

TOWARDS HEALTHY ORGANISATION IN CORRECTIONAL SETTING: CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS' WELLNESS, OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AND PERSONALITY

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Abstract

Correctional officers always confronted with two interrelated issues: wellness and stress at work. Correctional officers' wellness was irrefutable due to intense pressure conditions at the workplace that continuously faltered their wellness. Gradual wellness fluctuation due to excessive stress would severely tarnish performance of correctional officers and prison department. Nevertheless, their personality played an important role in conserving their wellness level despite continuous overrun of stress during work. Therefore this paper elaborated on correctional officers' personality and occupational stress in order to maintain their wellness at work. This research examined the relationship between correctional officers' wellness, their personality and occupational stress in Prison Department of Malaysia. Pertinent question of the study was to look at influence of correctional officers' personality and occupational stress on their wellness degree. These findings were significant since correctional officers' wellness, their personality and occupational stress remained loose issue particularly in Malaysia. Findings revealed that personality and occupational stress influenced correctional officers' health and wellbeing.

Keyword: *correctional officers, wellness, stress, personality*

JEL Classification: I15 Health and Economic Development

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years more professionals, organizations and industry were more responsive and perceptive of employee wellness issues. The relationship between employee wellness and their performance also caught the interest of those dealing with high risk at work specifically frontline correctional officers. Being a wage earner as correctional employee was dreadfully challenging and stressful since constant occupational stress due to routine tribulations might taint and damage correctional officers' health and wellbeing in long term. In actuality, threat of inmate violence against correctional officers, actual violence committed by inmates, threat of assault, inmate demands and manipulation and problems with coworkers were among conditions that officers reported in recent years causing cause stress and deplete wellness (Senol-Durak, Durak and Gencoz, 2006). These factors, combined with other sources of stress such as overcrowded prisons, intercultural conflicts, violent within the prisons, drug use, inadequate correctional staff, shift work, staff with training deficits, understaffing, extensive overtime, rotating shift work, low pay and poor public image, could impair officers' health, caused them to bum out or retire prematurely, and impaired their family life and affected the organization (Senol-Durak, Durak and Gencoz, 2006). Not only the increasing absence rate due to illness was irrefutable constraint but also problems such as burnout, substance abuse, internal depression and inability to cope with traumatic experiences of daily work often lead to early retirement or retirement with physical or mental problems. Since correctional officers' wellness and occupational stress in high-risk environment are two interrelated issues, it is important to accentuate wellness among correctional officers in order to guarantee effective prison service that entails long-term benefit to the society. Nevertheless, some officers were still committed in their work, until they reached their set pension date. Such officers showed intense focus and high levels of enthusiasm that expectedly boosted their level of wellness. This was because they possessed certain personality trait that caused happiness instead of illness and motivated them to stay on. Regardless of the situation, correctional officers' wellness and illness worked "shoulder-to-shoulder" throughout correctional officers' struggled to maintain their sanity despite working in highly strenuous correctional environment. Regrettably, despite these statements, most psychologists and criminologists study in correctional issues focused almost exclusively on offenders (Senol-Durak, Durak and Gencoz, 2006) instead of prison officers. However, beginning in the late 1970s, there was a series of studies investigating those who work in the field of corrections. Most research explored how prison or correctional workers viewed and reacted to their jobs, especially in terms of

