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Eric G. Lambert PhD, Nancy L. Hogan PhD & Kelly Cheeseman Dial PhD

Department of Criminal Justice, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, USA

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The Effects of Job Involvement on Private Correctional Staff: A Preliminary Study

ERIC G. LAMBERT, PhD, NANCY L. HOGAN, PhD, and KELLY CHEESEMAN DIAL, PhD

Department of Criminal Justice, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, USA

Much of the research on correctional officers over the past two decades has focused on job stress, job satisfaction, the job environment, and how demographic variables such as gender, race, health and family conflict influenced stress and job satisfaction. Because correctional staff is such an integral part of corrections, understanding job involvement and its impact on correctional employees is important, yet it has received little attention in the literature. Using survey data from a private correctional facility in the Midwest, the authors examined the effects of job involvement on job stress, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, absenteeism, and turnover intentions. A multivariate analysis indicated that job involvement had significant effects on all the predicted outcome variables.

KEYWORDS Job involvement, private correctional staff, job stress, job satisfaction, organizational commitment

Billions of dollars are spent each year on private security, and millions of people are employed in the field private security (Cole & Smith, 2004; Nalla & Heraux, 2003). The field shows signs of continued growth over the next several decades. For example, in the United States, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010) estimated that there would be approximately a 15% growth in the number of jobs in the field of private security over the next decade; this rate is faster than in the overall U.S. economy. The field of private security is complex, diverse, and dynamic. It is not limited to the uniformed security officers found in buildings, such as retail establishments.
People are employed in a wide array of private security, such as risk management, private detectives, private armed officers, protection agents, loss prevention, technology security, corporate trade and product security, curtailing counterfeiting of consumer goods, and security consultants (Lambert, Hogan, Paoline, & Clarke, 2005).

Employment in private correctional facilities currently is another important and growing area in the field of private security. Private correctional facilities are contracted by governmental bodies to incarcerate offenders. Although there is a long history of private businesses providing some of the services and materials used in correctional institutions, the concept of entirely privately owned and operated correctional facilities is a relatively new development (Thomas & Bolinger, 1996).

In the past 30 years, there has been a rapid growth in the number of private correctional facilities. In the United States in 1984, the first modern fully private prison was established by Correctional Corporation of America (Thomas & Bolinger, 1996). After this facility, the number of private correctional facilities dramatically increased, with more than 250 private correctional facilities currently in the United States. From 2000 to 2005, the number of private correctional facilities in the United States increased from 264 to 415, and accounted for the majority of growth in new correctional facilities (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008). In 2000, private correctional facilities held 87,369 inmates, which constituted 6.3% of all incarcerated offenders in the United States. By 2008, this number had grown to 128,524 inmates and constituted 8.05% of all incarcerated individuals in the United States (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2009). With the rise of private correctional facilities, there has also been an increase in literature on the topic. Camp, Gaes, and Saylor (2001) contended:

There has been no shortage of materials written on the merits or disadvantages of private prisons with the viewpoints often depending upon the politics of the authors. Much of the written material to date has been written to provide justification for or against the use of private prisons. (p. 27)

One area not fully explored in the literature is the issue of staff and their perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors from working in private correctional facilities. There are almost 26,000 individuals employed at private correctional facilities in the United States alone (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008).

Staff members are correctional institutions’ greatest assets (Lambert & Hogan, 2009a). They are the largest expenditure for any private correctional facility, and are necessary in order for the organization to operate. Staff members are responsible for a myriad of tasks and duties to operate a safe, secure, and humane facility (Lambert, Hogan, et al., 2005). It can be argued that staff members help private correctional institutions be successful
or, conversely, unsuccessful. Most of the literature on private prisons is directed toward other areas (e.g., effectiveness compared to public prisons regarding cost, recidivism) than staff. Private correctional staff members do not receive the research attention they warrant. Lambert, Hogan, et al. (2005) contended that private prison staff were orphans who been abandoned at a criminal justice research orphanage. It is often assumed that private and public correctional staff members are the same and that similar workplace forces affect them similarly (Lambert & Hogan, 2009a, 2009b). This may be incorrect. The effects of workplace factors may be situational and contextual, which means that they can differ by different types of correctional facilities. Before the contention that the findings among public correctional staff apply equally to private correctional staff, there is a need for research in this area (Lambert, Hogan, et al., 2005). There is too little research in this area for any firm conclusions to be drawn at this time. Far more empirical evidence is required before any such conclusions can be inferred.

Not only do private prison work environments significantly impact the attitudes and behaviors of employees, but staff attitudes and behaviors have significant effects on private prisons. For private correctional facilities to be effective, staff members are needed who are relatively unstressed, satisfied, committed, who show up for work, and wish to stay. Examining the job attitudes of employees at private correctional facilities is important because they can differ from what has been found among workers at government-run correctional facilities (Owen, 2006). Job involvement is theorized to be an important work attitude for workers (Diefendorff, Brown, Kamin, & Lord, 2002; Hackman & Lawler, 1971; Lawler, 1986). Although job involvement may be an important factor influencing the views and behaviors of private correctional staff, there has been little research on this subject. No published studies could be located that examined the effects of job involvement on staff working in the field of private corrections. Furthermore, only a handful of studies have examined the effects of job involvement among staff public correctional facilities. This preliminary study was, therefore, undertaken to examine the effects of job involvement on job stress, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, absenteeism, and turnover intentions on private correctional staff.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Job Involvement

