

Correctional Officer Recruitment in Canada's Federal Prison System: An Analysis from the Perspective of the Correctional Officer

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Recruitment is key to any thriving correctional service, however, knowledge of the recruitment processes, which also includes onboarding training, is still limited to administrators, instructors, and recruits despite the importance of recruitment for the well-being of prison staff and prisoners. Recruitment determines the composition of the correctional workforce, and the orientations of those entering the field, specifically, their values, morals, ethics, and knowledge base. Correctional agencies suffer from serious problems related to recruitment such as high employee turnover rates and an inability to recruit enough employees to replace those who exit the occupational field.¹ In the current study, we spoke to 64 correctional officers with a minimum of one year of work experience (and a maximum of less than two years) at Correctional Service Canada (CSC) to understand their interpretations of recruitment, particularly CSC's eligibility and selection criteria. Instead of examining recruitment processes, we explore how officers view CSC's selection criteria, including any suggestions they had to improve screening, engagement, selection, and onboarding. We limited our interviews to employees with one year work experience as these individuals will recollect their recruitment experience. We also recognise the needs of those in the occupational role due to their occupational tenure and as such, our sample balances recall of recruitment with knowledge on occupational needs.

CSC onboards recruits with a programme referred to as the 'Correctional Training Program' or simply 'CTP'; correctional workers also refer to CTP as 'core'. Correctional workers' interpretations of recruitment are central to advancing a more effective enlistment and training programme and ensuring occupational fitness for the job. These officers' interpretations provide a frontline, ground-up response to the challenges that are associated with creating a correctional officer workforce oriented to the provision of care, custody, and control.²

In the current article we draw from semi-structured interviews with correctional officers and ethnographic experiences of the lead author as she completed CTP at CSC in 2019 to unpack four themes tied to recruitment: the age of recruits, personal suitability for the occupation, the need for physical standards, and more pronounced recruitment efforts to increase CSC's visibility. We note that participants felt CSC did well in recruiting in line with equity, diversity, and inclusion standards. We conclude with a discussion of the next steps for recruitment, highlighting possible organisational cost savings and how to create a more rehabilitative workforce.

Recruitment in Corrections

There has been sporadic attention paid to recruitment in correctional services in Canada and internationally. In Canada, Corey evaluated CSC's CTP using Kirkpatrick's four-level evaluation framework.³ Although an insightful study about trainee reactions, learning, behavioural outcomes, and organisational

1. CSC. (2015). *Why do Correctional Officers Resign?* FORUM on Corrections Research. Retrieved from <https://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/research/forum/e011/e011c-eng.shtml>; Lambert, E. G. (2001). To stay or quit: A review of the literature on correctional staff turnover. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 26(1), 61.
2. Ricciardelli, R. (2019). *Also serving time: Canadian provincial and territorial correctional officers*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
3. Corey, S. (2012). *An evaluation of the correctional training program delivered by the correctional service of Canada*. (PhD). Carleton University.

implications, Corey's work, the only study on CSC's CTP, was removed from discussions of recruitment. Other evaluations have discussed correctional organisations' offered training, for instance, Amboyer surveyed correctional officers in the United States to unpack their interpretations of 77 correctional work tasks (e.g., prisoner custody, institutional security, prepare written reports)⁴ and Arredondo and colleagues evaluated a 'stress management programme' for both correctional officers and their spouses.⁵ Backer studied correctional worker coping by evaluating a stress inoculation training intervention,⁶ and Bhoodram,⁷ like others,⁸ studied correctional worker experiences with employee assistance programmes, finding each insufficient to meet the needs of officers. Stress management training has been studied by others also.⁹ Some have more generally evaluated correctional training and development — including with a lens to improve officer mental health rather than toward recruitment.¹⁰ Moreover, a scoping review of published literature on correctional officer training and education reveals that research tends to focus on entry-level training/educational programmes, development in officer training, and specialised well-being/mental health training initiatives.¹¹ What is missing across all literature is a focus on recruitment *alongside* training.

Claude Tellier Joseph, recognising the growing concerns in CSC tied to the management of the prisoner population, profiled CSC correctional officer recruits.¹² He showed that 87 percent of his sample of 1,357 recruits remained with the organisation for two

and a half years. Central here is that researchers have shown that assessment of candidates must be correlated to their attitudes and behavioural skills and that candidates' personalities and values must align with the organisational philosophy for positive occupational outcomes. Nevertheless, researchers have not properly explored how hiring, terminating, and turnover (as well as turnover intent) may hinder correctional services, represents massive budgetary demands, and may negatively impact efforts to support public and institutional safety.¹³ To further demonstrate the importance of this project, there is no international literature that develops an understanding around Correctional Officers' (CO) and recruitment to their correctional programme. Abdelsalam and Sunde's work made a comparison between CO's in the United States and Norway and found differences amongst CO's and their perceptions.¹⁴ Specifically, the focus and structure of training may be influenced by the ideologies and goals of different countries, as each should be systematically and culturally embedded. In the US, the focus of training is primarily on learning tactical and procedural skills related to static security within prisons. Conversely, to become a CO in Norway requires a degree from the Correctional Service of Norway Staff Academy and all recruits undergo a two-year theoretical and practical education, where their studies are divided between academic coursework and practical training in a designated 'teaching' prison where candidates receive a full-time wage to support their studies. Once training is completed, the graduates

