

## **The Work of Correctional Officers in British Columbia, 2008: Changing Working Conditions, Changing Inmate Populations and the Challenges Ahead**

- “The inmate population has at least doubled due to double-bunking and the shortage of correctional centres”.
- “The inmate population is constantly changing. Currently there is a real glorification of gangsterism, and division between gangs is noticeable”.
- “The inmate population has increased in size, with younger and younger inmates, more gang activity, the harder drugs these days are causing inmates to be more violent and mentally unstable.”
- “The living unit concept has become increasingly more difficult to manage, with the larger numbers in the units – it has taken away the officers’ ability to work one to one with inmates, and provide that time to build rapport with them”.
- “The living unit concept was designed to give individuals (inmates) space years ago (before double-bunking and overcrowding). Incarcerated individuals had quiet time when needed. Today the concept has gone to warehousing individuals”.
- “The overcrowding in the units creates a very stressful environment for both inmates and staff. This stress takes away from a learning opportunity for inmates and it creates more of survival instinct in the inmate, which in turn makes them more aggressive to each other and to staff”.
- “Corrections/incarceration will always have a negative connotation. Both from the staff’s perspective and the inmate’s. The “nothing works” attitude is hard to break. The only positive aspect seems to be the staff you work with day-to-day, and the level of professionalism you work hard to keep”.

These are examples of the kinds of concerns expressed by correctional officers in British Columbia, compiled from a survey of almost 300 officers in British Columbia in the fall of 2008. For the past decade British Columbia’s correctional officers have experienced higher rates of on-the-job criminal violence than any other workers in the province (Worksafe B.C., Occupational Injuries by Accident Type and Occupation in British Columbia, 1997-2006).

It will be helpful to put this problem into context. Worksafe claims for injuries from acts of force or violence comprised 1.85 per cent of injury claims for all workers in B.C. between 1997 and 2006. For those who work in protective services, 19 per cent of all claims flow from injuries due to acts of force or violence. For correctional officers and police officers, the relative contribution of criminal acts of force or violence is greater than for any other occupational category: 28.0 per cent of all claims for correctional officers and 29.8 per cent for municipal police officers. But when we drill down into the data and compare police officers with correctional officers, we find that correctional officers

experience a much higher rate of injury from criminal violence; they have averaged 45 claims per year for the past decade, in contrast to 50 from municipal police officers -- but there are 50 per cent more municipal police officers in B.C. than there are correctional officers.

Why are British Columbia's correctional officers exposed to such a high rate of violence – to the reality and threats of on-the-job violence? Correctional officers who work in Canada's federal prisons typically do not have these kinds of risks. In order to understand why our provincial correctional officers are exposed to these risks, we need to consider the nature of their work. These men and women work in pre-trial jails and holding centres, as well as in post-sentence facilities for men and women who are usually serving relatively short sentences of imprisonment.

When a person accused of a criminal offence is taken to a jail or a pre-trial holding facility, there is a constellation of factors, some or all of which may be present: He has often just committed a violent offence, he may be under the influence of drugs or experiencing difficulties related to withdrawal, and he may be very angry about his arrest, an event that is more than occasionally preceded by the incriminating statement of a former friend or business associate. There may also be uncertainties about bail, and the extent of the charges to be faced. In these circumstances he may feel that he has little to lose. Further, the population in pre-trial is highly transient, and those in provincial post-sentence facilities have relatively little time to serve.

In contrast, federally sentenced prisoners are given no less than two years imprisonment at the point of sentence; the federally sentenced inmate knows how much time he must spend in jail, wants to avoid jeopardizing his opportunity for early release, and has time to participate in various institutional programs.

In large measure, then, it is the circumstances of the inmate population that makes our provincial correctional officers especially vulnerable to inmate violence. Additionally, and critically, the nature of the work of correctional officers in British Columbia has changed dramatically in the past five to 10 years. The January 2008 report of Patricia Fisher and Associates, commissioned by the provincial government, made the following observation:

“Over the past five years BC Adult Custody has experienced major restructuring and deep cuts to staffing levels. Ten centres were closed and a substantial proportion of remaining staff were redistributed to other centres, resulting in bumping and significant social/cultural disruption. Inmate counts have continued to rise over the interval and the centres were required to deal with increased counts, crowding and decreased staff/inmate ratios. At the same time, the profile of offenders has changed, with a younger more volatile population containing more mentally disordered and psychiatrically compromised inmates. Throughout

this difficult interval the corporate culture has been impacted, staff morale has suffered, and the personal costs have been high.”<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Fisher’s commentary provides a portrait of the challenges facing B.C.’s correctional officers. Some recent developments in B.C. have likely had some positive impact on the working conditions of deputy sheriffs. Specifically, on September 16, 2008, the government of British Columbia announced market adjustments to the salaries of both deputy sheriffs and correctional officers; the adjustments amount, on average, to an increase of approximately 9.2 per cent in annual wages. We have undertaken the survey that follows after this market adjustment, allowing us to see what concerns remain after the market adjustment – the extent to which both monetary and/or non-monetary concerns remain in place for correctional officers within the province. As this report makes clear, many critical issues remain, and it will likely be useful for both the BCGEU and the government to work together to consider further improvements to health, safety and morale in this workplace.

## **A Survey of Correctional Officers: October, 2008**

In September and October of 2008 we constructed a survey, in consultation with the correctional component of the British Columbia Government Employees Union (BCGEU). This survey was responded to by 289 correctional officers working in nine provincial facilities: North Fraser Pre-Trial Centre, Fraser Regional Correctional Centre, Prince George Regional Correctional Centre, Surrey Pre-Trial Services Centre, Vancouver Island Correctional Centre, Nanaimo Correctional Centre, Kamloops Regional Correctional Centre, Alouette Correctional Centre for Women and Ford Mountain Correctional Centre (see Appendix A: Survey)<sup>2</sup>. More than 95 per cent of those responding to our survey are officers currently working in one of first seven of these facilities. We cannot conclude that the responses collected are entirely representative of all correctional officers, given the constraints of our sampling method (surveys were forwarded to us by BCGEU representatives in each of the nine sites). But the substantial number of responses and the reality that the responses were relatively uniform across the largest facilities do suggest that the opinions of these 289 men and women (214 men and 75 women) are likely to represent the opinions of correctional officers in British Columbia.

Most of the correctional officers we surveyed had significant on-the-job experience (73 per cent of respondents had been working for three years or more). Most are also very committed to their careers as correctional officers; more than

---

<sup>1</sup> Fisher and Associates, “BC Corrections – Adult Custody Division: Organizational Health Assessment Report and Recommendations, 2007, January 2008, [www.fisherandassociates.org](http://www.fisherandassociates.org)

<sup>2</sup> This survey was filled in by correctional officers on their own time; the research was commissioned by the BCGEU, and the responses given in both surveys and interviews were not a part of any work undertaken by correctional officers as employees of the British Columbia government.

70 per cent indicated that they intended to continue to work as an officer until retirement.

Our survey indicated that on-the-job violence, through either direct experience or observation, is pervasive within B.C.'s correctional centres. The following chart indicates the extent of exposure to biohazards, the experience of on-the-job violence, and observations of on-the-job violence.

