Factors Leading to Corrections Officers’ Job Satisfaction

By Seung-Bum Yang, Gregory C. Brown and Byongook Moon, PhD

This study explores the determinants of job satisfaction of corrections officers. Using a survey data collected from 400 South Korean corrections officers, we tested the effect of five factors on job satisfaction. The five factors were identified from the Job Descriptive Index (JDI). We used a single item approach and employed ordered logit regression analysis to ensure advance and sophisticated statistical analysis of survey research. The empirical analysis confirmed that pay, promotion, job itself, supervisor, and coworkers were all significant factors that lead to job satisfaction. The findings in this research are consistent with the extant research on job satisfaction. The results of this research can improve public managers’ understanding of employee job satisfaction.

The purpose of this study is to explore the influence of independent variables on variation in job satisfaction among South Korean corrections officers by using the ordered logit regression model. Job satisfaction was measured as overall satisfaction, not as satisfaction with multiple survey items. The data for this research are from a survey of 400 South Korean corrections officers representing 42 departments.

Job satisfaction has long been the subject of attention among managers and management scholars. There are two different perspectives to explain the importance of studying job satisfaction.1 The first is the humanitarian perspective. People deserve to be treated fairly and with respect. Job satisfaction is a reflection of good treatment. The second is the utilitarian perspective. Job satisfaction positively impacts employee behavior and this behavior can be linked to positive organizational functioning. In other words, job satisfaction can have a positive effect on behaviors such as turnover, absenteeism, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behavior, and ultimately increases organizational performance.

Prior research on job satisfaction has focused on the determinants of job satisfaction. This study is an extension of previous efforts to enrich our knowledge of job satisfaction; however, this work differs from existing research in several ways. First, there has been little attention focused on the factors affecting job satisfaction among corrections officers. This study examines corrections officers. The case of corrections officers is important to today’s human resource management because the turnover rate for corrections officers’ is significantly higher than that for other public employees. Second, this paper employs the Job Descriptive Index (JDI) as important factors in predicting corrections officers’ job satisfaction. Although analysts have long been used the JDI in
identifying determinants of job satisfaction, they have not paid much attention on its applicability to corrections officers. One advantage of employing widely used factors of job satisfaction such as JD IDI is that this enables comparisons to the determinants of corrections officers’ job satisfaction and those of other public employees. Last, in terms of research methods, most empirical research on job satisfaction has used a Likert-type scale to measure job satisfaction and has employed OLS regression analysis treating the Likert-type scale as continuous. This practice of treating ordinal level measurement as interval level measurement has been at the center of a long-standing debate. The present study attempts to overcome this limitation by employing ordered logit regression analysis.

Job Satisfaction of Corrections Officers

Job satisfaction can be defined as how an individual feels about his or her job. One of the primary reasons that public managers are concerned about job satisfaction is based on the assumption that it is related to higher performance. However, the empirical evidence for such a relationship is mixed. Some empirical studies have found that job satisfaction increases organizational performance. Others have indicated that there is not enough evidence to conclude that job satisfaction leads to higher performance. For example, Iaffaldano and Muchinsky found that job satisfaction and performance were not highly correlated. Several scholars have argued that the relationship between job satisfaction and organizational performance is mediated by several variables.

While the effect of job satisfaction on performance is dubious, its effect on retention related employee behaviors is fairly clear. Happy employees are more likely to stay at their job longer. Numerous research results show that job satisfaction is negatively associated with absenteeism and turnover intention. This has an important implication for today’s public organizations. Given today’s low unemployment rates and weak organization loyalty, the retention of valued employees has emerged as a major challenge for public managers.