4. Amboyer, D. J. (1991). *Entry-level correctional officer perceptions of academy training, higher education curricula of the correctional officer academic program, and frequency of job task performance*. (Ph.D.). Wayne State University, Ann Arbor. ProQuest One Academic database.
5. Arredondo, R., Shumway, S. T., Kimball, T. G., Dersch, C. A., Morelock, C. N., & Bryan, L. (2002). *Law Enforcement and Corrections Family Support: Development and Evaluation of a Stress Management Program for Officers and Their Spouses*. Executive Summary: (529902006-001).
6. Backer, L. H. (1990). *The differential effectiveness of a stress inoculation training intervention as a function of coping style among correctional workers*. (Ph.D.). California School of Professional Psychology - San Diego, Ann Arbor. ProQuest One Academic database.
7. Bhoodram, P. A. (2010). *An Evaluation of The Employee Assistance Programme in the Department of Correctional Services Benchmarked Against the Standards of the Employee Assistance Professionals Association of South Africa*. 26. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/2263/28567>
8. Siqueira Cassiano, M., Ricciardelli, R., & Foley, G. (2022). The Mental Health and Wellness of Correctional Officers in Canada: Programs and Practices. *Corrections*, 1-18.
9. Booth, B. (2009). *Cognitive-behavioral stress management program for correctional officers*. (Ph.D.). Nova Southeastern University, Ann Arbor; Bravo-Mehmedbasic, A., Salcic, D., Kucukalic, A., Fadilpasic, S., Cakovic, L., Mehmedika-Suljic, E., & Masic, I. (2009). Impact of psychoeducation on professional stress reduction among prison guards. *Materia Socio Medica*, 21(1), 24; Der Pan, P. J., Chang, S.-H., & Lin, C.-W. (2007). Correctional Officers' Perceptions of the Competency-Based Counseling Training Program in Taiwan: A Preliminary Qualitative Research. *International journal of offender therapy and comparative criminology*, 51(5), 523-540.
10. Bensimon, P. (2005). *Correctional Officers and Their First Year: An Empirical Investigation*. Correctional Services of Canada; Doughty, P. L., Spuches, C. M., & Wall, D. M. (1992). A Case Study of Evaluation in Corrections Training and Development. *Journal of Correctional Education*, 43(2), 82-87; Engelmann, N. D. (1997). *The impact of Critical Incident Stress Debriefing on correctional officers*. (M.A.). Southern Connecticut State University, Ann Arbor; Galvin, J. J. K. L. J. C. o. C. M., & Training. (1969). *Manpower and training in correctional institutions*. Washington: American Correctional Association; Khan, E. W. (2001). *Analysis of correctional officer training in the United States of America*. (Ed.). Oklahoma State University, Ann Arbor; Kois, L. E., Hill, K., Gonzales, L., Hunter, S., & Chauhan, P. (2020). Correctional Officer Mental Health Training: Analysis of 52 U.S. Jurisdictions. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 31(4), 555-572.
11. Ryan, C., Brennan, F., McNeill, S., & O'Keeffe, R. (2022). Prison Officer Training and Education: A Scoping Review of the Published Literature. *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, 33(1), 110-138.
12. Claude Tellier Joseph, A. M. C. D. B. V. (2001). *Profile of Correctional Officer Recruits*. 29.
13. Morgan, M., & Smith, J. E. *Hiring the Right Individual for Your Corrections Staff*. 4.
14. Abdelsalam, S., and H.M. Sunde. (2018). Enhancing the Role of Correctional Officers in American Prisons: Lessons Learned from Norway. *Federal Sentencing Reporter* 31(1), 67-74.

must then do one year of mandatory service as a CO. This latter approach, the authors suggest, serves to diminish prisoner discontent. Thus, there are similarities with the recruitment process internationally, but also stark differences. The correctional recruitment literature that exists focuses on officer attitudes towards rehabilitation of prisoners, job stress, and officer engagement with the prison. Especially in international literature, there is a lacuna regarding CO's training and recruitment.

As such, in the current study, we unpack what individuals who have very recently experienced recruitment identify as gaps in recruitment processes. Our intention is to provide knowledge to correctional services to help optimise such processes in support of the betterment of the organisation's functioning, as well as that of prisoners and staff alike.

