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## Attrition Experiences Among Officers in a Texas Correctional Organization

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# Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

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Dewanou J. Aisse

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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the review committee have been made.

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2025

Abstract

Attrition Experiences Among Officers in a Texas Correctional Organization

by

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MS, Purdue University Global, 2019

BS, Purdue University Global, 2016

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Industrial and Organizational Psychology

Walden University

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## Abstract

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) faces employee retention challenges, and recruiting and retaining correctional officers remains TDCJ's most significant challenge and highest priority. Correctional facility leaders need to understand these challenges as indicators of workforce sustainability. Grounded in job embeddedness theory, the purpose of this general qualitative study was to explore the turnover experiences of Texas correctional officers, to understand why officers left their jobs, and the factors that contributed to their decisions to stay in their jobs. Participants comprised 11 former correctional officers who had worked between 5 months and 6 years for the TDCJ. Data were collected using semistructured interviews with open-ended questions. They shared their perceptions of the experiences that contributed to their decisions to leave the job. Five themes emerged from the inductive analysis: (a) job dissatisfaction, (b) ineffective leadership, (c) compensation and benefits, (d) work-life imbalance, and (e) lack of retention strategies and need for implementation. Three subthemes that emerged were the lack of recognition and appreciation, the lack of support, and the poor workplace relationships between supervisors and correctional officers. Correctional facility leaders can use these strategies as insights into reducing attrition, enhancing morale, increasing job satisfaction, and mitigating burnout. Additionally, the findings foster more humane relationships between correctional officers and prisoners, ensuring consistent treatment of prisoners with dignity and respect. The implications for positive social change include the potential for TDCJ leaders to implement effective interventions with job embeddedness that may make the workplace conducive to retaining and attracting correctional officers.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this work to Almighty God, the ancestral spirits, and all my ancestors, known and unknown, who led righteous lives.

## Acknowledgments

I sincerely thank the committee members, Dr. Etchegaray, Jason, and Dr. Coddington, Jane, for their guidance and support throughout this journey. To the entire faculty, I express my deepest gratitude. Special thanks to my loved ones for their unwavering and unconditional support. To my friends and all those who, in one way or another, have helped me reach this point in my academic career, may the Almighty fill you with His grace.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Correctional officials are responsible for individuals who have been arrested, are awaiting trial, or have been sentenced to imprisonment. Working in a correctional facility may be stressful and hazardous. Correctional personnel have one of the highest rates of injuries and illnesses of any employment, with many originating from encounters with inmates. Officers work shifts that span the entire day and night, including Saturdays and holidays (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). According to the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (2022), the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), through the Correctional Institutions Division, administers approximately 104 prisons, state jails, and substance abuse felony punishment facilities, which are divided into six regions throughout the state of Texas, and employs about 20,000 Correctional Officers. Like many organizations, TDCJ is facing the challenge of employee retention. According to the Texas State Auditor's Office (2022), the TDCJ had a 40.3% turnover rate for correctional officer positions in 2021, an increase of almost 7% from 2020 to 2021. This qualitative study aimed to understand the factors that contribute to officers leaving their jobs in a Texas correctional organization and explore the factors that contribute to Texas correctional officers staying on the job.

### **Background of the Problem**

Recruiting and retaining correctional officers remains TDCJ's most significant challenge and highest priority. The annual report on classified employee turnover for fiscal year 2021, Texas Statewide, showed that the criminal justice occupational category had the highest turnover rate (37.0%) of all occupational types in fiscal year 2021. This

increased from the fiscal year 2020, when the turnover rate was 30.9%. The criminal justice occupational category's high turnover rate in the fiscal year 2021 can be partially attributed to the high turnover rates among juvenile correctional officers (the fiscal year 2021 turnover rate was 71.0%, an increase from 59.4% in the fiscal year 2020) and correctional officer (the fiscal year 2021 turnover rate was 40.3%, an increase from 33.6% in the fiscal year 2020). Those two job classification series accounted for 80.5% of employees and 90.3% of total separations within the criminal justice occupational category (Texas State Auditor's Office, 2022). This is a problematic situation because Hogan et al. (2017) asserted that prisons necessitate trained, dedicated, and experienced correctional staff to maintain overall custody and control of the institution. Employee disengagement and turnover jeopardize the prison's long-term stability.

### **Problem Statement**

The TDCJ's Correctional Institutions Division's mission encompasses the safe and proper confinement, supervision, rehabilitation, and reintegration of adult felons, as well as the effective management and administration of correctional facilities in accordance with applicable laws and regulations (The TDCJ, 2023). Achieving this would take officers who are available and experienced in the task. If officers leave their jobs, TDCJ cannot count on correctional officers to acquire the necessary experience to accomplish this mission. Whether turnover is voluntary or involuntary, it has a significant financial impact on the organization's performance and productivity. The understaffing situation may create new challenges for the remaining correctional officers, making their

jobs harder. There is a need to document factors that contribute to officers leaving their jobs so that strategies can be developed to improve officer retention.

### **Purpose**

This qualitative research aimed to understand why officers leave their jobs in Texas correctional facilities and the factors that contribute to Texas correctional officers staying on the job. The goal was to collect and analyze officers' perceptions of their lived experiences related to the voluntary or involuntary factors that compel them to resign from their employment, to identify themes that facilitate an understanding of the phenomenon, and to develop measures to reduce officer turnover.

### **Nature of the Study**

This study employed a qualitative approach to explore the turnover experiences of correctional officers in Texas. General qualitative research is a methodology that seeks to understand human experience by taking a qualitative stance and using qualitative procedures (Koster & Koster, 2021). The interviews were semi-structured, with open-ended questions. The participants shared their perceptions of experiences that contributed to their decisions to leave the job. This approach enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of the attrition experience. By analyzing the participants' responses, I highlight themes that may facilitate an understanding of the problem and identify factors that contribute to Texas correctional officers staying on the job.

The target group of interest was former Texas correctional officers. Regarding the sampling plan, the best sources to find participants who met the inclusion criteria were the social networks frequented by former correctional officers. There were no restrictions

on age, gender, race, or religion, as the goal was not to understand the officers' attrition based on these factors.

I used the purposive sampling method to have a small sample with sufficient knowledge of the lived experiences. It also helped me to conceptualize the commonality in experiences that lead to saturation. Hennink and Kaiser (2022) stated that results showed that 9–17 interviews or 4–8 focus group discussions reach saturation in qualitative research. According to Wasihun and Fikire (2022), the sample size range most frequently seen in qualitative research is between 20 and 60. The authors stated that these ranges depend on various factors linked to the study. Based on the above information, the specific range for my participants was 10-20. If saturation had been reached before I reached the cap of the range, I would have stopped the interview.

The first stage of my analysis plan involved organizing the data; in the second stage, I conducted coding and data enumeration. I broke down my data into units of analysis, such as words, sentences, and themes, and integrated them into categories to synthesize and draw inferences.

### **Research Questions**

The study had two main research questions:

RQ1: What factors contribute to Texas correctional officers leaving their jobs?

RQ 2: What factors contribute to Texas correctional officers staying on the job?

### **Conceptual Framework**

Mitchell et al.'s (2001) job embeddedness theory is defined as the on-the-job and off-the-job factors associated with individual links (how an individual is connected to

other people and activities), fit (how an individual's work relates to their values and goals), and sacrifice (the level of disruption an individual would experience if they were to quit their job). According to Mitchell et al., if managers and leaders understand these key factors in job embeddedness, they can assess the extent to which employees are at risk of leaving an organization and determine the best ways to promote retention where desirable. What makes the job embeddedness theory unique is its ability to consider and weigh the impact of community factors on an employee's decision to stay or leave their current work situation.

The problem of turnover is critical financially and emotionally to an organization. Putting the joint forces of job embeddedness (fit, links, and sacrifices) together to retain highly embedded employees can catalyze change (Mitchell et al., 2001). Rubenstein et al. (2019) applied job embeddedness theory in two studies. They concluded that biodata factors assessed during the hiring process provide valuable information about employee embeddedness and their future voluntary and involuntary turnover. Their results advance theory by demonstrating how embedding forces can be present among newcomers, thereby signaling their potential utility for reducing quit rates through recruitment and selection, as well as their role in employer decision-making regarding continued or severed work relationships. Practical applications of the job embeddedness theory consist of fostering an environment where coworkers can build good work relationships, training managers to be coaches, fostering an environment of psychological safety, setting clear expectations, increasing transparency, using management by objectives, developing a career strategy, giving praise and reward, practicing management by walking around, etc.

Other studies found that applying job embeddedness theory enhances employee retention (Chan et al., 2019; Holtom & Darabi, 2018).

### **Definition of Terms**

*Attrition*: "A reduction in the number of human resources due to retirement, resignation, or death" ( Krishna & Sidharth, 2022, p. 1).

*Correctional officer*: An officer overseeing those arrested and awaiting trial or sentenced to serve time in jail or prison (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021).

*Employee attrition*, also known as employee turnover, is characterized by the loss of human resources due to personal reasons, low job satisfaction, reduced pay, or a poor working environment (Krishna & Sidharth, 2022).

*Fit*: The compatibility between a person, an organization, and its environment. The better the fit, the less likely someone is to leave (Ma, Mayfield, & Mayfield, 2018).

*Involuntary turnover*: When the company initiates the exit of employees (Rubenstein et al., 2019).

*Links*: The connections a person has in the organization and community. Employees with more links on and off the job are more likely to stay, even when they may not like the organization (Ma et al., 2018).

*Sacrifice*: The material and psychological benefits one must forgo when leaving an organization. High perceived benefits will cause employees to remain due to their reluctance to lose them (Ma et al., 2018).

*Retention*: an organization's ability "to hold and keep in possession and to engage the services of high potentials (HIPOs) and value contributors in mission-critical and scarce skills positions (Bussin, 2018).

*Voluntary turnover*: Employees resign (Rubenstein et al., 2019).

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

#### **Assumptions**

The first assumption was that participants experienced attrition while working in a Texas correctional facility. The second assumption was that participants would answer all the questions honestly and openly. The third assumption was that the data collection would enable the gathering of accurate and comprehensive information regarding attrition experiences among Texas correctional officers. Lastly, it was assumed that Mitchell et al.'s (2001) job embeddedness theory was the appropriate conceptual framework for exploring the attrition experience of Texas correctional officers and developing measures to reduce attrition.

#### **Limitations**

One potential limitation was recruiting individuals who previously worked in Texas correctional organizations and had since left, and who were willing to participate in interviews. The second potential limitation concerned the data collection method. I wanted to collect data through face-to-face, open-ended interviews. Still, with the COVID-19 pandemic, I conducted the interviews using Zoom, Skype, or similar videoconferencing software, which was more efficient for me and more accessible for the participants.

Regarding the interview and debriefing, participants were available at different times. Additionally, participants who initially consented may have become reluctant and refused to cooperate at any stage of the data collection process.

### **Delimitations**

The first delimitation of this study was that only former Texas correctional officers were surveyed. The second delimitation was that participants were recruited only from select Texas correctional facilities. The third delimitation was that literature from the last 5 years was reviewed to keep the research current. The last delimitation is that demographic factors were not considered as criteria for this study.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study provides information that correctional agency or facility leaders, managers, and the TDCJ can use to implement effective interventions that make the working environment conducive to the retention of correctional officers. This study can contribute to Texas correctional officer retention by helping to understand the factors that contribute to officers leaving their jobs. It can also help implement effective strategies to improve the officer turnover rate.

At the end of my study, any conclusions drawn could serve as recommendations for improving correctional jobs. It should address issues such as reduced attrition, improved morale, increased job satisfaction, and lower burnout, among others. Additionally, the relationship between correctional officers and prisoners will be more humane; prisoners will be treated with dignity and respect. There will be a strengthening

of the protection of their rights and a decline in the use of force and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.

The organization will be able to accomplish its mission and meet the challenge of adapting to the requirements of our time if it makes efforts in terms of training, recruitment quality, supervision, follow-up, and ethics.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

Employee attrition refers to the voluntary or involuntary departure of employees for various reasons. The higher the attrition rate, the more unfavorable the effects on organizational performance and culture (Kumar, 2022). In recent years, many Texas correctional officers have quit their jobs, and the scholarly community has yet to determine the reasons behind their departures. McCullough (2019) stated that despite the state of Texas's efforts to increase salaries for correctional officers and other prison employees, the TDCJ continues to struggle with hiring and retaining officers. Less is known about the factors contributing to the attrition experiences of Texas correctional officers and the retention strategies to be employed by TDCJ.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

I selected articles relating to correctional officers' job attitudes, job experiences, turnover intent, and turnover to construct the literature review framework. The keywords searched were *attrition*, *retention*, *turnover*, *correctional officers*, *job satisfaction*, *commitment*, *Texas correctional officers*, *correctional personnel*, *occupational psychology*, and *systematic review* in the databases PsyInfo, Taylor and Francis Online, Criminal Justice Database, Google Scholar, ABI/INFORM Collection, SAGE Journals, ScienceDirect, SocINDEX with Full Text, and Academic Search Complete. The articles used to develop the literature review were published between 2017 and 2025, except for the theoretical framework, which was published in 2001.

