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Examining the Relationship between Job Characteristics and Job Satisfaction among Southern Prison Staff

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ABSTRACT

The job characteristics model was used to explain job satisfaction at a large southern prison. The effects of job variety, role clarity, views of supervision, views of training, perceived dangerousness of the job, and job autonomy on job satisfaction were studied. Using data from 322 staff members, the study found positive job characteristics (i.e., job variety, supervision, training, and lower perceived dangerousness of job) were associated with greater job satisfaction. Job autonomy was non-significant. Job variety, quality of supervision, and training views were positively associated with job satisfaction for all staff and security officers, whereas dangerousness of job was negatively associated. Role clarity mattered for all staff, but not security officers. Reasons for both significant and non-significant relationships were discussed.

KEYWORDS

Prison staff; job satisfaction; job characteristics; southern prison; role clarity

The United States incarcerates more people per capita than all but one nation (Seychelles) in the world (World Prison Brief, 2016). In 2014, an estimated 1.5 million adults were incarcerated in U.S. prisons, translating to an imprisonment rate of 612 inmates per 100,000 adult U.S. residents (Carson, 2015). To supervise these inmates, an estimated 475,000 individuals are employed in more than 1,800 state and federal correctional institutions (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017; Stephen, 2008). These individuals are an important resource because they are charged with the myriad tasks necessary to operate a secure, safe, and humane prison. These staff members are also an expensive resource; more than \$70 billion is spent annually on U.S. prisons (Kincade, 2017), and between 70% and 80% of the operating budget for a typical prison is for staff (Camp & Gaes, 2002; Tewksbury & Higgins, 2006). In light of the importance and cost of staff, it is no surprise that there has been a growth in research focusing on prison staff.

One area in the literature has been how workplace factors affect the job satisfaction of staff. Locke (1976) defined *job satisfaction* as “a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experiences” (p. 1300). Muchinsky (1987) viewed job satisfaction as an emotional, affective response resulting from the extent to which people derive pleasure from their jobs. Lu, Barriball, Zhang, and White (2012) saw job satisfaction as a global affective orientation a person has toward his or her job. Simply,

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job satisfaction is “the extent to which people like or dislike their jobs. As it is generally assessed, job satisfaction is an attitudinal variable” (Spector, 1997, p. 2).

Past correctional research has found that job satisfaction is an important work concept. Job satisfaction among correctional staff has been found to be associated with reduced work absenteeism, lower levels of job burnout, decreased turnover intent/turnout, increased support for inmate participation in rehabilitation programs, higher life satisfaction, greater commitment to the prison organization, an increased likelihood of engaging in prosocial work behaviors (i.e., going above what is expected), improved work performance, and greater creativity and support for organizational change (Byrd, Cochran, Silverman, & Blount, 2000; Farkas, 1999; Fox, 1982; Griffin, Hogan, Lambert, Tucker-Gail, & Baker, 2010; Jurik & Winn, 1987; Lambert, 2004, 2010; Lambert, Edwards, Camp, & Saylor, 2005; Lambert, Hogan, Paoline, & Baker, 2005; Leip & Stinchcomb, 2013; Matz, Wells, Minor, & Angel, 2012; Robinson, Porporino, & Simourd, 1997; Whitehead & Lindquist, 1986; Wright, 1993). In light of the salient outcomes associated with it, it is important to identify the variables that help shape the job satisfaction of prison staff. In addition to utilitarian reasons, there are humanitarian reasons to study the variables that raise or lower job satisfaction, including making the job more enjoyable and pleasant for prison staff (Yang, Brown, & Moon, 2011).

Workplace variables appear to play a role in shaping the job satisfaction of correctional staff (Armstrong, Atkin-Plunk, & Wells, 2015; Griffin, 2001). The current study examines the relationship between job characteristics and job satisfaction to determine whether past findings can be replicated in different correctional settings. Replication of past findings is critical (Easley, Madden, & Gray, 2013) because there is always the chance that single findings are due to random chance. As noted by Lindsay and Ehrenberg (1993):

replication is little discussed in the statistical literature nor practiced widely by statistically minded researchers. It is needed not merely to validate one’s findings, but more importantly, to establish the increasing range of radically different conditions under which the findings hold, and the predictable exceptions. (p. 217)

Thus, it is important to examine how workplace variables are associated with job satisfaction across a range of prison facilities to determine whether their effects are universal or unique to specific locations or types of correctional institutions.

The current study surveyed staff at Mississippi State Penitentiary in Parchman, Mississippi, a large southern prison. The pay level in this prison system is low and staff are not unionized. The low pay leads to difficulties in recruiting staff, which makes improving job satisfaction (to prevent turnover, for example) even more important. The selected prison holds a wide range of sentenced inmates and is a large facility, housing more than 4,000 adult male inmates at the time of this study, making it one of the largest U.S. prisons in terms of inmate population (University of Albany, 2017). Additionally, the majority of staff at the prison are women, including those working in custody, which is rare for prisons holding male inmates. One contribution of the current study, then, is that it adds to the literature by exploring whether the findings from previous studies are replicated at this unique prison.

Another reason for conducting this study is that the variables that affect job satisfaction may be situational and change over time. For example, in a review of the literature, Lambert, Hogan, and Barton (2002a) suggested that the effects of race on satisfaction may have changed over time as the result of improved race relations and greater diversity of

staff employed in prisons. Furthermore, Cheeseman and Downey (2012) reported that generation membership (e.g., Baby Boomers, Gen Xers, Millennials) had significant effects, suggesting that the predictors of satisfaction may change over time as staff from new generations enter the prison staff workforce. These factors make it important to conduct ongoing research on how various workplace variables are associated with prison staff job satisfaction.

