

# STRESS MANAGEMENT OF CORRECTIONAL PERSONNEL

*Hye-ri JEONG\**

## I. INTRODUCTION

Correctional officers' stress not only influences the quality of one's life but also corrections and rehabilitation of inmates. Therefore correctional officers' stress can be a serious obstacle to achieving the objectives of the organization. In this paper, the meaning and factors of stress and the methods of relieving stress will be discussed. Through this work, it is hoped that we will discover some ideas of policy for stress management.

## II. STRESS MANAGEMENT OF CORRECTIONAL PERSONNEL

### A. Status of Job Stress of Correctional Officers

#### 1. Previous Studies of Correctional Officers' Stress in Korea

Job stress is a physically and mentally adverse reaction that occurs when a worker's abilities or resources, or the worker's desire, do not match the job requirements. According to previous studies in Korea, job burnout of correctional officers was higher than police officers. Seventh grade correctional officers had the highest burnout level, and officers who have worked for 10 to 19 years had a higher burnout rate than the officers with 1 to 9 years of experience.

#### 2. A Result of Job Stress and the Need to Manage

Experiencing a variety of stresses at work is known to affect the individual's loss of productivity, physical symptoms such as sleep disorders, anxiety etc. To control job-related stress is more difficult than to control stress in day-to-day life; each person will have a negative work ethic in the process of experiencing job stress.

Thus, too much stress leads to job dissatisfaction; this will be the biggest stumbling block to the rehabilitation of prisoners. Therefore, all individuals should have the ability to respond effectively to the stress. Organizational efforts are also required to identify and eliminate job stress factors and to build a support system to enhance a person's ability to cope with stress.

### B. Factors of Job Stress

#### 1. Characteristics of the Work: To Perform Their Duties in Crisis

There is a probability that accidents can occur at any time in correctional facilities, so correctional staff must always deal with tension in the workplace. Attacks, hostage-taking, riots, assaults from inmates and suicidal or self-inflicted harm attempts are major stress factors. Threats of violence have more serious impacts on stress than the other factors.

Job performance in a crisis not only causes a threat to life but increases the fear of revenge by inmates after release. Sometimes the helplessness of not being able to respond to the misconduct of inmates can be a stress factor. In addition, a shift system can be a factor which causes stress.

#### 2. Overburden

In spite of increasing workload recently, due to the introduction of new correctional programmes and the policy of improving the treatment of prisoners, correctional staff are in the midst of a tough situation to perform the activities of rehabilitation because break time and meal time are short and, at the same time, there are many inmates to be managed by each staff member. Due to concerns about the

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\*Superintendent, Director of Welfare Division, Cheonan Correctional Institution, Republic of Korea.

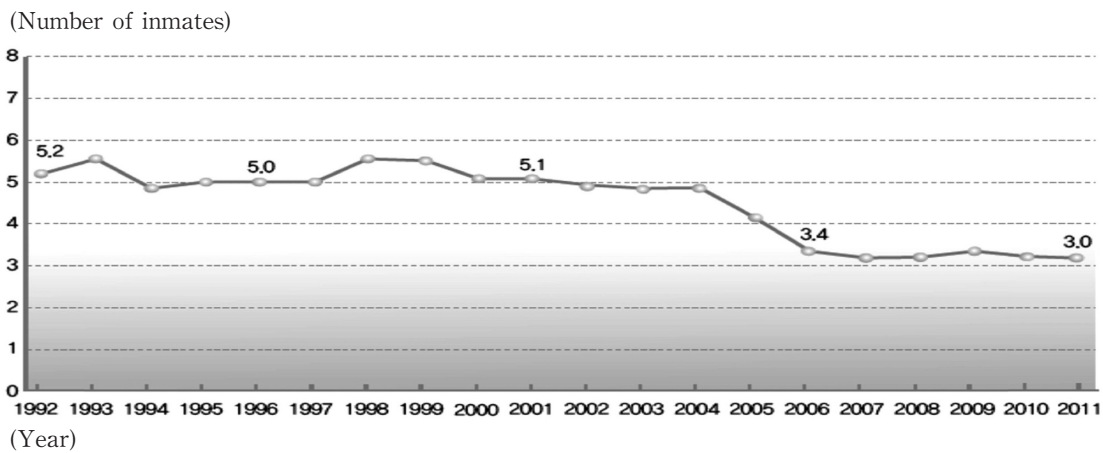
heavy work of other employees, vacation or early leave may not be used without permission.