Elloy, Everett, and Flynn (1992) saw job involvement as a “generalized cognitive state of psychological identification with the job” (p. 162). Paullay, Alliger, and Stone-Romero (1994) defined job involvement as when an employee “is cognitively preoccupied with, engaged in, and concerned with one’s present job” (p. 224). Basically, job involvement is the degree of psychological identification with the job (Brown & Leigh, 1996; Kanungo, 1982a,
It reflects the level of importance the job plays in an individual's life and the level of importance the individual places on the job (Kanungo, 1979; Paullay et al., 1994). As pointed out by DeCarufel and Schann (1990), “An individual with a high degree of job involvement would place the job at the center of his or her life’s interests. The well-known phrase ‘I live, eat, and breathe my job’ would describe someone whose job involvement is very high” (p. 86). It can be thought of as being part of the ego and self-identity of a person (Parasuraman, 1982). The opposite of job involvement is job alienation (Kanungo, 1979). Job alienation is the feeling of being detached from the job and that the job is unimportant in one’s overall life. Thus, one person who is a correctional officer at a private correctional institution and has a high level of psychological connection with the job, takes pride in holding the position, looks forward to going to the job each day, and has his or her self-worth tied to the job, would have a high level of job involvement. However, another person holding the same job at the same institution could have little psychological attachment to the job, feel no pride in holding the position, hate coming into work every day, feel the job has little centrality in the person’s life, and would leave if another employment opportunity with similar or higher financial benefits would become available, would have a low level of job involvement. DeCarufel and Schaan (1990) pointed out that “persons with low job involvement would place something other than their jobs (e.g., family, hobbies) at the center of their lives” (p. 86).

Sometimes job involvement is mistakenly confused with other work concepts. Although connected with one another, job involvement is distinct from work ethic, job stress, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Brown, 1996). Work ethic was in the past sometimes referred to as the Protestant work ethic. Work ethic is the belief that work is important in and of itself and will help people grow psychologically, physically, and morally (Elloy et al., 1992; Kanungo, 1982b). The old adage of “idle hands are the devil’s workshop” illustrates the part of the work ethic that work helps build the character of people. According to DeCarufel and Schaan (1990), work ethic is the belief that hard work leads to positive outcomes for people and society. Work ethic is a broad concept that deals with a general belief of work itself and not a particular job. In addition, work ethic does not require a person to identify psychologically with a particular job. Conversely, job involvement is much more limited. It is the psychological connection that a person feels between him- or herself and the job; therefore, it is possible for a person to have a high level of work ethic but not psychologically identify with the particular job held at the time. In addition, work ethic and job involvement have been empirically shown to be distinct concepts (Kanungo, 1982a; Lawler & Hall, 1970; Misra, Kanungo, Von Rosenthal, & Stuhler, 1985).

As with work ethic, job involvement is different from job stress. Job stress is generally defined as a staff member’s feelings of job-related tension,
anxiety, and distress (Cullen, Link, Wolfe, & Frank, 1985; Grossi, Keil, & Vito, 1996; Triplett, Mullings, & Scarborough, 1996). Thus, job stress is the degree of psychological strain felt from the job. Job stress is the degree of discomfort caused from the job, and job involvement is the bond the person has with his or her job. Job stress and job involvement can occur independently of one another. A staff member can be stressed from the job but still psychologically identify with the job. Similarly, a person can be unstressed by the job and feel no connection with the job either.

Although both involve the job, job satisfaction and job involvement are distinct concepts. Locke (1976) defined job satisfaction as “a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experiences” (p. 1300). Hopkins (1983) defined job satisfaction as “the fulfillment or gratification of certain needs that are associated with one’s work” (p. 7). Simply stated, job satisfaction is the degree that an individual likes his or her job (Spector, 1996). Job satisfaction is the emotional feeling (e.g., love, hate, like, dislike) that a person forms about his or her job, and this affective state results from whether or not the job meets the needs, wants, and desires of the person (Cranny, Smith, & Stone, 1992). Job involvement, however, is the cognitive connection the person has with his or her job (Kanungo, 1982a; Rabinowitz & Hall, 1977). As Brooke, Russell, and Price (1988) pointed out, job satisfaction is the “emotional state of liking one’s job,” whereas job involvement is the “cognitive belief state of psychological identification with one’s job” (p. 139). Job satisfaction and job involvement can occur independently of one another. A person can identify with the job even though they gain no satisfaction from the job (Kanungo, 1982b). Likewise, a person can gain satisfaction from the job but not psychologically connect with the job. Research has empirically demonstrated that they are distinct concepts (Blau, 1985; Brooke et al., 1988; Lawler & Hall, 1970).