Finally, there is a need to test various theoretical models used to explain job satisfaction. The current study adds to the literature by employing the job characteristics model to explain job satisfaction at the selected southern prison. Specifically, the effects of job variety, role clarity, views of supervision, views of training, perceived dangerousness of the job, and job autonomy on job satisfaction were studied.

Literature review

Job characteristics

Workplace variables can be divided into a number of different categories. Two of these categories are organizational characteristics and job characteristics (Lambert, 2004). *Organizational characteristics* refer to perceptions of how an organization arranges, manages, and operates itself (Lambert, 2004; Mahfood, Pollock, & Longmire, 2013; Oldham & Hackman, 1981). According to Lincoln and Kalleberg (1990), every organization uses several dimensions of structure to guide, regulate, motivate, and manage people. Lincoln and Kalleberg (1990) further suggest that the major forms of organizational structure are input into decision making, formalization (i.e., the degree of written rules, regulations, and policies and their enforcement), integration (i.e., the degree of having work groups and departments work together rather than competing against one another), instrumental communication (i.e., the degree to which the organization keeps staff informed of important organizational information), and organizational justice (i.e., fairness in outcomes and decision-making processes and how staff are treated). On the other hand, job characteristics refer to the perceptions of features that can vary across different types of positions within an organization. Examples of job characteristics include job variety, role clarity, quality of supervision, quality of training, perceived dangerousness of the job, and job autonomy (Hackman & Lawler, 1971; Lambert, 2004; Mahfood et al., 2013).

In the mid-1970s, Hackman and Oldham (1975, 1976) developed the job characteristics model, which provides a theoretical foundation for why job characteristics play a role in shaping salient employees outcomes such as job satisfaction (Ali et al., 2014; Fried & Ferris, 1987; Uruthirapathy & Grant, 2015). The basic premise of the job characteristics model suggests that providing workers with positive job characteristics will result in positive psychological states, which, in turn, result in positive outcomes for the employees and the employing organization; one of these positive outcomes is increased job satisfaction (Tiegs, Tetrick, & Fried, 1992). Alternatively, negative job characteristics lead to negative outcomes, such as job dissatisfaction and burnout (Griffin, Hogan, & Lambert, 2012).

Hackman and Oldham (1975, 1976, 1980) and Oldham and Hackman (2010) maintained that enriching jobs by improving job characteristics would result in positive

psychological states because people want to be successful, to grow, and to have pleasant working experiences. In turn, these positive psychological states would result in positive outcomes, including job satisfaction. Hackman and Oldham (1980) indicated that positive job characteristics allow workers to “experience a positive, self-generated affective kick when they perform well” (p. 60). On the other hand, Spector and Jex (1991) reported that negative job characteristics resulted in increased psychological strain, leading to job withdrawal. In sum, positive job characteristics lead to improved psychological states and more beneficial outcomes for both the person and the organization (Ghosh, Rai, Chauhan, Gupta, & Singh, 2015; Gillet & Vandenberghe, 2014; Ozturk, Hancer, & Im, 2014). On the other hand, negative job characteristics lead to psychological strain and negative outcomes, such as low job satisfaction (Griffin et al., 2012; Hackman & Oldham, 1975; Saavedra & Kwun, 2000). The job characteristics model suggests that job characteristics should have a significant effect on job satisfaction because these types of workplace variables are encountered on a regular (if not daily) basis by prison staff. As noted by Griffin (2001), “that which is perceived as being closer and experienced on a more regular basis has a greater influence on individual behavior and attitudes” (p. 227).

Hackman and Oldham’s (1975) work focused on job characteristics such as skill variety (i.e., job variety), task identity (the degree that the job is part of a whole identifiable outcome), task significance (the degree that an employee perceives that he or she affects the well-being of others), job autonomy, and job feedback. More recent studies have included additional characteristics such as role clarity, quality of supervision, and perceived dangerousness of the job (Fichtner & Strader, 2014; Griffin et al., 2012; Lambert, Cluse-Tolar, Pasupuleti, Prior, & Allen, 2012; Lambert, Hogan, Cheeseman Dial, Jiang, & Khondaker, 2012). The current study includes job variety, role clarity, quality of supervision, training, perceived dangerousness of the job, and job autonomy to determine what effects they have on job satisfaction and to determine whether their effects are similar to past studies or unique to this particular prison. These characteristics and their effects on job satisfaction are discussed below.

Job variety

Job variety, which refers to a person’s perceptions of the degree of variation required in the job (Lambert, 2004), is one of the original job characteristics proposed by Hackman and Oldham (1975). Some jobs require a great deal of variety and others are highly repetitive. A job with variety can result in personal growth and mental stimulation, which can make work more pleasant and enjoyable whereas a repetitive job, on the other hand, can become monotonous over time, resulting in psychological strain for staff members (Lambert & Paoline, 2012; Price & Mueller, 1986). According to the job characteristics model, job variety should lead to positive psychological states (because the job is seen in a more positive light and as more enjoyable) and higher job satisfaction among correctional staff.

Past research supports this postulation. Job variety has been reported to have a positive association with job satisfaction among officers at a Western prison (Jurik & Winn, 1987), staff at a private midwestern prison (Hogan, Lambert, Jenkins, & Hall, 2009), staff at a large Florida jail (Lambert & Paoline, 2008), staff at a midwestern public prison (Lambert, 2004; Lambert & Hogan, 2010), staff with a midwestern state department of corrections (Brief, Munro, & Aldag, 1976), officers at a Kentucky prison (Grossi & Berg, 1991), staff at

a western prison (Jurik & Halemba, 1984), and officers in a southwestern state prison system (Armstrong & Griffin, 2004).

