

Understanding & Responding to Correctional Officer Stress

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Background

Project Title: *Measuring the Effects of Correctional Officer Stress on the Well-Being of the Officer and the Prison Workplace and Developing a Practical Index of Officer Stress for Use by Correctional Agencies*

Funding Agency:
U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice (NIJ)

NIJ Award #:
2014-IJ-CX-0026

Lead Researchers:
Arizona State University
(Hepburn and Griffin);

Research Partners at Sites:
Massachusetts:
Northeastern University
(Frost and Monteiro)

Texas:
Sam Houston State
(Tasca and Butler)

Study Objectives

1. To advance current knowledge about the effects of correctional officer stress on the prison workplace
2. To create and validate a practical “stress index” developed on the basis of administrative data routinely collected by correctional agencies

Project Background

There is a growing body of empirical evidence to suggest:

- 1) that correctional officers are exposed through their work to a number of stressors and, as a result, have a higher level of job-related stress than is found in other occupations, and
- 2) that stress has a variety of debilitating effects on the **medical**, **behavioral**, **attitudinal**, and **emotional** well-being of correctional officers
- 3) Those attitudinal, behavioral, and emotional effects have impact organizational well-being

Theoretical Framework

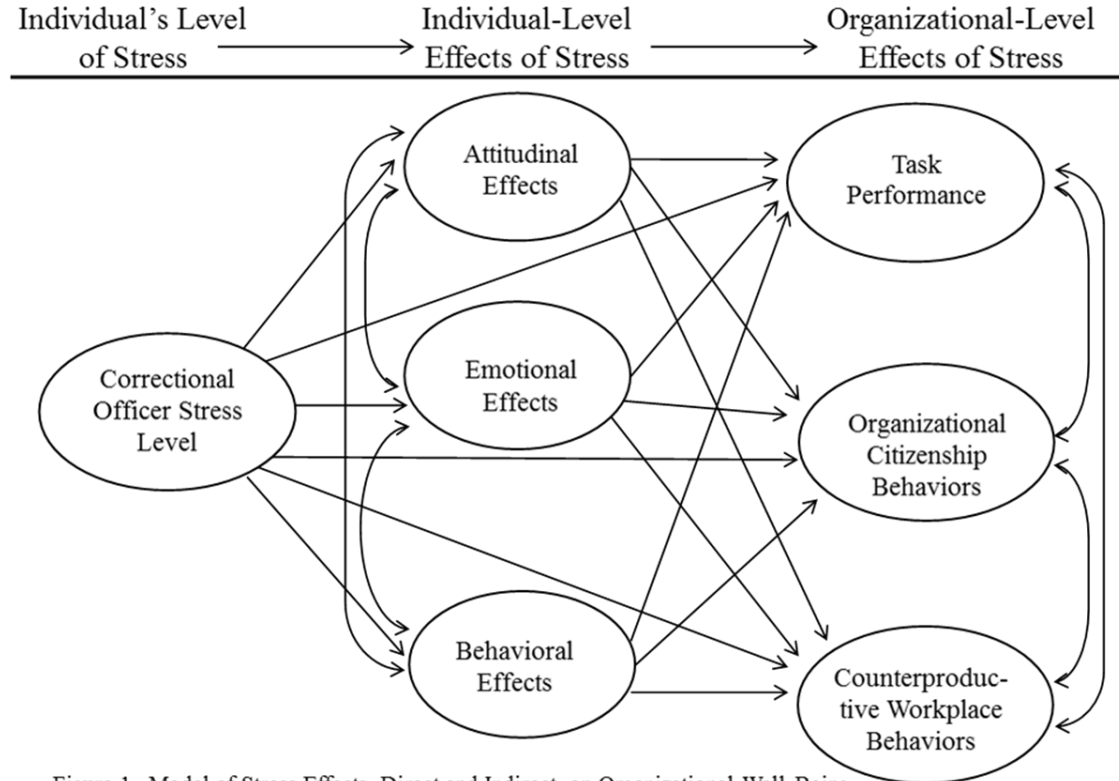


Figure 1. Model of Stress Effects, Direct and Indirect, on Organizational Well-Being

