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Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Alexis Nordman

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2024

Abstract

Understanding the Lived Experiences of Correctional Officers Working With Violent Adult Male Prisoners in Maximum-Security

by

Alexis Nordman

MA, Washington State University, 2020.

BA, Washington State University, 2018

Proposal Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Forensic Psychology

Walden University

February 2024

Abstract

Correctional officers (COs) have often been a topic of psychological research due to their highly stressful and dangerous job, but little attention has been paid to the specific subset of officers who work in maximum security exclusively. Often referred to as the prison within the prison, maximum security is home to the most dangerous and violent prisoners who have posed a threat to themselves, others, or the facility. In this qualitative study, the interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA) was used to better understand the lived experiences of COs who work in maximum custody settings with dangerous and violent adult male prisoners. Using Kurt Lewin's field theory as the conceptual framework, semistructured interviews were conducted to gain a better understanding of how environment and personal characteristics can explain behavior. The results of this study were six major themes including challenging population, barriers and challenges, strong camaraderie, dangerous prisoners, a strong sense of self, and increased support for the future. Of these six themes, 17 subthemes emerged. A better understanding this population resulted in more personalized recommendations to be made for those who govern this population, like increasing mental health support, having senior staff train junior staff and acknowledging the difficult work that these officers do. These findings may lead to positive social change for the entire field of corrections by highlighting that this subpopulation of the greater CO population has unique needs and challenges that needed to be addressed.

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Dedication

I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the brave men and women of the United States armed forces, first responders, corrections and dispatch. These individuals have chosen careers riddled with obstacles and very little gratitude. Please know that you are seen, you are appreciated and you have inspired so many. This dissertation is dedicated to you all and understanding more about what you go through. Thank you for keeping our communities safe.

Acknowledgments

I would also like to thank my committee and my amazing chairperson who have been a strong source of support and guidance throughout this entire process. I couldn't have achieved this without the countless edits, comments and suggestions that you all so willingly gave.

I'd also like to thank my family, my friends, my beautiful fur-child and my partner for sticking by my side as I took on this journey. Thank you for your consistent encouragement and constant motivation. Believing in my own dreams got me started on this journey, but your support is what helped get me through it.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Correctional officers (COs) are tasked with guarding the incarcerated population within jails and prisons. For those that work in a prison, the prisoners are broken up into custody levels ranging from minimum to maximum. Each level denotes the rights of the prisoners and the responsibilities of the COs (Carson, 2021). Working as a CO is generally a highly stressful and taxing job, but little is known about what life is specifically like working as a CO in the highest of security levels (Ferdik, 2018). Officers who work in maximum security encounter the most dangerous and violent prisoners and are tasked with being responsible for most of their care.

In this study, I explored the lived experiences of COs working in maximum security custody settings. Through the lens of Lewin's field theory, I examined how a CO's behavior can be explained by examining their personal characteristics and their work environment's impact (Lewin, 1939). Future stakeholders may use the information from this study to address this subset of the CO population better and allocate resources that will help them specifically.

Background of the Study

COs are responsible for everything within a prison, from the basic safety and security of the facility to tactical control and manipulation of prisoners to gain compliance (Cihan & Sorensen, 2019). Their broad scope of duties can mean that what is asked of them differs daily. Depending upon prisoner need, custody level, and policy, COs can be tasked with things that range from visual observation of inmate movement to

actual intervention in fights, riots, and assaults (Cihan & Sorensen, 2019). Regardless of how easy one task is versus another, COs still work in a primarily dangerous environment due to the nature of the clientele that surrounds them and the ever-looming threat of violence (Vickovic et al., 2020).

Understanding that danger has led many researchers to analyze further the safety and mental health ramifications of correctional work. As a whole, COs have been found to have higher levels of anxiety, depression, traumatization, and poor coping mechanisms for their health (Taylor & Swartz, 2021). These issues have been directly linked to variables such as the prevalence of violence in the workplace, being physically outnumbered by the prisoner population, and having little support from management (Vickovic et al., 2020). Though not an exhaustive list of variables that cause stress to the CO population, these problems represent the generally lived experiences of many COs.

Previous researchers have failed to parse out subsets of the CO population that potentially are impacted differently than others. For instance, COs who work in maximum security are addressed with their peers who work in lower security levels, yet they do not do the same job (Ferdik & Smith, 2016). COs who work in maximum security are tasked with dealing with the most violent and dangerous prisoners in the facility who reside there for behavioral, disciplinary, or protective reasons (Ferdik & Smith, 2016). These prisoners require a different level of security for themselves and the staff who interact with them daily.

I addressed the gap in the current CO research by paying specific attention to COs who work in this highly restrictive custody setting. Stakeholders may be able to use this

information to assist COs. Maximum security has already been shown to have a detrimental impact on prisoners, but little research exists about the impact it has on the officers (Ferdik, 2018). I added to the current knowledge of maximum security while also addressing the COs in this custody level as a unique subset of the greater CO population.

Problem Statement

The 2019 Census of State and Federal Adult Correctional Facilities reported that 35% of public, state, and federal correctional entities had a maximum-security unit, and that 11% of private correctional entities had a maximum-security unit. (Maruschak & Buehler, 2021). Approximately 18% of the incarcerated population within those maximum-security facilities was maximum-custody or high security (Maruschak & Buehler, 2021). Maximum security is the highest form of security in prison, entailing that the prisoners are severely limited on what they can participate in, as they present either a threat to themselves, others, maximum security, or the greater institutional goal of safety (Maruschak & Buehler, 2021). Though the percentage of prisoners residing in this custody level may be low, the requirements for tending to this population can be taxing. According to Maruschak and Buehler (2021), in order to be classified as a maximum-security unit, safety precautions must include, at a minimum, double-fencing, armed towers, and an extra layer of seclusion via a secure inner perimeter inside the secure outer perimeter. In addition, entering and exiting the maximum-security custody level must be handled via a sally port method which controls movement flow and requires authentication for egress and ingress. The security for this maximum custody is

purposefully intensified to address the threat these prisoners at this custody level represent.

Researchers have addressed the majority of the prisoner population in lower custody levels. However, they have not addressed the minority of that population, even though the minority presents the majority of the danger (Meyer, 2018). The usual risks of dealing with lower custody inmates are further intensified in a maximum-security setting due to the density of danger and violence in this single population. These risks include but are not limited to gang violence, exposure to hazardous bodily fluids, substance abuse, and overt displays of aggression with intent to harm themselves or staff (Ferdik & Smith, 2016). Behaviorally deviant and violent inmates are present in lower custody levels as well. However, maximum security is composed only of the inmates that pose a risk to themselves and others. Thus, the prevalence and egregiousness of daily risks encountered by COs are further intensified in this disciplinary setting (Meyer, 2018). This knowledge of heightened risk for COs exists. However, very little literature speaks directly of the officers who work in maximum-security settings, which oversee the highest risks in a correctional population. The research problem that I addressed in this study is the lack of information on the lived experiences of COs working in maximum security with the most dangerous and violent inmates.

Purpose of the Study

My goal for this study was to improve the understanding of COs' lived experiences working with dangerous and violent adult male prisoners in maximum security. I contributed to what little is known about this subset of the correctional officer

population and further understand their unique risks in this setting. Previous research has shown that the higher levels of violence and danger COs are exposed to, the more likelihood they have of developing mental health-related problems later in life (de Magalhães Bezerra et al., 2016) and becoming burnt out in their current profession (Senol-Durak et al., 2021). The risk of working as a correctional officer is already high, presenting officers with a buildup of stress that can often lead to post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), generalized anxiety orders, depression, and other mental health concerns (Taylor & Swartz, 2021). This can be further exacerbated by working in the most restrictive custody setting of maximum security among violent adult male prisoners, whose long-term clientele is more volatile and unpredictable than the general population. COs who work in maximum security routinely see psychological and physical threats, as their population is comprised entirely of individuals who are considered a threat to themselves and others (Ferdik, 2018). By conducting this study, I increased the available knowledge of a maximum-security environment and the role of the correctional officer within it. By understanding more about this environment and those who work within it, administrators and policymakers can better equip officers with specific resources to address inherent risks unique to this environment and improve officer safety in both the immediate and long term.

Research Question

What are the lived experiences of COs who work with dangerous and violent adult male prisoners in a maximum-security environment?

Theoretical Foundation

The theory that I used as the theoretical foundation for this study was Lewin's (1936) theory of behavior. Lewin believed that a person's behavior was a product of their characteristics and the impact of their social and physical environments (Lewin, 1936). Lewin coined the equation of B=f(P,E) to prove that behavior (B) is a function (f) of a person's unique history and traits (P) and their environment (E; Lewin, 1936). To understand a person's behavior, one can use their personal characteristics and environment to make sense of why an individual is the way they are (Lewin, 1946). The logical connections between this framework and the nature of my research include Lewin's theoretical work, which has been used extensively in understanding psychological aspects of environmental impact on human behavior in the workplace. Lewin (1936) provided an understanding of the impact that an environment inherent with danger and violence can have on a person's behavior and the impact that the person's behavior can have on the dangerous and violent environment itself.

Nature of the Study

To address the research questions in this qualitative study, I used an interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA; see Bush et al., 2019). I conducted via semistructured interviews with COs who worked in a maximum-security setting. I used detailed responses from a community of COs and interpreted their answers to improve the current knowledge surrounding COs working at this custody level.

IPA revolves around the premise that phenomena cannot always be explained in a neutral and removed manner and relies upon the individual interpretive skills of the

researcher to make sense of the phenomenon being studied (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). In this approach to understanding phenomenological data, the researcher uses multiple different interpretations around the same topic. The researcher cannot remove themselves entirely from the population they are studying (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). This does not mean that any interpretation is labeled as right or wrong but means that scholarly discourse can ensue. The more a topic is academically discussed and interpreted, the greater the understanding that can eventually be gained for the field overall (Butler et al., 2019.

The benefits of using an IPA approach for this population included approaching the population in an academically curious manner to try and explain a phenomenon of interest without making the participants feel judged or diagnosed. In addition, an IPA researcher acknowledges the idea that experiences are as unique as the humans who have them, so understanding a phenomenon may look different in each research setting (Bush et al., 2019). My goal was to better understand the lived experiences of these COs, using an IPA approach for results that could be used for a conversation about a marginalized population of COs and the unique challenges and risks they face.

Definitions

Correctional Officers: Individuals who guard constituents of correctional facilities, either in jails, prisons, courtrooms, or other defined correctional environments (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023).

Lived experiences: the personal interpretation, knowledge, and emotions of an individual after having experienced a phenomenon (Byrne, 2001).

Maximum security: The highest level of security in a prison and generally the most restrictive for the inmates. Reserved for disciplinary, behavioral, and violent offenders. (Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2022).

Assumptions

In this study, I assumed that COs who work in maximum security will generally be immersed in a more dangerous and violent environment than those COs who work in lower custody levels. In addition, I assumed that prisoners in maximum custody are more dangerous and violent than prisoners in lower custody levels. I assumed that all participants would answer truthfully and honestly about their experiences. Finally, I assumed that some participants might be uncomfortable participating in this research due to the restrictive nature of this work environment. I addressed these assumptions, as the correctional environment values safety, security, and privacy above all else, and this could have restricted some participants from participating in some fashion.

Scope and Delimitations

My goal for this study was to better understand the lived experiences of COs who work in maximum security with the most dangerous and violent adult male prisoners. I recruited the participants via emailed advertisements with information on contacting me if they wanted to participate. Specifically, the participants in this study were COs who worked in adult male facilities and have worked in a maximum-security custody setting for at least a year. I was able to gather a wide variety of officers to participate while still ensuring that the participants choosing to participate have had a substantiated amount of time in the custody setting in question.

Maximum security custody, for the purposes of this study, did not include super maximum custody settings, as these are not as common across the state and entail a whole different level of security procedures (Rubin, 2018). I focused specifically on maximum custody settings only. In addition to narrowing the scope to maximum security custody settings only, I also focused exclusively on experience in adult male facilities only. Male prisoners are more apt to be disciplined with maximum security than their female counterparts and make up a greater portion of the overall prisoner population (Cochran et al., 2018).

I identified and delineated resources for COs who work in a highly restrictive setting that may not be truly addressed by stakeholders when correctional reform has been previously attempted. I identified struggles and threats in this custody level that are staff specific and could be further addressed. This study can be replicated in the future by choosing different states or focusing on the lived experiences of COs working in female-only facilities.

Limitations

A potential barrier when collecting primary data included partner site agreement and possible difficulty recruiting participants for interviews. Ensuring a clear separation of my role at the institution from my role as a researcher was also a potential challenge. I currently work in a Washington State correctional facility, but I do not work in maximum security nor have any supervisory power over any officers. My contact with those who work in maximum security is minimal, so defining my role as a researcher was not difficult to achieve. In addition, the COs may not have wanted to participate or speak

candidly about their experiences to avoid stigmatization that could potentially impede their careers (see Carter & Thomson, 2022). Addressing the confidentiality of the study and encouraging participation for a greater understanding of the population's needs was essential.

Significance of the Study

By conducting this study, I filled a gap in understanding by focusing on a particular group of COs working in maximum security around violent adult male prisoners. The greater population of COs has been studied before, but very little research exists on the officers who work in maximum-security specifically (Ferdik, 2016). Maximum security is the highest custody level and most restrictive environment in prison, usually reserved for the most dangerous and violent prisoners (Ferdik, 2018). By understanding this group of COs, I identified specific dangers and challenges that these officers face that might be unique to the environment and provided a better understanding of the overall environmental demand on the officer as well. A better understanding of specific environmental impacts on the behavior of COs was significant for further use of Lewin's behavioral theory in corrections. Future scholars and policymakers can use the results of this study to better address the needs and resources allocated to these officers to enhance overall safety. Current knowledge about challenges and risks for COs are related to the population as a whole does not include specific needs for specific subsets of the population. Understanding more about this particular subset of the correctional officer population was integral to further expanding upon positive social change and

psychological awareness in the field of corrections and making a significant contribution to both the fields of corrections and psychology alike.

Summary

COs who work in maximum security settings are impacted by a different environmental strain than their coworkers in lower custody levels. Part of this is due to their clientele's violent and dangerous nature that populates this entire custody level. In addition, COs are relied on constantly to provide for these inmates' various needs and basic amenities due to the heavy restrictions in this environment. I used an interpretive phenomenological approach to better understand their lived experiences. The results of this study can be used in conversations surrounding CO needs, resources, and responsibilities. The next chapter includes more in-depth discussion of the nature of corrections, the roles of the COs and the specificities of maximum custody that make it different from other custody levels.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

COs routinely work in high-risk and high-stress environments, making them more apt to develop mental health problems due to their professional employment (Taylor & Swartz, 2021). These mental health problems can be further exacerbated by the type of unit a CO works in and the custody level restrictions in that unit (Ferdik, 2018). Maximum custody units, for example, are some of the most restrictive units for inmates and staff alike (Maghan, 1999). Maximum custody is usually reserved for the most violent and dangerous inmates a correctional facility needs to house, creating a unique environment rich in violence, disobedience, and overall risk to the officers who work among these inmates (Maghan, 1999).

Though maximum-security COs potentially face a greater risk than their peers in lower custody levels, little research existed to explore the lived experiences of this CO population specifically. Much of the research surrounding COs only addresses the COs as one general population, failing to parse out the individual differences in custody level requirements on the officers themselves. Thus, further research was needed to fill this gap in understanding the population to understand their needs and immediate well-being better.

Literature Search Strategy

Scholarly literature surrounding correctional officer experiences in maximum-security settings and dangers to officers in that setting is described here. The keywords that I searched were: *correctional officer, maximum security prisons*, *solitary*

confinement, psychology, and *danger* in SAGE Journals, EBSCO Discovery Service, and a Thoreau multi-database search. I gave priority to the results that were published between 2018 and 2022. However, I also used articles from outside of this timeframe in order to fully exhaust the known information available on COs working in maximum security settings.

Theoretical Foundation

The theory that I used as the theoretical foundation for this study was Lewin's (1936) theory of behavior, also known as Lewin's field theory. Lewin believed that a person's behavior was a product of their characteristics and the impact of their social and physical environments (Lewin, 1936). Lewin coined the equation of B=f(P, E) to prove that behavior (B) is a function (f) of a person's unique history and traits (P) and their environment (Lewin, 1936). To understand a person's behavior, one can use their personal characteristics, history, and physical environment to understand why an individual is the way they are (Lewin, 1946). This framework has been used extensively to understand psychological aspects of environmental impact on human behavior in the workplace. I used this approach to understand the impact that an environment inherent with danger and violence can have on a person's behavior and the impact that the person's behavior can have on the dangerous and violent environment itself.