The major theoretical difference between organizational commitment and job involvement is the level of connection. Organizational commitment is the bond between the employee and the employing organization (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). Organizational commitment is generally defined as having the core elements of loyalty to the organization, identification with the organization, and involvement in the organization (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979). It is a bond with the entire employing organization and not with the job itself or a particular part of the organization (Lambert, Barton, & Hogan, 1999). Job involvement, on the other hand, involves the degree of identification with the job. It is not concerned with the bond that a person has with the organization as a whole. Organizational commitment, therefore, focuses on bond at the organizational level and job involvement focuses on bond at the job level (Brown, 1996; Kanungo, 1982a). It has been empirically demonstrated that organizational commitment and job involvement are distinct concepts (Blau, 1987; Brooke et al., 1988; Morrow & McElroy, 1986).
Job Stress

Job stress is the degree of psychological strain felt from work (Cullen et al., 1985; Grossi et al., 1996; Triplett et al., 1996). Job stress is harmful to the employee and the employing organization over the long run. Stress can reduce the well-being of the person (Matteson & Ivancevich, 1987). Long-term exposure to job stress has been linked with medical problems and even early death (Cheek & Miller, 1983; Woodruff, 1993). Exposure to the job stress over long periods of time has been linked with job burnout, mental health problems, and substance abuse (Kahn, 1987; Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Matteson & Ivancevich, 1987; Neveu, 2007; Schaufeli & Peeters, 2000). It has also been linked with increased family problems and divorce (Cheek, 1984; Cheek & Miller, 1983). Job stress can lead to a reduced quality of interactions with co-workers and inmates and reduced job performance (Lambert, Hogan, & Griffin, 2008). In the end, job stress costs the employee and the employer (Lester, Nebel, & Baum, 1994; Matteson & Ivancevich, 1987). Because of the costs of stress, it is important to explore all the possible antecedents of stress among staff at private correctional facilities.

The person-environment theory is important in understanding the relation between a worker and the employing organization in explaining the perceptions, attitudes, views, intentions, and behaviors of the employee (Cable & Edwards, 2004). The person-environment theory is based on an interactional perspective in that the interaction between a person and his or her environment helps shape various outcomes, meaning that neither the individual nor the situation accounts for the outcome alone; rather, they work in conjunction with one another (Sekiguchi, 2004a). At its basic premise, the person-environment fit theory is defined as the match between a person and his or her environment (Edwards, Cable, Williamson, Lambert, & Shipp, 2006; Kristof, 1996). As such, there needs to be congruence between the attributes, needs, and wants of the staff member and the work environment (Cable & Edwards, 2004). If there is a fit between the worker and the work environment, usually there are positive outcomes for the worker and the organization. Similarly, if there is a poor fit between the employee and the work environment, negative outcomes generally result (Edwards et al., 2006; Kristof, 1996).

Previous research has shown that job stress for private correctional staff arises as a result of stimuli that cause strain, frustration, and anxiety among staff, whereas other factors can actually make the job less stressful (Lambert & Hogan, 2009c; Lambert, Hogan, Camp, & Ventura, 2006; Lambert, Hogan et al., 2005). Stimuli that cause stress are called stressors and those that help alleviate job stress or protect workers from it are called buffers. One possible antecedent not fully explored is job involvement. It could be that job involvement helps make the job more pleasant and helps buffer the employee from other workplace stressors. On the basis of the person-environment fit
theory, job involvement can be seen as a valuable resource that can help staff members to experience less strain at work and helps provide a buffer against work stressors (Lee & Ashford, 1996; Neveu, 2007; Sekiguchi, 2004a, 2004b). Staff members who psychologically identify with their job may look forward to work and may be less troubled by strains at work (Lambert, 2008). In the end, job involvement can provide people with purpose and make them feel more positive about the job and themselves. In addition, under the job demands model as part of the person-environment fit, a lack of job involvement can be a stressor for staff members (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; Neveu, 2007; Sekiguchi, 2004a, 2004b). Low job involvement can lead to a feeling of dread of going to work day after day. This places demands on the person, which in turn raises the chances of becoming stressed (Neveu, 2007). Job involvement was therefore predicted to have a negative relation with job stress for staff working in private correctional facilities.

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is the degree that a person likes his or her job (Hopkins, 1983; Locke, 1976; Spector, 1996). As with job stress, job satisfaction can have important outcomes for staff members and private correctional facilities. Among private prison staff, job satisfaction has been positively linked with increased productivity, heightened satisfaction with life, and reduced intent to quit (Lambert & Hogan, 2009a, 2009c; Lambert et al., 2009; Lambert, Hogan, & Griffin, 2008). It is important to explore the variables that help shape the job satisfaction of those working in the field of private corrections. Those individuals who are involved in their jobs probably enjoy going to work, which, in turn, increases the chances of their satisfaction from the job (Lambert, 2008). In addition, those employees who psychologically identify with the job are more likely to put forth effort at work, and this extra effort increases the chances that they will perform well and be rewarded (Kanungo, 1982b; Lawler & Hall, 1970). Being successful at work and being recognized and rewarded raises the likelihood of deriving satisfaction from the job. Likewise, low job involvement decreases the chances of being satisfied with the job. Low job involvement means working a job that the person does not feel is important to him or her, and this lack of interest probably affects motivation as well as a sense of purpose. In the end, job satisfaction is likely to suffer. It was predicted that among private correctional staff, job involvement would have a positive association with job satisfaction.

Organizational Commitment

As previously mentioned, organizational commitment is the bond between the staff member and the employing organization (Mowday et al., 1979;
Organizational commitment is another important work outcome. Lincoln and Kalleberg (1990) argued that “the committed employee’s involvement in the organization takes on moral overtones, and his [or her] stake extends beyond the satisfaction of merely personal interest in employment, income, and intrinsically rewarding work” (p. 22). Among private prison staff, organizational commitment has been linked with increased support for rehabilitation efforts for inmates, increased productivity, altruistic help for co-workers, and decreased intentions to quit (Lambert & Hogan, 2009a, 2009b; Lambert, Hogan, & Griffin, 2008). The potential benefits of high commitment and the costly consequences of low commitment, exploring and identifying the factors that may influence organizational commitment are important.