CO Stress: Two Phases

Phase One: 2015 – 2016

- **Goal:** Understand variations in stress and its effects
- Intensive interviews with 500 correctional officers (250 in Massachusetts and 250 in Texas)
- Review of administrative data from consenting participants

Phase Two: 2016 – 2017

- **Goal:** Validate Phase One preliminary findings
- Intensive interviews with 600 correctional officers (300 in Massachusetts and 300 in Texas)
- No need for administrative data

CO Stress Research Timeline: 2015 - 2018

- March 2015 – May 2015: Approached MA DOC & MCOFU; Met with Commissioner
- June 2015 – July 2015: Signed letters of cooperation from DOC and MCOFU
- Sept 2015: Began meetings with COs to refine survey/questions
- Oct 2015: Phase One Sample Selected
- Dec 2015 – May 2016: Conduct Phase One Interviews
- Dec 2016: Initial Analysis of Phase I Data Complete
- Jan 2017: Phase Two Sample Selected
- Feb 2017 – June 2017: Conduct Phase Two Interviews
- January 2018: Analysis Complete
- August 2018: Final Report for MA DOC Presented and Submitted
- December 2018: Arizona State University Final Report Expected

Phase One Site and Sample Selection

Identified eight MA
DOC facilities:

1. Souza Baranowski
2. MCI-Cedar Junction
3. Bridgewater State Hosp.
4. MCI-Norfolk
5. MCI-Framingham
6. MCI-Concord
7. MCI-Shirley
8. Northeastern CC

MA DOC provided a
roster of all those in
rank of CO-I (Officers)
and CO-II (Sergeants)
at the selected
facilities as of October
2015 (N = 2,371)

Selected random
sample of 350 officers
(15% of the total) and
worked with leadership
at the facilities to
conduct on-site, on-
shift interviews

Participation

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Approximately **74%** of the **randomly selected sample** participated in the interview (**n=259**). The sample was highly representative of the populations of officers (CO-I & CO-II)

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Of those who participated in the interview, **92%** agreed to allow the research team to review their personnel files (**n=237**).

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Participants' characteristics – gender, race, CO grade, age, and years on the job – almost exactly mirror those of the selected sample, and more importantly, the population of all MA DOC correctional officers.

Participation Rates by Facility

| Facility | Sample Size | Contacted | Declined Interviews | | Completed Interviews | | Administrative Data | |
|--------------|-------------|------------|---------------------|------------|----------------------|-------------|---------------------|------------|
| MCI-CJ | 66 | 59 | 21 | 36% | 38 | 64% | 37 | 97% |
| SBCC | 63 | 63 | 7 | 11% | 56 | 89% | 52 | 93% |
| MCI-N | 57 | 53 | 9 | 17% | 44 | 83% | 42 | 95% |
| MCI-C | 53 | 51 | 18 | 35% | 33 | 65% | 27 | 82% |
| MCI-F | 44 | 42 | 3 | 7% | 39 | 93% | 35 | 90% |
| MCI-S | 37 | 37 | 7 | 19% | 30 | 81% | 28 | 93% |
| BSH | 24 | 20 | 7 | 35% | 13 | 65% | 11 | 85% |
| NECC | 6 | 6 | 0 | 0% | 6 | 100% | 5 | 83% |
| Total | 350 | 331 | 72 | 22% | 259 | 78% | 237 | 92% |

Data Collection

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Alternating between interviews and self-reporting, the provided questionnaire touched on participant characteristics, facility conditions, identifying factors of acute stress, job-related information, behavioral effects of stress, and formal/informal help-seeking.

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Administrative data collection included information pertaining to absenteeism, performance evaluations, on-the-job injuries, inmate complaints, misconduct reports issued, use of force incidents, and other similar information.

