

Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment Among Probation and Parole Officers: A Case Study

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Numerous studies have focused on job satisfaction and organizational commitment of police officers and correctional personnel, but few have examined these concepts within community corrections agencies. This study draws on prior research into job satisfaction of criminal system actors and looks at the explanatory power of these concepts for probation and parole officers from one county in a northeastern state. Results indicate that employees are most satisfied when their occupational tasks are meaningful experiences into which they have input and are collaborative efforts with supervisors. Background characteristics of officers had no influence on job satisfaction, indicating that organizational culture and management style are the more important factors in explaining employee satisfaction and, possibly, retention.

"Employee satisfaction" and "organizational commitment" are two buzzwords associated with the retention of personnel in a variety of occupational settings. Nowhere are these concepts receiving more attention than in the field of corrections, where empirical links are being made between employee commitment, organizational culture, and institutional performance (Byrne, Taxman, & Hummer, in press; Hogan, Lambert, Jenkins, & Wambold, 2006). Much of the interest in assessing and analyzing employee satisfaction stems from a concern about possible on-the-job behavioral consequences (Camp, 1994). Low levels of job satisfaction among correctional employees have been shown to produce various undesirable behaviors, such as using the organization's time to pursue personal tasks, psychological and practical withdrawal from the job, and behavioral changes that alter the work place environment (Camp, 1994). Additional negative consequences associated with low levels of job satisfaction include attendance problems, higher rates of turnover, early retirements, lack of active participation in job tasks, and psychological withdrawal from work (Camp, 1994).

Job satisfaction refers to the extent that the working environment meets the needs and values of employees and the individual's response to that environment (Camp, 1994; Lambert, 2004; Tewksbury & Higgins, 2006). Lambert (2004, p. 210) defines job satisfaction as "the degree to which a person likes his/her job," while Lambert, Barton, and Hogan (1999, p. 97) define the term as "the fulfillment of gratification of certain needs that are associated with one's work."

In studies Camp (1994) and Lambert (2004) conducted, correctional worker job satisfaction was measured as fulfillment from work, pay, coworkers, supervision, and promotion. Another common measure maintains that job satisfaction is associated with five dimensions, namely skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback (Glisson & Durick, 1988). Glisson and Durick note that of these five dimensions, only three—task significance, role ambiguity, and skill variety—strongly predict levels of job satisfaction.

Models that empirically measure job characteristics and their relationship to job motivation and satisfaction have been applied to various work environments in different occupations. Some researchers rely on the response of individuals in assessing overall job satisfaction, whereas others calculate the

complex measures of job satisfaction from different dimensions of the job. Each approach has its strengths and weaknesses. Measuring the different dimensions helps to identify problem areas within the organization. For example, employees may point out that they are pleased with the salary but may be unhappy with other aspects of the organization such as how they are supervised (Camp, 1994).

Various studies have examined the predictors of job satisfaction among police officers and correctional personnel (Blau, Light, & Chamlin, 1986; Brough & Frame, 2004; Brunetto & Farr-Wharton, 2003; Cullen, Latessa, Kopache, Lombardo, & Burton, 1993; Lambert, 2004; Lambert et al., 1999; Zhao, He, & Lovrich, 2002; Zhao, Thurman, & He, 1999). As Zhao et al. (1999) indicate, two distinct models of job satisfaction are apparent in these studies. The first model focuses on demographic characteristics such as gender, ethnicity/race, educational level, rank, and years of service within the organization. The second model places emphasis on the individual's work environment. The work environment model consists of various dimensions of the work performed: skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback (Zhao et al., 1999).

Herzberg's two-factor theory of motivation (as cited in Zhao et al., 1999) has also provided a theoretical framework for scientifically assessing police officers' job satisfaction. Herzberg's theory claims that the work environment determines police officers' job satisfaction and identifies three main sources of job satisfaction in the work environment: the work itself, the responsibility one has in the work, and recognition received from performing the work (Brody, DeMarco, & Lovrich, 2002; Zhao et al., 1999).

