

Job Stress and Burnout Among Correctional Officers: A Literature Review

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This literature review presents an overview of occupational stress and burnout in correctional institutions, based on 43 investigations from 9 countries. First, the prevalence of various stress reactions among correctional officers (COs) is discussed: turnover and absenteeism rates, psychosomatic diseases, and levels of job dissatisfaction and burnout. Next, empirical evidence is summarized for the existence of 10 specific stressors in the CO's job. It appears that the most notable stressors for COs are role problems, work overload, demanding social contacts (with prisoners, colleagues, and supervisors), and poor social status. Finally, based on 21 articles, individual-oriented and organization-oriented approaches to reduce job stress and burnout among COs are discussed. It is concluded that particularly the latter (i.e., improving human resources management, professionalization of the CO's job, and improvement of the social work environment) seems to be a promising avenue for reducing job stress and burnout in correctional institutions.

KEY WORDS: job stress; burnout; correctional officers; intervention strategies; stress management.

Working in a prison as a correctional officer (CO) is a stressful job. At least this seems to be the prevailing opinion among professionals and the lay public alike. This current literature review seeks to find empirical support for this assertion by trying to answer three related specific questions: (1) What kinds of stress reactions are observed among correctional officers (COs)? (2) What kinds of job stressors are found among COs? (3) What preventive mea-

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asures can be taken in order to reduce job stress among COs? Special attention is paid to burnout since this is considered a long-term stress reaction that occurs among professionals who, like COs, do “people work.”

The majority (about 55%) of studies to be reviewed were conducted in the United States. Relatively few were carried out in Europe, most notably in Britain, Sweden, and the Netherlands, or in other countries such as Israel, Canada, or Australia. This might complicate the interpretation of the results since the situation in prisons in the United States differs greatly from those in other countries, particularly in Sweden and in the Netherlands. For instance, in the United States institutions with 1,500 prisoners are not uncommon, whereas in Sweden and in the Netherlands the maximum number of inmates is about 250. In addition, in the United States inmates may have to share cells whereas in Sweden and the Netherlands every inmate has a private cell. Also, the ratio of officers to inmates is less favorable in the United States than in these European countries. Finally, it is likely that COs’ personal characteristics differ between countries since recruitment and selection policies vary considerably. In the United States selection criteria are rather broad (e.g., high school education, particular size and weight, good sense of sight) whereas, for example, in the Netherlands psychological criteria are included as well (e.g., a particular level of intelligence, certain skills, and personality characteristics). Accordingly, it can be hypothesized that job stress is more common among COs in the United States because of higher workload (i.e., larger institutions and more inmates to deal with) and fewer personal coping resources (i.e., less adequate skills and personality characteristics).

Despite these differences similar developments can be observed between countries as well. Most notably, there is a tendency toward further professionalization of the CO’s job, which is well illustrated by the fact that the old-fashioned “prison guard” in most countries is replaced by the modern “correctional officer.” Not only has the job title changed, but so has the content of the job. The most important changes include (Stalgaitis, Meyers, & Krisak, 1982; Jacobs & Crotty, 1983; Kommer, 1993): (1) growing size and changing composition of the inmate population (i.e., increasing number of drug addicts, mentally ill, and aggressive inmates); (2) introduction of new rehabilitative programs, (3) liberalization (e.g., conjugal visits, inmate access to telephones); (4) influx of new treatment professionals; (5) growth of more middle-level supervisory positions, which provides better opportunities for career advancement; (6) recruitment of better-educated officers; (7) an increased sense of professionalism through improved pay and fringe benefits, increased training in legal matters and inmates’ rights, and stricter adherence to written policy and procedures. Therefore, as a result of these recent developments COs’ jobs may have changed likewise in various countries.

STRESS AND BURNOUT: A CONCEPTUAL NOTE

Although many definitions of stress exist, the interactive approach has come to dominate. Levi (1987) characterizes stress comprehensively as:

The interaction, or misfit of environmental opportunities and demands, and individual needs, abilities and expectations, elicit reactions. When the environmental demands made upon a person are beyond his or her response capability, when expectations are not met, or when abilities are over- or undertaxed, the organism reacts with various pathogenic mechanisms. These are cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and/or physiological and under some conditions of intensity, frequency or duration, and in the presence or absence of certain interacting variables, they may lead to precursors of disease. (p. 10)

Accordingly, job stress is defined as a particular relation between the employee and his or her work environment (e.g., Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Kahn & Boysiére, 1994). Environmental factors that are involved in the stress process are called *job stressors*, and individual reactions to these stressors are referred to as stress reactions or *strains*. Commonly, three types of strains are distinguished: (1) physiological strains (e.g., heart palpitations, high blood pressure), (2) psychological strains (e.g., job dissatisfaction, burnout, anxiety), (3) behavioral strains (e.g., turnover, absenteeism, alcohol and drug abuse). In sum, job stress is a subjective experience that results from the interplay of the objective work environment and the employee's coping resources.

Burnout is considered to be a long-term stress reaction that particularly occurs among professionals who work with people in some capacity—like teachers, nurses, social workers, or COs (Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993). Although various definitions of burnout exist, it is most commonly described as a psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach, 1993). Emotional exhaustion refers to feelings of being emotionally overextended and depleted of one's emotional resources. Depersonalization refers to a negative, callous, or excessively detached response to other people who are usually the recipients of one's services or care. Reduced personal accomplishment refers to a decline in one's feelings of competence and successful achievement in one's work.

Accumulating empirical evidence suggests that burnout is a process that gradually develops across time (Leiter, 1993; Maslach & Leiter, 1997; Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998). The first stage is characterized by an imbalance between resources and demands (stress). In human services professions considerable stress is caused by the emotionally demanding relationships with recipients (e.g., pupils, patients, clients, or prisoners) that eventually may result in the depletion of one's emotional resources. Next, a set of negative attitudes and behaviors is developed, such as a tendency to treat recipients in a detached and mechanical manner or a cynical preoccupation with gratification of one's own needs. Essentially, these negative attitudes and behaviors that constitute the depersonalization component

of burnout are to be considered as defensive coping mechanisms. In order to reduce emotional exhaustion, the burnout candidate creates a psychological distance in an attempt to protect him- or herself against the stressful social environment. However, this is an inadequate coping strategy that increases stress rather than reduces it because it diminishes the relationship with recipients and aggravates interpersonal problems. As a result, the professional is less effective in achieving his or her goals so that personal accomplishment diminishes and feelings of incompetence and self-doubt might develop. A suchlike sense of reduced personal accomplishment is considered to be the third component of the burnout syndrome.

