

*Occupational Stress and Coping among  
Irish Prison Officers:  
An Exploratory Examination*

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Occupational Stress and Coping among Prison Officers: An Exploratory Examination**

Prison officers as a professional group are exposed to unique and powerful stressors. Few other employees are given the responsibility of taken charge of an unwilling and potentially violent population. This present study grew out of a perceived paucity of systematic research examining the relationships between stressors and stress related problems among prison officers in Ireland. The research was conducted to extend knowledge about prison officer perceptions of stress, consequences in terms of physical and emotional status, perceived causes of stress, and coping techniques.

From self-reported data of sixty-eight prison officers drawn from a medium security committal prison for male offenders, findings of the present study indicate that according to several objective indicators, prison officers experience considerable stress on the job. Furthermore, the study revealed even though there are some concerns, such as safety, that might be more salient for prison officers than other professions, it is the broader organisation rather than the unique attributes of the job that exerted the greater influence on the level and sources of stress among prison officers in the present study.

Significant predictors of stress reported by respondents included issues with management, safety concerns, work overload, compulsory overtime, work-family conflict and lack of proper facilities. Furthermore, based on the results it was suggested that reactions by prison officers to different stressors were found not only to have consequences for the organisation such as absenteeism and job dissatisfaction but also to have effects on the employees' health. In addition, the majority of the prison officers appeared to engage in problem-focused coping for reducing overall levels of occupational stress. In light of the findings, recommendations and avenues for future research are discussed.

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# ***Chapter One***

## ***Introduction***

The workplace is one of the key environments that affects our physical and mental health. The World Health Organisation (WHO) (2005) emphasise that work can make a person feel that he or she is playing a useful role in society, substantially contributes to a person's identity and ultimately provides income for an individual and his/her family. The effects of work on mental health are complex. On the one hand, work is a source of personal satisfaction and accomplishment, interpersonal contacts and financial security, and these are all prerequisites for good mental health (WHO, 2003). However, when work is poorly organised and when risks at the workplace have not been properly addressed, work can also have negative effects on our mental health and well being (Cox et al., 2000).

Work stress is recognised worldwide as a major challenge to worker's health and the healthiness of their organisations. WHO (2005) is predicting that by 2020, stress will be a major cause of workplace ill health. It is now generally accepted that prolonged or intense stress can have a negative impact on an individual's mental and physical health. The Health Service Executive (HSE) (2004) state that around half a million people in the UK experience work-related stress at a level that they believe is making them ill, up to five million people feel "very" or "extremely" stressed by their work and work-related stress costs society about £3.7 billion each year. From an Irish perspective the Mental Health Association of Ireland carried out a survey that found that 35% of adults claim to have experienced notable levels of stress in the recent past, while 11% (300,000 people) said that workplace stress interferes with their family lives (HSA, 2002). Workers who are stressed are also more likely to be unhealthy, poorly motivated, less productive and less safe at work (WHO, 2003).

The stress experienced by different occupation types and job roles has been discussed in many papers with a number of different occupations being described as experiencing above average levels of stress. The job of prison officers, in particular, has been rated as among the most stressful of all occupations (Cooper, Cooper, & Eaker, 1988). A multivariate logistic regression analysis carried out by Stack & Tsoudis (1997) indicated that the risk of suicide among prison guards was 39% higher than the rest of the working age population. Prison officers play crucial roles in the functioning of prisons. According to Moon and Maxwell (2004) prison officers can influence the positive behaviour of inmates through daily contact therefore helping to maintain the social and

security environment of prisons on a daily basis. However, the responsibility this position holds is fraught with stress (Lambert et al., 2004). Crawley (2004, pp. 418) suggests that this 'anxiety arises from the unpredictability of prison life; although much of prison life is mundane and routine, the officer is always conscious that a prisoner *may* assault him, that a prisoner *may* try to escape, that a prisoner *may* try to take him hostage'.

Those who choose a career as a prison officer face a number of issues such as role problems, work overload, demanding social contacts (with prisoners, colleagues, and supervisors), and poor social status (Schaufeli & Peeters, 2000). These factors may not only affect the officer but also have a ripple effect that can result in negative consequences for the officer's family members as well as the organisation (Slate et al., 2001). Furthermore, as the prison population continues to blossom the conditions within prison facilities will remain stressful. There are approximately 3,311 prison personnel of all ranks serving in 16 prisons and places of detention in the Republic of Ireland (Irish Prison Service, 2004). The daily average number of persons in custody for 2004 was 3,199 (Irish Prison Service, 2004). For 2005 there were a total of 10,658 committals to prison, comprising 5,088 committals under sentence, 4,522 committals on remand/for trial, 951 committals under immigration law and 188 other committals (Irish Prison Service, 2005).

Closely connected to the level of work-related stress is coping i.e. the behavioural and cognitive efforts to manage stressful situations that are appraised as taxing personal resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Coping with work-related stress by prison officers has received limited attention, both in terms of the extent of the research, as well as the types of coping explored (Triplett et al., 1996). Preliminary investigation revealed that from an Irish perspective there has only been a scant acknowledgement of the issues pertaining to stress and coping among prison officers within the literature. Further investigation uncovered that most of the studies exploring this issue were conducted in the United States. The applicability of these findings is questionable as the situation in prisons in the United States differs vastly from those in Ireland. For instance, in the United States institutions with 1,500 prisoners are not uncommon, whereas in Ireland the maximum number of prisoners in any one location is approximately 515 (Irish Prison Service, 2005).

Therefore this study is timely in that it aims to explore occupational stress as it relates to prison officers by exploring the following areas. Firstly, the phenomenon of occupational stress and to identify its sources among Irish prison officers. Secondly, given the particular sources of work-related stress identified by prison officers, what, if any, are the most effective coping mechanisms utilized. The study will then present the results of the analysis and concludes with a discussion of the findings and suggestions for future research.

## ***Chapter Two***

### ***Literature Review***

## **2.1 Introduction**

The landscape of the work environment in the twenty-first century is changing at whirlwind speed. Downsizing, the growth in information systems, de-manning, a 'just-in-time' approach to name just a few in working life present new challenges to mental health and well being. Occupational stress is been increasingly recognised as one of the major challenge to workers' health and the healthiness of organisations. Without favourable working conditions, the ability to attract and keep well-trained, effective personnel becomes increasingly challenging (Botha and Pienaar, 2006). For these reasons, continuing to examine work-place stress and the precursors to workplace stress is essential. The role of the prison officer is one of the many professions contributing to a high body of research into the sources and effect of the phenomenon of occupational stress.

Historically, the position of the prison officer was very narrowly defined and did not attract the most educated or professional staff (Seiter, 2001). However, their role in modern prisons has changed considerably. Today, an officer will have a high level of responsibility for the care, safety, security and rehabilitation of prisoners (Irish Prison Service, 2005). In the United States this tendency towards professionalisation prompted the American Correctional association (ACA) in 1993 to pass a resolution to encourage the use of the term "correctional officers" rather than prison guard, because it much better describes their responsibilities of custody and control, which require extensive interpersonal skills, special training and educations (American Correctional Association, 1993). In Ireland, however, their title is "prison officer" and this term will be used in this thesis.

Farkas (1999) suggests that this tendency towards professionalism has resulted in an ideological shift where prison officers are now expected to control the behaviour of prisoners as well as been increasingly called to perform human service roles such as helping prisoners cope with problems associated with incarceration, as well as managing rehabilitation programs. Crawley (2004, pp. 414) further argues that 'unlike, for example, police officers, whose relationships with offenders are relatively fleeting, prison officers often spend sustained periods of time with the same prisoners, many of

whom will have suffered a variety of personal traumas, difficulties and disappointments during their sentences'. Whereas prisoners have numerous programs available to help them cope with the stress of their living environment, prison officers have limited resources designed to help them cope with the occupational stressors that can arise from working in the prison environment (Morgan et al., 2002). This current literature review seeks to find further empirical support for this assertion by exploring the theories of stress development, sources of prison officer stress and the coping strategies used by officers to reduce levels of stress.

## **2.2 Literature search strategy**

In conducting her research the author used both the Broad-brush approach and the Incremental approach. The Broad-brush approach involved finding all references about the given subject, while the Incremental approach involved getting primary sources that are located in the reference list of articles that you have already found. The author did this by doing both a computerised search and a manual search.

The computerised search involved the following databases, Pschinfo, Sage Journals Online, Science Direct, Springer Link, SocIndex and JSTOR. The following key words were used *prison officers, correctional officers, occupational stress, distress, stress management, coping strategies and job satisfaction*. An initial search using the word combination *occupational stress and prison officers* resulted in approximately 6154 articles. Selecting literature that was published between 1994-2007 refined the search; this resulted in approximately 250 articles, of which 72 were relevant to this paper. The National University of Irelands OPAC (On Line Public Access Catalogues) was also sourced which identified textbooks, which the author used accordingly. By evaluating all the literature it led to the following three main themes, which the author identified as:

- Understanding Stress: Theories of Stress Development
- Sources of Prison Officer Stress
- Consequences of Stress and Ways of Coping

These areas will be discussed in the proceeding sections.

### **2.3 Understanding Stress: Theories of Stress Development**

Over the past three decades there has been a growing belief in all sectors of employment and in government that the experience of stress at work has undesirable consequences for the health and safety of individuals and for the health of their organisations (Cox et al., 2000). The first step in understanding work-related stress among prison officers, and placing them in the context of the organisational literature on stress, is defining stress. Review of the literature indicates that an almost exhaustive attempt has been made to define stress, often with contradictory and confused results. For the purpose of the present study, stress is simply defined as *the pattern of specific and non-specific responses organisms make to a stimulus event that disturbs its equilibrium and tax or exceeds its ability to cope* (Zimbardo et al., 1995). In order to find a precise framework for prison officer stress research, there is a requirement to reposition confusing conceptualisations of stress to a more straightforward, simplistic and workable three-dimensional classification structure. This structure is based on the response, stimulus and interactional model of stress.

### **2.4 Models of Stress**

#### **▪ Stress as the Dependent Variable- A Response-Based Model of Stress**

Historically it is the work of Hans Selye in the 1930s and 1940s that really marks the beginning of a response-based approach in the study of stress (Viner, 1999). According to Selye's theory of stress, there are many kinds of stress-producing agents (stressors) that can trigger the same systematic reaction or general bodily response (Zimbardo et al., 1995). The general adaptive response to such non-specific agents was described by Selye as the General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS). It is comprised of three stages: an alarm reaction, the organism's initial response to the stressful stimuli; the stage of resistance, the organism's full adaptation to the stressor with consequent disappearance or improvement of alarm reaction symptoms; however if the alarm reaction is elicited too intensely or too frequently over an extended period the energy needed for adaptation becomes depleted and the third stage exhaustion or collapse occurs (Lees & Ellis, 1990). Although the GAS had far-reaching influence and significant impact on our understanding of stress, it has been challenged. One major criticism is that it does not

address the issue of psychological response to stress and is therefore often described as 'too simplistic' (Sutherland and Cooper, 1990). A response-based approach to stress, in seeking to define an intangible phenomenon, views it in terms of the dependent variable; hence research which utilizes Selye's physiological model attempts to measure the responses to, and the effects and consequences of stress (Viner, 1999). Whereas the identification of potential sources of stress is the central theme of the stimulus-based model of stress (Sutherland and Cooper, 1990).

▪ **Stress as the Independent Variable - A Stimulus-Based Model of Stress**

The stimulus-based psychological model of stress has its roots in engineering and physics; the correlation being that a force exerted which results in a demand that causes distortion can be described as a definition of stress (Zimbardo et al., 1995). The stimulus model states that strain on the individual are a direct result of an external (environmental) stimulus or force. The aphorism, 'the straw that broke the camel's back' is a view consistent with this model (Cooper et al., 2001). An individual is perpetually bombarded with potential stressor sources in the environment but just a minor or innocuous event can alter the delicate balance between coping and the total breakdown of coping behaviour (Sutherland and Cooper, 1990).

It has been suggested in most stress studies that prison officers' work environmental stressors are caused by external stimuli, which cause varying levels of strain with which the prison officer is unable to cope (Armstrong & Griffin, 2004; Finn, 1998 & Keinan & Malach-Pines, 2007). However this view has been disputed by Sutherland and Cooper (1990) who argue purely objective measures of environmental conditions are inadequate. Individual differences, variability in tolerance levels and expectations, account for the fact of two individuals exposed to exactly the same situation, might react in completely different ways i.e. two prison officers can react in completely different ways to the same stressor. This deficiency is a major weakness of the stimulus-based model of stress.

Richard Lazarus a pioneer in stress research and emotion research has distinguished two stages in our cognitive appraisal of demands. That is, having decided that something is at stake (primary appraisal) the meaning attributed to a situation is in part determined by the resources available to the individual to deal with it (secondary appraisal)

(Dewe, 1989). Therefore the judgement that a particular person-environment relationship is stressful hangs not only on the stimulus characteristics of the situation but also on the individual's appraisal of it (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984).

▪ **An Interactive Model of Stress**

The interactive model of stress focuses on the structural characteristics of the person's interaction with their work environment (Cox et al., 2000). It incorporates both the response-based and the stimulus-based approaches to stress and it is the model that most modern stress theorists subscribe to (Cooper et al., 2001). Sutherland and Cooper (1990) point out that within this model it is necessary to consider all three conceptual domains of the stress process:

1. Source of stress;
2. Mediators of the stress response;
3. The manifestation of stress.

This model proposes situations that arise are not inherently stressful, but are potentially stressful. However, from a critical perspective Lazarus (1990) argues that the interactional perspective may not provide a sufficiently comprehensive framework to enable a full understanding of the stress process. Nevertheless, this approach has clearly been important in drawing attention to the separate constructs that play a significant role in understanding stress (Cooper et al., 2001).

Stress research seems to have focused predominantly on the view of stress as a negative concept. However, Selye (1976) emphasizes that stress reaction is not automatically bad; neither can it be avoided, because being alive is synonymous with responding to stress. It is necessary for motivation, growth, development and change. Stress in this incidence is viewed as *eutress*. But the unwanted, unmanageable stressor situations are damaging, and so stress becomes *distress* (Sutherland and Cooper, 1990). 'Stress' therefore should be seen as a continuum where a person may alternate from feelings of eutress to mild/moderate distress or in some cases to severe distress. It is the transition to severe distress that is likely to be most detrimental for prison officers, the sources of which will be discussed in the next section.

Firstly, this will be preceded by a debate on how theoretical models can aid our understanding of the stress process by, as Cooper et al. (2001) suggests, reflecting the sequence of events in stress transactions as well as their interrelationships. The social epidemiological approach for explaining the causes of work-related stress, suggests that certain work characteristics elevate the susceptibility of the worker to the risk of job strain with negative consequences for mental and physical health (Calnan et al., 2004). This social epidemiological approach has spawned a number of different and competing social epidemiological models. Among these, two theoretical frameworks have been particularly successful in generating and guiding job stress research: the Job Demand-Control Model (Karasek, 1979) and the Model of Effort-Reward Imbalance (Siegrist, 1996, 1998).

- **The Job Demands-Control Model**

One of the most influential models in research on the relationship between work and stress is the Job-Demands Control (JDC) model (Karasek, 1979). Karasek's model drew attention to the possibility that work characteristics may not be linearly associated with worker health, and that they may combine interactively in relation to health (Cox et al., 2000). The basic assumption of the JDC model is that job control or decision latitude is a crucial resource that moderates the potential negative effects of job stress. Hence, increasing employee's control prevents physical and/or mental health when sufficient levels of control exist (Rodriguez et al., 2000).

The model contains two primary predications. The first major prediction of the JDC model is that the strongest adverse strain reactions (e.g. poor subjective health) will occur when job demands are high and worker's control is low (i.e. so-called high strain jobs). The second prediction of the model is that work motivation, learning and growth will occur in situations where both job demands and worker's control are high (i.e. so-called active jobs) (de Jonge et al., 2000). Essentially Karasek argues that high demand jobs produce a state of normal arousal i.e. increased heart rate, increased adrenalin, increased breathing rate). This enables the body to respond to the demand. However, if there is an environmental constraint, such as low control the arousal cannot be channelled into an effective coping response (e.g. participation in social activities and informal rituals). Unresolved strain may in turn accumulate and as it builds up can result in anxiety, depression, psychosomatic complaints and cardiovascular disease

(Dollard et al., 2003). In Karasek's theory, this anxiety can be ameliorated if workers (a) have the power to make decisions on the job (decision authority) and (b) can use a variety of skills in their work (skill discretion) (Cooper et al., 2001).

However, one of the main criticisms levelled against Karasek's model is that it is too simplistic and ignores the moderating effect of social support on the main variables (Cox et al., 2000). In response to this disparagement Johnson & Hall expanded the original model in 1988 to include social support entitled the Job Demands-Control Support (JDCS) model (Dollard et al., 2003). It is argued that adverse outcomes might be mitigated by social support at work from colleagues and superiors, which interacts with decision latitude to confer protection from the effects of high job demands (Calnan et al., 2004). Hence, one hypothesis that emerges from the JDCS model is that jobs with high demands, low control, and low support from supervisors or coworkers carry the highest risk for psychological or physical disorders (high strain-isolated jobs) (Dollard et al., 2003). However the JDCS model has also been criticised for its failure to consider individual differences in susceptibility and coping potential (Cox et al., 2000). Despite this judgement Dollard et al. (2003) asserts that the model attracts strong empirical support and has good face in the workplace.

- **Effort-Reward Imbalance Model**

The Effort-Reward Imbalance (ERI) model (Siegrist, 1996, 1998) is a more recently evolved model. This model is a transactional theory of stress in the sense that it focuses more on the interaction between environmental constraints or threats and individual coping resources. However, it also derives from sociological and industrial medical frameworks, and emphasises the social framework of the job (e.g. social status of the job) (Dollard et al., 2003). The model is based upon the premise that work-related benefits depend on a reciprocal relationship between efforts and rewards at work (Van Vegchel et al., 2002). Rewards are distributed to employees by three transmitter systems: money (i.e. adequate salary), esteem (e.g. respect and support) and security/career opportunities (e.g. promotion prospects, job security and status consistency) (de Jonge et al., 2000). More specifically, the ERI Model claims that work characterised by both high efforts and low rewards represents a reciprocity deficit between "costs" and "gains" (Van Vegchel et al., 2002). In essence, high efforts/low reward conditions may cause a state of emotional distress, which can lead to

cardiovascular risks and other strain reactions, like poor subjective health and sickness absence (de Jonge et al., 2000).

Importantly, the ERI further identifies extrinsic effort and intrinsic efforts (Dollard et al., 2003). It assumes that a combination of both sources provides a more accurate estimate of experienced stress than a restriction to one of these sources (de Jonge et al., 2000). Extrinsic effort is conceptually similar to the job demands concept in the JDCS model. On the other hand intrinsic efforts refer to a personal characteristic of coping, a pattern of excessive striving in combination with a strong desire of being approved and esteemed (Dollard et al., 2003). This pattern is referred to as over-commitment. People characterised by over-commitment tend to exaggerate their efforts and underestimate their rewards (Van Vegchel et al., 2002). In empirical tests of the model, the idea is that over-commitment could moderate or mediate the imbalance between demands & rewards. This is a major departure from the JDCS model, which specifies no such individual variable (Dollard et al., 2003). The number of published empirical studies with the ERI Model is growing rapidly (Calnan et al., 2004; de Jonge et al., 2000; Van Vegchel et al., 2002) and the combination of high effort and low reward at work was found to be a risk factor for cardiovascular health, gastrointestinal disorders, psychiatric disorders and poor subjective health (Dollard et al., 2003).

## **2.5 Occupational Stress: A Conceptual Note**

Job stress is defined as the harmful physical and emotional response that occurs when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources or needs of the worker (National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), 1998). Wainwright & Calnan, (2002) suggest that occupational stress indicates the 'natural' limit of human endurance and resilience, a product of the unsustainable pressures and demands placed on the worker by late capitalism. Environmental factors that are involved in the stress process are called *job stressors*, and individual reactions to these stressors are referred to as stress reactions or *strains* (Schaufeli & Peeters, 2000). Determinants of strain can generally be grouped into three major categories: job-specific sources, organisational sources and individual sources (Cooper et al., 2001).

Under the rubric of “environmental” sources of strain, Cartwright & Cooper (1997) have further differentiated six primary work-related stressors:

1. Factors intrinsic to the job itself (i.e. long hours, work overload, time pressure)
2. Roles in the organisation
3. Relationships at work, such as those with supervisors, colleagues, and subordinates
4. Career development issues
5. Organisational factors, including the structure and climate of the organisation as well as its culture and political environment
6. The home-work interface

In sum, the amount of stress a person experiences at work results from the interplay of the objective work environment and the employee’s coping resources (Schaufeli & Peeters, 2000). However, Johnson et al. (2005) propose different occupations will have different basic stressors, for example, the threat of violence, lack of control over work decisions or long working hours. However, people working in the same occupation will experience different levels of stress due to the interplay of many factors, for example, their personality type and the support mechanisms they have available to them. Thus, Johnson et al. (2005) further argue that it is not possible therefore, to say that all people working in a certain occupation will experience the same amount of stress. It is, however, reasonable to state that employees working in high-risk occupations such as that of a prison officer will have increased likelihood of experiencing negative stress outcomes. The sources of which will be discussed in the following section.