**Table 1: Exposure to Bio-Hazardous or Chemical Materials and Workplace Violence**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Number Exposed At Least Once (%)</b>	<b>Mean Number of Times / Year*</b>
<b>Exposure to Bio-Hazardous or Chemical Materials</b>		
• Blood (n = 274)	240 (87.6%)	14.87
• Feces (n = 272)	180 (66.2%)	8.2
• Saliva (n = 270)	172 (63.7%)	12.5
• Urine (n = 273)	171 (62.6%)	8.88
• Vomit (n = 274)	138 (50.4%)	5.09
• Other bio-hazards (n = 273)	47 (17.2)	0.85
• Chemicals (n = 272)	67 (24.6%)	2.53
<b>Directly Experienced Acts of Violence in Workplace</b>		
• Written threats (n = 278)	39 (14%)	1.34
• Verbal threats (n = 278)	215 (77.3%)	15.53
• Threatening gestures (n = 276)	208 (75.4%)	16.44
• Physical assaults (n = 280)	100 (35.7%)	2.84
• Assaults with a weapon (n = 279)	40 (14.3%)	0.97
• Other acts of violence (n = 278)	20 (7.2%)	0.42
<b>Witnessed Acts of Violence in Workplace</b>		
• Written threats (n = 282)	129 (85.1%)	4.97
• Verbal threats (n = 282)	240 (85.1%)	36.67
• Threatening gestures (n = 282)	223 (79.1%)	33.72
• Physical assaults (n = 281)	259 (92.2%)	18.65
• Assaults with a weapon (n = 279)	144 (51.6%)	4.98
• Other acts of violence (n = 281)	14 (5%)	0.36

Significantly, 35 per cent of officers indicated that they had been physically assaulted an average of three times during the last year. A majority of the officers had been exposed to multiple instances of vomit, urine, saliva, feces, and blood, in sum, a total of more than 40 exposures within the previous year.<sup>3</sup> Additionally,

<sup>3</sup> There is some doubt about the accuracy of the specific number of exposures, as some responses estimated values as high as 300. With a wide range of values, from 0 or 1 to 300, we must be cautious in interpreting the reliability of these numbers. Suffice to say, however, that there was significant exposure within the workplace to biohazards, and to violence, either directly experienced or witnessed.

more than 90 per cent of the officers indicated that they had witnessed a physical assault within the last year.

The job description of the correctional officer does, of course, include the possible use of physical force in certain situations, as does the job of the police officer. But, as noted above, WCB data make clear that the greater risk of injury arises with correctional officers. And it is perhaps not surprising, then, that 36 per cent of officers indicated that they have taken sick leave for work-related stress.

## The Concerns of the Workplace

The data from our survey reveal a rank-ordering of the concerns of correctional officers in relation to key issues in their workplace. The three issues that emerge at the head of the pack, well ahead of all others: overcrowding, increases in inmate to staff ratios, and staff safety/workplace violence. Wages ranked 6<sup>th</sup> in a list of 9 issues, identified by only 7 per cent of respondents as one of their top three concerns within the workplace (we have identified only those issues that at least 5 per cent of respondents ranked as one of their top three workplace concerns).

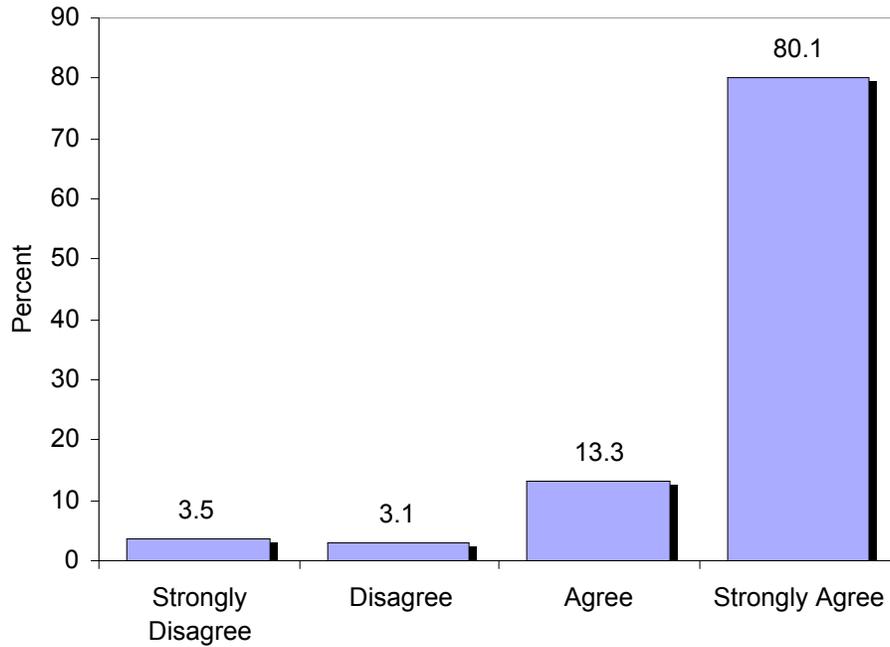
**Table 2: Employee Workplace Concerns**

	<b>Concern 1 (n = 268) N (%)</b>	<b>Concern 2 (n = 261) N (%)</b>	<b>Concern 3 (n = 234) N (%)</b>	<b>Total (n =763) N (%)</b>
Overcrowding	95 (35.4%)	47 (18%)	24 (10.3%)	166 (21.6%)
Inmate to Staff ratios/understaffing	63 (23.5%)	44 (16.9%)	26 (11.1%)	133 (17.4%)
Staff safety/workplace violence	40 (14.9%)	29 (11.1%)	31 (13.2%)	100 (13.1%)
Inadequate training	13 (4.9%)	30 (11.5%)	23 (9.8%)	66 (8.6%)
Placement or qualifications of new staff	16 (6%)	26 (10%)	22 (9.4%)	64 (8.4%)
Wages	13 (4.9%)	15 (5.7%)	25 (10.7%)	53 (6.9%)
Unfair or ineffective policies/practices	9 (3.4%)	19 (7.3%)	20 (8.5%)	48 (6.3%)
Relations and concerns with management	6 (2.9%)	18 (6.9%)	20 (8.5%)	44 (5.8%)
Other	4 (1.5%)	17 (6.5)	19 (8.1%)	40 (5.2%)

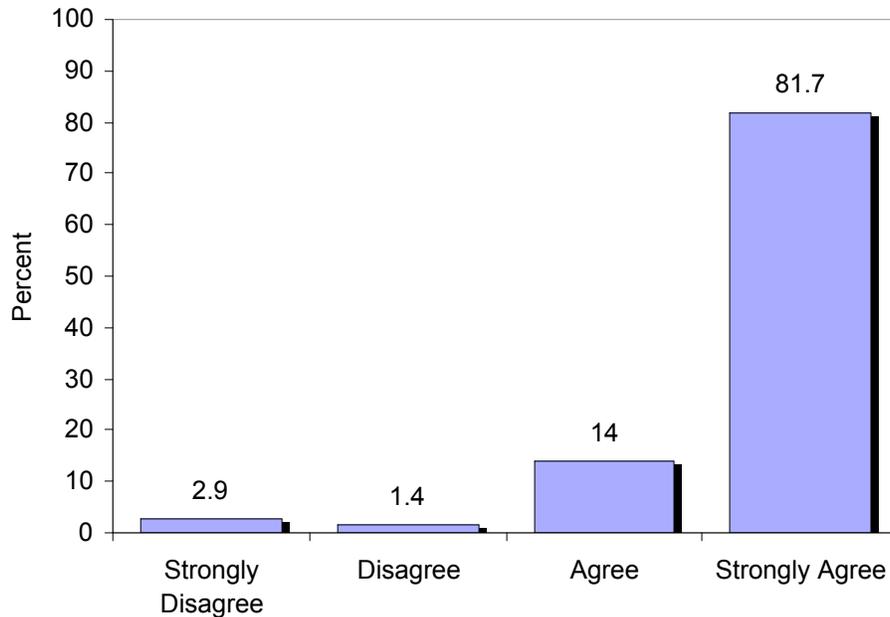
When we asked correctional officers specifically about overcrowding, inmate to staff ratios, and perceptions of safety on the job, we found a considerable degree of discontent. Figures 1, 2, and 3 convey current perceptions regarding overcrowding within B.C.'s correctional facilities. Figure 1 indicates that more than 93 per cent of officers believe that their correctional facilities are overcrowded; Figure 2 indicates that more than 95 per cent believe that the overcrowding has become worse within the last year; Figure 3 indicates that more

