

# TRAUMA IN THE CORRECTIONAL SETTING: ORIGINS, CONSEQUENCES, AND SOLUTIONS

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By:

Dr. Frank Ferdik  
Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice  
Austin Peay State University

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# TRAUMA SOURCES

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics for variables used in analysis.

Variables	Code or min–max	Mean or <i>N</i>	SD or percent	Factor loadings
<b>Risk perceptions</b>	7–35	29.22	5.68	–
Working alongside inmates with infectious diseases	1–5	3.99	1.32	.555
Gang presence	1–5	3.75	1.27	.794
Disruptive inmates	1–5	3.89	1.20	.821
Working alongside mentally ill inmates	1–5	3.91	1.25	.808
Contraband presence	1–5	4.02	1.26	.727
Riots	1–5	4.94	1.20	.711
Community retaliation from inmates released back into the community	1–5	3.50	1.16	.584

**TABLE 2: Sources of Direct and Vicarious Workplace Trauma for Correctional Officers**

Direct			Vicarious		
Trauma source	<i>n</i>	%	Trauma source	<i>n</i>	%
Physical threats to officers and their families from incarcerated persons	5/193	2.6%	Learning about incarcerated person suicide	55/193	28.5%
Physical threats to officers and their families from co-workers	5/193	2.6%	Learning about co-workers and their workplace injuries	55/193	28.5%
Physical threats to officers and their families from supervisors	5/193	2.6%	Learning about co-worker suicide	185/193	96.3%
Dashing (incarcerated persons projecting bodily fluids onto officers)	74/193	38.3%	Learning about intra-gang violence and brutality	47/193	24.4%
Finding lethal contraband (i.e., knives, shanks)	72/193	37.3%	Learning about self-injurious behaviors by incarcerated persons	47/193	24.4%
Small-scale riots	1/193	00.5%	Hearing about the sexual and violent victimization experiences of incarcerated persons	179/193	92.7%
Physical assaults	88/193	45.5%			
Personally observing deceased bodies on-the-job	92/193	47.6%			

**Table 2**

*Frequency Distribution of Potentially Psychological Traumatic Episodes (N = 1,517)*

Incidents	Does not apply N (%)	Witnessed while at work N (%)	Personally happened at work N (%)
Fire or explosion	640 (43.2%)	212 (14.3%)	629 (42.5%)
Transportation accident (e.g., car wreck)	572 (38%)	164 (10.9%)	768 (51.1%)
Exposure to toxic substances	624 (41.5%)	164 (10.9%)	714 (47.5%)
Physical assault	87 (5.8%)	452 (30.1%)	962 (64.1%)
Assault with a weapon	416 (27.8%)	316 (21.2%)	762 (51.0%)
Sexual assault	634 (42.2%)	154 (10.2%)	716 (47.6%)
Other unwanted or uncomfortable sexual experience	558 (37.2%)	181 (12.1%)	762 (50.8%)
Exposure to war zone-like violence	662 (44.0%)	151 (10.0%)	690 (45.9%)
Captivity (e.g., kidnapped)	883 (58.7%)	62 (4.1%)	559 (37.2%)
Life-threatening illness or injury	439 (29.2%)	369 (24.6%)	694 (46.2%)
Severe human suffering	761 (50.8%)	273 (18.2%)	465 (31.0%)

# CONSEQUENCES OF TRAUMA



Beginning initially with an overview of our descriptive estimations, it will be seen from Table 1 that the mean ratings for each of the mental illness screening measures were 15.09 for PTSD, 6.56 for depression, 5.40 for anxiety, and 2.40 for alcohol use disorder. Finally, a total of 306 officers disclosed experiencing at least some symptoms of a panic attack within the previous two weeks of survey distribution. Regarding the first four mental illnesses and their respective diagnosable cutoff points, 19.9% of our sample screened positively for PTSD, 26.7% did for depression, 19.5% did for anxiety, and finally, 5.7% tested positive for alcohol use disorder. From our frequency distribution table, 31.0% of officers reported that severe human suffering happened to them personally while at work, while 64.1% reported experiencing personally a physical assault. Just over 4.0% reported witnessing while at work some



Table 4. Frequency distribution of the items used to create conceptual variables.