## **Conceptual Foundation**

The theoretical framework for this study was Mitchell et al.'s (2001) job embeddedness theory. Job embeddedness is an alternative explanation for voluntary turnover. Mitchell et al. stated that settling in an organization and a community is associated with reduced quitting and actual turnover. The theory is defined as the on-the-job and off-the-job factors related to three main elements: links (the connections a person has in the organization and community), fit (the compatibility between a person, an organization, and its environment), and sacrifice (the material and psychological benefits one must forgo when leaving an organization), where each central part is about internal embeddedness and external embeddedness. This means that as long as employees feel a sense of belonging in their communities, they will continue to be valuable members of the organization. Mitchell et al. stated that understanding links, fit, and sacrifice enables the assessment of the extent to which employees risk leaving an organization and how best to promote retention where desirable. This is to ensure that an employee is well integrated into its community, and for this integration to succeed, it will depend on how an employee is linked with colleagues, relatives, and friends; it will depend on individual factors, such as personal values and aspirations, knowledge, skills, etc.; on organizational aspects, mostly job requirement and company culture, and other factors, such as entertainment activities, climate, etc.

### **Job Embeddedness**

According to Mitchell et al. (2001), applying job embeddedness theory is expected to have a positive impact on organizations in terms of employee retention.

Employees become embedded by developing more links on the job within their organizations (internal embeddedness) and off-the-job within their communities (external embeddedness), which improves their commitment and reinforces their positive behaviors toward their organizations. If employees' expectations are met, they are more engaged, efficient at work, satisfied, and motivated. This makes them more open to accepting future duties and responsibilities, as well as career management and other benefits the organization offers. The more an organization offers favorable and fulfilling working conditions to its employees, the longer they tend to stay with it. Mitchell et al. suggested that leaders utilize links, fit, and sacrifice components to enhance employee happiness and productivity, as well as reduce job turnover and absenteeism. By applying the principles of job embeddedness, managers must work on both on-the-job and off-the-job factors, especially since the two do not have the same consequences. Mitchell et al. stated that off-the-job factors have a significantly greater impact on voluntary turnover and absence than on-the-job factors. Still, on-the-job embeddedness led to a more incredible feeling of organizational citizenship and higher job performance than off-the-job embeddedness. This is to ensure that, both at work and outside of work, the employee enjoys the best conditions and is free from significant concerns related to their professional and private life. According to Nica (2018), by enhancing job embeddedness in both the job and the community, an organization can boost morale, strengthen commitment, increase resilience, improve work relationships, reduce job turnover, and enhance well-being and job satisfaction among its employees.

### **The Human Resources/Leadership Perspective on Retention and Attrition**

Attrition and retention are indicators of an organization's attractiveness to employees (Pavlović, 2018). According to Pandita and Ray (2018), a low attrition rate indicates strong employee engagement and loyalty, as well as a higher retention rate, since these factors lead to improved employee performance, more focused efforts, and better results. Attrition and absenteeism are reduced as a result of increased employee engagement. In reality, attrition and retention are opposite variables. Attrition refers to the employees that an organization has lost, while retention refers to the employees that an organization has retained. Although turnover and retention are opposite variables, the factors that predict retention are also important when predicting turnover. According to Mamun and Hasan (2017), various influential factors result in organizational employee turnover. These factors include organizational factors, working environment, pay, fringe benefits, career advancement, job fit, clear job expectations, the influence of coworkers, and job market conditions. In addition to factors that predict turnover, several key factors must be considered by organizations when predicting employee retention, including recruiting suitable employees, effective leadership, training and development, job satisfaction, organizational culture, and balancing work and family life.

The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM, 2023) stated that workgroup cohesiveness, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, the strength of the supervisor-employee relationship, role clarity, and job design are additional predictors of turnover that require careful consideration. Employee retention and attrition are influenced by top management's capacity to develop effective human resources

management (HRM) strategies that support workers within the organization (Hussainy, 2019). Human resources (HR) managers or leaders should develop a strategic HR plan that anticipates the organization's future HR needs, having analyzed the organization's existing human resources, the external labor market, and the future trends of the environment in which the organization will operate (Zhu et al., 2017). When forecasting future human resources needs, assessing the organization's challenges in recruiting staff and considering the external environment is necessary (Khadilkar, 2022). According to Hussainy (2019), the HR manager or leader must identify employees' knowledge, skills, and abilities, and compile an inventory of each employee's skills to conceptualize training activities that enable employees to perform new tasks and provide professional development opportunities to prepare them for future roles within the organization.

In a constantly changing work environment, the human resources (HR) department is responsible for identifying and retaining the talent necessary for productivity and growth (Kumar, 2022). One of the critical tasks of human resources that directly impacts an organization's performance is hiring. Finding the talent to fill those needs involves figuring out what the company requires. Along with hiring personnel, it is essential to keep talent, which begins with arranging their integration into the organization and identifying the right motivational levers. The primary objective of the human resources department is to develop policies, best practices, and strategies to prevent employees from voluntarily or involuntarily leaving their jobs. All of these tactics would help lower attrition rates, boost retention, prevent turnover, and foster engagement.

### **Costs Associated with Retention and Attrition**

Organizations invest a considerable amount of time and money in recruiting, selecting, and developing the skills of their employees; therefore, retaining competent employees is an ongoing challenge for them. The departure of an employee has consequences for the organization. When an employee quits an organization, their direct costs range from 30% to as much as 150% of the annual total compensation for the position, and indirect costs such as work disruption, loss of productivity, a fall-off in customer service, loss of a valued mentor, competition with the former employer, possible theft of trade secrets, and the potential loss of institutional knowledge, organizational memory, or, perhaps, strategic knowledge (Lyons & Bandura, 2020).

Turnover can be a recurring demotivating factor, especially when departures are voluntary, due to the associated costs and disruptions to the organization's social fabric (Zhang & Stewart, 2017). The issue of employee attrition and retention can be costly for employers, as it requires significant compensation to replace their expertise and efficiency (Alsheref et al., 2022). The significance of turnover is driven by its high expenses and impact on organizational effectiveness. The total cost of replacing an employee can reach 100% of the employee's annual compensation. Turnover-related costs might account for up to 40% of a company's pre-tax income. Moreover, meta-analytic research shows a strong and inverse relationship between turnover and organizational success (Field et al., 2021). With a structured attrition strategy, employers can more easily quantify the costs, particularly in terms of productivity, lost time, and missed revenue opportunities.

### **Attrition and Retention Strategies**

Job embeddedness mediates the relationship between specific constructs, including on-the-job and off-the-job factors, and employee retention (Ma, Mayfield, & Mayfield, 2018). Therefore, regardless of the organization's nature, leaders must understand that the job embeddedness process should begin with the hiring process. Ma, Mayfield, and Mayfield (2018) stated that organizations could enhance employee fitness and retention by implementing effective recruitment, selection, training, and development procedures. Indeed, a good integration of the employee in the company conditions the employee's motivation and commitment in the short and medium term. According to Ma, Mayfield, and Mayfield, increasing organization and community ties (internal and external links) helps new hires build strong connections immediately. Holtom, Kiazad, and Dandu (2020) stated that an organization could enhance its retention by increasing the sacrifices one makes when leaving, making employees reluctant to leave because they will have to give up a desirable situation. According to Holtom, Kiazad, and Dandu, this can be justified by the fact that new employees often face numerous uncertainties at the start due to discrepancies between their expectations and the professional realities imposed by the organization. If their expectations are met, individuals will be more engaged, efficient at work, satisfied, and motivated. On the other hand, if their expectations were met, the integration would avoid being less successful, which could lead to absenteeism or premature departure from the company.

The importance attributed to turnover is justified, as a high turnover rate can leave other employees feeling insensitive to the desire to leave. Indeed, turnover is an effective

and quantifiable measure for assessing a company's attractiveness to its employees and estimating the effectiveness of its retention strategies (Zhang & Stewart, 2017).

According to Zhang and Stewart (2017), an organization must foster a positive work environment, encourage fit, encourage leaders to act in supportive ways, and help staff members manage change at both the individual and organizational levels to increase employee retention and prevent attrition. Bussin (2018) referred to employee retention as the ability of a company to hold and maintain in possession, and to engage the services of, high-potential employees (HIPOs) and value contributors in mission-critical and scarce skills jobs. Analyzing employee retention enables the assessment of whether the company is experiencing a genuine turnover problem or if the turnover rate is acceptable. Loss of human resources due to personal reasons, a lack of job satisfaction, lower compensation, or a hostile work environment are characteristics of turnover or attrition (Krishna & Sidharth, 2022). According to Biason (2020), job satisfaction enhances employee retention. A valid and accurate predictor of employee retention is job satisfaction.

Greater levels of staff retention are typically correlated with higher levels of work satisfaction. The turnover rate is a metric used to assess worker satisfaction and investigate the causes of departures. It also enables analysis and the adoption of remedial measures to keep employees, as well as the regular maintenance of a meticulous, in-depth record of who quits and why. This information can reveal workplace characteristics that may lead to employee turnover. These elements might indicate potential modifications (Lyons & Bandura, 2020). Comparing the organization's turnover rate to the industry

average is also good. Analyzing the occupations and departments most affected within the firm is also crucial to accurately understanding the reasons behind employee turnover. This action encourages the use of improved retention strategies. According to Millward (2022), a whole-life approach and flexibility within a framework are necessary to fulfill the demands of both individuals and organizations. Employee empowerment, commitment, and loyalty are fostered by helping people define and implement work by design. According to Millward (2022), this can be done by providing employees with an education that empowers them to identify what is essential across their lives, ensuring the workplace has the right technology and culture to empower hybrid work, providing leaders with the education and tools to have the right conversations with their employees, ensuring the voice of the employee is visible and actioned, and engaging employees to co-create solutions.

Every organization wants its employees to stay with it for as long as possible. However, generally, most employees remain if they are happy with their job and leave if they are not. According to Lyons and Bandura (2020), there are other factors to consider, such as poor working conditions, schedule inflexibility, extremely high workload, the stress of work pace, abusive managers, lack of trust, unfair treatment, lack of support, lack of adequate feedback on performance, insufficient pay, or opportunities for advancement. According to Rothausen et al. (2017), the decision to stay with or leave an organization is rooted in a strong desire for a positive and harmonious identity, as well as psychological well-being throughout life. Organizations view employee job satisfaction as a crucial factor in determining whether employees intend to stay or leave the company.

However, the degree of satisfaction changes according to the employee's expectations, which can change throughout the employee's life. Indeed, employees expect salaries and rewards corresponding to their contributions, recognition, and support from superiors and the organization. Not all employees who leave an organization have the same qualifying effects on retention; in other words, "Not all turnover is negative or dysfunctional as the departing employee may not have been a consistent, high-level performer; a vacancy may provide opportunities for promotion for remaining employees or acquisition of new, high-level performers" (Lyons & Bandura, 2020, p. 1).

Retention is positive for the organization if the employee does not bring added value or has a low performance level. On the other hand, a successful employee's departure is a sign of the harmful nature of retention. According to Singh, Shaffer, and Selvarajan (2018), having a supportive work environment fosters an attachment link between an employee and their organization, which lessens the person's desire to quit the organization. Stirpe and Zárrega-Oberty (2017) stated that when an organization employs selective staffing, training, performance appraisal, incentives, flexible job assignments, and the disclosure of company information, it creates a high-performance work system, which is an excellent practice in employee retention. "By considering diversity in attrition modeling, organizations can position themselves to identify groups who may be at greater risk of voluntary attrition and implement interventions to reduce this risk, thus contributing to the development of a more inclusive workplace" (Obenauer, 2019, p. 305). One of the most effective ways to enhance employee retention is to foster a positive and engaging work culture that values employees and motivates them to be engaged in

their work (Krishna & Garg, 2022). When people leave voluntarily or involuntarily, it usually causes disruptions that can delay projects and impact results (Laulié & Morgeson, 2021). The additional time, cost, and effort are required to hire and train replacements for these roles. This is especially true if an employee leaves soon after joining a company, and the whole process must be repeated (Simeonoglou, 2020).

### **Work Environment, Career Stage, and Turnover Intention**

The work environment can be defined as all the material conditions, services, and means made available to employees to support their work performance. Given the above, the working environment must include working hours, safety, hygiene conditions, operating standards, and the working atmosphere, among other factors. The working environment has an impact on employee job satisfaction. It has been demonstrated that a positive work environment is a crucial component of an organization that can encourage and engage workers, resulting in improved employee retention (Yusliza et al., 2021). In other words, an organization will improve the employees' well-being, motivation, and performance by promoting a healthy working environment. Healthy workplace practices can be categorized into five key areas: employee involvement, health and safety, employee growth and development, work-life balance, and employee recognition (American Psychological Association, 2021). Working conditions significantly influence people's job satisfaction and play a crucial role in their decision to stay or leave. Employees who are satisfied with their jobs are likely to show high commitment.