Recruitment at CSC: Selection Process and Onboarding Training

Scholarship on the broad topic of recruitment at the CSC is still limited; the only work available on the topic is a doctoral thesis that focuses solely on CTP.¹⁵ Ethnographic data collected by the lead author, however, reveals that recruitment entails phases, the selection process, training (i.e., CTP), and onboarding. Each phase includes several steps. In the selection phase, CSC screens applicants' eligibility and fitness to the job. In the training phase, CSC trains recruits on correctional policies and routines while continuing to assess their occupational fitness.

The selection phase begins with an application to work for the federal government.¹⁶ CSC invites selected candidates to complete the following tasks: an online questionnaire, a written examination, an interview, and a reference stage. If selected, candidates must still pass a criminal record check. Candidates are assessed for fluency in English or French. They must have a secondary school diploma or a 'satisfactory score' on

the Public Service Commission test or an approved secondary school equivalence test.¹⁷ In addition, candidates must have a valid Standard First Aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation 'Level C' certificate. Candidates must demonstrate competencies in teamwork, be action-oriented, show integrity and respect, be reflective, and be able to communicate orally. Candidates must also have a driver's license, and pass a medical examination and a psychological assessment. Next, CSC recruits the CO candidates who fulfil the eligibility and selection criteria to participate in training, the CTP phase.

CSC's CTP involves three distinctive training stages. In the first stage, recruits study several online modules and complete a test.¹⁸ Recruits who successfully complete stage one continue to stage two, which consists of a series of written 'take home' assignments. Upon completing stage two, recruits are invited to stage three, an in-person 14-week programme at one of CSC's training facilities. In essence, the 14-week training is an extended job interview where CSC will send home recruits for scores of less than 70 percent on three examinations, or if their morals, values, and ethics are assessed as failing to align with those of the organisation.

Method

Our data are taken from the qualitative component of our multi-year, mixed-methods study, that started in 2018 and will continue until 2028 on the mental health and well-being of COs in Canada, entitled the 'Canadian Correctional Workers' Well-being, Organisations, Roles and Knowledge' (aka CCWORK). Canada's correctional system includes provincial, territorial, and federal prisons, but CCWORK studies only COs from federal penitentiaries, which house prisoners sentenced to two or more years in prison, which is under the administration of CSC.

As a longitudinal project, CCWORK collects qualitative (interviews), clinical (mental health

The correctional recruitment literature that exists focuses on officer attitudes towards rehabilitation of prisoners, job stress, and officer engagement with the prison.

15. See footnote 3.

16. CSC. (2022). *WE'RE HIRING! Correctional Officer I*. Retrieved from <https://emploisfp-psjobs.cfp-psc.gc.ca/psrs-srfp/applicant/page1800?poster=1715741>

17. Government of Canada. (2016). *Public Service Commission Tests*. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-service-commission/services/staffing-assessment-tools-resources/human-resources-specialists-hiring-managers/human-resources-toolbox/personnel-psychology-centre/consultation-test-services/public-service-commission-tests.html>

18. Ricciardelli, R. (2021). Socialization Across the Three Stages of the Correctional Service of Canada's Correctional Officer Training Program: An Ethnographic Study. *Journal of Qualitative Criminal Justice & Criminology*, 11(1); Ricciardelli, R. (2022). Ethnographic experiences of participating in a correctional officer training program: An exploration of values, ethics, and role conflict. *Ethnography*, 146613812110690.

assessment), and quantitative (surveys) data from COs when they begin onboarding for training (i.e., baseline interviews) and annually thereafter (i.e., follow-up waves).¹⁹ CCWORK interviews are semi-structured and inquire into the officers' expectations, experiences, and perceptions of correctional work, which includes the following topics: their views of correctional training, prison, prisoners, and co-workers; work-life balance; exposure to potentially psychologically traumatic events; correctional policies; and health and wellness. To capture participants' experiences and interpretations of correctional training, we inquired into their experiences of recruitment, specifically asking participants if they had any 'advice for CSC' about recruitment processes, gaps, or needs.

CSC facilitates participant recruitment by allowing us to advertise CCWORK to CO recruits (between 350 and 700 individuals per year) and conduct interviews during paid time, as well as by providing a private space for the project team to conduct interviews in-person or over the phone (since the COVID-19 pandemic). CCWORK interviews last between 45-90 minutes and are voice recorded and transcribed verbatim. Despite CSC's collaboration, participation in our project remains voluntary. CSC had no access to the research data, and interview data (i.e., all participant identifying information) are anonymised during the analysis, including participants' names, which were replaced with a unique identification number.

