A CASE STUDY OF CAREER DECISIONS MADE BY
DIRECT CARE WORKERS IN JUVENILE FACILITIES

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Abstract: This dissertation investigates the factors influencing direct care staff intentions to stay within Cedar Valley juvenile facility, utilizing the Person-Environment Fit Theory as a framework. Through a qualitative case study approach, perceptions of direct care staff were explored regarding their employment. Nine interviews were conducted at Cedar Valley juvenile facility, offering rich insights into the experiences and motivations of these individuals. This research explores commonalities between individual characteristics and environmental factors, shedding light on the complexities of staff retention in juvenile detention settings. Research questions, such as factors encouraging longer-term employment, environmental influences, and job challenges, thoroughly investigated to provide insight to direct care staff retention at Cedar Valley juvenile detention center. Findings from this study contribute to a deeper understanding of the workplace perspective in juvenile justice facilities. The research also provides implications for policy and practice to enhance staff retention and effectiveness of rehabilitation efforts.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

When one considers American society, it is evident much value exists in ensuring the safety of its citizens (Palmary & Moat, 2002). Part of ensuring the safety of citizens is a process by which individuals who violate laws and cause harm and damage to others are housed and kept separate from others. One example of this value is evidenced in Executive Order 14074 which outlines a focus on effective practices to enhance trust and safety (Biden, 2022). At end of 2021, in the United States, the population totaled 331.9 million, with a staggering 1.2 million people in the United States incarcerated (Carson, 2022; U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). In Oklahoma, as of 2020, there were 22,462 people incarcerated (NIC, 2020). The average cost to incarcerate an individual is approximately $45,771 per prisoner in 2022 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2022). As a society, we spend $75 billion annually on corrections, while only $65 billion is spend on higher education (Ash, 2019). In some cases, the incarceration cost are evident as indicated by the staggering $75 billion being spent. These obvious costs include feeding, housing, and
providing clothing to inmates as well as recruiting and retaining qualified staff to manage this
difficult work. In other cases, the costs are hidden and difficult to measure such as loss of
human potential (Vera, 2018). template is best used for directly typing in your content.
However, you can paste text into the document, but use caution as pasting can produce
varying results.

Individuals who work in the correctional profession experience high stress as they are
required to maintain control and follow all procedures of the facility and the policies of the
Department of Corrections in the respective state (Forman-Dolan, 2022; Dawson, 2019).
Added to these requirements, correctional officers are asked to manage and hopefully
rehabilitate inmates who often have poor coping skills, bring with them lifelong habits that
do not serve them well and present challenges in how to deal with others in a productive
manner (Robde, et al, 2004; Califano, 2010). After incarceration, the goal is for the
individual to have served their debt to society and not return to a life of crime or become a
recidivism statistic (Robde et al., 2004). Califano (2010), in his article on prison policy,
states that “Without rehabilitation, imprisonment is vengeance” (p. 17). Individuals who
work directly with the inmates, known as direct care staff, have the central role of
rehabilitation. The work of restoring humanity in prisoners is central to reorient these
individuals who are incarcerated in a facility of some type.

Several different types of correctional facilities exist and can be both private and
public. The facilities can also be divided by the level of offense, gender, and age (Office of
Juvenile Affairs, 2023). In Oklahoma, juvenile facilities involve a secure and temporary
setting with a program approach including school and counseling (Tulsa County, 2023). The
age of the offender gives hope that habits can be changed before further offense, as the
research shows a tendency to offend after incarceration as a juvenile (Childress, 2014). Considering all of these contextual factors, it is significant that quality individuals work in these facilities (Wilder et al., 2004). The quality of prison administration and staff serves as an instrument to enhance both organizational and individual outcomes (Wilder et al., 2004).

In Steiner and Woolredge’s (2015) work, prison officers were found to have the greatest stressors originating from job demands and victimization, as well as facility violence. The National Institute of Justice has touched on workplace issues in corrections, including the challenges of recruitment and turnover, with the added stressors of the work itself (Russo, 2019). In the industry of business management, the concept of person-environment fit has been found to have an impact on the outcome of turnover of employees (Morrow & Brough, 2015). More recent research has looked at the role of person-environment fit for police officers, looking at their perceptions of stress, and finding that agencies should focus on organizational culture when addressing issues of turnover and retention (Rief & Clinkinbeard, 2021).

