

# **THIS JOB IS KILLING ME: THE IMPACT OF JOB CHARACTERISTICS ON CORRECTIONAL STAFF JOB STRESS**

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Working in a correctional institute is often a demanding and stressful job. This study examined the impact of job characteristics and job involvement on correctional staff job stress. Specifically, the effects of supervision, perceived dangerousness of the job, job variety, feedback, role stress, and job involvement were studied, while controlling for the effects of the personal characteristics of gender, educational level, race, age, and tenure. Using Ordinary Least Squared regression, it was observed that gender, age, perceived dangerousness of the job, feedback, role stress, and job involvement had statistically significant effects on correctional staff job stress. Tenure, educational level, race, supervision, and job variety had non-significant effects.

Job stress has been negatively associated with job satisfaction and organizational commitment among correctional workers, as well as lack of support for rehabilitation of inmates among correctional staff (Blau, Light, & Chamlin, 1986; Grossi, Keil, & Vito, 1996; Lambert, 2004; Robinson, Porporino, & Simourd,

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1997; Shamir & Drory, 1982; Van Voorhis, Cullen, Link, & Wolfe, 1991). Relatively unstressed staff can help create a safe, productive, professional, and humane correctional institution. Conversely, stressed employees can lead to an unsafe, unpleasant, and poorly run correctional facility. Additionally, correctional staff job stress has been linked to premature death, physical and mental health problems, illness, social problems, and decreased job performance (Cheek & Miller, 1983; Woodruff, 1993). Not only does job stress have negative outcomes for the correctional institution, it also has detrimental effects on correctional staff; therefore, identifying the antecedents of job stress among correctional staff is of the utmost importance.

Research has shown that the correctional work environment impacts the staff and their behaviors. While there have been many studies that focus on antecedents of correctional staff job stress, various other circumstances have yet to be examined. This study focuses on three new potential antecedents of job stress, specifically feedback, job involvement, and job variety, and also examines the previously studied job characteristics of supervision, dangerousness, and role stress on correctional staff job stress.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The correctional work environment consists of many different dimensions. These dimensions can be divided into two major groups, organizational structure and job characteristics. Organizational structure refers to how an organization arranges, manages, and operates itself (Oldham & Hackman, 1981). Organizational structure applies to the entire organization, and as such, it permeates the work environment. As it is generally found throughout an organization, organizational structure factors impact virtually all employees within the organization. According to Lincoln and Kalleberg (1990), every organization uses several dimensions of structure to control, influence, and manage employees, with the major forms of organizational structure being centralization, formalization, organizational justice, integration,

and instrumental communication. Job characteristics, on the other hand, are related to a particular job and are not necessarily found throughout the organization (Hackman & Lawler, 1971). Examples of job characteristics are job variety, role stress, feedback on job performance, dangerousness of the job, supervision, and job involvement (Hackman & Lawler, 1971). Both organizational structure and job characteristics are theorized to be antecedents of job stress for correction workers (Lambert, Hogan, & Allen, 2006).

For many individuals, work can be a major cause of stress (Davis & Newstrom, 1985). Job stress is a broad concept that has been defined in different ways over the past several decades, both as a stimulus that causes stress (i.e., stressor) or as a response to a stressor (i.e., job stress). According to Matteson and Ivancevich (1987):

The word stress means so many different things to so many different people that it has been described as the most imprecise in the Scientific Dictionary. There are literally hundreds of definitions for stress to be found in the research and professional literature. Virtually all of them can be placed into one of two categories, however: stress can be defined as either a stimulus or a response (p. 9-10).

As pointed out by Kahn (1987), stress is used to “refer to damaging stimuli in the environment and to the immediate or longer range results of such stimuli” (p. 312). The term stress can, therefore, be used to describe either a force that causes stress or the response to a stressful stimulus (Huckabee, 1992). Stressors are “conditions that place excessive/unusual demands on a person and are capable of engendering psychological discomfort (that is, stress, physiological pathology, and/or social disability” (Cullen, Link, Wolfe, & Frank, 1985, p. 507). The effects of job stress can range from fatigue, anxiety, tension, burnout, depression, and medical problems (e.g., heart problems, high blood pressure, etc.). Job stress is a harmful outcome for both correctional staff and the correctional facility. In this study, the effects of fatigue, anxiety,

and tension are of interest, and are used to measure job stress.

