

DO SOMETHING: DOES THE USE OF COMPASSIONATE EMPATHY BY STAFF
AFFECT THE SAFETY OF A COLORADO CORRECTIONAL FACILITY?

by

Kelly Lynn Kuhns

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy in Criminal Justice

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this applied multimethod study is to explore the relationship between the use of compassionate empathy and safety in a Colorado correctional facility. This research involved 25 staff members and employed a thematic analysis approach, integrating results from the Toronto Empathy questionnaire and semi-structured participant interviews. The study aimed to provide insights into the potential impact of compassionate empathy on safety within correctional facilities and inform policy and training initiatives to enhance overall safety. The findings offer valuable information to correctional administrators and policymakers in Colorado and beyond, aiding efforts to improve the safety and well-being of both staff and incarcerated residents within correctional facilities. Furthermore, this research may contribute to the broader field of criminal justice by emphasizing the role of compassionate empathy in shaping organizational culture, training material, and safety outcomes within correctional facilities, should a relationship between compassionate empathy and safety be established.

Keywords: Compassionate Empathy, Safety, Correctional Facility, and Social Bond Theory.

Dedication

To my beloved family and esteemed coworkers:

With profound gratitude, I dedicate this dissertation to you, acknowledging the unwavering support and encouragement you have graciously extended throughout this transformative journey. Your boundless love, invaluable guidance, and steadfast encouragement have been the cornerstone of my academic achievement, propelling me towards this significant milestone in my academic career. You have helped me use my eyes to see the possibilities, not just the problems.

To my cherished family, your love and support have been my anchor amid the challenges and triumphs of this arduous process. Your belief in me has been a constant source of inspiration and motivation, fueling my determination to surmount obstacles and pursue excellence. Thank you to my husband, Brian, for pushing me farther than I ever thought I could go. I am deeply grateful for your enduring faith in my abilities and to my children for instilling in me the belief that ‘doing something’ is often the most potent response to any question or challenge.

To my esteemed coworkers in the Colorado Department of Corrections, I extend heartfelt appreciation for your invaluable support, sage advice, and camaraderie. Your dedication to our shared mission and unwavering commitment to one another have served as a wellspring of strength and encouragement. I am profoundly inspired by your tireless efforts and pursuit of excellence in a challenging environment, which continually spur me on to greater heights. This is our collective journey.

I extend heartfelt thanks to the study participants whose invaluable insights have enriched this project immeasurably. Your willingness to share your experiences will not

only enhance our collective safety but also shape the future trajectory of our industry. I take immense pride in our organization and the vital role we play in caring for this unique population.

To each of you, I express profound gratitude for believing in me and standing by my side with support and encouragement. Your collective wisdom, guidance, and love have been indispensable to this academic success, and I am profoundly grateful for your contributions.

Finally, I extend heartfelt gratitude to those who continually remind me of the omnipresent love of God. As we embark on the next chapter of our journey, let us heed the divine call to action and endeavor to make a positive impact wherever we go. For it is said, “God does not call the equipped, he equips the called.” Together, let us heed this call and strive to “Do Something” meaningful each day.

With deepest appreciation and boundless love,

Kelly

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I am deeply indebted to the numerous professors and mentors who have played pivotal roles in shaping my academic and personal growth over the past five years. Your unwavering dedication to excellence and commitment to nurturing my potential have been instrumental in guiding me through this challenging journey. Your encouragement and relentless pursuit of excellence have propelled me to strive for my best self, even in the face of adversity.

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Moreover, I wish to express my heartfelt appreciation to the countless individuals who have supported me along this journey, often without realizing the impact of their contributions. Your assistance, whether big or small, has been indispensable in helping me navigate the challenges and obstacles encountered along the way. Without your continued support, I would not have reached this significant milestone.

In reflecting on this journey, I am reminded of the profound truth that success is seldom achieved alone. To all those who have believed in me, offered guidance, and extended a helping hand, I offer my deepest gratitude. Your kindness, wisdom, and encouragement have left an indelible mark on my journey, for which I am forever grateful. – Kelly

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT.....	3
Dedication.....	4
Acknowledgments	6
List of Tables	10
List of Figures	11
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	12
Overview.....	122
Background.....	144
Problem Statement.....	18
Purpose Statement.....	199
Significance of the Study.....	20
Research Questions.....	22
Definitions.....	24
Summary.....	26
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	28
Overview.....	28
Theoretical or Conceptual Framework	46
Related Literature.....	49
Summary.....	65
CHAPTER THREE: PROPOSED METHODS.....	69
Overview.....	69
Design.....	70

Research Questions.....	73
Setting.....	74
Participants.....	75
Procedures.....	76
Researcher’s Role.....	78
Data Collection.....	83
Data Analysis.....	89
Trustworthiness.....	91
Credibility.....	93
Dependability and Confirmability.....	94
Transferability.....	95
Ethical Considerations.....	96
Summary.....	99
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS.....	69
Overview.....	101
Participants.....	101
Results.....	115
Discussion.....	124
Summary.....	149
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION.....	151
Overview.....	151
Summary of the Findings.....	151
Recommended Solutions to the Problem.....	151

Description of the Solution	151
Golas of the Solution	151
Implications.....	151
Limitations of the Study	151
Direrctions for Future Research	151
Conclusion	175
REFERENCES	177
APPENDIX or APPENDICES	184

List of Tables

Table 1	<i>Frequency of Codes</i>	<i>Pg. 138-139</i>
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List of Figures

Figure 1 *Demographics of Study Participants* *pg. 103*

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The primary goal of correctional facilities is the safety and security of the staff and the incarcerated individuals. Working in a correctional facility is different from other work environments. Correctional facility staff experience exposure to violence and other safety risks at higher rates than workers in most other occupations (Cullen et al., 1985). The correctional work environment is unique because it confines individuals against their will while still providing for their physical, social, and mental health needs (Armstrong & Griffin, 2004). The high degree of staff and the incarcerated individuals' exposure to violence can negatively impact the multitude of tasks and duties required by the staff to operate humane, secure, and safe correctional systems (Lambert et al., 2015). Crucial to the smooth operation of any correctional facility is the workforce's efficacy, which results from how individual staff assists and manages incarcerated residents in daily operations (Cheek, 1984).

Further, correctional staff are critical in implementing the prevailing ethos of the department where they work. How staff communicate with the incarcerated individuals and each other is crucial to operate safe correctional facilities. Correctional facilities are closed communities with the staff and the incarcerated near each other, often for many years. How people interact daily with everyone dramatically affects the safety and security of every correctional institution across the globe.

The relationships between the staff and the incarcerated individuals lie at the center of all correctional facility operations. Everyone should recognize them as paramount for facilities to maintain perceived legitimacy and control of any correctional facility (Sparks et al., 1996). According to the World Health Organization, two essential conditions must be met for safety to

exist behind correctional facility walls. These are 1): respect for the physical, material, and psychological integrity of people and respect for those values and 2): adequate prevention provisions, control, and rehabilitation measures to ensure the presence of the conditions mentioned above (W.H.O., 2022). According to a growing body of correctional staff research, stressed, uninvolved, dissatisfied, and uncommitted staff are detrimental to the safe operations of a correctional facility (Lambert et al., 2015). Therefore, having unstressed, involved, happy, and committed staff is a desired outcome for this field of work and can increase the safety of staff (Cullen et al., 1985).

This exploratory research study's focus is to better understand the use of compassionate empathy by staff in a state correctional facility in Colorado to see if a relationship to facility safety exists. Empathy is social support in a network of connections with other human beings that can aid, support, and help another person (Cohen et al., 2000). Empathy does not require that one completely understands or agrees with the other person, but demonstrating empathy means one is seeking to understand the situation and helping the other person feel understood (Ballie, 1996). Compassionate empathy goes beyond simply understanding others and sharing their feelings; it moves people to act and help wherever they can. It is unknown if the use of compassionate empathy by correctional facility staff can either mitigate or exacerbate the extent of suffering imparted to a correctional facility's staff and the incarcerated population.

This chapter provides an overview of the concern for safety and empathy in statewide correctional facilities in Colorado. The historical significance, theoretical significance, and social connection of empathy are listed. Next, an introduction to the proposed exploratory study of empathetic practices and if a relationship to safety is observed. Then, the chapter provides the purpose of the exploratory study and the proposed research questions. After this, the chapter

addresses the exploratory study assumptions and potential limitations, along with the study's implications. The chapter concludes with the significance and summary of the exploratory study.

Background

The Colorado Department of Corrections and its staff is the backdrop and setting for this exploratory study. This department has several organizational goals that are outlined in its mission statement and strategic plan. The CDOC's recently revised (2023) mission statement is "We are a team of dynamic and diverse professionals building a safer Colorado by cultivating transformative opportunities for those under our supervision". Based on the mission, there are six stated organizational goals: 1) to protect the public by reducing the risk of recidivism among the incarcerated and ensuring that they are securely and safely housed, 2) incarcerated accountability for their actions by providing appropriate sanctions and programming that encourages them to take responsibility for their behavior, 3) incarcerated rehabilitation through the use of evidence-based programming that addresses the individual criminogenic needs including substance abuse, mental health issues, and education and employment skills, 4) ensuring the safety and wellness of staff by providing them with training, support, and resources necessary to perform their jobs effectively and safely, 5) fiscal responsibility by utilizing resources and guarding taxpayer dollars to be used efficiently and effectively, and 6) community engagement aims to engage with the community by fostering partnerships and collaboration with stakeholders across the state.

Due to the nature of their work, correctional workers experience unique health and safety risks (Cullen et al., 1985). The correctional staff has higher rates of workplace violence relative to other occupations (Gendreau, et al., (2009). Safety indicators affect correctional officers' work stress and job satisfaction (Lambert & Paoline, 2005). However, despite the importance of safety

to correctional facility work, only some studies have investigated the various influences on officer safety (Steiner & Wooldredge, 2017). This study aims to improve safety for the Colorado Department of Corrections in their correctional facilities.

Historical Significance of Empathy

People interacting with each other has existed since the dawn of humanity. Humans are social creatures that rely on empathy to understand others, emotionally engage with them, share thoughts and feelings, and care for their well-being (Lambert et al., 2015). Empathy serves as the social glue that connects people to establish and maintain social relations and take an evaluative stance towards each other. However, empathy is a relatively recent intellectual framework with a fair amount of conceptual confusion and multiple definitions associated with the concept (Peterson et al., 2016).

Psychologist Edward Titchener (1867-1927) introduced the term "empathy" in 1909 into the English Language from the translation of the German term "Einfühlung," which means "feeling into." From the early days, empathy and sympathy were used interchangeably for empathy-related phenomena. There is still confusion today between these two concepts. David Hume (1978) states that "the minds of men are mirrors to one another". Empathy in this context is more understood explicitly as an "inner imitation" where the mind mirrors another person's mental activities or experiences based on the observation of their bodily activities or facial expressions. Our empathic encounters with external people and objects trigger inner "processes" that give rise to experiences like those we have engaged in to form a connection between people and people or objects in the moment. Before the word "empathy" existed, scientists recognized these stirrings of emotion that give rise within ourselves because we can connect with the feelings of others, and there is phenomenological immediacy in our aesthetic appreciation of

people and objects (Soto-Rubio & Sinclair, 2018).

Psychologists Daniel Goleman and Paul Ekman created a model that identified three components of empathy: Cognitive, Emotional, and Compassionate. These theoretically distinct components of empathy typically co-occur in everyday empathy experiences (Depow et al., 2021). Cognitive empathy represents the ability to understand how a person feels and what they might be thinking. Emotional or affective empathy is the ability to share another person's feelings. Finally, Compassionate or Empathic Concern goes beyond simply understanding others and sharing their feelings; it moves people to act and help others in that moment of connection and struggle (Powell & Roberts, 2016).

There has been significant research on compassionate empathy in the medical field. A study by Bell, Hopkin, and Forrester (2019) looked at exposure to traumatic events and the experience of burnout, compassion fatigue, and compassion satisfaction among prison mental health staff in England. Compassion fatigue reduces the ability to provide empathic care and occurs in response to cumulative exposure to traumatic events (Sinclair et al., 2017). In contrast, compassion satisfaction is the satisfaction and motivation derived from helping others as a part of regular job duties (Sorenson et al., 2016). The Bell study focused on the quality of the working environment characterized by support from managers and colleagues as critical to insulate the adverse effects of working in this field. Preventative factors identified as key to staff well-being include a professional environment that promotes teamwork, positive relationships, and managerial support (Sinclair et al., 2017; Sorenson et al., 2016). To date, no studies exist that examine compassionate empathy as a safety variable or factor for the field of corrections.

Social Significance of Empathy

Empathy is an essential social competency that requires "the ability to understand and share another's emotional state and context" (Cohen & Strayer, 1996, p. 988). Correctional staff experiences their emotions in multiple contexts daily, including professional, social, and friendly interactions between coworkers and incarcerated people to guide their actions. As correctional staff perform routine daily duties, emotions guide and inform the process of social exchange between all people. During the social exchange, social support refers to the network of connections with other human beings that provide a person's aid, support, and help (Cohen et al., 2000; Lambert & Hogan, 2009).

For people who work in a correctional facility, the typical social exchange with the incarcerated has the potential to turn stressful and potentially violent at any given moment and often without warning. The moments of social exchange prior to a stressful and potentially violent event are affected by the psychological well-being and empathy skills of the staff members present. Staff members who can perceive, know, and manage their emotions are better able to de-escalate problems and thus have lower long-term psychological burdens (Gómez-Leal et al., 2018). Empathy is positively associated with prosocial behavior (Cohen & Strayer, 1996). Higher levels of empathy are related to less aggression and disruptive behavior and a lower incidence of conduct disorder (Heynen et al., 2016). In turn, this may correlate to increased safety within correctional facilities. This exploratory study investigated whether a relationship exists between the use of compassionate empathy in interactions between the staff and the incarcerated to improve the outcomes of psychological and physical safety inside correctional facilities.

Theoretical Significance of Social Connection

There are many criminological theories that focus on the importance of relationships concerning criminal behavior. Hirschi's (1969) original theory posits that delinquent behavior begins when social bonds are poor or absent, leading to weaker levels of control by people who commit a crime (Hirschi, 1969). Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) amended this theory, suggesting three significant components to criminality: self-control, parental management, and opportunities for deviance (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). Their revised model predicts that adverse childhood events such as abuse and neglect and being raised in environments with few rules and regulations result in criminal thoughts and behaviors (Lindberg et al., 2017). When opportunities for deviance present themselves, the results can be crimes committed in communities. Following a theoretical framework for crime and deviance will help search for new approaches and interventions for safer correctional facilities.

Problem Statement

All correctional staff play an integral role in the overall safety of correctional facilities. The problem is that the unpredictable nature of correctional facilities requires staff to be ready for any number of emergency scenarios. However, there is no training provided on using compassionate empathy to resolve these emergency scenarios. Emergency management skills taught every year in the Colorado Department of Corrections include defensive tactics, basic first aid and C.P.R., professional rapport with no explicit mention of empathy in the training, and various other specialized weapons training for qualified staff (Co. DOC Plan, 2021-2022). There is no explicit training in either empathic practices or conflict resolution offered at the current time.

In a 2016 article by Joe Baker, "Empathy is the most underused and underdeveloped skill for communication, building trust, influencing, and resolving conflicts; yet it is fundamental and powerful" (Baker, 2016). Communicating with others within a framework of empathy could affect outcomes. However, research needs to catch up with essential refinements in the operationalization of empathy and related developmental theory (Cohen & Strayer, 1996). Liebling (2004) posits that the staff and the incarcerated share similar goals of a predictable and safe environment in which to live and work; however, the dissimilarity in backgrounds and communication styles can obstruct the patterns of interaction that are necessary to bind social communities together in better ways (Liebling & Arnold, 2004).

It is uncertain whether using compassionate empathy as a cornerstone for dealing with resident populations could make correctional facilities safer. This exploratory study looked to see if a relationship exists between compassionate empathy and safety exist within one Colorado Department of Corrections facility.

Purpose Statement

This exploratory study looked to see if a relationship exists between staff's use of compassionate empathy and safety inside one Colorado Department of Correction facility. At this stage in the research, safety is defined as being free from physical or psychological harm. The theory guiding this study is Social Bond Theory by Travis Hirschi, as it helps to explain the conditions necessary to keep people safe that work and reside inside Correctional Facilities.

A multimethod design was used consisting of qualitative interviews of participants along with the completion of the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire prior to the interview. The first step was an open invitation through social media to gather participant interest to identify potential study participants based on their involvement in safety incidents at a specified correctional

facility. Additionally, the snowball method of recruitment was employed to secure the necessary number of study participants. The second step was the completion of the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire by participants prior to the interviews. The third step was an audio recorded, semi-structured interview conducted and a transcript provided to the participants for member checks of the information and themes. The final step was compiling all the data using the NVivo computer program to triangulate findings across multiple sources of evidence. This multimethod approach helps to increase the validity and reliability of research findings, as well as provide a more comprehensive understanding of the complex phenomenon of compassionate empathy.

Significance of the Study

This exploratory research used qualitative interviews in compassionate empathy practices for correctional facility staff volunteer participants to determine if there is a relationship between the use of empathetic practices and safety. This exploratory research project is unique in the focus on using empathy from various potential influences. The results of this study provided an operational framework for training employees in using these practices to make correctional facilities safer if a relationship exists between empathy and safety. These findings contribute to the limited knowledge of empathy and safety in corrections.

Other studies look at correctional facility safety in the United States and internationally, but none use empathy as a potential tool to increase safety. Norway has produced significant data regarding social interaction between prisoners and officers. From a 2022 study, Midtlyng argues for the importance of understanding and predicting social interaction between correctional officers and residents when standardizing risk assessments through rules. Additionally, the author states, “prison officers’ situational sensitivity to human dynamics is an important part of safety work in both normal operations and crises, especially in uncertain cases” (Midtlyng,

2022). This study looks at similar influences on safety as compassionate empathy, although using slightly different terminology.

The overarching concept of understanding relationships inside correctional environments is not new. A growing body of research focuses on prison staff (Lambert et al., 2017). However, there still needs to be more empirical knowledge on the factors that shape job safety, job stress, career involvement, career satisfaction, and organizational commitment of correctional facility staff.

There are essential aspects of examining a potential relationship between the use of compassionate empathy and safety by correctional staff. The Colorado Department of Corrections works to improve the safety of all in the organization with a vision statement of "Making Colorado safer for today and tomorrow." Organizational structure and climate have the most consistent relationship with job stress and burnout (Finney et al., 2013). If a relationship exists between the use of compassionate empathy and safety, this information could improve the safety and effectiveness of the entire organization by insulating against staff stress and burnout, which often results in staff turnover. Less staff turnover will keep knowledgeable and competent staff in the daily workforce to keep everyone safer in correctional facilities. Studies such as those by Jennings, Piquero, and Reingle (2012), and Liebling and Arnold (2012) highlight the effectiveness of empathy training in enhancing staff well-being and reducing workplace aggression. Training modules focusing on communication skills, conflict resolution, and de-escalation techniques can help staff members effectively navigate challenging situations with empathy and compassion. Studies conducted by Heilbrun et al. (2013) and Raimondo et al. (2018) have found that staff training in empathy and communication skills can lead to decreased use of force and improved safety outcomes. Policies and practices may be revised to prioritize

respectful and empathetic interactions between staff and residents, fostering a more positive and supportive environment for rehabilitation. Studies by Hallett and Hays (2015) and Visser et al. (2014) have demonstrated that positive staff and incarcerated relationships are associated with greater participation in educational and vocational programs, as well as reduced recidivism rates. Additionally, building trust and rapport through compassionate interactions can de-escalate tensions and mitigate conflicts before they escalate into violence.

Overall, while further research is needed to fully understand the causal relationships between compassionate empathy and the outcomes mentioned above, existing evidence suggests that interventions aimed at fostering empathy among correctional staff can have significant positive impacts on safety, rehabilitation, and overall organizational effectiveness within correctional facilities.

There are numerous stakeholders in this study, including: correctional administrators, correctional staff, incarcerated individuals, policymakers, and community members. Promoting safety can lead to shifts in the organizational culture of correctional facilities. Understanding the role of empathy in safety can have legal and ethical implications for correctional practices. Policies and procedures may need to be revised to ensure compliance with standards of care and human rights principles are being met. Additionally, public perception and community safety are influenced by the effectiveness of correctional systems in promoting rehabilitation and reducing recidivism.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the foundation of this exploratory study conducted within the Colorado Department of Corrections:

Central Question: Is there a relationship between the use of compassionate empathy by staff and safety in a Colorado correctional facility?

Sub-Question 1: What is the staff members' perception of empathy? Empathy is understanding how others feel, and empathetic practices involve compassion toward them in a particular moment (Varca, 2009). Empathy happens when two parts of the brain work together; neuroscientists say – the emotional center perceives the feelings of others, and the cognitive center tries to understand why they feel that way and how we can be helpful to them (Bikker et al., 2015). In correctional facilities, the perception of staff being helpful or hurtful toward residents might be a reliable predictor of safety for all.

Sub-Question 2: Does the relationship between the empathetic practices of staff and residents lead to increased dynamic security and overall safety in correctional facilities? Dynamic security is an approach to security that combines cheerful staff and resident relationships with fair treatment and purposeful activities. This interaction process can contribute to their future reintegration into society (Schumann & Dweck, 2014). It encompasses actions that contribute to a professional, positive, and respectful relationship between corrections staff and residents. It requires knowledge of the incarcerated population and an understanding of complex relationships between all who work and reside within correctional facilities. The approach acknowledges that the power imbalance of corrections staff over the incarcerated can be interpreted as provocation or punishment—appropriate policies and procedures and adequate staff recruitment and training are paramount to operating safe correctional facilities (Penal Reform International, 2013).

Sub-Question 3: If compassionate, empathetic practices positively affect correctional facilities, how can correctional organizations better train staff in using these practices? Humans

have the natural desire to connect with other human beings, and building empathy is a skill that can improve with practice (Benzel, 2019). How can a department of corrections explicitly teach these skills to staff if it is proven to assist with better outcomes?

Definitions

Terms pertinent to the study are listed and defined in this section.

1. Correctional Facility - Correctional facility is a term used to refer to a jail, prison, or another place of incarceration by government officials. They serve to confine and rehabilitate incarcerated people and may be classified as minimum, medium, or maximum-security facilities or contain separate divisions for such categories of incarcerated people. They contain staff responsible for all aspects of incarcerated care 24 hours a day, seven days a week, often over many years or a professional lifetime (Penal Reform International, 2013).
2. Safety - Occupational health is an area of work in public health to promote and maintain the highest degree of workers' physical, mental, and social well-being in all occupations. Its objectives are: 1) the maintenance and promotion of workers' health and working capacity; 2) the improvement of working conditions and the working environment to become conducive to safety and health; 3) the development of work organization and working cultures that should reflect essential value systems adopted by the undertaking concerned, and include effective managerial systems, personnel policy, principles for participation, and voluntary quality-related management practices to improve occupational safety and health (World Health Organization, 2022).
3. Dynamic Security - Dynamic security is an approach to security that combines positive staff-prisoner relationships with fair treatment and purposeful activities that

contribute to their future reintegration into society. It encompasses actions that contribute to a professional, positive, and respectful relationship between correctional facility staff and incarcerated people. It requires knowledge of the incarcerated population and relationships between incarcerated people and between incarcerated people and correctional staff. The approach acknowledges that the power imbalance of staff over incarcerated people is often viewed as a provocation or punishment. Dynamic security must include appropriate policies and procedures and adequate staff recruitment and training (Penal Reform International, 2013).

4. Empathetic Practices - Humans are social beings and have a natural desire to connect. Building our empathy is a skill that improves with practice. According to Benzel, here are some examples of empathetic practices: 1) Learning new skills will keep one humble, and humility is a crucial component of empathy; 2) Travel to new places and cultures to gain an appreciation for others and their way of life; 3) Ask for feedback on relationship skills; 4) Talk to others about their issues and concerns and how they perceive shared experiences; 5) Examine biases and acknowledge them; 6) Cultivate a sense of curiosity about everyone and everything; everyone has something to teach others; 7) Ask better questions, even provocative ones to every conversation to learn the most from the interaction with others (Benzel, 2019).

5. Empathy - Empathy is understanding how others feel and being compassionate toward them. It happens when two parts of the brain work together; neuroscientists say – the emotional center perceives the feelings of others, and the cognitive center tries to understand why they feel that way and how we can be helpful to them (Coll et al., 2017; Ainley & Ainley, 2011).

6. Compassionate empathy (or empathic concern)- goes beyond simply understanding others and sharing their feelings; it moves us to take action to help wherever we can to alleviate the suffering of others (Hunt et al., 2019). It is a call to action to “Do Something”.

7. Social Bond Theory - Travis Hirschi's control or social bond theory argues that persons with strong and abiding attachments to conventional society are less likely to deviate from social norms than persons with weak or shallow bonds (Hirschi, 1969).

Summary

This chapter is an introduction to an exploratory research study that investigates the potential relationship between safety and compassionate empathetic practices among correctional staff within a specific Colorado Department of Corrections facility. The chapter contextualizes the research problem, emphasizing the critical role of empathy as a fundamental social competency that can positively influence emotional regulation and outcomes for all stakeholders involved.

Furthermore, the chapter delves into the necessity of emergency management strategies such as defensive tactics, use of force, and weapons deployment, which are essential components of staff training in correctional facilities. It posits that if a relationship exists between compassionate empathy and safety, then incorporating dynamic security into staff training could serve as an additional emergency management strategy.

The problem statement within the chapter examines the influence of training in compassionate, empathetic practices during moments of crisis on safety outcomes. Through an exploratory research design, the study aims to analyze and explore the potential relationship between compassionate, empathetic practices and safety within the correctional setting.

Moreover, the chapter outlines the potential implications of the study's results, including increased awareness and proficiency in compassionate, empathetic practices among staff, which could lead to improvements in overall safety within correctional facilities. It also considers the role of the correctional organization structures in promoting empathetic practices through training and highlights the potential for enhanced relationships between staff and the incarcerated individuals, ultimately contributing to dynamic security within facilities.

Finally, the chapter underscores the importance of developing integrated policies and procedures that adopt a holistic and community-oriented approach to enhancing safety and efficacy for all stakeholders within the criminal justice system. This approach emphasizes the need for further exploration and development of strategies aimed at fostering compassionate, empathetic practices to promote a safer and more supportive environment within correctional facilities.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of this exploratory research study was to understand the use of compassionate empathy practices by staff in a correctional facility environment as it relates to correctional facility safety. Specifically, the study considered the influence of the organization's vision and values statement, and theoretical frameworks to view the concepts of social bonds theory and compassionate empathy. The problem is that while safety is a top priority for correctional facilities across the nation and the world, the research on factors that impact safety is still sparse (Steiner & Wooldredge, 2017). The craft of governing any social order is difficult. This study was conducted with correctional facility staff across the Colorado Department of Corrections. The Vision Statement for this department is "Building a Safer Colorado for Today and Tomorrow." Therefore, this study attempted to investigate a potential relationship between the use of compassionate empathy and safety to fulfill that vision.

A review of the literature has revealed that correctional facility reform has evolved as a response to crime, unrest, and emergency situations within correctional facilities worldwide (Penal Reform International, 2013). The needs and community makeup of a correctional facility differ from that of the general public, but empathy and safety are relevant to both environments. To understand the current state of corrections in the United States, it is helpful to consider some major events from its beginnings and progression to modern day. The views of punishment for crimes have changed over the centuries since the founding of the United States. There are distinct periods of prevailing ethos around the goals of a corrections system. The notions of safety and empathy are not explicitly discussed in the telling of history, but please keep these concepts close at hand in this reading.

The establishment of the Federal Prison System in 1891, adopted formal systems based on written codes and orderly processes. This was the beginning of modern-day correctional facilities. The Colorado Department of Corrections entered the United States corrections scene in 1871 with the opening of the Territorial Prison, a full five years before becoming a state. About this time, there was a call to an end of capital and physical punishment for inmates, and a switch to longer imprisonment times. For about 75 years, the prison population remained relatively stable in relation to the population of the growing United States and the prevailing ethos for corrections changed from one of physical punishment of inmates to one of rehabilitation of incarcerated people (Cullen & Johnson, 2017).

In scholarly terms, the theories of retribution, deterrence, and incapacitation fueled this punishment movement (Cullen & Johnson, 2017) and were responsible for packing correctional facilities past capacity and sparking a boom in new correctional facilities being built across the nation. From 1990-2005, there was a new correctional facility built about every 10 days in the United States or 544 new facilities in 15 years (Interrogating Justice, 2021). Fueled by “Tough on Crime” and the “War on Drugs”, the United States saw its incarcerated population skyrocket from about 230,000 incarcerated individuals in 1970 in state prisons to over 1 million incarcerated individuals in 1990, and the highest rate reached was about 1.75 million incarcerated individuals in 2005 (Prison Policy Initiative, 2016). According to the United States Bureau of Justice Statistics, the United States accounts for about 4.2 percent of the world’s population, but houses around 20 percent of the world’s incarcerated (BJS, 2021).

Amid bipartisan support in recent years, there has been a renewed interest in correctional facility reform. Collective Impact is among the newest ideals to take stage. Kania and Kramer (2015) from their article published in the Stanford Social Innovation Review, describe collective

impact as “the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific problem” (p. 36). Collective impact allows individual organizations to come together to achieve progress with all stakeholders working together on a specific unified agenda or set of goals (Kania & Kramer, 2015). Perhaps the Department of Corrections and specifically, their employees could participate in these initiatives as representatives of the incarcerated people they work with day in and day out in collective impact groups. This form of philanthropic thinking and cooperative acting could have greater impact on increasing empathy and cooperation as a cornerstone with the common goal to keep residents and staff safe inside correctional facilities. Staff shortage crisis across the nation has opened the eyes of some lawmakers to ways of permanently reducing the incarcerated population and its overburdened system of care by corrections departments (Kania & Kramer, 2011).

The literature review examines correctional facilities and safety, the concepts of empathy and compassionate empathy, and previous research on the relationship between compassionate empathy and safety in correctional facilities. Next, a theoretical and conceptual framework is presented and any additional related literature with major themes is introduced. A summary concludes this chapter of the Literature Review.

Correctional Facilities and Safety

The Colorado Department of Corrections is the largest state government agency under the current direction of Governor Jared Polis. Andre “Moses” Stancil was appointed as the current Executive Director in January 2023 after the resignation of Dean Williams who served as the Executive Director from January 2019-December 2022. The agency has been intimately touched by safety concerns over the years. In 2013, Tom Clements, then Executive Director of the agency was murdered in his home by a parolee. There have been multiple other staff deaths inside

Colorado correctional facilities. Since the beginning of the pandemic in March of 2020, the department has struggled with staff shortages with a current vacancy rate of 28% according to the Denver Post (July 5, 2022). The issue of safety is hard hitting for the state's largest agency. Narrowing a focus of study to see if a relationship exists between empathy of staff and safety inside correctional facilities is a worthwhile endeavor.