than 96 per cent believe overcrowding has become worse within the last five years. This lack of difference in perception between changes within one year and within five years suggests considerable concern regarding very recent events within B.C.'s correctional facilities.

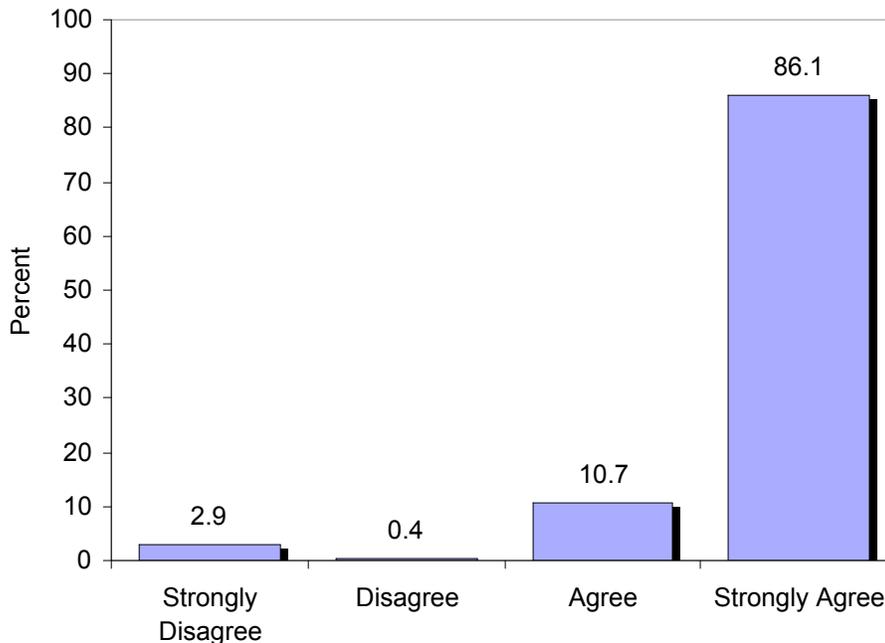
**Figure 1: Living Units in my Facility are Overcrowded**



**Figure 2: My Facility has become more Overcrowded in the past year**



**Figure 3: My Facility has become more Crowded in the past 5 years**

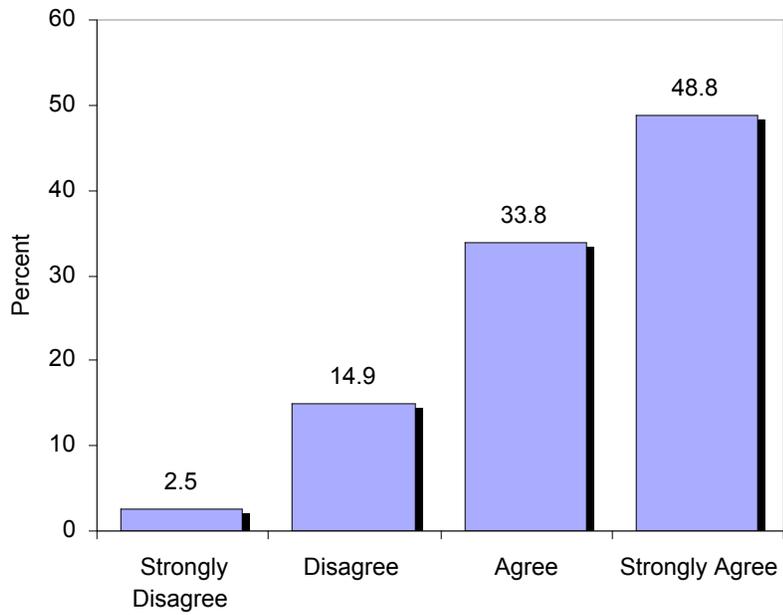


Similarly, correctional officers expressed concerns about staffing in the workplace. Figure 4 indicates that more than 82 per cent perceive that the current level of staffing makes their workplace unsafe. Figure 5 indicates that more than 90 per cent believe that there has been no favourable change in staff/inmate ratios during the past five years.

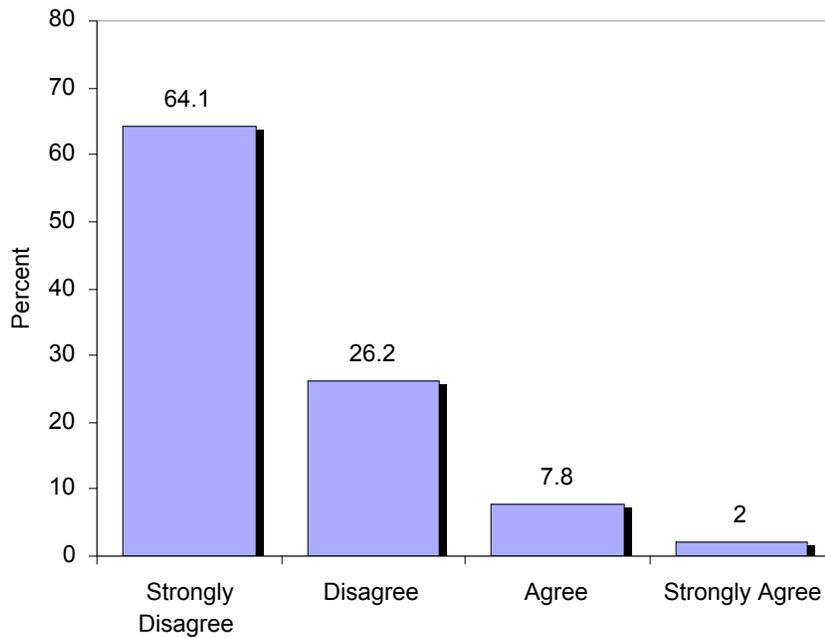
With respect to safety and workplace violence, a large majority of officers perceives an increase in both inmate to staff violence and inmate to inmate violence within B.C.'s institutions during the past year. Figures 6 and 7 make this point quite clear; the perception is particularly striking with inmate to inmate violence, with almost 90 per cent of officers suggesting an increase in violence of this kind. Figure 8 conveys the finding that almost 73 per cent of the province's correctional officers do not feel safe in carrying out their duties. In this context, it is instructive to compare the job of correctional officer to most other occupations in the public or private sector. It is extraordinary to hear that a very strong majority of employees in a work place do not feel safe while they are engaged in their work – as an earlier survey in 2002 also discovered.<sup>4</sup> This finding appears to distinguish correctional officers from other workers in the public and private sectors, even police officers.

