

# Understanding Staff Perceptions of Turnover in Corrections

**Kevin I. Minor, Cherie Dawson-Edwards, James B. Wells, Carl Griffith, and Earl Angel**

Correctional staff turnover is a critically important but under-researched topic, and studies are lacking of how staff perceive the problem. By using a descriptive survey method, this study examined such perceptions of turnover among a sample of correctional officers. Staff attributed turnover to insufficient pay and benefits as well as to key areas of the work environment, including interpersonal conflicts, stress, unfavorable treatment and lack of recognition from superiors, and perceived lack of input. A third of respondents indicated they are likely to leave their jobs in the next three years. We conclude that correctional staff may consider alternative employment prospects and contemplate turnover when they experience a sense of devaluation, especially where devaluation is accompanied by perceptions of low efficacy on the job.

**Key Words:** corrections • correctional staff • employee turnover • employee perceptions

Employee turnover has been studied across various disciplines, and it is a serious problem in the field of corrections. Correctional agencies spend considerable funds from limited budgets on personnel recruitment, selection, and training (Kiekbusch, Price, & Thesis, 2003; Lambert & Hogan, 2006). High turnover, especially among staff who are relatively new, means that monetary and other resources invested in recruitment, hiring, and training do not produce desired returns. In turn, this situation can result in fewer resources available for initiatives to promote staff retention and development (e.g., pay raises and in-service training) as well as the for the betterment and management of offenders (e.g., inmate programs).

Of course, the problem involves much more than money. Correctional agencies with high turnover commonly confront a shortage of high performing, experienced, and skilled personnel. The result can be suspensions and delays of activities, breakdowns of continuity and consistency, and increased likelihood of mistakes (Roseman, 1981). The personnel who are available may end up working excess overtime, which, in addition to further straining budgets, can heighten job stress and burnout. Under such conditions,

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correctional environments can grow more volatile and potentially dangerous than usual. Moreover, these circumstances can fuel public stereotypes of correctional agencies as undesirable places to work—as jobs of last resort (Stohr, Self, & Lovrich, 1992). In short, high turnover often feeds on itself to intensify problems and undermine organizational effectiveness on a number of fronts.

Correctional staff turnover clearly deserves more attention than it has received in the criminal justice literature. Furthermore, nearly all studies conducted to date have focused on the relationship of turnover to two broad categories of variables: (1) staff demographic and background profiles and (2) organizational and work environment variables, including work-related attitudes (see Jurik & Winn, 1987). Other than research on turnover intentions (described below), we located few studies that have examined the problem of turnover as correctional staff themselves perceive it. Yet a focus on staff perceptions complements the focus of existing literature on background and work environment variables. In addition, a sound argument can be made that any agency should pay careful attention to the factors its own employees see as important in promoting and controlling turnover. Thus, the objective of this study is to examine the turnover problem as correctional staff members perceive it.

### **Literature Review**

Correctional staff turnover is known to be related to organizational and work environment factors. Accordingly, there is considerable variation across correctional agencies in turnover volume. While average annual turnover can be as high as 45% in corrections, the best estimate seems to be in the range of 12% to 25% (Lambert, 2001; and see McShane, Williams, Schichor, & McClain, 1991; K. N. Wright, 1994).

The literature draws two distinctions as regards the study of correctional staff turnover. The first is between turnover that is voluntary and involuntary (Lambert, 2001, 2006; Price & Mueller, 1986). In the case of the former, the staff member initiates cessation of employment, while with the latter, the agency initiates cessation (e.g., layoffs and dismissals). Lambert suggests that this distinction is important because voluntary turnover is more frequent, most costly and disruptive to the organization, and the most amenable to curtailment. Indeed, dismissals are often in the best interest of the organization. For this reason, researchers tend to be most interested in voluntary turnover.