This study suggests that similar predictors of positive or negative job satisfaction found among police or corrections officers will be found among probation/parole officers due to the commonalities all criminal justice personnel share, e.g., they are in contact with individuals who have broken society's laws. Further, criminal justice personnel are continually asked to perform their jobs in under-resourced conditions and sometimes within unsafe environments. It also is likely that many of the issues related to low levels of job satisfaction among non-criminal justice personnel apply equally to probation and parole officers. For example, the more general literature suggests that employees are better satisfied with their jobs when they are adequately recognized for a job well done and when they have an opportunity to contribute to policies and procedures of the organization (Slate, Wells, & Johnson, 2003). The current study examines the predictors of job satisfaction among probation and parole officers, drawing on the methodologies and findings of previous studies that examined both criminal justice and non-criminal justice related organizations.

Literature Review

According to Glisson and Durick (1988), it is important to understand certain job characteristics and how they affect behavioral outcomes. The characteristics of the job workers perform, the characteristics of organizations where they perform the job, and the characteristics of the workers performing the job all play a crucial role in job performance. Glisson and Durick define *job task* as the actual job performed and include characteristics such as skill variety, task significance, task ambiguity, and conflict. *Organization characteristics* include the work group size, budget, type of leadership, and the age of the organization. *Worker characteristics* refer to the individual's years within the organization, age, gender, education, and salary. Their findings indicate that the characteristics of job tasks are the best indicators of job satisfaction

while organizational characteristics are the best predictors of organizational commitment (Glisson and Durick, 1988).

Finlay, Martin, Roman, and Blum (1995) suggest that some standardization measurements in job satisfaction studies do not differentiate between job characteristics such as job ambiguity, variety, and autonomy and organizational characteristics such as rule enforcement, openness of information flow, standardization procedures, and authority structure. To further understand the relationship between organizational structure and job satisfaction, the authors argue that it is important to separate measures of job characteristics from measures of organizational characteristics. Based on their efforts to do so, Finlay et al. (1995) found that organizational structure, with informal communication and loose chains of command, coupled with a management style that promotes teamwork as well as participatory decision-making, results in more productive and satisfied employees.

Job Satisfaction Among Police Officers

Research on job satisfaction among criminal justice personnel is relatively new compared with similar research conducted among employees in other occupations (Brough & Frame, 2004). These studies in general are inconclusive with variable results (Blau et al., 1986; Brough & Frame, 2004; Brunetto & Farr-Wharton, 2003; Cullen et al., 1993; Lambert, 2004; Lambert et al., 1999; Zhao et al., 2002; and Zhao et al., 1999). Job satisfaction associated with policing, for example, has been examined within several different theoretical frameworks. Issues related to gender and race are prominent in this body of literature. Female officers have been found to view their administrators and supervisors as unfair and less supportive of their efforts (Butler, Winfree, & Newbold, 2003). Dowler (2005) found that Black/African-American police officers were more likely to believe that they are perceived as militant by their fellow officers when they speak out about perceived racial problems, thus causing some reduction in overall job satisfaction.

Other job satisfaction studies associated with police officers reveal several interesting findings. Brough and Frame (2004) found that the amount of leave taken, along with no opportunity for advancement, were both negatively associated with job satisfaction. Zhao et al. (1999) found that police officers who rated higher on job dimensions such as skill variety, task significance, and autonomy viewed their work positively. Most officers believe that they perform a significant work and that they possess the necessary skills to accomplish their tasks. According to Zhao et al. (1999), supervision plays an essential role in improving the working environment of police officers, thus enhancing job satisfaction. Brough and Frame (2004) report the influence of insufficient supervisory support and a lack of ongoing training programs on job satisfaction and turnover intentions (Brough & Frame, 2004). Finlay et al. (1995) found that officers express a higher level of job satisfaction when their professionalism is recognized and when bureaucratic formalities do not impede their autonomy. Changes in the structural contexts and management practices of police organizations are also believed to affect job satisfaction (Brunetto & Farr-Wharton, 2003).

