

Exploring Belonging & Interventions to Improve Well-Being Through a Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Qualitative Study Among Correctional Workers

Catherine M. Kiaupa¹, Drashti Topiwala, Lisa Jaegers, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA²

¹Saint Louis University, St. Louis, Missouri, United States; ²Saint Louis University, Saint Louis, MO, USA

DOI: [10.5014/ajot.2023.77S2-PO313](https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2023.77S2-PO313)

Date presented: April 22, 2023

Primary Author and Speaker: Catherine M. Kiaupa, katiekiaupa88@gmail.com

PURPOSE: Belonging increases well-being and mitigates stressors among employees [1; 2]. Stress and trauma are significant issues of public safety workers, especially those in prisons [3]. This study aimed to identify prominent belonging challenges of correctional workers and consider solutions to foster belonging.

DESIGN: This qualitative study used participatory action research to develop questions and perform focus groups at randomly selected prison workplaces.

METHOD: A participatory prison system executive team selected focus group questions from existing resources that explored employee challenges and suggestions about belonging, bias, microaggression, microinequity, and special advantage [4]. Focus groups were completed at 6 sites (N = 53, employing 8,400) across a Midwest state. There were 3 prisons, 2 probation and parole districts, and 1 transition center. Virtual focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed to explore themes. Transcripts were independently coded by 2 researchers and thematic analysis was performed with a 3rd rater.

RESULTS: A total of 9, one-hour focus groups were completed out of 10. There were a total of 47 participants with an average of 5 participants per focus group. The focus groups were primarily represented by non-custody staff and the daytime shift. Out of all the challenges, the most notable was 'belonging,' with the most prominent theme being negative experiences and suggestions related to belonging. Non-custody staff had more suggestions related to belonging and negative experiences, while custody staff had more positive experiences coded.

CONCLUSION: 'Belonging' is especially important for workplace diversity, equity and inclusion; and for guiding workplace health research and interventions.

IMPACT STATEMENT: This study provides an overview of the challenges and need for more assessment to implement occupational therapy belonging-focused interventions that can support the emotional needs of correctional workers.

References

- Ayyala, R. S., Artunduaga, M., Morin, C. E., & Coley, B. D. (2022). Leveraging diversity, equity, and inclusion for promoting wellness in the radiology workplace. *Pediatric Radiology*, 52(9), 1724–1729. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00247-022-05292-z>
- Roberts L. W. (2020). Belonging, respectful inclusion, and diversity in medical education. *Academic Medicine: Journal of the Association of American Medical Colleges*, 95(5), 661–664. <https://doi.org/10.1097/ACM.00000000000003215>
- Finney, C., Stergiopoulos, E., Hensel, J., Bonato, S., & Dewa, C. S. (2013). Organizational stressors associated with job stress and burnout in correctional officers: A systematic review. *BMC Public Health*, 13(82), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-13-82>
- Harvard Human Resources Questions, https://hr.harvard.edu/files/humanresources/files/diversity_inclusion_belonging_and_equity_toolkit.pdf 5. Washington State Corrections Worker Survey, Equity Diversity, Inclusion & Respect Index, <https://www.doc.wa.gov/about/agency/strategic-plan-g3o1.htm>