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Lived Experiences of Workplace Stress Among Female Detention Officers

Genevieve Lorraine Saucedo
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

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Genevie L. Saucedo

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Walden University
2023

Abstract

Lived Experiences of Workplace Stress Among Female Detention Officers

by

Genevie L. Saucedo

MPhil, Walden University, 2021

BS, Colombia Southern University, 2018

Dissertation Submitted in Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Forensic Psychology

Walden University

November 2023

Abstract

There is limited research pertaining to the personal perceptions and lived experiences of workplace stress among female detention officers. This qualitative study was conducted to provide a research inquiry into female detention officers' lived experiences of workplace stress and current organizational resources available for female detention officers. The nature of this study's exploration aligns with the stress performance theory of the Yerkes-Dodson stress curve. Using a purposive sampling method, seven participants were recruited for semistructured interviews. All participants met the inclusion criteria of the study, which was that they were at least 18 years old, had at least one year of work experience, were a detention officer at line-level or first-line supervisory rank, worked in a city or county jail, and had direct contact with the inmate population. Data were analyzed and themes were identified. The most common ways female detention officers experienced workplace stress included (a) psychosocial stressors (i.e., the need to prove competency to peers in a predominately male industry), (b) organizational stressors (i.e., understaffed and lack of leadership), and (c) environmental stressors (i.e., inmate threats and safety concerns). All participants experienced health and performance-related issues due to stress. All participants expressed a need for more resources for women in corrections. The findings of this research could have potential implications for positive social change for female detention officers by guiding organizations in developing appropriate resources to help this population manage work stress and avoid burnout.

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Dedication

For my husband, Martine, you have been my motivator, encourager, coach, teacher, leader, and biggest supporter throughout my journey. You held me accountable every day. I was not brave enough to take on this challenge until you told me to walk by faith and LEAP. Thank you for catching my tears and celebrating my laughs. You are my anchor.

For my children, Remy and Rocky, you both are my motivation. I look up to your innocent spirits, explorative minds, and creative imaginations. Thank you for telling Mommy that I can do anything. Always remember you both can do anything you put your mind to!

For my parents and my siblings, thank you for all the support and encouragement and for believing in me. I missed a few birthday parties and family gatherings during my doctoral journey, but you were always on my side. We know where we come from, but we can create any future we want with faith, hard work, and support. Thank you!

For my extended family and friends, thank you for the support and encouragement. Thank you for reminding me to keep going.

Finally, this is dedicated to all the first responders sacrificing so much to hold the line. The work must continue. Remember why you started. Thank you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

In this study, I provide a qualitative research inquiry into female detention officers' lived experiences of workplace stress. Detention officers fall under the field of corrections within the criminal justice system. Corrections personnel are assigned to local, state, and federal prisons or jails to provide care, custody, and control of incarcerated individuals (Auerbach, 2022). Jail facilities are stressful and dangerous environments to work in (Auerbach, 2022). Chronic occupational stress can lead to feelings of burnout causing emotional, physical, and attitudinal exhaustion (Mugridge, 2022). About one third of corrections officers are at a high risk for stress-related disorders (Fusco et al., 2021; Taylor & Swartz, 2021). In general, research pertaining to corrections officers and workplace stress is limited, especially regarding female detention officers. There is a lack of research exploring the personal perceptions and lived experiences of female officers working inside jail facilities. The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the thoughts, perspectives, and experiences of female detention officers who work inside city or county jail facilities. I explored the unique stressors of female detention officers.

I begin the study by introducing and describing detention services and job demands. I elaborate on the environmental conditions of a jail and the purpose of detention services within the criminal justice system. I discuss theories of stress and the impact of stress on officers' health and performance. Through a qualitative approach, I explored the lived experiences of workplace stress among female officers and highlighted

emerging themes of common stressors. The study could serve as an informative piece of literature for program development to support female detention officers.

Background

Detention officers are professionals within the criminal justice field who primarily work inside jails and prisons supervising incarcerated individuals (Santos et al., 2021). The criminal justice system encompasses many interrelated subsystems that collaborate to ensure evidence-based court adjudication for inmates who are criminally charged (Palmiotto, 2021). Although jail systems serve a critical and essential role providing housing and other services for inmates awaiting court, jails have been described as *iron cages*, fostering negative social climates, instability, and high-stress situations for detention officers (Hsieh & Boateng, 2020). Jails are not seen as prestigious, high-status institutions in which to work. Houston et al. (1988) once called them “the sewers of the justice system” (p. 449). These concrete and steel enclosed facilities embody different levels of repeating and unpredictable workplace stressors. Such stressors may be subject to the behaviors and actions of the inmate population, organizational climate, life-threatening incidents, and chronic occupational stress (Houston et al., 1988; Hsieh & Boateng, 2020).

Detention officers are exposed to life-threatening situations known as *critical incidents*, which can contribute to long-term psychological and physical health issues (Fusco et al., 2021; Taylor & Swartz, 2021). Critical incidents include, but are not limited to, assaults, attempted suicides, suicides, homicides, and even riots. Officers’ performance and health can also be negatively affected by the chronic, ongoing stressors

generated from high job demands and lack of resources (Demerouti et al., 2001). The raw, tough conditions of jail environments pose many risks for officers. Their jobs are essential not only to the criminal justice field, but they serve to protect the community. The roles and responsibilities of officers must be assumed by resilient individuals who are capable and able to adapt and problem solve in response to various workplace stressors. Without resiliency and stress management strategies for such difficult, taxing, and demanding jobs, officers' health and performance may be at stake.

Most research on corrections personnel and workplace stress continues to focus on the general population of corrections with little research specific to female officers (Butler et al., 2019; Rania et al., 2020; Ricciardelli & McKendy, 2020). This study was conducted to highlight common experiences and themes of workplace stressors unique to female detention officers. The qualitative approach was used to reveal information pertaining to the impact of stress on female officers' health and performance. The qualitative information obtained in the study can introduce a positive direction for social change in the field of corrections. The study could serve as an informative piece of literature for resource development for female officers.

There remains a paucity of research regarding the experiences of workplace stress among female detention officers inside jail environments (Butler et al., 2019; Rania et al., 2020; Ricciardelli & McKendy, 2020). Therefore, an exploration of the impact of workplace stress on their health and performance was important to capture. Chapter 1 includes a description of the study and its purpose and provides information pertaining to the social problem addressed.

Problem Statement

There is limited research pertaining to the personal perceptions and lived experiences of workplace stress among female detention officers (Butler et al., 2019; Rania et al., 2020; Ricciardelli & McKendy, 2020). Most research has been focused on police and correctional officers who work in patrol units and prisons, respectively (Butler et al., 2019; Rania et al., 2020; Ricciardelli & McKendy, 2020). Detention officers working in city or county jail systems face similar stressors as public safety professionals. However, little research has been focused specifically on female detention officers and their perceived stressors of the job within city/county jail environments (Butler et al., 2019; Rania et al., 2020; Ricciardelli & McKendy, 2020). Current research indicates that female officers are at a higher risk for certain health issues, such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and stress-related disorders, than their male counterparts are (Fusco et al., 2021; Taylor & Swartz, 2021). This information supports the need for research into stress, health, and performance among female officers; their perceptions and experiences can help inform resiliency programs for law enforcement and public safety agencies and organizations. Considering the potential severity of illnesses female officers face and the importance of developing/expanding resiliency and support programs for female officers, I contributed to this body of literature by conducting research specifically on female detention officers and exploring their lived experiences and perceptions of workplace stress and current available resources.

The high risks of mental health issues, ongoing dangers inside jail facilities, and lack of sufficient organizational programs and resources for officers highlight a

significant social problem. In this study, I found common themes in workplace stressors impacting health and performance among female detention officers, which supports a need to further explore this issue. Although more research is needed in general for all public safety workers, the experiences and perceptions of workplace stress in female officers remains understudied. Information gained from further research on this topic could assist with the development and/or improvement of organizational support and resources applicable to the unique needs of female officers (Butler et al., 2019; Rania et al., 2020; Ricciardelli & McKendy, 2020). The specific research problem was addressed in this study is the lack of information in the research literature about the lived experiences of workplace stress among female detention officers. Therefore, this study was conducted to explore their lived experiences to gain a better understanding of this phenomenon.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of workplace stress among female detention officers to gain a better understanding of their experiences and interpret the essence of what these experiences mean to them. This qualitative approach allowed a window of opportunity to learn about female officers who work in demanding jail environments. Workplace stress can have a negative impact on health and performance (American Psychological Association [APA], n.d.d; Demerouti et al., 2001). This study served as an opportunity to contribute to the gap in literature pertaining to female detention officers and their experiences with workplace stress in city

and county jail environments (Butler et al., 2019; Rania et al., 2020; Ricciardelli & McKendy, 2020).

Research Question

This qualitative study regarding the experiences of female detention officers with workplace stress and the consequences of stress on their health and performance was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of workplace stress among female detention officers who work in city or county jail environments?

RQ2: What are the current organizational resources available for female detention officers?

Theoretical Framework

The logical connections between the framework presented and the nature of this study included the Yerkes-Dodson (1908) stress curve (Figure 1; APA, n.d.h) and Nixon et al.'s (1979) stress response curve (Figure 3). The research and conceptual diagrams of the stress curve explain and illustrate the relationship of stress and human performance based on individual perception and tolerance to stress; this includes the negative and positive effects of stress arousal on performance when stress is overbearing (Casey & Strain, 2016). Nixon et al.'s stress response curve is closely related to Yerkes-Dodson law but included the notion that stress management can increase performance level. The stress-performance theory (SPT; Nixon et al., 1979; Yerkes & Dodson, 1908) connects the stress-curve framework and nature of the study regarding the lived experiences of workplace stress among female detention officers who work in city and county jail

environments. Stress can impact female officers' performance and health, and I discovered commonalities in workplace stressors in this study. This is important for positive social change for women working in detention officer positions.

The Yerkes-Dodson (1908) stress curve measures the relationship between arousal (i.e., determination, drive and/or motivation to learn a new task or take on a challenge) and performance, where extremely low arousal and extremely high arousal both influence poor performance (APA, n.d.h). Simple tasks increase the likelihood of desired quality performance over difficult and challenging tasks. A balance between low and high arousal levels, based on individual perception (appraisal) and tolerance to stress, promotes optimal performance. Simple tasks and difficult tasks render different challenges, thus influencing different perceptions and tolerances to stress for each individual person. Individuals with the necessary competencies, tolerance levels, and healthy perceptions can endure much higher challenges/stressors and demonstrate optimal performance (APA, n.d.h; Yerkes-Dodson, 1908).

Nixon et al. (1979) suggested that stress management training improves performance under stress. Nixon et al.'s stress response curve is, therefore, a framework that ties directly to this study's research topic area in that stress management programs and training have the potential to increase officers' performance. Therefore, understanding and learning from female detention officers' perceptions and experiences with workplace stress and exploring current resources for female detention officers are essential for resource development and/or improvement. This study shed light specifically on female detention officers to understand their perceptions and experiences

with workplace stress and the consequences of such stress on their health and performance.

Yerkes-Dodson law, as the originating root of the stress curve and early theory of stress and performance, can be applied to support potential outcomes and common themes of stressors and common influences of such stressors on health and performance among female officers. Yerkes-Dodson law connects the theoretical framework and nature of this study through the application of a specific conceptualization of stress and performance on female detention officers' lived experiences of workplace stress. Common themes of workplace stressors discovered from this qualitative inquiry were better understood and explained post-data analysis using the Yerkes-Dodson law and stress curve diagram. Findings generate reportable and useful implications for organizational leaders in program development and support resources for female detention officers.

Nature of the Study

In this qualitative study, I used an explorative phenomenological approach that employed semistructured interviews intended to develop an understanding of the experiences and perceptions of workplace stress among female detention officers. I explored common themes of workplace stressors experienced by female detention officers and the impact on their health and performance. Participants were recruited through a purposive sampling method for convenience purposes (see Patton, 2015). All participants were at least 18 years of age, female, held the position of *detention officer* or *correctional officer*, and assumed the rank of line-level staff or first-line supervisor at the

time of their participation. All participants worked directly with the inmate population inside jail facilities. Participants had at least 1 year of experience working inside a city or county jail system. Considering the lack of research regarding female detention officers and their experiences working inside city and county jail facilities (Butler et al., 2019; Rania et al., 2020; Ricciardelli & McKendy, 2020), I did not include any female officers who worked patrol or transportation positions in this study.

Definitions of Terms

For this study, the following terms are important and are defined as:

Anxiety: Characterized by feelings of anticipation, apprehension, tension, misfortune, and a feeling of danger, threat, or challenge approaching. Anxiety activates a physiological stress response, which is a long-term or ongoing response associated with future-oriented stressors and fears (APA, n.d.a; APA, 2013).

Burnout: Characterized by physical, emotional, and attitudinal exhaustion due to chronic occupational stress. Signs indicate diminishing interest in work, loss of passion, loss of optimism, and decreased sense of purpose. There is no generally accepted definition and burnout is not recognized in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed.; *DSM-5*; APA, 2013). Burnout is not considered a mental disorder or mental illness. The term was first coined in the 1970s by American Psychologist Herbert Freudenberger based on his observations of clients' experiences with chronic stress (Rholetter, 2021). American Psychologist Christina Maslach has dedicated her research to occupational burnout, which involves research in law enforcement and corrections. Maslach is the author of the Maslach burnout inventory

(MBI), which has been widely used to measure burnout since the 1980s (APA, n.d.b; Kavan & Powell, 2021; Kinman et al., 2017).

