

# CPH News and Views

*A semi-monthly column on emerging topics related to healthy workplaces*

## **Issue #65: Overtime work and work-family conflict among correctional supervisors**

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### **I. Work-family conflict**

Work and family are two of the most important domains in a person's life and both compete for the same time and energy resources. When the domains of work and family collide, tension and stress are produced in the form of work-family conflict. Work-family conflict occurs when resources are invested in one role (e.g., work), making participation in another role (e.g., family) difficult. Several studies have found that work-family conflict is related to a number of employment (e.g., turnover), family (marital dissatisfaction) and health-related outcomes (e.g., depression) (Greenhaus & Buetell, 1985). Further, the experience of work-family conflict may be especially intense for employees working in occupations with overtime demands, such as those working in correctional facilities (e.g., prisons and jails).

### **II. Overtime work and work-family conflict in corrections**

The demand for overtime work has increased across various U.S. correctional facilities. This surge in overtime is primarily due to rising incarceration rates, which has created budgetary constraints and staffing shortages (Swenson, Waseleski, Hartl, & 2008). For most correctional employees, overtime work is characterized by working 16 hours within a 24-hour period, and can be mandatory or voluntary. Some correctional staff may be mandated to work overtime on consecutive shifts due to staffing shortages. Most correctional agencies do not set a limit on the amount of overtime that employees can work in a single workweek. As such, a correctional employee can volunteer to work overtime hours equivalent to a second full-time and/or part-time job. Most correctional supervisors volunteer to work overtime for financial and retirement security.

For correctional supervisors, working long hours could mean that they are missing important family events and holidays. Additionally, whether mandatory or voluntary, overtime work tends to be unpredictable and occur on short notice, which can interfere with correctional employees' ability to recover from work or spend time with family. We conducted a study to examine the extent to which overtime is associated with work-family conflict and depressive symptoms among correctional supervisors (i.e., lieutenants, captains and counselor supervisors).

### **III. What we found**

We found that over one-third of our sample, who had between 16 to 20 years of tenure on the job and were close to retirement, reported working more than one overtime shift per week. These supervisors also reported greater work-family conflict.

Finally, we found that amount of overtime hours worked was directly associated with correctional supervisors' experience of work-family conflict, which in turn, made supervisors more likely to report depressive symptoms. These findings suggest that working an extended shift may reduce the time and energy resources correctional supervisors have to fully partake in family life, which in turn can take a negative toll on their mental well-being.

#### IV. Organizational Strategies for addressing overtime work to reduce work-family conflict

- Correctional agencies could consider developing policies that limit the amount of voluntary and mandatory overtime hours that employees can work in a single workweek. They could also offer staff with the opportunity to do shared overtime. This means that two staff could share the overtime hours rather than having one staff work the full overtime shift.
- Correctional agencies could consider providing correctional employees and their families resources such as counseling services and family support groups to help them cope when longer work hours are unavoidable, such as when staffing levels at a facility fall below minimum safe levels and staff are mandated to work.
- Correctional agencies could facilitate workshops on work-life balance for correctional employees and their families. This could be provided through existing committees, such as Wellness Committees, or through the Employee Assistance Program.

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**This study was supported by the CPH-NEW pilot grant program, funded by Grant Number 1 U19 OH008857 from the U.S. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).**



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