

# **STRESS MANAGEMENT OF CORRECTIONAL PERSONNEL — ENHANCING THE CAPACITY OF MID-LEVEL STAFF: THAILAND'S STRATEGIC APPROACH**

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

This essay attempts to analyze the current situation of the stress management of mid-level correctional personnel in Thailand. This issue is rather new in Thai society and particularly in the public sector administration. However, it is likely to make some academic observations on the Thai Department of Corrections (DoC) to some extent. The two main approaches of the stress management strategies under the administration of the DoC are correlated. One is the preventative strategies, and another is post-stress strategies of stress management. As a consequence, this article can be divided into three parts; firstly, the current situation of work-related stress in the Thai correctional context; secondly, the preventative strategies of stress management in Thailand; and lastly, the post-stress strategies of stress management.

## **II. CURRENT SITUATION OF WORK-RELATED STRESS IN THE THAI CORRECTIONAL CONTEXT**

Firstly, the current situation of work-related stress in the Thai correctional context is fundamental to an understanding of the situation of the DoC, which has been serving the country for almost a century, and it is the single national agency that professionally keeps inmates in custody and efficiently rehabilitates inmates by several activities, e.g. providing treatment for offenders according to court verdict under the Penitentiary Act and relevant laws and providing social and other welfare for prisoners (Corrections in Thailand 2012: page 2). The Department's missions and responsibilities therefore have focused mainly on prisoners and activities relating to prisoners, or in other words, the correctional personnel have been the unnoticed agenda of the Department's development scheme for quite a long time.

Nowadays, the total number of correctional personnel is 10,691 (Statistical Source: Division of Personnel, Department of Corrections; as of 10th April 2013) working within the headquarters, and 114 prisons, 24 correctional institutions, 5 detention centers, and a house of relegation compared to the rising number of inmates to 223,188 (Source: Division of Planning, Department of Corrections; of 10th April 2013).

Due to the overcrowded state of prisons, the atmosphere of the prison setting has been considerably overwhelmed by inmate overcapacity. Moreover, there seems to be a growing number of correctional overload work and frequent inquiries from international organizations such as human rights bodies, politicians, stakeholders, the public etc. over topics like prisoner treatment, human rights practice in prisons, correctional personnel corruption, penal policy implementation and so forth. The correctional administration tries to overcome these problems, but it is still an ongoing process of the problem solving.

Considering the stress of correctional officers, it is assumed that the key skills for prison officers are highly demanding as well as totally different from one setting to another, for example having ability to react quickly and effectively under pressure i.e. in any incidents of prison disorder; sensitivity to inmates' problems and issues; ability to get on with people from different social backgrounds (Liebling, A. et al.; 2011). On the basis of these challenging prison skills, prison officers often face stress

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at work. These cause stress amongst correctional officers.

Each different position has relatively different duties and, more importantly, different roles. It is common for correctional officers to be rotated to fit in any positions relating to penological practice or prisoner treatment; as a result the flexibility of personnel competence yields a number of successful outcomes of the correctional administration including urgent and regular work. Besides the difference of duty expectation from the organization, role conflict is also a challenging factor that makes officers feel stressful. Wilson (2000) states that role conflict occurs when correctional officers have to reconcile between the different roles of "custody" and "care". Correctional officers have to play the custodial role which regards as a hard role in order to keep discipline and order in prison settings, whereas at other times correctional officers have to play the role of care for inmates to offer consultation on personal problems and dilemmas. Therefore the entirely different roles can give officers stress in terms of the unclear job description guidelines and conflicting orders in reality.

For the mid-level correctional officer, there is a constructional period of a strong professional specialization. By failing to keep a balance between the rewarding and punishing sides for correctional personnel, it is probable that these personnel may leave the correctional system or continue working under stress and dissatisfaction. Furthermore, some phenomenon such as the brain drain situation can accordingly happen also. In the future, it is predictable that the educated and highly skilled correctional officers may choose to work for other organizations where they are better promoted or receive reasonably higher remunerations. To give more information on punishment to correctional officers, the transfer to another prison or correctional institution is one of the most stressful situations for all correctional personnel.