Scales Included in the Interview Instrument

1. Turnover Intent
2. Task Performance
3. Erosion of Authority
4. Social Support
5. **Generalized Stress and Anxiety**
6. **Work Stress**
7. Emotional Exhaustion
8. Depression
9. Psychosomatic Symptoms
10. Depersonalization Disengagement
11. OCB* Organizational
12. OCB* Individual
13. CWB** Interpersonal
14. CWB** Organizational
15. Organizational Commitment
16. Job Satisfaction
17. Corruption of Authority
18. Promotion stress
19. Procedural Justice Promotions
20. Administrative Support

* Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB); ** CWB (Counterproductive Workplace Behavior)

Organizational Measures

Organizational Citizenship Behavior

OCB-Organizational measures participant's attitudes towards the correctional organization as a whole

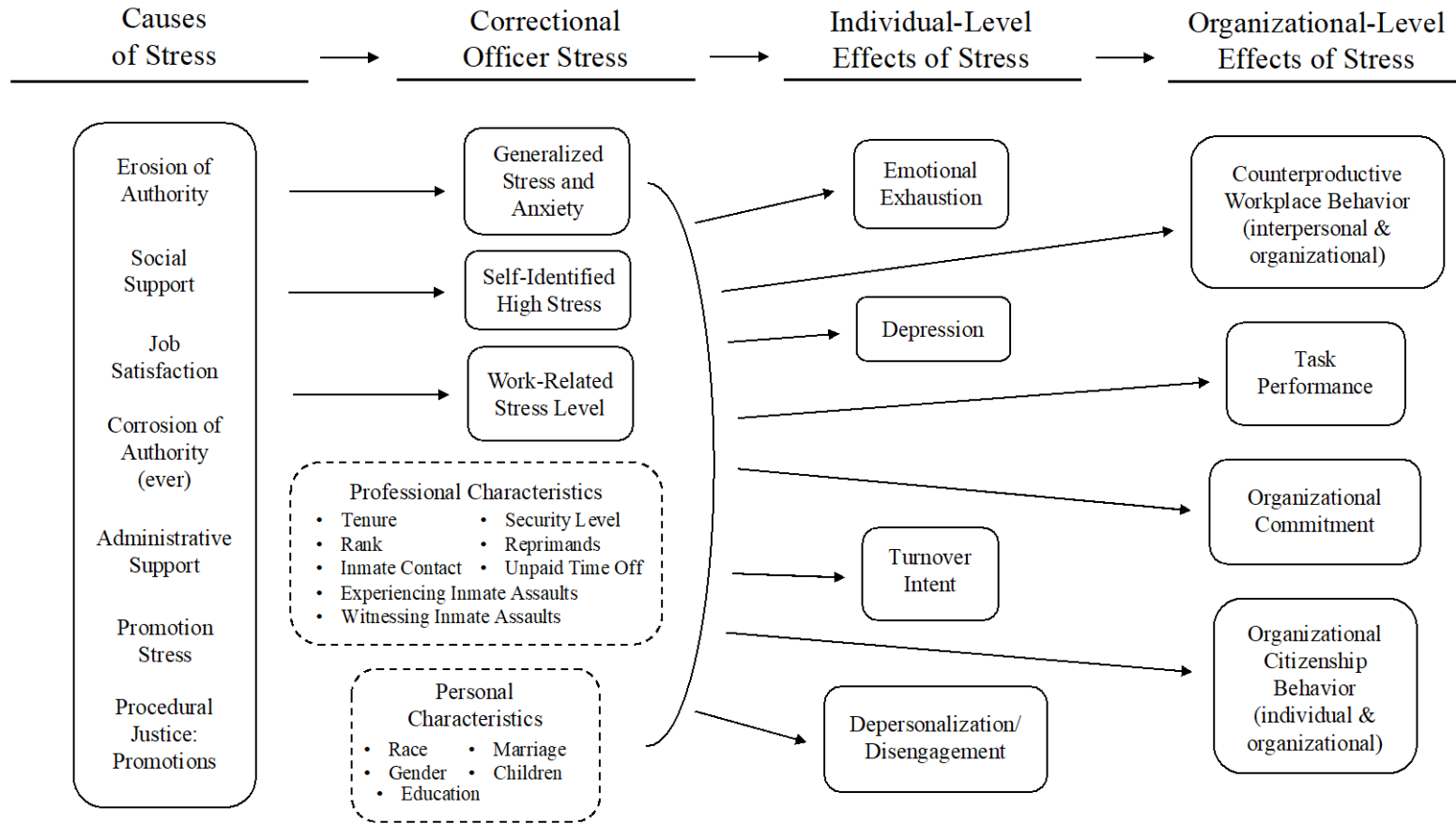
OCB-Individual measures the participant's personal willingness to assist and work with others within the organization