Job involvement is a possible antecedent. Staff members with higher levels of job involvement are psychologically attached to their jobs. They are aware that it is the organization that created this job and hired them to fill it. This increases the chances that the staff member will view the organization favorably and bond with it. Oppositely, those with low job involvement may blame the organization and may be less likely to be committed to the organization. Job involvement was, therefore, predicted to have a positive relation with organizational commitment among private correctional staff.

Absenteeism

Worker attendance is a vital element for managing the productivity of any organization, including private correctional facilities, which often operate on a thin margin of profit (Lambert, Edwards, Camp, & Saylor, 2005). Absenteeism occurs when a person misses hours or days of scheduled work periods (Huczynski & Fitzpatrick, 1989; Lambert, Edwards et al., 2005; Rhodes & Steers, 1990). A work absence can be scheduled ahead of time (e.g., doctor appointment) or be unscheduled (e.g., calling in sick a few hours before the start of a work shift). Being absent from work has direct and indirect effects on a private correctional facility. The direct costs are lost productivity, sick pay, cost of overtime to fill the position, and overstaffing (Huczynski & Fitzpatrick, 1989). Overstaffing is scheduling additional staff members in advance to fill in for those employees who may be absent. The indirect costs are the use of staff members to fill in for the absent staff member who may not be as knowledgeable for a particular post (e.g., a staff member who is filling in may not know all the inmates in a housing unit, as would the absent officer who is usually assigned to work this post). In addition, there is the time needed for supervisors to arrange for overtime and the impact of absenteeism on the morale of other employees (Lambert, 2001a). Absenteeism can create a hardship for other staff members, which, in the long run, hurts the morale of the staff (Lambert, Edwards et al., 2005). Absenteeism,
particularly excessive absences, can be costly for any private correctional organization.

There are two general types of absences, unavoidable and avoidable absenteeism (also called involuntary and voluntary absenteeism; Rhodes & Steers, 1990; Steers & Rhodes, 1978). Unavoidable absences are the result of conditions that are generally not under the control of the worker, such as illness or injury. Avoidable absences are those absences that could have been avoided, such as being hung-over after a night of partying, arranging medical/dental appointment at times that have the greatest disruption on the employing organization when other times are available, and just skipping work to have a day off (Lambert, 2001a). About 40% of absences fall in the avoidable category (Brooke, 1986; Lambert, Edwards et al., 2005; Rhodes & Steers, 1990). Those with job involvement tend to look forward to work (Kanungo, 1982b). They have no reason to miss work, unless there is a legitimate, pressing reason to be absent. Higher levels of job involvement should provide motivation for staff members to attend work. Alternatively, low levels of job involvement could be a force that drives people to miss work for reasons that involved staff members view as legitimate reasons. For example, a staff member with little job involvement may feel drained from attending a job that provides them no interest and seek a day off from work to recover. Therefore, job involvement was postulated to be negatively related to absenteeism among staff at private correctional facilities.

Turnover Intentions

Turnover intentions are the process of thinking, planning, and desiring to leave a job (Lambert, 2001b; Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, & Meglino, 1979). Turnover intent is usually the penultimate step of voluntary turnover (Lambert & Hogan, 2009a; Steel & Ovalle, 1984). According to Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), “The best single predictor of an individual’s behavior will be a measure of his intention to perform that behavior” (p. 369). Turnover can be costly directly and indirectly. The direct costs include the reduced productivity and the cost of overtime to cover the job of the staff member who quit (Lambert & Hogan 2009a; Mowday et al., 1982). In addition, there is the cost of hiring a replacement, including the costs of recruitment, background checks, and training (Lambert, 2001b). Private correctional facilities must take the time and effort to hire those who are qualified to work in a correctional setting. This is neither quick nor inexpensive. The indirect costs include the loss of expertise of the staff member, understaffing, and the loss of social networks and lines of communication (Mitchell, MacKenzie, Styve, & Gover, 2000; Stohr, Self, & Lovrich, 1992). It takes time for correctional staff to develop the skills and contacts that are critical for a safe, humane, and secure institution (Lambert, 2001b; Stohr et al., 1992). In addition, higher rates of
Job involvement was theorized to be negatively associated with turnover intentions among staff at private correctional facilities. Those with high job involvement have formed a psychological bond with the job. This bond reduces the chances that staff would want to voluntarily quit their jobs. Alternatively, staff with low job involvement have less of a reason to remain employed at the particular private correctional organization. They have little psychological connection with their jobs. Those alienated from their jobs may, over time, develop a strong desire to leave their jobs.

HYPOTHESES

To reiterate, the following hypotheses were made:

Hypothesis 1: Job involvement will have a negative effect on job stress among private correctional staff.
Hypothesis 2: Job involvement will have a positive effect on job satisfaction among private correctional staff.
Hypothesis 3: Job involvement will have a positive effect on organizational commitment among private correctional staff.
Hypothesis 4: Job involvement will have a negative effect on absenteeism among private correctional staff.
Hypothesis 5: Job involvement will have a negative effect on turnover intentions among private correctional staff.