Lewin's Field Theory in Corrections

Lewin's field theory is not new to the workplace environment (Lewin, 1939). This theory has been previously used to study linkages between workplace characteristics and their correlation with employee burnout, stress, overall satisfaction, and other linked

personal characteristics (Lewin, 1939). A person's behavior is not just a representation of who they are on a personal level but also a representation of who they are as an employee and coworker (Lewin, 1946). One such use of Lewin's field theory has been the greater understanding of correctional officer behavior due to their chosen occupation (Elechi et al., 2018). COs are a unique subset of the working population who must think, act and behave differently than other professions due to the nature of their job. The physical safety of staff, inmates, and the greater community is at risk if a correctional officer does not adequately do their job (Abdelsalam & Sunde, 2018). Thus, Lewin's field theory can be used to better understanding their personal, social, and psychological characteristics and the prison environment's overall impact on them (Elechi et al., 2018).

This theory has been adapted further in corrections research by recognizing prison culture is a separate and unique environment that COs have experienced working within (Borghi et al., 2021). Punitive policies have been changed into rehabilitative measures to reduce recidivism and promote more positive prison programming (Borghi et al., 2021). Due to the culture of prisons changing the physical environment, researchers have used these periods as a time to employ Lewin's field theory and test how cultural shifts could potentially equate to environmental modifications, thus creating a repeating cycle in the equation and potentially changing the employee's behaviors as well (Borghi et al., 2021).

Lewin's original theory of human behavior is a widely used tool in correctional research and still allows researchers to draw key and insightful conclusions.

Reciprocal Idea of Change

Lewin's field theory of B=f(P, E) not only means that behavior is a direct result of the person and their environment, but that the equation can be solved for an unknown variable of either P or E if the behavior is already presently defined (Lewin, 1936). Just as the equation can be used to identify behaviors of COs, the equation can also shed light on the impacting variables of personality and environment that may explain an already known behavior. A 2018 study on correctional officer personalities revealed that personality changes due to increased neuroticism were a direct result of work-related stress in the correctional environment (Suliman & Einat, 2018). In this case, the personality changes were already identified in the target population, and the missing variable was the impact of the environment on these personality changes. This study is one of its kind and showed how using Lewin's field theory in correctional work is highly applicable. Researchers can adapt the theory to the situation in various ways for a more comprehensive understanding of each of the individual variables and their impact when all three are combined.

Subsets of the Same Environment

Understanding the prison environment's toll on the COs is integral, but the concept of prison is also too broad to be used to explain the linkage between officer behavior and environmental factors. As there are multiple different custody levels, job classifications, and specializations in the prison environment, summarizing the impact of

environmental factors as just relating to prison does not accurately explain all CO behaviors. Instead, Lewin's field theory needs to be adapted to specific subsets of the prison environment to understand precisely what pieces of the prison environment might impact certain COs and not others. Understanding individual components of the whole environment, Lewin's field theory can be used to accurately explain specific behavior instead of generalizing an entire population.

I used Lewin's field theory to examine a maximum-security setting to understand this custody level and highlight potential linkages between variables. I also used Lewin's field theory to highlight similarities that could be drawn between COs in this custody level and other respective environments of the prison. By better understanding CO behavior and the impact their environment has on them, I addressed this population specifically.

Overview of Corrections in the United States

Prisons exist to house the criminally responsible individuals in society who are sentenced to incarceration as part of their sentence for their crimes (Abdelsalam & Sunde, 2018). COs exist to ensure that these inmates complete their time in a structured, safe, and highly controlled manner (Abdelsalam & Sunde, 2018). Conflict often arises between these two groups. Though their relationship may be adversarial, they must work together to coexist (Vieraitis et al., 2018). Officers must work with inmates to get their jobs done, and inmates must work with officers to accomplish their daily tasks to survive. A delicate balance between hostility and amenability allows COs and inmates to coexist inside a correctional facility (Vieraitis et al., 2018). Additional variables like custody level,

inmate behavior, and threats to internal safety procedures can easily sway this balance for inmates and COs.

At the end of 2020, approximately 1,215,800 individuals were incarcerated in the United States (Carson, 2021). These individuals ranged in custody levels from least restrictive (minimum) to most restrictive (maximum). Of the 1,215,800 individuals under correctional supervision, approximately 97% of them were sentenced to more than a year in a state or federal correctional institution (Carson, 2021). Approximately 549,600 inmates were released from state or federal incarceration during this same timeframe, still leaving a considerable burden on the U.S. correctional system to supervise the remaining inmates (Carson, 2021).

For those tasked with supervising the inmates in correctional environments, the national total of COs as 392,600 for a similar timeframe (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). The number of individuals under correctional supervision exceeded the number of COs employed to provide said supervision by three times as much. Working in an already outnumbered population, COs are tasked with dangerous daily tasks like monitoring contraband, breaking up fights, searching inmates and cells for weapons, etc. (Abdelsalam & Sunde, 2018). The increase in danger and the lack of resources and personnel can quickly create burnout and other mental health-related problems in COs nationwide (de Magalhães Bezerra et al., 2016).

Current Takeaways from Previous Correctional Studies

Much of the current literature surrounding correctional practitioners includes assessments of COs as a whole, failing to parse out specific subsets of that population

that specialize in certain custody levels, behavioral problems in prison, and other specialty groups (Ferdik, 2016). Understanding these subsets of the population is crucial to the greater goal of the agencies, which include trained and well-versed staff working in areas that might differ from the general population (Ferdik, 2018). By failing to address these populations as unique entities, researchers have failed to address the unique situations they face. Addressing the correctional officer population as a whole does not result in reform or improved practices within a penal institution. Instead, this can cause a glaring misunderstanding of what these individuals genuinely do.

Though the research on COs has grown considerably in the last 4 decades, there is still a limit to what information is available about this population. Butler and associates (2019) studied the literature surrounding correctional officer research from 1980 to 2017 and found that research regarding COs more than tripled during this timeframe. The most common topics researched during this period included workplace stress, satisfaction, and a CO’s personal attachment to the organization they worked for (Butler et al., 2019). This shows progress in documenting this unique population but lacks breadth and depth.

Most CO-related studies strongly focus on job stress, burnout, and organizational commitment. The premise behind many of these studies is that prisons are dangerous environments that uniquely impact those that work within them regarding their temperament, loyalty to the organization, and years of service (Vickovic et al., 2020). This is further bolstered by follow-up studies regarding analyzation of what specific factors in correctional environments cause the most stress to COs as a whole (May et al., 2020). Many studies have shown that understanding CO job stress and turnover rates is

integral to understanding organizational commitment and employee retention. However, the understanding of these variables is happening at a macrolevel that does not include results from the individual studies. The microlevel details are being left out.

Another critical factor that is mentioned in CO research is that of mental health ramifications from the job (Lerman et al., 2022). COs are routinely studied because they develop depression, anxiety, and trauma-related disorders (Evers et al., 2020). The combination of a hazardous environment, overwhelmingly taxing responsibilities placed on officers, and physical outnumbering of inmates to staff has spiked CO-reported stress and anxiety levels (Lerman et al., 2022). Exposure to violence has added to those growing concerns, increasing post-traumatic stress disorder diagnoses in the CO population as well (Regehr et al., 2021). Understanding the need for greater mental health awareness in the CO population is commendable. However, addressing the suggestions for improvement for this population requires a more tailored and individualized approach. Exploration of the roots of this stress requires a deeper understanding of individual-level impacts on the organizational level.

The current literature about COs is about an environment filled with violence, danger, and unruly inmates (Walters, 2022). Though this can be a common theme among all job classes within a correctional environment, more information is needed to adequately represent these variables' severity or differences in different custody levels. Take, for example, maximum custody. This custody level is generally the highest in a correctional facility, except for the select few prisons with supermax custody capabilities (Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2022). Maximum custody settings may exist within the

greater prison environment, but they come with restrictions and rules of their own. To consider part of a correctional facility a maximum custody living unit heightened safety protocols have to be put into place that usually take shape in the form of double fencing, armed guards, and heavily restricted traffic to and from the unit (Maruschak & Buehler, 2021). These added restrictions are born from the premise that maximum custody exists to house criminally violent and dangerous individuals that present a threat to themselves and others in the general population.

Custody Level and Officer Roles

Minimum custody is denoted as the lowest possible custody setting. It allows the inmates to have more liberties within the correctional environment and often requires less supervision by the COs (Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2019). In minimum custody, inmates can often live and work outside the secure perimeter during pre-approved timeframes (Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2019). Not only do minimum security inmates enjoy fewer restrictions than their counterparts in higher custody levels, but the officers are also less prevalent and less encumbered to micromanage at this custody level (Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2019). This is not to say that there are no security protocols in minimum security levels but to highlight that this is the least restrictive for inmates and COs.

From there, custody levels can increase to medium, close, and eventually maximum custody (Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2019). As the custody levels increase, the liberties of the inmates decrease, and the supervision from the COs increases (Cihan & Sorensen, 2019). Things that can impact a prisoner’s custody level include, but are not limited to, history of escape, sentence length, type of crime, mental health, and overall

prison discipline (Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2019). The deeper an inmate goes into the custody levels of a facility, the more supervision they can expect from COs, including allocation of resources, controlling inmate movement, and restricting inmate actions (Cihan & Sorensen, 2019).

When an inmate hits a maximum-security level, officers tend to most of their essential needs, and their privileges are heavily restricted (Maghan, 1999). Getting to maximum security can be achieved in various ways, but usually comes as a result of the inmate posing a threat to themselves or others in the prison environment and posing an overall threat to the safety and security of the institution (Maruschak & Buehler, 2021). Thus, most of the inhabitants of maximum security are remanded there for disciplinary and safety reasons, creating a uniquely dangerous and violent environment for the COs that work there.

Maximum Security Overview

To be considered a maximum-security environment, stringent safety protocols must be followed in addition to the general safety protocols in the greater correctional environment (Maruschak & Buehler, 2021). Some of these security protocols include multiple layers of fencing inside the secure perimeter, a more restricted flow of traffic that consists of a purposeful allotment of staff in a given area, as well as an addition of armed sentries who are capable of exercising deadly force on a prisoner, if needed (Maruschak & Buehler, 2021). These safety protocols enhance the already secure prison environment to address the increased threat these inmates face to themselves and the

institution at their greater custody level. Maximum security is restrictive for the inmates housed there and the staff that must abide by these security cautions.

Getting to maximum custody can be achieved in various ways, including severe behavioral problems, persistent mental health concerns, violent actions against others, and introducing or using illegal substances into the secured environment (Cihan & Sorensen, 2019). Having a living unit comprised of the most deviant inmates creates a unique prison environment laden with risk, danger, and threat to staff. These inmates are housed in maximum custody as a last resort for the facility, as traditional methods and conduct procedures have not worked for them (Cihan & Sorensen, 2019). When an inmate has exhausted all disciplinary procedures for an individual, they may find themselves in the solitary confinement of maximum custody.

Life in maximum custody generally comprises inmates locked in their single-man cells for up to 23 hours daily with restricted possessions and abilities (Lovell et al., 2000). Inmates are allowed one hour of recreation time a day. However, their recreation time is usually spent within a secure "yard" that is generally still within the secure building but provides fresh air to enter in via the ceiling, window, or a cage-like setting (Lanes, 2011). During this time, the inmates are still solitary and not allowed to partake in their outings from their cell with other incarcerated individuals. Inmates are allowed out of their cells for medical callouts, legal meetings, schooling, and showers outside of this time. However, those excursions from the cell often require a team of officers to securely transport them from one room to the next via multiple restraints like ankles, wrists, and belly chains (Lanes, 2011).

Officer Responsibilities in Maximum Custody

Due to the restrictive nature of the maximum custody environment, COs are usually tasked with providing a majority of the daily care to those incarcerated at that level (Ferdik, 2016). This can include delivery of meals and mail, escorting to and from their cell, and even monitoring essential self-care like showering and shaving. COs are also the primary individuals responding to inmate concerns, supplying the population with their required items, and ensuring the safety and security of the environment by routinely searching inmates and their cells (Ferdik, 2018). This burdens COs in this custody level in a way that other officers in lower custody levels do not have to deal with quite as much. Though the basic tenants of safety and security are present in lower custody levels, the threat level and demand of basic needs on the officer are less. As there are an abundance of rules in prison to enforce and such an unreceptive audience to enforce them to, many officers pick and choose their battles by selecting which regulations to enforce heavily and which to let go of (Haggerty & Bucerius, 2021).

What is currently known in the literature surrounding maximum security is that the danger and threat levels increase in this custody setting (Ferdik, 2016). However, what needed to be further discussed by many scholars and practitioners is how COs view this environment via their lived experiences. Understanding this was integral to better understanding how to promote safety and well-being for these officers and making future policy recommendations.

Threats to Officer Safety

COs encounter danger in their daily duties simply by entering the secure facility and surrounding themselves with violent and unstable inmates (Cihan & Sorensen, 2019). The physical outnumbering of inmates to officers is a large part of their danger. However, it does not wholly encompass the plethora of other risks this population is riddled with (Abdelsalam & Sunde, 2018). Certain items, criminal association, and deviant actions can exacerbate inmate behavior, thus creating riskier situations for staff to mitigate and diffuse. Access to unauthorized items like weapons and technology can further impact a CO's safety, as can the presence of gangs, lack of programming, and propagation of antagonistic attitudes between inmates and officers (Abdelsalam & Sunde, 2018). Understanding the risks that COs face is integral to understanding the danger they encounter. Though danger is a common risk for all COs, the portion of the population which works in maximum security can see these risks magnified to a detrimental extreme in their units (Ferdik, 2016).

Contraband

Contraband is the term most correctional facilities use to describe items not allowed in the facility's secure perimeter (Rosebrough, 2018). This can include but is not limited to, drugs, alcohol, weapons, and unauthorized technology like cell phones and cameras (Grommon, 2018). Prisons are generally very restrictive in what they allow in the secure perimeter to minimize the potential additional risk that contraband can have (Rosebrough, 2018). In addition, prisons are generally well-controlled environments that

follow strict protocols. This is partly due to control outcomes in the daily operations to preserve the safety of inmates and officers.

The presence of weapons alone can increase the potential lethality an officer faces as they go to work and provide a crude manner to transfer diseases and unhygienic biohazards to staff. Unauthorized technology can further exacerbate the contraband issue by providing an unmonitored line of communication with the outside community that could include the increased introduction of contraband into the facility or promote violence on staff and their families in the community as well (Grommon, 2018). Drugs and alcohol can alter the daily interactions of inmates and even encourage behaviors of violence and mischief. In addition to dealing with a clientele under the influence of an illicit substance, officers also face the potential risk of exposing themselves inadvertently to these substances through their daily practices (Rosebrough, 2018). Second-hand contact with illegal substances can prove troublesome or even fatal, depending on the dosage and type of substance encountered by staff. For example, fentanyl usage is on the rise in many communities, and prisons are also seeing increased fentanyl exposure to officers, which could be fatal to their well-being (Bucerius & Haggerty, 2019).

Gang Violence

Over the years, an upsurge in gang violence has proved troublesome for COs who often encounter an increasingly large gang population (Mitchell et al., 2017). Gang affiliation is common in the prison setting for inmate survival and comradery. However, it can prove especially dangerous to the officers intervening when violence erupts (Lessing, 2017). In addition to the prevalence of violence, gangs also have a positive

correlation with contraband and weapons, often promoting the possession of such for survival (Mitchell et al., 2017). Gang violence can prove especially lethal to COs due to their weapons and sheer size in numbers (Lessing, 2017). Prison gangs often operate on the shared indoctrination technique that the members are always against the COs, even when they would rather join forces with rival gangs than side with officers (Mitchell et al., 2017). When these issues arise in the general population, the gang members at fault are immediately taken to maximum security, where they now become active threats to COs working there (Pyrooz & Mitchell, 2020).

Having an increased presence of gang members in one custody level can be quite taxing on the officers in that unit (Pyrooz & Mitchell, 2020). Often, these inmates must be separated for fear of violence and intentionally kept from programming with other inmates to whom they might pose a risk. This can be challenging to mitigate, as their need to be kept away from others can rival their need to associate with like-minded individuals (Lessing, 2017). To associate with and further propagate the gang's missions in maximum security, inmates find alternate methods to communicate with others, like passing notes, yelling through doorways, and even trying to slide items under another prisoner's door (Pyrooz & Mitchell, 2020).