Role clarity

Role clarity was not one of the original job characteristics proposed by Hackman and Oldham (1975) but was added in later studies (e.g., Lambert, Cluse-Tolar, et al., 2012). *Role clarity* refers to the perception that job expectations and directions are clear (Allisey, Noblet, Lamontagne, & Houdmont, 2014; Hassan, 2013). Role stress, the opposite of role clarity, comprises role ambiguity and role conflict and refers to a lack of clear directions and guidance in completing job tasks (Grossi & Berg, 1991; Hassan, 2013; Lambert, Hogan, Paoline, & Clarke, 2005). Role stress can lead to frustration and lower enjoyment from the job. Conversely, role clarity can help a person be more successful at the job, which is likely to result in viewing the job more favorably. Based on the job characteristics model, role clarity should assist correctional staff in doing their jobs and being more successful, which is likely to result in a more positive psychological state and greater satisfaction from the job.

Role clarity was predicted to be positively associated with job satisfaction among the studied prison staff. Studies have observed that role stress, the opposite of role clarity, is negatively associated with job satisfaction among Arizona prison officers (Hepburn & Knepper, 1993), staff at a Florida jail (Lambert & Paoline, 2005; Lambert, Reynolds, Paoline, & Watkins, 2004), midwestern prison staff (Lambert, Hogan, & Barton, 2002b), staff at a private midwestern prison (Lambert Hogan, Paoline, & Clarke, 2005), southern correctional officers (Cullen, Link, Wolfe, & Frank, 1985; Van Voorhis, Cullen, Link, & Wolfe, 1991; Whitehead & Lindquist, 1986), Missouri prison staff (Hepburn & Albonetti, 1980), and Ohio juvenile correctional staff (Blevins, Cullen, Frank, Sundt, & Holmes, 2006).

Quality of supervision

Although quality of supervision was not included in Hackman and Oldham (1975) original work, other studies have added it when testing the job characteristics model (Griffin et al., 2012; Lambert, Cluse-Tolar, et al., 2012; Lambert, Hogan, et al., 2012). Views of supervision deal with perceptions of the quality and supportive guidance given by the job supervisor. Quality supervision is critical for staff to be able to perform their jobs in an effective and efficient manner (Lambert, 2004). Supervisors can either help or hinder staff performance. Quality supervisors provide control, direction, support, and guidance for staff (Brough & Williams, 2007). Quality supervision tends to be more productive and successful at work, which, in turn, allows staff to feel better about themselves and see the job in a more positive manner (Yang et al., 2011). Conversely, poor supervision is likely to result in unpleasant work conditions, poorer job performance, frustration, and strain, translating to a less favorable view of the job (Cullen et al., 1985; Hogan et al., 2009; Lambert, 2004). According to the job characteristics model, quality supervision should create a more pleasant workplace and increase job effectiveness, producing a positive psychological state and increasing job satisfaction.

Views of quality supervision were postulated to be related to job satisfaction among the surveyed prison staff. Quality, open, and supportive supervision has been associated with

higher levels of job satisfaction in different correctional settings. Specifically, views of supervision have been reported to result in higher job satisfaction among staff at a western prison complex (Jurik & Winn, 1987), officers at a large Arizona jail (Griffin, 2001), a Midwest public maximum security prison (Lambert, 2004), a Midwest private prison (Hogan et al., 2009; Lambert & Hogan, 2009), Kentucky prison officers (Grossi, Keil, & Vito, 1996), northeastern jail officers (Castle, 2008), federal prison staff (Britton, 1997; Garland, McCarty, & Zhao, 2009), Texas prison officers (Hartley, Davila, Marquart, & Mullings, 2013), Ohio juvenile correctional staff (Blevins et al., 2006), and southern correctional officers (Cullen et al., 1985; Van Voorhis et al., 1991).

Views on training

Training views were also not included in Hackman and Oldham (1975) original job characteristics model or in more recent iterations of the model. We added this variable to the current study because quality training can provide skills that allow greater work success, which, in turn, should increase positive psychological states indicated in the job characteristic model. *Views of training* refer to a perception that the prison organization offers meaningful training for staff. Quality training provides staff with the knowledge and skills to be more productive in their work and to more effectively handle problems that occur (Castle & Martin, 2006; Griffin, 2001). In turn, this can make work more pleasant, resulting in positive perceptions of the job and increased job satisfaction. Conversely, perceptions of poor training can result in feeling unsure about work tasks and about how to handle problems that arise. In addition, training viewed as unusable or impractical can result in feelings of frustration. Ultimately, these negative feelings are likely to detract from how the job is viewed (Lambert, Hogan, et al., 2012).

Views of training should have a positive association with satisfaction from the job among the currently surveyed prison staff. There is support for this position in the limited studies that have included a measure of views of training. Griffin (2001) found that perceptions of relevant job training had significant positive effects on job satisfaction among Arizona jail officers. Training views also had a positive effect on job satisfaction among staff at a Midwest maximum security private prison (Lambert, Hogan, et al., 2012) and among staff at a southern jail (Lambert & Paoline, 2005).

Perceived dangerousness of the job

Perceived dangerousness of the job was added to the job characteristics in a study by Lambert, Cluse-Tolar, et al. (2012) and is also included in the current study. *Perceived dangerousness of the job* refers to perceptions of feeling at risk of injury from the job. Corrections is a unique occupation that carries risks. As noted by Armstrong and Griffin (2004), “few other organizations are charged with the central task of supervising and securing an unwilling and potentially violent population” (p. 577). As Lai, Wang, and Kellar (2012) noted, “there is no doubt that unexpected threats of violence, from either inmates or staff, are always prevalent in a correctional setting” (p. 15).