**Problem Statement**

Juvenile detention centers are designed to provide confinement and help inmates develop into productive members of society, while facilitating support for the needs of the juveniles (Gilman et al., 2021; National Institute of Corrections, 2022). These juveniles often suffer from undiagnosed physical and mental illnesses (Califano, 2010, Meservey & Skowyra, 2015; Skowyra & Cocozza, 2007). Different types of individuals work in the field and include those who have supportive roles without direct interactions and those who do have direct interactions based on amount of time spent interacting with inmates (Rhineberg-Dunn & Mack, 2020). Direct care staff are employed individuals who spend the largest
amount of their work time tasked with constant and daily interactions with prisoners/inmates (Clark, 2014). They often have to make quick decisions, and sometimes without all of the information necessary (NIC, 2022); (Dir et al, 2019). Coupled with exposure to violence and overload, the result is a turnover rate of upwards of 20% of direct care staff (Mikytuck & Cleary, 2016); (Brown, Fine, Cauffman, 2021). Effectiveness of possible rehabilitation of these incarcerated juveniles can be impacted because of frequent turnover of those tasked with this important work (Appling-Plummer, 2019; Wells et al, 2009).

Despite these stresses, some direct care staff remain in the profession while others leave the profession. Some individuals have education in the field, receive training, find ways to mitigate the stress and maintain lifelong employment as a direct care staff (Houchins et al., 2010; Minor et al, 2014). Others become overwhelmed and indicate an intent to leave and eventually leave the field (Hatcher et al., 2011; Lazzari et al. 2022). From the environment-fit perspective, some individuals fit with the environment and are able to adjust while in other cases they are not. While these jobs are known to be stressful, these positions may not offer adequate support to prevent turnover in the workplace research (Wells et al., 2009; Aalsma et al., 2019). A work-related environmental adversity scale (WREAS) was used to measure participants’ perceptions of environmental adversity (Trounson et al, 2016). Levels of environmental adversity appeared to lead to correctional officers leaving their profession frequently.

There are many factors that can influence a worker within this environment to leave. These factors can be demographic, economic and/or psychological in their origins (Wells et al, 2009; Lazzari et al., 2022). Perhaps the theory of person-environment fit could provide valuable information to why some individuals stay, and others leave. Person-environment fit
theory suggests that the environment fit of the employee depends on the compatibility between the work environment and themselves. As an employee strives to adjust to the work environment, supplementary components arise such as when an employee perceives the characteristics of the work to be similar to themselves. In other cases, the theory proposes the idea of complementary fit when the individual adds their own intrapersonal and interpersonal characteristics to the work environment and develop strategies to fit within the work environment (Taxman et al, 2014; Armstrong et al., 2014).

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to examine the perceptions of direct care staff regarding their intent to stay at their employment through the lens of the Person-Environment Fit Theory.

**Research Questions**

1. What factors have encouraged these longer-term direct care employees to remain in this profession?
2. What environmental or institutional factors have influenced their decisions to stay?
3. What job related challenges have these employees encountered, and how have they addressed these challenges?
4. How does person-environment fit theory explain these findings?

**Epistemological Perspective**

The epistemological perspective aligned with the study is constructionism, supporting the idea that humans gain knowledge through experience, and that inmates being incarcerated and working towards reintegration would influence experiences and knowledge (Sabnis, &
Newman, 2023). For this study, the perception of person-environment fit will be built by the experiences had by the direct staff as participants, as well as an overall knowledge of other’s roles (Mishra et al., Rhodes, 2020). New understandings about the perceptions of direct care staff turnover may be made when connecting the concept of juvenile facilities to the component of environment fit, collecting information about what is happening within the system through the lens of direct care staff (Lazarri et al, 2022).

Looking at the purpose of the study and exploring the impacts of person-environment fit, more will be understood through the knowledge of the participants and what they already know and think about their own tendency to stay. Working to find meaning from the responses given by the participants will be a central goal of the research (Creswell, 2014). In defining the meaning of the research, the foundation and framework of the theoretical basis of the research will then be achieved (Creswell, 2009). Through an investigation of the experiences of direct staff, the theories surrounding person-environment fit can be upheld, as well as finding meaning in what responses are collected by the participants.