Correctional officers: This includes the term *detention officer* within the study and are public safety professionals within the criminal justice system who monitor incarcerated individuals under legal custody inside jails, prisons, courthouses, and other facilities (e.g., hospitals; Auerbach, 2022).

Depression: Characterized by physical, behavioral, and emotional signs and symptoms that disturb or interfere with daily life. Physical and behavioral signs include diet changes, sleep changes, fatigue, weight loss or weight gain, withdrawal or avoidance behaviors, cognitive issues, and a negative affective state. Emotional signs include sadness, despair, lack of motivation or enthusiasm, pessimism, and discontent. Depression ranges from moderate to severe and in clinical cases is treated by a licensed mental health professional (APA, n.d.c; APA, 2013).

Occupational (workplace) stress: Workplace stress generates a physiological and psychological stress response impacting individuals' health and well-being. Workload, job demands, lack of resources, job security, decision making, level of responsibility, peer and supervisor relationships are some of the factors of workplace stress (APA, n.d.d; Demerouti et al., 2001).

Self-care: An individual choice to utilize various resources and techniques to improve personal health and well-being. Individuals who choose to perform self-care practices for themselves might use training, education, or coaching from professionals. Individuals may decide to improve health through meditative practices such as imagery,

breathing, relaxation, hypnosis, and biofeedback. Other practical self-care practices include exercise and diet (Evans, 2020).

Stress: According to the *APA Dictionary of Psychology* (n.d.e), stress is a psychological and physiological response to internal and/or external forms of stressors, marked as a unique, individual experience based on individual perceptions, experiences, and appraisals of any good or bad situations that cause stress (i.e., marriage, divorce). The stress response involves changes in multiple bodily systems, which generates how individuals behave, react, or respond to stress. Some physiological responses include increased heart rate, rapid breathing, sweating, muscle tension, increased metabolism, and changes to digestive functioning (Selye, 1953). Psychological responses might include emotional reactions (e.g., fear) and even behavioral reactions (e.g., avoidance behaviors). Severe stressors or traumatic stress can have a significant impact on psychological and physical health. Stress can cause mind–body changes and even influence certain mental health conditions (i.e., posttraumatic stress disorder [PTSD], stress-related disorders; APA, 2017). Stress affects health and performance, which can reduce job satisfaction and quality of life (APA, n.d.e; Selye, 1953).

Stress management: According to the *APA Dictionary of Psychology* (n.d.f), stress management is “the use of specific techniques, strategies, or programs—such as relaxation training, anticipation of stress reactions, and breathing techniques—for dealing with stress-inducing situations and the state of being stressed” (para. 1).

Threat appraisal: An individual’s assessment of a threat (stressor) based on their cognition and emotions that produces a certain determination of the level of threat; some

individuals might appraise a threat as high stress and other individuals might appraise it as moderate to low stress. This process is unique to each individual and threat appraisal may change over time based on individual perceptions of the stressor (APA, n.d.g).

Yerkes-Dodson law: According to the *APA Dictionary of Psychology* (n.d.h), the Yerkes-Dodson law is represented by an inverted U-shaped curve illustrating the relationship between stress (arousal) and performance. The center of the inverted U-curve marks the area of optimal stress and optimal performance (see Figure 1). The Yerkes-Dodson law theorizes that too little arousal (i.e., boredom, depression, lack of motivation) or too much arousal (i.e., overwhelm, anxiety) weaken performance and health (APA, n.d.h; Yerkes-Dodson, 1908).

Assumptions

In this study, I assumed that detention officer participants may not be completely forthcoming in their responses to interview questions due to their reluctance to disclose personal information regarding workplace stress (see Useche et al., 2019). However, considering their willingness to volunteer for the study and participate in the interview process, I assumed they disclosed their experiences candidly. The field of corrections is a vulnerable population to chronic stress and burnout (Useche et al., 2019), and female detention officers participants were asked to disclose information about different types of workplace stressors (e.g., organizational, environmental, interpersonal, psychosocial) and information about resources needed to overcome such stressors. I anticipated that participants working in custody settings within jail facilities would provide details about

the experiences of a job that is hidden in contrast to service-type jobs that are openly seen by the public (see Useche et al., 2019).

I assumed that female detention officers would be reluctant to fully disclose the details of their experiences with workplace stress due to the nature and culture of harboring a private and strong attitude about their battles with stress and ways they overcome stress (see Useche et al., 2019). The qualitative approach and interview process for this research was a way of learning about participants' experiences, which were openly shared, with an understanding that responses were limited to general workplace stress (not to delve into traumatic experiences). The field of corrections also entails dangerous and critical incidents that pose a great threat toward officers (Useche et al., 2019). Some participants disclosed these types of experiences and provided short responses. Participants explained the field of corrections as having a stigma against officers who display emotions, which aligns with previous research pertaining to such stigma in the field of corrections (see Useche et al., 2019). Participants explained some officers may feel like they are weak or soft due to stigma/culture, and therefore, some officers would withhold information or refrain from displaying unacceptable emotions while on duty. Interview responses were not limited and, instead, participants in this study were open to disclosing their emotions and feelings, thoughts, perspectives, and overall experiences with workplace stress. The study benefited greatly from their candid responses.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this qualitative study included six participants of varying ages and lengths of service who represent a homogenous sample of female detention officers with at least 1 year experience and whose work status was not considered probationary. Female detention officers who do not work in a custody setting with direct contact to the inmate population were excluded. Participants were recruited through a purposive sampling method (see Patton, 2015). The interview, guided by six questions decided upon beforehand, inquired about a female officer's experience with workplace stress and the support resources currently available to them.

This group of participants was chosen because of the lack of research on female detention officers and their lived experiences with workplace stress inside jail facilities, a hidden occupation based on the nature of its enclosed operations (see Useche et al., 2019). Most research has been focused on correctional officers in general, with little research on the relationship between stress, performance, and health. Useche et al. (2019) explained the lack of research studies combining the spheres of stress and health in corrections and most research being conducted on these topics separately. Furthermore, female detention officers are far less studied, especially pertaining to workplace stress, performance, and health.

The current study was limited to a small sample size of participants, understandably so due to the margin of the corrections population they make up. The field of corrections is a predominately male industry with women making up about 38% of the population (Zippia, 2022). Considering the low visibility of female detention

officers at work, having learned from their experiences emphasizes a new focus on this vulnerable population who are at high risk for job burnout (see Useche et al., 2019). As part of this homogenous sample, duty assignments, tenure, responsibility, and agency/organization varied. Jail facilities, jail functions, agency operations, and regional locations are all considerations for the subjective experiences of each participant's interview responses. Considering the sample size and subjective experiences pertaining to the officers' respective assignments and jail facilities, the results of the research have limited transferability outside the bounds of this study.

Limitations

In this phenomenological study, I explored the experiences of a small group of participants to whom the interview questions structurally applied. Considering the small number of purposefully selected participants and the limited geographical area in which the study was conducted, the results may not be generalized across populations. Consistency and dependability of a study are essential for trustworthiness and repeatable findings (Forero et al., 2018). Documentation of a thorough audit trail pertaining to the study's elements was conducted to ensure the data collection and findings would be consistent among outside researchers when reviewing the analysis and findings.

There was a possibility participants would be unwilling to fully disclose their experiences pertaining to workplace stress. However, participants were fully willing to disclose personal experiences and views. To protect participants, confidentiality relating to the interview and data analysis process was emphasized in the informed consent form and prior to each interview. Interviews in the study were conducted in a neutral way to

eliminate researcher bias, and confidentiality was emphasized to establish a baseline of rapport with the participant and protect them from identity exposure.

It is important to eliminate researcher bias in research studies. A researcher's bias can influence or sway elements of a study including data collection and analysis (Smith & Noble, 2014). According to Codington-Lacerte (2018), bias can shape the design of the study and recondition outcomes to favor hypotheses. Researcher bias can configure data interpretation and reporting (Codington-Lacerte, 2018). Bias can stem from personal beliefs, in search of personal fulfillment, and bias can play a role in a researcher's observations. To eliminate researcher bias, I kept a journal for personal expression and bias awareness. These safeguards are useful in mitigating potential flaws and/or distorted research results (Codington-Lacerte, 2018).

Significance

The significance of the current study is that an understanding of female detention officers' lived experiences of workplace stress can inform agencies and/or organizations of potential common themes in stressors for female officers. Common themes in workplace stressors can also influence the development of training programs and support resources. The lived experiences of workplace stress in relation to health and performance is subjective to each participant based on the individual differences in stress tolerance and stress appraisal (Casey & Strain, 2016). However, in my analysis of the data, I identified common themes of workplace stressors. The information in this study may serve female officers positively in the following ways: (a) female detention officers may find the information in this study useful in preparing them against common

workplace stressors, and (b) they may become more apt to use support resources during their careers. The findings of this study provide useful information that can be used for future studies pertaining to common influential factors of workplace stress affecting women in the field of corrections.

Summary

Chapter 1 presented a description of this qualitative study, the social problem it addresses, the research questions that guided the semistructured interviews, and the theoretical framework of the study. Background information was provided regarding the field of corrections, jail systems, and the many stressors detention officers regularly face in the performance of their duties. Chapter 1 highlighted a gap in the literature pertaining to female detention officers and their experiences with workplace stress, which supports the significance of this study.

Jail facilities are stressful and dangerous environments to work in. Like many first responders, correctional officers are often exposed to high stress situations and critical incidents. Stress impacts health and performance. Without support resources and stress management training, officers' health and performance may be at risk. Approximately one third of correctional officers are at a high risk for stress-related disorders (Fusco et al., 2021; Taylor & Swartz, 2021). Most research pertaining to correctional officers is generalized to the whole population, with little research focused on women who work in corrections. This qualitative study revealed information pertaining to common themes of workplace stressors, information about support resources and training, and the impact of workplace stress on female detention officers' health and performance. In this

phenomenological study, I explored the lived experiences and perceptions of workplace stress among female detention officers inside city and county jail facilities. The findings of the study can be used to inform agencies and organizations of support resources and training programs for female detention officers. Female detention officers can benefit from the information within the study by recognizing common themes of workplace stress. Female detention officers might be more apt to use support resources and training to increase their resiliency skills and stress tolerance. Overall, the information in the study may be beneficial for female officers' health and performance.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

In this phenomenological study, I explored the lived experiences of workplace stress among female detention officers. In general, the corrections field is established to provide care, custody, and control of individuals deprived of their liberties due to legal charges and/or convictions (Auerbach, 2022). Detention officers who oversee the inmate population and work to maintain jail systems are routinely faced with stressful work conditions in the performance of their duties (Auerbach, 2022). Overtime, workplace stress can impact health and performance. Individual stress tolerance and stress appraisal play a role in the impact of stress on health and performance (Casey & Strain, 2016). Chronic workplace stress can lead to job burnout, which impacts individuals emotionally and physically (Mugridge, 2022). Approximately one third of correctional officers are at a high risk for developing stress-related disorders and other health issues (Fusco et al., 2021; Taylor & Swartz, 2021). Agencies and organizations that implement support resources and training programs addressing the mismatch between workplace elements and worker competencies can help prevent or ameliorate burnout (Mugridge, 2022). Support resources and training are essential in helping correctional officers build resiliency, tolerance, and stress management skills.

Most research pertaining to correctional officers is generalized to the whole population. There is a lack research specific to women in corrections. There is a gap in research regarding the perceptions and lived experiences of workplace stress among female detention officers, especially those who work in city and county jail environments

(Butler et al., 2019; Rania et al., 2020; Ricciardelli & McKendy, 2020). The study delved into the theoretical frameworks that explain the relationship between stress and performance (Nixon et al., 1979; Yerkes & Dodson, 1908). The study bridges SPT (Nixon et al., 1979; Yerkes & Dodson, 1908) with the experiences of workplace stress among female detention officers. The framework provides structure to the study's exploration and foundation for qualitative inquiry. The qualitative approach served to capture the essence of what female officers' experiences mean to them. The overall purpose of the study was to gain a better understanding of female detention officers' perceptions, thoughts, and views regarding workplace stress and available resources.

Chapter 2 begins with a historical background on research pertaining to stress, health, and performance. The theoretical concepts of stress and performance from significant historical research are presented in a chronological manner. In Chapter 2, I elaborate on research pertaining to correctional officers and the impact of workplace stress on health and performance. Finally, I summarize the significance of exploring the impact of workplace stress on female detention officers. Through a qualitative approach, I explored the lived experiences of workplace stress among female detention officers and highlighted emerging themes of common stressors. This study could serve as an informative piece of literature for support resources and program development to support female detention officers. The findings of this study might encourage female officers to use support resources and fortify their resiliency against the stressors inherently associated with the corrections field.

Literature Review

Historical Background on Stress and Health

Stress Origins

Stress is subjective to each person. There are individual differences in stress tolerance, stress appraisal, coping mechanisms, and competencies to resist and overcome stress (Casey & Strain, 2016). The *APA Dictionary of Psychology* (n.d.g) explains stress appraisal in terms of *threat appraisal*, which is defined as the “cognitive and emotional processes involved in assessing the potentiality and level of threat” (para. 1). Stress is perceived differently based on cultural characteristics and background, such as age, upbringing, morals, and personal beliefs (Casey & Strain, 2016). Stress can come from environmental factors, interpersonal conflict, psychosocial crisis, and even biological issues. Individuals may experience stress from many different situations, internally and externally. APA (2013) has clustered trauma and stressor-related disorders as its own classification of mental disorders in the *DSM-5* based on stress being an etiological agent in diagnoses (Casey & Strain, 2016). The differences in individual perceptions of stress make it difficult to decide what event is considered a stressor, especially traumatic events. It is also difficult to determine what is considered an abnormal reaction to a stressful event and what is an appropriate reaction (Casey & Strain, 2016). When navigating experiences of stress, it is important to factor in subjectivity.