Us versus Them

Officers also encounter opposition against what they do based on the shared beliefs many inmates hold regarding an "us versus them" mentality (Cooke et al., 2019). This social collection of views often paints authority figures as the enemy and creates hostility between inmates and officers. Though not present in every interaction, this

shared social belief can negatively impact officers who may encounter resistance or even danger trying to accomplish the most minor tasks with an inmate (Vieraitis et al., 2018). Simply put, the inmates can act aggressively towards officers not for who they are as people but for what they represent. The adversarial nature of officers and inmates can create a workday riddled with intense anger and mistrust, often shown through acts of aggression towards staff.

In a maximum security setting, these physical displays of an "us versus them" mentality are arguably the strongest (Lanes, 2011). Officers are the only ones with free roam of the unit and movement of their choice. The inmates are locked down behind their cell doors and can watch the movement around them but can never participate unless they are physically escorted by the officers themselves (Lovell et al., 2000). In addition to the escorted movement, inmates in maximum security must physically rely on officers for nearly all of their needs (Lovell et al., 2000). From feeding to mail delivery, requisition of personal hygiene products, and even the essential act of showering, officers are the only support these inmates can receive while in this custody level (Lovell et al., 2020). This can often be degrading to the inmates and further make them resent the officers they are forced to rely on.

Inmate Assaults on Staff

Aggression towards staff can look a variety of ways in prison. Still, the highest form of this aggression is displayed in acts of violence against staff members through assault or other bodily harm (Lahm, 2009). Staff assaults can be considered the ultimate "us versus them" embodiment, rallying support from each group to punish the other for

their perceived wrongdoing. Staff assaults increase with the custody level and ratio of officers to inmates (Lahm, 2009). Inmates that commit staff assault are generally transferred to maximum custody, where the custody level and ratio of officers are automatically increased, thus still possessing two variables associated with higher levels of staff assaults (Lahm, 2009).

Steiner and Wooldredge (2017) conducted a study on over 1,800 COs and found that their levels of safety were directly tied to their regular contact with inmates and their support from others at both the co-worker and organizational levels. The conclusions of the 45 different prisons studied in this research remained relatively the same. Officers who were younger or of specific racial backgrounds may be targeted for more violence than others. However, those with infrequent or poor contact with inmates were at a greater risk of encountering staff assault, as were those who did not have good group cohesion with their coworkers or employer (Steiner & Wooldredge, 2017).

COs have one of the highest injury rates due to the natural danger and violence levels of the clientele they routinely work with (Konda et al., 2012). Though their injurious rates are not frequently fatal, the ever-looming threat of harm can create undue stress and dread within the employees. When inmate behavior does not comply with the prison environment after repeated attempts to handle the problem at a lower level, staff may use force to gain inmate compliance (McNeeley & Donley, 2021). Utilizing force to gain compliance then puts the staff member at a greater odd of being assaulted amid this act or, at the very least, developing injuries in trying to carry it out (McNeeley & Donley, 2021). Utilizing force as a normalized means of gaining compliance in the correctional

environment dramatically increases the likelihood that the inmates will also use force on COs.

Recommendations for mitigating violence in prisons and lessening staff assaults include educating staff members on risky behavior, handling problems at the lowest level possible, and understanding how to de-escalate an unruly inmate properly (McNeeley, 2021). These methods of reducing violence are often built into the structure of some units, like maximum security units, where the chances to act violently or harm others are significantly reduced (Maruschak & Buehler, 2021). This does not mean that maximum security units do not see violence but instead suggests that they are better equipped to deter violent behaviors before they happen as they take away means and opportunities that could potentially pose risks for their safety and that of the other inmates.

Perceived Risk of Danger

Though maximum security units are highly controlled and monitored units, there is still the common knowledge among officers that they have the potential to not be secure at any moment. Threat levels and danger to the officer increase exponentially when the custody level of a prison setting increases (Ferdik, 2016). The ever-looming threat of danger present amongst such a high concentration of dangerous and violent inmates is mentally, emotionally, and physically taxing on the officers (de Magalhães Bezerra et al., 2016). Risk is not always defined concretely for officers as what happens in their line of work, as it can appear in the form of hypothetical situations that could occur at any time (Lambert et al., 2021). Perceived threats in a maximum security environment increase when you are custody staff who have more routine access and

interaction with these dangerous and violent inmates (Lambert et al., 2018). This danger can be minimized but never eradicated in this environment due to the type of clientele being housed there. Having officer input into decision-making that impacts them is a proven method to lessen perceived danger for these officers (Lambert et al., 2018).

Sometimes the most significant levels of perceived risk are not the statistical odds of something happening but rather the severity of the situation should it happen (Ferdik, 2016). Ferdik (2016) found in a study of COs in maximum-security settings that a prison riot was the highest level of perceived danger in their environment. However, prison riots did not frequently occur at their facilities. Regardless, their perceived danger of this situation stemmed from the fact that it could happen, and if it did, it would have a higher level of lethality and threat to them than other dangers they could encounter (Ferdik, 2016). A similar connection can be drawn from working in maximum security among highly violent and dangerous individuals. Officers may not encounter many problems with the inmates during their shifts. However, the magnitude of the issues they could endure could be far greater and more ominous than the likelihood that the actual events will happen (Haggerty & Bucerius, 2021).

Profiling Danger

In an attempt to understand which inmates pose the most danger to COs, it can be difficult to parse out specific dangerous identities and ascertain precisely what COs should be on the lookout for. Simply put, all inmates can pose a threat to officers, regardless of the presence of pre-violence indicators. However, a 2018 study canvassed dangerous and violent individuals in prison and found that certain variables made inmates

more likely to participate in violence and danger in the facility (McGuire, 2018). Being under 21 years of age and being a gang member were commonly shared variables among these known violent and dangerous inmates, suggesting that age and gang affiliation had an impact on the lethality of an inmate (McGuire, 2018). Other standard variables included the history of violence, proximity to release, and short amount of time having served already (McGuire, 2018).

As displays of violence and danger are one of the quickest ways for an inmate to achieve maximum custody status, the characteristics above can be highly prominent amongst maximum security inmates. This does not mean that every inmate with those characteristics will be in maximum security. Still, studies such as McGuire's (2018) indicate that these inmates will be residents of maximum security at some point in their incarceration due to their higher likelihood of violence in the general population.

Programming Paradigm

As many correctional entities nationwide try to adopt more rehabilitative and programming-positive opportunities for the incarcerated, officer involvement in these trends is split (Yu et al., 2021). Many officers are tasked with assisting the incarcerated in their programming endeavors; not all of them have the desire to. Educational, therapeutic, and prosocial programming has been shown to positively impact incarcerated individuals under correctional supervision and lessen their recidivism rates upon release (Courtney, 2019). Maximum security is no different. Though fewer programs are available in maximum security settings than in lower custody levels, there is still a legislative push to encourage even maximum security inmates to program (Labrecque et al., 2021).

Programming in maximum security has caused some contention among COs, citing concerns over the legitimacy of programs in a restricted environment and even overall safety concerns (Meyers, 2018). For incarcerated individuals who are usually locked in their cells for approximately 23 hours a day, intentional programming in this setting means more escorted movement out of their cells and among fellow inmates. As all inmate movement in maximum security has to be escorted and highly scheduled to avoid mishaps in isolation requirements, programming can burden the correctional staff in that unit (Meyers, 2018). Extra security layers have to be taken in maximum security when allowing the program, including multiple officers escorting one inmate, a controlled transference of restraints, and a highly systematic transition to a secure space where they are safely confined but also able to comply with programming requirements like writing and speaking with classmates (Labrecque et al., 2021). Though the legislative desire for programming is evidence-backed, applying programming in maximum security can add extra layers of concern and risk to a maximum-security correctional officer's day.

Officers Set the Tone

Besides their peers, officers are usually the most significant driving factor impacting inmate behavior in most correctional facilities (Ferdik & Hills, 2018). Officer attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions of the incarcerated population can often dictate how the inmates treat the officers and their peers (Ferdik & Hills, 2018). Officers who adopt primarily punitive mindsets about inmates and their role during incarceration usually spawn behavior from the inmates that are antagonistic, deviant, and generally

misbehaving (Vieraitis et al., 2018). Officers who encourage a more rehabilitative approach can foster greater respect, self-discipline, and interpersonal skills among the inmates they are around (Vieraitis et al., 2018). Understanding the types of officers in a maximum custody setting can help understand the potential behaviors they are spawning in the incarcerated population.

As environmental shifts in prison change the punitive nature of incarceration to more rehabilitative, officers must shift their behaviors to adapt (Borghi et al., 2021). More officers have to adjust to the rehabilitative prison environment, and this adaptation often changes their behavior as well (Borghi et al., 2021). Though the peer influence may remain the same, a different officer's behavior in their environment means that the incarcerated will also be influenced by this tonal change (Ferdik & Hills, 2018). Officer influence on inmate behavior is especially pertinent to understand in maximum security, as officer presence is assured in daily interactions with the incarcerated, who rely on them for everything.

Officer Stress, Trauma, and Burnout

Working in a high-risk, low-reward environment can be physically and emotionally taxing (de Magalhães Bezerra et al., 2016). The stress that COs endure is immense and can be further compounded by poor coping mechanisms, jaded mindsets, and fractured prosocial relationships with others (Taylor & Swartz, 2021). Officers encounter frequent expressions of violence and danger just in performing their daily duties, which often leads to why their workplace injury rate is so high (Regehr et al., 2021). As a result of this continuous exposure to stress and violence in the workplace,

COs are highly susceptible to developing anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), among many other health concerns (Regeh et al., 2021).

Suliman and Einat (2018) found that correctional officer personality changes could be linked to high-stress levels in the work environment, creating negative neurotic impacts on the officers. These researchers also indicated that length of service directly compounded the neurotic changes in personality, indicating that the longer a person worked in prison, the more detrimental the impact on their personality (Suliman & Einat, 2018). A similar study in Turkey found work-related stress to be a compounding influence on correctional officer burnout, anger, and overall negativity (Senol-Durak et al., 2021). These studies indicate a strong mental health connection to stress in the correctional environment, particularly for those in an officer role.

The mental and physical stress that COs encounter makes them one of the most adversely impacted occupations (Jaegers et al., 2021). Jaegers and associates conducted a mental health study on COs in their first year of employment at a jail in the Midwest. The results indicated that these COs were already experiencing high levels of burnout in their first year (Jaeger et al., 2021). A higher turnover rate at this correctional facility was accredited to the expedited burnout of employees via severe declines in their mental health after employment. Higher levels of depression and conflicts in their personal lives were deemed two of the most significant ramifications of employment in the correctional facility. It significantly impacted the length of time these COs stayed employed (Jaegers et al., 2021). Though the stress of being a CO certainly builds up over time, there is also

overwhelming evidence that this job immerses employees into immediate stress in the early stages of their careers.

Understanding the stress, trauma, and burnout that COs endure is integral to understanding how to help them mitigate long-term problems and keep valued employees working in this field (Vickovic et al., 2022). Increasing the level of job satisfaction and decreasing the severity of the stress on the COs was found to have a positive impact on keeping COs from burning out. The burnout for this profession includes not just a lack of employment within the correctional field but also lifelong health problems like depression, anxiety, and other mental health disorders (Vickovic et al., 2022). Mitigating the stress that prisons provide is not always attainable, but skills like prosocial coping and personal development are certainly contenders for fighting burnout that correctional facilities could employ (Miller et al., 2022).

Stigmatization of Support

COs are often not understood well by their communities, friends, or even their families who do not have similar work environments (Suliman & Einat, 2018). The requirements, needs, and duties of being a CO are incredibly taxing and further compounded by their inability to relate these experiences with others. For those that have never experienced having bodily fluids, feces, and urine thrown on them or have never been physically assaulted by an irate constituent at their place of work, these kinds of things that COs encounter daily can seem mind-boggling (Suliman & Einat, 2018). In addition to not having a highly receptive population of people who can understand their plights, COs can be ostracized and further neglected by their peers outside of prison when

they share their experiences just due to the sensitive nature of their topics (Regehr et al., 2021). Lack of support and highly stressful and dangerous situations can often worsen a CO's mental health stability.

When COs do not feel that they have others outside their work environment who understand what they are going through, they are more likely to seek consoling from within their population (Taylor & Swartz, 2021). This can be fruitful, as they can bond with others who have had similar experiences, but this can also hinder an individual's ability to take care of themselves when that is not the mainstream message of the population (Regehr et al., 2021). The negative stigma surrounding mental health can be perpetuated through a correctional system's ranks, as those seeking help can be seen as weak or less than their counterparts. Instead, poor coping mechanisms like jaded humor, addiction, and even reckless behavior can be encouraged through affirmations from those in similar situations (Taylor & Swartz, 2021).

Failure to seek help for the job's physical, emotional, and mental ramifications can cause COs to burn out quickly and develop problems that will be with them their whole lives (Senol-Durak et al., 2021). Some COs are afraid to lose their livelihood by speaking up and asking for help, while others are more afraid of the peer pressure they might receive. In an environment that values a finite power structure and emphasizes strength-based values, being seen as weak might equate to being seen as unfit to perform their duties (Senol-Durak et al., 2021). COs must rely on one another in the correctional field to safely survive their days. If a perceived weakness is detected, this could also compound a lot of their interpersonal relationships.

Rise of Mental Health Awareness in Corrections

As with the surge in programming for the incarcerated, COs are also seeing an uprise in support from their appointing authorities (Kois et al., 2020). Mental health awareness has peaked in recent years as attention has been drawn to the plights that COs endure and their fractured support systems (Antony et al., 2020). An effort is being made to normalize mental health in this environment, though it is still being met with some resistance. Deeply rooted distrust in mental health support still permeates parts of the correctional field, making the buy-in for change to be significantly diminished (Fusco et al., 2021).

One of the ways that correctional officials have implemented mental health support in their facilities is by introducing mental health task forces deployed within the prison whenever high-stress situations occur (Antony et al., 2020). Their presence can be as formalized as providing on-site counseling and as informal as boosting morale via food or beverage. These teams are usually highly visible during or after highly dangerous or violent situations have occurred within the correctional facility (Antony et al., 2020). Though only sometimes physically present, there is generally a method of communicating with these members and an understood directive to staff that allows them to reach out whenever they could benefit from their services (Carleton et al., 2020).

Correctional officials generally offer support facility-wide, addressing situations impacting many constituents (Antony et al., 2020). However, more is needed to know about triaging mental health-related resources in subsets of this environment, like maximum security. These officers are the ones who work with the most dangerous and

violent inmates, but little is known about the direct mental health support that they receive, if any. Understanding their reception to mental health support and their access methods is integral to ensuring they are adequately represented in the greater population.

Summary and Conclusions

COs work in a highly stressful environment that requires interacting daily with dangerous and violent inmates. COs encounter gang-based violence, contraband introduction and usage, and behavioral problems routinely. The worst offenders are often removed from their current housing level and sent to maximum security when they threaten themselves and others. It is then the duties of the COs in maximum security to feed, clothe and adequately maintain these inmates for the duration of their stay in restrictive housing.

Maximum security COs are often tasked with the most significant amount of support to inmates, as they are responsible for their daily needs and activities. Providing constant care and supervision to a highly dangerous and violent population puts these COs at a different risk than their counterparts in lower custody levels. Understanding these risks, how they are being handled, and what they might benefit from is essential to further support the correctional population and their goals.

Much of the current literature that speaks to the correctional officer population speaks to the population as one large mass. However, subsets of this population are tasked with different routines, problems, and resources. One of these subsets of the greater CO population is the individuals who work in maximum security among the most dangerous and violent inmates. Making an informed decision regarding the correctional

population means considering all the unique nuances. This is currently not the case. Maximum security officers need to have a voice in sharing their lived experiences to understand better how this population is being served and improve future recommendations that may impact them. Understanding the differences in custody levels, like maximum security, increases knowledge about the field and a better understanding of the nuances of restrictive custody on those who are paid to endure it. The next chapter will outline the research method used to gain this understanding.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

My goal for this study was to improve the understanding of COs' lived experiences working with dangerous and violent adult male prisoners in maximum security. Higher levels of violence and danger have been linked to adverse mental health problems for COs (de Magalhães Bezerra et al., 2016). The levels of violence and danger tend to increase in a correctional setting as the custody level goes up (Ferdik, 2016). Much of the current literature is about the CO population as a whole, without discussion of subsections of the CO population, like maximum security, where the restrictions are at their greatest (Ferdik, 2018). Understanding more about the COs that work in maximum security can result in accurate and practical recommendations can be made to administrators and policymakers regarding officer safety and well-being for this specific population. In this chapter, I will discuss the research design of this study, including how I conducted the study, the screening of participants, and the research method I used.

