

# An Exploratory Examination of the Consequences of Burnout in Terms of Life Satisfaction, Turnover Intent, and Absenteeism Among Private Correctional Staff

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## Abstract

Burnout, a syndrome caused by excessive strain and psychological exhaustion, comprises the dimensions of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and feelings of being ineffective. Survey results from 160 correctional staff at a maximum security private prison in the Midwest were used to compute ordinary least squares regression equations in order to reveal the effects of burnout on the outcomes of life satisfaction, turnover intent, and absenteeism. Ineffectiveness was linked with none of the three outcomes. Depersonalization was linked with increased turnover intent and more frequent absenteeism, and emotional exhaustion was linked with all three outcomes. The results differed somewhat between female and male staff and between correctional and noncorrectional officers.

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Corrections is an integral part of the criminal justice system. In the United States alone, more than 30 billion dollars are spent annually to house more than 1.5 million prisoners in more than 1,200 correctional facilities, which collectively employ more than 400,000 people (Pastore & Maguire, 2008). Correctional staff are the driving force of these facilities. Their importance has led to a growing body of research that has explored the perceptions, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors of correctional workers. Although many salient areas are now better understood, not all areas have been fully researched. There has been little research on job burnout. Job burnout is a real possibility in the field of corrections (Hurst & Hurst, 1997; Whitehead, 1989). Whitehead and Lindquist (1986) reported that approximately 33% of the Alabama correctional officers in their study were suffering from burnout. Hurst and Hurst reported that more than half of the Kentucky correctional officers in their study reported experiencing burnout. Keinan and Malach-Pines (2007) reported that the Israeli correctional workers in their study reported much higher levels of burnout than found in the general population, even higher than police officers. Overall, there is a large body of research on job stress among correctional staff, but far less research on burnout.

Although some people equate job stress to burnout, they are not interchangeable terms, but very distinct concepts (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Whitehead, 1989). Job stress occurs first, and burnout tends to be the result of prolonged exposure to job stress (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Researchers have found that job stress has been found to be linked with increased levels of correctional staff burnout (Garner, Knight, & Simpson, 2007; Keinan & Malach-Pines, 2007; Whitehead, 1989). It is time to expand the research on correctional staff burnout. Although there is a small but growing body of literature in this area, most of the limited research to date has explored the potential causes of correctional staff burnout. It is also important to focus on the outcomes of burnout. Burnout should have consequences in the lives of correctional employees. No published study to date has examined the extent to which burnout influences life satisfaction, turnover intent, and absenteeism, and whether position or gender interact with burnout to influence these outcome areas; therefore, this exploratory study examined the effects of burnout on life satisfaction, turnover intent, and absenteeism.

Life satisfaction matters not only to the employee but also to his or her family, friends, the employer, and society in general. Donovan and Halpern

(2002) argued that “when people are happier, they tend to be more open-minded and creative in their thinking. In contrast, people who are unhappy, stressed or dissatisfied tend to exhibit ‘tunnel vision’ and rigid thinking” (p. 32). Additionally, individuals who are happy with their lives tend to be healthier (Donovan & Halpern, 2002). It is possible that staff members unhappy with life may become demoralized while on the job and, as a result, perform duties poorly. Thus, correctional agencies need satisfied staff members to accomplish their mission of maintaining a safe and secure institution.

Turnover can be harmful to a correctional facility. When turnover becomes commonplace, the well-being of the correctional organization suffers. Turnover has both direct and indirect costs. The direct costs are the costs for replacing employees and the use of overtime to pay for other staff members to cover the job responsibilities of those who have left employment with the correctional agency. Indirect costs include the loss of social networks, increased use of inexperienced and/or tired staff, insufficient staffing, and even decreased morale. Working in corrections requires the ability to deal with others and to develop social networks and communication networks. These relationships and skills are gradually acquired over time. High turnover can result in inexperienced staff because of a constant need for replacements (Stohr, Self, & Lovrich, 1992). Additionally, the increased use of overtime to cover staff shortages caused by turnover can result in tired and less alert employees. This increases the chances of mistakes being made, and these mistakes can result in a lapse of security and services. Simply, turnover drains valuable resources and is costly.

Absent workers are also costly to correctional facilities. Direct costs of absenteeism include the pay for sick leave, possible overtime pay to have another staff member cover the post vacated by the absent person, and overstaffing (i.e., overstaffing is scheduling additional workers to fill in for those employees who may be absent on any particular day). Additionally, there are the management costs of altering employee assignments to deal with absent staff. Indirect costs include reduced productivity from the absent staff member, loss of expertise and experience, and costs to monitor and administer the sick leave program (Lambert, Edwards, Camp, & Saylor, 2005). There is the possible temporary loss of the social networks when another staff member fills in for the absent colleague. Absenteeism often creates a hardship for other employees, including working mandatory overtime and doing extra work because of the missing person, which can cause resentment and a decrease of morale among other employees (Lambert et al., 2005). Even if the position is left vacant, the absence means that there will be one fewer staff member able

to monitor inmates and respond to emergencies, which leads to decreased productivity for the organization (Farkas, 1990). In sum, absenteeism, especially if it is commonplace, can be harmful to correctional organizations.