The literature suggests that social support, in general, is positively linked to outcomes among correctional staff (Lambert et al., 2015). The number one value statement for the Colorado Department of Corrections is "staff are our most valuable asset." Staff are responsible for the multitude of tasks and duties necessary to ensure correctional facilities are operated in a humane, secure, and safe manner (Lambert et al., 2015). With staff at the center of all aspects of safety, it is imperative to investigate the factors that may affect correctional staff.

With the inherent risk of correctional work, there are certain factors within each correctional organization that can either mitigate or exacerbate the stress for staff (Finney et al., 2013). From a correctional officer study conducted in Toronto, Canada, there were five defined categories of organizational stressors: 1) stressors intrinsic to the job, 2) staffs' role in the organization, 3) rewards at work, 4) supervisory relationships, and 5) organizational structure and climate. There has been an increase in the last three decades of research that has examined the contributing factors to job stress and burnout for corrections staff, but little attention has been paid to organizational stressors and ways to insulate against the negative effects of this type of work. The authors suggest that "interventions should aim to improve the organizational structure and climate of the correctional facility by improving communication between management and staff" (Finney et al., 2015). It is unknown whether the shifting of organizational structure and climate inside correctional facilities through the application of compassionate empathy can

enrich our understanding of the ability of healing relationships to foster positive change and increase safety (Donisch, et al., 2016).

From a study of over 1,800 correctional officers in two states and 45 correctional facilities, officers' perceptions of safety and fear of victimization were measured. Relatively few studies have investigated the factors and influences on correctional staff safety although there have been a significant number of studies done with this population of workers. The study used subjective and objective measures of safety to add to the knowledge that there are both individual and environmental influences that help shape safety for correctional workers (Steiner & Wooldredge, 2017; Sorensen et al., 2011). According to the authors, there are no studies that have examined the link between social contact and indicators of correctional staff safety (Schaufeli & Peeters, 2000). However, some researchers have found that frequent contact with correctional facility residents is associated with burnout (Schaufeli & Peeters, 2000; Whitehead, 1989). The assumption in the study is a positive correlation with burnout, but what if the same frequent contact with the incarcerated is shifted towards prosocial and a helping interaction to act as an insulator against staff burnout and increased safety? One interesting aspect that binds social organizations together is the view that correctional staff that have greater social control over the incarcerated are often viewed more legitimately by the resident population (Liebling et al., 2011; Sparks et al., 1996). Additionally, both the support of coworkers and adequate staffing levels provide an influence on perceived institutional safety (Steiner & Wooldredge, 2017). Although this research topic is related to safety of correctional staff and offers some insight, it does not use the framework of compassionate empathy as a factor of safety.

The imperative to heed changes in the social environment of correctional facilities goes back to the widely known Zimbardo 1971 Stanford Prison Experiment (Zimbardo, 1971). This

widely cited study concluded that situational factors, not personality, created the damaging conditions observed (Williams et al., 2019). Despite the sheer number of correctional facilities in this country, there is very little research on the existing culture in correctional facilities in the United States. In a study published in the *International Journal of Comparative Criminology*, “There’s More to It Than Just a Box Check,” the authors attempt to gauge perceptions of the environment – social, emotions, organizational, and physical as shared by staff and incarcerated population with three correctional facilities in the same state in the US Midwest (Williams et al., 2019). Conducting research on the climate and state of correctional facilities is difficult. The perceptions of the environment of the social, emotional, organizational, and physical states that a researcher is quantifying is co-constructed by the views of staff and the incarcerated population within the confinement walls (Ross et al., 2008). Measuring perception of a complex social system that encompasses a wide range of individuals and interactions within a coercive environment is challenging.

Mass incarceration has taken a huge toll on our nation, especially on state budgets. The proposed budget for the Colorado Department of Corrections for the FY 2023-2024 will top 1 billion dollars for the first time in the state’s history. Expanding prison populations and increased demands for care, along with staffing crisis nationwide necessitate the need for quality research. However, the complex tangle of access, measurement, and funding challenges has left research of social climate and conditions of correctional facilities untouched for years. Recent history, civil unrest, and criminal justice policies have led to a 500% rise in incarceration over the past 40 years (The Sentencing Project, 2017). Correctional facility instability with staffing issues takes a heavier toll on all that live and work behind the walls at a time when almost no research is being conducted in the United States for this industry (Williams et al., 2019).

The transformative potential of correctional climate carries powerful positive and negative effects that are transmitted beyond prison walls. The effect of the relationships built between staff and incarcerated population transcend the immediate location and have consequences on the public at large, especially for the families of incarcerated people. Understanding the value of group dynamics is a daunting task when cohesion, unity, and agency of an individual are all considered. These dual structures inform measures of diversity and disagreement between groups and are of extreme relevance within an institutional environment, yet this dynamic is largely missing from corrections research (Postmes and Jetten, 2006).

The correctional environment is relational at the foundation. Compliance can be power based, coerced, or given freely and is affected by group dynamics. Recent work stresses that the relationships inside correctional facilities are much more complex and personal agency and willingness to follow authority is conditional on the belief that the authority is right and fair (Haslam & Reicher, 2012). This co-construction of the correctional facility environment by staff and incarcerated population is a product of social influence and social support. To be effective, this social pressure must be consistently applied or disorder erupts. This delicate balance of consent and coercion is influenced by the social capital network in place at the time. If consent is purchased by social capital, perhaps empathy is the currency of the transaction. Most scholars now agree that a focus singly on importation based on individual characteristics or deprivation based on structural or situational factors is an incomplete understanding of the larger dynamics (Kupchik & Snyder, 2009).

A meta-analysis of 68 studies revealed that settings providing behavioral treatment programs such as therapeutic or rehabilitations units, delivered by professional staff, experienced the lowest rates of prison misconduct (French & Gendreau, 2006). Few U.S. researchers have

begun to investigate the quality and consequences of contemporary correctional facility environments and climate that reflect interpersonal contexts and constraint and support features (Williams et al., 2019).

A 2002 Georgia study examined the addition of personnel who implemented numerous rehabilitation-type programs over a 22-month period. The researchers concluded that the presence of treatment personnel improved the correctional climate which promoted positive incarcerated population adjustments (Waters & Megathlin, 2002). Using both staff and incarcerated surveys, they found both individual-level and institutional-level factors with positive influence on survey results. There are distinct differences between institutions designed for therapeutic purposes and those that are primarily for containment (Morenoff & Harding, 2013). Further, climate may influence many other safety related aspects of correctional facility life, including riots, disturbances, and general disorder.

There have been a few government reports that underscore the value of studying correctional facility culture, including research by the National Institute of Corrections (NIC), and the National Institute of Justice (NIJ). The NIC emphasizes the importance of understanding a facility's history and culture by scholars so erroneous assumptions are not made. While the NIJ focuses on failure in the U.S. system of "corrections" by drawing attention to the staggering and unchanging recidivism rate in the United States and the vital need for attention to social climate (Gustafson, 2012).

The first steps taken in this United States study have led to four recommendations and considerations for relevant future research. These include: 1) establishing a baseline of climate by staff and the incarcerated population inside each correctional facility to measure and track changes over time and across facilities to provide comparative data on programming and

structural conditions for the incarcerated populations; 2) studies can help identify mechanisms that affect correctional staff regarding burnout, anxiety, and trauma on the job that can provide a framework to offer support and help to retain staff; 3) use data to capture a broad range of facilities to produce a hierarchical analysis of structural and individual-level characteristics of social cohesion and interpersonal relations within harsh human conditions to inform future policies and practices; and 4) through understanding correctional facility culture, researchers can identify and correct elements that leave the incarcerated population believing their very existence to be offensive, and work toward an environment more conducive to prosocial rehabilitation (Williams et al., 2019).

The broader goal of this pilot study demonstrates compelling evidence that correctional facility social climate is meaningful in terms of detecting environmental distinctions at a facility level. Insight from qualitative data suggests that perceived support may be key to enhancing rehabilitation efforts, and that research must address situational factors for both staff and incarcerated population as conditional upon other facility characteristics. Analyses to identify problematic issues within specific facilities can guide interventions and mitigate positive or negative effects and increase safety and security for all who work or live inside the walls (Gustafson, 2012).

This exploratory study will look specifically at safety factors in correctional facilities in the state of Colorado that might contribute to this growing body of knowledge and add to the greater understanding of a larger picture of the current state of safety in correction systems in the United States.

Compassionate Empathy

There is limited empirical research available on compassionate empathy, and what does exist focuses primarily on the medical field. A more robust knowledge of the potential benefits of compassionate empathy is necessary to understand the importance of this concept when used with vulnerable and potentially violent incarcerated people. One of the core principles from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) is the SHARE model of principles (safety, hope, autonomy, respect, empathy) that are recommended for effective correctional rehabilitation and outcomes. A study conducted in New Zealand on correctional treatment and supervision of incarcerated people promotes the importance of understanding how criminal behavior develops and informs intervention strategies (Levenson & Willis, 2019). Traditional U.S. correctional treatment services are highly risk-focused and confrontational in nature which neglects the principles of effective correctional rehabilitation strategies. A more holistic approach that incorporates knowledge of neurobiological, social, and psychological effects of empathy is argued for as a possible change agent to foster positive trends in corrections systems (Donisch, Bray, & Gewirtz, 2016).

Taking from recent studies, a combined comprehensive model of compassionate empathy outlines some of the social benefits of connecting with others that includes: 1) improved relationships and deeper connections with others because compassionate empathy promotes a sense of belong and feelings of being valued by others, 2) decreased stress and anxiety because compassionate empathy allows us to step back from our own worries and focus on others which can provide a sense of perspective and a calming influence, 3) increased happiness and well-being because compassionate empathy helps create a positive and supportive social network, and 4) improved mental health because compassionate empathy can reduce feelings of loneliness,

isolation, and depression (Pettus-Davis et al., 2017; Hunt, Denieffe, & Gooney, 2019; Bikker et al., 2015).

Empathy is a complex phenomenon that involves many different brain regions and psychological processes. With the advances in relatively new neuroimaging methods of functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), the rise of social neuroscience began as scientists were able to view and understand the brain in new and novel ways (Lamm & Majdandžić, 2014). Mirror neurons, a type of brain cell that are activated both when an individual performs a particular action and when they observe the same action performed by someone else, have been thought to play a role in empathy (Singer et al, 2004). The theory is that when we observe someone else performing an action or experiencing emotions, our mirror neurons fire in a similar way as if we were performing the action or experiencing the emotions ourselves, thereby allowing us to understand and share in the other person's experience. However, the link between mirror neurons and empathy is still the subject of scientific debate, and more research is needed to determine the precise role of mirror neurons in empathy and social cognition. Some studies have found a correlation between activity in mirror neuron regions and empathetic responses, while others have not (West, 2013). This concept of mirror neurons is an interesting perspective for correctional facilities because the resident population is in a carceral environment, so they are limited in their interactions and influence by mirror neurons to only staff and other incarcerated individuals. This is an avenue of exploration for another study to increase this new area of research and to test assumptions about this issue.

There is a gap between risk-averse officials who favor 'rule following' and the daily delivery of a 'negotiation model' employed by most correctional staff in the delivery of services and interactions with the incarcerated population they are tasked to manage (Liebling, 2000).

This gap between correctional staff can create unintended consequences with the incarcerated population by putting the perception of staff into distinct categories such as ‘nice or mean’ when really the framework of empathy could be applied in many situations. From a University of Amsterdam and Tinbergen Institute entitled “Fight or Flight: Endogenous Timing in Conflicts,” there is support for that in the animal kingdom, the timing of actions plays a crucial role in high-stakes situations (van Leeuwen et al., 2022). Predictable patterns emerge in a dynamic structure of intense interactions between people such that they occur in correctional facilities every day. Patterns of behavior by subjects are far from a random benchmark. This study finds that 90% of all decisions are captured by individual cutoff strategies (van Leeuwen et al., 2022) with substantial heterogeneity in the strategies used. A cutoff strategy is a dynamic action that mathematically depends on the size of the intended solution. This knowledge can be leveraged in correctional facilities by staff to understand the role of empathy and compassion in a familiar environment (Myerson, 1991). Whether a situation escalates or de-escalates is predictable in the animal kingdom.

This paper helps clarify how time can help people reach better outcomes in dynamic games, even when time is not costly. Further, there is support for a behavioral version of the model that allows for heterogeneous risk aversion (van Leeuwen et al., 2022). By engaging in training that promotes the use of empathy and compassion to increase the interaction time of difficult circumstances, perhaps the safety of staff and the incarcerated population can be increased.

Distraction techniques are a key element in many chronic pain management programs. Distraction alarms, alerts, and interruptions shift clinician attention away from a patient’s verbal and nonverbal expressions of distress. Further, just as distraction diminishes one’s own pain,

distractions diminish one's empathy for another's pain (Goldberg, 2020). Using fMRI, Gu and Han demonstrated that human empathetic responses were constrained or withdrawn by cognitive distractions (Gu & Han, 2007). Without explicit focus on another's pain, neural pathways underlying empathy are not activated. Barriers that inhibit compassion activation are embedded in today's health care delivery: decreased face-to-face time with patients; lack of autonomy; increased documentation requirements; and non-intuitive electronic medical record systems. For the health care delivery participant, this absence of the activation of compassion neural pathways can begin to have adverse effects including feeling ineffective in their profession and staff may begin to experience burnout (Goldberg, 2020). While defensive tactics are taught with a variety of hands-on distraction techniques, there are a myriad of verbal techniques that could also become part of a dynamic verbal training program for the Colorado Department of Corrections. The increase in time between a stimulus and a response decreases the fight-flight-freeze response and will give participants involved in threatening situations the time necessary to make more rational and less emotional choices. The notion of using empathy and compassion as a distraction technique could be further explored as a factor in increasing safety and security inside a correctional facility.

Functional neuroimaging of empathy and compassion demonstrates many neural networks at play involving the insula, cingulate, and prefrontal cortices that are involved in the hard wiring for empathic emotional and cognitive experiences (Goldberg, 2020). Neuroscience and social science research evidence have found support for the belief that empathy and compassion are teachable skills and that internal and external factors influence their expression in people. Until recently, evidence was lacking as to whether compassion was innate, acquired, or modifiable. Looking to the medical profession, patients who experience compassionate health

care report better clinical outcomes (Hunt, et al., 2019). Understanding the science behind compassionate care could give rise to methods of incorporating compassion training into the field of corrections.

A high-level summary conducted in 2020 of the social and neuroscience research was constructed in “Compassionate Care: Making It a Priority and the Science Behind It” (Goldberg, 2020). From this review of the literature, one pioneering idea surrounding the use of compassion in the field of corrections can be understood from the framework of burnout. In the medical field, burnout is said to result when clinicians know what their patients need (thereby activating the empathy/pain neural pathways), but are unable to deliver that care (thereby inactivation of the compassion/reward neural pathways). In this model, understanding the neuroscience underlying empathy and compassion informs practical programs that mitigate burnout and create a more compassionate workplace (Goldberg, 2020). This high-level summary of evidence supports the intentional efforts that incorporate compassion into medical education and care delivery models. While the field of corrections is not a direct medical delivery system, finetuning the narrative of the role corrections plays in both the incarcerated population and the staff towards a model of compassionate care could increase the safety for all involved.

Compassion activates areas involved with positive affect and reward systems (Goldberg, 2020). Studies utilizing fMRI to study the functional neural pathway activity related to empathy and compassion found neurofunctional activity were precursors to changes in cortical thickness and other structural changes in the brain when study participants engage in practicing compassion (Bikker et al., 2015; Goldberg, 2020).

Increases in the availability of fMRI technology have led researchers to findings that suggest empathy is based on shared representations for firsthand and vicarious experiences of

affective states. Further, empathic responses are not fixed, but can be modulated by personal characteristics. Also at play is contextual appraisal, including perceived fairness or group membership of others, which may help modulate empathic neuronal activations (Bernhardt & Singer, 2012). Therefore, empathy-related activity may reflect and predict feeling states in self and others, including adaptive responses and goal-directed behavior in dynamic social contexts. Of note, from an article entitled “The Neural Basis of Empathy”, is the concept of alexithymia which is defined as a person who has difficulty identifying and expressing emotions; this person may have problems maintaining relationships and taking part in social situations. From the perspective of a correctional facility, managing complex coactivations in neural networks associated with social cognition, depending on the specific situation and information available in a coercive and authoritarian environment it is unknown if this condition may increase safety risks for staff. The ability to share the affective states of the people closest to us as well as complete strangers allows us to predict and understand their feelings, motivations, and actions (Bernhardt & Singer, 2012). The advances in social neuroscience have provided important new insights into the brain basis of empathy. Perhaps future research could explore the extent of the incarcerated population affected by alexithymia.

The general processes of subjective experiences and adaptive responses to actual and predicted states when subsumed by empathy create a special case in brain biology. There is burgeoning evidence that additional networks involved in social cognition can be flexibly co-recruited during empathic understanding, depending on the information available and situation in the immediate environment (Bernhardt & Singer, 2012). Additionally, initial evidence suggests that empathic responses can be counteracted by opposing motivational systems, including

revenge and reward-processing networks. A deeper understanding of these neural networks and how they interact with each other is a future research avenue.

Emotional contagion and empathy when watching a friend in distress can lead to personal distress, a self-centered and aversive response in the observer (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1990). By contrast, during empathic concern, sympathy, or compassion, vicarious responses involve a feeling of concern for the other's suffering that induces a motivation to alleviate the suffering, but not necessarily any sharing of feelings. There is a fine distinction in emotional contagion, between empathizing with a sad person that results in feelings of sadness in oneself, versus compassion that often results in a feeling of loving or caring for the person and a motivation to relieve their suffering (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007). This motivation may then be transformed into prosocial behavior (Batson et al., 2007). Based mostly on results from empathy for pain, studies show that empathic responses recruit similar brain areas to those engaged during the corresponding first-person state. The following brain responses for pain are similar for a variety of states including: disgust, fear, anxiety, anger, sadness, neutral touch, pleasant affect, and reward; also similar are higher order emotions including social exclusion and embarrassment (Bernhardt & Singer, 2012). Understanding of these complex but predictable brain patterns could increase the safety of correctional facilities.

Is it possible to build a more compassionate and safer workplace inside a correctional facility? The answer is yes, with a delivery system that addresses compassion, empathy, and resilience at three levels: the incarcerated individual, the staff, and organizational leadership (Goldberg, 2020). Each of these levels can be influenced by the prevailing ethos of the department. Much of the training for each of these levels are interdependent on the others with

overlap from one group to another and the implementation of these reduces an ‘us vs. them’ mentality and can improve outcomes in correctional facilities.

The individual level would include all correctional staff and all the incarcerated population. Programs designed to build empathy, self-compassion, resilience, and individual wellness are widespread in many health care organizations (Goldberg, 2020) which are similar to correctional facilities. A meta-analysis by West et al, provides clear evidence that mindfulness, individual stress management, and small group discussions are effective in reducing burnout scores among physicians (West et al., 2016). However, no amount of resilience can withstand a toxic or unsupportive work environment and organizations that address workloads and workflow inefficiencies are more likely to have greater rates of positive health behaviors from staff. Learned behaviors around notions of empathy and compassion through dynamic security are a place to start with staff and incarcerated populations.

From a team perspective, several health care organizations have developed staff support programs that nourish provider to provider compassion and many have been adapted across a broad range of academic and teaching hospitals (Goldberg, 2020). One such program, Schwartz Rounds, is a multidisciplinary conference designed to talk about the experience of caring for patients and to give additional support when an adverse event happens. A limited number of studies have demonstrated its effectiveness, with a statistically significant correlation of participation and an increased insight into the psychosocial and emotional aspects of care, as well as appreciation of the roles and contributions of colleagues, and an increase in self-reported compassion (Brown, 2010). While the Colorado Department of Corrections has a Critical Incident Response Team (C.I.R.T.) and an Employee Support Program (ESP), these are not often

utilized for mundane work stresses, but larger issues. Perhaps more frequent debriefing in an informal group setting would give rise to increased staff support and improved mental health.

The impact of empathy is becoming more widely studied for its potential benefits to personal achievement, health, relationships, compassion, and the positive effects it can have on organizations, communities, and society overall. As researchers continue to seek to understand how everything connects people to each other, they are discovering that social-emotional factors are an integral part of any learning process. When people feel safe and secure in who they are in their environment, their life success increases. From education, medical fields, and significant international research, there is a deep understanding that creating cultures that are inclusive, fair, empathetic, and compassionate helps people feel connected, valued, safe, and secure within their surroundings. This decreases a person's stress and allows more receptiveness to learning and change. The goal of a correctional facility is learning and change, so empathy and compassion should be standard tools available to staff and the incarcerated population. Empathy training for correctional staff can contribute to more group cohesiveness for everyone.

Finally, organizational leadership bears the most essential role in creating compassionate workplace strategies that directly address workforce well-being and engagement. In the Mayo Health system, nine organizational programs have been identified as being effective in reducing burnout (Shanafelt, 2017). These efforts include acknowledging and assessing the problem; building a physician community; developing frontline leaders; promoting autonomy; and providing resources to effectively combat the drivers of burnout. Importantly, providing efforts that improve work quality is only part of problem-solving system barriers. In the case of the Mayo Health System, the Electronic Health Record system was nonintuitive and often demanded irrelevant documentation, which increased provider time with non-patient tasks at an incredible

rate of 2:1. If the goal is compassion-driven patient care, requiring providers to spend twice as much time completing computer tasks instead of providing face-to-face interaction with patients is a recipe for burnout by clinicians. Organizational leadership was recruited to find a deliberate, sustainable, and comprehensive solution to this problem to support health care professionals' innate compassion and contribute to their well-being, rather than addressing burnout later through remedial strategies. Evidence suggests that compassionate practices are correlated with improved patient and family experience as well as physician engagement (Shanafelt, 2017).

Neuroscience and social science evidence support the idea that compassion mitigates burnout and systems that promote compassionate care must be developed. Such systems recognize that the experience of the staff drives the experience of the incarcerated population. Therefore, the impetus for moving towards a more compassionate workplace is a business model that calculates return-on-investment of people and provides supporting evidence that compassionate, collaborative care improves workforce well-being and both experiential and financial outcomes (Goldberg, 2020).

The role that relationships play in daily interactions acts as instruments of power and needs to be better understood as a possible mitigating factor for safety, empathy, and compassionate care. A shift in focus of the overarching goal of corrections needs to occur in our country before we can truly turn the narrative of the role of correctional facilities and the intended outcomes.

Theoretical or Conceptual Framework

A criminological theory that focuses on the importance of relationships as a component of criminal behavior is the social bonds theory. Hirschi's (1969) original theory suggested that delinquent behaviors begin when social bonds are poor or absent, which in turn leads to weaker

levels of control. Travis Hirschi's Social Bonds theory, also known as Social Control theory, has been further developed and refined by several criminologists and sociologists.

One of the key contributors to the advancement of Social Bonds theory is Michael Gottfredson, who along with Travis Hirschi, co-authored a book in 1990 called "A General Theory of Crime". In this book, they refined and expanded upon the original Social Bonds theory, emphasizing the role of self-control in criminal behavior. This perspective is important to understand when looking at compassionate empathy and safety. How people interact with each other inside correctional facilities matters. When an incarcerated individual is having a difficult moment with staff, how staff respond with either "help or hurt" will influence the outcome of that transaction. It is yet to be determined if increasing the amount of compassionate empathy toward an incarcerated individual will improve outcomes?

Other scholars such as Robert Agnew, have also made significant contributions to the development of Social Bonds theory. For example, Robert Agnew (2011) in his book "Toward a Unified Criminology", has extended the theory to include the concept of strain, or negative emotions and experiences that result from blocked goals, as a possible explanation for criminal behavior. A look at emotions as it relates to criminal behavior is essential to include when considering empathy as a moderator of safety (Agnew, 2011).

Utilizing frameworks of theory is an accepted approach to understanding the behavior of people. Hirschi's (1969) social bonds theory posits that attachment to significant others and institutions, commitment to conventional goals, involvement in conventional activities, and beliefs in conventional norms are the cornerstone for strong, healthy relationships throughout one's life. Social support is complex and varied, but researchers from various disciplines report its importance in particular areas of stress, mental health, chronic illness, and substance use

disorders (Cohen, Underwood, & Gottlieb, 2000). Social support occurs in the context of interpersonal relationships and refers to providing or exchanging resources. Research consistently shows that small networks of friends, family, or acquaintances that support conventional norms improve chances of better outcomes (David-Pettus et al., 2017).

Social bonds theory is viewed as a unitary construct with four interrelated, yet independently measured elements: 1) attachment to significant others and institutions, 2) commitment to conventional goals, 3) involvement in conventional activities, and 4) belief in conventional norms (Peterson et al., 2016). According to scholars, these elements are found in three major domains of the social institution: the family, peers, and school. Correctional facilities by their very nature are not necessarily 'conventional' as outlined in the measured elements of Social Bonds Theory. However, there may be value in understanding the innate desire of biological connectedness among humans as a new research direction (Lamm & Majdandžić, 2014).

Correctional facilities with their carceral design are intended to remove incarcerated people from their family, peers, and school as a form of punishment. Neither the staff nor residents have easy access to the main component of social support and family in this space. This lack of access to family support can have deleterious effects on both groups (Lindberg et al., 2017). In the absence of normal conditions for social support, these institutions serve as de facto means of social support. Correctional facilities are a collection of relationships forming a microcosm of communities at large. The literature suggests that social support is important for staff to deal with the unique strains and challenges encountered in a correctional facility work environment (Lambert et al., 2015). What kind of social support is necessary to maintain safe environments in correctional facilities is still limited and unclear.

It is not known if encouraging the use of empathetic practices between these groups can increase attachment to institutions and thereby foster connected and meaningful social bonds. It is proposed here that increased involvement and opportunities for prosocial behavior within an institution can constrain the time offenders are involved in delinquent activities and encourage conformity to conventional values and norms, thereby increasing security for all inside correctional facilities. Hirschi's social bond theory will be applied and utilized to view the concepts of compassionate empathy and safety in the following literature review section.

In conclusion, while Travis Hirschi is credited with originating the Social Bonds theory, it has been advanced and refined by several criminologists and sociologists over the years. This study's objective is to explore the nature of the relationship between compassionate empathy and safety. Expanding knowledge of these relationships provides a framework for the future development of research in this area and provides correctional administrators with information on ways different forms of social support might affect correctional facility environments.

Related Literature

The following categories are major themes that presented themselves in the related literature review. These are themes that have a relationship to either compassionate empathy or safety in the realm of correctional facilities. They are arranged in conceptual order and include the topics of dynamic security, global perspectives on empathy or safety, life and job satisfaction, stress and social support, staff turnover, and organizational and procedural justice.

Dynamic Security

Dynamic Security is a relatively new word utilized in the corrections profession. The United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime Corrections Handbook – Dynamic Security and Prison Intelligence (Bryans, 2015) introduces this statement:

Where dynamic security operates effectively, staff will be monitoring and reading their environment and the prisoners within it. The strength of dynamic security is that it is likely to be proactive in a way that recognizes a threat to security at a very early stage... Staff should interact with prisoners in as positive a manner as possible. (p. 34)

Security and dignity in places of detention are interdependent, not mutually exclusive.

Fairness and legitimacy have demonstrable effects on order (Cullen & Johnson, 2017). Research in the UK suggests that the incarcerated experience order and safety along with fairness, respect, and humanity as what matters most in prison life (Penal Reform International, 2013). At the same time, security is of utmost concern in correctional facilities and security practices and policies by their very nature can be viewed as restrictive, intrusive, and limiting enjoyment of residents in correctional facilities. Dynamic Security makes a case for the opposite type of interaction with prisoners. Codes of conduct to guide correctional facility administration as well as contingency planning should be conducted to establish scenarios to plan and be trained for accordingly.

To further bolster support for dynamic security inside correctional facilities, the use of isolation or solitary confinement over the past decade across the globe has been eliminated or reduced as the practice has been deemed to have negative mental health effects on offenders (Lindberg et al., 2015). Medical research confirms that the denial of meaningful human contact can cause 'isolation syndrome' the symptoms can include anxiety, depression, anger, cognitive disturbances, perceptual distortions, paranoia, psychosis, self-harm, and suicide, and can destroy a person's personality (Grassian, 2008). These changes in policy and practices are occurring all over the world in response to new information of best practices for security. In keeping with Hirschi's social bond theory, the more interconnected a society, the better the odds for positive outcomes. It may seem counterintuitive to think about abolishing the use of solitary confinement as a security measure, but the research is clear about the negative effects of this long-used

practice. Reform and innovative thinking are coming from many directions to correctional facilities around the globe (Bryans et al., 2015).

A review of the literature revealed that ‘dynamic security’ is an approach to security that combines positive staff-resident relationships and fair treatment with meaningful activities that contribute to future reentry into society. It is a wrap-around approach that encompasses actions that contribute to a professional, positive, and respectful relationship between staff and residents. The process requires knowledge of the correctional facility population and an understanding of relationships between offenders and staff to anticipate problems and security risks. Dynamic security must be accompanied by effective policies and procedures, and most importantly, by adequate staff recruitment and training (Penal Reform International, 2013). The use of empathetic practices as discussed in the first section of the literature review outline the merits of increasing safety using practices that are in line with Hirschi’s social bond theory.

Global Perspectives on Empathy, Compassionate Empathy, or Safety

Looking at several studies from around the world, the pool of knowledge is added to from international perspectives and voices. Non-Western contexts belong in every literature review. This next section includes studies from South Korea, England, Norway, Canada, Switzerland, Wales, Spain, China, and the United States.

A study from South Korea examines Hirschi’s social bonds theory with intra- and inter-individual implications of juvenile delinquency and Korean adolescents (Petersen et al., 2016). This study attempts to test the cross-cultural generalizability of social bonds theory and finds some support for indicators of within- and between-individual variation of delinquency rates. The finding generally supports the theory, although it is noted that the strong emphasis on education and the role of parenting has an integral role in reducing delinquency in Korean youth

(Peterson et al., 2016). In a study from South Korea, Ronald Akers (2010) said that the goal of cross-national theory testing should be “to test current theory, to modify it appropriately for better application in different societies, and to develop new or integrated theories that come closer to being truly universally applicable to explaining criminal and deviant behavior” (Akers, 2010, p. 3). Interestingly, there are many differences in discipline, family, and school structure. For instance, in South Korea teachers are permitted to use both corporal and emotional punishment as a means of motivating students to work harder (Peterson, et al., 2016). South Koreans are expected to conform to the group and respect the social hierarchy within their group, resulting in strong social bonding. This longitudinal study has some obvious limits such as the two measures of delinquency and the wide ranges of some of the named variables. However, the study was included in the literature review as a method to examine non-U.S. samples to determine whether the findings were generalizable across nations. When theories are extended to a global level, researchers gain deeper understanding of the underlying mechanisms of social bonding and delinquency and this type of research can help with the development of policies and interventions that target individual cultures. This study supports Hirschi’s social bond theory as a viable explanation of delinquency and this information is useful to apply to other situations such as increasing safety in United States correctional facilities.