### **III. PREVENTATIVE STRATEGIES OF STRESS MANAGEMENT IN THAILAND**

Secondly, the preventative strategies of stress management in Thailand have been developed through correctional personnel welfare from the DoC such as the Standard on "Qualified Correctional Staff" through the usage of Thai Prison Standards Key Performance Indicators<sup>i</sup> (KPI) and the "Prison Standard on Quality of Correctional Personnel Work Life"<sup>ii</sup>. Some of the welfare activities responding to the needs of correctional personnel help assisting officers' working and living conditions to be in a good quality. In prisons and correctional institutes there are many projects supporting such subsistence conditions such as:

- (i). Establishing the "One product One correctional officers' wife club"
- (ii). Providing school bus service for correctional officers' families
- (iii). Supporting the monthly consumption goods for correctional officers
- (iv). Establishing the medical expense and child education funds
- (v). Distributing a free uniform a year
- (vi). Providing free lunch for operating officers
- (vii). Providing assistance to injured correctional officers or to the families of correctional officers killed in the line of duty
- (viii). Providing free home repair for better-conditioned construction
- (ix). Providing cost-priced consumption goods
- (x). Welfare funds with low interest loans

These remarkable projects are regulated throughout prisons and correctional institutes across the

country as to maintaining and applying of one standard to all correctional officers. By having implemented these inventive projects, some four basic requirements of correctional officers are supported by the DoC for the underlying ideology that the fundamental needs for living and family support are considered crucial elements of correctional personnels' burdens and concerns. In addition, the Self-sufficiency economic project initiative by His Majesty the King Bhumibhol Adulyadej, or King Rama the 9<sup>th</sup> of the Kingdom of Thailand, also implemented by the DoC in order to give philosophy on sufficient living for correctional officers especially on financial management and life planning.

As sports is evidently seen as a stress-preventative strategy in the correctional system, the Correctional Sports Competition amongst all prisons and correctional institutes across the country is hence arranged annually for enhancing physical capability and improving relationships between correctional-officer athletes to participate in recreational activities once a year and receive special opportunity to take part in the ASEAN Sports competitions between the 10 ASEAN countries in the region to extend the worldwide experience and knowledge from other nations in the ASEAN community.

Besides, when focusing on correctional personnel who work in the prison setting, the interpersonal relations play a major role causing stress. The nature of the prison work mostly involves interaction with inmates, other correctional personnel and higher and lower hierarchical position officers, thus the management of professional relationships in the correctional setting is the invisible line; keeping the right distance is the best practice of all. The relationship of prison staff and inmates is the critical area to be calculated wisely by correctional personnel at all times. It is claimed by Genders and Players (1995; page 98) that "the staff-prisoner relationships...tended to be characterized by three specific qualities: individualism, permissiveness and trust". It is not wrong to say that in a practical way, experience holds the right answers. Stress is the byproduct of the "go wrong" relationship (Liebling et al; 2011).

Not only that, there is potential of having anxiety, depression and hopelessness (Biggam and Power 1997: pages 225-6). Another type of relationship within the institution is the officer-officer relationship, because under the management problem situation in the correctional work environment, working tends to be more problematic such as the organizational coordination lacks several supporting elements; some work on the edge is being thrown away from officers because they do not want to take any responsibility; and beyond that, some of the setting is divided into regional groups e.g. some officers from different regions of the country prefer to gather in the particular group and sometimes isolate other groups. This causes complication in personnel management in some aspects especially the weak teamwork management and many more consequential problems. The direct superior-inferior officer relationship is also perplexing within the correctional setting, as most extra work is from unreasonable demands from superior officers on an urgent basis. This creates work-related stress among correctional officers to some degree.

#### **IV. POST-STRESS STRATEGIES OF STRESS MANAGEMENT**

Lastly, the post-stress strategies of stress management avail in the correctional system in both informal and formal traditions. Some of the formal traditions of the post-stress strategies of stress management in the Thai correctional setting are conducted regularly in the form of the correctional personnel welfare fund and the correctional personnel cremation servicing fund. The informal tradition can be observed via the real situation of an officer who mistakenly shot and killed an inmate when he was chasing the escaping inmate; this led to the long-term imprisonment of the officer. However, most attempts to help reduce imprisonment terms were done by the DoC through pledging the special Royal Pardon and assisting the officer's wife to have a paid job within the correctional setting so as to be a bread winner while her husband was imprisoned. At the end, the officer received a special parole and now is released from prison. Therefore the lessening of the stress is what the DoC concerns most when any traumatic situation occurs to correctional officers. Further, the "peer to peer" consultation as well as communication with understanding from superior and inferior officers is somewhat the informal tradition of the post-stress strategies of stress management in the Thai correctional setting.

The causes of work-related stress are heavily discussed within the correctional institution because the structural elements build up the total climate of the organization whether it derives from heaviness

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of prison workload, transparency interrogation, or a shortage of alternatives to imprisonment leading to prison overcrowding. This has been a backdrop of the Thai correctional management today.