All CCWORK interviews are axial coded using QSR NVivo software,²⁰ and based on a multi-item coding scheme that reflected the core themes explored in the interviews, including stress. This scheme included a code labelled 'Correctional Training Programme,' which contained excerpts from 64 COs who had completed a year on the job (i.e., follow-up wave). To develop our analysis on recruitment, we applied open coding to the excerpts coded under 'recruitment' and identified patterns and repetitions within the data, classifying them into the following four themes (i.e., sources of

stress): age of recruits, personal suitability, physical standards, and expanding awareness of correctional work to optimise a recruitment pool.

The 64 interviews used to support this article were conducted between October 2019 and October 2021. We sampled based on convenience, as those interviews had been transcribed and coded and were ready to be analysed. Our research ethics protocols received approval from the Memorial University of Newfoundland.

Over half of participants self-identified as male (56 per cent), while about 44 per cent self-identified as female. Most participants were aged 19-24 (27 per cent) and 25-34 (56 per cent). The remaining aged between 35-44 (11 per cent) and 45-64 (6 per cent).

Ethnically, most participants self-identified as 'white' (83 per cent). Meanwhile, the percent of Indigenous or racialised participants accounted for 11 per cent and 6 per cent, respectively. Considering Canada's population profile,²¹ the views of Indigenous people, who account for about 5 per cent of Canada's population, are well represented in our sample. In contrast, the same is not true about officers who are racialised; in 2016, approximately 22 per cent of Canada's population described themselves as belonging to a community in the racialised category. Most participants were either single or married: 45 per cent of

participants were in a marital relationship (i.e., married, or common-law relationship), while about 44 per cent had never married. Separated or divorced participants accounted for about 11 per cent of the sample. Most had a post-secondary degree: over half had obtained a college diploma (52 per cent) and about a third (31 per cent) had a university degree. The remaining had a high school diploma (12 per cent) or some college experience (5 per cent). Approximately a third of participants (29 per cent) had previous correctional experience in Canada's provincial system. In contrast, 71 per cent had no correctional experience before joining CSC. Participant demographics were consistent with the CO population in Canada.²²

Considering Canada's population profile, the views of Indigenous people, who account for about 5 per cent of population, are well represented in our sample.

19. Ricciardelli, R., Andres, E., Mitchell, M. M., Quirion, B., Groll, D., Adorjan, M., . . . Carleton, N. (2021). CCWORK protocol: a longitudinal study of Canadian Correctional Workers' Well-being, Organisations, Roles and Knowledge. *BMJ Open*, 11(12), e052739.

20. Michael, W., & Tami, M. (2019). The Art of Coding and Thematic Exploration in Qualitative Research. *International management review*, 15(1), 45-72.

21. Statistics Canada. (2017). *Census Profile. 2016 Census*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2016001. Retrieved from Ottawa: <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>

22. Samak, Q. (2003). *Correctional Officers of CSC and their working conditions: a questionnaire-based study*. Retrieved from <https://ucco-sacc-csn.ca/assets/uploads/2019/04/Correctional-Officers-and-their-working-conditions1-1.pdf>

Results

In this section, we denote participants by their participant number; doing so allows us to manage a large longitudinal dataset and ensure ethics protocols concerning participant identity confidentiality. Based on our data, we categorised CO's perceptions of recruitment into four themes, which we unpack in the following sections. The themes are age of recruits, personal suitability, diversity, and lack of physical screening.

Age of Recruits

Maturity

When asked 'What kind of recruitment advice would you give to CSC?', P100 explained that although CSC does not 'want to age discriminate', value is inherent to hiring persons with lived experience instead of '19-year-olds who are still living with their parents'. Echoing P100, P33 stated: 'Just because they've gone to university doesn't mean they're necessarily ready for something like [correctional work]'. P7 too felt that CSC must 'find fairly mature people' and keep their 'standards high', explaining that, in his experience, once CSC releases someone from the recruitment or training processes, the individual should likely *not* be allowed back. The perspective is that the individual's abilities are inadequate and thus, if readmitted, they could compromise institutional safety.

Participants explained that hiring *young* recruits (e.g., '19-year-olds'; P33) presents consistent challenges given the recruits are 'young and they're impressionable' (P100). P30, for instance, explained:

We've had a couple of people come in who are 18, 19-years old and they're very, very nice, but they, we had a girl cry because someone had told her: 'you're on OJT, you've been late a couple of days, maybe just set the alarm earlier, don't let it happen again.' And she was pretty upset after being talked to, and no one was mean to her (P30).

P30, echoing others, explained that young participants appear impacted by any criticism and, some appear emotionally vulnerable, particularly when criticised. Likewise, P105 explained:

A lot of the younger staff come here and it's tough to deal with stuff when you're 20 years old. It's tough to come and deal with mass murderers and sex offenders... they [the offenders] don't have much respect and the 20 years old don't know how to talk (P105).

P105 suggest younger recruits may lack the necessary communication skills to engage with criminalised persons in healthy ways oriented to their rehabilitation. P106 also wondered 'how young is too young... the maturity level of people involved here. You know somebody starts CSC at the ripe old age of twenty'.

