

# Prison Changed Me—and I Just Work There: Personality Changes Among Prison Officers

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## Abstract

This study examined the impact of prison officers' time on the job on changes in two personality factors, conscientiousness and agreeableness. The results confirmed the hypotheses that after four years of work, there was a clear interaction effect and significant difference between prison officers and the control group regarding the personality factors examined. A downward trend in conscientiousness and agreeableness was indicated, contrary to the trend that characterized the employees in the control organizations. These findings suggest a unique personality change among prison officers as a result of their work, which could have a negative effect.

## Keywords

prison officers, personality, change, conscientiousness, agreeableness

## Introduction

Prison has been viewed as one of the most unique and extreme work environments in terms of the nature of the job and the quality of the involved population (Keinan & Malach-Pines, 2007; Lambert et al., 2009). This

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all-encompassing, closed environment is characterized by numerous difficulties and extraordinary pressures and by the physical, emotional, and mental detachment of most of the inmates from the outside world (Armstrong & Griffin, 2004; Walsh & Freshwater, 2009).

Until three decades ago, most of the academic literature on imprisonment focused on prisoners, with very little attention paid to prison staff (Bierie, 2012; Lambert et al., 2018a). Recent recognition of the relationship between different stress factors associated with the work of prison officers, their physical and mental health, and their professional functioning has led to the development of a relatively new and extensive field of research (Kinman et al., 2017; McCraty et al., 2009). Studies have focused mainly on the characteristics of the prison work environment that create stress and burnout (Hogan et al., 2006) and how this affects the stress levels of officers (Dowden & Tellier, 2004; Lambert et al., 2002; Lovell & Brown, 2017). Some have also examined the impact of this stress on attitudes toward the job, absences, resignations, burnout, and health (Schaufeli & Peeters, 2000). However, to date, there has been no in-depth investigation of the effect of these characteristics at a deeper level; that is, on the relationship between working in a prison and personality change. The present research, which is a part of a larger study examining the effects of employment as a correctional officer on personality change, aims at addressing this gap by analyzing the possible relationship between working as a prison officer and changes in personality, with an emphasis on the personality factors of conscientiousness and agreeableness.<sup>1</sup>

### *Personality and Personality Change*

A considerable part of the research on personality and personality change in recent years has been based on the Big Five personality traits known as the five-factor model (Lucas & Donnellan, 2011; Ludtke et al., 2011). According to this model, personality is composed of five main traits: extroversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, conscientiousness, and openness to experiences (Fisher & Robie, 2019; McCrae & Costa, 2003).<sup>2</sup>

The current study focuses on two of these personality factors: conscientiousness and agreeableness. Conscientiousness (Havoosha, 2006) refers to the individual's style of performance and approach to tasks, work, and responsibilities in general. Its subscales include self-efficacy, orderliness, dutifulness, achievement striving, self-discipline, and cautiousness. Agreeableness (Havoosha, 2006) refers to interpersonal orientation and expresses the balance between a focus on oneself and a focus on others. Its subscales include trust, morality/values, altruism, cooperation, modesty, and empathy. Research on personality change over a lifetime has indicated a minor increase in the factors

of extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness to experiences and a minor decline in the factor of neuroticism, mainly in young adulthood (i.e., age 20–30) (Van Aken et al., 2006). In their meta-analysis of 92 studies on personality change throughout life, Roberts et al. (2006) found an increase in social dominance (which is associated with extraversion) and the factors of conscientiousness, emotional stability (in other words, a decline in neuroticism), and agreeableness. They concluded that personality traits change as a function of personal experience in employment, family, and society (see also Lucas & Donnellan, 2011; Specht et al., 2011). Additional studies in this field have identified more specific factors that lead to change in personality traits, including drinking habits (Quinn et al., 2011), relationships with authority figures (Sturaro et al., 2008), and significant life events (Van Aken et al., 2006). A longitudinal study conducted in Germany among 2000 students (Ludtke et al., 2011) found a decrease in the factor of neuroticism, an increase in the factors of conscientiousness and agreeableness, and a relationship between personality development and chosen life paths, according to which a greater increase in conscientiousness and agreeableness was reported among participants who turned to the employment market than among those who chose a path of training and studies.

