

ALWAYS ON ALERT: WORK-RELATED HYPERVIGILANCE AND EMPLOYEE OUTCOMES IN CORRECTIONS

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Correctional officers (CO's) work in an occupation in which potential danger and the possibility of physical confrontations are parts of their everyday work environment. A core task for CO's is maintaining their personal safety as well as the safety of coworkers and inmates. While being receptive to the presence of potential danger and being prepared to respond to incidents is crucial, sustaining this level of alertness over time may be associated with increased stress and strain (Cullen et al, 1985). Therefore, this study examined relationships between work-related hypervigilance and employee outcomes.

We defined work-related hypervigilance as an extreme attentiveness to and assessment of the environment for potential danger that goes along with cognitive and physiological arousal. We conceptualized work-related hypervigilance as a distinct experienced stressor that is related to, but separate from, phenomena around perceptions of danger or traumatic stress. We hypothesized that the chronic experience of work-related hypervigilance is associated with increased strain symptoms among CO's. Specifically, the requirement to stay alert may lead to cognitive and physical exhaustion over time (Ganster & Rosen, 2013). The constant screening of the environment for potential danger may also impact CO's nonwork life. For example, they may feel that their work life conflicts with their nonwork life (i.e. work-family conflict), and they may be less likely to mentally distance themselves from work (i.e., psychological detachment) and relax during nonwork time. Therefore, we proposed that chronic levels of hypervigilance would be associated with higher exhaustion, physical symptoms of stress and work-to-family conflict, and lower levels of psychological detachment from work and relaxation during nonwork time.

We examined the hypothesized relationships using a sample of correctional officers (N = 1317; response rate 54%) from 14 correctional facilities in one state in the Western United States. Based on site visits of three facilities, interviews with CO's, feedback from researchers in Industrial and Organizational psychology, and past research, we developed a nine-item scale to measure work-related hypervigilance (Sample item: "I had to be on guard to stay safe."). CO's in all 14 institutions then received surveys asking them to report their levels of experienced hypervigilance, exhaustion (Demerouti, Bakker, Vardakou, & Kantas, 2003), physical symptoms (Spector & Jex, 1997), work-to-family conflict (Netemeyer, Boles & McMurrian, 1996), and psychological detachment and relaxation during nonwork time (Sonnetag & Fritz, 2007) along with questions that we included as control variables. Specifically, to test our hypotheses, we used hierarchical ordinary least squares (OLS) regression controlling for facility, security level of inmates, PTSD- like symptoms, veteran status, physical confrontations with inmates, job tenure, and gender.

Results indicate that hypervigilance was indeed associated with higher employee exhaustion, physical symptoms of job stress, and work-family conflict, and lower psychological detachment from work and relaxation during non-work time. Thus, our findings indicate that the experience of work-related hypervigilance is associated with a variety of employee outcomes and is worthy of further examination as a perceived stressor in certain occupations, such as corrections, police, or security.

By identifying and defining work-related hypervigilance as a work-related experience – as opposed to a clinical diagnosis following a traumatic event, for example – our study may act as a starting point in helping work organizations create policies and interventions to reduce chronic levels of hypervigilance. Additionally, future research may further examine ways to alleviate the potential negative impact of hypervigilance on employee outcomes. Specifically, while hypervigilance may be important for employees while at work, they may find ways to reduce elevated levels of alertness and activation during nonwork time, providing them with a chance to rest and recover. We further suggest for future research to examine the relationships between hypervigilance and employee outcomes over time to better understand how and when the psychological processes involved may affect employee outcomes. Thus, we see this study as a stepping-stone for understanding work-related hypervigilance and its effects on employees in the context of dangerous occupations such as corrections.

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Paper 2 Sleep Quality and the Subjective Experience of Social Media

- ▲ Michelle Van Laethem, MSc, Radboud University Nijmegen, The Netherlands; Debby G. J. Beckers, PhD; Ap Dijksterhuis, PhD; Sabine A. E. Geurts, PhD

Paper 3 Employees' Need Satisfaction and Recovery on Non-Work Days: Does the Timing of Non-Work Days Make a Difference?

- ▲ Madelon L. M. van Hooff, PhD, Radboud University Nijmegen, The Netherlands; Paul Flaxman, PhD; Mia Söderberg, PhD; Chris Stride, PhD; Sabine A.E. Geurts, PhD

Paper 4 Assessing the Effect of a 4-Week Internet-Based Mindfulness Intervention on Work-Related Rumination, Sleep and Fatigue: A Randomised Waitlist Control Study

- ▲ Dawn Querstret, MSc, University of Surrey, England, UK; Mark Cropley, PhD; Chris Fife-Schaw, PhD

Emotional Labor (Paper Panel Session)

Augusta G

Chair: Ivonne Moreno-Velázquez, PhD, University of Puerto Rico - Rio Piedras Campus, Rio Piedras, PR

Paper 1 Testing a Eustress/Distress Model of "Service with a Smile"

- ▲ Cristina Quiñones, PhD, Open University, Milton Keynes, England, UK; Raquel Rodriguez-Carvajal, PhD

Paper 2 The Paradox of Compassionate Work: A Mixed-Methods Study of Veterinarians and Animal Health Technologists

- ▲ Alicia Polachek, MA, University of Calgary, AB, Canada; Jean Wallace, PhD

Paper 3 Emotional Work: Exploring the Condition of Mexican Teachers

- ▲ Marlene Rodriguez-Martínez, Masters, Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, Iztapalapa, Mexico; Dr. Jose Horacio Tovalín-Ahumada; Sara Guadalupe Unda-Rojas, Masters

10:45–11:00 a.m.

Break

11:00 a.m.–12:15 p.m.

Concurrent Sessions

Staying Healthy and Safe: Relationships Between Workplace Stressors and Employee Outcomes in Corrections (Symposium)

Augusta A

Chairs: Charlotte Fritz, PhD, and Frankie Guros, MS, Portland State University, Portland, OR

Paper 1 Correctional Officer Suicide: Recent National Data

- ▲ John M. Violanti, PhD, University at Buffalo, The State University of New York, Buffalo, NY

Paper 2 Always on Alert: Work-Related Hypervigilance and Employee Outcomes in Corrections

- ▲ Charlotte Fritz, PhD, Portland State University, Portland, OR; Frankie Guros, MS; Leslie Hammer, PhD; Brittanie Shepherd, BS; David Meier, MS

Paper 3 The Effect of Prison Security Level on Health and Safety of Correctional Officers

- ▲ Kerry Kuehl, MD, DrPH, Oregon Health & Science University, Portland, OR; Diane L. Elliot, MD; Bharti Garg, MD; MPH; Adriana Sleigh, BS

Paper 4 Health Improvement Through Employee Control II (HITEC2): Adapting the Participatory Action Research Approach to Corrections

- ▲ Martin G. Cherniack, MD, MPH; UConn Health Center, Farmington, CT; Jeffrey Dussetschleger, DDS; Robert Henning, PhD; Mazen El Ghaziri, PhD; Nicholas Warren, PhD

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