Exploiting claims on release of information as a means of harassing the staff and the rights to sue, accuse, and appeal to human rights are the factors of overburden.<sup>1</sup>

**Table 1: The number of inmates per staff member who works in cells (In 2004)**

E Prison	K Prison	C Prison	J Prison	D Prison	S Detention house
121	47.9	74.2	77	123	98.6

**Picture 1: Annual average number of inmates per staff member (1992~2011)**



**Table 2: Number of cases where inmates disobey the treatment (2007~2011)**

(unit : case)

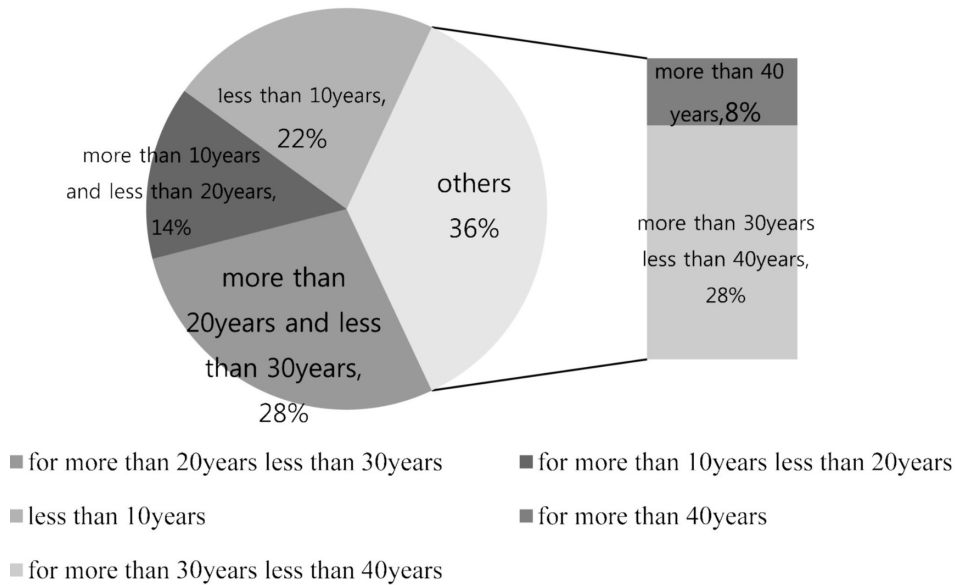
year \ contents	Petition	Administrative judgment	administrative litigation	Sue and accuse
2007	1,999	268	63	1,277
2008	2,330	301	83	1,153
2009	2,205	354	104	1,173
2010	1,573	245	79	800
2011	1,313	239	77	646

**3. Poor Working Environment**

Working environments of prisons and workshops that most staff are working in are poor. And overcrowding can be one of the factors that causes poor work environment.

<sup>1</sup> While inmates used the method of violating discipline or causing correctional accidents including assault to express their complaints or attempt to have what they want in the past, the tendency of false accusations and litigating human rights is increasing.

**Chart 1: The State of Correctional Facilities by the Elapsed Years**



4. Role Stress Due to Role Conflict

Role conflict between establishing orders and correction and rehabilitation for re-socialization may trigger stress. This is called “security or treatment” in Korea.

5. Low Social Recognition for Corrections Officials

The negative images that the public have of correctional officers can also be stressful.

6. Other Factors Such as Organizational, Personnel Management, etc.

The following factors can also contribute to an individual’s stress:

The lack of communication between the upper and lower classes from a closed corporate culture and vertical instruction system, conflicts with boss and coworkers in job performance, complaints about personnel management, promotion backlog or limited promotion opportunities.

**C. Stress Management**

1. Current System and Direction of the Discussion.

In Korea, several correctional institutions are currently working under agreements with local medical centers. According to the agreements, physicians are in charge of correctional officers’ mental health by consulting each staff member about their job stress. They both agreed to work on improving mental health by the treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, which usually appears after some correctional accidents including fleeing, suicide attempts and assault. According to this agreement, each staff member can get proper treatment. This is one of the system supports to help staff manage their stress individually.

In this paper, we will find stress management divided up as follows.