Lived experience

Compounding the notion of 'maturity' (P106) is the perceived lack of 'life experience' (P100) due to youthfulness. P100 continues to lament: 'they're [CSC] hiring younger these days. And, I don't think it's good to have the younger people without a little bit of life experience in here'. As evidenced by P100, some participants interpreted the younger recruits as, due to their 'need [for] life experience' (P33), taking incidents and dialogue 'personally', rather than professionally. P33, for instance, reflected on a recruit who 'cried'

Younger recruits may lack the necessary communication skills to engage with criminalised persons in healthy ways oriented to their rehabilitation.

and 'felt everybody was judging her all the time and if she wasn't doing something right, she would cry about it, she'd self-doubt it, or she'd you know behave like it wasn't happening'. The participants' indirectly reveal an interpretation of prison spaces as difficult places to learn how to create and enforce boundaries and, most importantly, to take criticism — a reality in prison work given individuals may not be pleased with their current living or working conditions.

P45 too spoke to CSC's need to hire persons with lived experience. She explained her positioning with the following argument:

With age comes experience and you cannot hire people under 25 and expect them to know how to do this type of job, know how to talk to people... I just think recruitment needs to zero in and focus more on people that have dealt with difficult situations (P45).

The central focus for P45 was for CSC to recruit individuals who have experienced hardship, which

comes with lived experience and age, feeling such individuals are more prepared for the occupation (and related interactions). In their responses some participants, like P105, felt CSC should seek out 'older staff and that I'm saying the 30's'. He believed that lived experiences would prevent recruits from being both easily manipulated by or 'taken advantage of' by prisoners (P100) and would assist with rapport building, and their ability to cope with criticism.

Participants considered having prior work experience most beneficial. For instance, P104 explained:

Try to get involved in some sort of like profession before you go on to like into corrections. I was a support worker, and I did the military for a bit so like being around structure and being around mental ill people, [I] really find it helps.... (P104).

Like P104's words evidence, embarking on correctional work as a second career ensured that recruits had prior work experience and understood the dynamical relationships that unpin working with people. Some participants felt that a career in provincial correctional services or public safety work was particularly beneficial for recruits to possess. P99 also believed that prior experience in correctional services or law enforcement, even internship or educational experience, is fundamentally necessary for competent and well-adjusted employees. He explained: *'The best thing I ever did was while I was in college. I did a two-year programme. They had a college placement for four hundred and fifty hours inside of some kind of facility institution/halfway house'*. Here, P99 described their internship as preparing them for the complexities of the occupation. Others felt, that even if the recruits lack correctional work experience, they should *'tour a prison at some point to see if that would be an environment you'd like to be in'* (P104). Likewise, P5 told us that recruits should experience prison prior to entering the occupation. He believed *'it would be nice to take these recruits and actually put them in a jail before they get here ... let them do a week with a mentor in jail and then come back to the academy and make sure this is what they want to do'*. P5 here expressed a concern that results from recruits exiting the training

programme post prison exposure — which is a fundamental waste of funds. P54 too believed that prior to entering the field *'it would be good to see where you're going beforehand... to kinda at least talk to someone who was in the job'*. Likewise, P63 suggested that *'it should be a requirement before going into to CTP that you have some background maybe go visit and I think you should have to visit a prison'*. Thus, among recruits, there was a desire to see older recruits — those on a second career — with lived experience, and knowledge about correctional work and facilities.

Concomitantly, such interpretations may, to a degree, reflect broader cultural stereotypes and prejudices towards young people and their level of maturity regarding interacting with criminalised individuals in correctional settings. Such reverse ageism, to an extent, mirrors attitudes and beliefs towards elderly persons regarding their competences in terms of job performance.²³ That said, some recommendations are not inherently ageist but reflect experiences that come with time, including the necessity of maturity and communication skills for corrections, and the need for familiarity with prison and jail spaces, and the labour process prior to entering the profession.

A key consideration for recruitment was to remove individuals from consideration who feared criminalised populations.

Personal Suitability

Most participants spoke about the personal suitability of those recruited, speaking of a need to ensure that the recruits' personalities, values, and ethics align with those of the organisation. Such traits including recruiting individuals who are *'serious'*, with *'confidence and ability'* (P150), and able to *'deal with things head on in order to resolve a situation'* (P18). P45, speaking to personal suitability, explains that CSC needs to *'find people that have values, morals, ethics, find people that care about the community'*.