In a somewhat similar vein, burnout has been described as a process of increasing disillusionment: “a progressive loss of idealism, energy, and purpose experienced by people in the helping professions as a result of conditions in their work” (Edelwich & Brodsky, 1980, p. 14). The initial idealistic expectations and noble aspirations are regarded as built-in sources of future frustration and therefore as major causes of burnout. In their progressive disillusionment model of burnout Edelwich and Brodsky distinguish four stages: (1) enthusiasm, (2) stagnation, (3) frustration, and (4) apathy. Quite remarkably, their process model of burnout closely matches observations on the typical CO career path: “Watching their entrance into the prison can be quite an experience. The hopes on their faces, the positive anxiety of their motivated gait—at first, it’s all there. Then slowly and almost methodically, the smiles wane, the expectations atrophy, and the desires to perform in a positive fashion succumb to escapist fantasy and verbally acknowledged skepticism” (Wicks, 1980, p. 1).

Hence, job stress and burnout are not identical; rather, chronic and serious job stress may lead to burnout, especially if the employee is not able to change the situation (Cherniss, 1980, p. 47).

LITERATURE REVIEW METHODS

Five databases were systematically searched, four of which being more general in nature covering the academic fields of psychology (Psychological Abstracts 1981–present), sociology (Sociological Abstracts 1981–present), health sciences (Medline Express 1981–present), and sciences and arts in general (Netherlands Central Catalogue 1977–present). The remaining bibliographic database of the Scientific Documentation Center of the Dutch Ministry of Justice (WODC) is highly specialized and includes information on law and law enforcement. Keywords that guided our search were: prison personnel, correctional officers, (job) stress, (job) stress prevention (programs), (job) stress management, (job) stress reduction, occupational stress and (professional) burnout. Forty-three empirical articles from nine different countries were identified (see Table 1) of which three articles deal exclusively with burnout among COs; 11 articles include job stress as well as burnout, and the remaining 29 articles

Table 1. Overview of Empirical Studies on Job Stress and Burnout Among COs
(in chronological order from 1981)

Author(s)	Sample	Strains	Stressors
1. Shamir & Drory (1981)	306 Israeli COs of various ethnic backgrounds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • burnout (“tedium”) • job satisfaction • general satisfaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • role problems • lack of skill variety • lack of task significance • lack of feedback • lack of autonomy
2. Poole & Regoli (1981)	144 COs 35 Custody staff (USA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • alienation (powerlessness; normlessness; meaninglessness; isolation; self-estrangement) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • relations with inmates • relations with fellow officers • relations with superiors
3. Lombardo (1981)	50 USA COs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • job dissatisfaction • job stress • physical isolation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • role ambiguity • dealing with inmates • lack of a support network • lack of decision latitude
4. Toch & Klofas (1982)	832 USA COs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • alienation • job stress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • role definition problems • custody orientation • role conflict
5. Shamir & Drory (1982)	370 Israeli COs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • burnout (“tedium”) • job stress 	
6. Cheek & Miller (1983)	143 USA COs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COs’ perceptions of own and other’s stress • stress reactions (physical health; emotional and interpersonal relations; job performance) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • administrative problems (lack of clear performance criteria; lack of participation in decision-making; lack of administrative support) • interaction with inmates • poor job conditions • stressful family relations • “macho” style • “CO subculture”
7. Klofas & Toch (1986)	832 USA COs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • work-related alienation (powerlessness; meaninglessness; self-estrangement; bureaucratic indifference) • COs’ professional orientation (interest in work beyond pure custody; preference for moderate social distance from inmates) 	

Table 1. (Continued)

Author(s)	Sample	Strains	Stressors
8. Dignam et al. (1986)	166 USA COs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • job stress • burnout 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • role ambiguity • high workload • negative direct inmate contact • lack of social support
9. Lindquist & Whitehead (1986)	241 USA COs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • job stress • job satisfaction • burnout 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • role conflict • lack of social support • lack of participation in decision making • resource inadequacy
10. Verhagen (1986a, b)	250 Dutch COs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • job stress • job satisfaction • psychosomatic complaints • absenteeism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high work load • poor management support • uncertainty about the future
11. Gerstein et al. (1987)	166 USA COs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • burnout 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • role conflict • contact with inmates • job classification
12. Whitehead et al. (1987)	258 USA COs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • job satisfaction • job stress • burnout 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interaction with inmates • punitive orientation • counseling role (rehabilitation) • lack of participation in decision making • role conflict
13. Hepburn (1987)	185 USA COs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • job satisfaction • role strain • alienation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CO's perceptions of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the actual amount of CO's influence • the difference between the CO's actual influence and the prisoners' actual influence • discrepancy between the CO's actual and ideal influence
14. Jurik & Winn (1987)	179 USA COs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • turnover 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • poor opportunities to influence institutional policy decisions • dissatisfaction with perceived working conditions
15. Drory & Shamir (1988)	266 Israeli COs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • job satisfaction • burnout ("tedium") 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • intra-organizational characteristics (role conflict; role ambiguity; poor management support) • task characteristics (lack of skill variety,

Table 1. (Continued)

Author(s)	Sample	Strains	Stressors
16. Härenstam et al. (1988)	2063 Swedish prison staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • symptoms of ill health • cortisol and gamma glutamyltransferase levels • sick leave rate • work satisfaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> task significance, autonomy, and feedback) • extra-organizational variables (poor community support; family-role conflict) • poor working conditions (high proportion of drug abusers) • nonsupportive psychological climate • understimulation • lack of decision latitude
17. Farmer (1988)	41 USA COs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • burnout 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • perceived juvenile exploitation
18. Dignam & West (1988)	262 USA COs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • job stress • burnout • poor health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high workload • stressful job events • lack of social support
19. Lombardo (1989)	23 UK COs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • self-perceptions as CO • perception of their work (professionalization) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • role ambiguity • dealing with inmates • lack of a support network • lack of decision attitude
20. Launay & Fielding (1989)	81 UK COs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • job stress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interaction with inmates • interaction with management
21. Cullen et al. (1990)	155 USA COs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • job satisfaction • life and work stress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • role problems • perceived danger • lack of supervisory, peer, and family support
22. Härenstam & Theorell (1990)	1998 Swedish prison staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plasma cortisol and the interaction between cortisol and liver function as an indicator of strenuous work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • role problems • loneliness at work • poor management style • overtime work
23. Hughes (1990)	109 Canadian COs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • work-related stress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • management problems • dealing with inmates and co-workers • boredom
24. Grossi & Berg (1991)	106 USA COs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • job stress • job dissatisfaction • social support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • role problems • court problems • dangerousness

Table 1. (Continued)