From the perspective of employment, the personality–work relationship has been examined in terms of its two-way, reciprocal effects: the impact of personality on functioning at work and the impact of work on personality. Regarding the former, Chiaburu et al.'s (2011) meta-analysis of 87 studies on the relationship between personality and work showed that the factors of emotional stability (neuroticism), extraversion, and openness to experiences predicted positive organizational behavior. Regarding the latter, Girardi et al. (2007) documented a correlation of harassment and aggravation with high rates of depression and passivity. Scollon and Diener (2006) found increased satisfaction from work and from interpersonal relations as well as a decline in neuroticism and rise in extraversion among employees in their 20s and 30s. Another study (Roberts et al., 2003) that analyzed the relationship between work experiences and personality development reported that personality measures at the age of 18 predicted employment experiences at 26. A high status position at work and high professional satisfaction correlated with a decrease in negative emotional measures (aggression, alienation, and stress) and an increase in positive measures (social intimacy, achievement striving, and social competence).

Only one study to date has examined the relationship between personality change and work in the prison environment (Dollard & Winefield, 1998). This research, which included 419 US prison officers working in different prison frameworks, found a correlation between characteristics of the job and

symptoms of stress, a tendency to experience negative feelings, and a pessimistic attitude. The researchers concluded that experiences related to the world of work, particularly with high and ongoing levels of stress, were likely to have a long-term effect on the personality of prison officers, primarily on the tendency toward negative feelings.

### *Neo-Socioanalytic Theory of Personality Change*

The current study applies neo-socioanalytic theory (Roberts & Nickel, 2017; Roberts & Wood, 2006) to analyze its findings. The underlying assumption of this theory is that personality is composed of four basic dimensions: traits (ongoing patterns of thought, emotions, and behavior), values/motives, abilities, and narratives. These dimensions have a genetic base, but from the moment of their appearance, they interact with the environment and are characterized by their ability to change and develop in the course of one's lifetime according to significant interpersonal relationships, important choices, and critical life events.

The theory includes seven principles of personality development and change over a lifetime: (a) flexibility and the ability to change; (b) cumulative continuity of personality change; (c) maturation with age; (d) correspondence between the effect of significant experiences and intensification of the traits that led to choosing those experiences from the outset; (e) development of identity with age and in light of experiences that strengthen it; (f) role continuity as strengthening personality consistency; and (g) social investment in significant social situations, such as social roles, as age-dependent.

The relevant principle for the current study is social investment. According to this principle, personality change occurs as the outcome of the individual's commitment to a new social role (related to family, employment etc.), whose characteristics are not identical to their own personality structure. Specifically, this is commitment to a new role that is important to the individual but does not totally fit their personality and thus results in expectations—by both the individual and their surroundings—of behavior and adjustment to the position and the organization. In time, this adjustment is internalized and ingrained in the personality of the individual (Nye & Roberts, 2019; Roberts et al., 2005).

Many people become committed during young adulthood to social institutions such as work, marriage, family, and community. These institutions encourage traits such as self-efficacy, orderliness, dutifulness, achievement striving, and self-discipline, which are sub-traits of conscientiousness, as well as traits such as trust, cooperation, and empathy, which are sub-traits of agreeableness. According to the neo-socioanalytic theory, the very existence

of a life path that most people follow in their transition from adolescence to adulthood helps explain many research findings that indicate a rise in the conscientiousness factor, along with a moderate increase in the factor of agreeableness, in their 20s (Lucas & Donnellan, 2011; Roberts & Mroczek, 2008; Specht, 2017).