A study from England examines staff-prisoner relationships, staff professionalism, and the use of authority in public- and private-sector prisons. This study makes the case that service users (incarcerated people) are usually powerless and highly dependent in vulnerable circumstances. Therefore, emphasis on the complexity and consequences of this kind of work cannot be stressed enough (Smith & Lipsky, 1998). Combined, these studies give some international perspective to topics this research wishes to address.

From a study in England and Wales, this article seeks to compare and explain three key aspects of prison culture and quality: 1) relationships between frontline staff and prisoners, 2) level of staff professionalism or jail craft as the article titles the practice, and 3) prisoner's experience of state authority over their lives (Crewe, et al., 2015). The authors make the case that service users of correctional facilities are often powerless, in vulnerable circumstances, and highly dependent on staff as caregiver of services. Staff act as gatekeepers to institutional resources which shapes the experiences of offender residents. This experience is highly influenced by prison officer and staff work and reflects distributive fairness, respectful relationships, jail craft, and the judicious use of power as a range of classic ethnographic studies of prison life have depicted (Crewe, 2013). Correctional staff can be seen as Liebling describes as "specialists in mediation and arbitration" (Liebling, 2000). The findings of this study showcase the risks of underestimating the skills and professionalism that distinguish between good and poor-quality service work in public or private penal sectors and beyond (Crewe, et al., 2015).

Norway, is arguably seen as a "gold standard" in the correctional facility world as they prioritize human dignity, individualized treatment, and the promotion of positive outcomes for both the incarcerated and society. Their commitment to rehabilitation and social reintegration has earned Norway widespread recognition as a model for effective and humane correctional practices. Norway offers clearly defined safety rules and a comprehensive model of the impact of social interaction between residents and officers (Midtlyng, 2022). All safety work is characterized by social interaction and Midtlyng argues that rule-regulated safety work in correctional facilities may be considered a source of safety risk and is often overutilized and misunderstood (Boustras, 2020). Situational sensitivity to human dynamics is important to the safety work of correctional staff as well as the long-term effects on staff and residents who are often together for long periods of time

of days, months, years, and often decades in correctional facilities (Dekker, S.W.A., 2005). The author makes a compelling case that all safety work is characterized by social interaction, therefore, social interaction is an important characteristic of the safety of correctional facilities. Empathy, if utilized properly, is a constant sensitivity to empirical signals of danger. From the ethnographic data collected, Midtlyng claims social interaction between prisoners and prison officers is found to be “the heart of prison work” (Liebling, et al., 2010). Additionally, the author states that “sometimes safety systems work well because of rule deviations, not despite them” (Pettersen, 2013, p. 108).

A study from Canada looks at the concepts of picking battles: correctional officers, rules, and discretion in prison (Haggerty & Bucerius, 2020). These authors have concluded that official statistics on “rule-following” by incarcerated individuals is very misleading because so much of rule interpretation is discretionary for a bigger picture look by staff and supervisors. While correctional facilities have become more bureaucratic and the exercise of power has become much more formally rational with increased external oversight and decisions being made by managers and supervisors instead of boots on the ground officers (Garland, 2018), this study reveals there is still a tremendous amount of discretion available to correctional facility staff regarding rule enforcement. Specifically, this study called out five aspects of rule enforcement: 1) rule context, 2) officer orientation to rule enforcement, 3) soft power, 4) constrained discretion, and 5) fellow officers, supervisors, and colleagues. This study illuminates that discretionary decisions have both instrumental and expressive components to rule enforcement. This directly has bearing on the safety of staff and offenders inside correctional facilities. Their findings advance the knowledge of correctional officer discretion in exchange of nonenforcement of rules for larger, overall organizational accomplishments. Understanding clearly the goal of any organization will help

make better goal and value driven decisions by the front-line workers and more clearly reflect the prevailing ethos of organizations.

Another international study reviewed is from a 2012 Switzerland study of 2,045 respondents from all work areas of 89 of the 112 correctional facilities in the country, it is evident that violence in the workplace has serious consequences for employees and organizations. The analysis method utilized was structural equation modeling and the results are clear that corrections workplaces are prone to an increased risk for experiencing violence. Further, victimization and witnessing violence between offenders on offenders and offenders on staff to a less extent, negatively affect the personal sense of security and well-being and increase correctional staff burnout as well as the sense of security mediated the effect from experienced and observed violence on workplace burnout. (Isenhardt & Hostettler, 2020). A more stable workforce leads to less expense, higher job satisfaction, and increased safety for both employees and the public. Staff burnout as this study explains is the consequence of work stress and stressful events in the workplace. It is described using a three-dimensional construct comprising of these dimensions: 1) emotional exhaustion (accompanied by feelings of exhaustion, frustration, excessive demand, and reduced performance), 2) depersonalization (distancing oneself from others and treating him or her with cynicism and indifference), and 3) a reduced sense of personal accomplishment (this often leads to disengagement). Correctional staff in their care-orientated work tasks and close contact with residents may be considered at risk, and several studies researched the factors influencing the development of burnout within this specific occupation. It is reasonable to assume that employees of different work areas of correctional institutions differ in their exposure to violence and in their sense of security because of the differences in their work tasks. Further, a sense of security was a mitigating factor when

experienced or observed violence was encountered. This sense of security helped to insulate the staff member and reduced the negative effects of violent events.

This study also examined the role of gender in correctional facilities and concluded that female employees in Swiss corrections do not feel more vulnerable than male employees, and although women have a higher risk of exhaustion compared with men, this is not related to violence exposure (Isenhardt & Hostettler, 2020). This study contributes to the knowledge on violence in the corrections field especially the importance of improving individual sense of security to prevent burnout and those associated negative consequences. Further, measures taken by correctional institutions intended to reduce insecurity and provide support in coping with victimization experiences must be geared toward this group of staff members. Lastly from this study, attention should be paid to the “daily grind” of correction staff duties, such as the ordinary forms of violence such as insults and psychological intimidation. These are the most prevalent form of harm and are often the most overlooked. Perhaps the use of empathetic practices by staff towards residents could help mitigate these acts by repairing small broken cracks in relationships between residents and staff when they occur. The definition of Dynamic Security would seem to support these practices well and help to mitigate staff distress and burnout inside correctional facilities.

A Spanish study from the medical field discusses mindfulness and engagement in the nursing profession. This information was interesting to look at from the perspective of job safety, although it does not specifically apply to correctional workers. However, the work of health personnel is characterized by high psychological and emotional demands and a high level of perceived stress, therefore the promotion of self-care and wellbeing through strategies such as practicing mindfulness become fundamental in maintaining optimum patient-care and self-care. It

is interesting to ponder the possibility that mindfulness or “being present” presents the ability to attend to what is conscious and accepting what happens without judging. This would appear to be a skill worth investigating for use in correctional workers as a safety measure (Pérez-Fuentes et al., 2020). Perhaps this is a skill that would be useful to be taught to incarcerated individuals to maintain emotional control during times of stress and conflict. This would increase the safety of correctional facility staff. Hacking into people’s habit loops and altering the programming is an achievable goal.

From “A happy life: Exploring how job stress, job involvement, and job satisfaction are related to the life satisfaction of Chinese prison staff” (Lambert, et al., 2018) the authors take the perspective of job satisfaction to the next logical level of life satisfaction in the People’s Republic of China. This study could have implications to American correctional staff in that it is well documented that this line of work has statically higher rates of substance abuse, divorce, and suicide than the general population. Furthermore, Jones (2006) reported that life satisfaction is a stronger predictor of job performance than job satisfaction. Life satisfaction has positive benefits on job performance, such as increased engagement in organizational citizenship, lower turnover, and better productivity. Life satisfaction and job satisfaction are intricately enmeshed (Jones, 2006). The case can be made that safety inside correctional facilities is also influenced by the job or life satisfaction of correctional staff and coworkers. No one person inside of a correctional facility is an island unto themselves. Everything that is done inside of a correctional facility will have a consequence on someone else. The correctional institutes are a community unto themselves and should be viewed as such.

Finally, a study from the United States offers a look at individual and environmental influences on prison officer safety as part of a global perspective on safety in correctional

facilities. The authors acknowledge that despite the relevance of safety to correctional facility work and the indicators of safety on other occupational outcomes, there are few studies that have comprehensively explored these factors as either subjective vs. objective measures (Steiner & Wooldredge, 2017). A common denominator of the studies that have been conducted is that the interaction between staff and the incarcerated inside correctional facilities are in the simplest form, a transactional relationship. Further, relationships are the agents of change. This exploratory study will look to see if a relationship exists between strengthening these transactional relationships through targeted compassionate empathetic practices training to see if it can make correctional facilities across the Colorado Department of Corrections safer.

Life and Job Satisfaction

There were many connections made in the literature review between the concept of life and job satisfaction in articles that were searched using parameters for empathy and safety. It is evident from the literature, that correctional workers who feel a sense of human connection and safety in their work environments, have an increased job and life satisfaction.

Revealed in a study from China, male prison staff reported lower satisfaction with their lives than their female counterparts (Lambert, et al., 2018) and that job stress had a negative correlation, meaning increases in reported work stress were associated with decreases in reported life satisfaction. These concepts would suggest additional study in the United States would be necessary to measure if the same applies to correctional workers here.

Findings from this study support a spillover theory that is perhaps universal between work life and personal life and variables between each workplace. Additionally, it is noted that reducing role stress, such as role conflict, role ambiguity, and role overload can reduce the occurrence of stress from the job among correctional facility staff, and increasing workplace

resource variables, such as instrumental communication, input into decision-making and job variety, can buffer staff from the effects of job stress or at a minimum, reduce its effects (Dowden & Tellier, 2004). Also, of importance, this study illuminated the movement in the past few decades to make workplaces more human oriented and being concerned about workers' life satisfaction. In addition, given that life satisfaction is related to important outcomes, comprehensive research should consider life satisfaction as an essential factor in organization research in the future (Erdogan, et al., 2012).

Research articles specifically targeted to correctional facilities and job satisfaction yielded many articles on the topic. The first study's literature examines social support and suggests that social support, in general, is linked to positive outcomes among correctional staff, but the different types of social support (family/friends) may differ in their effects. The study states, "Stressed, uninvolved, dissatisfied, and uncommitted staff can be detrimental to a prison's operations. On the other hand, having relatively unstressed, involved, satisfied, and committed staff is a desired outcome" (Lambert et al., 2015). Few other organizations besides correctional facilities are tasked with supervising and securing an unwilling and potentially violent group of people. In keeping with Hirschi's social bond theory, the authors state, "Social support should help staff deal with strains that would otherwise increase job stress and decrease job involvement, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment" (Lambert et al., 2015).

Stress and Social Support

Understanding the dynamics of stress and the role of social support within the workplace is crucial for promoting employee well-being and organizational effectiveness. Stress can manifest in various forms, whether as a stimulus from external factors or as a response to perceived challenges or threats. Job stress refers to the psychological strain experienced by

individuals due to job-related pressures, leading to a myriad of adverse outcomes such as hardness, tension, anxiety, frustration, and worry arising from work (Misis, et al., 2013).

In this context, social support emerges as a critical resource in mitigating the negative effects of stress and fostering resilience among employees. Social support encompasses various forms of assistance, feedback, encouragement, and camaraderie provided by peers, supervisors, and other members of the organizational community. This support network serves as a buffer against the adverse impacts of stress, offering individuals a sense of belonging, validation, and emotional comfort during challenging times.

Importantly, the benefits of social support extend beyond individual well-being to encompass organizational outcomes as well. Socially supported employees tend to exhibit higher levels of innovation, productivity, and job satisfaction (Lambert and Paoline, 2008). They are more likely to engage in collaborative problem-solving, share knowledge and expertise, and contribute positively to team dynamics. Furthermore, socially supported employees are perceived as more enjoyable to work with, fostering a positive organizational climate characterized by mutual respect, trust, and cohesion.

Moreover, the reciprocal nature of social support within organizations underscores its significance as a key determinant of employee engagement and retention. Employees who feel valued, supported, and connected to their peers and supervisors are more likely to exhibit greater commitment to the organization and its goals. They are also more resilient in the face of adversity, better equipped to navigate challenges, and more likely to contribute to a culture of continuous improvement and growth (Midtlyng, 2022).

In summary, social support plays a pivotal role in alleviating job stress and promoting well-being within the workplace. By cultivating a supportive organizational culture and fostering

strong interpersonal relationships, organizations can harness the power of social support to enhance employee resilience, performance, and overall organizational effectiveness.

Staff Turnover

Continuing with reviewing literature on safety, the average turnover rate in adult corrections is about 20% and has been reported to sometimes exceed twice that number as well as approximately 25% of newly hired staff resign or are terminated within their first year of being hired and trained (Lambert, 2001). From an organization's perspective, it costs as much as \$20,000 to start a new employee on the job in adult corrections. Beside the monetary cost of staff turnover, there is an impact to the very organization that relies on staff to accomplish their goals. Therefore, staff turnover is possibly one good measure of correctional agency effectiveness. Staff turnover can undermine effectiveness by creating personnel shortages which cause existing staff to be overworked, this in turn takes a toll on staff morale, destabilizes daily operations, and hurts the agency's public image. Combining the monetary resource drain with the blow to morale, high turnover can become embedded and lead quickly to a relatively dysfunctional organization (Minor, et al., 2011). Staffing crisis of correctional facilities in the United States has increased since the Covid-19 pandemic (Western, 2021).

It behooves correctional facility management to keep an eye on trends in staff turnover and the underlying dynamics at play such as personal characteristics of staff, job attitudes among workers, work environment factors, and how these variables relate to one another in an individual correctional facility. The concept of job satisfaction is very relevant to management because without an understanding of the current situation, turnover control efforts are likely to be fragmentary or misguided. There were mixed finding about the relationship of the attitudinal variables and turnover intent to actual turnover in corrections (Camp, 1994). In some cases,

voluntary quitting was more spontaneous, stress related, or situational than job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and contemplation of quitting. Variables outside the work environment were highly correlated with voluntary turnover (Western, 2021). Turnover intent was illuminated in this study and regardless of whether an employee leaves a job or not, once intent has entered the equation, there are negative outcomes linked to lower productivity and psychological withdrawal from the job (Lambert, 2001). With study restricted to one state, it may not generalize across different jurisdictions and agencies and a wider range of contexts need to be measured. Further, research is needed to shed light on the relationship to determine why people express intent to leave or stay within their jobs. While this study does not attempt to fill the gap in the literature around this issue, this is an important factor when examining correctional facility safety and is a possible future research topic.

Organizational and Procedural Justice

Organizational justice as introduced by Greenberg (1987), explains how perceived justice and equity impact employees' attitudes and behaviors in a workplace. There are two subdomains including procedural justice and distributive justice and without the perception of organizational justice, correctional staff may engage in negative behavior and show a lower level of commitment, lower job satisfaction, higher levels of burnout and turnover, and job stress (Greenberg, 1987; Lambert, 2003). Further, using a meta-analysis, Colquitt, et al., found that employees who perceived a lower level of organizational justice were more involved in counterproductive work behaviors and were less likely to have positive job and task performance (Colquitt, et al., 2013). When there is a strong sense of procedural and distributive justice, correctional staff can engage in positive and transparent interactions while practicing care, custody, and control in a rehabilitative approach (Ricciardelli, 2016, p. 339). Empathy as a

standard of practice by an organization may have an influence on the aspect of procedural justice and how it affects staff and offenders.

Lambert and Paoline (2008) describe that procedural justice would reduce the negative emotional and psychological effects of stress as well as dissatisfaction with the nature of the job and prospects for career advancement. Likewise, distributive justice is an influencer related to job stress as perceptions of a lower level of fairness related to outcomes could be associated with strain and stress, which might result in further dissatisfaction with life (Lambert & Hogan, 2011). Like most people, correctional staff weigh their benefits and rewards in proportion to the degree of effort and energy they contribute to their work. Such that, when officers perceive greater benefits and rewards, they are less likely to report a higher level of job stress or negative feelings about the organization. In this study, officers were found to have increased levels of stress if their judgement of an outcome was unfair, around such issues as a job performance. While inmates reported that they would trust an institution and have confidence in their legitimacy if they had positive correctional facility experiences that included interactions with correctional staff that provided them procedural equality and fairness and a safe environment (Franke, et al., 2010).

From a different perspective, organizational injustice affects not only the incarcerated individuals' behavior, but also influences criminal justice officials and leads to misconduct. These circumstances can lead to complaints to internal affairs, departmental disciplinary actions, increased use of force, and potential risk of other misconduct by employees (Wolfe & Piquero, 2011). Prior to this study, there is no single study that has tried to examine the etiology of correctional officers' misconduct from the organizational justice perspective, although similar studies have been conducted among police officers (Haas, et al., 2015). From those studies with law enforcement, the research is clear that when there is a higher perception of organizational

justice it reduces the potential for misconduct by employees (Haas et al., 2015). Therefore, interactional justice emphasizes the need for interpersonal communication in a work environment to be respectful, honest, and polite, as opposed to communication that is characterized by dishonesty, disrespect, and biases, staff are likely to view their organization as unjust.

Another aspect of the role of organizational justice is understanding correctional workers behavior. Boateng and Hsieh (2019) explore prison misconduct and stress in the article “Misconduct within the ‘four walls’: Does organizational justice matter in explaining prison officers’ misconduct and job stress?” This research is conducted in Ghana and utilizes a negative binomial and ordinal logistic analyses that revealed significant contributions of two dimensions of organizational justice to explain misconduct and stress among officers (Boateng & Hsieh, 2019). Further, the study posits that officers’ characteristics were found to predict the number of times officers received misconduct complaints. This information is crucial for understanding by human resource professionals in corrections. These factors have the potential to affect the daily safety of correctional staff by other coworkers’ reaction to forces placed on them by the job or the organization.

Officers are tasked daily to maintain safety and security at both individual and organizational levels and have a tremendous impact on offenders’ perceptions of justice and their ability to adjust to correctional facility life. As such, officers control offenders’ institutional behavior and even address daily aspects of social support (Dirkzwager & Kruttschnitt, 2012). Corrections employees who are viewed as fair and unbiased in their management of confinement, treatment, and interventions with residents as well as positive attitudes and

performance affect how residents cope with correctional facility life and arguably how they later behave when released back to society (Adams, 1992).

Looking back on the proposed use of empathetic practices by correctional staff, from this study, they found that female officers engage in less misconduct and receive fewer complaints than their male counterparts, supporting the widely established gender effects on officer's behavior. (Brandl, et al., 2001). It has been hypothesized that one reason female officers might engage in less misconduct than male counterparts are that females are friendlier, are less likely to use force than male officers, are less likely to engage in aggressive behavior and they are more likely to adopt a rehabilitative-oriented approach and encourage positive relationships with offenders. Further, male, or female officers who have positive interaction with residents might be able to reduce unnecessary conflicts within institutions and are more adept in handling potential violent situations using communication skills rather than a physical confrontational style of other officers (Gunnison, et al., 2017). However, officers who were married, regardless of gender and those at lower ranks tended to engage in less misconduct, the study shows.

One last item of note from this study are the practical insights for corrections management to develop better working relationships with staff as well as to create a conducive working environment. There needs to be a fair allocation of opportunities in an organization based on a merit system. Also, the promotion of open dialogue and communication will ensure that employees at all levels are free to express themselves and to be heard by their management (Gunnison, et al., 2017).

Summary

In 1994, Cullen urged that the concept of social support be construed as an organizing concept for the field of criminology. He saw social support as a theme common to various theories

of criminal behavior and viewed it as a means of helping unify the field. Cullen's argument is that a lack of social support is criminogenic (Cullen, 1994). This concept is a natural progression to build on Hirschi's social bond theory and help deepen the pool of understanding around criminology.

Looking to other countries for bodies of research has significant importance, especially in the field of criminology. There are universal themes that can be illuminated and understood better by sharing research and best practices among correctional facilities around the globe. International studies can help narrow the gaps between countries and build bridges for the free flow of information while opening possible theoretical and practical benefits. Jowell (1998) pointed out that 'the importance and utility to social science of rigorous cross-national measure is incontestable. They help to reveal not only intriguing differences between countries and cultures, but also aspects of one's own country and culture that would be difficult or impossible to detect from domestic data alone' (Jowell, 1998, p. 168).

While correctional facilities are arguably potentially violent and dangerous constructs, there are many safety factors that can improve outcomes for all who work and reside behind correctional facility walls. The review of the literature has shown there is room for improvement into the understanding of the use of empathetic or compassionate empathetic practices by staff to increase the overall safety. The importance of delivering services in a professional and responsible manner cannot be understood enough as a key component to correctional work. Further, the concepts and major themes of dynamic security, global perspectives on empathy and safety, life and job satisfaction, stress and social support, staff turnover, and organizational and procedural justice are all areas that can be expanded upon and added to the existing knowledge pool for correctional systems. The theoretical framework of social bond theory is a solid starting point.

However, not all research has supported Hirschi's social bond theory explicitly and it is not a panacea for correctional work problems. The lack of agreement amongst these studies supports the need for further research on the relationship between empathetic practices and institutional safety.

Throughout the literature, social bond theory has been applied to explain and has been instrumental in identifying the connection of empathy and compassionate empathetic practices to safety within correctional facilities. While the relationship of compassionate empathy and job satisfaction has been recently considered in such fields as medicine, it has yet to be considered in correctional facilities in terms of safety. This study fills a gap in the current literature and research by extending the knowledge of compassionate empathy in terms of safety for correctional facility employees.

This chapter serves as a comprehensive introduction to the research study, laying the groundwork by exploring key concepts and existing literature relevant to the investigation of compassionate empathy and safety within correctional facilities. Initially, the chapter provides an overview of correctional facilities and safety, highlighting the importance of ensuring a secure and supportive environment for the staff and the incarcerated. It also delves into the concept of compassionate empathy, emphasizing its significance as a foundational element in fostering positive interpersonal interactions and promoting well-being within correctional settings.

Furthermore, the chapter reviews existing research on the relationship between compassionate empathy and safety in correctional facilities. It examines empirical studies and theoretical frameworks that elucidate the complex dynamics underlying this relationship, drawing upon insights from social bond theory to provide a theoretical foundation for the study. A relevant literature section offers a thorough exploration of additional major themes potentially linked to compassionate empathy and safety in correctional facilities. This section provides a

comprehensive global perspective on the topic, synthesizing findings from diverse sources to enrich the conceptual framework of the study.

Moving forward, the subsequent chapter will present the proposed methodology for the study, detailing the research design and rationale. Chapter 3 will also reaffirm the study's purpose and delineate the research questions, providing a comprehensive explanation and operationalization of the study objectives. Additionally, the chapter will discuss selected data sources and outline appropriate data analysis strategies to be employed in the research process.

In summary, this chapter lays the groundwork for the subsequent chapters, providing a solid foundation for the exploration of compassionate empathy and safety within correctional facilities and setting the stage for the implementation of the research study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

In this chapter, we delve into the methodological framework underpinning the exploratory study, which seeks to address a critical research problem: the potential relationship between compassionate empathetic practices among correctional staff and overall safety within a Colorado correctional facility. Given the paramount importance of safety for the staff and the incarcerated individuals in maintaining order and control within correctional settings, this study aimed to shed light on the efficacy of compassionate empathy as a potential determinant of safety outcomes.

Building upon the understanding that effective security and respect for human rights are not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary objectives within correctional environments (UNODC, 2015), this research examined the nuanced interplay between compassionate empathetic practices and safety outcomes. It explored the extent to which compassionate empathy influences safety within a real-world correctional setting, and aimed to contribute valuable insights to the ongoing discourse on effective correctional management and rehabilitation.

This chapter will elucidate the qualitative research design employed in the study, offering a justification for its selection, and detailing the methods used for data collection. Specifically, we will discuss the administration of the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, along with the sampling strategy utilized to select participants and the ethical considerations inherent to the research endeavor.

Furthermore, the data analysis methods employed are delineated, including coding and thematic analysis, and insight into how the data were organized and managed throughout the

research process is discussed. The rigor and trustworthiness of the data analysis, underscores the commitment to ensuring the credibility and validity of the study findings are discussed.

Ultimately, this chapter serves as a foundational framework for understanding the methodological underpinnings of the research study, providing a roadmap for the rigorous collection, analysis, and interpretation of data aimed at addressing the central research question concerning the relationship between compassionate empathy and safety within correctional facilities.

Design

A qualitative exploratory research project is done to gain an initial understanding of a phenomenon or to explore a research question in-depth. This type of study is often used when there is limited existing research on a topic or when the topic is complex and requires a more nuanced understanding of an issue. The researcher chose an exploratory research design because they wanted to examine if a relationship exists between the use of compassionate empathy practices by staff and the overall safety of a correctional facility in Colorado. There is limited existing research from the United States on the use of compassionate empathy inside correctional facilities where safety is the number one priority.

A qualitative study was selected to gain insight and perspective of the staff members performing the front-line work of managing and communicating with the incarcerated population. This type of study is appropriate because it gives voice to how the participating staff members believe safety is affected in the workplace. Interpersonal information must be interpreted accurately to understand if a relationship exists between responding in an empathic manner and safety of staff.

The specific type of design was selected because the researcher has access to staff of a correctional facility and is interested in exploring the perspectives, experiences, and meanings of the participants involved in safety matters. This approach allows the researcher to gain knowledge and insights into how people experience and understand the world around them. This information generated insights and ideas which help address a gap in the literature or suggest future research, practice, or policy decisions. By gaining an initial understanding of the phenomenon of the use of compassionate empathy inside a correctional facility, there can be targeted improvement or intervention for staff members of correctional facilities.

Exploratory research helps a researcher build understanding about the complex problem of the research (Creswell, 2002). The purpose of conducting exploratory research is to explore a problem and areas around a particular problem (O’Leary, 2005). Exploratory research can use secondary research of reviewing available literature and data along with informal qualitative approaches to answer researcher questions like why, how, and what about the research questions (O’Leary, 2005).

The specific approach to this qualitative, exploratory study is outlined. The researcher works for the Colorado Department of Corrections and created a social media post asking for potential participants. The snowball recruiting method was used for selecting potential participants for the exploratory research study. By leveraging the connections and networks of the initial participants, valuable insights, and experiences from individuals with direct knowledge of the topic were selected. This method relied on the connections and networks of the initial participants to refer additional participants, forming a “snowball” effect as the sample size grew. In the context of the study on compassionate empathy and safety in a correctional facility, the

snowball method was a valuable approach for identifying potential participants who may be willing to share their insights and experiences.

Participants that were willing to share their experiences were provided informed consent forms to participate in the study. Additionally, when looking for answers, what we were after is answers that are held by a population; in this case, the correctional staff. The purpose of sampling is to speak to the 'few' to capture the thoughts, knowledge, attitudes, feelings, and/or apply those beliefs to the 'many.' The strategic goals of sampling include being broad enough to represent a parent population, large enough to allow a researcher to conduct desired analysis, and small enough to be manageable. (O'Leary, 2005, ppg. 87-88). The researcher secured 25 willing and informed participants across a multitude of job classifications and ranks inside the correctional facility for the study.

After each informed consent form was read and signed, the researcher emailed a hyperlink and asked each participant to self-administer the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ) located in Appendix C, and bring the printed results to the interview. The self-report results on the TEQ encompass 16 questions on a Likert scale and provided an immediate on-line score. This self-assessment is a brief, reliable, and valid instrument for the assessment of empathy (Spreng, et al., 2009). The rationale for the self-administration of the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire is that potential deficits in empathic understanding may be better understood through assessment and quantification, leading to effective intervention (Spreng, et al., 2009). It is not known if empathic deficits pose serious challenges to the quality of life and work performed inside correctional facilities, including matters of safety.

The Toronto Empathy Questionnaire results were reviewed with the participants during the beginning of the in-person interview. The researcher then conducted in-depth, semi-

structured interviews with staff members to gather their experiences and perceptions of using compassionate empathy in their work with the incarcerated and how they believed it affects safety in the correctional facility. These interviews were semi-structured, meaning there was a predetermined set of open-ended questions to guide the interview but the interviewer also asked a few follow-up questions to gather more detailed information as needed.

Next, all participants were provided with emailed written transcripts of the interview and asked each participant to member check them for accuracy. Each was given the opportunity to add or delete any information to ensure their voices were represented correctly in the interview. There were some very minor changes to 3 participants transcript, with 22 of them accepting them as they were presented by the researcher.

All data collected through the self-report assessment and during the interviews was analyzed using qualitative thematic and content data analysis techniques in Nvivo software. The results of the study provided insights into the potential relationship between the use of compassionate empathy by staff members and safety in correctional facilities.

Research Questions

The research questions are specific and focused questions that are answered through the study. The questions are closely related to the research problem and guided the data collection and analysis process. Research questions are framed for this exploratory study to examine the specific phenomenon of compassionate empathy, to understand the experiences of individuals, and to investigate the relationships between variables. The original research sub-questions for this study are as follows:

Sub-question 1: Do staff fully understand the concept of compassionate empathy and empathetic practices?

Sub-question 2: What is the relationship between dynamic security with incarcerated residents and overall safety in a correctional facility?

Sub-question 3: Does increased compassionate empathy by staff towards incarcerated residents result in safer careers?

The research sub-questions, found in Appendix B, are exploratory and open-ended and allowed participants to share their experiences and perspectives regarding empathy and safety. The research sub-questions evolved as the study progressed, and the researcher refined and adjusted the questions as they learned more from the data.

Setting

All participants were recruited on a volunteer basis from a maximum-security men's correctional facility in Colorado. This correctional facility is accredited through the American Correctional Association (ACA), the national accrediting body recognized by the United States of America. The facility can house approximately 1,000 incarcerated individuals that have been convicted of various crimes and sentenced to serve time in the Department of Corrections. The incarcerated individuals come from different backgrounds and have varying sentences. There are a variety of security measures including cameras, controlled entry and exit points, electric fence with barbed wire, routine searches, and trained staff who are responsible for maintaining order and security for everyone.

Data suggests that approximately 80% of the staff commute over 50 miles one way to work, while only about 20% of the staff live near the facility. The facility is rurally located. There are approximately 300 staff members currently employed at this location. The physical layout of the facility includes various building and units designed to accommodate different aspects of incarcerated life such as housing units, dining areas, recreational spaces, education

spaces, administrative offices, and medical facilities. These facilities are enclosed by security fences and monitored by security staff. The interior courtyard is well maintained with an extensive grass area and a brick planter with flag poles adorned with flowering plants in the warm months.

The Colorado Department of Corrections is Headquartered out of Colorado Springs, Co and is a para-military type organization that was established in 1871. The Executive Leadership Team for the organization have a reformatory vision that pushes the agency to think of itself as a keystone at the intersection of public safety and social change (Fleming, 2019). There are approximately 6,000 staff members in 19 correctional facilities and many parole offices across the state.

Participants

The selection criteria were guided and informed by the literature review (Glesne, 2016). The literature review suggested that the experiences of correctional series staff in a correctional facility have the most interaction with the incarcerated population on an ongoing basis. However, this study was not limited to correctional series staff, but included all staff members across the spectrum of job duties. As Glesne suggests, the rationale for choosing the participants was based upon the associated Social Bond Theory (Hirschi, 1969), a thorough review of the literature, the methodological framework, personal experiences and hunches of staff concerning safety and what is learned through any pilot study conducted (Glesne, 2016, p. 53).