Author(s)	Sample	Strains	Stressors
25. Holgate & Clegg (1991)	106 UK COs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • burnout 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • role conflict • role ambiguity • lack of participation in decision making • levels of client contact
26. Van Voorhis et al. (1991)	155 USA COs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • job dissatisfaction • job stress • professional orientation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of peer support • role conflict
27. Augestad & Levander (1992)	122 Norwegian COs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • job stress • self reported health problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • personality characteristics • coping strategies
28. Patterson (1992)	4500 USA police officers and COs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • perceived job stress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • job experiences (e.g. danger, lack of personal support, poor compensation)
29. Morrison et al. (1992)	274 Australian COs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • physical and mental well-being • general job satisfaction • family strain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • perceptions of job components • lack of social support • negative affectivity
30. Saylor & Wright (1992)	3325 USA prison employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • job satisfaction • personal efficacy • job stress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • status • longevity • frequency of contacts with inmates
31. Ulmer (1993)	198 USA COs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cynicism toward prison administration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • experience on the job • perceived influence on administrative superiors
32. Wright (1993)	79 USA COs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • voluntary turnover • job satisfaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • growth orientation • (non)tenure
33. Hughes & Zamble (1993)	118 Dutch COs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • work-related stress • job/life/overall satisfaction • self-rated health • coping ability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • poor leadership and management skills • boredom • interaction with co-workers
34. Verhaeghe (1993)	536 Belgian prison staff (494 COs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • job stress • burnout 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • feeling of unsafety • mutually dependence of COs and inmates • role conflicts • hierarchic structure of the organization • work shifts
35. Schaufeli et al. (1994)	79 Dutch COs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • job stress • burnout 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • work overload • role conflict
36. Peeters et al. (1995)	38 Dutch COs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • negative affect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • number of stressful events • lack of social support

Table 1. (Continued)

Author(s)	Sample	Strains	Stressors
37. Dollard & Winefield (1995)	419 Australian COs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • physical symptoms • trait anxiety • minor psychiatric morbidity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high work pressure • lack of peer support • lack of supervisor support
38. Triplett et al. (1996)	254 USA COs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • job stress • coping strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • role ambiguity • role conflict • quantitative/qualitative role overload • career development • underutilization of skills • overtime • safety concerns
39. Slate & Vogel (1997)	468 USA COs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • job stress • physical strain • intention to quit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of participation in decision making
40. Britton (1997)	2979 USA COs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • job stress • job dissatisfaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • institutional characteristics (e.g. poor quality of supervision)
41. Hurst & Hurst (1997)	224 USA COs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • burnout 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ways of coping • lack of social support
42. Dollard & Winefield (1998)	419 Australian COs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • psychological distress • physical symptoms • job dissatisfaction • work-home conflict • negative affectivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high job demands • poor job control • lack of social support
43. Pollack & Sigler (1998)	85 USA COs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • job stress • cynicism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • type of work setting (jail, youth center, correctional center)

discuss, in addition to job stress, phenomena like alienation, cynicism, tedium, social support, and ways of coping with stress. Moreover, our search revealed 19 nonempirical articles or chapters, including three review studies (Stalgaitis, Meyers, & Krisak, 1982; Philliber, 1987; Huckabee, 1992). The present study elaborates on these three earlier overviews by: (1) including more recent studies that are published in the 1980s and particularly in the 1990s; (2) integrating the studies carried out among COs into the general job stress literature; and (3) discussing preventive strategies.

REVIEW: CO STRESS AND BURNOUT

The Nature of the Reviewed Studies

Typically, empirical studies on job stress and burnout among COs use cross-sectional study designs and self-report questionnaires. Of all 43 studies

that were reviewed only one used a prospective design in order to predict future turnover (Jurik & Winn, 1987) and one was longitudinal in nature in the sense that questionnaire data was collected at two waves. The remaining 41 studies employed one-shot designs that do not allow one to disentangle cause and effect. Moreover, with one notable exception (Lombardo, 1981) *all* studies used questionnaires: 33 (80%) used exclusively questionnaires; two studies also used interviews (Poole & Regoli, 1981; Hughes & Zamble, 1993); four studies included administrative records (Verhagen, 1986a,b; Junk & Winn, 1987; Härenstam, Palm, & Theorell, 1988; Augestad & Levander, 1992); two studies used physiological measures in addition (Härenstam et al., 1988; Härenstam & Theorell, 1990); and finally, one study also used a daily event-recording approach in addition to questionnaires (Peeters, Buunk, & Schaufeli, 1995). Only the Swedish study of Härenstam et al. (1988) is truly multimethodical in nature because in addition to a questionnaire, data administrative records, physiological measures, and a physical health examination are included. Finally, with three exceptions that used large representative samples (Härenstam & Theorell, 1990; Saylor & Wright, 1992; Britton, 1997) all studies employed small and/or convenience samples. Thus, the results of the empirical studies to be reviewed should be interpreted with caution because: (1) cross-sectional designs do not allow drawing of conclusions about the causal direction of the relationship between stressors and strains; (2) self-reports are known to be sensitive to all kinds of response biases; and (3) results obtained in small and nonrepresentative samples cannot be generalized (see Frese & Zapf, 1988, for a methodological discussion of these three issues).

What Kinds of Stress Reactions are Observed Among COs?

Broadly speaking, four kinds of stress reactions can be distinguished among COs: (1) withdrawal behaviors; (2) psychosomatic diseases; (3) negative attitudes, and (4) burnout. Behavioral stress reactions (i.e., turnover and absenteeism) that are documented by archival data suggest that COs work in stressful jobs. This is illustrated by alarmingly high *turnover* rates. For instance, recent figures from a national survey of correctional facilities in the United States reveal an average turnover rate among COs of 16.2% with some states reporting turnover rates as high as 38% (Corrections Compendium, 1996). Needless to say, such rates are likely to create administrative nightmares, desperate recruiting, and much overwork. Most turnover in the United States occurs in young, inexperienced COs within six months after beginning their jobs. Likewise, in Israel 50% of the COs leave correctional service within 18 months of being hired (Shamir & Drory, 1982). Obviously, initial expectations of neophytes do not correspond with the everyday reality of the job. Probably, the less

rigorous personnel selection in these countries explains these high turnover rates relative to the Netherlands, about 4–5% annually, where more strict criteria are applied than in the United States (Greuter & Castelijns, 1992).

In addition, *absenteeism* is also quite high among COs. For instance, absenteeism rates among New York COs are 300% higher than the average rate of all other occupations in that state (Cheek & Miller, 1983). In the Netherlands, absenteeism rates among COs are not as high as in the United States, but are nevertheless nearly twice as high as the country's average (Greuter & Castelijns, 1992). In the mid-eighties, the absenteeism rate among Dutch COs was 15% against 8.5% for all other occupations. It was calculated that on average, a Dutch CO was absent for two months per year. These alarming figures prompted the Dutch Ministry of Justice to grant a number of studies to investigate the causes of absenteeism. It appeared from these studies that about one-third of the COs' absenteeism was stress-related (Verhagen, 1986a). More than half of the Dutch COs receive their work disablement pensions on mental grounds. That is, they are work incapacitated because of the stressful nature of their jobs. This disablement rate is well above the Dutch average; about one-third of the disabled workers in the Netherlands leave their jobs for psychological reasons (Houtman, 1997).

