

RESEARCH REPORT NO. 4

CORRECTIONAL OFFICER TURNOVER

AT THE

UTAH STATE PRISON JUNE, 1978

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ABSTRACT

The turnover rate for correctional officers at the Utah State Prison is nearly twice as high as that for State employees generally. Data collected over a four-year period indicated that 74 percent of the correctional officers resigned voluntarily, 11 percent retired normally, six percent had to quit for health reasons, five percent retired for medical reasons, and four percent were dismissed. More than half of the employees who terminated employment did so prior to working a year. There was no difference in age between those who terminated employment and those who did not. There was some difference in marital status. A variety of reasons were stated for terminating employment.

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INTRODUCTIONACQUISITIONS

Correctional officer turnover at the Utah State Prison has been a critical problem for several years. A comparison of the entire state turnover rate and the turnover rate of officers at the Prison for 1976 and 1977 show that the officer rate is almost double:

	<u>State</u>	<u>Officers</u>
1977 Turnover	16%	28%
1976 Turnover	13%	24%

This study was undertaken to gather data that could be of use to the agency and division administrations, personnel offices, and other parties interested in reducing the problem.

PROCEDURE

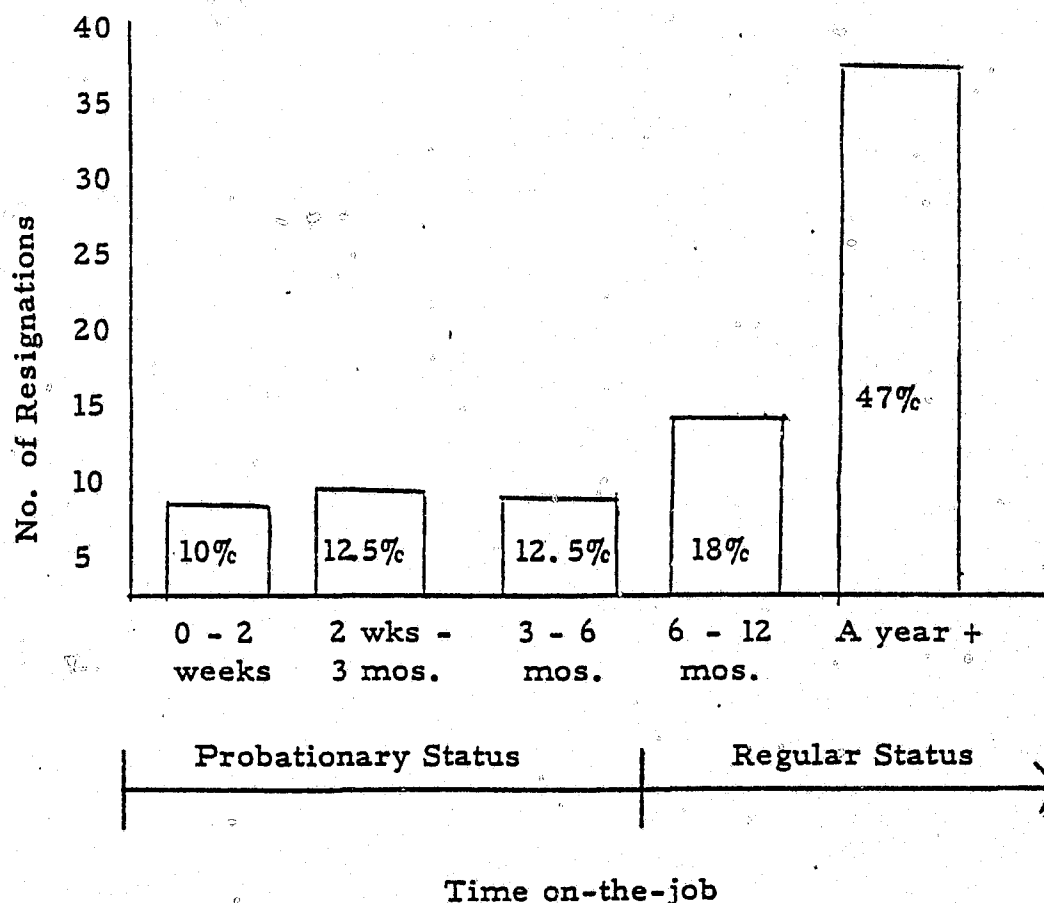
The data collected came from the 4-year span of January 1, 1974, to December 31, 1977. A review was made of personnel files to identify characteristics of employees who resigned during that period.