Higgins, Tewksbury, and Denney (2012) reported that perceived harm at work can wear on correctional staff. Individuals who perceive their job as dangerous are more likely to be on edge and apprehensive at work, which can detract from affective feelings toward

the job. Feeling safe at work probably raises the chances the person will find the job enjoyable (Cullen et al., 1985; Lambert & Hogan, 2010). Feelings of increased likelihood of victimization at work are likely to result in psychological strain, which, according to the job characteristics model, increases the chances of negative outcomes, including job dissatisfaction.

Perceived dangerousness of the job was postulated to be negatively related to job satisfaction among the studied southern prison staff. Consistent with this idea, empirical research has found that perceived dangerousness of the job was linked to lower job satisfaction among southern officers (Cullen et al., 1985; Van Voorhis et al., 1991), Texas prison staff (Mahfood et al., 2013), New York prison staff (Lombardo, 1981), staff at a midwestern state-run prison (Lambert & Hogan, 2010), female officers at a large Arizona jail (Griffin, 2001), Ohio juvenile correctional staff (Blevins et al., 2006), and staff at a Florida jail (Lambert & Paoline, 2005).

Job autonomy

Job autonomy was one of the original variables in the job characteristics model and was included in the current study (Hackman & Oldham, 1975, 1980). *Job autonomy* refers to the degree to which people feel free to make job-related decisions (Lambert, 2004; Saavedra & Kwun, 2000). According to Ross and Reskin (1992), job autonomy allows staff to have a degree of occupational self-direction. In addition, higher levels of autonomy send a message that staff are trusted, respected, and valued. Furthermore, it can allow staff to be more effective in their jobs, which can result in a sense of pride (Lambert, Paoline, & Hogan, 2006). Ultimately, autonomy should increase feelings of satisfaction from the job (Brief et al., 1976; Lambert, 2004). Conversely, lack of autonomy at work can result in staff feeling like they have no control, which results in frustration and strain (Whitehead & Lindquist, 1986). In turn, these negative feelings can reduce levels of job satisfaction. As previously indicated, positive psychological states generally result in positive outcomes, such as job satisfaction, under the job characteristics model.

Job autonomy should have a positive association with job satisfaction among the correctional staff in the current study. Job autonomy was observed to have a positive association with satisfaction from work among Midwest public prison staff (Brief et al., 1976; Lambert & Hogan, 2010; Lambert et al., 2006). Among Arizona prison staff, Hepburn and Knepper (1993) found that intrinsic job rewards/aspects (e.g., job autonomy and an opportunity to use one's skills) were positively related to job satisfaction. Finally, job autonomy was reported to raise the job satisfaction of federal prison staff (Wright, Saylor, Gilman, & Camp, 1997).

Summary

To review, several key conclusions can be drawn from the research to date on the association between job characteristics and correctional staff job satisfaction. Considering the salient consequences of correctional staff job satisfaction, there has been surprisingly little research on the link between job characteristics and staff job satisfaction. Additional research is needed to determine whether past findings can be replicated and to explore whether the results vary across time and across prisons in

different jurisdictions and regions. Additionally, there has been little research around the efficacy of the job characteristics model. Although past correctional staff satisfaction research has tested other theoretical models, only a handful of past studies specifically testing the job characteristics model could be found. There is a need for current studies that use the job characteristics model to determine whether it helps explain prison staff job satisfaction. Finally, there is a need to include different job characteristics to determine whether the effects on satisfaction vary by different types of job characteristics.

Hypotheses

Based on theoretical reasoning of the job characteristics model and the findings of past studies, we tested the following hypotheses. The variables measuring job variety (Hypothesis 1), role clarity (Hypothesis 2), quality supervision (Hypothesis 3), and quality training (Hypothesis 4) were hypothesized to have a positive association with job satisfaction in a multivariate regression analysis. Perceptions of job dangerousness were postulated to have a negative association with the job satisfaction in a multivariate regression analysis (Hypothesis 5). Lastly, job autonomy was hypothesized to have a positive association with job satisfaction in a multivariate regression analysis (Hypothesis 6).

Method

Participants

In the spring of 2015, researchers secured Institutional Review Board approval for a research project surveying all available staff at Mississippi State Penitentiary. The prison had different custody levels (i.e., medium and maximum security) and also housed the death row for the state prison system. The prison was designed to house approximately 4,700 adult male inmates and was separated into seven units. At the time of the survey, the prison housed about 4,600 inmates. There were 720 staff employed at the prison, of which 74% ($n = 532$) were custody officers and 26% ($n = 188$) were noncustody staff (e.g., counselors, teachers, medical staff, etc.). Women represented 70% ($n = 375$) of the security workforce.

The researchers visited the prison during the musters (i.e., roll calls) for each of the three shifts across six separate days to ensure survey data were obtained from all rotations of security officers. At musters, the purpose of the study was explained, including that participation was voluntary. A packet was distributed by a researcher to staff, and the packet included a cover letter, the survey instrument, an informed consent form, one half of a bifurcated raffle ticket (the research team kept the other half for a later drawing), and a blank envelope to return the survey and/or half of the raffle ticket. The cover letter also indicated the purpose of the study, that participation was voluntary, and that responses would be anonymous.