## **Brief Literature Review**

### *Burnout*

Maslach and Jackson (1981), pioneers in the study of job burnout, defined burnout as “a syndrome of emotional exhaustion and cynicism that occurs frequently among individuals who do people work” (p. 99). They contended that burnout is extensive strain and psychological exhaustion faced by the employee. Specifically, burnout is a syndrome where the worker experiences emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment (Maslach, 1982; Maslach & Jackson, 1981). According to Maslach (1978), burnout occurs when workers experience “the gradual loss of caring about the people they work with. Over time, they find that they simply cannot sustain the kind of personal care and commitment required in the personal encounters that are the essence of their job” (p. 56). Job burnout is a multidimensional concept, comprising the dimensions of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a feeling of being ineffective (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Emotional exhaustion is the feeling of being emotional drained, fatigued, overextended, and used up from the job. Depersonalization refers to treating others impersonally, callously, and as objects. Ineffectiveness is a feeling of being ineffective in dealing with others at work, including a feeling of not making a positive impact on others and a feeling of not being competent and successful at work (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Whitehead, 1989).

There is a small, but growing, body of published studies that have explored burnout among correctional employees. Most of these studies have examined the degree of burnout and the predictors of burnout among correctional workers. These studies have found that burnout is an issue in the field of corrections and that the work environment (e.g., administrative support, input into decision-making, role ambiguity, role conflict, supervisory support, etc.) is more important than personal characteristics of position, gender, age, tenure, educational level, and race in predicting correctional staff burnout (Belcastro, Gold, & Grant, 1982; Carlson, Anson, & Thomas, 2003; Carlson & Thomas, 2006; Garland, 2004; Garner et al., 2007; Gerstein, Topp, & Correll, 1987; Hurst & Hurst, 1997; Keinan & Malach-Pines, 2007; Whitehead, 1989; Whitehead & Lindquist, 1986). Interestingly, the degree of contact with

inmates has not been found to be associated burnout (Morgan, Van Haveren, & Pearson, 2002; Whitehead & Lindquist, 1986). As previously stated, there has been very limited research on possible consequences of burnout for correctional employees. In a study of teachers working in Illinois correctional facilities, burnout was linked to higher levels of desire to quit and increased self-reported health and physical problems (Belcastro et al., 1982). Similarly, for correctional staff in treatment roles, burnout was linked with turnover (Carlson & Thomas, 2006). Although several studies have examined the effect of burnout on turnover intent and turnover among teachers and treatment staff in correctional institutions, there is a need for more research on the impact of burnout on not only the turnover intent but also on other salient areas, such as life satisfaction and absenteeism.

### *Life Satisfaction*

Life satisfaction is a cognitive appraisal of the overall degree of satisfaction one has with his or her life (Hart, 1999). Life satisfaction is basically a person's general assessment with the overall quality of his or her life. Burnout should have a negative relationship with life satisfaction. For the vast majority of adults, work and home represent the two primary domains of life. For most people, work occupies a significant period of their waking day. In addition, many peoples' identities and self-worth are defined by their jobs. When work is out of balance because of burnout, there should be a spillover effect to a person's life overall; therefore, if a person is unhappy with work, the overall quality of his or her life should be affected (Kantak, Futrell, & Sager, 1992). Thus, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and ineffectiveness were each hypothesized to have an inverse relationship with life satisfaction among correctional employees. Emotional exhaustion is an unpleasant experience for most individuals. It is likely to lead to discord in a person's life, which then would reduce his or her overall life satisfaction. In addition, long-term emotional exhaustion can take a long-term physical and psychological toll on a person, which can lead to health problems. These health problems could decrease the overall quality of life experienced by the correctional staff member. Treating others impersonally or as objects is less likely to result in positive interactions with others. The loss of these positive and meaningful interactions may fail to meet a person's social needs, which, in the end, could result in decreased life satisfaction. Finally, ineffectiveness can lead to a sense of failure at work. This sense of failure could spillover, affecting a person's perceptions of accomplishments in life.