In the 4-year period there were 122 terminations. The percentages of each kind of termination are as follows:

74%	Resigned (voluntarily)
11%	Normal retirement at 65
6%	Had to quit for health reasons
5%	Medical retirement
4%	Dismissed
100%	

The next step was to identify major characteristics of just these that resigned (the 74%). Of those, 11% were hired but never did report for work. In other words, they made application, passed whatever screening tests were given, were interviewed, were offered employment, accepted the offer, and then never did report for work. The other 89% resigned after going to work at the Prison.

Now of those who did come to work, the following graph indicates the number who quit, when they quit, and percentages by time period (figures in the bars).



The graph shows that 65% are quitting after they gain regular status and almost 50% are quitting after a full year at the institution. Only 10% are quitting during the initial 2-week training and orientation that all new officers must complete. Implications will be discussed later.

Two other characteristics, marital status and age at the time of application, were researched to see if significant differences appeared between those who quit and those who stayed. Files of those who started at the same time and stayed were compared with those who resigned.

Practically no real difference was found as to average age of those that stayed was 30.3 and the average age of those that resigned was 30.7.

The following statistics on marital status suggest that there is little real difference between those who stay and those who don't.

<u>Marital Status</u>	<u>Resigned</u>	<u>Stayed</u>
Married	72.5%	71%
Single	21%	14%
Divorced	4%	8%
Separated	1.25%	--
Not Available	1.25%	7%

The data would indicate that it would be quite difficult to predict those who would stay versus those who would quit based on age or marital status.

INDICATIONS

An in-depth statistical analysis of all possible variables affecting turnover was not undertaken. General indications or trends were sought to assist prison administrators in personnel decisions. The key data in the research appears to be when officers quit.

Previously, it was thought that the major factor behind correctional officer turnover was the hazard involved in close contact with the inmates. The statistics indicate that only 35% are quitting in the first 6 months before they complete probation while almost 50% are not quitting until after a full year at the institution.

Logic would say that the hazardous conditions would push the employees to resign long before a year has passed. It appears that they come on the job, get used to the conditions, receive a promotion after 6 months and then around a year or more become dissatisfied. Possible reasons for the job dissatisfaction at that point in time could include:

1. There is a lack of promotional opportunities in the prison system after moving up to the senior officer level.
2. The employees begin to look to transferring to sister agencies now that they've completed a year in correctional work.
3. Having been there a year - - long enough to know the system and its problems - - they may become dissatisfied with the management, the rules and regulations they must work under, or dissatisfied with their immediate supervisor.

Inasmuch as the officers are staying quite a while before quitting, it appears that the salary at the entry level is probably adequate.

Dissatisfaction with salary may be occurring after they have been there some time and they see that promotional opportunities are very limited.

The final part of the research was to interview officers who have resigned and others still at the Prison. In order to get candid opinions of why officers quit, the following is a summation of all the responses. Names and dates of the respondents are withheld to prevent any confidentiality problems. The responses are categorized for ease of identification and use.

Management/Administration

- Officers are not well-informed of the administration's new rules and procedures - inmates know of changes before the officers on occasion.
- There is a lack of communication with the administration.
- The deputy warden over our area doesn't really know what's happening down on the firing line.
- Bad reports on inmates written up by officers bring no action. The supervisor ignores it so that the inmates appears to be doing fine which results in his being transferred to a lesser level of custody. The supervisor wants that so he won't have to deal with the inmate anymore.

- The prison has an extremely low morale among rank-and-file officers. I didn't quit because of the salary or the working conditions, just that I got tired of the mis-management and inconsistent application of rules and procedures. If we rewarded competence, officers would stay.

