

# **OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AND ILL HEALTH OF CORRECTIONAL SERVICE WORKERS**

By

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**BA (Hons) Industrial Psychology**

Mini-dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
Magister of Arts in Industrial Psychology in the School of Behavioural Science of  
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**November 2005  
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to:

- ♣ My heavenly Father, for blessing me with the strength, ability and opportunity needed to complete my studies.
- ♣ Prof. J.H. Buitendach, my study leader, for her amazing support and encouragement.
- ♣ Ilana Human, for her generous assistance and support.
- ♣ My husband, Thamsanqa, for his continuous support and encouragement throughout my studies. "You are the best".
- ♣ My handsome boys, Simphiwe and Sthelo-esihle, for their support and understanding.
- ♣ My colleagues for their interest, support and assistance.
- ♣ Director Pravesh Bhoodram, for his consistent support and assistance.
- ♣ Mrs Aldine Oosthuizen, from the statistical consultation services, for the processing and helpful advice.
- ♣ Vanessa Callow, for her consistent assistance and encouragement.
- ♣ My father, mother and sisters for their constant support and encouragements.
- ♣ My in-laws for their encouragements and continuous support.
- ♣ Ndawo Tshabalala attorneys, for their encouragement and support and for availing their resources to aid in the completion of this study.
- ♣ The staff at Vereeniging Correctional Centre, especially the Social Work section, for their co-operation with the collection of data.
- ♣ The Department of Correctional Services for giving me the opportunity to conduct this research.

## COMMENTS

The reader is reminded of the following:

- ♣ References and the editorial style as prescribed by the Publication Manual (5<sup>th</sup> *edition*) of the American Psychological Association (APA) were followed in this mini-dissertation. This is in line with the policy of the Programme in Industrial Psychology of the North-West University, to use the APA-style in all scientific documents as from January 1999.
- ♣ The mini-dissertation is submitted in a form of a research article. The editorial style specified by the South African Journal of Industrial Psychology (which agrees largely with the APA style) is used. However, the APA guidelines were followed with the construction of the tables.
- ♣ The financial assistance of the National Research Foundation (NRF) towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at, are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the National Research Foundation.

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## SUMMARY

**Title:** Occupational stress and ill health among Correctional Services officials.

**Key terms:** Occupational stress, ill health, burnout, engagement and Correctional Service official.

Occupational stress is considered to be a rising concern in many organisations in South Africa; it is, moreover, a pervasive problem in our communities in general. The consequences of high-stress environments are typically a, reduction in the quality and quantity of job performance, high levels of absenteeism, an increase in turnover, an increased number of grievances and increased frequency of accidents. Correctional Services has been reported to be the most challenging and frustrating component of the criminal justice system. Factors such as having a high level of responsibility, genuine threats to personal safety, rotating shifts, meagre salaries and unpleasant surroundings, all add to the stress of Correctional Service Officials. The results of uncontrolled stress are costly to both the individual and the organisation. It is thus important for both the organisation and employees to learn or acquire ways of coping with stress.

The empirical objective of this study was to investigate relationships between occupational stress and ill health among employees of Correctional Services in the Vereeniging Management Area, in order to contribute towards an understanding of the interaction between these variables, and the implication thereof for the management of occupational stress and ill health in the specific setting.

A cross-sectional design was used to collect data and to attain the research objectives.

The study population included the entire population consisting of (n=197) employees of Correctional Services in the Vereeniging Management area. Management and production levels were fully represented. The Correctional Official Stress Inventory, General Health Questionnaire, Maslach Burnout Inventory and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale were used as measuring instruments.

The reliability and validity of all questionnaires were found to be acceptable. The findings revealed that increased levels of occupational stress lead to increased levels of exhaustion and this may in turn lead to increased experience of somatic symptoms, anxiety and insomnia, social dysfunction and severe depression. Higher levels of exhaustion and cynicism were associated with higher levels of somatic symptoms, anxiety and insomnia, social dysfunction, and severe depression.