Snowball sampling was used to identify potential participants. This type of sampling is used to select a group of participants who are chosen because they belong to a specialized population; in this case, they were current or former employees of the Colorado Department of Corrections who have worked at a specific correctional facility for some time of their career.

This method relied on the connections and networks of the initial participants to refer additional participants, forming a “snowball” effect as the sample size grows. In the context of a study on compassionate empathy and safety in a correctional facility, the snowball method was a valuable approach for identifying potential participants willing to share their insights and experiences (O’Leary, 2005).

This study was conducted with 25 volunteer participants. All participants were clearly explained the purpose of the study, the data collection process, and how their privacy is protected. Participants are active, retired, and no longer employed with the agency. All participants were a minimum of 18 years old, which is the minimum age for employment with the agency. The informed consent sample is included in Appendix D. It clearly explained the purpose of the study, the data collection process, and how their privacy is protected and was secured from all potential participants. Ethical guidelines throughout the process were followed and all participants selected pseudonyms to protect their identity in the research process.

Procedures

This exploratory research project is unique in the focus on the use of compassionate empathy and empathetic practices from a variety of potential influences and required novel ways of interpreting the issue of safety. The use of a qualitative research procedure, helped paint a clear picture of the historical and present safety conditions at this Colorado correctional facility as well as elucidated safety trends, if they exist. O’Leary (2005) states:

“The collection of research data needs to be rigorous. In fact, it is the systematic and rigorous nature of your approach that will help define your data as more than anecdotal evidence, and act to give credibility to your eventual findings. Data collection is a complicated process that needs to be tackled in a thoughtful and methodical manner” (O’Leary, 2005, p. 100).

The first step in conducting this exploratory research study was to apply and receive permission to conduct the study through the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). IRB approval was obtained on September 28, 2023. The approval letter is included in Appendix A. The study was conducted in six stages. The first stage of potential participant selection began after IRB approval was received. The researcher created a private Facebook page group specifically for this research study. This platform served as a hub for sharing information, updates, and connecting with potential participants. All voluntarily participation in the research study on compassionate empathy included current or former staff members that have relevant experience or insights on the subject and have worked at this correctional facility.

The second stage was an invitation to potential participants listing the study objectives, qualifications, and their potential role if they opt in to the study. All study participants completed the informed consent process to proceed to the next stage.

During the third stage, participants were asked to complete and print results for the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire, preferably ahead of the interview, at their home and leisure. The scores were reviewed and discussed during the in-person interview process.

The fourth stage scheduled and conducted the one-on-one semi-structured interviews with each participant and the researcher. These sessions focused on utilizing the interview questions to gain insight, thoughts, perspectives, and suggestions from the participants on whether a relationship exists between compassionate empathy and safety at this correctional facility. Appendix E includes one sample transcript from the 25 conducted interviews.

The fifth stage provided the participants with an emailed transcript of the interview so they can conduct a member check to ensure the accuracy and validity of the collected data by the

researcher. If any errors, misunderstandings, bias, or other troubling data was represented in the transcript, the member participant made corrections and clarifications with the researcher.

The sixth, and final stage, was to collect and interpret all the data to compile and write Chapter 4: Findings for the exploratory research study. The study will be made available by email link for participant members after acceptance by the university and upon publication.

It is important to be mindful that researchers invariably underestimate the amount of time needed to conduct thorough research where qualitative methods are part of the process. Equally important is to not become discouraged by such delays (Glesne, 2016). A comprehensive timetable and guidelines for what needed to happen at each interval helped with managing feasibility of the big project as well as being flexible and adapt to change to stay the course.

If a relationship between compassionate empathy and safety exists, the results of this study can provide an operational framework to train employees in the use of empathetic practices to make correctional facilities safer for everyone. These findings contribute to the body of knowledge on compassionate empathy in the corrections profession.

The Researcher's Role

Much research in criminal justice is conducted to explore a specific problem, known as exploratory research (Maxfield & Babbie, 2017, p. 12). Typically, a researcher is interested in a particular topic where little is known about the issue and why it occurs. An exploratory research project might collect data on a measure to establish a baseline against which future changes can be compared and examined more thoroughly. The researcher has been an educator for eleven years. Of those, seven years were spent inside both a county jail and a state correctional facility, in two separate states. The researcher has searched long and hard for methods that worked to connect incarcerated students to staff and others to encourage and nurture both student learning

and success in the classroom and success in students' daily lives inside a correctional facility. For this researcher, one method that has had proven results, is the use of compassionate empathy and connecting with the students on an equal level, whenever possible inside the classroom.

The researchers experience as an educator in correctional facility classrooms helped elucidate some interesting phenomena. Upon reflection of class sessions with less than desirable outcomes, there was always a precipitating factor. It involved the teacher stepping away from the normal position of compassionate empathy as a cornerstone of classroom management. Once there was no longer a genuine connection with a student or students, the classroom engagement was broken and the attention always turned to things that the teacher did not want. From the perspective of this researcher, this premise held true whether the students were in elementary classrooms, or they were adult students in corrections classrooms. How the teacher first acts or reacts to an event in the classroom setting could accurately predict and guide outcomes for students.

When a class lesson was going 'sideways', if the researcher could stop themselves from reacting negatively and even apologize for their role in the events, they have been able to bring the student(s) back on line with engagement in the material and better outcomes and results. If the social bond between teacher and student(s) was broken, this is when the troubles start in a classroom, and it can spread like wildfire. Understanding the nuances of these predictable behaviors across multiple classroom settings led the researcher to think about how other correctional staff could use these skills of empathy to keep themselves and others safe behind facility walls. Communicating with others, especially in a rule heavy environment is one of the most difficult skills correctional staff are tasked with daily in completing. The researcher wanted

to know if the use of compassionate empathy used as a communication starting point, makes a difference in outcomes?

The thought process for this study is to see if this premise held true to other correctional facility staff as a measure for safety. The assumption the researcher is making with this study is that how people treat each other matters. It matters to ourselves and it matters to other staff. The researcher will need to be mindful that all personal bias, assumptions, and influences need to be set aside in the role of data collection and data analysis to allow the data from the participants to speak for itself. The conceptualization of this study involved a mental process to take fuzzy and imprecise notions or concepts of compassionate empathy and make them more specific and precise for a broader audience.

Bracketing is a technique used in qualitative research to help researchers acknowledge and manage their own biases, preconceived notions, and personal feelings during the research process (O'Leary, 2005). It is crucial for the researcher to ensure that their own feelings and opinions do not unduly influence the interpretation of data or the findings. According to Glesne, there are many methods to effectively bracket feelings and opinions that were used by the researcher in this process (Glesne, 2016), including:

- 1) **Self-Reflection:** The researcher engaged in a thorough self-reflection process. This involved identifying their own biases, assumptions, and preconceived notions about the topic of compassionate empathy and their coworkers. By acknowledging these personal perspectives, the researcher consciously worked to set them aside during data collection and analysis.
- 2) **Maintain Objectivity:** The researcher was committed to maintaining objectivity throughout the study. This meant approaching the research with an open mind and a

- willingness to accept findings that may challenge their initial beliefs. By reminding themselves of this commitment, researchers can avoid selectively interpreting data to align with their own opinions.
- 3) **Reflexive Journaling:** The researcher kept a reflexive journal to record personal thoughts, feelings, and reflections about the research process. It provided a safe space for the researcher to explore their biases and reactions as they engaged with the data. The journal was regularly reviewed to help identify moments where personal biases might be affecting the interpretation.
 - 4) **Peer Review and Feedback:** The researcher engaged in regular discussions with colleagues and mentors who are not directly involved in the study which provided valuable insights. Sharing of findings and interpretations with others helped identify areas where personal biases might be influencing the analysis.
 - 5) **Triangulation:** Utilizing multiple data sources, such as interviews, observations, and the Toronto Empathy questionnaire results entered into NVivo Analysis Software, this provided triangulation that reduced the risk of drawing conclusions solely based on the researcher's perspective.
 - 6) **Refocus on Participants' Voices:** During data analysis, the researcher consistently focused on the participants' voices and experiences. This helped ground the analysis in the data itself rather than the researcher's personal opinions.
 - 7) **Ongoing Monitoring:** Throughout the research process, the researcher continually checked in with themselves to ensure that their biases are not interfering with the integrity of the study.

The Colorado Department of Corrections is the researcher's employer. The researcher wants to conduct research that can modify practices, policies, and procedures if necessary to increase safety inside a correctional facility. An exploratory research design is inexpensive, interactive, unrestricted, and open-ended in nature (Creswell, 2002). Researchers often conduct research within their organizations by gathering data that can be instrumental in the ability to either modify, refine, and improve what it is that they do, or to make recommendations that can influence the practices of others within a particular setting (O'Leary, 2005, p. 8). The researcher was a former vocational educator at this facility and wants to look for ways to increase safety for all staff and incarcerated residents in this workplace. The researcher's current position is Wellness Concierge that focuses on all aspects of employee wellness. In this new role, outside of a classroom and away from a facility, objectivity has increased about the various factors that affect and influence employee wellness, especially physical and psychological safety.

While the upside of researching within an organization of employment is ease of access to people and data, the downside was setting aside personal experiences and biases. It was important that the study parameters are adhered to and ensure that the data conveys the participants experiences through structured and textural descriptions of their experiences alone, regarding compassionate empathy and empathetic practices. One method to ensure this separation is the real goal of any 'reporting' which is to provide engaging explanation and clear illumination to the audience so they can see the consequence of the research journey (O'Leary, 2005, p. 272). Additionally, providing confirmation checks to the participants to ensure their voice was heard and reported accurately by the researcher from transcripts was helpful. The goal was to produce an unbiased research account to the stakeholders of the Colorado Department of

Corrections, with the potential to make a difference in terms of safety to all the people who work and live at a correctional facility.

The very title of this study is “Do Something” which is a call to action to go beyond simply understanding others and sharing their feelings, but to move a person to act, and to help wherever they can. The researcher held their biases in check but had a driving curiosity to determine if a relationship between compassionate empathy and safety exist in this Colorado correctional facility and what that could mean for the field of corrections if there is a proven relationship.

Data Collection

The ability to answer any research question is highly reliant on a researcher getting hands on, and making sense of the available data (O’Leary, 2015, p. 98). The data collection and analysis of the data is the heart and soul of any credible research study. The goal of researching real-world problems is to gather data or information that can help us target strategies for change. The key to data collection is appreciating a problem situation as it is understood by the people most affected by it and building empathetic understandings is difficult but essential for any change to occur (O’Leary, 2015, p. 158).

This exploratory research study involved asking potential individuals for their participation in the study. A pre-assessment with a valid and informal measure of empathy, the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire was utilized, followed by in depth semi-structured interviews. The data was verified by confirmation checks with the participants. Finally, the data was analyzed and compiled using triangulation software, NVivo to write Chapter 4: Findings, of this exploratory study.

Participant Analysis

The nuanced method of finding, accessing, and evaluating potential participant selection is key to getting the right “voices” into the study. The people most affected by the issue of safety are the subject matter experts, regardless of their title. Using the “snowball” method of recruitment helped surpass the goal of the researcher to interview 20 participants, with 25 completing the process. The potential participants were confirmed to meet the research study criteria, and informed consent documents were given and signed by study participants. Informed consent is an expected part of ethics board requirements. Qualitative researchers must give potential research participants information about the research purposes, the procedures, and the expected ways of sharing the research results and that their participation is voluntary and revokable at any time (Glesne, 2016, p. 160). Member confirmation checks after the interview process were an important aspect of this study to confirm credibility. A timeline of the research process and what their required participation to the study (if accepted) was presented to each potential participant.

Questionnaires

Research is always partial, always fragmented, and always co-constructed by the participants and the researcher (Glesne, 2016, p. 128). The researcher used a standardized measure of each participants empathy knowledge and practice as a “jumping off” point for the level of empathy that each participant brought to the interview process. Each study participant was asked to complete an initial empathy questionnaire prior to the actual in-person interview stage. The Toronto Empathy Questionnaire sample and a table of the results, including whether participants felt empathy was a teachable skill are included in Appendix C.

The Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (free and available on-line at: <https://psychology-tools.com/test/toronto-empathy-questionnaire>) was assigned to participants to complete and print results at their convenience, but prior to the interview process. Psychology Tools is a free to use website dedicated to providing psychology professionals, students, and the public with transparent access to academically validated psychological assessment tools. The website strives to provide tests, questionnaires, and assessments in the most streamlined format possible, through a simple interface coupled with automatic scoring. Additionally, they only use assessments derived from scholarly psychological journals which have a history of practical application. The automatic scoring system is designed to save time, prevent human error, and demystify the scoring process. The results include both raw scores and indicative score ranges wherever possible (Psychology Tools.com, 2023).

Empathy is an important component of social cognition and the basis for this exploratory study. Therefore, having a baseline level measurement of participant empathy was crucial. While the concept of empathy is multifaceted, this unidimensional measure framework leaves a gap in some understanding, but it does offer a single, homogenous construct that gives common conceptions a single underlying score factor. The Toronto Empathy Questionnaire is a brief, reliable, and valid instrument for the assessment of empathy (Spreng, et al., 2008). The interviews included discussions of the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire results for each participant.

Interviews

According to O’Leary, “the job of a researcher is to talk only enough to facilitate someone else’s ability to answer (O’Leary, 2005). This reminder is especially important in qualitative research to give voice to the interviewee who holds the answers a researcher is

seeking. This exploratory study seeks to gain the insight, thoughts, reflections, and perspectives of staff members inside a correctional facility that have experience and expertise on safety incidents during their job duties.

What the researcher aims to discern with this study is the difference between knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge refers to the accumulation of information and understanding through education, experience, and research. It is the familiarity with facts, concepts, theories, and principles. Wisdom, on the other hand, refers to the ability to apply knowledge and experience to make sound judgments and decisions. It involves insight, good judgment, and the ability to perceive and evaluate situations with discernment. Wisdom requires not just knowledge but also the ability to reflect on that knowledge, understand its first-hand implications, and apply it in practical ways. In summary, knowledge is what you know, while wisdom is how you use that knowledge to make good choices and navigate the world. While many people have knowledge on safety matters inside a correctional facility, the staff that have lived this experience have potentially moved to wisdom.

The researcher has chosen one-on-one, qualitative semi-structured interview questions as the research instrument for these reasons: 1) to develop rapport and trust with the participants, 2) to gather rich, in-depth data, 3) to allow for nonverbal as well as verbal data, 4) to be flexible enough to allow participants to explore tangents, and 5) to be structured enough to generate standardized, quantifiable data (O'Leary, 2005, p. 114). The semi-structured interview used a pre-established list of questions, in a pre-determined order, with a standard mode of delivery. There were prompts and probes that are pre-determined to keep the interview on track. Standardized data regarding staff's wisdom regarding safety incidents was the goal of the interview questions.

The researcher recruited 25 participants. Job classification, age, gender, or time on the job will not be considered factors in participant selection, only their involvement in a safety incident which can include anything from verbal assault, sexual harassment, to physical harm while on the job which was a participant requirement for the study. Once participants replied with their willingness to be involved in the research study, they received a timeline for interviews and data confirmation checks for scheduling purposes.

Semi- structured interviews were conducted at a mutually agreed private location outside of working hours of both the participant and the researcher. The participant interviews were all conducted by the researcher. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym (picked by themselves) to ensure complete confidentiality during the research process. The interviews were recorded and field notes were collected. After the interview, the researcher utilized Nvivo for transcript production and for thematic categorization of data. Data confirmation checks were provided to participants as soon as possible after the interview to ensure validity of the data collected and accurate capturing of their narrative story in response to the interview questions. Following are the research questions asked:

- 1) Introduce yourself to me as if we were meeting for the first time.
- 2) Tell me about your Toronto Empathy Questionnaire results. Were there any surprises for you with these results?
- 3) What is your current understanding of the phrase “compassionate empathy”?
- 4) In what ways do you think your use of (or lack of use of) empathetic practices on the job contribute to outcomes for others?
- 5) Tell me what you remember about any training DOC has provided around using empathetic practices? Could you recommend a way to increase this type of training that would be meaningful to you?

- 6) Can you recall any experience with compassionate empathy, either giving or receiving this term in your own life, and if so, how has that influenced you?
- 7) What concerns (if any) do you have for your safety or that of coworkers?
- 8) Do you think safety relates to empathy? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?
- 9) Have you heard of the term ‘dynamic security,’ and what is your understanding of this concept?
- 10) What is the most satisfying and least satisfying aspect of your job with DOC? Do you have any suggestions for DOC on improving your job satisfaction?
- 11) Do you have anything else to share?

The recorded interviews were done on a cell phone and uploaded into the Nvivo software that was on a personal researcher, password protected computer. General note taking was also used during each interview. The general note taking captured cues and data that the researcher found significant. This included things such as tearing up during a question, a participant being noticeably uncomfortable during the process, or facial expressions that might be missed by an audio recording alone. The phone audio interviews have been uploaded into the computer and deleted from the phone. At the conclusion of this study and dissertation approval, they will be permanently deleted from the researcher’s computer.

There were several factors considered in the structured, one-on-one interview process to capture a clear voice and understandable narrative from the participants. The researcher must clearly and succinctly articulate to themselves and the research participants what they are after in terms of ‘data’ and exercise rigor instead of a haphazard approach to data collection (O’Leary, 2005). It is the job of the researcher to ensure these goals are met. Several participants mentioned giving the “correct answers” and they were reassured that there are no “right” or “wrong”

answers to any of these questions, that their thoughts and opinions are the “correct answers” in this case.

Data Analysis

While the gathering of credible data is a daunting task, the analysis of this data and making meaning from it is an equally important task (O’Leary, 2005). The entire purpose of an exploratory research project is to help a researcher build understanding about the problem of the research. This type of research is usually carried out when a problem is at a preliminary stage of investigation. To the researchers’ knowledge, there is no study that specifically looks at compassionate empathetic practices as it relates to safety inside a correctional facility. This data helps fill the void in the research literature. O’Leary (2005) suggests engaging in a creative and inspired analysis using a methodical and organized approach to move from disjointed raw data to rich, meaningful, and eloquent understandings in a logical and systematic framework (O’Leary, 2005, p. 229). Additionally, O’Leary cautions that even the most sophisticated analysis is worthless if you cannot grasp the implications of the findings to the overall problem. Following are the steps to guide the data analysis in this exploratory research study:

1. Define the research question and objectives to ensure the data analysis process is focused and relevant. The central research question of this exploratory study will ask “Is there a relationship between the use of compassionate empathetic practices by correctional staff and overall safety at a Colorado correctional facility?” The objectives of this study are to examine the literature, ask relevant questions to staff that may hold answers, and to present the findings in a way that can help enhance safety to maintain order and control inside a correctional facility for staff and incarcerated residents a top priority.

2. Choose appropriate data collection methods. With the stated research questions and objectives, the following data collection methods were used: a) identify potential participants, b) send an invitation to participate in the study, c) create a list of respondents that are willing to participate in the study d) request participants complete the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire and print results prior to the interviews, e) schedule one-on-one structured interviews, f) provide member confirmation check before utilizing any collected data, and g) gather all data and begin to construct the findings.
3. Prepare for data analysis. After the data has been collected, it needs to be organized and prepared for analysis. This involved transcribing interviews, coding open-ended responses, and entering data into a spreadsheet and utilizing the Nvivo statistical software program.
4. Familiarize and organize the data for analysis. After member confirmation checks have been returned by participants to check for accuracy and validity and any changes are made, start by reading through the data several times to gain a general sense of what it contains. Take note of any patterns, themes, or interesting features that emerge. For a study on compassionate empathy, the analysis might involve identifying patterns in staff behavior or attitudes towards empathy, and exploring the relationship between empathy and outcomes such as staff burnout or recidivism rates.
5. Interpret the findings: Once the data has been analyzed, the findings need to be interpreted in the context of the research question and objectives. This involved discussing the implications of the findings for theory, practice, or policy.
6. Communicate the results: Finally, the results of the data analysis need to be communicated in a clear and concise manner. This involved writing the findings in a

dissertation paper and creating visualizations such as charts or graphs to illustrate the results.

The power of an exploratory, qualitative research design lies in the ability to shift from a top-down system of imposed answers that may not work because those at the receiving end are misunderstood or ignored. To shift to the vision that allows participants who are subject matter experts on issues of safety inside a correctional facility to incorporate this knowledge and wisdom into a part of their vision and their goals of sustainable change (O'Leary, 2005). Instead of a staff member being part of a problem, they have shifted to become part of a solution. Solutions that reflect the needs, desires, and goals of relevant stakeholders are sure to produce more lasting results towards complex and real-world problems.

Trustworthiness

Simply put, trust is the reliability, ability, or strength to believe in something or someone. According to Glesne (2016), it is about “alertness to the quality and rigor of a study and what sorts of criteria can be used to assess how well the research was carried out” (Glesne, 2016, p. 53). There are certain specific criteria to judge the research methods of the technique of data collection, analysis, and interpretation of a research design. This criteria for trustworthiness contain four areas of consideration and those are credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It demonstrates to the academic community that the research has been conducted in an ethical, rigorous, and systematic way, and that the results can be trusted as a basis for future studies.

To ensure trustworthiness in a dissertation, researchers must adhere to ethical standards, use appropriate research methods, and report their findings accurately and transparently. This includes providing detailed descriptions of the research methods, presenting the data in a clear

and unbiased way, and acknowledging any potential limitations or biases in the study (Glesne, 2016).

The research methods used in this exploratory study included participant selection for the study, a self-report instrument in the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire, an interview section with each participant, followed by confirmation checks of the transcript and analysis of the data into the findings and conclusions section.

Potential limitations of this study include transferability to other correctional facilities. Staff members may perceive the use of compassionate empathy as a potential safety risk. Staff members in correctional facilities are often trained to maintain a professional distance from incarcerated residents to ensure their own safety and the safety of other staff members. Therefore, the use of compassionate empathy could be perceived as a breach of this professional distance and could lead to concerns about the potential for violence or manipulation by incarcerated individuals. This could make it challenging for staff members to adopt and implement the use of compassionate empathy in their interactions with inmates, and could limit the generalizability of the findings to other correctional facilities where safety is a primary concern. It is important for staff and administration to understand that dynamic security is similar in scope to the use of compassionate empathy. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, dynamic security is a worldwide accepted concept which requires an alert staff who interact with incarcerated residents in a positive manner and engage them in constructive activities, allowing staff to anticipate and prevent problems before they arise (UNODC, 2015). Therefore, an intense understanding by administration and policy makers that the use of compassionate empathy is like dynamic security is necessary as a measure of professionalism inside correctional facilities.

Credibility

Credibility is important in a dissertation because it is the cornerstone of a high-quality research study. A credible dissertation is one that is well-designed, well-executed, and well-supported by evidence, and is therefore more likely to be accepted by the academic community to influence future research and policy decisions. This exploratory research study is being conducted to provide knowledge to the field of corrections and possible ways to increase safety for staff and the incarcerated population inside correctional facilities.

The credibility criteria must involve establishing that any results of qualitative research are credible and believable from the perspective of the research participant, not from the perspective of the researcher (O'Leary, 2005). When looking at the concepts of compassionate empathy and safety, it was described and understood from the perspective of the participant's eyes. Therefore, only the participants are the ones who can legitimately judge the credibility of the results. The strategy of member confirmation checking will be utilized to confirm with participants about the accuracy of the interpretation of feedback, thoughts, and use of those items to guide this process.

This exploratory study is based on a thorough review of existing literature, the research methods are appropriate and well-suited to the research questions, and the data is valid, reliable, and accurately analyzed by member confirmation checks (Glesne, 2016). The researcher in this study is employed by the organization under study and has previously worked in the location with potential staff participants involved in the research project. The researcher maintained ethical standards during the research, paying special attention to bracket their own biases and perspectives and evolved as necessary as research perspectives grow and participation increased (Glesne, 2016, p. 175).

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability and confirmability are important in a dissertation because they are essential for establishing the reliability and validity of research findings. Dependability refers to the consistency and stability of research findings over time and across different contexts. A dependable dissertation ensures that the research process is well-documented and transparent, and that the findings can be replicated by other researchers. This helps to establish the generalizability of the findings and the robustness of the research methods. Confirmability, on the other hand, refers to the objectivity and neutrality of the research findings. A confirmable dissertation ensures that the research process is free from bias or opinion, and that the findings are based solely on the data collected. This helps to establish the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings and the research process (Glesne, 2016).

To establish dependability and confirmability in a dissertation, researchers must document their research methods and procedures in detail, and provide a clear and transparent account of their data collection and analysis. They must also acknowledge any potential biases or limitations in their study and demonstrate how they have addressed them. Additionally, they should make their data available for review and replication by other researchers (O’Leary, 2005).

The very notion of dependability, is based on replicability or repeatability of the research and whether we would arrive at the same conclusions if the research was repeated. However, when dealing with real-world, complex issues, the researcher needs to be cognizant of the everchanging context in which research occurs (O’Leary, 2005). No two settings can be identical and these changes will or should affect the outcomes of the researcher approach to looking at any phenomenon in qualitative research.

This aspect of qualitative research assumes that each researcher brings a unique perspective to the research study (Glesne, 2016). Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results could be confirmed or corroborated by others. There are various accepted strategies for enhancing confirmability. A researcher can document the procedures for checking and rechecking the data with member participants throughout a study. Additionally, after the study, a researcher can conduct a data audit that makes judgements about the potential for bias or distortion in the research process (Glesne, 2016; O’Leary, 2005)

In summary, dependability and confirmability are important in a dissertation because they ensure the reliability, validity, and objectivity of the research findings. A dependable and confirmable dissertation is essential for establishing the credibility and trustworthiness of the research, and for contributing to the advancement of knowledge in a particular field. For this exploratory study, that field is the corrections community.

Transferability

Transferability is important because it enables researchers to apply their findings to other contexts or populations beyond the specific study. This refers to the extent beyond a particular sample or setting that your data can have influence. Transferability is concerned with whether findings of the study can be generalized to other studies, sites, or participants (Patton, 2015, p. 385.) Additionally, Glesne (2016) urges researchers to go beyond the research process and to ask questions of the purposes and outcomes of the research work (Glesne, 2016, p. 154).

This study was conducted with staff at a maximum-security men’s correctional facility with approximately 1,000 incarcerated residents in the Colorado Department of Corrections organization. Participant staff members were selected based on the snowball method of recruiting regardless of job classification, length of time on the job, gender, or age. Participation

was voluntary and involved data collected from the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire and in-depth interviews, with member checks to ensure fidelity of the interview transcript.

Future research based on these findings could include exploring the impact of compassionate empathy on recidivism rates of the incarcerated population to see if a relationship exists between these two factors. Also, the role of training programs in promoting the use of compassionate empathy or dynamic security to increase safety inside correctional facilities can be explored. Lastly, any potential connection between the use of compassionate empathy by staff and job satisfaction could be explored.

In summary, transferability of this study to other contexts and populations exists. The use of compassionate empathy or dynamic security is relevant and applicable to broader communities, including school settings. Future research and policy decisions based on safety data, participant perspectives, narratives, and suggestions can all be utilized to leverage the understanding and voices from staff that are in the trenches doing the work every day to keep people safe inside a correctional facility.

Ethical Considerations

For this exploratory research study, there were several ethical considerations that are addressed. What is researched and how the inquiry is designed relate to both the philosophical and ethical stance on the purpose and nature of any research (Glesne, 2016, p. 158). The first ethical consideration is to seek ethical review and approval from the Liberty University institutional review board (IRB) before conducting any research to ensure that the research meets ethical standards. This consideration was met on September 28, 2023.

The next ethical consideration is participants sharing personal information. To protect their identity, all the study participants picked pseudonyms. Additionally, to protect

confidentiality of any transcripts and survey instruments, they were limited to viewing by the researcher, external auditors, and peer reviewers only. All printed material was stored in a locked cabinet and any electronic copies are password protected to limit access to anyone.

Further, respect for participants included treating participants with respect, sensitivity, and cultural competence. This meant recognizing their diversity and avoiding any form of discrimination or prejudice. The researcher remained aware of any power imbalances that may exist between themselves and the participants. The researcher does not have any supervisory influence over any participants at the correctional facility but does work in a capacity to provide help and support for these staff at an organizational level. This issue was addressed in the informed consent literature to ensure and promise that there is no possibility of negative repercussions in the support role of the researcher for anything that happens in the research process.

It should also be noted that there was an ethical consideration for the potential for conflicts of interest with coworkers as research participants in my study. While the researcher does not work inside the correctional facility at the present time, they did work there previously for five years. As a human collection instrument and a person who has strong views on empathetic practices with the incarcerated population, the researcher was always cognizant not to share any information about their own personal experiences surrounding the concepts of compassion, empathy, or safety. The close and intimate relationships with previous coworkers might provide for less boundaries to overcome in information sharing with participants but did not bias any data collected. It is very important to balance rapport as the researcher examining empathetic practices and exercising any undue influence on the data. The position of the researcher to the research goals remained clearly delineated throughout this research process.

Researcher reflexivity about their own positionality and how it may influence the research process and findings always remained in the researcher's framework reference during the entire process.

Data was collected and analyzed with integrity, ensuring that the data was accurate and that the analysis was transparent and unbiased. Confirmation checks were required by participants to guarantee that their voices were represented in the data prior to utilizing the data in the analysis stage. A confirmation check is important because it helps to ensure that information or actions are correct and accurate. It is a way of verifying or double-checking information or actions to avoid errors, mistakes, or misunderstandings. In qualitative research, confirmation checks help ensure that the intended message has been received and understood correctly. This helps prevent misunderstandings, confusion, or misinterpretation of information. Overall, confirmation checks are an important tool for improving accuracy, preventing errors, and ensuring that information or actions are correct and appropriate (O'Leary, 2015). All 25 participants completed a member check prior to utilizing any data for content analysis.

Finally, participants are offered access to the study after completion and approval by Liberty University. The researcher hopes that in addition to the included research accounts, research deliverables can include: recommendations, action plans, procedures, protocols, guidelines, and programs; tools and kits; prototypes and models; policy; and education and awareness materials to be utilized by corrections professionals. It is important to understand the target audience and what they might find useful in the research, what their expectations are, and what reactions they may have to the work (O'Leary, 2015, p. 287). This exploratory research study will help fill the gaps in knowledge of proven strategies in managing difficult populations.

Summary

Chapter 3 presents the methodology employed in this qualitative study, which seeks to explore the use of compassionate empathy by correctional staff within a Colorado correctional facility. Grounded in the understanding that exploratory research aims to delve into a problem and its surrounding areas without necessarily reaching definitive conclusions (O’Leary, 2005), this study endeavors to illuminate the extent to which staff members employ compassionate empathy in their interactions with incarcerated individuals, as well as how it is perceived by the staff and the incarcerated population.