Halsted, Bromley, and Cochran (2000) assessed the effects of work orientations, namely community service vs. crime control functions, on police officer job satisfaction. Their findings suggest that officers with strong community service orientations are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs than are those officers more oriented toward crime control functions.

Adams, Rohe, and Arcury (2002) examined the effect of community policing (COP) on officers' perceptions of non-traditional modes of policing and job satisfaction. They conclude that officers involved in COP are more accepting of COP principles and strategies, more accepting of their agency, and more satisfied with their job position. Moreover, officers who perceive their organization as having a participatory management style are more likely to support COP, be optimistic about police-community relations, and be satisfied with their positions.

Bennett and Schmitt (2002) focused on cynicism directed toward the police organization itself. They measured police cynicism from three dimensions: the work environment, organizational setting, and individual characteristics. Their findings indicate a significant relationship between organizational settings and police cynicism. The organizational setting measures were the work assignment, relationship with the community, relationship with supervisors, relations with fellow constables, and job dissatisfactions. No statistically significant relationship was found between the working environment (work load, available resources, and criminal violence) and police cynicism. The individual characteristics examined (rank, length of service, and socioeconomic status) also failed to reach statistical significance. The authors conclude that police cynicism and its effect on job satisfaction can better be explained by organizational conditions rather than the working conditions and individual characteristics (Bennett & Schmitt, 2002).

Job Satisfaction Among Correctional Personnel

Regarding correctional institutions, Lambert (2004) examined job characteristics such as job-related stress, supervision, job variety, and job autonomy as factors determining job satisfaction among correctional officers. Lambert defines job stress as "an employee's feelings of job-related stress, tension, anxiety, frustration, worry, emotional exhaustion, and stress," and defines job autonomy as "the degree of freedom that employees have in making job-related decisions" (2004, p. 211). Lambert refers to job variety as "the degree of variation in a job" (p. 211). Lambert theorized that these job characteristics are an important aspect of the work environment that helps shape job satisfaction among correctional officers; however, the study found only job variety and supervision to influence all the group categories studied (supervisory staffs, non-supervisory staffs, and correctional staffs). The study found job autonomy to be important in shaping the job satisfaction of non-supervisory and correctional staff but not supervisors (Lambert, 2004).

Lambert found that only job stress and supervision had a significant effect on organizational commitment. Organizational commitment is "generally defined as loyalty to an organization, identification with an organization, and a desire for involvement in an organization" (Lambert, 2004, p. 211). Neither job variety nor job autonomy was found to effect organizational commitment among correctional staff members. Job satisfaction was found to have the greatest effect on organizational commitment. Job satisfaction, together with job characteristics, accounted for the greater portion of the variance in organizational commitment. The findings support the assertion that work environment factors have a great effect on job satisfaction (Lambert, 2004).

Tewksbury and Higgins (2006) argue that emotional dissonance is associated with work-related stress, which, in turn, correlates with satisfaction with supervisors. According to the authors, emotional dissonance is a precursor of work stress and work stress is a precursor of supervision satisfaction. They suggest that

understanding that emotional dissonance is stressful will assist correctional administrators to better predict the nature of work dissatisfaction among staff members.

Britton (1997) examined the role of race and gender on perceptions of work. She found that gender and race shape the perceptions of the work environment among correctional officers; however, the working environment itself did not account for the differences. The analyses demonstrate that race and gender should be considered as they interplay in the lives of individuals working in correctional settings.

Cullen et al. (1993) explored the overall job satisfaction among prison wardens and the factors that influence job satisfaction. Generally speaking, prison wardens are satisfied with their work and report significantly higher levels of job satisfaction compared with line officers. The job satisfaction determinants Cullen et al. examined were individual variables, organizational variables, work role variables, previous work roles, and social context (1993). The social context, organizational conditions, individual variables, and previous work were found to have no significant relationship with job satisfaction among prison wardens. However, the work role conditions (warden's influence on the daily activities of the prison) were significantly related to job satisfaction (Cullen et al., 1993).