A second distinction is that between actual turnover and turnover intentions. Actual turnover is a behavioral construct, referring to an employee actually leaving the organization. On the other hand, intentions are a cognitive construct and refer to an employee planning to leave. The earlier studies of staff turnover in adult and juvenile corrections (e.g., Camp, 1994; T. A. Wright, 1993) focus on actual turnover. This is sensible in that an employee

who indicates intent to leave an agency might not actually end up doing so. Alternatively, one who indicates a plan to stay might actually leave on what amounts to a whim. However, Lambert (2006) makes a case that it is more feasible to obtain a reliable and valid measure of turnover intent compared with actual turnover, primarily due to potential inaccuracies and unavailability of agency records. He also argues that intention is the single best predictor of actual turnover behavior. More recent research has typically used measures of turnover intent (e.g., Kieckbusch et al., 2003; Mitchell, MacKenzie, Styve, & Gover, 2000; Tipton, 2002). Still, there are questions about the extent to which intent accurately predicts actual turnover behavior, and some have pointed out that the time frame is important in defining intent because as time increases the link between intent and actual turnover weakens (see Kirschenbaum & Weisberg, 1990).

As mentioned above, research on turnover and related issues in corrections has focused on individual background variables. Examples of these variables include age (Camp, 1994; Robinson, Porporino, & Simourd, 1997), gender (Jurik, 1985; Tipton, 2002), race (Ford, 1995; Jacobs & Gear, 1977; Jurik & Winn, 1987; Mitchell et al., 2000), and education (Jurik, Halemba, Musheno, & Boyle, 1987; Mitchell et al., 2000). Researchers have also examined variables related to the organization and work environment. Examples include job satisfaction (Byrd, Cochran, Silverman, & Blount, 2000; Dennis, 1998; Jurik & Winn, 1987; Udechukwu, Harrington, Manyak, Segal, & Graham, 2007; T. A. Wright, 1993); organizational commitment (Byrd et al., 2000; Camp, 1994; Griffin & Hepburn, 2005); and job stress (Byrd et al., 2000; Mitchell et al., 2000; Slate & Vogel, 1997).

Some investigators outside corrections have sought to model turnover (e.g., Kirschenbaum & Weisberg, 1990; Michaels & Spector, 1982; Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, & Meglino, 1979). These models usually conceptualize turnover in terms of the effect of moderator variables on intentions to voluntarily terminate employment. Lambert (2001) applied this logic to corrections and developed a model in which actual turnover behavior is seen as a direct effect of turnover intents. In Lambert's model, intent is the direct outcome of perceptions of alternative employment, work related attitudes such as job satisfaction, and individual characteristics. Organizational commitment mediates the effect of job satisfaction on intents. Both job satisfaction and organizational commitment, in turn, mediate the effect of personal and work environment factors.

Lambert (2006) tested this model by using survey data collected from staff at a high security state correctional facility with a population of about 1,000 male inmates. He reported that three individual factors (gender, education, and tenure) and two work environment factors (organizational commitment and job satisfaction) were significant predictors of turnover intention, with job satisfaction having the strongest effect. Lambert (2008) also reported no significant relationship between job involvement and turnover intention. In a more recent study

of staff working in a private prison, Lambert and Hogan (2009) found the most direct predictors of turnover intent to be age, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment.

As mentioned above, something missing from this body of literature is attention to the manner in which correctional staff members themselves account for turnover. As a process, turnover may actually begin long before the termination or departure of employment takes place. Referred to as psychological turnover, this may develop in an employee when certain experiences or events occur, such as being overlooked for promotion, conflicts at work, major organizational restructuring, or insufficient pay increases (Roseman, 1981). In addition to instances of psychological turnover that lead ultimately to employment cessation, turnover intent can remain even if an employee never voluntarily severs ties to the organization. We know from psychological research that the manner in which people attribute the causes of events and issues in their lives shapes what they expect to see happen and, in turn, how they behave (see Carver & Scheier, 2008; Schunk, 2008). So there is good reason to consider staff perceptions of the turnover issue.