## **2.6 Sources of Prison Officer Stress**

*'Any organisation or social structure which consists of one group of people kept inside who do not want to be there and the other group who are there to make sure they stay in will be an organisation under stress' (Brodsky, 1982).*

Armstrong & Griffin (2004) regard prisons as unique working environments as very few other institutions are charged with the primary duty of supervising and securing a population that can be unwilling and potentially violent. In consequence working in prisons results in a number of equally distinct occupational stressors which collating the evidence from the literature the author identified as follows.

- **Work Overload**

Work overload was highlighted as a pervasive stressor for prison officers. Both past and present studies have identified (and are still identifying) this problem as a major source of stress (Keinan & Malach-Pines, 2007). Long et al. (1986) conducted a survey into the sources of occupational stress and the effects on levels of health for a group of New Zealand prison staff. Staff were categorised into three groups: prison officers, ranking prison officers, and instructors. The authors of the study found that for prison officers, task pressures such as long periods without days off and lack of breaks during shifts accounted for the second major reason for stress occurring in this group.

Related frustrations with job demands were discovered in a very recent study of 157 South African prison officers undertaken by Botha & Pienaar in 2006. Complaints of having to perform tasks that did not make up the normal job description, having to cover work for other employees and having insufficient personnel to handle assignments fuelled the annoyance in the sample of officers. In a similar enquiry, Moon & Maxwell (2004) carried out a quantitative study using 260 South Korean prison officers to examine the sources and consequences of stress. Work overload was one of the four stressors that appeared to significantly affect work stress. A shift in the prison officer's role from a purely custodial to a human service role was suggested by the authors as attributing to the high levels of stress experienced by the officers.

It is apparent from the aforementioned studies that powerful stressors such as work overload among prison officers are cross-cultural. This assertion is further exemplified by research conducted by Keinan & Malach-Pines in 2007 involving a group of Israeli employees. The aim of the study was to identify the typical stressors among 496 employees of whom 76% were prison officers working in the prison system in Israel. Qualitative and quantitative techniques were employed in the form of questionnaires and in-depth interviews. Regarding the stressors reported by the respondents, the authors concluded that factors inducing the highest levels of stress are those that are not necessarily unique to working with inmates. Respondents rated stressors such as work overload, low pay, or conflict with superiors at the top of their list. This is a belief, which concurs with the view of Triplett et al. (1996) who argue that factors identified in the larger organisational stress literature do impact on prison officers' reports of work-related stress.

- **Safety Concerns**

Another factor identified in the literature, as a precursor to workplace stress was the concern that prison officers had regarding their lack of personal safety. For instance, very recent figures from a national survey conducted in Ireland addressing prison officer stress found that four out of ten staff being physically threatened by inmates on a regular basis. An astounding 12pc of prison officers had been the victims of serious assaults in the last year. Furthermore more than eight in ten prison officers believe the Irish Prison Service provides them with insufficient support to ensure they are safe at work (Stack and Hogan, 2007). Within the international context a survey conducted by Finn (2000) in the United States (U.S) highlighted that inmate assault against prison staff in State and Federal prisons has increased. Between 1990 and 1995, the number of attacks jumped by nearly one-third, from 10, 731 to 14, 165. Furthermore, except for police officers, the number of workplace non-fatal violent incidents is higher per 1, 000 employees for prison officers than for any other profession, including taxi drivers, convenience store staff, mental health workers, and teachers (Finn, 2000).

Considering the above statistics it not surprising that safety concerns have been contextualised in a number of studies (Auerbach et al., 2003; Botha & Pienaar, 2006; Keinan & Malach-Pines, 2007; Long et al., 1986; Millson, 2000; Moon & Maxwell,

2004). In 1996, Triplett et al. conducted a survey incorporating self-report data from a sample of prison officers at a medium security prison. The main aim of the study was to examine whether or not there are similarities in the particular sources of stress for prison officers and those described in the organisational literature as sources of stress among employees of other organisations. The findings showed that factors identified in the larger organisational literature do impact on prison officers' reports of work-related stress, which suggests similarities among all occupational categories. Three sources of stress were identified that have significant impact on work-related stress: safety concerns, career development, and qualitative role overload. Of the three, the coefficients that contributed most to the variance in job related stress was safety issues.

Triplett et al. (1996) in their study discovered that employee concerns surrounding this issue were so intense that it elicited the following response from a respondent on an open-ended section: "*The stress level and fear level are really high here*". However, a study conducted by Armstrong & Griffin (2004) comparing correlates of stress among treatment and correctional staff made an interesting finding in relation to workplace safety. Perceptions of workplace safety were a salient issue for prison officers, but not for treatment personnel. Given the fact that treatment staff are also in contact with prisoners, one would expect safety concerns to exert some influence on their stress levels. This not being the case, Armstrong & Griffin (2004) suggested when looking at this issue in future research to consider the personality of the individual and the nature of the job.

- **Work-Family Conflict**

The work conditions for many prison officers (shift work, overtime, and distance from home) often create an intense discord that can disrupt the obligations of an officer's home life (Keinan & Pines, 2007). Lambert et al. (2006) maintains that work-family conflict occurs when the work domain and family domain are incompatible with one another in some manner. Many of the hassles that people experience in contemporary life stem from the interface between work and home, primarily from the increase in dual-career families and how this affects roles and relationships at home (Cartwright & Cooper, 1997). Lambert et al. (2006) suggests that there are two major forms of work-family conflict, which are family on work conflict and work on family conflict. Family-

and-work conflict occurs when family conflict and crises impact work performance and behaviour (Lambert et al., 2004).

Work-on-family conflict can be further divided into three dimensions: time based conflict; strain based conflict; and behaviour-based conflict (Netemeyer et. al, 1996). Time-based work on family conflict occurs when the amount of time spent at work or the nature of the scheduling of work interferes with home life (Lambert et al., 2006). Employment factors that can contribute to time-based conflict include the requirement to work excessive hours, frequent overtime, or irregular shiftwork (Triplett et al., 1999). Behaviour-based conflict is the potential for conflict between role norms and expectations (Cooper et al., 2001). For example, role requirements at work might demand independence in decision making and aggressiveness, while the role of parent or spouse requires qualities such as concern for the opinion of another and nurturance (Triplett et al., 1999). Finally, strain-based work on family conflict occurs when the demands and tensions from work negatively impact on the quality of a worker's home life (Lambert et al., 2006). These negative emotional reactions within the work environment can lead to expressions of irritability toward family members or withdrawal from family interaction to recuperate (Cooper et al., 2001). Lambert et al. (2006) emphasises that working in prisons presents many opportunities for the above forms of work-family conflicts, which has been exemplified by the following studies.

Triplett et al. (1999) examined the impact of behaviour-based conflict on prison staff at a Southwestern prison facility in the United States. They found that behaviour-based conflict was an important contributor to work stress, especially for female prison officers. In contrast to this finding, Lambert et al. (2006) in their study on the impact of work-family conflict on correctional staff discovered that behaviour-based conflict did not have a significant impact on work stress. Strain-based conflict was the only form of work-family to have a significant impact. The reason suggested why this finding is contrary to Triplett et al. (1999) is that the latter study only included one dimension of work-family-conflict in their analysis, while Lambert et al. (2006) included four dimensions. The difference in these findings suggests that more research is required to explore the impact of the work-home interface on prison officer stress.

▪ **Gender Issues**

Wells (2006) claims that as women increasingly have entered into the traditionally male domain of law enforcement, there has been an increase in the scholarly pursuit in the way in which men and women experience differently the role of the prison officer, as well as the stresses associated with the role. The prison environment is an exceedingly masculinised organisation wherein the traits of the dominant group (i.e. physical strength and a willingness to use force are emphasised and valued and where the essential skills for the job are assumed to be masculine in nature (Griffin et al., 2005). Carlson et al. (2003) claims that male officers resent the presence of women co-workers in men's prisons because women are perceived as possessing limited physical strength in responding to emergencies and may not be reliable backups in dangerous inmate encounters. Therefore, Zimmer (1997) suggests that to survive on the job it has been necessary for women to redefine the guard role in a way that eliminates the competitive atmosphere and instead utilises the skills, characteristics, and patterns of interaction that women are likely to bring to the job.

For instance, Jurik (1985) carried out a qualitative study involving in-depth interviews and observation with twenty female and ten male officers in four male prisons. The aim of the research was to examine the strategies developed by female correctional officers to avoid the barriers to advancement in the traditionally male work organisation of the men's prison. The author found that female officers utilise a variety of strategies that change over the course of their careers, but each is designed to avoid role traps and stereotypes. Five strategies identified in the study were (1) projecting a professional image, (2) demonstrating unique skills; (3) emphasising a team approach; (4) humour; and (5) using sponsorship to enhance positive visibility. However, despite these efforts many of the female officers were unsuccessful in avoiding the negative stereotypic images of, for example, been passive, weak and incompetent. Jurik (1985) argued that the consequence for the female officers continually trying to prove themselves in this macho environment is work-related stress. However, Armstrong & Griffin (2004) indicate that studies like that of Jurik's were carried out a time when female prison officers were still very much a novelty in men's institutions. More up-to-date studies have observed no significant relationship between gender and job stress (Britton, 1997;

Griffin; 2006; Triplett et al., 1996). To reinforce this point Carlson et al. (2003) found that contrary to earlier studies conducted in the 1980s, female prison officers demonstrated a greater sense of job-related personal achievement and accomplishment than their male counterparts.

- **Role Problems**

Research studies have consistently highlighted two other sources of organisational stress that prison officers themselves do not usually identify as stressful: role conflict and role ambiguity (Finn, 2000). Role conflict may be seen as the simultaneous occurrence of two or more sets of pressures, such that compliance with one would make more difficult compliance with the other (Dewe et al., 2000). A role conflict that may occur for prison officers is to reconcile custodial responsibilities (maintaining security, such as preventing escapes and prisoner fights) with their treatment functions (helping prisoners rehabilitate themselves). Role ambiguity exists when prison officers lack the necessary information to perform the job properly (Keinan & Malach-Pines, 2007). The role of the prison officer is problematic by its very nature since two conflicting demands have to be met simultaneously- guarding prisoners and facilitating their rehabilitation (Schaufeli & Peeters, 2000). The friction between these two very diverse responsibilities has often been associated with officers' perceptions of the lack of clarity about their duties leading to difficulties and confusion on how to deal with prisoners (Moon & Maxwell, 2004). Furthermore, occupational stressors such as role conflict have been found to negatively effect organisational commitment. Organisational commitment is generally defined as 'loyalty to an organisation, identification with an organisation (i.e. pride in an organisation and internalisation of the goals of an organisation), and a desire for involvement in an organisation (i.e. the willingness to make a personal effort for the sake of an organisation' (Lambert, 2004 pp. 211).

Hogan et al. (2006) conducted a survey to examine the effect of stressors on organisational commitment among members of prison staff. Of the total staff members included in the study, 53% were prison officers. Results showed that role ambiguity and role conflict had negative effects on prison staff organisational commitment. The authors inferred from this finding that prison workers, including prison officers, want clearly defined roles, directions, expectations, and guidance for their jobs. This

discovery was supported by an earlier study by Armstrong & Griffin (2004) who found that role problems such as lack of rule clarity, ambiguous duties, and other factors significantly affected prison officer stress.

However, interestingly, the sample of Korean prison officers studied by Moon & Maxwell (2004) indicated that they generally did not experience high levels of role problems despite recent shifts in the country about emphasis on the rehabilitation of inmates. A possible explanation for this finding proposed by the authors is that, South Korea's prison institutions still abide by a generally militaristic model with clear delineated lines of authority and functions, consistent with South Korea's generally hierarchical social structure. Prison officers, thus, may be clear with their formal roles and lines of authority, unlike officers in the United States and other Western societies (Moon & Maxwell, 2004). However this surprising finding stands alone as Schaufeli & Peeters (2000) argue that perhaps the most important job stressor identified in the literature facing prison officers are role problems of several kinds. In the end Hogan et al (2006) emphasise that if role conflict and role ambiguity are left unchecked, harmful stress will remain leading to lower organisational commitment.

- **Job Satisfaction, Participative Management & Organisational Support**

Job satisfaction is an important subject in relation to work stress. High levels of job satisfaction have been linked to positive behaviours, such as support for rehabilitation and performance, and low levels of job satisfaction have been linked to negative behaviours, such as absenteeism and turnover (Slate et al., 2001). Lambert et al. (2002) sees job satisfaction as a subjective, individual-level feeling reflecting whether a person's needs are or not being met by a particular job. Recent studies have investigated the satisfaction which prison officers have with their job and the role the organisation can play in mitigating stress experienced by officers (Britton, 1997; Lambert; 2004; Moon & Maxwell, 2004; Owen; 2006). Although satisfaction with one's job and stress are individual experiences, authors have concluded that the organisation in which an individual works can impact the degree of stress experienced and how the employee copes with the stress that is experienced (Finn, 1998). Most studies have found a significant relationship between work stress and job satisfaction among prison officers.

Owen (2006) conducted a study to examine the issue of stress upon 329 prison officers with a supervisory role. Quantitative analysis was used and a qualitative element was added in the form of brief interviews with appropriate 10 supervisors. Results concluded that there was a significant relationship between work stress and job satisfaction. Low levels of stress were associated with high levels of social support and job satisfaction and an internal locus of control. In a study carried out by Britton (1997) to examine the relationship between race and sex and perceptions of the work environment among prison officers, white female officers' reported higher levels of overall job satisfaction. Britton (1997) argued that this finding was consistent with the larger body of literature on the job satisfaction of working women, which shows that women consistently report equivalent or higher levels of job satisfaction than men, even when working in jobs with lower extrinsic rewards and prestige.

Opinions put forward by Britton why this might be are that women's high levels of job satisfaction may be due to differences in reference groups (e.g. women compare themselves to other women, rather than men, in forming their perceptions of the working environment) or differences in expectations (e.g. women expect less than men in terms of extrinsic and intrinsic rewards of work). Furthermore, Lambert (2004) conducted quantitative research looking at the impact of job characteristics on prison staff (including prison officers) on job satisfaction. The author found that job stress had negative significant effects on organisational commitment and job satisfaction. Lambert (2004) differentiated that job stress can be both a job characteristic and an organisational factor. Therefore, it would be expected that job stress would negatively affect both the job satisfaction and organisational commitment of prison officers.

The literature review also highlighted the growing importance of internal organisational factors such as decision-making and organisational support as additional predictors of job stress. Participation in workplace decision-making was often specified as a potential internal organisational stressor in the prison environment (Auerbach et al., 2003; Farkas, 2001; Sims, 2001). In a study carried out by Slate et al. (2001) research focused on the perceptions of prison employees regarding their participation in decision-making and the relationship between organisational stress, physical stress, and thoughts about quitting the job. Overall, the results of the study showed that as organisational stress increased, respondents were more likely to think about leaving their job. Also, the

greater the perception that participants had about being able to freely participate in decision making within the institution, the less they thought about leaving. Slate et al. (2001) believed that participatory management was one of the ways forward and worthy of further exploration within the prison arena for reducing stress and turnover.

In addition to decision-making, empirical evidence suggested that administrative practices, such as the level of organisational support for employees, were the most robust predictors of prison officer workplace stress. Auerbach et al. (2003) conducted a study among 413 juvenile correctional officers (JCO) and 84 of their supervisors. On the job-specific SSOSQ (Specific Sources of Occupational Stress Questionnaire) lack of support by the agency, long hours, and inadequate tools for the job eclipsed physical danger as stressors. Auerbach et al. (2003) concluded that the model officer is committed to doing a good job and that many of his or her primary stressors are aspects of the job situation that are viewed as interfering with being able to do so. The outcomes of the aforementioned studies suggest that effective stress management programs for prison officers need to focus on ways to give them more autonomy, control, flexibility, and decision-making authority in their everyday work.

## **2.7 Consequences of Stress**

Over the past two decades, there has been an increasing belief that the experience of stress has undesirable consequences for health (Cox et al., 2000). The experience of stress can alter the way the person feels thinks and behaves, and can also produce changes in their physiological function (Stansfeld et al., 1999). Keinan & Malach-Pines (2007) observe that prison officers' reactions to different stressors can be divided into three categories: (a) physiological, (b) psychological, and (c) behavioural.

### **▪ Physical symptoms of stress**

Wells (2006) argues that when compared to the general population, prison officers have been found to have significantly lower life spans and higher rates of alcoholism, suicide, heart attacks, ulcers, and hypertension. Ultimately, it has been suggested that the health of the prison employee can suffer to the point that it shortens the person's life (Lambert et al., 2004). It has been highlighted from studies conducted in the United States that psychosomatic diseases are more common among prison officers than members of most

other occupations, including police officers - a comparable profession (Cheek & Miller, 1983). In the period up to six months prior to a survey carried out in the United States, 17% of the prison officers reported that they visited a physician because of hypertension (vs. 10% of police officers and 9% of other professions). Another 3.5% suffered from heart disease, which is rather high compared to police officers (1.4%) and members of the other occupations (2.1%) (Schaufeli & Peeters, 2000).

Pollard (1997) points out that laboratory studies have suggested that if chronically repeated, elevation of the stress hormones adrenaline and cortisol is likely to have long-term consequences for health, especially cardiovascular health, partly via the effects of the hormones on blood pressure and serum cholesterol levels. This scientific fact was verified by a Swedish study which showed that prison officers not only had significantly higher levels of blood pressure compared to the control group, consisting of physicians, engineers, traffic controllers, and musicians, but also their levels of the stress hormone plasma cortisol, were much higher (Harenstam, 1989).

- **Psychological symptoms of stress**

The psychological effects of stress may be expressed in a variety of different ways, and involve changes in cognitive-perceptual function, emotion and behaviour (Cox et al., 2000). Chronic exposure to stress results in a depleted emotional state, which can lead to emotional exhaustion (Schmitz et al., 2000). Burnout is an example of an extreme strain reaction. It is characterised by a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion caused by long-term involvement in situations that are emotionally demanding (Pines & Aronson, 1988). Maslach (1982) maintains that burnout is a threefold process of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishment, experienced by individuals in service-oriented positions. Maslach's model of burnout characterises emotional exhaustion as depletion of emotional energy and a feeling that one's emotional resources are inadequate to deal with the situation (Cooper et al., 2001). The second component of burnout, according to Maslach, is a tendency toward depersonalisation, which occurs as employees become frustrated with their job and less concerned for their clients and results in increasingly negative work-related attitudes (Morgan et al., 2002). Finally, the third component of burnout in Maslach's formulation is diminished personal accomplishment, characterised by a tendency to evaluate one's behaviour and performance negatively. As a result, the

person experiences feelings of incompetence on the job and an inability to achieve performance goals (Cooper et al., 2001). The above three-component conceptualisation is the most widely accepted model of burnout, partly at least because Maslach and her associates constructed an easy-to-use questionnaire (the Maslach Burnout Inventory [MBI]) (Maslach & Jackson, 1981, 1986) to measure the three dimensions of burnout exemplified in the following two studies.

Morgan et al. (2002) carried out quantitative research among 250 prison officers from a Southwestern state department in the United States. The study used the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS) to assess psychological or affective dimensions of burnout. The results of the study showed some interesting findings in relation to the experience of burnout among prison officers. Results indicated that older and more educated officers reported increased levels of personal accomplishment, whereas less experienced officers and officers with increasing job responsibilities experienced increased levels of depersonalisation and emotional exhaustion and decreased levels of personal accomplishment. This finding concurs with a study conducted by Carlson et al. (2003) among 277 prison officers administered the MBI. The study also examined potential predictors of burnout using the ordinary least square (OLS) regression procedure. The predictors were classified into the following categories: (a) demographic factors; and (b) prison facilities factors (i.e. whether the facility is for men or women, correctional rank, or military experience). Item analysis of the MBI confirmed that younger prison officers experienced higher levels of depersonalisation than older prison officers.