Physiological Stress Response

Beyond the psychiatric research and criteria of stress-related disorders, a whole body of research relating to stress stems from neurobiological research (Casey & Strain,

2016; Rittenhouse & Miller, 2022). The neurobiological response to stress is a way of determining what is perceived and felt as stress based on physiological changes in the body (Casey & Strain, 2016). There are physiological components to natural stress responses measured in the function and structures of biological systems. Chemical and hormonal changes from the stress response begin with the chemical messenger systems found in neurotransmitters, neurohormones, and neuropeptides centrally located in the brain (Rittenhouse & Miller, 2022). Stress hormones include, such as adrenaline and cortisol, are chemical messenger systems that send signals throughout the body, activating chemical and hormonal glands to prepare the body to survive the perceived stress (Rittenhouse & Miller, 2022)

The commonly known flight-or-fight response has been referenced in many research studies over time and is referred to as the stress response. During the stress response, there is an increase in heart rate, blood pressure, respiration, and distribution of energy to muscles and certain body parts needed for survival when facing stress (Rittenhouse & Miller, 2022). With neurobiological and physiological measures of stress, researchers can identify levels of stress, situations that initiate the stress response, behaviors to manage stress, and interventions to improve health and performance (Casey & Strain, 2016; Rittenhouse & Miller, 2022). Considering the psychiatric and neurobiological body of research that supports and explains the harmful effects of stress on health and performance, the lived experiences of workplace stress is a significant topic to explore.

Health Risks

Health risks resulting from stress vary. Considering environmental conditions, genetic predispositions, differences in coping skills, and available support resources, individuals will perceive and experience stress differently (Bremmer, 2016; Casey & Strain, 2016). Some individuals thrive and grow from certain stressors while others who experience the same type of stress develop health issues (APA, n.d.g; Bremmer, 2016; Casey & Strain, 2016; Rholetter, 2021). Individuals who experience chronic stress and lack resources may experience health issues due to sustained physiological changes in the body. One of the main hormones produced during the stress response is cortisol, which is secreted from the adrenal glands located above both kidneys (Harmon, 2019). Chronic stress and lack of resources can leave an individual feeling helpless and defeated, causing them to sustain high levels of cortisol in the body. Imbalanced levels of cortisol can cause major health issues (Harmon, 2019).

High levels of sustained cortisol can cause certain chronic diseases. Depression, anxiety, cognitive decline, and heart disease are linked to elevated cortisol levels (Harmon, 2019). High levels of cortisol can increase weight, changes in diet, sleep patterns, energy levels, and impact the immune system (Harmon, 2019). Individuals with high levels of cortisol may have difficulty coping with stress, which prohibits a balanced level of cortisol in the body. Stress tolerance, stress appraisal, and individual competencies all play a significant role in overcoming stress (Casey & Strain, 2016; Cooper & Dewe, 2004). In contrast to high levels, low levels of cortisol sustained in the body can also impact health. Low levels can cause a rare autoimmune disease known as

Addison's disease, which can cause fatigue, weight loss, muscle loss, skin conditions, and changes in behavior (Harmon, 2019). A balanced level of cortisol is achieved when the stress is no longer present or the individual copes with stress well. Other suggestions for balanced cortisol levels include exercise, support systems, meditation, and healthy social activities (Harmon, 2019).

Stress and Performance

Stress not only impacts health but is also a critical factor in performance level (Demerouti et al., 2001; Casey & Strain, 2016; Nixon et al., 1979; Yerkes & Dodson, 1908). For optimal performance, it is necessary for workers to manage workplace stress (Demerouti et al., 2001; Casey & Strain, 2016; Nixon et al., 1979; Yerkes & Dodson, 1908). Workplace stress is a phenomenon researched in various disciplines and has been found to strongly impact employee performance and overall health (Kleis, 2020).

Research stemming from the early 20th century posits a decline in strong performance and health due to stress (Nixon et al., 1979; Yerkes & Dodson, 1908). For first responders, optimal performance cannot be compromised, especially if their duties and responsibilities entail high-stress conditions and demands (e.g., saving a life). Training programs and organizational support can help lower feelings of workplace stress and increase strong performance (Chitra & Karunanidhi, 2021). Chitra and Karunanidhi (2021) found that resiliency skill-building programs and training on occupational stress enhance job satisfaction, reduce feelings of workplace stress, and improve psychological well-being in female police officers. Feelings of hope and self-efficacy are helpful in work performance. Support resources and training can improve hope and self-efficacy.

Law and Guo (2016) found a relationship between hope and self-efficacy with job satisfaction, workplace stress, and organizational commitment in correctional officers. More specifically, the researchers found correctional officers who were hopeful felt more job satisfaction and less workplace stress (Law & Guo, 2016). Moreover, correctional officers who believed in their abilities to complete certain tasks felt more job satisfaction and were committed to their organizations (Law & Guo, 2016). Strong performance, even under high-stress situations, can be generated through organizational support and training in occupational stress and resiliency (Chitra & Karunanidhi, 2021; Law & Guo, 2016). Overall, biological, psychological, and social–environmental components are essential in coping with, and overcoming, stress for quality health and performance.

Historical Background on the Stress and Performance Theory

Yerkes–Dodson Law

To better understand the relationship between stress and performance, it is important to revisit historical findings and theoretical concepts. Yerkes and Dodson (1908) originally founded the stress curve (Figure 1) in the early 1900s and explained a significant relationship of habit forming and arousal to stimuli and how the strength of such stimuli impacts the rapidity of habit formation. The Yerkes-Dodson stress curve (1908) became a widely used hypothesis to explain the relationship between arousal (drive and motivation to learn a new task or take on a challenge) and performance (weak, strong, optimal). The hypothesis is modeled with an inverted U-shaped graph conceptualizing the relationship between (X) arousal and (Y) performance (see Figure 1; APA, n.d.h; Yerkes & Dodson, 1908).

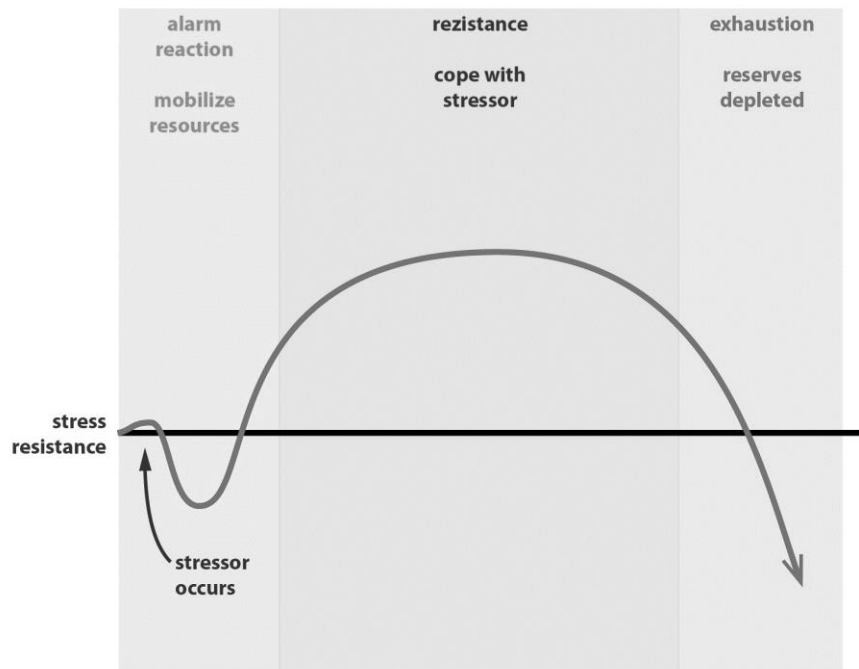
Figure 1*Yerkes-Dodson Stress Curve*

The Yerkes-Dodson (1908) stress curve indicates that too low arousal and too much (high) arousal both influence poor performance. Simple tasks increase the likelihood of strong performance over difficult and challenging tasks. A balance between low and high arousal levels, based on individual perception (appraisal), tolerance to stress, and personal competencies generate optimal performance. Simple tasks and difficult tasks render different challenges. Based on individual perceptions of such challenges, individuals appraise challenges differently. Some challenges may be perceived as something easy to cope with or difficult to cope with. Some challenges (stress) might make individuals feel defeated, whereas others feel they can manage it. As individuals gain motivation and interest in learning a new task or challenge, their will to perform increases. Optimal performance is achieved when arousal toward challenges (stress) matches the individual's tolerance capacity and competency abilities to accomplish the goal of the challenge (Nixon et al., 1979; Yerkes & Dodson, 1908;

Yerkes-Dodson Law, n.d.). SPT conceptualized in the Yerkes-Dodson (1908) stress curve explains why some people can perform better than others under certain arousal levels to stress.

Selye's General Adaptation Syndrome

As the 1908 Yerkes-Dodson Law (Yerkes & Dodson, 1908) continued to gain momentum in stress-related research, a new stress model emerged that conceptualized the stress response reflecting the concepts of the Yerkes-Dodson Law. In the 1930s, Selye's general adaptation syndrome (GAS; Selye, 1953) emerged and became a widely known model still used today (Remembering Hans Selye, 2010). Selye's GAS model (Figure 2) illustrates the process in which individuals experience stress (Remembering Hans Selye, 2010; Selye, 1953). The model categorizes the stress response in three phases: (a) alarm reaction, (b) resistance, and (c) exhaustion (Remembering Hans Selye, 2010).

Figure 2*Selye's GAS Model*

During the alarm reaction phase, individuals first experience or perceive the stressor and begin to mobilize resources to help cope with the stressor (Selye, 1953). During the resistance phase, individuals are utilizing using those resources to resist and cope with the stress. Resources can be internal and/or external. Some resources may include support from a social support network of family, friends, etc. Some resources could be based on individuals' resiliency skills or traits (e.g., deep breathing). Resources are subjective to each person. During the third and final phase of the GAS model, Selye (1953) explains a period of exhaustion once all resources are depleted. This period occurs when individuals no longer have mechanisms in place to resist and/or cope with the

stressor (Remembering Hans Selye, 2010). Unless the stressor is resolved or is no longer present, individuals will continue to experience stress and exhaustion continues. The experience of chronic stress and lack of resources can lead to feelings of physical, emotional, and psychological issues (Demerouti, et al., 2001). Alarm, resistance, and exhaustion are all subjective measures for each person. Individuals may be able to perceive, tolerate, and manage stress at healthier, optimal levels in comparison to others. The GAS model (Selye, 1953) relates to the Yerkes-Dodson Law (Yerkes & Dodson, 1908) being that perception is a major factor in individual stress experiences and the ability to perform under stress. This qualitative study captured individual experiences of female officers with workplace stress. As the researcher, I understood that each participant will have their own perceptions, stress tolerance, and personal competencies. Selye's GAS model (1953) provides a comprehensive, simplistic concept of experiencing stress aligning the study with the SPT (Yerkes & Dodson, 1908).

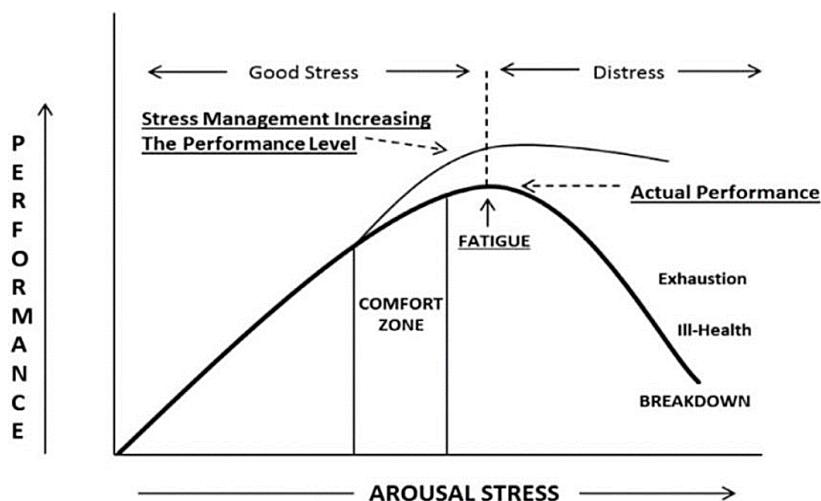
Nixon's Stress Response Curve

In the 1970's, Nixon's Stress Response Curve (refer to Figure 3) became the newest stress curve rooted to the Yerkes-Dodson Law (Nixon, et al., 1979; Yerkes & Dodson, 1908). Nixon's stress response curve conceptualizes stress and performance based on perception, stress tolerance, and the negative and positive effects of stress arousal on performance when stress is overbearing (Nixon, et al., 1979). Although derived from the Yerkes-Dodson Law, Nixon included the notion that stress management training can increase performance level (Nixon et al., 1979). Considering the physical nature of jail facilities, the psychosocial pressures of working with inmates, and

susceptibility to job burnout, stress management training can serve as a way of helping female officers increase their ability to cope with workplace stress (Rania, et al., 2020). Female officers may benefit from stress management training by developing new perceptions, increasing their stress tolerance, and expanding their competencies of healthy coping. Nixon's stress curve claims a need for training to improve performance, especially during difficult challenges and high levels of stress arousal (Nixon et al., 1979). Themes of workplace stressors that emerged from this phenomenological study may be used to inform organizational development of training programs to build officers' resiliency and strengthen performance.