METHODOLOGY

Respondents

A Midwestern private correctional facility was selected to survey employees. At the time of the survey, the facility housed 450 youthful offenders who were under 20 years old. All of the offenders at this private, closed, high-security correctional facility had been sentenced in state court to adult sentences for violent crimes. All available staff members were provided a survey packet; however, some staff members were not available because of vacation leave, sick leave, administrative leave, and other similar reasons. Of the 220 staff members, 200 received the survey packet. This packet contained a cover letter, the survey, a return envelope, and a bifurcated raffle ticket. The cover letter explained the nature of the study, that human subjects review approval had been obtained, that participation was voluntary, how to complete and return the survey, how to be part of the raffle, and responses would be anonymous and confidential. To increase the response
rate, a raffle of cash prizes ranging from $50 to $150 was offered to those staff members who returned half of the raffle ticket regardless of whether the survey was completed. Staff members were informed to keep the other half of the raffle ticket. The raffle tickets were removed and separated from the surveys so it was impossible to link a survey with a specific staff member. About a month after the survey packets were provided to employees, a drawing of raffle tickets was held at an employee function, and individuals with a winning raffle ticket were awarded a particular cash prize. Prizes that were not claimed were donated to the employee organization. A total of $500 was given out from the raffle. Any unclaimed raffle prizes were donated to the employee association at the private correctional facility. On the basis of the 200 staff members who were provided the survey packet, a total of 160 usable surveys were returned, representing a response rate of 80%. \(^1\)

Staff members holding a wide variety of positions at the private correctional facility were surveyed. Staff members in upper administration were the only group not surveyed. In terms of position, 62% of the respondents indicated that they were correctional officers, 9% were supervisors, 6% worked in the business office, 4% worked in education, 4% were unit management staff (i.e., counselors, case managers, and unit managers), 3% worked in the medical department, and 13% worked in other areas. Of the respondents, 59% were men and 41% were women. The median age was 33 years and ranged from 19 to 49 years. The median tenure at the facility was 17 months and ranged from 1 to 53 months. The reason for the low number of months at the facility was that it had been opened slightly less than five years prior to the survey. About 6% of the respondents marked that their highest educational level was a high school diploma or general equivalency degree, 47% reported some college but no degree, 24% an associate’s degree, 16% a bachelor’s degree, and 7% a graduate or professional degree. Seventy-nine percent of the respondents indicated that they were white, 11% black, 2% Hispanic, 3% Native American, and 4% were another race/ethnic status. Institutional records indicated that, at the time of the survey, approximately 81% of the staff members at the facility were white and 61% were male. The median age range of the entire population of staff members was 31–35 years, the average tenure was about 20 months, and about 66% held the position of correctional officer; therefore, the respondents appeared to be demographically representative of the staff at the private correctional facility.

Variables

**DEPENDENT VARIABLES**

Job stress, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, absenteeism, and turnover intentions were the dependent variables in the study. The items
measuring job stress, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment were measured with a response scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A job stress variable was created using five items (e.g., “I am usually under a lot of pressure when I am at work” and “When I’m at work I often feel tense or uptight”) from Crank, Regoli, Hewitt, and Culbertson (1995), and it measured the degree of perceived stress from work. The responses to five items were summed together to form an index measuring job stress. The job stress index had a Cronbach’s alpha of .82.

Five items were used to measure job satisfaction (e.g., “I like my job better than the average worker does” and “Most days I am enthusiastic about my job”). The items were adapted from Brayfield and Rothe (1951) and had a Cronbach’s alpha value of .92. They were summed together to form an additive index. This index measured global satisfaction rather than facet-oriented job satisfaction. Facet-based measures ask people about their satisfaction with specific areas of their jobs, such as pay, supervision, tasks (Smith, Kendall, & Hulin, 1969). Global measures, on the other hand, ask people to what degree they like their job in general (Cranny et al., 1992). According to Camp (1994), global measures are recommended because they allow “respondents to assess mentally what they feel are relevant dimensions in formulating a response to the issue of job satisfaction” rather than restricting them to think about specific facets of the job” (p. 286).

Organizational commitment was measured using six items (e.g., “I feel very little loyalty to this prison” (reverse coded) and “I find that my values and the prison’s values are very similar”). The items were from Mowday et al. (1982), and tapped into the affective dimension rather than the continuance dimension of organizational commitment. Continuance organizational commitment is based on the sunken costs (e.g., pension plan, pay grade, social relationships with co-workers) people have with an organization, and these investments/sunken costs bond the person to remain with the organization (Becker, 1960; McElroy, Morrow, & Wardlow, 1999). Affective organizational commitment focuses on the psychological bond of the person with the organization. According to Griffin and Hepburn (2005), “affective commitment stems from an emotional attachment to the organization and is especially sensitive to work experiences” (p. 612). It is generally the form of commitment that is measured in the literature (Lambert, Hogan, & Jiang, 2008). The six items were summed together, and the resulting index had a Cronbach’s alpha of .88.

Absenteeism was measured by asking the respondent “How many days of sick leave have you used in the past six months,” and the response options were 0, 1, 2, and 3 or more days. There are two major approaches to measuring employee absences. The first examines the type of absence, such as all absences from work, scheduled in advance versus unscheduled, short-term versus long-term, paid versus unpaid, and so forth (Rhodes & Steers, 1990). The second focuses on the metric used to measure absenteeism
Absence metric can further be divided into magnitude, duration, and frequency. In this study, we used a duration measure. Furthermore, there are two general sources to obtain absenteeism data, official organizational records and self-reported (Johns, 1994). Because official attendance and absence records could not be released by the private correctional facility, we used self-reported absenteeism. Last, self-reported duration absenteeism measures are commonly used (Lambert, Edwards, et al., 2005).