However, an organization needs adequate and motivating working conditions (Tarmidi et al., 2022). When working conditions are not suitable, employees may become

exhausted and disengage or leave the organization to protect themselves. Even under challenging circumstances, employers that maintain a solid commitment to employee well-being will have a distinct competitive advantage in attracting and retaining top talent (American Psychological Association, 2021). According to Tarmidi et al. (2022), a healthy and pleasant work environment will make the company more welcoming, leading to happier, more efficient, and more productive employees, as well as a lower absenteeism rate. In addition, it will significantly improve staff retention because why would you go elsewhere when you are happy where you are? People will not change employers to obtain similar working conditions if they are satisfied with their current environment. Of course, the work environment is not the only element that helps staff retention, but it is a significant factor. According to Binu and JD (2022), in addition to the work environment, factors such as career development, leadership, performance management, relationship with superiors, compensation, and job satisfaction also contribute to employee retention.

Another essential element is the career stage. Hogan et al. (2017) defined a career progression into four main stages: exploration, mastery, maintenance, and disengagement. They demonstrated that correctional officers and staff progress through different career levels, where job attitudes and turnover intentions vary in the context of the working environment and the type of organization. According to Lambert, Hogan, and Griffin (2017), during the first career stage, known as the exploration phase, employees are still unsure about their future in the organization and remain open to all

other options. They also found that turnover intentions were highest for correctional staff at the exploration stage compared to other occupations.

### **Organizational Commitment**

In business, organizational commitment is employees' dedication to the companies and organizations they work for. Philip and Medina-Craven (2022) stated that Allen and Meyer originally defined organizational commitment as loyalty towards one's organization, comprising affective, continuance, and normative aspects. Organizational commitment refers to the degree to which employees believe in and accept the organization's goals and are willing to remain with the company (Ratna et al., 2022). In other words, organizational commitment refers to the bond that unites employees with their organization. It comprises three commitment forms: affective, normative, and continuity (Singh, 2018). The impact of engagement on productivity and employee loyalty to the organization varies depending on the form of engagement. According to Singh (2018), a highly engaged employee is an invaluable asset to a business. Employees with a solid organizational commitment are more likely to stay with the company in the long term and demonstrate this commitment to their colleagues. Indeed, the link between the organization and the individual seems increasingly weakened by unilateral decisions made by the organization; according to Saks (2022), sharing information, soliciting employee input, and involving employees in organizational decision-making that affects their work and well-being demonstrate that the organization values their opinions, values, and contributions. These build trust and increase employee engagement with the organization. When employees are not involved in decision-making, it risks

compromising employees' sense of identification with the organization and their moral obligation to continue the employment relationship. Failure to fulfill these organizational obligations prompts employees to consider leaving the organization.

Organizational commitment is a critical factor in turnover intention in a correctional setting. According to Lambert et al. (2021), the effects of organizational commitment on correctional staff's desire to quit and actual voluntary turnover have been studied. The results showed that continuance commitment had a negative impact on turnover intent, and moral commitment had a nonsignificant effect. Affective commitment reduces the intention to turnover among correctional staff. This commitment is also linked to lower turnover. Affective commitment has been reported as having the most significant impact on turnover intent and reducing work absenteeism among correctional staff.

### **Burnout and Turnover Intentions**

Burnout is a metaphor for a work-related state of mental exhaustion first used in the United States at the end of the 1970s (Hadžibajramović, Schaufeli, & De Witte, 2020). "Job burnout is a phenomenon when negative feelings or emotions are experienced by an individual within the organizational setting. Reduced work-related achievements, lack of enthusiasm to perform roles and duties for the organization, mental exhaustion, etc., are some symptoms indicating job burnout" (Thakre & Kawde, 2021, p. 396). Since then, it has been the subject of numerous works that have given rise to several definitions, all converging on at least one point: burnout would result in a state of professional exhaustion, both emotional, physical, and mental, felt in the face of

demanding work situations (Woods & Feller, 2020). The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) is an introspective psychological instrument measuring professional burnout, developed by Christina Maslach. The MBI assesses three aspects of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment (Maslach & Leiter, 2021). Burnout is a set of consecutive reactions to cases of chronic professional stress in which the dimension of commitment is predominant. It is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and the feeling of personal non-accomplishment at work (Hadžibajramović, Schaufeli, & De Witte, 2020). According to Rogue (2021), feelings of inefficacy are the primary component of burnout. Burnout occurs when you feel like you cannot do enough. Rogue stated that the most significant challenges with burnout, personally and organizationally, are creating a sense of self-control and retaining personal agency.

The author defined personal agency as the capacity to accomplish tasks and avoid burnout. The sentiments of personal agency are comprised of three key components: outcomes, support, and self-care. Results fill your capacity for new things and reaffirm that you can accomplish things. Relaxation and diversion are recharging strategies that enable us to be ready to face the world again (Rogue, 2021). When the job requires a significant personal and emotional investment from the employee, they begin to feel a considerable gap between their representation of the profession and the reality of the work. This situation can exhaust and emotionally drain the employee, leading them to question their role and place within the organization. According to Rholetter (2021), the individual's attitude becomes harmful, harsh, and detached toward their work, colleagues,

and superiors. Gradually, he withdraws from his work and his organization. The person reduces their investment and develops pejorative, cynical views of the people with whom they are supposed to work. For the organization, the consequences are not less severe because the increase in burnout cases leads to higher absenteeism; burnout incurs additional costs, reduces productivity, and diminishes creativity, ultimately harming the quality of productivity, while also resulting in the loss of talent (Maslach, 2017).

Burnout has a positive impact on career turnover intentions and satisfaction (Barthauer et al., 2020). Working in a correctional institution can be stressful and dangerous; it is a demanding job that can very quickly lead to burnout, especially when there is a lack of staff. According to Harney and Lerman (2021), correctional officers are at significant risk of being exposed to workplace violence. Many officers reported suffering from severe mental health conditions like post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression. Burnout is typically a combination of stress, an excessive workload, a toxic work environment, inadequate professional or personal support, and an unbalanced work-life balance.

In summary, burnout manifests in specific attitudes and behaviors at work and affects an individual's behavior outside of work. Burnout has been linked to increased absenteeism, turnover, and decreased work effort. Additionally, the impact of burnout is evident in its effects on job satisfaction, health, and the quality of personal life. It can sometimes be difficult to distinguish the manifestations of burnout's consequences. Nevertheless, it is essential to identify the objective repercussions of burnout for both the individual and the organization in order to support and stimulate interventions that

prevent it. “The personal, social, and organizational costs of burnout can be considerable in terms of physical health, psychological well-being, and work performance, so it does not make sense to incur those before taking any ameliorative action” (Maslach, 2017, p. 148). To improve the job-person relationship, employers should establish a manageable workload, a wide range of options and control, recognition and rewards, a welcoming work environment, social justice, fairness standards, and values that align with their own, providing meaningful work. According to Maslach (2017), a primary prevention strategy should aim to reduce the likelihood of burnout. Second, building engagement is the most effective approach to prevent burnout. Third, organizational intervention can be more productive than individual intervention.

### **Work-Life Balance**

Work-life balance is a healthy balance between one's professional and personal lives. It feels at ease with work and non-work obligations (Shanker & Kumar Kaushal, 2022). Thilagavathy and Geetha (2022) conducted a morphological analysis of the literature on employee work-life balance from 1991 to 2019. According to Thilagavathy and Geetha, a chronological classification showed that from 1991 to 2000, researchers focused more on the issue of work-family conflict. Work-life balance was studied using work-family conflict scales. The adverse effects of work-life balance on employees were explored. Between 2001 and 2010, scholars and researchers investigated the factors that influence work-life balance. The organizations were held responsible for improving the work-life balance of employees. The influences of various factors on work-life balance, including work-life satisfaction, work interference with family life, support systems, and

work-life balance policies, were explored. Between 2011 and 2019, researchers and scholars shifted their focus from organizations to individuals, aiming to enhance their work-life balance. The influence of yoga, mindfulness, and resilience on work-life balance was studied to enhance the employee work-life balance (Thilagavathy & Geetha, 2022). Several experimental studies have been conducted to investigate the effects of these strategies. The influence of various individual factors was explored, including employee perception, commuting time, autonomy, utilization of work-life balance policies, person-environment fit, psychological climate, work-family image, and work value ethics (Thilagavathy & Geetha, 2022). Organizational factors were also explored, including work-family backlash, work-life balance policy implementation, organizational work climate, organizational culture, and societal factors such as societal expectations and demands, as well as societal culture regarding work-life balance (Thilagavathy & Geetha, 2022). According to Thilagavathy and Geetha, the key takeaway from these studies is that organizations can benefit from enhancing employees' ability to balance work and life, thereby securing the best human resources. To promote the development and implementation of work-life balance policies tailored to the perceived needs of their employees, managers must understand the workplace demographics in terms of social, cultural, and employee requirements (Thilagavathy & Geetha, 2022).

It is essential to remember that employees have a life after work. For this reason, good work-life integration is essential to enable employees to strike a balance between the two aspects, even if a perfect balance is not achievable. What employees are looking for, beyond salary conditions, are working conditions that allow them to balance their

private and professional lives. Finding a balance between work and personal life is more crucial than ever, as an imbalance can have a negative impact on both the workplace and family members. Achieving a work-life balance has a significant impact on interpersonal relationships, particularly with close family members (Shanker & Kumar Kaushal, 2022). The notion of balance will not be perceived similarly by individuals, partly because it is influenced by the sacrifices they are willing to make. Some people, for example, may have put a great deal of effort into choosing a career that brings them great satisfaction and have decided not to have children. For them, the point of balance in terms of time devoted to each area of their life will not be in the same place as that of a less ambitious person in terms of career, but who has chosen to invest a lot of time and energy in their family. Organizations that support work-life balance practices tend to experience a reduction in their employees' absenteeism rates and a positive impact on employee productivity and the overall work climate. Additionally, organizations that promote work-life balance tend to have higher employee retention rates. Work-life balance is one factor that influences the stress and job satisfaction of correctional officers. Vickovic and Morrow (2020) discovered that while strain-based conflict was a powerful predictor of both job stress and job satisfaction, time-based conflict only predicted job satisfaction among correctional officers.

Working in a correctional institution can be a stressful and potentially dangerous environment (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). Correctional jobs are demanding and can quickly lead to burnout, especially when there is a need for more staff, as is the case with Texas correctional officers. The departure of some correctional officers will increase the

workload of others due to the lack of personnel (Berry, 2022, May 6). Berry (2022, May 6) stated that officers would be called upon to work more to compensate for the lack of employees. Very often, in these situations, employees are requisitioned ex officio. The risk may hurt decision-making autonomy, social support, and working relationships. It leads to burnout, a combination of stress, an excessive workload, a toxic work environment, a lack of professional or personal support, and poor work-life balance (Berry, 2022, May 6).

### **Texas Correctional Officer Turnover**

The TDCJ is facing a significant turnover among correctional officers, and the causes seem unknown to researchers and scholars. Despite the many articles published in the United States on correctional officers, most existing studies have focused on the outcomes of job satisfaction, job stress, and organizational commitment. None of these studies examined other job attitudes and experiences of correctional officers (Butler et al., 2019). No single article studied the attrition experience among Texas correctional officers. Jeff Ormsby, executive director of the Texas Correctional Employees Council and a retired Texas prison correctional officer, stated that understaffing within Texas prisons makes an already difficult job even harder (Berry, 2022, May 6). TDCJ implemented a 15% pay increase for all correctional officers, but Ormsby thinks more than the pay increase will be needed to keep the staff from leaving. He stated that although numerous issues have contributed to staffing turnover in Texas prisons, the biggest problem he sees is how the State of Texas treats its correctional staff.

Ormsby said many Texas correctional officers are single parents and might have issues finding childcare while working at facilities away from home. They have obligations to their family and responsibilities to the state (Berry, 2022, May 6). This raises the issue of work-life balance. Thakur and Bhatnagar (2017) stated that job embeddedness fully mediates the relationship between work-life balance and intention to stay. A breakdown in the balance between the employee's work and private life leads to role conflicts between work and personal life that the employee needs help resolving; according to Shanker and Kumar Kaushal (2022), work-life conflict can cause emotional distress, health problems, decreased job satisfaction, and conflicts that can lead to violence, alcohol, and drug use. Work-life conflict in a worker's life can result in several negative consequences for the organization, including increased absenteeism, higher attrition rates, decreased productivity, and a decline in work quality.

Work-life balance is crucial for both employees and the organization. Work-life balance policies benefit workers by making them happier and more satisfied, while also lowering their stress levels. In contrast, the benefits for the organization include highly motivated employees, optimal job performance, high productivity, a low absenteeism rate, and a decrease in the attrition rate (Shanker & Kumar Kaushal, 2022). The authors stated that the organization emerges as an employer of choice for prospective employees, fostering good relationships between the organization and its employees, and improving the communication level between workers and the organization. Workers tend to be more loyal and committed to the organization.

