

Correctional officers and stress essay sample

[Law](#), [Crime](#)



Everyday that a correctional makes the decision to go to work could be the distinction between life and death. Many people do not realize the unseen dangers lurking behind the stereotypes of the job. Watching over inmates and criminals a person must be ready for anything. At any second throughout the day an inmate could start a riot and the correction officer would have to step in and split it up. The danger of anything close to this happening will eventually cause stress in even the most lighthearted people. Along with the stress from fear of possible dangerous situations, correction officers also receive stress from their long and tiresome work hours. Often times the correctional officers are on call, even during the holidays, this interferes with their family and personal lives.

Also, the correction officers often do not feel as if their family could relate to what they are going through and so they do not talk about it creating a rift within their family relationships. This split between personal lives, family, and work is almost always a cause for stress. There are new programs being set up to help deal with the stress created on the job, but this does not always help and the programs are not always free. There are high hopes to make advances in these programs to make them relatively low in cost and effective.

“ Correctional officers are the gatekeepers of the prison system. They watch over convicted criminals as these criminals serve their time in prison” (“ What’s correction officer,” n. d., p. 1). Any amount of time spent with criminals can be taxing on a persons stress levels. Imagine being right next to a convicted murderer and knowing that it is your job to control them if they get out of line. Any human being would be scared at the thought of a

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minute next to these criminals let alone eight to twelve hours a day for years. Correction officers are truly brave people who help to keep our prison system safe.

Correction officers prevent fights within a jail or prison and keep the convicts from getting out of hand. Their job can be seen as that of a babysitter for the felons. This close proximity to dangerous people causes a majority of the correction officers to drop out and search for a new job having been unable to handle the stress of their present one. Some of the stress that is felt by the officers is that which is caused by a poor public image. It is a common myth that correction officers beat the inmates. This leads people to believe that all correction officers are violent in nature which is absolutely not the case. In most cases the criminals antagonize the officers hoping for a beating to change up their boring scheduled lives.

All criminals are different however, especially between the jails and the prisons. "Inmates in jails may present different problems for officers than prison inmates because so many jail detainees have just come into the facility right off the streets" ("Correctional officer stress," 2010, p. 2). This difference in behavior between the two criminal classes could mean life or death for the correction officers. Many of the long-term prisoners pay no attention to punishment choosing rather to disrespect the authority of the correction officers and frequently harming them. "Inmate assaults against correctional staff in State and Federal prisons have increased and the number of attacks have jumped by nearly 1/3" ("Correctional officer," 2009, p. 1).

Overcrowding within prisons has not helped the odds for the correction officers to make it out of their jobs unscathed. With risks such as riots or hostage situations everyone in the jail knows the disasters that may come with these volatile conditions. Statistics have shown that “ attacks on correctional officers jumped from 10, 731 to 14, 165 in a five year period” (“ Correctional officer stress,” 2010, p. 1) (see graph above). Many of the correction officers going into these prisons are blissfully unaware of half of the danger they are going to find. There is no training for everything that you will see within the prison or jail and how to deal with any emotional distress that comes with it. “ For most police officers, the thought of touring the yard of a maximum security prison may seem like a deer visiting a gun store” (“ Correctional officer,” 2009, p. 1). Not only do correctional officers have to witness all this confinement and anger they also do not have the privilege to see the positive changes that occur in detainees. Most of the criminals are in and out of one jail or prison within a short period of time leaving the correction officer constantly having to deal with new detainees.

“ The effects of stress on correctional officers can degrade their ability to perform their responsibilities in the prison in ways that compromise safety, cost, and create more stress” (“ Correctional officer,” 2009, p. 3). Symptoms of stress include backaches, headaches, stomach problems, strokes, high blood pressure, heart attacks, and possible suicide. Physical illnesses such as heart disease or eating disorders are also caused by stress. Stress also often damages family relationships causing the person to become distant or violent. “ An inherent source of stress for correction officers is supervising

individuals who do not want to be confined” (“ Correctional officer stress,” 2010, p. 1).