## **Prison as a Stressful Workplace**

The overwhelming majority of studies that have examined stress among prison officers have revealed high levels (Garland et al., 2013; Keinan & Malach-Pines, 2007; Lambert et al., 2009; Steiner & Wooldredge, 2015; Stöver, 2017; Suliman & Berman, 2010). Tewksbury and Higgins (2006) found the following factors to have the greatest impact on stress among prison officers: (a) job conflict, which is generated when officers feel ambiguity about the objectives of their job and how to implement them; (b) emotional dissonance, or a disparity between inner emotional reactions and open reactions in cases where the employee has to “fake” feelings according to procedures and the job; and (c) a lack of independence and autonomy in executing professional tasks.

Lambert et al. (2017) revealed that instrumental communication, views that policies are followed, input into decision-making, formalization and supervisor support, had statistically significant negative effects on role stress among jail staff. Consequently, the researchers recommended jail administrators to create clear structure of job duties and expectations, provide personnel with a greater organizational voice, explain the importance of organizational policies being followed and how they benefit staff, improve the flow of critical information about job and organizational matters, and train supervisors about how to provide support to their subordinates and reward them for doing so.

Both Schaufeli and Peeters (2000) and Dowden and Tellier (2004) conducted meta-analyses examining factors of stress among prison officers. The findings of both studies indicated that the strongest stress factors were emotional (such as intensive and emotionally-loaded relationships with prisoners, colleagues, and superiors), social (i.e., belonging to a low social class), and organizational (i.e., role ambiguity, role conflict, heavy workload, and multiple tasks) (see also Armstrong & Griffin, 2004). Hogan et al. (2006) found that the main stressors in prison work were role conflict, role ambiguity, risk at work (injury caused by prisoners), and conflict between family and work. With respect to role conflict and role ambiguity, Nylander et al. (2011) found that conflict between security tasks and rehabilitation tasks posed difficult dilemmas for prison officers, leading to great tension and stress. According to

the researchers, the “dual task” facing prison officers—to be both security officers and rehabilitation personnel at the same time—and the lack of adequate and appropriate tools for this resulted in their autonomous and spontaneous development of strategies of repression and artificial emotions. This state of affairs leads to feelings of tension and stress among the officers.

The results of a study by Bourbonnais et al., (2007) revealed that prison officers who were exposed to high job demands, a narrow range for decision making, and a low level of social support from colleagues and superiors suffered mental distress. This distress was correlated with injury to their mental and physical health and general functioning (see also Ghaddar et al., 2008; Kinman et al., 2017), high levels of burnout (see also Armstrong & Griffin, 2004; Dowden & Tellier, 2004), the development of negative attitudes, absence, and resignation (see also Lambert, 2001a, 2001b; Mitchell et al., 2000).

Finally, Lovell and Brown (2017) examined the predictive value of personality variables, the “big five,” and locus of control for feelings of burnout in a sample of 120 U.K. prison officers. Using the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Human Services Survey, the NEO-P Personality Inventory, and the Rotter Locus of Control Scales, the researchers found that neuroticism predicted emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment, and locus of control predicted all burnout dimensions; namely, depersonalization, emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment. As a result, the researchers concluded that prison officers higher in neuroticism and with an external locus of control might be at greater risk for burnout,

## Method

### *Instruments*

For the purpose of the present research, the Behavioral Tendencies Scales (BTS) test was employed. This test includes a self-report questionnaire consisting of 240 statements, rated on a Likert scale (five dimensions, six scales, eight items in each scale), each describing an attitude or behavior, based on the Five-factor model (McCrae & Costa, 1992). This questionnaire serves organizations and employers in Israel, including the Israel Prison Service (IPS), in selecting employees. A reliability test that was conducted for the BTS test (Havoosha, 2006) elicited the following coefficients: 0.92 for extroversion, 0.89 for agreeableness, 0.93 for neuroticism, 0.93 for conscientiousness, and 0.89 for openness to experiences. A reliability test that was conducted on the current research population obtained the following coefficients: 0.50 for extroversion, 0.46 for agreeableness, 0.87 for neuroticism,