The findings again revealed that an increase in the frequency of stress might lead to an increase in the experience of exhaustion, somatic symptoms, anxiety and insomnia, social dysfunction and severe depression. It was also found that stress could have some predictive value with regard to burnout, work engagement and health.

It is recommended that more awareness need to be created about the symptoms and effects of occupational stress and burnout on individuals as well as organisations. This study was conducted in a small correctional institution, as a result the study population was too small, which made it difficult to generalise beyond the study population.

## OPSOMMING

**Titel:** Beroepstres en swak gesondheid by Korrektiewe Dienste amptenare

**Sleutelwoorde:** Beroepstres, swak gesondheid, uitbranding, betrokkenheid en Korrektiewe Dienste-amptenare

Beroepsverwante stress, as 'n beskou toenemende bron van kommer by verskeie organisasies in Suid-Afrika; dit is verder ook 'n deurlopende probleem in ons gemeenskappe. Die gevolge van 'n hoë-stres omgewing in die algemeen is veral die volgende: 'n afname ten opsigte van kwaliteit en kwantiteit van werkverrigting, hoë voorkoms van afwesigheid, 'n toename in omset, groeiende aantal griewe en verhoogde voorkoms van ongelukke. Die aanduidings is dat Korrektiewe Dienste die mees uitdagende en frusterende komponent van die kriminele regstelsel is. Faktore soos hoë vlakke van verantwoordelikheid, 'n reële gevaar ten opsigte van persoonlike veiligheid, roterende skofte, karige salarisse en onplesierigomstandighede dra alles by tot die stresvlakke, van die Korrektiewe Dienste se personeel. Die gevolge van spanning wat nie behoorlik bestuur word nie kom die individu sowel as die organisasie duur te staan. Dit is dus belangrik vir beide die organisasie en die betrokke werknemers om maniere aan te leer of te kweek wat van hulp kan wees met die hantering van spanning en stress.

Die empiriese doelwit van hierdie studie was om 'n ondersoek te loods na die aard van die verhoudings tussen beroepstres en gesondheid van werknemers by Korrektiewe Dienste aan die Verenigingse Bestuurs area, met die doel om 'n bydrae te maak aangaande die begrip van die interaksie tussen genoemde veranderlikes, asook die implikasies hiervan ten opsigte van die bestuur van beroepspanning en swak gesondheid binne die gegewe omstandighede.

'n Kruisdeursnee-ontwerp is gebruik om inligting te bekom met die oog daarop om die navorsingsdoelwitte te bereik. Die studie-populasie het totale werknemerskorps van 197 by, Korrektiewe Dienste in die Verenigingse Bestuurs Area ingesluit. Bestuurs- en

produksievlakke is ten volle verteenwoordig. Die Korrektiewe Beroepstresinventaris, die Algemene Gesondheids vraelys, die Maslach-uitbrandingsinventaris en die Utrechts-Werksbegeesteingskraal is as meetinstrumente gebruik.

Daar is gevind dat alle vraelyste aanvaarbaar was met betrekking tot hulle betroubaarheid en geldigheid. 'n Positiewe verband tussen die vlak van werkstres en uitputting is gevind. Daar is verder aangetoon dat die laasgenoemde verband aanleiding tot die verhoogde ervaring van somatiese simptome, angs en slapeloosheid, sosiale disfunksie en erge depressie. Hoër vlakke van uitputting en sinisme was geassosieër met hoër vlakke van somatiese simptome, angs en slapeloosheid, sosiale disfunksie, en erge depressie.

Daar is voorts bepaal dat 'n verhoging in die belewings van stress, aanleiding lei tot 'n verhoogde ervaring van uitputting, somatiese simptome, angs en slapeloosheid, sosiale disfunksie en erge depressie. Dit was verder bevind dat stres 'n bepaalde voorspellingswaarde ten opsigte van uitbranding, werkbetrokkenheid en gesondheid het.

Dit word aanbeveel dat meer bewustheid oor die simptome en effek van werkstres en uitbranding op beide individue en organisasie geskep word. Die studie is geloots in 'n klein korrektiewe instituut, en gevolglik is die studie populasie relatief klein. Daarom is dit moeilik om die resultate wyer as die studie populasie te veralgemeen.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This study investigates possible relationships between levels of occupational stress, general health, burnout and engagement among correctional officials.