In an interview with KXAN in May 2022, Michele Deitch, a professor of criminal justice at the University of Texas at Austin Law School, stated that officers are leaving the profession for several reasons, including inadequate compensation for the position. These are not comfortable working conditions, and the surroundings are frequently dangerous. Due to the remote locations of these facilities, it can be challenging to recruit qualified candidates for these positions. Applying job embeddedness takes on its full meaning here because an employee needs to be better integrated into the social structure of the workplace and its community; otherwise, this can have devastating consequences for both professional and personal life. Here, the two areas merge: if the social work environment suffers, the employee also suffers and carries his worries and problems into almost all other areas of his professional and private life. Treuren and Fein (2021) stated that off-the-job embeddedness weakened the impact of work-life conflict on turnover intention for more embedded employees. Off-the-job embeddedness refers to the degree to which an employee has attachments to the community in which they reside (Singh, Shaffer, & Selvarajan, 2018). The greater the community integration, the greater the social support networks. This means that employees will be more embedded and able to access social support resources to manage work-life conflicts. Employees' relationships with friends and family predicted their attachment to their communities, which predicted their workplace turnover intentions. Links with friends and family predicted employees' intentions to leave their communities. This association was mediated by employees' experiences of fitting in with their community and their perceptions of the sacrifice they would experience if they were to leave their community (Gonzalez et al., 2018). The

links that unite an employee with their organization are conditioned by the quality of the relationship between the employee and their community. These relationships go beyond the family framework. Organizations can enhance employees' workplace attachment by recognizing the role of friends and offering work-life programs that use a broad conceptualization of family. By doing so, they will have less intention to quit their job (Gonzalez et al., 2018).

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

This qualitative research aimed to understand why officers leave their jobs in Texas correctional facilities and to explore strategies the TDCJ can use to improve staff retention. Chapter 3 presents the research methodology and design employed in this study. In this chapter, the research design and methodology will be justified as the procedures followed in conducting the research. This chapter will provide details for the study methodology, sample or participants, instrumentation, data sources, data collection, and data analysis plan.

### **Research Design**

This study aimed to collect and analyze officers' perceptions of their lived experiences related to the voluntary or involuntary factors that compel them to resign from their employment, with the intention of identifying themes that enabled an understanding of the problem and inform the development of measures to reduce attrition. This made it possible to rule out the use of quantitative research methods, as they are not suitable for this study, since it does not involve examining relationships between variables or testing hypotheses.

The qualitative method was, therefore, the most suitable approach for this study. Qualitative research methods aim to understand personal experiences and explain certain phenomena. The standard qualitative designs are case studies, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative inquiry, and phenomenology (Thelwall & Nevill, 2021).

Ethnography is a qualitative research technique that describes the shared and learned cultural practices of a specific group of people (culture) (Tomaszewski, Zarestky, & Gonzalez, 2020). A case study describes specific cases to develop an in-depth understanding of the context surrounding particular issues (Tomaszewski, Zarestky, & Gonzalez, 2020). Grounded theory is a method that involves developing a theory to offer an abstract understanding of one or more core concerns in the studied world through data collection and analysis (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). Grounded theory is a systematic research method that shapes data collection and provides explicit analysis strategies. The primary purpose of this method is to develop a theory that provides an abstract understanding of one or more core concerns in the studied world. Narrative inquiry involves people sharing their stories about their lives and experiences (Tomaszewski, Zarestky, & Gonzalez, 2020). Phenomenology describes the meaning of a phenomenon as experienced by the people who lived it; in other words, the person's perception and interpretation of the event are given priority in understanding how the event unfolded (Tomaszewski, Zarestky, & Gonzalez, 2020).

According to Koster and Koster (2021), the general qualitative approach aims to understand how people interpret their experiences and attribute meaning to them. Since this qualitative study aims to understand why officers leave their jobs in Texas correctional facilities and the factors that contribute to Texas correctional officers staying on the job, based on the focus of each approach, ethnography, case study, and grounded theory are unsuitable for this study. Phenomenology might be suitable for the study, but due to the research's focus and the type of data to be collected, it is also inappropriate for

this study. Therefore, the general qualitative design is the most suitable approach for this study.

A general qualitative research strategy is one in which researchers are primarily concerned with fixing a problem, creating change, or uncovering key themes. General qualitative research tries to extract participants' experiences and their interpretations of those experiences (Ellis & Hart, 2023). “General qualitative research involves using an eclectic approach taken up to best match the research question at hand” (Williams, 2019, p. 5). Williams (2019) stated that general qualitative research is primarily conducted to gain a deeper understanding. The primary objective here is to broaden people's knowledge, rather than to develop or invent something. This form of study is intended to add to an organized body of scientific knowledge.

### **Population and Sampling**

The target population was former Texas correctional officers. Regarding the sampling plan for the study, the best sources to find participants who met the inclusion criteria were the social networks frequented by former Texas correctional officers.

Ninety-eight state prison facilities and hundreds of jail facilities located throughout the state are under the jurisdiction of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ, 2023). Consequently, I was unable to select participants from each prison or jail facility, but I ensured that not all participants came from the same facility. There were no restrictions on age, gender, race, or religion in the selection of participants, because the goal was not to understand the officers' attrition based on these factors.

The sampling method was a purposive sample. Purposive sampling, also called judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling, describes population samples used for research deliberately chosen to reflect a specific characteristic such as age, location, species, etc. (Andrade, 2021). According to Hennink and Kaiser (2022), the sample size should be between 10 and 20. I did not address saturation until after the minimum number of participants (10) were interviewed. According to Buckley (2022), saturation is achieved when the researcher begins hearing the same responses to the interview questions and when further coding is no longer feasible. Failure to reach data saturation has a negative impact on the credibility of one's research. Participants were contacted via email and phone to invite them to participate in the study.

### **Instrumentation**

The qualitative data collection methods commonly used include direct or participant observation, structured, semi-structured, or open individual interviews, focus groups, videos, films, photographs, and the examination of documents and artifacts. I chose semi-structured interview questions to collect data from participants. According to Elhami and Khoshnevisan (2022), interviewers use open-ended questions in semi-structured interviews to investigate specific topics. Open-ended questions allow the interviewer to get detailed data from the subject, including personal sentiments, emotions, and ideas, with less self-censorship. The semi-structured interview is based on generally formulated, open-ended questions prepared in advance (Elhami & Khoshnevisan, 2022). It is possible to ask follow-up open-ended questions during the interview if the

interviewee raises an aspect that is still unknown. See Appendix B for the interview questions.

### **Data Sources**

The study included interviews with former Texas correctional officers as part of its data collection. The sample size ranged from 10 to 20 participants. There was no use of a secondary source. The data was collected through interviews.

### **Data Collection**

Once the IRB approved my study, I started the data collection process. For data collection, I posted the IRB approval letter with the research announcement on social media sites of several open-access groups frequented by former Texas correctional officers. See Appendix A for the text of the research announcement. When between 10 and 20 participants were identified, I chatted with them to explain what it was all about. For those who agreed to be interviewed, I sent them the informed consent form, which explained the interview procedures, the voluntary nature of the interview, and any associated risks and benefits. The participants were selected from those who consented based on availability. I wanted to collect data through face-to-face, open-ended interviews. If a face-to-face interview is not possible, I will conduct the interviews using phone, Zoom, Skype, or a similar videoconferencing software.

To set the appointment and work out the format, once the individuals consented to participate, I contacted them, explaining how the interview would be conducted and approximately how long it would last. Therefore, based on the availability and preferences of each of them, we agreed on a place, date, and time for the interview.

To ensure the interview process runs smoothly, I explained that there are no right or wrong answers to the questions; instead, they should answer based on their experiences during their previous job. Then, I gave an introductory statement to make them more comfortable. Each interview was conducted separately on a different day or the same day and recorded on a military-grade hardware encryption USB drive, such as the Dictopro Digital Voice Activated Recorder with Password Protection-HQ or the iStorage datAshur Personal 2 Secure Flash Drive, both of which are password-protected.

### **Potential Ethical Issues**

Regarding ethical procedures, I completed an online training course to obtain certification in protecting human research participants and to stay informed about ethical issues associated with human subjects research. Additionally, I adhered to Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) regulations and guidelines to ensure that my study aligned with the university's ethical standards and U.S. federal regulations. Walden University's approval number for this study was 01 25 24 101 7771. Also, I protected their identity and any confidential information obtained during the interview process. Data are accessible only to me, maintained on an encrypted flash drive, and stored in a locked file cabinet in my home.

The first potential ethical issue I faced was recording participants' voices. According to the American Psychological Association (2017), as outlined in the Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct, Section 8.03, to address this issue, I obtained informed consent from my research participants before recording their voices or images for data collection. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), various ethical

issues may arise during this stage of data collection, including disruption, unfair treatment of participants, power imbalances, exploitation of participants, and the collection of harmful information. To address these issues, Creswell and Creswell recommended building trust and conveying the extent of anticipated disruption in gaining access, discussing the purpose of the study and how the data will be used, avoiding leading questions, adhering to questions stated in the interview protocol, providing rewards for participants, and so on. The second issue concerned inducement for research participation. Even at this time, no reimbursement is available for participation in this research; some participants may later request an appeal for their participation. To avoid ethical issues, I made “reasonable efforts to avoid offering excessive or inappropriate financial or other inducements for research participation when such inducements are likely to coerce participation” (American Psychological Association, 2017, Section 8.06).

Ethical issues that may also arise during the data analysis stage include biasing the results in favor of participants, disclosing only positive results, and compromising the privacy and anonymity of participants. To address these issues, I presented multiple perspectives on funding, assigned fictitious names to participants, and developed composite profiles (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Mohamed (2022) stated that qualitative data analysis involves recording, noticing, categorizing, and reflecting on the data. Recording involves gathering data, such as conducting interviews, making observations, writing field notes, and administering surveys. Noticing includes identifying and coding interesting findings or patterns in the

gathered data. Categorizing involves sorting, sifting, and classifying coded data to reassemble them in a meaningful way. Reflecting is thinking about patterns in coded and categorized data to make sense of them. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method used to identify patterns or themes within a given dataset. The analysis is independent of any specific theoretical framework, allowing researchers to apply any paradigm (Braun & Clarke, 2022). There are three types of thematic analysis: inductive analysis, theoretical analysis, and thematic analysis with constant comparison. I employed inductive analysis to examine the data collected from the semi-structured interview questions for this study. According to Nowell et al. (2017), inductive analysis is based on different strategies, primarily using the detailed reading of raw data to elicit categories from the researcher's interpretations, which rely on these raw data. Belotto (2018) and Williams (2019) suggested the following step-by-step data analysis plan:

1. I reviewed and familiarized myself with the data collected from each participant. I read the documents and highlighted the sentences, phrases, or paragraphs that were meaningful. During this process, I immersed myself in each participant's data.
2. I highlighted data.
3. I retained and stored all highlighted data unrelated to my research questions in a separate file. Later, I will reevaluate these data, keeping just those pertinent to my research questions. The remaining data irrelevant to my study will be disregarded.
4. I coded words, phrases, or portions of data.

5. After I coded all transcripts, all the codes were examined to identify categories. The categories were identified from all the codes, not individual coded transcripts.
6. As I see patterns, I identify data items that correspond to that pattern. I placed them in the previously assembled categories that manifested that pattern.
7. I examined all the categories and looked for the emerging themes. Upon observing significant themes across the categories, I assigned meaningful designations to the themes.
8. Finally, I synthesized the themes to form a composite synthesis of the data collected regarding the question under inquiry.

Nowell et al. (2017) stated that Lincoln and Guba explained and refined the notion of trustworthiness in 1985. They defined trustworthiness as one-way researchers can persuade themselves and readers that their research findings are worthy of attention. They refined the concept of trustworthiness by introducing the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to parallel the conventional quantitative assessment criteria of validity and reliability. To overcome issues of trustworthiness, I adopted the following strategies:

### **Credibility**

It is the confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research findings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). According to Stahl and King (2020), triangulation procedures are one approach to enhancing credibility, as they often establish recognizable patterns by utilizing multiple sources of information or field-based methods. Another approach to

achieving credibility is enlisting informants to verify researchers' views post-facto. This is sometimes referred to as member checking, where members are individuals who play multiple roles in specific qualitative research. I ensured that the question under inquiry had been accurately represented by allowing participants to review the themes that emerged and their responses.

### **Transferability**

It refers to the extent to which the results of qualitative research can be applied to other contexts or settings with different respondents (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). According to Stahl and King (2020), in qualitative research, a transfer is not a formula but a proposition that must be evaluated for applicability in a new situation. A transfer is only possible when a precise description provides a clear enough image of the event to be applied to other people's situations. I provided sufficient contextual descriptions of the setting, data collection context, relevant participant selection criteria, and recruitment and data collection procedures.