The choice of an exploratory research design was deliberate, driven by the researcher’s interest in investigating the potential relationship between the use of compassionate empathetic practices by staff and overall safety within the correctional facility. This design facilitated a nuanced exploration of the research questions, allowing for a comprehensive examination of why, how, and what factors influence safety within this unique context (O’Leary, 2005).

Central to the study’s relevance is its potential to provide valuable insights into the benefits and challenges associated with the implementation of compassionate empathy in correctional settings. By collecting data through interviews with staff members, the study aimed to capture diverse perspectives and experiences, thereby enriching the understanding of this complex phenomenon.

The methodology involved a thorough analysis of the collected data to identify key themes and patterns, which will be instrumental in generating meaningful insights and informing future research endeavors and policy decisions pertaining to the use of compassionate empathy in correctional facilities. Ultimately, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse surrounding the importance of providing compassionate care in correctional settings, with the overarching

goal of enhancing the safety and well-being of staff members and the incarcerated population alike.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

Correctional facility staff experience exposure to violence and other safety risks at higher rates than workers in most other occupations (Cullen et al., 1985). Additionally, all correctional staff play an integral role in the overall safety of correctional facilities and the unpredictable nature of these work environments requires staff to be ready for any number of emergency scenarios. As stated in Chapter 1, this exploratory study aims to see if a relationship exists between staff's use of compassionate empathy and safety inside a Colorado Department of Correction Facility. This chapter will give an overview of the Problem and Purpose Statements. This chapter contains a section on research participants, results, discussion, and data summary. Chapter 5: Conclusion will answer the research question.

Participants

There were 25 participants in the study conducted from September 2023 until mid-December 2023. There were 15 males and 10 females. There were 259 years of combined CDOC experience, with an overall average of 10.36 years on the job. The least experienced staff was a female employed less than a year, and the most experienced staff was a female employed over 31 years. The modal for the most years is five years at six participants, followed by 16 years for three participants. One retired and two staff are no longer with the department. Several have worked at other facilities or agencies, including one that worked in corrections in another country. The racial demographics include 16 White, 5 Black, and 4 Hispanic.

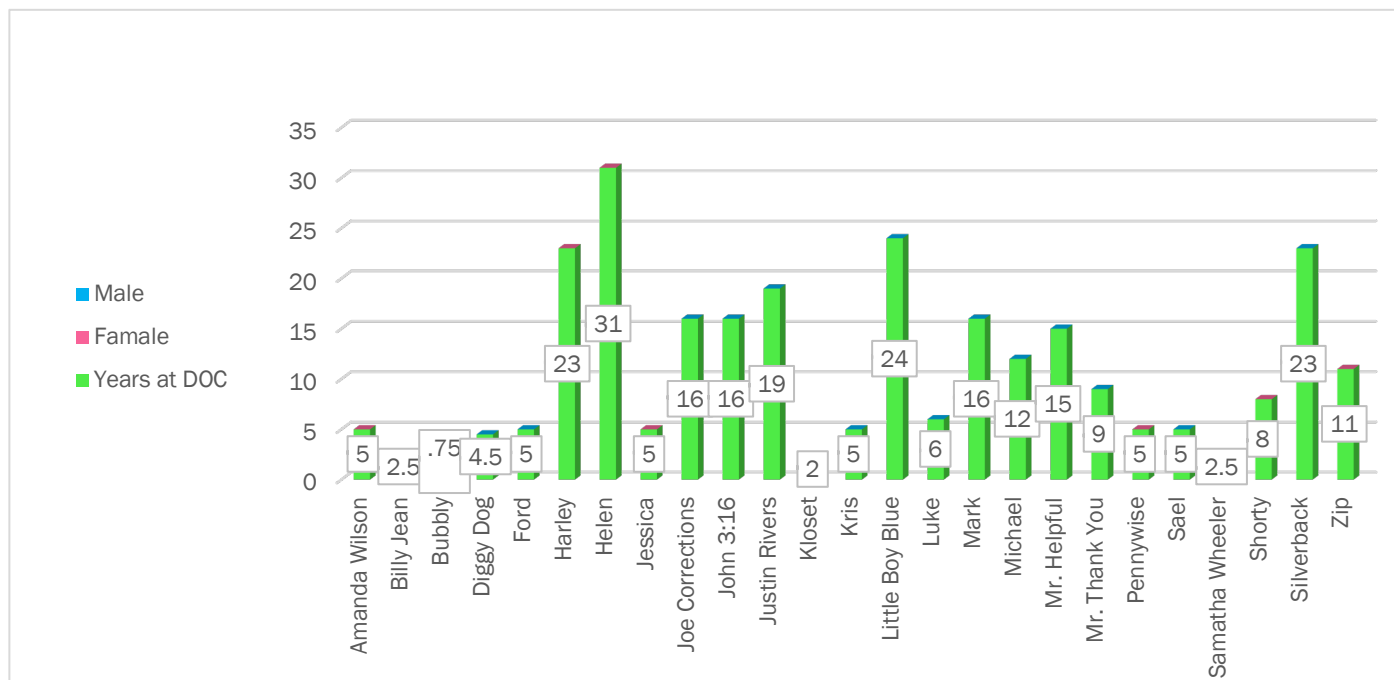


Figure 1 – *Demographics of Study Participants (Years of service to DOC and Gender)*

Pseudonyms were used and picked by each participant to protect their identities. Various work roles included correctional officers, who have worked in housing, security, kitchen, visiting, recreation, maintenance, armory, and Correctional Industries. There were sergeants, lieutenants, education and support staff, mental health and parole staff, Correctional Industries staff, information technology, administration, and other support roles in the CDOC.

A pseudonym refers to each participant. No real names are referenced in this study.

Following are composite descriptions of each of the participants:

Amanda Wilson (AW) – This participant is a seasoned mental health provider with over a decade of experience in three different state Department of Corrections (DOC) systems.

Dedicated to supporting the mental well-being of incarcerated individuals, she brings extensive knowledge and expertise to her role. Despite facing challenges within correctional environments, AW remains committed to fostering empathy and understanding among both patients and staff.

While recognizing the limitations of standardized empathy assessments, she believes in the teachability of empathy and advocates for ongoing training to enhance compassion and safety in correctional settings. AW emphasizes the importance of empathetic communication in achieving positive outcomes and strives to create a supportive environment for everyone within the criminal justice system.

Billy Jean (BJ) – This participant is a seasoned maintenance Sergeant with five years of experience within the CDOC system. With a background in security at a mental hospital, he plays a pivotal role in overseeing maintenance operations within the correctional facility. While focusing on operational aspects, BJ interacts regularly with incarcerated individuals, demonstrating notable empathy in his supervision. His above-average score on the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ), highlights his capacity for understanding and connecting with others, even within the constraints and challenges of a correctional environment. BJ firmly believes that empathy is a teachable skill, advocating for its integration into staff training to promote positive relationships and respect among incarcerated individuals. Dedicated to fostering empathy and compassion, BJ seeks to improve overall well-being and rehabilitation outcomes in the correctional setting.

Bubbly (BU) – This participant is a newly employed security officer within the CDOC. With less than one year of experience, she brings a fresh perspective and enthusiasm to her role in maintaining facility security. Despite her brief tenure, she demonstrates remarkable empathy, reflected in her above-average score on the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ). She values empathy as crucial to building relationships with coworkers and incarcerated individuals, actively seeking to establish rapport, and understanding. She expresses disappointment by the lack of teamwork and camaraderie among colleagues but remains committed to upholding

principles of empathy and collaboration. Outside of work, she finds solace in nature walks. Despite challenges, BU's resilience and dedication to fostering a supportive work environment exemplify her commitment to positive outcomes in the correctional setting, making her a beacon of compassion and understanding, striving to make meaningful impact on the lives of staff and incarcerated individuals.

Diggy Dog (DD) - This participant is a seasoned computer support provider within the CDOC system. With nearly nine years of experience, he brings extensive knowledge from previous roles as a corrections officer and teacher. Despite transitioning out of the correctional facility on a day-to-day basis, DD's empathetic nature remains evident, supported by his above-average score on the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ). He recognizes empathy's role in fostering positive relationships and communication, advocating for personal accountability and self-awareness among staff. DD values the camaraderie shared among coworkers, viewing it as crucial for resilience in the challenging DOC environment. However, he criticizes ego-driven behaviors that undermine teamwork and collective well-being. DD's journey provides unique insights into empathy, teamwork, and organizational dynamics within the CDOC system, contributing to a deeper understanding of the complexities of promoting a culture of empathy and mutual respect within correctional institutions.

Ford (FO) – This participant is a security officer with seven years of experience across three different DOC facilities, gaining insights into security and mental health care intersections. His above-average empathy, as indicated by the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ) score, drives him to apply the Golden Rule, fostering respect and cooperation among staff and incarcerated. FO is concerned about staffing shortages, emphasizes the need for safety and well-being. He leverages relationships with families to establish rapport with incarcerated

individuals and influence positive behavior and rehabilitation, recognizing the human aspect of incarceration. Despite challenges, his commitment to dialogue and de-escalation has resulted in minimal use of force incidents, contributing to a safer correctional environment.

Harley (HA) – This participant is retired after dedicating an impressive 24 years to her career in the DOC. She demonstrated above-average empathy with her Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ). Her correctional system tenure was marked by resilience, leadership, and a commitment to vocational education with the incarcerated population. As a supervisor of incarcerated individuals in a technical vocation, HA was pivotal in facilitating skill development and rehabilitation opportunities. Through her guidance and mentorship, many incarcerated were able to acquire valuable vocational skills that could potentially pave the way for a successful reintegration into society upon release. Despite a harrowing attack by an incarcerated person, seven years into her career, she demonstrated remarkable resilience by returning to her duties and continuing her service for an additional 17 years. HA embodies dedication to rehabilitation and her legacy extends far beyond her years of service, leaving an indelible mark on the vocational education programs she championed and the countless people whose lives were positively influenced by her leadership and dedication in vocational programs.

Helen (HE) – This participant has an extensive background in corrections, boasting over 32 years of experience within the field, and specializing in a special housing unit. Despite scoring below-average on the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ), she adeptly manages this challenging population with tailored, pragmatic strategies. HE has developed a nuanced understanding of the incarcerated population, recognizing that individual within this environment may not always process information in the same way as those outside of it. She views the facility as a microcosm of society's discarded individuals, likening her role to that of a mother managing

a frat house – a testament to the challenges inherent in maintaining order and stability within such an environment. While she values dynamic security, she finds the implementation of dynamic chronicles burdensome, viewing them as a bureaucratic imposition that adds little value to the safety and security of safety. HE's nuanced approach reflects deep understanding of correctional complexities, highlighting challenges staff encounter in maintaining safety and order.

Jessica (JE) - This participant with five years of experience in corrections, balances her role with single motherhood, offering a unique perspective. Scoring above-average empathy on the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ), she consistently demonstrates compassion and understanding. JE firmly believes that empathy is teachable and advocates for its cultivation among staff. She seeks clarity on concepts like dynamic security and supports comprehensive training for a more inclusive work environment. Committed to positive change, she aims for a more humane approach to rehabilitation and incarceration.

Joe Corrections (JC) – This participant is a Lieutenant with many years of diverse experience in the military and 16 years of extensive experience across various departments within corrections. His military background shapes his leadership style, emphasizing structure and order. JC holds a pragmatic view of dynamic security, prioritizing genuine connections over procedural measures. He perceives the dynamic security chronicle measures as primarily procedural, aimed at fulfilling regulatory requirements rather than fostering meaningful interactions between staff and the incarcerated population. He appreciates the shift towards a calmer work environment, as it contributes to a safer and more conducive working environment for everyone.

John 3:16 (JO)- This participant has a diverse professional background, starting his

career as a corrections officer and now as a teacher in the facility. He has diligently served this organization for 16.5 years and has gained valuable insight into human behavior, conflict resolution, and the complexities of institutional dynamics. With above-average empathy scored on the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ), he believes in empathy's role in effective teaching and lead transformative trainings on trust and bias with staff and incarcerated individuals together. JO values inclusivity and collaboration, advocating for dynamic security measure that prioritize trust. He mentors younger staff, aiming to bridge generational gaps and foster responsibility. Grateful for his faith, he sees every experience as a chance for growth and remains committed to making a positive impact through education, faith, and understanding.

Justin Rivers (JR) - This participant is a Lieutenant with over 20 years in corrections, scoring below average empathy on the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ). While pragmatic and task-oriented, he challenges department norms and emphasizes safety. He is critical of bureaucratic hurdles and he advocates for accountability and proactive problem-solving. Despite concerns, he remains committed to his duties, finding solace in the autonomy he is allowed in his current position.

Kloset (KL) – This participant brings a unique perspective to her role as a Sergeant in the corrections field, having gained eight years of experience in a Caribbean country's correctional system before relocating to the United States. As a black woman, she navigates identity complexities and adapts seamlessly to new challenges in the US. Her average empathy score on the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ) reflects her ability to understand and relate to others. KL advocates for mental health training and transparency in dynamic security measures. She identifies areas for improvement in staff issues, promotion processes, and diversity within the department. Despite challenges, her insight contributes to a more inclusive approach to

correctional work.

Kris (KR) - This participant is no longer with the CDOC, leaving with five years' experience in the corrections field working in two different facilities. Despite his below-average empathy score on the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ), he gained valuable experience and insights into the correctional system's complexities. KR believes empathy is crucial for safety but emphasizes firm boundaries for security. He values camaraderie but faced challenges with negative staff. Despite considering returning to corrections, he seeks new experiences in a different state. Driven by curiosity and a desire to make an impact, KR was a dedicated professional in the field.

Little Boy Blue (LBB)- This participant is an immigrant with prior military service and has dedicated 24.5 years to working for the CDOC, serving only at this facility. He has experienced the full spectrum of the corrections profession. He scored above-average empathy on the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ). His compassionate nature guided him through triumphs and a life-threatening attack at work, displaying remarkable resilience. He understands the delicate balance between safety and empathy within the correctional environment, mentoring new staff and finding satisfaction in positive interactions with inmates. Despite frustrations with rule-breaking, he embodies resilience, empathy, and dedication in his role.

Luke (LU) – This participant is a correction Lieutenant with six years of experience in the field at several facilities across the state. LU has a family and he prioritizes work-life balance and safety. He acknowledges that empathy is not his most vital attribute, as he scored below-average empathy on the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ). However, he recognizes its importance in preventing violence and fostering a safer environment within the correctional facility. He advocates for staff well-being, mentorship, and dynamic security measures to

enhance safety and foster relationships with the incarcerated population. LU believes in proactive measures to combat burnout and monotony, striving to create a supportive work environment within the CDOC.

Mark (MA) – This participant transitioned from a distinguished 20-year military career to a 16-year tenure as a Lieutenant in the CDOC. While his below-average empathy score on the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ) surprised him, he acknowledges the challenges of empathy in the correctional environment. He believes empathy is teachable but requires willingness and receptiveness from the individual learner. MA emphasizes the importance of empathy in effective communication for safety and positive change. Despite frustrations with staff lacking empathy, he sees improvements in DOC leadership and culture. His personal experience profoundly influences his perspective on empathy, as his brother is currently incarcerated. He hopes that someone within that system can provide his brother with the support and encouragement he needs to make a lasting positive change in his life. Despite the challenges he faces in this work setting, he remains committed to making a difference in the lives of staff and incarcerated.

Michael (MI) - This Lieutenant has 12 years of DOC experience and prior military service, values compassionate empathy but scored below average on the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ). While he acknowledges empathy's importance, he finds specific training elusive within the DOC for this skill. MI believes empathy is learnable but challenging to promote in a correctional environment. He practices compassionate empathy in personal relationships, facilitating deeper understanding. In his work role, he balances safety concerns with the potential of empathy in de-escalating situations. MI perceives dynamic security as valuable but recognizes implementation challenges. He finds staff development fulfilling but

struggles with disgruntled individuals. Demonstrating a nuanced understanding of empathy, he navigates the challenges of his role with resilience and pragmatism.

Mr. Helpful (MH)- This participant brings 21 years of correctional experience, finds purpose in helping incarcerated reintegrate into society. MH had the highest score of any of the participants of above-average empathy on the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ), reflecting his deep-seated belief in empathy. He prioritizes building trust and mutual respect for incarcerated individuals, recognizing empathy's role in facilitating positive change. While MH can not recall specific empathy training within the DOC, he views empathy as a teachable skill and enhances communication. MH endorses dynamic security principles but sees room for improvement in implementation. He emphasizes knowing individuals personally to provide empathetic support. Security-related tasks for his least satisfying aspect of his job, detracting from his primary role as a mentor. Advocating for continued empathy training, he believes it fosters a culture of compassion vital for positive outcomes and rehabilitation. Through his career, MH demonstrates empathy's profound impact in fostering rehabilitation and promoting a safer, more compassionate correctional environment.

Mr. Thank You (MT) – This participant has nine years of experience as a corrections Sergeant. He initially doubted his empathy and was surprised to discover his above-average score on the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ). MT defines compassionate empathy as considering both the feelings of others and oneself, while maintaining personal boundaries. He believes empathy and humor foster positive outcomes for staff and the incarcerated population by improving communication and cooperation. He suggests enhancing empathy training by teaching trainers to convey empathetic principles effectively. MT emphasizes the correlations between safety and empathy and appreciates the UNODC's definition, which prioritizes building

personal relationships with the incarcerated. He finds humor and positive interactions to be the most satisfying aspects of his job but dislikes enforcing rules. MT believes deeper empathy understanding among staff could improve interactions and outcomes in corrections. His journey highlights empathy's transformative power in fostering positive outcomes for all involved in the correctional environment.

Pennywise (PE) – This participant served as a custody and control Sergeant for 5-1/2 years before leaving DOC to care for her first-born child. Born in a US territory, English is not her first language, but she has built a new life in Colorado. With an above-average Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ) score, she values empathy and human connection. PE defines compassionate empathy as being present for others without judgment, stressing the importance of kindness and shared humanity. Despite challenges in corrections, she believes empathetic practices benefit both staff and the incarcerated, by fostering trust and progress. She notes limited empathy training in CDOC, citing job demands as a barrier. PE sees empathy as teachable and crucial for safety, emphasizing its role in promoting a caring work environment. She appreciates efforts to move past an “us vs. them” mindset and advocates for recognizing the humanity of all individuals in corrections. Though she enjoyed teamwork, long hours away from family were challenging. Nevertheless, she maintained a positive attitude and valued her impact on others' lives. Her insights underscore the need for enhanced staff training and support, emphasizing empathy's transformative potential in corrections.

Sael (SA) - This participant is a native-born Coloradan corrections Sergeant with five years of experience, who brings membership on the CIRT team (Critical Incident Response Team). He scored above-average empathy based on the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ), defining compassionate empathy as understanding other's emotions and showing genuine care

and concern for their well-being. He emphasizes empathy's role in fostering a supportive environment and mitigating the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and promoting resilience among colleagues. While he acknowledges challenges in applying empathy to the incarcerated population, he suggests integrating programs like Mental Health First Aid to equip staff with the skills needed to navigate the complex interpersonal dynamics that exist in a correctional facility. SA highlights moments of receiving and providing empathy within the broader DOC community, emphasizing mutual support during difficult times. He recognizes empathy's potential to de-escalate conflicts but acknowledges its complexity. Familiar with dynamic security, he sees its value in promoting positive interactions despite challenges in communication boundaries. SA finds fulfillment in assisting the incarcerated transitioning back into society and expresses genuine passion for his work, underscoring empathy's importance in promoting resilience and overall well-being within the correctional facility.

Samantha Wheeler (SW) – This participant brings three years of corrections experience to her support role within the education department in the corrections facility. Scoring above-average empathy on the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ), she draws from her personal struggles, including homelessness, to treat others with dignity and respect. She defines compassionate empathy as understanding others' emotions without judgement, fostering positive relationships in the correctional environment. SW believes her approach contributes to mutual respect and cooperation among incarcerated individuals. While formal empathy training is limited, she develops her empathetic skills through life experiences. Despite safety concerns, she sees empathy as crucial for fostering a secure environment. SW is familiar with dynamic security but faces challenges in documenting interactions due to privacy concerns. She finds fulfillment in supporting others but identifies challenges in navigating interactions with colleagues and

management. She embodies empathy and human connection, contributing to a more supportive workplace culture

Shortie (SH) - This participant has served as a corrections officer and as an administration assistant in her eight years in CDOC. She has a large family, including many children and grandchildren, and her husband is also a CDOC employee. Rooted in her values of love, support, and faith, she brings compassion and empathy to her work. Scoring above average on the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ), she emphasizes the importance of self-assessment tools for personal growth and empathy development. For SH, compassionate empathy embodies kindness, acceptance, and unconditional love, which she applies in her interactions with staff and incarcerated individuals. She advocates for addressing psychological safety and supporting staff mental health. While familiar with dynamic security, she calls for clearer understanding and application within the DOC. Working in the Employee Support Program, she helps staff during tough times and advocates for recognizing the value of new staff. She suggests prioritizing staff well-being, family support, work-life balance, and fostering empathy and compassion to improve job satisfaction and retention. Her dedication to love and understanding underscores the importance of empathy and support within the correctional environment.

Silverback (SI) - This participant is a maintenance Sergeant and brings over 23 years of corrections experience along with a distinguished military career. He prioritizes empathy, respect, and understanding in his interactions. Scoring above average on the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ), he defines compassionate empathy as genuine concern for others' well-being. SI believes in using empathy to assist and counsel his incarcerated workers, aiming to reduce recidivism rates through dignity and respect. He sees empathy as a teachable skill and advocates for staff support before extending it to interactions with the incarcerated. SI stresses

the link between empathy and safety, emphasizing verbal skills and understanding in conflict resolution. While familiar with the concept of dynamic security, he interprets it as a holistic approach. Despite the lack of recognition, he finds fulfillment in fostering positive relationships with the incarcerated. Advocating for a culture of empathy and support, he aims for positive outcomes for both the staff and the incarcerated.

Zip (ZI) – This participant is a teacher for the CDOC with 11 years of experience and an additional six years of experience in a private correctional facility before coming to state service. She is married to a law enforcement officer and has two grown sons. She brings a wealth of experience and a nuanced perspective to her role. Despite scoring below average on the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ), she emphasizes understanding and respectful interactions in her teaching approach, balancing empathy with accountability. Viewing empathy as understanding without pity, she defines compassionate empathy as incorporating understanding into responses. ZI navigates the delicate balance between empathy and accountability in her teaching, humanizing interactions while instilling responsibility in her students. While she hasn't received specific empathy training from the DOC, she values practices like motivational interviewing and peer mentoring for fostering empathy. Reflecting on her journey, she emphasizes understanding perspectives and avoiding power struggles. ZI sees safety as closely linked to relationships and respect, highlighting the role of positive interactions in conflict prevention. While familiar with dynamic security, she finds satisfaction in creating supportive learning environments but expresses frustration with a lack of support for incarcerated students' needs. Through her experience, ZI emphasizes the importance of empathy and respect for safety and positive outcomes in the correctional setting.

Results

Participants were selected using a Social Media post and the snowball recruitment method. All participants signed a consent form, completed the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire before the interview, participated in an audio-recorded semi-structured interview and reviewed member checks to ensure accuracy of statements made during the interview. Themes related to their experiences working at this correctional facility were identified. The main research question is if they felt a relationship between empathy and safety exists for staff in this location.

Interview Question Responses

The researcher has previously worked with some of the participants. The first question asked was for the participant to introduce themselves to the researcher as if they were meeting for the first time. There was a total of 10 questions that followed the introduction question. The following report includes a detailed analysis of the outcomes obtained from each interview question.

Interview Question 2: “Tell me about your Toronto Empathy Questionnaire results. Were there any surprises with these results?” The Toronto Empathy Questionnaire has the highest score of 64 (Spreng et al., 2009). The scores ranged from a low of 34 to a high of 62 for the participants. The average overall scores for all 25 study members of the study were 45, the threshold for above-average empathy. There were nine members with below-average empathy and 16 had above-average empathy. There were three modes of the data set with three scoring 34 or below-average empathy, three scoring 52 or above-average empathy, and three scoring 54 which is also above-average empathy. Overall, the responses reveal a consistent theme of self-awareness among participants regarding their empathy levels, with many expressing a lack of

surprise in their scores. However, there are notable variations in how individuals reflected on personal growth, factors influencing their results including their job roles, familial influences on their empathy skills, and their confidence in their empathetic abilities. These insights emphasized the multifaceted nature of empathy, influenced by personal, professional, and familial factors.

Interview Question 3: “What is your current understanding of the phrase compassionate empathy”? Overall, twenty-three participants viewed compassionate empathy as a blend of empathy and compassion, emphasizing understanding, the difference of sympathy, and a caring attitude toward others’ feelings and situations. Many demonstrated their grasp of empathy by showing an ability to relate to and understand others’ perspectives and emotions, often described as “putting oneself in someone else’s shoes.” Participants associated compassionate empathy with caring for others, responding to their needs, and feeling a duty towards others’ well-being. Some notes that it involves understanding without merely feeling sorry for others, and a few mentioned its influence on their reactions and responses, particularly in professional contexts like teaching. Unique insights included connections between compassionate empathy and human kindness, as well as the impact of personal experiences and background on ones’ understanding of empathy.

Interview Question 4: “In what ways do you think your use of (or lack of use of) empathetic practices on the job contribute to outcomes for others?” In hindsight, this question was cumbersome and difficult for participants to understand. A more precise question would have been “Do you believe how you treat people at work affects outcomes or safety for others around you?” Participants widely recognized the crucial role of empathy in various work settings, particularly when dealing with challenging incarcerated populations. Twenty-three participants emphasized that understanding others’ emotions is essential for effective

communication and positive outcomes. Ten participants saw empathy as a tool for building relationships and rapport with coworkers and incarcerated individuals, which fosters trust and positive outcomes. Nine participants highlighted the importance of empathy in humanizing offenders and fostering positive change, contributing to rehabilitation and reintegration back into society. Seven participants linked empathy to job success and the effectiveness of rehabilitation programs. Six participants discussed the challenges and considerations of applying empathy, including balancing discipline and navigating complex scenarios. Additionally, six participants emphasized treating others with respect and dignity, even in a correctional setting. Four participants noted empathy's role in deescalating situations and preventing adverse outcomes. Finally, three participants acknowledged the need to balance empathy with professional boundaries to maintain discipline and order. Overall, empathy was seen as vital for building relationships, des-escalating situations, promoting job success, and fostering positive change, while balancing it with professional boundaries and addressing challenges.

Interview Question 5: "Tell me what you remember about any training that CDOC has provided around using empathetic practices. Additionally, could you recommend a way to increase this type of training that would be meaningful?" Participants expressed diverse perspectives on the effectiveness of existing training programs, with all twenty-five sharing varied experiences and views about existing empathy training. Twenty-four participants noted a lack of specific empathy training within the CDOC, and twenty voiced skepticisms towards online training, calling for more engaging methods. Seven participants recommended incorporating empathy training to emphasize understanding and humanizing the incarcerated population. Three participants highlighted the challenge of balancing empathy with professionalism in a correctional setting. Participants noted the intersection of empathy and

mental health training, emphasizing the importance of understanding, and responding to the mental health needs of the incarcerated population. Two participants specifically acknowledged the absence of empathy-focused training in leadership programs, suggesting the benefits of compassionate leadership. Concerns about the impact of heavy workloads, staff shortages, and the overall culture of the department on staff well-being and the development of empathetic practices are featured prominently in the responses. Multiple staff expressed concerns about the department culture, citing issues with new staff training, lack of preparations, potential psychological harm to them, and increased threats to physical safety of existing staff. Overall, there was a clear call for improved, explicit empathy training across various levels within the CDOC.

It occurred to the researcher early in the interviews that asking if staff feel empathy is a teachable skill would be essential. The question was not asked for all participants; however, following are the responses to the questions asked. Interview Question 5A “Is empathy a teachable skill?” was added. The first 9 participants did not receive this question, and 16 were asked in the interview process after the question was added. While 14 participants believe empathy is a teachable skill, two do not believe it is teachable. Overall insights for this addendum question are that there was a diverse range of perspectives on empathy, including timing, organizational roles, impact of personal backgrounds, and receptiveness to empathy training by the organization.

Interview Question 6: “Can you recall any experience with compassionate empathy, either giving or receiving this term in your own life and how has that influenced you?” Participants shared diverse experiences and interpretations of compassionate empathy, highlighting its transformative role. Fourteen participants described how compassionate empathy

profoundly impacted their lives, especially during personal challenges and growth. Eight participants shared instances of everyday acts of empathy, such as helping homeless individuals or supporting coworkers and family. Six participants recounted professional empathy, detailing support received or given in difficult situations, including a notable account of a near-death staff assault victim who experienced an outpouring of support and remained in their role for 15 years after the incident. Two expressed unfamiliarity with the term “compassionate empathy.” Overall, the responses suggest that compassionate empathy plays a significant role in shaping personal and professional relationships, fostering understanding, and contributing to positive change and a more compassionate society.

Interview Question 7: “What concerns (if any) do you have for your safety or that of your coworkers?” Participants highlighted various safety concerns in correctional facilities, revealing a multi-faceted view encompassing physical, mental, and organizational aspects. Eleven participants discussed physical safety worries, including the dangers of managing a large incarcerated population and the mental toll on the work. Ten participants expressed mental health safety concerns, emphasizing the job’s stressful nature, high suicides rates in the profession, and the need for robust support systems. The importance of teamwork and camaraderie was noted by ten participants, which highlighted differences in team dynamics between shifts. Nine participants underscored empathy as a crucial safety tool, aiding in communication, de-escalation, and building relationships. Five participants emphasized the need for better training and preparation for real-life situations, noting the challenges posed by high turnover and inexperienced staff. Several participants addressed the impact of work-related factors on personal lives, such as long commutes and work-life balance issues. Overall the collective responses highlighted the need for continuous awareness, adaptability, and resilience in addressing safety

in correctional facilities, with empathy playing a key role in fostering a positive and safe environment.

Interview Question 8: “Do you think safety relates to empathy? If so, in what ways, and if not, why not?” Many participants highlighted the critical role of empathy in ensuring safety within correctional facilities. Ten participants emphasized the importance of treating the incarcerated population with empathy, believing it can reduce volatility, prevent violence, and improve responses during challenging situations. The humanizing approach of recognizing the emotions of incarcerated individuals helps build rapport, reduce aggression, and enhance overall safety. Three participants highlighted the value of empathetic staff-incarcerated relationships, noting that empathetic staff are less likely to be targeted and may even be protected by incarcerated individuals during violent incidents. While most participants (21 of 25) believed in the connection between empathy and safety, there were nuanced perspectives, particularly from those in custody and control roles, who emphasized the need for professional boundaries and effective communication to ensure safety. Overall, empathy is seen as a significant factor in promoting safety, but it must be balanced with professionalism and effective communication strategies.