A key consideration for recruitment was to remove individuals from consideration who feared criminalised populations. P18 spoke of new employees who *'froze'* on the job after seeing an incident — *'he stood there and just like didn't know what to do'*. P114 spoke of the safety challenge that arises when officers are *'terrified of inmates'* and how that impedes their occupational safety, as well as their ability to support

23. Rupp, D. E., Vodanovich, S. J., & Crede, M. (2006). Age bias in the workplace: The impact of ageism and causal attributions 1. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 36(6), 1337-1364.

prisoner rehabilitation. P99 explained that recruits who fear prisoners are liabilities and should not be recruited and explained that *'when you're actually on the job doing that right I mean if you're ducking inmates and you're in training then that's probably a sign'*, thereby suggesting that such recruits should be removed from the roster.

Many participants spoke of recruits who finished CTP but were simply *'not suitable for the job'* (P69). For instance, P69 explained that *'I saw people in my core and other cores that I feel like should have been, should have been scrutinized a little bit more'*. He explained the following: *'Once you're in the service word gets around really quick, so, you're able to keep tabs on everybody that was in your core and how well they're doing in different places'*. P69 continued to describe how *'The ones that I had my like concerns about while I was in core... I think two left or something like that and then like a lot of them aren't doing so well, aren't doing so hot'*. Thus, his sentiments suggests that suitability must be consistently re-evaluated after the initial recruitment screening throughout CTP training and even on the job training. Like many others who had the same concerns and saw people who struggled in CTP struggling on the job, they felt not everyone is *'cut out'* for CO work. Pronounced, here, is the recognition that a failure to perform in the occupation can result in compromised occupational safety. The recommendation was that *'personality screening'* should be part and parcel of the recruitment process.

Echoing many others, P144 felt that CSC should not *'be afraid to let people go home'*. They continued to explain:

I understand CSC has spent a lot of money getting them to Core. And the training is very expensive you put them up in a house and you're feeding them, and I get it's very expensive but at the end of the day I'd much rather have good officers that have my back that I know I can trust them (P144).

This participant reveals an understanding of the expense tied to recruitment and training but remains committed to the value that *'good officers'* who can be

trusted bring to the institution. Thus, personal suitability should trump any expense tied to recruitment and training. For this reason, many participants spoke about how *'judge of character'* (P117) is essential to consider during recruitment, and that CSC should not *'be afraid to let people go on personal suitability'* (P114). Asked to explain how they understood *'personal suitability'*, P114 continued to explain that *'I've noticed with some of the new staff, they're very arrogant, very cocky, [they] think they know it all ... They're not the brightest...'*. Likewise, P117 valued *'trustworthy'* among recruits, explaining:

In our CTP, for example, there was some people that you don't even know how they passed the interview because they're just wild. We're like 'I would not feel safe working with you'. I think that's what it boils down to, like you need to find people that are going to be safe when they're here because if they're not safe that means that your safety is in jeopardy too (P117).

The safety and security of institutions, staff, and prisoners (as well as public safety) is foundational within the carceral environment.

P117 reflects on the link between personal suitability, trustworthiness, and safety — which is critical to all correctional work, as the safety and security of institutions, staff, and prisoners (as well as public safety) is foundational within the carceral environment.²⁴ P62 illustrated the following on the topic of personal suitability, trustworthiness, and safety:

Sometimes you get people right out of the gate that are not suited for the job at all and it's kinda shocking how they even made it through everything right and then you get some that five years down the road probably shouldn't have been doing this job (P62).

Participants drew on personal suitability with a lens to how prison work may affect the recruit over time if they are not prepared for the occupation. This angle, complementing the idea that some recruits are simply not suited to the occupation due to their personality, suggests that their mental health — the fabric of their constitution — may not be compatible with the demands of the occupation.

²⁴ See footnote 2.

With this in mind, P33 explained that during recruitment, CSC is 'needing to weed people [out] ... like [if] they're not able to meet like full requirements' or, as stated by P128, if they fail to have a 'balanced perspective of the job itself' and instead have 'expectations of grandeur [and] glory'. The idea here being that people should be recruited for their value and ethics and, critically, have realistic expectations of the occupational role. For these reasons, P18 felt recruitment needs to be 'more stringent, because you're getting people in that can't do the job, or they're not suited for the job but, because they passed everything, they're here... Just more stringent. You gotta look at people's personal suitability'. This participant, echoing others, presents a need for a stricter recruitment process that place a greater emphasis on ensuring that recruits meet personality standards as well as pass their screening. P28 recognised that correctional work is 'not also a career that draws a lot of people to it'. Although P28 acknowledged there may be pressures to fill seats in training and vacancies in institutions, he also believed that occupational fitness should never be compromised.