Research has found that organizational structure is linked to correctional staff job stress (Lambert et al., 2006). Participation in decision-making, instrumental communication, and procedural justice have each been linked to lower levels of job stress among correctional employees (Dowden & Tellier, 2004; Lambert et al., 2006; Slate & Vogel, 1997; Stohr, Lovrich, & Wilson, 1994; Wright, Saylor, Gilman & Camp, 1997).

Research has also examined the impact of different job characteristics on job stress. Most of the research on the antecedents of correctional staff job stress has focused on the job characteristic of role stress and, to a lesser degree, dangerousness and supervision. Role stress consists of role conflict and role ambiguity. Role conflict occurs when an employee is given conflicting orders or tasks, or there is disagreement on how things should be handled (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970). Role ambiguity occurs when an employee is not given sufficient information or direction on how to carry out the duties and responsibilities for a given job (Rizzo et al., 1970). Role stress generally arises when an employee's responsibilities and duties are vague, ill-defined, and ambiguous and/or when directives are inconsistent or contradictory (Hepburn & Knepper, 1993). Role stress has consistently been found to increase correctional staff job stress (Armstrong & Griffin, 2004; Dowden & Tellier, 2004; Griffin, 2006; Hepburn & Albonetti, 1980; Hepburn & Knepper, 1993; Lambert & Paoline, 2005; Triplett, Mullings, & Scarborough, 1996, 1999; Van Voorhis et al., 1991; Whitehead & Lindquist, 1986). Furthermore, perceived dangerousness of the job also appears to be a salient antecedent of job stress. While less research has examined the impact of perceived dangerousness of the job as compared to role stress, studies have generally found that dangerousness may be linked with higher job stress for correctional workers (Cullen et al., 1985; Triplett et al., 1996, 1999). Finally, there has been little empirical research on the impact of supervision on correctional staff. The limited studies to date suggest that there may be a link between supervision and job stress among correctional employees. Specifically, it has been observed that trust in supervisors and

supervisory support is correlated with lower levels of work stress (Cullen et al., 1985; Van Voorhis et al., 1991).

There has been very little research on the impact of feedback on job performance or job involvement on correctional staff job stress. Feedback on job performance should be timely and meaningful information provided to employees in order for them to complete their tasks within the specifications of the job (Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins, & Klesh, 1983). Job involvement is the importance of the job to the worker (Paullay, Alliger, Stone-Romero, 1994); it is the degree of psychological identification the person has for his or her job (Kanungo, 1982; Lawler & Hall, 1970). In other words, job involvement is the degree to which an employee is interested in his/her job. Job variety is simply the degree of variation in the job (Price & Mueller, 1986). Some jobs require highly repetitive tasks while other jobs require significant variation.

While a significant body of literature has examined possible antecedents of correctional worker job stress, not all potential antecedents have been studied. To date, the research has been pragmatic, looking at the impact of different factors rather than exploring how job characteristics as a group impact job stress. The current study attempts to fill a void in the understanding of job stress among correctional employees by looking at three new potential antecedents (i.e., feedback, job involvement, and job variety), as well as looking in a collective manner at the impact of the job characteristics of supervision, dangerousness, job involvement, job variety, feedback, and role stress. Finally, the literature supports the position that the nature of work and organizational forces, not personal factors, leads to work stress (Gerstein, Topp, & Correll, 1987). Moreover, not just correctional officers suffer from job stress - all correctional employees can experience job stress (Weinberg, Evans, Otten, & Marlowe, 1985). Thus, this study examined the impact of the above job characteristics on all correctional employees rather than limiting the focus to just correctional officers.

### RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

Quality, open, and supportive supervision is hypothesized to have a significant negative effect on job stress among correctional workers. Workers look to their supervisors to help them cope with the demands of the job (Poulin, 1994). Therefore, supervisors who are approachable and supportive of employees should create a more pleasant and supportive working experience, which can lead to lower job stress. By contrast, if supervisors are harsh and unsupportive, workers will likely experience greater job stress. Perceived dangerousness of the job was hypothesized to lead to greater job stress for correctional employees. Individuals who perceive their job as dangerous may feel anxious, which will in turn lead to increased job stress.