The turnover intentions variable was measured using five items that were summed together to form an index. Turnover intentions are theorized to have the cognitive parts of (a) thinking of quitting, (b) planning to leave, (c) searching for alternative employment, and (d) a psychological desire to leave the job (Mobley et al., 1979). Each of the four cognitive parts of turnover intentions was measured using items from Sager, Griffeth, and Hom (1998). Thinking of quitting was measured using the two items of “In the last 6 months, have you thought about quitting your current job?” reported with a yes or no, and “I frequently think about quitting my job at this prison,” reported on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Planning on leaving was measured by “How likely is it that you will be at this job in a year from now?” reported on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (very likely) to 5 (very unlikely). Searching for alternative employment was measured using “How actively have you searched for a job with other employers in the last year?” reported on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very actively). A psychological desire to leave the job was measured using “Do you desire to voluntarily leave/quit your job?” reported with a yes (coded as 1) or no (coded as 0). The five items were summed together to form the turnover intent index, which had a Cronbach’s alpha value of .77.

**INDEPENDENT VARIABLES**

Job involvement was the independent variable of focus in the current study. Job involvement was measured by using three items (“I live, eat, and breathe my job”, “The major satisfaction in my life comes from work,” and “The most important things that happen to me in my life occur at work”). The items tapped into the importance the job had in a person’s life (i.e., the degree of psychological identification the respondent had with his or her job). The items were adopted from Kanungo (1982a, 1982b). The response scale for the items was a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (agree). The responses were summed together to form an index which had a Cronbach’s alpha value of .81.

**CONTROL VARIABLES**

The demographic characteristics of position, gender, age, tenure, educational level, and race were included in the study more as control than predictor variables. Position measured as whether the respondent worked in a correctional
officer position (coded 1) or a noncorrectional officer position (coded 0). About 62% of the respondents were correctional officers, and 38% of the respondents worked in other positions at the private correctional facility. The variable of gender was coded “1” for male respondent and “0” for female respondent. About 59% of the respondents were male. Age was measured in continuous years, and the mean age was 35.77 years ($SD = 10.82$). Tenure at the private correctional facility was measured in continuous months, and the mean tenure was 20.64 ($SD = 13.84$). Educational level was measured as a variable representing whether the respondent had earned a college degree (coded as 1) or not (coded as 0). Approximately 47% of the respondents had earned some type of college degree (i.e., associates, bachelors, masters, or professional). Last, race/ethnicity was collapsed into a dichotomous variable representing whether the respondent was white/non-Hispanic (coded 1) or Nonwhite (coded 0). Of the respondents, 79% were white and 21% were non-white.

**FINDINGS**

The descriptive statistics for the variables in this study are presented in Table 1. There appeared to be significant variation in the dependent and independent variables (i.e., none of the variables were constants). The median and mean were similar to one another for the variables, suggesting that the variables were normally distributed. Statistical tests were conducted that showed the data was normally distributed. On the basis of the skewness and kurtosis statistics, there appeared to be no problem with skewness or kurtosis. Cronbach’s alpha, a measure of internal reliability, was above .70 for all the indexes, which indicates a good level of internal reliability for these variables. Factor analyses were conducted for the items measuring the indexes. The items loaded on the predictor factors which indicated that there was construct (i.e., convergent) validity for the index variables.

The Pearson product moment correlations are presented in Table 2. Job involvement had a negative correlation with job stress. The more involvement a staff member reported, the less stress from the job they reported. Job involvement was positively correlated with higher levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment to the organization. Job involvement was correlated with reduced use of sick leave. Last, higher levels of job involvement were associated with reduced intentions to leave employment with the private correctional facility.

Ordinary least squares regression equations were estimated with job stress, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, absenteeism, and turnover intentions as the dependent variables (i.e., a total of five ordinary least squares regression equations were estimated). The independent variables in each of the ordinary least squares regression equations were the
TABLE 1 Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>38% non-CO (coded 0) 62% CO (coded 1)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>41% female (coded 0) 59% male (coded 1)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Measured in continuous years</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>35.77</td>
<td>10.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td>Measured in continuous months employed at the private prison</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20.64</td>
<td>13.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational level</td>
<td>53% had no college degree (coded 0) 47% had a college degree (coded 1)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>21% non-white (coded 0) 79% white (coded 1)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job involvement</td>
<td>3-item additive index, ( \alpha = .81 )</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.90</td>
<td>2.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job stress</td>
<td>5-item additive index, ( \alpha = .82 )</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14.29</td>
<td>4.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job satisfaction</td>
<td>5-item additive index, ( \alpha = .92 )</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18.34</td>
<td>4.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational commitment</td>
<td>6-item additive index, ( \alpha = .88 )</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18.14</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absenteeism</td>
<td>Number of days of sick leave used in last 6 months (1, 2, or 3 or more days)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnover intentions</td>
<td>5-item additive index, ( \alpha = .77 )</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8.02</td>
<td>3.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CO stands for Correctional officer.