Interview Question 9: “Have you heard of the term ‘dynamic security,’ and what is your understanding of this concept?” Participants discussed various aspects of dynamic security, highlighting its connection to empathy and humanity. Five participants emphasized the opportunity dynamic security provides to treat the incarcerated more humanely and understand their problems. However, an equal number of participants expressed confusion or a lack of clarity regarding its definition, with most of them being correctional staff and supervisors. Four participants noted challenges in implementing dynamic security effectively, citing forced

interactions, lack of authenticity, time constraints for documentation, and difficulties in changing entrenched mindsets. Additionally, four participants viewed dynamic security as a buzzword, lacking a comprehensive understanding among staff and supervisors. A unique perspective from one participant highlighted a positive shift in correctional culture, with decreased violence and improved staff-incarcerated relations, partly attributed to dynamic security initiatives. Most felt that positive interactions, such as conversations based solely on the intent for rapport building, contribute to a safer environment. The mention of quotas and pressure to meet certain interaction criteria and arbitrary quotas was viewed as having a potential negative impact on genuine connections. Some participants expressed the need to balance safety concerns with a more compassionate approach, viewing dynamic security as a method to bridge the gap between staff and the incarcerated. Lastly, several mention that training on dynamic security, even understanding the reason behind the requirement has yet to convey its meaning comprehensively or effectively. Many stated that supervisors have said they, too, need clarification about the reason behind the mandates. Overall, while dynamic security is seen as a tool for enhancing empathy and humane treatment, its implementation faces significant challenges and varying perceptions among correctional staff.

Interview Question 10(A): “What is the most satisfying aspect of your job with CDOC?”

Participants expressed a deep passion for their work in the CDOC, with twenty-two participants highlighting job enjoyment. Eighteen participants found satisfaction in positively impacting the incarcerated population, supporting their rehabilitation, and contributing to their well-being. Providing support and compassion, especially during challenging situations, was another fulfilling aspect noted by eighteen participants. The importance of building positive relationships and camaraderie among colleagues and the incarcerated and finding fulfilment in making a

positive difference contributed to a sense of purpose for most of the participants. Personal and professional growth, witnessed by seven participants, and positive outcomes for both staff and incarcerated individuals were sources of satisfaction. Some felt a sense of family and belonging within the CDOC, while five appreciated witnessing educational and personal achievements among the incarcerated. Overall, staff found fulfillment in helping others, contributing to positive change, and mentoring colleagues, reflecting a strong sense of purpose and satisfaction in their roles.

Interview Question 10(B): “What is the least satisfying aspect of your job with CDOC?” Participants highlighted several aspects of their job in the CDOC that they find dissatisfying. Nine participants mentioned the burden of paperwork and administrative tasks, criticizing the outdated and user-unfriendly software. Six felt unappreciated, citing a lack of recognition, and being judged by the actions of a few “bad apples.” Five participants expressed frustration with accountability issues, especially among staff who deflect responsibility. Micromanagement was another significant concern for five participants, with some feeling driven to consider leaving due to oppressive supervision. Four participants discussed the impacts of frequent policy changes, organizational culture, and unresponsive supervisors, while three highlighted a lack of teamwork, ambitious agendas, and staff drama as sources of dissatisfaction. The challenges of maintaining work-life balance and coping with long hours were also noted by three participants. Overall, while many staff members find aspects of their job satisfying, they face significant challenges related to organizational culture, accountability, and support, contributing to burnout and dissatisfaction.

The final Interview Question 11: “Do you have anything else to share?” Sixteen participants shared additional comments. Twelve expressed gratitude and faith in their CDOC careers,

appreciating the research and their experiences. Ten participants had mixed feelings, noting satisfaction in being part of the CDOC but recognizing ongoing safety challenges. Ten also reflected on their careers and achievements, with one retired participant fondly recalling their 23-year tenure. Six participants emphasized the need for better work-life balance, suggesting improvements in staffing, pay, and mental health support, including a dedicated wellness concierge for each location for staff. Four participants appreciated the research on empathy, believing it could positively transform the correctional environment. Three participants discussed staffing challenges and safety concerns, advocating for more comprehensive training, better leadership promotion practices, and fostering a sense of belonging within the system. Overall, participants exhibited a complex view of their roles, balancing gratitude, and satisfaction with the recognition of significant challenges and the need for continued improvements in empathy, work-life balance, and safety.

In addition to the above narrative presentation of the data, the following qualitative table including (1) open codes and themes and (2) frequency codes across qualitative data points is provided.

Table 1 - *Frequency of Codes*

Safety	89
Impact of empathy on behavior	63
Understanding of empathy	56
Staff recommendations for training	52
Organizational culture and policies	42
Negative aspects of corrections work (8 combined aspects)	33
Different and diverse perspectives on empathy	32
Teamwork and camaraderie	27
Challenges and considerations of empathy	24
Safety related to empathy	24
Limited explicit training on empathy	24
Understanding as a combination of empathy and compassion	23
Empathy as a teachable skill	23
Job enjoyment and passion for work	22

Skepticism towards online training	20
Support and compassion as a satisfying aspect	18
Putting yourself in someone else's shoes	18
Caring and responding to others	17
Lack of surprise in results	16
Fulfillment in making a difference	16
Transformative empathy	14
Gratitude and faith of corrections work	12
Building relationships and rapport	10
Fostering positive change	10
Mental health safety	10
Mixed feelings	10
Empathy interactions with incarcerated	10
Empathy as a safety tool	9
Everyday acts of empathy	8
Humanizing incarcerated individuals	8
Personal growth and development	7
Recommendations for improvement	7
Effect on job success and incarcerated rehabilitation	7
Balancing empathy with professional boundaries	7
Promoting respect and dignity	6
Varied perspective on training impact	6
Professional empathy	6
Management prioritization of safety	6
Work-life balance concerns	6
Confidence in empathy	4
De-escalation and preventing escalation through empathy	4
Organizational culture	4
Appreciation for research on empathy	4
Lack of teamwork	3
Complacency and vigilance	3
Understanding without feeling sorry	3
Leadership training and compassion	2
Job enjoyment and passion for corrections work	2
Spiritual and faith-based empathy	2
Humor and positive interactions	1
Role of empathy in new staff training	1

Discussion

Building upon the analysis of the empirical findings for each interview question, this section addresses each research sub-question, synthesizing participant perspectives, elucidating key themes, and exploring the implications for practice and policy. This analysis reveals a

tapestry of insights, ranging from the teachability of empathy and the transformative potential of empathetic interactions to the integration of dynamic security principles and the organizational considerations shaping staff perceptions and experiences. As we embark on this discussion journey, it is imperative to approach the findings with a reflective lens, recognizing the diverse perspectives, contextual nuances, and inherent complexities embedded within the correctional landscape.

Through qualitative analysis of staff interviews, we explore the nuanced dimensions of empathy, its impact on workplace dynamics, and the challenges inherent in balancing empathy with professional responsibilities. By integrating interview findings with relevant literature, we aim to deepen our understanding of empathy's role in correctional settings and highlight strategies for promoting empathetic practices while maintaining safety and accountability. This exploration sheds light on the complex interplay between empathy and safety in correctional environments, offering insights that can inform organizational practices and support staff well-being.

The literature review is woven into the discussion tapestry to identify similarities, differences, confirmations, and contradictions between the literature and the empirical findings. This comparative analysis highlights consistencies and inconsistencies, providing evidence for established concepts and addressing gaps between this study's findings and existing knowledge. Finally, we discuss the implications of this study for theory development, practical applications, policy recommendations, and future research directions.

Connection Between Empathy and Safety

In the realm of correctional facilities, where safety and rehabilitation intersect, the role of empathy emerges as a critical factor in fostering positive outcomes for both staff and the

incarcerated population. Understanding the intricate connection between empathy and safety within such environments is essential for promoting well-being, reducing conflicts, and facilitating rehabilitation. This study delves into the perceptions of staff members in a maximum-security correctional facility in Colorado regarding the relationship between empathy and safety.

Comparing these themes to the literature review offers theoretical foundations and empirical evidence to contextualize and enrich our understanding of empathy in this setting. Both sources highlight the importance of compassionate care and empathy training in promoting positive outcomes for everyone in a correctional setting. Following is a synthesis of interview responses combined with literature review sources.

Participants emphasized helping both the incarcerated population and staff members as a recurring theme, whether through training, support during traumatic incidents, or simply making someone laugh. Helping others is deeply satisfying to all participants. JO states, “My happiest times at work are when one of my students gets their GED diploma that they have worked hard to achieve and I get to hand it to them which makes my heart full. They are filled with pride in themselves and that is a rare thing inside a prison.” The literature recognizes that helping others is critical to job satisfaction and overall well-being among correctional staff. Studies have shown that social support and a sense of purpose in helping others contribute to higher job and life satisfaction (Erdogan et al., 2012). Helping others is deeply fulfilling and meaningful for correctional staff, highlighting the importance of fostering a supportive and compassionate work environment.

Witnessing positive outcomes, such as incarcerated rehabilitation, successful reentry into society, or educational achievements, brings a sense of fulfillment to many participants. LBB stated, “Interacting with the offenders and trying to set an example for them based on my

behavior is the best part of this job. Hopefully it will make a change for them, and I find that personally rewarding when someone does better than they did the day before. I make sure to reinforce the positive with every one of them.” Witnessing positive outcomes validates the efforts and dedication of correctional staff in their professional roles. It reinforces their belief in the effectiveness of rehabilitation programs and interventions, affirming their skills and expertise in facilitating positive change (Erdogan et al., 2012). This validation contributes to professional pride and accomplishment among staff members. Additionally, positive outcomes serve as a source of motivation for correctional staff, encouraging them to continue their efforts to support and facilitate rehabilitation among the incarcerated population. Studies have shown that staff who witness positive transformation in individuals under their supervision are more motivated to engage in their work and contribute to the rehabilitation process (Brandl et al., 2001).

Finding purpose in the work, whether it is through making a difference, instilling hope, or providing guidance, was highlighted by several participants. Correctional staff often cultivate a sense of purpose when they frame their work as a vital component of maintaining public safety. Staff view their roles as essential for protecting communities by supervising and rehabilitating individuals who have been convicted of crimes and placed in their care (Lambert et al., 2015). MT reflects, “Telling dad jokes and making people laugh brings joy to my life. I like being able to hijack someone’s emotions by making them laugh. If I can make someone feel positive for a few moments in a day, it is a win in my book.” However, many participants indicated that they feel their jobs are thankless and unseen by the public. National sentiment about law enforcement over the past years has added to that point of pain for many in this field. As reflected in the literature, DOC agencies need to set goals that align with broader societal objectives of rehabilitation and public safety (Erdogan et al., 2012).

Personal Growth, Reflection, Teachability, and Understanding Compassionate Empathy

Participants reflected on their empathetic nature, noting variations in their empathy and personal growth over time. They connected their empathy levels to life experiences, professions, and familial influences. From the interview responses, participants' introspection regarding their empathetic capacities aligns with the understanding that empathy can vary based on individual experiences and influences over time. JE stated, "To me, I guess compassionate empathy is just caring for the people around you, caring for your community and doing the right thing. Especially when the world is so negative and ugly and to not be one of those people, just to show love and caring to everyone, and I guess do what's right in your heart." This introspection resonates with findings from the literature review, particularly Goldbert's (2020) research, which suggests that empathy and compassion are dynamic processes shaped by personal growth and experiences. The review emphasizes empathy's multifaceted nature, its evolution over time and its susceptibility to various internal and external factors. These insights underscore the complex interplay of personal reflection and external influences in shaping individuals' empathetic capacities. These dynamic interactions highlight the need for ongoing reflection and adaptation in empathetic practices by the CDOC.

Despite facing challenges, such as cultural barriers, diversity issues, or negative perceptions, many participants find satisfaction in overcoming these obstacles and growing personally and professionally. Many correctional staff demonstrate resilience in the face of adversity. Despite encountering these barriers, they persevere and adapt to overcome them (Brandl et al., 2001). Some staff view their experiences addressing cultural barriers and diversity issues as an opportunity for professional development as they learn to skill-build and effectively navigate complex interpersonal dynamics within the correctional environment (Lambert et al.,

2015). Developing greater cultural competence, empathy, and interpersonal skills through interactions with diverse populations is often challenging and rewarding for staff. KL summarizes this point with these statements, “I enjoy going to work even though there are barriers sometimes to getting things done. We just have to come up with dynamic ways of getting through the experiences and trying to make it as pleasant as possible. The challenges at times come from diversity and cultural barriers and how people communicate with each other can be a bit discouraging. I try to help people manage those times as best as possible. We all have to be in this enclosed environment so we should make it the best we can.”

Some participants expressed fulfillment in personal growth and development, whether through overcoming challenges, learning new skills, or seeing progress in their careers. Research suggests that personal growth and development opportunities increase job satisfaction among correctional staff. Several participants expressed their personal satisfaction derived from their ability to help staff as members of the Employee Support Program or the Critical Incident Response Team and talked about the professional training received to join those teams. HA (retired) stated, “I liked being a part of the staff and the DOC family. The camaraderie of working there was satisfying to me. Teaching the incarcerated a skill and how to hold a job made me very happy in my work.” When employees feel supported in their personal and professional growth, they are more likely to feel valued and satisfied (Erdogan et al., 2012). Additionally, personal growth can contribute to a sense of fulfillment and purpose, leading to greater overall well-being. Programs such as workshops, seminars, and expanded career prospects can help relieve burnout by enhancing employees’ skills and competencies (Brandl et al., 2001). Fostering a culture of continuous learning and improvement can help employees feel supported in their growth and development, and they are more likely to be engaged and committed to their roles

(Lambert et al., 2015). This sense of empowerment could lead to increased motivation, productivity, and job satisfaction.

There was a consensus among participants that compassionate empathy involves understanding, compassion, and actively caring for others. How individuals respond to others, fostering graciousness in interactions, and promoting a caring approach towards peoples' needs was a positive force of influence. LBB stated, "I may not have been through what someone is experiencing, but I can try to understand a little bit of whatever is hurting them or bother them and try to walk with them through that situation for that little period of time to make it better." The interview responses and literature review underscore the significance of compassionate empathy, noting its pivotal role in fostering positive interactions, promoting understanding, and facilitating supportive relationships. Studies by Pettus-Davis et al. (2017) and Hunt et al. (2019) offer evidence for the positive outcomes associated with compassionate care, such as improved relationships and emotional well-being. These findings corroborate the understanding that compassionate empathy involves understanding, compassion, and actively caring for others, as highlighted by interview participants. Evidence from various studies supports the benefits of compassionate care across different settings, underscoring its significance in promoting well-being.

Conditions for teachability were raised. While most participants believed that empathy is teachable, some emphasized the importance of consistent practice over time for its development. Some expressed skepticism, suggesting that empathy may be influenced more by personal background and early learning experiences than formal training. Not all the participants were asked this question, as it was added after interviews began. However, among the 16 participants who were asked, the teachability of empathy sparked discussion, revealing varying perspectives

on its learnability. SI said, “I believe it is teachable. It starts with your family. You know, when you are growing up, you are brought up by parents, school teachers, coaches, and others. As you grow up, you are influenced by adults around you and learn from them. I served in this military and you know, we must have empathy amongst each other to keep everyone safe.” Conversely, others expressed skepticism, suggesting that personal background and early learning experience may influence empathy more than formal training. DD believed that it is not the role of any organization to teach empathy to its workers, that it should be taught at home, by parents.

Support from the literature review further delves into the complexities of teaching empathy and the factors influencing its development. Studies from Ghana and the United States shed light on the impact of organizational justice and staff characteristics on empathy and misconduct among correctional officers (Boateng & Hsieh, 2019; Brandl et al., 2001). Moreover, research indicates that while individual factors may play a role in empathy, targeted interventions and training programs can effectively enhance empathetic skills among correctional staff (Steiner & Wooldredge, 2017). This synthesis underscores the importance of considering individual predispositions and structured interventions to foster empathy within correctional settings.

Participants widely recognized the importance of empathy in various work settings, including the correctional facility. Empathy was associated with building relationships, de-escalating potentially volatile situations, and preventing adverse outcomes. There was a consensus on its positive impact on job success, incarcerated population rehabilitation, and fostering positive change. It is apparent from the interview findings and literature review that empathy has a crucial role of empathy in work settings, highlighting its importance in building relationships, de-escalating conflicts, and promoting positive outcomes. The interviews reveal participants’ recognition of the significance of empathy across diverse work settings. MH stated,

“compassionate empathy goes beyond feeling sorry for someone, it helps me to do something in my work role to help alleviate their suffering if only in a small way.” Complementing these insights, the literature review, exemplified by Goldberg’s (2020) research, discusses the benefits of empathy training and compassionate care in organizational contexts, particularly in healthcare settings, where empathy is associated with improved patient outcomes and staff satisfaction. Together, these findings underscore the impact of empathy in professional environments and its potential to enhance workplace dynamics and outcomes. Both sources recognize the importance of empathy in professional environments, highlighting its relevance for relationship-building and positive outcomes. However, they also acknowledge the complexities of maintaining professional boundaries while demonstrating empathy, emphasizing the need for ethical considerations and organizational support.

The Complexity of Empathy Within Professional Boundaries

The diverse perspectives on empathy and varying reactions to specific questions underscored the complexity of measuring and understanding empathy levels. Participants acknowledge that empathy is multi-faceted and influenced by various factors, making it challenging to assess and interpret accurately. ZI stated, “compassionate empathy is acting with a little bit of graciousness and a little more grace to my response to someone because of the situation or circumstances that they are going through and are upset by. How I react with them will help determine the outcome. Do I want to help them in that moment or hurt them more in that same moment?” Examining both the interview findings and literature review it is easy to acknowledge the intricate nature of measuring and understanding empathy, underscoring the challenges posed by its multifaceted character. The interviews offer insights from participants’ perspectives within a correctional facility, shedding light on the complexities of assessing

empathetic responses accurately. Similarly, the literature review, exemplified by studies conducted by Bernhardt and Singer (2012) and West (2013), delves into the theoretical and methodological challenges of studying empathy across various disciplines. Together, these sources highlight the nuanced nature of empathy and the difficulties inherent in capturing its diverse manifestations, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the complex construct. The recognition of the complexities of empathy underscores the importance of employing comprehensive methodologies and considering diverse perspectives in studying empathy in the future.

In the high-stakes environment of corrections, the delicate interplay between empathy and professionalism is not just a matter of maintaining decorum; it is a critical component of ensuring safety for all involved. The multifaceted challenges faced by correctional staff to extend empathy and compassion while upholding stringent safety protocols create a nuanced landscape where genuine human connection meets the rigid structure of institutional regulations. The strategies employed by staff to strike a delicate balance between fostering understanding and maintaining order in an inherently complex environment and the broader literature shed light on the intricate interplay between empathy, safety, and professionalism.

Many participants find satisfaction in the positive influence they have on the incarcerated individuals- including helping them improve behavior, obtain education (such as a GED, vocation skills, or college classes) and ultimately reintegrate into society successfully. SI stated, “If you act as a positive influence on inmates, you have a chance at a better outcome with them in the long run.” Considering the safety concerns within any Department of Corrections that are exacerbated by recent staff shortages and historical incidents, it is imperative to invest in interventions that foster empathy and understanding among correctional staff. SW emphasized,

“Being here is their punishment. I’m not there to make it worse for them. I’m there to enforce the rules. As far as making a point to make their day worse, that’s not what I’m there for. And I think empathy plays a role to help me remember they are already being punished by being away from their families and not having the freedoms of people who have not broken societies rules. My job is to help get them ready to go back to an outside world one day to be better, to follow rules, and hopefully to lead a good life.” The literature underscored the pivotal role of social support in mitigating job stress and promoting positive outcomes among correctional staff (Lambert et al., 2015). Given the inherent risks and stressors associated with correctional work, it is essential to equip staff with the necessary tools and resources to navigate these challenges effectively. A comprehensive training program should focus on empathy and understanding for incarcerated individuals and staff members, aiming to cultivate non-judgmental attitudes and enhance interpersonal skills (Brandl et al., 2001). Research has consistently shown that supportive relationships with staff can profoundly impact the experiences and outcomes of incarcerated individuals (Dirkzwager & Kruttschnitt, 2012). When correctional staff demonstrate empathy and understanding, they humanize the interactions between staff and incarcerated individuals, promoting dignity and respect. It can contribute to a more positive institutional climate, fostering trust and cooperation between staff and incarcerated individuals. Further, studies have demonstrated that incarcerated individuals who feel supported and understood by staff are more likely to engage in programming and treatment opportunities aimed at addressing criminogenic needs (French & Gendreau, 2006). By creating a culture of empathy within correctional facilities, staff can motivate and encourage individuals to take positive steps toward personal growth and rehabilitation.

Some participants acknowledged the importance of balancing empathy with professional

boundaries. They recognized potential challenges in maintaining appropriate boundaries while demonstrating empathy in their work roles, indicating a nuanced understanding of the complexities involved in practicing empathy within professional contexts. HE stated, “Dealing with the incarcerated individuals has a ripple effect of dropping a rock into water. They don’t always process things normally, so if you don’t respond empathetically and push them away or shelve their situation, then it just gets worse and worse until it blows up. I have found that if I just slow down, show a little empathy and kindness and give them a minute, it sometimes diffuses things that could happen days later. I have seen that many times in my career.”

Additionally, LU reflected, “I could see how having a lack of empathy would potentially keep staff from effectively handling individual situations, especially if they are highly emotional or in a mental state that could derail or prevent them from having a positive outlook on resolving a situation.” The interview findings underscore participants’ nuanced understanding of the delicate balance between maintaining professional boundaries and demonstrating empathy in their work roles, particularly within a correctional facility. This complexity is elucidated by the literature review, which delves into ethical considerations and organizational factors influencing this balance, especially in high-stress environments like corrections. Research by Shanafelt (2017) emphasize the crucial role of organizational support and resources in mitigating burnout among healthcare professionals, highlighting the need for strategies that address the challenges of navigating professional boundaries while exhibiting empathy. The discussions point to implications for organization practices, particularly in high-stress environments like corrections. They stress the need for strategies that address the balance between empathy and professional responsibilities and the provision of support and resources to mitigate burnout and foster staff well-being.

Overall, staff members recognize empathy as a dynamic and multifaceted construct shaped by individual experiences, organizational contexts, and ethical considerations. While they value the importance of compassionate empathy in fostering positive relationships and outcomes, they also acknowledge the challenges in maintaining professional boundaries and accurately measuring empathetic responses. These insights underscore the need for ongoing reflection, organizational support, and strategies to balance empathy with professional responsibilities in high-stress environments like corrections.

Staff-Incarcerated Relationships, Dynamic Security, and Transformative Outcomes

The dynamics between staff members and the incarcerated play a pivotal role in shaping safety, security, and overall well-being for everyone that lives and works in a correctional facility. This section of the study delves into the nuanced relationship between staff empathetic practices and its ramifications for dynamic security and overall safety within correctional institutions. By exploring the perceptions, experiences, and insights of staff members through qualitative analysis, this research seeks to uncover the multifaceted nature of empathy and its implications for the correctional environment.

Diverse perspectives on empathy training where participants expressed varied experiences and perspectives on existing empathy training programs, highlighting both positive aspects and limitations. BU, a new staff member who completed the training academy within the past year had this to say, “I remember them teaching us the difference between empathy and sympathy in the training academy. And I remember that it’s important to know the difference between the two and that we are allowed to feel both, but we cannot let it go too far in terms of sympathy because these fellows did do something to end up in this prison, but we can still be empathetic to their journey, and their attempts to get to go home and make a better life for

themselves.” A majority noted a lack of specific and explicit training on empathy within the CDOC, suggesting a need for more comprehensive and targeted programs. Additionally, resistance to online training revealed widespread skepticism towards online training methods, with participants expressing the need for more engaging and effective training approaches. JC had this to say, “There may be some online empathy training, but to be quite honest with you, I don’t pay very much attention to online training because we are also trying to do our regular jobs while sitting at a computer to take a lesson that we’ve had over and over and over and everyone is quite numb to online training.” Additionally, recommendations for improvement by several participants who recommended incorporating empathy training, focusing on understanding, and humanizing the incarcerated population were voiced. First, both participant responses and the literature underscore the significance of empathy training within correctional facilities.

Participants shared diverse experiences and perspectives on existing programs, noting both positive aspects and limitations. A prevalent observation was the lack of specific training on empathy within the CDOC, indicating a need for more comprehensive and targeted programs. PE said, “The problem with empathy at work right now is that everyone is so busy and short staffed that there is no time to connect with the incarcerated individuals or other staff, and that hurts in a real way. The amount of work leaves you in survival mode all the time and that hurts hearts over time. We are better when we are connected to each other.” Moreover, there was widespread skepticism towards online training methods, calling for more engaging approaches.

Several participants mentioned the satisfaction derived from the relationships with staff and the incarcerated population. This camaraderie fosters a sense of community and teamwork within the correctional environment. The camaraderie and sense of community fostered by the relationships built between correctional staff and the incarcerated population contribute

significantly to job satisfaction and overall well-being within correctional environments. Here is an overview from one participant that highlights this notion: One participant began their career as a correctional officer. From the custody and control side of this job, they felt that the incarcerated population needed to be held at 'arm's length' for safety and security. In their new role as an admin assistant, they openly worship with the incarcerated population weekly. They stated that this has changed their life for the better and now feels safer in this environment because of the Golden Rule- treat everyone like you wish to be treated. They said what they used to view as vulnerability in connecting with the incarcerated has improved job satisfaction and their sense of safety at the facility. This staff encourages coworkers to participate in hugs with each other to bring purpose and connection to this environment. They still hold the incarcerated at arm's length with hugs as this is still considered taboo, but they are not afraid to connect with them through common humanity and love of Jesus. Fist bumps are allowed and shared openly.

These relationships provide social support that helps staff members process stress and navigate the challenges inherent in their work environment (Lambert et al., 2015). Research indicates that correctional workers who feel a sense of human connection and safety in their work environments tend to experience higher job and life satisfaction levels (Lambert et al., 2018). For example, a study from China found that male prison staff reported lower satisfaction with their lives compared to their female counterparts, and that job stress was negatively correlated with life satisfaction (Lambert et al., 2018). Moreover, addressing factors contributing to job stress and burnout, such as role conflict and role ambiguity, can further enhance job satisfaction among correctional staff (Dowden & Tellier, 2004).

Some participants derive satisfaction from their lasting impact, whether through educational opportunities, emotional support, or positive interactions that may influence an

individual's future choices. SI stated, "I'm pretty happy with my job here because I think I'm making a difference in helping offenders be successful even in small ways. We must put the bad stuff behind us or off to the side and still deal with them as a human being. You must focus on the future, not the past." The positive impact of successful rehabilitation and reentry extends beyond the individual level to benefit communities. Reduced recidivism rates and increased community safety contribute to society's overall well-being and cohesion (Gustafson, 2012). Correctional interventions that promote positive outcomes can create lasting benefits for individuals and communities.

Overall, the common thread among these responses is the fulfillment derived from making a positive impact, fostering relationships, and finding purpose in the work within the challenging environment of the Colorado DOC. These practices contribute to the rehabilitation and successful reintegration of offenders and foster a healthier and more supportive work environment for staff members. The synthesis of interview responses and literature review findings underscores the significance of compassionate empathy practices within correctional facilities. Training programs focusing on empathy can enhance safety, foster supportive relationships, and promote job satisfaction among correctional staff. Additionally, personal growth and development opportunities contribute to staff well-being and resilience in overcoming challenges. Witnessing positive outcomes validates staff efforts and reinforces the importance of rehabilitation efforts. Ultimately, promoting empathy within correctional environments benefits individuals and contributes to community safety and cohesion.

The literature review supports implementing various training strategies to promote empathy, communication, trauma-informed care, cultural competency, self-care practices, compassionate leadership, and continuous evaluation within correctional facilities. The literature

supports each of these ideas. First, research suggests that comprehensive training programs focusing on empathy can enhance interpersonal skills, reduce job stress, foster a positive institutional climate, and improve safety within correctional facilities (Brandl et al., 2001; Lambert et al., 2015; Dirkzwager & Kruttschnitt, 2012; Donisch et al., 2016). Additionally, emphasizing respectful and compassionate communication and providing guidance on active listening, conflict resolution, and de-escalation techniques has improved interactions among staff and incarcerated individuals, leading to better outcomes and reduced conflicts (Lambert et al., 2015).

Next, equipping staff with trauma-informed care training enables them to recognize and respond to trauma among the incarcerated, creating safer and more supportive environments for rehabilitation efforts (Donish et al., 2016). Further, training programs that promote cultural competency and sensitivity enhance understanding and inclusivity within correctional facilities, reducing instances of bias and promoting a more respectful and supportive environment (Donish et al., 2016).

Next, recognizing the emotional toll of correctional work and providing resources for staff to prioritize self-care can improve staff well-being, reduce burnout, and enhance job satisfaction (Lambert et al., 2015). Additionally, cultivating a culture of compassion and empathy starting from leadership positions within the organization has positively influenced staff morale, job satisfaction, and institutional climate (Donish et al., 2016). Lastly, regularly assessing the effectiveness of training programs and incorporating staff feedback ensures that initiatives remain relevant, impactful, and responsive to the evolving needs of staff and incarcerated individuals (Donisch et al., 2016).

By implementing these strategies based on empirical evidence, correctional organizations

can better equip staff with the skills and mindset needed to foster a culture of compassion and empathy within their facilities, ultimately leading to positive outcomes for staff and incarcerated residents.

Recommendations for improvement included incorporating empathy training focused on understanding and humanizing the incarcerated population. In line with these findings, research from various countries supports the importance of empathy training in enhancing staff-incarcerated relationships. For example, studies conducted in Norway and Canada stress the necessity of comprehensive training programs to cultivate empathetic skills among correctional staff (Midtlyng, 2022; Haggerty & Bucerius, 2020). These studies highlight the positive impact of empathy training on staff attitudes and behaviors towards incarcerated populations, leading to improved communication and rapport within the correctional setting. Additionally, research suggests that practical empathy training can improve safety outcomes and reduce misconduct incidents within correctional facilities (Steiner & Wooldredge, 2017; Boateng training programs to foster a safer and more humane correctional environment.