To increase the survey response rate (Porter & Whitcomb, 2005), participants were offered a chance to win one of ten \$50 Visa gift cards by returning half of the bifurcated raffle ticket, regardless of whether they completed the survey. Participants were informed that if they wished to participate in the study they should sign the consent form, complete the survey, and place the consent form and survey in the provided envelope. In addition, if they wished to be part of the raffle, they were asked to return part of the bifurcated ticket

in the envelope and told to maintain the other half for verification purposes at the raffle. The sealed envelope was to be placed in one of four locked drop boxes at the prison. One drop box was placed in each of the two units where security officers held their muster calls, one drop box was placed in the administration building, and one drop box was placed outside the training building. Those locations were selected because they were most convenient for the participants to return their sealed envelopes. Only the researchers had access to the drop box lock keys.

Because we wanted to collect data from all employees of the institution (not just security officers), researchers sent an e-mail to all administrative staff informing them of the purpose of the survey and advising them that the survey would be forthcoming. On the first day of data collection, members of the research team visited each administrative office and delivered the survey packets directly to the staff member or supervisor for that section (parole, industry, etc.). The purpose of the survey was explained to the available staff.

Of the 720 employed staff, only 547 received the survey packet. A total of 339 packets were distributed to security officers, whereas 188 nonsecurity staff received the packet. Some staff did not receive the survey because they were away from the prison for sick leave, training leave, personal leave, or administrative leave at the time the surveys were distributed. A total of 322 completed surveys were returned, which is a response rate of 59%. For security officers, the response rate was 68% ($n = 218$), and for nonsecurity staff, the response rate was 32% ($n = 103$).

Completed surveys were removed from the locked drop boxes approximately every 2 days during the 2-week data collection period. To decrease the likelihood of linking a particular staff member to a returned survey, the returned raffle tickets were removed from the envelopes and separated from the informed consent forms and surveys before they were examined. A drawing for the incentive prizes was conducted after the data collection period ended.

Variables

Dependent variable

Job satisfaction was the dependent variable in the current study. Overall global satisfaction from the job was measured by four items adapted from Brayfield and Rothe (1951): (1) I find real enjoyment in my job, (2) I like my job better than the average worker does, (3) Most days I am enthusiastic about my job, and (4) I feel satisfied with my job. Responses to the 6-point Likert-type scale were coded 1 (*strongly disagree*), 2 (*disagree*), 3 (*somewhat disagree*), 4 (*somewhat agree*), 5 (*agree*), and 6 (*strongly agree*). The responses for the four items were summed together to form an additive index of job satisfaction. This index had a $M = 15.63$, with a $SD = 5.79$. Cronbach's $\alpha = .95$, indicating a high degree of internal reliability.

Independent variables

The job characteristics of job variety, role clarity, supervision, training views, perceived dangerousness of the job, and job autonomy were the focal independent variables. Each of the items included in the indexes described below were measured using a 6-point Likert-type scale, mirroring the range of *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* described earlier for the job satisfaction items.

Job variety was measured using three items adapted from Curry, Wakefield, Price, and Mueller (1986): (1) My job requires that I must constantly learn new things, (2) My job requires that I be very creative, and (3) My job has a lot of variety in it. The responses to the three items were added together to form an index measuring job variety, and this additive index had a $M = 12.62$, with a $SD = 3.34$. These items had a Cronbach's $\alpha = .74$.

Role clarity was measured using two items adapted from Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970): (1) I clearly know what my work responsibilities are, (2) The rules that we're supposed to follow seem to be very clear. The responses were summed together and the resulting index measuring role clarity had a $M = 9.45$, with a $SD = 2.38$. The Cronbach's $\alpha = .76$.

Views of quality and supportive supervision were measured by five items adapted from Griffin et al. (2012): (1) My supervisor gives me advance notice of changes; (2) My supervisor looks out for my personal welfare; (3) When decisions are made by my supervisor, persons effected are asked for their ideas; (4) My supervisor is friendly and approachable; and (5) My supervisor works hard to make it pleasant to work here. Responses to these five items were added together to form an index for supervision, which had a $M = 17.34$ and a $SD = 7.34$. Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$.

Views of training were measured by a single item: My organization offers meaningful, practical training. The views of training variable had a $M = 3.98$, with a $SD = 1.35$.

Perceived dangerousness of the job was measured using three items adapted from Cullen et al. (1985): (1) I work at a dangerous job, (2) My job is a lot more dangerous than most jobs in the community, and (3) At my job, there is a real risk of being hurt or injured. The items were summed to form an index which had a $M = 15.30$, a $SD = 3.64$, and a Cronbach's $\alpha = .93$.

Job autonomy was measured using a single item adapted from Curry et al. (1986): My job does not allow me much opportunity to make my own decisions (reverse coded). The job autonomy variable had a $M = 3.53$ and a $SD = 1.48$.

Finally, measures for gender, age, position, tenure, educational level, and supervisory status were included as control variables and explanatory measures. Gender was coded as 0 = male and 1 = female. Age was measured in continuous years. Position was coded as 0 = nonsecurity position and 1 = security officer. Tenure with the state prison system was measured in continuous years. Educational level was coded as 0 = no college degree and 1 = some type of college degree. Supervisory status was coded as 1 = nonsupervisor and 1 = supervisor of other prison staff.

Results

Descriptive statistics for the respondents and the indexes are presented in Table 1. Approximately 74% of respondents were women. The mean age of the respondents was 40.07 years and the average respondent had worked 10.26 years with the state prison agency. About 68% of those who completed the survey indicated that they were security officers and 32% worked in other positions. In terms of educational level, 45% indicated that they had earned an associate's degree or higher. Approximately 16% of those who responded indicated that they were a supervisor of other prison staff. Personal correspondence with prison administrators at the time of data collection confirmed the respondents were representative of the overall prison workforce.

Table 1. Univariate statistics for study variables.