Research Design and Rationale

I focused on individual interviews with COs who have had at least 1 year of experience working in a maximum custody correctional setting. I used interviews with the maximum-security COs as part of an IPA to understand the individual experiences of the officers themselves regarding the overall phenomenon of maximum security. I used an IPA qualitative design method to hear, analyze, and interpret individual experiences in this study. As the greater phenomenon being studied was the physical setting of maximum security, I used the IPA approach so that the participants could provide their

unique and individual responses on this same topic. Researching COs is not new, but understanding one custody level of the corrections field is relatively new. I used the IPA to explore the unknown details of one particular subset of the data (see Alase, 2017).

Other approaches that I considered for this study included quantitative or qualitative case studies. Quantitative data were not the best fit for this study as the variables being studied are human behavior, interpretations of experiences, and thematic concepts (see Gelo et al., 2008). Case studies were not the best fit, as this approach relies more on a cause-and-effect relationship to answer the *how* and *why* questions of research (see Gelo et al., 2008). I did not examine cause and effect but rather humanistic interpretations of a known phenomenon. Thus, an interpretative phenomenological approach was best for this study and the type of data that I analyzed (see Eatough & Smith, 2017).

The research question that I used to guide this study was: What are the lived experiences of COs who work with dangerous and violent adult male prisoners in a maximum-security environment? I used IPA to identify a phenomenon of interest and gain a better understanding of it via in-depth interviews with participants who had experienced that phenomenon (see Alase, 2017). The biggest time constraint for this design was ensuring that all participants met the criteria of having had at least 1 year of correctional experience working in a maximum security unit. There were no resource constraints for this research design. All the physical resources needed were a free web-based video conferencing platform and my and the participant’s time.

Role of the Researcher

I conducted interviews and analyzed participant responses using the IPA., I sought to understand individual COs' interpretations and experiences of working in maximum security. My role as the researcher was to be able to receive and interpret the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of the participants in my research as they described their experience with the given phenomenon (see O'Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015). To accomplish this goal, I guided the conversation just enough to provide structure and left the participants the opportunity to guide me to topics, thoughts, and experiences that they felt were related and important. I sought to understand the phenomenon by asking open-ended and clarifying questions without inserting my thoughts and opinions (see O'Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015).

Potential Biases

My potential biases in this situation included confirmation bias, because I believed I might already have known the answer to my research question and unknowingly interpreted the data to reflect those results (see Chenail, 2011). To mitigate this bias, I created bias check-ins for myself during the interpretation of the data I received to make sure I was evaluating the data for accurate results and not for the results I thought I would find. I took breaks between data interpretation sessions to get space and review things with a new mindset and purposefully reviewing my findings to ensure that what I was finding was what was present and not what I was hoping was present. I also kept a research journal in which I recorded and organized my observations on the phenomena so that no facts became misinterpreted or lost (see Ortlipp, 2008). Another

potential bias I faced as a researcher was wording bias, which could have led the participant to answer one way versus another (see Chenail, 2011). I mitigated this by purposefully wording my interview questions so that they were direct yet sanitized of potential connotative meanings. Another way I mitigated this was to have my committee review my questions before using them to ensure that my answers did not appear to have a wording or leading bias that I might have missed.

Methodology

Participant Selection

The intended participants for this study included all COs who had worked in a maximum security setting with male inmates for at least 1 year during their career. This included COs who currently work in maximum security or those who no longer do but did for the required time. By doing this I had access to a greater number of COs that were eligible to participate and share their views, but did not include newly hired COs. An exact number of participants was not originally defined for this research. However, IPA research is generally facilitated with fewer participants from whom greater detail is asked about their experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Ensuring that depth, quality of data, and overall saturation were met was prioritized over ensuring a specific numerical target had been met. Six to eight participants have been averaged as an acceptable amount for an IPA study (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). However, I paid attention to the quality of these participant responses and not the total number.

Current research has shown that male prisoners are likelier to be sent to maximum security for disciplinary problems than female prisoners (Cochran et al., 2018). In

addition, there are five times as many male prisons in Washington state than female prisons (Washington State Department of Corrections, 2022). Thus, I focused exclusively on the COs who had worked in adult male prisons to address the prevalence of maximum security in their facilities and pooled a larger number of participants. In addition, male prisoners have been statistically proven to be more violent and more likely to respond to problems with violence than their female counterparts (Wooldredge, 2020). This supported the male-only facility parameters of this study and further supported the exclusion of female facilities with the idea that future researchers could replicate this study at a female prison.

Sampling and Sampling Procedures

I contacted the appropriate Washington State Department of Corrections authority regarding my intent to interview COs who meet a specific requirement (i.e., number of years and maximum custody experience). From there, I had hoped to receive a list of individuals I could contact regarding my intent. I would then email this entire list and re-state the study’s requirements, asking individuals to agree to participate in an interview with me. I would then give the participants my contact information and instructions on contacting me if they wished to participate in this study. Once a participant chose to contact me, I would screen them to ensure they met the basic eligibility criteria before moving forward in the interview process.

Instrumentation

To guide these semistructured interviews, I created a list of questions, which can be found in Appendix A. These questions were open-ended, prompted participant

responses, and were flexible enough to encourage free thought. All answers were accepted in the interview process, but I used this instrument to ensure that the saturation of the topic had been met. I curated the questions to ask about environmental description, identification of demands, interactions with staff and inmates, and officer thoughts and feelings.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection (Primary Data)

Participants were recruited from their written or verbal responses to my email asking for participants. I then ensured they had met the eligibility requirements of having worked in maximum custody for at least 1 year in a male prison. Participants were briefed about the information I was going to ask them to provide, their right to refuse, and my procedures for ensuring anonymity and participant privacy during this process. From there, I also gathered demographic information like total years of experience as a CO and the specific number of years having conducted that work in maximum security. I ensured each participant’s privacy by assigning them a numerical identification instead of using their name.

After identifying participants, I sent them an introductory email outlining the research process's next steps. This email included gratitude for their interest in participating, an outline of the time commitment I was asking of them, and an explanation of what was expected of them in the process, like receiving an electronic invite to meet. I also expressed that their participation was voluntary and private. Both of these items I covered again in the actual interview with them.

Once participants were identified, I sent them an electronic invitation to meet via a web-based video calling application. This link was unique to them and provided a private meeting space for the participant and me to meet. At the very beginning of the meeting, I reiterated my gratitude for their participation and went over their rights as the participant. I also ensured that they knew the interview was recorded by the web-based platform for my transcription purposes. So long as the participant agreed with these conditions, the interview commenced in a semistructured fashion. I guided the conversation to ask about specific topics pertinent to my research but also allowed the participant to speak freely on the subject and guide the conversation to a place that felt natural and not forced.

During these interviews, participants were asked to describe their lived experiences working in this custody setting as it related to working around dangerous and violent adult male prisoners. These interviews were then further analyzed for common themes and concepts that were be used to explain maximum security's impact on those who work within it. These results then guided a scholarly discussion on the conclusions that were drawn from these themes and concepts and additional recommendations for future research and resources targeted to this population.

Once I covered all of my required questions, I closed the interview by thanking the participant for their time and explained the next steps of the process. I gave them a brief overview of my transcription process and how I looked to understand specific themes and topics that emerged during our conversation. From there, the results were compared and contrasted with others and used to formulate my conclusions regarding my

research topic. I ensured that I gave my participants free mental health hotline numbers for dealing with any stress that this study may have invoked and a verbal summary of the interview. I provided the summary of the interview by reviewing my notes with them at the end of our time and summarizing what I wrote down and interpreted of their answers. Providing this opportunity allowed me as the researcher to validate the data I received and allowed for any potential misinterpretations to be corrected before data analysis (see Alase, 2017).

Data Analysis Plan

Through the interview transcriptions and my notes during the process, I coded the data I had. Coding involved condensing my field notes into themes, topics, and thoughts to summarize the data presented (see Deterding & Walters, 2021). Through the coding process, I identified key points that summarized what the participant were saying in response to my questions and then further condensed those thoughts into a bigger picture of themes and topics presented in the interview. This process is best known as primary and secondary codes (Vaughn & Turner, 2016). I used the coding process to pull the richer data from the interviews to the surface and summarize the results related to existing scholarly literature and theories on the topic (see Deterding & Walters, 2021).

The first stage of coding was a deductive process, which entailed looking for common topics and themes in the interviews that were pre-defined in literature and research surrounding this topic (see Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). This was where a thorough analysis of the available literature on my topic was crucial to reference, as the themes, topics, and theories of immediate interest were be outlined in those. From there, I

engaged in an inductive coding process that focused more on themes, theories, and topics that became present to me during the coding process but were not anticipated initially (see Vaughn & Turner, 2016). This level of supplemental coding allowed me to analyze my data in a semistructured way that afforded me the ability to speak on pre-designated topics relevant to my research and introduce any new ideas that came about as a result of the interview as well. My coding was conducted by hand, and I did not utilize any software to ensure continuity in the coding process.

Threats to Validity

Issues of Trustworthiness

Though I tried to control for research validity, I knew there were potential threats to my research. One such threat that would impede the trustworthiness of my data was if participants changed their responses and behaviors during the interview due to being interviewed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This is known as the Hawthorne Effect (Sedgwick & Greenwood, 2015). If the participants were not candid in their answers, this could have potentially impacted the results of my study. In order to mitigate the Hawthorne Effect to the best of my abilities, I reminded my participants that their honesty and candor were of the utmost value to me as a researcher (Sedgwick & Greenwood, 2015).

Dependability

Another potential threat to the validity of my study was the dependability of the results. Dependability relies on the premise that the physical setting and characteristics of the interview do not impact or sway the participants' results in any way (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This could have been seen as a situational effect of recording these interviews

over a web-based platform. A situational effect indicates that some part of the situation causes the participant to act or behave differently due to this external factor (Baldwin, 2018). Knowing that the interview was being recorded added a potential level of skepticism to a population that already suffers from jaded outlooks and innate skepticism of what is presented to them (Carter & Thomson, 2022). Again, this is something that I addressed best verbally via reassuring statements of privacy and anonymity, and I also provided information on how this process was entirely voluntary. If participants were uncomfortable participating, they were not forced to participate. Those participating were informed of their rights and the entire process before answering any questions, which lessened the chances of the situational effect being present (Baldwin, 2018).

Credibility and Transferability

The biggest threat to credibility and transferability that I was selection bias. As I was not selecting the participants for this research personally or via a randomized manner, there was still the possibility that those who volunteered could have provided a disproportionate view of the population I was attempting to study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Those who volunteered to participate may have provided answers that were not proportionally accurate to the population they were speaking for. The best way I could try and mitigate this was by encouraging everyone to participate in my initial introductory email and ensuring that I was not unfairly soliciting individuals more than others. In addition, I addressed this in the limitations of my study, restating that I had made informed decisions on my research based on my available data and that future research should be encouraged to validate my results further.

Confirmability

Finally, the issue of confirmability in my findings was also a potential threat to my study. Confirmability refers to the idea that if another researcher conducted this study after me, they would find similar results to what I found (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The best way to mitigate this was to ensure that I consistently kept my role as the researcher in check and aligned my views with the parameters set forth by that identification. I also ensured that my results were as confirmable as possible to the population I studied by ensuring that my coding techniques were standard for each participant's responses and outlined them clearly and accurately (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethical Procedures

My utmost responsibility was to ensure that all ethical procedures were followed and outlined in my study's informed consent and full participation (Ferreira & Serpa, 2018). Not only did I follow all ethical procedures set forth by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), but I also ensured that I was cognizant and respectful of the challenging topics I was be addressing with this population. I ensured that my participants knew their rights and responsibilities during the process and understood that they could withdraw participation at any point. It was also integral that I respected the participant's boundaries and understood that they may tell me about situations that caused them great distress. I did everything I could to create a welcoming and safe space for these participants to feel the most at ease.

I also understood that privacy and data dissemination were essential topics to my population. I discussed, multiple times during this process, with my participants that their

identities were anonymous and that no personally identifiable information about them was included in my research. I also ensured that they knew my data was securely locked away in a locked container to ensure the confidentiality of their responses and participation.

Summary

This qualitative study employed an interpretive phenomenological approach to understand better the lived experiences of COs who work with dangerous and violent adult male prisoners in maximum security. Semi-Structured interviews were utilized with the population of COs who worked in an all-male prison and have worked in a maximum custody setting for at least a year during their careers. Through these interviews, I was able to ascertain prominent themes, topics, and theories in the responses and therefore draw conclusions based on their presence within the data.

Primary and secondary levels of coding were used to analyze transcriptions of these interviews, including deductive and inductive coding techniques. Participants were aware of their rights, responsibilities, and privacy in the entire process, including in the data transcription phase. All participants were also reminded that their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw their consent anytime. The next chapter will discuss the results of this research and the further implications they represent.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to improve the understanding of COs ' lived experiences working with dangerous and violent adult male prisoners in maximum security. The research question that I used to guide this research was: What are the lived experiences of COs who work with dangerous and violent adult male prisoners in a maximum-security environment? I conducted a qualitative study using semistructured interviews with COs who worked in maximum security for at least 1 year in an all-male facility.

During these interviews, I asked participants various questions about their tasks while working in maximum security and their challenges. I further analyzed these answers for summaries, themes, and concepts. I compared and contrasted these against one another to see the similarities and differences.

In this chapter, I provide a detailed analysis of these interviews and their common themes, concepts, and ideas. In addition, I will outline the differences among the results. Finally, I will conclude this chapter by summarizing the participants' needs and addressing barriers they encountered when doing their jobs. I analyzed the results for recommendations for key stakeholders on how to best support this population, along with recommending what future researchers might address, building off of this study.

Research Setting

I conducted semistructured qualitative interviews over 2 weeks with individuals who all shared the experience of working in a maximum-security setting in a Washington

correctional facility. Five of the seven participants still worked in the corrections field, one had retired, and one had chosen another job. I conducted Zoom interviews at the participant's preferred time due to their unique schedules, limitations, and privacy needs. I conducted the interviews in a quiet and private space to avoid interruptions and asked that the participants did the same. I asked each participant a total of 19 questions.

Officer Demographics

Out of the 19 questions asked in the interviews, the first five questions revolved around gaining a baseline understanding of the participant and maximum security, or intensive management unit (IMU). The participants' work experience in the IMU varied between 4 and 38 years. Their positions included management, relief staff, and full-time IMU officers. These job differences were found to have impacted some of the responses participants later gave, such as how the unit staff received them and how the prisoners received them as well. Five of the seven participants were male and two were women.

Data Collection

Research Advertisement

I contacted the potential partner site multiple times to request access to potential participants but was never provided with an a clear response on accessing this potential population. Thus, my secondary plan was enacted, which included posting a flyer on social media that can be seen in Appendix B. Potential participants were encouraged to message me directly if they felt they met the study requirements and were interested in participating. Shortly after posting the flyer on social media, I began receiving messages from individuals interested in participating.

Selecting Participants

Once potential participants identified themselves, I communicated with them via social media messages to thank them for their expressed desire and ask them for their email. Once an email was provided, I sent a consent form. In reading the consent form entirely, the final instructions led a participant to reply to my email with the words "I consent" if they agreed with the study terms and conditions and felt they met the eligibility criteria. Of the 11 participants who expressed interest, seven were eligible, and seven met both the eligibility criteria and consented to participate in the study. I then reached out to the seven who consented and qualified and scheduled web-based interviews via Zoom that provided the participants with a unique link and passcode to enter the meeting.

Interview Process

Once the Zoom links were established with the participants, I conducted semistructured interviews with the participants that lasted approximately 70 minutes and in which I asked a total of 19 questions, which can be seen in Appendix A. I reminded the participants that their consent was fluid and could be withdrawn anytime. I also verified that they were comfortable with the interview being audio recorded. Closed captioning was turned on in the interview to aid in transcription purposes for the audio data. This created a transcript of the audio in the interview that I was able to revise and edit later for accuracy.