Lambert et al. (1999) measured job satisfaction among correctional staff in relation to work attitudes, behaviors, and job performance. Their findings indicate that satisfied correctional staff tend to engage in more positive relationships with inmates and hold more positive attitudes toward rehabilitation. Lower levels of job satisfaction were linked with negative work behavior such as absenteeism, tardiness, and higher turnover (Lambert et al., 1999). Inconsistency and poor communication were also found to be sources of dissatisfaction among subordinates in correctional institutions, reinforcing the belief that there is a strong relationship between effective communication and job satisfaction (Lambert, 2004).

Blau et al. (1986) focused on the influences of individual and contextual characteristics on stress and job satisfaction among correctional officers. They suggest that in addition to stress, the main determinants of job satisfaction involve factors that relate to organizational culture. They found bureaucratic control and administrative policies to be the possible sources of dissatisfaction among correctional officers. The organization's stability, administrative directives, and administrator's ability to maintain stable force were all found to affect officer job satisfaction. Their findings indicate that the social controls embedded within the bureaucratic administrative system are predictors of job satisfaction and job morale (Blau et al., 1986).

In one of the few studies focusing on non-institutional corrections employees, Slate et al. (2003) found probation officers' stress levels to be greater than the mean within the general public. The key stressors of probation officers Slate et al. identified were inadequate salary, leniency of the courts on offenders, lack of promotional opportunities, excessive paperwork, lack of recognition for a job well done, inadequate support from management, ineffectiveness of correctional systems, and the lack of adequate community resources (2003). Further, they found employees' perceptions of participation in workplace decision-making to have a significant influence on job satisfaction. Slate et al suggest participatory management within the probation organization as a means of reducing stress and burnout among probation officers (2003).

Summary

The research findings reviewed here suggest the need for the inclusion of several key measures in any study examining job satisfaction among criminal justice personnel. For one, supportive relationships

between supervisors and employees are important if the latter are to remain satisfied with their jobs. Similarly, ongoing training programs for supervisors that focus on effective supervisory practices and effective communication with staff appear to play an essential role in improving the working environment and increasing overall job satisfaction of organizational members.

Even with the stressors common for many who work in the criminal justice field (e.g., police and correctional officers), employees appear to function better if the following factors exist: (1) they have effective training; (2) they believe their supervisors support them; (3) they believe they have a say-so in the development of policies and procedures under which they function; and (4) they associate a sense of some autonomy with their job tasks. Thus, understanding the culture surrounding the work environment is key to explaining the behavioral outcomes of employees. A focus on individual characteristics (e.g. socio-demographic variables) alone limits the extent to which job satisfaction among criminal justice personnel in general, and probation and parole staff in particular, can be explained.

Methods

Our research sought to identify the predictors of job satisfaction among probation and parole officers, an area of study that has received less than adequate attention in the more general literature. The participants in this study were probation and parole officers employed by a county department of probation/parole with approximately 104 officers: 68 field probation and parole officers and 36 officers assigned to the county's work release center program. Eighty-five officers participated in the study, yielding a response rate of 82 percent.

Administering the Questionnaire

The study used a non-probability, convenience sampling technique. No effort was made to pull a random sample because the entire population was sampled. The county was selected based on an existing relationship between the lead author and the agency itself. The study's questionnaire was administered through interoffice mail. In advance of distributing the survey packets, the lead author sent an e-mail message to all officers notifying them that they were being asked to participate in a research project. This initial contact e-mail also included information about how to participate. The survey packets included a cover letter from the researchers stating the purpose of the study and encouraging participation, a copy of the study's implied informed consent form, a copy of the study's questionnaire, and a self-addressed return envelope. Study participants were asked to complete the questionnaire, seal it in an envelope, and either give the envelope directly to the lead author or place the envelope in a mailbox set aside for completed questionnaires in the agency's main office. Approximately a week after the distribution of the survey packets, the lead author sent a reminder notice by means of agency e-mail reminding subjects who had not yet done so to complete and return the questionnaire.

Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 presents a summary of the characteristics of respondents in the study. Sixty-one percent of the respondents were male, and the majority (83 percent) of the respondents were white. More than half (64 percent) of the respondents were married or were in a live-in relationship at the time of the study. The subjects represented a highly educated group, with all subjects having at least a four-year college degree or

equivalent experience and almost one fourth (24 percent) reporting at least some postgraduate educational experience. Fifty-seven percent of the respondents were field probation officers, 38 percent were work release officers, and the remaining 5 percent were individuals in administrative positions.

The average years of employment at the present job was nine with a range of 1–34 years. About 80 percent of POs had not worked in any other probation and parole department, and 65 percent had not worked in other criminal justice-related fields before employment with the studied agency. The mean age of probation and parole officers at the time of the study was 37 years, with the youngest officer being 26 and the oldest 64.

Table 1. *Background Characteristics of the Sample*

Variables	Numbers	Percentage
Gender		
Male	50	61
Female	32	39
Race		
White	68	83
Non-white	14	17
Marital Status		
Married/live in relationship	51	64
Not married	29	36
Education Level		
Four years college/equivalent experience	62	76
Postgraduate work	20	24
Current Position		
Field officer	45	57
Work release	30	38
Administration	4	5

Note. Numbers may not total to 85 or percentages 100 due to missing data and rounding.

Independent Variables

The central premise of the current study is, "To what extent can characteristics associated with training, supervisory roles, the agency's reward system, perceptions of communicated directives, officers' sense of input into decision-making, individuals' perceptions of the meaningfulness of their jobs, and job-related stress predict officers' expressions of satisfaction with their jobs?" A number of independent variables were included, tapping into several key factors, to adequately conceptualize this rather dense question (see Table 2).

All of the independent variables use a 5-point Likert Scale where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither disagree nor agree, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. Where appropriate, items were reverse coded so positive responses received the highest numerical code, thus providing for consistency in scale construction. The following indices were constructed as predictors of job satisfaction among probation and parole officers.

Training. Training is an important component because it refers to the preparation to perform the *required* task. The survey assessed the influence of training by using a three-item measure: the availability of adequate training to perform the job; provision of orientation to new hires; and accessibility of training to advance on the job.

Supervisory Role. The type of supervision within the organization is believed to affect job satisfaction. The survey measured supervisory role by means of a seven-item measure. The participants indicate their opinions on the fairness of their supervisors and their supervisor's willingness to provide guidance and assistance on a daily basis when required.

Officers Input Into Policies and Procedures. Employees' participation in decision-making within the organization is theorized to affect job satisfaction. The survey measured participation in terms of giving input into the policies and procedures of the organization by using a three-item measure: "officers are often asked

to participate in departmental decision-making," "officers make decisions on their own without consulting supervisor," and "officers are encouraged to establish their own individual work plan."

Meaningfulness of the Job. Job meaningfulness refers to the actual job performed and was assessed by using a six-item measure. Sample items from the scale are "my job makes good use of my skills and abilities," "the job can sometimes be challenging," and "the job gives me a sense of personal accomplishment."

Work Stress. The negative consequence of stress is costly both to the individual and the organization. The survey used a five-item measure to assess job stress. Sample items from the scale are "I often feel tense when I am at work," "the job is frustrating," and "I feel under a lot of pressure at work."

Reward System. Reward systems in the private sector are argued to have an effect on job performance and job satisfaction. This study examined whether reward systems also affect individuals involved in probation/parole work by means of a four-item measure. Sample items include "recognition depends on a job performed well," "pay raises depend on performance," "high performance is recognize and promoted," and "high performing employees receive non-monetary rewards."

Perception of Communicated Directives. Research findings are not conclusive on the effect of organizational structure on job satisfaction. The survey assessed the influence of perceptions of communicated directives within the organization on job satisfaction by using a three-item measure: "clear rules and regulations are in place," "there are chances for mobility and promotion," and "clear communication exists within the organization."