- **Behavioural symptoms of stress**

Absenteeism and turnover are common behavioural responses to stress among prison officers (Schaufeli & Peeters, 2000). For instance, a survey conducted in the United States by the National Institute of Justice as part of the Corrections and Law Enforcement Family Support (CLEFS) Program found that turnover occurs early in the officer's career. It was reported that 71.3% of officers that leave do so in the first two years of employment. The reasons for leaving given were financial, retirement, work hours, overtime, shifts, and lack of career opportunities (Delprino, 2004). Finn (1998) also suggests that turnover among experienced staff also forces remaining staff to work with a large number of rookies who are not as trustworthy or experienced coming to

their aid in a crisis. Finn (1998) further claims that this turnover results in inmate exposure to officers who have not yet learned the institution's procedural rules and how to enforce them consistently, inmates may either increase their attempts to manipulate staff in an effort to test or exploit the officers' inexperience or be genuinely confused about what behaviour is and is not allowed. Either result could increase officer stress.

While turnover is detrimental to prison organisations, absenteeism is another form of negative employee behaviour (Lambert et al., 2005). It is estimated that more than half of all absences in the workplace are stress-related, amounting to more than 1 million stress-induced employee absences a day in the workplace (Dillon, 1999). Lambert et al. (2005) undertook a study to explore potential antecedents of prison staff (including prison officers) absenteeism. From self-report data, the results of the study indicated that job stress had a positive effect on absenteeism. Research has shown that the experience of work stress may affect the immune system leading to medical problems resulting in the use of sick leave (WHO, 2003). Lambert et al. (2005) postulated that by being absent, prison employees might be able to deal with job stress, and, hence avoid burnout and associated long-term medical problems.

In sum it is clear from the aforementioned discussion that the experience of stress at work for prison officers is associated with changes in behaviour, psychological and physiological function, which have detrimental effects on their health. This is illustrated by high absenteeism (Lambert et al, 2005); hypertension and elevated secretion of stress hormones (Harenstam, 1989); and stress-related cardiovascular disease (Cheek & Miller, 1983). Finally, and most typically, prison officers experience a number of negative feelings and attitudes leading to depleted emotional states such as burnout.

## **2.8 Ways of Coping**

While there has been a rapidly increasing growth in occupational stress research, knowledge about coping with stressful work has lagged by comparison (Beehr et al., 1995). Coping studies that focus on work stress have been described as being in their infancy (Kuhlmann, 1990), limited somewhat in their scope (George et al., 1991) and few in number (Latack, 1986). As Cox et al. (2000) points out coping is an important part of the overall stress process. However, it is perhaps the least well understood despite many years of research. As with stress, coping has been defined in a number of different ways. This literature review uses the following definition developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), which refers to coping as the behavioural and cognitive efforts to manage stressful situations that are appraised as taxing personal resources.

As discussed earlier differences in mastery of stress exert their influence primarily in the person's appraisal of the stressful encounter i.e. primary or secondary appraisal. Although coping may lead to reduced stress intensity, the effectiveness with which one deals with stressful situations is not inherent in most definitions of coping (Anshel, 2000). Keil (2004) proposes that coping appears to carry with it a sense of success or failure. However, Webb (1996) further argues that success or failure is not central to the concept of coping; all reactions are some form of coping, what is at issue is the effectiveness of these responses. Lazarus & Folkman (1984) identified two approaches: coping, which alleviates emotional distress (emotion-focused coping) and coping, which attempts to manage or alter the problem causing distress (problem-focused coping).

Problem-focused forms of coping would include cognitive problem-solving and decision-making, information-gathering, time management and goal-setting; while emotion-focused strategies would include cognitive efforts to change the meaning of a situation through the likes of cognitive restructuring, minimization, looking at the bright side of things, humour, talking to caring people and efforts to escape through the use of alcohol and drugs (Biggam et al., 1997). Although most stressors elicit both types of coping, problem-focused coping tends to predominate when people feel that something constructive can be done, whereas emotion-focused coping tends to predominate when people feel that the stressor is something that must be endured (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). Coping therefore may be viewed as a shield, which curbs the impact of stress.

## **2.9 Coping among Prison Officers**

The author found research on coping among prison officers to be very limited. Triplett et al. (1996) also identified this problem by suggesting that coping among officers had received limited consideration both in terms of the extent of such research, as well as the types of coping explored. Therefore analyses of coping measures used by occupations with which prison officers might be compared to will be considered in turn. Three factors were identified in the literature that may serve to mitigate stress: social support, locus of control and personality hardiness.

In addition to personal resources, people have access to resources in their social environment. Specifically, people's relationships with others are a potential source of support during times of stress. The effect of social support on adjustment to work stress has received a considerable amount of empirical attention (Dewe et al., 2000). The concept of social support refers to social networks (i.e., family friends, and coworkers) that can provide an individual with resources, both tangible (i.e., emergency financial assistance) and intangible (i.e., feelings of belonging or self-worth) (Stranks, 2005). Social support has been identified as a resource that helps individuals cope with job stress through supportive relationships with others (Sutherland and Cooper, 2000). Patterson (2003) asserts that social support simultaneously can function as a problem-focused and an emotion-focused coping strategy. For instance, talking to a co-worker about a stressful event can function as a problem-focused coping strategy when the individual receives tangible information that aids to resolve the event. Talking to someone about a stressful event functions as an emotion-focused coping strategy when the emotional support obtained is used to regulate emotional responses arising from the event (Patterson, 2003).

It goes without saying that police perform an extremely important role in society, particularly through their law enforcement and community service functions (Hart & Cotton, 2003). Like prison officers, police officers encounter experiences of physical danger, including the threat of serious injury or death to themselves, and exposure to others who have been seriously injured, killed, or otherwise traumatised (Aaron, 2000). Patterson (2003) in his research investigated the effects of coping (problem-focused and emotion-focused) and seeking emotional support on distress among police officers. A

convenience sample of police officers was recruited from a mid-sized police department located in a northeastern city in the United States. A total of 345 surveys were distributed to police officers during the roll call period, and of these surveys, 233 police officers returned completed surveys, resulting in a response rate of 67%. The results indicated that seeking social support buffered the relationship between work events and distress. In particular, the female officers in the study reported fewer stressful work and life events, and lower levels of distress. The author postulated that the reason for this might be that marriage, as a form of support, and exposure to fewer work life events result in enhanced psychological well-being for female officers.

This gender difference with regard to social support has also been identified by Biggam et al. (1997). In their study among 699 Scottish police officers, six distinct styles of coping were assessed, the use of social support, task strategies, logic, home/work relationships, time management and involvement. Female officers reported higher usage of the social support strategies of coping. It was proposed the reason why male officers did not score highly on this coping style may reflect the social environment of the police, which can actively mitigate against the expression of emotion. The importance of social support was also established in a study by Dollard & Winefield (1998) where the demand-control/support (JDCS) model, discussed earlier, was tested in a sample of 419 prison officers. One of the hypotheses addressed in the study was that workers in high-strain (high demand, low control) jobs with low social support would show the highest levels of distress and ill health compared with workers in other jobs. The importance of social support at work was confirmed with workers in high iso-strain jobs with low support showing higher levels of strain than workers in other jobs.

A discussion of the coping process is incomplete without examining the personal factors that influence the choice of coping strategy and the effectiveness of that strategy (Anshel, 2000). Two dispositional factors, locus of control and hardiness will now be considered as potential moderators of the relationship between job stressors and psychological strain. Dewe et al. (2000) argue that individuals with an internal locus of control (a belief in themselves having control over their own 'destiny') are less likely to doubt the efficacy of their attempts to confront a problem than individuals with external control beliefs (beliefs that success or failure are attributable to outside forces). This opinion is exemplified by previously mentioned quantitative research conducted by

Botha and Pienaar (2006) among South African prison officers. The Work Locus of Control Scale was used to measure participants' locus of control within the work environment. Results indicated that the officer with a strong internal locus of control may experience less negative affect, and less strain from occupational stress. This corresponds to Owen's (2006) finding among prison supervisors, which revealed that maintaining an internal locus of control is a significant factor in reducing occupational stress.

The psychologist Suzanne Kobasa believes a particular personality type and associated outlook on life is important in diffusing stress (Zimbardo et al., 1990). Kobasa characterised the 'hardy personality' as one that encompasses high levels of commitment or involvement in day-to-day activities, the perception that one has control over life events, and a tendency to view unexpected change as a challenge rather than a threat to well-being (Cooper et al., 2001). Although this construct would appear to be highly salient to strain reactions, the author found that there has been no investigation of its role to date in job stress among prison officers. However, the following study investigating nurses, another occupational group contributing significantly to the high body of literature on the phenomenon of occupational stress, did find support for the relationship between personality hardiness and the experience of stress. Boyle et al (1991) examined the relationship of personality hardiness, ways of coping and social support to burnout. The convenience sample consisted of 103 registered nurses employed full-time and part-time as staff nurses or charge nurses in six intensive care units at a large Southeastern medical centre in the United States. Data collection packets, which included the various research instruments, were distributed to 202 nurses. 103 nurses returned completed data packets, yielding a response rate of 51%. The results of the study supported the hypothesis personality hardiness was negatively related to burnout.

The findings presented above show that there is a shared variance among employees on coping strategies. This would encourage future research to examine the interaction between these variables as they pertain to prison officer stress. It is also apparent that personal dispositions influence an officer's perceptions of stress and the subsequent coping process. Botha & Pienaar (2006) see this as presenting an important point of intervention in terms of prison officers' mental health, because these factors might be

addressed in stress management techniques such as stress education and stress management training. Cooper and Cartwright (1997) assert that these techniques serve as a useful function in helping individuals to recognise the symptoms of stress, and to overcome much of the negativity and stigma still associated with the stress label. The authors further maintain that awareness activities and skills training programs designed to improve relaxation techniques, cognitive coping skills, and work/lifestyle modification skills have an important part to play in extending the individual's physical and psychological resources.

However, as Michie (2002) points out, there are many sources of stress such as structure, management style or culture of the organisation that the individual is likely to perceive as outside his or her power to change. Therefore, it is important to note that stress management approaches that concentrate on changing the individual without changing the sources of stress only have partial effect. Cooper and Cartwright (1997) argue that they simply reflect 'damage limitation' often addressing the outcomes rather than the sources of strain that may be inherent in an organisation's structure, culture, or climate. The authors call this the "the band aid" or inoculation approach. Therefore, the prevention and management of workplace stress requires organisational level interventions, because it is the organisation that creates the stress (Michie, 2002). Organisational interventions can be of many types, ranging from the structural (for example, staffing levels, work schedules, physical environment) to psychological (for example, social support, control over work, participation) (WHO, 2005). The development of a healthy workplace for prison officers is not a simple process. The challenge falls upon all stakeholders and includes officers, union representatives, administrators, supervisors and service providers. It appears that the ultimate challenge is to create an organisational culture that promotes well-being, in which employees are viewed as assets and given an opportunity and support to be productive.

## **2.10 Summary**

Evidence from published literature on occupational stress was explored in this review. It was revealed that work stress theories are important as they attempt to describe, explain and predict stress/strain according to a coherent set of hypotheses (Dollard et al., 2003). A brief overview of the historical origins and early approaches to the study of stress was explored and also strengths and weaknesses of these early approaches. Theoretical models of stress, the Job Demands-Control Model and the Effort-Reward Imbalance model were also examined to investigate how they are conducive to understanding stress thereby contributing to its successful management.

With regard to sources of stress, the literature identified several predictors of job stress among prison officers: role problems; work overload; the impact of work-family conflict and gender issues in an environment that is traditionally seen as male dominated. Furthermore, much of the literature supports the argument that other issues, such as the perceptions of job dangerousness, participative management and lack of support from administrators also play a significant role in stress among prison officers. Based on the results of the review it was also suggested that reactions by officers to different stressors were found not only to have consequences for the organisation such as absenteeism and turnover but also to have detrimental effects on the employees' health.

Two principle coping strategies were identified in the literature: problem focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Research indicates that problem-focused coping is the more effective of the two at preventing occupational stress (Cooper et al., 2001). However, research also indicates that the effectiveness of a strategy partly depends on the situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Three factors were identified in the literature that may serve to mitigate stress: social support, locus of control and personality hardiness. However, the author found limited exploration in the literature about the types of coping used by prison officers. Despite the existence of a wide range of studies that dealt with sources and consequences of stress reactions among prison officers, very little has been written about intervention strategies for the prevention or the alleviation of these sources and reactions.

Therefore, in light of these research deficiencies this thesis aims to explore occupational stress as it relates to prison officers by exploring the following areas. Firstly, the phenomenon of occupational stress and to identify its sources and consequences in terms of physical and emotional status among Irish prison officers. Secondly, given the particular sources of work-related stress identified by prison officers, what, if any, are the most effective coping mechanisms utilized. Finally, the study will then present the results of the survey in light of possible interventions that can be introduced to reduce occupational stress among prison officers. Limitations of the study are also addressed and recommendations for future research are also made.

# ***Chapter Three***

## ***Methodology***

### **3.1 Introduction**

The research presented in this study on stress and coping among Irish prison officers consisted of a sample of 100 officers drawn from a medium security committal prison for male offenders. According to Bowling (2002) research methods refer to the practices and techniques used to collect, process and analyse the data. A quantitative methodology with self-administered questionnaires was the data collection method chosen. The following chapter will outline details of ethical considerations, the research process, sampling framework used, questionnaire design, data collection tools and data analysis.

### **3.2 Ethical Considerations**

According to Reynolds (1979) ethics refers to rules of conduct; typically, to conformity to a code or set of principles. The ethical principle governing research is that respondents should not be harmed as a result of participating in the research (Bowling, 2002). To adhere to this, ethical approval was sought from the prisons' Research Ethics Committee to conduct the study (see Appendix A). Along with the questionnaire, prison officers received a cover letter (see Appendix B) explaining the purpose of the survey and an envelope, which facilitated the anonymous return of the questionnaire. Participants were also informed that they were free to withdraw at any time, and the authors' contact details were included on the cover letter in case of any questions regarding the study. Bowling (2002) stresses that this voluntary consent safeguards the freedom of the participant to choose to participate in the research or not, and reduces the legal liability of the researcher.

### **3.3 Quantitative Research Process**

Quantitative research has been designed as a formal, objective, systematic process where numerical data are utilised to obtain information about the world (Burns & Grove, 2001). The author used the quantitative approach because data can be measured and quantified by statistical analysis. As Bowling (2002) emphasises quantitative research is ideal in studies where pre-existing knowledge prevails and it permits the use of

standardised data collection thus enhancing the validity of this approach as being distinctly appropriate in order to gather valuable data for this particular research topic.

A cross sectional survey design was used to provide a quantitative/numeric description of the attitudes and opinions of the prison officers in the study. The major strength of a survey is that you can gain broad-based data, a high level of precision, or when statistical background data are needed and lacking (Kane & O'Reilly-de Brun, 2001). Surveys can also be designed to measure certain phenomena in the population of interest; these types of surveys are called descriptive or cross-sectional surveys. The main benefit of employing the use of a cross sectional survey is that data can be collected from the population of interest at one point in time. This is extremely advantageous considering the time constraints with which the present study had to be undertaken. Furthermore, Robson (2002) enthuses that the cross-sectional survey is probably the most widely used design in social research. The prison officers in the present study were asked to report about past as well as current behaviours and attitudes. Therefore, the cross-sectional survey is further applicable because it is retrospective i.e. respondents are asked to report on events, feelings and behaviour retrospectively (Bowling, 2002).

It is important to emphasise that with a survey if the questions are incomprehensible or ambiguous, the exercise is obviously a waste of time. Therefore, to prevent this potential problem from occurring the author endeavoured to ensure the questionnaire was reliable and valid by using questions drawn (Work Positive Questionnaire, 2005) or adapted from prior research (Cartwright & Cooper 1997; Carver, 1997). In sum, Robson (2002) notes that a good, competently run self-administered survey can be extremely efficient at providing large amounts of data, at relatively low cost, in a short period of time. Surveys also allow anonymity, which can encourage frankness particularly when dealing with a sensitive issue like occupational stress.

### **3.4 Questionnaire Design**

The self-completed questionnaire was the chosen format of data collection in this study. As Cormack (2000) maintains questionnaires are designed to elicit information through the written responses of subjects. The author chose this method, as it is suitable mainly for collecting data on facts, knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and opinions, which are pertinent to the topic under study. Also an additional strength of structured questionnaires is the ability to collect unambiguous and easy to count answers, leading to quantitative data for analysis. Furthermore the self-administered questionnaire can minimise social desirability and interviewer bias, as it is less of a social encounter than interview methods (Bowling, 2002).

The survey questions were designed to help achieve the goals of the research and, in particular, to answer the research questions. Questions used were mainly closed with pre-coded response choices as these are quicker and cheaper to analyse. Two open-ended questions were used to add a minor qualitative element. The main advantage of using open-ended questions is that respondents use their own words and form their own response categories. This allows the researcher to explore the topic with more depth by providing a truer assessment of what the respondents really believe (Robson, 2002).

The questionnaire was divided into three sections (see Appendix C) containing 85 items. The majority of these questions were Likert-type rating scale where, in relation to each item, respondents are asked to indicate the point on the scale, which most effectively describes their opinion. For example, please rate your coping ability with stressful work situations, 1 (*very poor*) to 5 (*very good*). Section A contained questions to obtain valuable information for the study. These included a demographic profile of the participant with personal characteristics such as age, gender and nationality. The literature review has shown that previous researchers who examined stress among prison officers frequently considered these characteristics as important correlates in their studies (Armstrong and Griffin, 2004).

Question 11 (Section B) dealt with the behavioural and physical symptoms of stress and was positioned on a 5 point Likert-type scale response ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*). These symptoms were adapted from a questionnaire developed by Cartwright and Cooper (1997 p. 12). Question 13 from Section B dealt with eight different methods of coping with occupational stress and was adapted from Carver (1997). They involved individual responses to stress and included measures of active coping, planning, religion and using emotional support. For example, turning to religion as a coping tactic was measured by the item “I’ve been trying to find comfort in my religion or spiritual beliefs”. Response options in this format ranged from 1 (*never*) to 4 (*often*).

Sixty-eight Likert-type scale questions in Section C were taken directly from the Work Positive Questionnaire (2005). This is a risk-assessment/risk-management framework developed jointly by the Health and Safety Authority in Ireland and the Health Education Board of Scotland, to address the issue of occupational stress. The author chose the Work Positive Questionnaire because it’s a tool that has been successfully tested in many organisations and with various groups of workers over nearly two decades (European Agency for Health and Safety at Work, 2002). The questionnaire also incorporates the 35 items from the HSE Indicator tool (developed as part of the HSE Management Standards for work-related stress). These standards focus on the following six main aspects of work:

Organisational demands, organisational/employee control, organisational/employee support, organisational/employee relationships, organisational/employee role, and organisational/employee change.

Organisational demands includes issues like workload, work pattern and the work environment (e.g. “I find the work I do repetitive and boring”). Organisational/employee control deals with how much say the person has in the way they do their work. Organisational/employee support includes the encouragement and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues (e.g. “I receive the training I need to do my job”). Organisational/employee relationships deals with conflict and organisational/employee role looks at whether people understand their role in the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that the person does not have conflicting roles. Organisational/employee change considers how organisational change

is managed and communicated in the organisation (e.g. “Staff are always consulted about change at work”).

Finally, a further three questions drawn from prior research were added by the author to measure employee concerns about career development (“I lack the proper opportunities to advance my career in this institution”) (Triplett et al.,1996); work-family conflict (“I am concerned about not having enough quality time with family due to my work”) and threat perception (“The risk of been threatened particularly due to my position is a cause of concern for me”), both of which are adapted from research conducted by Senol-Durak et al. (2006). The questionnaire concludes with an open ended question to record any issues not covered and also provides some qualitative information.

### **3.5 Pilot Study**

A pilot study was carried out to identify some of the inevitable problems of converting the authors’ questionnaire design into reality. Research has shown that respondents may interpret questions in different ways to the investigator (Cormack, 2000). The validity of a questionnaire data depends on shared assumptions and understandings of the questions and response categories. The completed questionnaire was piloted on 11 volunteers in the service professions i.e. nurses, teachers and guards. Johnson et al. (2005) assert that these professions have being regularly deemed by researchers as highly stressful occupations, and therefore are suitably comparable to the target sample.

The pilot study gave the author an indication of weather the respondents understood the questions in the same way, whether the format of the questions were the most suitable for the target population, whether they understood the instructions and how relevant the questions are. Following this process some minor changes were made including alteration of two questions. The average time to complete the questionnaire with the pilot group ranged between 10 to 15 minutes.

### **3.6 Validity and Reliability**

An essential feature of all measurements used in research is that it must be valid. Robson (2002) suggests researchers should be able to predict accurately on the basis of

the measurements taken. Validity is an assessment of whether an instrument measures what it aims to measure (Bowling, 2002). As Kasl & Cooper (1987) point out, in the absence of information concerning reliability and validity, one can only speculate as to whether the inconsistencies in the data are real. The finished questionnaire was tested for face and content validity. Face validity ensured that questions were assessed to confirm that they were clear, relevant and unambiguous. Content validity refers to judgements about the extent to which the content of the instrument appears logically to examine the full scope of the domain it intends to measure (Bowling, 2002). Content and face validity were measured by conducting the pilot study.