Index Items	SA	A	D	SD	Yes	No	M	Std. Dev.
<i>Turnover Intent (Cronbach's alpha = .77)</i>								
How likely is it that you will be at this job one year from now? <sup>b</sup>	VL = 50.2%	L = 34.3%	U = 9.6%	VU = 5.9%	—	—	1.712	.867
How actively have you searched for another job in the last year? <sup>c</sup>	VA = 9.3%	A = 14.9%	AL = 32.8%	NA = 43.0%	—	—	1.904	.970
I frequently think about quitting my job at this prison	12.6%	23.7%	55.6%	8.1%	—	—	2.407	.810
Do you desire to leave your job?	—	—	—	—	25.0%	75.0%	.250	.433
In the last six months, have you thought about quitting your job?	—	—	—	—	50.0%	50.0%	.411	.492

# POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

Table 3. OLS regression models for leadership and correctional officer mental health.

Variables	Organizational culture	Depression	Anxiety	Burnout	Depression	Anxiety	Burnout
	Beta (s.e.)	Beta (s.e.)	Beta (s.e.)	Beta (s.e.)	Beta (s.e.)	Beta (s.e.)	Beta (s.e.)
Treatment Group	0.22 (0.89)**	−0.18 (0.93)**	−0.25 (0.99)***	−0.22 (0.98)***	−0.015 (0.90)**	−0.20 (0.98)**	−0.16 (1.01)**
Control Group 1	−0.03 (0.95)	−0.07 (0.88)	−0.04 (0.96)	0.02 (0.78)	−0.08 (0.95)	−0.05 (0.99)	−0.08 (0.82)
Organizational Culture	---	---	---	---	−0.54 (0.04)***	−0.40 (0.04)***	−0.51 (0.05)***
Sex	0.06 (0.84)	−0.05 (0.50)	−0.07 (0.69)	−0.08 (0.89)	−0.06 (0.88)	−0.09 (0.98)	−0.10 (0.89)
Hispanic Ethnicity	0.08 (0.77)	0.10 (0.84)	0.05 (0.80)	0.04 (0.89)	0.09 (0.98)	0.07 (0.98)	0.08 (0.99)
Indian	−0.01 (0.88)	0.06 (0.83)	0.10 (0.92)	0.09 (0.92)	0.11 (0.89)	0.11 (0.89)	0.10 (0.88)
Asian	0.02 (0.98)	0.02 (0.97)	0.02 (0.99)	0.08 (1.01)	0.08 (1.02)	0.06 (0.99)	0.07 (1.01)
Black	0.08 (1.01)	−0.09 (0.97)	−0.12 (1.01)	−0.03 (0.98)	−0.05 (1.08)	−0.09 (0.98)	−0.06 (1.03)
Age	−0.02 (0.75)	−0.09 (0.61)	0.11 (0.41)	0.09 (0.55)	0.10 (0.65)	0.06 (0.76)	0.09 (0.75)
Tenure	−0.07 (0.76)	−0.05 (0.67)	−0.12 (0.77)	−0.11 (0.80)	−0.09 (0.81)	−0.11 (0.83)	−0.10 (0.86)
Constant	31.40 (4.65)***	13.18 (3.88)***	13.48 (3.81)***	18.81 (4.94)***	26.05 (3.65)***	26.08 (3.81)***	34.12 (4.66)***
F-Test	9.62***	3.07***	4.30***	5.51***	11.53***	8.56***	14.08
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.24	0.17	0.22	0.24	0.29	0.29	0.34
N	238	239	239	240	237	237	239

Note. Beta=standardized regression coefficient; s.e. = standard error; Control Group 2 is the reference category for the treatment effect, while White is the reference category for Race; \*\* =  $p \leq .01$ ; \*\*\* =  $p \leq .001$ .

# REFERENCES

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# QUESTIONS?

THANK YOU