Dependent Variables

Job Satisfaction. Job satisfaction was measured by using a six-item measure. The measures include satisfaction with the job, salary, and benefit packages (see Table 2).

Demographic Measures

Studies on job satisfaction have examined the influence of demographic measures such as age, gender, race, marital status, educational level, position, length of employment, and years of experience. This study recognizes the importance of these indicators as control variables and includes them in subsequent multivariate analysis.

Table 2. *Scale Items*

Training (3 items)

1. Probation/parole officers are given adequate training related to their individual jobs.
2. Officers are encouraged to attend various trainings aimed at assisting them to advance.
3. Supervisors and/or team leaders provide adequate orientation and on-the-job training for new hires.

Supervisory Role (7 items)

1. Supervisors here are fair in their dealings with officers.
2. Supervisors here are helpful to employees when it comes to making sure all policies and procedures are understood by officers.

3. Supervisors and administrators acknowledge and recognize officers for a job well done.
4. Officers here receive guidance and assistance they need on a daily basis from their direct supervisors.
5. Supervisors provide officers with constructive criticism aimed at improving overall job performance.
6. All too often, supervisors will blame officers when things go wrong.
7. When there is a dispute between an employee and a supervisor, the supervisor handles the matter in a professional manner

Input Into Policies and Procedures (3 items)

1. Officers here are often asked to participate in departmental decision-making.
2. Officers have the freedom to make some decisions on their own without consulting a supervisor.
3. Officers are encouraged to establish their own work plans and schedules.

Meaningfulness of the Job (6 items)

1. My job here utilizes well my skills and abilities.
2. I find my job to be challenging and often difficult.
3. My job is challenging, but in a way more positive than negative.
4. My job allows me to feel as though I am being productive and contributing something.
5. This job allows me opportunities to try out new and innovative (creative) ways to carry out my responsibilities as a probation/parole officer.
6. With this job, I feel a real sense of job security.

Table 2. (continued)

Job-Related Stress (5 items)

1. I often feel tense when I am at work.
2. My job is often frustrating in ways that cause me to become angry.
3. I feel I am under a great deal of pressure when I am at work.
4. There are many aspects of my job over which I feel I have no control.
5. I sometimes feel a threat to my personal safety when I am on the job.

Reward System

1. Recognition of employees depends on how well they perform their jobs.
2. Pay raises in this agency depend on how well employees perform.
3. High-performing employees are recognized for their efforts through promotion.
4. Exceptional employees are often the recipients of non-monetary rewards as well (e.g. praise, recognition letter, etc.).

Perception of Communicated Directives

1. There are clear rules and regulations specifying what I can and cannot do on the job.
2. There are chances for mobility and promotion within the organization.
3. There is adequate communication between supervisors and/or administrators and officers.

Job Satisfaction

1. Overall I am satisfied with my job.
2. This job measures up to the goals I had in mind for myself when looking for employment.
3. I would say that I enjoy the work I do here.
4. My satisfaction with my job here is sufficient that I have no immediate plans to look for another job elsewhere.
5. Overall, I am satisfied with the salary associated with my job.
6. Overall, I am satisfied with the benefit package associated with my job.

Note. All items coded on a standard 1–5 Likert scale, with 1 = strongly disagree,

2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree

Scale Reliability Analysis & Coding

The researchers conducted a series of scale reliability analysis to assess to what extent the various underlying concepts measured what they purported to measure. The results appear in Table 3.

Each of the scales constructed produced a Cronbach's alpha of at least .590. All items in the original questionnaire were used in the indices except for two items from the Perceptions of Communicated Directives within the Organization section of the questionnaire. Originally, five items combined into one index produced a Cronbach's alpha of .376.