Imagine working with thousands of people for 8-12 hours that are not trustworthy, that suspicion that anything could happen at any moment can carry with you into your daily life and cause an enormous amount of stress. In fact, many officers do not pick up the phone just in case they are being called to work extra. Other officers seek solace in the job, finding that they are alone more often and are experiencing marital problems. A brutal cycle will start to appear as more and more problems come up. “ The effects of stress may accumulate until you cannot take any more and explode unable to hold your world together” (“ Correctional officer,” 2009, p. 4).

Even top administrators experience stress. They are often times saddled with a 24/7 commitment to the job and have to carry a beeper around the clock in case they are needed. Having to complete all the required paperwork and still finding time to supervise other officers is often a source of stress for administrators because it is often difficult to balance the time between the two. If they do manage to get all the paperwork done but don't make it out into the line officer's view there could be major drawbacks. One such drawback being that the line officer's will feel alone and become angry towards the administrators blaming them for all of their problems since they are not putting themselves at risk just the line officers. Another stressor for administrators is “ attempting to follow unclear policies and procedures and frequent modifications to policies and procedures as top-level supervisors

change their minds or are replaced” (“ Correctional officer stress,” 2010, p. 6).

Admitting to a problem and seeking help for that problem is viewed as weakness; we often suffer needlessly in silence and take our family with us (Smith, n. d., p. 2). The best time to institute organizational change is after a critical incident when administrators and local government leaders will want to be seen as individuals who care about the well being of correctional staff (“ Correctional officer stress,” 2010, p. 5). Many agencies are just now realizing they need to consider the impact of work related stress (“ Correctional officer,” p. 4). Program costs for stress help programs or just general therapy may vary, but can be virtually free with the help of volunteers. Clinicians and peer supporters in correctional officer stress programs may be especially vulnerable to burnout because much of the counseling they do and support they provide revolve around issues of injury and death (“ Correctional officer stress,” 2010, p. 4).

An example of a stress program would be the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) which is a service that is contracted by the state that helps employees cope with problems. Another stress program is called the Peer Support Program (PSP) and it includes non-clinician employees helping other employees deal with problems. Clinical Incident Stress Management (CISM) is also a stress program, this program is a combined effort of professional and peer support. CISM usually deals with pre-incident prevention and stress inoculation. All employees receive training on these topics. A CISM program policy and procedures manual, applicable to the agency, must be established

(Ream, 2006, p. 2). The best results are achieved if team membership is voluntary (Ream, 2006, p. 2). CISM program services should include:

1. On scene support (usually provided by peer support members),
2. Brief intervention to assist employees in making the transition from the traumatic event back to routine or stand-by duty,
3. Defusing (a three phase group crisis intervention provided immediately or within 12 hours after the event to mitigate the effects of the stressors and promote recovery,
4. Debriefing (a 7 phase group crisis intervention process to help employees work through their thoughts, reactions, and symptoms followed by training in coping techniques,
5. Individual intervention if a single or small event and a group intervention is not possible or additional assistance is deemed necessary after group process,
6. Significant other or family debriefing,
7. Line-of duty death support (defusing provided immediately after event),
8. Team member recommends and instructs employee to access additional support through EAP or other resources,
9. Follow up (team leader contacts employee and or the supervisor a few days after team services.

(Ream, 2006, p. 2).

Stress Programs also improve relations with the union because they will be working together. They save money by encouraging people to talk instead of call off and become hermits. " Most correctional officers will not seek help until it is absolutely necessary. They wait until the stress buildup has created a crisis and they can not function because of it" (" Correctional officer," 2009, p. 4).

" Any organization or social structure which consists of one group of people kept inside who do not want to be there and the other group who are there to make sure they stay in will be an organization under stress" (" Correctional officer," 2009, p. 2). With the help of stress relief programs and a better understanding within the officer's homes of what it is these officers do, it is hoped that stress levels will go down. It will be years until the programs that deal with problems and stress within the workplace can be perfected, but at least it is a step in the right direction. These people take risks everyday keeping our prison system safe. It's about time that we did something to help protect them. It is true that all stressors will never be alleviated, but there are ways to deal with them and reduce the effect they have.

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