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A further examination of antecedents of correctional staff life satisfaction

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Abstract

Working in corrections is not only a demanding job, but a socially important one. While a growing number of studies have examined how the work environment impacts the job stress, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment of staff, very few studies have examined how working in corrections impacts the life satisfaction of workers. The current study utilized OLS regression to examine the antecedents of life satisfaction among staff at a Midwestern private prison. Job satisfaction had a positive relationship with life satisfaction, while age, work on family conflict, family on work conflict, and job involvement all had statistically significant negative effects. Finally, perceptions of the level of financial rewards, job stress, organizational commitment, gender, race, educational level, tenure, supervisory status, position,

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marital status, and having children, all had non-significant associations with overall satisfaction with life.

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Correctional staff are the most valuable asset for any correctional organization. Their importance has led to a growing body of research that has explored the perceptions, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors of correctional workers. Many salient areas are now better understood. One area that has received scant attention is life satisfaction. Life satisfaction is the degree that a person is satisfied with his/her overall life (Hart, 1999). Life satisfaction is an important outcome for correctional employees. It has been pointed out that the overall well-being of workers is critical, not only for workers and their families, but also for the organization and society (Fry, 1989). 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). In addition, people who are satisfied with their lives tend to be healthier (Donovan & Halpern, 2002), and life satisfaction is inversely related to turnover intent (Lambert, Hogan, Paoline, & Baker, 2005). Correctional organizations need well-balanced and satisfied workers in order to accomplish their mission; therefore, this study was undertaken to examine the effects of work-family conflict, financial rewards, job involvement, job stress, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment on life satisfaction among staff of a private correctional facility in the Midwest section of the United States.

1. Brief literature review

1.1. Life satisfaction

Life satisfaction is as a cognitive appraisal of the overall degree of satisfaction one has with his or her life (Hart, 1999). As such, life satisfaction is usually seen as a global measure of an individual’s assessment of the overall quality of life. Cullen, Link, Wolfe, and Frank (1985) and Voorhis, Cullen, Link, and Wolfe (1991) examined life stress among Southern correctional officers and reported that work-based stressors increased the overall life stress reported by the officers. These results suggest that there is spillover from work to the life satisfaction among correctional staff; however, these studies did not directly test whether work-based forces helped shape the life satisfaction of correctional employees. Spillover theory holds that work occupies a major part of the lives of adults and what happens at work affects people’s overall quality of life (Kantak, Futrell, & Sager, 1992; Steiner & Truxillo, 1989). The spillover theory also holds that when work is positive, people are happier and more satisfied with their lives, and when work is negative, their overall lives suffer. Lambert, Hogan, et al. (2005) and Lambert, Edwards, et al. (2005) found support for spillover theory among correctional employees. Specifically, they examined the effects of job satisfaction, work on family conflict, family on work conflict, job stress, role stress, dangerousness of the job and demographic

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