cares about them”. Respondent 6 reported. “Policies and procedures have to be clearly written and show what staff must do. Exactly what must be done. Similarly, respondent 8 reported that “Policies and procedures will give supervisors some type of direction on how to utilize the wellness program as well as staff”. Respondent 9 reported “Policies and procedures will create opportunities”.

Although the participants in this study think there can be some changes made with the wellness program, there is clear consensus that the wellness program can be beneficial if utilized correctly. Participants also agree that correction officers are under a tremendous amount of stress that can be addressed through their correctional organization. Policies and procedures can be a start to making sure this happens. When asked, most participants (82%) felt that the wellness program can improve.

Summary

In Chapter 4, I presented the results of the study. The anonymous surveys revealed four major themes related to the wellness program: occupational stress of correction officers, lack of information, management, and mandatory policies. The participants expressed the need for a wellness program to help correction officers manage their stress. They also stressed the need to have policies and procedures in place for the proper implementation of the program. In the next chapter, I will further interpret the findings. I will also discuss the limitations of the study, offer recommendations, consider the study's implications for positive social change, and provide a conclusion to the study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore correction officers' perceptions of a wellness program on their stress level. I analyzed the experiences of correction officers to understand how the wellness program impacted their stress. The findings revealed that there are several stressors that corrections officers face that could be addressed by using the wellness program. The study involved a qualitative approach using anonymous surveys with correction officers who were purposefully chosen based on their experience as a correction officer. The goal of this qualitative approach was to understand the effects of the wellness program on correction officers' stress. I sought to answer the following RQs:

RQ1: How do correction officers perceive the wellness program's impact on correction officers' stress?

RQ2: What are the implications of not having mandated guidelines for the creation and maintenance of wellness programs within corrections organization?

This research involved 13 members of one Midwestern correctional organization. At the time of the study, each participant had over 5 years of service. Each participant had experience working as a correction officer and indicated that they understood the stress associated with the job position. Each participant had used the wellness program. I administered anonymous surveys consisting of 10 questions to participants. The surveys produced five main themes: occupational stress of correction officers; lack of ;information; management/supervisors, and mandatory policies and procedures. In this

chapter, I will discuss the results of the study and its implications. I will further discuss the limitations and implications of the study and offer recommendations for further research.

Interpretation of the Findings

Correction officers in the study reported having a range of stressors that they negotiated daily, not only in their professional lives but in their personal lives as well (see Figure 1). One way that these stressors may be alleviated is to provide correction officers a means of addressing their stress. The leaders of the Midwestern correctional organization created a wellness program to help assist correction officers manage their stressors. One of the participants in the study explained that the wellness program staff are trained to work with correction staff. Speaking with someone who understands the stress correction officers endure may make it easier for them to communicate their concerns. Also, through the program, correction officers can instantly connect with a wellness coordinator who can assist them in coping with stressors by creating healthy coping strategies.

Four of the participants who had been involved with the wellness program stated that they showed up after a traumatic event they had experienced. Although they felt this was helpful to help correction officers identify physiological responses to events that they may experience, they need to be more present at their worksites. One participant explained that the wellness program needs to be utilized more proactively than reactively. Stress may invoke feelings of being overwhelmed or becoming lethargic to the point that an individual has trouble accomplishing daily activities, as well as experiences physical

responses (El Sayed et al., 2019). The wellness program may help corrections officers to deal with their stress more effectively.

One of the main themes that emerged from the study was organizational stress. Organizational structure, styles and quality of leadership, and overloaded responsibilities are the main reasons for organizational stress (Hussain et al., 2021). One of the main sources of stress expressed by the participants were their supervisors. Some organizational stress of being a correction officer cannot be controlled. However, supervisors can help officers deal with stress and give them tools and information that they may use to effectively deal with stress created from their work environment.

In this study, participants indicated that supervisors were not very supportive of the needs of correction officers. Correction officers in the study reported feeling that they were not being heard. This type of supervisor will not embrace change. According to Biggs and Naimi (20212), law enforcement has adopted a paramilitary structure in the early 20th century . Correction organizations are a part of law enforcement and also instill a para-military style of leadership. However, leadership should not only include authority, but also the capacity to lead other people. A commander who is authoritarian will never be a leader; they must know how to motivate their subordinates to be perceived as a leader (Stănciulescu & Beldiman, 2019). Being a leader who does not take the need of their subordinates into account might decrease the morale of the workplace and generate unnecessary stress. Furthermore, the link between stress and health is well documented. When correction officers do not address their stress, they can respond in

ways that threaten their health. Having a positive way to manage their stress may add to their resilience.

Another theme that emerged from this study was a lack of information.

Information is essential to understanding the wellness program. In this regard, many participants noted a lack of information on how to access the wellness program. Several participants reported that they were only made aware of the wellness program when they responded to a critical event that happened at their workplace. Others reported that there were flyers at their facility. According to the participants, the most significant source of information came from emails sent to all state employees.

There was a consensus among participants that there needs to be more information about the wellness program. Participating in worksite programs promotes employee wellness, research shows (Neyens, & Childers, 2017). If a program is created to address the wellness of employees, there needs to be clear and concise communication about the program. Having information about wellness programs might assist in building a culture of wellness. Participants indicated that there should be a process in place so that they know where to go for program information so it can be utilized.