There are two primary bases for correctional staff making attributions about turnover in their field. The first is experiential and derives from a staff member's own direct work history in corrections, both in the present agency and in places where she or he may have worked previously. The second basis is vicarious and derives from staff member socialization in the employee subculture generally and, more specifically, interactions with other correctional staff who have left their agencies or are planning to do so. The vicarious component consists of perceptions of why others have left the agency (or aim to do so) as well as perceptions of what those persons have accomplished by leaving (e.g., obtaining more pay and more desirable hours from alternative employment). As such, the present study is meant to complement and extend past research on turnover intentions by examining data on correctional employees' perceptions of the staff turnover problem.

## **Method**

### *Correctional Facility and Participants*

This study was conducted during late 2007 and early 2008 at a medium security state prison located in a rural area. The facility's inmate population is approximately 1,250 males. It has 285 staff members, approximately 200 of whom are correctional officers. While turnover data were not available for the particular facility, wider state Department of Corrections (DOC) turnover was 21% for the 2006 to 2007 time period (the most recent available).

The survey described below was administered to a random sample of 101 correctional officers selected for purposes of this research. The sample was stratified to ensure proportional representation by shift, gender, race, tenure, and rank (i.e., supervisor versus line staff), and proportionality was achieved on these variables. The survey response rate was 88.1% ( $N = 89$ ).

The majority of respondents were male (82%) and Caucasian (97.7%), with 2.3% African American. Respondents ranged in age from 19 to 68 years, with a mean of 42 years ( $SD = 12.3$ ). More than half (53.9%) the respondents indicated that their highest level of education completed was high school (either graduation or GED). More than a third (37.1%) indicated having completed some college credit without finishing a degree; 6.7% held an associate's degree, and 2.2% had baccalaureate degrees.

The majority of officers (78.7%) were line staff; 21.3% were supervisors. The average number of years worked in the field of corrections was 7.5 ( $SD = 6.27$ ). The average number of years employed in the particular DOC was 7.0 ( $SD = 6.02$ ), while the average years worked at the facility where the research was conducted was 6.8 ( $SD = 6.05$ ). The average starting salary for a correctional officer in the DOC for 2005 (the most recent available) was \$25,565.

### *Survey Instrument*

The survey instrument used in this study had five parts. The first part asked staff to provide an open-ended description of the top three reasons they believe correctional officers leave the DOC within three years of being hired. Part two asked staff to rate the importance of 15 factors in promoting officer turnover. Ratings were made on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from very unimportant (1) to very important (5). The factors were selected based on the literature review and on the basis of one of the author's 16 years of experience working in the DOC.

Part three of the survey was meant to assess participants' turnover intentions. Participants were asked to indicate (from the following options) the time frame in which they intend to leave the DOC and instructed to select only one option: 6 months, 12 months, 3 years, 5 years, 10 years, 15 years, or 20 years or more. Subsequently, participants were asked to provide an open-ended response describing the reason(s) for leaving in the indicated time frame, starting with the most important reason.

The fourth part of the survey was an open-ended item asking participants to describe the most important change(s) the DOC could implement to reduce staff turnover. The final part solicited the staff demographic and background information described above.

Survey participation was voluntary and anonymous. Following distribution to staff, surveys were returned in sealed envelopes.

## **Results**

### *Survey Part 1*

Low pay was overwhelmingly the major reason staff gave to account for turnover. Nearly 97% of respondents cited pay as one of the top three reasons new staff leave the DOC

within the first three years of being hired. Additionally, 37% cited insurance or benefits as a reason. More than 21% mentioned the need to find a “better” job or one closer to home.

However, not all reasons given related primarily to economics. Staff also cited key features of the work environment. For example, 29.2% listed interpersonal conflicts with coworkers or supervisors as reasons for staff departures, and 28.1% cited stress or the poor nature of the work environment. More than 20% made reference to unequal or unfavorable treatment of staff from supervisors.