To emphasize, the changing page of the Department of Corrections in terms of stress management and other correctional personnel programmes is hoped to be done in the individualistic approach for the national strategic plan on human resources. Furthermore, the entire layout of structured manpower plan may be put into practice. As the mid-level correctional officer is a constructional period of a strong professional specialization, sincerity of the correctional system to them can well be given by putting more effort into the core strategic plan and implementation plan on correctional personnel on the individualistic aspect in order to prevent the brain drain of qualified and experienced correctional personnel in the future. Because all costs regarding forming up and maintaining one qualified correctional officer within the correctional system requires a good deal of investment, the mid-level correctional officer represents the medium-term developmental plan.

### V. CONCLUSION

To sum up, the lack of stress management in Thai corrections has shown that there is some room to develop in this field. The psychological needs of correctional personnel are proven to be unspoken in the Thai correctional context; in years to come all programmes including stress management, anger management, depression management and many others should be equipped with the development scheme for correctional personnel. The room for development in stress management in the Thai correctional setting across the country is that there shall be more forms of professional consultations such as legal consultation when officers face legal issues; or some psychological assistance in any cases that encounter such good conduct correctional officers who intentionally serve the organization and country. The last word leaves to the correctional administrators as shown as the following: as long as this national organization has the mission to professionally keep inmates in custody and efficiently rehabilitate inmates, this organization shall have a parallel mission to assist those who are dedicated to their 24 hour work for organizational missions' achievement.

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**i Appendix A****Standard on “Qualified Correctional Staff” in the Thai Prison Standards**

Staff or human resource is regarded as the most significant element of the mechanism. However, this statement can be practical when human resource receives the development to achieve appropriate knowledge, experience and vision to job description, accompanied by being surrounded by the well-balancing personnel numbers to correctional duties under the just and transparent staff welfare and staff emolument plan.

#### **Personnel Administration**

- (i). Personnel Policy shall be established. The personnel administration procedure ranging from personnel recruitment, job assignment, promotion, position rotation, and special achievement promotion shall be carried in a just, transparent and accountability manner. This shall be considered yearly by history of personnel proficiency, knowledge, and appropriateness to the position, duties, vision, policy, laws and any relevant regulations.
- (ii). Personnel administration chart and detailed position's responsibility shall be structured.
- (iii). All personnel shall have the work accomplishment history file.
- (iv). The operational assessment shall be conducted regularly or at least every 6 months by the assessment committee in particular.

#### **Personnel Development**

The personnel development aims for professionalism in corrections by several means such as training, educational visitation, consistent meeting attendance in relevance to the position and the requirement of the organizations and personnel principally.

- (i). Portable operational manual shall be published in each duty for all personnel.
- (ii). Appropriate place for academic research for personnel shall be provided e.g. documents of textbooks, laws, regulations, orders, operational manuals of internal and external organizations for personnel professionalism enhancement.
- (iii). New personnel training shall be arranged not under 30 days assessable for all.
- (iv). Correctional personnel proficiency examination and support involving academic, physical, mental, emergency and safety technical skills shall be performed regularly.
- (v). Appropriate training, seminar, further education opportunities shall be supported for personnel to broadening understanding of life experience and notion at least once a year.
- (vi). Result of training assessment or educational visitation report shall be processed.

#### **Personnel Maintaining**

The staff welfare shall cover all aspects e.g. staff emolument, operational environment, work condition, residential condition, recreation, education, medical service and personnel family welfare shall be adequate and appropriate to increase personnel operation level to reach the operation efficiency.

- (i). Correctional personnel who work closely to inmates shall receive special emolument.
- (ii). Personnel opinion, suggestion, and grievance shall be processed in a confidential and particular manner to prison governor or director general.
- (iii). Consultation by professional counselor to personnel shall be provided in all work-relating

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aspects such as legal, welfare, financial issues etc.

(iv). Disciplinary and penalty procedure shall be conducted in a just manner. Opportunity to advocate the accusation, no delay and transparency ground shall be performed.

**Standard on “Qualified Correctional Staff” in Thai Prison Standards  
Key Performance Indicators**

**Personnel Administration Key Performance Indicators**

(i). Personnel Planning Policy shall be established. The personnel administration procedure ranging from personnel recruitment, job assignment, promotion, position rotation, and special achievement promotion shall be carried in a just, transparent and accountability manner. This shall be considered yearly by history of personnel proficiency, knowledge, and appropriateness to the position, duties, vision, policy, laws and any relevant regulations.

**Key Performance Indicator**

- Success of Personnel Planning Policy establishment
  - (ii). Personnel administration chart and detailed position's responsibility shall be structured.

