Chapter 6

Interactions Between Personality Traits of Law Enforcement and Corrections Officers, and Attitudes Toward Felony Drug Offenders:
Best Practices for Interventions

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ABSTRACT

Punitive attitudes in criminal justice staff towards felony drug offenders, as related to level of social dominance orientation, right wing authoritarianism, protestant work ethic orientation, and openness to change were examined. These traits were hypothesized to be factors contributing to continued acceptance of a paradigm emphasizing use penalties and punishment to address substance abuse. The study utilized 28 law enforcement officers, 14 corrections officers, and 58 non-criminal justice individuals. Data was collected using Altemeyer abbreviated RWA scale, SDO-6 scale, Miles and Garrett protestant work ethic scale, attitudes to organizational change, officer's attitude survey, and researcher designed survey. Results indicated both moderating and mediating effects between variables, except in the case of openness to change. To reduce unwanted behaviors, focus needs to be on assisting criminal justice staff with challenges in a more psychologically healthy manner.

INTRODUCTION

With the events in Ferguson, Missouri and other similar high-profile events involving law enforcement and citizens in recent years, the appropriateness of examining potentially contributing personality factors in law enforcement and corrections officers continues to be relevant. This is especially relevant comparative to how the majority of the remainder of non-low income nations approach law enforcement, criminal justice, and corrections. Of specific interest to this research are personality factors related to an individual's level of identification with a Social Dominance Orientation (SDO), Right Wing Authoritarianism (RWA), Protestant Work Ethic (PWE), along with openness to change. Using a critical theory lens, this research sought to explain "what is wrong with current social reality, identify the actors to change it, and provide both clear norms for criticism and achievable practical goals for social transformation" (Malpas, 2012). Despite being an unethical practice, law enforcement and corrections officers have historically been proven to treat felony drug offenders differently, particularly in instances where it is permitted to seize the assets of the alleged offender (Champion, 2001). Specific attitudes related to officers having a higher percentage of these personality traits (greater identification with a higher level of SDO, RWA, and a stronger philosophical adherence to the idea of PWE) were hypothesized to be significant factors.

These factors perpetuate the continued acceptance of a paradigm that emphasizes the use of restrictions, penalties, and punishment to discuss substance abuse and addiction, despite a growing body of research contrary to the efficacy of these practices. Continued adherence to this approach towards felony drug offenders has a negative impact on the criminal justice system. For example, it contributes to the overcrowding of jails and prisons. Excessive emphasis on penalties, punishment and the like also perpetuate the problem of recidivism. This then becomes an issue of ethics, as it does nothing to ease the process of rehabilitation of these incarcerated individuals and yet we expect them to reintegrate into society in a successful manner. In the United States, responsibility for poverty, crime, and drug use are attributed to the communities suffering from these symptoms, and society at large is exonerated from any responsibility. As Sidanius and Liu (2001) explain, the idea that inequality is moral, fair, and unavoidable is maintained. If assistance is offered, it is often under extremely restrictive circumstances. In the United States, state spending on addiction across the nation averages around 11% of state budgets. Of this 11%, only between 1 to 4 cents on each dollar is spent on prevention and treatment. The rest is spent on the consequences of addiction, and this includes incarceration (CASA Columbia.org, 2015).

Within the larger criminal justice field, there is a lack of understanding in the process of addiction, recovery, and mental health (Silverstone, Krameddine, DeMarco,

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