Figure 3

Nixon's Stress Curve



Influence From Lazarus's Theory of Stress and Coping

Lazarus produced over 50 years of research pertaining to stress and developed the Theory of Stress and Coping Mechanisms (see Table 2) and the Transactional Stress Model (Figure 4; Cooper & Dewe, 2004; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Kivak, 2020). The

historical milestones of Lazarus’s work highlight specific categories of coping mechanisms as well as the significance of “stress appraisal” (Cooper & Dewe, 2004). According to Lazarus, coping mechanisms included emotion- and problem-focused coping (Cooper & Dewe, 2004; Russell, 1998). Emotion-focused coping includes strategies like self-control, social support systems, distancing, positive appraisal, accepting responsibility, escape, and avoidance (Cooper & Dewe, 2004). Problem-focused coping includes strategies like confrontive coping, seeking social support, creating an action plan, and developing a practical solution for a problem (Cooper & Dewe, 2004). Coping mechanisms vary for individuals and for certain problems (i.e., social support may be useful during a time of grieving; minimizing energy use is a form of problem-solving to reduce the amount of an electric bill). These coping mechanisms can be used independently of each other or combined (Cooper & Dewe, 2004). Healthy coping mechanisms are useful stress management strategies.

Table 1

Lazarus’s Theory of Stress and Coping Mechanisms

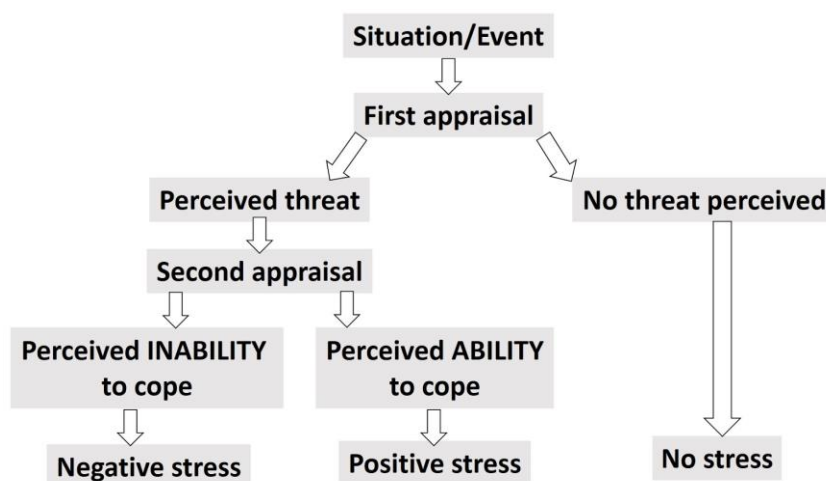
Problem-focused coping	Emotion-focused coping
Confrontative coping	Self-control
Seeking social support	Seeking social support
Plan full problem solving	Distancing
	Positive appraisal
	Accepting responsibility
	Escape/avoidance

Lazarus’s work explains stress as a transactional process, which depicts stress as a transactional outcome of the complex interaction between individuals and their environment (Kivak, 2020). Previous stress research focused on two dimensions of stress:

(a) the stressor and (b) the stress response. As an attempt to further describe the complexity of stress, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) introduced the Transactional Stress Model (TSM) as the third dimension. The TSM incorporates “stress appraisal” as a mediating factor between stressors and stress responses (Cooper & Dewe, 2004, Kivak, 2020).

Figure 4

Lazarus’s Transactional Stress Model



Stress appraisal is otherwise regarded as individual perceptions of stress and personal assessment of the severity of stress (Kivak, 2020). Appraisal is significant in the process of evaluating stressors and evaluating the capacity and ability to cope with stress (Goh et al., 2020; Kivak, 2020). The Theory of Stress and Coping Mechanisms (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) is a linear organization of variables, which includes: (a) The stressor; (b) primary appraisal process, in which individuals cognitively assess the level of stress or threat; (c) secondary appraisal process, in which individuals assess their ability/inability to cope and the need to mobilize resources—similar to Selye’s (1953)

work; (d) mobilization of coping mechanisms; and (f) psycho-physiological reactions to stress as an outcome (Goh, et al., 2010; Kivak, 2020). Goh et al. (2010) found that psycho-physiological reactions to stress can occur during the first or second appraisal phases and can be sustained if the stress is perceived to be overwhelming. If individuals perceive stress as weak and believe they possess the ability to cope, psychophysiological reactions may be nonexistent (Goh et al., 2010). Lazarus's research on stress appraisal is widely used to explain the transactional process of stress as a third dimension of stress and his research remains intact (Goh et al., 2010).

Stress appraisal is subjective to each person. Stress appraisal is a reminder for researchers to factor in subjectivity when collecting data pertaining to stress (Kivak, 2020). This study included semi-structured interviews to collect information from female detention officers about their lived experiences of workplace stress. During this study, I treated all interviews with an understanding that each participant would appraise stress differently. Their tolerance to stress and capacity to cope and manage stress would also be different. I also understood that the impact of stress on health and performance would vary. The common themes of workplace stressors that emerged from the data may benefit agencies/organizations in the development of programs and resources to support female detention officers.

Influences From the Maslach Burnout Inventory

Burnout syndrome is characterized by physical, emotional, and attitudinal exhaustion stemming from chronic workplace stress (Rholetter, 2021). Individuals experiencing burnout show signs of diminishing interest in work, loss of passion and

optimism, and feel a decreased sense of purpose. There is no generally accepted definition of burnout (Rholetter, 2021). Burnout syndrome is not recognized by the American Psychiatric Association (APA, 2013) as a mental disorder or mental illness; therefore, is not recognized in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5; APA, 2013).

The term “burnout” was first coined in the 1970s by Freudenberger based on his observations of clients’ experiences with chronic workplace stress (Rholetter, 2021). Maslach and Jackson (1981) later redefined burnout as a syndrome of three core factors: (a) emotional exhaustion, (b) reduced sense of personal accomplishment, and (c) depersonalization. Burnout syndrome is mostly generated from working with people who have psychological and social problems (e.g., inmate population; Rania et al., 2020). Chronic occupational stress (workplace stress) can lead to burnout syndrome, especially due to lack of resources and organizational support (Lambert, et al., 2018; Rania et al., 2020). Burnout is a process that happens over time and manifests from the interplay of individual characteristics and their work environment (Rania et al., 2020).

Maslach Burnout Inventory

The MBI (Maslach & Jackson, 1981) is the first scientifically developed measure to assess experienced burnout in workers (Kavan & Powell, 2021). To determine worker burnout using the MBI, individuals are assessed based on 22 symptom items pertaining to the three core factors (a) emotional exhaustion, (b) reduced sense of personal accomplishment, and (c) depersonalization (Kavan & Powell, 2021). The scales are assessed using factor analysis of arbitrary symptoms and generalizes a measure of

workers' experienced burnout symptoms (Kavan & Powell, 2021). The MBI is still used today to assess burnout syndrome.

Correctional Officers and Workplace Stress

Correctional officers and their experiences with workplace stress is an area of study requiring further research inquiry. Harizanova and Stoyanova (2020) conducted research involving correctional officers and burnout as it relates to chronic occupational stress. The researchers (2020) explicitly addressed limitations which included a pitch for future research to utilize longitudinal study designs to examine potential causality. Harizanova and Stoyanova (2020) also explained the need for further research investigating organizational characteristics and personal characteristics as potential predictive factors of burnout and even protective factors against burnout. Although the researchers' (2020) study focused on burnout and used a specific inventory to measure burnout levels (MBI), they noted corrections work as one of the most stressful jobs in the world and remains an understudied phenomenon.

Burnout in Corrections

In the context of corrections, officers may experience burnout from several factors. Researchers have identified the physical working environment and organizational-structural conditions of jails and prisons as major factors of burnout (Rania et al., 2020). More specifically, Rania and colleagues (2020) conducted a qualitative study using semistructured interviews and coding software that produced categories of burnout pertaining to the field of corrections. These burnout categories included: (a) organizational factors such as work environment, distance from home,

excessive work shifts, and overcrowding; and (b) psychosocial factors, which are broken down into two subcategories. Rania and researchers (2020) subcategories of psychosocial stressors included: (a) individual factors such as emotional burden, problem-solving difficulty, and work-family conflict; and (b) relational factors such as relationships with supervisors and inmates (p. 765). Rania and researchers (2020) study is limited. The study only focused on male correctional officers. Female correctional officers' experiences with workplace stress and burnout are areas requiring further research (Rania et al., 2020).

The physical and organizational-structural conditions of the jail environment can have harmful effects on officers' health. The vast responsibilities within a building structure entailing individuals whose liberties have been taken, concede to many psychosocial issues for detention officers (Rania et al., 2020). Some facilities are outdated, dirty, neglected, with poor lighting and ventilation systems. Some facilities are overcrowded with inmates. Many psychosocial issues stem from interpersonal conflicts (Rania et al., 2020). Officers are subject to inmates' psychological and social issues, physical threats, and medical emergencies (Rania et al., 2020). Jails and prison settings are enclosed with loud noises, mandatory routine engagements with inmates, and lack a sense of comfort. Without organizational support, supervisory support, and resources, these physical and psychosocial conditions can influence severe health concerns for officers (e.g., addiction, alcoholism; Rania et al., 2020).

Chronic and mundane workplace stress can lead to burnout for detention officers. The jail environment entails routine, monotonous work for officers aside from critical

incidents and high-stress situations. These issues can lead to problems with retention, short staffing, excessive shift work, frequent absences, and poor performance (Rania et al., 2020). It is critical to consider themes in workplace stressors that have the potential to negatively impact officers' health and performance. Themes in workplace stressors can help inform programs and support resources for officers. Officers who work directly with the inmate population are at higher risk of experiencing burnout (Rania et al., 2020). Furthermore, there remains a paucity in research literature pertaining to female detention officers and workplace stress. Female detention officers' experiences of burnout may stem from how gender identity shapes social relationships and work orientation in the fundamentally hyper-masculine jail systems (Ricciardelli & McKendy, 2020). Agencies and organizations that implement support resources addressing the mismatch between workplace stressors (both physical and psychosocial) and worker competencies can help prevent burnout (Mugridge, 2022). Overall, the field of corrections has one of the largest gaps in the social-behavioral sciences literature (Fusco et al., 2021). This qualitative study explored this phenomenon, specifically the lived experiences of female detention officers and workplace stress.

Correctional Officers and Coping Mechanisms

Correctional officers face stressful situations during the performance of their duties requiring them to adopt coping mechanisms to manage workplace stressors (Fusco et al., 2021; Rania et al., 2020; Taylor & Swartz, 2021). The jails are stressful and dangerous environments to work with routine tasks and unpredictable emergencies. According to Taylor and Swartz (2021), correctional officers are at a higher risk for

developing stress-related disorders than the general public. About one third of correctional officers suffer from PTSD symptoms (Taylor & Swartz, 2021). Female officers are at a higher risk for certain health issues such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and stress-related disorders (Fusco et al., 2021; Taylor & Swartz, 2021). Taylor and Swartz (2021) explain a need for more research regarding correctional officers, stress, and coping mechanisms in general. Although this study was not focused on coping mechanisms, future research could explore industry culture and stigma on coping mechanisms for correctional officers and add to that body of literature.

Coping mechanisms vary and may be considered adaptive or maladaptive ways of dealing and managing stress (Fusco et al., 2021; Taylor & Swartz, 2021). Some coping mechanisms are considered healthy (e.g., exercise) while other coping mechanisms cause further health damage (e.g., drinking alcohol; Fusco et al., 2021; Taylor & Swartz, 2021). Lazarus's (1984) work categorizes coping in two categories, emotion- and problem-focused coping mechanisms. Where emotion-focused coping entail mechanisms like self-control, social support, positive appraisal, accepting responsibility, distancing, escape and avoidant behaviors. However, some stressors may not be easily avoided. Certain emotional distress or triggers may not be easy to escape. Chronic stress and emotional triggers may be better managed with social support and learning techniques for self-control (e.g., breathing). Lazarus's coping mechanisms may be used in combination depending on officers' perceived stress and actual stress (Taylor & Swartz, 2021). Problem-focused coping like planning and confrontative coping may be beneficial for certain workplace stressors. For example, officers who face heavy paperwork with due

dates and other administrative duties may benefit more from action planning and social support – a combination of both emotion- and problem-focused coping. Emotion-focused coping mechanisms are associated with individuals who feel they have less control over the stressor. Problem-focused coping mechanisms are associated with individuals who feel they have more control over the stressor (Taylor & Swartz, 2021). Both emotion- and problem-focused coping can be adaptive or maladaptive ways of coping depending (Taylor & Swartz, 2021). Correctional officers may benefit from training programs regarding coping mechanisms to provide them with more tools to mitigate, combat, and overcome workplace stress. Healthy and effective coping for officers is critical to their health and performance in a stressful and dangerous work environment (Taylor & Swartz, 2021).