It has been observed in the United States that *psychosomatic diseases* are more common among COs than among members of most other occupations, including police officers—a comparable profession (Cheek & Miller, 1983). In the period up to six months prior to the United States survey, 17% of the COs reported that they visited a physician because of hypertension (vs. 10% of police officers and 9% of other professions). Another 3.5% suffered from heart disease, which is rather high compared to police officers (1.4%) and members of the other occupations (2.1%). These figures agree with a carefully designed Swedish study that shows that COs are at higher risk to develop cardiovascular diseases (Härenstam et al., 1988). It appears from this study that COs not only had significantly higher levels of blood pressure compared to the control group, consisting of physicians, engineers, traffic controllers, and musicians, but also their levels of the stress hormone plasma cortisol, were much higher (Härenstam, 1989).

Perhaps most typically, COs report a number of *negative job-related attitudes*. For instance, their level of job dissatisfaction is remarkably high compared to a dozen occupations that are quite similar with respect to levels of pay and education (Cullen, Link, Cullen, & Wolfe, 1990). Moreover, abundant empirical evidence suggests that COs experience alienation (Lombardo, 1981; Toch & Klofas, 1982), occupational tedium (Shamir & Drory, 1982) and powerlessness, and are characterized by cynicism, authoritarianism, skepticism, and pessimism (for a review see Philliber, 1987). For instance, in the study of Toch and Klofas (1982) about 70% of COs in the United States agree with the state-

ment: “We’re damned if we do, and we’re damned if we don’t.” Many officers viewed their work as dull, tedious, and meaningless. As one CO put it, “We’re paid prisoners.” Their skepticism and cynicism is nourished by the repeated failure to successfully rehabilitate prisoners, which is illustrated by high relapse rates. Research has shown that cynicism is more prevalent in treatment settings than in custodial settings where the accent is less on rehabilitation (Philliber, 1987). Moreover, cynicism is more common among officers who are in the middle of their careers. Younger COs are still idealistically motivated, whereas only those of the older COs have survived who did cope well in their jobs—this survival bias is also called the “healthy worker effect” (Karasek & Theorell, 1990).

How many COs are *burned out*? Although a valid and reliable burnout measure exists—the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach, Leiter, & Jackson, 1996)—this question cannot be answered straightforwardly since it is wrongly posed; like length, burnout is a continuous variable. Obviously, the answer to this question depends on the criterion that is used, and the criterion for burnout is arbitrary. For instance, Lindquist and Whitehead (1986) used as a criterion for each dimension of burnout that one crucial symptom should occur at least once a week. Based on this arbitrary criterion they estimated that one-third of the COs experiences considerable emotional exhaustion, approximately one-fifth treated prisoners in an impersonal manner (depersonalization), and about one-quarter evaluated themselves negatively (reduced personal accomplishment). Schaufeli, Van den Eijnden, and Brouwers (1994) found that burnout among COs was particularly characterized by feelings of depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. These findings are in line with other empirical findings that suggest that, in comparison with other occupational groups, COs experience more feelings of alienation, cynicism, pessimism, skepticism, and powerlessness (Philliber, 1987; see also the previous discussion about negative job-related attitudes). In a similar vein it has been observed that the level of psychological distress—as measured with the General Health Questionnaire—was significantly higher for Australian COs than in a national sample of that country (Dollard & Winefield, 1994). A recent Canadian study by Pollack and Sigler (1998), however, reported that compared to United States inner-city teachers and police officers, Canadian COs experience exceptionally low levels of job stress. The authors explain this finding by pointing to the harsh environment of northern Ontario that might have produced a selection effect: COs with a weaker constitution have left the service or did not apply for a job in this area in the first place.

Do differences in gender, race, and age exist as far as stress reactions in COs are concerned? Although many would probably expect that, for instance, women, non-whites, and older COs report higher strain levels, this is not supported by empirical results. Huckabee (1992) reviewed the literature and found

that the effect of gender, race, ethnicity, and age on stress reactions “remains unclear” (p. 483). More recent research confirms that no significant *direct* relationship exists between gender and age on the one hand and job dissatisfaction (Cullen et al., 1990; Dollard & Winefield, 1995, 1998; Morrison, Dunne, Fitzgerald, & Cloghan, 1992), depression, boredom, trait anxiety, and minor psychiatric symptoms (Dollard & Winefield, 1995, 1998), physical health (Morrison et al., 1992), burnout (Hurst & Hurst, 1997), and stress symptoms (Triplet & Mullings, 1996) on the other hand. Race and ethnicity have been studied much less in relation with stress and burnout. Triplett and Mullings (1996) did not find significant relationships between stress reactions and race and Shamir and Drory (1981) who studied COs with Druze, Jewish North African and Jewish Georgian backgrounds in Israeli prisons, concluded that “the realities of the job are clear enough to be perceived in a similar manner by people with different cultural backgrounds and the pattern of relationships among perceptions and evaluations of the job is also generally similar across cultures” (p. 280). However, the fact that no direct relationships exist does not mean that gender, race, ethnicity, and age do not play a role at all; it seems that their role is more subtle. For instance, Britton (1997) found that among minority male COs, greater efficacy in working with inmates was associated with lower job stress, while white female COs’ higher levels of overall job satisfaction were mediated by quality of supervision. Furthermore, Härenstam et al. (1988) found that understimulation was associated with a high sick leave rate for male prison staff and high mean levels of cortisol and symptoms of ill health for female staff. Finally, Holgate and Clegg (1991) showed that the process of burnout differs between age groups; for younger COs role conflict contributed to increased emotional exhaustion and to increased contact with inmates, whereas for older COs emotional exhaustion contributed to decreased contact with inmates. The results of these three studies suggest complex patterns of interactions rather than direct effects of gender, ethnicity, and age on stress reactions.

In sum: COs are under stress. This is illustrated by relatively high turnover, absenteeism, and disablement rates compared to other occupations. Moreover, they suffer more than other professionals from psychosomatic risk factors such as hypertension and elevated secretion of stress hormones. Additionally, stress-related cardiovascular disease is more common among COs. Finally, and probably most typically, COs experience a number of negative feelings and attitudes, including job dissatisfaction, cynicism, and burnout.

What Kinds of Job Stressors are Found Among COs?