In particular, public employees such as corrections officers have experienced a high turnover rate. For example, the turnover rate in prison staff was 20% in Texas in 2000. In other states such as Arkansas the turnover rate was 42.3% and in Tennessee, 39.0% in 2000. Corrections officers with five to 10 years of service were most likely to seek new employment because of stress and outside pressures. It makes sense that correctional organizations suffer the detrimental consequences of employee absenteeism. This is clearly demonstrated in the following example: “Many posts in a prison cannot be vacated. Management must expend valuable time to modify employee assignments to respond to absences. Thus, there are the obvious overtime costs associated with filling the post. Additionally, absenteeism puts hardship on other employees, particularly those expecting to go home at the end of their shift. Aside from forcing attending employees to work mandatory overtime that they may not have been expecting or desiring to work, absenteeism can cause a temporary loss of contacts because the staff member filling in does not have the extensive knowledge of the area and inmates that a regular staff member has developed over time from working at that post. Even if the position is left vacant, the absence will mean that there is one less staff member able to monitor...
inmates and respond to emergencies. In sum, absenteeism, particularly if it becomes commonplace, is costly for correctional organizations.” \(^{10}\) Hence, assuming job satisfaction is related to job turnover and absenteeism, it is important to investigate the factors affecting corrections officers’ job satisfaction.

In search of determinants of employee job satisfaction, researchers have employed a number of different variables. Although there have been several approaches utilized, as stated earlier, the Job Descriptive Index (JDI) is one of the most widely used approaches to identify factors affecting job satisfaction. \(^{11}\) Created by Smith, Kendall, and Hulin, the JDI identifies five important determinants of job satisfaction: pay, promotions and promotion opportunities, coworkers, supervision, and the work itself. \(^{12}\) This study will also use the same factors. The primary reasons are: (1) they are widely used predictors of job satisfaction; (2) they have been shown to be valid determinants of job satisfaction; (3) they are simple; and (4) they are applicable to a wide variety of demographic groups. \(^{13}\) Thus, using the five aforementioned factors allows the comparison of this research on South Korean corrections officers’ with other research on corrections officers’ job satisfaction, and permits the generalization of this study’s results to other public employees.

**Pay**

Pay refers to the amount of wages, salary, and benefits and the individual’s perception of their fairness. Research has found that well paid employees are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs. \(^{14}\) If individuals are more satisfied with their pay, then the cost of leaving their organizations is greater; thus, they develop more positive attitudes toward their jobs. \(^{15}\) Lawler argued that employees who believe their pay is equitable in comparison to others should have higher job satisfaction than those who perceive their pay as inferior. \(^{16}\) Lewis examined the Federal Senior Executive Service and found that 57% cited a continuous federal salary gap as the most important reason for departure. \(^{17}\) Ellickson used data from American municipal employees to examine the effect of pay and benefits on job satisfaction. \(^{18}\) He found that both satisfaction with pay and satisfaction with benefits have a positive relationship with overall job satisfaction. Based on the review of literature, the following hypothesis was proposed:

**Hypothesis 1:** Corrections officers who perceive that they are well paid are more likely to have a higher level of job satisfaction.

**Promotion Opportunities**

Researchers have often found a relationship between promotion opportunities and employee job satisfaction. \(^{19}\) Like pay, the cost of leaving the job is greater for employees who are satisfied with promotion opportunities, because they develop more positive attitudes toward their job. \(^{20}\) According to Maslow, an individual’s desire to fulfill five types of needs (i.e., physiological needs, safety needs, social needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs) leads to job satisfaction. \(^{21}\) Promotional opportunities are related to these five needs, and employees with better promotion opportunities have a better chance to satisfy their needs. Therefore, the following hypothesis was identified:
**Hypothesis 2:** Corrections officers who perceive that they have better promotion opportunities are more likely to have a higher level of job satisfaction.

**Job Itself**

The job itself involves employee perceptions of the degree to which a job is challenging. As employees perceive their job becoming more challenging, their corresponding level of job satisfaction will increase. Studies have shown that the degree to which employees can utilize a variety of skills at work is a major predictor of job satisfaction. In a similar vein, Wright and Davis’s recent research observed state agency employees and concluded that the extent of routines in an employee’s job had a negative effect on employee job satisfaction. Thus, the study tested the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 3:** Corrections officers who perceive that their job is more challenging are more likely to have a higher level of job satisfaction.