Lesser proportions of respondents attributed turnover to other factors. Almost 17% referenced the nature of the work schedule (i.e., shifts and hours worked). Nearly 16% of respondents said that staff leave due to concerns or fears over personal safety. More than 11% stated that employees who leave do so when they learn the nature of the job is not what they expected. Other factors cited included staff shortages (9% of respondents) and poor training (7.9%).

Table 1. *Perceived Importance of Factors Potentially Contributing to Turnover (N = 89)*

Factor	Mean	SD
Inadequate pay scales	4.82	0.44
Concerns over personal safety	4.30	0.79
Concerns over institutional security	4.26	0.76
Officers not knowing what their supervisors expect	4.09	0.83
Officers not believing that senior management understands problems faced on the job	4.43	0.74
Problems with coworkers	3.91	1.05
Problems with inmates	3.84	1.03
Officers feeling they lack say over matters that most affect them	4.45	0.64
Lack of loyalty to the institution	4.01	0.95
Lack of satisfaction with the nature of the work	4.06	0.84
Stressful work environment	4.61	0.67
Inadequate training	4.13	0.88
Feeling that the job is dead-end with few opportunities to advance	3.96	0.95
Perceptions of better employment opportunities elsewhere	4.49	0.74
Job keeps them away from their family too much	3.66	1.11

*Survey Part 2*

Recall that the second part of the survey solicited staff ratings of the importance of various factors in promoting officer turnover. Ratings ranged from 1 (least important) to 5 (most important). Table 1 presents descriptive data.

As the table shows, no items had mean ratings below 3.66. Items with the highest mean ratings pertained to pay scales, work stress, perceptions of alternative employment, perceived lack of say over matters affecting staff, not believing managers understand the problems officers face, and the interrelated issues of personal safety concerns and concerns over institutional security. Other items with relatively high mean ratings include the inadequacy of training, officers feeling that they do not know what their supervisors expect, dissatisfaction with the nature of the work, and lack of loyalty to the institution.

Multiple *t*-tests were performed to determine the extent to which staff ratings of the factors in Table 1 varied by different staff categories based on demographics and backgrounds. Only one test yielded significant results. The mean rating (5.00, *SD* = .000) assigned to inadequate pay by women was significantly higher than the rating (4.78, *SD* = .479) assigned by men,  $t(72) = 3.91, p = .000$ , 2-tailed.

Correlations were computed to study the relationship between ratings and continuous staff demographic variables. Four significant relationships were found, two involving education and two involving age. Compared with staff with higher education levels, those with less education rated "concerns over institutional security" as a more important cause of turnover ( $r = -.27, p = .01$ ). Similarly, staff with less education had higher ratings of the factor "officers not knowing what their supervisors expect" ( $r = -.26, p = .02$ ). Ratings on this same factor decreased as age increased ( $r = -.23, p = .04$ ). Finally, ratings on the factor "officers feeling they lack say over matters that most affect them" declined with increasing age ( $r = -.24, p = .03$ ).

### *Survey Part 3*

Table 2 shows the proportion of respondents indicating that they are likely to leave the DOC within the various time frames. As the table reveals, more than 20% of the respondents said they were likely to leave in the coming three years, and 11.5% indicated a likelihood to leave in the coming year. On the other hand, more than 55% selected 10 years or longer as the time frame.

Given that more than half of the staff said they plan to stay with the DOC at least another decade, it is not surprising that the most commonly cited reason for departure (58.4% of respondents) was retirement. (These DOC staff members are eligible to retire after 20 years of service.) But other reasons were also given. Nearly 15% expressed a desire to find a different or better job. Similarly, 11.2% cited poor pay as a reason for their turnover intentions. Other explanations included stress (4.5%), safety concerns (3.4%), lack of opportunities for promotion, (3.4%), and the way staff feel they are treated (3.4%); the latter category included mention of poor or unequal treatment and lack of recognition.