① Organization-wide management halting and alleviating job stress factors

② Supportive measures for cultivating and strengthening the ability of individuals to deal with their stress directly

2. To Control Job Stress Factors - Preventive Management as Fundamental Management of Job Stress

(i) To Control the Factors from Features of Work

(a) Forming a Flexible Organizational Culture

The factors from the features of work itself are difficult to be directly controlled. However, constant tensions from managing the inmates will be released by the organizational culture in which mistakes can sometimes be acceptable. In particular, when inmates are caught for breaches of discipline, providing proper measures to the staff, instead of censuring, will be helpful to forming a tolerant

and flexible atmosphere.

(b) Building Facilities for Managing Violent Criminals and Trouble-making Inmates

In Huntsville Prison in Texas in the U.S., locking devices of the cells are fully-automated, strictly blocked to avoid physical contact between the staff and inmate by separating hallways with wire netting. Counselling and interviews with defenders can also be done across the wire netting. This powerfully decreases the chance of violence toward the staff; therefore, accidents such as assault or riot are prevented fundamentally and order is well established in the prison.

Therefore, when dealing with violent offenders, their complete isolation from staff must be reserved, and it also needs to be deeply considered when designing the facility.

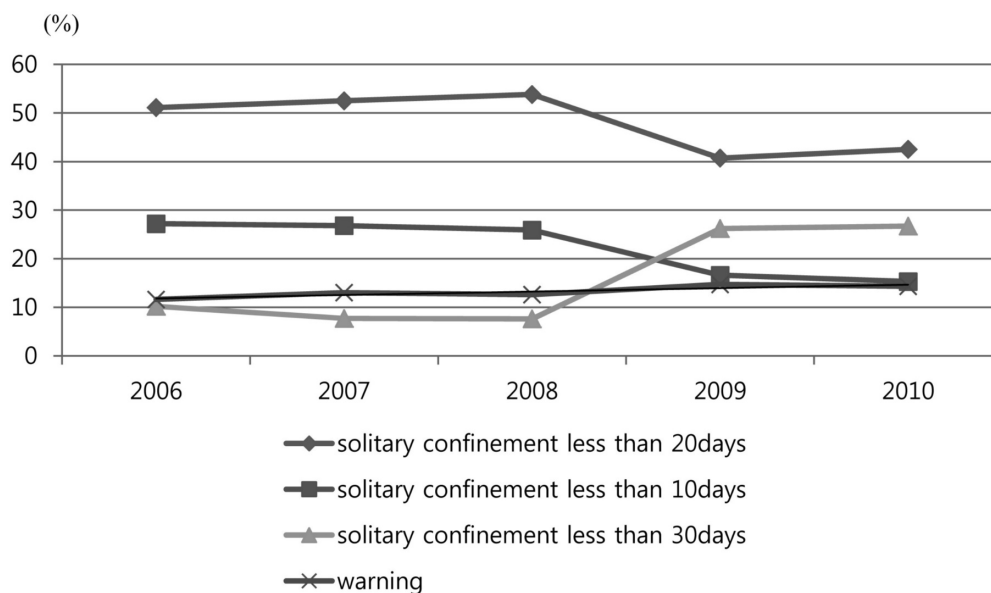
(c) Enhancing Means of Sanctions for Breaches of Discipline — Overhauling and Improving the Punishment System

To decrease the stress factor resulting from physical and mental threats from inmates, there need to be active and stern responses dealing with breaches of discipline. However, the existing punishment system has no effect as punishment.

Most inmates want to be housed in an individual room for privacy. There are many cases where inmates violate the rules on purpose to get their own room, even though housing in an individual room is one of the means of punishment for breaches of discipline. If inmates break the rules, they will be placed in solitary confinement for a month at most including the period of investigation, which gives an actual punishment period of only 10 to 20 days.

Therefore, the punishment enforcement law needs to reflect the characteristics of criminal law to have a strong punishment effect. That is, it should not be said that all actions of breaking the rules within correctional facilities are only considered as violations of administrative order. In order to do so, it would be much better to revise the punishment enforcement law so that the punishment of criminal activities and violation of internal regulations must be specified separately.

**Chart 2: Composition of punishment enforcement**



(d) Offering Correctional Officer’s Human Rights Protection

Now there is a treatment team for inmates in each institution to protect the inmates’ human rights and solve their complaints. Recently it has been frequently noted that correctional officers’ human rights would often be neglected because the headquarters places more emphasis on inmates’ human rights.