Theoretical Perspective

The idea of Person-Environment Fit Theory has its basis in the works of Parsons (1909), as well as Lewin (1938), as the understanding of a relationship between workers and their organization of employment. In Parson’s primary work, the idea was based in vocational congruence, later shaped by Lewin (1938). Both were able to focus on an interactional relationship between an individual and their environment, then building on the theory for the workplace. The expansion of Person-Environment Fit theory derives from Lewin’s (1951) work in behavior and environment, with the theoretical basis that the fit between person and environment predicts human behavior.
The broadest aspect of the theory involves the person-occupation fit, supported by Hollands’ (1959) research in the conducive nature of acceptance of work that meets individual needs. Other aspects of the theory include person-group fit, looking at the compatibility between an individual and their coworkers, and person-job fit, looking at what the expectations are of the individual and the job, and what actually occurs (Kristof, 1996). The theory itself relates to the needs-supply framework, which focuses on the fit between the needs of the individual and the structure and function of an organization (Cable & Judge, 1994).

Much research since then has expanded upon the work of person-environment fit, with the inclusion of the theory in the late 1980’s into criminal justice. Gerstein, Topp and Correll’s (1987) research examined burnout among correctional personnel, along with the role of environment, connecting the concepts beyond the discussion of person-environment and the workplace. In the following years, Smyth (1991) sought to understand how environment and the adaptation of high-risk inmates worked to apply person-environment theory to criminal justice, looking at the adaptation of male inmates and their environment.

As the use of person-environment fit theory continued to be applied to research, many of the studies focused on job and workplace impacts from the concept. For example, Gutierres, Saenz & Green (1994) conducted their work on job stress and health outcomes on employees, testing the person-environment fit model. When applied to criminal justice, much of the scholarly literature had focused on environment fit and inmates, or participants in the justice system, rather than the employees. Lambert and fellow colleagues began to connect the concepts, in their (2011) research, as they used a correctional facility for study and looked at the perception of person-environment fit to the workplace outcomes of correctional
officers, looking at the perspectives of fairness understood by the officer’s contingent upon their sense of environment fit.

More recent research with the application of both turnover and person-environment fit has focused on the workplace in diverse industries. Ketkaew, Manglakakeereee, and Amankwah-Amoah (2020) study focused on employee turnover intention and person-environment fit as a theoretical basis within an office setting. Although limited now, research on the theory is being expanded into understanding turnover within the context of corrections and criminal justice with a focus on the connection between employee turnover, correctional facilities, and person-environment fit. Based on Misra, Roberts and Rhodes (2020) research, the terms of interpersonal and intrapersonal characteristics are being defined to mean employees personalities with an analysis of intention of turnover. Interpersonal characteristics are those that align with the skills and experience in their role within the facility, based on interaction with others (Misra, Roberts & Rhodes, 2020). Intrapersonal characteristics are the knowledge of the person, openness, and one’s own self-awareness of their skills in alignment with the facility (Misra, Roberts & Rhodes, 2020).

Figure 1, based on Mishra, Roberts, and Rhodes (2020) work, uses the components of Person-Environment Fit Theory, including the person’s interpersonal and intrapersonal characteristics. These personal factors influence fit, looking at the characteristics of an individual that would impact their likelihood of remaining in the profession. These factors include personal features of their own personality, as well as how the individual interacts with others. The environmental influences for fit are also presented in the figure, as the structure of the organization has an impact, as well as characteristics of the facility. These are also outlined in the figure as influences for person-environment fit.
The figure shows passive adaptation or optimization taking place during work at the facility as expressions of individual variances, then influenced by macro and organizational environment, leading to low or high person-environment fit. The additions to Figure 1 include appropriate training to the optimization category, as well as an alteration to environment. This also includes structure and programs being macro-environment changes for the facility. In addition, the outcomes have been altered for the population, with low P-E fit reflective of turnover.

**Figure**

*Person-Environment Fit Figure*

Methodology

Research Design

A qualitative case study design was used as the design for this research. Creswell (2013) utilized qualitative approach in looking at programs, arguing that research may affirm former studies, add to the literature, and be beneficial in progressing or enhancing practices (Creswell, 2013). One form of qualitative research design is a case study. This design was selected for this study. Case study design is “different from other types in that they are intensive analyses and descriptions of a single unit or system bounded by space and time.” (Hancock et al., p. 9). This approach is applied to this study because the investigation addresses an individual case, Cedar Valley detention facility (a pseudonym), at one point in time. Instead of quantitative work, this research is best set in a qualitative format, as the rate of basic turnover lacks expansion of the ideas surrounding mitigation of turnover and indications for change. For example, a turnover rate of staff per facility can be calculated but does not answer the question of why staff are leaving. This study will explore the why of turnover.