0.88 for conscientiousness, and 0.17 for openness to experiences. magnitude and differ significantly from Havoosha's (2006) sample. These differences likely relate to the various prison officers' personal and professional backgrounds and job requirements and to the varying sample sizes of the two studies. With regard to the prison officers' backgrounds and job requirements, it is possible that the preliminary requirements of the job may encourage a certain level of homogeneity around the dimensions of neuroticism and conscientiousness (as reflected by high coefficients in the current study); the relevance of prison officers' backgrounds to the dimension of openness to experiences tends to vary significantly and is thus expressed by low coefficients in the current study. Our sample included 297 participants (Time 1=177 participants; Time 2=120 participants), in contrast to Havoosha's (2006) sample that included 2,443 participants (756 women and 1,687 men).

### ***Research Population***

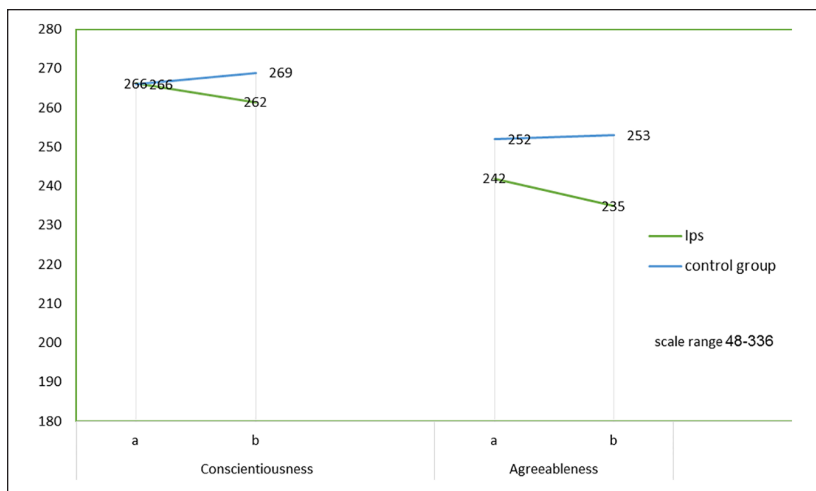
The research population included a research group and a control group. The research group was comprised of 120 male prison officers aged 21 to 31 who had taken the BTS tests in the process of their recruitment to IPS between the years 2009 and 2010 (Time 1), and again, after three or four years as prison officers (Time 2). Comparison of their BTS scores on conscientiousness and agreeableness at the two points in time served as a longitudinal intra-participant examination.

The control group was comprised of 148 participants (59 men and 89 women) of similar ages to those of the research group, who were employed in two organizations parallel to the IPS: the National Insurance Institute and a security organization. These organizations were chosen due to their similarity to the IPS: National public hierarchical organizations with over 1,000 employees.

Participants from the two organizations (e.g., control group) were also tested twice using the BTS scales: prior to acceptance for work in the organization and after 3 years of employment. The results of this group were compared with those of the research group.

### ***Findings***

To compare the overall scores of conscientiousness and agreeableness between the research group and the control group initially and after 3 to 4 years of work (see Figure 1), mixed-measures ANOVA analyses were performed.



**Figure 1.** Conscientiousness factor, a comparison within subjects, before and after.

### *Finding 1: The Conscientiousness Factor*

The analysis revealed no main effect of group (IPS, control),  $F(2,264)=1.3$ ,  $p=.27$ , Partial  $\eta^2=0.01$ . In addition, no main effect was found for the time of measurement,  $F(1,264)=0.03$ ,  $p=.86$ , Partial  $\eta^2=0.00$ . However, a significant interaction effect,  $F(2,264)=4.03$ ,  $p=.019$ , Partial  $\eta^2=0.03$ , was indicated in the research group only, with a decline indicated in the conscientiousness factor between Time 1 and Time 2. At this point, it should be noted that although the time of measurement effect was not significant, it was a downward trend, with the score of the conscientiousness factor after 3 to 4 years of work (Time 2), with prison officers being lower ( $M=261.5$ ,  $SD=27.8$ ) than before beginning service (Time 1) ( $M=266.3$ ,  $SD=31.8$ ). In comparison, the score of the conscientiousness factor in the control group was higher after several years of work ( $M=269$ ,  $SD=21.7$ ) than at the beginning of employment ( $M=266$ ,  $SD=22.8$ ).