While a few research studies have examined job involvement among police officers (e.g., Lord, 1996; Love & Singer, 1988; McElroy, Morrow, & Wardlow, 1999), there has been little, if any, research on the issue of job involvement among correctional staff, including its impact on job stress. Nevertheless, it is predicted that job involvement would have a negative effect on job stress. Terkel (1974) argued that for most people, a job provides “daily meaning as well as daily bread” (p. XI). Jobs give people more than financial resources; they provide purpose and meaning. If correctional staff have low job involvement, this should cause them to experience greater stress because they are performing a job that means little to them.

It is hypothesized that job variety would be negatively related to correctional staff job stress. Most individuals do not desire boring, repetitive jobs. Having job variety should stimulate employees and provide them with new experiences and rewards, and this in turn, should reduce the level of stress that results from work.

While there has been little research on feedback, it is predicted that feedback on job performance would lead to lower job stress among correctional workers. Employees require feedback

on how they are performing their jobs (Price & Mueller, 1986). Without feedback, correctional employees generally would have greater difficulty in successfully accomplishing their jobs, which in turn, places greater pressures on them.

Finally, role stress is hypothesized to have a positive impact on job stress. Jobs with responsibilities, directives, and duties which are vague, ill-defined and inconsistent cause the average worker problems and difficulties, which could very likely lead to increased job stress.

## METHODS

### *Respondents*

A survey of all the correctional staff at a Midwestern state prison was undertaken in the Fall of 2000.[1] The state prison had been in operation for many decades and housed approximately 1000 medium and maximum security level male inmates who were serving long prison sentences for drug and violent offenses. While there were 450 employees assigned to work at the state facility, only about 400 were available at the time of the survey. Employees were provided the survey and a cover letter which explained the nature of the survey, that participation was voluntary, and informed that all responses would be anonymous. A locked box was placed in a central location where employees could place the completed survey. Additionally, employees were given the opportunity to mail the surveys in a self-addressed, stamped reply envelope which was provided with each survey. To encourage workers to participate in the study, a cash raffle, with several cash awards ranging from \$50 to \$100, was used to increase participation. The cash prizes awarded was \$250. In order to avoid multiple responses, each survey was placed in an envelope with one raffle ticket, which was separated from the survey so that the respondent could not be identified. In addition, one follow-up survey was given. A total of 272 useable surveys were returned, representing a response rate of 68%.

The respondents represented numerous areas at the facility, such as correctional officers, case managers, medical staff,

industry staff, food service workers, line staff, supervisors, and managers. Overall, the respondents appeared to be representative of the staff at the prison. Of the total prison staff, about 77% were male, 86% were white, and 53% were correctional officers. Among the respondents, about 76% were male, 82% were white, and 50% were correctional officers.

## MEASURES

### *Job Stress Variable*

Job stress was the dependent variable in this study. Job stress was measured using five items adapted from Crank, Regoli, Hewitt, and Culbertson (1995) and had a Cronbach's alpha of .82. See the appendix for the specific items that were summed together to measure indexed variables. A summed index measure of perceived job stress was utilized rather than a physiological measure (i.e., blood pressure, heart rate, etc.). The items considered a person's feelings of job related tension and anxiety; perceived measures of job stress are frequently used in correctional staff studies (Cullen et al., 1985; Van Voorhis et al., 1991).

### *Job Characteristic Variables*

Supervision, perceived dangerousness of job, job variety, feedback, role stress, and job involvement were the measures of job characteristics used in this study. Three items were used to measure a person's perception of accessibility, fairness, and candidness of the relationship with his/her supervisor(s) and were summed to form the supervision index (alpha = .79). The three items were based upon supervision questions from the Prison Social Climate Survey (Wright & Saylor, 1992). Perceived dangerousness of the job was measured using four questions adapted from Cullen et al., (1985). The items were summed to form an index which had a Cronbach's alpha of .82. The index for job variety was comprised of five items (alpha = .76), which were adapted from Curry, Wakefield, Price, and Mueller, (1986). The index of feedback measured the degree of worthwhile and timely feedback of job tasks and requirements, which are provided to employees. The index was created by summing two items together, and the index had a Cronbach's alpha of .64. The two



items were adapted from Federal Bureau of Prisons Social Climate Survey (Wright & Saylor, 1992). Role stress was measured using nine items, of which the first four were from Rizzo et al., (1970), the next three were from Cullen et al. (1985), and the last two were from Triplett et al., (1996). The questions are consistent with the definition of role stress and represent the role ambiguity and conflict confronted by correctional workers in the performance of their job duties. The role stress index had an alpha of .79. Job involvement was measured using three items adopted from Lawler and Hall (1970); the three items had an alpha of .74.