Participants shared experiences where compassionate empathy played a transformative role in their lives, influencing personal growth and understanding. SW expressed this sentiment beautifully with this statement, “Growing up I had it pretty tough, I was homeless at one point and lived in and out of shelters for years as a young kid. My mom was an addict and I had to ask for money on the street. I feel for some of our incarcerated people who have also experience homelessness and addiction. When I was younger, I didn’t understand why my mom couldn’t stop doing drugs. Now that I’m older, I’m like ‘oh yeah, because life can suck’ and I understand more about what demons she was fighting in her own mind. So I tend to be more compassionate with people and understand that you may not know what someone is dealing with just by looking

at them. There were instances where I witnessed or engaged in everyday acts of empathy that were shared, emphasizing the importance of empathy in personal and professional relationships.” FO stated, “I like the saying to treat others as you want to be treated, the Golden Rule. I try to do that every day in life and at work, and it makes for an easy job and that makes my life easy as well because I don’t have all these battles and all these places where I’m fighting with others. There is a lot less drama and instances of altercations, because I can de-escalate most things by talking to people. When I’m talking, I’m not fighting.” Providing or receiving compassionate empathy in professional settings, highlighted its significance in managing challenging situations and fostering positive relationships were discussed by many participants. MA stated, “You must be careful in this role because you have influence over other human being and their outcomes. We must help our incarcerated population whether they are right or are wrong, we are their role models.” Participants recounted transformative experiences where compassionate empathy was pivotal in their personal and professional lives, fostering growth and understanding. These narratives highlighted the significance of empathy in nurturing positive relationships and managing challenging situations. SH encapsulated this perspective with this, “I’ve stopped seeing everything as us vs. them. I had that thought pattern engrained deeply in my soul when I worked in blue or custody and control. I’ve softened now and it’s better for my heart to see them as human beings trying to make the best of their situations in prison. I don’t have to be part of the punishment and withhold my care and concern for them and that has changed my world view. I’m much happier now after this mindset shift.” The literature review further corroborates these observations, presenting evidence of empathy’s transformative effects on staff well-being and organizational dynamics. Research from Switzerland and Spain illustrated how empathetic practices contribute to staff satisfaction and job performance (Isenhardt & Hostettler, 2020;

Pérez-Fuentes et al., 2020). Moreover, studies emphasized the importance of fostering positive relationships with the incarcerated to create a safer and more supportive correctional environment (Dirkzwager & Kruttschnitt, 2012; Lambert et al., 2018). This synthesis underscored the profound impact of empathy on both individual experiences and broader organizational dynamics within correctional settings.

Empathy and Dynamic Security as a Safety Tool

Empathy was highlighted as a safety tool for enhancing communication, de-escalating situations, and building positive relationships with the incarcerated population. Participants emphasized the connection between safety and empathy, viewing it as crucial for humanizing incarcerated individuals, promoting understanding, and preventing conflicts. Additionally, participants voiced concerns about both physical and psychological safety, including potential assaults and confrontations, and mental health safety, such as work-related stress and high suicide rates in this environment. Some participants discussed the risk of complacency and the importance of maintaining vigilance to prevent safety incidents. Empathy emerged as a crucial safety tool within the correctional setting, facilitating effective communication, conflict de-escalation, and cultivating positive relationships with incarcerated individuals. Lastly, participants acknowledged the importance of empathy in enforcing safety measure while expressing the need for vigilance to prevent safety incidents. JR stated “From what I’ve seen in the last 20 years is that your actions will generally not come back on you in this line of work. It comes back on somebody else. I’ve seen countless people get assaulted for things they didn’t do. They were just the next person to show up after something happened to set a guy off and want to hurt someone. So the person that does this almost seems like they never pay for it. It is often an innocent bystander comes walking by that he or she is the one who is assaulted. What we say and

do at work matters to keep people safe.” Further, MT stated “The main concern I have is any little microaggression or any negative connotation or any negative seed that I plant into somebody might negatively affect somebody else down the road. You know, just not being nice to somebody today, could result in an assault on someone else tomorrow. It’s kind of an interesting concept if you think about how connected we are to each other in that place, whether we like it or not.” The literature review supports these insights, highlighting studies from the United States and Canada that underscored the significance of empathy in promoting positive staff-incarcerated interactions and de-escalating conflicts (Steiner & Wooldredge, 2017; Haggerty & Bucierius, 2020). Additionally, research suggests that organizational justice and fair treatment of staff play a crucial role in creating a safer and more secure correctional environment (Franke et al., 2010; Boateng & Hsieh, 2019). This synthesis underscores the multifaceted relationship between empathy and safety within correctional facilities.

Participants discussed the connection between dynamic security and empathy, viewing it as an opportunity to treat incarcerated individuals more humanely and understand their problems. However, there were challenges, lack of clarity, confusion, and skepticism regarding the definition and implementation of dynamic security, with participants noting challenges such as forced interactions and documentation quotas called ‘dynamic security chronicles’ that they are required to complete in a month or face reprimands. Lastly, many participants stated they were unclear of the definition of dynamic security. When provided the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime definition of dynamic security, they unanimously stated that information would have been helpful for buy-in and understanding of this concept as an actual strategy to increase safety at this correctional facility. FO sums up all these concepts with his statements:

“As far as I view the dynamic security, it’s a big way of building rapport with the

inmates. You talk to them about their favorite sports team or something like that and then you have to write a report that you talked to them about sports. It's not actually like getting to know each other or treating them like human beings and stuff. As far as I view it, its okay but a little bit of a waste of time to make staff must write these chrons or be written up by supervisors. When I learned what the real definition of dynamic security means, it hits me very different. If they did it the right way, instead of just being used the way it's done right now, it could change things. It's almost used against staff to punish them because you have to have a certain quota of dynamic security interactions or you get yelled at because you didn't meet your quota instead of actually having meaningful and real interactions with the offenders. It would be more organic, and it could change things with the inmates.”

The imposition of this requirement for staff to document their interactions with incarcerated individuals directly contradicts the intent of the existing practice to increase security through communication. This confusion has caused considerable distress among many custody and control staff members. The conflation of concepts has led to confusion and angst among many staff members. ZI states “My understanding of the term is the intention for housing and security staff to encourage staff to have conversations that are unrated to correcting behaviors. That the intention is to have a positive interaction between staff and inmates with a statistical threshold to measure pro-social interactions.” Additionally, SA mentions “They want us to talk to offenders, but don't go too overboard with what you talk about. It's actually kind of confusing for staff.” The literature review contributes to this discourse by presenting dynamic security as a relatively new concept in corrections. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, dynamic security involves proactive monitoring of the correctional environment and positive interactions with prisoners to enhance safety and order (Penal Reform International,

2013). Studies emphasize the interdependence of security, dignity, fairness, and legitimacy within correctional facilities. Research suggests that fostering positive staff-resident relationships and providing meaningful activities contribute to successful future reentry into society and overall facility safety (Bryans, 2015). Additionally, the review highlights the detrimental effects of practices like solitary confinement on incarcerated mental health, prompting global reforms toward more humane and adequate security measures (Lindberg et al., 2015). Moreover, the literature highlights the significance of effective policies, staff training, and understanding of the correctional population in implementing dynamic security strategies (Penal Reform International, 2013). This evidence informs the evolving nature of security practices in correctional facilities and the need for empathetic approaches to enhance safety and rehabilitation outcomes.

Organizational and Additional Considerations of Empathy

There were two primary concerns raised for organizational considerations. First, there are concerns regarding management's prioritization of safety, deficiencies in training, and the potential repercussions of inexperienced staff on safety outcomes. Participants emphasized the need for more hands-on training, practical scenarios, and preparation for real-life situations that are not covered in current training models. Second, some participants mentioned the impact of work-related factors on their personal lives, including long commutes and work-life balance challenges. PE states "I have concerns for my husband who works there. He is the father of my son and I do not want anything to happen to him or be harmed in any way. My parasympathetic nervous system is activated every time the phone rings and he is not home. The flight or fight response kicks in and adrenaline dumps into my stomach until I know who is calling. That is not a good way to have to live." Two staff members died within six months while traveling home from work recently, and this was mentioned by several participants as an organizational concern.

The literature review further delves into these organizational considerations, drawing on studies from various countries, including England, Switzerland, and Norway. These studies underscore the crucial role of organizational justice and supportive work environments in fostering staff well-being and safety (Crewe et al., 2015; Isenhardt & Hostettler, 2020; Midtlyng, 2022). Further, research indicates that addressing workload and promoting work-life balance can contribute to staff satisfaction and mitigate burnout within this setting (Lambert et al., 2018; Boateng & Hsieh, 2019). These findings highlight the need for comprehensive organizational support to enhance staff morale, safety, and overall effectiveness in correctional facilities.

Three additional perspectives emerged from the qualitative data. First, some participants discussed experiences of compassionate empathy within the context of their faith, indicating how spiritual beliefs can influence empathetic outlooks. Second, some participants raised concerns about privacy laws impacting documentation requirements for dynamic security interactions, highlighting potential compliance challenges. Finally, staff observed that positive relationships with incarcerated individuals contributed to safety, believing that empathetic staff less likely to be targeted during incidents.

The literature review acknowledged the influence of spiritual beliefs on empathetic perspectives. Studies from diverse cultural contexts, including the United States and India, have explored the intersection of spirituality and empathy, suggesting that individuals' faith and spiritual practices can shape their empathetic responses (Levin, 2010; Gupta & Rajaram, 2016). These findings align with the participants' discussions regarding experiences of compassionate empathy within the context of their faith. Concerns raised by participants regarding privacy laws impacting documentation requirements resonate with broader discussions on compliance challenges in correctional settings. Research on the implementation of documentation protocols

in healthcare and legal contexts highlights the tension between privacy regulations and documentation practices (Damschroder et al., 2009; Miller & Sim, 2004). While not specific to dynamic security interactions, these studies illuminated the complexity of navigating privacy laws in documentation processes, supporting the participants' concerns.

Overall, these themes illuminate the complexity of varying perspectives, suggesting that personal background, training, and organizational culture influence empathy. We recognize empathy as essential for fostering positive relationships, preventing conflicts, and promoting rehabilitation among the incarcerated population. There was a consensus on the need for comprehensive and targeted empathy training and adequate support systems to address safety concerns and promote staff well-being. These aggregated themes provided a comprehensive overview of the intersection between empathy, safety, training, and organizational dynamics within the correctional environment, as the participants in the interviews voiced.

Theoretical Framework Analysis

Travis Hirschi's (1969) seminal criminology theory, known as Social Bonds theory or Social Control theory, underscores the importance of relationships in influencing criminal behavior. The literature review provided both theoretical foundations and empirical evidence supporting the significance of relationships, social bonds, and compassionate empathy in correctional settings. Hirschi's original theory, along with contributions from scholars like Michael Gottfredson and Robert Agnew, emphasizes the importance of attachment to institutions, commitment to conventional goals, involvement in conventional activities, and belief in conventional norms in fostering healthy relationships and reducing delinquent behaviors (Hirschi, 1969; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Agnew, 2011).

Using this theoretical framework, the study's findings align with the literature by

demonstrating the crucial role of compassionate empathy in enhancing safety within correctional facilities. Participants recognized empathy as a tool for improving communication, preventing conflicts, and humanizing incarcerated individuals, ultimately contributing to a safer environment for all involved (Lambert et al., 2015).

The study further underscores the recognition of compassionate empathy as a positive force that promotes gracious interactions, builds relationships, and fosters positive outcomes within the workplace (Lambert et al., 2015). Despite challenges in measuring and understanding empathy levels, participants acknowledged the multifaceted nature of empathy and its potential impact on behavior, education, and rehabilitation outcomes among incarcerated individuals (Dirkzwager & Kruttschnitt, 2012).

Additionally, the study highlighted the importance of maintaining professional boundaries while practicing empathy and emphasized the positive impact of empathetic practices on both incarcerated individuals and staff members (French & Gendreau, 2006). Overall, the study's findings complement the existing literature on social bonds theory and compassionate empathy, providing valuable insights into the relationship between empathy and safety within correctional settings.

Summary

After detailed analysis of all the participants interviews, five prominent themes have emerged from the data: **1) Connection between empathy and safety** – staff participants recognized empathy as a crucial tool for enhancing safety within the correctional facility. They noted its role in communication, conflict prevention, and humanizing incarcerated individuals, ultimately contributing to a safer environment for everyone in a closed system, **2) Recognition of compassionate empathy**- participants universally acknowledged compassionate empathy as a

positive force. It involves understanding, compassion, and actively caring for others, fostering gracious interactions, building relationships, and promoting positive outcomes within the work place, **3) Challenges in measuring and understanding empathy-** Participants highlighted the complexity of measuring and understanding empathy levels. They noted diverse perspectives and reactions to empathy-related questions, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of empathy and the challenges it presents in assessment and interpretation, **4) Importance of boundaries in empathetic practices-** Participants discussed the importance of maintaining professional boundaries while practicing empathy. They recognized the potential challenges of balancing empathy with professional responsibilities, highlighting the need for a nuanced understanding and application of empathy within the professional contexts of this environment, and **5) Positive impact of empathetic practices-** Staff participants derived satisfaction from the positive impact of empathetic practices on incarcerated individuals and themselves. They noted improvements in behavior, education, and rehabilitation outcomes among incarcerated, as well as personal growth, camaraderie, and a sense of purpose and organizational commitment among staff members.

This chapter provides a comprehensive summary of the results obtained from the empirical investigation into the relationship between empathy and safety within a correctional facility. Through qualitative analysis of interviews conducted with staff members from a maximum-security correctional facility in Colorado, we unveiled critical insights into how empathy impacts safety dynamics within such environments. The findings shed light on staff perceptions of compassionate empathy, its connection to safety practices, and the potential implications for organizational training and development. This chapter encapsulates the essence of the research findings, providing valuable insights into the complex interplay between compassionate empathy and safety within the correctional context.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this dissertation study was to explore the relationship between the use of compassionate empathy by correctional staff and overall safety within correctional facilities. The study aimed to address the limited understanding of the role of compassionate empathy in enhancing safety within correctional facilities. This chapter provides a summary of the findings, proposes recommended solutions to the identified problem, discusses implications, limitations, suggests directions for future research, and provides a summary of the research. The study participants breakdown of job descriptions is as follows: mental health (1), maintenance (3), custody and control (13), teachers (3), other support roles (2), and retired or no longer with the department (3). The researcher tried to garner diverse and representative perspectives within the facility. By including a diverse set of participants, the study aims to capture a comprehensive understanding of experiences and viewpoints across different functions within this correctional setting. The perspectives of custody and control staff, who make up the largest portion of participants, may carry significant weight in understanding safety dynamics and challenges within the facility. The gender distribution of study participants (10 females and 15 males) does not align proportionally with the overall gender breakdown within the facility (84 females and 177 males). This discrepancy may impact the representativeness of the study sample and raise questions about the inclusivity of perspectives, particularly regarding any gender-specific experiences and concerns related to safety. The breakdown of study participants' job descriptions and gender distribution offers valuable insights and considerations for the analysis of the data. By examining these factors through an intersectional lens and contextualizing the findings within the unique dynamics of the correctional environment, the researcher can derive robust

conclusions and recommendations for enhancing safety, communication, and empathy within this correctional facility.

Summary of the Findings

The qualitative analysis conducted in Chapter 4 revealed several critical themes regarding the relationship between empathy and safety within correctional facilities. Participants consistently emphasized the pivotal role of empathy as a tool for enhancing safety and promoting positive outcomes for both staff and incarcerated individuals. Empathy was recognized as a powerful communication tool, facilitating conflict de-escalation, fostering understanding, and humanizing interactions within the correctional environment.

Concerns for safety emerged as a prominent theme, encompassing physical safety concerns such as assaults and confrontations, as well as psychological safety issues such as work-related stress and challenges in maintaining a healthy work-life balance. Participants highlighted the importance of maintaining vigilance while practicing empathy, ensuring a secure environment without compromising safety protocols.

The concept of dynamic security elicited mixed responses, with participants expressing confusion and concerns about its implementation. While some saw potential benefits in improving interactions with incarcerated individuals, others raised issues related to forced interactions, documentation requirements, and the need for clear guidelines and training.

Organizational considerations played a significant role in the discussions, with participants highlighting deficiencies in training programs, management priorities, and the impact of work-related factors on staff well-being. Practical training, organizational support, and a focus on addressing safety concerns were identified as crucial elements for creating a safer and more empathetic work environment.

Additional perspectives, such as the influence of spirituality on empathy, concerns about current documentation practices, and the positive impact of empathy on relationships and safety, further enriched the understanding of empathy's multifaceted role within correctional settings.

Overall, the findings underscore the complex interplay between empathy, safety, professional boundaries, and organizational dynamics in correctional facilities. The study provides valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities for enhancing safety through empathetic practices, with implications for policy, practice, and future research in the field of corrections.

Recommended Solutions to the Problem

In addressing the central question regarding the relationship between the use of compassionate empathy by correctional staff and overall safety within correctional facilities, a multifaceted solution is proposed. This solution is based on a thorough analysis of the themes developed in the Results section of Chapter Four, as well as insights from relevant literature and theoretical frameworks.

Based on the responses from participants during the interview process, and the picture created during the data analysis, the question remains, does a relationship exist between safety and empathy? The answer is, yes, a relationship between empathy and safety does indeed exist within the context of correctional facilities. Here are the themes that support this position:

Empathy as a safety tool – The concept of empathy as a safety strategy or tool is not new in some parts of the world. Correctional systems in Germany and Norway, specifically, have evolved over several decades, reflecting gradual shifts in philosophical approaches to punishment, rehabilitation, and social justice. It is challenging to pinpoint an exact timeframe for the adoption of empathy as a core principle in these systems, however, these initiatives aim to

create environments that promote rehabilitation, well-being, and positive outcomes for both staff and the incarcerated.

Norway's correctional system is often cited as a model of humane and rehabilitative incarceration, emphasizing principles of empathy, respect, and individualized care. The primary focus is on rehabilitation rather than punishment, with an emphasis on preparing the incarcerated for successful reintroduction into society. For this type of philosophical belief system to be effective, the incarcerated are provided with opportunities for education, vocational training, and meaningful work. For staff to be effective in the rehabilitative role, they receive extensive training in communication skills, conflict resolution, and empathetic engagement with the incarcerated and their families. Depending on the jurisdiction and level of the position, basic training in Norway typically lasts for one to two years and includes a combination of classroom instruction, practical exercises, and on-the-job training. A wide range of topics are taught, including legal principles, human rights, instruction in security procedures, emergency response protocols, and risk management. Continuing education, strong mentorship, and supervision are highly valued in this training process. The emphasis is on building positive relationships and fostering a supportive environment conducive to personal growth and transformation for both the staff and the incarcerated residents.

Germany's correctional system emphasizes the principles of human dignity, individualization, and rehabilitation. The system is based on the belief that incarceration should aim to reintegrate offenders into society as law-abiding citizens. New correction staff undergo about six months in a basic training program before beginning their careers. Their curriculum includes cornerstone courses on legal principles, psychology, sociology, criminology, and conflict resolution. Trainees also receive instruction in practical skills such as communication

techniques, emergency response procedures, and self-defense. German prisons prioritize the well-being and rehabilitation of the incarcerated, offering educational programs, vocational training, and therapeutic interventions tailored to individual needs. Correctional staff in Germany receive training in empathy, communication, and conflict resolution, with an emphasis on building trust and fostering positive relationships with incarcerated individuals.

In both Norway and Germany, positive relationships between staff and the incarcerated based on empathy are seen as contributing to safety inside correctional facilities and valuable to the rehabilitative techniques, therapeutic interventions, cultural competence, trauma-informed care, and restorative justice practices used by staff to help the incarcerated populations. Staff are encouraged to pursue further education and training opportunities to enhance their knowledge and skills in specific areas of interest or expertise. The combination of theoretical knowledge, practical skills, and ethical principles in both countries signifies a high commitment to the preparation and ongoing professional development of correctional staff to ensure effective and humane service delivery within correctional facilities in Norway and Germany.

In the United States, the average basic training academy is about one month and persistent staffing vacancies and shortages for the past decade have significantly impacted the caliber, longevity, and quality of corrections staff (UNODC, 2015). While the United States correctional system has its strengths, there are notable differences in approaches and outcomes when compared to the systems in Norway and Germany. These countries are widely praised for their emphasis on rehabilitation, humane treatment, and the promotion of positive outcomes for both the incarcerated and their societies. These countries prioritize principles such as empathy, individualized care, and community reintegration, resulting in lower rates of recidivism and a greater emphasis on restoring individuals to productive members of society. While recognizing

the complexities involved, there is certainly room to learn from and potentially incorporate aspects of these successful models into our own correctional practices. These examples demonstrate the potential for incorporating empathy and safety principles into our correctional systems. It is important to note that no system is without its challenges and limitations.

Implementing and sustaining such initiatives require an ongoing commitment, resources, and collaboration among stakeholders. However, these examples serve as inspiring models for other systems such as the United States for promoting a more humane and effective approach to incarceration that prioritizes empathy, rehabilitation, and community safety.

Staff-incarcerated relationships – Based on the Social Bond Theory by Travis Hirschi, it has long been understood that relationships foster positive inter-group interactions and mitigate conflict within social constructs such as families, communities, and institutions. Empathy, especially compassionate empathy contributes to safer environments by addressing underlying criminogenic factors and reducing the likelihood of deviant behavior. When strong, healthy, and professional relationships persist in corrections, based on the qualitative interviews in this study, it is undeniable that empathetic engagement with the incarcerated leads to reduced incidents of violence, self-harm, and disciplinary infractions. The complexities of empathy and safety dynamics are difficult to quantify as the power lies in the relationship between the involved people. However, empathetic communication enhances rapport-building, facilitates effective conflict resolution, and promotes a culture of mutual respect and cooperation. Empathy can serve as a foundational principle in adopting a trauma-informed approach within the correctional setting. Recognizing and empathizing with the experiences of trauma among incarcerated individuals can inform interventions that prioritize safety, healing, and rehabilitation.

Additionally, empathetic engagement with trauma survivors facilitates trust-building and

emotional support, which empowers individuals to navigate the complex process of trauma recovery within the confines of the correctional environment. By acknowledging the interconnectedness between trauma and maladaptive behaviors, empathetic correctional staff can implement trauma-informed care and practices that address underlying psychological wounds, promote resilience, and prevent re-traumatization within professional and appropriate relationships between staff and the incarcerated populations. Further, mitigating institutional violence can be achieved with awareness that these behaviors often stem from a culture of dehumanization, power imbalances, and punitive disciplinary practices.

Dehumanizing treatment within correctional settings perpetuates a cycle of violence that degrades the humanity of both staff and the incarcerated and erodes trust in the rehabilitative potential of the criminal justice system. Compassionate empathy disrupts this cycle by humanizing both staff and incarcerated in fostering empathy-driven responses to conflict resolution and behavior management. Empathy serves as a potential antidote to dehumanization and fostering empathetic connections that can transcend the persistent negative labels of “inmate” or “guard”. Through increased empathetic engagement, correctional staff can acknowledge the intrinsic worth and dignity of everyone, affirming their humanity and inherent capacity for growth and change.

A humanizing approach can challenge stereotypes and stigma associated with the incarcerated, promoting a culture of empathy, respect, and dignity. An increased awareness of empathetic understanding of the social determinants of violence, such as systemic oppression, poverty, substance use disorders, and structural inequalities can inform targeted interventions aimed at addressing root causes of criminogenic factors and promoting social justice within correctional institutions. Increasing staff’s empathetic listening skills and validation of

incarcerated people's experiences can empower them to reclaim agency and voice within a system that often marginalizes their perspectives. By centering the voices and experiences of those directly impacted by dehumanizing treatment, correctional institutions can cultivate environments that prioritize empathy, compassion, and social justice. A natural extension of empathetic practices involves restorative justice approaches that can transform the dynamics of power and accountability, fostering healing and reconciliation among individuals impacted by violence while promoting a sense of community and shared responsibility for safety.

The power and importance of relationships are essential for effective change management for incarcerated individuals. There are specific ways to leverage this knowledge to build trust, facilitate communication, create alignment, build resilience, mobilize resources, and sustain momentum throughout the change process. By prioritizing relationship-building efforts, leaders can foster a culture of collaboration, trust, and commitment that enables organizations to navigate change successfully and achieve desired outcomes for everyone involved in the correctional environment. If we could change the role of incarceration to truly return our citizens back to their communities to be productive citizens, we could change the way our nation functions, from a bottom-up approach. Relationships matter and they have the power to transform lives.

Dynamic security and communication – Dynamic security, which involves engaging in pro-social conversations with the incarcerated, was associated with empathy, and pro-active communications rooted in empathy were viewed as important components of dynamic security and contributing to a safer and more controlled environment by participants. Unlike static security measures such as physical barriers and surveillance, dynamic security focuses on interpersonal interactions, communication, and relationship-building as a key strategy for

managing risks and preventing incidents. One of the strengths of dynamic security is that it necessitates a holistic approach to address the complex social, psychological, and behavioral dynamics inherent in carceral environments.

Within the context of dynamic security, communication plays a vital role in promoting positive interactions, fostering trust, and de-escalating conflicts among staff and the incarcerated. Proactive and empathetic communication strategies are essential for building rapport, managing tensions, and promoting a culture of safety and respect within correctional facilities. Pro-social conversations refer to interactions characterized by empathy, respect, and a genuine interest in the well-being of others.

In correctional settings, pro-social conversations involve engaging with all people in a manner that acknowledges their humanity, validates their experiences, and fosters positive relationships. Empathy is a foundational element of pro-social communication and can promote trust, reduce hostility, and enhance compliance with rules and regulations in a peaceful manner. Correctional staff who demonstrate empathy in their interactions with the incarcerated are better equipped to recognize and address underlying issues such as trauma, mental health challenges, and social isolation, which contributes to a safer and more rehabilitative environment.

Empathy enhances a staff's ability to effectively engage with and manage the diverse needs and behaviors of incarcerated individuals. Additionally, empathetic staff are more likely to establish positive relationships with inmates, anticipate and address potential conflicts, and de-escalate volatile situations before they escalate into violence. Empathy promotes pro-active communication by encouraging staff to use active listening skills, validate concerns, and respond empathetically to the needs of the incarcerated. By demonstrating empathy in their interactions, correctional staff can create a sense of trust, respect, and mutual understanding that builds a safer

and more cohesive environment within facilities.

Integrating empathetic communication strategies into dynamic security practices are essential for promoting safety, well-being, and rehabilitation in this environment. Research suggests that environments characterized by empathy and positive social interactions are associated with lower rates of violence, disciplinary infractions, and recidivism among incarcerated populations. Dynamic security and effective communication rooted in empathy are integral components of safe correctional management and contribute to a more rehabilitative and meaningful setting for both staff and the individuals involved in the criminal justice system.

Concerns for safety – On the job concerns about safety, both physical and mental, were raised by participants in this study. Factors such as work-related stress, high suicide rates among staff, and the risk of physical assaults underscored the importance of addressing staff well-being and promoting a supportive work environment. These concerns can be supported and addressed through multifaceted dynamic empathetic practices.

Due to the nature of corrections work, staff often face significant safety concerns on the job. These concerns can stem from interactions with the incarcerated, institutional challenges, and the overall culture within the correctional facility. Empathetic engagement with staff and the incarcerated involves acknowledging concerns, validating experiences, and demonstrating a sincere commitment to supporting everyone's well-being and safety.

Compassionate empathy fosters trust and rapport between correctional staff, administrators, and other stakeholders within the facility. When staff feel heard, understood, and valued, they are more likely to communicate openly, seek support when needed, and collaborate effectively to address safety concerns. An additional stressor for correctional staff is the cumulative exposure to trauma and emotional stress because of their work, including exposure to

violence, witnessing traumatic events, and managing challenging interactions with the incarcerated. Compassionate empathy provides a framework for acknowledging and addressing these experiences in a supportive and understanding manner. By creating spaces for staff to express their emotions, seek support, and access resources for coping and resilience-building, compassionate empathy helps mitigate the negative impact of trauma and emotional stress on staff well-being and safety.

Effective communication and conflict resolution strategies rely on fostering empathetic listening, mutual understanding, and respectful dialogue. Staff can navigate challenging situations with empathy and professionalism, thereby reducing the risk of escalation and violence in moments of conflict and intense emotional situations. Empathetic communication helps de-escalate conflict between staff members, promoting a culture of cooperation, teamwork, and mutual support and respect that contributes to overall safety and well-being in the workplace.

While many may misunderstand compassionate empathy as viewing it as weakness, it encourages a comprehensive and proactive approach to safety management within correctional facilities. The use of compassionate empathy prioritizes staff concerns, addresses underlying issues contributing to safety risks, and implements preventive measures where administrators can create a safer and more supportive work environment for everyone. Empathetic leadership plays a crucial role in promoting a culture of safety and well-being, where staff feel empowered to voice their concerns, collaborate on solutions, and actively participate in efforts to enhance security and mitigate risks. A supportive and resilient workplace culture that promotes the safety, well-being, and professional satisfaction of correctional staff is an important goal for correctional organizations.

Balancing empathy with professionalism – Some participants expressed concerns about

finding a balance between empathy and professionalism, particularly in enforcing standards and safety measures. This suggests an awareness of the need to maintain boundaries while still practicing empathy in correctional settings. There are three types of empathy: affective, cognitive, and compassionate. Cognitive and affective forms of empathy help a person to understand and share the feelings, perspectives, and experiences of others, while compassionate empathy is a call to action to help alleviate the suffering of others.

Compassionate empathy is characterized by a deep understanding of and often an emotional response to other's experiences. It is often misunderstood by many for several reasons. In professions that require frequent engagement with other's suffering, such as corrections, people may confuse compassionate empathy with emotional exhaustion or burnout. While compassionate empathy involves experiencing and acknowledging others' emotions, it also involves setting healthy boundaries and practicing self-care to prevent burnout. Next, there is a risk of over-identification with others' experiences, where individuals may become so immersed in other's emotions that they lose sight of their own boundaries and well-being. This can lead to emotional distress and hinder one's ability to provide effective support or assistance.

Continuous exposure to other's suffering without adequate self-care measures can lead to compassion fatigue, where individuals may become desensitized or emotionally numb to others' pain. This can result in diminished empathy and a reduced capacity to provide meaningful support or assistance. It may also be misunderstood in terms of boundary issues, where individuals may struggle to maintain appropriate emotional boundaries between themselves and others. This can lead to feelings of overwhelm, intrusion, or emotional entanglements, which may hinder effective communication, support, or lead to staff compromise. Acts of compassionate empathy may be misinterpreted as intrusive or unwanted, especially if individuals

perceive them as patronizing, pitying, or imposing. It is essential to approach empathetic interactions with sensitivity, respect, and a genuine desire to understand and support others' needs and experiences.

Cultural differences in expressions of empathy and emotional communication can also lead to misunderstandings. What may be perceived as compassionate empathy in one cultural context may be interpreted differently in another, highlighting the importance of cultural sensitivity and awareness in empathetic interactions. Last, some individuals may resist or misunderstand compassionate empathy because of a fear of vulnerability or emotional intimacy. They may perceive expressions of empathy as a sign of weakness or as uncomfortable reminders of their own emotional struggles, leading to defensiveness or avoidance of empathetic interactions. It is important to recognize the potential pitfalls and to approach empathetic interactions with sensitivity, awareness, and a commitment to maintaining healthy boundaries and self-care practices.

While the relationships with the incarcerated are a critical key to safety, the relationships between staff are also important. Positive and professional relationships foster collaboration, teamwork, mutual support, safety, professional development, organizational culture, staff retention, and recruitment. When employees feel connected to their colleagues and have a sense of belonging within the organization, they are more likely to remain in their positions and recommend the organization to others as a desirable place to work. Additionally, when staff feel valued, motivated, and empowered to contribute to the organization's mission and goals, it increases their commitment to the job and their co-workers. By prioritizing relationship-building efforts among staff, correctional facilities can create a positive and conducive work environment that enhances overall effectiveness and promotes the well-being of staff and their families.

Overall, the aggregated responses suggest that empathy contributes significantly to safety within a correctional facility as a transformative force by fostering positive relationships, facilitating effective communication, and promoting a supportive work environment. However, participants also acknowledged the complexity of this relationship and the need to balance empathy with other considerations, such as maintaining professional boundaries and addressing safety concerns effectively.