Reliability is a measure of the questionnaire's consistency, in other words its precision of measurement (Cormack, 2000). To ensure reliability the author used questions drawn (Work Positive Questionnaire, 2005) or adapted from prior research (Cartwright & Cooper 1997; Carver, 1997; Senol-Durak et al., 2006; Triplett et al., 1996). However, as Creswell (2007) indicates, it is important to emphasise that when one modifies an instrument or combines instruments in a study, the original validity and reliability may not hold for the new instrument. To overcome this potential problem validity and reliability were re-established with the aid of the pilot study.

### **3.7 Survey Sample**

A major feature of a survey is that information is obtained from a sample of subjects who are selected from a study population and then, on the basis of this information the whole study population can be described. A sample refers to the group of people that a researcher selects from a defined population and these are the individuals about whom information will be collected (Cormack, 2000). The aim of this study was to examine stress among Irish prison officers in a medium security committal prison for male offenders. Using a non-probability convenience sampling technique, the target sample was 100 prison officers.

In probability sampling, it is possible to specify the probability that any person (or other unit on which the survey is based) will be included in the sample. Robson (2002) propose that any sampling plan where it is not possible to do this is called 'non-probability sampling'. Convenience sampling was chosen by the author as it easy to use

and is cost effective. With this type of sampling the researcher chooses participants according to who is available to them. However, the main disadvantage of convenience sampling is the presence of bias. Cormack (2000) argues that it is not normally representative of the target population because sample units are only selected if they can be accessed conveniently. Nevertheless, despite this weakness Robson (2002) notes that it can deliver accurate results when the population is homogeneous i.e. prison officers.

### **3.8 Data Collection**

The sample of prison officers for this study was drawn from a medium security committal prison for male offenders. Survey packets were distributed to prison officers at shift meetings. In order to provide every officer an opportunity to participate, the survey was distributed at all three shift meetings each day for two weeks. Survey packets included a questionnaire, cover letter, and an envelope to facilitate anonymous return of the questionnaire. Participants were allowed to complete the survey while on duty or off prison grounds. All completed questionnaires were returned to a data collection box placed in the prison clerks' office.

To ensure an optimum response rate the author telephoned the organisation after a one week period, to enquire from the managers if there was any difficulty with the questionnaire and to remind the organisation of the collection date. After the two week collection period had expired, all questionnaires were submitted to a secure point accessible by the author for collection.

### **3.9 Data Analysis**

The questionnaire was coded for Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), to conduct statistical analyses, manipulate data, and generate tables and graphs that summarised the findings of the present study. Coding is the method of conceptualising research data and classifying them into meaningful and relevant categories for the participants in the study (Bowling, 2002). The data from the questionnaire was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

Descriptive statistics are ways of representing some important aspect of data by a single number (Robson, 2002). Hinton et al (2004) further suggest that the most common descriptive statistics used are the measures of central tendency (mean, median and mode) and the measures of dispersion (standard deviation, standard error and variance). Inferential analyses undertaken in the present study included Chi Squares, Mann Whitney U Tests and Spearman's Rank Order Correlations ( $\rho$ ). The qualitative data was analysed by content analysis. The two open-ended questions in section B and C of the questionnaire were indexed and categorised in preparation for analysis i.e. all responses were grouped by theme for the development of an appropriate coding frame so coding could take place.

# ***Chapter Four***

## ***Results***

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the results from the quantitative and qualitative data collected. Computer based data analysis was carried out using the Windows based statistical package SPSS, the graphs and tables were created in Microsoft Word packages. Any discrepancies noted in the tables are due to missing values in the data.

The results will be divided into three sections that reflect the format of the questionnaire providing a composite description of the survey population. The first section will deal with background information relating to the respondents. This includes gender, age group, employment status, job title, level of education, hours worked per week and length of time working in the organization. The second section will focus on the effects of stress on the respondents and coping strategies utilized. The final section will concentrate on the findings in relation to the major sources of stress that exist for the prison officers in the survey.

#### **4.2 Response Rate**

The present study on stress and coping among Irish prison officers consisted of a sample of 100 officers drawn from a medium security committal prison for male offenders. Of the 100 surveys distributed, 68 were returned giving a very good response rate of 68%.

#### **4.3 Profile of Respondents**

The majority of the respondents in the study were male 92.6% (n=63) with 7.4% females (n=5). With regard to age distribution 20.6% of respondents were in the 25-35

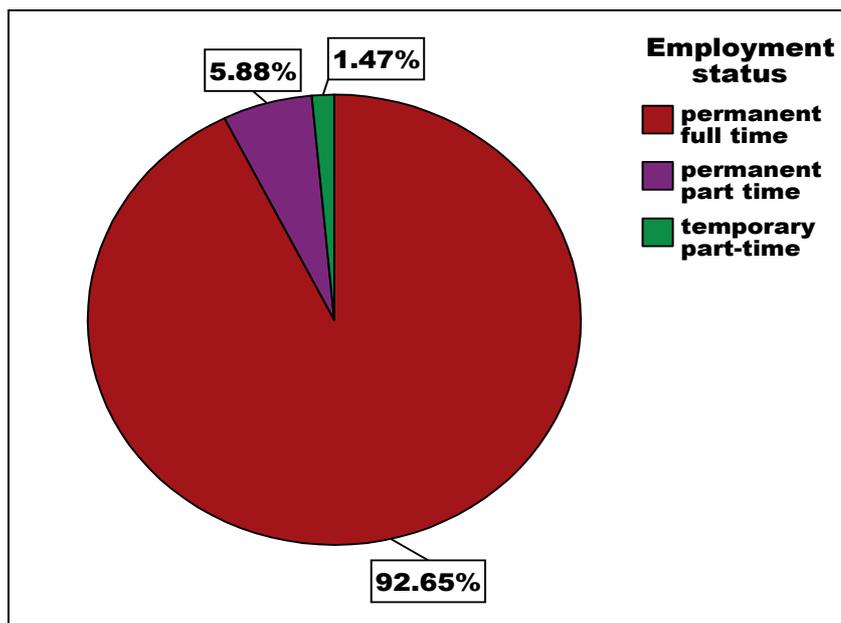
age group, 51.5% were aged between 36-45 years old, 25% of prison officers were between 46-55 years old and finally 2.9% were aged between 56-65 (See Table 4.1).

**Table 4.1** Age distribution of respondents

Age group in years	Frequency	Percent
25-35	14	20.6
36-45	35	51.5
46-55	17	25.0
56-65	2	2.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The job titles represented in the study were: 89.7% prison officers (n=61), 5.9% chief officers (n=4) and 4.4% prison clerks (n=3). The employment status for the majority of participants was permanent full time 92.9% (n=63), 5.9% (n=4) were employed on a permanent part-time basis and 1.5% (n=1) were temporary part-time (Figure 4.2 below).

**Figure 4.2** Employment Status



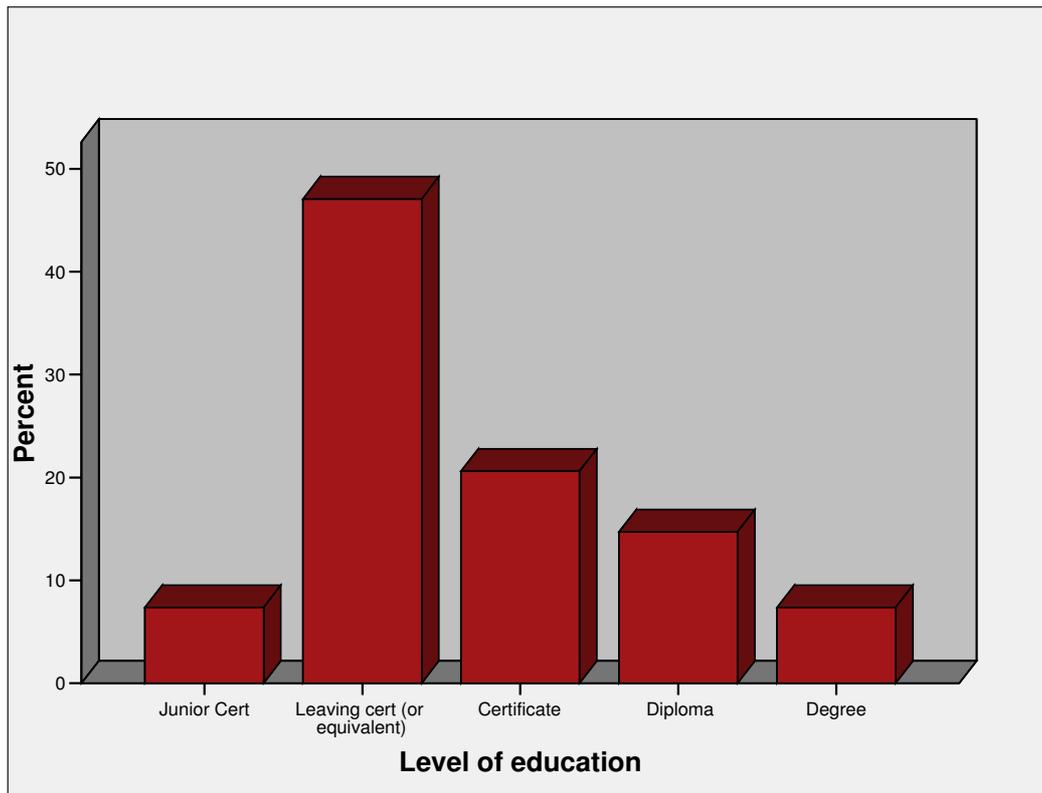
In relation to work schedules 44.1% (n=30) of the surveyed population worked day duty only. 55.9% (n=38) respondents worked both day and night shifts. None of the respondents worked solely on night duty. Remarkably, the majority of prison officers 79.4% (n=54) worked between 40-60 hours per week. 16.2% (n=11) of respondents worked 20-40 hours per week while two prison officers stated that they worked between 70-80 hours each week.

The length of time working in the organization ranged from 5 to 36 years with the majority of respondents (n=25) serving between 20-30 years. A number of chi-square analyses were completed to enable the author to ascertain whether there were patterns between length of time working in the organisation and effects of stress i.e. feeling blue or depressed, job dissatisfaction, job frustration, trouble sleeping, headaches and increases in alcohol consumption were significant. Pallent (2005) points out that the chi-square for independence is used to determine whether two categorical variables are related. It compares the frequency of cases found in the various categories of one variable across the different categories of another variable.

To complete the analysis data was collapsed into prison officers working in the organization for less than twenty years and prison officers working for more than twenty years. The scale for effects of stress was collapsed into *never* and *often*. Results of the statistical test revealed that there was a significant relationship between increases in alcohol consumption and the length of time working in the organization (Pearson Chi Square with one degree of freedom = 6.865,  $p = .009$ , which is  $< 0.05$ ). Increases in alcohol consumption occurred more often in prison officers working in the organisation for more than twenty years.

The survey showed that there was a wide variation in the level of education attainment. All respondents were educated to Junior Certificate level. Just shy of half of the participants (47.1%) had obtained the Leaving Certificate while the other 45.6% possessed a third level education. Qualifications ranged from Degree level for example Bachelor of Arts, Accountancy & Finance, and Engineering to Certificates in Health & Safety, Business, Physical Education and Addiction Studies (See Figure 4.3).

**Figure 4.3**                      **Level of Education**



Further statistical analyses was carried on this data in the form of chi squares to examine the relationship between level of education and prison officers' job dissatisfaction and levels of frustration with co-workers and inmates. For ease of interpretation the level of education category was collapsed into prison officers educated to leaving certificate level and prison officers who possessed a third level education. The scales for levels of job dissatisfaction and frustration were also collapsed into *never* and *often*.

The results of the chi-square revealed that there was a significant relationship between level of education and frustration (Pearson Chi Square with one degree of freedom = 4.930,  $p = .026$ , which is  $< 0.05$ ). Prison officers who did not possess a third level education indicated more frustration with fellow co-workers and inmates than officers who did possess a third level education. In addition, job dissatisfaction was also related to level of education (Pearson Chi Square with one degree of freedom = 5.557,  $p = .018$ , which is  $< 0.05$ ). Prison officers who did not possess a third level education tended to be more dissatisfied with their job than officers who do (See Table 4.4).

**Table 4.4 Is there a relationship between level of education and job dissatisfaction?**

			Level of education		Total
			Leaving Cert	Third level	
<b>Job dissatisfaction</b>	never	Count	17	23	40
		% within level of education	45.9%	74.2%	58.8%
	often	Count	20	8	28
		% within level of education	54.1%	25.8%	41.2%
<b>Total</b>		Count	37	31	68
		% within level of education	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

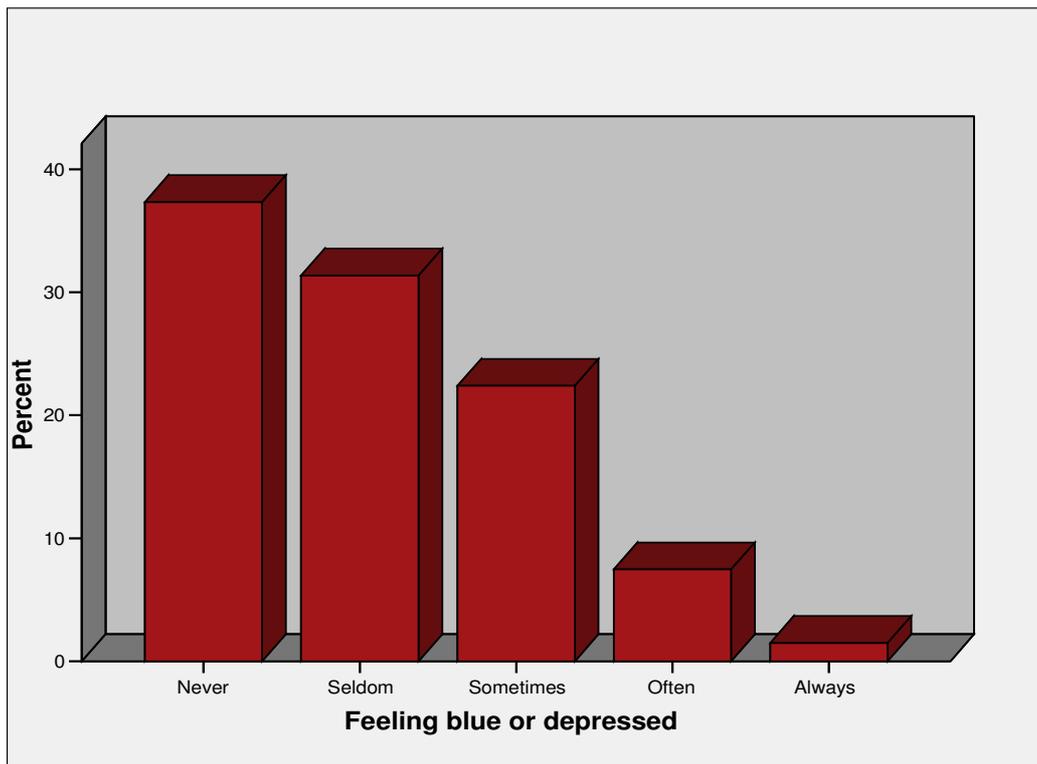
#### **4.4 Effects of Stress**

The objective of question 11 on the questionnaire was to ascertain the effects of stress on the prison officer population. Respondents were asked if they had experienced any of the twenty-three symptoms listed in the past four weeks. The findings revealed the following behavioural and physical reactions to stress among prison officers.

##### **4.4.1 Feeling Blue or Depressed**

Feeling blue or depressed was sometimes experienced by 22.1% (n=15) of respondents. Five prison officers (7.4%) reported that they often reacted in this way while one person (1.5%) always felt this way. However, 36.8% (n=25) of the survey population never experienced being depressed with a similar percentage seldom feeling in this way (30.9%) (See Figure 4.5).

**Figure 4.5**                      **Feeling Blue or Depressed**

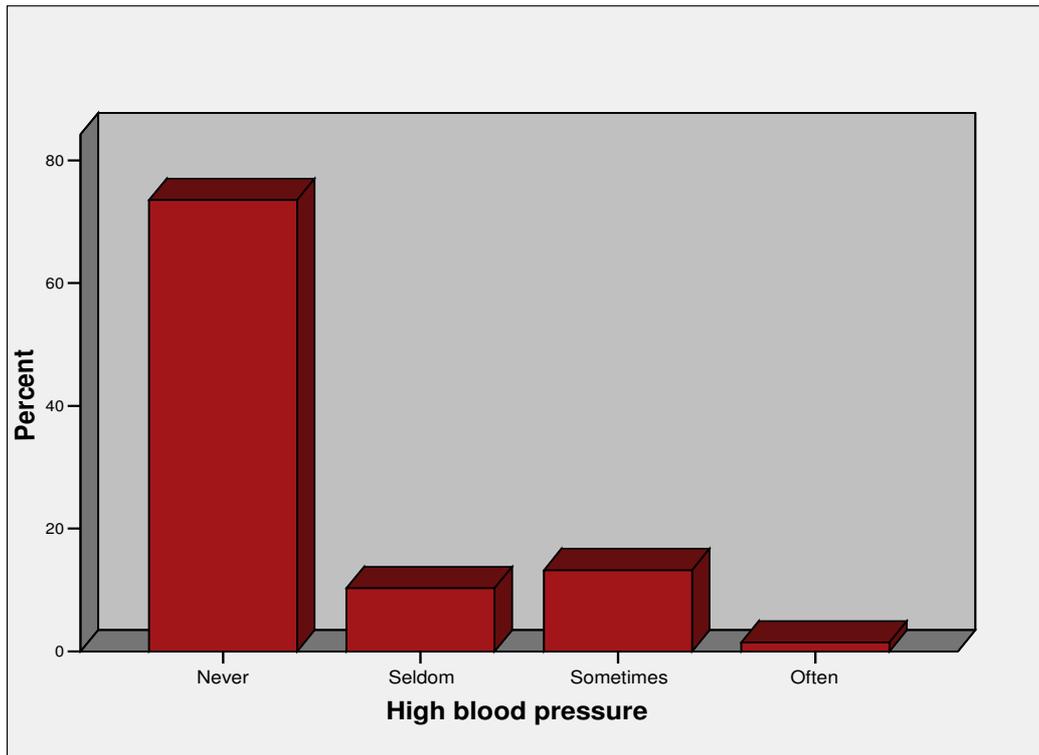


#### **4.4.2 Nausea/Upset stomach, Headache and High Blood Pressure**

With regard to the experience of the above physiological symptoms in the last four weeks, headaches were the most frequently reported among participants. Nineteen prison officers (26.5%) cited that they experienced headaches sometimes; eighteen (26.5%) seldom endured them while twenty-nine (42.6%) respondents never suffered from them in the previous month. Nausea/upset stomach was experienced often in the last four weeks by two respondents (2.9%) while ten prison officers (14.7%) cited that they sometimes had this symptom.

However, high blood pressure was the least reported stress reaction with 50 respondents (73.5%) never suffering from it in the last four weeks. Nine respondents (13.2%) claimed to have sometimes experienced high blood pressure while one participated often had it the last four weeks (See Figure 4.6).

**Figure 4.6 High Blood Pressure**



#### **4.4.3 Frustration (at co-workers/prisoners)**

Frustration at co-workers/prisoners yielded interesting findings. The experience of this particular behavioral reaction was very prevalent among the survey population. Only eight prison officers (11.8%) reported that they never felt frustrated with co-workers/prisoners in the last four weeks. However, twenty-eight respondents (41.2%) reported that they sometimes felt frustrated with coworkers and prisoners while nineteen (27.9%) prison officers often felt this way. Six respondents identified that they always felt frustrated with co-workers and prisoners over the last four weeks (See Figure 4.7).