occupational stress, job satisfaction, and correctional orientation (Britton, 1997; Cullen, Latessa, Burton, and Lombardo, 1993; Karasek and Theorell, 1990). Latest pertinent studies also validated on correctional officers' poor health due to high level of stress and anxiety (Senol-Durak, Durak and Gencoz, 2006, Sundt and Cullen, 2002). Since previous research and subjective evidences highlighted on the massive effect of occupational stress on correctional officers this might seriously retard or cause correctional officers' mental health to deplete unswervingly (Senol-Durak, Durak and Gencoz, 2006; Pfeffer, 2010; Purcell, Kinnie, Hutchinson, Rayton and Swart, 2003). Viewing these conditions, therefore, it is crucial for the prison department administrators to pursue into this matter. Regrettably, research on correctional officers' wellness, their personality and their occupational stress are nonetheless quite scanty in Malaysia. Several local studies conducted in correctional facilities focused on incarcerated individuals such as imprisoned drug addicts, HIV sufferers in prison, female inmates, felon awaiting for delinquents, detainees under ISA act (Internal Security Act) viewing from pathological perspectives (Karofi, 2005; Yik 2006; Mazlan, Mat Saat and Ahmad, 2010; Choi, Kavasery, Desai, Govindasamy, Kamarulzaman, and Altice, 2010) but insufficient research are pursued on correctional officers. Therefore, this study aimed to fill up the literature gap in correctional study specifically on correctional officers' health and wellbeing, their occupational stress and personality traits. Hopefully, the literature and empirical findings of correctional officers' wellness, their personality and occupational stress would initiate future study of the keepers. The objectives of the study were:

- To investigate the correlation between correctional officers' wellness, occupational stress dimensions and personality domains.
- To examine the influence of work stress dimensions and personality domains on correctional officers' wellness.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1. Participants

The required respondents sample for the populations of 4,783 (8 locations) was between 354 and 356 (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970). In tandem, Nunnally (1978) advised appropriate sampling calculation should be subjected to the measured construct variable (in this research, parceled items) of 10:1. Meanwhile McMillan (2004) suggested the rate of return should be at least at 60%. Considering all suggestions, the authors settled for the usable returned questionnaires amount because it was between the recommended sample size and also suitable for item parceling purposes. The returned questionnaires were totaled at 570 whilst usable

returned questionnaires were at 417. The sample size had satisfied the proposed minimum by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) and Nunnally (1978). This indicated acceptable returned questionnaires were at 62.68% and had met the suggested rate (McMillan, 2004). The questionnaire was completed by front line correctional officers as selected respondents (n=417; mean age 33 years).

2.2. Instruments

Three instruments (using likert-type formatted scales) were incorporated to establish an appropriate questionnaire for the study; the 5F-WEL (91 items) (Myers and Sweeney, 2004), the Five Factor Personality Inventory (60 items) (Costa and McCrae, 1992) and the Work Stress Scale for Correctional Officers (35 items) (Senol-Durak, Durak and Gencoz, 2006).

2.3. Statistical Analyses : Correlation and Regression Analyses

The researchers attempted to examine the relationship of work stress dimensions, personality domains and wellness through Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient and Stepwise Regression as statistical tools.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1. Demographic Information

Respondents consisted of 417 correctional officers (of 233 male and 184 female; 56% and 44% respectively). This sample reflected real situation of correctional officers population where majority were male dominated. Most female correctional officers were at Kajang Female Prison. This sample also reflected true populace of the profession where it was dominated by Malay ethnic (94.24%). Mean age of respondents was at 33 years. 284 respondents worked 10 years and below. Another 31.8% respondents served the department between 11 to 30 years.

3.2. Reliability Analysis

In this study, the cronbach alpha values of 5F-Wel, NEO FFI and WSSCO instruments were .90, .90 and .89 respectively, indicating acceptable alpha value. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for each measurement battery was adequate. However, two dimensions of Work Stress Scale for Correctional Officers scale namely Work Overload and Inadequacies in Physical Conditions of Prison revealed cronbach's alpha value of .614 and .602 respectively and two personality domains, extraversion and openness revealed cronbach value of .646 and .670 respectively. Albeit low alpha values, they were still acceptable (Sekaran, 2000).

3.3. Factor Analysis

Exploratory factor analyses were performed on the measurement instruments for the purpose of investigating the factor structure of the measurement battery as well as to objectively trace natural groupings of factors (Suhr, 2006). By performing exploratory factor analysis (EFA), the number of constructs and the underlying factor structure were identified. Since this was the first time 5F-WEL and WSSCO were adapted into Malay language and were tested in Malaysia, exploratory factor analyses (EFA) were performed to investigate the factorial validity of the translated instrument measurements (Suhr, 2006). Through EFA, the underlying factor structures of three measurement instruments were identified. Factor analyses results revealed that the measurement instruments fitted well with this study.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Correlation between Wellness, Occupational Stress and Personality Characters of Correctional Officers.