personal characteristics and job involvement. Ordinary least squares regression allows for the effects of a variable to be estimated while controlling for the shared effects with the other independent variables (Berry, 1993). The results are reported in Table 3. On the basis of the correlation matrix, the variance inflation factor scores (not reported), and tolerance statistics (not reported), collinearity and multicollinearity were not a problem in any of the ordinary least squares regression equations. For the job stress equation, the \( R^2 \) value was .20. This means that the personal characteristics and job involvement accounted for 20% of the variance in the job stress variable. Of the personal characteristics, only tenure had a statistically significant effect. As tenure at the private correctional facility increased, the level of job stress reported also increased. Job involvement had a negative effect on job stress. Based upon the standardized regression coefficients (\( \beta \) in Table 3), job involvement had a larger sized effect on job stress than did tenure.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Position</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td>.28**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.53**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Tenure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.20**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Educational level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.29**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Job involvement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.16*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Job stress</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Job satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.41**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Organizational commitment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.70**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Absenteeism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.31**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Turnover intentions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.37**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. See Table 1 for a description of the variables and how they were measured.

*p ≤ .05, **p ≤ .01.
TABLE 3 Effects of Job Involvement on the Job Stress, Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment, Absenteeism, and Turnover Intentions of Private Prison Staff (N = 160)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Job stress</th>
<th>Job satisfaction</th>
<th>Organizational commitment</th>
<th>Absenteeism</th>
<th>Turnover intentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>β</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>β</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>−1.92</td>
<td>−.20*</td>
<td>−.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>−1.13</td>
<td>−.12</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>.15*</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>−.01</td>
<td>−.03</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>−.06</td>
<td>−.17*</td>
<td>−.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational level</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>−.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>−.14</td>
<td>−.01</td>
<td>−.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job involvement</td>
<td>−.64</td>
<td>−.36**</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.36**</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. See Table 1 for a description of the variables and how they were coded.

*p ≤ .05. **p ≤ .01.

For the job satisfaction ordinary least squares regression equation, the independent variables explained 26% of the variance of job satisfaction. Among the personal characteristics, position, gender, and tenure had significant associations. In general, correctional officers reported lower job satisfaction as compared with staff members holding positions in other areas. Male staff members in general reported higher levels of job satisfaction than did their female counterparts. Tenure had a negative relation with job satisfaction. Job involvement also had a significant effect. Increases in job involvement were associated with increases in reported satisfaction from the job. Among the significant variables, job involvement has the largest effect on job satisfaction.

The $R^2$ for the organizational commitment equation was .26. None of the personal characteristics had a significant effect on commitment. Job involvement had a significant positive effect. Increases with psychological identification with the job were associated with increased commitment to the organization.

The independent variables accounted for 8% of the variance in the Absenteeism equation. The only personal characteristic variable to be associated with use of sick leave in this equation was tenure. As tenure increased, the use of sick leave increased, even when controlling for age. Job involvement was significantly associated with decreased absenteeism from work. Both tenure and job involvement had similar sized effects.

The final ordinary least squares regression equation was Turnover Intentions. About 20% of the observed variance in the turnover intentions index was accounted for by the personal characteristics and job involvement variables. The only personal characteristic to have a significant effect was age. As age increased, turnover intentions dropped. Likewise, job involvement had a significant negative effect on turnover intentions. Increases in job involvement were associated with decreases in intentions to leave the job.
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

All five hypotheses were supported. Job involvement had significant effects on all the predicted outcome variables. Those who are more involved with their jobs reported lower levels of job stress. Job involvement may help buffer staff members from other workplace stressors or a lack of job involvement could be a stressor in itself. This is a speculation that was not directly tested in the current study and needs to be further researched.

Similarly, private correctional staff who reported higher levels of job involvement also reported higher levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment. It could be that one of their needs being met by the job is to feel that the job is important to them. It seems likely that most people wish to connect with their job. It is probably psychologically difficult to work a job that holds little meaning to the person. Thus, job involvement may provide a person satisfaction with the job. It could also be that job involvement is linked to work motivation as proposed by Lawler and Hall (1970), and this propels the person to do better at the job. In the end, this probably results in intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction for the staff member. Those with low job involvement are basically alienated from their jobs, and it is unlikely that being alienated from the job will lead to feelings of job satisfaction. Likewise, those who identify with their jobs see the organization in a more favorable light and are willing to bond with it. Those who have a psychological bond with the job are probably happy with the organization for providing them with this job, and this increases the level of the bond between these staff members and the private correctional organization. What is known is that job involvement had a negative relation with job stress. In the end, job involvement among private correctional staff is linked with increased job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

As hypothesized, job involvement was negatively associated with absenteeism and turnover intentions. It appears that higher levels of job involvement pull staff members towards work, and lower levels of job involvement pull staff members away from work. Job involvement provides staff members with incentives to attend work and not to use sick leave unless necessary. Similarly, those with low levels of job involvement are probably pulled away from work by things in their life that are more important to them than their job. This group of staff may be more inclined to use sick leave for purposes an employer might view as illegitimate, such as taking a day off work. In addition, job involvement was inversely linked to job stress. Long term exposure to heightened levels of job stress is linked with increased physical and mental health problems (Kahn, 1987; Matteson & Ivancevich, 1987; Neveu, 2007). This can lead to the need for increased use of sick leave. It is important to note that of all the dependent variables, the least amount of observed variance was accounted for in the absenteeism model. Specifically, the personal characteristics and job involvement variables accounted for 8% variance in
the absenteeism measure. The low R-squared value is probably partially the result of the type of absence measure used. A general duration measure was used. A stronger relation between job involvement and absenteeism may be observed if a frequency measure that included why a staff member was absent. According to Blau and Boal (1987, p. 289), “frequent absences of short duration may reflect attitudinal problems.” Short term absences may reflect taking a day off to have a day off, while long term absences may reflect underlying medical problems (Lambert, Edwards, et al., 2005). In addition, staff could be asked if they had taken a sick day just to have a day off in a given time frame (Brooke & Price, 1989). It is predicted that job involvement would have a stronger relation with avoidable forms of absenteeism.

