Promoting Wellness and Resiliency in Correctional Staff

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Presentation Team

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Polling Questions

- In which correctional setting do you work?
  A. Community
  B. Jails
  C. Juvenile
  D. Prisons
  E. Other

- In which field do you work?
  A. Administration
  B. Case Management
  C. Medical/Mental Health
  D. Operational Staff
  E. Other
Learning Objectives

- Develop an understanding of the current research on correctional staff wellness and resiliency.

- Learn how to apply a holistic approach to workplace wellness.

- Gain knowledge on promising real-world practices that can assist and promote both wellness and resiliency.
Dr. Hayden Smith

- Officer safety and wellbeing is area of interest and I have worked with international settings on the topic.
- Over 60 journal articles, 3 books, 20 technical reports, numerous trainings, and chairs of several dissertations on the topic (e.g., including studies of officer wellbeing, retention, burnout, resiliency, absenteeism).
- Key programs: Inmates who self-injure, PREA, character dorms, mental health dorms, training academy work, and program evaluations of a wide range of officer-based programs.
Welcome

- The all-encompassing nature of staff wellbeing and resiliency.

- Stress → Burnout/absenteeism/quit /ning/staffing crisis

- Complex problems require partnerships.
Current Research

- Over reliance on **measuring deficits and problems** while offering few solutions.
- Using **inappropriate methods** from other work groups (i.e., police)
- Conducted by **researchers with no experience or expertise** in criminal justice settings.
- Front-line officers are a **difficult population to study**.
- **High turnover** in CO’s means that policy interventions are often short-term.
# Summary of Dangers and Risks Confronting Correctional Officers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work-Related Dangers</th>
<th>Institutional-Related Dangers</th>
<th>Psycho-Social Dangers</th>
<th>Mental Health Risks</th>
<th>Physical Health Risks</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gangs</td>
<td>Role Ambiguity/Role Conflict</td>
<td>Work/Family Conflict</td>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>Injuries</td>
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<td>Contraband</td>
<td>Demanding Work Obligations</td>
<td>Media/Political Scrutiny</td>
<td>Burnout</td>
<td>Death</td>
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<td>Mentally ill Inmates</td>
<td>Poor Leadership/Trust/Support</td>
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<td>Disruptive Inmates</td>
<td>No Input into Decision-Making</td>
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<td>Disease-Afflicted Inmates</td>
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<td>Riots</td>
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<td>Extended Hours</td>
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<td>Co-worker Conflict</td>
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<td>Understaffing</td>
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Wellness Poll Question

When correctional officers are asked about stress, what do you think their most common response is?

A. “Those inmates are just too much”
B. “The administration doesn’t care”
C. “I am worried about violence”
D. “I don’t get paid enough”
E. “I don’t know my role”
Wellness
The active pursuit of activities, choices and lifestyles that lead to a state of holistic health.
Resiliency

- Resiliency: “being able to continue functioning relatively normally”.

- In research I use the term “bounce back” because it is understandable to people.

- 1) Social support is key.
- 2) Good physical & mental health habits
- 3) Flexibility in thought: Creating new frameworks...
Changing a Framework

- How to change a framework?
- Welcome to baggage claim

- Inmates who engage in self-injurious behaviors.

<table>
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<th>Old Framework</th>
<th>New Framework</th>
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<td>Inmate motivation: Manipulation, control movement, hospital tour.</td>
<td>Inmate motivation: Early/severe trauma, coping, mental distress.</td>
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<td>Response: Staff stress, staff take behavior personally, punitive isolation of inmate.</td>
<td>Response: Empathy, staff do not take personally, staff assist in prevention &amp; response with training.</td>
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<td>Outcome: Class action lawsuits, increased mental illness, staff burnout/stress, etc.</td>
<td>Outcome: Improved outcomes for staff, inmates, and the workplace.</td>
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Holistic: The Two Pillars of a Healthy Work Life (Control & Meaning)

- **Bus drivers vs. Taxi Drivers**

- What opportunities are there in your current workplace to provide a sense of control and meaning in the work of officers and staff?

- **Prison Example:** Programs and Community-Based
Best Practices

- Three criteria towards best practices
  - Innovative (as new or unique as possible)
  - Cost effective (as cheap as possible)
  - Comprehensive (as holistic as possible)

- Hypothetical: Correctional Officer on 12-hour night shift.
Karin Ho

- Over 25 years experience working in corrections in both Ohio and South Carolina
- Provides technical support and guidance to correctional agencies across the nation
- Victim Advocate for over 35 years
- Privileged to be trusted by countless crime victims, correctional employees and others to provide support to them following some of the most traumatic experiences in their lives
- Having experienced traumatic events personally, recognize the importance of peers helping peers in the aftermath of these situations
Impact of Working in Corrections

Corrections has been described as a “toxic” environment, that often changes people who work in it.

Being able to effectively manage stress and bounce back from critical events is what can make all the difference for correctional professionals.
What we Know About Correctional Employees

- Used to being in control
- Always “FINE”
- Judge other who react to traumatic events
- Being emotional seen as weak
- Find it hard to ask for help
- Stuff feelings & reactions
Changing Times

- Thankfully, many agencies are starting to recognize the toll corrections can take on staff.
- Understanding that critical events can and DO impact employees, it important.
- Every state reports challenges in recruiting & hiring correctional employees, so it is critical to take care of those who do join our profession, so they make it a long career, rather than leaving!
Recognize that each employee’s needs are different. Do your best to meet them where they are.

Peer Team adds layer of support into existing EAP and other support within agency or family structure.

Address ongoing trauma-related issues through PCIS.

Implement agency-wide, mandatory training for entire workforce addressing culture of correctional environment to strengthen resiliency.
Post Critical Incident Seminar

- 3-Day Seminar
- For Employees (and their Spouse/Partner) Experiencing Ongoing Issues Related to a Traumatic Event(s)
- Combination of:
  - Presentations/Information
  - Peer Team Support
  - Small Break-Out Group Discussions
  - Opportunity to Talk with Mental Health Professional
  - Possibly Experience EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing)
  - Medical Massage Therapy
  - Mindfulness Exercises (meditation, breathing exercises, etc...)
  - Research
Be creative to **implement strategies** that effectively **break barriers** and connect with staff in the way that they need!
Trauma Dog

Recognize that not everyone likes dogs. Some may have allergies and/or be afraid of dogs. Respect everyone’s feelings and train dog to wait for command to approach people.

Make sure trauma dog is specifically trained to work with trauma and in highly emotional situations.

- Can have a calming effect in stressful environment
- Can utilize pressure-points to reduce blood pressure and heart rate
- Can utilize “leaning” and “weight” to provide feeling of being grounded for someone experiencing a panic attack or Post Traumatic Stress triggering event
- And...
And...
They’re CUTE and can just be petted!
Contact Us!

Dr. Hayden Smith, smithhp@mailbox.sc.edu
Karin Ho, Ho.Karin@doc.sc.gov
Scott Richards, s1richards@bop.gov
Thank you!

Thank you for your participation today! Please visit the National Institute of Correction’s website for more information about additional trainings and webinars.

www.nicic.gov
Questions?

Please submit your questions in the WebEx chat
Wellness Poll Results

When correctional officers are asked about stress, what do you think their most common response is?

- A. “Those inmates are just too much” 15
- B. “The administration doesn’t care” 518
- C. “I am worried about violence” 23
- D. “I don’t get paid enough” 130
- E. “I don’t know my role” 25