Hipotesis 1 There is a relationship between frontline correctional officers' wellness, occupational stress (role conflict and role ambiguity, work overload, inadequacies in physical conditions in prison, threat perception and general problems) and personality (neuroticism, openness to experience, extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness).

Table I Correlation Analysis

Construct / Dimensions / Domains	Wellness	
	Pearson Correlation	Sig.
Work Stress (Construct)	-.132*	.007
Dimensions:		
Role Conflict Role Ambiguity	-.112*	.004
Inadequacies in Physical Conditions in Prison	-.043	.381
Threat Perceptions	-.164	.001
Work Overload	-.060	.221
General Problem	-.187**	.007
Personality (Construct)	-.215**	.000
Domains:		
Openness	-.079	.107
Agreeableness	-.104*	.034
Extraversion	.063	.198
Conscientiousness	.161**	.000
Neuroticism	-.062	.206

The results of Pearson correlation (r) between work stress, personality and wellness are highlighted in Table I. Wellness construct was significantly negative correlated with work stress at $r = -.132$ and personality at $r = -.215$. Therefore Hypothesis 1 was substantiated. There was similarity of results compared to

previous research. This findings confirmed previous studies on the negative relation and impact of work stress on employee health and wellbeing (Senol-Durak, Durak and Gencoz, 2006; Pfeffer, 2010; Purcell, Kinnie, Hutchinson, Rayton and Swart, 2003).). The present study also supported Kropp, Cox, Roesch and Eaves' (1989) study where they revealed the mentally disordered inmates as the main source of correctional officers increasing stress (90%) causing them exhausting health and mental wellbeing. In particular work stress dimensions namely role conflict and role ambiguity, threat perception and general problems were significantly negative related with the officers' wellness. First and foremost, the findings indicated that correctional officers' perception of threat issues (such as risk of being involved in arguments and fights with prison inmates and the need to be cautious all the time) were significantly related to their wellness at work. This discovery supported previous research that cited correctional officers' perceived threat of inmate violence as the major cause of stress at work and cause depleting health and wellbeing (Finn, 2000; Senol-Durak, Durak and Gencoz, 2006). Next, these officers' general problems such as health problems due to the nature of work, not having enough quality time with family due to work, ignoring the needs of family due to work which were related to correctional officers' wellness (Senol-Durak, Durak and Gencoz, 2006). Eventually these problems drained off correctional officers' health and wellbeing. Low salary to compensate with the high risk working in prison also caused stress (Senol-Durak, Durak and Gencoz, 2006). These officers wellness were also related to their role conflict and role ambiguity at work especially during the transition period from pure custodial-oriented to rehabilitative-oriented. Role conflict occurred when correctional officers' custodial responsibility (maintaining security) collided with the rehabilitation of inmates in prison. Role ambiguity occurred when correctional officers were expected to go by the rules and at the same time be flexible and used judgment in their interactions with inmates. In this case, these officers were often engulfed by multiplicity of job demands, role, responsibilities and array of duties that implicated ambiguous job role resulting work stress. Prolong situation caused high strain and impairment; thus causing deteriorating correctional officers' wellness (Young & Lambie, 2007, Senol-Durak, Durak and Gencoz, 2006).

As for the relation between personality and wellness, there was similarity and contradictory findings compared to previous research findings. Although contradicting to the personality of general population, yet this finding corresponded with previous researches particularly on the correlation between personality traits and individual's health and wellbeing (Booth-Kewley and Vickers, 1994). The similarity was on the positive correlation between wellness