### *Finding 2: The Agreeableness Factor*

The analysis showed a main effect of group (IPS, control),  $F(1,265)=29.68$ ,  $p<.001$ , Partial  $\eta^2=0.1$ , with the control group showing a higher level of agreeableness ( $M=252.89$ ,  $SD=1.7$ ) than the IPS group ( $M=238.69$ ,  $SD=1.9$ ). In addition, a main effect of time of measurement was found,  $F(1,265)=4.05$ ,



**Table 1.** Subscales of the Conscientiousness Factor, Dependent Sample *t* Test, Research Group.

Subscale	Time 1	Time 2	Statistic	Significance
Self-efficacy	43.5 ± 4.7	43.4 ± 5.2	<i>t</i> (119) = 0.184	<i>p</i> = .855 <i>d</i> = .02
Orderliness	47.5 ± 6.0	44.4 ± 7.4	<i>t</i> (119) = 4.671	<i>p</i> < .001 <i>d</i> = .42
Dutifulness	47.5 ± 5.2	45.8 ± 5.2	<i>t</i> (119) = 2.86	<i>p</i> = .005 <i>d</i> = .26
Achievement striving	45.0 ± 5.8	44.7 ± 5.5	<i>t</i> (119) = 0.446	<i>p</i> = .657 <i>d</i> = .04
Self-discipline	42.9 ± 4.1	41.6 ± 4.8	<i>t</i> (119) = 2.651	<i>p</i> = .009 <i>d</i> = .24
Cautiousness	42.1 ± 4.9	42.0 ± 16.7	<i>t</i> (119) = 0.058	<i>p</i> = .954 <i>d</i> = .01

$p = .037$ , Partial  $\eta^2 = 0.02$ ), with a lower level of agreeableness indicated at Time 2 ( $M = 244.32$ ,  $SE = 1.46$ ) than at Time 1 ( $M = 247.26$ ,  $SE = 1.49$ ). In addition, the analysis revealed a significant interaction effect,  $F(1, 265) = 6.76$ ,  $p = .01$ , Partial  $\eta^2 = 0.025$ .

To examine the fine details of the change in each factor, analyses of variance were performed on the six subscales of each factor—a total of 12 subscales.

### *Finding 3: The Subscales of the Conscientiousness Factor*

Dependent-sample *t*-tests performed for the research group indicated a significant decline in the subscales of orderliness and dutifulness between the two points in time. In all the other subscales, a non-significant decline was indicated (See Table 1).

### *Finding 4: Subscales of the Agreeableness Factor*

Dependent sample *t*-tests performed for the research group indicated a significant decline in the subscales of morality and cooperation between the two points in time. A non-significant decline was found in the scales of trust, altruism, and empathy (See Table 2).

In short, all the findings showed a change in the factors of conscientiousness and agreeableness among the prison officers over time, expressed by a

**Table 2.** Subscales of the Agreeableness Factor, Dependent Sample *t* Test, Research Group.

Subscale	Before	After	Statistic	Significance
Trust	37.4 ± 6.6	36.2 ± 6.0	<i>t</i> (119) = 2.21	<i>p</i> = .029 <i>d</i> = .20
Morality	42.6 ± 5.0	40.1 ± 5.8	<i>t</i> (119) = 4.48	<i>p</i> < .001 <i>d</i> = .41
Altruism	44.6 ± 5.3	44.1 ± 5.4	<i>t</i> (119) = 1.06	<i>p</i> = .29 <i>d</i> = .10
Cooperation	44.9 ± 5.8	41.3 ± 7.3	<i>t</i> (119) = 4.81	<i>p</i> < .001 <i>d</i> = .44
Modesty	32.9 ± 5.6	33.5 ± 6.0	<i>t</i> (119) = -1.09	<i>p</i> = .28 <i>d</i> = .10
Empathy	42.3 ± 20.3	40.2 ± 6.2	<i>t</i> (119) = 1.14	<i>p</i> = .26 <i>d</i> = .10

consistent downward trend. This direction of change is contrary to that observed in the control group, where an increase was found in the scores for the same factors (albeit only slight with regard to the agreeable factor).