Description of the Solution

Based on the finding of the study, the proposed solution aims to implement comprehensive training programs designed to cultivate compassionate empathy among correctional staff. Drawing on insights from Goldberg (2020), these programs would go beyond traditional training methods and incorporate specialized techniques tailored to the unique challenges and dynamics present within correctional facilities.

The cornerstone of these training programs would be the development of empathetic skills among staff members. Through targeted instruction and practical exercises, correctional staff will learn to recognize and understand the needs, emotions, and experiences in themselves as well as for the incarcerated individuals in a more profound and empathetic manner. This approach aligns with the recent findings of Pettus-Davis et al. (2017), which emphasize the importance of empathy in promoting positive outcomes within correctional settings.

Furthermore, the training programs would focus on equipping staff members with practical strategies for responding to the diverse needs and situations encountered within correctional environments. This may include techniques for de-escalating conflicts, providing support during crises, and fostering constructive communication with incarcerated individuals. By enhancing staff members' ability to navigate complex interactions with empathy and

compassion, these training programs aim to create a more conducive and safer environment within correctional facilities.

Moreover, the proposed solution aligns with findings from studies by Lambert et al. (2015), which highlight the link between social support and staff well-being within correctional settings. By fostering a culture of empathy and support, correctional institutions can address concerns such as staff burnout and turnover, thereby promoting a more stable and secure work environment.

Importantly, the training programs would not only address individual-level skills but also aim to cultivate a culture of empathy within correctional institutions. This involves fostering a collective understanding and commitment to empathetic principles among all staff members, from frontline officers to administrative personnel. By promoting empathy as a core value within the organizational culture, correctional facilities can create an environment where compassionate interactions are not only encouraged, but also expected.

This approach resonates with insights from Steiner & Wooldredge (2017), which emphasize the importance of organizational factors in shaping safety outcomes within correctional facilities. By embedding empathy into institutional practices and policies, correctional facilities can foster an environment where staff feel supported, valued, and empowered to respond empathetically to the needs of incarcerated individuals. This, in turn, can lead to enhanced safety, reduced conflict, and ultimately, better outcomes for the staff and those in their care.

Goals of the Solution

In response to the identified need for enhancing safety and fostering positive interactions within correctional facilities, the proposed solution outlines several key goals. These goals aim to

not only address the immediate challenges faced by correctional staff but also to cultivate a more compassionate and empathetic culture within the institutional framework. By delineating clear objectives, the solution seeks to provide a roadmap for implementing effective strategies that promote safety, improve the staff and incarcerated population relationships, and enhance the overall well-being of correctional staff. The following goals represent crucial pillars upon which the solutions are built, drawing from existing literature and this research to inform their significance and relevance.

Cultivate a culture of empathy and compassion within correctional facilities: Drawing from insights provided by Goldberg (2002), the primary goal of the solution is to foster a culture where empathy and compassion are integral to the operations and interactions within correctional institutions. By instilling these values at all levels of the organization, from leadership to frontline staff, the aim is to create an environment where empathetic practices become the norm rather than the exception. This cultural shift is crucial for promoting positive interactions, conflict resolution, and overall safety within correctional facilities.

Improve staff-incarcerated relationships and communication: Building upon research by Wooldredge et al., (2017), another key goal is to enhance the quality of relationships and communication between staff and incarcerated individuals. By equipping staff with empathetic skills and communication techniques, the solution seeks to foster mutual understanding, trust, and respect. Strengthening these relationships can lead to a more cooperative and harmonious environment, reducing tension and conflicts that may arise within correctional settings.

Reduce incidents of violence and conflict within correctional environments: This objective is supported by insights from Steiner & Wooldredge (2017), which highlight the importance of positive staff-incarcerated relationships in enhancing institutional safety and reducing staff-

targeted incidents. By fostering empathetic interaction and understanding between staff and incarcerated individuals, the solution aims to prevent conflicts and mitigate the risk of violence within correctional facilities.

Enhance the overall well-being and job satisfaction of correctional staff: Building upon the findings of West et al. (2016), the solution aims to improve the well-being and job satisfaction of correctional staff. By providing training and support in empathetic practices, staff are better equipped to cope with the challenges of their roles, reducing stress, burnout, and turnover rates. Additionally, fostering a culture of empathy can create a more supportive and fulfilling work environment, where staff feel valued, respected, and empowered to make a positive difference in the lives of those they serve.

The themes identified in the results section underscore the significant impact of empathy on enhancing safety, improving staff-incarcerated relationships, addressing concerns for safety, and balancing empathy with professionalism. These themes form the basis for recommending a multifaceted solution aimed at addressing the central question of the study. Further, the proposed solution centers on implementing comprehensive training programs designed to cultivate compassionate empathy among correctional staff. Drawing on specialized techniques tailored to correctional settings, these programs will focus on developing empathetic skills, fostering constructive communications, and equipping staff with practical strategies for navigating complex interactions with empathy and compassion. By embedding empathy into institutional practices and policies, correctional facilities can create a culture where empathetic interactions are not only encouraged but also expected, leading to enhanced safety, reduced conflict, and improved well-being for staff and incarcerated individuals alike. By achieving these goals, correctional facilities can create a more supportive, harmonious, and safer environment

conducive to positive outcomes for all stakeholders involved. The recommendations put forth in this study provide a roadmap for implementing effective strategies that promote empathy, enhance safety, and foster a culture of compassion within correctional institutions.

Implications

There are several implications to this study that highlight the broader significance and practical applications of the research findings. This section provides insights into how the study's results can inform policies, practices, and interventions within correctional settings to improve the overall effectiveness of rehabilitation efforts.

Enhanced Safety

The study underscores the critical role of compassionate empathy in bolstering safety within correctional facilities. Implementing empathetic approaches can foster better communication, mitigate conflicts, and cultivate a more positive environment conducive to safety for both staff and incarcerated individuals.

Improved Staff Well-Being

Promoting empathy and understanding among correctional staff can significantly enhance their well-being. Empathy-focused training programs have the potential to reduce job stress, increase job satisfaction, and improve the overall mental and emotional health of staff members. By equipping correctional staff with empathy-building skills, these programs aim to foster better relationships and communication between staff and incarcerated individuals. A potential personal benefit for correctional staff undergoing empathy-focused training is the development of stronger interpersonal skills, which can improve their relationships both inside and outside the workplace. Enhanced empathy can lead to better conflict resolution, increased patience, and a deeper understanding of others' perspectives, contributing to more meaningful and positive

interactions with family, friends, and colleagues. Additionally, this personal growth can foster a greater sense of fulfillment and purpose, improving overall life satisfaction and emotional well-being. This improvement can lead to greater trust, respect, and cooperation, ultimately contributing to safer and more rehabilitative environments both inside and outside a correctional work location.

Positive Institutional Culture

The findings emphasize the importance of nurturing a culture of empathy and compassion within correctional institutions. This includes encouraging empathetic interactions, addressing concerns related to professionalism and boundaries, and creating a supportive atmosphere where staff feel valued and empowered to help the incarcerated. Implementing comprehensive training programs focused on fostering compassionate empathy can lead to a cultural shift within correctional facilities, where empathy becomes a core value. This shift can positively influence staff attitudes and behaviors towards incarcerated individuals by promoting more humane treatment and constructive interactions that can lead to lasting pro-social changes in the incarcerated.

Job Classification

The findings indicated that job classification may be a mitigating factor to how these classifications can impact safety, empathy practices, and overall outcomes. It is essential to know that teachers, case managers, medical providers, and support staff contribute to safety dynamics differently than custody and control staff. Often, staff are viewed as either a disciplinarian or a helper and this colors the lens through which they view their role at work. This includes addressing concerns related to professionalism and boundaries, and creating a supportive atmosphere where staff feel valued and empowered. Understanding these nuances can inform

targeted interventions and training programs tailored to the specific needs and challenges faced by each job classification, ultimately contributing to a more comprehensive approach to enhancing safety and promoting empathetic practices within correctional environments.

Enhanced Rehabilitation Efforts

Empathetic practices can contribute to the success of rehabilitation programs and the reintegration of incarcerated individuals into society. By fostering positive relationships and humanizing interactions, correctional facilities can motivate individuals to participate in programs aimed at addressing criminogenic factors and promoting personal growth. Education and programming has been positively linked with reduced recidivism, however, these programs are often the first to be shuttered when budget constraints and staffing crisis are revealed. From a meta-analysis that examines the effect of educational programs on recidivism among offenders, 50 studies were analyzed, with a total sample size of 66,995 incarcerated persons. The results indicate that participation in educational programs is associated with a 13% reduction in the risk of recidivism, supporting the notion that education plays a significant role in reducing reoffending rates among individuals involved in the criminal justice system (Wilson et al., 2000).

Reduced Conflict and Violence

Implementing empathetic communication strategies can significantly reduce conflicts and violence within correctional environments. By fostering positive relationships based on empathy and understanding, staff and incarcerated individuals can create a more cooperative and harmonious atmosphere. This approach not only reduced conflicts but also mitigates the potential for violence against both staff and incarcerated individuals. Addressing the underlying factors contributing to violence through empathy training can decrease incidents of aggression, hostility, and rule violations. When staff are equipped to understand and respond empathetically to the

needs of the incarcerated, tensions are eased, and potentially volatile situations can be defused more effectively.

Training and Policy Recommendations

The study suggests the need for comprehensive training programs focused on empathy, communication skills, trauma-informed care, cultural competency, and self-care practices. Additionally, policy recommendations may include guidelines for maintaining professional boundaries while practicing empathy and strategies for evaluating the effectiveness of training initiatives. However, implementing a cultural shift towards empathy may face resistance from staff members who are skeptical or resistant to adopting new practices or cultural norms. Overcoming this resistance will require effective communication, training, and leadership support to ensure buy-in and commitment from all levels of the organization. Additionally, limited financial resources may pose a barrier to procuring the necessary training materials, hiring expert personnel, and dedicating time for staff training. Budget constraints may require seeking alternative funding sources or scaling down the scope of the solution, potentially impacting the effectiveness and sustainability of the training programs. Another potential pitfall that may present a significant challenge includes addressing entrenched institutional culture that prioritize security and control over empathy and compassion. Shifting organizational norms and values towards empathy and compassion will require sustained effort, leadership commitment, and cultural change initiatives, which may encounter resistance or pushback from entrenched systems and practices. Lastly, staff members may perceive the use of compassionate empathy as a potential safety risk due to concerns about maintaining professional distance and preventing manipulation or violence from incarcerated individuals. This perception could hinder the

adoption and implementation of empathy training programs and limit the generalizability of the findings to other correctional facilities where safety is a primary concern.

Overall, the implications of this study highlight the potential benefits of integrating empathetic practices into correctional settings. These implications encompass safety improvements, staff well-being enhancements, the development of positive institutional cultures, strengthened rehabilitation efforts, conflict reduction, and the formulation of effective training and policy measures.

Limitations of the Study

There are study limitations to any research methodology and this section will address some limitations to provide a balanced perspective that acknowledges potential weaknesses while highlighting the study's overall value and contribution to the field of corrections work.

Sampling Bias

The study's findings may be influenced by sampling bias, leading to a limited representation of diverse perspectives within the facility. The study participants breakdown is as follows: mental health (1), maintenance (3), custody and control (13), teachers (3), other support roles (2), and retired or no longer with the department (3). The researcher tried to garner diverse and representative perspectives within the facility.

Social Desirability Bias

Participants may have provided responses that they believed were socially desirable or aligned with organizational values, potentially impacting the accuracy and depth of their reflections on empathy and safety.

Single-Setting Focus

The study's focus on a specific correctional facility within the Colorado Department of

Corrections may limit the generalizability of findings to other facilities with different organizational cultures, staff dynamics, and incarcerated populations. The findings may be influenced by specific contextual factors unique to the setting under study. This can make it challenging to determine whether the results are representative of the broader population or are specific to the studied setting. Eight of the study participants have worked in another correctional setting outside of the one being studied. Additionally, a single-setting study may lack the variability present in multiple-setting studies, which can limit the depth of insights and the ability to explore diverse perspectives or experiences.

Difficulty in Establishing Causality

Without comparisons to other settings or conditions, it can be challenging to establish causal relationships between variables. This limitation may hinder the ability to draw firm conclusions about cause-and-effect relationships.

Potential Bias in Results

Researchers and participants in a single-setting study may be influenced by biases specific to that setting, such as social desirability bias or institutional norms, which can impact the accuracy and objectivity of the results.

Difficulty in Replication

Replication of the study findings from a single-setting study in other settings may be challenging due to the unique conditions and variables present in the original setting.

While every study has limitations, researchers can consider complementing single-setting studies with multi-site studies or comparative research designs with a robust literature review. Additionally, transparent reporting of the study's limitations and careful interpretation of results within the context of the single setting can enhance the validity and reliability of the findings.

Directions for Future Research

Future research should explore the impact of compassionate empathy on recidivism rates, the role of training programs in promoting empathy or dynamic security for safety, and the connection between staff's use of empathy and job satisfaction. Comparative studies across multiple correctional facilities to explore variations in the relationship between compassionate empathy and safety could examine differences based on facility size, location, security level, and organizational culture. Cross-Disciplinary research collaborates with experts from fields such as psychology, sociology, criminology, and organizational behavior to gain a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms through which compassionate empathy influences safety in correctional environments. Transferability of findings to other contexts, such as school settings, suggests broader applicability.

Longitudinal studies to investigate the long-term effects on implementing empathetic practices on safety outcomes, including tracking changes in safety incidents, staff well-being, and incarcerated behavior over an extended period would be of value to the field of corrections. Quantitative assessments paired with qualitative findings to measure the impact of specific empathetic interventions on safety metrics, such as rates of violence, disciplinary incidents, and staff turnover. Leadership and organizational factors such as leadership styles, organizational policies, and institutional support in fostering a culture of empathy and its implications for safety within correctional facilities could be studied. Technological solutions such as virtual reality simulations or communications platforms in enhancing empathetic skills training and improving interactions between staff and inmates for better safety outcomes could be explored.

Incorporating the perspectives of incarcerated individuals in future research to gain insights into how they perceive and respond to empathetic practices from staff members and the

impact on their behavior and rehabilitations efforts is an interesting notion. Lastly, international perspectives with correctional facilities in different countries to examine culture influences on empathetic practices, safety perceptions, and organizational strategies for addressing safety concerns is of value for further exploration.

Future research should incorporate safety data, participant perspectives, and stakeholder input to inform policy decisions and improve correctional practices. Deliverables should include actionable recommendations, protocols, and education materials to support corrections professionals in implementing evidence-based strategies for managing difficult populations. Understanding stakeholder needs and expectations is crucial for effective dissemination and utilization of future research.

Overall, navigating these potential barriers will require a multifaceted approach that addresses the financial, cultural, and organizational challenges while leveraging available resources and stakeholder support to generate a comprehensive solution aimed at fostering compassionate empathy, enhancing safety, and promoting well-being for everyone within correctional facilities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has shed light on the vital relationship between compassionate empathy and safety within correctional facilities. It explored the perspectives of correctional staff regarding empathy levels, safety concerns, and the potential impact of empathy training programs. The research underscores the need for practical interventions informed by these findings to enhance safety measures and promote positive interactions among staff and incarcerated individuals. Overall, this exploratory study suggests that there is a relationship between the use of compassionate empathy by staff and safety within correctional facilities.

One key takeaway is the transformative power of compassionate empathy as a guiding principle of controlled correctional environments. Unlike conventional empathy, compassionate empathy has been shown to influence individual responses positively, fostering a more gracious and supportive environment within correctional settings. This highlights the importance of adopting action-oriented approaches to safety that prioritize empathy training programs tailored to the unique challenges faced by correctional staff.

While the study emphasizes the potential of compassionate empathy, it also acknowledges the complexity of implementing such programs and navigating varying perspectives on empathy. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that considers staff well-being alongside safety measures. By integrating insights from this research with existing literature on empathy and correctional environments, we can develop comprehensive strategies to promote a culture of compassion and safety within correctional facilities.

The research findings have significant implications for correctional facilities worldwide. Existing literature suggests a positive link between social support and outcomes among correctional staff, highlighting the importance of addressing staff well-being in addition to enhancing safety measures. Ultimately, the answer to turning a correctional facility towards safety for all may lie in embracing and promoting compassionate empathy as a guiding principle.

As we reflect on the profound impact of empathy on safety and well-being, let us heed the call to action within the helping profession of corrections. Let us collectively champion safety, sow seeds of empathy, and ignite transformative change. It is through collective action with our fellow brothers and sisters in humanity and a commitment to compassion that we can truly create safer and more supportive spaces for all individuals involved. Together, let us rise, let us act, let us truly transform this correctional environment, and let us **DO SOMETHING!**

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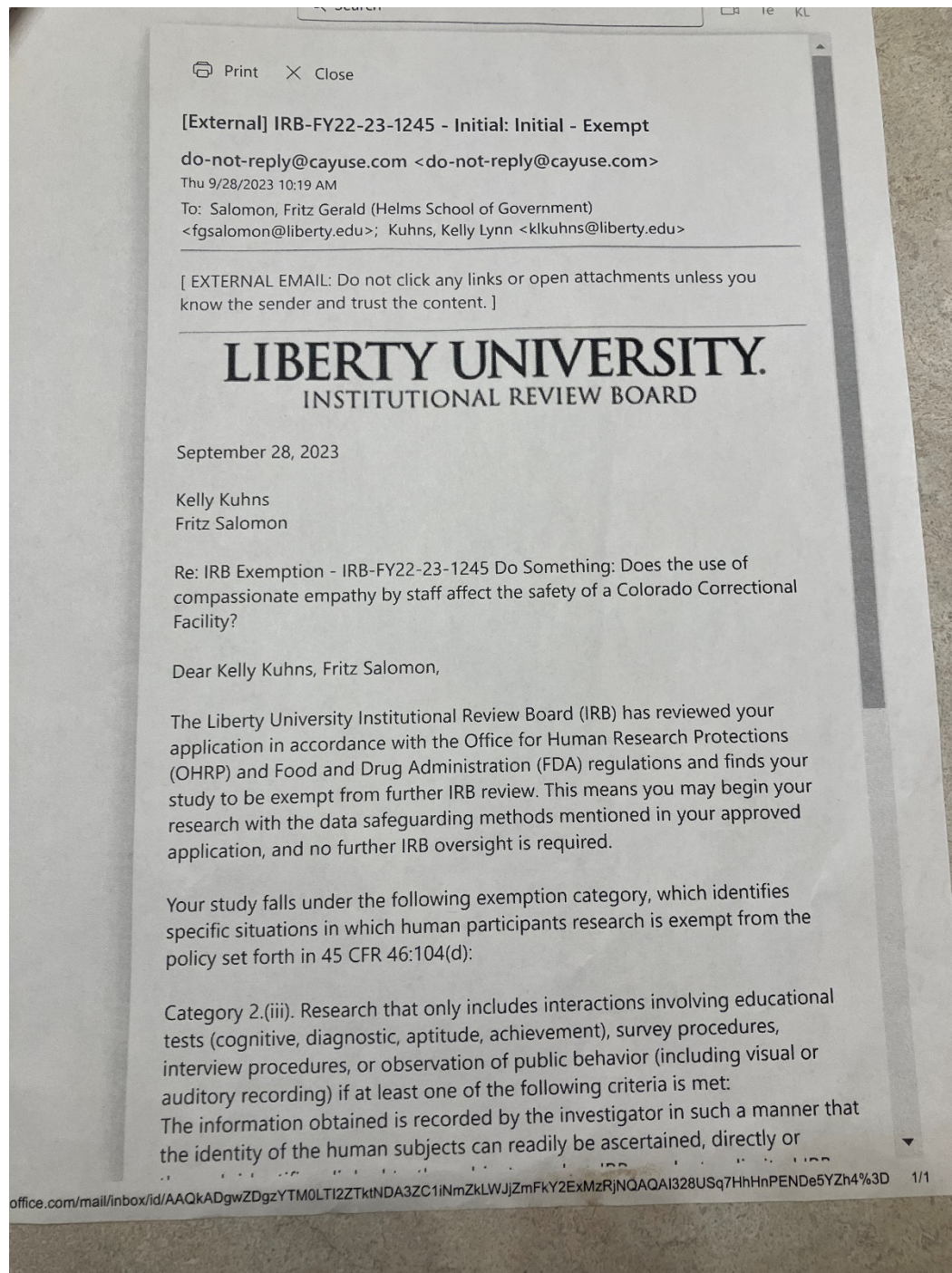
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APPENDIX A

IRB Approval 9/28/23:



Appendix B

Interview Questions asked of each Study Participant:

Interview Questions

Structured interviews will be conducted at a mutually agreed private location outside of working hours of both the participant and the researcher. The participant interviews will be conducted by the researcher. Each participant will be assigned a pseudonym to ensure complete confidentiality during the research process. The interviews will be recorded and field notes will be collected. After the interview, the researcher will utilize Nvivo for transcript production and for thematic categorization of data. Data confirmation checks will be provided to participants as soon as possible after the interview to ensure validity of the data collected and accurate capturing of their narrative story in response to the interview questions. Following are the proposed research questions:

- 1) Introduce yourself to me as if we were meeting for the first time.
- 2) Tell me about your Toronto Empathy Questionnaire results. Were there any surprises for you with these results?
- 3) What is your current understanding of the phrase “compassionate empathy”?
- 4) In what ways do you think your use of (or lack of use of) empathetic practices on the job contribute to outcomes for others?
- 5) Tell me what you remember about any training DOC has provided around using empathetic practices? Could you recommend a way to increase this type of training that would be meaningful to you?
- 6) Can you recall any experience with compassionate empathy, either giving or receiving this term in your own life, and if so, how has that influenced you?
- 7) What concerns (if any) do you have for your safety or that of coworkers?
- 8) Do you think safety relates to empathy? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?
- 9) Have you heard of the term ‘dynamic security,’ and what is your understanding of this concept?
- 10) What is the most satisfying and least satisfying aspect of your job with DOC? Do you have any suggestions for DOC on improving your job satisfaction?
- 11) Do you have anything else to share?

Appendix C

Toronto Empathy Questionnaire given to all participants prior to interviews:

Below is a list of statements. Please read each statement carefully and rate how frequently you feel or act in the manner described. Circle your answer on the response form. There are no right or wrong answers or trick questions. Please answer each question as honestly as you can.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1. When someone else is feeling excited, I tend to get excited too.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Other people's misfortunes do not disturb me a great deal.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. It upsets me to see someone being treated disrespectfully.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. I remain unaffected when someone close to me is happy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. I enjoy making other people feel better.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. I have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. When a friend starts to talk about his\her problems, I try to steer the conversation towards something else.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. I can tell when others are sad even when they do not say anything.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. I find that I am "in tune" with other people's moods.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. I do not feel sympathy for people who cause their own serious illnesses.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11. I become irritated when someone cries.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12. I am not really interested in how other people feel.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13. I get a strong urge to help when I see someone who is upset.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14. When I see someone being treated unfairly, I do not feel very much pity for them.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15. I find it silly for people to cry out of happiness.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16. When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards him\her.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Sources

Spreng RN, McKinnon MC, Mar RA, Levine B. The Toronto Empathy Questionnaire: Scale development and initial validation of a factor-analytic solution to multiple empathy measures. *J. Pers. Assmt.* 2009.;91(1):62-71.

The Toronto Empathy Questionnaire results for each participant and whether they think empathy is a teachable skill (Yes/No/Maybe).

Pseudonym	Results- Out of 64	Is Empathy a teachable skill?
Amanda Wilson	39	Maybe
Billy Jean	47	Yes
Bubbly	52	Yes
Diggy Dog	52	No
Ford	54	Maybe
Harley	53	Yes
Helen	47	No
Jessica	52	Maybe
Joe Corrections	34	Maybe
John 3:16	45	Yes
Justin Rivers	36	No
Kloset	41	Yes
Kris	38	No
Little Boy Blue	48	Yes
Luke	34	Yes
Mark	40	Yes
Michael	34	Yes
Mr. Helpful	62	Yes
Mr. Thank You	45	Yes
Pennywise	50	Yes
Sael	46	Yes
Samantha Wheeler	54	Yes
Shorty	60	Yes
Sliverback	54	Yes
Zip	42	Yes
	Avg.45	

Appendix D

Participant consent form sample:

Consent

Title of the Project: Do Something: Does the use of compassionate empathy by staff affect the safety of a Colorado correctional facility?

Principal Investigator: Kelly L. Kuhns, Doctoral Candidate, Helms School of Government, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older, a current or former employee of the Colorado Department of Corrections, a staff member who has been involved in a safety incident while at work. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to examine if a relationship exists between the use of compassionate empathy by staff and safety inside a Colorado correctional facility.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Participate in an in-person, audio-recorded interview that will take no more than 1 hour. This will be conducted in private, either before or after your scheduled work day at the facility or an off-site close public location.
2. I will assign a pseudonym to all participants to protect their identities in this study.
3. I will provide you with a written transcript of the interview within one week of the interview for a process known as member checking. Member checking is used in qualitative studies whereby participants are asked to review the interview transcripts to check for developed themes, accuracy, and to confirm agreement and understanding by both the participant and researcher of what was understood from the interview. This process should take about a half hour to review and up to an additional half hour of time to correct any errors made by the researcher, if necessary.
4. All interviews will be recorded and stored until member checks are complete. After member checks are completed, the recordings will be deleted.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include possible increased knowledge of mitigating factors of safety for staff who work in a correctional facility.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. The risks involved in this study include the possibility of psychological stress from being asked to recall and discuss prior trauma. All questions will be optional to answer. To reduce risk, I will monitor participants distress level, discontinue the interview if needed, and provide referral information for counseling services.

I am a mandatory reporter. During this study, if I receive information about child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse, or intent to harm self or others, I will be required to report it to the appropriate authorities.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data collected from you may be used in future research studies and/or shared with other researchers. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and any printed material will be kept in a locked drawer. After three years, all hardcopy records will be shredded.
- Interview recordings will be stored on a password locked phone until participants have reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts and then deleted. The researcher and members of the doctoral committee will have access to these recordings until the member check transcripts are completed.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Kelly L. Kuhns. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Fritz Salomon, at [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Appendix E

Sample transcript from one participant:

Pennywise Interview

Interviewer	00:00	Today is November 7, 2023 and I am here with Pennywise, not their real name. Pennywise, do I have your permission to record this interview?
Pennywise	00:29	Yes, you have my permission to record this interview.
Interviewer	00:39	Okay. Can you introduce yourself to me as if we were meeting for the first time?
Pennywise	00:59	Yes, Hi, I'm Pennywise. I'm 35 years old, I'm a first time mom. I have previously worked at DOC for 5-1/2 years. I'm getting married, and I have a big family.
Interviewer	01:16	Okay. Were there any surprises on your Toronto Empathy Questionnaire results?
Pennywise	01:28	No real surprises in my score. I did find one question difficult, but I can't remember exactly which one.
Interviewer	01:36	Okay, that's not a problem. What is your current understanding of the phrase compassionate empathy?
Pennywise	01:47	I think that compassionate empathy simply means that you are there for someone when they are hurting. Just being there for others.
Interviewer	01:56	Okay. In what ways do you think your use of or lack of use of empathetic practices on the job contribute to outcomes for others?
Pennywise	02:18	Um. I don't know specifically how it affects outcomes. I do know that working in a prison you see the same stuff over, over, and over again. There is a lot of lack of empathy that goes on there. But when progress is happening, it always made me feel good. There are lots of differences between staff and offenders, but we are all still humans and have a lot in common. I always operated from trust until I couldn't trust someone anymore. That worked well for me when I was there.
Interviewer	03:02	Can you tell me what you remember about any training that DOC has provided around using empathetic practices? Can you recommend a way to increase this type of training that would be meaningful to you?
Pennywise	03:25	The only training that I remember that talked about empathy was CIRT training. That is the Critical Incident Response Team and they taught us how to talk to and approach people from an empathetic perspective. The problem with empathy at Limon right now is that everyone is so busy and short staffed that there is no time to connect with the offenders or other staff in any real way. The amount of work leaves you in a survival mode all the time and that hurts staff over time.
Interviewer	04:10	Okay. Do you think that empathy is a teachable skill?
Pennywise	04:22	I think that it is a teachable skill. Mostly parents teach it to their children, but adults could learn it too if they wanted.

- Interviewer 04:46 Okay. Can you recall any experience with compassionate empathy, either giving or receiving this term in your own life? And if so, how has that influenced you?
- Pennywise 05:02 I grew up in Puerto Rico with my mom and we had a good friend that always helped my family. There are lots of good people in the world but sometimes it's hard to remember that. This lady always helped my mom and helped my family have a better life by what she gave us every day.
- Interviewer 05:48 Okay. What concerns, if any, did you have for your safety or that of your coworkers when you worked at Limon?
- Pennywise 06:05 Yeah, I have concern every day for my future husband who works there. He is the father of my son and I do not want anything to happen to him or be harmed in any way while at work. My parasympathetic nervous system is activated every time the phone rings when he is not home. The fight or flight response kicks in and adrenaline dumps into my stomach until I find out who is calling. That is not a good way to have to live. I like it when he is at home with us and I know he is safe.
- Interviewer 06:45 Okay. Do you think safety relates to empathy? If so, in what ways, and if not, why not?
- Pennywise 06:58 Yes, I think safety relates to empathy. When we take care of each other, it is related when you care and it creates safety in the group. Trying to be good to people helps everyone. There are lots of different personalities at Limon but empathy keeps us safe when we treat people good. I always used to say that kindness "saves the day" at work.
- Interviewer 07:46 Have you heard of the term 'dynamic security' and what is your understanding of this concept?
- Pennywise 08:53 So, yes, I have heard of dynamic security. We had to make dynamic security chrons in the computer system to document our interactions with offenders. I liked that Limon was moving in a progressive manner and away from the Us vs. Them mindset. So many of these people in there are forgotten by society. We have to help the offenders out and to help staff understand they are people too if staff don't get that concept. There were lots of people who did not like to view them as follow humans and that made me sad. They are people too with families and friends just like everybody else.
- Interviewer 09:32 Okay, great. And what was your most satisfying aspect of your job with D.O.C.?
- Pennywise 09:41 So I think that the most satisfying aspect when I worked there was when supervisors would help staff. It didn't happen often, but when it did happen, it brought everyone together in a special team. When they would take the time to invest in staff and teach them how to do things better, I liked that feeling.
- Interviewer 10:32 And what was your least satisfying aspect?

Pennywise	10:38	I really enjoyed my job when I was there. So this is a hard question. I guess the long hours, driving long distances, and being away from family were drawbacks. Those were probably the only things I was dissatisfied with when I worked there.
Interviewer	10:53	Okay. And do you have anything else to share?
Pennywise	11:02	The only other thing that I can think of is that a positive attitude makes all the difference there. You have to ‘fake it until you make it’ sometimes but the positive attitude is the most important thing you can have there.
Interviewer	11:27	Okay, great. Thank you so much for your time.
Pennywise	11:31	You are welcome.