## *Turnover Intent*

Turnover is the severing of employment between the worker and the employing organization and can be divided into two categories, involuntary and voluntary (Price & Mueller, 1986). Involuntary turnover occurs when an individual is removed from his or her job by the employer. Voluntary turnover (i.e., quitting) occurs when the worker elects to leave the job. In the field of corrections, voluntary turnover is more frequent than involuntary turnover, and it also tends to be more costly and disruptive. Rather than examining voluntary turnover, turnover intent was studied. Turnover intent is the cognitive process of thinking of quitting, planning on leaving a job, and the desire to leave the job (Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, & Meglino, 1979). Studying turnover intent rather than actual turnover has several advantages. Turnover intent is often used as the final outcome variable in studies because it is easier to measure and tends to be more accurate. Gaining access to people who have left the employing organization can be difficult. Also, it is too late to change the work environment for those who have already left. Finally, it is generally viewed as the final cognitive step of turnover (Sager, Griffeth, & Hom, 1998).

Burnout should be linked with turnover intent among correctional employees. Burnout can have serious consequences, both physically and mentally. The natural reaction to a painful situation is to try to escape from it; therefore, correctional workers who are experiencing higher levels of burnout may voice a greater intention to leave their current employment. In addition, burnout can lead to mental and physical problems and illnesses, which may cause the staff member to feel that he or she must quit the organization. Specifically, each of the three burnout dimensions were hypothesized to have a positive relationship with turnover intent. Emotional exhaustion is a negative state for a person that could cause the person to express a desire to leave the job that caused the negative state. As with emotional exhaustion, depersonalization was hypothesized to have a positive association with turnover intent. Employees who treat others impersonally may have less incentive to remain on the job. Treating others callously and impersonally probably hinders the development of satisfaction from social interactions and relationships. Most people are social creatures who enjoy interacting with others in a positive and personal manner. The lack of the meaningful social relations may fail to create a tie between the person and the job, which in turn makes it easier to express intent to leave the organization. Finally, ineffectiveness was postulated to be positively linked with correctional staff turnover intent. Most people want to succeed at work. If people feel ineffective at work, they may feel that they lack a rewarding and satisfying job, and as such, may have a stronger desire to leave the job.

## *Absenteeism*

Absenteeism occurs when an employee does not attend a scheduled work period (Rhodes & Steers, 1990). The reasons for the absence can vary, including an illness, transportation problems, family emergency, or just to have a day off from work. The specific reasons for being absent can be categorized into unavoidable and avoidable absenteeism (also called involuntary and voluntary absenteeism; Rhodes & Steers, 1990). Unavoidable absences are the results of conditions that are usually not under the control of the worker, such as illness, injury, unexpected transportation problems, or the need to care for a sick family member. Avoidable absenteeism results when the employee decides to be absent from work for reasons that most employers would view as inappropriate or even illegitimate, such as to have a day off, to attend a social event, and so forth. About 60% of absences fall into the unavoidable category and the other 40% are viewed to be avoidable absences (Lach, 1999).

Burnout was predicted to be positively associated with absenteeism. Burnout is a negative experience that can have serious consequences for the worker. These adverse effects can lead to employees being absent because of illness or to escape temporarily from the work, such as “mental health days” to attempt to recover (Rhodes & Steers, 1990); therefore, the three dimensions of burnout were hypothesized to have a positive relationship with absenteeism among correctional staff. Being emotionally exhausted from work is an unpleasant experience that employees may escape by choosing to be absent. In addition, correctional workers may need to take time off from work in an attempt to recover mentally. In addition, emotional exhaustion may increase the chances for a person to become ill. Similarly, depersonalization was predicted to have a positive relationship. Treating people as objects may cause a person to wish to avoid work because they do not feel comfortable interacting with others. Finally, ineffectiveness was predicted to have a positive association. Staff who feel that they are ineffective at work may have a greater desire to avoid work, and, as such, may temporarily escape work by being absent.

## *Position and Gender*

Burnout may vary by position and gender. There have also been indications that the work environment has different effects depending on the position. Hepburn and Knepper (1993) observed that treatment staff reported less role strain, had greater perceptions of extrinsic and intrinsic job benefits, and had higher levels of job satisfaction than correctional officers. Moreover, they found that different factors helped shape the job satisfaction of correctional

officers as compared with human service officers. Similarly, Robinson, Porporino, and Simourd (1996) found that correctional officers had on average lower levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment as compared with other groups of correctional employees. Gerstein et al. (1987) reported that correctional officers reported greater levels of burnout than staff working in noncustody positions. These findings suggest that correctional officers are working in a job that is different from working in a noncustody position and may lead to different outcomes; therefore, the consequences of burnout may vary by position type. As such, separate analyses were conducted for correctional officers and noncustody staff.