Correctional Officers' Stress and Performance

Performance Discrepancies

Stress-related disorders, anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues threaten the wellbeing of detention officers daily (Fusco, et al., 2021). Although the field of corrections is risky, stressful, and dangerous, it is often overlooked and understudied. Correctional officers' levels of stress are impacted by various influential factors and can affect officers' ability to serve and protect the public and inmate population (Fusco et al., 2021). Inappropriate and/or unprofessional officer-inmate interactions may be a consequence of unmanaged personal stress of officers, or when officers become so mentally unhealthy, they no longer perform well (Fusco et al., 2021). Critical incident situations require officers to make sound decisions quickly. Rees stated (2006), "Many

times the correctional officer is on the front line observing potentially dangerous situations that may require quick, crucial decisions and actions” (p. 6). Correctional officers’ stress and performance is a significant area of study, especially considering the potential performance discrepancies resulting from unmanaged or overbearing stress. Although self-reported data from previous research highlights the significance of workplace stress and mental health-related issues of correctional officers, their public service roles and responsibilities are often forgotten or disregarded (Fusco et al., 2021). However, it is important to address health and performance issues resulting from stress, and to ensure support resources are made available for officers. Support resources and training can help officers with sound judgment and decision-making abilities (Fusco et al., 2021). Resources can help officers foster quality, professional, ethical, and optimal treatment for staff, volunteers, and inmates who circulate throughout jail facilities (Fusco et al., 2021). Overall, research pertaining to correctional officers and workplace stress can benefit officers and the communities they serve.

Peer Support

Martin (2021) notes the significance of supervisor and line-officer relationships, rotating shift work, and mandatory overtime as major contributors to organizational stress among correctional officers impacting a positive work-life balance. Butler et al. (2019) explain corrections as an extremely stressful field to work and is substantially underexamined than other criminal justice professions (e.g., police officers). Butler and researchers (2019) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of 172 peer-reviewed articles published between 1980 and 2017 pertaining to research on correctional

officers. The researchers (2019) found that job stress, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment of correctional officers were the most studied outcomes among the peer-reviewed articles. The researchers (2019) found that personal characteristics of officers had inconsistent effects on such outcomes. However, Butler et al. (2019) denoted the strongest influences of these outcomes (e.g., job stress) was supervisor and peer support. Butler and colleagues suggested further research is needed to examine officer experiences and attitudes as well as explore the potential influences of organizational and personal characteristics and their effects on correctional officers' job stress. Further research is needed to explore the degree of impact of peer support on officers' workplace stress and performance. These suggestions coincide with the suggestions from Harizanova and Stoyanova (2020).

Jail Environments

Jail systems serve a critical and essential role by providing housing and other services for inmates and/or prisoners. Jail facilities have been described as “iron cages” prone to high-stress conditions, instability, negative social climate, and unpredictable emergencies (Hsieh & Boateng, 2020). Jails are not popular environments to work in. The enclosed facilities have been referred to as the “the sewers of the justice system” (Houston, et al., 1988, p. 449). Jail environments unfortunately embody daily incidents and major emergencies. Officers are required to make quick, sound decisions in dangerous situations (Rees, 2006). Officers are routinely faced with unpredictable critical incidents and chronic workplace stress (Houston, Gibbons, & Jones, 1988; Hsieh & Boateng, 2020). Exposure to critical incidents and chronic occupational stress can impact

officers' psychological and physical health (Fusco et al., 2021; Taylor & Swartz, 2021). Assaults, attempted suicides, suicides, homicides, and even riots are some of the critical incidents that take place inside jail facilities. High job demands and lack of resources also impact psychological and physical health (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). Jail environments pose many risks for officers. Officers' health and wellness are essential to quality conduct and professional work performance. Detention officers are essential within the criminal justice field. Their ability to perform the job duties and responsibilities expected of them in the harsh conditions of jail environments is critical to the survival of their respective communities. The roles and responsibilities of officers must be assumed by resilient individuals who possess the capacity and ability to adapt to stress (Demerouti et al., 2001). Officers must possess quality assessment and problem-solving abilities (Demerouti et al., 2001). Without resiliency and stress management strategies to work in the raw conditions of jail environments, officers' health and performance may be at risk.

Lack of Recognition and Stigma

Detention services are critical yet underappreciated. Jail environments present many psychological and physical challenges for detention officers daily, but these essential jobs must be done (Hernandez, Arrell-Rosenquist, & Lewis, 2021). Although detention officers possess a profession within the criminal justice system and work collectively to establish functioning and operational jail environments, they are not recognized as legal professionals (Hernandez, Arrell-Rosenquist, & Lewis, 2021). They

are considered first responders and/or public safety professionals (Hernandez et al., 2021).

Like many first responders, correctional officers may resist seeking assistance due to cultural reasons or fear of stigma (Farrell, Monk-Turner, & Scallon, 2020; Hernandez et al., 2021). Resistance to seeking help and resources frequently results in psychological and behavioral problems such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, suicidality, aggression, and other health issues (Husain, 2014). Research estimates that one in three correctional officers has one or more mental health issues including stress-related disorders (Taylor & Swartz, 2021). Correctional officers, in comparison to medical health professionals working inside corrections/detention facilities, had significantly higher exposure rates to traumatic events (Fusco et al., 2021). The jail environment conditions and organizational stressors can become factors of psychological and behavioral issues in correctional officers and can negatively impact officer performance (Fusco et al., 2021).

Women in Corrections

Female detention officers and their experiences and perceptions about levels of workplace stress inside jail environments is a particular topic far understudied (Butler, Tasca, Zhang, & Carpenter, 2019; Rania, Migliorini, & Coppola, 2020; Ricciardelli & McKendy, 2020). Female officers in general are at higher risk for certain medical and stress-related conditions in comparison to their male counterparts (Chopko, Palmieri, & Adams, 2018). Female officers have been found to demonstrate higher levels of perceived fear and risk to victimization by both staff- and inmate-precipitated victimization (Gordon, Proulx, & Grant, 2013). By qualitatively exploring the lived

experiences of female detention officers, a better understanding of their personal perceptions about levels of workplace stress was obtained.

The qualitative insight of female detention officers and workplace stress contributed to the understanding of potential influences of workplace stress on their health and performance. This qualitative study extracted vital information of female detention officers working inside city and county jail systems. The data collected can also contribute to the framework and evaluation of organizational programs pertaining to stress management skill-building, strategies for resiliency, and other support resources for female detention officers. The data collected in this study can potentially inform and/or improve organizational training, programs, and peer support resources for the needs of female detention officers. The findings of this study may influence female detention officers to utilize support resources and build resiliency skills for their overall health and performance.

Female Detention Officers' Stress and Health

Female officers are at a higher risk for certain health issues than their male counterparts, such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and stress-related disorders (Fusco et al., 2021; Taylor & Swartz, 2021). Female officers are at higher risk for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) than male officers, which reflects the higher risk of PTSD in females in comparison to males of the general public (American Psychiatric Association, 2017; Chopko et al., 2018; Fusco et al., 2021; Taylor & Swartz, 2021). Female officers also face psychosocial stressors within the workplace unique to female attributes and characteristics such as sexual harassment, gender bias, and gender stigmas (Thompson,

Kirk, & Brown, 2006). The jobs of public safety professionals entail a great deal of stress, overall. Stress impacts individuals differently based on stress appraisal, chosen coping strategies, stress tolerance, and level of competence (e.g., critical incidents; Cooper & Dewe, 2002; Duxbury & Halinski, 2018). Overall, law enforcement and corrections organizations can benefit from research regarding workplace stress to develop sufficient and useful training programs and support resources for female detention officers (Duxbury & Halinski, 2018).

Summary

First responders are generally considered to be at greater risk than other occupations of developing health issues, as their duties routinely and frequently expose them to dangerous critical incidents (Martin, 2021). Besides critical incidents, organizational stress, agency relationships, and lack of resources are major sources of workplace stress for detention officers (Harizanova & Stoyanova, 2020; Martin, 2021). These issues should be investigated and examined by researchers and organizational leaders to improve resources for their officers (Martin, 2021). Female officers face higher risk to trauma and stress-related disorders (Chopko et al., 2018) and require further research to study their unique experiences of workplace stress while working in jail environments (Harizanova & Stoyanova, 2020).

Today, the relationship between stress and performance is widely studied throughout various disciplines and has been incorporated as useful knowledge for occupational sectors like law enforcement and corrections (Fusco et al., 2021; Rogers, 2021; Rosenbluh, 2005; Taylor & Swartz, 2021). Some of the questions formulated from

lessons of the SPT (Nixon et al., 1979; Yerkes & Dodson, 1908) as it relates to the study of female detention officers and workplace stress, might include the following: (a) Are there workplace stressors that change the arousal level (stress levels) in female detention officers? If so, what are they – what themes tend to emerge (e.g., organizational stressors, social stressors, critical incident stressors, chronic occupational stressors)? (b) What encourages or discourages female officers' motivation and desire to work in a stressful job? How are female officers' performance impacted by encouraging/discouraging factors? (c) What available resources are there to assist female officers with quality health and performance?

Considering the field of corrections is one of the most stressful jobs in the world, especially considering the chronic occupational stress factors that influence burnout syndrome (Harizanova & Stoyanova, 2020), what common stressors exist and what support resources are available to help female officers? Considering the minimal research dedicated to female detention officers, this study provided a platform for the qualitative exploration of their lived experiences of workplace stress. The outcomes from this qualitative study contribute to the limitations highlighted in the meta-analysis explored by Butler et al. (2019). This study's outcomes also contributed to the gaps and limitations in research pertaining to female correctional officers and burnout (Rania et al., 2020; Ricciardelli & McKendy, 2020). The purpose of this study was to connect the theoretical framework of the Yerkes Dodson Law (stress curve; 1908) – which generated the SPT – with the nature of this study. This study explored the lived experiences of workplace

stress among female detention officers. This study explored the potential impact of stress on female officers' health and performance and inquired about support resources.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

This study was a qualitative research inquiry of female detention officers' lived experiences of workplace stress. Chronic occupational stress can cause job burnout and other health conditions (Mugridge, 2022). Approximately one third of correctional officers are at a high risk for stress-related disorders (Fusco et al., 2021; Taylor & Swartz, 2021). Female officers are at a higher risk for certain health issues, such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and stress-related disorders (Fusco et al., 2021; Taylor & Swartz, 2021). There is limited research pertaining to the personal perceptions, thoughts, views, and overall experiences of workplace stress among female detention officers. In the last century, stress and performance have been conceptualized and theorized in several ways, originating from the Yerkes-Dodson (1908) law. The nature of this study's exploration aligned with the SPT of the Yerkes-Dodson (1908) stress curve. The study is critical to support female detention officers considering the potential impact of workplace stress on their health and performance. In the research, I sought to answer two research questions:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of workplace stress among female detention officers?

RQ2: What are the current organizational resources available for female detention officers?

The findings of this study will provide a better understanding of the lived experiences of female detention officers regarding workplace stress. The emerging themes of workplace stressors could benefit agency/organization programs and resources for female detention

officers. Female detention officers may also be encouraged by the findings of this research to inquire and/or use support resources to help them overcome workplace stress.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the design and philosophy of this study. The chapter also provides the methodology of the research and highlights information pertaining to population and sample selection, recruitment, consent, interview guide and questions, validity, and researcher bias. Chapter 3 includes information regarding data collection and analysis as it pertains to coding methods and the use of NVivo Version 14 for Windows computer software.

Research Design and Rationale

Phenomenology is focused on the immediate, lived experiences of people and not independent matters in the external world (Groenewald, 2004). Phenomenology is the meaning of those matters established by the person who has experienced them. Such experiences are the realities for people that illustrate and develop the meaning of a particular phenomenon. Immediate experiences are the root of exploring individuals' perspectives of what is certain and real to them (Groenewald, 2004). Phenomenology is an attempt to understand, explore, describe, and/or interpret the lived experiences of individuals and make meaning of what they deem is reality (Groenewald, 2004).

I used a phenomenological approach to explore the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experiences of workplace stress among female detention officers. Phenomenology is an approach that attempts to explore participants' experiences and perspectives (Groenewald, 2004; Patton, 2015). A phenomenological framework stems from philosophy and allows interview-based inquiry to capture the essence of lived

experiences by placing value on participants' personal views, thoughts, and perspectives (Brinkmann, 2013; Patton, 2015). The purpose of this study was to discover more about the stressors female detention officers experience that may lead to issues in their performance and health.

Methodology

Target Population

The target population of interest for the study was female detention officers willing to volunteer as a participant and who met the inclusion criteria. Table 2 reviews the participant inclusion and exclusion criteria. I ensured criteria were met during the process of participant recruitment. The inclusion criteria required participants to be full-time sworn or nonsworn female detention officers, active duty, who work inside a city or county jail facility. Participants were required to be at least 18 years old and have 1 or more years of work experience. Inclusion criteria also required participants to work in a duty assignment entailing direct contact with the inmate population.

Table 2

Participant Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria Table

Inclusion	Exclusion
Female	Male
Adults \geq 18 years of age	Under the age of 18
Detention officer	Positions outside city/county jail facilities
Line-level or first-line supervisory ranks	Ranks above first-line supervisor
Works in a city or county jail	Prison or patrol duties
Has direct contact with the inmate population	Has no direct contact with the inmate population

In the study, I explored female detention officers' perceptions and experiences of workplace stress, or occupational stress as defined by the APA (n.d.d). Female detention officers' experiences with workplace stress have not been explored, especially among officers who work in city or county jail facilities as opposed to prison systems (Butler et al., 2019; Rania et al., 2020; Ricciardelli & McKendy, 2020). The current study was conducted to contribute to addressing the gap in the literature pertaining to female detention officers and their personal perceptions and lived experiences of workplace stress.

