

**Mental health issues are rampant among prison staff and officers,
and nothing is being done**

In 2019 ABC News reported that correctional officers' suicides tied for the most in a single year at 13 deaths. Yet despite that nothing is being initiated to give therapy, training, improve work conditions, and improve management relationships with prison workers. Correctional officers have a much higher rate of PTSD and mental illness compared to the public. These mental health issues lead to many problems for the correctional staff's lives such as drug/alcohol abuse, divorce, and violent family lives. Furthermore, to compound the issues an alarming number of correctional officers burn out and leave the job which only intensifies the problems for those still working in penal facilities.

PTSD is a terrible issue that destroys many of the lives that it affects. One study on correctional officers examined how they experience symptoms of PTSD. The results showed that 34% of prison officers reported that they had symptoms of it (Regehr, 2021). Another study showed that correctional officers' suicide rate was 50% higher than the general public at 19.4 deaths per 100,000 in guards to 12.6 deaths per 100,000 in the general public (Regehr, 2021). In California, a study considered how many correctional officers have attempted or considered suicide. The results detailed that out of 8,300 officers who completed the study 10% of them had attempted or considered suicide (Regehr, 2021). That rate that is three times higher than the general public. Furthermore, these numbers could be on the lower end due to the fact of many may feel ashamed or unable to show that they have or had PTSD or thoughts of suicide/ hurting themselves.

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Even if prison staff doesn't have PTSD, it is almost impossible for them to avoid watching extreme violence, injuries, and death in their line of work. A study showed that 100% of correctional officers have reported some exposure to one of those things. In addition, they receive more nonfatal injuries or illnesses than any other occupational group at a rate of 53.5 per 10,000, which can be compared to 2.9 per 10,000 of general work. The work fatality rate is 2.7 per 100,000 with the majority of the deaths being assaults or violent acts towards the correctional officers. Going on it is reported that 97% of 240 correctional officers have reported a verbal or physical assault with and without a weapon towards them. While 93% reported that they saw a resident attempting suicide or completed suicide. Lastly, 98% reported that they have experience with indirect assaults. Being in a line of work so dangerous and depressing leads to many acquiring major depression disorder and anxiety disorders.

Stress is a major problem in correctional officers' line of work due to the high workload and mandatory overtime due to lack of staffing. They also regularly experience feelings of being within a poor social class and have a conflict with their roles and their ideas. Furthermore, the poor communication from superiors and a sense that the organization is treating its employees unjust and unfair leads to high levels of stress. These issues cause the officers to have negative attitudes and a high burnout rate which only makes things into an endless loop of stress. The combination of these issues was termed as corrections fatigue, which has the symptoms of, negative personality changes, socially dysfunctional thinking, and a decline in health and function. These problems lead to the correctional officers having lower decision-making ability, lower job satisfaction, and a change of their perception of work-related danger. In addition, these problems also tend to lead to large amounts of alcohol consumption and terrible sleep patterns,

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high divorce rates, domestic violence, and a feeling of shame. Lastly, the extreme stress and its problems lead to yet again depression, anxiety, and PTSD.

There are a few major solutions required to reduce these issues and give the help to the correctional officers that they desperately need. The first is that the politicians and the general public have the realization that the correction facilities are caught in a cycle of trauma exposure and re-traumatization. Knowing this would help reduce the shame and fear that correctional officers feel about talking about their issues and allow each other to understand their issues better. The next step would be training the correctional officers in trauma-informed practices and providing trauma-informed care for the correctional officers who are struggling. A strong follow up would be an increase in pay for the correctional officers. This would take away the idea that being a correctional officer is in poor social class and have an increase in more people becoming one to help reduce the overtime and reduce the overworked

Those who would oppose improving the mental health conditions frequently cite the cost of enacting these programs. The justice system is already widely known for being overly packed and massively underfunded. However, the improvement of mental health conditions would decrease the cost for correctional officers' overtime as fewer officers would likely call in sick leaving others to pick up their shifts. The burnout rate would slowly decrease, which would reduce the cost of finding and hiring new officers all the time as turnover would likely decrease. In addition, the improvements in the officer's mental health, the relations between them and the residents of the facilities would also likely improve—another cost savings.

The lack of concern for mental health for correctional officers is heartbreaking. To continuously not give resources into the correctional facilities and make policies to help those who are guarding people we deemed “dangerous to society” while they struggle with mental

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issues, physical and verbal abuse is outrageous. We need to help reduce the stress and workload for them, to reduce the causes for their mental issues. If not the stress, workload, and mental issues will continue to rise, which will only lead to more suicides, more families getting destroyed and the correctional system being increasingly more broken.

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