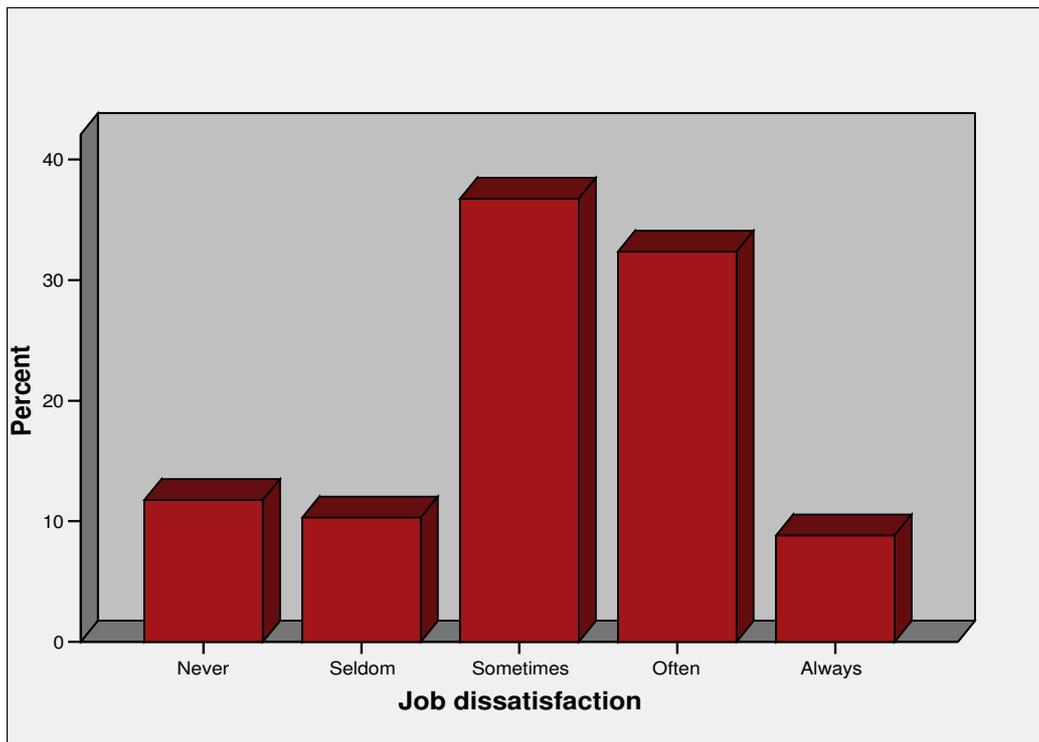
**Figure 4.7 Frustration at co-workers/prisoners**



#### **4.4.4 Job dissatisfaction**

Job dissatisfaction was also another negative stress outcome that was frequently reported among the sample of prison officers. Remarkably, 32.4% (n=22) of prison officers identified that they were often dissatisfied with their job. A further 36.8% reported that they sometimes felt dissatisfied over the last four weeks while 8.8% always experienced job dissatisfaction. Similar to the findings on frustration with co-workers/prisoners, only eight of the participants reported that they never felt dissatisfied with their job (See Figure 4.8).

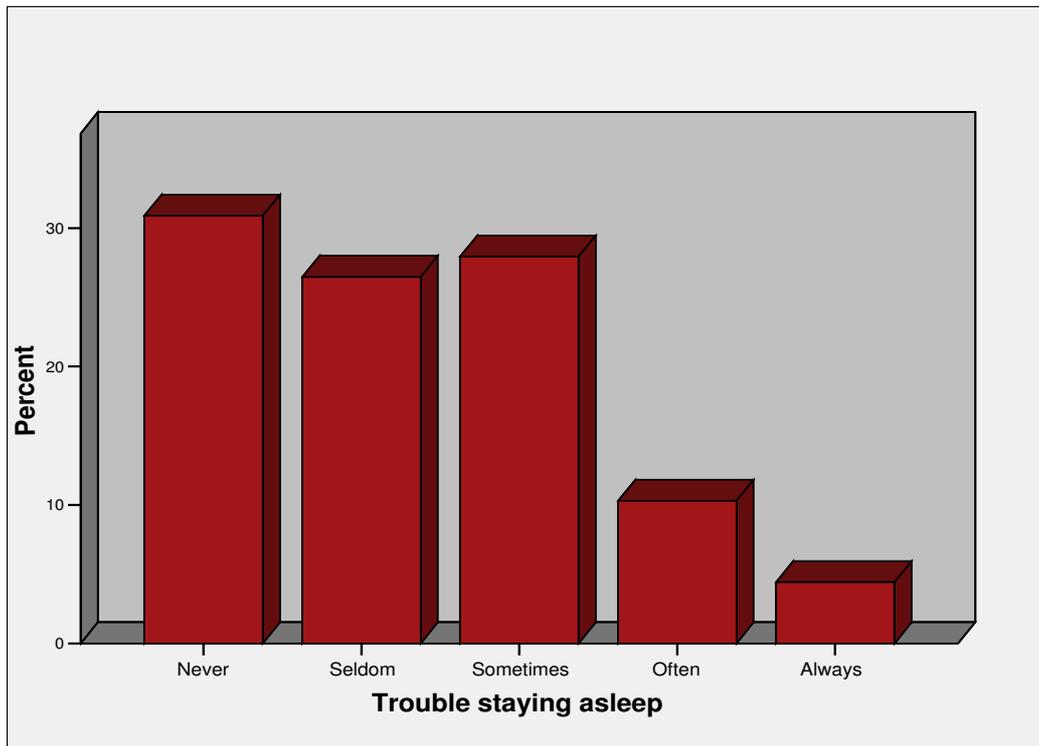
**Figure 4.8 Job Dissatisfaction**



#### **4.4.5 Trouble Getting to Sleep & Trouble Staying Asleep**

Trouble getting to sleep and trouble staying asleep was also another physical symptom of stress that featured among the survey population of prison officers. 20.6% (n=14) of respondents reported that they sometimes had trouble getting to sleep in the last four weeks. Six prison officers (8.8%) cited that they often have trouble fallen off to sleep while 41.2% (n=28) stated that they seldom suffered from difficulties with getting to sleep. Trouble staying asleep yielded similar results, however there was a slight increase in the number of respondents for the sometimes and often scales. 27.9% (n=19) prison officers reported trouble staying asleep in the last four weeks while 10.3% (n=7) often had trouble. Three prison officers indicated in the last four weeks that they always had trouble staying asleep (See Figure 4.9).

**Figure 4.9**                      **Trouble Staying Asleep**



#### **4.4.6 Breakdown of Relationships at Work & Home**

The findings with regard to the work-home interface showed that relations at home appear to be more amicable. Breakdown of relationships at work happened sometimes in the last four weeks for thirteen respondents (19.1%), half of the prison officers (n=34) stated that it seldom happened while eighteen respondents (26.5%) reported that this has never happened.

However in contrast to the work environment only five prison officers (7.4%) reported that there was sometimes a breakdown of relationships at home while just two indicated that this occurred often. However, the majority of respondents 52.9% (n=36) reported that in the last four weeks that breakdown in relationships at home had never occurred.

#### 4.4.7 Absenteeism

Self-reported use of sick leave due to pressure at work yielded mixed results. Thirty-three (33.8%) respondents indicated that they never take time off work due to pressure while seventeen (25%) reported that this seldom happens. However, twenty-four (35.3%) prison officers admitted that they sometimes take time off due to pressure at work while very few respondents indicated that they often do this (n=4) (See Figure 4.10). Interestingly the majority of respondents (n=45) indicated that they would never consider leaving the organisation due to pressure at work while seventeen (25%) admitted that they sometimes consider this.

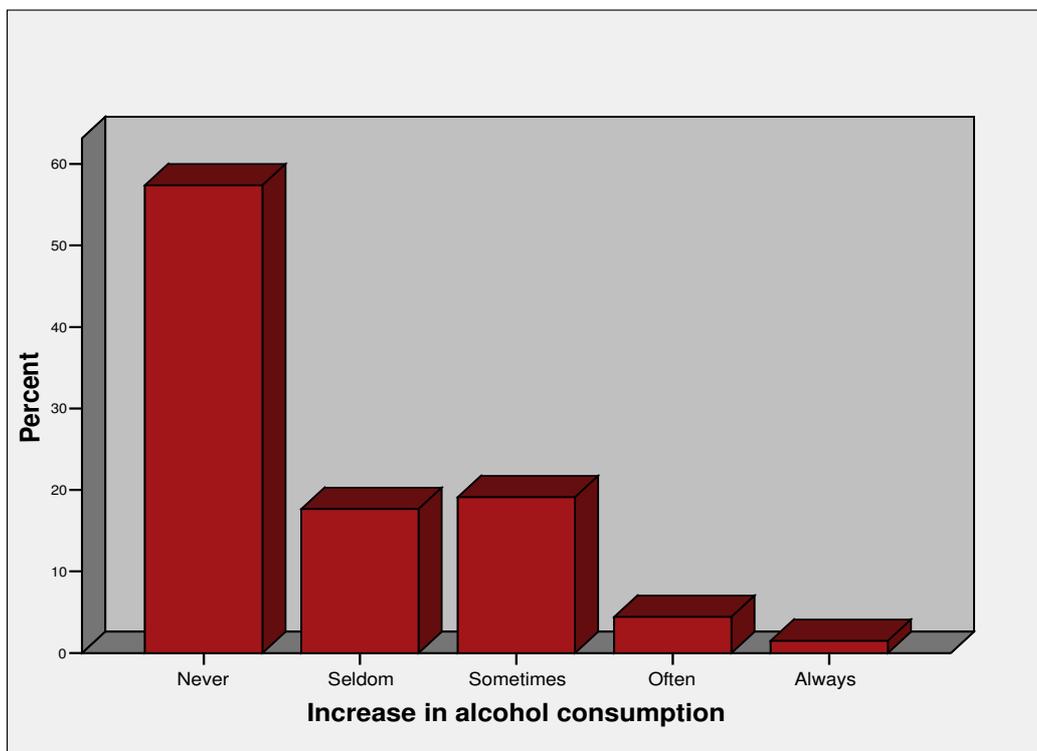
**Figure 4.10** Time off due to pressure at work



#### 4.4.8 Smoking, Drug Taking and Alcohol Consumption

With regard to smoking, drug taking and alcohol consumption the latter appears to be the most significant behavioural reaction to stress among the sample of prison officers. Thirteen respondents (19.1%) reported that they had increased their intake of alcohol in the last four weeks. Comparing this figure to the findings for smoking and drug taking, only eight respondents reported an increase in smoking (11.8%), while the majority of prison officers (95.6%) never resort to drug taking. However, despite thirteen respondents (19.1%) indicating that they sometimes increase their alcohol intake, the prison officers claiming that they have not increased their alcohol intake far outweighed this number. Thirty-nine (57.4%) prison officers reported that their level of alcohol over the last four weeks has not increased; while twelve (17.6%) responded that they seldom increase their alcohol intake (See Table 4.11).

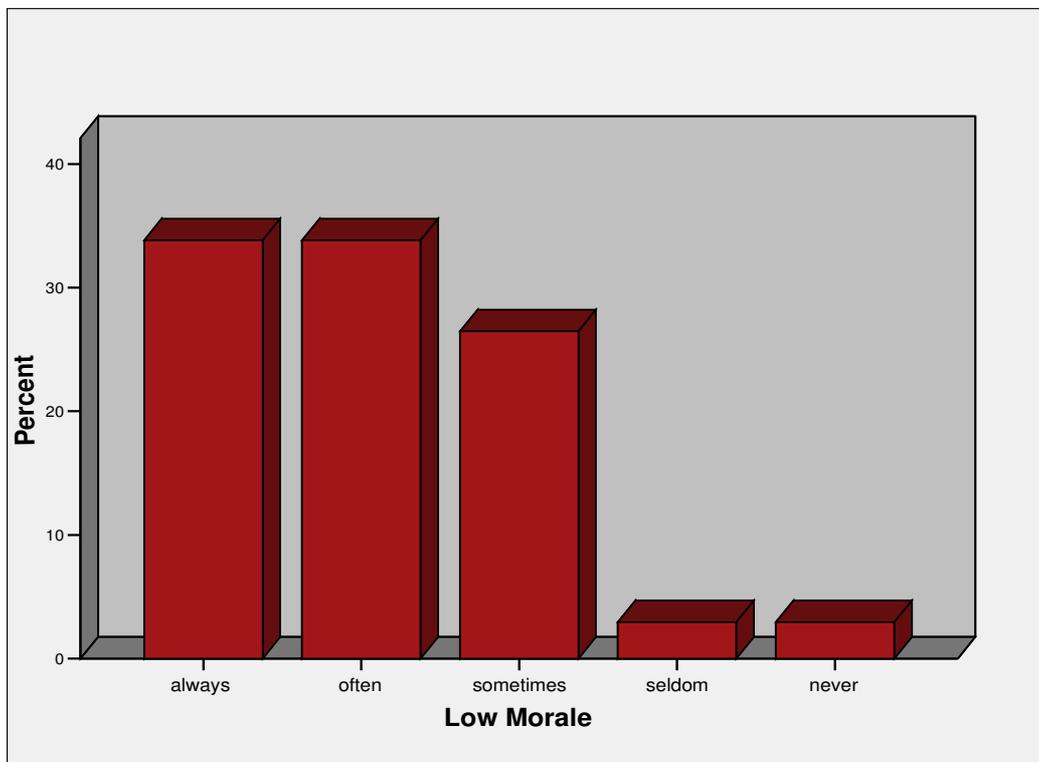
**Figure 4.11 Increase in Alcohol Consumption**



#### 4.4.9 Morale in the Organisation

Finally results of the analysis revealed that the most significant consequence of occupational stress within the organisation was level of morale. Findings show morale in the organisation to be very low with the majority (33.8%) of prisons officers (n=23) reporting that morale was always low and a further twenty-three (33.8%) indicating that it was often low. Only two respondents (2.9%) indicated that it was never low while a further two officers stating that it was seldom low (See Figure 4.12).

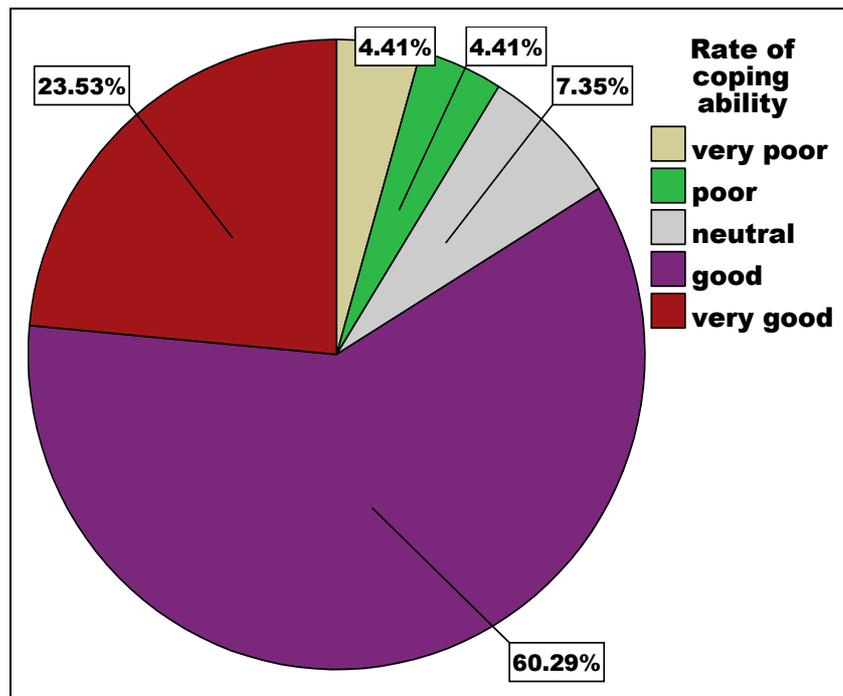
**Figure 4.12** Low Morale in the Organisation



#### 4.5 Coping with Occupational Stress

The next set of results address coping with occupational stress. Question 12 in the questionnaire asked the respondents to rate their coping ability with stressful work situations. Results revealed that the majority of the prison officers (n=41) considered their coping ability to be good while a further sixteen respondents (23.53%) rated their ability to be very good. Only six (4.4%) considered their levels of coping to be very poor. The following pie chart illustrates these statistics.

**Figure 4.13** Rate of Coping Ability



##### 4.5.1 Coping Strategies

In question 13 prison officers were given a list of eight coping strategies and were asked to indicate their responses on a four point Likert-type rating scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 4 (*often*). For the presentation of results the data was collapsed into two tables showing the percentage and frequency of the most frequently used (*often*) (See Table

4.14) and the least frequently used (*never*) coping strategies by respondents (See Table 4.15).

**Table 4.14 Coping Strategies Most Frequently Used**

<b>Method of Coping</b>	<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Percentages &amp; Frequencies</b>
<b>1. Active Coping</b>	I've made a plan of action and followed it	44.1% (n=30)
<b>2. Planning</b>	I've been trying to come up with a strategy about what to do	17.6% (n=12)
<b>3. Religion</b>	I've been trying to find comfort in my religion or spiritual beliefs	11.8% (n=8)
<b>4. Self-distraction</b>	I've been turning to other activities such as reading, sleeping or watching TV to keep my mind off things	11.8% (n=8)
<b>5. Emotional Support (emotion focused)</b>	I've been getting emotional support from others	5.9% (n=4)
<b>6. Substance</b>	I've been using alcohol or other drugs to make myself feel better	4.4% (n=3)
<b>7. Instrumental support (problem focused)</b>	I've been trying to get advice or help from other people about what to do	2.9% (n=2)
<b>8. Venting</b>	I've been saying things to let my unpleasant feelings to escape	1.5% (n=1)

From Table 4.14 it is apparent that the majority of respondents (44.1%) engage in active coping to try and remove the stressor or to ameliorate its effects. Twelve prison officers (17.6%) look to planning as a way of coping while eight participants (11.8%) turn to religion as a coping response. Seeking emotional support from others (emotion focused coping) was utilised by 5.9% (n=4) of the respondents while two prison officers (2.9%) sought advice from other people about what to do (problem focused). The least

frequently used was venting of emotions which one officer (1.5%) identified as a coping strategy.

**Table 4.15 Coping Strategies Least Frequently Used**

<b>Method of Coping</b>	<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Percentages &amp; Frequencies</b>
<b>1. Substance</b>	I've been using alcohol or other drugs to make myself feel better	60.3% (n=41)
<b>2. Religion</b>	I've been trying to find comfort in my religion	50% (n=34)
<b>3. Emotional Support (emotion focused)</b>	I've been getting emotional support from others	42.6% (n=29)
<b>4. Venting</b>	I've been saying things to let my unpleasant feelings to escape	38.2% (n=26)
<b>5. Self-distraction</b>	I've been turning to other activities such as reading, sleeping or watching TV to take my mind off things	32.4% (n=22)
<b>6. Instrumental support (problem focused)</b>	I've been trying to get advice or help from other people about what to do	26.5% (n=18)
<b>7. Planning</b>	<b>7.</b> I've been trying to come up with a strategy about what to do	14.7% (n=10)
<b>8. Active coping</b>	<b>8.</b> I've made a plan of action and followed it	10.3% (n=7)

From Table 4.15 we can infer that the use of alcohol and drugs, often referred to in the literature as a dysfunctional type of coping (Carver et al., 1989), is the least used among respondents (n=41). Interestingly second to this is turning to religion with thirty-four officers (50%) reporting that they never use this coping technique in times of stress. "Getting support from others" also featured as the least frequently used with a total of twenty-nine officers reporting that they do not engage this type of emotion focused coping when dealing with workplace stressors. Also maladaptive coping responses such

as venting emotions was not a technique commonly used by respondents with 38.2% (n=26) indicating that they do not respond in this way. Only a minority of prison officers (n=7) reported that they never employed the problem-focused method of coping 'Made a plan of action and followed it'.

#### **4.6 Sources of Occupational Stress**

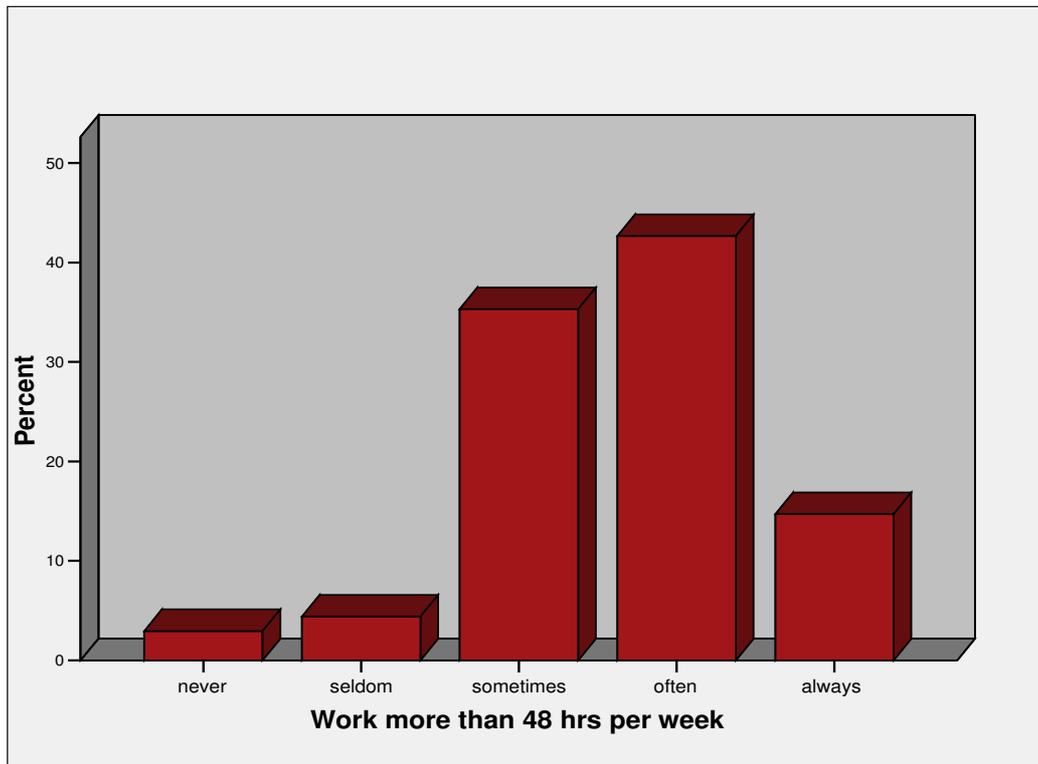
Section C in the questionnaire dealt with the sources of stress that exist for prison officers. Analysis of results reveals that the major sources of stress for the respondents can be categorised into the following areas:

- Work Demands
- Employee Control
- Employee Support
- Organisational Change
- Safety Concerns
- Family and Career Issues

##### **4.6.1 Work Demands**

The major areas of stress identified were related to heavy workloads, the working environment and work patterns. Alarming, 42.6% (n=29) of the respondents had to often work more than 48 hours per week with 14.7% reporting that they always had to (n=10) (See Figure 4.16).