#### *Control Variables*

Measures for gender, age, tenure, education, and race were used as control variables in the multi-variate analysis. Gender was measured as a dichotomous variable (0 = female, 1 = male). Approximately 76% of the respondents were male. Age was measured in continuous years. Age ranged from 20 to 61 years of age with a median of 44 years. The mean age was 42.55, with a standard deviation of 8.32. Tenure at the correctional facility was measured in continuous years. The median tenure was 9 years and ranged from 0 to 26 years. The mean tenure was 9.64 years, with a standard deviation of 6.82. In terms of the highest educational level reported, 9% of the respondents had a high school diploma or GED, 50% had some college but no degree, 20% had an associates degree, 16% a bachelors degree, 4% a masters degree, and 1% a professional or terminal degree. For this study, educational level was collapsed into a dichotomous variable representing whether a respondent had earned a college degree (1) or not (0); 41% had earned some type of college degree. In terms of race, approximately 82% of the respondents were White, 8% were Black, 2% were Hispanic, 3% were Native American, and 5% identified themselves as some other race. The measure of race was collapsed into a dichotomous variable representing whether the respondent was White (1) or Nonwhite (0). About 82% of the respondents were White and 18% were Nonwhite.

## RESULTS

Descriptive statistics for the measures used in this study are presented in Table 1. There was significant variation in both the dependent and independent variables. The median and mean were similar to one another for each variable, which indicates the variables were normally distributed. The typical respondent was a middle-aged, white man who had worked at the prison for more than nine years. About 40% of the respondents had some type of college degree. There was a good range of variances in the indexes. Moreover, the indexes had a Cronbach's alpha value above .60. Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951) is a measure of internal reliability, which provides an estimate of how the items used to form an index are related to one another (Carmines & Zeller, 1979). Cronbach's alpha is bounded by 0 and 1, with measures closer to 1 representing strong reliability for the items and measures closer to 0 being less reliable. Cronbach's alpha values of 0.60 or higher are viewed as acceptable (Gronlund, 1981).

**Table 1**  
**Descriptive Statistics**

Measure	Description					
Gender	0=Female, 1=Male	24% were women and 76% were men				
Education	0=No college degree, 1=College degree	59% did not have a college degree and 41% had some type of college degree				
Race	0=Nonwhite, 1=White	19% were Nonwhite and 81% were White				
		Min	Max	Median	Mean	St. Dev.
Age	Continuous Years	20	61	44	42.55	8.32
Tenure	Years at the prison	0	26	9	9.63	6.81
Supervision	3 item index, $\alpha=.77$	3	15	10	9.51	2.79
Dangerousness	4 item index, $\alpha=.82$	4	20	14	13.58	3.54
Job Involvement	3 item index, $\alpha=.74$	3	12	4	4.75	1.71
Job Variety	5 item index, $\alpha=.76$	5	24	16	15.74	3.91
Feedback	2 item index, $\alpha=.64$	2	10	7	6.74	1.61
Role Stress	9 item index, $\alpha=.79$	9	40	22	22.92	5.00
Job Stress	4 item index, $\alpha=.78$	4	20	10	10.51	3.26

*Note.* Min stands for minimum value, Max stands for maximum value, St. Dev. stands for standard deviation, and  $\alpha$  stands for Cronbach's alpha, a measure of internal reliability. N = 272.



Pearson's product-moment correlations are presented in Table 2. Among the control variables, age and tenure had statistically significant positive correlations with job stress. As age increased, so did job stress. Those staff with higher tenure reported, on average, higher job stress than those employees with lower tenure at the prison. Among the job characteristic variables, supervision, dangerousness, job variety, feedback, and role stress had statistically significant correlations with job stress. Dangerousness and role stress had positive correlations; that is, increased dangerousness and role stress were associated with increased job stress. Conversely, supervision, job variety, and feedback had negative correlations. An increase in the supervision or the feedback variables was associated with a decline in self-reported job stress. Among the significant variables, role stress had the largest correlation, followed by feedback. Age and tenure had the smallest correlations with job stress. In fact, except for job variety, the job characteristic measures had twice or more sized correlations with correctional staff job stress compared to control variables.

An Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression equation was estimated with job stress as the dependent variable and the control and job characteristic measures as the independent variables. The results are presented in Table 3. OLS regression allows for the effects of an independent variable to be estimated while controlling for the shared effects with the other independent variables. Additionally, OLS is the most common method used for regression analysis in research in the criminal justice field. Based upon the correlations in Table 2, the Variation Inflation Factor (VIF) statistics, and the tolerance statistics, there appeared to be no issue with multicollinearity. "Multicollinearity is the extent to which a linear dependence exists between an explanatory variable and the other explanatory variables in the equation" (Bollen, 1989, p. 58). High multicollinearity can seriously impede estimation of the equation since it increases the variance of estimates (i.e., standard errors are effected), and as such, multicollinearity can be a serious problem in multiple regression if it occurs (Berry, 1993).

**Table 2**  
**Correlation Matrix**

Variables	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	
1. Gender	1.00											
2. Age	.09	1.00										
3. Tenure	.23**	.40**	1.00									
4. Education	-.10	.00	-.25**	1.00								
5. Race	-.01	.06	.04	-.06	1.00							
6. Supervision	-.14*	.02	.02	.08	.12*	1.00						
7. Dangerousness	.24**	-.10	-.10	-.17**	-.13*	-.28**	1.00					
8. Job Involvement	.00	.03	.03	.03	.01	.10	-.12	1.00				
9. Job Variety	-.09	-.02	-.02	.19**	.00	.39**	-.04	.23**	1.00			
10. Feedback	-.06	-.02	-.02	.00	.19**	.63**	-.24**	.17**	.25**	1.00		
11. Role Stress	.12*	.10	.10	-.07	-.16**	-.56**	.25**	-.16**	-.28**	-.54**	1.00	
12. Job Stress	-.02	.14*	.14*	.02	-.11	-.37**	.28**	.01	-.13*	-.40**	.45**	1.00

Note. For a description of the variables, see Table 1. N = 272.

- p # .05
- \*\* p # .01

**Table 3**  
**OLS Regression Results of the Impact of the Control Variables and Job**  
**Characteristic Indexes on Correctional Staff Job Stress**

Variables	b	SE b	B	t-value
Gender	-.88	0.42	-.12	-2.07*
Age	.06	.02	.15	2.59**
Tenure	-.02	.03	-.05	-0.79
Education	.48	.37	.07	1.29
Race	.24	.46	.03	0.51
Supervision	-.08	.09	-.07	-0.86
Dangerousness	.20	.05	.22	3.75**
Job Involvement	.25	.11	.13	2.32*
Job Variety	-.03	.05	-.04	-0.57
Feedback	-.29	.15	-.14	-1.98*
Role Stress	.19	.04	.29	4.24**
R-Squared	F = 9.51		.30**	

*Note.* For a description of the variables, see Table 1. b represents the unstandardized regression slope. The unstandardized regression coefficient represents the change in the dependent variable from a unit change in a given independent variable with the other independent variables being held constant (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996). Therefore, it represents the direct effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable in the metric/scale (i.e., the unit of measurement) of the independent variable. SE B represents the estimated standard error of the slope. That is, it represents the variability of the errors for the regression coefficient (Vogt, 1993). B represents the standardized regression coefficient. The standardized regression coefficient represents the standard unit change in the dependent variable expected from a standard unit change in a given independent variable with the other independent variables being held constant free (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996). It is metric/scale free. Therefore, it represents the direct effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable in standard units, and as such, the size of effects between the independent variables can be compare with one another. The t-value represents if the slope for a particular variable is statistically significant or not. N = 272.

\*p # .05 \*\* p # .01

Among the control variables, gender and age had statistically significant effects on correctional worker job stress. In general, women reported higher levels of job stress than did their

male counterparts. As age increased, job stress also increased. Tenure, educational level, and race were not statistically related to job stress. Among the job characteristic variables, dangerousness, job involvement, feedback, and role stress each had a statistically significant association with job stress. As perceived dangerousness of the job increased, the level of self-reported job stress also rose. Likewise, job involvement had a positive relationship with job stress. Those employees who reported higher levels of job involvement reported, in general, higher levels of job stress. Feedback on job performance tended to reduce job stress. Role stress had a positive impact on job stress (i.e., increases in role stress were associated with increases in job stress). Looking at the magnitude of effects (i.e., values in the B/standardized coefficient column in Table 3), role stress had the greatest impact on job stress, followed by dangerousness. Gender had the smallest significant impact, followed closely by feedback. Finally, based on R-squared, 30% of the variance in the job stress measure was accounted for by independent variables used in this study. The OLS regression model was re-estimated using only the control variables. The R-squared for this equation was only .03. Another OLS regression model was run with the job characteristics variables but not the control variables; the R-squared for this equation was .28.