### **Dependability**

It refers to the consistency of results across time; dependability entails participants' judgment of the research's findings, interpretation, and suggestions, all backed by data collected from study participants (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I double-checked that the analytic procedure adhered to the approved study design guidelines. I provided sufficient procedural details of the research design, data collection procedure, and any flaws, missteps, or changes in procedures to enable replication of the study.

**Confirmability**

It refers to the extent to which the study's conclusions might be validated by other researchers (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Confirmability is concerned with demonstrating that the facts and interpretations of the findings are not a fiction of the inquirer's mind but are drawn from the data. Confirmability is concerned with neutrality (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I'll have to ensure the data's intersubjectivity. The interpretation should be based on the evidence rather than my inclinations and perspectives. I ensured that any themes constructed and any interpretation of participants' responses were analyzed by the participants to ensure that the findings are the result of the participants' experiences and ideas, rather than my characteristics and preferences as a researcher.

## Chapter 4: Results

This general qualitative study aimed to explore the turnover experiences of correctional officers in Texas. This qualitative research aimed to understand why officers left their jobs in Texas correctional facilities and the factors that contributed to Texas correctional officers staying on the job. Eleven former correctional officers who had worked for the TDCJ participated in one-on-one semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions. The participants shared their perceptions of experiences that contributed to their decisions to leave the job. The participants in this study worked between 5 months and 6 years in TDCJ's facilities. Chapter 4 provides a detailed analysis of data collection, analysis processes, and results.

### **Setting**

The study aimed to understand why officers leave Texas correctional facilities and to explore strategies for improving staff retention. Using semi-structured interviews, I collected and analyzed officers' experiences related to both voluntary and involuntary factors, aiming to identify themes, understand attrition, and potentially develop measures to reduce it. General qualitative research focuses on extracting participants' experiences and interpretations, aiming to broaden knowledge and contribute to an organized body of scientific knowledge.

### **Participants**

The study involved former correctional officers from the TDCJ. Participants were selected through a process approved by Walden University's Institutional Review Board. Participants were recruited via Facebook from several open-access groups frequented by

former Texas correctional officers. There were no restrictions on age, gender, race, or religion in the selection of participants, as the goal was not to understand the officers' attrition based on these factors. When the invitation was posted, the consent form was sent to those who contacted me and expressed interest in the study. The participants were selected from those who consented based on availability. The research announcement remained on social media sites for 4 weeks. I reposted the announcements every 3 weeks to keep them appearing in the news feeds of the selected groups until all participants had been recruited. Saturation was reached after conducting 11 interviews. All participants' names in this study have been kept confidential. To identify participants, I labeled them as "Participant" followed by a number determined by the order of the interviews. For example, the first individual interviewed was designated Participant 1, and so on for all participants. The participants' tenure in the TDCJ ranged from 6 months to 6 years, with an average tenure of 3 years.

### **Data Collection**

After obtaining approval from the university's Institutional Review Board, the research announcement was posted on Facebook groups frequented by former Texas correctional officers. The participants were selected from those who contacted me, expressed interest, and consented to participate in the study after being provided with information regarding the study's purpose, potential benefits, procedures, confidentiality of their participation, data to be collected, and the voluntary nature of their participation. Based on the availability and preferences of each participant, we agreed on the place, date, and time for the interview. Data was collected using the interview questionnaire

(Appendix B). Seven participants were interviewed via phone, and four in person. All interviews were conducted in a quiet, comfortable, private location with no loud noise. Each interview was conducted separately on a different day and recorded on a digital voice-activated, password-protected recorder. Transcripts were stored on a secure flash drive that was password-protected. After each interview, I began the member-checking process. This opportunity was given to each participant to review the transcript of their interview and verify the accuracy of the responses provided for each question. Once the member-checking process was completed, I began the data analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

The data were transcribed manually, using Microsoft Word, reviewed for accuracy, and hand-coded. To analyze the raw data, I began by transposing the data into a Word document format. I then read each full transcript while listening to the recording of each interview to familiarize myself with the data. Once familiar with the transcript, I resumed reading it line by line to select sentences or text segments relevant to my research objectives, as well as data that emerged from participants and that I had not anticipated. I assigned a code to each sentence or segment of text. The assigned codes were reviewed and revised if needed to make them more relevant to the sentence or segment of text. Categories were then identified by clustering the previously highlighted codes. The exact process was applied to each of the remaining transcripts. This resulted in a large number of categories, including some duplicates. To reduce the number of categories, I combined all duplicates to keep the most critical categories. Finally, I determined the themes from the groupings of the categories. I employed inductive

analysis to examine the data collected from the semi-structured interview questions for this study. Inductive analysis is based on various strategies, primarily utilizing the detailed examination of raw data to elicit categories from the researcher's interpretations, which rely on these raw data (Nowell et al., 2017). As Belotto (2018) and Williams (2019) suggested, I used the following step-by-step data analysis plan:

1. I reviewed and familiarized myself with the data collected from each participant. I read the documents and highlighted the sentences, phrases, or paragraphs that were meaningful. During this process, I immersed myself in each participant's data.
2. I reviewed the highlighted data.
3. I retained and stored all highlighted data unrelated to my research questions in a separate file. Later, I reevaluated these data, retaining just those pertinent to my research questions. The remaining data irrelevant to my study was disregarded.
4. I coded words, phrases, or portions of data. The code was straightforward and helped me keep track of individual data items.
5. After I coded all transcripts, all the codes were examined to identify categories. The categories were identified from all the codes, not individual coded transcripts.
6. As I saw patterns, I identified data items that corresponded to that pattern. I placed them in the previously assembled categories that manifested that pattern.

7. I examined all the categories and looked for the emerging themes. Upon observing significant themes across the categories, I assigned meaningful designations to the themes.
8. Finally, I synthesized the themes to form a composite synthesis of the data collected regarding the question under inquiry.

In summary, I worked on one transcript at a time as part of the data analysis procedure. I arranged the data and became acquainted with it. I reviewed the transcript and underlined pertinent passages using the corresponding codes. I went back and looked over the codes that were initially applied. As I read, I reapplied, modified, and recreated codes as necessary to reflect the data coded in each category. I made a comparison between the recent and previous examined data. I concluded that either the data could be adequately described using the existing codes or that new codes would need to be developed after examining all the data. I continued to document and define codes by describing and elucidating the ones I had created. After coding all transcripts, the codes were examined to identify categories. The categories were identified from all the codes, not individual coded transcripts. Themes are then derived from the categories.

### **Trustworthiness**

Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are key factors in communicating and boosting trust in qualitative findings. Qualitative research places a higher priority on trustworthiness than replicability (Stahl & King, 2020).

**Credibility**

To be considered credible, the researcher must demonstrate that the research techniques accurately reflect the participants' actions or words. Rather than requiring the researcher to demonstrate that it was impartial, credibility asks what research features increase the probability that you are correct (Novak & Jen, 2024). In this study, I employed member checking as a method for building credibility. I asked the participants to review the transcripts of the recorded interviews to ensure their accuracy.

**Transferability**

When a study is transferable, readers can apply it, comprehend it, and then apply it to their own contexts or other circumstances. To facilitate this, the researcher must provide a comprehensive presentation of the participants, setting, data collection, analysis, and findings (Novak & Jen, 2024). After obtaining IRB approval for the study, the invitation was posted on LinkedIn and social media, including Facebook, to several open-access groups frequented by former Texas correctional officers. Eleven former Texas correctional officers were recruited among those who contacted me, expressed interest in the study, and consented based on availability. They were recruited without restrictions on age, gender, race, or religion in the participants' selection, because the goal is not to understand the officers' attrition based on these factors. A purposive sample was used to reflect the specific characteristics of a former Texas correctional officer. Data was collected using interview questions. Each participant did a 15 to 30-minute interview, which was voice-recorded. Some participants were interviewed via phone, and others were interviewed in person. All the interviews were done in a quiet, comfortable,

private location with no loud noise. Each interview was conducted separately on a different day or the same day and recorded on a Military-Grade Hardware Encryption USB drive and Flash Drive, such as the Dictopro Digital Voice Activated Recorder with Password Protection-HQ and the iStorage datAshur Personal 2 Secure Flash Drive, both of which were password-protected. Collecting participants' demographic details was unnecessary and will not be included in the final results; however, participants' names were essential for communication and member-checking processes, where interview transcripts were returned to participants to verify accuracy and resonance with their experiences. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis.

### **Dependability**

Novak and Jen (2024) stated that dependability shows whether the outcomes are consistent or can be replicated. Would the outcomes be comparable if the study was conducted again with a different sample or at a different time? Techniques to ensure dependability include triangulation, field notes, an audit trail, and reflexivity.

I used an audit trail to ensure dependability. According to Bingham (2023), an audit trail is a comprehensive record of all research-related activities. Field notes or a researcher's journal go hand in hand with the audit trail. While the audit trail primarily records the date, time, headline, and incident, field notes provide a narrative supplement that thoroughly documents interactions, observations, reflections, and any internal disputes you had over decisions. Another source of information for triangulation is well-documented field notes.

## **Confirmability**

By demonstrating confirmability, we demonstrate that participant voices—rather than the researchers' prejudices or intentions—have influenced the results. Reflexivity and triangulation are two methods for proving confirmability (Novak & Jen, 2024). Using data from multiple distinct sources to create a picture that is as accurate as possible is known as triangulation. Data, investigators or researchers, the environment, or theoretical methods can all contribute to triangulation. Throughout the research process, reflexivity is a critical reflection that ensures the data and/or participants are accurately represented in the study's outputs. Reflexivity is a continuous process that enables researchers to conduct research in more equitable ways by better understanding their positions concerning the populations they work with. Reflexivity refers to how your values, assumptions, biases, and beliefs influence your role in research, not just your job as a researcher or in the community.

## **Results**

The results of the in-depth interview analysis are shown and organized as common excerpts and codes in Table 1, as codes and categories in Table 2, and as categories, themes, and subthemes in Table 3.

**Table 1***Common Excerpts and Codes*

Common excerpts	Codes
Disastrous working conditions.	Overworking, unmotivated, favoritism,
Poor working conditions, with one officer doing multiple tasks.	Unhappy, undervalued, mistreated,
Relationships were strained due to unfair treatment. Unjust treatment and favoritism. Lack of air conditioning.	Frustration, miscommunication,
Termination threats. Adverse treatment from supervisors. Management issues.	Mandatory work, thankless task.
Uncooperative supervisors.	Conflict, carelessness, apathy, disgust,
Lack of support from supervisors.	Unsupportive, favoritism,
Supervisors need to review leadership styles. Unsupportive supervisors.	miscommunication.
Supervisors seemed less concerned about employee departure—uncaring supervisors.	
Lack of recognition and support from supervisors. Do not listen to officers.	
Standard benefits, the salary is insufficient. The benefits were common.	Low wages, drawbacks, and perks.
Benefits were not exceptional and did not attract or retain employees. No adequate benefits. Pay could be improved.	
Complex pay structure.	
Long working hours.	Drained, stress, exhausted,
Mandatory overtime and short-staffed positions. Increased work hours.	Overwhelming, high workload, burden, strain.

Common excerpts	Codes
Forced to work long hours.	
Unclear work hours and mandatory overtime. Unpredictable hours, long shifts. Officers often leave, which can lead to burnout. Overload work and family life burden. Constant workload, fatigue, and shift slacking. Burnout. Sickness and tiredness.	
Need for retention strategies.	Turnover, dissatisfaction, short-staffed,
The organization did not employ retention strategies. Need to implement retention strategies.	Unattractiveness.

**Table 2***Codes and Categories*

Codes	Categories
Overworking, mandatory work, thankless task,	Unpleasantness, workload
Unmotivated, unhappy, frustrated, and dissatisfied,	Lack of motivation, bad feelings
Undervalued, favoritism, mistreated, and miscommunication	Workplace mistreatment,
Conflict, favoritism, and unsupportive	Interpersonal conflict, poor workplace interaction, and relationships
Carelessness, apathy, disgust, and miscommunication	Supervisors' attitudes and communication issues
Low wages, drawbacks, perks	Pay issues, benefits concerns.
Drained, stressed, exhausted, overwhelming	Emotional instability, burnout
High workload, burden, strain	Workload pressure, work-life balance issues
Turnover, short-staffed, unattractive, dissatisfaction	Staffing, unattractiveness, workforce challenges

**Table 3***Categories, Themes, and Subthemes*

Categories	Themes	Subthemes
Unpleasantness, workload, lack of motivation, bad feelings, and workplace mistreatment	Job dissatisfaction	Lack of recognition and appreciation, Lack of support
Interpersonal conflict, poor workplace interaction and relationships, Supervisors' attitudes, and communication issues	Ineffective leadership	Supervisors-Correctional Officers' poor workplace relationship.
Pay issues and benefits concerns.	Compensation and benefits	
Burnout, emotional instability, workload pressure, work-life balance issues	Work-life imbalance	
Staffing, unattractiveness, workforce challenges	Lack of retention strategies and need for implementation	

**Theme 1: Job Dissatisfaction**

The results of the data analysis indicate that participants were dissatisfied with their jobs due to subpar working conditions, where one person was responsible for handling multiple tasks. They felt they had no rights and were compelled to work long hours without being acknowledged. Supervisors did not offer the required assistance and were unsupportive. Favoritism and unfair treatment created tension in the relationships between coworkers and supervisors, leaving correctional officers feeling dissatisfied, undervalued, and unappreciated. Participant 1 stated,

If I left my job, it was due to an overwhelming workload that was increasingly burdening my family life. I came home exhausted after each day of work, to the point where I could no longer make time for my wife and children. Added to this is the lack of support from those responsible and the resulting injustices. When you are not in the circle of friends of those in charge, you are given the most thankless and complex tasks.