Based on earlier reviews of literature on job stressors (e.g., Warr, 1987; Kahn & Byosiere, 1994; Buunk, de Jonge, Ybema, & de Wolff, 1998), we

distinguish between ten psychosocial risk factors for developing stress reactions. Each of these risk factors will be briefly discussed in relation to the CO's job so that a particular psychosocial risk profile emerges.

High Workload

Many studies indicate that the workload of COs is high (for reviews see Philliber, 1987; Huckabee, 1992). For instance, in several Dutch studies, between 65% and 75% of the COs report that they feel under strain because of high workload (Kommer, 1990). More particularly, they complain about high peak load (i.e., having too much to do in too short a time), brief periods of recovery (i.e., intervals between peak hours are too short), and multiple workload (having to perform different tasks simultaneously). It is quite likely that the workload of COs has increased over the past years because of financial cutbacks and reduction of staff. Furthermore, it was observed that high absenteeism rates have a negative impact on COs' workload since more overtime has to be performed (Kommer, 1990). A study among COs in the United States showed a positive relationship between workload and burnout: the higher the workload the more burnout symptoms were observed (Dignam, Barrera, & West, 1986). In a somewhat similar vein, COs who report problems with shift-work showed more burnout symptoms (particularly emotional exhaustion) than officers who did not report such problems (Schaufeli et al., 1994). Shamir and Drory (1982) found work-overload to be a significant predictor of tedium among Israeli COs. Finally, a recent study among Australian COs not only found that those who experienced high job demands reported more psychological distress, more job dissatisfaction, and more physical health symptoms, but also that these negative effects were aggravated when high job demands were accompanied by low control and lack of social support (Dollard & Winefield, 1998). Obviously, a *combination* of high demands, poor control, and lack of social support constitutes a special risk for COs' health and well-being.

Lack of Autonomy

As noted above, a recent test of the so-called Job Demand Control Support model (Karasek & Theorell, 1990) in Australian COs was successful in that it showed both significant main effects and interaction effects of job demands, job control (or autonomy), and social support on various measures of health and well-being (e.g., psychological distress, job dissatisfaction, physical health symptoms) (Dollard & Winefield, 1998). More specifically, two aspects of job autonomy can be distinguished: skill discretion and decision authority (Karasek & Theorell, 1990). The former refers to the level of control the worker has in

performing the task, whereas the latter refers to the level of social authority over making decisions. It appears that COs who report low levels of skill discretion experience fewer feelings of personal accomplishment, compared to COs who report higher levels (Schaufeli et al., 1994). In addition, COs' perceived influence on administrative supervisors (decision authority) appeared to be negatively related to cynicism (Ulmer, 1992), whereas lack of participation in decision making is positively associated with job stress (Lasky, Gordon, & Strebals, 1986; Slate & Vogel, 1997). A possible explanation for these relationships is offered by Whitehead (1989) who showed that role problems play a mediating role between lack of participation in decision making and burnout. Because COs do not sufficiently participate in decision making (i.e., lack decision authority), their role problems are not solved and as a result of that burnout might develop. On the other hand, COs with supervisory responsibilities perceive less job-related stress and more job satisfaction than their colleagues who have less decision authority (Saylor & Wright, 1992). In the Netherlands, a small but significant proportion of COs (15%) complains about lack of decision authority (Kommer, 1990).

Underutilization of Knowledge and Skill

A job that requires the use of knowledge and skills is challenging and provides learning opportunities. However, a large majority (69%) of Dutch COs indicate that only "every now and then" they have the opportunity to use the knowledge and skills they acquired during their training (Kommer, 1990). In other words, most COs feel underutilized, particularly in custody-oriented institutions as compared to rehabilitation-oriented institutions (so-called "half-open prisons"). In Sweden, "understimulation" of COs was associated with higher sick-leave rates and higher levels of stress hormones, like plasma cortisol (Härenstam et al., 1988). Willett (1982) claimed that many Canadian COs feel "trapped" because they are paid a disproportionately high salary for a job that requires a low level of education and few skills. Another Canadian study showed opposite results suggesting that the stereotype of COs is incorrect (Hughes & Zamble, 1993): COs felt neither undereducated, nor did they evidence exceptional stress, in fact they were content to stay in their job. Since the authors do not present any rationale for their deviant findings, it may be speculated that these are due to sampling bias.

Lack of Variety

Typically, the CO's job is considered to be dull and routine (Philliber, 1987). In recent decades, task variety has been further reduced by the influx of

other professional staff such as social workers and counselors who have taken over part of the traditional CO's job (Fry, 1989). Although this might make the CO's daily work even more tedious, in the Netherlands only a small minority (15%) experiences lack of variety to be a problem (Kommer, 1990). Moreover, skill variety was not significantly related to burnout in an Israeli study (Drory & Shamir, 1988). Hughes and Zamble (1993), however, found among Canadian COs that boredom was the second source of stress after poor management. But as noted previously, they found COs, in contrast to previous reports, to be reasonably effective and adaptive, with little evidence of job stress.

Role Problems

Perhaps the most important job stressor COs are faced with are role problems of several kinds. After a thorough review of empirical studies Philliber (1987, p. 19) concludes: "Overall, role difficulties in prisons appear to take a rather serious toll." Basically two different kinds of role problems are observed among COs: role ambiguity and role conflict. The former occurs when no adequate information is available to do the job well, whereas the latter occurs when conflicting demands have to be met. The role of the CO is problematic by its very nature since two conflicting demands have to be met simultaneously—guarding prisoners and facilitating their rehabilitation. This typical role conflict is convincingly demonstrated by the results of a Dutch survey (Kommer, 1990) in which a large majority (80%) agrees with the statement that "keeping peace and order" is a crucial task for COs. At the same time, however, a similar percentage (74%) agrees with the statement that "encouraging the inmate to understand himself better" is a crucial task as well. Clearly, to a large degree both tasks are incompatible. The former statement implies that rules are applied strictly, whereas the latter statement implies that the rules are interpreted rather smoothly. Role problems are aggravated because the objectives of rehabilitation are usually rather vaguely described so that, in addition, role ambiguity is likely to result. That is, COs hardly know what is expected of them when it comes to rehabilitating prisoners. Not surprisingly, it has been argued that the emphasis on rehabilitation and the recent influx of other professionals have increased role problems of COs (Philliber, 1987). COs feel uncertain about their role, are doubtful about which services they have to provide, and blame their superiors for the lack of standardization of policies in dealing with inmates (Poole & Regoli, 1981; Toch & Klofas, 1982). It was demonstrated that such role ambiguity resulting from poor leadership is strongly related to job stress (Rosefield, 1981; Cheek & Miller, 1983). In a somewhat similar vein, Poole and Regoli (1980a) observed that changing correctional philosophies and institutional practices concerning the handling of prisoners produced stress among COs because

they are associated with role conflicts. Similar direct relationships between role conflict and stress have also been found by Cullen, Link, Wolfe, and Frank (1985), Lindquist and Whitehead (1986), and Grossi and Berg (1991). However, interestingly, in another study of Poole and Regoli (1980b), a reverse pattern was suggested—namely, that stress increases levels of role conflict as well as conflicts between professional and nonprofessional staff. Despite claims for causality, all above-mentioned studies are cross-sectional in nature, so that a causal order between variables cannot be determined.