## CONCLUSION

Three conclusions can be drawn from the findings. First, job characteristics as a group are important in helping shape the job stress levels of correctional employees. Second, job characteristics are more important in explaining job stress among correctional workers than are personal characteristics. Third, the impact of job characteristics on job stress varies by the type of job characteristic being examined.

As a group, job characteristics have a significant impact on correctional staff job stress. In the OLS regression model with only the job characteristics as the independent variables, they accounted for 28% of the observed variance of the job stress index.

As perceived dangerousness, job involvement, and role stress rose, so did job stress.

The second conclusion is that the job characteristic variables have far greater effects on correctional staff job stress than do personal characteristics. Far more variance of job stress was explained by the job characteristic variables than the control variables (i.e., R-squared of .28 versus .03 respectively). It appears that job characteristics are far more important than personal characteristics in shaping correctional staff job stress. This finding reflects those of other studies, which indicate that the organization itself shapes behavior rather than individual characteristics (Hepburn, 1987; Lambert, Barton, & Hogan, 1999; Van Voorhis et al., 1991; Worden, 1995).

Of the five control variables, only two had a significant relationship with job stress in the full OLS regression model (see Table 3). Women on average reported greater job stress than did men in this study. This finding is consistent with findings in past studies. Studies examining Southern correctional officers, New York correctional staff, western jail staff, and Federal correctional employees, observed that women reported higher levels of job stress as compared to their male counterparts (Blau et al., 1986; Cullen et al., 1985; Lovrich & Stohr, 1993; Van Voorhis et al., 1991; Wright & Saylor, 1991). An explanation for female workers reporting greater stress may be due to possible hostile work environment faced by many women in correctional facilities. The literature contends that female correctional staff faces hostility by male counterparts that feel they should not be working in corrections; additionally, females are more often the victims of sexual harassment than are male correctional workers (Carlson, Anson, & Thomas, 2003; Pogrebin & Poole, 1997; Savicki, Cooley, & Gjesvold, 2003; Zimmer, 1986). As age increased, so did job stress. A possible explanation is older workers may become burned out from the anxiety-filled environment of a correctional institution, which leads to higher job stress.

The third primary conclusion is that the impact of job



stress varies by the specific job characteristic being examined. Role stress not only had a significant effect, but it had the largest sized effect in the multi-variate analysis. It is frustrating to be given unclear and conflicting directions and assignments. Therefore, it should be no surprise that role stress leads to increased job stress among correctional employees. As previously indicated, past correlation studies have found role stress to be a salient antecedent of job stress. This study provides further support that role stress is harmful to staff, even when controlling for the shared effects of other job characteristics in a multi-variate analysis. Not only is role stress frustrating for most correctional staff, but it can also be dangerous. Being provided contradicting and ambiguous information will often lead to frustration for a person undertaking a task. In addition, supervision and feedback had significant associations with job stress. Therefore, it appears that poor supervision and a lack of feedback about job performance leads to increased job stress for correctional workers.

Based on the multi-variate analysis results (see Table 3), perceived dangerousness of the job had the second largest significant impact on the job stress measure. Everyday inside a correctional institution, danger is a possibility. Most workers adjust to this anxiety-filled environment, but over time, some may be overwhelmed. This could be triggered when an incident occurs that reinforces the volatile nature of prisons. For example, a co-worker is attacked unexpectedly by an inmate. This may trigger fear, which is a powerful force and causes discomfort for most people. Thus, those individuals who feel that they will be hurt or injured on the job report greater job stress.

In addition, feedback had a significant negative relationship with job stress among correctional staff. Doing a job without timely and meaningful feedback makes the job more difficult and frustrating. Feedback is a type of job characteristic that has not been included much, if at all, in studies examining the antecedents of correctional staff job stress. The findings from this study suggest that feedback should be included as a variable in future research examining correlates of correctional staff job stress.