Counterproductive Work Behavior

CWB-Organizational measures the amount of counterproductive work behavior

CWB-Interpersonal measures the amount of counterproductive work behavior taking place within the organization *between* co-workers

Phase One



Self-reported Stress

Almost half of all officers reported being under a lot of stress, with more than a quarter indicating they were highly stressed at that moment.

48% of officers (n=123) answered that they are under “a lot of stress.”

26% of officers stated that they are “highly stressed at the moment.”

Officers understand stress: When asked to estimate what percentage of their coworkers are highly stressed, on average, the response was **47%**.

Supervisors matter: **61%** either ‘agreed or strongly agreed’ that their level of stress varied based on which supervisor was on shift.

Self-reported Life Stress

Approximately one in five officers were currently experiencing relationship problems, but fewer reported that they were currently experiencing financial or legal problems.

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At least 20% of officers reported family and relationship problems:

- 22% reported family problems
- 21% reported having recently lost or broken up with someone they cared about.
- 22% reported heated arguments with friends and neighbors while away from work.

Only 13% reported financial problems and 7% reported law enforcement contact.

Self-reported Health

Officers perceived themselves to be generally healthy, but 25% reported chronic or ongoing health problems and 26% reported recent injuries.

Less than 10% of officers self-reported **fair** (5%) or **poor** (2%) health, most reported they were in **good** (40%), **very good** (34%) or **excellent** (9%) health.

25% of officers reported that they were dealing w/ **ongoing or chronic health problems**.

More than one-quarter (26%) reported a recent injury or accident: **8%** reported a recent injury or accident at work and **18%** reported an injury/accident outside of work.

Self-reported Substance Use (*not abuse)

All of the substance use questions were generic (e.g. “do you drink alcohol?”) and do not distinguish types of frequency of use. While most officers reported that they drink alcohol, relatively few reported using marijuana or any other illegal drug. Just over a third were currently taking a prescription medication and 16% reported use of sleep aids. For most, use had stayed the same or declined over the past month.

84% of officers reported that they drink alcohol:

- 4% reported marijuana use and 5% acknowledged use of other illegal drugs
- 34% reported they were currently taking a prescription drug
- 16% reported used of sleep aids

Less than 7% reported that their substance use had increased in past 30 days.

Scores by Facility: Individual Measures

| Facility | Generalized Stress and Anxiety | Work Stress | Emotional Exhaustion | Depression | Job Satisfaction | Promotion Stress | Procedural Fairness Promotions | Administrative Support |
|----------------|--------------------------------|-------------|----------------------|------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------|
| BSH | 23 | 20 | 12 | 10 | 17 | 15 | 20 | 12 |
| MCI-CJ | 21 | 17 | 12 | 10 | 18 | 17 | 21 | 10 |
| MCI-C | 22 | 17 | 12 | 10 | 18 | 16 | 22 | 12 |
| MCI-F | 22 | 19 | 11 | 10 | 17 | 17 | 20 | 12 |
| MCI-N | 20 | 18 | 11 | 8 | 18 | 16 | 22 | 12 |
| SBCC | 23 | 19 | 13 | 10 | 17 | 18 | 20 | 11 |
| MCI-S | 19 | 18 | 9 | 8 | 18 | 16 | 20 | 12 |
| Average | 21 | 18 | 11 | 9 | 18 | 17 | 21 | 11 |