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The abuses of rights have increased due to the pressure on respecting inmates' human rights. Now is the time that we should pay attention to correctional officers' human rights, and we must set up a way to consult and help them with their complaints.<sup>2</sup>

(e) Improvement of Educational Training

Educational training for correctional officers should not be a formality but should be helpful for practical work and improve hands-on training. For the training, role-playing will be introduced and provided with individual manuals on each situation and the target of treatment. This manual has to be available anytime, if needed.

(ii) *Reducing Overburden*

(a) Improvement of Working System and Increasing the Staff for Reduction of Workload

We should reduce the factor of overburden through adjustment of night duty and improvement of the working system by offering incentives including some allowance to staff who manage trouble-making inmates. This will let them regard their duty as equivalent to the benefit but not overburdening.

It is impossible to directly control the overburdening factors caused by features of work itself. Therefore, we need to increase the number of staff and the budget as a part of special efforts to reduce overburden and improve the work environment.

(b) Reduction of Workload by Introduction of Modern Security Equipment

Expanding modern security equipment helps the reduction of workload as well as concentration of implementing policy focusing more on correction and rehabilitation but less on maintaining security.

(iii) *Improvement of Poor Environment*

Korea Correctional Service headquarters is now constantly modernizing correctional facilities and trying to build facilities smaller than the previous ones. In the future, when designing a correctional facility, the view of stress will have to be considered by creating stress impact assessments<sup>3</sup> obtaining the idea from the environmental impact assessment.

(iv) *Relieving Role Stress from Role Conflicts*

A key solution of the conflict is changing staff's perception of inmates; they are not subject to manage but beneficiaries of rehabilitation. Precisely, we need to switch from secure detention to more emphasis on rehabilitation and improvement. For this paradigm shift, the correctional environment itself has to be furnished with institutional devices first.<sup>4</sup> Separate accommodations and reduction of overcrowding are the foundation of those institutional devices.

(v) *Rational Way to Cope with Being Accused*

We should create institutional devices in response to inmates' false accusations, appeal and claim rights such as right-to-know. For example, we should sternly deal with false accusations or abuses of rights to maintain convenient life in prison by appointing special staff to detect abuses of accusation. Also, law experts should be hired to provide the staff with opportunities to receive legal advice.

(vi) *Raising Recognition of Correctional Officers*

We need to make good use of various media such as newspapers and broadcasts. We will let the local residents know about correctional administration and provide more chances to participate in activities that are related to rehabilitation.

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<sup>2</sup>In immediate response to inmates' verbal abuse and physical violence, the CRPT (Correctional Rapid Patrol Team) is now being operated in Korea, which focuses on restoring order to respond to inmates' breaches of discipline. It is expected that the team in charge of correctional officers' complaints will play a bigger role.

<sup>3</sup>For example, to secure enough space for taking a rest might be one of the indicators.

<sup>4</sup>In Korea, the Ministry of Justice opened a correctional psychological treatment center to plan the sexual violence control measures and effective prevention of recurrences in 2011. Korea Correctional Service also opened a mental health center at Gunsan Correctional Institution last year. The center was established to rehabilitate inmates suffering from a mental illness.

*(vii) Improvement of the Methods of Operating Organizations*

Taking part in the decision-making process through various channels contributes to reducing job stress. Offering opportunities of communication between staff and setting up the system to increase cooperation among departments will reduce conflicts at work. Organizing a cohesive team when performing a job could be a measure to diminish conflicts.

3. Measures to Consolidate Personnel Ability to Manage Stress

*(i) Mid-level Staffs' Ability to Manage Their Stress*

The important thing is to release negative emotion about inmates and work in order to turn the stressful situation back to the starting point. Mid-level staff will be able to cope with stress more effectively by having the following skills.

- The capability of objectively recognizing the situation
- Effective communication skills
- Ability to control anger
- Adjustment of the cognitive structure
- Full knowledge of job performance in advance
- Obtaining self-calming strategies
- To find a haven for relieving one's stress such as taking a rest or pursuing hobbies
- Getting out of perfectionism and into the habit of laying out realistic goals
- Receptive attitude towards change
- Request for cooperation in difficult situations and capability of expressing one's inner feelings
- To maintain a sense of balance to stress<sup>5</sup>
- Ability to mediate conflicts among individuals and organizations

*(ii) Supporting Measures of Personnel Ability to Manage Stress*

(a) Establishing a Task Force for Measuring, Managing, and Preventing Stress

The nature of the work is not completely resolved by simply increasing the number of civil servants or reducing workload. Therefore, organizing a team consisting of a psychologist and professional counsellor could be a more efficient alternative combined with changing external policy considering the specific character of stable public organizations.