Table 2. *Percentage of Respondents Likely to Leave DOC in Specified Time Periods (N = 87)*<sup>a</sup>

Time Period	N	%
6 months	1	1.1
1 year	10	11.5
3 years	18	20.7
5 years	10	11.5
10 years	17	19.5
15 years	9	10.3
20 years or more	22	25.3

<sup>a</sup> Two study participants did not answer this question.

#### *Survey Part 4*

The respondents identified a number of important changes they believed the DOC might make to reduce staff turnover. Improved pay was by far the most commonly cited change (89.9% of respondents). Similarly, 29.2% made reference to improved insurance and benefits. Almost 32% described the need for improved treatment and recognition of officers.

Other changes were mentioned with less frequency. These included improved communication and teamwork (9%), hiring of additional staff (5.6%), improved hiring practices (3.4%), improvements to work environment safety (3.4%), provision of better equipment (3.4%), improved opportunities for promotion (2.2%), and better public perceptions of corrections (1.1%).

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

A high level of correctional staff turnover can feed off itself to exacerbate problems, impair organizational effectiveness, and promote even more turnover. We have suggested that any correctional agency can benefit by identifying and attending to factors its employees perceive as important in promoting and controlling turnover. These employees are uniquely positioned to understand the problem due to their own direct experiences as well as their interactions with and observations of other employees.

The causal attributions people make about issues they encounter affect their expectations and behaviors (Carver & Scheier, 2008; Schunk, 2008). It is reasonable to believe that employees of all organizations have ideas about causes of organizational problems generally and, in particular, about why people might leave an organization. Direct and vicarious experiences in an organization help establish and confirm (or disconfirm) employees' attributions regarding organizational problems, and in this ongoing manner, employee attributions concerning turnover could affect turnover intents and ultimately behavior.



In many respects, the participants in this study mirrored the traditional prototype of correctional officers. For instance, they were employed in a rural geographical area in a medium security male institution. They were predominantly male, Caucasian, middle aged, lacking a college degree, and employed in line positions. Almost 21% indicated they were likely to leave the DOC over the next three years, and 11.5% said they were likely to leave within a year. This one-year intent figure approaches the lower end of the 12 to 25% actual turnover range referenced in the literature (Lambert, 2001) but is only about half the most recently available (2006–2007) DOC-wide actual figure of 21%. By the same token, the facility seems to have a relatively stable core of staff planning to retire from the DOC. More than 55% of the respondents said they planned to stay with the DOC for 10 years or longer, and more than a quarter intended to stay 20 years or more. On average, respondents had already worked at the facility for nearly 7 years. So there is evidence of core stability amid higher than desired levels of turnover.

It is worth noting that there was minimal variation across subgroups of staff in their perceptions of reasons for turnover. From the standpoint of statistical significance, women rated inadequate pay at a higher level of importance than men, but the mean difference in ratings was too small (0.22 points) to be of much practical significance. There were also a few significant correlations by education and age, but, all in all, there was a strong pattern of homogeneity in staff perceptions. Perhaps most important, there were no significant differences in ratings by employee rank. Line officers and supervisors provided similar ratings. The same holds for tenure in the field of corrections generally, tenure with the DOC, and tenure at the facility. In this study, therefore, there is no evidence that turnover attributions are a function of rank or tenure.

People who have spent time employed in the field know that corrections work can be demanding, stressful, and potentially dangerous. It is too frequently characterized by low pay and a dearth of other rewards, such as status and recognition from the public, supervisors, and other parties. Such as they exist, rewards are largely intrinsic and come in the form of employees believing they are performing the job effectively, both individually and as part of the organization (i.e., a sense of efficacy). In short, the job is very important but, in many respects, thankless. Intrinsic rewards, such as believing that one is able to help make a positive difference, become paramount almost by default.