Participant Selection Logic

I used an instrumental-use multiple-case sampling method—more specifically, a purposive sampling method—to recruit participants. Female detention officers willing to participate were asked to confirm their decision by sending an email to me as the researcher. I emailed each participant an informed consent form, a description of the study, and an invitation to select a date and time convenient for them to participate in an interview. Along with selecting a convenient date and time for the interview, I asked participants to email their response with the words “I consent” written in the email. Participants who did not respond to the email with their consent were not contacted again. Participants who responded and consented to participating in the study were asked to reach out to other female detention officers they know who would be interested in participating in the study. Referred participants were provided a copy of the invitation and the same consent process was conducted via email for participation confirmation.

This process of recruitment continued until the number of needed participants was reached.

Considering a small number of female officers exist, recruitment was challenging. A purposive sampling method was useful for recruiting female officer participants, and my goal was to recruit least seven participants. I was able to recruit seven participants but due to technical difficulties of one interview recording, only six interviews were used for coding and analysis. There are approximately 337,000 correctional officers in the United States. Female officers make up approximately 38% of the correctional officer population (Zippia, 2022). Therefore, this sampling method was convenient, especially when attempting to recruit female officer participants for this study, which is a small population overall. According to Patton (2015), the purposive sample strategy known as instrumental-use multiple-case sampling is also used to “inform professional practice and program decision-making” (p. 528). The purposive sampling method allows a researcher the ability to recruit other potential participants and to collect information-rich data even with a small sample number (Patton, 2015). The goal of this study was to provide generalized findings that could inform organizational resources, programs, and training to support and enhance the well-being of female detention officers. The findings of this study might encourage female officers to seek out and utilize support resources.

I interviewed six female detention officers with at least 1 year of service who were considered line-level or first-line supervisory ranks (no higher). The inclusive criteria required that participants be assigned to a city or county jail and work with or have direct contact with the inmate population, regardless of the classification of inmate

(e.g., juvenile, adult, male, female). I explored the lived experiences of workplace stress among female detention officers who work in a city or county jail facility. Inclusive and exclusive criteria for interview participation are critical for quality research (Patino & Ferreira, 2018).

Instrumentation

I conducted semistructured one-on-one interviews with a homogeneous sample of active-duty female detention officers to explore their perceptions and experiences regarding workplace stress. Interviews were conducted virtually (e.g., FaceTime) for face-to-face communication. Interview questions were followed with formulated questions to draw out further responses from the participant as the interview progressed. I developed an interview guide with six open-ended interview questions for each semistructured interview. The interview guide was developed to provide the foundation for the semistructured interviews. A protocol was used to guide the interviews in addressing the research questions.

Setting and Sources of Data

Interviews occurred in a private location (e.g., home office) using FaceTime and a digital-enabled device (TapMedia Ltd., n.d.). Sources of data were female detention officers who worked as line-level staff or first-line supervisors in a city or county jail facility at the time of data collection. Participants had direct contact with the inmate population. Sources of data were attributed to the response of interested female detention officers to my social media recruitment post as well as through word of mouth from participants who completed the interviews (e.g., snowball sampling). I used instrumental-

use multiple case sampling strategy, purposive sampling, to recruit female detention officers and obtain data (Patton, 2016). Female detention officers who did not meet the inclusion criteria were not invited to participate in this study. If it had been later discovered that a participant did not meet the criteria, they would have been excluded from the study. All consenting participants met the inclusive criteria.

Data Collection and Analysis Plan

Each interview was approximately 30–60 minutes. Interviews were electronically recorded for subsequent transcription, coding, and analysis. The entire research process included a thorough audit trail to ensure the study could be replicated. Each interview question was designed to generate discussions aligned with the research questions. The interview questions did not request any personally identifying information. The interview questions were appropriate to guide the interviews while protecting the identity of the interviewee. All participants were provided a consent form to participate in the study. Prior to the interviews, all participants were reminded they could end their participation at any time.

The interview questions were categorized around five topic areas: (a) female officers' perceived workplace stressors, (b) effects of stress on performance, (c) effects of stress on health, (d) coping mechanisms, and (e) available support resources and training programs for female officers. These five topic areas address the concerns of workplace stress on officers' health and performance. These five topic areas explored the perceived workplace stressors unique to female detention officers and inquired about support resources. The semistructured interview questions were guided by these five topic areas.

There were six interview questions. The interview questions were focused on female detention officers' perceived stressors while working inside city or county jail facilities. The interview questions explored female officers' opinions and experiences regarding the impact of stress on their health and performance. The interview questions inquired about coping mechanisms and available resources for female detention officers. The interview questions included six open-ended questions guided by the five discussion topic areas. The interview questions were created to potentially provoke further discussion around the topic of workplace stress unique to female officers.

The interview was limited to six questions to ensure participants were not pressed for time. Six questions were sufficient for in-depth discussion on the topic areas pertaining to the research questions (Patton, 2015). The interview questions included the following:

1. What workplace stressors have you experienced while working inside a jail facility?
2. What workplace stressors do you consider to be unique to female detention officers?
3. How does workplace stress impact your health?
4. How does workplace stress impact your work performance?
5. How do you cope with workplace stress?
6. What resources or training programs are available for female detention officers?

The participants' responses provided qualitative data appropriate for thematic analysis. Responses were categorized, coded, and analyzed for common themes

pertaining to female detention officers' lived experiences with workplace stress. Each interview was electronically recorded for transcription. Notes were taken for analysis and for a thorough audit trail. I reviewed notes with each participant during and at the conclusion of the interview to ensure responses and intent were noted correctly.

NVivo Software

NVivo is a computer software program able to record and code a broad range of data from other software programs, such as SPSS, Zotero, PDF, and Microsoft Word (NVivo by QSR, 2020). NVivo communicates and works with other programs for effective analysis (NVivo by QSR, 2020). NVivo organizes, codes, and analyzes data. NVivo produces an outcome of the patterns, codes, concepts, and themes from original data sources. NVivo helps researchers with background information, analysis, and findings. NVivo produces visual tools to aid in conceptualizing and presenting data. For example, NVivo produces diagrams, word trees, maps, charts, graphs, cluster analysis, word clouds and more (NVivo by QSR, 2020). NVivo allows researchers to record notes, explore data inquiries, and organize codes/sets/themes and findings (NVivo by QSR, 2020). I used NVivo for documenting interview data, coding, and thematic analysis. I used NVivo to explore common themes in stressors experienced by female officers. I used NVivo to organize and interpret findings. I used NVivo to generate hierarchy charts of the codes to identify themes in the data. This is further explained in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Validity of the study was lessened due to the subjectivity of participants' interview responses (Williams, 2007). Interview questions were limited to discussion around the research questions. The interview questions did not cover content beyond the research questions such as the effects of coping mechanisms, experiences with trauma-related situations, and outcomes of the use of available resources. Due to the limitation of discussion areas framed within the interview guide and subjectivity of participants' responses, validity was lessened (Williams, 2007). Content validity was reviewed by my dissertation committee. The results of the study have limited transferability outside the bounds of this study, especially considering participants' subjective experiences based on their respective assignment positions and geographical locations.

Summary

Using a phenomenological approach, this study explored the lived experiences of workplace stress among female detention officers. A specific inclusion criterion was used for recruit participation. A purposive sampling method was used for participant recruitment (Patton, 2015). A description of the study, invitation, and consent forms were provided to each participant. The interview guide included five topic areas of discussion that guided the six interview questions for each semistructured interview (Brinkmann, 2013; Patton, 2015). Interviews were done privately, one-on-one, using a virtual-enabled device (e.g., FaceTime). All participants were reminded of their ability to end their participation at any time. Due to lowered validity and subjectivity of participants, a thorough audit trail was conducted to ensure the study can be replicated. All interviews

were transcribed for notes and coding purposes. Coding and thematic analysis was done using NVivo v.14 for Windows. The findings of this study can be used to inform the development of training and support resources for female detention officers. The findings of this study might encourage female officers to utilize support resources. Support resources have the potential to help female officers fortify their stress management and resiliency skills against the stressors of working inside jail facilities.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain a better understanding of the thoughts, views, perspectives, and experiences of workplace stress among female detention officers working in city or county jail systems. Data were collected from participants through semistructured interviews using an interview guide with five topic areas of discussion and six open-ended interview questions. The study was guided by the following two research questions:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of workplace stress among female detention officers who work in city or county jail environments?

RQ2: What are the current organizational resources available for female detention officers?

In this chapter, I explain the data collection, data analysis, and results.

Setting

Following the explanation in Chapter 3, I used a purposive sampling strategy to recruit participants for this study. The social media platforms Instagram and LinkedIn were used to post a general invitation to the study outlining eligibility requirements. If interested individuals met the eligibility requirements, they were asked to send me a direct message (DM) using the social media platform to gain further information. The DM allowed me to acquire emails from potential volunteers and send them emails with the formal invitation and description of the study along with the consent form. The informed consent form included further details and instructions to participate. There were

no outliers among participants to note. All participants met the inclusion criteria requirements for eligibility. None of the participants reported anything pertaining to PTSD, as I was not seeking information pertaining to PTSD or traumatic events. One of the interviews was not used due to poor audio recording. The audio recording had numerous sections that were completely silent; therefore, it was not used.

There was some difficulty obtaining participants upon the first post on social media, but after posting the invitation again, more interested individuals inquired about the study. Those who participated in the study were also asked if they knew anyone who would be interested in the study (e.g., snowball sampling method). All candidates met the inclusion criteria. Data for the study were obtained from the interview responses of six participants.

Demographics

Seven participants who met the inclusion criteria of the study completed an interview. Interviews averaged anywhere from 30 minutes to 60 minutes. To be included in the study, participants had to be an active-duty female detention officer who worked in a city or county jail system. Participants had to be 18 years or older with at least 1 year of experience. Participants had to have direct contact with the inmate population and hold the rank of line-level officer or a first-line supervisor. All participants had to read and complete an informed consent form prior to participating in the study. To consent, all participants were instructed to reply to the email with the attached consent form with the words "I consent." The words "I consent" were used instead of signing the consent form for privacy purposes. The participants' identities remain confidential. All participants

were assigned alphanumeric identifiers for reporting information in the study (i.e., Participant 1, Participant 2, etc.). All information pertaining to age, agency location, and other personal demographics are confidential to protect participants' identity.

Data Collection

Participation in the study was voluntary. Anyone interested and inquiring about the study, whether via social media post or through word of mouth, was not paid or given any gift or incentive for participation. All participants were volunteers. The participants' names, emails, and phone numbers were collected as contact information pertaining to the study (i.e., sending consent forms, setting up a date/time to meet for the interview, etc.). All identifying information of the participants was kept separate from the computer used for transcription, coding, and analysis. All identifying information, confidential documents, and miscellaneous information pertaining to the study are locked in a filing cabinet (hard copies) or locked files on a computer (electronic copies). The goal was to protect the participants from being identified during data collection and throughout the study.

During the data collection phase, some participants were open to sharing their experiences with workplace stress, and others were reluctant to disclose further details of their experiences. Some participants explained their need to refrain from disclosing certain information in fear of retaliation for participating in the study, regardless of their information being confidential. Some participants who disclosed details explained they were glad to express their views and perspectives of workplace stress and felt the

information could help other female officers and administrators who employ women in corrections.

All interviews were conducted using a digitally enabled platform (e.g., FaceTime). None of the interviews were conducted in person. All interviews were conducted using the interview guide. All interviews were conducted in private and were audio recorded for transcription purposes.

Data Analysis

Participation

Participation in this study was voluntary and, as previously mentioned, recruitment was done using social media platforms and/or word of mouth. All participants in the study met the inclusion criteria (e.g., female detention officers). The goal was to recruit six to eight participants. I collected the names, email addresses, and phone numbers of all participants to communicate with them throughout the data collection process. All identifying information is confidential. All participants were assigned alphanumeric identifiers (i.e., Participant 1, Participant 2, etc.). All participants were sent an email with the formal invitation/description of the study and informed consent form attached. Participants consented by responding to the email with the words "I consent." Seven participants consented to participate in the semistructured interviews for this study. However, one of the audio recorded interviews was not used in the study due to missing content (gaps of silence in the recording). Therefore, six of the seven interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed.

Interviews

Semistructured interviews were used to collect qualitative data for this study. The interview questions were categorized around five topic areas: (a) female officers' perceived workplace stressors, (b) effects of stress on performance, (c) effects of stress on health, (d) coping mechanisms, and (e) available support resources and training programs for female officers. These five topic areas were used to explore the perceived workplace stressors unique to female detention officers and to inquire about support resources. The interview questions included the following:

1. What workplace stressors have you experienced while working inside a jail facility?
2. What workplace stressors do you consider to be unique to female detention officers?
3. How does workplace stress impact your health?
4. How does workplace stress impact your work performance?
5. How do you cope with workplace stress?
6. What resources or training programs are available for female detention officers?

All participants provided answers to all six open-ended questions. All interviews with participants were conducted using FaceTime, a digitally enabled platform. FaceTime allowed audio and video interaction during each interview. All interviews were audio recorded using Voice Recorder and Audio Editor for transcription purposes. The audio recordings were transcribed using Microsoft Word. Each audio recorded interview was separately transcribed into its own Microsoft Word document. The six transcriptions were

imported into NVivo V.14 for Microsoft Windows to aid in organizing and analyzing the data. I coded all transcriptions of interview data using NVivo V.14 to identify patterns and themes in the responses.