Physical Component

Many participants, like P45 felt essential that CSC 'bring back the fitness test [and] make it so it is hard to get in [to CSC], make it like the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Where you can pride yourself on how hard it was to be there, how hard it was to get through and you wear the uniform with pride here.' Participants felt that the 'physical component' was 'the big thing for me' (P107). P107 associated physical fitness with safety, recognising that in CO work 'it can go from zero to hundred in a blink of an eye' (P107). Thus, he felt, particularly given persons vary in biological composition that 'some kind of physical screening' (P36) was essential to ensure persons could keep up with the demands of their occupational work. Thus, screening exercises such as 'lift[ing] some weights or they're able to run up and down the stairs' (P36) were deemed necessary to preserve the integrity of the service in terms of adequate responses to call for support. To this end, participants, like P107, desired introducing physical screenings and did so by reflecting on other services that require diverse testing. For instance, P107 explained the following about physical aptitude in correctional services:

The idea here being that people should be recruited for their value and ethics and, critically, have realistic expectations of the occupational role.

Back in the day with provincial corrections, they had this thing called COPAT [Corrections Officer Physical Abilities Test] so it's a correctional officer physical aptitude test basically it's an obstacle course and, I've done the COPAT, it's challenging but it's not unrealistic... That's the one thing I wish CSC would maybe implement a bit more a physical requirement for the position.

Others reflected on desiring not to work with officers who 'don't take care of themselves like they're not physically fit for the job' (P114), or 'people who are obese and that can't make it to a code. That's one thing I would change about CTP is the fitness testing is nothing... obviously you need healthy staff' (P99). Thus, a key recommendation for recruitment remains physical fitness testing and screening.

Recruitment Events

Participants largely felt that recruitment for the service needed to be more widespread. For instance, P150 felt 'there should be more recruitment canvassing cause, again, you recognise an RCMP officer, you recognise a Canada Border Services Agency officer, but I feel people just know nothing about corrections'. The 'canvassing' was presented as requiring a strong social media presence and 'dedicated persons' (P152). P152 felt CSC would benefit from having 'somebody who goes out and does recruiting events cause again that will help public perception, that will get people in' by increasing awareness. P152 spoke to their experience, explaining that 'there also isn't a person to talk to, you send an email to a generic mailbox and then somebody gets back to you in a couple days. During the recruitment process there was nobody I could call to say 'hey this is so and so, I got a question, what's your job? You've done the job, what is it actually like?' dadadadada'. This need for more available information and dedicated recruitment support was articulated by a few participants, who desired being able to ask someone on the frontline about the realities of working the job. Of note, participants overwhelmingly expressed that CSC was excelling at recruiting and hiring following the principles of inclusion, equity, and diversity. P77 felt diversity was well represented at CSC, stating 'I think it's good that they're [recruits] from different backgrounds. Everyone's very different

backgrounds'. P25 explained the following on the hiring diversity: *'I think corrections is doing a really good job of hiring different people. There's a widespread of cultures and races and genders'*. However, one comment that arose selectively among recruits was concern about an over emphasis on *'statistics and stuff like that'* (P28), where equity hiring may be surpassing merit. Discussion of diversity linked to participant confusion about who completes the recruitment process successfully versus who CSC eliminates from the service. Participants often felt 'no rhyme or reason explains the nuance of the selection process. Many drew attention to *'some guys who got turned away'*, expressed that these individuals were *'awesome'* and explained: *'I'm not sure how this guy got turned away, but this guy got it and I'm like that just blows my mind'* (P128). P150 also *'had friends not get by [the recruitment] and was 'shocked'*. P128 finished his interview by saying *'I'm not actually sure recruiting works... I just wish there was more qualified people that got in'*.

Discussion and Conclusion

Recruits were positive about the inclusivity, diversity, and equality evidenced by who was recruited, some going as far as to say the service was well implementing processes that supporting these principles.

However, participants were also confused about why some seeming *'awesome'* candidates were turned away. Thus, more transparency in the selection process appears desirable. Perhaps conflictingly here, recruits often felt that if a recruit was released from training or recruitment processes the individual should not be allowed back because some concern was identified. Perhaps, however, there is an opportunity to change the release process — including that tied to strikes. Instead of *'re-starting'* CTP or recruitment, there may be opportunity for persons to be repositioned in a class where they have the opportunity to relearn the skills they struggled with—if recruits are deemed of satisfactory performance and aptitude to continue in the programme. Thus, rather than *'restarting'*, recruits would be placed such that they can redo areas of need and learn the competencies necessary. Such a practice would ensure cost saving for CSC and support the recruit in minimising time away from family as well as economic sacrifices. Moreover, the practice would ensure the recruit attains necessary skills before moving

forward and without repetition, while providing CSC the opportunity to re-access the recruit's competencies in a fashion with legacy memory (i.e., aware of prior challenges and able to provide necessary supports to overcome such challenges).