<sup>4</sup> See Neil Boyd, *The Work of Correctional Officers in British Columbia, 2002: Problems and Prospects*, Paper commissioned by the Correctional Component, BCGEU, November, 2002.

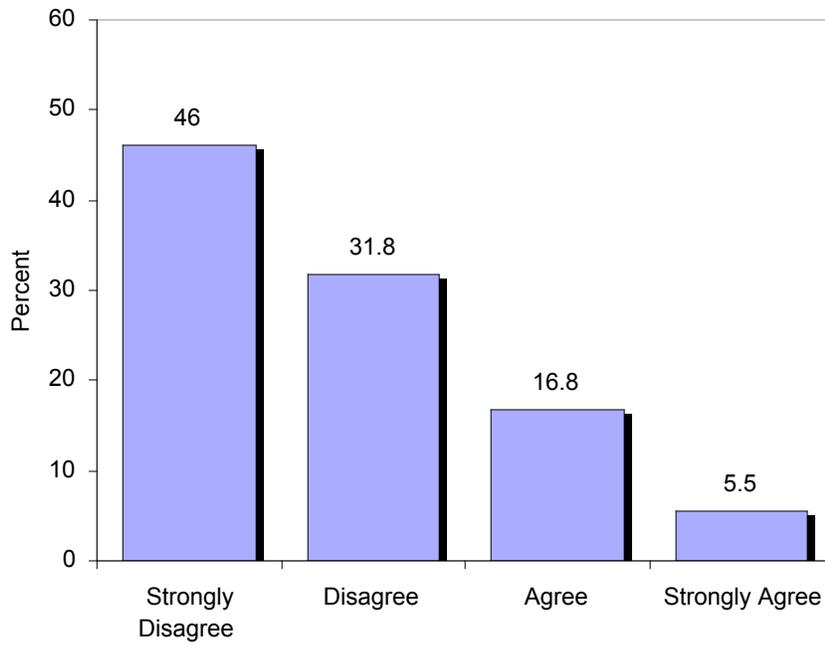
**Figure 4: The current level of staffing makes my workplace unsafe**



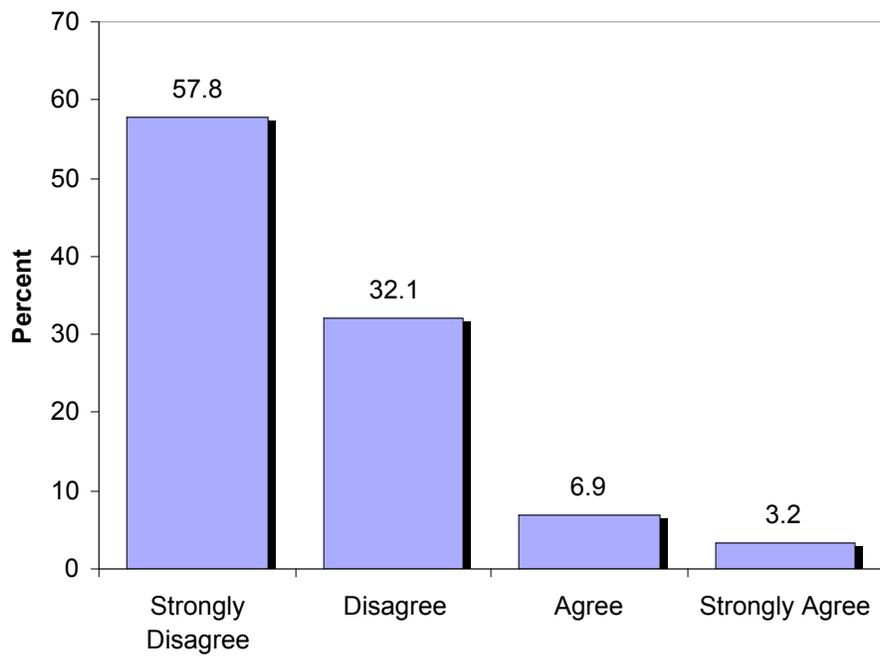
**Figure 5: Corrections B.C. policies on staff/inmate ratios have changed for the better over the past 5 years.**



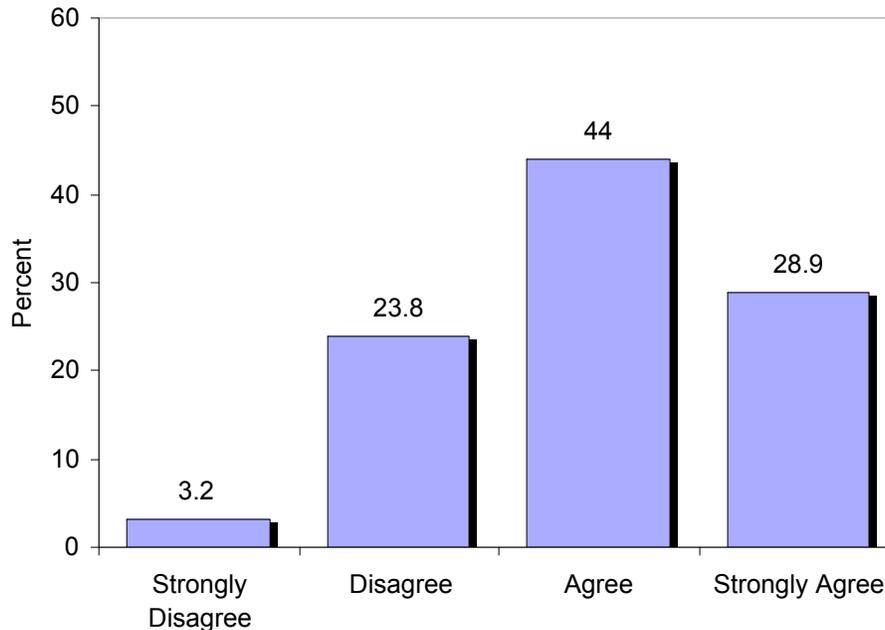
**Figure 6: The level of inmate to staff violence in my workplace has not risen over the past year**



**Figure 7: The level of inmate to inmate violence in my workplace has not risen over the past year.**



**Figure 8: I do not feel safe doing my job**



## **Staffing Changes: Historical Context**

In its February 2002 document, *Service Plan, 2002/2003 - 2004/2005*, the British Columbia Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General announced that between 2001 and 2002/2003 inmate to staff ratios would increase within provincial facilities from approximately 20 to 1 to up to 45 to 1. These changes were designed with the goal of lowering overall operating costs; the document noted that there would be a reduction in "contracted offender programs and treatment" and a consolidation of "operations in adult custody and community corrections". More specifically, the Ministry closed camps and moved all provincial offenders into secure settings, settings in which staff-inmate ratios have more than doubled. This change was poorly received by front line staff who are "in the trenches" -- those who have the daily responsibility of protection of the public, within the context of our correctional system.