**The Supervisor**

Supervisors’ support and caring for employees have a positive impact on employee job satisfaction. Ting examined US federal government employees and found that individuals were more satisfied with their jobs if they had better relationships with their supervisors. Kim used data collected from a survey of County government employees and concluded that employees’ effective communications with supervisors were positively related to job satisfaction. Similarly, Ellickson surveyed municipal government employees and found that there was a positive relationship between satisfaction with the employee’s immediate supervisor and overall job satisfaction. Therefore, the following hypothesis was proposed:

**Hypothesis 4:** Corrections officers who perceive that their supervisors care for them are more likely to have a higher level of job satisfaction.

**Coworkers**

Positive and supportive relationships with coworkers have an influence on employee job satisfaction. Individuals that had a better relationship with their coworkers were more likely to be satisfied with their job. Interestingly, Ellickson noted that there was a positive relationship between the extent to which members take pride in their work groups (i.e., esprit de corps) and job satisfaction. More recently, Moon and Maxwell found that negative interaction with coworkers was related to corrections officers’ job dissatisfaction.

**Hypothesis 5:** Corrections officers who perceive that they have positive and supportive relationships with coworkers are more likely to have a higher level of job satisfaction.
Methods

The data used for this study were originally collected by Moon and Maxwell. They distributed 500 survey questionnaires to corrections officers in the Legal Research and Training Institution, a women’s institution, and a male prison in South Korea. This study utilized 400 survey questionnaires to investigate the determinants of corrections officers’ job satisfaction.

The survey items contained in this study are listed in Appendix. The dependent variable, corrections officers’ job satisfaction was measured by a single item. The item asked respondents about their overall satisfaction on their job. Responses were based on a four-point scale which was coded 1 (not satisfied at all), 2 (not too satisfied), 3 (somewhat satisfied), and 4 (satisfied). The benefits of using a single-item approach to measure job satisfaction include: single item measures may be easier and take less time to complete; single-item measures may be less expensive; single-item measures may contain more face validity; and single-item measures may be more flexible than multiple-item scales.

The pay was measured by a single item. This item was coded on a four-point agree/disagree scale coded 1 (strongly disagree) through 4 (strongly agree). The other four independent variables (i.e., promotion opportunity, job itself, supervisor, and coworkers) were measured by three survey items respectively. These items were also coded on a four-point agree/disagree scale. The average of three items for each variable was calculated before the statistical analyses were conducted.

Ordered logit regression analysis was conducted using STATA version 9. Ordered logit regression is appropriate when the dependent variable is ordinal. This study employed ordered logit regression because the dependant variable, the job satisfaction, was measured at the ordinal level.

Results

Table 1 shows the frequency distribution for the overall job satisfaction of the respondents. Approximately 60 percent of the respondents perceived that they were satisfied or somewhat satisfied with their job (52.9% somewhat satisfied; 6.2% satisfied). However, it should be noted that more than half of the respondents feel they are somewhat satisfied with their job. Only 6.2 percent of the Korean corrections officers responded

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall Job Satisfaction</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not satisfied at all</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat dissatisfied</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>32.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat satisfied</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>52.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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that they were satisfied with their job. Likewise, approximately 40 percent of the respondents perceived they were dissatisfied with their job (32.6% somewhat dissatisfied; 8.3% not satisfied at all).

Table 2 summarizes descriptive statistics of the independent variables used in this study. The minimum value for each variable was 1 and the maximum value was 4. The mean scores of the variables ranged from 2.10 (job itself) to 2.71 (coworkers). The standard deviations were ranged from .43 to .68.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the Independent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pay</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Itself</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coworkers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 provides the results of the ordered logit regression analysis. The logit model regressed job satisfaction on the independent variables. All five hypotheses were supported. The pay, the promotion, and coworkers had significant effect on job satisfaction at the .01 level. The impact of job itself was also significant at the .05 level. Additionally, the supervisor was significantly related to job satisfaction at the .10 level. To summarize, the findings of this study suggest that employees who are well paid, have better promotion opportunities, have more challenging jobs, have caring supervisors, and have positive co-worker relationships are more likely to have a higher level job satisfaction.