The data from this study support this portrayal of correctional work. Specifically, the respondents perceived staff turnover as resulting from insufficient pay and benefits as well as from the availability of alternative employment. Almost all respondents listed low pay as one of the top three reasons for turnover among new recruits. Pay received the highest mean rating of any item in Part 2 of the survey, and almost 90% of respondents said the DOC could reduce turnover by improving pay. However, only 11.2% of respondents cited

poor pay as a reason they personally intended to leave the DOC. Clearly, then, poor pay received more weight in accounting for the turnover of coworkers than for explaining employees' own intentions. Indeed, other researchers have not found pay and benefits to affect turnover significantly (e.g., Camp, 1994; Lambert, 2006).

However, perceptions of alternative employment may be a different matter entirely. Recall that in his model, Lambert (2001) hypothesized that turnover intentions were a direct outcome of perceptions of alternative employment availability. And, in fact, Kieckbusch et al. (2003) reported that perceptions of the economy and outside job opportunities were predictive of turnover among jail employees. By definition, though, perceptions of alternative employment are fluid and contingent on the time frame a study considers. Interestingly, the data for this study were collected during the latter part of 2007 and early in 2008, a few months *before* the major downturn in the United States economy that became manifest in mid 2008 with the fall of the housing market, soaring fuel prices, and the ensuing demise of banks, securities, and major corporations. Along with these developments, unemployment became so problematic that massive job creation has been made central to the Obama Administration's economic recovery plan. These developments are bound to influence the role of perceived alternative employment opportunities in affecting turnover. At present (first quarter of 2009), fewer staff in the DOC studied (relative to the number surveyed in late 2007 and early 2008) might see alternative employment prospects as plentiful or desirable, but this could change with success from job creation initiatives and added competition for workers.

Some of the less tangible but no less important work environment factors that have been linked to turnover in past research (e.g., Byrd et al., 2000; Lambert, 2006; Mitchell et al., 2000) also emerged in this study. A sizeable proportion of respondents (nearly 30%) identified interpersonal conflicts as one of the top three reasons for employee turnover, almost as many cited stress, and more than 20% referenced unfavorable treatment from supervisors. Similarly, also receiving high ratings were the items in Part 2 dealing with officers feeling that management does not understand problems faced on the job and officers feeling they lack say over matters affecting them. Nearly 32% of respondents identified better treatment and recognition of officers as a means for the DOC to control turnover.

Some of the perceptions just described (i.e., unfavorable treatment and lack of recognition from superiors, feeling misunderstood, and sensing a lack of say over matters directly affecting officers), when combined with the perceptions of insufficient pay and benefits mentioned above, paint a portrait of officers perceiving themselves as devalued for what they do. It is reasonable to suppose that people who perform work that is demanding, stressful, potentially dangerous, and yet very necessary to society need to sense their contributions and sacrifices are valued. However, this is unlikely to the extent

employees believe that their pay and benefits are inadequate, they are not sufficiently recognized in other ways, they are poorly treated, and their input is nonexistent or disregarded. The outcome is likely to be a converse sense of devaluation.

The devaluation construct underscores the point made earlier about correctional work involving a paucity of external rewards, such that motivation to continue in the field becomes heavily reliant upon intrinsic factors. One of the foremost of these factors may be individual and collective efficacy (Bandura, 1997, 2001). Unfortunately data to address the issue are lacking from the present study, but a tenable hypothesis is that increases in both turnover intentions and behavior are especially probable when perceptions of devaluation of the kind this research uncovered conjoin with perceptions of low efficacy among staff. When this occurs, there is nothing to bind the employee to the agency, except perhaps the need for a paycheck and benefits of some form; ergo, the attractiveness of alternative employment.

Low efficacy perceptions could arise from any number of conceivable sources not assessed in this study (e.g., jurisdictional policy changes, physical limitations developed by an employee, absence of resources for inmate programming, political dynamics, etc.). However, an important potential source that did surface in this study (as a factor important in promoting turnover) involves conflicts with coworkers or supervisors. A work environment riddled with conflict among staff is hardly one where staff are likely to believe they are advancing organizational goals in an optimal way. A further source of low efficacy could be high levels of employee turnover among coworkers. As pointed out earlier, high turnover consumes resources that could be used to promote effectiveness in other areas of an organization. It can lead to breakdowns in continuity, job stress, burnout, and mistakes. In short, staff conflict and turnover are not conducive to a sense of efficacy among people who remain in the organization.

