



CONNECTING THE DOTS: BURNOUT AND MANDATORY OVERTIME IN CORRECTIONS

INTRODUCTION

Academic studies and occupational research continue to confirm what we already know. Correctional Officers are seriously and negatively impacted when chronically forced to work mandatory overtime. The facts are clear. Requiring corrections professionals to work an excessive amount of mandatory overtime increases burnout and turnover, which ultimately leads to poorer conditions and worse outcomes for both staff and inmates.

HOW DOES EXCESSIVE MANDATORY OVERTIME AFFECT CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS?

- Excessive mandatory or “forced” overtime exacerbates both physical and mental health risks for Correctional Officers.
- Of all American workers, Correctional Officers have one of the highest rates of nonfatal, **work-related injuries**. Research has found that working too much overtime increases the likelihood of **on-the-job injuries by 61%**.
- Excessive **mandatory overtime** has been linked to **increased work-family conflicts** and on-the-job stress.
- Studies have found that Correctional Officers suffer from much higher rates of **stress, burnout, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)** than the general workforce, including police officers.
- Heightened work stress, **chronic fatigue**, burnout, and occupational hazards have led to **worse health outcomes** among Correctional Officers compared to the general population. This includes increased risk of cardiovascular problems, gastrointestinal diseases, diabetes, high cholesterol, hypertension, and musculoskeletal disorders. Higher rates of depression, anxiety, sleep deprivation, poor diet, and substance abuse have also been linked to the difficulty of this profession.
- A recent **survey** by the American Correctional Association found that “overtime was the most negatively rated tactic that impacted retention,” and that poor work-life balance was the top reason cited for leaving corrections.
- In high-stress jobs like corrections, excessive mandatory overtime ends up accelerating burnout and staff turnover, which can **become a vicious cycle**.

IMPACT ON CORRECTIONS INSTITUTIONS

- Officer turnover and vacancies are financially and operationally costly. Employers can end up paying more than 200% of a job’s annual salary to **replace an employee**.
- Higher turnover has been linked to Officers feeling less safe and less inclined to depend on coworkers, which has been shown to **negatively affect an institution’s operational climate**.
- **Elevated rates of Officer turnover and absenteeism** lead to higher inmate-to-officer ratios, greater numbers of assaults, and deteriorating conditions. Research has shown that recidivism can be reduced through **evidence-based programming** such as cognitive behavioral therapy and **educational opportunities**. However, chronic staffing shortages cause vital programs to be cancelled.

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