**Figure 4.16** Work more than 48 hours per week



As well as being pressured to work long hours 29.4% (n=20) of respondents believed that they were unable to take sufficient breaks. However 19.1% (n=13) of officers sampled never felt that their breaks were inadequate. Twenty-five respondents (36.8%) felt that they had to sometimes neglect some tasks because they had too much to do with seventeen officers (25%) reporting that they often had to do this. In relation to working very intensively twenty-nine officers (32.4%) held the opinion that this happened sometimes while twenty-two respondents (32.4%) believed it often happened. Only two participants stated that this never happened (2.9%) with five reporting that it seldom happened (7.4%). However the majority of prison officers believed that despite these heavy work demands that they had the necessary skills to do their jobs with only seven officers reporting that they were lacking in this area (10.3%). In relation to emotional demands of the job, 41.2% (n=28) of officers agreed that their work was emotionally distressing while 14.7% strongly agreed on this matter (n=19). Only one participant strongly disagreed with their job was not emotionally demanding.

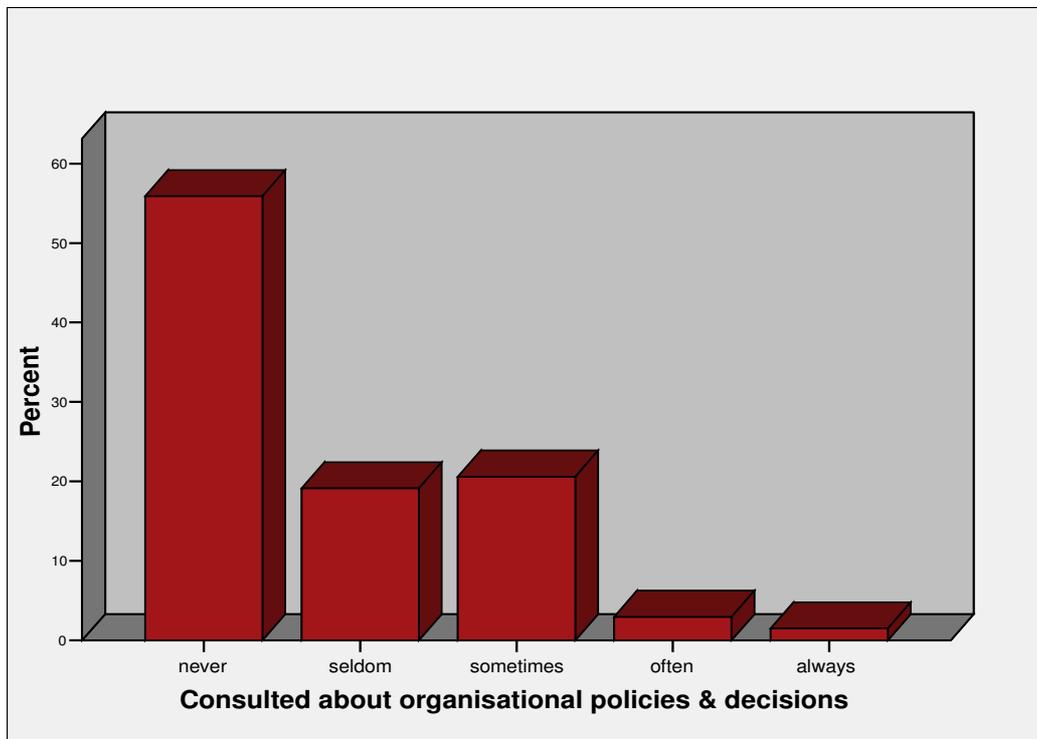
The working environment was also another area that prison officers felt very strongly about. With regard to how well the work area was designed and laid out, 42.6% (n=29) of respondents strongly disagreed that it was adequate with twenty-four officers (35.3%) disagreeing that the work area was well designed and laid out. Only five of the officers (7.4%) were happy with the design of the workplace while ten officers remained neutral about the issue (14.7%).

#### **4.6.2 Employee Control**

When asked to indicate their response to the statement 'I feel secure in my job' results revealed that the majority of prison officers (n=41) agreed with this statement with 29.4% (n=20) strongly agreeing. However, results were not as positive for how much say the respondents have in the way they do their work. Twenty-six (38.2%) prison officers believed that they sometimes have a choice in deciding how do their work, however twenty-four officers (35.3%) reported that they never have a choice in deciding what they do at work. Furthermore, twenty-seven (39.7%) respondents strongly believed that their working time was not flexible while twenty-three (33.8%) agreed. With regard to how much officers are consulted about organisational policies and decisions thirty-eight officers (55.9%) indicated that they were never consulted while only one respondent thought they were always (See Figure 4.17).

Further statistical analysis was conducted in the form of a Spearman's Rank Order Correlation ( $\rho$ ), which was used to calculate the strength of the relationship between two continuous variables (Pallant, 2005). In the present study the analysis explored the relationship between prison officers being consulted about organisational policies and decisions and levels of job dissatisfaction and frustration at co-workers and inmates. The direction of the relationship between the variables for the first test showed a negative correlation coefficient (-.353), indicating a moderate relationship between being consulted about policies and decisions and job dissatisfaction ( $r = -.353, p < .01$ ). In other words, the *less* prison officers are consulted about organisational policies and decisions the *more* dissatisfied they are about their jobs. A moderate relationship was also detected for prison officers' levels of frustration at co-workers and inmates and the extent to which they are consulted about organisational policies and decisions ( $r = -.329, p < .01$ ).

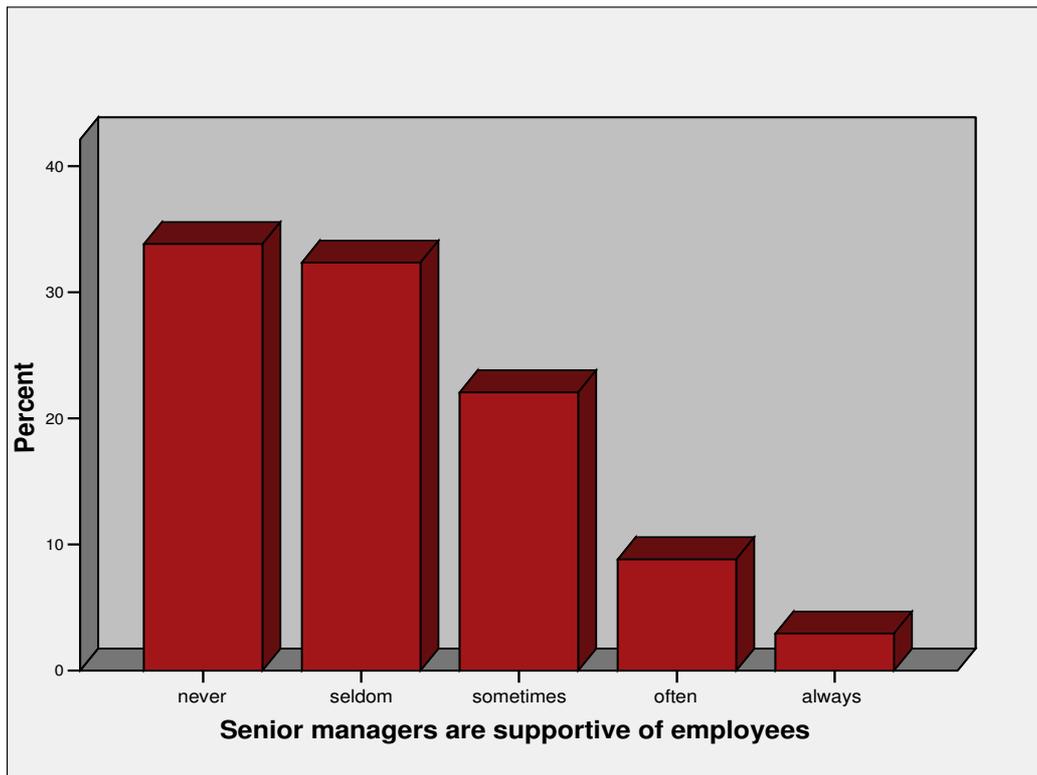
**Figure 4.17** Consulted about organisational policies & decisions



### **4.6.3 Employee Support**

The main form of support for respondents was from work colleagues. Twenty six (38.2%) prison officers agreed that they can often get help and support from colleagues when required while fourteen (20.6%) of respondents can always rely on this form of support. Twenty-six (38.2%) respondents also concurred that they could talk to line managers about something that has upset or annoyed them. However, senior management were not considered as favourably when it came to the issue of encouragement and support. 41.2% (n=28) of prison officers believed that they are never given supportive feedback on the work they do while twenty reported that this seldom happens (29.4%). The majority of respondents (33.8%) believed that senior managers are never supportive of employees with twenty-two officers (32.4%) reporting that they are seldom supportive. Only six participants contested by indicating that senior management are often supportive (8.8%) (See Figure 4.18).

**Figure 4.18 Senior managers are supportive of employees**



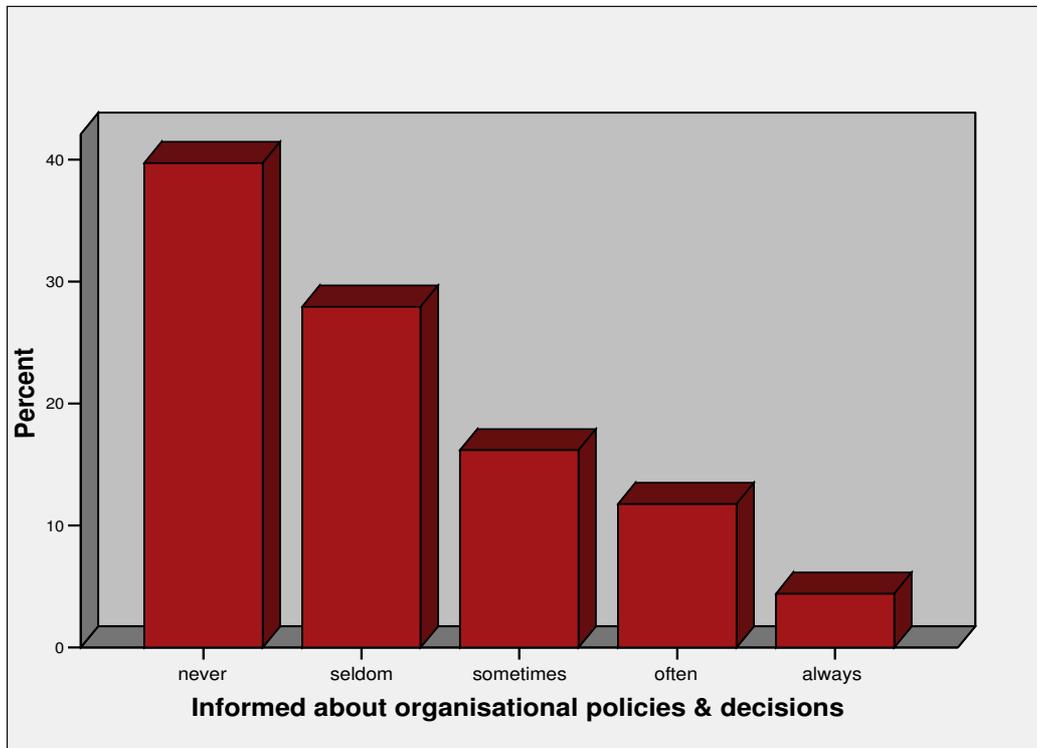
As well as human support, respondents identified deficiencies with technical support in the organisation. Twenty prison officers (29.4%) strongly disagreed that the equipment they were using was adequate enough to do their jobs while twenty-five also disagreed with this issue (36.8%). Furthermore, with regard to training the majority of officers, a total of 42.6% agreed that they did not receive the training they needed to do their jobs.

#### **4.6.4 Role Issues**

The findings identified the overall majority of prison officers in the survey understand their role in the organisation. Twenty-four (35.3%) officers were always clear of what is expected of them at work, thirty-nine (57.4%) always knew how to go about getting their job done, thirty-nine were also always clear about what their duties and responsibilities were and finally twenty-four respondents (35.3%) reported that they always understood how their work fits into the overall aim of the organisation. However similar to the earlier finding that officers did not believe they were consulted about organisational policies and decisions, respondents further believed that they were not informed of organisational policies and decisions. Twenty-seven officers (39.7%)

reported that they were never informed of organisational policies and decisions while nineteen (27.9%) indicated that this seldom happens (See Figure 4.19).

**Figure 4.19** Informed of organisational policies and decisions



#### **4.6.5 Organisational Change**

Results revealed another issue prison officers felt strongly about was the extent to which organisational change is managed and communicated in the organisation. Twenty-eight officers (41.2%) disagreed with the statement that they had sufficient opportunities to question managers about change at work. The majority of respondents (n=35) strongly disagreed that staff are always consulted about change at work (See Figure 4.20) while thirty officers (44.1%) disagreed that when changes are made at work, they are clear how this will work out in practice.

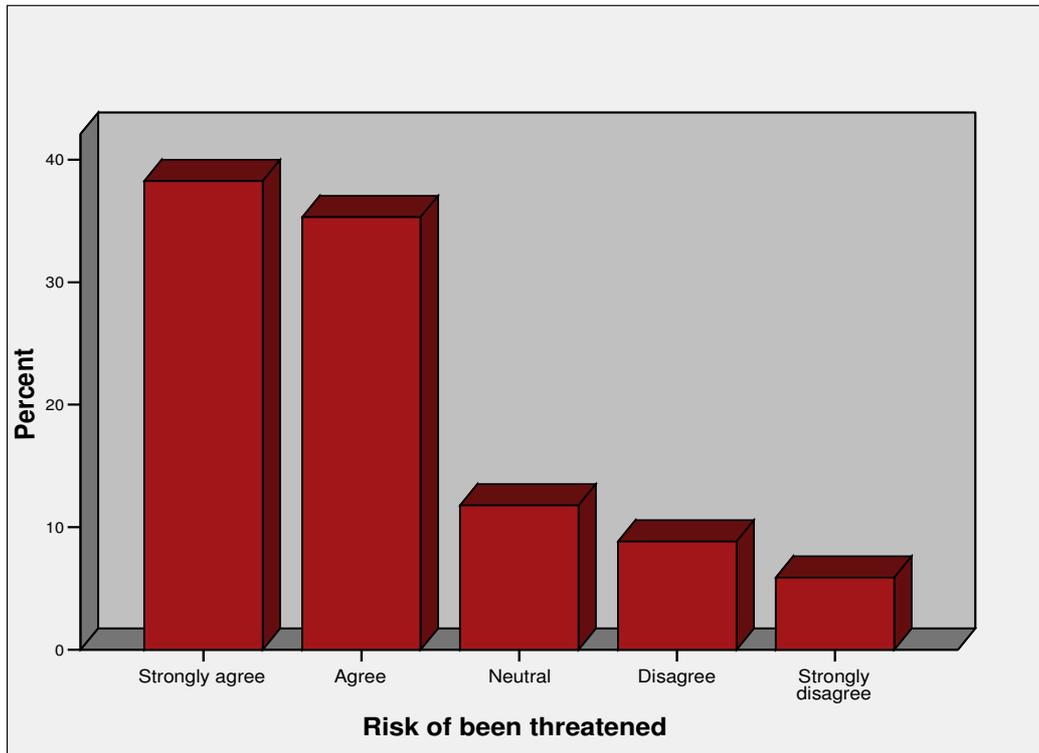
**Figure 4.20**                      **Staff are always consulted about change at work**



#### **4.6.6 Safety Concerns**

Safety concerns were a definite salient issue among the prison officers surveyed. Twenty-eight respondents (41.2%) strongly agreed that they were concerned about their safety at work while a further thirty officers agreed with this issue (44.1%). Twenty-six respondents (38.2%) strongly agreed that the risk of been threatened particularly due their position was a cause for concern while twenty-four (35.3%) agreed on this matter (See Figure 4.21). Only six respondents (8.8%) felt that the risk of been threatened was not a cause for concern. With regard to health at work thirty prison officers (44.1%) agreed that they were concerned about this issue.

**Figure 4.21**                      **Concerned About the Risk of Been Threatened**

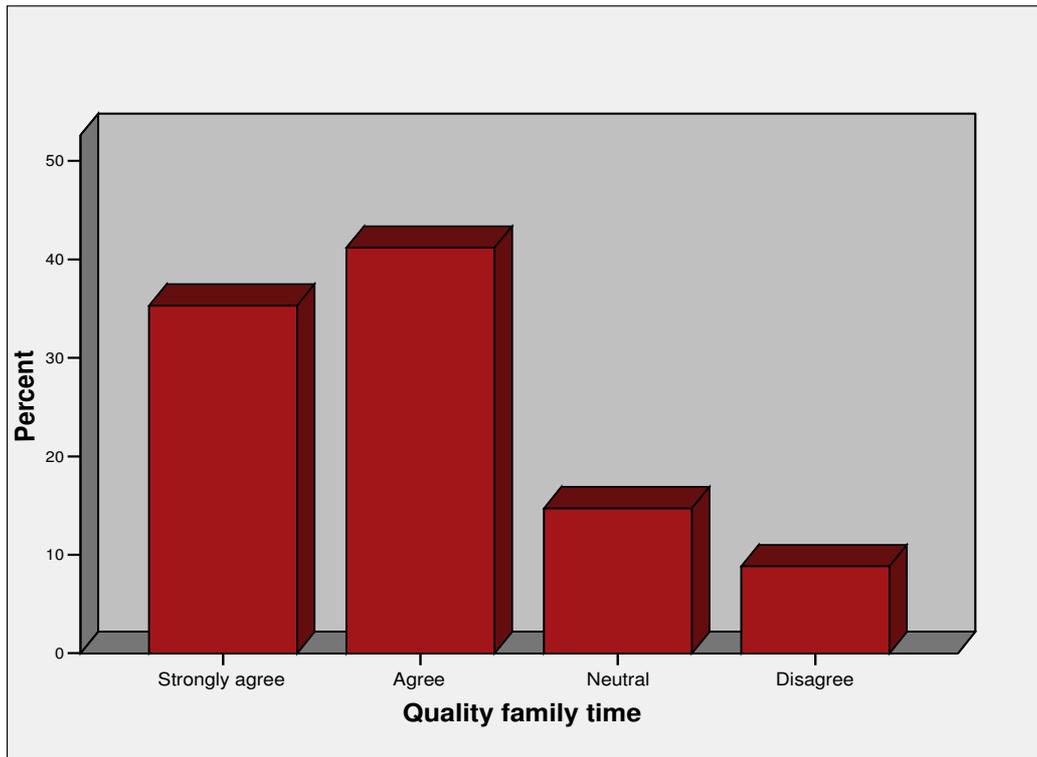


#### **4.6.7 Family & Career Opportunities**

In relation to career opportunities the findings revealed mixed opinions regarding the issue. Three (4.4%) prison officers strongly disagreed that they lacked the opportunities to advance their career in the organisation, thirteen (19.1%) disagreed, nineteen remained neutral with the issue while a further nineteen (27.9%) agreed that they lacked career opportunities. Fourteen respondents (20.6%) strongly agreed that they lacked the career opportunities to advance within the organisation.

Another personal issue noticeable among the prison officers was concerns about time spent with family. Twenty-four officers (35.3%) strongly agreed that they were concerned about not enough time with family due to work commitments while a further twenty-eight (41.2%) of respondents agreed on this subject (See Figure 4.22).