Information plays a vital role in how people live their daily lives. Not having information could possibly create miscommunications between individuals. To understand how the wellness program works, proper information about the program needs to be relayed. Understanding the wellness program may help correction officers make the best decisions when it come to their health. One participant expressed the need to have someone from the wellness unit at each facility. They expressed that this would

make it easier for officers to contact them and may be a way to overcome officer reluctance to use the program.

Another theme that emerged from this study was having mandatory policies for the wellness program. Participants reported that having mandatory policies will show staff that the correctional organization leaders care for their workers. However, if they are not followed, they are just empty words that are not being used. Policies and procedures regulate the Midwestern correction organization. This is understood by its employees, responses indicate. They are aware that when policies are created, the organization takes the issue seriously. Creating policies may give not only correction officers but management direction on how to properly follow and implement the wellness program.

One participant expressed that creating policies and procedures for the wellness program could improve the morale, work production, workplace safety, and job satisfaction of officers. Another expressed that it would give supervisors as well as staff some type of direction on how to use the wellness program. In the legal system, legal order stems from the implementation of legal policy and procedures for their implementation and fulfillment (Svinin & Kubyshkin, 2021). This system is also applicable to the field of corrections. Policies and procedures are there to help generate and fulfill the goals of the organization.

Policies and procedures will also help hold people responsible for their action in the workplace. Example, supervisor has been mentioned as a main source of stress for correction officers. Having policies and procedures in which can be followed by supervisor can alleviate some of the stress caused to correction offices. Working without

direction can cause confusion and create an environment that could be filled with negativity. This will create more unwanted stress to correction officers while they perform their duties.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations of this study. One significant was that the participants of this study were chosen from one Midwestern correctional organization. There were no attempts to obtain random samples from a larger population. The findings of this study were limited to this Midwestern state and to the state correctional organization that was studied. Because the study was qualitative in nature, the results are limited to interpretation. The research was not reinforced by any quantitative data.

Another limitation would be researcher's bias. I currently work for this Midwestern correction organization. However, any potential bias was minimized by allowing the participants to share their own experiences. I did not use my experience to influence any participants or the way in which data was collected. All bias was eliminated by not including my own feelings, self-knowledge, beliefs, or own opinions when analyzing the data.

Recommendations

In this study, 13 correctional employees from one Midwestern organization took part in this study. The results showed that recommendations for future research could be made. One example is that further research could include interviews with wellness coordinators from the program. Correction officers see the benefits of the wellness program however, they feel that there should be someone from the wellness person at

their perspective facilities. Interviewing wellness coordinators may help understand the impact they feel the wellness program have on the correction officer's stress.

Additionally, research can also be conducted with different correctional agencies who too utilize a wellness program. This could provide a new perspective for correctional organizations when creating or utilizing a wellness program in their organization. Future research can also address the importance of creating policies and procedures regarding wellness programs. This could provide correction organizations a foundation or a new perspective on wellness programs.

Implications

This research also suggest that the organization stressors experienced by correction officers are a leading cause of their stress. Having a wellness coordinator immediately available could assist in providing strategies to correction officers before their stress get out of control. This could also aid in changing the organizations culture and some of their processes. Example, having a wellness coordinator present at each facility can help an officer who experience a traumatic event can assist them and the administration of the facility by creating a trauma involved approach to their employees after a traumatic event occurs.

The research also suggests that the wellness program could be beneficial to correction officers however, there is very little information that has been given to the employees of this correction organization. Correction officers need help but are relucted to ask for it. Not seeking help can have long lasting effects on correction officers that may be very negative.

Lastly, if there were policies and procedures to regulate such a program it could assist in it being more successful. It will also give supervisors some direction on how to refer their staff to the program when dealing with a traumatic event. This could help alleviate the stressors correction officers inherit when they enter this job position. Policies and procedures could also help change the environment in which correction officers must work in.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand the overall effectiveness of wellness programs on correction officers' stress. It also aimed to understand how creating policies and procedures to regulate such a program can influence correction officers. Wellness programs have been utilized by other professions and proven to be successful. They are now becoming popular in the field of corrections. Prison reform is a topic everyone is talking about. However, correction officers are being left out the discussion. The wellness program can help correction officers build their resilience. Resilience can help promote the social health of correction officers. This will allow them to not only be able to deal with the stress of their jobs more effectively, in their personal lives as well.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. Prior to utilizing the wellness program, how were you made aware of the program?
2. Do you feel the wellness program is used proactively? Please explain.
3. Please explain your occupational stress.
4. Describe the range of issues in which you utilized the wellness program.
5. Do you feel these issues were generated by your occupational stress? Please explain.
6. What benefits do you see with this program versus correction officers just speaking with a psychologist?
7. What are the benefits of creating policies and procedures to address the wellness program?
8. Overall, when you contacted the wellness program, do you feel that they assisted you with your needs? Please explain.
9. Do you think the wellness program can improve? Please explain.
10. Is there anything else you would like to add related to how the wellness program impact correction officer stress?

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

1. Invite to Participants
2. Instructions for Interviewee
3. Informed Consent Statement.
4. Interview Questions.
5. Opportunity to ask the interviewee if they have anything to add; and
6. Acknowledgment of thanks to the interviewees.