Scores by Facility: Organizational Measures

| Facility | OCB Organizational | OCB Individual | CWB Interpersonal | CWB Organizational | Org Commitment | COA Ever | COA Past Month |
|--------------|-----------------------|-------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|
| BSH | 34 | 33 | 4 | 4 | 21 | 2 | 2 |
| MCI-CJ | 28 | 34 | 9 | 7 | 23 | 4 | 2 |
| MCI-C | 22 | 31 | 8 | 8 | 21 | 3 | 2 |
| MCI-F | 29 | 36 | 6 | 5 | 21 | 3 | 1 |
| MCI-N | 30 | 36 | 4 | 5 | 22 | 3 | 2 |
| SBCC | 26 | 34 | 5 | 6 | 20 | 3 | 2 |
| MCI-S | 30 | 37 | 5 | 6 | 22 | 3 | 2 |
| Total | 28 | 35 | 6 | 6 | 21 | 3 | 2 |

Bivariate Relationships

*The strongest relationships were observed between the different types of stress (GSA and WS) and psychological effects (particularly emotional exhaustion and depression)
Officers working in maximum security facilities exhibited higher levels of GSA and emotional exhaustion, but similar levels of work stress and depression to those working in mediums/minimums.*

Generalized Stress and Anxiety (GSA) and Work Stress (WS): **.49***

Generalized Stress and Anxiety (GSA) and Emotional Exhaustion: **.74***

Generalized Stress and Anxiety (GSA) and Depression: **.83***

Work Stress (WS) and Depression: **.45***

Work Stress (WS) and Emotional Exhaustion: **.56**

Self-reported Assault and Violence Exposure

*Exposure to violence is prevalent. Almost half reported having been physically assaulted, with most reporting assaults requiring medical care and time off.
More than half had witnessed assaults on other staff.
Threats of violence are even more prevalent.*

44% reported they had been physically assaulted by an inmate over their career:

- **64%** reported the assault required medical care
- **40%** reported that they missed work as a result of an assault-related injury

51% reported witnessing assaults on other staff

74% reporting having been threatened, **36%** in the past month.

Self-reported Assault and Violence Exposure

Physical assaults far more common among those in maximum security facilities... but there were no significant relationships between assaults and stress or depression / emotional exhaustion. There were relatively weak but significant relationships between assaults and organizational citizenship/counterproductive work behavior.

| | Never Physically Assaulted | One Physical Assault | Two Physical Assaults | Three Physical Assaults | Four Physical Assaults | Five + Physical Assaults |
|---------|----------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Min/Med | 60% | 15% | 4% | 4% | 5% | 12% |
| Max | 49% | 7% | 5% | 9% | 6% | 23% |

Predicting Stress and its Effects: Phase One Regression Model Controls

Demographic Factors

- Race
- Gender
- Education
- Marriage
- Children

Occupational Factors

- Tenure
- Rank
- Inmate Contact
- Security Level
- Reprimands
- Unpaid Time Off

These factors were controlled for in all regression models.

Predicting Stress: Phase One Regression Results

Education, tenure, job satisfaction, security level and promotion-related stress are key predictors of generalized stress and anxiety (GSA). Only job satisfaction and promotion-related stress predicted higher work-related stress (WS).

Generalized Stress and Anxiety (GSA):

- Higher **education** predicts **lower GSA**
- Higher **tenure** predicts **lower GSA**
- Higher **job satisfaction** predicts **lower GSA**
- Higher **security level** predicts **higher GSA**
- More **promotion-related stress** predicts **higher GSA**

Work Stress (WS):

- Higher **job satisfaction** predicts **lower WS**
- More **promotion stress** predicts **higher WS**

Predicting Psychological Effects: Phase One Regression Results

Generalized stress and anxiety (GSA) and work stress (WS) both predict both emotional exhaustion and depression. Working at a maximum security facility was also a predictor of emotional exhaustion; and lower levels of education predicted higher levels of depression.

Predictors of Emotional Exhaustion:

- Generalized Stress and Anxiety (GSA)
- Work Stress (WS)
- Working at maximum-security facilities

Predictors of Depression:

- Generalized Stress and Anxiety (GSA)
- Work Stress (WS)
- Lower levels of education

Predicting Organizational Effects: Phase One Regression Results for CWB

Work stress (WS), security level-maximum, number of reprimands, and witnessing staff assaults predict interpersonal Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB). Generalized stress and anxiety (GSA), experiencing assaults, unpaid time off, and lower rank increase organizational CWB, whereas having children decreases it.