Having prior experience visiting a prison (or more preferably, interning in a prison) was also deemed desirable. Participants had exposure to recruits exiting training post-prison exposure. Thus, beneficial would be to ensure that recruits are aware of prisons, have toured prisons, and understand the nuances of prison living. Participants recognise the lost funds on training and recruitment that derived from recruits exiting after the realisation that they were unsuited to prison work and felt this could be avoided with mandated interning or, at minimum, exposure to a prison post recruitment and training. Thus, we recommend correctional services ensure potential employees have at least visited a prison prior to their recruitment to ensure they are able to navigate the realities of prison work and what is expected of every CO.

Participants requested hiring individuals with *'lived experiences'*, referring to individuals who had diverse opportunities to overcome life challenges — particularly those associated with the passage of time and life transitions (e.g., marriage, divorce, death, employment). Participants

recognised that *'age discrimination'* was never desirable but felt maturity — including maturity derived from a first career and exposure to a prison — was an essential preparatory element for correctional work. Articulated with different rationalities, for instance lived experience was thought necessary for rapport building with prisoners, safety, handling criticism, comfort in the work environment, participants felt life experience helped ensure their colleagues had the bearings and positionality to cope with CO work. Thus, lived experience was desirable for working in prison spaces to prevent individuals from acting in ways that may compromise the environment, and thus safety and security.

Participants advocated for *'personality screening'*, which was operationalised as screening to ensure morals, values, and ethics aligned with those of the organisation, that recruits who feared prisoners were dismissed, as well as those who were untrustworthy. Adding additional screening to recruitment processes that encompassed personality would also reduce

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wasted training costs due to dismissals later in the process. Of note, many participants felt it was invaluable that CSC dismiss recruits whose personalities are not deemed compatible with that desired by the organisation. Participants drew attention to the continuance of watching recruits struggle first in CTP and later on the job, recognising that such struggles could be eliminated with more aggressive and stringent screening prior to and during training. Participants desired more stringent processes to ensure their own and institutional safety, but also as a protective factor that recognises not all people share qualities and some, particularly those who fear criminalised populations, may be significantly affected personally — and negatively — by their occupational responsibilities.

Personality screening, however, can be interpreted in many ways. Thus, future researchers may wish to better understand the desirable versus undesirable personality traits of recruits/officers and develop measure to capture such traits in a timely and affordable manner. Efforts should be undertaken in collaboration with correctional services to ensure all perspectives are considered and a tool developed that is customised to the occupational demands while protecting staff well-being.

Second to personality screening was the desire for physical standards to guide who is eligible for recruitment. Participants felt CSC should return physical screening practices to ensure the correctional workforce is able to respond to incidents in a timely manner without becoming fatigued or immobilised by their physical fitness. Many participants felt unnecessarily vulnerable because of the physicality of their colleagues and passionately advocated for the reintroduction of physical fitness testing. Some attributed passing such tests to an increased pride in the uniform, because of the imposed standard demanded by physical screening, but more commonly felt that their safety would be enhanced if there was a standard.

To increase the recruitment pool, participants suggested more widespread recruitment activities, including a vaster social media presence. They felt that increasing the public visibility of COs was essential to increasing their recruitment pool. In addition, some requested having a staffed recruitment position to help interested citizens navigate the recruitment process, to answer questions, and to be able to speak of the

nuances of the job — many here felt that recruitment occurred in a black box void of information regarding processes and timelines. To this end, staffing a recruitment support position may be beneficial and, if such a position already exists, making the position more visible to potential recruits will optimise its utility.

The analysis presented in the current article has several limitations that should be taken into consideration upon interpreting the findings. First, although our findings can benefit any correctional service willing to revise and improve their recruitment processes, the research data supporting our analysis speaks to CSC's recruitment reality. Second, our analysis did not account for CSC's recruitment strategy (i.e., the reasons why recruitment is operationalised as is) nor for the challenges CSC faces when organising recruitment activities. Future research on the topic of recruitment should include interviews with the correctional agency's human resource department. Doing so would make the analysis more nuanced and expose the complexities of recruiting prison employees. Third, the dataset utilised in this analysis consisted of interviews with officers who had at least a year of experience on the job, but no more than two years. Although we believe that experienced employees are better positioned to provide insights into recruitment than recruits, the views and perceptions of experienced employees are informed and influenced by peer-groups and their opinions of the new hires (i.e., external bias). Such views and perceptions are also affected by memory limitations, given that more than a year had passed since the participants themselves had undergone CSC's recruitment process.

Nevertheless, recruitment serves as a prime tactic to ensure positive outcomes for correctional organisations. As we have demonstrated, within correctional services, recruitment, including eligibility and selection criteria, constitute the composition of the correctional workforce and the moral and professional orientations of those entering the field. Of utmost salience, recruitment shapes correctional agencies' capacity to deliver their mandate to rehabilitate and safely reintegrate criminalised persons into communities. Here we have offered insights into the key characteristics — in terms of values, knowledges, and capabilities — for ensuring the necessary screening of officers during training and the capacities that make for suitable COs in the field.