Variable	Description	Min	Max	Md	Mn	SD
Gender	74% female (coded 0) 26% male (coded 1)	0	1	0	0.26	0.44
Age	Age in years	20	77	42	40.07	12.74
Position	32% nonsecurity (coded 0) 68% security officers (coded 1)	0	1	1	0.68	0.47
Tenure	Tenure with agency in years	0	34	9	10.26	8.71
Educ lev	55% no college degree (coded 0) 45% college degree (coded 1)	0	1	0	0.45	0.50
Sup status	84% non-supervisors (coded 0) 16% supervisor other staff (coded 1)	0	1	0	0.16	0.37
Job variety	3 item additive index, $\alpha = .74$	3	18	13	12.62	3.34
Role clarity	2 item additive index, $\alpha = .76$	2	16	10	9.45	2.38
Supervision	5 item additive index, $\alpha = .92$	5	30	18	17.34	7.34
Training	1 item variable	1	6	4	3.98	1.35
Danger	3 item additive index, $\alpha = .93$	3	18	17	15.30	3.64
Job auto	1 item variable	1	6	4	3.53	1.48
Job sat	4 item additive index, $\alpha = .95$	4	24	17	15.63	5.79

Note. Educ lev = educational level; Sup status = supervisor status; Danger = perceptions the job is dangerous; Job auto = job autonomy; Job sat = job satisfaction; Min = minimum value; Max = maximum value; Md = median value; Mn = mean value; SD = standard deviation value; and α = Cronbach's alpha value, a measure of internal reliability.

The total number of participants was 322.

There was significant variation in the dependent and independent variables (i.e., none was a constant). The median and Mean were similar to one another for each variable, which suggests that the variables were normally distributed. In addition, the skewness and kurtosis statistics indicated a normal distribution. All the index variables had a Cronbach's α value above .70, indicating that each of the indexes was internally reliable. In addition, factor analysis for each index variable was conducted, and the items for each particular index loaded on a single factor indicating unidimensionality (Gorsuch, 1983)

A correlation matrix is presented in Table 2. All of the variables except educational level had a statistically significant correlation with job satisfaction. In general, women were less satisfied with their jobs than men. Likewise, security officers generally reported less job satisfaction than nonsecurity personnel. Older staff and those with longer tenure tended to report greater job satisfaction. Similarly, supervisory staff were more satisfied than nonsupervisory staff. Job variety, role clarity, views on supervision, views of training, and job autonomy each had a significant positive correlation with the dependent variable, meaning increases in each were associated with higher job satisfaction. Perceived dangerousness of the job had a significant negative correlation, meaning that staff who viewed their jobs as being more dangerousness reported less satisfaction. The educational level variable had a nonsignificant correlation with the dependent variable.

An ordinary least squares (OLS) regression equation was estimated with the job satisfaction index as the dependent variable and gender, age, position, tenure, educational level, supervisory status, job variety, role clarity, supervision, training, dangerousness, and job autonomy as the independent variables. The results are presented in Table 3.

"Multicollinearity is the extent to which a linear dependence exists between an exploratory variable and the other explanatory variables in the equation" (Bollen, 1989, p. 58). High multicollinearity can seriously impede estimation of the equation because it increases the variance of estimates (i.e., Standard Errors are affected) and, as such, multicollinearity can be a serious problem in multiple regression if it occurs (Berry, 1993).

Table 2. Correction matrix for study variables.

Variable	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.
1. Gender	1.00												
2. Age	.04	1.00											
3. Position	.01	-.39**	1.00										
4. Tenure	.03	.68**	-.28**	1.00									
5. Educ lev	-.02	.26**	-.42**	.13*	1.00								
6. Sup status	.10	.28**	-.35**	.35**	.21**	1.00							
7. Job variety	-.04	.12*	-.22**	.09	.10	.04	1.00						
8. Role clarity	-.25**	.12*	-.13*	.10	.04	-.04	.51**	1.00					
9. Supervision	.02	-.01	-.18**	-.06	.00	.04	.54**	.36**	1.00				
10. Training	-.14*	.02	-.06	.09	.04	.04	.49**	.46**	.42**	1.00			
11. Danger	.04	-.02	.23**	-.06	.00	.07	.05	.13*	-.04	.05	1.00		
12. Job auto	.02	.17**	-.14*	.05	.19**	.00	.34**	.35**	.23**	.20**	.10	1.00	
13. Job sat	-.13*	.19**	-.31**	.16**	.07	.13*	.56**	.42**	.50**	.49**	-.13*	.21**	1.00

Note. Educ lev = for educational level; Sup status = supervisor status; Danger = perceptions the job is dangerous; Job auto = job autonomy; and Job sat = job satisfaction.

The total number of participants was 322.

See Table 1 for a description of the variables, how they were coded, and their univariate statistics.

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$.

Collinearity is seen as a problem when two independent variables have a correlation of .80 or higher, and multicollinearity is seen as a problem when variance inflation factor scores (VIF) exceed 5 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Based upon the correlations (see Table 2) and the VIF statistics (see Table 3), there appeared to be no issue with multicollinearity. In addition, the issues of outliers, influential cases, normality, linearity and homoscedasticity of residuals, and independence of errors in the regression analysis were tested and determined to be unproblematic in the model (Berry, 1993; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

The dependent variable is a limited measure rather than a continuous one. The index measuring job satisfaction ranged from 4 to 24. In light of this, ordered ordinal regression models, which can be used for ordered ordinal-level limited dependent variables, were also estimated (Long, 1997). The results for the ordered ordinal (also referred to as ordered

Table 3. Regression results with job satisfaction as the predicted variable for all staff and just security officers.