Job involvement appears to also lower the intentions to quit. Those who are involved with the job are pulled to want to remain in employment with the private correctional organization. It makes sense that those who identify with their jobs would want to remain at their jobs. Similarly, those with low job involvement are probably being pulled away from the organization and as such have a greater desire to quit. The job is not psychologically important to them, and there are probably other areas of their lives that they are more involved with than their jobs. In this study, the relation between job involvement and turnover intentions was examined. It is unknown if turnover intentions actually lead to voluntary turnover, and if job involvement is related to voluntary turnover. This is an area that needs to be researched further. In addition, future research needs to explore whether turnover intentions lead to other forms of withdrawal from the job, such as job performance. It could be that while those with high turnover intentions do not leave, they do not perform well at the organization because they have psychologically withdrawn from work and are no longer motivated to do well.

Although the results of this study are informative, the study is not without limitations. It was a single study of staff at one private correctional facility. Additional research at other private correctional institutions is needed to determine whether the results can be replicated. In addition, longitudinal research is needed to determine the direction of the relations. This study was cross-sectional, and as such, the causal direction of the relation were theorized but cannot be empirically demonstrated. The relation between job involvement and the five areas of job stress, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, absenteeism, and turnover intentions were explored. Other outcome areas should be studied. For example, Blau and Boal (1987) argued that workers with high levels of job involvement are star employees who will be instrumental in the long term success of the organization. Future research is needed to determine whether private correctional staff with high levels of job involvement do in fact put forth extra prosocial (i.e., helping co-workers, making use of free time to be organizationally productive) and work efforts which help the facility to be successful over time. Future
research may wish to use more complex measures of the latent variables. In this study, a three-item measure was used. It is unknown if a more in-depth measure of job involvement would alter the results. Moreover, the findings of the current study indicate that job involvement may be important in influencing the levels of job stress, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, absenteeism, and turnover intentions. Each of these is an important outcome area of administrative concern; however, in order for administrators to increase job involvement, they need to know the variables that help shape staff job involvement. There is almost no literature on the factors that shape job involvement for either private or public correctional staff. Research is needed to identify the variables that influence job involvement among private correctional staff. Without this additional research, it is impossible to determine the antecedents and consequences of job involvement among private correctional staff. Brown (1996) pointed out that “a deep understanding of job involvement and its antecedents and consequent influences has the potential to enrich a fundamental aspect of human experience (i.e., work) and contribute to heightened productivity in organizations and society by fostering greater use of human potential” (p. 253).

In closing, private security is a growing and dynamic trend in the U.S. One area of private security that has played an important role is private correctional facilities. During the past three decades, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of private correctional facilities. Staff members are critical elements of any private correctional institution. Staff are the heart and soul of any private facility. Only they can ensure a humane, secure, and safe institution. With the growth of private correctional facilities, there is a need to understand how workplace factors influence staff. Although there is a small and growing body of research on staff at private correctional organizations, there needs to be much more. In order for private correctional organizations to be successful, they need unstressed, satisfied and committed staff members who attend work consistently and wish to remain with the organization. In this study, job involvement had a negative effect on job stress, absenteeism, and turnover intentions, and had positive effects on job satisfaction and organizational commitment among staff at a private Midwestern correctional facility. This suggests the need for administrators to invest in interventions and changes that should lead to increased job involvement. The good news is that private correctional facilities usually have greater flexibility to make changes to improve the work environment than do many public correctional agencies. Camp and Gaes (2001) pointed out that “in many circumstances, public sector managers are bound by more workplace restrictions such as those that limit their ability to reward workers, reduce their flexibility in assigning workers to jobs outside of their position descriptions, and constrain their decision making in hiring and firing workers” (p. 292). These findings of the current study also suggest the need to explore further the causes and effects of job involvement among staff at different private correctional
institutions. Much more research is required on the issue of job involvement among staff. It is hoped that this study will generate more interest in job involvement and spark further research in the area.

NOTES

1. The survey measured a wide array of areas concerning the perceptions, views, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors of employees. There were more than 220 questions on the survey. Because of the wealth of information from the survey, other studies have been conducted using different parts of the survey. The full citations of these studies are available upon request. None of these previous studies examined the effects of job involvement on the job stress, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, absenteeism, or turnover intentions among private prison staff.

2. Magnitude is the portion of employees of an organization who have been absent during a given time frame. Duration refers to the total amount of time absence from work in a given time frame. Frequency refers to the number of times a person is absent in a given time frame (Brooke, 1986; Rhodes & Steers, 1990). For example, an employee who used 36 hr of sick leave across eight different occasions would be coded as using 40 hr of sick leave under a duration measure and as being absent eight times on a frequency measure.

REFERENCES

Job Involvement


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