



PERSPECTIVES ON CORRECTIONAL OFFICER HEALTH



CATERINA SPINARIS, PHD, LPC
DESERT WATERS CORRECTIONAL OUTREACH

MANDATORY OVERTIME AND CHRONIC PARTIAL SLEEP DEPRIVATION A FORMIDABLE FOE HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

A NOT UNCOMMON SITUATION IN CORRECTIONS

6 hours ago • 

Anyone else working ridiculously long hours. We are show short handed in our state, we are all working mandatory 16 hour days. 6 days. I love what I do but man, it takes a toll. I've been doing this for 3 years.

   20

22 Comments

 Like

 Comment

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

- *“Employees who are working double shifts and/or shifts 7 days a week, particularly in a corrections environment which is a **DANGEROUS** environment, are in **survival mode**. They are not eager and ready to engage with their clientele to promote healing and reduce future criminal behaviors.*
- *I don’t care who you are, how young you are, or how much education you have to do this work, **your body and mind can’t overcome the strain of this type of schedule** to be engaged in this type of program.”*

Susan Jones, PhD, Warden (Retired)

SLEEP

- ***Non-negotiable BIOLOGICAL/PHYSIOLOGICAL NECESSITY***
- Affects:
 - brain function
 - physical health
 - mental health

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

- *“Mandatory overtime makes me feel like I am **running at half speed with no hope of getting caught up**. It is even worse if I have had something planned or it occurs on a holiday. The more it happens, the worse it gets. **I am not sure you ever mentally recover. It is always worse the next time it happens, no matter the time in between.** It is one of the reasons I left custody even though I am less safe in my current assignment. It is also **one of the reasons that officers resign.**”*

Anonymous

INSUFFICIENT SLEEP OUTCOMES

- ***Cognitive impairments:*** attention, reaction time, executive function, working memory
- ***Mood disturbances:*** irritability, anxiety, depression
- ***Behavioral disturbances:*** interpersonal conflict, combativeness, excessive use of force
- ***Physical symptoms/disease:*** increased inflammation (associated with obesity, diabetes, heart disease, some cancers, elevated mortality risk); low energy; Alzheimer-like neuron changes

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

- *“You are not mentally prepared to work for 16 hours. It is hard to work 16 hours and then get up again the next morning prepared to deal with the inmate population. You have to be able to quickly diffuse situations. I also have not brought enough food to have two meals, so **I begin feeling sluggish.** Imagine the effects after 16 hours of dealing with various personalities. **Tempers flare. Things that would not normally bother you are enhanced ten times and incidents get out of control quickly.**”*

Anonymous

SLEEP DEPRIVATION = ALCOHOL INTOXICATION

HOURS AWAKE	EFFECTS ON DRIVING BAC EQUIVALENT
18	0.05%
24	0.10%

https://www.cdc.gov/sleep/about_sleep/drowsy_driving.html

BAC = Blood Alcohol Content

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

- *“Due to mandatory overtime I don't get to see my family, as I often have to work 16 hours. My commute home is a challenge to stay awake. **I have almost fallen asleep behind the wheel.** When I get home I try to go to sleep right away because I get up 5-6 hours later, sometimes less, because I am too wired to sleep due to stress and due to drinking caffeinated beverages throughout the night to stay alert. When I am mandated I am not able to take my nighttime medication, so I fall behind in my schedule in taking my daytime meds. **My health deteriorates. I am tired and irritable. At work, I am not as alert as I want to be, fighting off sleep and fatigue.** I can be doing a back to back mandatory or maybe get one day in between. At times I have to call in sick to get some rest.”*

Anonymous

INSUFFICIENT SLEEP & MENTAL HEALTH SYMPTOMS

- **Insufficient sleep is strongly associated with mental health symptoms**
- **A dose-response relationship** exists between insufficient sleep and reported mental health symptoms

N=110,496 college students, including 8462 varsity athletes

Ramsey, T., Athey, A., Ellis, J., Tubbs, A., Turner, R., Killgore, W. D. S., Warlick, C., Alfonso-Miller, P., and Grandner, M. A. (2019). Dose-response relationship between insufficient sleep and mental health symptoms in collegiate student athletes and non-athletes. SLEEP, 42 (Abstract Supplement): A362.

INSUFFICIENT SLEEP & MENTAL HEALTH SYMPTOMS

REPORTED SYMPTOMS	SYMPTOM RISK INCREASE per each additional night of insufficient sleep
Depressed mood	21%
Hopelessness & anger	24%
Anxiety & desire to self-harm	25%
Functional problems	28%
Thoughts of suicide	28%

N=110,496

Ramsey et al., 2019

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

- *“Correctional Officers are stressed out and stretched as thin as they can go. Officers are burned out and unhealthy and suffer because **we are not allowed sufficient time to decompress. We feel like hostages.** We feel like no one is listening, and that administration does not care, and that there is no end, no relief in sight.*
- ***Some will quit. Some will make grave errors in judgment.** And some will stay and keep fighting. But all of them, **all of us, are wearing thin.** If I feel like I am drowning, if I feel like I am in a situation that is never going to change, how can I get better? At some point you just have to let go and swallow the water.”*

Corporal William Young

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

- *“It doesn't matter what type of resources you have in place for your staff if they can't go home when they want to. You can tell me to hydrate and meditate and suggest that I eat better and run more, but **after working back to back 16 hour shifts all I want to do is sit on my porch and talk to my family for 15 minutes before I have to sleep for 4 hours and go do it all over again.**”*
- *You don't have to recognize me as a first responder, **just figure out a way that I can go home at the end of my shift.** Recognize that I am **doing a very dangerous and thankless job on 3-4 hours of sleep.** Understand that **I have been on my feet for 16 hours and I have been awake for 30.** Understand that **we only care about one thing, and that one thing is going home.”***

Corporal William Young

CONCLUSIONS

- Across the nation, custody staff often suffer from chronic partial sleep deprivation due to being mandated to work overtime on a regular and long-term basis.
- This practice impairs staff's physical and mental health and functioning.
- To maintain the safety and security of institutions, and to promote the well-being of custody staff, corrections agencies MUST figure out ways to decrease the use of mandatory overtime.