In the past five years difficulties with staffing shortages, inmate to staff ratios, and consequent workplace safety have become more pronounced. Patricia Fisher notes in her January 2008 report to the provincial government, referenced above, the following list of key structural and operational issues (at page 61):

- Increased bed counts, double-bunking and crowding on the living units
- Chronic staff shortages, and consequent over-reliance on overtime, and difficulties with scheduled days off
- Reductions of staff to inmate ratios such that officers were working solo on units with over 40 and up to 65 inmates

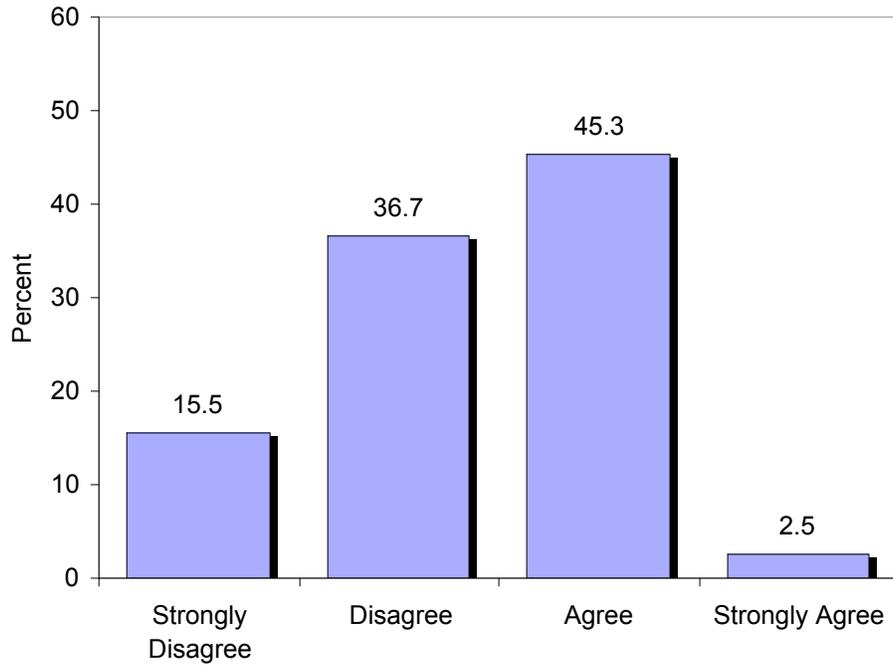
- Increased anxiety and safety concerns for officers given the high counts and low ratios
- Increased workload consequent on the low staff/inmate ratios
- More education and skills needed to effectively deal with the changing inmate demographic – i.e., younger psychiatrically compromised, higher needs, more volatile and violent
- The operational consequences of CAR (Correction Act Regulation, 2005) legislation and need for guidance about how to effectively and practically manage negative inmate behaviours
- Wide variations in shift patterns across Centres
- Need for clarity regarding roles for new managers and Correctional Supervisors

This listing of structural and operational issues is strongly reflected in our survey data. The top three concerns of correctional officers in November of 2008 are overcrowding, staff to inmate ratios, and workplace safety/workplace violence.

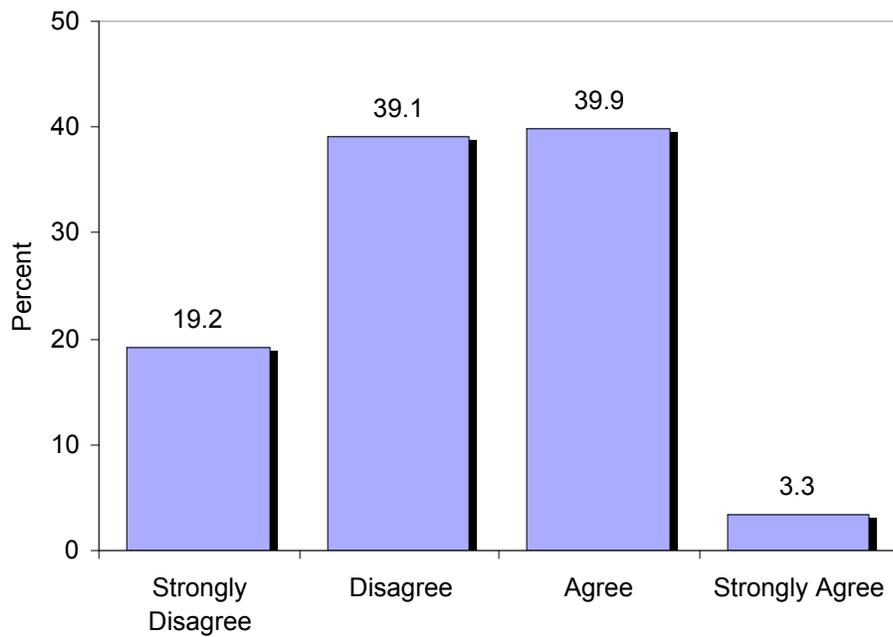
### **Inadequate Training:**

As in 2002, a majority of correctional officers believe that the training provided by B.C. Corrections has not been adequate for the tasks required. In 2008, however, the degree of concern regarding training is not as great as it was six years ago. While two-thirds of respondents in 2002 perceived training to have been inadequate, a slim majority has the same perception in 2008. Figure 9 indicates that a little more than 50 per cent of officers perceive training to have been inadequate, while Figures 10 and 11 point to perceptions regarding the suitability of B.C. Corrections training for relevant job skills, and the extent and adequacy of training in relation to biohazards in the workplace. These results deserve further and more detailed scrutiny. It is noteworthy that a significant minority – 40 per cent or more of correctional officers – believe that they have had sufficient training prior to beginning their jobs, and that their training has been relevant both for job skills, and biohazards. It would be helpful to know what distinguishes those who perceive the training to be adequate from those who do not; this knowledge may permit improvements in the delivery of training, both for new recruits and for those already in the workplace.

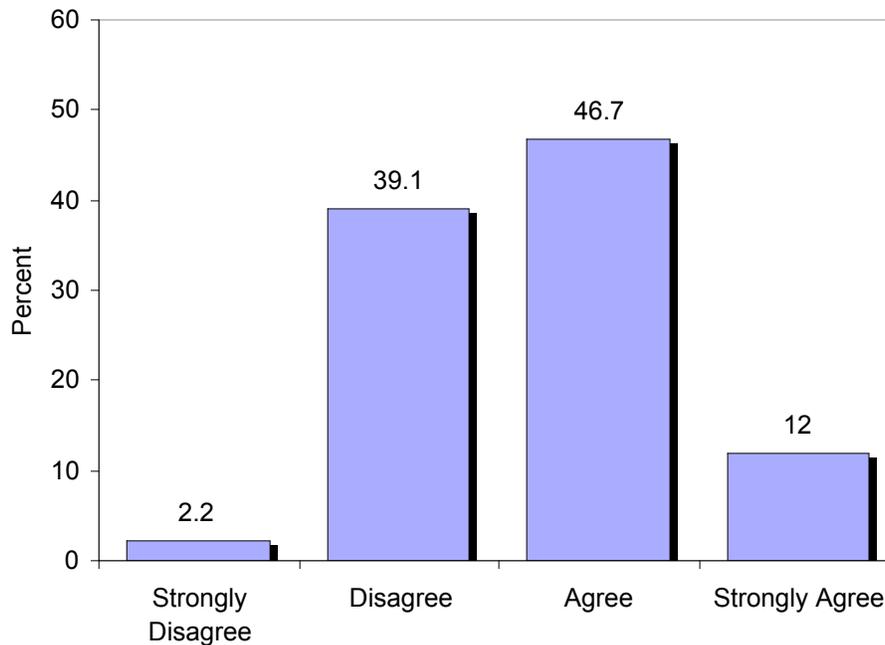
**Figure 9: I have received adequate training for this job.**