**Figure 4.22**                      **Quality Family Time**



To reinforce the above descriptive statistics the author conducted inferential analyses in the form of Mann Whitney U tests to explore the hypothesis: are prison officers working more than forty hours a week more likely to experience higher levels of workplace stress? For ease of interpretation, the data on numbers of hours worked per week, collected from question nine in the questionnaire, was collapsed to less than forty hours per week and more than forty.

As previously mentioned, section C of the present survey was based on the Work Positive Questionnaire (2005). This contained an open-ended question and a total of sixty-seven statements on a Likert-type rating scale from 1 to 5, which were further subdivided into nine categories based on a range of salient structural and work organisational influences, which contributed to workplace stress. The nine categories include workplace demands, employee control, employee support, employee relationships, employee role, organisational change, reward and contribution, safety and health at work and indicators/outcomes.

In attempting to analyse this data in the light of the proposed hypotheses, a number of newer scales were adapted from the Work Positive Questionnaire to simplify interpretation of the data. When computing scales, it is important to note the direction of a question in relation to the response system allocated. Within the Work Positive Questionnaire most of the questions are positive in direction, however the direction of negative statements such as 'I have unachievable guidelines' were changed to positive statements, in order to maintain the scale of 1-5 (low to high response). Summing the responses of respondents in the present study across pertinent questions created each scale. To ensure this score is relative to the original scoring system (1-5) and for direct comparisons to be made between each scale, these scores were then divided by the total number of pertinent questions within the scale. This provides a final score that indicates individuals' responses across the nine categories rather than dealing with responses to individual questions. As with the original scale, a low score indicates low work based stress and high score indicates high work based stress.

Statistical analyses were then carried out by Mann-Whitney U tests to explore the hypotheses: are prison officers working more than forty hours per week more likely to experience higher levels of workplace stress? A Mann-Whitney U test evaluates whether the medians on a test variable differ significantly between two groups (Pallent, 2005). The main reason the Mann-Whitney U test was chosen by the author is because the variables to be measured are ordinal scale data. Green and Salkind (2005) indicate that if a study has two independent samples, and individuals in the samples are assessed on a dependent variable measured on an ordinal scale, then the data from the study should be measured with a Mann-Whitney U test. Results of the test revealed that work demands ( $z = -2.89, p < 0.05$ ), work relationships ( $z = -2.54, p < 0.05$ ) and safety and health at work ( $z = -2.34, p < 0.05$ ) were in the expected direction and significant (See Table 4.23).

**Table 4.23 Significant Results for Mann-Whitney U Test**

	Work Demands	Work Relationships	Safety & Health
Mann-Whitney U	153.500	175.500	195.000
Wilcoxon W	231.500	253.500	273.000
Z	<b>-2.891</b>	<b>-2.541</b>	<b>-2.344</b>
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	<b>.004</b>	<b>.011</b>	<b>.019</b>

a Grouping Variable: Hours worked per week

Therefore the hypotheses is supported for these three determinants of stress i.e. work demands, relationships at work and health and safety concerns pose a greater source of stress for prison officers working more than forty hours a week than those who work less than forty hours per week.

#### 4.7 Qualitative Findings

Question 14 and 18 added a qualitative element to the present study. Question 14 in the coping section on the questionnaire asked participants to specify any other coping strategy they use other than the eight listed. Twelve respondents (8.16%) identified the following ways in which they cope (see Table 4.24 below).

**Table 4.24 Coping Strategies: Open-ended Questions**

<b>Coping Strategies: Open-Ended Answers</b>
1. Exercise
2. Meditation and self-development books
3. Ignore the problem until it goes away
4. Keeping a positive mental attitude
5. Staying calm and not being afraid to admit when wrong
6. Timeout
7. Keeping busy
8. Avoiding stressful situations

Questions 85 on the questionnaire gave respondents the option of indicating the three main sources of pressure at work that existed for them. A total of sixty-one (89.7%) open-ended answers were put forward by the prison officers in the survey. The main sources of stress that emerged in order of frequency are listed in Table 4.25 below.

**Table 4.25**                      **Main Sources of Stress: Open-ended Answers**

<b>Main Sources of Stress: Open-Ended Answers</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
<b>1.</b> Management	N=36
<b>2.</b> Concern about threat from prisoners	N=24
<b>3.</b> Compulsory overtime	N=17
<b>4.</b> Staff shortages	N=16
<b>5.</b> Work overload	N=12
<b>6.</b> Lack of proper facilities	N=9

## ***Chapter Five***

# ***Discussion & Conclusions***

## **5.1 Introduction**

This present study of occupational stress for prison officers grew out of a perceived paucity of systematic research examining the relationships between stressors and stress related problems among prison officers in Ireland. The research was conducted to extend knowledge about prison officer perceptions of stress, consequences in terms of physical and emotional status, perceived causes of stress, and coping techniques. The most important finding of the study is that, according to several objective indicators, prison officers experience considerable stress on the job. This chapter examines the results of the survey in light of possible interventions that can be introduced to reduce occupational stress among prison officers. Limitations of the study are also addressed and recommendations for future research are also made.

## **5.2 Prison Officer Job Demands**

The job of a prison officer is known to entail high stress levels because of the unique environment of working in a prison. Numerous studies in the United States attested that these high stress levels then lead to job dissatisfaction (Lambert et al., 2004), physical illnesses (Cheek & Miller et al., 1983), burnout (Morgan et al., 2002), or family problems (Triplett et al., 1999), which then lead to the inability by prison officers to perform their duties properly and efficiently. Using a sample of 68 prison officers, this present study unearthed similar findings by revealing that prison officers were very dissatisfied with their jobs, suffered from various health problems, and felt high levels of work stress.

Regarding the stressors reported by the respondents, it is important to note that the factors inducing the highest levels of stress were those that are not necessarily unique to the prison environment. Triplett et al. (1996) further suggests that factors identified in the organisational stress literature do impact on prison officers' reports of work-related stress, which suggests similarities among all occupational categories. In particular, the main sources of stress that existed for the sample of prison officers in this survey ranged

from work overload, employee control, employee support, organisational change, safety & family concerns and career development issues.

The most important job demands experienced by prison officers in the present study were being pressured to work long hours. Twenty-nine officers (42.6%) reported that they often had to work more than 48 hours per week and the majority of officers indicated that they had to neglect some tasks because they had too much to do. Furthermore, statistical analyses showed that prison officers working more than forty hours per week were more susceptible to stress arising from job demands, relationships at work and safety issues. In addition, the emphasis respondents placed in the open-ended section on understaffing and compulsory overtime clearly illustrates the power of their concerns about work overload. For example a commonly voiced frustration was being *'forced to work long hours often with only a few hours notice'*. Another officer suggested that with the introduction of *'annualised hours the workload is now carried by two people where before we had two and half to three people'*. The former Minister for Justice Michael McDowell introduced these annualised hours in a bid to cut an annual 60 million Euro overtime bill in prison officers' wages. The scheme was opposed by the Prison Officers Association (POA) who believed that annualised hours would bring chaos to many jails. However, despite voicing their concerns the scheme was introduced in 2005 (Burke, 2007).

In addition, the majority of the officers agreed that their role was emotionally demanding. This stress may stem from an observation made by Crawley (2004). She believed that prison officers' emotion-work is likely to be problematic, since it emerges in interactions with individuals who are often perceived as *unworthy* of such emotions. She further pointed out that even officers who strive to work positively with such prisoners often find it difficult to manage feelings of anger and disgust; similarly they may feel guilty when feelings of empathy do emerge. Prison officers' physical working environment was also a source of stress with the majority of respondents indicating that their environment was not well designed and properly laid out leading to discomfort. This was not a theme that emerged in the larger literature on occupational stress among prison officers. However, despite this fact it should not be ignored as an issue for

concern as WHO (2003) argue that poor work organisation, that is the way we design jobs and work systems, and the way we manage them, can lead to occupational stress.

In previous studies (Armstrong & Griffin, 2004; Hogan et al. 2006) important stressors identified among prison officers were issues with lack of role clarity, ambiguous duties, and other factors that defined role problems. However, the results indicated that the prison officers in the present study did not experience high levels of role problems. Respondents appeared to be very clear of what is expected of them at work, were sure of their duties and responsibilities and understood how their role fits into the overall aim of the organisation. This finding is consistent with a study by Moon & Maxwell (2004) who discovered that Korean prison officers did not experience high levels of role problems despite recent shifts in prisons on the rehabilitation of inmates.

Notwithstanding, an overriding stressor that did emerge with the present study was perceived lack of employee control within the context of a high demand job. In this sense, the job of a prison officer conforms to the “high strain” job as conceptualised by Karasek (1979) in the earlier mentioned Job Demand-Control model – where work that combines high demands with low control is predicted to cause a high state of job strain with the subsequent risk of psychological and physical morbidity (Calnan et al., 2004). Respondents indicated that they do not have much say in the way that they do their work. Furthermore, officers in the survey strongly indicated that they were never informed or consulted about organisational policies and decisions. Results of statistical tests revealed that the less prison officers in the present study were consulted about organisational policies and decision their levels of job dissatisfaction and frustration at co-workers and inmates increased. Shadur et al. (2001) maintain that if employees are adequately informed about matters that concern them and allowed to make decisions, they will have a more positive work attitude and work more effectively.

An issue closely related to control is social support and has been found to be a predictor of psychological stress for prison officers (Dollard et al., 1998). Respondents in the present study reported that they are never given supportive feedback on the work they do and the majority of the officers believed that senior managers are not supportive of employees. Cheek and Miller (1983) made a few interesting observations regarding administrative support for prison officers. The authors suggested that prison officers are

in a vulnerable position. The prison officer cannot follow regulations inflexibly but if he/she does not and something goes wrong he/she may well be used as a scapegoat and given charges or suspended. On the other hand, if he/she does try to 'go by the book' and discipline the inmates, the officer may find that his disciplinary activities will not be backed by administration, increasing the officer's sense of powerlessness.

In addition, deficiencies in technical support were noted among respondents who strongly agreed that equipment such as radios and alarm systems were outdated and inadequate. As one respondent stated as a source of stress in an open ended question,

*'The Governors and their regard for health and safety of their officers, they don't respect their officers. Everything is down to cost cutting and saving'.*

The overall context of this could be viewed as being nonsupportive of employees. This finding is supported by a study conducted by Auerbach et al. (2003) among juvenile prison officers. Stressors in the study that eclipsed physical dangers of the job were lack of support by the agency, long hours and inadequate tools for the job. In sum, WHO (2003) argues that the most stressful type of work is that which values excessive demands and pressures that are not matched to workers' knowledge and abilities, where there is little opportunity to exercise any choice or control, and where there is little support from others.

Furthermore, organisational factors such as change management featured as a major source of stress for the prison officers in the present survey. Respondents indicated that they were not consulted about change at work and strongly agreed that they did not have sufficient opportunities to question managers about change at work. In addition the respondents agreed that when changes are made at work, they are not clear how these will work out in practice. From a management perspective, work environments that nurture and facilitate interpersonal communication among employees and managers will be more effective (Slate et al., 2001). Josi & Sechrest (1998) argue that prison officer's participation in workplace decision-making has been cited as a means for bolstering social support on the job and as a mechanism for reducing factors that have been found to contribute to stress and burnout. In essence research has shown that the more an

employee perceives that an organisation values their work and input, the less stress they will experience in the workplace.

Results from the present study also found that perceptions of personal security were a predictor of job stress for the overall sample. This finding is consistent with earlier research (Auerbach et al., 2003; Botha & Pienaar, 2006; Keinan & Malach-Pines, 2007; Long et al., 1986; Millson, 2000; Moon & Maxwell, 2004) that has demonstrated safety concerns as one of the most important determinants of stress among prison officers. Respondents concerns about safety were high enough to evoke the following comment in an open-ended section at the end of the survey,

*“We are constantly working in dangerous and hostile conditions that leave us at the behest of the good will of prisoners. Much frustration that conditions are so lax for drugs, phones, knives etc to be passed (to inmates) on visits”*

Results of the study also indicated that work-family conflict is a real cause of concern for many prison officers with the majority of respondents agreeing that they were concerned about not enough family time due to work commitments. As one officer wrote, the *‘roster is not family friendly at all’* and *‘parental leave is only given in block’*. Worryingly one officer stated, *‘concern for the well-being of my family because of the job I do’*. This finding concurs with previous research (Lambert et al., 2004; Lambert et al., 2006; Triplett et al., 1999) where strain felt by prison officers at work negatively impacts their home life leading to higher levels of job stress.

As well as family concerns another bone of contention highlighted in the literature for prison officers were career development issues (Pollack & Sigler, 1998; Triplett et al., 1999). Results of the present study revealed that respondents had mixed feelings regarding the issue. However, the majority of the officers in the survey held the belief that they lacked the opportunities to advance their careers. As with the earlier finding that powerlessness to question managers about change at work was a source of stress at work for the officers in the present study. The same holds true for those who report impediments in their career progression.

With regard to sources of prison officer stress earlier studies have also investigated the issue of gender and stress (Britton, 1997; Carlson et al. 2003; Griffin 2006). Because of the gendered nature of the prison environment, these studies have examined the way in which men and women experience differently the role of the prison officer, as well as the stresses associated with this role. However, in the present study statistical analysis to further understand this relationship could not be carried out due to the very low number of female respondents (n=5). This obvious inequality may affirm a view held by Griffin et al. (2005) who saw the prison environment is an exceedingly masculinised organisation.

### **5.3 Consequences of Stress**

Stress affects different people in different ways. The experience of work stress can cause unusual and dysfunctional behaviour at work and contribute to poor physical and mental health (WHO, 2003). Childress et al. (1999) suggest prison officers may become vulnerable to emotional problems such as increased irritability, feelings of tension and depression. Additive behaviours such as substance abuse, gambling and overeating may emerge as well. However, in the present study scores were not high for some of the physical and emotional effects of stress such as pain/pounding in the chest, sudden feelings of panic or fear, crying spells and feeling nervous. The majority of prison officers indicated that they never experienced these symptoms in the last four weeks. One possible explanation for this suggested by Cheek & Miller (1983) is that like the police, prison officers tend to be tough, macho and impassive men who tend to deny their feelings and weaknesses. The authors' further postulate that considerable evidence exists to indicate that this macho style termed the "working personality" of the prison officer by Skolnick (1966) is at least in part a product of socialisation in the role.

In addition, it has been suggested in previous studies that prison officers are susceptible to a variety of stress-related illnesses including cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure and alcoholism (Cheek & Miller, 1983; Harenstam, 1989; Wells, 2006). Results from the present study revealed that high blood pressure was not a commonly reported indicator of stress with fifty respondents (73.5%) reporting that they never suffer with this symptom. Increases in smoking, alcohol consumption and drug taking were also underreported. However, seventeen respondents did admit to increasing their

alcohol consumption over the last four weeks and a significant correlation was found ( $p < 0.05$ ) between increases in alcohol consumption and length of time working in the organisation. Prison officers working more than twenty years in the organisation reported an increase in alcohol consumption more than officers working less than twenty years.

A possible reason for underreporting of substance abuse among the sample could be the bias of social desirability. Bowling (2002) asserts that people may describe the variable of interest in a way that they think the investigator wants to hear, and people want to present themselves in the best possible way. The personal effects of stress that were however reported in the present study were feeling blue or depressed, trouble sleeping, headaches, breakdown of relationships at work and at home. Slate et al. (2000) argues that the pernicious effects of stress are well documented and, according to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, over 75% of visits to primary care doctors and as high as 85% of all industrial accidents involve workers under stress. Furthermore, Finn (2000) emphasises that the effects of stress on prison officers can degrade their ability to perform their responsibilities in the prison in ways that compromise institutional safety, cost money, and create stress for other staff.

Another significant effect of stress most typically found among prison officers is negative job-related attitudes. Cullen et al. (1990) found that their level of job dissatisfaction is remarkably high compared to a dozen occupations that are quite similar with respect to levels of pay and education. Findings from the present study were consistent with this view as frustration and job dissatisfaction ranked high among respondents as a negative consequence of stress. Moreover a significant relationship was also found between educational level and degrees of job dissatisfaction and frustration among respondents. Lambert et al. (2002) observes that during the past several decades, prison administrators have focused on increasing the higher educational level of employees as a way to promote professionalisation and job satisfaction of staff. Statistical analysis in the present study revealed that prison officers who did not possess a third level education experience higher levels of job dissatisfaction and frustration. This finding concurs with previous research conducted by Jurik et al. (1985) who found that the less educated prison officers experienced more job dissatisfaction.

However, despite high levels of job dissatisfaction and frustration among respondents, intentions to quit the organisation were not strongly indicated with the majority of prison officers (66.2%) reporting that they would not consider leaving the organisation due to pressure at work. This result is in contrast to previously mentioned research conducted by Lambert (2004) who found that job stress had negative significant effects on prison officers' organisational commitment and job satisfaction. However despite this contradiction pressure at work was found as an antecedent of prison officers' absenteeism in the present study, which has been highlighted as a problem in previous research. Finn (2000) implies that researchers have long reported that prison officers take excessive sick leave as a means of coping with stress. Forty-two officers in the present survey admitted to taken time off due to pressure at work. In response to this growing problem, Lambert et al. (2005) argues that the job satisfaction and organisational commitment of prison officers should be raised, which should ultimately improve the efficacy of the organisation by reducing employee absenteeism.

#### **5.4 Ways of Coping**

The data from the present study on the coping strategies used by prison officers revealed that the majority of respondents (n=42) engaged in problem-focused coping. Research indicates that problem-focused coping is the more effective of the two at preventing occupational stress (Cooper et al., 2001). Moreover, the majority of respondents rated their coping ability to be good (n=41). Empirical evidence to support these findings is difficult as the author found very little research exploring coping strategies among prison officers. However, Biggam et al. (1997) assessed coping styles used among Scottish police officers, an occupational group where comparisons to prison officers can be made, and found that the officers in the study showed a preference for more problem-focused, direct action coping strategies as a means to dealing with occupational stressors. A reason suggested why this may be is that as a result of training and socialisation into the specific police culture, officers are encouraged to use such problem-focused, direct action strategies as a means of coping with the uncontrollable and unpredictable issues that they may have to face as a result of their occupation (Biggam et al., 1997).

The use of religion emerged very clearly in the factor analysis of coping activities in the present study. Carver et al. (1989) suggest that one might turn to religion when under stress for widely varying reasons: religion might serve as a source of emotional support or as a tactic of active coping with a stressor. Problem-focused coping implies targeting or changing the person-environment transactions rather than the resulting emotional strains (Latack and Havlovic, 1992). Religious activities such as praying for a change in the work situation, for example, would fit that target. This supports Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) assertions that individuals are likely to use both emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies (seeking comfort in religion can serve as both an emotion-focused and a problem-focused coping strategy).

In the present study the use of religion was ranked as the third most frequently used coping techniques among prison officers with eight respondents reporting that they use this strategy in times of stress. However, turning to religion was also listed second to the use of alcohol and drugs as the least frequently used coping method among respondents with thirty-four officers reporting that they never use this coping strategy in times of stress. Thus, while turning to religion was clearly a coping technique reported by some prison officers, it appears unlikely to be particularly helpful for other officers. Interestingly the use of social support yielded similar results. Only four prison officers reported the use of emotional support from others as a coping technique whereas twenty-nine officers indicated that they never employ this coping technique, which ranked as the third least frequently used coping method. A reason for this may be the fact that the majority of the respondents in the present study are male (92.6%) and working in an environment that may not encourage the expression of emotion. This gender difference with regard to social support was identified by Biggam et al. (1997), who found that female police officers reported higher usage of the social support strategies of coping.

Maladaptive coping responses such as the use of alcohol and drugs, which was the least frequently used coping strategy, and venting of emotions were not commonly reported among the prison officers in the present survey. This finding contradicts previous research by Anshel (2000) who suggests that police officers often use maladaptive styles of coping such as drinking, smoking and eating to cope with workplace stressors.

While this study advances knowledge about the use of coping techniques by prison officers, there are still a number of important areas to be explored in future research. Triplett et al. (1996) indicate that other measures of coping need to be developed. One issue in particular is the level of specificity at which coping should be conceptualised and measured. Since all strategies for coping depend on situational factors and personality, Beehr et al. (1995) proposes that very specific measures of coping that apply only to a certain type of stressor, type of job, or type of person might provide better detail and insight for a specific situation.

In summary, the above findings not only lent support to the vast majority of prior literature that examined workplace stress in prison officers, but also added to the limited research exploring coping among prison officers. The study found that prison officers do not appear to be a totally distinct occupational group, but rather one that shares many of the same concerns of workers in other occupations. Even though there are some concerns, such as safety, that might be more salient for prison officers than others, it is important to realize that it is the broader organisation rather than the unique attributes of the job that exerted the greater influence on the level and sources of stress among the respondents in the present study. The implications of these findings are especially important when shaping future institutional policies, or developing specific stress management and stress reduction programs.