Data Analysis

Upon completing the interviews, I exported the audio recordings and transcriptions to a secure file. I then transferred the transcription of the interviews into a Microsoft Excel document. I then verified the transcription against the audio recordings and made necessary edits and adjustments to correct the closed captioning errors. Upon completing an accurate transcription, I participated in a deductive coding process to initially process my data. Deductive coding entails looking for themes, theories and ideas in the data that were also present in current literature surrounding the topic (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). These were all placed into a column next to the original transcription of the interview and labeled as my primary codes. Vaughn and Turner (2016) recommended starting with primary coding for IPA research to create a foundation of knowledge that is already known about the topic before moving to what is unknown, or less explored. After pulling out these initial codes, I engaged in an inductive coding process and formulated my own themes, theories, and concepts based on the results I saw in the literature. These codes were placed into a second column next to the original transcription to see which pieces of the original audio prompted which codes, thus creating secondary codes. This second round of coding is recommended to further highlight concepts and themes unique to the dataset being analyzed (Vaughn & Turner, 2016).

After completing both rounds of coding, I created a new table, as seen in Appendix C, with the 19 interview questions and a space for each participant's summarized responses. I also color-coded the questions to match the portions of their

interviews that spoke directly to each question. In creating this table that let me see all my data at a glance, I saw commonalities and differences among the seven participant answers. For the commonalities, I highlighted words and phrases in each response that were common to the other terms and phrases in other participant responses to that question. The themes, concepts, and theories resulting from this data coding process will be further discussed in the study results section but can be seen below in Table 1.

Table 1

Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Subtheme A	Subtheme B	Subtheme C	Subtheme D
Challenging Population	Severely mentally ill offenders	Violent and disruptive prisoners	Protective custody placements	Security Threat Group members
Barriers and Challenges	Fast-paced work environment	Mental and physical wear and tear	Heightened responsibilities	
Strong Camaraderie	Shared experiences of violence	Knowing how others will respond		
Dangerous Prisoners	Prisoners who pose a threat to themselves or others	Prisoners who have desires to harm/kill officers	Increased force to gain compliance	
Strong Sense of Self	Good communication	Patience	Mentally and physically fit	
Increased Support for the Future	Better support from administration/management	Increase in mental health resources		

Evidence of Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data collected, I paid particular attention to ensuring the confidentiality of the interviews and reaffirming the participant's rights to withdraw consent at any point if they didn't feel comfortable. As discussed in Chapter 3, I was concerned about the potential impact of the Hawthorne Effect, which meant that

participants might change their responses due to the fact that they were being interviewed (Sedgwick & Greenwood, 2015). Participants seemed candid and honest during the interview, and I reaffirmed their participation intermittently by thanking them for their thorough and candid answers. When asked about their experiences or prompted to go into further description, I found that most of my participants used that opportunity to either share anecdotal information to support their ideas or further expand upon the topic at hand. This leads me to believe that the data collected were rich and trustworthy.

Another potential concern I had in Chapter 3 was looking out for problems with the dependability of the results. Dependability problems would exist if the nature of the interview setting impacted the participants and potentially swayed their answers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To mitigate this potential impact, I informed the participants of the recording process in writing via the consent form and then again verbally before the interviews started to ease any potential skepticism or reluctance they might have. In addition to informing them of the process to show full transparency, I also highlighted that their participation was voluntary and confidential. Providing transparency in the process and reminding the participants of their privacy protection were ways to mitigate the dependability issues of the results (see Baldwin, 2018).

I also paid unique attention to the credibility of the results to ensure that selection bias did not occur. As I sought volunteers instead of randomly choosing individuals, I was concerned about disproportionate viewpoints (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To mitigate this to the best of my abilities, I responded the same way to everyone about their potential interest in the study. I encouraged participation for all, not just some

participants over others. By using stock language to respond to participants, I kept my biases in check and not solicit specific individuals more than others.

The participants in this study provided unique experiences and varied backgrounds that included different positions, varied years of experience, and various interpretations of the same environment. I also followed each interview with a verbal member-checking technique to re-summarize what the participant had told me during the interview. Member checking was a form of credibility assurance to make sure that the responses given by the participants were the same responses I had interpreted in the interview to ensure no researcher bias had occurred (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

To ensure the transferability of the results, Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended that a researcher's data set and data analysis be as detailed as possible so readers can draw the same conclusion that the researcher did. Thus, I provided a lengthy and detailed analysis section of my results, including participant quotes and direct themes from my research. In addition to transparency of results, I will also be addressing further recommendations for the future in Chapter 5 that encourage researchers to replicate this study to ensure validation of the results in this study.

Finally, the issue of confirmability was addressed in Chapter 3 as a potential threat by understanding that if another researcher replicated my study, they would find results similar to mine (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This was mitigated by constantly keeping my own researcher bias in check and routinely referring back to the IRB-approved method of contacting participants and conducting interviews. In addition, I

participated in multiple levels of coding for each participant that were standard across the board and made their responses as clear and accurate as possible.

Study Results

Theme 1: Challenging Population

Each of the seven participants highlighted that the population of IMU included those that were too challenging to keep in any other custody level lower than maximum security. Specifically, IMU housed a majority of prisoners that fit into one or more of the following categories: severely mentally ill, violent and disruptive, protective custody, and Security Threat Group (STG) members. As Participant 2 stated,

> You have every type of inmate. You have your inmate that's scared to be in prison or maybe owes a debt or first-time offender that doesn't wanna be out on mainline. You have a guy that is a continual behavioral problem, your people that are fighters or staff assaulters or all the way up to your mental health that just can't manage in a regular unit.

Many of the participants acknowledged that these categories also existed in lower custody levels but were moved to IMU as they posed a danger to themselves or others and required increased supervision.

Subtheme 1.1: Severely Mentally Ill Offenders

Severely mentally ill offenders were often housed in IMU as a result of their actions causing harm to themselves or others. These included both diagnosed and undiagnosed individuals who required more isolated housing to be able to be dealt with one-on-one. Participants 3 and 5 highlighted that sometimes IMU was used for mentally

ill offenders due to the increased supervision requirements in this custody level. Where other custody levels are required to do a tier check once per hour, maximum custody requires a tier check every thirty minutes to ensure the offender's well-being and the institution's security. Participant 3 expanded on this by stating the severely mentally ill were usually housed in IMU

> “So that no harm comes to people, even themselves. Especially with the nature of IMU having the 30-minute checks as opposed to like in general population, it’s an hour. They get that more frequent visual and verification of wellbeing.”

Thus, closer monitoring of these individuals can be done in IMU instead of a lesser custody level.

A majority of the participants highlighted that the mentally ill were often sent to IMU as a result of not having the resources or abilities to deal with them at a lower level. This included sometimes punitive responses to mental health-prompted issues, like assuming someone refused to do something when they didn’t cognitively comprehend it in the first place. In addition, mental health-related meltdowns and breaking points were sometimes seen as a threat to physical and personal safety for those around, so that these individuals would land in IMU as well. As Participant 1 said, many mental health prisoners went to IMU for things like “refusing a search or threatening staff. And what the cause was from that is debatable. Sometimes it was just their mental illness has gotten to a point where they’re just snapping.”

Many of the participants highlighted that their population had an increased number of mental health prisoners. Still, there was little to no increased mental health

training surrounding how to interact with them. Participant 6 highlighted that they "had a lot of outside training that helps deal with that," when referring to how they worked with mentally ill offenders. Participant 6 disclosed that prior work with mentally ill individuals gave them the tools they used to work with the mentally ill in IMU.

Subtheme 1.2: Violent and Disruptive Prisoners

Six of the seven participants highlighted that IMU houses those who pose a danger to themselves or others and must be removed from a general population setting. The participants further explained this to include suicidal ideation by prisoners, those who got into fights, assaulted staff, or incited others to resist the terms of incarceration. Essentially, this heightened custody level was entirely comprised of those who could not function in a lower custody level. Participant 6 highlighted this unique range of IMU clientele by stating "the deal with IMU is it can be anywhere from our minimum custody offenders clear to the toughest of the toughest." Thus, it was not uncommon for IMU to house every level of prisoner, from minimum to maximum custody. Participant 7 confirmed this by speaking in detail about how prisoners of all varieties could find themselves in IMU:

> "they might be in for a small crime on the outside. But then they get in, they get into gangs, they get into possibly drugs, and they kind of get in the political garbage system of prison. And they end up getting in fights, they end up making threats, they end up maybe trying to commit suicide. So when those things happen, they kinda, they don't really have the ability to live in general population."

Thus, IMU becomes the facility's receptacle for violent and disruptive people when these prisoners don't have the choice of living anywhere else due to their own actions.

Due to the restrictive nature of the IMU setting, this housing was deemed necessary for many of the institution's violent and disruptive prisoners. Many of the participants highlighted that this setting would isolate the problem behaviors and restrict their access to harming themselves or others with increased supervision and restrictions. However, it also created an environment built on a disproportionate number of violent and disruptive prisoners that lower custody level staff did not have to deal with. As many prisoners get sent to jail or prison for their crimes, IMU was often the prison within the prison. Participant 4 spoke about how prisoners would go to IMU for doing something

> "In that level of offense that it could be, it would be a crime on the streets or is considered a crime. Attempted escape, attempted murder, murder, drugs, high level drugs-you know, production or distribution, and they've been able to prove stuff like that."

Subtheme 1.3: Protective Custody Placements

IMU was also defined as a safe harbor for those who needed protection. These were further defined as those who could not safely operate and survive in a lower custody level due to an increase in violence towards them. Some protective custody placements would be for those who were scared for their safety and voluntarily requested isolation from the general population. The administration would also place others there for notoriety reasons, crime severity, or heightened status in the gang hierarchies. Participant 4 spoke about some prisoners could be restricted to IMU because:

"they've been convicted of such a heinous crime on the streets that they can't work, they can't be in population, up to and including the death penalty, previous penalty inmates, Green River Killer, for instance. Those people can't safely exist in population. Even if we wanted to release them in the population they would probably be harmed pretty quickly."

IMU exists as a space to protect the vulnerable just as much as it exists to house the disruptive individuals. Their residency here could be voluntarily requested or mandated, depending on circumstances.

Subtheme 1.4: Security Threat Group Members

Another common constituent of IMU includes Security Threat Group (STG) members, who are members of a gang within a prison setting. STG members could find themselves in IMU for carrying out plans of violence that they were tasked with, creating racial wars, or participating in other illicit activities to accomplish the goals of the gang. High-ranking gang officials could also fall into the protective custody placement, as their lives could be in jeopardy when housed around other rival gang members. Participant 3 added to the complexity of STG members in IMU by stating that some "get wrapped up in some of the prison security threat groups and behave in ways that they just need to be removed from the group for a while to reduce their participation."

Participant 1 emphasized that STG affiliation could often change the racial makeup of IMU prisoners at any given time. For example, if large physical altercations happened between races, those individuals would go to IMU for disciplinary reasons. Now, the IMU staff that works around these individuals has to deal with a

disproportionate number of STG clientele whose gang ties could still influence potential opposition to segregation. Participant 1 spoke about a time where IMU had a

> "Very large clientele of one race. Like the Aryan race would come into segregation because they get in major fights. And when they were all in segregation together, it was a lot of uses of force because of them refusing everything." Their STG affiliation did not end when they got to IMU, but instead worsened their behaviors while there in order to show loyalty to their STG.

Theme 2: Barriers and Challenges

When discussing barriers and challenges in IMU, participants spoke about various factors like a fast-paced work environment, physically and mentally demanding on the officers, more laborious than other custody levels, and increased responsibilities. Participant 6 highlighted that "there's nothing in IMU that isn't really difficult," which further supports the idea that IMU is riddled with challenges and barriers for the officers. Not all of the barriers had negative impacts on individuals, though, as Participant 2 stated that "what some people think would be a bad day makes the days interesting and different from the typical day." Participant reception to the challenges varied, but their identification of what constituted challenges was comparable.

Subtheme 2.1: Fast Paced Work Environment

Many participants highlighted that IMU had a vast number of tasks to complete and only a little time to complete them, making for a hectic day. Time was a constant barrier in IMU, as many daily tasks hinged on successfully creating and adhering to a schedule. However, the schedule they would strive for would often get thrown off, and

the officers were expected to adapt on the fly. Things listed as throwing off the schedule included emergencies in other parts of the prison, needing to escort staff and visitors at the last minute, and prisoner disruptions that required deviation from the schedule to deal with their immediate issues. Participant 4 gave an example of that by stating “there will be inevitably somebody, unless it’s a weekend, somebody will come in and say they need to interview somebody.” The need of this interviewer then becomes the officer’s duty as they have to get the prisoner, escort them to the interview, and remain with them. The duties of the officer do not end with these interruptions, but instead shift into later in their schedule.

The fast-paced work environment was enjoyed by many of the participants due to it helping their workday go by quickly. However, they acknowledged that it was still a challenge, nonetheless. Participant 2 spoke about how it had to be busy for officers, as

> “these men can’t get up and just go get what they need. So, it’s you running and going and getting it. And you have, you know, 33 people wanting something, trying to remember what that guy in A1 wanted and the guy in B5 wanted and oh yeah that guy over there wanted this, and trying to remember all that stuff in one trip.”

Aside from their tasks being stacked up, many participants spoke about how the prisoners also wanted to avoid the schedule getting behind either. When the schedule got thrown off, the prisoners were also delayed in receiving their services and would often experience anxiety because of this disruption in the routine nature of IMU.

Subtheme 2.2: Mental and Physical Wear and Tear

Many participants highlighted that IMU was built structurally sound concerning the secure nature of the environment, involving a lot of hard concrete and stairs. This was highlighted as a challenge for those who needed to be physically fit and used to climbing stairs and walking for long periods. Some participants highlighted it as a bonus, stating that they were "paid to work out," but also acknowledged that it was a unique barrier to this custody level that other custody levels did not have as much of. Participant 5 recalled that when working in IMU, they put in "between five and seven miles a day" on foot.

Specifically, all seven participants spoke about the physicality of the job in regards to feeding the incarcerated. The participants talked about how they were asked to carry many warm food trays up the stairs with a partner, open a wicket on the prisoner's door, and hand food through without spilling or dropping anything. This would have to be repeated multiple times, as there were often more trays to go out than could be carried in one trip. Participant 2 highlighted that one time they were physically injured when trying to serve food in IMU, stating that "I was carrying some trays to go serve chow, and I hit a post and fell really hard on the floor and I was trying to save trays so I got hurt." This was further enhanced by Participant 3's response about how there are actually elevators in IMU that were "originally put in to move the food carts-the type of food carts that never wound up being utilized in that building. And so then they decommissioned elevators, and we couldn't use them." The lack of being able to use resources to aid in the physicality of this job was highlighted as a significant barrier.

In addition to the physical wear and tear that IMU takes on the body, many of the participants also highlighted the mental ramification as well. For some of the participants, this was centered around not feeling heard or seen by the administration for their job. Some participants highlighted that their jobs were uniquely challenging because they dealt with the heightened number of behavioral problems in IMU, and they didn't feel that management or administration truly understood what they did in a day. In addition, examples were shared about how the administration would fail to recognize unique challenges in IMU, good work done by officers, or hear their complaints when they arose.

For other participants, it was dealing with prisoner attitudes and threats to their safety that took the most significant toll on their mental health. Some participants shared this as the idea that they were constantly dealing with people on their "worst days" and only being surrounded by negativity and hostility. Others highlighted the fact that they still had to ensure the well-being of prisoners who would hurl insults, threaten their lives, and try to assault them physically. Manipulation tactics were also mentioned as a form of mental strain caused by the prisoners. Participant 7 highlighted that many prisoners would "push your buttons to see what they can get away with" constantly.

Subtheme 2.3: Heightened Responsibilities

In IMU, officers are not only in the unique position of having to monitor prisoner behavior for disciplinary reasons but are also the primary caretakers of these individuals. As the heightened security of IMU dictates that prisoners cannot leave their cells without an escort, officers are quite literally tasked with a two-to-one officer-to-prisoner ratio any

time that prisoner leaves their cell. In addition to taking them everywhere they need to go, officers are responsible for providing all prisoners with their basic amenities. This means getting them laundry, food, toilet paper, etc. It also includes ensuring that they take them to their recreational area, take them to their medical appointments, and take them to their showers as well. Participant 6 highlighted that their routine tier checks were

> "also a common time when an inmate says 'I need toilet paper,' or 'if you have time, can I get a book?' There's always something, grievances come up for their complaints. Anytime we're doing a tier check, somebody's asking for something." There is no place a prisoner goes without an officer being present, and there are very few items a prisoner gets that an officer doesn't have to provide.