The findings of this study imply the need for continued efforts to improve the pay and benefits of correctional officers, at least in the facility studied and in similar ones. It would be easy to minimize the importance of such efforts in view of: (a) the finding that more employees see inadequate pay and benefits as important in accounting for turnover among other staff than in accounting for their own personal turnover intents and (b) other research showing that pay and benefits are not significantly related to turnover (see Lambert, 2006). Still, the presence of a substantial proportion of staff who believe poor pay and benefits are among the top reasons their coworkers leave the organization is likely to detract from morale and organizational effectiveness. Also, it seems clear that efforts to improve pay and benefits are important for recruiting top quality staff to the field.

Additionally, inadequate pay and benefits constitute one, but certainly not the only and possibly not even the most important, basis for employees feeling devalued for their

work. Concerns over pay and benefits may become intensified to the extent that these are part of a larger composite of factors promoting a sense of devaluation. Examples of other factors this study identified include perceptions of unfavorable treatment, lack of understanding and recognition, and lack of opportunity for input. This implies the need for initiatives other than improved pay and benefits to make staff feel more valued.

For instance, some jurisdictions have instituted periodic recognitions for officers exhibiting excellent performance. However, initiatives need not be so formal or competitive to be effective. An administrator who practices "management by walking around," takes time to inform staff that they are valued and appreciated, and endeavors to establish rapport with subordinates can accomplish a great deal in this regard.

In terms of opportunities for staff input, there are various ways to increase participation in decision making and promote greater staff autonomy. Interestingly enough, such initiatives have also been demonstrated to be associated with reductions in job stress (Auerbach, Quick, & Pegg, 2003; Dowden & Tellier, 2004; Wright, Saylor, Gilman, & Camp, 1997), another major factor that staff in this study saw as contributing to turnover. And in fact, Slate and Vogel (1997) reported that thoughts about quitting among correctional staff are linked with perceptions of an organizational atmosphere that is negative toward staff participation in decision making.

Staff members usually have much knowledge of problems and issues faced at their facilities. A more decentralized, participative approach to institutional management that makes use of advisory groups and decision-making bodies comprising staff can draw upon this knowledge. The point is to minimize line staff detachment from management and managerial issues. Approaches of this nature could also promote a heightened sense of efficacy among staff (cf. Wells, Minor, Angel, Matz, & Amato, 2009).

Future research seems warranted into staff perceptions surrounding the turnover problem. Data for the present study came from a single facility, the number of cases was limited, and the data obtained were largely descriptive in nature. Future investigations could use larger samples with greater variation in staff demographics and facilities. While descriptive studies such as this are valuable for generating hypotheses, data collection instruments could be redesigned to allow for more inferential analyses and multivariate modeling.

This study raises the need for additional inquiry into possible discrepancies between why employees believe their coworkers exhibit turnover and why they personally contemplate leaving. Likewise, the construct of devaluation this study developed should receive more attention, specifically attention to further establishing construct validity and examining the potential sources. Finally, future investigations could explore the interaction this study proposed between perceptions of devaluation and low perceptions of efficacy as a reason for staff opting to explore alternative employment. It may turn out that in a

model such as the one Lambert (2001) proposed, perceptions of alternative employment mediate the effects of devaluation and low perceptions of efficacy on turnover intents. If research was to establish the importance of such a connection in prompting decisions to leave, efforts designed to promote a greater sense of valuation among staff could be integrated with initiatives to foster greater efficacy and overcome bureaucratic and political barriers to staff sensing they are accomplishing something worthwhile in their work with offenders. In short, the subject of correctional staff turnover continues to provide fertile ground for theory and research.

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