Merriam (1998) describes the basis of qualitative research within the view that reality is created through the interaction of individuals in their own social worlds. For the participants of the research, individuals provide insight to their own social dynamics and environment at work through the lens of their own interactions. The researcher can then bring a construction of reality to the study, with the interaction of the interpretation of the phenomenon being studied (Merriam, 1998). Such interpretations are met with the researchers’ own view of what has been collected in the data and filtered through for interpretation of the phenomenon (Merriam, 1998). The case study design, within qualitative
research, is understood as a single entity with boundaries (Merriam, 1998). Case study methodology focuses on the representations of the participants being researched within the phenomenon, as well as its bounding to natural context (Hancock, Algozzine, Lim, 2006). This type of methodology is also indicative of the use of description, with interview and quotes from participants to gain mental images of the phenomenon (Hancock et al., 2006).

Characteristics of a case study design include analysis of the process and definition of the case itself. Access and rapport, as part of the case study research, is also applicable to the work, as there is accessibility for interviewing and interacting with the participants (Hancock et al., 2006). The type of information collected, including interviews, is part of the case study design and practice, as well as a variety of approaches to compile data. The data collection is practical, using organizational methods to code and theme the responses, with secure storage of the information, central to the work of case study design (Hancock et al., 2006). The use of triangulation will involve the use of the interviews and other forms of data collection, such as observations and document analysis, to better understand the experiences of the sample (Patton, 1990). Using information derived from the facility, as well as the first-hand responses of participants, the findings will be understood through this triangulated approach to gain more insight. This will provide information for the purpose of interpretive qualitative design, with an emphasis on the experience from the perspective of the workers (Merriam & Associates, 2002). With this type of research, the information is rich, and can help to learn a great deal about issues relative to juvenile workers and stress, important for purposeful sampling (1990). The objective, in using this approach, is to provide an implicit, inductive approach, so that the findings are generalizable for other facilities in its design (Merriam, 2016).
Location of Study

For this study, one facility was selected that met the criteria for this case. This case has been chosen with consideration of the facility, which includes direct care employees who have remained for a sustained period of time. A juvenile justice facility is the lowest level of incarceration in the criminal justice system and the point at which systemic changes can be made. A juvenile facility was desired because of the research which indicate if offenders are rehabilitated at this level, they are less likely to reoffend (NIJ, 2014).

There are 10 such facilities in the state of Oklahoma. I eliminated the one in which I have worked. Upon visiting the facility this site stood out. Other criteria were that this site is a for profit business, not one that is state run. A for profit institution must by their very nature must maintain profitability. A for profit business cannot survive when their expenses exceed their income. A high turnover at staff can cause unnecessary expenses. The CEO of the facility indicated a willingness to participate and indicated a concern about turnover among his staff. As a result, the correctional facility at Cedar Valley was selected.

Population

The population of the research involves the correctional facility at Cedar Valley within the state of Oklahoma in a case study format. I will apply person-environment fit theory to explain the findings. A total of 35 individuals works in the facility with various roles. Of that number, 20 are considered to be direct care staff which is the targeted population. Direct care staff have the most interaction with the inmates and often face high levels of stress in managing their jobs.
Sample

The first set of selection criteria will include the role of the participant in the facility and their status in terms of onboarding and length of time as an employee, including the individuals who have chosen to stay in the profession over an extended period. All individuals who are considered to be direct care staff will be asked to participate. At the current time, there are 20 who are considered direct care staff at this facility. Individuals who have completed the onboarding process will be included. Recently the length of time for probation at the facility has changed from 3 months to 40 hours of job shadowing.

All potential participants will be approached to ask for their participation. The total desired sample size will be approximately seven to nine individuals. If more individuals than needed are willing to participate, I will employ additional purposeful sampling. I will use the following set of additional criteria to reach the desired sample size. I will prepare a spreadsheet of potential participants listing their age, length of employment, gender, educational level, and race/ethnicity. Eligibility will be inclusive of employees that have remained in their jobs for an extended period. At this time, due to the fluidity of the employee pool, it is not possible to know how many individuals will meet the criteria of being a direct care staff member with 40 hours of job shadowing experience.