- Performance appraisals are extremely subjective. Those with poor performance sometime are promoted before those with good performance. My supervisor covered up for incompetent officers so that bad reports wouldn't go out. When an officer tries to do a good job and enforces the rules, the inmates get upset. They complain and the lieutenant moves the "good" officer out.

- We feel very little support from the administration. It seems the inmates are believed more and afforded more rights than the officers.

Pay

- Some quit because the pay is not worth the hassle.

- The pay is pretty good. I make as much as people I know with the police department.

- I think those at maximum and B-North earn the extra \$50.00 a month.

- Maximum and B-North don't deserve extra pay as they are some of the safest areas of the Prison because they are lock-up.

- The extra pay for some posts is unfair. For example, the man in the control room at maximum gets an extra \$50.00 a month and it's probably the safest spot in the Prison.

Working Conditions

- Some quit because of boredom (tower work).
- Fear of inmates causes some to quit. How many people do you know want to work with criminals 8 hours a day?
- I was terrified the first couple of months on the job, but I learned how to survive. You have to be "half-crazy" to work here.
- The ones that quit do so because they don't learn how to get along with inmates.

Promotional Opportunities/Job Specifications

- Older officers quit because they see no future if they stay.
- Right now promotions are a big issue. Younger officers are promoted to sergeant before officers who have been here longer. Once in a while, officers still on probation are promoted before others with more experience. The ones who are not chosen want to know why and get pretty upset when no explanation is given.
- Officers should be allowed to advance as soon as they can and want to.

- When officers bid and take a job out of custody, they can't come back into custody at a comparable level. That makes them mad.

- Your work performance doesn't correlate with whether you are promoted or not. Advancement was possible if you were a friend or relative of the lieutenant, deputy, warden, etc. I saw several instances where basically poor workers were promoted because they were a friend of the boss.

- Experience isn't counted as much as education in getting promotions. That seems very unfair.

- It's not what you know, but the degree you have.

- I supervise functionally other officers but can't have the direct supervisor's position because they require a degree without substituting for experience.

- People without the degree are being discriminated against.

Family

- Shiftwork causes problems for the younger officers. It can be a real strain on a marriage.

- Family members put pressure on the officer to quit when there is a disturbance or another officer is hurt.

- There is a stigma about being a "prison guard."

Recruitment

- Expectations of the job are not fulfilled. They start and then the job turns out to be very different than they thought.

- It would be helpful to get people who have had military experience. It's easier for them to adjust to the jobs here.

Rules & Regulations

- We need tighter security - it's now a "fun house."

- The administration needs to restrict the verbal abuse that the officers take. Inmates need to show more respect for officers.

- Those officers that are stricter are under more pressure from the inmates than the more lenient officers.

- Rules are often changing and are inconsistently enforced.

This makes both the officers and inmates very nervous. Things have become very loose and strict standards are not enforced.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on all the data presented, I think the following recommendations are appropriate:

We need to do further study of Correctional Officer selection and recruitment procedures to see if we can reduce the number of people who are hired and then never report for work. Further study could also help find ways of reducing the overall turnover.

Even more important, I think, than reviewing the selection process, we need to evaluate the effectiveness of the Prison's personnel policies and procedures. Since most officers are resigning after they've worked quite awhile, I don't think the hazardous conditions and pay are causing it as much as other factors.

We need to look at the bid system and the job specifications. Are we not allowing the kind of movement in the Prison that is necessary to keep the officers from feeling dead-ended? Are our minimum qualifications too restrictive? Should we allow experience at the Prison to substitute for college study more often than we do now?

We need to take a look at the lines of communication in the Prison. Why do some officers feel a lack of support? Do we need to set up management training for first-line supervisors? What is the policy or method for disseminating information throughout the Prison? Are lines of accountability clearly drawn?

The study suggests that the overall turnover problem is serious but not terrible. It also suggests that our focus should shift to how the personnel system at the Prison is working.

John King
7/11/78

END