Likewise, the burnout literature suggests that gender may be related to burnout. Research has suggested that female staff members experience greater stress, a known antecedent of burnout, than male staff members (Zupan, 1986). Furthermore, studies have reported that gender is linked with burnout (Morgan et al., 2002; Pelletier, Couto, & Lamonde, 1996). For example, Carlson et al. (2003) examined the effects of gender on the different dimensions of burnout and found that female correctional officers demonstrated a greater sense of job-related personal achievement and accomplishment than their male counterparts. Thus, there is an indication that the consequences of burnout may vary by gender. As such, separate analyses were conducted for female and male staff members.

## Method

### *Respondents*

All the staff at a private Midwestern maximum security correctional facility were selected to receive a survey packet, which consisted of a cover letter, the survey, and a return envelope. The cover letter explained the purpose of the study and emphasized that participation was voluntary and all responses would be anonymous. Because of vacations, sick leave, and other reasons, only 200 of the 220 staff were available. To improve the response rate, several cash awards ranging from \$50 to \$150 were randomly chosen from those who returned surveys. The response rate was 80% (i.e., 160 completed surveys were returned). In terms of position at the facility, 62% were correctional officers and the other 38% worked in other areas at the facility. A total of 59% of the respondents were men. The median age was 33 years and ranged from 19 to 49 years of age. The median tenure at the facility was 17 months and ranged from 1 to 53 months. Because the facility had been in operation for less than 5 years at the time of survey, the tenure of the employees was low.

In terms of educational level, 53% had no college degree. With regard to race/ethnicity, 79% of the respondents were White, 11% were Black, 2% were Hispanic, 3% were Native American, and 4% marked other. At the time of the survey, 61% of the total prison staff were male, 81% White, and the median age was 33 years; therefore, overall, the respondents appeared to be representative of the employees at the prison. Finally, the facility at the time of the survey housed about 450 youths who had been sentenced as adult offenders.

## Variables

**Dependent variables.** Life satisfaction, turnover intent, and absenteeism were the dependent variables. Life satisfaction was measured using two items from Quinn and Staines (1979), which have been used in numerous life satisfaction studies. The items allowed respondents to assess their overall life satisfaction rather than measure specific domains of life. The two items were (a) "Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are with your life" (response options—*not too happy*, *happy*, and *very happy*), and (b) "In general, how satisfying do you find the ways you're spending your life these days" (response options—*not too satisfying*, *satisfying*, and *very satisfying*). The items were summed together to form an index, which had a Cronbach's alpha value of .84.

Mobley et al. (1979) theorized that turnover had four cognitive parts: (a) thinking of quitting, (b) planning to stay or leave, (c) searching for alternative employment, and (d) a desire to leave the current job. In this study, the four cognitive parts of turnover intent were measured using items adapted from Sager et al. (1998). Thinking of quitting was measured using two items: (a) "In the last 6 months, have you thought about quitting your current job?" (Response option—*yes/no*), and (a) "I frequently think about quitting my job at this prison" (response option—5-point Likert-type scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*). Planning to stay or leave was measured using "How likely is it that you will be at this job in a year from now?" (Response option—5-point Likert-type scale ranging from *very likely* to *very unlikely*). Searching for alternative employment was measured using, "How actively have you searched for a job with other employers in the last year?" (Response option—5-point Likert-type scale ranging from *not at all* to *very actively*). A desire to leave was measured using, "Do you desire to voluntarily leave/quit your job?" (Response option—*yes/no*). The five items were summed together to form the turnover intent index, which had a Cronbach's alpha value of .77.

The measurement of employee absenteeism can be divided into two general categories, the area measured and absence metric (Rhodes & Steers,

1990). The area measured refers to the type of absenteeism covered, such as all absences, scheduled versus unscheduled, excused versus unexcused, long-term versus short-term, medical versus nonmedical, and so on (Rhodes & Steers, 1990). Thus, area measured deals with why a worker was absent. Absence metric refers to how absenteeism is operationalized and measured. There are three types of absence metrics, magnitude, duration, and frequency. Magnitude is an aggregate measure of the average amount of absenteeism per employee of an organization in a given time period. Duration is the total amount of absenteeism expressed in a given unit of time, during a specific time period for each employee. Frequency measures the total number of occasions of absenteeism in a given time period, regardless of the length of each absence for an individual or why it was taken (Rhodes & Steers, 1990). It is important to note that duration and frequency measures will differ from one other in the amount of absenteeism for employees. For example, if an employee uses 24 hours of sick leave in a 1-month period for two different absences from work, the 24 hours represent duration of absence, while the two occasions represent frequency. In this study, self-reported absenteeism in terms of number of times they had used sick leave in the 6 months prior to the survey (i.e., frequency) was measured. The absenteeism data were recoded into the categories of *took no sick leave in the past 6 months* (coded 0), *took sick leave once* (coded 1), *took sick leave twice* (coded 2), and *took sick leave three or more times* (coded 3).