**Key Performance Indicator**

- Success of Personnel administration chart and detailed position's responsibility structuring
  - (iii). All personnel shall have the work history file.

**Key Performance Indicator**

- Success of Personnel obtaining individual work history file.
  - (iv). The operational assessment shall be conducted regularly or at least every 6 months by the assessment committee in particular.

**Key Performance Indicator**

- Success of Personnel obtaining the individual operational assessment.

**Personnel Development Key Performance Indicators**

The personnel development aims for professionalism in corrections by several means such as training, educational visitation, consistent meeting attendance in relevance to the position and the requirement of the organizations and personnel principally.

- (i). Portable operational manual shall be published in each duty for all personnel.

**Key Performance Indicator**

- Success of publishing the Portable operational manual within organization.
  - (ii). Appropriate place for academic research for personnel shall be provided e.g. documents of textbooks, laws, regulations, orders, operational manuals of internal and external organizations for personnel professionalism enhancement.

**Key Performance Indicator**

- Success of establishing learning corner within organization.
  - (iii). New personnel training shall be arranged not under 30 days assessable for all.

**Key Performance Indicator**

- Success of arranging the operational training for new personnel.
  - (iv). Correctional personnel proficiency examination and support involving academic, physical, mental, emergency and safety technical skills shall be performed regularly.

**Key Performance Indicator**

- Success of promotion and arrangement of correctional personnel proficiency examination and support involving academic, physical, mental, emergency and safety technical skills
  - (v). Appropriate training, seminar, further education opportunities shall be supported for personnel

to broadening understanding of life experience and notion at least once a year.

**Key Performance Indicator**

- Success of the trained personnel within organization on necessary operational skills.
  - (vi). Result of training assessment or educational visitation report shall be processed.

**Key Performance Indicator**

- Success of the trained personnel by making educational visitation report.

**Qualified Personnel Maintaining Key Performance Indicators**

The staff welfare shall cover all aspects e.g. staff emolument, operational environment, work condition, residential condition, recreation, education, medical service and personnel family welfare shall be adequate and appropriate to increase personnel operation level to reach the operation efficiency.

- (i). Correctional personnel who work closely to inmates shall receive special emolument.

**Key Performance Indicator**

- Success of arrangement of the special emolument for closely inmate-contacting personnel.
  - (ii). Personnel opinion, suggestion, and grievance shall be processed in a confidential and particular manner to prison governor or director general.

**Key Performance Indicator**

- Success of arrangement of the personnel opinion, suggestion, and grievance system.
  - (iii). Consultation by professional counselor to personnel shall be provided in all work-relating aspects such as legal, welfare, financial issues etc.

**Key Performance Indicator**

- Success of arrangement of the professional counseling system.
  - (iv). Disciplinary and penalty procedure shall be conducted in a just manner. Opportunity to advocate the accusation, no delay and transparency ground shall be performed.

**Key Performance Indicator**

- Success of setting the appropriate disciplinary and penalty procedure.

ii Appendix B

**Prison Standard on Quality of Correctional Personnel Work Life**

1. Healthcare for operational readiness
  - 1.1 Arranging the personnel exercising at least 2 times a week
  - 1.2 Arranging the physical proficiency test at least 2 times a year
  - 1.3 Arranging the annual physical checkup
2. Subsistence support
  - 2.1 Setting the “One product One correctional officers’ wife club”
  - 2.2 Providing school bus service for correctional officer’s family
  - 2.3 Supporting the consumption goods monthly for correctional officers
  - 2.4 Setting the medical expense and children education funds
  - 2.5 Distributing a free uniform a year
  - 2.6 Providing free lunch for operating officers
  - 2.7 Assisting injured and deceased correctional officers on duty
  - 2.8 Providing free house fixing
  - 2.9 Providing the cost-priced consumption goods
  - 2.10 Setting welfare fund with low interest loan
3. Operational Facilitation
  - 3.1 Arranging separate toilet and bedding for correctional officers on duty

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- 3.2 Providing necessities for operation e.g. baton, torch, two-way radio etc.
- 3.3 Providing drinking water and coffee corner or refreshment for correctional officers

**4. Burden lessening**

The Department of Corrections looks to lessen the officers burden by arranging the shift consecutive not over 3 shifts, except the necessary situation e.g. hospital shift, or official travel to other regions etc.

**5. Morale support**

5.1 Systemizing counseling services in various expertise areas such as legal, welfare, psychological, and financial aspects etc.

- 5.2 Arranging educational visitation for correctional officers

**6. Discipline and ethics**

6.1 Correctional officers dress properly and orderly

6.2 Salutation and official report are to conduct properly.