Table 3. *Scale Reliability Analysis*

Scale Name	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Mean	St. Dev
Training	3	.590	10.12	2.528
Supervisory Role	7	.710	23.06	4.176
Input Into Policies and Procedures	3	.596	9.31	2.330
Meaningfulness of the Job	6	.798	20.45	4.358
Job-Related Stress	5	.763	14.36	3.845
Reward system	4	.840	7.75	2.853
Perception of Communicated Directives	3	.611	8.91	2.589
Job Satisfaction	6	.774	21.60	4.229

A factor analysis was performed on the five items to better examine underlying theoretical constructs. Through factor analysis, two underlying theoretical dimensions were found. Three of the questions pertaining to clear rules and regulations, chances for mobility and promotion within the organization, and communication loaded on the same factor, while the other two questions related to hierarchical decision-making and rigid policies leaving no room to officers' discretion loaded on a second factor. A decision was made to discontinue the use of the latter two questions and subsequent scale reliability analysis on the new three-item index yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .611 (see Table 3).

Six items were used for the outcome measure of job satisfaction. Out of the six, three items were derived from the Brody et al. (2002) study. As Table 3 shows, scale reliability analysis on the six items yielded a fairly high Cronbach's alpha of .774. Several of the demographic measures were dummy coded for inclusion in the full model. Gender was coded as 0 = male and 1 = female. Race/ethnicity was coded as 0 = non-white and 1 = white. Marital status was coded as 0 = not married and 1 = married/live-in relationship. Education was coded as 0 = postgraduate work and 1 = four years degree/equivalent experience. Current position was coded as 0 = work release and 1 = probation/field officers. Age, Years Employed at Present Job, Years Worked Elsewhere in Probation/Parole, and Years Worked in Some Other CJ-related Field remained coded as continuous measures.

Results

To examine the overall research question—to what extent can job characteristics predict probation/parole officers' level of job satisfaction—controlling for officers' background characteristics, an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression was used with job satisfaction as the dependent variable. The overall model is significant ($p = .000$) and explains 58 percent of the variance in the dependent variable (see Table 4).

Table 4. *Regression Analysis: Job Satisfaction as Dependent Variable*

Independent Variables	β	T	Sig.
Training	-.002	-.015	.988
Supervisory roles	.171	1.580	.120
Input into policies	.086	.659	.513
Meaningfulness of the job	.441	3.473	.001

Job-related stress	-.309	-3.473	.003
Reward system	.066	.582	.563
Perception of communicated directives	.165	1.084	.283
Age	.123	.864	.392
Gender	-.185	-1.902	.062
Race	.094	1.029	.308
Marital status	.158	1.800	.077
Education	.074	.829	.411
Current job position	-.218	-2.018	.049
Years employed at present job	-.119	-.935	.354
Years worked elsewhere in probation/parole	-.077	-.740	.462
Years worked in some other CJ related field	.098	.950	.346

Sig. = .000

Adjusted R² = .578

Note: Age, gender, marital status, education, and current job position were dummy coded.

The study's overarching argument is partially supported by the results of the multivariate regression. None of the control variables (demographic characteristics of officers, years employed at the current job, years of experience either in probation/parole or criminal justice related field) are significant predictors of the variance in the dependent variable (job satisfaction), with one exception: current job position. From the way the data were coded, it is interpreted that probation/field officers have a higher degree of job satisfaction than work release officers.

Of the remaining variables, meaningfulness of the job ($\beta = .441$; $p = .001$) and on-the-job stress ($\beta = -.309$; $p = .003$) are significant predictors of officers' job satisfaction. The findings support the assertion that officers who report higher levels of job meaningfulness are more likely to report a higher level of job satisfaction. Further, officers who report less stress at work are more likely to report a higher level of job satisfaction. Both of these results are in the expected direction, as they replicate similar findings from studies of job satisfaction and commitment in other contexts (e.g. policing and institutional corrections).

Several of the predictor variables that were found to be significantly related to job satisfaction in the bivariate analysis (not shown) failed to remain so in the full model; however, this issue deserves further explanation. For example, the bivariate correlations revealed that older officers report a higher level of job satisfaction as did those with the most years of employment with the agency. This finding contradicts Butler et al.'s (2003) assertion that the interaction between age and length of employment has no correlation with job satisfaction.