## Discussion and Conclusion

The first major finding of the present study relates to the decline in the conscientiousness factor among prison officers. This trend, which was found in all six subscales (with significant personality changes in the subscales of orderliness [effect size 0.42] and dutifulness [effect size 0.26]), is opposite to that found in most studies conducted in Western countries, which have indicated increased conscientiousness among young adults (i.e., ages 20–30) after entering the world of work (Fisher & Robie, 2019; Johnson, 2014; Lucas & Donnellan, 2011; Ludtke et al., 2011).

Conscientiousness is associated with the adoption of healthy habits in different spheres of life, adherence to them, and avoidance of behaviors that are considered unhealthy (O'Connor et al., 2009; Tucker et al., 2006). Accordingly, a decline in the subscales of conscientiousness reflects a decline in the ability of the individual (in this case, the prison officer) to control urges and channel them into functional needs, indicating a weakening of the ability to look ahead, make long-term plans, determine tactics and strategies, and execute them persistently in spite of the difficulties they face (Havoosha, 2006). Against this background, it is not surprising that many studies focusing on the impact of work in prison on the well-being of prison

officers have found high levels of physical and mental illness and health-endangering behavior when compared with employees in other work settings (Garland et al., 2009; Ghaddar et al., 2008; Salyers et al., 2015). From the perspective of the organization, a decline in the conscientiousness factor is detrimental to many components that the organization seeks to encourage, including work ethic, success in tasks and roles, and persistence in occupational and social frameworks (Bowling, 2010; Lambert et al., 2018b; Roberts et al., 2005). An association has also been found between such a decline and a delay in or impediments to success and long-term persistence in one's career (Kern et al., 2009).

An organization's success in fulfilling its professional tasks depends, among other things, on the proper professional functioning of its staff members and their professional commitment (Bierie, 2012; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). This commitment is all the more important when the employees are required to function optimally in non-optimal working conditions and environments such as prisons (Armstrong & Griffin, 2004; Walker et al., 2018) that often require the fulfillment of spontaneous and/or ambiguous tasks. As a result, traits such as commitment to the workplace, persistence in overcoming difficulties, maintenance of discipline and order, and the ability to cope with a wide range of threatening, complex, and unplanned situations are essential for succeeding as a prison officer.

In striking contrast to the above and to an organization's needs and aspirations, the findings of the present research identify a process according to which these critical characteristics decrease over time among prison officers. The concrete implication of this process is that officers who begin their professional career with high motivation steadily become burned out, cynical, disorganized, and lacking commitment to the prison service. This paradoxical and disconcerting dynamic is intensified in light of the finding that this is particular to the prison work environment and was not found in the control group of other organizations, where, on the contrary, conscientiousness increased over time. It is, therefore, not surprising that studies have revealed lower organizational commitment among long-standing prison officers than among newcomers (Hogan et al., 2006).

A possible explanation for this decline in conscientiousness among prison officers draws on neo-socioanalytic theory (Roberts & Nickel, 2017; Roberts & Wood, 2006) and is linked to the prison service's explicit and implicit expectations of its officers and the inherent conflicts (as discussed earlier). For example, prison officers are required to combine rehabilitative and security-punitive aspects in their work (Dowden & Tellier, 2004; Keinan & Malach-Pines, 2007; Lambert et al., 2018a). This demand, together with insufficient training in rehabilitation methods and a lack of clear guidelines

regarding the appropriate punitive response, causes prison officers to experience role conflict and, as a direct result of it, stress (Clements et al., 2019; Tewksbury & Higgins, 2006).