Job involvement, interestingly, had a positive relationship with job stress in the multi-variate analysis. The direction of the relationship was opposite of that predicted. Workers who are highly involved in their jobs may experience greater stress because they place such great importance on their jobs. When things do not work out at work, workers with high levels of job involvement may take it more personally than employees who have lower levels of job involvement. This extra level of caring may cause discomfort and stress. It could also be that those with high job involvement do not have a balanced life because of their identification with their jobs. This, in turn, could lead to increased stress for these individuals. As previously indicated, the concept of job involvement and its effects have rarely been studied in the field of corrections. This study suggests that it may be a salient antecedent of job stress. There is a need for more research on the relationship between job involvement and job stress.

Interestingly, supervision did not have a significant impact on correctional employee job stress in the multi-variate analysis when the effects of other measures of organizational structure were controlled. As presented in the literature review, Cullen et al. (1985) and Van Voorhis et al. (1991) observed that trust in supervisors and supervisory support were negatively correlated with work stress. It could be that the relationship between supervision and job stress varies depending on what aspects of supervision are measured. Cullen et al. (1985) and Van Voorhis et al. (1991) measured trust in supervisors and supervisory support, while this study measured supervisory support and consideration. Additionally, it could be that the relationship between supervision and job stress disappears when a group of job characteristics are included in the analysis, as was the case in this study. While supervision had no direct effects in this study, this does not mean that it has no effects on correctional staff job stress. Based on the correlations presented in Table 2, supervision had a moderate sized association with both feedback and role stress. It is very likely that supervision helps shape the perceptions of feedback and role stress among correctional workers. Thus, supervision appears to have an indirect impact on job stress through feedback on job per-

formance and role stress.

While it had a significant correlation, job variety had no significant effect on job stress in the multi-variate analysis. This was an unexpected finding. Because the association between job variety and job stress has not been explored much in the correctional literature, little guidance can be gained from past studies. It is possible that job variety does not affect the stress level of correctional staff when controlling for the impact of other job characteristics. It is also possible that there is a relationship that was not observed in this study. There is a need for more research on the relationship between job variety and job stress among correctional employees before any firm conclusions can be drawn.

As with most research, this study has limitations. Staff at only one correctional facility were surveyed. There is a need for more research on the impact of different job characteristics on correctional staff job stress, particularly for job involvement, supervision, and job variety, before well-grounded conclusions can be reached. Studies at other correctional facilities should be undertaken to determine whether the findings can be replicated and to determine whether the relationships between job characteristics and job stress may vary by different types of facilities (e.g., public versus private, security level, jails versus prisons, adult versus juvenile institutions, etc.) or by across different states/regions of the nation. Furthermore, research in different countries is needed to see if the relationships between job characteristics are consistent or vary across nations. Because job stress has so many negative consequences, there is clearly a need for more research in this area.

There are implications of these findings. There is a need for more information about the antecedents of correctional staff job stress. In order to respond to job stress, its antecedents must be identified. In an era of greater demand and less resources, the importance of correctional staff becomes even more critical for the success of correctional institutions. This means there is a need for calm and focused correctional employees. Working in corrections is a thankless job that should not be made more difficult by

increasing the job stress of workers. In this study, it was observed that job characteristics are important in reducing the amount of job stress experienced by staff. Specifically, it was observed that perceived dangerousness, job involvement, feedback, and role stress are salient antecedents. Correctional administrators and scholars need to explore possible interventions to reduce the level of perceived dangerousness experienced by correctional staff. It is recommended that workers be asked why they perceive their jobs to be dangerous and what can be done to reduce the danger faced on the job. It was postulated that a lack of feedback and role stress may increase the perception of job dangerousness. Therefore, increased feedback and reduced role stress should not only lower job stress of workers, but additionally lower employees perceptions of the job being dangerous.

Better, clearer, and more frequent job feedback should reduce the level of stress experienced by staff at work. This means that supervisors must be aware of employees efforts and provide constructive feedback. Correctional staff need guidance in how they are doing their jobs. This means that there must be on-going two-way communication with correctional staff. Correctional administrators and scholars need to explore different methods of improving feedback to employees. At the very least, correctional workers should be asked their views on job performance feedback for themselves and how it can be improved.