**Figure 10: Corrections BC training has improved my job related skills**



**Figure 11: I do not have enough education and training to protect myself from bio-hazardous and chemical materials in the workplace**



## **What Does the Relevant Literature Tell Us?**

As first noted in 2002, if we turn to the available empirical literature concerning the consequences of overcrowding, high inmate to staff ratios and workplace safety, we enter a quagmire of methodological difficulty. First, while there has been a significant amount of research which looks at the problem of overcrowding in prisons, this work does not focus on variations in inmate-staff ratios, but on the spatial densities of prison life -- that is, most typically, the number of inmates per given area of living space.<sup>5</sup>

This literature concludes that while it is clear that "crowded prisons may produce physiological and psychological stress among many inmates" (Bonta and Gendreau, at p.355), it is much less clear that the inevitable response to overcrowding is one of a greater number of incidents of inmate violence, against either staff or other inmates. The methodological difficulty here is that as we move from one prison to the next we find significant differences in the physical layout of each facility, in how medical, food and protective services are delivered

<sup>5</sup> See Cox, V.C., Paulus, P.B., and McCain, G. (1984), "Prison Crowding Research: The relevance for prison housing standards and a general approach regarding crowding phenomena. 39 American Psychologist 1148-1160; Bonta, J. and Gendreau, P. (1990), "Re-examining the Cruel and Unusual Punishment of Prison Life", 14 Law and Human Behavior, No.4, 347-368,

within each facility, and in the mission or purpose of each facility. It would not be easy, for example, to compare North Fraser Pre-Trial Centre to a federal penitentiary such as Kent Institution, housing inmates serving very long sentences, or even to a facility such as Fraser Regional Correctional Centre, housing inmates under sentence of two years less a day, or less. The purposes of the facilities are different, their designs are different and their methods of service delivery are different.

But more recent literature does suggest quite clearly that overcrowding leads to increased stress among inmates. The 2006 Report of the Commission on Safety and Abuse in America's Prisons, based upon a year of inquiry into prisons across the United States, concluded that both overcrowding and inadequate risk classification of inmates are fuelling violence against both inmates and staff.<sup>6</sup> Toch and Kupers (2007) indicate that a disproportionate amount of prison violence can be traced to the mental health problems of inmates; they note that overcrowding among these inmates has produced new and more troubling forms of prison violence.<sup>7</sup> Finally, Lahm (2008), reporting in the prestigious journal, *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, has noted in a study of more than 1,000 inmates in 30 prisons that young and aggressive inmates commit a disproportionate share of assaults, particularly in overcrowded institutions. He writes:

"...highly aggressive inmates (i.e., inmates who enter prison with aggressive or violent tendencies) were more affected by specific deprived conditions (i.e., overcrowding and a greater presence of younger inmates) and committed more ...assaults in these conditions. Prison officials may need to rethink the importance of housing context for these particular types of inmates. This research indicated that the effects of inmates' aggressive personalities might be minimized in more appropriate living conditions (i.e., those with less crowding and older inmates). However, because of budgetary, housing, and/or staff constraints, prisons typically cannot concentrate on placing specific inmates in the most suitable contexts. In fact, most focus on individual characteristics and not contextual factors when placing an inmate in the proper housing unit. It is possible that the classification of inmates may need to incorporate context as well as individual characteristics. This may involve the creation of new classification tools that assess both micro- and macro-level variables. Thus, prison researchers and prison officials will need time to develop new classification tools and test them. This may make the placing of inmates in the proper housing units a more time-consuming effort for prison officials."<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Gibbons, J. and deBKatzenbach, Nicholas, *Confronting Confinement*, Commission on Safety and Abuse in America's Prisons, Vera Institute of Justice, New York, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Toch, H. and Kupers, T., "Violence in Prisons, revisited", *45 Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, No. 3/4, pp. 1-28, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Lahm, K. F. "Inmate-on-Inmate assault: A multilevel examination of prison violence", 35 (1) *Criminal Justice and Behavior* pp.120-137, 2008.

Additionally, as we noted in 2002, in a review of inmate disruptions in 24 Canadian penitentiaries, Porporino and Dudley found that high inmate turnover was a more significant variable than population density in predicting the potential for inmate violence.<sup>9</sup> As provincial pre-trial centres are necessarily categorized as institutions in which there is a high rate of turnover, it follows that we could anticipate a correspondingly high rate of inmate violence in these facilities.

The available research on overcrowding in prisons has generally concluded that differences from one institution to the next appear to be more significant than population density in understanding the incidence of inmate violence and disciplinary infractions.

## **Discussion:**

This report has identified correctional officers as the category of workers in British Columbia who are most likely to be injured by on-the-job criminal violence. Despite far from comparable rates of pay, B.C.'s correctional officers have a rate of WCB claims due to acts of force or violence in the workplace that is more than 50 per cent higher than that of municipal police officers.

In the last five years our province's correctional officers have experienced profound changes in their workplace, significantly beyond the changes that first began in 2001-2002. The last five years have seen significant increases in inmate to staff ratios, a concomitant overcrowding of inmates within the facilities in which they work, and the increasing presence of younger and more gang-involved inmates. The living unit concept has largely disappeared and correctional officers now appear to have a mandate of warehousing offenders, in a social and spatial context that has become increasingly difficult.

These changes are overwhelmingly viewed by those who have the task of protection of provincial inmates as both compromising employee safety and inducing more substantial stress: 70 per cent of those responding to our survey do not feel safe at work. On a more positive note, however, 70 per cent want to continue working as correctional officers to the point of retirement; the issue of wages is clearly much less important to them than the trilogy of overcrowding, inmate-staff ratios and workplace safety.

In this context, it can be hoped that the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor-General will work co-operatively with correctional officers, and their union, to respond to the concerns that have been raised: to develop pragmatic and meaningful improvements to the current realities.

---

<sup>9</sup> Porporino, F. and Dudley, K., (1984) An analysis of the effects of overcrowding in Canadian penitentiaries, Research Division, Programs Branch, Solicitor General, Canada.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **The Work of Correctional Officers in British Columbia, 2008: Problems and Prospects**

#### **Research Proposal**

#### **Submitted to:**

**Simon Fraser University's Ethics Review Committee**

#### **Overview**

This project has been commissioned by the Correctional and Sheriff Services Component of the British Columbia Government Employee's Union (BCGEU). The researcher, Neil Boyd (principal investigator) of Simon Fraser University's School of Criminology, will examine how British Columbia Corrections' work practices and conditions of employment are impacting the safety of correctional officers, the inmate population, and the public. The specific areas of emphasis include, but are not limited to:

- recruitment and retention
- double bunking
- stress
- job satisfaction
- critical incidents (i.e. Code yellows; assaults)
- staff inmate ratios
- overcrowding
- the living unit concept and its value
- biohazards
- emergency response preparedness
- training
- changes in the inmate population over time
- WCB claims

#### **Methodology**

This research proposes to survey and interview members of the BCGEU who are correctional officers. The survey (see Appendix A) will be distributed by our contact at

the BCGEU, Wiho Papenbrock. The survey will be mailed to members and they will be instructed to return the survey, by mail, to the BCGEU. All respondents will be instructed not to place their name on the survey, thereby keeping the survey anonymous. Since the respondents will be contacted through the BCGEU and this contact will not interfere with their workplace, the office of the PSSG does not need to grant approval of this research.