Table 3: Ordered Logit Regression Analysis (Dependent variable: Job Satisfaction)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Coefficients</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pay</td>
<td>.539***</td>
<td>.174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td>.797***</td>
<td>.217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Itself</td>
<td>.531**</td>
<td>.241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>.411*</td>
<td>.231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coworkers</td>
<td>1.141***</td>
<td>.276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threshold 1</td>
<td>5.241</td>
<td>.797</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threshold 2</td>
<td>7.769</td>
<td>.851</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threshold 3</td>
<td>11.518</td>
<td>.956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log likelihood</td>
<td>-368.91</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-square</td>
<td>131.53***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R2</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>400</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. * p<.10, ** p<.05, *** p<.01.
Conclusion

The study investigated factors that affect corrections officers’ job satisfaction. The ordered logit regression analysis revealed that the five predictors employed in this study were all significant factors affecting corrections officers’ job satisfaction. First, the research found that the pay level of corrections officers was related to their job satisfaction. Second, the empirical analysis confirmed that promotion opportunities increased the likelihood of higher job satisfaction. Third, the study’s results indicated that more challenging jobs had an impact on corrections officers’ job satisfaction. Fourth, the finding suggested that supervisors’ support and caring for employees were related to corrections officers’ job satisfaction. Finally, the results of the study supported that positive and supportive relationships with coworkers had an influence on corrections officers’ job satisfaction.

The findings in this research can improve public managers’ understanding of employee job satisfaction, especially, corrections officers’ job satisfaction. Public managers have made an effort to increase employee job satisfaction with the expectation of decreasing the turnover rate. In particular, considering the high turnover rate of corrections officers, the five factors investigated in this study are critical to the management of corrections officers.

This study also has implications to social scientists. The research contributes to the body of knowledge relating to the important predictors of job satisfaction. The findings in this research are consistent with the extant research that the five variables suggested by JDI are significantly related to employee job satisfaction. In addition, the research contributes to the advancement of statistical research methods in the study of job satisfaction. The study used the single-item measure of job satisfaction and employed the ordered logit regression model which is appropriate for ordinal level measurement. This ensures advance and sophisticated statistical analysis of survey research.

Appendix

Job Satisfaction
All in all, how satisfied would you say you are with your job?*

The Pay
A problem in this profession is the low wage. (R)

Promotion Opportunities
I lack the proper opportunities to advance in this institution. (R)
If I want to get promoted I have to look for a job in another institution. (R)
I have few opportunities to grow and learn new knowledge and skills in my job. (R)

Job Itself
I am responsible for an almost unmanageable number of assignments or prisoners at the same time. (R)
The demands for work quality made upon me are unreasonable. (R)
A lot of times, my job makes me very frustrated or angry. (R)

**The Supervisor**

My supervisors often encourage the people I work with to think of better ways of getting the work done.
My supervisors often encourage us to do the job in a way that we really would be proud of.
When my supervisors have a dispute with one of my fellow guards, they usually try to handle it in a friendly way.

**Coworkers**

My fellow officers often compliment someone who has done his/her job well.
My fellow officers often encourage each other to do the job in a way that we would really be proud of.
My fellow officers often encourage each other to think of better ways of getting the work done.

(R) = Reversed scoring.

* Responses on a four-point scale coded 1 (not satisfied at all), 2 (not too satisfied), 3 (somewhat satisfied), and 4 (satisfied), all other items coded on a four-point agree/disagree scale coded 1 (strongly disagree) through 4 (strongly agree).

**Notes**


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