There appears to be a link between job longevity, age, and officers' job satisfaction. Eighty-nine percent of the respondents report that they are satisfied with the benefits package associated with the job. It is likely that the level of job satisfaction increases with age, as officers are eligible for retirement benefits after working the twenty-year minimum. Forty-nine percent of the officers believe that chances for mobility and promotion within the organization are limited, and 84 percent believe that high-performing employees are not recognized through promotion. It is likely that these factors contribute to the low level of job satisfaction among younger officers. Perhaps future research should further analyze the interplay between age and length of employment as they affect job satisfaction.

As indicated by Zhao et al. (1999), many of the studies conducted on job satisfaction among criminal justice personnel are limited to testing the relationships between demographic variables and job satisfaction. However, the findings from this study suggest that work-related characteristics are better predictors of job satisfaction and, indeed, override any bivariate associations between officer characteristics and job satisfaction. Multivariate analysis in this study revealed that demographic characteristics, with the exception of current work position, have no significant relationship with job satisfaction. Administrators should give more attention to the work environment and organizational culture than to the individual background characteristics in trying to increase job satisfaction.

Regarding the one significant demographic measure (job assignment), work release officers appear less satisfied with their job than probation/field officers. As indicated by open-ended comments the officers provided, capricious rules, the court system, limited chances for promotion, long hours shift, lack of communication with management, lack of recognition for a job well done, favoritism shown among staff members, and lack of supportive relationship between departmental units are most problematic for officers assigned to the work release center. The agency must examine the culture of the work release environment more closely to determine the factors that might contribute to the lower job satisfaction among these officers.

As stated earlier, the negative relationship between job-related stress and job satisfaction is in the theoretically expected direction. Other study findings support the negative relationship between job stress and job satisfaction (Blau et al., 1986; Slate et al., 2003; Zhao et al., 2002). Some of the least liked aspects of the job, again as noted in the open-ended comments, are similar to the total stressors Slate et al. identified (2003). As was the case in this study, some of the stressors are not within the reach of management; however, many could be addressed by altering management tactics (Slate et al., 2003). Involving employees in decision-making that directly affects the job and enhancing supportive relationships between the various units within the agency are suggestions for reducing stress and potentially improving overall job satisfaction.

Zhao et al. (1999) found that officers who rate higher on the various dimensions of job meaningfulness (skill variety, task significance, and autonomy) view their work more positively and are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs. The findings reinforce the belief that there is a strong relationship between the meaningfulness of the job and job satisfaction (Hogan et al., 2006; Zhao et al., 1999). Having a sense of job security, performing a job that allows productivity, and performing a job that uses the skills/abilities of officers were deemed as meaningful aspects of the job. Administrators should attempt to promote those aspects that provide meaningful experiences for officers to ensure job satisfaction.

This study supports the premise that job characteristics, particularly job stress and meaningfulness of the job, are aspects of the work environment that have significant effect on job satisfaction. This suggests that future research should examine in greater depth the effects of organizational culture, job characteristics, and management style to refine further the predictors of job satisfaction among probation and parole officers. These results also demonstrate possible dynamics behind retention issues in corrections. Younger officers and/or officers with fewer years on the job tend to be assigned to less desirable positions within the agency (e.g. work release). This disassociation between these officers and the organization so early in their careers could very easily lead to job dissatisfaction and result in officers leaving the organization.

Administrators can help to offset this phenomenon by rotating officers between “sought-after” and “undesirable” assignments within the organization.

In sum, findings from the present study further demonstrate the need for community-based administrators to pay particular attention to several key elements of the working environment of their employees. It is not surprising that employees who see their work as meaningful and who experience less stress on the job are more likely to find some overall personal fulfillment related to their work. In such an environment, probation/parole officers, the clients they supervise, and local communities are all better served.

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