The participants described the average IMU schedule as comprising nearly entirely of prisoner movement and need. Providing prisoners with their right to shower and use the yard, mixed with all other escorting and security responsibilities, takes an entire eight-hour shift, if not more. As Participant 4 brought up, "a good day would be when you're done with your yards and showers before the next shift comes on," and you don't leave any extra work for them. As it is, that shift will also be tasked with providing mail, books, and other nightly amenities to the prisoners, along with the escorts they must provide as well.

In addition to providing basic amenities, officers are also responsible for the prisoner's well-being in IMU in a unique way. The two required tier checks an hour are not just for security purposes but also for health and wellness reasons. As many suicidal

prisoners are put into IMU, this is another significant part of the officer's responsibilities when working in this unit. Officers must ensure the physical well-being of the prisoners just as much as the physical well-being of the building and related resources. This often makes officers in IMU the first responders to everything because there are no other people to help triage these concerns.

Even when responding to emergencies of self-harm or suicide attempts, IMU officers still have to be wary of their security responsibilities as well. A couple of the participants highlighted that prisoners would purposefully cover their cell windows to prevent officers from visually seeing their well-being or commit acts of self-harm on purpose to get officer attention. It is a known consequence that officers must enter that cell if a prisoner’s well-being cannot be verified or is in jeopardy. Participant 3 gave an example of the severity of rules not being followed in IMU if

> “Prisoners covered up their windows and refuse to be seen, we have to verify their wellbeing. They’re not making it to where we can see them. We don’t know what’s going on, so that’s when we would get a good team assembled.”

Some of the participants highlighted that not only were these situations stressful, but they were more frequently used in this environment than any other custody level.

Theme 3: Strong Camaraderie

All seven participants spoke about how their relationships with their coworkers were strong. Many participants talked about how the fellow officers they worked with in IMU were very tight-knit. Examples were given about hosting celebrations to support

their coworker's successes and even meeting up outside of work to bond on a more personal level. Participant 2 recollected:

> "my crew was a really good crew and I loved them like we were family. I broke up with a boyfriend and they all took me out afterwards to try to cheer me up. Or, you know, somebody had a baby and we celebrated and had a little makeshift baby shower for him there at work-it was one of the dads in IMU. You know, Christmas and Thanksgiving there was so much food there. You could have fed the whole institution. It's just kind of your family."

This theme of camaraderie ran deep through many of the responses given by participants. Some participants also spoke about the challenges to being accepted by this tight-knit crew, like being a full-time staff member in IMU or proving yourself.

However, despite the challenges highlighted, all seven participants had positive things to say about their relationships with fellow officers. As a relief officer, Participant 4 stated that he "wouldn't have been invited back to IMU if my relationship with the officer sucked, even though my abilities were great." Thus, camaraderie with coworkers was seen as absolutely vital to succeeding in working in IMU.

Subtheme 3.1: Shared Experience of Violence

Given that the IMU officers worked in a uniquely challenging environment, the participants highlighted stressors they encountered more frequently than their coworkers in lower custody levels. One of the most common shared experiences the participants brought up was prisoner violence towards officers. As IMU receives prisoners from all custody levels who pose a threat to themselves or others, the majority of the population in

IMU is severely swayed. These same individuals who can verbally berate and harass staff with their threats and attempts to harm them are more frequent in this custody level than any other. Thus, many of the participants spoke about how they could bond with their coworkers over this stressor to process it.

Participants 1 and 3 spoke about developing a macabre sense of humor with coworkers to help process traumatic events they regularly dealt with. Participant 1 phrased that "it tends to build a bond between the team. And we crack a lot of humor- that's how we stayed sane in IMU and Seg, when I was there, is having a sense of humor, joking about the crazy stuff." These sentiments were further echoed by other participants who also agreed that their coworkers were the first people to help them process the violence they encountered on a near regular basis. Their shared experiences further added to their camaraderie.

Subtheme 3.2: Knowing How Others Will Respond

Another critical factor to the shared camaraderie of IMU officers was learning how their coworkers responded to stressors in the work environment. Many participants highlighted that IMU officers could often appear cliquish to others around them and be picky about letting others into their inner circle. The pickiness was further explained as knowing who they could trust to respond to stressors in a way that their partners felt was safe and accurate. Participant 3 highlighted that understanding how a person responds to stress helped them better understand that person's character. They stated that "you're kinda bonding more with people in a highly stressful environment. And you're really able to see kind of how people react and what they're about."

Other participants also mentioned that loyalty increased when officers saw that others responded to stressors as they did. Participant 7 spoke about gaining access to the tight-knit camaraderie of IMU officers by stating:

> "you're untested is part of the problem. They want to know that if something happens, are you going to be able to respond in a way that protects the officers that keeps people from getting hurt? And kind of until you prove that you're kind of always on the outside looking in."

The idea that better interpersonal relationships existed as a part of doing right by your coworkers was a common response from many participants. Safety and security were promoted not just in the physical environment of IMU but also in the interpersonal relationships of coworkers.

Theme 4: Dangerous Prisoners

Many of the participants described a bad day in IMU as an increase in dangerous behavior and the lethality of the tasks that they had to perform to maintain the homeostasis of the unit. Three of the seven officers highlighted that prisoners smearing bodily fluids like urine, feces, and spit in their cells would intensify their bad day, as the officers then had to remove the prisoner from that cell and expose themselves to these bodily fluids in cell entry and cleanup procedures. In addition to bodily fluids being present in the cells, the participants also highlighted that bodily fluids could be used as a form of staff assault by throwing them out of the wicket when officers went to serve food or move a prisoner. Participant 1 affirmed this when stating "what a lot of assaults are is

incarcerated throwing, spitting, spitting urine on people, throwing feces on people," highlighting the increase in usage of bodily fluids as biological weapons towards staff.

Being assaulted was brought up by participants as not being an option in their day but an expectation. Be it bodily fluids or physical displays of violence, these officers stated that these acts increased when they had to respond to disruptive behavior and enter prisoner cells to gain their compliance. Cell entries to gain physical compliance of an individual who has harmed himself or the space he is in were referred to as "uses of force" and were said to be more common in this custody level than any other custody level in the prison. Participant 4 recollected a time when

> "An inmate barricades himself in a day room. He's a janitor, he's broken off a broomstick, so he's got two sharpened ends and he's sprayed baby oil on the floor so you, when you come in, you're gonna trip and fall, slip and he's gonna try to stab you. I was there for those."

Increased uses of force were often referred to as bad days among many of the participants due to the risk it puts them at.

Subtheme 4.1: Prisoners Who Pose a Threat to Themselves or Others

Many participants spoke about how IMU was the disciplinary setting for prison and would house all the individuals who posed a threat to themselves or others in other custody levels. This further increases the number of dangerous individuals in one custody setting and makes IMU imbalanced in terms of behavioral issues. This imbalance alone creates a greater danger to officers, as their primary constituents of this custody level

have histories of danger and violence. Prisoners like this are often ones who've gotten into fights, assaulted others, or tried to harm themselves.

When asked to expand upon their interactions with dangerous prisoners, Participant 7 stated that "you don't always know danger by looking at it," explaining further that dangerous prisoners didn't look any different than non-dangerous prisoners. It was not always something easily identifiable if an officer didn't know the prisoner and their history. Participant 7 expanded on that idea further by stating "you got the whole spectrum and you have to treat them all as if they're the most dangerous person in the room because they will always rise to that common denominator." Other participants echoed those statements by affirming that IMU required all prisoners to be treated as the most dangerous individuals simply because some of them indeed were.

Subtheme 4.2: Prisoners Who Have Desires to Harm/Kill Officers

Three of the seven participants all spoke about how they routinely had to work around prisoners who expressed goals of killing an officer. Participant 6 expanded upon this by stating that the prisoner they worked around had "no problem saying that at some point he will do it. He's had multiple very serious staff assaults, has used weapons against staff and injured two pretty badly with a metal piece out of the cell." Not only did other officers share these experiences of violence expressed towards them, but others had encountered some of the violence as well.

Participant 5 expressed that they had to routinely work with a prisoner who made it clear that their goal was to hurt them. As Participant 5 stated

> "He is hell bent on hurting people. I mean, that's his reason for waking up in the morning. And he's very organized in his thoughts to where he knows when he's gonna have an opportunity. And very commonly, he'll use them every time."

When asked about how these participants dealt with prisoners who openly wished them harm, all three expressed that they did their best to treat them like everyone else. However, they also said that their levels of awareness and hypervigilance would also increase with individuals they knew were threats. In addition, many participants said they would stay in this hypervigilant state for most of their shift, as they knew that others wished them harm, even if they weren't as vocal about their intentions.

Subtheme 4.3: Increased Force to Gain Compliance

As many of the officers had to work with highly dangerous prisoners, one of the most common ways to gain control of the situation was to exert force on the prisoner to encourage physical compliance. Many of the participants expressed that the number of uses of force was higher in IMU than any other custody level due to the behavioral management problems this custody setting had and the heightened level of threat these prisoners represented. Verbal tactics were always used to try and gain compliance first, but the lack of success with those was met by the officer's necessity to use force on a prisoner.

Uses of force not only applied physical force to the prisoners but also meant that many of the officers would be recipients of force as well. As Participant 1 phrased, "getting hit, getting kicked, that happens during a use of force. That's, you know, we can deal with that." The understanding that prisoners would react poorly to uses of force

meant that officers would also likely be injured in the process. Thus, the anticipation of being injured when dealing with a dangerous prisoner was not a matter of “if” but instead of “when.” Participant 2 affirmed this in their response by stating “we know that there’s people in there that if, when we pull them out, it’s going to be an assault.” Many participant interviews affirmed these types of interactions as typical for the clientele they dealt with in IMU.

Theme 5: Strong Sense of Self

Many participants brought up that officers had to have a particular set of qualities to survive and adequately accomplish their duties in IMU. Some of these qualities included being a good communicator, patient, and able to handle their job mentally and physically. In possessing these helpful qualities, an officer would not only be able to do their job, but to do it well. Doing it well was further defined by the participants as doing a quality job and handling problems at the lowest level possible, so they did not become more significant. Participant 6 spoke about the longer-term impact of the interactions officers have with prisoners, stating

> “people forget that these inmates are still inmates. They will get out of IMU and there will not be a door or glass between you and them. And then unfortunately some people get too comfortable and tend to forget that. These guys don’t forget what you said or how you said it and you’ll be out on what we call mainline when they get out of IMU and you’re face to face with them. So, it takes a cool and calm headed person to get the inmates what they need, but that’s what they get.

> You, you can’t go too soft and give them everything they want and you can’t be a total ass and give them nothing.”

Walking a fine line between enforcing the rules and not making life unduly hard was attributed by many of the officers as being a product of having a strong sense of self as an officer.

Subtheme 5.1: Good Communication

One of the most common qualities discussed by the participants was that an officer needed to have good communication skills. If they were not able to verbally interact with prisoners in such a way that would help de-escalate their negative behavior, they were not deemed as successful as officers who were. Verbal communication skills were often stated as the first means of solving a problem and an opportunity for officers to triage a concern before it became something that later required a use of force. Participant 1 attributed a lot of their success to having good social skills and stating that communication was integral to success in IMU in general. Participant 1 highlighted that

> “anybody can hand them a mop. Anybody can hand them a tray. But communication with the individuals, I’m de-escalating stuff when they get upset about, angry about something. The good staff members are the ones that will take the time to try to de-escalate to a certain point.”

Participants explained some excellent communication skills, such as being honest, fair, and consistent in their answers. The participants acknowledged that the prisoners may not always like the officer's answers. However, if they were honest, fair, and consistent, they would usually respect the answer and the officer who gave it to them.

This would help further build the rapport between prisoners and officers in this environment. A good rapport established through positive verbal communication was also something that would encourage compliance at later periods when needed.

When officers used their communication skills negatively, they tended to get negative results from the prisoners. Many participants referred to this as "spinning an inmate up" and explained it as when an officer would talk poorly or disrespectfully to a prisoner just to get a reaction from them. Participant 2 highlighted that one of their previous coworkers chose this harmful communication method and got Participant 2 assaulted when the prisoner had meant to hit their partner. Participant 2 stated "I got thrown on once and it was honestly because of my partner. He had been just antagonizing this guy all day long." Poor officer communication skills not only stalled current problems for prisoners but could potentially create new ones for staff that wasn't even directly involved in the situation.

Subtheme 5.2: Patience

The participants routinely brought up patience as an essential quality for officers to have as there were constant competing priorities an officer faces in IMU. As Participant 6 highlighted, "IMU will teach you patience. Nothing happens fast, but everything has to be done," insinuating that patience was pivotal for success in this setting. As important as a routine and schedule were to success, many of the participants also confirmed that the schedule would routinely get thrown off, and they would be expected to adapt quickly. According to the participants, failure to accept the changes and be patient with the process increased frustration levels in officers.

Subtheme 5.3: Mentally and Physically Fit

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the physicality of IMU was one of the challenges that made it a unique setting. Thus, many participants echoed these sentiments in their responses to the qualities needed to succeed in this setting. Officers needed to be physically fit enough to accomplish their duties without hurting themselves or slowing down the process. Participants also highlighted the fast-paced nature as playing into the importance of being physically fit and able to move quickly from task to task. Participant 5 recalled that "when step things first came out, step counters. Step trackers. People were going-those that had them-were on between five and seven miles a day." The mileage an officer would put in just performing their daily duties spoke to the high physicality in this environment.

In addition to physical fitness, mental toughness was highlighted as necessary in this environment. Many participants stated that officers needed to have a strong sense of self to not lose that part of themselves in this environment. This would help them avoid being burnt out, manipulated, and compromised. The participants highlighted various examples of prisoners berating them, being upset at the authority they represent, and attacking their character as part of the challenges officers routinely see in this environment. Participant 4 stated that

> "you have to be, have self-control. I'm a Christian, but even then I believed that you know, you have to be a better person and not act like a better person around people who are having or had more trouble in life. You have to be a better person

when you speak to somebody because you'll bring the better person out of them if you can."

Thus, many participants stated that an officer needed to be able to let things go and not take things personally in this environment to preserve their own mental sanity and that of those around them.

Theme 6: Increased Support for the Future

When asked about what changes could be made to improve their jobs as officers in IMU in the future, four of the seven participants highlighted common themes of support. This support ranged from support from administration and direct management to additional resources for mental health presence in IMU. Many participants highlighted changes that had already occurred in the IMU setting that had made their jobs better and safer from previous times. Participant 1 gave an example of this by highlighting "our IMUs are even built better than I mean, way better, than our segregation was as far as being safe for staff. Our new IMUs are way safer than segregation." Many participants acknowledged that positive change was happening, however, these were still common spots that many participants felt could be improved for even greater future success.

Subtheme 6.1: Better Support from Administration/Management

Being seen and recognized for their work in this unique setting was the basis of many of the participant's responses on support from the administration. However, this was further expanded by suggesting that management encourage collaboration and teamwork instead of adding to division or hostility between coworkers. Supporting teamwork and collaboration was recommended by three participants as the administration

pairing up senior staff with new staff and providing more direct guidance. Essentially, those more familiar with the IMU environment would be encouraged to share their experiences with those new to the IMU environment to supplement the formalized training they already receive further. Participant 2 remembered this best as a coaching program that required being “paired up with senior staff and they would work through this book with me and I would have to demonstrate different skills.” These skills could be everything from verbal communication skills to restraint application procedures.

Many of the participants also felt that improving their peers' collaborative training would also improve IMU's overall safety. Participants 2, 3, and 5 spoke about how properly trained coworkers created fewer safety problems than those without pertinent guidance. As IMU is the highest of all security levels and works with some of the prison’s most dangerous individuals, these three participants felt that increased training should accompany the administration’s training techniques for newly hired officers in that unit to promote further safety for all. Participant 7 highlighted the risk of new staff not being well trained when saying “you get a lot of new people put in there, which compromises the safety because you don’t know if they’re trustworthy. You don’t know if they’re gonna be able to handle themselves or if they’re mentally tough.” Being new, paired with a lack of training were identified as some key areas needing greater support.

In addition to administrative support, many of the participants also highlighted that more significant mental health resources were needed for the prisoners in IMU. A couple of participants spoke about how mental health departmental staffing used to

operate 24/7 in IMU and was able to accompany officers with clear mental health-related problems. Participant 2 recalled that

> "we had a third shift mental health person. And we are very fortunate for that. But there was only one of them, sometimes two, and they can't be in all of those places. So, officers would step up and try to dialogue with the offenders to try to get them to calm down because once one starts yelling, they get everybody riled up in there."