Interviews will be conducted by telephone. Each interviewee will be contacted by the BCGEU and asked to voluntarily participate in a short (20 minute –30 minute) interview. If the individual agrees, they will be contacted by either Neil Boyd of the School of Criminology for the interview, or a researcher assigned to this task. The participant will be asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix B) prior to participation, which will inform them of the voluntary and confidential nature of the interview. The open-ended interview will examine the issues listed on page one of this proposal (see Appendix C for interview schedule). The interviews will not be tape recorded. Instead, the interviewer will take notes during and after the interview takes place.

# The Work of Correctional Officers in British Columbia, 2008: A Membership Survey

---

This survey is one part of a research project that is looking at how B.C. Corrections work practices and conditions of employment are affecting the safety of Correctional Officers, the inmate population and the public. In addition to this survey, we will carry out in-depth interviews and analysis of available documents. Specific issues that will be examined include, but are not limited to, the following:

- recruitment and retention
- double bunking
- stress
- job satisfaction
- critical incidents (i.e. Code yellows; assaults)
- staff inmate ratios
- overcrowding
- the living unit concept and its value
- biohazards
- emergency response preparedness
- training
- changes in the inmate populations over time
- WCB claims

The principal researcher commissioned by the BCGEU is a professor at Simon Fraser University's School of Criminology, and has no ties to the BCGEU. The results of this survey will form a part of a larger research document that will be submitted to the Correctional and Sheriff Services component of the BCGEU.

Your **VOLUNTARY** participation marks an important step in the successful completion of this project. There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this survey. Please be assured that everything collected in the course of this research project is **COMPLETELY CONFIDENTIAL AND YOUR IDENTITY WILL REMAIN ANONYMOUS**. Please do not identify yourself in your answers. This survey is in compliance with the research ethics guidelines as established by Simon Fraser University. All research materials, data, survey data, communications, interview notes or any other data will be held in confidence by the researcher, Neil Boyd. Please note that confidentiality is guaranteed to the full extent permitted by law. The Research Ethics Board of Simon Fraser University also requires that the following statement be added to all research with this guarantee of confidentiality, "Information with respect to child abuse or the threat of physical harm has to be reported to the relevant authorities".

If you have any questions, concerns or comments, you may contact Hal Weinberg, SFU Ethics, at 778-782-6593, or by email, [hal\\_Weinberg@sfu.ca](mailto:hal_Weinberg@sfu.ca)

**Please send your completed survey or any written correspondence to the person who gave it to you. Should you not wish to do so, you may mail it directly to Neil Boyd, School of Criminology, ASSC #1, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, B.C. V5A 1S6.**

**Research results may be obtained from Neil Boyd, [nboyd@sfu.ca](mailto:nboyd@sfu.ca), or 778-782-3324.**

*Thank you for your time and consideration in completing this survey.*

# The Work of Correctional Officers in British Columbia, 2008: A Membership Survey

---

## ***Part 1: Background***

In order to understand a little bit about your Correctional service background, we need to ask a few basic questions. Please tick appropriate answer.

**Q01. What is your gender?**

- Male                       Female

**Q02. What was your age in years, as of August 1, 2008?**

- 18-24             25-34             35-45             46 or Older

**Q03. Please indicate where you work.**

- Fraser Regional Correctional Centre  
 North Fraser Pre-trial Services Centre  
 Prince George Regional Correctional Centre  
 Surrey Pre-trial Services Centre  
 Nanaimo Correctional Centre  
 Alouette Correctional Centre for Women  
 Vancouver Island Correctional Centre  
 Ford Mountain Correctional Centre  
 Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

**Q04. Please indicate approximately how long you have worked as a Correctional Officer.**

- Less than one year  
 One to two years  
 Three to five years  
 Six to nine years  
 Ten to fifteen years  
 Sixteen or more years

**Q05. What is the highest level of formal education that you have completed?**

- Less than High School Diploma  
 High School Diploma  
 One-Year Certificate  
 Two-Year Diploma  
 Four-Year Degree  
 Graduate Degree

**Q06. Please list any other career training you may have:**

---

---

---

---

**Q07. What training have you had provided by BC Corrections related to changing job conditions?**

---



---



---

**Q08. How long do you intend on working in corrections?**

- less than 1 year    1-5 years    6-10 years    Until I retire

**Q09. How many times in the past year have you been exposed to chemical or bio-hazardous substances in your workplace?**

Type	Number of occurrences
Q09a. Blood	_____
Q09b. Feces	_____
Q09c. Saliva	_____
Q09d. Urine	_____
Q09e. Vomit	_____
Q09f. Other, please specify: _____	_____
Q09g. Chemicals, please specify: _____	_____

**Q10. Have you ever taken time off from work due to chemical or bio-hazardous substance exposure in the workplace?**

- Yes    No

If you answered no to **question 10**, please go on to **question 13** of this survey. If you answered yes, complete **questions 11** and **12** below:

**Q11. How much time have you taken off from work due to chemical or bio-hazardous substance exposure in the workplace in the past year?**

- None  
 1 – 2 days  
 3 – 5 days  
 6 – 10 days  
 11 – 15 days  
 Over 15 days

**Q12. Through what means did you take time off from work due to chemical or bio-hazardous substance exposure in the workplace?**

- WCB claim    sick leave    another form of absence, specify \_\_\_\_\_

**Q13. How many times in the past year have you been directly involved with an act of workplace violence?**

Type	Number of occurrences
Q13a. Written threat	_____
Q13b. Verbal threat	_____
Q13c. Threatening gesture	_____
Q13d. Physical assault	_____
Q13e. Assault with weapon	_____
Q13f. Other, please specify: _____	_____

**Q14. How many times in the past year have you witnessed an act of workplace violence? (i.e. witnessed inmate on inmate violence; responded after inmates restrained)**

Type	Number of occurrences
Q14a. Written threat	_____
Q14b. Verbal threat	_____
Q14c. Threatening gesture	_____
Q14d. Physical assault	_____
Q14e. Assault with weapon	_____
Q14f. Other, please specify: _____	_____

**Q15. Have you been debriefed to critical incident stress debriefing ? Have you ever taken time off from work due to an act of violence in the workplace?**

Yes       No

If you answered no to **question 15**, please go on to **question 18** of this survey. If you answered yes, complete **questions 16** and **17** below:

**Q16. How much time have you taken off from work due to an act of violence in the workplace within the past year?**

- None
- 1 – 2 days
- 3 – 5 days
- 6 – 10 days
- 11 – 15 days
- Over 15 days

**Q17. Through what means did you take time off from work due to an act of violence in the workplace?**

WCB claim     sick leave     another form of absence, specify \_\_\_\_\_

**Q18. Have you ever taken time off from work due to work-related stress?**

- Yes       No

If you answered no to **question 18**, please go on to **question 21**. If you answered yes, complete **questions 19** and **20** below:

**Q19. How much time have you taken off from work due to work-related stress in the past year?**

- None  
 1 – 2 days  
 3 – 5 days  
 6 – 10 days  
 11 – 15 days  
 Over 15 days

**Q20. Through what means did you take time off from work due to work-related stress?**

- WCB claim     sick leave     another form of absence, specify \_\_\_\_\_

**Q21. Is there currently double-bunking or more at your facility?**

- Yes       No
-

## Part 2: Perceptions

This section asks you to comment on a number of work related issues. If a question is inappropriate, or you are unsure how to fit your experience into the confines of the question at hand, please tick “not applicable”, or provide a short written comment at the appropriate question.