In this chapter the problem statement will be discussed. Thereafter the research objectives, which consist of a general objective and specific objectives, are presented. The research methods, including the research design, study population, measuring battery and statistical analysis, are explained and, finally, the division of chapters is set out.

#### **1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

According to Alighieri (2005), Correctional Services is believed to be the most challenging and frustrating component of criminal justice by many experts; there are the challenges of managing the inmates daily as well as the frustrations of inevitable mismanagement at attempting to accomplish multiple goals. New challenges present themselves daily. In a very real sense, employees in a correctional system are doing time the same as the inmates are doing time. (Ben-David, Silfen & Cohen, 1996).

Correcting Corrections (October, 1998) reported that numerous studies have confirmed that the psychosocial working climate in custodial institutions is highly stressful and can be traumatic. Much of the stress that correctional officials experience is related to different aspects of the job. The Correcting Corrections Article (1998) maintains that a correctional official is locked up with offenders' day in and day out. The possibility of serious injury, even death from the hands of inmates is an every day danger. The relationship between inmates and staff is always problematic and usually one of mutual distrust. More often than not, the correctional officers describe themselves as 'buffers' caught between management and offenders, with conflicting demands facing them. (Correcting Corrections, October 1998).

Ben-David, Silfen and Cohen (1996) states that correctional officers are often victimised, bribed and intimidated by inmates if they do not adhere to their wishes, which often include delivery of drugs and helping with escapes. Ben-David et al. (1996) further states that the poor salaries, which correctional officials receive, make them vulnerable to bribes by inmates. All this culminates in the corruption of correctional officers; the high number of corruption incident reports is evidence of this (Chaka, 1998).

The researcher is of the opinion that factors such as decrease of overtime payment, introduction of day offs for Saturday worked, poor communication, decrease in housing subsidy and introduction of payments for medical aids which was free, all of which are recent changes that have been introduced in the department, can be described as great sources of dissatisfaction, as well as stress for the correctional services employees which may result in a highly dangerous, stressful and unhealthy environment to work in.

Despite the necessity of these changes as mentioned above, within Correctional Services, Lord and Hartley (1998) state that employees may feel threatened since some might not see the need for change, others might fear the unknown, especially for their job and financial security. It seems with all these changes that are taking place within the Department, correctional officials will feel more demotivated and stressed in their jobs.

Ill health and sickness absence due to psychosocial stressor in the work environment are a serious and increasing problem in contemporary working life (Levi, Sauter, & Shimomitsu, 1999). Botha (2003) states that the seriousness of the physical and psychological effects of stress on the correctional official is becoming more and more important to the Correctional Services on an international level. He further mentions that a high level of absenteeism is a huge concern in this Department. According to the Irishhealth (2005) stress is the result of any emotional, physical, social, economic or other factors that require a response or change. It is generally believed that some stress is okay (sometimes referred to as "challenge" or "positive stress") but when stress occurs in excessive amounts, both mental and physical changes may occur (Irishhealth, 2005).

According to Pousette and Hanse (2002) theories that make predictions about antecedents to ill-health and sickness absence often make the assumption that the relationships are the same in different occupational types. These authors further state that the literature is somewhat contradictory to this statement, some authors suggest that relationships may vary according to the occupation that is studied and argue in favour of using occupation-specific models (Bacharach and Bamberger, 1992; Narayanan, Menon & Spector, 1999; Sparks & Cooper, 1999; Van der Doef & Maes, 1999).

Taris, Schreurs and Van Iersel-Van Silfhout (2001) state that the effects of job stress may be studied with regard to a wide range of outcome variables, for example: health complaints, burnout, etc. They further state that there is no comprehensive conceptual framework that allows for the specification of general hypotheses on the differential effects of occupational stress on different sets of outcome variables.