These participants also highlighted that around the clock mental health care is no longer the case, and they'd like to see this come back to help further support the prisoners and the officers in charge of their care. Currently, officers are being asked to respond to mental health-related problems with inadequate training and punitive responses. Many participants felt that these problems would be more adequately responded to with people with the level of training needed to interpret and triage them.

Additional mental health personnel and mental health resources for the prisoners were listed as two of the greatest resources both prisoners and officers currently needed. These resources would then increase the quality of care the prisoner received and take some of the burden off the officer. In addition, many of the participants highlighted that it would further help differentiate behavioral problems from mental illness problems in the population of prisoners.

Summary

As a result of the seven semistructured interviews with these participants, I found multiple common themes that helped summarize the experiences of these officers. Many

of the officers spoke about IMU as a challenging yet rewarding environment filled with unique barriers and individuals that other custody levels didn't have. In addition, the people they worked with were usually some of their strongest professional bonds, as these individuals shared the same experiences they had of violence and responding to stressors. Looking to the future, many participants suggested further support was needed from the administration and mental health staff to continue doing their jobs to the best of their abilities. The next chapter will go further in-depth, interpreting these findings, stating the study's limitations, and making recommendations for the future.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

In this study, I examined the lived experiences of COs who worked with dangerous and violent adult male prisoners in a maximum-security custody setting. Maximum security is the highest of security levels within a prison and has the most restrictions for prisoners and officers alike (Maghan, 1999). Prisoners go to maximum security for behavior that generally poses a threat to themselves or others (Cihan & Sorensen, 2019). There was a gap in the literature about the lived experiences of the officers who worked in maximum security. I explored this gap by using an IPA approach and conducting semi structured interviews with seven officers who have worked in maximum security. The research question that I used in this study was: What are the lived experiences of COs who work with dangerous and violent adult male prisoners in a maximum-security environment?

By interviewing these seven participants about their experiences in an IMU setting, six themes emerged: challenging population, barriers and challenges, strong camaraderie, dangerous prisoners, a strong sense of self, and increased support for the future. As a result of these six themes emerging, 17 subthemes also emerged: severely mentally ill offenders, violent and disruptive prisoners, protective custody placements, security threat group members (STG), fast-paced work environment, mental and physical wear and tear, heightened responsibilities, shared experiences of violence, knowing how others will respond, prisoners who pose a threat to themselves or others, prisoners who have desires to harm/kill officers, increased force to gain compliance, good

communication, patience, mentally and physically fit, better support from administration/management and an increase in mental health resources. In this chapter, I will further interpret these themes and subthemes by connecting them to existing literature and applying them to recommendations for the future.

Interpretation of Findings

In my study, I found a total of six major themes that related to COs and their experiences working in a maximum-security prison setting with dangerous adult male prisoners.

Officer Responsibilities in Relation to Barriers and Challenges

Current research has shown that maximum custody officers are usually responsible for most prisoner needs, requests, and essential services (Ferdik, 2016). I further confirmed those results by highlighting that the officers are providers of every service the incarcerated need in this population due to the restricted nature of the prisoner movement schedules and liberties. Participants expanded upon this by identifying the toll it took on them as officers to provide every basic service to everybody in their care. Officers at this custody level are charged with everything from providing food and personal hygiene products to physically standing by a shower while a prisoner uses a razor to ensure no dangerous or prohibited acts occur with this essential device (Lovell et al., 2020).

The corrections profession is physically and emotionally demanding (de Magalhães Bezerra et al., 2016). Participants further supported this concept by describing the working conditions in maximum security as fast-paced, consistent walking on

concrete floors and scaling flights of stairs. Many participants stated that a successful officer in this setting needs to like to work and be physically able to accomplish the necessary tasks. The results of this study expand upon the current understanding of what physical and emotional demand looks like by highlighting specific tasks that officers are asked to complete in this setting.

Threats to Officer Safety in Relation to Dangerous Prisoners

The existing literature on COs in maximum security supports the idea that these officers are consistently around the most dangerous and violent prisoners (Ferdik, 2016). I addressed the gap in understanding about officers' perspectives. The participants highlighted the increased level of awareness they had to sustain for lengthy periods to work with this unique population. Participants also further expanded on the fact that assaultive behavior aimed towards them from the prisoners was an expectation in this environment due to the clientele. Prisoners who assault staff are generally sent to maximum security as part of their punishment and make up a certain percentage of the population in this custody level (Lahm, 2009).

Participants further expanded on the constant threat they encountered by identifying the potential ways prisoners could harm them, both physically and verbally. One participant highlighted the continuous verbal abuse they would endure from prisoners who still relied upon them for the delivery of their basic services. Other participant responses enhanced this sentiment, showing that they were also wary of the bodily fluids that sometimes accompanied these verbal insults. A few participants spoke about the presence of urine, feces, and other bodily fluids that would be thrown at them

by the prisoners who were unhappy with their current situations. Participants also spoke on another theme that was consistent in current literature, supporting the idea that those with poor interpersonal communications with prisoners were at a greater risk for these assaults than others who attempted to have more positive social interactions with the prisoners. Officers who interacted respectfully with prisoners were generally more likely to be treated with respect and those that interacted disrespectfully were more likely to have that demeanor matched (Steiner & Wooldredge, 2017).

One participant spoke openly about the fact that officers must treat all the prisoners as if they were the most dangerous individual because they could be more assured that a prisoner would prove them right than prove them wrong. This idea of both physical and nonphysical danger supports current research that suggests part of the toll danger takes is in the idea of what could happen just as much as it is in the reality of what does happen (de Magalhães Bezerra et al., 2016). Lethality was also discussed by many of the participants, expanding upon interpersonal interactions with prisoners who openly phrased their desires to harm and kill staff. Many of the participants spoke about individuals in maximum security who have personal goals to kill an officer during their incarceration. The severity of the potential danger officers face heightens the toll it takes on individual officers (Ferdik, 2016). My findings increased information about the depth of information available regarding the violence and danger these officers constantly face in this particular custody setting.

Profiling Danger in Relation to Challenging Population

Current literature surrounding descriptions of dangerous prisoners suggests it can be challenging to pinpoint the exact characteristics that make a person dangerous (McGuire, 2018). However, many indicators such as age, history of violence, and being gang-affiliated have been linked as common characteristics of violent prisoners (McGuire, 2018). The participants added to this by describing the type of prisoners housed in a maximum-security setting and institutionally deemed as being the most dangerous and violent. These prisoners were described as being severely mentally ill, those with histories of violence and disruption, victims of violence, and STG (prison gang) members. These in-depth descriptions of the common clientele in maximum security affirm the idea that a history of violence and gang affiliation impacted the labeling of what violence looks like in prison. However, I also expanded upon what violence and danger look like in terms of what types of prisoners most commonly go to a maximum-security custody setting.

I deduced that those sent to maximum security were there due to being a threat to themselves or others. Risk level for officers rises as custody levels for prisoners rise (Ferdik, 2016). Participants in this study spoke about how danger could look overt, like the prisoners who routinely try to harm staff any chance they get. However, they also highlighted that danger could look innocent and appear from an unlikely prisoner when the opportunity struck. Participants highlighted that one of the best ways to reduce danger was to control the situation and prisoner routine as much as possible by implementing extra security measures and procedures.

Officer Stress, Trauma, and Burnout in Relation to Strong Camaraderie

COs routinely work in a highly stressful environment with unique dangers and safety threats (de Magalhães Bezerra et al., 2016). These implications for their stress, trauma, and burnout rates can be dramatically impacted by their coping abilities, or lack thereof (Taylor & Swartz, 2021). The participants in this study provided further information to support this concept by explaining that their camaraderie with other officers flourished in a stressful environment. The fact that their fellow officers had the same experiences they did made them feel heard, understood, and appreciated. In addition, these participants explored further topics related to camaraderie, like trust and acceptance of individuals who respond to stress similarly to them.

A couple of participants expanded upon the ideas of trust and acceptance by stating that the regular group of officers in a maximum-security setting could be very picky about who they worked with and why. When their normal staffing was not there, they explained that they could be wary and increasingly more stressed, as they didn't know how somebody new in this environment might think, act, or respond to the stressors they encountered. In addition, they did not know if that person would support them the way they needed in a crisis either. The results of this study showed that a strong sense of trust and security had to be fostered between coworkers to feel safer in this dangerous environment.

Stigmatization of Support in Relation to Increased Support for the Future

Working in a highly dangerous and unique environment does not generally allow COs to find many people outside their profession who can fully understand what they do

(Suliman & Einat, 2018). The participants in this study supported this concept by explaining that the isolation they felt could also exist within their own ranks. Participants stated that they experienced isolation because management and administrators who did not grasp the depth of their work.

Multiple participants described how the support they needed for future success could be first found within their own administration. They highlighted things such as pairing up senior staff members with new members, embracing a coaching mentality, and having management listen to officer recommendations more. Greater acceptance of support for officers and the challenges they encounter is a progressive way to prevent burnout and keep staff safer (Senol-Durak et al., 2021). The results of this study showed that internal support would be as impactful as external support.

Us Versus Them in Relation to Strong Sense of Self

The stigmatization in corrections that officers represent authority has routinely challenged positive interpersonal interactions with prisoners (Cooke et al., 2019). A divide between officers and prisoners fractures compliance and increases the force level to regain compliance (McNeeley & Donley, 2021). Participants spoke about how the anger and hatred they often encountered could be attributed to their uniform more than who they were as people. Participants further described that understanding the difference was often difficult and draining.

The results of this study indicated that a successful officer in maximum security had to have a strong sense of self, good communication skills, and patience to survive. In addition, they also had to be mentally fit to endure the structural demands and mental

strain this conflict with prisoners could create. One participant highlighted the fact that prisoners were routinely trying to manipulate officers at the lowest level possible to control the department that was controlling them. This highlight also warned new staff members to be wary of even the most straightforward interactions with a prisoner. This theme of division between officers and prisoners is present in current literature, but only generally. I expanded upon that theme by showing how the division grows stronger in maximum security, where prisoners can feel beholden to officer schedules and abilities to provide for them.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations to this study were discussed in Chapter 1 as barriers to collecting primary data, ensuring a clear separation of my role as a researcher and officers potentially being resistant to participating fully. I did encounter resistance to my prior attempts to partner with a Washington correctional facility to seek out participants. The secondary plan of utilizing social media as a recruitment tool was enacted and was successful in garnering participants, but it has its limitations. The participant pool for this study represented a broad range of years of experience and timeframes of employment, which may not be generalizable to all Washington State COs currently working within a maximum-security setting. To provide as accurate of a representative sample as possible, all participants were screened to meet basic eligibility criteria that included at least a year of maximum-custody officer experience.

The sample size for this population was relatively small, only including seven participants. This small of a population cannot be generalized to the entire state of

Washington and can only speak to officers with maximum custody experience in a specific part of Washington State. Utilizing seven participants was applicable for this study, as this study relied upon an IPA approach that focused on cultivating smaller datasets with richer information (Alase, 2017). As common themes and conclusions could be drawn from the responses in this sample size, and no new information was presented in the last couple of interviews, data saturation was deemed met. Most IPA studies recommend six to eight participants to reach data saturation, which this study confirmed in the seven participants it took to get data saturation (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

My role working in a Washington State correctional facility may have also impacted this study. Though I am not in a custody role and have minimal involvement in a maximum-security setting, my role working in a similar environment may have impacted my interpretations or interactions with participants. However, I clearly distinguished my identity as a researcher early on in the recruitment process. I actively exercised my bias checking multiple times during the data analysis process. I would never code data for extended amounts of time for fear of creating biased conclusions and would securely save the data and come back to it to analyze it with a clear mindset. I also ensured that no participant was any individual I directly worked with or had supervisory power over to ensure I did not bias their responses.

As topics were discussed that were deemed potentially uncomfortable or unsettling for the participant, there is the limitation that participants did not freely share their candid experiences with me in the interview process. COs, as a profession, often

have a reluctance to speak on stress or mental health-provoking topics for fear of being judged or deemed weak (Carter & Thomson, 2022). Thus, this could have limited the responses from my study's participants. However, participants were clearly informed multiple times during this process that their participation was voluntary and confidential. Their right to withdraw consent at any point during the process was clearly defined and reassured as their right as a participant. Due to the personal nature of the shared anecdotal stories and experiences, participants appeared to have provided some candid thoughts and experiences with me in this process. Also, as this research collected data that added to the current gap in the literature, the richness of the data was valued as not being overtly impacted.

Recommendations

One recommendation for the future would be to replicate this study across Washington State to verify that the results gathered here apply to the entire state. By creating this level of generalizability to the greater state's population, the literature gap will be filled with statewide recommendations for all COs working in a maximum-security setting. As state entities govern many correctional institutions, this would further speak to the entire population of maximum-security officers that the state employs and provide valuable recommendations for support of this unique population.

Another recommendation for the future would be to replicate this study across the United States in different maximum-security settings. As each state differs in its policies and procedures, this addition to the available dataset might help better understand the shared experiences maximum security officers have across the country and what might be

similar or different across states. A better understanding of the nationwide needs of this population would enable the tailoring of specific resources and information that would be pertinent for their success.

Understanding the differences between male and female officers would also be interesting to explore in the future. The current study involved both male and female officers, who spoke briefly about their gender differences in a maximum-security setting. It would be interesting to explore further to see if there are unique gender differences in how officers perceive and interpret the environment of maximum security.

Lastly, exploring the experiences of mental health staff in maximum security would also be an excellent recommendation for the future. Many of the participants in this study recommended an increase in mental health staffing in maximum security to aid them in their general duties. Thus, it would be beneficial to understand the experiences of mental health workers in this setting to understand better the feasibility and importance of potentially increasing their presence in maximum security. This could also be further developed to create a more robust intersection between the usage of restrictive housing, like maximum security, and access to mental health resources in an incarceration setting.

Implications

Improving positive social change was the crux of this study. This study was born as a result of acknowledging that COs are spoken about as a whole, with little to no attention paid to officers who work in specialized environments like maximum security. This study suggested that these officers encounter a different severity of threat levels and a different clientele challenge than their counterparts in lower custody levels.

Understanding their unique space within corrections opens the door for further support, resources, and knowledge about what they need to succeed.

The results of this study suggest that this setting is highly demanding on officers, as they are the primary lifeline for all incarcerated individuals. The officers in maximum security are responsible for tending to all the basic needs of the incarcerated and are often their only human contact. This pressure to juggle responsibilities and duties could be further explored to understand better IMU's long-term impacts on the officers who work there. The theme of support from the administration was brought up in this study because officers need to feel that those who manage them truly understand what they deal with daily. This indicates a greater need for transparency and support for these officers, in particular, from those who make decisions that impact their daily duties.

The findings of this study also suggest that strong interpersonal interactions are a premium skill to have in this environment to succeed. Understanding the need for positive interpersonal interactions further speaks to the skills and abilities an officer needs to work in this custody setting effectively. The administration should be aware of the high premium on these skills, as understanding the need for these could undoubtedly be woven into training and professional development for current and future officers. Improving the social abilities of officers directly funnels into a more significant social change that values humanity and person-centered thinking, even in the most restrictive of environments.

Lastly, the findings of this study also highlighted the enhanced need for mental health support and personnel in the maximum-security setting. The results suggested that

IMU does not have enough resources or staff specifically trained in mental health to respond to the increased level of mental health problems. IMU was listed as a unit that a lot of mental health prisoners go to, therefore suggesting that mental health resources should be at a premium in this setting. Administration can focus on lessening the burden on their already taxed staff by increasing the mental health counterparts they are allotted. This would help create more comprehensive care for the mentally ill, as well as help scale back on the amount of officers being asked to tap into outside training to de-escalate situations.