In response to such dual and conflicting job requirements and in order to live with themselves, many prison officers make personality and identity adjustments. The mental cost of these adjustments includes partial abandonment of the “conscientious” worldview they held prior to beginning work in the prison service and an undermining of their desire for orderliness, organization, and dutifulness—the subscales of conscientiousness in which decline was most evident. The (somewhat pessimistic) bottom line of this account of the paradoxical situation is that the prison service encourages its officers, both officially and unofficially, to be flexible in their attitudes and traits (thereby reducing their conscientiousness). This flexibility reduces their chances to succeed in the job according to the formal standards of the organization and weakens the traits that contribute to their positive and healthy functioning in life outside of the workplace.

The second major finding of this research concerns the downward trend in the agreeableness factor among the prison officers. Similar to the decline in conscientiousness, the decline in agreeableness was found in all five subscales (with a significant decline in morality and cooperation and an effect size of over 0.4 and non-significant decline in trust, altruism, and empathy). Here too, the trend contrasts with that found among members of the control group (no decline or a slight increase) and among the general population, regarding whom most research has indicated a moderate increase in agreeableness, both during early adulthood (i.e., ages 20–30) and later in life (i.e., ages 30–60) (Caspi et al., 2005; Roberts et al., 2006).

In line with neo-socioanalytic theory (Roberts & Wood, 2006), one possible explanation for this finding is associated with the encouragement (even partial) by the prison service of harsh, less pleasant, distrustful, and more rigid interpersonal behavior among prison officers. Prisons are inhabited by a population that is, generally speaking, characterized by high levels of violence, suspicion, and manipulation, among others (Armstrong & Griffin, 2004; Randol & Campbell, 2017). Working in such social environments that include intensive and intimate interaction between the officers and the inmates on a daily basis and at all hours of day and night often involves the development of rigid, detached, and “machoistic” approaches by prison officers (Ireland et al., 2016; Lariviere, 2001). Such approaches may lead correctional staff to gradually adopt a strategy of mistrust toward the environment and an alertness to manipulation by prisoners, such that this becomes a “work tool.” This can be seen, in particular, in the decline in the scale of morality. According to Havoosha (2006), people with high scores on the morality scale

perceive themselves as firm and honest and see no need for pretense or deviousness. On the other hand, people with low scores on the morality scale are characterized by a need for manipulative behavior, cunningness, and utilitarianism. With regard to the current study, the decline in the morality subscale might therefore suggest the adoption of a perception of work in prison and attitudes toward the prisoners that is consistent with the expectations of the organization. Simultaneously, this perception causes prison officers to lose two main components of their interpersonal relations: cooperation with others and trust in others, thus damaging, or potentially damaging, their interpersonal abilities at work and beyond.

Another possible explanation for this finding concerns the influence of the organization and the occupation as a prison officer on the components of social distance, restraint, and formalism that characterize this type of work (Halsey & Deegan, 2017; Hemmens & Stohr, 2001). Haney (2008) argued that the management culture in prisons creates rigid, well-defined management patterns that concentrate on punishment and offer officers very little room to maneuver or to embrace other strategies. Prison officers thus experience constant tension between the sense of threat from inmates and professional and collegial pressures to carry out their tasks optimally. This tension may lead officers to adopt extreme behavior patterns (beyond those determined by the formal rules of the organization), including emotional distancing, the demonstration of a firm demeanor, the assumption of a distrustful attitude toward others, and rigid adherence to commands and procedures.

