

Study examines correctional officer stress

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Conflicts between work and family life were the most significant issues that affect work stress and job satisfaction among correctional officers, a new study by the Correctional Management Institute of Texas at Sam Houston State University found.

In a study of 441 correctional officers from adult prisons in the South, the most significant [work](#)-home issues experienced by correctional officers were demands and tensions from work that impact their home life; an incompatibility between the officer's role at work and at home; and family circumstances that place strain on work experiences.

In addition to work-home conflicts, the perceived dangerousness of the job and family support also weighed heavily on job stress, while supervisor support had a significant impact on [job satisfaction](#).

"Criminal justice careers, particularly those in the field of corrections, consist of unique daily challenges," said Dr. Gaylene Armstrong, co-author of the study. "The demands on correctional employees are numerous, including monitoring a challenging population in a confined space, shift work, and an ongoing potential for danger. All of these aspects contribute to the challenges of successfully balancing demands between work and [family life](#)."

The study recommended training supervisory staff to maintain an open, yet professionally driven, line of communication with employees about [family matters](#) and [work demands](#).

"It is critical for supervisors to take notice of the emotional and cognitive state of their subordinates to ensure a high level of job performance and professionalism," Dr. Armstrong said. "Not only are desperate or unhappy employees likely to exhibit emotional distress via job burnout, the odds of compromised decision making is also at stake."

To assist in the effort, CMIT developed a brochure for correctional officers to recognize the signs of stress and to find ways to address those issues. Stress can manifest itself in several ways, including memory problems, anxiety, racing thoughts, moodiness or irritability, agitation, depression, physical aches and pains, changes in sleep patterns or appetite, isolation, or increased use of drugs or alcohol.

The pamphlet offered several ways to reduce stress, including:

- Exercise regularly and maintain proper nutrition
- Use meditation and other relaxation techniques as part of your daily schedule
- Reach out to co-workers, friends and family
- Avoid drugs and alcohol; the reliefs from such self-medication are only temporary
- Make a point to do something enjoyable every day
- Be sure to get enough sleep
- Use the confidential Employee Assistance Program

Provided by Sam Houston State University

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