In various studies, role problems such as role conflict and role ambiguity were found to be predictors of burnout (Shamir & Drory, 1982; Lindquist & Whitehead, 1986; Dignam, Barrera, & West, 1986; Drory & Shamir, 1988; Whitehead, 1989; Schaufeli et al., 1994). Whitehead's (1989) model of CO burnout illustrates the crucial function of role problems in the burnout process. The model is based on survey data of over two hundred Alabama COs and suggests that role problems have both a direct and an indirect effect on burnout. Indirect paths run through job dissatisfaction and job stress. In its turn, role problems are aggravated by lacking social support and by poor participation in decision making.

Demanding Social Contacts

Intensive and emotionally charged contacts with prisoners are the hallmark of the CO's job. The relationship between CO and prisoner has been characterized as a situation of structural conflict (Poole & Regoli, 1981): the role of the officer ("the keeper") fundamentally contradicts the role of the prisoner ("the kept"). Recently, several changes in the population of the prisoners have intensified the stressful social contacts between COs and inmates. For instance, more and more mentally disturbed delinquents and drug addicts are imprisoned (Harding & Zimmermann, 1989). Härenstam et al. (1988) found a high proportion of drug abuse in correctional institutions to be positively correlated with COs' symptoms of ill health, high sick-leave rates, and low work satisfaction. Moreover, prisoners are more entitled than they used to be, whereas the authority of COs has declined. The demanding nature of prisoner contact is further illustrated by the positive relationship between the intensity of prisoner contact and CO burnout. The more hours per week COs spend in direct contact with prisoners, the more burnout symptoms are reported—particularly, diminished personal accomplishment (Whitehead, 1989).

A distinction should be made between positive and negative direct contact with prisoners (Dignam, Barrera, & West, 1986). The former is positively related with COs' feelings of personal accomplishment, whereas the latter is positively related with both other dimensions of burnout (i.e., emotional exhaustion

and depersonalization). Schaufeli et al. (1994) showed that the discrepancy COs experience between their investments and outcomes in relationships with prisoners is positively related to all three dimensions of burnout. That is, COs who feel that they continuously put more into relationships with prisoners than they get back from them in return tend to burn out.

Social contacts of COs are not restricted to prisoners but include colleagues and superiors as well. It has been argued that group loyalty and collegiality among COs are weakly developed because they interact only occasionally (Poole & Regoli, 1981). The main reason for this is that the organization emphasizes individual responsibility rather than team responsibility. As a result, an individualistic culture develops in which asking for social support is considered to be an expression of incompetence. Therefore, it is not surprising that the so-called *John Wayne syndrome* is often observed: the CO as a tough lonesome cowboy who is emotionally unaffected by his job, and who can solve his own problems without the help of others. As in many occupations (for overviews see Warr, 1987; Buunk et al., 1998), social support of colleagues and supervisor reduces stress among COs (Dollard & Winefield, 1995). This was particularly the case among COs with high levels of anxiety. However, results concerning social support are equivocal since other studies suggested that peer support *increases* rather than reduces COs' level of job stress (Grossi & Berg, 1991; Morrison et al., 1992). Similarly, a Dutch study showed that COs' social support does not unconditionally lead to positive affect (Peeters, Buunk, & Schaufeli, 1995): COs perceived social support as a restriction of their personal freedom, which in turn induced feelings of inferiority to the donor of the support.

COs have rather negative attitudes about their superiors. For instance, 42% of the COs in the United States believed that prisoners are treated better by their superiors than they are (Toch & Klofas, 1982). One-third of the COs fully agree with the statement: "My superiors care more about the inmates than about the officers." The poor relationship between COs and their superiors constitutes a serious problem since feedback and support from superiors are crucial for performing adequately on the job, particularly when structural role problems exist. Typically, COs attribute much of their stress to poor communication with their supervisors (Cheek & Miller, 1983). Drory and Shamir (1988) found lacking management support to be positively related to burnout.

Uncertainty

Two types of uncertainty can be distinguished among COs: the threat of losing one's job and uncertain career prospects. In many European countries

such as the Netherlands, Germany, and Sweden, COs are civil servants who enjoy strong legal protection against dismissal. It has been noted that such a high level of job certainty also has a negative side in that COs tend to accept poor working conditions in exchange for a stable job (Kommer, 1990). It is quite likely that the present discussions in many countries about the privatization of prisons will enhance feelings of job insecurity among COs. There is ample evidence that the psychological effects of anticipated job loss are at least just as serious, or perhaps even more so, than actual job loss (Hartley, Jacobsen, Klandermans, & Van Vuren, 1991). In the Netherlands, the majority of the COs (54%) is quite uncertain about their future career prospects and many COs (39%) indicate that they experience a career dead-end (Kommer, 1990).

Health and Safety Risks

The situation of structural conflict between COs and prisoners may easily escalate and end up in a violent confrontation. Thus, the threat of violence is an important stressor for COs. For instance, 75% of Israeli COs considered potential violence as the most stressful aspect of their work (Shamir & Drory, 1982). Similar figures have been reported in the United States (see Philliber, 1987). Danger is reported as another major source of stress (e.g., Lombardo, 1981; Cullen et al., 1990; Triplett, Mullings, & Scarborough, 1996). Recently, the risk of AIDS or hepatitis infection has increased because many inmates are drug addicted.

A Dutch survey showed that many COs complain about the physical climate in the institution (Verhagen, 1986b), most notably dry air (41%), lack of fresh air (74%), and draught (70%). Jacobs and Crotty (1983) found specific job conditions that are associated with prison employment—such as dirt and odor—to be related to COs' level of job stress.

Inadequate Pay

Research on pay shows that the experienced fairness of the pay level is related to the worker's well-being, rather than absolute pay (Warr, 1987). Is the pay appropriate for the kind of job that is performed compared to other similar jobs? Indeed, a moderate negative relationship was observed between satisfaction with pay and burnout among Israeli COs (Shamir & Drory, 1982). Rosefield (1981) found factors as low pay, slow promotions, and insufficient fringe benefits to contribute to work-related stress.