In accordance with our findings, the ultimate outcome of the adherence of the prison officers to these extreme patterns of behavior is a significant loss in their ability to maintain proper interpersonal relations in their private lives and severe damage to their personality. On the organizational level, decline in the agreeability factor among prison officers might lead to a deterioration of the atmosphere in the workplace and to less cooperation between officers (Bradley et al., 2013; Wilcox et al., 2014). Prison guarding is shift work, and workers on the same shift are dependent on one another for arriving on time and performing regular tasks in the prison (Bell, 2007; Lambert, 2001a, 2001b). A decrease in professional cooperation among prison officers could therefore seriously impair the organization's ability to implement ongoing tasks. Furthermore, in light of findings on the relationship between social support and the personal wellbeing of officers (Kinman et al., 2017; Sackett & Walmsley, 2014), a decline in the agreeability factor could affect the ability of prison officers to perform successfully and to cope effectively and appropriately with the inherent conflictual situations (Haas et al., 2007; Hemmens & Stohr, 2001).

Finally, by viewing all the above from a broader perspective, our findings highlight an unfortunate and complex situation, in which work in a high-pressure environment and an organizational culture that conveys mixed professional messages lead to unfavorable personality changes. This occurs even when individuals see the workplace as a significant place where they want to succeed. In this respect, the present study sheds light on the dramatic impact of the experiences of an extreme work environment on one's personality, in particular, in the case of prison officers. It indicates that these individuals, who perform an important social, security, and national task, namely, supervising and treating people ostracized by society, are paying a heavy (perhaps too heavy) price in order to carry out their work.

### *Limitations of the Study*

The current study suffers from two main limitations: social desirability and restrictions of range.

*Social desirability.* It is possible that the completion of the questionnaires prior to acceptance to work (Time 1) was biased due to the desire of the candidates to make a good impression on the organization and that they subsequently answered more "freely" (Time 2). However, if there were such a bias, it would be expected to also affect the members of the control group, who completed the two questionnaires at the same points in time and with similar levels of motivation. Instead, the results in the control group showed a similar change to that documented in research on the general population and in contrast to the prison officers. Furthermore, the majority of studies and meta-analyses that have focused on selection tests and their validity (see, e.g., Ones et al., 2007), did not find such a positive bias.

*Restrictions of range.* The results of the study are based solely on prison officers who were recruited to the IPS and were willing to participate in the research. Such willingness may suggest preparedness for greater exposure as well as greater awareness of one's feelings and attitudes and readiness to acknowledge difficulties and distress. There is, however, no reason to assume that such a tendency did not exist among the research participants when answering the questionnaire at Time 1, that is, before their recruitment by the IPS, and we thus maintain that it does not represent a limitation. The current study examined personality change in the same people between the first and second administrations of the questionnaire; it is, therefore, unlikely that the restriction of range influenced the results.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Working in prison places a great challenge before the prison officers. The findings of the present research reveal the need for prison authorities to recognize that the work of prison officers poses specific risks to their personality that may affect their personal health, their well-being, and their work quality and efficiency. One of the main interests of prison organizations is to preserve the wellbeing of its employees, particularly when this is connected to or derives from the conditions and nature of their job (Halsey & Deegan, 2017).

We offer several recommendations that might help them respond to this operatively.

First, prison organizations should characterize the challenges inherent in prison officers' work and construct their recruitment process accordingly, including comprehensive personality evaluations (see Ones et al., 2007), simulations of complex situations they are likely to encounter (such as provocations and open and hidden threats from prisoners), and tests of their ability to work in a team.

Second, prison authorities should provide officers with tools for dealing with conflicts and complex situations in their job. As early as preliminary job training and later in on-the-job training, prison officers should be presented with conflictual situations and dilemmas they are likely to encounter.

Lastly, the prison organization should identify the contradictory and conflicting messages it conveys to its employees, knowingly or not, and discuss their ethical implications and the distress they create. If implemented as part of the work routine in the prison, such a process is likely to contribute to the preservation of both conscientiousness and agreeability.

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## Notes

1. A part of the study, which focused on the relationships between employment as a correctional officer and changes in Neuroticism, has been published in *Criminal Justice and Behavior*. See: Suliman and Einat (2018). Does Work Stress Change Personalities? Working in Prison as a Personality-Changing Factor among Correctional Officers. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 45(5), 628-643.

2. Recently, Fisher and Robie (2019) and Musek (2017) suggested that a single, latent personality factor underlies the Big Five factors.

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