

Inmates-to-staff Assaults, PTSD and Burnout: Profiles of Risk and Vulnerability

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Abstract

Prison employees are often confronted with critical incidents and chronic stressors that may lead to trauma or burnout symptoms. However, most of the research on clinical aspects of interpersonal violence in prisons (inmates-to-staff violence, specifically) focuses either on trauma or on burnout. The purpose of the present study is (a) to examine both burnout and posttraumatic stress among prison staff and (b) to examine the influences of inmates-to-staff violent relations on posttraumatic stress in terms of risk profile to develop PTSD. A random sample of French correctional employees has completed various self-reported questionnaires assessing burnout, posttraumatic stress, and stress as well as victimization and demographic characteristics. Correctional employees demonstrated high levels of PTSD symptoms, burnout, and stress. Violent interactions with inmates lead to experienced trauma of all types (PTSD, secondary, or vicarious trauma). Results have highlighted a prison worker's profile prone to PTSD: he or she expresses high levels of emotional exhaustion, intense levels of stress, high levels of depersonalization, and high levels of intrusion, avoidance, and hyperreactivity. This study contributes to an understanding of the literature by explaining the complex association between burnout and posttraumatic stress after interpersonal violence. These findings suggest a need to support prison workers and to address inmates-to-staff relational dynamics.