Poor Social Status

Working in a prison has low social status. This is illustrated by the fact that for most COs their current job is their second choice (Philliber, 1987). Rather than being unemployed, COs “choose” to work in the prison. The major attraction of their job is employment security and pay. Stalgaitis et al. (1982) found that COs considered the poor social status of their job as a significant source of work-related stress. Among Israeli COs, community esteem for the incumbent’s occupation was about as strongly correlated with burnout as was role conflict (Shamir & Drory, 1982). The poorer the experienced community support, the more burnout symptoms were reported. In addition, the status of the job is also poor in the eyes of the prisoners. As one prisoner notes: “We don’t actually have any respect for a regular guard, he just carries the keys. It’s those up there who have something to say; captain, doctor, and inspector” (Kommer, 1990, p. 36).

In sum, virtually all psychosocial risk factors that have been identified in the occupational stress literature apply more or less to the CO’s job. However, the most prominent psychosocial risks that may lead to stress and burnout among COs are: (1) role problems; (2) stressful social contacts with superiors, prisoners, and colleagues; (3) work overload; and (4) poor social status. In addition, three risk factors seem to play a minor role: lack of participation in decision making, inadequate pay, and underutilization of knowledge and skills. It should be noted, however, that these conclusions are almost exclusively based on cross-sectional surveys that are conducted in relatively small and/or nonrepresentative samples.

REVIEW: INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

Although there is a large literature on CO stress, not much is written about specific intervention strategies to reduce it. Empirical work on interventions in correctional institutes is even more scarce. From all publications included in Table 2 on recommendations to reduce job stress and burnout among COs, only Kiely and Hodgson (1990) systematically evaluate the effects of a stress prevention project.

Basically, there are two types of approaches to deal with work-related stress (Quick, Quick, Nelson, & Hurrell, 1997): (1) helping employees to develop their skills in order to cope with stressors more effectively (i.e., individual-based approaches); (2) changing the work environment in order to eliminate or reduce the stressors (i.e., organizational-based approaches). A quick glance at Table 2 shows that almost all recommendations are organization-based. We agree that restructuring the environment is a superior strategy to prevent work-

Table 2. Overview of Recommendations to Reduce Job Stress and Burnout Among COs (in chronological order from 1981)

Author(s)	Recommendations
1. Lombardo (1981)	• broadening of overlapping CO's custody and treatment roles
2. Poole & Regioli (1981)	• participative management
3. Stalgaitis et al. (1982)	• two general approaches to deal with stress: 1. to change the environment to reduce stressors 2. to help COs develop skills to more effectively cope with stressors
4. Shamir & Drory (1982)	• support from management
5. Lindquist & Whitehead (1986)	• reduce role conflict by consistent instructions from supervisors • enrichment of the CO's job (give COs more responsibility and commensurate goals, for a variety of tasks with objectively measurable goals) • encouragement from prison administrators to seek personal support • pay special attention to younger officers, and assist them in warding off burnout
6. Toch & Klofas (1986)	• training • coaching of novices by an experienced colleague
7. Verhagen (1986a,b)	• change group norms • personnel policy: —improve selection —realistic job preview —performance appraisal —exit interviews • organizational development: —stimulating teamwork • task-structuring • management support: —visibility of management at the shop floor —fair distribution of overwork —monitoring of work (over)load —monitoring of absenteeism —introduction and guidance of new personnel
8. Gerstein et al. (1987)	• training • individualized institutional programs need to be designed to enhance the quality of the relationship between staff and inmates (cooperative recreational and maintenance activities; programs that involve inmates and staff in community outreach and prevention) • institutions must better define the role and function of their personnel, thereby clarifying the organizational structure and responsibilities of the COs
9. Hepburn (1987)	• transferring control exercised by administrators to COs • participative management (active and formal role for COs in making those policy and procedure decisions that effect the CO's job)
10. Drory & Shamir (1988)	• improve the work-shift system to enable COs to cope better with family-role conflicts • education of prison management

Table 2. (Continued)

Author(s)	Recommendations
11. Farmer (1988)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establishment of liaison officers who develop and maintain relations with the wider community (site visits; joint prison-community projects; community educational and recreational institutions) • initiate programs for family visiting • better welfare services for prison staff, including personal counseling for COs and their families • group discussions among prison guards moderated by social workers • increase the prison staff visibility and image in mass media • staff meetings to discuss grievances, frustrations, and other problems • systematic training sessions to help define work roles • employee assistance programs to help employees to deal with personal conflicts
12. Härenstam et al. (1988)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • foster a proactive management style • establish goal consensus among staff • increase decision latitude • establish a good psychological climate
13. Launay & Fielding (1989)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • initiate 'Fresh start projects' to improve communication within prisons by getting COs to work in smaller groups, and to improve staff/inmate relations by providing more continuity of work
14. Kiely & Hodgson (1990)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • physical exercise programs
15. Holgate & Clegg (1991)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve HRM (select applicants who are emotionally suited to dealing with stressors of the job; provide adequate supervision; communicate clearly policy and practices to COs; provide opportunities for input into decision making)
16. Morrison et al. (1992)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adopt selection strategies which take into consideration individual characteristics
17. Huckabee (1992)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improving HRM through specifying job performance criteria, improving communication with supervisors, increasing participation in decision-making, fostering social leadership styles, adequate personnel selection, and in-service educational programs
18. Wright (1993)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enhancement of selection, training & development, and placement criteria
19. Hughes & Zamble (1993)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • keeping managers in place for longer periods • increase management skills, both as a criterion for promotion and as a staff-training objective • tasks that lack stimulation could be combined with clerical duties to make the job more demanding by matching COs to specific clusters of jobs rather than rotate them through all posts
20. Dollard & Winefield (1994)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • appointment of mental health counselor • supervisor support training • management training • screening out of COs with high levels of negative affectivity • targeting the most vulnerable COs

Table 2. (Continued)

Author(s)	Recommendations
21. Triplett et al. (1996)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fitness programs • educational and training program • reduction of client-staff ratio • organizational flexibility • clear performance criteria • feedback.

related stress compared to changing the individual since it tackles the source of the problem. Obviously, there is no point in training individuals to cope better with stress and then sending them back to their stressful work environments. However, this does not mean that an individually oriented stress management approach is useless. In fact, a recent meta-analysis covering 48 studies showed that individual strategies such as cognitive-behavioral interventions, relaxation techniques, and multimodal interventions (i.e., a combination of both) are effective in reducing work-related stress (Van der Klink, Blonk, Schene, & Van Dijk, 1999).