Participant 2 stated,

I left because there were no opportunities over there, and I no longer liked it due to my experiences; the job became mentally draining and tiring. I do not just want to spend the rest of my life doing what I do without spiking my career. I also wanted to be able to go back to school. With the hours and shifts I worked, I was unable to do that.

Along the same lines as Participants 1 and 2, Participants 3, 4, 5, and 8 added that

It was a horrible situation; they do not give you any chances, and in those places, many people's promotions often stem from the fact that they know the supervisors and have some sort of relationship. If you are not in the circle of friends of those in charge, you are given the most thankless and complex tasks. The way I was treated during my job was sometimes mainly targeted, which made my job harder. I had to do everybody else's job because they had their favorites in the office.

Participant 6 stated,

I did not like how they treated officers. The lieutenants, sergeants, and some officers tried to make the job more difficult for you by not doing their job

effectively because of their malpractice and lack of support. When you confront them, you become a target. They will try to make your job miserable.

Participant 9 declared,

When I started the job, I was motivated and liked my work. Then, the work conditions went down; we were short-staffed and outnumbered. I started having mandatory workdays and hours, which I didn't like because they negatively impacted my personal activities and family life.

### **Subtheme 1: Lack of Recognition and Appreciation**

According to the findings, most participants reported a lack of employee recognition and appreciation within their facilities. The participants felt the organization did not value them, especially since they were constrained to work long hours without recognition. Unjust treatment and favoritism made them feel unappreciated and unfulfilled. Participant 1 indicated, "I worked there for 5 years, and believe it or not, none of my supervisors had ever told me 'Thank you,' even after a long shift. There was no recognition for my job." Participant 3 and Participant 11 supported the notion by stating,

Everything is mandatory for them, and on top of that, the administration did not recognize or appreciate all my efforts. I do not know if they thought we were robots or machines, or if we didn't have a life outside of work, so they made us work too many hours, and there was no appreciation.

Participant 6 also noted the lack of appreciation by stating, "I stayed over sometimes, but it was never enough." Agreeing with the participants above, Participants 4 and 5 stated, "There was no recognition or appreciation; I had never been recognized for my work."

Following the statements of Participants 4 and 5 during the interview, I asked them to elaborate on any recognition programs at their facility. Participant 4 stated, “For the officer appreciation day, no recognition, they brought us some donuts.” Participant 5 stated, “They had a Correctional Officer Appreciation Day. However, they did talk to us, and they would consult with us if something happened. However, it never went further.” Participant 8 stated, “They only saw us as a working buddy, so they never recognized or appreciated all the work we were doing. Not even a little thanks from the supervisors, you will not get.”

### **Subtheme 2: Lack of Support**

From the findings, Participant 1 noted,

There was no support from the supervisors. Even if you do not want to do what an officer tells you, at least take the time to listen to them, show them you care, and offer some support; there was often a lack of organizational support.

Participant 2 stated, “They did not have a good understanding; they just wanted you to go to your position and do your job.” Participant 3 expressed,

Sometimes, I felt like the supervisor no longer cared; they just did as they pleased and left me to do the job without any support. You know, a supervisor should be there for the team and help them succeed, but that was not what I experienced there.

Participant 4 declared,

I just felt like I was a body, like that was it. You are here. I need you here to do this and that. I did not feel welcome, and I didn't feel protected. Additionally, I did not feel like my supervisors had my back.

Sharing the same perception as Participant 4, Participant 5 stated, "Your job will be miserable if you are not among the ranks' favorites; you will not receive any support from them." Participant 6 stated, "Receiving more support from higher-ranking staff could have been better altogether." Participant 7 noticed that the support he/she received varied depending on the supervisor. Participant 7 noted,

It depends on the supervisor; my last one was nice, and he made an effort to look out for his team. At the same time, we were all from different departments, but whenever the captain or the major came to pull us to work various shifts, my supervisor never backed us up.

Participant 8 and Participant 11 stated, "It depends on which supervisor I worked with; some supervisors tried their best to support their team, but others did not." The participants in the study did not feel valued by the organization or their supervisors, as they did not perceive any support from them. The participants felt their supervisors were uncooperative and did not understand the situation. The lack of organizational support and communication was a significant issue for them. They stated their supervisors were unsupportive and seemed less concerned about employee departures. The unjust treatment and favoritism made employees feel unappreciated and unfulfilled.

**Theme 2: Ineffective Leadership**

Leaders have a unique and important function in the operation of organizations. They must be dedicated to their work and possess the ability to handle the most erratic circumstances while fostering close bonds with their teammates. Effective leadership with the appropriate abilities will increase employee retention and engagement rates. According to Yasin et al. (2023), organizations can enhance employee loyalty and diminish turnover intention through inclusive leadership techniques. The participants highlighted a poor working relationship between supervisors and correctional officers, as well as a lack of communication.

**Subtheme 1: Supervisors-Correctional Officers' Poor Workplace Relationship**

From the findings, Participant 1 declared,

They decide for us without consulting or involving us, while experiencing reality firsthand. It was a one-way relationship that translated into receiving and carrying their orders. They do not see us as collaborators but as work instruments; that is the resentment I have always had. The organization will still face turnover if supervisors do not review their leadership styles and provide support to the officers. Only some people can be leaders; just because someone has been in the organization for a long time does not make them a leader. Many supervisors need to develop more leadership skills. Instead of being a leader and helping officers, they act like dictators. All they knew was giving orders; you had nothing to say; you had to carry out their orders. We work on the floor while they stay in their offices and make all the decisions for us.

Participant 2 stated,

You can tell people all day that this is bothering me, and they can still force you to do it anyway, just because they need their job done and their particular position coverage. They did not try to understand the situation; they wanted you to go to your position and do your job.

Participant 3 expressed,

I was not treated fairly during my time there. Treat someone fairly, meaning that you provide them with the proper equipment and all the support they need to succeed in their job, taking into account any life events that may have impacted them. I sensed that the supervisors did not care if I quit or not at my workplace facility. They acted as if they didn't need you. I could have had a better experience, but the injustice, lack of recognition, and favoritism made me feel like I no longer belonged to the team. The only thing that mattered to the supervisors was their success.

Participant 4 said,

My relationship with my supervisors seems more like it should not have been. They saw us as a working body. They did not care about us. For example, none of them had ever asked me if I was doing well or how my day was, checking in on us and ensuring we were okay. It was more like I need you to go here and just be here, and that is it. I just felt like a working body there.

Participant 5 stated, “My relationships with my supervisors were horrible; they played favoritism. They brought outside personal problems to the workplace, affecting the team and how you do your job.” Participant 6 stated,

My relationship with my supervisors could have been better and more efficient if they were more focused on my coworkers and my growth and development.

During my time there, none of my supervisors met with me to provide feedback or discuss how I could improve my work or advance my career.

Sharing the same opinion as Participant 6, Participant 10 noted, “I did not remember the last time I had discussed any work-related or personal concern with any of my supervisors or called in the office for any feedback.” Participant 7 declared,

The contempt of particular supervisors made the job harder. I had been yelled at before by a captain because the count took too long, and he hung up in my face; he was screaming at me without trying to know or understand what was going on.

There were some excellent leaders, and some could not work under pressure.

The workplace relationship between officers and supervisors was also impacted by the lack of leadership communication skills. According to the findings, participants reported a lack of communication from their supervisors.

### **Theme 3: Compensation and Benefits**

From the findings, Participant 1 declared, “There was nothing special about the benefits; they offered health benefits and retirement. The pay scale could be better; they could pay more incentives. The benefits could not be listed among the top attractive

points.” Participant 2 stated, “The benefits were standard, but the salary was insufficient.”

Participant 3 stated,

There was nothing special about the job’s benefits; they were the primary benefits most organizations offer nowadays. The benefits are not attracting new employees or helping retain people on the job. When you are having difficulty recruiting new employees, providing excellent benefits is essential to attract top talent.

Participant 4, Participant 7, and Participant 10 noted, “They offered just regular benefits like many other employers.” Participant 5 stated,

The job benefits are essential, and the pay could be improved. We received one paycheck per month and had to learn how to budget and stretch it to last the whole month. Overtime checks help, but for those who cannot work overtime due to childcare responsibilities, one check for the entire month is sometimes insufficient and does not cover their bills.

Sharing the same opinion as Participant 5, Participant 6 declared, “The pay could be better; being once a month was hard, especially when most of your pay comes from your overtime check. It was hard.” Participant 8 stated, “The benefits were not extraordinary, and the once-a-month pay system was not helpful. I had to manage every month to pay the bills on time.” Participant 11 declared, “The benefits were not better than what most organizations offered, and the salary was insufficient.” In summary, the participants in this study stated that the benefits and compensation provided by the TDCJ were not unique, the salary was insufficient, and the pay structure was complex. Receiving pay once a month was challenging, especially since most of their income came from overtime

checks. It was complicated, with only one paycheck a month, and they had to learn how to budget and stretch their money for the whole month. Overtime checks help, but for those who cannot work overtime due to their children or personal circumstances, a single check for the entire month was sometimes insufficient and did not cover their bills.

#### **Theme 4: Work-Life Imbalance**

From the findings, Participant 1 declared,

If I left my job, it was because of an overwhelming workload that was becoming increasingly burdensome to my family life. I came home exhausted after each day of work, to the point where I could no longer make time for my wife and children. You worked all shifts, all hours; sometimes, you gave up your family's time for those who were married or a part of your social life because of the mandatory overtime. Instead of eight-hour shifts, I worked most days twelve or sixteen hours. I was tired; I had low energy and was burned out, like most of my coworkers.

Participant 2 stated,

The job became mentally draining and tiring. We are all tired there. We worked extremely long hours because some people did not show up, and many others did not show up at all, sometimes because they were completely exhausted. These people had lives and families; supervisors should better understand that.

Participant 3 expressed,

You come to work for eight hours, but you will be working 14 to 16 hours almost daily. We have a life outside of work; they did not know that. Everything is

mandatory for them, and on top of that, the administration did not recognize or appreciate all my efforts. This job requires a significant amount of sacrifice from you, and these activities are too demanding for me. It took away the time you might spend with your family and social life; it's as if you will be living just to work, and it didn't work for me. I do not know if they thought we were robots or machines, or if we didn't have a life outside of work, so they would make us work too many hours, and there was no appreciation; everything was mandatory to them. Sometimes, you have to give your employees a break and let them breathe, which was not the case when I was there. It was like an enormous weight being lifted from my chest when I left that job. I was very anxious and very nervous. Still, since I left, I have felt much better.

Participant 4 said,

I left my job because we were severely understaffed, and it was a lot for the officers to handle coming to work every day. We didn't have the staff, and that was probably the worst part of it. I feel like it was very short-staffed to the point where it was not safe, because you were working such long hours that you are now tired. After all, you just worked your whole 12 hours. Now you are doing the 16, and then you must return in the morning and do the same thing. It was tiring, and then we got in trouble for slacking in places. Still, it was all because we didn't get the rest we needed or were tired, so it became unsafe for me, too.

Participant 5 stated,

I left the job because they were not very clear about the work hours, there was mandatory overtime, and they would threaten to write us up if we chose not to stay on the days they tried to make us stay. Many officers called in because they were exhausted and burnt out.”

Participant 7 declared,

They were so short-staffed that they started using me in other areas, and I am getting burned out. The constraint related to the job was the need for more staff, which led to excessive working hours, increased absenteeism due to sickness, and fatigue. I dedicated most of my time to the job, which had a negative impact on my private life. People were getting mandated to work a day on their day off or work another 4 hours, and sometimes people had to pick up their kids, and they got mandated at the last minute and were stuck in that position.

Participant 8 stated, “The overworking hours were challenging and overwhelming.”

Participant 9 declared,

Honestly, it is a situation in which you do not know what to expect until you arrive. The most challenging part was not knowing where you would work and when you would go home. You go to work for 8 hours, and the 8 hours turn into 15 hours. If I were going on medical transport, it would take 20 hours or more. I had worked up to 22 hours straight, which was not mandatory. I was held in security at a hospital, and it was three hours away from the unit. So, basically, we would work sixteen hours and then have to drive three hours to the unit. I would work 20 hours, but I would also have to wait three hours for somebody to come

and release me. It was a staggered time in between, so the later that person showed up, the later I stayed at work.