Predictors of Counterproductive Work Behavior— Interpersonal (CWB-I)

- Work Stress (WS)
- Maximum security level
- Number of reprimands
- Witnessing staff assaults by inmates

Counterproductive Work Behavior – Organizational (CWB-O)

- Generalized Stress and Anxiety (GSA)
- Unpaid Time Off
- Experiencing inmate assaults
- Lower rank
- Having fewer children

Predicting Organizational Effects: Phase One Regression Results for OCB

Rank increases both interpersonal and organizational OCB.

Witnessing staff assault by inmates also increases both types of OCB.

Working in a lower security level facility predicts increased interpersonal OCB.

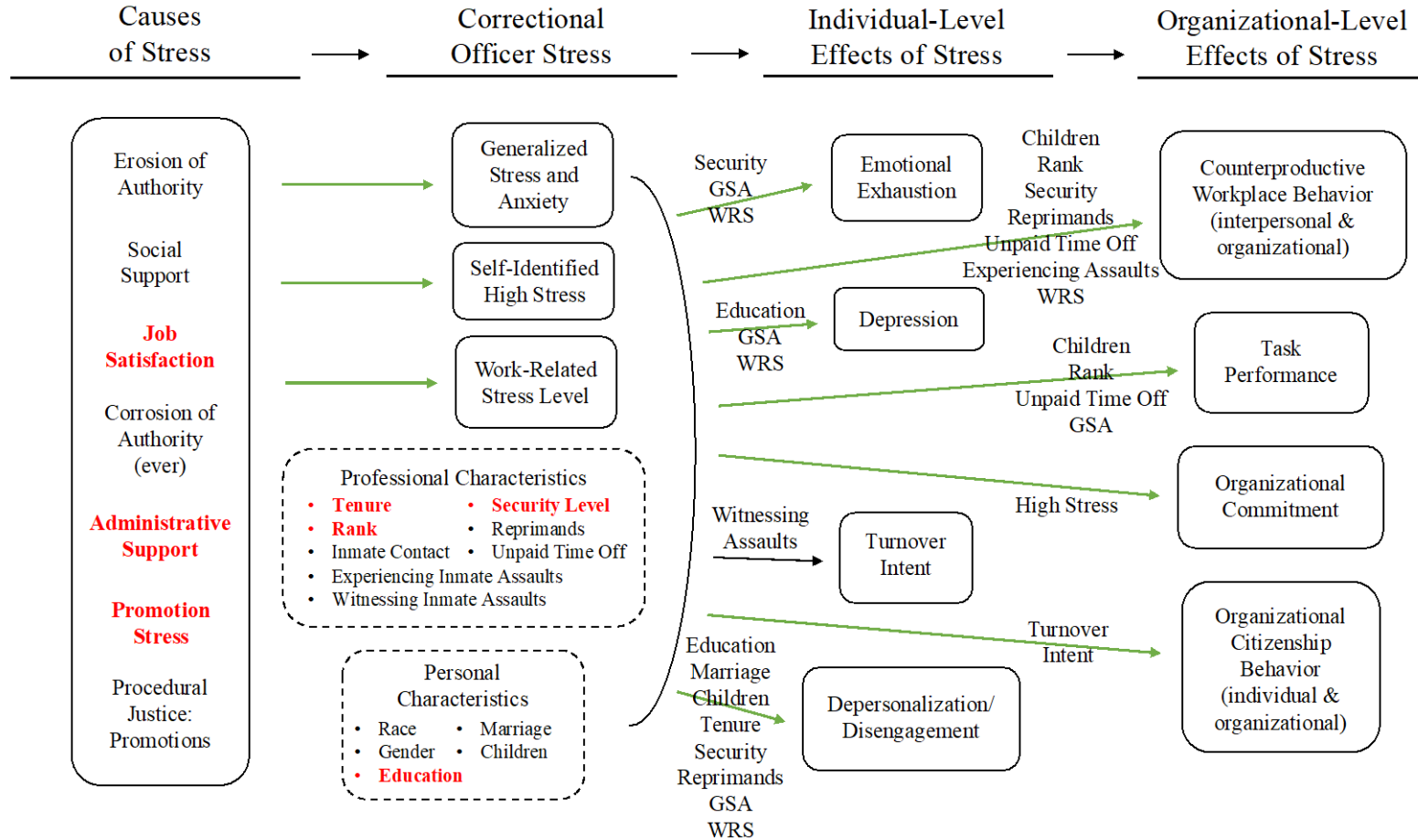
Organizational Citizenship Behavior – Individual (OCB-Interpersonal):