Individual-Based Approaches

Stalgaitis et al. (1982) discuss two ways of individually dealing with job stress: coping and training. Coping strategies most frequently used by COs appear to be primarily passive and indirect in nature, such as listening to music, talking to family, reducing on-the-job involvement, refusing to talk about work after hours, having sex, and reading. So instead of actively tackling problems at work, COs use primarily palliative strategies to cope with negative emotions that result from their job. Moreover, Dollard and Winefield (1998) showed that longer serving COs used significantly higher levels of passive coping than shorter serving COs. Triplett et al. (1996) found that particular coping strategies were successful in reducing COs' job stress (e.g., downward comparison—that is, considering one's job to be better than that of similar others—or talking with family and friends) whereas other strategies were not (e.g., selective ignoring, positive comparison over time, substitution of rewards, and optimistic action). As far as training is concerned, Stalgaitis et al. (1982) state that the majority of the programs available seek to help the COs to manage stress by teaching them a variety of job-related behavioral skills. However, the authors recommend a more comprehensive multifaceted approach that is inspired by Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1986) and includes in addition to behavioral skills training:

(1) relaxation training, (2) cognitive restructuring, and (3) stress inoculation training.

Finally, Kiely and Hodgson (1990) demonstrated positive effects of a physical exercise program that was run among British COs. Their study suggested that physical exercise not only prevented job stress but that it also helped COs to overcome stress-related illness. Unfortunately, this study was for the most part qualitative in nature. As the authors argue, their physical exercise program is likely to be most effective within a comprehensive (“holistic”) approach that includes organizational measures as well.

Organizational-Based Approaches

Generally speaking there are three organizational based approaches to prevent work-related stress.

Improving Human Resources Management (HRM)

Adequate HRM starts with recruitment and selection of employees. It has been argued that realistic information should be presented to candidates who consider to accept a job as a CO. This is necessary since the public image of the CO's job is largely incorrect (Philliber, 1987). The entering of COs with wrong expectations should be avoided, since frustration and disillusionment are precursors of work-related stress and burnout. In addition, it is argued that psychological criteria should be included in the selection process of COs. For instance, based on a study among Australian COs, Holgate and Clegg (1991) recommend selecting applicants who are emotionally suited to deal with the stressors of the job. In a similar vein, and based on the results of their own study, Dollard and Winefield (1994) suggest screening out COs with high levels of negative affectivity. Wright (1993) adds that improving selection, training and development, and placement criteria is not only important for novices, but is likely to have a positive effect on those who work longer in their jobs as well. Verhagen (1986b) also emphasizes the importance of HRM in preventing stress. He recommends the use of adequate selection criteria, realistic job previews, performance appraisal, periodically conducted stress-audits or “burnout checkups,” monitoring of absenteeism rates, and exit interviews with COs who leave service voluntarily. Improvement of recruitment and selection is not only likely to reduce turnover and absenteeism rates because of job stress and burnout, in the long run it will also enhance the social status of the profession. In a similar vein, Huckabee (1992) advocates various HRM strategies such as spec-

ifying job performance criteria, improving communication with supervisors, increasing participation in decision making, fostering social leadership styles, improving personnel selection, and providing in-service educational programs.

Since it appears that work-related stress and burnout are particularly common among young and inexperienced officers who start their careers (Dollard & Winefield, 1988), the introduction of brief orientation programs has been recommended (Lindquist & Whitehead, 1986). As Cherniss (1980) has pointed out, such orientation programs need not be elaborate and expensive in order to be effective. Even short programs of one or two days can have a positive effect. Such programs reduce the “reality shock” that many newcomers experience. By way of follow-up, a systematic pairing of new recruits with older experienced COs has been recommended (Klofas & Toch, 1986). The introduction of such dyads is not only expected to be beneficial for the inexperienced COs, but also offers a job variety for the more experienced colleagues who act as coaches.

Finally, Dollard and Winefield (1994) argue that correctional institutions should appoint fulltime mental health counselors who should particularly target the most vulnerable COs; that is, older workers, those who do shift work, and those who presently are or have recently been on stress leave.

Improving Professionalization

Basically, professionalization of COs’ jobs may develop along two lines that are largely incompatible. The crucial common element in both approaches is the avoidance of role problems that result from COs’ overlapping custody and treatment roles (see Lombardo, 1981). Some authors advocate job enrichment, mainly by offering more participation in decision making and by expanding the CO’s role beyond the traditional domain of custody (e.g., Poole & Regoli, 1981; Lindquist & Whitehead, 1986; Hepburn, 1987; Holgate & Clegg, 1991; Hughes & Zamble, 1993).

A second way of professionalizing the CO’s job takes the opposite direction—the professionalization of protection and guarding tasks. In other words, as an occupational group, COs should specialize on their core custodial role instead of combining it with treatment and assistance. This is another way to reduce role problems; instead of combining custody and treatment roles a rather sharp and clear boundary is established between different professions and their roles in the prison. It is likely that this approach fosters the development of a positive professional self-image and esprit-de-corps among COs, similar to that of police. As a result, a CO’s job might be the first step in a career that could be continued outside the prison, for instance in police-like areas such as security or surveillance. Further professionalization of the CO’s job is also expected to

have a positive effect on the poor social status of the occupation. Other ways to improve the image of the CO's job are the establishment of liaison officers whose role is to develop and maintain relations between prison staff and the wider community, and the development of programs for family visiting (Shamir & Drory, 1988).

Improving the Social Work Environment

There are several ways to improve the social work environment for COs. Verhagen (1986a) recommends stimulating teamwork in prisons and improving communication between COs and their supervisors by institutionalizing regular staff meetings. Gerstein, Topp, and Correll (1987) recommend clarifying roles, responsibilities, and duties of COs and point to the pivotal role that supervisors play in this process.

In Dutch prisons the experiences of COs working together in teams are quite positive for the organization as well as for the individual COs (Kommer, 1990). For instance, absenteeism rates are relatively low and COs learn to know each other and the prisoners better because of regular meetings in which problems at work are discussed. In addition, the CO's role is more clear since he or she regularly receives feedback from colleagues and superiors. It is extremely important that supervisors provide adequate and systematic feedback not only when things go wrong but also when COs perform well. Such feedback not only prevents role problems, but is likely to enhance job satisfaction and reduce job stress as well (Warr, 1987). For this reason, Dollard and Winefield (1994) have recommended management training and supervisor social support training. Since responsibilities are shared and the work is performed by a team rather than by a loose set of individuals, the social climate is likely to improve. In particular, group loyalty, collegiality, and team spirit develop that will counteract the development of the detrimental *John Wayne syndrome* that is typical for a strongly individualized organizational culture. Moreover, for COs the stage is set for asking and providing social support without fear of embarrassment or looking incompetent. It should be emphasized that the introduction of teamwork requires a substantial effort on the part of the organization, mainly but not exclusively in terms of training.

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