Themes

Two themes were formed during the coding process reflective of both research questions. Theme 1 (T1) is focused on female detention officers' perceptions and experiences of workplace stress, and Theme 2 (T2) is focused on current organizational resources for female detention officers. Several subthemes underly each of these two main themes highlight the participants' most common perceptions and experiences of workplace stress and organizational resources.

Theme One

The first theme, T1, is conceptualized in a hierarchy chart of codes (Figure 5). I used NVivo to generate the hierarchy chart of the coded data associated with T1. The hierarchy chart illustrates the most common experiences of workplace stress among female detention officers. The two subthemes most commonly found pertaining to female detention officers' experiences and perceptions of workplace stress are as follows: (a) health and (b) work performance. The coded data revealed that female detention officers experience workplace stress to primarily impact their health and work performance. Participants self-reported in the interviews that workplace stress impacts their physical, mental, and emotional health. Of the three categories under health, emotional health was reported as most impacted by workplace stress. Participants self-reported that workplace stress impacts their work performance in the following ways:

(a) experiencing a lack of energy or fatigue; (b) inability to focus; (c) feelings of being overwhelmed; (d) experiencing negative emotions (e.g., sad, angry); (e) forgetfulness; (f) decreased interest in the job or lack motivation to work; and (g) experiencing a decrease in quality/strong performance due to cumulative stressors. Of the seven categories pertaining to work performance, lack of energy and fatigue were the most common experience. The two subthemes underlying T1 were reported by all six participants, indicating each experienced workplace stress that impacted their health and work performance. Although health and work performance were reported as the most common experiences associated with workplace stress, some participants reported the following experiences as the sources of workplace stressors: peers and supervisors, feeling of having to prove yourself as a woman in a predominately male industry, jail environment, safety concerns, and inmate behaviors (e.g., threats).

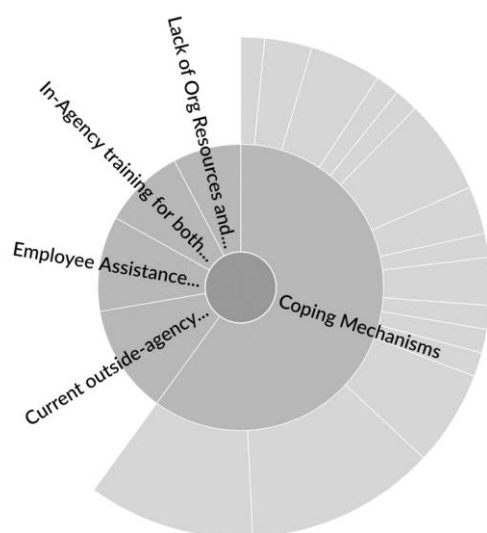
Figure 5*Hierarchy Chart of Theme 1****Theme Two***

The second theme, T2, is also conceptualized in a hierarchy chart developed in NVivo (Figure 6). The hierarchy chart of T2 illustrates the most common female detention officers' experiences and perceptions pertaining to current available resources. There are five subthemes underlying T2, including (a) outside-agency resources, (b) employee assistance programs, (c) training classes provided by their agency, (d) reported a lack of resources specific to the needs of female detention officers, and (e) the use and preference of personal coping mechanisms to combat workplace stress. Four of the six participants mention outside-agency resources and training available for female detention officers but most of these training classes are open to both female and male officers. Three of the six participants reported an all-women's training provided by an outside

vendor. All participants reported a need for more in-agency resources for female officer needs but expressed their gratitude for the resources currently established for all officers, male and female (i.e., employee assistance program, in-agency leadership training, stress management training, and defensive tactics training). All participants reported a need for more resources specific to female officers. The most common subtheme pertaining to T2 reported by all participants during the interviews is their use of coping mechanisms aside from available resources to cope and overcome workplace stress. Some of the most common coping mechanisms experienced by the participants to manage workplace stress include things like exercise, support systems, spending time with pets, taking time off work, and seeking professional assistance. These two main themes (T1 and T2) and their subthemes highlight commonalities in the lived experiences of workplace stress among female detention officers.

Figure 6

Hierarchy Chart of Theme 2



Evidence of Trustworthiness

The number of participants was helpful in gaining an understanding of female detention officers' lived experiences of workplace stress who work inside a jail facility. Females are the minority gender within the field of corrections. Therefore, it is understandable to be limited to a small sample size for qualitative research. Considering participants were from different city and county jails around the southwest region of the US, transferability is limited. Some experiences may be due to assignment within the jail or geographical characteristics (i.e., more gang-related inmates in an urban jail than a small rural jail). Nonetheless, many of the themes/subthemes were common (i.e., a major concern with safety, impact of stress on health and performance, proving oneself as a female in a predominant male industry). Certain themes were very common regardless of the geographical location of the different participants.

Six transcribed audio recorded interviews provided information on common themes of experiencing workplace stress. Participants did not hesitate to express their experiences and explain what they perceive, think, and feel regarding their personal experiences with workplace stress in a jail environment. They were able to display a sense of trust and rapport with me as the interviewer/researcher by disclosing their experiences with inmates, peers, supervisors, health, and performance issues. Many expressed their concerns with health, performance quality, and a need to prove themselves as strong, competent women able to handle the stressors of working in a jail.

To ensure the credibility of the data being analyzed, I kept a thorough audit trail log using a Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet. I conducted self-checks to ensure the data was

not misinterpreted, misrepresented, and to eliminate any researcher bias. The interaction and communication between me and each participant during each interview were held privately and professionally. I provided a disclaimer that stated the research was to learn about their experiences with general workplace stressors and not meant to discuss or delve into the effects of traumatic experiences. All participants understood this disclaimer and the purpose of the study. My own experiences with the phenomenon being studied had no influence on the participants' responses because none of them knew me personally. I was perceived as an interviewer and researcher of a dissertation study, which is appropriate and correct. This kept my own experiences completely omitted from the study. I used reflexivity to ensure the data reflected the participants' responses accurately. There are no adjustments or changes needed for transferability, only to note the assignments and geographical locations of participants pose some limits to transferability. Please note, the same interview questions for female detention officers from different US regions, or even across countries, may produce different results.

Results

Female Detention Officers' Experiences of Workplace Stress

During the interviews, many participants experienced workplace stressors from peers, supervisors, inmate threats/manipulations, understaffing, physical jail environment, and from feeling they must prove themselves as worthy and competent in a predominantly male industry. Two of the six participants said inmates would either "size them up" or give "cat calls" (flirting with the officer) due to their gender. Two of the six participants expressed tension and/or competition with other female officers. Participant

3 stated, “To me unique stressors are other females. You would think like, ‘Hey, let’s empower each other’ like, stay strong with each other. But [at] this facility it’s like they divide themselves.” Five of the six participants experienced stressors from peers and supervisors. Participant 3 experienced competition with male officers. Participant 3 stated,

When I worked at the bigger facility. It was almost like if you have an idea, the male wouldn’t accept it and he’ll say it basically the same – what I just said but differently. That was one of pet peeves. You know what I mean? Like, I just said that, but I guess it sounds better from the man, I guess.

Most experiences regarding workplace stress for female officers are associated with proving themselves worthy in a predominantly male industry. The most commonly coded categories of experiences of workplace stress for female officers include health and work performance concerns.

Health Issues Due to Workplace Stress

According to the data obtained in this study, female detention officers experienced health-related issues due to workplace stress. Five of the six participants said they experienced low energy, feeling tired, drained, and had lack of sleep. Participant 7 stated, “Like I said before, you have lack of sleep and you make mistakes and you start to open the wrong doors or open the wrong cells.” Participant 6 stated,

It’s hard getting off work and wanting to like workout and be active and stay in shape because it’s like you had a crappy night and you just want to go home and sleep. Or you’re trying to sleep but also include your family and relationships

outside of work. It's really hard to divvy it up and give your time when you're just so tired. Like you don't want to do anything.

Feeling drained, tired, sleepy, and having low energy was the most frequent expression of health-related concerns. Participants experienced physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion from workplace stress and concerns with how this impacts work performance and home life (e.g., relationships).

Other health related issues pertained to mental and emotional health. Aside from feeling drained or having low energy, participants expressed concerns with mood changes (i.e., anxious, irritable, cynical). Participant 4 said, "I feel like I have a good head on my shoulders so when I do get stressed out or I get anxiety, or in a bad mood or whatever, I hold in my feelings a lot." Three of the six participants expressed a concern of stigmatization within their agency and a need to suppress feelings due to such stigma. Three of the six participants expressed the need to bottle up emotions so as not to appear as weak. Two of the six explained that bottling up emotions tends to lead to outbursts. Participant 6 explained,

[I] couldn't count on my hand how many times something has happened and I've went and cried in the bathroom and like had to pull myself together and like mentally prepare myself to go back into the situation. Because it's like you get so bombarded by everything else that like the only thing you can do is sit there and cry—at least personally—because it's so much going on. That – yeah – normal, normal everyday nine-to-five people that sit at a desk wouldn't understand. And it's like—people are like, "Why are you crying?" and I'm like, "I don't know. I

just need to cry.” Like I can’t explain my emotions to you. It’s just too much going on.

All six participants have expressed concerns about emotional health such as feelings of anxiety, overwhelmed, irritated, frustrated, or annoyed. Three of the six have expressed issues with mental health like inability to focus, lack of concentration, extreme anxiety, lack of motivation and depressed moods. Participants experienced a combination of health issues and work performance issues, all stemming from workplace stress.

Work Performance Issues Due to Workplace Stress

According to the data, female detention officers’ experienced work performance issues due to workplace stress. Two of the six participants explained their low energy, inability to focus, and feelings of being overwhelmed contribute to poor work performance (i.e., opening the wrong cell doors). Participant 7 stated, “With lack of sleep you just rush things. I make mistakes. I make errors, you know... You make a mistake; you get your partner hurt or yourself hurt.” Participant 2 expressed a concern for safety due to lack of energy or motivation to work. Three of the six participants expressed concerns about lack of motivation to go to work due to workplace stress from low morale, understaffing, peers, and supervisors. Participant 3 stated,

People call off. Like [I] said earlier, ‘Awe man, I already know this supervisor’s going to be there or these workers.’ They allow them to do whatever so why do I want to go in if that’s what I’m going to deal with? That’s how it impacts bad morale – the call offs. It will impact your work performance like that.

Participant 2 expressed concerns of safety when work performance lacks. Participant 2 stated, “For me, I think the biggest thing would be the inability to focus. But I have to, I have to make sure that I always am aware of my surroundings.” Workplace stress can impact energy levels, ability to focus, and even decrease motivation to work. These experiences can lead to mistakes at work, safety concerns, and bad morale.

Female Detention Officers’ Experiences and Perceptions of Resources

Female detention officers experienced a lack of resources pertaining to their specific needs. Five of the six participants expressed a need to prove themselves worthy as a female officer for two main reasons: (a) prove they have adequate competency skills to do the job in a predominately male industry, or (b) to compete with other female detention officers. Due to a feeling of inferiority in many cases, participants expressed a need for female detention officers to have resources pertaining to self-defense or defensive tactics training and leadership training from their respective agencies. Outside-agency resources and training programs for female detention officers seem more common than resources from within their respective agencies. Four of the six participants explained their agency benefits include a mental health benefit called the Employee Assistance Program where officers have access to mental health professionals. Two of the six participants said they have a peer-support program within their agencies. Participant 1 explained a class offered at their police academy that trains women to build confidence to do the job. Participant 1 stated,

There is this young lady, this officer at our – at the academy – at the police academy, which detention officers can still go to, that sets up trainings for

females. And, specific – specifically for females and uses our strengths to help teach us that we don't have to be burly in order to defend ourselves.

Participant 1 goes on to explain how this class helps build confidence in female detention officers. Participant 2 stated, “We don't have anything as far as training for female officers...But yeah, in terms of resources, we need to do better.” Five of the six participants said there is a need for more organizational resources specific to the needs of female detention officers. However, participants expressed gratitude for the current available resources provided by their respective agencies and resources/training from outside entities.

Coping Mechanisms

According to the data from the interviews, female detention officers' experiences with workplace stress appear to lead to various coping mechanisms, which are constantly implemented aside from internal or external resources available to them (e.g., peer support group). All six participants experienced several types of coping mechanisms in lieu of workplace stress. These coping mechanisms include, but are not limited to, the following: exercise, talking to someone, utilizing support systems, spending time with spouse/children, spending time with pets, creative outlets (e.g., art, music), and taking time off work. Female detention officers experienced an array of coping mechanisms and claimed them a necessity to combat and/or overcome workplace stress from working inside a jail environment. Participants expressed an interest in useful resources unique to their needs to help them fortify their resiliency against workplace stress. However, five of the six participants expressed a need for more resources for female detention officers.

Summary

The information in Chapter 3 Methodology is consistent with the recruitment process, data collection, and data analysis. The consent form was thorough in informing potential participants of the elements of the study, steps to participate in the study, ways to contact the researcher, and fully disclosed that participants can end participation at any time. The consent form was also thorough in listing the steps required by the participant to consent as well as the data collection process (e.g., semistructured interviews). Participation in this study was voluntary. All participants met the inclusive criteria and all participants consented via email. All interviews were done following the methods outlined in Chapter 3.