- Higher rank
- Lower security level
- Witnessing staff assaults by inmates
- Race

Organizational Citizenship Behavior – Individual (OCB-Organizational):

- Witnessing staff assaults by inmates
- Higher rank
- Having more children

Phase One



Phase Two: Sample Selection

Sampling criteria in Phase Two: 75 randomly selected COs from each of four groups split on tenure and security level:

1. Maximum security – high tenure
2. Maximum security – low tenure
3. Medium security – high tenure
4. Medium security – low tenure

SCHOOL OF CRIMINOLOGY AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

| Facility | Sample Size | Contacted | Refused Interviews | | Completed Interviews | |
|--------------|-------------|------------|--------------------|------------|----------------------|------------|
| MCI-S | 71 | 71 | 30 | 42% | 41 | 58% |
| MCI-N | 80 | 80 | 18 | 23% | 62 | 78% |
| SBCC | 99 | 89 | 4 | 4% | 85 | 96% |
| MCI-CJ | 90 | 90 | 29 | 32% | 61 | 68% |
| Total | 340 | 330 | 81 | 25% | 249 | 75% |

| | Frequency | Percent |
|----------------------------|------------|-------------|
| Low Tenure, Low Security | 56 | 23% |
| Low Security, High Tenure | 67 | 27% |
| Low Tenure, High Security | 62 | 25% |
| High Tenure, High Security | 64 | 26% |
| | 249 | 100% |

Predicting Stress and its Effects: Phase Two Regression Models

Demographic Factors

- Race
- Gender
- Marriage
- Children

Organizational Level Factors

- Tenure
- Rank
- Inmate Contact
- Security Level

These demographic and organizational level factors were controlled for in all regression models.

Predicting Stress: Phase Two Regression Results

Generalized Stress and Anxiety (GSA):

- Being *female* predicts higher GSA
- Higher *social support* predicts lower GSA
- Higher *job satisfaction* predicts lower GSA
- More *corrosion of authority* predicts higher GSA

Work Stress (WS):

- More *inmate contact* predicts lower WS
- Higher *social support* predicts lower WS
- Higher *job satisfaction* predicts lower WS

Predicting Psychological Effects: Phase Two Regression Results

*Generalized stress and anxiety (GSA) and work stress (WS) both predict emotional exhaustion and GSA predicts depression.
Additional predictors of depression were tenure were identified.*

Emotional Exhaustion:

- Generalized Stress and Anxiety (GSA)
- Work Stress (WS)

Predictors of Depression:

- Generalized Stress and Anxiety (GSA)
- More inmate contact
- Being female
- Having fewer children

CO Stress Preliminary Conclusions

Controlling for other factors administrative support, education, rank, tenure, security level, social support, job satisfaction, promotion stress all predict either **generalized stress and anxiety (GSA)** AND/OR **work stress (WS)**

Generalized Stress and Anxiety (GSA) is a significant predictor of both emotional wellbeing and of organizational behavior

Work Stress (WS) predicts emotional exhaustion but not other emotional outcome or org behavior

1. To advance current knowledge about the effects of correctional officer stress on the prison workplace
2. To create and validate a practical “stress index” developed on the basis of administrative data routinely collected by correctional agencies

Help-seeking

Correctional officers were reluctant to seek help with stress management and especially skeptical of stress management services that were offered by the MA DOC. Almost half of all officers reported that they were not at all likely to seek help with stress management even if they were under a great deal of stress and needed help.

45% of officers reported that they were not at all likely to seek help

- 30% somewhat likely
- 25% very likely

59% reported they were not at all likely to seek help from a service provided by the DOC

- 27% somewhat likely
- 12% very likely

Acknowledgments

with special thanks to all of the MADOC correction officers who have contributed to this research