Participant 10 stated,

With the long working hours and all the mandatory overtime, it is a good job when it comes to a single person. If you are single and want to work overtime, it is excellent if you enjoy live rock 'n' roll. It is not a good job if you are trying to settle down, have a family at home, and like to know when you are going home.

Participant 11 stated,

You worked 12 hours on the floor, and sometimes, they told you that you were not released at the end of your shift, so you had to stay on mandatory overtime. You did not know you were working 15 hours; you were already tired and had not even taken your break, so I want to say it was an issue because it was becoming a frequent occurrence.

Thus, the participants in the study stated that they left their jobs due to mental strain, long working hours, work overload, and the burdens of family life. They were experiencing exhaustion and burnout. With mandatory overtime, they were constrained to work long hours, resulting in a constant workload that led to fatigue, shift slacking, sickness, and exhaustion. The unpredictable long hours shift challenged the balance between their job and private life.

### **Theme 5: Lack of Retention Strategies and Need for Implementation**

Employee retention refers to an organization's ability to retain its employees, regardless of their position or status. Most participants in the study emphasized the need

for their facilities to implement retention strategies. The participants felt that their supervisors seemed less concerned about employee departures. They stated that when an employee decided to leave, they just let him go without an exit interview. Alternatively, an exit interview might provide crucial information about why they are leaving and what improvements could be made to retain prospective employees. Participant 1 stated,

The strategy used at the facility where I worked was that when an officer decided to leave, they would change their post. For example, they will move you from inmate supervision to transportation or the kitchen. Sometimes, they will send one person from the human resources department to talk to you, and when you explain to them why you are leaving, they will ask you to be patient and that things will change, but nothing has changed. That was what they told me the first time I told them I was leaving, and the second time, they tried to say the same thing.

As Participant 1, Participant 2 also stated, “When an officer decides to leave, sometimes they send you to talk with someone who tries to keep you on the job, but most of the time, they will just let you go.” Participant 3 declared, “To my knowledge, the organization did not use any strategies to retain officers who intended to leave.”

Participant 4 stated, “To my knowledge, the organization needed strategies for retaining officers on the job. When officers decide to leave, they do nothing to keep them on the job; they just let them go without care.” Participant 5 said,

I believe the organization should have employed strategies to retain its officers. I do not think they have any because they do not know how to keep their officers,

so they do not know how to treat them; they see us as numbers. If one leaves, another's going to come.

Sharing the same opinion as the above participants, Participant 6 noted,

If an officer decides to leave, they do not try to keep him/her there; they just let the officer go. When somebody says they are leaving, they do not even call the person and try to talk to them to ask why they want to go.

When asked what strategies the organization used to retain officers, Participant 7 stated, "I wonder if the organization used any strategies to retain officers because they needed help keeping them. As soon as they had one in, a couple were leaving."

Regarding Participants 8 and 9, the organization took no action to retain those who left.

In matters of strategy, Participant 10 stated,

One strategy they used to keep officers on the job is that if an officer, out of the blue, says they want to quit, the supervisor, even the warden, will offer them a different position. I have talked with many coworkers with whom I was an excellent friend. They said that when they wanted to leave, they no longer wanted to do the job. The warden would offer them a different position, and instead of being in a pod, they would be provided with transportation, food service, or even a different administrative position.

Participant 11 also stated, "They just tried to offer me a different position, and when I refused, they asked me to put in my two weeks' notice. They did not even try to find out why I was leaving."

## Summary

In Chapter 4, the study's purpose was confirmed. This general qualitative study aimed to understand why officers left their jobs in Texas correctional facilities and the factors contributing to Texas correctional officers staying on the job. In this chapter, I provided a detailed analysis of data collection and analysis processes.

Eleven former correctional officers, who had worked between 5 months and 6 years for the TDCJ, participated in one-on-one, semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions. They shared their perceptions of the experiences that contributed to their decisions to leave the job. Participants were recruited via Facebook from several open-access groups frequented by former Texas correctional officers. There were no restrictions on age, gender, race, or religion in the selection of participants, as the goal was not to understand the officers' attrition based on these factors.

When the invitation was posted, the consent form was sent to those who contacted me and expressed interest in the study. The participants were selected from those who consented based on availability. Saturation was reached after conducting eleven interviews.

The data were transcribed manually using Microsoft Word, reviewed for accuracy, and hand-coded. I reviewed transcripts while listening to the recording to familiarize myself with the data. Then I coded each transcript. Next, I clustered similar codes into categories. Lastly, I determined themes by grouping them into categories.

The credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability of the results are addressed in this chapter, along with a review of the results in relation to the research questions.

Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the research results, the study's limitations, and recommendations for future research. In this chapter, I present the interpretation of the data. I elucidate their relevance by putting them within the broader context of current research, articulating the implications of the findings, and hypothesizing the reasons for their occurrence. I examine the research's limits by critically assessing the study's flaws and elucidating their potential impact on the findings. I then propose implications for future research by suggesting new inquiries or subsequent actions that emerge from the findings to guide future research endeavors.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This general qualitative study aimed to understand why officers left their jobs in Texas correctional facilities and the factors contributing to Texas correctional officers staying on the job. Eleven former correctional officers who had worked for the TDCJ participated in one-on-one, semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions, sharing their perceptions of the experiences that contributed to their decisions to leave the job. Inductive analysis was used to analyze the data obtained from the semi-structured interview questions. The data were transcribed manually, using Microsoft Word, reviewed for accuracy, and hand-coded. The themes that emerged from the data analysis were job dissatisfaction, ineffective leadership, compensation and benefits, work-life imbalance, lack of retention strategies, and the need for implementation. The subthemes that emerged from the data analysis were the lack of recognition and appreciation, as well as the need for support, and the supervisors' poor workplace relationships with correctional officers.

Chapter 5 commences with the discussion of the research results, then states the study's limitations, and provides recommendations for further research.

### **Discussion of the Research Results**

The semi-structured interview questions enabled the 11 former Texas correctional officers to fully share their perceptions of the experiences that contributed to their decisions to leave the job. Using the inductive analysis technique, the results of the in-depth interview analysis revealed themes and subthemes that explained the participants' lived experiences. The research results are interpreted in the following section.

**Finding 1: Job Dissatisfaction**

One of the key findings of this study was job dissatisfaction, a theme that emerged as former Texas correctional officers shared their experiences. They also identified the lack of recognition, appreciation, and support, which negatively impacts their level of job satisfaction. Jannat, Omar, and Nazri (2020) asserted that job dissatisfaction is a detrimental emotional condition stemming from multiple personal and environmental factors, such as discontent with remuneration, working hours, job security, and compromised interpersonal relationships with colleagues. The former Texas correctional officers stated that they experienced unfavorable work conditions, a lack of recognition, appreciation, and support, as well as a scarcity of rewards and strained relationships with their supervisors. Recognition is often linked to specific achievements, such as being named Employee of the Month, celebrating a milestone, or exceeding expectations. Employee recognition reinforces and facilitates desired behaviors. Appreciation entails regularly expressing gratitude to employees for their efforts, contributions, and the daily challenges they face. To be effective, appreciation must be genuine. Employee appreciation helps build commitment (HR.com Professional Education Team, 2022). Effectively structured recognition programs can enhance employee morale, reduce turnover, and positively impact the firm's overall success. The efficacy of these programs is contingent upon several aspects, including organizational culture, the kind of recognition, and the degree to which the program aligns with employee expectations (Arunraj et al., 2024). According to Glavin and Schieman (2025), research indicates that the determinants of job satisfaction are diverse, encompassing both

extrinsic factors, such as compensation, work hours, and promotion opportunities, as well as intrinsic elements, including the meaningfulness of work and job autonomy. Arunraj et al. (2024) stated that recognition incentivizes employees and fosters a favorable workplace atmosphere, leading to increased engagement. Employees feel valued and appreciated when they are more devoted to their jobs and the organization. Through the development of a sense of worth, gratitude, and community inside the organization, employee recognition programs significantly contribute to increased employee retention. It fosters a supportive workplace culture that promotes sustained involvement. When employees feel appreciated for their work, they are more likely to form a deeper connection with the organization, which enhances loyalty and reduces turnover. Recognition programs have a significant impact on employee retention, whether they are formal or informal. Because they cater to intrinsic motivational requirements, recognition programs are a significant factor in retention improvements. The desire to be respected and acknowledged is just as important to employees as financial incentives. By honoring accomplishments, significant events, and everyday efforts, recognition programs meet these demands and provide workers with a sense of respect and value. However, the authors cautioned that recognition programs can strengthen links between staff members and the organization. However, they will not have a lasting effect if they are inconsistent, haphazard, and only honor a small percentage of workers. Instead, to be successful, organizations must carefully integrate the program into their corporate culture and adapt it to changing circumstances. The finding of job dissatisfaction aligns with the conceptual framework of Mitchell et al.'s (2001) job embeddedness theory, which is defined as the

on-the-job and off-the-job factors associated with individual links, fit, and sacrifice. In addition to increased motivation, job-embedded people can better shape their jobs due to their fit and links within their organization, which may contribute to higher job satisfaction. Because of their fit with the organization, highly embedded individuals better understand the work environment than weakly embedded employees (Zhang et al., 2021).

### **Finding 2: Ineffective Leadership**

The finding of ineffective leadership emerged as former Texas correctional officers shared their experiences of attrition. They also identified the supervisors' poor workplace relationship with correctional officers as a determinant of ineffective leadership. Participants recalled that supervisors were self-centered. Everything centered around them, including their views and interests. Their relationships with the correctional officers did not exist; if they did, they were manipulative. They were more concerned with themselves than their leadership responsibilities to correctional officers. The interests of correctional staff fell far behind. The perceived supervisor-employee relationships at the workplace refer to leader-member or member-leader exchange, which refers to how managers and employees, respectively, appraise their relationships (Kazemi et al., 2024). Derindag, Demirtas, and Bayram (2021) stated that in any organization, job outcomes directly reflect the quality of the connection and interactions between managers and employees. The authors noted that the quality of the manager-employee relationship is a key factor in job satisfaction and engagement. Leaders or supervisors should be empathetic in order to effectively represent the employee's point of view and perceive

what a team member is feeling. According to Ramaite, Rothmann, and Leoni van der Vaart (2022), employees who receive support from their supervisors exhibit greater job embeddedness. On the other hand, a negative relationship with a supervisor is a significant factor in employee turnover because when employees experience micromanagement, disrespectful behavior from supervisors, inconsistent feedback, or a lack of support, they are more likely to be stressed out, have lower work satisfaction, and be more likely to leave the organization. Rogers et al. (2023) stated that Eisenberger et al. referred to organizational support as employees' perceptions of how much their organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. High organizational support is associated with higher job satisfaction, lower turnover, and improved performance. Employees closely observe their organization's treatment of them, paying particular attention to how their superiors regard and prioritize their welfare, as well as how their contributions to the organization are acknowledged (Nadia, 2022). Organizational support theory posits that workers perceive their work environment as an indicator of how much the organization and/or supervisors value and care about them (Rogers et al., 2023). Rogers et al. stated that a work environment lacking support could increase voluntary turnover. Low organizational support can also hamper the organization's ability to attract new talent. The finding of ineffective leadership correlated with the supervisors' poor workplace relationships with correctional officers, aligning with the conceptual framework of Mitchell et al.'s (2001) job embeddedness theory. Ramaite, Rothmann, and van der Vaart (2022) stated that the balanced-high job embeddedness profile, defined by moderate embeddedness in terms of links but high

embeddedness in fit and sacrifice, was associated with the best results. The authors also stated that positive supervisor relations were linked to job embeddedness profiles, which in turn influenced employees' feelings of job satisfaction and engagement.

Poor communication can weaken links, fit and sacrifice, making it easier for staff to leave. In contrast, transparent and effective communication leads to higher job embeddedness, builds strong social ties, and fosters a sense of belonging, making employees happier and reducing turnover rates. Job embeddedness influences communication by strengthening social connections, fostering trust, and promoting positive interactions among individuals within the same organization. It fosters open and honest communication, making employees feel more informed and valued. It strengthens employees' commitment to the organization by helping them feel more connected to its vision and values. It also encourages employees to be open and work together.