**Independent variables.** The three burnout areas of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and ineffectiveness in dealing with others at work were included in this study. The three items used to form the emotional exhaustion index had a Cronbach's alpha of .85. The emotional exhaustion items were (a) "Working with others is an emotional strain for me," (b) "I feel that I am burned out from my job," and (c) "I am emotionally drained at the end of the day from my job." Depersonalization was created by summing together four items, which had a Cronbach's alpha value of .74. The items were (a) "I feel that I treat some inmates as if they were impersonal objects," (b) "I feel that I have become more callous toward my coworkers," (c) "I am becoming less sympathetic to others at work," and (d) "The vast majority of time at work, I treat all inmates and staff with respect (reverse coded)." The ineffectiveness index was formed using six items, which had a Cronbach's alpha of .72. The ineffectiveness items were (a) "I feel that my coworkers value my assistance (reverse coded)," (b) "I feel that I am effective in solving problems at work (reverse coded)," (c) "I feel that I am a positive influence at this prison (reverse coded)," (d) "I have the ability to deal effectively with the problems of inmates (reverse coded)," (e) "I feel that I am positively influencing inmates with my

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics for Variables

Variables	Description	Min	Max	Median	Mean	SD
Position	0 = noncustody, 1 = custody (CO)	0	1	1	0.62	0.49
Gender	0 = female, 1 = male	0	1	1	0.59	0.49
Age	Measured in years	19	68	33	35.77	10.82
Tenure	Measured in months at the facility	0.5	53	17	20.64	13.84
Educational level	0 = no college degree, 1 = college degree	0	1	0	0.47	0.50
Race	0 = non-White, 1 = White	0	1	1	0.79	0.41
Supervisory status	0 = Not a supervisor, 1 = supervisor of staff	0	1	0	0.21	0.41
Burnout— emotional exhaustion	3-Item index, $\alpha = .85$	3	14	6	7.08	2.40
Burnout— depersonalization	4-Item index, $\alpha = .74$	4	19	9	9.42	2.93
Burnout— ineffectiveness	6-Item index, $\alpha = .72$	7	23	13	13.20	3.10
Life satisfaction	2-Item index, $\alpha = .84$	2	6	4	4.30	1.13
Turnover intent	5-Item index, $\alpha = .77$	3	17	7	8.02	3.76
Absenteeism	No. of times sick leave used in past 6 months, 0 = none, 1 = once, 2 = twice, 3 = three or more times	0	3	1	1.42	1.23
		0 = 34%, 1 = 19%, 2 = 19%, and 3 = 29%				

Note: Min = minimum value; Max = maximum value.  $N = 160$ .

work here (reverse coded),” and (f) “I feel that I can create a relaxed atmosphere with inmates (reverse coded).” All the burnout items were answered by a 5-point Likert-type response scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*.

Finally, the personal characteristics of position, gender, age, tenure, educational level, race, and supervisory status were used as control variables in this study. See Table 1 for how the control variables were coded.

## Findings

The descriptive statistics for the variables are presented in Table 1. There appeared to be significant variation in both the dependent and independent

**Table 2.** Multivariate Results on the Effects of Burnout Dimensions of Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Ineffectiveness on Correctional Staff Life Satisfaction and Turnover Intent

Variable	Life Satisfaction		Turnover Intent		Absenteeism	
	B	$\beta$	B	$\beta$	B	$\beta$
Position	-.11	-.05	-.20	-.02	-.16	-.06
Gender	-.22	-.10	-.23	-.03	.19	.08
Age	-.01	-.07	-.05	-.15	.01	.06
Tenure	-.01	-.07	-.02	-.06	.02	.17*
Educational level	.20	.09	.40	.05	-.08	-.03
Race	-.01	-.01	.08	.01	-.02	-.01
Supervisory status	-.01	-.01	-.99	-.11	-.72	-.24*
Emotional exhaustion	-.23	-.49**	.59	.38**	.10	.20*
Depersonalization	-.03	-.09	.39	.30**	.10	.23*
Ineffectiveness	-.03	-.08	-.08	-.07	-.04	-.09
R <sup>2</sup>		.36**		.38**		.18**

Note: For a description of the variables, see Table 1. *B* represents the unstandardized regression coefficient and  $\beta$  represents the standardized regression coefficient.

\* $p \leq .05$ . \*\* $p \leq .01$ .

variables. The median and mean were similar to one another for the variables, which suggested that the variables were normally distributed. Cronbach's alphas, a measure of internal reliability, were  $\geq .70$ , which is viewed as good.