Variable	All Staff			Security Officers		
	<i>b</i>	β	VIF	<i>b</i>	β	VIF
Gender	-0.10	-.01	1.16	-0.44	-.03	1.16
Age	0.05	.10	2.33	0.01	.01	2.88
Position	-1.77	-.14*	1.78	n/a	n/a	n/a
Tenure	0.01	.01	2.09	0.05	.07	3.08
Educational level	-1.26	-.11*	1.29	-1.50	-.11	1.12
Supervisor status	1.38	.09	1.30	2.35	.11	1.49
Job variety	0.34	.20**	1.90	0.29	.16*	1.92
Role clarity	0.32	.13*	1.79	0.38	.16	2.00
Supervision	0.18	.23**	1.64	0.26	.31**	1.85
Training	0.98	.23**	1.62	0.95	.22**	1.68
Dangerousness of job	-.18	-.11*	1.18	-0.27	-.14*	1.25
Job autonomy	0.11	.03	1.26	0.09	.02	1.26
<i>F</i> Value		20.08**			12.87**	
<i>R</i> ²		.51			.50	

Note. VIF = variance inflation factor scores.

See Table 1 for a description of the variables and how they were coded.

The total number of all participants was 322, and the total number of correctional officers was 218.

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$.

logistic) regression analysis (not shown) were identical to the results from the OLS regression analysis in terms of statistical significance of the independent job characteristic variables and the amount of variance explained. For example, for the ordered ordinal regression, the Nagelkerke $R^2 = .50$, and for the OLS regression equation, the $R^2 = .51$. As the results between the two analyses are very similar and the vast majority of the past studies looking at the effects of job characteristics on correctional staff job satisfaction have used OLS regression, we report the OLS results in this study.

Among all prison staff, position, educational level, job variety, role clarity, views of supervision, views of training, and perceived dangerousness of the job all had significant associations with job satisfaction in the multivariate analysis. Security officers, on average, reported lower satisfaction than nonsecurity personnel. Likewise, those with a college degree tended to report lower satisfaction than staff without a college degree. Increases in job variety, role clarity, supervision, and training were associated with greater satisfaction from work. On the other hand, increases in perceived danger were related to lower job satisfaction. Gender, age, tenure, supervisory status, and job autonomy had nonsignificant associations with the dependent variable. As previously indicated, the model R^2 was .51, meaning that the independent variables explained about 51% of the variance observed in the job satisfaction index. A separate OLS regression equation (not shown) was run with job satisfaction as the dependent variable and gender, age, position, tenure, educational level, and supervisor status as the independent variables. The R^2 for this equation was .13, which means far more variance in the job satisfaction variable is accounted for by the job characteristic variables than by the personal variables.

As security (i.e., correctional) officers are the largest position group of staff in most prisons, including the one surveyed, a second OLS regression equation was conducted for this group of participants. The results are also reported in Table 3. Based on the VIF scores (see Table 3), multicollinearity was not observed to be an issue. The independent variables accounted for approximately 50% of the observed variance in the dependent variable. Job variety, supervision, training, and dangerousness each had significant relationships with job satisfaction, with the first three variables having positive effects and the last variable a negative effect. Although it came close to statistical significance ($p \leq .05$), role clarity had a nonsignificant positive association with job satisfaction among security officers. Gender, age, tenure, educational level, supervisory status, and job autonomy also had nonsignificant associations with the dependent variable. Finally, a separate regression equation (not shown) using only the responses of security officers was estimated with job satisfaction as the dependent variable and gender, age, tenure, educational level, and supervisor status as the independent variables. The R^2 for this equation was .07, which means far more variance in job satisfaction is accounted for by job characteristic variables than by personal variables among security officers.

Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to examine the relationship between job characteristics (i.e., job variety, role clarity, supervision, training, perceived dangerousness of the job, and job autonomy) and job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is important because it is associated with reduced absenteeism, lower levels of burnout, decreased turnover, and increased commitment to the prison organization, all of which are beneficial to the individual and the institution. According to the job characteristics model, positive job

characteristics produce improved psychological states because people want to be successful and to have pleasant working experiences, which result in other positive outcomes like job satisfaction.

Overall, the results of this study provide support for the job characteristics model as an explanation for job satisfaction among the currently surveyed prison staff. Specifically, they indicate that positive job characteristics (i.e., job variety, supervision, training, and lower perceived dangerousness of job) are associated with greater job satisfaction (i.e., Hypotheses 1, 3, 4, and 5 were supported). Job autonomy, however, was unrelated to job satisfaction (i.e., Hypothesis 6 was not supported). There are three likely explanations for the finding that job autonomy was nonsignificant. First, job autonomy may have been insignificant because it was measured by a single item, which does not fully capture this latent concept. Incorporating additional measures of autonomy in future research would be beneficial to understand its effects. Second, it may be that corrections workers in this institution had what might best be described as “limited job autonomy” (i.e., the level of job autonomy has been curtailed as compared to the level in the past). At the time of this data collection, the entire Department of Corrections was under close scrutiny because of recent federal indictments against former corrections leaders and evidence of maltreatment in other institutions in the state. Anecdotal evidence suggests that one result of that scrutiny was limiting job autonomy for all corrections employees throughout the state. Thus, a later data collection may yield different results. Finally, job autonomy may not matter after other job characteristics are taken into account. Replication of this research in other institutions in the state with multiple measures of job autonomy may help understand this nonsignificant finding.