This study of Correctional officials in the Correctional Services distinguishes between two sets based on the ideas of Lazarus and Folkmann (1984), discerning between health outcomes (strain) and outcomes directed at reducing the effects of occupational stress by withdrawing oneself psychologically from one's job (Lee & Ashforth, 1996).

According to Schaufeli and Enzmann (1998) an individual experiences job stress when the demands of the workplace exceed his or her adaptive responses. Chaka (1998) described the demands and stressors of correctional officials as having a high degree of responsibility for people, genuine threats to personal safety, rotating shifts and unpleasant physical surroundings. According to Spielberg and Vagg (1999) other stressors can include organisational factors, inherent factors, shortage of resources and stressful working conditions. The researcher is of the opinion that Correctional Services environment is harsh, factors like long working hours, work pressure, overtime and the changes that are continually being introduced add to the stress of the Correctional Services Officials.

According to Jagdish (1996) stress is defined as the nonspecific response of the body to any demand. Because these responses include endocrinal as well as psychological and physical

reactivity to demands, they can, if intense enough or repeated frequently enough, upset the homeostasis of the body (its state of natural balance) (Jagdish, 1996). In such cases, the individual is said to have become hyper-reactive to stress, a condition, which has been associated with decreased performance on a range of physical and psychological task, and with illness and diseases via prolonged arousal of the sympathetic nervous system and its endocrinal and psychophysiological sequelae. (Jagdish, 1996).

According to Botha (2003), the Person-Environment Fit Theory states that stress in a work setting is attributed to the interaction of the individual with his or her work environment. National Occupational Safety and Health Council (2000) indicate that individuals and work groups can both show they are experiencing unmanageable levels of stress through a range of symptoms. These symptoms can include absenteeism, high or increased accident rate increased drinking and smoking, poor work performance and poor interpersonal relations in the workplace.

The Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and the Appraisal Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) have provided a theoretical background for this study. According to the COR theory people strive to obtain and maintain that which they value (resources). Negative outcomes, such as health complaints and burnout, are likely to occur when valued resources are threatened or lost, are inadequate to meet demands, or do not reap the anticipated level of return (Taris, et al., 2001). Major work demands include role ambiguity, work load and work pressure, whereas major resources include control, participation in decision making and job autonomy (Lee & Ashforth, 1996). Some of the central manifestations of organisational burnout that were found among Correctional Officials are: withdrawal and detachment and literalism and paranoia (Tracy, 2003).

This research considers work demands and resources as potential sources of stress (Taris et al., 2001). Hobfoll and Freedy (1993) have mentioned that job demands threaten one's resources and therefore, triggers stress. According to Taris, et al. (2001) prolonged exposure to such job demands will result in strain in the form of emotional exhaustion. These authors further state that people who are confronted with stress are expected to strive to minimise net

loss of resources, that is, they will attempt to cope with the job demands in such a way that resource loss is minimised. This reasoning implies that those who have few resources are vulnerable to resource loss and therefore strain (Hobfoll, 1989).

According to Lee and Ashforth (1996) resources help to overcome the need for defensive coping behaviour. This implies that while the threat of resources loss may lead to the use of coping strategies, such as depersonalisation, i.e. having a distant and cynical attitude towards the people one is working with professionally, those who have many resources at their disposal have a lower need for such coping strategies than others. A study conducted by Rossouw (1997), found that most of the respondents in the study were exposed to gang related activities and controlling riots, as a consequence Correctional Officials found themselves having to resort to making amendments in their lives (both professionally and personally) some of which might have lethal implications.

The Job Demands-Control-Support Model (Van Doef & Maes, 1999) considers three psychosocial factors to be important in health and well-being of workers, namely, job demands, job resources and social support. Job demands are conceptualised as stressors present in the work environment, for example, high pressure of time, high working pace, difficult and mentally exacting work. (Shimazu & Shimazu, 2004). Botha (2003) found that lack of resources and job demands were more severe factors in Correctional Services because of the frequent exposure and the intensity of the experience for a Correctional Official.

Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), refer to job resources as those physical, psychological, social or organisational aspects of the job that either or reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs, are functional in achieving work goals, and stimulate personal growth, learning and development. Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner and Schaufeli (2001) successfully tested the Job Demand-Resource model that posits that job demands (i.e. physical demands, time pressure, shift work) are associated with exhaustion, whereas lacking job resources (i.e. performance feedback, job control, participation in decision making, social support) are associated with disengagement. (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004)

According to Bakker, Demerouti, and Verbeke (2004), this implies that when people become exhausted under the influence of environmental demands, they will not be able to perform well because their energetical resources are diminished. Factors such as communication break down with superiors, potential dangerous inmates, lack of standardised policies in dealing with inmates, legal liability, the constant vigilance necessary in prisons and meager salaries were identified as continuous stressors on correctional officials. (Cheek & Miller, 1983).

Anson, Johnson and Anson (1997) found little difference between police officers and prison guards, and showed them to have high levels of chronic stress, depersonalisation, tedium and physical, mental or emotional exhaustion. They further point out that correctional officials have more instances of sickness, ulcers, hypertension and heart disease than the compared sample of police officers. According to Irishhealth (2005), measured on a scale of one to ten, correctional officials' occupation rated high on stress.

As mentioned above many studies have shown that occupational stressors can result in mental, physical and behavioral stress reaction, such as burnout, depression and psychosomatic diseases (Houkes, Janssen, de Jonge & Nijhuis, 2001). Unsuccessful attempts to cope with a variety of negative stress conditions can result in a multidimensional chronic stress reaction: burnout (Basson & Rothmann, 2002). Taris et al. (2001) states that if this line of reasoning is correct, one would expect job demands to be especially strongly related to exhaustion and less to depersonalisation, whereas job resources should be related to both and perhaps most strongly to depersonalisation. These ideas were tested in Lee and Ashforth's (1996) meta- analysis on the relations between the subscales of Maslach and Jackson's (1986) and Maslach Burnout Inventory and other variables. According to Taris et al. (2001), their results confirmed their expectation that exhaustion would be strongly associated with the demand correlates whereas the correlations with job resources would be somewhat lower. Depersonalisation was correlated with both resources and demands (Taris et al., 2001).

















































































*Regression analysis with Social Dysfunction as a dependent variable.*

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE				
Model 1: Biographical variables (social dysfunction)				
R: 0,28	Source of variation	<i>df</i>	Sum of	Mean
R <sup>2</sup> : 0,08			squares	square
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> : 0,02	Regression	6	150,37	25,06
Standard error: 4,15	Residual	97	1671,16	17,22
<i>F</i> = 1,45 <i>p</i> = 0,202				
Model 2: Biographical variables on stress with social dysfunction as dependent variable				
R: 0,51	Source of variation	<i>Df</i>	Sum of	Mean
R <sup>2</sup> : 0,26			squares	square
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> : 0,18	Regression	9	453,59	50,39
Standard error: 3,88	Residual	83	1254,68	15,11
<i>F</i> = 3,33 <i>p</i> = 0,002*				

VARIABLES IN THE EQUATION					
INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	B	SEB	Beta	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>
Gender	-1,24	0,91	-0,13	-1,36	0,17
Race	1,41	1,06	0,15	1,32	0,18
Age	1,02	0,74	0,16	1,37	0,17
Tenure	-0,25	0,40	-0,08	-0,62	0,53
Rank	0,40	0,38	0,11	1,05	0,29
Section	-0,49	0,33	-0,15	-1,48	0,14
Gender	-1,49	0,94	-0,15	-1,57	0,11
Race	0,98	1,10	0,10	0,88	0,37
Age	1,31	0,76	0,20	1,71	0,09
Tenure	-0,33	0,41	-0,11	-0,79	0,42
Rank	0,49	0,37	0,13	1,32	0,19
Section	-0,46	0,34	-0,13	-1,32	0,18
Job demands	0,07	0,04	0,34	1,79	0,07
Lack of resources	0,04	0,04	0,20	1,16	0,24
Correctional stressors	-0,02	0,02	-0,16	-0,96	0,33

\*Statistically significant  $p \leq 0,05$

Table 11

*Regression analysis with Severe Depression as a dependent variable.*











