The three dimensions (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and ineffectiveness), along with control variables of position, gender, age, tenure, educational level, race, and, supervisory status, were entered as independent variables into ordinary least squares (OLS) regression equations with life satisfaction, turnover intent, and absenteeism as the dependent variables. The results are presented in Table 2. Based on the variation inflation factor (VIF) scores, the tolerance values, multicollinearity was not a problem for the three OLS equations. (Ordered ordinal regression equations were also estimated for life satisfaction and absenteeism. In terms of statistical significance, the same results were observed.) For the life satisfaction equation, the  $R^2$  statistic was .36. Thus, the independent variables explained about 36% of the variance observed in the life satisfaction variable. None of the control variables (i.e., position, gender, etc.) had a statistically significant relationship with life satisfaction. Among the burnout measures, only emotional exhaustion had a significant association with life satisfaction. As emotional exhaustion increased, life satisfaction dropped.

For the turnover intent equation, the  $R^2$  statistic had a value of .38. None of the control variables had a significant association. Emotional exhaustion and depersonalization both had significant effects and the effects were positive. Employees who reported higher levels of either emotional exhaustion or depersonalization were more likely to express a desire to leave employment with the correctional organization. By examining the standardized regression coefficients ( $\beta$ ), the size of the impact can be estimated. Emotional exhaustion had the largest sized effect, followed closely by depersonalization.

For the absenteeism equation, about 18% of the variance in the absenteeism variable was explained. Among the control variables, tenure and supervisory status had a significant association. As tenure increased, the number of times absent also rose. Supervisors were less likely to have been absent than were their nonsupervisory counterparts. Emotional exhaustion and depersonalization had significant effects, whereas ineffectiveness had nonsignificant effects. The effects of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization on absenteeism were both positive. The statistically significant variables had similar sized effects on the absenteeism measure.

To determine whether the consequences of burnout differed by position, separate OLS regression equations were estimated for correctional officers and noncustody staff. (Although not reported in tabular form, the results are available on request.) For life satisfaction, emotional exhaustion had significant negative effects for both correctional officers and their noncustody counterparts. As with the analysis with the full group, emotional exhaustion was the only independent variable for both groups to have a significant relationship with life satisfaction. Emotional exhaustion and depersonalization both had significant positive effects on turnover intent for correctional officers. For noncustody employees, emotional exhaustion, but not depersonalization, had significant positive association with turnover intent. Additionally, age had a significant inverse association for noncustody workers but not for correctional officers. For both groups, emotional exhaustion had significant positive effects on absenteeism. For correctional officers, but not among noncustody staff members, depersonalization and tenure had significant effects.

To determine whether the consequences of burnout differed by gender, separate OLS regression equations were estimated for men and women. (Although not reported in tabular form, the results are available on request.) For both men and women, emotional exhaustion had a significant negative effect on life satisfaction; however, the effect size was much larger for women than it was for men. Tenure had an inverse relationship with life satisfaction for men only. For both groups, emotional exhaustion and depersonalization had positive relationships with turnover intent. Ineffectiveness had a

significant association only for men. Curiously, as ineffectiveness increased, turnover intent decreased. For the absenteeism equation, none of the variables reached statistical significance for women. For men, depersonalization had a significant positive association with the absenteeism measure, along with tenure and supervisory status.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The findings generally support that job burnout has consequences for correctional staff and agencies; however, the relationship differed depending on the burnout dimension, the outcome, and the subgroup examined. Emotional exhaustion had a statistically significant association with the outcomes of life satisfaction, turnover intent, and absenteeism. This finding is in line with what was proposed by Maslach and Jackson (1981), who argued that a key aspect of burnout is emotional exhaustion. They postulated that emotional burnout would have the greatest negative outcomes for workers. The findings suggest that emotional exhaustion is a powerful dimension of burnout, which helps shape the life satisfaction, turnover intent, and absenteeism of correctional employees. Work is one of the primary domains of life for most people. Emotional exhaustion is a feeling of being beaten down and having to drag oneself to get out of bed in the morning, not from physical exhaustion or lack of sleep, but just mental exhaustion from the thought of having to go to work. Thus, feeling drained from work probably decreases the degree of satisfaction with life. In addition, wishing to escape a negative state of being is a logical response from most individuals. If the job is causing the person to experience emotional exhaustion, the rational choice for many workers is a desire to leave the job. Likewise, emotional exhaustion probably takes a toll both on a person. Thus, correctional staff experiencing emotional exhaustion are more likely to use sick leave either because of physical ailments or a need for a “mental health” day. Simply put, the findings support that emotional exhaustion is costly for the individual employee and the correctional organization.