Conclusions

The findings of this study directly apply to the gap in the current literature regarding COs. Little is known about officers who work in the most restrictive setting in a correctional environment. This study expanded upon this lack of knowledge and suggested that these officers were consistently challenged in their environment and with their clientele, developed strong relationships with coworkers through shared experiences of danger, and felt that strength in self and management were pertinent for success in this environment. These themes can further help guide future research and speak to the resources needed for this unique population. Understanding this population better will help serve them in terms of providing support for the mental and physical health of the officers who are as unique as the custody level that they work in.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

KEY: IMU= Intensive Management Unit

1. How many years have you worked in an IMU setting?
2. During that time period, what sorts of tasks are you expected to do as an officer in a maximum-security unit?
3. What barriers do you face in completing your job duties?
4. Describe to me what types of inmates are housed in IMU.
5. Describe what an average day looks like working in IMU.
6. What challenges do you face working in IMU?
7. What does a bad day in IMU look like?
    a. What makes it a bad day?
8. Please describe what made working in IMU difficult
9. Please describe what made working in IMU easy
10. What makes working in IMU different than working in a lower custody level?
11. What is your experience of working with dangerous inmates?
12. Tell me about the most dangerous part of your job.
13. How would you describe your relationship with other IMU officers when working there?
14. How do inmates interact with you as an officer in IMU?
15. What is the greatest lesson you've learned while working in IMU?
16. Describe to me the qualities that an officer needs in order to work in IMU
17. What support do you think would make your job safer?

18. What resources do you think would make your job safer?

19. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me?

Appendix B: Social Media Invitation Template

Social Media Invitation Template

Caption: There is a new study about the experiences of correctional officers working with violent adult male prisoners in maximum security. that could help correctional staff like officers and other stakeholders better understand and help officers in this setting. For this study, you are invited to describe your experiences working in a maximum custody setting with violent adult male prisoners.

About the study:

- One 70-minute phone interview that will be recorded via a web-based platform.
- There is no financial payment or incentive for participating in this study.
- To protect your privacy, the published study will not share any names or details that identify you.

Volunteers must meet these requirements:

- 18 years old or older
- Have worked in a maximum-security setting for at least a year in an all-male facility.

This interview is part of the doctoral study for Alexis Nordman, a Ph.D. student at Walden University. Interviews will take place during October.

Please message Alexis Nordman privately to let them know of your interest.

Appendix C: Data at a Glance

Question	P1 Response	P2 Response	P3 Response	P4 Response	P5 Response	P6 Response	P7 Response
1. How many years have you worked in an IMU setting?	18 months ofc; 10 years total (Sgt)	4 Years	7 Years	38 year career/on and off	15 years	20 years	7 year career/on and off
2. During that time period, what sorts of tasks are you expected to do as an officer in a maximum-security unit?	Counts, feed, pill line, escort staff, escort I/Is, emergencies, tier checks, I/I questions, showers	Escorts, yards, showers, standing on razors/fingernail clippers, shower rolls, feed, escort staff, hand out supplies, hand out mail, security inspections	Tend to all basic needs, tier checks, escorts, restraints, strip searches, escort to yard, shower, medical, feed, search cells, security inspections, uses of force	External/internal security checks, tier checks, feed, escort staff and I/Is, assisted transport, searched yards/showers, logged all actions	Run yards, showers, feed, calm them down	Feed, yard, showers, mail and legal mail, hearings, escorts, give resources, cell extractions	Tier checks, feed, yard, shower, escorts, programming, escort visitors

3. What barriers do you face in completing your job duties?	Lack of support from MH, from administration, clash of personalities w/ others, administration valuing policy over behavior changes	Time, two staff members with a lot of responsibility, constantly feeling rushed, mgmt not valuing/listening to ofc opinions	Time management, lack of staffing to tasks ratio, schedule getting thrown off, lack of teamwork	If every I/I exercises their right to a shower/yard, major events in the facility, having to drop everything and help others, mgmt making exceptions to the rules, schedule being thrown off	MH and Sgts not wanting to talk to I/Is because they're "done" with them, not having 24/7 MH staff coverage to lift burden off ofcs	Time, shuttling I/Is to and from, MH needs of I/Is, administration wanting things done differently than should be, cell extractions, UoF	I/I attitude and compliance, having to use extra precaution on moving some I/Is, when I/Is would misuse resources, I/Is refusing to comply, I/Is purposefully breaking rules, I/Is gaining control over a situation
4. Describe to me what types of inmates are hous	Protective custody, fighters, severely MH, STG, those that pose a risk to themsel	Every type of I/I from min to max, young, MH I/Is, behavioral problems	MH I/Is, Violent I/Is, STG, those that pose a risk to themselves/others	Violent I/Is, protective custody, habitual criminals, administrative segregation, those that pose a risk to themselve	Disruptive I/Is, MH I/Is, Those that pose a risk to themselves/others	Every type of I/I from min to max, severely MH, disruptive I/Is, those that pose a risk to themselves/others, drug users	Every type of I/I from min to max, protective custody, disruptive behavior, those that

ed in IMU.	ves/others			s/others, STG, high level transfers			pose a risk to themselves/others
5. Describe what an average day looks like working in IMU.	Smell of the units distinctive, very busy, yards/showers, x-rays, noise level dictates the type of day, UoF, cleaning bodily fluids,	Tier checks, security checks, prep I/Is for yards/showers, get all supplies & razors, 30 minute tier checks, repeat all tasks	Count, security checks, facilitate yards/showers, search cells and areas, feed, laundry	Different schedules based on position, ask if they want to go to yard, perimeter checks, security checks, count, escort, feed, showers, stand on razors, dialogue with I/Is, escort staff, searches	Tier checks, showers, stand on razors, feed, housekeeping duties, mail	Get passdown, count, tier checks, orchestrate yards/showers, pass out shower rolls, feed, escort, security checks, stand on razors, strip searches	Count, feed, yards/showers, pass out towels/laundry, log I/I movements, escorts
6. What challenges do you face working in IMU?	UoF, handling bodily fluids, responding to emergencies all day	Mentally draining spot, super busy, working w/ relief staff, people w/ poor work ethics, loud, smells, constant duties, threat of being sued	Physical wear and tear on bodies from working in IMU, Mental and emotional strain, always having to be	Relief staff in IMU, Junior staff in IMU w/ little training, physically demanding environment, time, perfectionism not an ability,	You make your own challenges, bad moods/attitudes, working with bad staff	Range of I/Is in IMU, verbal/emotional/mental abuse from I/Is, hatred of ofcs, not taking things seriously	I/I behaviors, manipulation of new ofcs, manipulation techniques of I/Is, challenging coworke

			the first responder	when people cut corners on safety policies			r personalities, getting behind on tasks
7. What does a bad day in IMU look like? a. What makes it a bad day?	I/Is smearing bodily fluids, lots of UoF	Bodily fluid smearing, lots of I/I issues at once, MH I/Is acting up, one I/I riling everyone up	The reason people want to work there, I/Is destroying the space they're in, multi-man incidents from elsewhere in the facility	Power outages, suicides/attempts, escapes, MH of I/Is, smearing of bodily fluids, dumping a food cart, weekends w/ no support, threat to staff	You make your own bad days, cell entries, getting behind, throwing off the schedule	When ofcs don't have a moment to breathe because they're constantly responding, multiple cell extractions in one day, Group displays of unrest	Staff assaults, when rules aren't followed, violent behavior, throwing off the schedule, getting behind, when I/Is manipulate the system
8. Please describe what made working in IMU difficult	Realizing it's not personal, group displays of unrest, when subpar programs are implemented	Not feeling valued/seen by mgmt, shift rivalries and mgmt picking a side, feeling invisible, having to do all the unfavorable jobs	Personality differences, Mgmt adjusting policies that put more burden on the ofcs	Interuptions to the schedule, other departmental demands, destruction of an environment/property prompting UoF	You make your own day difficult, Poor personalities, unit staff not enforcing policies, shortcutting safety policies	Everything in IMU is difficult, there is no place to get away from ofc tasks/reposnsibilities, constant repetition of tasks, burden that you are "everything" to everybody	Fast paced work environment, structural toll the environment takes on a person's body, lack of compliance,

							little to no time to eat/relax
9. Please describe what made working in IMU easy	Increase in CBI programming and targeting issues that are troublesome in the I/I population	Tight knit crew, camraderie	Loved working in IMU, tight knit crew, camraderie	When days go smoothly and according to plan the system works, getting ahead on tasks	Busy days, good crew, camraderie, everyone working together	Predictability of routine nature of tasks/duties	Good crew, camraderie, having seasoned staff, having a good booth ofc, having an established routine
10. What makes working in IMU different than working in a lower custody level?	IMU I/Is rely on staff more, have a greater ofc presence, more restrictions, less abilities to act out, less group displays of violence, staff are the	Level of restraints I/Is have to wear, treating I/Is as highly dangerous, more individual tracking of I/I movements/interactions, higher verbal skill usage, more likely to have bodily fluids thrown on	Single person traffic instead of free flow, talk to ofcs more than lower custody levels who only speak to ofcs when they need	Different transport methods, increased ofc to I/I ratio, heightened situational awareness	Lack of privacy in speaking with I/Is, staff to I/I ratio for transporting	Nonstop stress, working w/ people at their worst, lack of privileges for I/Is, increased burden on ofcs	Every ofc has a partner, staff to I/I ratio for transporting, increased usage of restraints, completely different escort policies

	lifeline for I/Is	ofcs, higher behavioral management, seeing people at their worst	them, more rapport building				
11. What is your experience of working with dangerous inmates?	Can't label anyone as dangerous or not dangerous, treat everyone equally, physical assault expected-part of the job	Capable of throwing bodily fluids, poor impulse control of I/Is who know right from wrong but do it anyways, stripping people of their control, operating in a heightened situational awareness, knowing someone will assault you when you interact with them, emotionally draining to sustain awareness level for 8 hours	History of escape prone I/I, treat everyone as if they're the most dangerous, treat dangerous ones with respect, I/Is who claim their goal is to kill a staff member and have actively worked towards it	History of staff assaulters, history of violence, vengeance doesn't have to make sense, being exposed to infectious diseases, the most horrific killers are some of the easiest keeps	Never let your guard down around dangerous I/Is, I/Is who express their goals to kill ofcs, I/Is who have immaculate cells are taking advantage of the control they have, build rapport with those who wish to harm you, if you give	High profile I/I escorts, seen age decrease criminal activity in some of the worst, constantly moving I/Is who pose a threat, I/Is who express their goal to kill a staff member, increased security presence on the dangerous ones	You don't know danger just by looking at it, more wary of the talkative ones than the quiet ones, some of the most notorious killers look the simplest, avoided sharing any personal information, high ranking STG members, drugs making

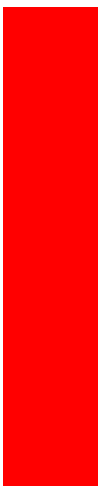
					a dangerous I/I an opportunity, they will seize it		I/is impervious to pain, weapon usage on ofcs, razor policy changed for safety reasons, asserting mental control whenever possible
12. Tell me about the most dangerous part of your job.	Any time you open a cuff port, the bodily fluids that can stay with you after the assault,	Escorts most dangerous, had an I/I slip their cuffs,chat with them during most dangerous time periods to reduce thoughts of danger	Cell entries- as ofcs have no idea what they're walking into and the I/I is unrestrained	Anytime an I/I is out of their cell, transitioning restraint methods, any time you move an I/I	Moving I/Is and opening wickets, having partners that don't operate by safety policies and put you at jeopardy	Whenever an I/I is out of their cell, not knowing what an I/I will do or act on	Entering a cell where an I/I is unrestrained and you don't know what you're walking into, when I/Is have access to weapons , when I/Is get control,

13. How would you describe your relationship with other IMU officers when working there?	Great camraderie with others as an ofc, sometimes power struggle as a sgt to subordinates, shared stressors create bonds, dark humor as a coping mechanism	Really great, tight knit crew, crew becomes family	Really great, strong camraderie with the crew, having lasting relationships to this day, knowing how someone responds to stress creates a bond	Really great, repeatedly asked back to IMU, asked for specifically by mgmt as a relief ofc, worked well w/ fellow staff even when had hard times	Good relationship with other ofcs, crew would often rotate, everyone working together would make it good	Regular ofcs tend to be more tight knit than relief staff, more experience a person has the better staff treats them	Good minus the naysayer staff members who try to bring everyone down, new people have to prove themselves in IMU to show they can be trusted, once people are accepted the group is tight knit

14. How do inmates interact with you as an officer in IMU?	Good rapport for the most part, able to talk guys down, always transparent with actions and fair, I/Is can turn on you on a dime, people are people even in IMU	Some good, some bad, I/Is tended to treat ofcs better during the holidays even though it was harder for them, expressed genuine concern when this ofc got hurt	Gender differences could make some interactions better/worse, rapport w/ I/Is extends pre and post IMU	Friendly or hostile depending on the I/I, boredom fueled a lot of interactions, basic human decency went a long ways, you get what you give, you learn how to talk to I/Is, relying on the uniform as your identity leads to problems	Good rapport with I/Is, tended to entertain them, the energy an ofc goes into the unit with dictates how the ofc will be treated,	Good, established rapport through previous contacts, stayed constant and reliable, calm staff calm I/Is	Pretty limited interactions, fielded manipulation techniques, I/Is would distract an ofc with simple conversation to keep them from seeing something a few cells down, very needy population, Never take a converation with an I/I at face value, remember they will promote custody levels soon, treat I/Is with respect

							and follow policy
15. What is the greatest lesson you've learned while working in IMU?	People are still people, even in IMU. You can gain compliance through communication	Acknowledging that everyone is a human being, don't treat people like monsters in a cage, Basic empathy	Taught patience, taught how to become more grey instead of black and white, there's more than one way to get to a resolution, people do things of their own accord that are beyond our control	You're as much a steward of your partner as you are the I/Is, constant hypervigilance, know yours and your partners strengths/weaknesses, always listen, always observe, no job is any less important in IMU	What we can learn by our interactions with I/Is, time in IMU could make a person more likely to promote due to increased social skills	Patience, nothing happens fast but everything has to be done, patience with an I/I and patience with the process itself	That people all generally want the same things across the board, if people's needs are met they're usually pretty easy going, you may not trust people but you do build a certain level of trust with

							them, human element - everyone is always going through something
16. Describe to me the qualities that an officer needs in order to work in IMU	Communication, integrity and honesty	Good verbal skills, showing humanity, modeling good behavior to I/Is	Physically fit, energetic, predictable, able to make routines, communicate well	Maturity, professionalism, Intrinsically driven, good work ethic, self control ,authority with empathy, be observant, put yourself in the other person's shoes	flexible, physically fit, patience	Patience, letting things roll off your back, avoid being complacent , can't be too nice and can't be too tough	Strong sense of self, physically fit, be able to handle healthily what you go through, realizing I/Is treat you like who you represent not who you are, when they are at their worst you still have to be at your best, once you treat them

							the way they treat you you've lost control
17. What support do you think would make your job safer? **18. What resources do you think would make your job safer?**	Felt safe and supported, positive changes already made like security enhancements to the building, being able to shut off water, etc.	Senior staff demonstrate skills to younger staff, working with younger staff to help them, increase in programming, see mental health staffed 24/7, Bring back coaching program for new staff	Supervisors who encourage teamwork make safer teams, elevator that is in unit to be usable again for chow delivery,	Have a lot of good resources already, Body cameras would be good to show people ofcs perspective,	Support from mgmt when taking initiative, properly trained coworkers for safety reasons, having more than one person make all the decisions/have all the power, not putting new staff directly on the floor, following chain	Have a lot of good resources already- restraints are a great addition, would love to see increased MH resources for MH I/Is and more punitive approach to dissuade people from coming to IMU	Increase in people to help fill in when they're busy, hazard pay, administration to think about safety implications of implementing programs

					of command and them supporting staff		
19. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me?	Segregation is not as bad as people think it is, isn't as inhumane as people think, segregations are a necessary part of prison, majority of the people in prison don't cause problems and just want to go home	A lot of people see IMU as a punishment but it also can be a rehabilitative tool where good things happen too, helped an I/I learn to read when they worked in there-never would have had that opportunity otherwise, the idea most people have of IMU is false, the people who work in IMU are very empathetic	N/A	IMU can be seen as a group of elite individuals, only the finest get to work there, one of the few positions that does everything in a day, camraderie makes the team, male and female differences in ofc abilities and reception	People need to realize where they're working and take it seriously, senior staff need to train the junior staff, even if you aren't confident fake it, female staff can feel falsely safe due to gender, uptick in females being compromised through the years, if everyone does what they're	N/A	Penitentiary breeds abnormal people- staff and I/Is alike, work with diverse staff from all backgrounds, working at the prison gives you weird habits, one day you could see a guy in IMU who actually helps you out in a lower custody level, times where I/Is work

supposed to it's a great place to work, admin sometimes undermines ofc decisions, excess of off site medical appts for on site issues	with ofcs to accomplish a common goal, some I/Is can be friend material or seem like normal people