Likewise, there is a need to reduce role stress for correctional employees. Administrators must work hard to make sure that workers do not experience role stress. Employees want clear and concise roles. Supervisors, managers, and administrators cannot give workers unclear and/or conflicting orders, directions, directives, or tasks. Most facilities have three shifts of operation. Each shift supervisor develops his or her own expectations for worker performance. Thus, in most facilities, there seems to be no clear method of carrying out the job. Thus, there must be dialogue between administrators and supervisors to ensure that everyone is on the same page. Administrators and supervisors must communicate with employees in order to learn specifically why role stress

occurs and what can be done to reduce it. Managers and supervisors must be on the constant look-out for role stress among staff and respond to it quickly. Furthermore, the rules, regulations, and policies at the correctional facility and agency need to be carefully reviewed to ensure that they are clear, specific, and not contradictory. This recommendation is based upon the concept of formalization. According to Taggart and Mays (1987), formalization is “the use of well-defined rules and regulations to govern the behavior of individuals so that actions within the organization become standardized” (p. 186). According to Lambert, Hogan, Paoline, and Clarke (2005), the vast majority of correctional employees want clear and concise rules and regulations which apply to employees in the organization. In other words, they want consistency. Additionally, as previously indicated, it appears supervision and feedback are linked with role stress. Without feedback and quality supervision, role stress increases.

Because there has been very few studies on the relationship between job involvement and correctional staff job stress, no administrative recommendations are made at this time. There needs to be more research to verify that there is a positive relationship between job involvement and job stress. If it can be shown that there is a positive relationship between the two, administrators and scholars must explore possible interventions to stop those highly involved with their jobs from experiencing greater stress than less involved counterparts.

In closing, this study confirms prior research that indicates job characteristics play a significant role in worker stress. Since stress not only affects performance on the job and the health and well-being of the worker, administrators need to actively promote stress-reduction policies. This study indicates that there are a few positive and inexpensive ways to reduce worker stress which requires active, open-ended communication between supervisors and employees. By concentrating on feedback and the reduction of role stress, administrators can reshape the work environment to be less stressful, which in turn, can lead to a more productive workforce.

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## APPENDIX

The below items used in this study were answered by a five-point Likert-type of response scale of strongly disagree (coded 1), disagree (2), uncertain (3), agree (4), and strongly agree (5).

**Job Stress:** 1) A lot of time my job makes me very frustrated or angry; 2) I am usually under a lot of pressure when I am at work; 3) When I'm at work I often feel tense or uptight; and 4) I am usually calm and at ease when I'm working (reverse coded).

**Supervision:** 1) My supervisor demonstrates sensitivity to such personal needs as shift and leave requests by fairly balancing them with the needs of the prison; 2) My supervisor encourages me in doing my job; and 3) My supervisor asks my opinion when a work-related problem arises.

**Job Involvement:** 1) I live, eat, and breathe my job; 2) The most important things that happen to me in my life usually occur at work; and 3) The major satisfaction in my life comes from work.

**Job Variety:** 1) My job has a lot of variety in it; 2) My job requires that I be very creative; 3) I rarely get to do different things on my job (reverse coded); 4) My job requires that I constantly must learn new things; and 5) My job is mainly concerned with routine matters (reverse coded).

**Feedback:** 1) Information I receive about my job performance usually comes too late for it to be of any use to me (reverse coded); and 2) I am given adequate information on how well I am performing my job.

**Role Stress:** 1) There are clear, planned objectives and goals for my job (reverse coded); 2) I clearly know what my work responsibilities are (reverse coded); 3) I am unclear to whom I report to and/or who reports to me; 4) I lack the authority necessary for me to fully carry out my job responsibilities; 5) The rules and regulations are clear enough here that I know specifically what I can and cannot do on my job (reverse coded); 6) When a problem comes up here, people seldom agree on how it should be handled; 7) The rules we're supposed to follow seem very clear (reverse coded); 8) I receive conflicting requests at work from two or more people; and 9) There is bickering between various departments.

**ENDNOTE**

1. The survey had 221 questions, which covered a wide array of work environment dimensions and issues. The data from this survey has been used in different papers that have looked at the issue of work-family conflict, organizational structure characteristics, organizational justice, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and turnover intent (a list and full citations is available upon request). Therefore, there may be some familiarity in the methods section in the discussion of the data source. Nonetheless, this paper is based upon an area not examined by the previous papers.