Depersonalization was linked with increased turnover intent and absenteeism. It appears that people who suffer from this dimension of burnout are more likely to wish to escape either permanently or temporarily from the job. It could be that depersonalization leads the person to feel that they do not like the person he or she has become. Additionally, treating people in a callous and impersonal manner at work probably hampers positive social interactions and relationships from developing. The lack of meaningful social relationships is generally not a rewarding experience, and probably leads workers to wish to leave the job, either permanently or temporarily. Interestingly,

depersonalization was not linked with life satisfaction. It would be expected that if depersonalization was linked to various forms of escape from work (i.e., turnover intent and absenteeism here), that it would also be inversely associated with life satisfaction. It could be that depersonalization is linked to life satisfaction but was not observed in the current study. If this is true, then this relationship should be borne out in future research. It is also possible that depersonalization is not directly linked with correctional staff life satisfaction. This is an interesting finding that needs to be explored further.

The feeling of being ineffective with others at work was not associated with any of the three outcome areas in the analyses with the entire group of respondents, but was negatively linked with turnover intent in men. It may be that feeling ineffective at work is not linked to life satisfaction. It could be that the perception of being ineffective at work does not reduce people's sense of accomplishment in life or it could be that a sense of accomplishment is not a salient force in shaping correctional staff life satisfaction. Correctional workers may value other things in their lives other than being effective with others at work. In terms of a lack of significant relationship between ineffectiveness and turnover intent for the entire group of respondents, it could be that those who perceive that they are ineffective may feel that they do not have other career options and are tied to their present job. They may feel that they cannot leave their current job because they lack the skills needed for other positions. This may explain the interesting finding that ineffectiveness was inversely linked with turnover intent for men. Additionally, the relationship between ineffectiveness and turnover intent may be moderated by the reasons why the employee accepted the correctional job in the first place. If a person accepted the job for financial security, for custodial reasons, or because it was available, then being ineffective may not be a reason to leave the job. On the other hand, people who accepted the position because they wanted to perform an important service for society may be more likely to have intentions to leave the job if they feel that they are ineffective in dealing with others at work. Similarly, ineffectiveness was not associated with absenteeism in this study. As with turnover intent, being ineffective at work may not be a large enough issue to cause correctional employees to experience problems that cause them to be absent from work.

For both the life satisfaction and turnover intent OLS regression equations on the full sample, none of the control variables had a statistically significant effect. Thus, position, gender, age, tenure, educational level, race, and supervisory status are not salient variables in shaping the life satisfaction or turnover intent of correctional employees. Rather, other variables, such as burnout, are

more salient variables for these two outcomes. For the absenteeism equation, tenure and supervisory status were the only control variables to have a statistically significant association with the absenteeism. The positive correlation suggests that employees with high tenure are suffering from the long-term effects of working in a prison environment (e.g., physical ailments, emotional problems, burnout, boredom, etc.). In addition, supervisors were less likely to be absent than nonsupervisory staff members. Supervisors probably feel a greater sense of obligation to attend work if at all possible.

The findings also suggest that the relationships may vary depending on the subgroup being examined. In general, there were more effects of the dimensions of burnout on the outcome areas for correctional officers than there was for noncustody staff. It was postulated that this finding was because correctional officers had higher levels of each of these dimensions of burnout. An independent *t* test indicated that there was a statistically significant ( $p \leq .05$ ) level of difference in emotional exhaustion and ineffectiveness between correctional officers and noncorrectional officers. It could be the type of job that explains why emotional exhaustion plays a role in turnover intent and absenteeism for correctional officers but not noncustody employees. Correctional officers generally have more interpersonal contact, including confrontations, with inmates than do other types of staff members, and emotional exhaustion plays a greater factor in their ability to do their job. Whatever the explanation, it is clear that there is a need to explore more completely why the consequences appear to vary to some degree for correctional officers.

Similarly, there were several differences between female and male staff members in the relationship between the dimensions of burnout and the outcome areas. At first, it was thought that male employees had higher levels of the dimensions of burnout, but an independent *t* test indicated that there was no statistically significant level of difference in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, or ineffectiveness levels between men and women. For turnover intent, ineffectiveness had a negative association for men but not women. It could be that men who felt that they were ineffective with their job concluded that they had very little employment opportunities, and, as such, were less likely to express a desire to leave. Women on the other may feel that being ineffective with others was not a reason to stay or leave their current job. Emotional exhaustion had a positive relationship with absenteeism for men but not women. This was an interesting finding. Maybe men have more freedom in why they are absent from work than women who tend to be the primary caregivers of others at home. It could be that as women use more sick leave, they have do not have extra hours to use when they experience the effects of burnout. That is, men may have a larger pool of "discretionary" sick leave

banked, which they use for “mental health days” or use due to an actual increase in stress-related ailments. This may also explain why the  $R^2$  value for the absenteeism equation for women was lower than the  $R^2$  for the absenteeism equation for men. Because there has been very little research on the consequences on burnout among correctional employees and whether the outcomes vary by subgroup, it is hard to draw a conclusion. There is a need for further research if, how, and why the effects of the burnout differ between female and male correctional staff.