### **Finding 3: Compensation and Benefits**

The finding of compensation and benefits emerged as participants described their experiences with attrition. Participants stated that salary, bonuses, and benefits, including health insurance, paid time off, retirement plans, and wellness programs, were unappealing. Participants responded that the structure of wages and benefits does not attract new employees or encourage current employees. As a result, correctional officers are disengaged, which increases staff turnover and undermines long-term workforce stability. Employees are more attentive than ever to the benefits offered by employers (Hong, Ford, & Jong, 2024). As suggested for any organization by Collinson (2023), TDCJ could develop appealing benefits and compensation packages by offering

comprehensive physical and mental health benefits, enhancing financial wellness and insurance protections, broadening retirement benefits, and implementing best practices for a multigenerational workforce (Implement a diversity and inclusion policy statement, facilitate alternative work arrangements, offer initiatives to promote lifelong learning, provide assistance for caregivers, and employ intergenerational recruitment strategies).TDCJ may further emphasize the importance of corporate wellness initiatives and the need for financial wellness programs (Collinson, 2023). According to Kristina (2024), compensation and benefits are a vital component of the employment contract, essential to both employee recruitment and retention efforts. Employees receive these benefits and compensation in addition to their salaries. These include bonuses, health insurance, school funding, retirement benefits, vacation time, professional development opportunities, and sick leave (Li, 2023). Providing competitive pay is one of the main concerns in organizations nowadays. The compensation and benefits package has a direct impact on the recruitment and retention of staff. It can serve as a source of motivation and performance if appropriately crafted. On the other hand, poorly designed compensation and benefits systems might result in a higher turnover rate and disengagement. Offering attractive benefits and pay packages is essential to attract and maintain employees in an organization. Offering the pay and types of benefits that employees expect is insufficient to mitigate the risk of employee attrition; the perceived fairness and the distribution of benefits are also crucial. The findings of compensation and benefits align with the conceptual framework of Mitchell et al.'s (2001) job embeddedness theory. Based on the theory, a well-crafted employee's compensation and

benefits can positively impact job embeddedness. They can predict employee retention if the benefits focus on strengthening links, establishing a good fit with the organization and position, and raising the perceived sacrifices of leaving. According to Holtom, Kiazad, and Dandu (2020), a benefit package that enhances motivation and improves fit rewards desired behaviors with financial incentives and psychological resources that meet employees' needs. It also encourages employees to join advisory networks to share knowledge, assistance, and guidance related to their work through incentive schemes. Then, it causes job-specific sacrifices by requiring employees to leave incentive plans or high-performing teams if they change jobs.

#### **Finding 4: Work-Life Imbalance**

The finding of work-life imbalance emerged as participants described their experiences with correctional officers' attrition. The former correctional officers affirmed that their job was stressful and demanding, with mandatory overtime and short-staffed positions. The work overload burdened their family life, and they were experiencing exhaustion and burnout. They mentioned that the lack of flexible work hours and employee assistance programs made it hard for them to manage work and other obligations more straightforwardly. The participants emphasized the importance of maintaining a healthy work-life balance. Concerns about unsatisfactory work-life balance negatively affect turnover in many organizations (Bello et al., 2024). Many workers remain unhappy and believe that their work-related activities have a negative impact on their personal lives. It is a common misconception that workers are inert machines that need to recharge when their energy levels drop. Most workers want to be valued and

respected for who they are and for what they desire. An organization that disregards this issue treats its workers like robots, forcing them to continuously produce the same output. The quality of both professional and personal life, as well as the relationship between them, is critical to achieving a healthy work-life balance. When private life is invaded by work-related matters or vice versa, the entire system is negatively impacted. However, Kerksieck et al. (2024) stated that a balanced work-life might mean different things to different people. Everyone's conception might differ, and what is considered meaningful or essential nonwork activities can differ markedly across individuals. According to Bello et al. (2024), understanding the importance of work-life balance is crucial for any organization that aims to enhance employee satisfaction and engagement, reduce burnout and turnover, and improve its organizational reputation. When employees feel encouraged to balance their personal and professional lives, they are more inclined to stick with their current organization. This dedication lowers the expenses related to hiring, onboarding, and training new hires while increasing employee retention (Bello et al., 2024). The finding of work-life imbalance aligns with the conceptual framework of Mitchell et al.'s (2001) job embeddedness theory. According to Nunes and Rodrigues (2024), promoting job embeddedness can improve workers' well-being in demanding work-life balancing situations. Employees who maintain a healthy work-life balance are more likely to feel engaged in their jobs and less inclined to seek alternative employment.

#### **Finding 5: Lack of Retention Strategies and Need for Implementation**

The lack of retention strategies also emerged as participants described their experiences with correctional officers' attrition. The participants wondered if the

organization used strategies to retain officers; they did not recall seeing the organization use any strategy to keep officers who left the job. The participants expected the organization to develop retention strategies that would reduce turnover while enhancing productivity, attendance, and citizenship behaviors, thereby promoting a more pleasant and cohesive workplace culture and lowering absenteeism. According to Bell and Rahman (2024), compensation, rewards and recognition, promotion, opportunities for growth, participation in decision-making, work-life balance, a good work environment, training and development, proper leadership, and job security all contribute to employee retention. In an article titled "SHRM's Toolkit on Managing for Employee Retention," published in 2023, SHRM stated that Strategic measures can be taken to maintain employee motivation and engagement, so that employees choose to stay and contribute fully to the organization's success. Employees can be attracted and retained with an extensive employee retention program, which can also help lower turnover and the associated expenses. The finding of a lack of retention strategies and a need for implementation aligns with the conceptual framework of Mitchell et al. (2001), who developed a job embeddedness theory. This theory synthesizes associated attributes that offer an alternative explanation for employee retention. Holtom, Kiazad, and Dandu (2020) stated that job embeddedness refers to the totality of forces that increase the likelihood of employees remaining in organizations. Strong relationships with coworkers or the community may persuade an employee to stay in a job or organization she does not enjoy. Employees who align with the organization's values are more likely to stay as long as those ideals are implemented in practice. Finally, employees may have strong

preferences for community traits or non-transferable advantages that they are hesitant to give up by switching to another organization.

### **Limitations**

The TDCJ currently operates 104 correctional facilities, including prisons, state jails, and other types of correctional facilities, scattered across six regions in the State of Texas (TDCJ, 2025). One limitation in this qualitative study was the inability to confirm how representative the sample was of former Texas correctional officers. Self-selection biases may have existed, potentially skewing the selection of respondents to the research announcement. A second limitation was that the intent was to collect data from former Texas correctional officers about their attrition experience. However, there was no guarantee that all participants worked in all six regions and all facilities. A third limitation was that the data should be collected through face-to-face interviews. However, seven participants were interviewed via phone, and four were interviewed in person, which prevented me from obtaining a deeper description of their experiences. This may be the case if all participants had met to complete the face-to-face interviews. A fourth limitation was that the study's conclusions did not apply to other contexts, as the qualitative experience data pertained specifically to the TDCJ. Despite these limitations, the results of this study were still significant and focused on enhancing retention within TDCJ's facilities.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This general qualitative study aimed to understand why officers left their jobs in Texas correctional facilities and the factors contributing to Texas correctional officers

staying on the job. The data in this study were collected by interviewing 11 former TDCJ officers who worked in any of the TDCJ's facilities and any of the TDCJ's regions. For future research, I recommend that this study be repeated by facility and region, using participants who worked almost simultaneously during the same period. I also recommend repeating this study, including factors such as marital status and gender differences, to further investigate these aspects. This will contribute to the literature by providing significant insights into how TDCJ's correctional officers experience attrition based on their marital status and gender. Future research may explore the factors contributing to the officers' job satisfaction, particularly by facility and region. I recommend that future research examine the impact of benefits and compensation on correctional officers' decisions to quit their jobs. I recommend that future research encompass diverse questions that address aspects such as recognition, compensation, workplace quality of life, significance of work, and professional relationships at TDCJ. Future research may study leadership within TDCJ's facilities, focusing on the critical abilities and attributes that foster employee commitment and retention. I suggested a comparative study of leadership quality between TDCJ's facilities and regions, and possible relations between leadership quality and correctional officers' turnover should be established.

### **Implications**

The findings of this qualitative study have the merit of promoting positive social change. The study's results can enhance the existing body of knowledge regarding job embeddedness theory and add to the literature on Texas correctional officers. The study

provides insights for leaders and managers of the TDCJ's correctional agencies and facilities into the factors contributing to officer attrition. It also provides recommendations for implementing effective interventions that can make the working environment conducive to the retention of correctional officers.

The theoretical implications of this qualitative study are that Mitchell et al.'s (2001) job embeddedness theory remains a concept that encapsulates the various factors that bind individuals to their positions and organizations, thereby diminishing the probability of attrition. To improve correctional officers' retention and mitigate the costly impacts of attrition, the TDCJ may consider using job embeddedness, as it highlights factors beyond job satisfaction that can influence a correctional officer's decision to stay. A high level of job embeddedness can counteract job dissatisfaction by making it harder for correctional officers to leave, even if they are not fully satisfied. In other words, correctional officers can be embedded in their jobs even if they are somewhat dissatisfied, meaning they might stay despite negative aspects due to the strong links and perceived sacrifices associated with leaving.

The managerial implications of this qualitative study suggest that the TDCJ can enhance the retention of correctional officers and reduce attrition by implementing a support system for these officers. According to Nadia (2022), organizational support improves job satisfaction by meeting employees' emotional and professional needs, strengthening their sense of belonging and recognition. This leads to increased motivation, reduced stress, and greater organizational loyalty, improving overall well-being and productivity. Organizational support promotes employee retention by

increasing employee engagement and satisfaction. TDCJ's correctional officers' engagement may depend on how well its supervisors and leaders can address challenges and inspire their teams. A supportive and involved supervisor can have a significant impact on employees' motivation, job satisfaction, and sense of worth, making them less likely to leave the organization. Organizational support fosters a positive work environment by providing recognition, resources, and opportunities for professional development. This fosters employee loyalty by making them feel valued and supported, thereby reducing turnover and enhancing overall work performance (Nadia, 2022; Rogers et al., 2023). Kristina (2024) suggested applying a motivation system, including opportunities for self-realization at work, a recognition and evaluation system for employees, and a microclimate within the organization, when crafting employee retention strategies. TDCJ may also employ a comprehensive plan that incorporates effective communication and a commitment to creating a work environment that balances organizational performance and individual well-being. TDCJ may utilize open and transparent communication to foster a culture of dialogue, build strong working relationships that promote trust and collaboration, and ensure staff members feel informed, appreciated, and aligned with the organization's goals and values, thereby fostering embeddedness through effective communication. By doing so, TDCJ may establish a harmonious balance that supports its employees' positive and long-lasting work-life balance.

The study's findings have significant implications for social change, providing valuable insights to reduce attrition, enhance morale, increase job satisfaction, and

mitigate burnout. Also, the findings promote more humane relations between correctional officers and prisoners; consequently, prisoners can be treated humanely and with dignity. This can strengthen the protection of prisoners' rights and lead to a decline in the use of force and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. The organization can accomplish its mission and meet the challenge of adapting to the requirements of our time if it makes efforts in terms of training, recruitment quality, supervision, follow-up, and ethics.

### **Conclusion**

This qualitative study highlighted the factors contributing to the TDCJ's officers leaving their jobs and provided recommendations that the TDCJ can implement to improve officer retention. The attrition of officers in the TDCJ can be attributed to job dissatisfaction, ineffective leadership, unsatisfactory benefits and compensation, work-life imbalance, and a lack of effective retention strategies. The TDCJ may need to reassess its approach to increase the engagement of correctional officers. TDCJ should consider how its initiatives translate into better working experiences that can attract, develop, and retain correctional officers in a strong labor market where turnover has been a persistent concern. By understanding the principles of job embeddedness and implementing strategies to enhance it, TDCJ can cultivate a more engaged and committed staff that is less likely to pursue external options. Upon recognizing that inadequate compensation and benefits, insufficient work-life balance, restricted career advancement prospects, ineffective management, and detrimental organizational culture can lead to employee attrition, organizations can strategically enhance workplace relationships, cultivate a sense of belonging, offer career development opportunities, establish a

positive work environment, implement flexible work arrangements, and acknowledge and reward employees to bolster job embeddedness and subsequently diminish attrition.

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## Appendix A: Research Announcement

## Social Media Invitation

## Interview Study

Seeks former Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) correctional officers



Caption: There is a new study about attrition experiences among officers in a Texas Correctional Organization that could help improve correctional jobs, reduce attrition, improve morale, increase job satisfaction, lower burnout, etc. For this study, you are invited to describe your perceptions of your lived experiences related to the voluntary or involuntary factors that compel you to resign from your employment.

About the study:

- One virtual, phone, or face-to-face interview that will be audio recorded (no video recording)

- Participants will not be reimbursed for any expenses or paid for participating in this research.
- 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
- Being a former Texas correctional officer who had worked in one of the TDCJ's correctional facilities

This interview is part of the doctoral study for Dewanou Joel Aisse, a Ph.D. student at Walden University. Interviews will take place based on the availability and preference of each participant. We will agree on the site, date, and time to do the interview.

Please privately message the researcher by phone at XXX or by email at XXX@waldenu.edu to express your interest.

## Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What are the reasons you left the job?
2. What are the constraints related to the job?
3. How were the working conditions with your employer?
4. Describe your relationships with your supervisors.
5. Describe your relationships with your peers
6. How were you treated during your job?
7. How did you perceive the job's benefits?
8. How did you perceive the job's safety?
9. What strategies did the organization use for retaining officers?
10. What else can you share about your correctional officer job experience and your organization's retention strategies?