and conscientiousness that supported previous findings. According to Salgado (1997), an extent amount of research indicated that conscientiousness was among the best predictors of performance at work. Whilst Booth-Kewley and Vickers (1994) claimed that personality particularly conscientiousness and agreeableness had positive relation with health behavior. Traits under conscientiousness domain such as cautiousness, dutifulness, orderliness, self discipline were among the essentials to correctional officers' wellness and performance. These traits ensured them to excel despite of strenuous working conditions in prison. Meanwhile contradicting to previous findings, this finding revealed agreeableness was negatively correlated to wellness. The ground for negative correlation result was also mainly due to the strenuous working conditions in prison. At work, they were frequently vulnerable to inmate violence and aggression. Under major apprehension, they were assumed to be decisive in brief periods of time. They were also publicly and internally scrutinized for the choices and actions they took at work. Additionally, their jobs required shift work, long hours, and attention to strict organizational guidelines. Therefore, to effectively adjust with their kind of work, these officers had to adjust their personality at work. They restrained themselves from showing their true emotions and conduct themselves according to the nature of their work. Once they were at work, they were a different person due to the exigency of the nature of their work that differed from the usual. Agreeableness personality traits such as trust, sympathy, altruism and morality were impractical in conditions that required tough or absolute objective decisions especially when they were attending the prison inmates (Mitchell & Bray, 1990). In reality, due to the nature of their work, they were low in trust, more guarded and not affected strongly by human suffering. This study had demonstrated agreeableness (although negatively correlated) and conscientiousness as relevant to wellness behavior; and supported Conway, Vickers, Wallston and Costa Jr. (1992) remark on extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness as three most important elements of personality in predicting health behavior (in this circumstance wellness).

4.2. The Influence of Work Stress and Personality on Correctional Officers' Wellness

Hipotesis 3 Frontline correctional officers' work stress and their personality significantly influence their wellness.

Stepwise regression analysis on five dimensions of both correctional officers' work stress and personality was performed. The R^2 indicated the percentage of variance in the correctional officers' wellness was explained by their occupational

stress and personality. Percentage of variance explained in frontline correctional officers' wellness was significant at 11.0 percent; explained by five independent variables which are conscientiousness, threat perception, agreeableness, openness to experience and role conflict and role ambiguity respectively. Therefore Hypotesis 3 was substantiated. Correctional officers who worked under strenuous condition embraced positive conscientiousness characters (dutiful, cautious, organized and self control), negative agreeableness characters (Peabody & De Raad, 2002; Saucier & Ostendorf, 1999) and negative openness to experience characters to ensure they maintained their wellness at work. Apparent display of correctional officers' perception of threat and their experience of role conflict and role ambiguity at work also triggered their wellness to deplete. Glaring reason of the results was due to secluded prison condition and prison culture. The custodial and rehabilitative-oriented service rendered towards the prison inmates had demanded correctional officers to strongly adopt conscientiousness character (dutifulness and dependable), the differing side of agreeableness (being suspicious and uncooperative to the demand of prison inmates) and disparate character of openness to experience (more guarded, low in trust, and change resistant) so that they would be able to control their stress at work specifically their perception of threat and their experience of role conflict and role ambiguity. Eventually, both occupational stress and personality components worked together to guarantee and maintained correctional offices' wellness at work.

Table II Regression Analysis

	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)		21.773	.000
Conscientiousness	.263	4.983	.000
Threat Perception	-.225	4.074	.000
Agreeableness	-.270	4.165	.000
Openness	-.134	-2.162	.031
Role Conflict Ambiguity	-.115	-2.059	.040
R value	.331	F Value	10.081
R ² Value	.109	Sig F Change	.000

5. CONCLUSIONS

This research demonstrated the relationship and influence of correctional officers' personality and work stress on their health and wellbeing that ultimately have an effect on their performance. Based on the findings, work stress dimensions namely role ambiguity and role conflicts and threat perception correlated and influenced wellness. Meanwhile, personality characters which were

agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness to experience influenced wellness. To conclude, occupational stress at work and individual health and well-being appear to be closely intertwined. Whereas an acceptable work stress can bring good things to an organization, it also hurts health and well-being especially when it lingers on, when passivity and withdrawal dominate the way people cope with stress, and when socio-emotional and relationship issues are at stake causing depleting individual and organisational performance. Therefore these issues cannot be ignored. Once these issues were established, proper practical suggestions could be forwarded; to ensure these officers were well prepared. Any indication of poor health and low levels of well-being in the work place may be taken as a signal that high stress amongst frontline correctional officers lingers on and need to be addressed.

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