The results presented in [Table 3](#) showed several similarities between all staff and security officers. For example, job variety, supervision, training, and dangerousness of job were positively associated with job satisfaction for both all staff and security officers. One difference between them, however, is that role clarity (i.e., knowing what one’s work responsibilities are and having clear rules) mattered for all staff, but not for security officers (i.e., Hypothesis 2 was only partially supported). One reason for this difference may be our measure of role clarity, which included only two items. Had we been able to measure additional dimensions of role clarity (e.g., understanding of task priority and how supervisor’s expectations are mirrored by employees), we may have found that it mattered for security officers as well.

Regarding personal characteristics, two variables mattered: type of position and educational level. Specifically, security officers (compared to nonsecurity officers) and those with more education (i.e., a college degree) reported lower job satisfaction than did their counterparts. As stated previously, the pay level in this prison was low and staff were not unionized. Additionally, at the time of the data collection, the prison was in the midst of a custodial staff shortage and correctional officers were being forced to work mandatory overtime several shifts per week. A number of officers expressed their discontent to the researchers as the project was being described to them during muster, and several officers approached the researchers to express dissatisfaction with their circumstances shortly after the study was described. Thus, quantitatively and qualitatively, there was a real sense that these problems are likely more acute for security officers and may have contributed to their lower job satisfaction.

A number of possible explanations exist for the negative relationship between educational level and job satisfaction. First, more educated staff may have been bored with their work and were thus less satisfied with it. Educated staff may have also viewed their position in the prison as only temporary (i.e., as a way to gain experience before moving on to another career). The most plausible explanation, however, may be one that was presented to the researchers when they reported the results of the survey at the state conference of correctional professionals. Members of the audience, when asked to explain this finding, were vocal in their agreement that educated employees were more likely than less educated employees to feel that they were not utilizing their college degree that they had worked hard to earn in their daily job activities. Furthermore, the professionals also suggested that educated respondents may have felt trapped by the fact that they were in a rural area where jobs befitting their education were unavailable; consequently, their life situation “forced” them to work in the prison and they were dissatisfied with their jobs because of it.

Nevertheless, supplemental analyses also revealed that, for all staff and security officers, job characteristics explained far more variance in job satisfaction than did personal characteristics. Although personal characteristics are important, it is still job characteristics that contribute most to levels of job satisfaction.

Implications

The finding that job characteristics mattered more than personal characteristics in predicting job satisfaction is an important one, in large part because it points to tangible changes that institutions can make. For example, varying staff work routines, improving supervision quality and support, and providing meaningful, practical training are changes institutions can make to improve job satisfaction. Another strategy for improving job satisfaction is to enhance the safety of the workplace, as concerns about the dangerousness of the job and one’s risk of being hurt or injured were associated with lower job satisfaction.

Limitations and directions for future research

One limitation of the current study is that it relies on data from a single prison. As noted in the beginning, it is important to replicate this study in other facilities to determine whether and how the findings vary across different jurisdictions and regions. That the majority of the correctional staff in this study were female makes this study unique, but also highlights the importance of examining the relationship between job characteristics and job satisfaction among a larger, more representative sample. We also did not examine differences by race and/or ethnicity because the question measuring this area was dropped from the survey in printing and was not discovered until after the completed surveys were returned. As a result, future research should examine whether the relationship between job characteristics and job satisfaction holds across different demographic groups. Although many of the job characteristics had significant effects, as has been found in past studies, there have been too few studies, including the current one, to conclude that job characteristics will have the same association with job satisfaction across all correctional institutions. There is a need for more

research a wide range of different types of correctional facilities, including prisons, across the different locations and regions of the United States.

A second limitation of this study is that our measure of role clarity was based on only two measures. Given the importance of role clarity in distinguishing between all staff and security officers, it is important to employ a measure that assesses multiple dimensions of role clarity. After all, the factors that matter most for security officers may differ from those for other staff. Relatedly, our measures of training and job autonomy were measured using single items. As with role clarity, it is important for future studies to measure these job characteristics using multiple items.

Finally, the job and personal characteristics included in our models accounted for about half of the variance in job satisfaction. It is important for future research to identify the other variables that help shape prison staff job satisfaction. The job characteristics model should also be tested for other outcomes, including organizational commitment, job involvement, organization citizenship behaviors, turnover intent, and absenteeism.

Conclusion

As corrections practitioners and researchers are well aware, in many jurisdictions, corrections is one of the most underfunded areas in the employment sector. Employees often work long hours for low wages and thus are likely to express more dissatisfaction with their jobs (in general) than employees of most other organizations. Nevertheless, the results of this study paint a more hopeful picture. The most important influences of job satisfaction uncovered here were organizational, not individual, and organizational influences can be modified without changing salary or benefits.

The results presented here suggest that job variety, quality of supervision, and quality of training are the most important influences on whether these corrections employees were satisfied with their jobs. Each of these factors can be influenced by supervisors and thus supervisors appear to have the power to influence job satisfaction among their employees in corrections even when the state budget does not allow pay raises or increased benefits. For example, dividing the various tasks that must be performed in the daily operations of the prison more evenly among the officers may lead to greater job variety—rotating officers between posts during the same shift may thus increase job satisfaction. Discussing this idea, and asking the officers for other ideas that might increase the variety of their job, would likely increase their perception of the quality of their supervision and would likely increase job satisfaction even more. Asking officers how to improve training, then actually doing it, would also increase satisfaction with supervision and likely job satisfaction as well. Each of these are simple, but often overlooked, solutions that may help increase job satisfaction and, eventually, reduce turnover in corrections as well. Adhering to a rigorous chain of command in a dangerous environment does not mean that supervisors cannot be innovative in the way their employees perform their jobs. We believe that innovation is not only possible, but a relatively inexpensive way to create a more positive working environment.

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