In the United States, peer support and teams for relieving stress have been operated in order to remove post-traumatic stress disorder. Setting aside the kinds of post management discussed previously, additionally forming a preventive job-stress management team will be able to analyze factors of stress, plan to solve the problem and evaluate level of performance and personal relationships after accomplishment.<sup>6</sup>

(b) Encouraging Staff to Become Counsellors

In order to present a prescription that goes well with characteristics of the work, it would be better for a stress management team if it partially consists of qualified correctional officers instead of full

<sup>5</sup>It is the ability to adjust the degree of response not to feel more stress than the importance of the situation.

<sup>6</sup>The Massachusetts Department of Corrections in the U.S. established a Stress Unit which consists of five correctional officers who were trained as peer supporters. They have duties to consult with other co-workers who suffer from stress or connect with external professional organizations. Furthermore, they carry out follow-up treatment.



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external specialists in a team. Therefore, we should constantly bring up special counsellors within our organization.

(c) Matching the most suitable duty with each staff member's ability to endure stress

We can also consider ways to give a suitable job that matches each staff member's ability to endure stress by measuring features of their own abilities to endure stress from various angles.

(d) Outlining Stress Treatment Programmes

① Presenting Suitable Guidelines for Stress Situations

To provide opportunities for staff to participate in a treatment programme, we need to develop stress treatment programmes for ourselves or by outsourcing. There is also a way to build a web-based programme to manage and support depending on the degree or type of stress. Those programmes will provide guidelines on how to deal with each problem such as exposure to dangerous situations, sleeping problems, human relationship issues, etc., sorting by classification of stress.

② Introduction of EAP

EAP stands for Employee Assistance Program, and it is to provide a counselling service for employees' mental health in enterprises, public institutions, schools, the military, etc. Currently in South Korea, EAP still appears to be in the early stages because it is often being processed as limited and a one-time practice in the training course. In the near future, we need to examine the introduction of EAPs also in the public field such as managing correctional officers' stress.

The EAP provides the following services:

- Counselling and training for mid-level managers to improve leadership, work environment and workers' morale.
- Providing services that are available to their families as well as staff themselves.
- Advising and supporting the organization.

③ CISM (Critical Incident Stress Management)

Critical Incident Stress is also known as post-traumatic stress, if that stress is not resolved, it will be diagnosed as Acute Stress Disorder. Once these symptoms continue for more than one month, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder will proceed. Correctional officers working in a crisis situation have a higher risk of being exposed to traumatic stress. This appears when one experiences severe emotional stress that can almost be considered as trauma.

CISM (Critical Incident Stress Management) is a comprehensive and systematic approach to control and reduce the hazards of post-traumatic stress caused by a crisis situation. In Korea, Critical Incident Stress Management recently started to target firefighters. Also, introducing the programme for corrections officials who have a duty to provide services in crisis situations could help manage traumatic stress in advance and prevent progression of acute stress disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder.

(e) Taking Advantage of Education and Training

Education and training are necessary to include stress management training in a job training course as well as build the curriculum with discovered contents that can be applied to the actual field of corrections. It is worth taking advantage of education and training as an opportunity to reduce job stress which includes psychological therapy, group counselling and outdoor activities in the course.

Also, through assertiveness training<sup>7</sup> and anger management training, we will be able to improve the effective communication skills and the ability to control stress.

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<sup>7</sup> Assertiveness training is showing someone's needs, thoughts and feelings in a clear and direct expression without criticizing or making them feel uncomfortable.

Educational training should include contents that raise receptive attitudes for changes so they do not feel confused and stressed about the new policy.

(f) Financial Support to Management of Mental Health by the Government

As mentioned above, in Korea, nowadays several institutions are separately planning to sign agreements with mental health physicians in charge of local medical centers. It would be great to have special health check-ups for correctional officers more than once a year in conjunction with the agreement. And it is suggested that governments support the expenses of medical examination and treatment for staff who are diagnosed with higher levels of post-traumatic stress disorder.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

Because job stress is generated by various factors, it is not too much to say that removing fundamental factors of job stress is equal to resolving all issues in correctional organizations. It is impossible to solve the problems visibly and quickly so we should focus on the training, psychological treatment programmes and financial support to enhance the capability of individuals' stress management. Diverse stress factors within organizations, at the same time, should be evaluated and improved with long-term and overall plans that include "Stress Impact Assessment".