### **5.5 Limitations of the study**

There are a number of limitations with this study that should be mentioned. Firstly, one of the major restrictions was that it was cross-sectional in nature. The main benefit of employing the use of a cross sectional survey is that data can be collected from the population of interest at one point in time. However, Dowden & Tellier (2004) assert that cross-sectional designs can preclude an appropriate examination of cause and effects relationships. Therefore, a more sophisticated methodological design such as a longitudinal study would have been beneficial in the present survey as it provides much more accurate results as participants are surveyed over a longer period of time and this can reflect truer responses (Robson, 2002). However due to time constraints associated with the present research this was not possible.

Secondly, the findings from the present study failed to facilitate the discovery of differential specific predictors of work stress in terms of gender comparisons. This was due to the fact that statistical analysis could not be attempted, as only five respondents were female. Thirdly, the use of a self-administered questionnaire could serve as a further limitation. The prison officers who were surveyed may have given the socially acceptable response or what they thought was the “right answer” rather than what they really felt. The use of interviews may be able to penetrate those surface responses to the underlying sources of stress that exist for prison officers. Finally, participants were selected using non-probability convenience sampling, which is not normally representative of the target population because sample units are only selected if they can be accessed conveniently. However, in the present study the phenomena under investigation are homogenous within the population, which means the risk of bias is minimal.

## **5.6 Recommendations**

Prison officers must cope with stress stemming from a variety of sources. Although it may not be feasible to demand an immediate pay rise for all employees, there are several strategies that could effectively promote an atmosphere less susceptible to stress. An overview of the literature on stress management and important suggestions made by the participants in this study have led the author to propose a number of recommendations that may help reduce the substantial level of stress experienced by prison officers in their work. Most of these recommendations are organisation-based as restructuring the environment is a superior strategy to prevent work related stress compared to changing the individual since it tackles the source of the problem. As Slate et al. (2001) states attempts at reducing stress on individuals without examining the organisational milieu can be linked to bailing out of the boat without plugging the leak.

### **5.6.1 Addressing Prison Officer Stress**

An overriding theme in the stress data collected in the present study was perceived lack of control in a job entailing significant responsibilities. The present findings in conjunction with previous research (Britton, 1997; Lambert; 2004; Moon & Maxwell, 2004; Owen, 2006), suggest that to improve perceptions of worker control is for the employees to be empowered and involved in changes to any system or practice that induces stress at work. This is to create a better balance between the perceived levels of demand and worker control (Sutherland and Cooper, 2000), a situation that could be achieved through increased participation in decision-making. Stranks (2005) suggest the use of self-managed work teams and team-building exercises, which might promote interdependence and greater communication among prison officers. Furthermore, providing a nonpunitive forum for prison officers to air their concerns followed by reasonable efforts made to address them would likely have an immediate impact on stress and job satisfaction.

The present findings suggest that ways need to be found to provide prison officers with the basic tools they need to do the job i.e. adequate working equipment. The work environment must provide satisfying physical conditions and a clean and orderly place of work is important for safety and hygiene reasons. This has implications for the morale of the workforce, especially in an environment where the work situation is acknowledged as hazardous.

Prison officers in the present study also reported that work overload; understaffing; compulsory overtime and lack of career opportunities were key sources of stress in the workplace. It is therefore a priority to re-analyse staffing levels and job and task design to help reduce stress in the prison. To strengthen job satisfaction the organisation could provide training and career development opportunities, job enrichment programs and give prison officers some discretion in the hours they work. Research supports the notion that workers who chose to work a particular shift have fewer difficulties than workers who were involuntarily assigned a work shift (Delprino, 2004).

To reduce stress resulting from the difficulty in balancing family and work demands, alternative work arrangements that offer staff flexibility could be put in place. Lambert et al. (2004) suggest that prison officers could be provided with days of personal leave, in addition to sick and annual leave; officers would be free to use these personal days when a family situation required them to be absent from work. Employees are more attracted to organisations with family friendly policies (Sutherland and Cooper, 2000) because offering assistance to employees makes them feel as though the organisation cares about and is responsive to their needs (Owen, 2006). In addition, building a supportive and open climate is important in the reduction of stress at work. The present findings suggest that management need to examine ways to increase supportive feedback within the organisation. Keinan and Pines (2007) recommend that events should be organised designed to improve prison officers' motivation such as talks by senior staff management emphasising the importance of officers work or to analyse stressful events, for example, workshops in which prison officers' actions that were successful in preventing violence in the prison are presenting and analysed thus enhancing self-esteem.

As a coping mechanism to a stressful environment, there is much evidence that social support can play a significant role in enhancing the level of employee well being. An accommodating environment is typified by the promotion of co-worker and supervisor support to facilitate employees to complete tasks. An example of such an intervention would be the establishment of a peer support program. Peer Support Programs aim to reduce stress resulting from critical incidents and accelerate the return of workers to normal personal and professional functioning (Stranks, 2005). Peer support utilises the experiences and skills of fellow workers to provide support and reassurance in times of distress. Furthermore, as perceived danger of the job had a very significant impact on the stress of prison officers in the present study, officers may benefit from training programs aimed at recognising potential dangers on the job, without incorporating these concerns as major organisational stressors. Keinan and Pines (2007) indicate that it is especially important that prison officers perform simulations of typical stress situations that occur on the job and practice ways of coping with such situations.

### **5.6.2 Future Research**

Although the results here provide useful information about stress among prison officers, further research is necessary. Relatively few studies in the literature review gave serious consideration to stress management intervention and support issues, despite the fact that support programmes specifically designed to alleviate stress do achieve some success (Botha and Pieneer, 2006).

In addition, the coping ability of individual prison officers must be explored more systematically in future research to better understand how these mechanisms may be better institutionalised, to the benefit of all employees. Future studies should also strive to incorporate more objective measures of stress such as staff turnover, sick leave and absenteeism. The inclusion of such measures would allow researchers to empirically explore the impact of perceived stress on observable outcomes and thus quantify this relationship more explicitly. Moreover, the present finding of the strong relationship between job dissatisfaction and stress warrants further investigation.

Finally, there is a strong need for further research to be carried out regarding occupational stress among prison officers in Ireland. As preliminary investigation revealed that from an Irish perspective there has only been a scant acknowledgement of the issues pertaining to stress and coping among prison officers within the literature.

### **5.7 Conclusion**

The findings from the present study have revealed that the organisation has been identified as a major source of stress for prison officers. Therefore, it makes sense to investigate what steps the organisation is taking to promote a healthier workplace. It may not be possible to eliminate all workplace stress for officers. However, it may be possible that through the development and implementation of organisational programs like those discussed above, the variables that result in critical levels of stress for prison officers can be identified and altered. However, the success of stress prevention initiatives will depend on the culture in the organisation. Tackling work-related stress issues can be challenging, however, it can also serve as a vehicle for positive change.

Michie (2002) suggests that to build a positive culture towards this issue requires the development and implementation of stress policy throughout the organisation, active leadership and role models from the top of the organisation, and systems to identify problems early and to review and improve the strategies developed to address them. Good management and good work organisations are the best forms of stress prevention.

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**Appendix A: Letter seeking ethical approval**

\*\*\*\*\*  
\*\*\*\*\*  
\*\*\*\*\*

\*\*\*\*\*  
\*\*\*\*\*  
\*\*\*\*\*  
\*\*\*\*\*.

30<sup>th</sup> May 2007

Dear.....

I am currently doing my masters in Occupational Health, Safety and Ergonomics at the National University of Ireland, Galway. A requirement of this course is to carry out a research thesis. The proposed study will deal with the subject of occupational stress amongst prison officers in Ireland. It will attempt to identify the sources of stress, its effects on the individuals concerned and the coping strategies utilized by them in the prison environment.

The method of data collection will be questionnaires and strict confidentiality will be adhered to by the researcher. I would be grateful for your ethical approval regarding this research study. I am enclosing details of my proposed study and examples of questions to be asked in the questionnaire. If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me at the following mobile number \*\*\* \*\*\*\*\* or the above address.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

---

Sinead Regan.

**Appendix B: Cover Letter of Questionnaire**

\*\*\*\*\*  
\*\*\*\*\*  
\*\*\*\*\*  
\*\*\*\*\*

Mobile: \*\*\* \*\*\*\*\*

25<sup>th</sup> June 2007

**Re: Occupational stress survey of Prison Officers.**

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am currently undertaking a Masters in Occupational Health and Safety & Ergonomics at the National University of Ireland, Galway. As part of the course students are required to carry out research for a thesis. The aim of this study is to identify the sources of occupational stress and coping strategies among prison officers. I would appreciate if you could take part in this survey.

The information it provides will be of great value to me in completing my research. Your response will be strictly private and confidential. Your name will not appear on the questionnaire so your participation will be completely anonymous. The results of this survey will be summarised and sent to all interested participants and hopefully be of benefit to your organisation.

The questionnaire is divided into Section A, Section B and Section C- it is important to attempt all questions. The questionnaire should take around 15 minutes to complete.

I am aware that your time is valuable and I would like to thank you in advance for your support and co-operation in completing the questionnaire. Your help will be much appreciated.

If you have any queries regarding this, please do not hesitate to contact me at the above mobile number.

Yours sincerely,

---

Sinead Regan.

**Appendix C: Questionnaire**

**Section A**

*Please read each question carefully and tick the appropriate box. Responses will be strictly confidential.*

---

**1. Are you**

Male  Female

**2. What nationality are you?** \_\_\_\_\_

**3. What age group do you fall into?**

<25  25-35  36-45  46-55  56-65

**4. What is your marital status?**

Single  Widowed

Married  Separated

Divorced  Live-in partner/Significant other

**5. What is your employment status?**

Permanent full time  (39 hours a week)  
Permanent part time  (<39 hours a week)  
Temporary full time  (39 hours a week)  
Temporary part-time  (<39 hours a week)  
Other  (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**6. What is your job title?**

---

**7. What is your level of education?**

Junior Cert (or equivalent)   
Leaving Cert (or equivalent)   
Certificate  please specify \_\_\_\_\_  
Diploma  please specify \_\_\_\_\_  
Degree  please specify \_\_\_\_\_  
Other  please specify \_\_\_\_\_

**8. What shift do you primarily work?**

- Day duty only
- Night duty only
- Both

**9. How many hours do you work per week?** \_\_\_\_\_

**10. How long are you working in this organisation?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Section B**

**11. Please indicate if you have experienced any of the following symptoms in the last FOUR weeks. (Tick every box that applies to you)**

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
Pain/pounding in your chest	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Feeling blue or depressed	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Nausea/upset stomach	<input type="checkbox"/>				
High blood pressure	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Diarrhoea	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Sudden feelings of panic or fear	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Frustration (at co-workers/prisoners)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Job dissatisfaction	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Trouble getting to sleep	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Trouble staying asleep	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Feeling nervous or fidgety	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Crying spells	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Headaches	<input type="checkbox"/>				
A change in appetite	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Eczema/skin rashes	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Breakdown of relationships at work	<input type="checkbox"/>				

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
Breakdown of relationships at home	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Inability to find pleasure in anything	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Feelings of hopelessness	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Feelings of worthlessness	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Increase in smoking	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Increase in alcohol consumption	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Increase in drug taking	<input type="checkbox"/>				

**12. In general, please rate your coping ability with stressful work situations**

- Very poor
- Poor
- Neutral
- Good
- Very Good

**13. The following are a list of coping strategies. Read each statement carefully and tick the appropriate box.**

**I've made a plan of action and followed it**

- |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Never                    | Seldom                   | Sometimes                | Often                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**I've been trying to come up with a strategy about what to do**

- |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Never                    | Seldom                   | Sometimes                | Often                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**I've been trying to find comfort in my religion or spiritual beliefs**

- |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Never                    | Seldom                   | Sometimes                | Often                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**I've been getting emotional support from others**

- |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Never                    | Seldom                   | Sometimes                | Often                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**I've been trying to get advice or help from other people about what to do**

Never                  Seldom                  Sometimes                  Often  
                                                     

**I've been turning to other activities such as reading, sleeping or watching TV to take my mind off things**

Never                  Seldom                  Sometimes                  Often  
                                                     

**I've been saying things to let my unpleasant feelings escape**

Never                  Seldom                  Sometimes                  Often  
                                                     

**I've been using alcohol or other drugs to make myself feel better**

Never                  Seldom                  Sometimes                  Often  
                                                     

**14. Please specify any other coping strategy you use that is not mentioned above**

---

---

**Section C**

*Please read each question carefully and tick the appropriate box to each answer.*

**15. I am clear what is expected of me at work**

Never                  Seldom                  Sometimes                  Often                  Always  
                                                                       

**16. I can decide when to take a break**

Never                  Seldom                  Sometimes                  Often                  Always  
                                                                       

**17. Different groups at work demand things from me that are hard to combine**

Never                  Seldom                  Sometimes                  Often                  Always

**18. I know how to go about getting my job done**

Never                  Seldom                  Sometimes                  Often                  Always  
                                                                       

**19. I am subject to personal harassment in the form of unkind words or behaviour**

Never                  Seldom                  Sometimes                  Often                  Always  
                                                                       

**20. I have unachievable deadlines**

Never                  Seldom                  Sometimes                  Often                  Always  
                                                                       

**21. If work gets difficult, my colleagues will help me**

Never                  Seldom                  Sometimes                  Often                  Always  
                                                                       

**22. I am given supportive feedback on the work I do**

Never                  Seldom                  Sometimes                  Often                  Always  
                                                                       

**23. I have to work very intensively**

Never                  Seldom                  Sometimes                  Often                  Always  
                                                                       

**24. I have a say in my own work speed**

Never                  Seldom                  Sometimes                  Often                  Always  
                                                                       

**25. I am clear what my duties and responsibilities are**

Never                  Seldom                  Sometimes                  Often                  Always  
                                                                       

**26. I have to neglect some tasks because I have too much to do**

Never                  Seldom                  Sometimes                  Often                  Always

**27. I am clear about the goals and objectives for my department**

Never  Seldom  Sometimes  Often  Always

**28. There is friction or anger between colleagues**

Never  Seldom  Sometimes  Often  Always

**29. I have choice in deciding how I do my work**

Never  Seldom  Sometimes  Often  Always

**30. I am unable to take sufficient breaks**

Never  Seldom  Sometimes  Often  Always

**31. I understand how my work fits into the overall aim of the organisation**

Never  Seldom  Sometimes  Often  Always

**32. I am pressured to work long hours**

Never  Seldom  Sometimes  Often  Always

**33. I have choice in deciding what I do at work**

Never  Seldom  Sometimes  Often  Always

**34. I have to work very fast**

Never  Seldom  Sometimes  Often  Always

**35. I am subject to bullying at work**

Never  Seldom  Sometimes  Often  Always

**36. I have unrealistic time pressures**

Never  Seldom  Sometimes  Often  Always

**37. I can rely on my line manager to help me out with a work problem**

Never  Seldom  Sometimes  Often  Always

**38. I get the help and support I need from colleagues**

Strongly disagree  Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly agree

**39. I have some say over the way I work**

Strongly disagree  Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly agree

**40. I have sufficient opportunities to question managers about change at work**

Strongly disagree  Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly agree

**41. I receive the respect at work I deserve from my colleagues**

Strongly disagree  Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly agree

**42. Staff are always consulted about change at work**

Strongly disagree  Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly agree

**43. I can talk to my line manager about something that has upset or annoyed me at work**

Strongly disagree  Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly agree

**44. My working time can be flexible**

Strongly disagree  Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly agree

**45. My colleagues are willing to listen to my work-related problems**

Strongly disagree       Disagree       Neutral       Agree       Strongly agree

**46. When changes are made at work, I am clear how they will work out in practice**

Strongly disagree       Disagree       Neutral       Agree       Strongly agree

**47. I am supported through emotionally demanding work**

Strongly disagree       Disagree       Neutral       Agree       Strongly agree

**48. Relationships at work are strained**

Strongly disagree       Disagree       Neutral       Agree       Strongly agree

**49. My line manager encourages me at work**

Strongly disagree       Disagree       Neutral       Agree       Strongly agree

**50. My work patterns/arrangements (e.g. hours, shifts) suit me**

Strongly disagree       Disagree       Neutral       Agree       Strongly agree

**51. I feel my job is secure**

Strongly disagree       Disagree       Neutral       Agree       Strongly agree

**52. I feel I am fairly paid for the work I do**

Strongly disagree       Disagree       Neutral       Agree       Strongly agree

**53. The pace of change (whether too fast or too slow) is a source of pressure for me**

Strongly disagree       Disagree       Neutral       Agree       Strongly agree

**54. I am happy with the non-monetary benefits I receive (e.g. pension, social events, annual leave entitlement)**

Strongly disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree      Strongly agree  
                                                                                       

**55. I feel that my contribution is valued**

Strongly disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree      Strongly agree  
                                                                                       

**56. The work environment is comfortable**

Strongly disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree      Strongly agree  
                                                                                       

**57. The equipment I use is adequate to do my job**

Strongly disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree      Strongly agree  
                                                                                       

**58. My work area is well designed and laid out for the job I do**

Strongly disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree      Strongly agree  
                                                                                       

**59. I am clear who I report to**

Strongly disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree      Strongly agree  
                                                                                       

**60. Recent incidents at work have been a source of pressure (e.g. threat of redundancy, death of a colleague, violence at work)**

Strongly disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree      Strongly agree  
                                                                                       

**61. I receive positive feedback when I do a job well**

Strongly disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree      Strongly agree  
                                                                                       

**62. I lack the skills I need to do my job**

Strongly disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree      Strongly agree

**63. I am concerned about my safety at work**

Strongly disagree       Disagree       Neutral       Agree       Strongly agree

**64. I am concerned about my health at work**

Strongly disagree       Disagree       Neutral       Agree       Strongly agree

**65. The welfare facilities are adequate (e.g. toilets, wash facilities etc)**

Strongly disagree       Disagree       Neutral       Agree       Strongly agree

**66. I receive the training I need to do my job**

Strongly disagree       Disagree       Neutral       Agree       Strongly agree

**67. I am involved in decisions made by my team/function**

Strongly disagree       Disagree       Neutral       Agree       Strongly agree

**68. The type of work I do is emotionally distressing**

Strongly disagree       Disagree       Neutral       Agree       Strongly agree

**69. I find the work I do repetitive and boring**

Never       Seldom       Sometimes       Often       Always

**70. Senior managers are supportive of employees**

Never       Seldom       Sometimes       Often       Always

**71. I am fairly treated**

Never       Seldom       Sometimes       Often       Always

**72. I am consulted about the organisational policies and decisions**

Never       Seldom       Sometimes       Often       Always

**73. I am informed of organisational policy and decisions**

Never                  Seldom                  Sometimes                  Often                  Always  
                                                                       

**74. I am informed of decisions within my team or function**

Never                  Seldom                  Sometimes                  Often                  Always  
                                                                       

**75. I work more than 48 hours per week**

Never                  Seldom                  Sometimes                  Often                  Always  
                                                                       

**76. Pressure at work causes me to come to work when I am not well enough to work**

Never                  Seldom                  Sometimes                  Often                  Always  
                                                                       

**77. Pressure at work causes me to do my job less well**

Never                  Seldom                  Sometimes                  Often                  Always  
                                                                       

**78. I have taken time off due to pressure at work**

Never                  Seldom                  Sometimes                  Often                  Always  
                                                                       

**79. I have considered leaving this organisation due to pressure at work**

Never                  Seldom                  Sometimes                  Often                  Always  
                                                                       

**80. Pressure at work has affected my health whilst working in this organisation**

Never                  Seldom                  Sometimes                  Often                  Always  
                                                                       

**81. Morale is low in this organisation**

Never                  Seldom                  Sometimes                  Often                  Always  
                                                                       

**82. I am concerned about not having enough quality time with family due to my work**

Strongly disagree          Disagree          Neutral          Agree          Strongly agree  
                                                                       

*Please see overleaf for final three questions*

**83. The risk of been threatened particularly due to my position is a cause of concern for me**

Strongly disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree      Strongly agree  
                                                                                       

**84. I lack the proper opportunities to advance my career in this organisation**

Strongly disagree      Disagree      Neutral      Agree      Strongly agree  
                                                                                       

**85. It is important to establish the main issues and also to identify anything that is not covered in the questions above. In order to do this, please indicate below the three main sources of pressure at work for you.**

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for your support and co-operation in completing the questionnaire. I want to assure you again that your responses will be strictly confidential.**

***About the Author:***

***A graduate of the National University of Ireland, Galway, Sinead Regan was awarded a Masters in Science by NUIG in 2007. This study on Occupational Stress was undertaken as part of her Master's research.***

***Sinead is a lecturer in Early Childhood Care and Education at the Institute of Technology, Sligo.***

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