Analysis of the participants' responses to the semi-structure interviews indicated that female detention officers experience workplace stress while working inside a city or county jail environment. Their experiences varied but most responses emphasized overall concerns for personal health and performance. For health, particularly, emotional health. For performance, lack of energy, focus, and motivation were major concerns. Majority of responses also indicated workplace stress to stem from peers, supervisors, inmates, physical jail environment, and proving themselves as female officers in a predominately male industry. Some participants responded that they were viewed as inferior or incompetent to do the job. Feeling anxious, overwhelmed, tired were consistent responses to some of the interview questions. Worried about safety and understaffing were also experienced as stressors. Majority of participants indicated a need for more

organizational resources for female detention officers overall. The results and findings are interpreted and further discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of workplace stress among female detention officers who work in city or county jails. This phenomenological approach gave female detention officers an opportunity to express their perceptions, thoughts, views, and overall experiences regarding general workplace stressors in a jail environment and to elaborate on their perceptions and experiences regarding available resources.

Interpretation of the Findings

Previous Research and Theoretical Framework

Previous research throughout various disciplines emphasizes a need to study the impact of stress on health and performance. This theoretical concept became the framework of the earliest generated model illustrating the relationship between stress and performance: Yerkes–Dodson’s (1908) law (APA, n.d.h). Later, Nixon et al.’s (1979) stress curve emerged, which added to the SPT. Nixon et al. (1979) factored in the significance of stress management training to aid human performance while under stress. Selye’s GAS model adds to the SPT in that all three phases of the model (alarm, resistance, exhaustion) illustrate the human stress response and an end point of exhaustion (the last phase). Once resisting stress becomes overbearing, exhaustion sets in and impacts health and performance. Individuals will eventually meet the exhaustion phase but that depends on the individual perceptions, coping strategies, and resources. Also adding to SPT is Lazarus’s transactional stress model integrated individual stress

appraisal, stress tolerance, and competency abilities as mitigating factors of the impact of stress on health and performance (i.e., high stress tolerance and healthy coping may generate a favorable outcome post-stress experience; Casey & Strain, 2016; Cooper & Dewe, 2004; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Kivak, 2020).

The SPT is also reflected in the work of Maslach as it pertains specifically to job burnout and the symptoms of burnout syndrome in service workers (Rholetter, 2021). Core factors of burnout assessed using the MBI include emotional exhaustion, reduced sense of personal accomplishment, and depersonalization (Kavan & Powell, 2021). The study of burnout has migrated into research pertaining to first responders/public safety personnel. Most research on correctional officers and workplace stress incorporate both male and female officers in general, and more research is needed to explore the experiences of female officers (Butler et al., 2019; Rania et al., 2020; Ricciardelli & McKendy, 2020).

Gap in Literature

This phenomenological study was designed to contribute to the gap in literature pertaining to the perceptions and lived experiences of workplace stress among female detention officers who work in a city or county jail environment. Understanding female officers' experiences with workplace stress can be useful in the development and modification of organizational resources designed to meet the needs of female detention officers. Agencies and organizations that implement support resources and training programs need to address the mismatch between workplace elements and worker

competencies to help prevent or ameliorate burnout (Mugridge, 2022). Resources overall can help reduce stress and strengthen female officers' health and performance.

Research Questions

This study was conducted to address two research questions, which coincide with the main themes that emerged from the data analysis:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of workplace stress among female detention officers who work in city or county jail environments?

RQ2: What are the current organizational resources available for female detention officers?

Female Detention Officers' Experiences with Workplace Stress

The results of this study show that female detention officers experience various workplace stresses, many of which pertain to health concerns (e.g., emotional health) and performance concerns (e.g., fatigued, forgetful). Other experiences with workplace stress include interpersonal matters with peers, supervisors, and inmates (i.e., having to prove worthiness/competency due to being female in a predominately male industry). Other experiences included safety concerns, issues with understaffed facilities, policy and leadership concerns, and burnout symptoms from chronic occupational stress (i.e., high demands and low resources). Identified categories of workplace stressors influencing the ways female detention officers experience workplace stress include organizational, environmental, and psychosocial stressors. These categories of workplace stressors were identified during the analysis of the interview data. These categories are not to be mistaken with the emerging themes during the coding and thematic analysis of the

qualitative data. Two main themes emerged that correspond directly to both RQ1 and RQ2. T1 is related to female detention officers' perceptions and experiences of workplace stress and T2 is related to current organizational resources for female detention officers. Several subthemes underlie each of these two main themes, which highlight the most common perceptions and experiences of workplace stress and organizational resources.

Theme One

The most common experiences with workplace stress pertain to the impact of stress on personal health and performance. All six participants indicated that health and performance concerns are a product of workplace stress in their experiences. My findings indicate that female detention officers' experiences with workplace stress fall mostly under psychosocial stressors. Five of the six participants stated they experience conflict among peers and supervisors, feeling a need to prove their competency and ability skills to do the job. Besides psychosocial stressors in the workplace, the female detention officer participants indicated a great deal of workplace stress from environmental matters, such as officer safety and inmate threats. Other stressors were associated with organizational stressors (i.e., lack of recognition, poor supervision, and leadership). Participants also reported a culture of stigma against those who express emotion or seek professional assistance and identified the significance of creating a time and place for proper emotional expression and stress relief. Regardless of the category of workplace stressors experienced (e.g., organizational, environmental, psychosocial), all participants

disclosed concerns with the impact of their experiences with workplace stress on their personal health and work performance.

The findings of this study confirm that female detention officers experience various workplace stressors (organizational, environmental, and psychosocial) unique to them. No experiences were identical, but many of the experiences shared among participants revealed commonalities. The most common health-related experiences from workplace stress included emotional exhaustion, cognitive issues (e.g., forgetfulness, lack of focus), and fatigue/lack of energy. The most common performance-related issues included fatigue/lack of energy to work, lack of motivation and interest, and inability to focus on tasks, which led to making mistakes. Participants expressed a concern of health and performance as it pertains to making mistakes on the job that can be detrimental to their safety or the safety of others. The findings of this study also indicate that participants all agreed there is a need to develop and work on resources for female detention officers, especially with training women to expand their emotional capacity to deal with the stressors of the job. Some participants identified the need to learn about strengthening women's competencies skills to reduce the feeling of competing with male counterparts. Participants hold a special place in corrections because they can manage many different tasks systematically and are able to search both male and female inmates (unlike male officers), although search procedures among agencies will vary (i.e., policies vary among agencies/organizations).

Burnout Syndrome

Many of the subthemes that emerged in the findings correspond to core factors of burnout syndrome. Many of the participants expressed concerns with emotional exhaustion. One participant expressed her need to cry in the bathroom to relieve stress before returning to work. Some of the experiences with emotional exhaustion the participants discussed were rooted in critical incidents/emergency calls within the jail (e.g., assaults on officers). Besides emotional exhaustion, some participants noticed a change in their attitude both at work and at home (e.g., irritability, outbursts). The attitudinal exhaustion is also reflective of burnout (Rholetter, 2021). Physical fatigue, depersonalization, and lack of motivation to work were noted throughout the interviews. These findings also reflect that participants have likely experienced burnout, to a degree, at some point during their careers. Further research may be needed to focus specifically on female detention officers and job burnout.

Theme Two

The findings of this study confirmed there is a need to develop further organizational resources and training programs to support the specific needs of female detention officers. T2 revealed a consistent message throughout participant responses indicating a need to provide better resources for female detention officers. Three of the six participants mentioned outside-agency training and resources for female detention officers, such as leadership training conferences. Three of the six participants mentioned the need to repress emotions and refrain from seeking assistance due to stigma. These findings are consistent with Farrell et al. (2020) and Hernandez et al. (2021) that

correctional officers may resist seeking assistance due to cultural reasons or fear of stigma. Research estimates that one in three correctional officers has one or more mental health issues including stress-related disorders (Taylor & Swartz, 2021). Considering the potential severity of workplace stress on health and performance, and the feeling of resisting seeking assistance or displaying emotions due to stigma, agencies/organizations should implement ways to shift the culture of stigma. The use of evidence-based resources and training programs would help to improve the health and performance of female detention officers. By shifting the stigma and promoting resources, officers may be more apt in utilizing them. Resources can include training in stress management and coping strategies. All six participants explained their first option to deal with workplace stress was to resort to their coping patterns and habits (i.e., both good and bad habits). Good coping strategies included exercise, talking to someone, taking days off work, spending time with family, and spending time with pets. Bad coping strategies included repressing emotions and poor eating. Coping mechanisms may be expanded through stress management training classes. By expanding female officers' knowledge of coping mechanisms, they will have more options and tools to use to combat stress. Overall, participants expressed a need for more resources for female detention officers.

Limitations of the Study

I anticipated limitations in the data collection related to the chance that participants would be reluctant to answer openly and honestly in their interview responses. There was also no way of knowing if the participants worked directly with inmates. However, all participants stated they work inside a city/county jail facility and

have some kind of inmate contact, whether working in a housing unit, the intake area, or a specialty unit within the jail (visitation). There was a strict inclusive criterion considering the study's design and methodology. This allowed me to recruit candidates for participation appropriate for this study's qualitative research inquiry. I intend to report the results of the study on LinkedIn. I also intend to report the results of the study to the participants by emailing them a short summary of the study.

Another limitation was not being able to recruit from the law enforcement agency I currently work for due to ethical reasons. Participants for this study worked for agencies/organizations I am not affiliated with at all. Participants responded to my social media post and/or were recruited through snowball sampling (word of mouth). Participants were required to show ID for proof of employment. Participants were ranked no higher than first-line supervisor within their respective agencies, which was a requirement of the inclusive criteria. The data collection process was reflective of the female detention officers' experiences that they had over the course of their careers. Participants were required to have a minimum of 1-year experience. All participants met the inclusive criteria for this study.

There are approximately 337,000 correctional officers in the US. Female officers make up approximately 38% of the correctional officer population (Correctional Officer Demographics and Statistics in the US, 2022). Considering females make up the minority population of correctional officers, I was confident that six to eight participants would be adequate for data analysis. Data collection continued until a minimum of six participants were recruited to reach data saturation.

Recommendations

Because of the challenges of recruiting participants from a specific agency for ethical reasons, future research on this topic may benefit from snowball sampling and omitting any participant/agency identifiers, as modeled in this study. Keeping participant and agency information confidential allows for more open dialogue and/or open responses from participants. This study illustrated the benefits of this recruiting methodology and data collection process. Another recommendation is to use a survey or questionnaire posted on social media to recruit participants for a study on this topic. However, some limitations might be the inability to control for proof of employment as correctional officers if they are anonymous participants. Another recommendation may be to recruit retired or resigned female detention officers. Retired/resigned officers may feel more comfortable to participate. Another recommendation is to recruit globally to explore the experiences of female detention officers from different countries. Global participation may also promote research to compare female detention officers' experiences across borders and cultures.

Workplace stress in jail facilities and the impact of stress on correctional officers are topics worthy of exploring. There can be different designs and research methods to explore and understand these topics areas. Whether qualitative or quantitative methods, research on these topics can support agency and organizational change to support correctional officers' health and wellness. Correctional officers who work with a specific inmate classification, such as juvenile or high-profile inmates, are significant areas to study to better understand the conditions of this type of work within corrections. This

study does not include specific inmate demographics that the participants worked with in the jails. Future researchers might want to consider focusing on the roles, expectations, and experiences of correctional officers that experience working with a specific demographic of inmates (e.g., maximum inmates). Further research is needed regarding female detention officers and workplace stress overall.

Implications

Detention officers fall under the field of corrections within the criminal justice system. They are assigned to various types of jails and prisons to provide care, custody, and control of incarcerated individuals (Auerbach, 2022). Jail facilities are stressful and dangerous environments to work in (Auerbach, 2022). Chronic occupational stress can lead to feelings of burnout causing emotional, physical, and attitudinal exhaustion (Mugridge, 2022). About one third of corrections officers are at a high risk for stress-related disorders (Fusco et al., 2021; Taylor & Swartz, 2021). Although the jail systems serve a critical and essential role in the criminal justice system, they remain as the “iron cages” fostering negative social climates, instability, and high-stress situations for detention officers (Hsieh & Boateng, 2020). Unless these workplace stressors are dealt with by administrative leaders, the work will continue to put a strain on female detention officers. Other options are to develop training programs on stress management and coping strategies to equip officers with resiliency skills to deal with a challenging and dangerous job.

According to the models and research pertaining to the SPT (Nixon et al., 1979; Yerkes & Dodson, 1908), including the findings of this study, healthy officers who

manage stress may produce stronger work performance. In turn, stronger work performance would generate quality service. Agencies/organizations and communities can benefit from healthy and strong performing officers and quality services, but addressing this positive social change means to invest in officer health and wellness.

Conclusion

Female detention officers make up about 38% of the population of correctional officers in the US (Correctional Officer Demographics and Statistics in the US, 2022). They work to provide the care, custody, and control of the inmate population within city and county jail facilities. They have the responsibility to protect and serve their communities through detention services required by the criminal justice field. Female detention officers are at higher risk for stress-related health issues than their male counterparts, which stands as an unexplained phenomenon. Further research is needed to dissect and understand the impact workplace stress has on their health and performance. Not only will this research benefit communities, agencies, and inmates, but it can benefit the officers' health and wellness. Health is critical in generating quality and strong work performance according to the SPT (Nixon et al., 1979; Yerkes & Dodson, 1908), which has been studied for over a century. With all the historical research on the SPT, researchers can use this framework to design useful studies to better understand the tools needed to help officers succeed in what is known as one of the most stressful jobs in the world - corrections (Harizanova & Stoyanova, 2020).

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