As with most research, this study has limitations. It was a single exploratory study based on a survey of staff at a single correctional facility. Much more research is needed on the relationship between job burnout and life satisfaction, turnover intent, and absenteeism. The findings need to be replicated with staff at other correctional facilities, including whether the relationships vary by the type of correctional facility (e.g., public, private, adult, juvenile, jail, etc.). There is a need to explore the other factors that shape the life satisfaction, turnover intent, and absenteeism among correctional workers. For example, in this study, the independent variables only accounted for 18% of the variance in the absenteeism measure. This means that other variables account for more than four-fifths of the variance observed for the absenteeism measure is accounted for by other variables. It is also possible that the results were influenced by the type of absenteeism measure used in this study. As previously indicated, a frequency measure of sick leave was used. The specific reason for the reason for being absent was not measured. The results may vary depending on the reason for the absence. For example, burnout may be more linked to being absent because of personal illnesses and a need for a “mental health” day off rather than for taking care of sick family members or transportation problems. There is a need to determine whether the relations between the various dimensions of burnout vary by the type of absenteeism measure used. Future research is needed to determine whether using different measures of burnout influence the results. This study used indicators from the Maslach Burnout Inventory. There are other measures of burnout, such as the Total Exhaustion Index by Gerstein et al. (1987). Furthermore, the relationship among the three dimensions of burnout among correctional staff needs to be understood more completely. It is unclear if emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and ineffectiveness occur relatively at the same time or if there is a progression of one dimension to the next (Cherniss, 1980; Maslach & Jackson, 1981). If there is a progression in the process of burnout, it means that the type of relationship between the different dimensions of burnout with life satisfaction, turnover intent, and absenteeism needs to be reexamined. If there is a progression in the burnout

process, the relationships may be different from those proposed in this study. In this study, it was proposed that emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and ineffectiveness each had a direct effect on the life satisfaction, turnover intent, and absenteeism of correctional staff. Research is needed to explore the associations between burnout and other consequences, such as organizational citizenship, health, or work–family conflict. Continued research should shed a clearer light on the relationship between the burnout and life satisfaction, turnover intent, and absenteeism among correctional staff.

If the findings from this study are confirmed by other studies, there are implications for correctional organizations. The findings suggest that burnout has adverse consequences for both the employee and the organization. The satisfaction with life decreases for the employee. The intent to leave is a negative outcome not only for the employee but also for the organization, which risks losing the person. Even if the person does not quit, the chances are high that he or she will psychologically withdraw from the job. This type of withdrawal from the job is sure to lead to decreased productivity. Moreover, inattentiveness can ultimately cause lapses in security, which can be dangerous not only for the person, but inmates, his or her coworkers, and society. Likewise, an absent worker can hurt the financial health and productivity of a correctional facility, as well as placing a burden on other employees; therefore, it is in the best interest of a correctional organization to try to combat burnout. Workers should be provided stress-coping workshops to help alleviate the effects of burnout (Carlson et al., 2003; Keinan & Malach-Pines, 2007). Correctional organizations should help foster support systems for employees to turn to for help when they feel that they are experiencing burnout (Keinan & Malach-Pines, 2007; Whitehead & Lindquist, 1986). The aforementioned interventions deal with coping with burnout after it has started. It would also be best to turn to address the potential causes of burnout to stop it from occurring in the first place, or at the least to minimize its occurrence. As previously indicated, the literature suggests that administrative support, input into decision making, role ambiguity, role conflict, and supervisory support are linked, either positively or negatively, with correctional staff burnout.

In closing, employees are the “heart and soul” of any correctional facility. They are responsible for a myriad of tasks and responsibilities. As with most human service organizations, job burnout is a possibility for some correctional employees. Burnout has negative consequences for the employee, for coworkers, for inmates, for family members, for friends, and the organization. In an era of increasing costs, shrinking budgets, and growing inmate populations, focusing on burnout is crucial. It was observed that emotional exhaustion was linked to decreased life satisfaction and increased turnover intent and

absenteeism, and depersonalization was associated with increased turnover intent and absenteeism. A feeling of being ineffective with others at work had no significant relationship with any of the three outcomes. Thus, the results of the current study suggest that emotional exhaustion and depersonalization have detrimental outcomes for correctional employees and correctional organizations. There is a need for additional research on the consequences of burnout. It is hoped that the present study will spark renewed interest and research on job burnout among correctional staff. This information can save correctional administrators from wasting taxpayer dollars by aiding them in the understanding of how to avoid costly turnover and absenteeism among workers.

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