**Q22. Please indicate your degree of agreement (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) with the following statements.**

	Not Applicable	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Q22a.</b> The current level of staffing makes my workplace unsafe.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<b>Q22b.</b> Corrections BC policies on staff/inmate ratios have changed for the better over the past year.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<b>Q22c.</b> Corrections BC policies on staff/inmate ratios have changed for the better over the past 5 years.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<b>Q22d.</b> The level of <b>inmate to staff</b> violence in my workplace has not risen over the past year.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<b>Q22e.</b> The level of <b>inmate to staff</b> violence in my workplace has not risen over the past 5 years.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<b>Q22f.</b> The level of <b>inmate to inmate</b> violence in my workplace has not risen over the past year.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<b>Q22g.</b> The level of <b>inmate to inmate</b> violence in my workplace has not risen over the past 5 years.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<b>Q22h.</b> Corrections BC policies on sick leave have changed for the better over the past year.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<b>Q22i.</b> Corrections BC policies on sick leave have changed for the better over the past 5 years.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<b>Q22j.</b> The living units in my facility are overcrowded.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<b>Q22k.</b> My facility has become more crowded over the past year.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<b>Q22l.</b> My facility has become more crowded over the past 5 years.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<b>Q22m.</b> I do not feel safe doing my job.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

	Not Applicable	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Q22n.</b> My level of on-the-job stress has gone up over the past year.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<b>Q22o.</b> My level of on-the-job stress has gone up over the past <b>5</b> years.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<b>Q22p.</b> Emergency response preparedness in my facility has increased over the past year.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<b>Q22q.</b> Emergency response preparedness in my facility has increased over the past <b>5</b> years.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<b>Q22r.</b> Double bunking does not increase levels of <b>inmate on inmate</b> violence.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<b>Q22s.</b> Double bunking does not increase levels of <b>inmate on staff</b> violence.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<b>Q22t.</b> I received adequate training for this job.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<b>Q22u.</b> Corrections BC training techniques have gotten better over the past year.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<b>Q22v.</b> Corrections BC training techniques have gotten better over the past <b>5</b> years.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<b>Q22w.</b> Corrections BC training has improved my job-related skills.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<b>Q22x.</b> Corrections BC training has improved my promotional opportunities.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<b>Q22y.</b> I regularly worry about my safety due to exposure to bio-hazardous and chemical materials in the workplace.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
<b>Q22z.</b> I do not have enough education and training to protect myself from bio-hazardous and chemical materials in the workplace.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

**Q23. What are the three most important concerns that you currently have regarding B.C. Corrections work practices and conditions of employment?**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**Q24. Has the inmate population changed in the past five years? If yes, explain how it has changed below.**

---

---

**Q25. Does the living unit concept still apply to your workplace? Does it have value in your workplace?**

---

---

**Q26. Please provide any additional comments that you would like to make:**

## APPENDIX B

### SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

#### INFORMED CONSENT BY SUBJECTS TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

The University and those conducting this project subscribe to the ethical conduct of research and to the protection at all times of the interests, comfort, and safety of subjects. This form and the information it contains are given to you for your own protection and full understanding of the procedures. Your signature on this form will signify that you have received a document which describes the procedures of this research project, that you have received an adequate opportunity to consider the information in the document, and that you voluntarily agree to participate in the project.

Your **VOLUNTARY** participation marks an important step in the successful completion of this project. There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this survey. Please be assured that everything collected in the course of this research project is **COMPLETELY CONFIDENTIAL AND YOUR IDENTITY WILL REMAIN ANONYMOUS**. Please do not identify yourself in your answers. This interview is in compliance with the research ethics guidelines as established by Simon Fraser University. All research materials, data, survey data, communications, interview notes or any other data will be held in confidence by the researcher, Neil Boyd. Please note that confidentiality is guaranteed to the full extent permitted by law. The Research Ethics Board of Simon Fraser University also requires that the following statement be added to all research with this guarantee of confidentiality, "Information with respect to child abuse or the threat of physical harm has to be reported to the relevant authorities".

If you have any questions, concerns or comments, you may contact Hal Weinberg, SFU Ethics, at 778-782-6593, or by email, hal\_Weinberg@sfu.ca

Having been asked by Neil Boyd of the School of Criminology of Simon Fraser University to participate in an interview, I have read the procedures specified below.

I understand that this research project has been commissioned by the BCGEU and examines how B.C. Corrections work practices and conditions of employment are impacting the safety of correctional officers, the inmate population, and the public.

I understand that I may withdraw my participation in this interview at any time.

I may obtain copies of the results of this study, upon its completion, by contacting:  
Wiho Pappenbrock, BCGEU Regional Coordinator  
Office: (250) 563-1116  
Fax: (250) 562-9012

Toll free: (800) 667-8772

I have been informed that the research material will be held confidential.  
I agree to participate in a telephone interview, which should last between 20 to 30  
minutes,

during the time period: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**NAME (please print legibly):** \_\_\_\_\_

**SIGNATURE:** \_\_\_\_\_ **WITNESS:** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

### Interview Schedule

#### ***I. Introduction***

- Interviewer/ Scribe
- Interviewees (name, position, length of service, institution)
- About the project (brief background)
- Explain interview process

#### ***II. Participant Consent Form***

#### ***III. Questions & Discussion***

##### **Area 1: Violence/aggression in the workplace**

1. Do you see violence/aggression as a problem in your workplace?
  - Tell me more; ask for examples of both physical & verbal aggression; critical incidents (i.e. Code yellows; assaults)
2. What things (i.e. factors) contribute to the problem of aggression or what causes the aggression?
3. How do you deal with it?
  - Usage of sick, WCB, or other leave?

##### **Area 2: On-the-job stress**

1. How does stress affect your job?
  - Usage of sick, WCB, or other leave?

##### **Area 3: Overcrowding**

1. What is the staff/inmate ratio at your institution? How does this affect your job?
2. Does your institution double-bunk the inmates? How does this affect your job?

#### **Area 4: Biohazards**

1. How is your job affected by biohazards?
  - Describe specific incidents
1. What things (i.e. factors) contribute to problems regarding biohazards?
  - Training issues; inmate overcrowding, etc.
2. How do you deal with on-the-job biohazards?
  - Usage of sick, WCB or other leave?

#### **Area 5: Training**

1. What kind of training have you received to deal with the above issues?
2. Has this training been beneficial? Is it adequate?

#### **Area 6: Recruitment and Retention**

1. What problems face your organization with respect to retaining good officers and recruiting promising officers? What solutions might there be for these problems, if they exist?

#### **Area 7: Changes in the Inmate Population**

1. Has the inmate population changed during the past five years? If yes, explain how the population has changed, and suggest any explanations as to why.