The purposeful sampling approach will be applied to the sample, as the candidates have been chosen to give credible insight, central to the research of the topic (Patton, 1990). There can be a minimum of seven participants in the research, with a minimal number of participants appropriate for the findings, and the potential to add more if necessary (Patton, 1990).
Data Collection

Data for this study will be collected through multiple forms of data collection including interviews, observations, and document analysis. To collect interview data, a semi-structured interview protocol will be utilized in a one-on-one format. After receiving permission from the director of the Cedar Valley program, I will make a personal visit to the facility, introduce myself, and discuss participation. These visits will take place during shift changes to maximize contact with as many direct care staff as possible. I will make an introduction to them and discuss their willingness to participate. When participants have indicated their desire to be interviewed, I will schedule interviews at a mutually convenient location. Interviews will last approximately one hour and will be conducted face-to-face if Covid protocols allow. All interviews will be audio recorded so that transcriptions can take place immediately following each interview. Additionally, as the data collection instrument in qualitative inquiry, I will take field notes during each of the interview sessions. Observations will be conducted during monthly staff meetings, weekly treatment team meetings, and shift change transitions. Informed consent will be received prior to each interview, as well as the use of an IRB. Document analysis will include all system documents that explain or operationalize retention and training procedures in the system. All documents that explain turnover in this system will be collected for data analysis.

Data Analysis

Following Merriam and Tisdell (2016) as methodologists, a constant comparative method of data analysis will be used. The analysis of interview data will take place through a series of steps. Immediately following each interview, audio recordings of each interview
will be transcribed, and color coding will then be used to identify key information relating to the purpose of the study. Following open coding, codes will be organized into categories. Categories then will be grouped into themes, and themes will be utilized to answer the research questions. Because a constant comparative method of analysis will be followed, data collection and data analysis will occur simultaneously (Merriam, 1985). Additional data such as document analysis and analysis of field notes during will be conducted to triangulate the data and support the trustworthiness and transferability of study findings.

**Significance of the Study**

**Significance to Research**

For researchers, knowing more can help to create evidence-based frameworks to provide to prisons and facilities with high turnover of direct care staff. The research advances Person-Environment Fit Theory to the current incarceration environment and may be used to explain the process of employee retention in these facilities. New insight from direct care staff could influence the development of training or proposals surrounding retention, informing decision-making processes to make better choices for employees and facilities. The findings can give more support of Person-Environment Fit for correctional facilities, and better insight to the needs of employees, furthering the development of interventions designed for direct care staff support. It can also provide knowledge to solve problems in the facilities, and to train employees with examples in how to navigate the complexities of the work of direct care staff.
**Significance to Theory**

The importance of understanding the efficacy of current processes in employability within juvenile justice facilities, and outcomes, can help to show relevance in the application of Person-Environment Fit theory for problems specific to turnover within the field. By applying such theory to this unique case study, a larger perspective of its workings may provide evidence for more research to include Person-Environment Fit theory as a viable basis. Being able to identify new variables or factors not previously considered in the literature can expand the research, as well as addressing gaps in the literature. To research, the findings will add to understanding for the theory, as well as application for facilities. It can also illuminate complexities and exceptions that can lead to more expansion of the theoretical framework.

**Significance to Practice**

Implementation of the frameworks or evidence surrounding turnover within the juvenile justice field for direct care staff could bring about changes for individuals being employed and retained in the future. The possible significance of the study will derive from its contributions to the development of more training and retention programs. Criminal justice systems, prisons, and rehabilitation programs may use this information to establish new protocols or areas that should be established in their own programs for their employees.

**Researcher Perspective**

My own work with adjudicated juveniles and adult inmates was an influence for the subject of my research. With a background in criminal justice, and experience working with inmates, I have found the issue of turnover problematic. Often factors that may lead to high turnover are not identified. Often facilities resort to simply hiring someone, regardless of
skills or desire to be in the profession, to meet mandated requirements for supervision. Drawing from my own experience, these vital components include consistent training programs, comprehensive support systems, and a thorough understanding of job duties. Understanding what causes turnover for direct care staff, alongside their degree of fit within their work, are central to understanding factors that may lead to high turnover. There is a consideration for the lack of support and understanding surrounding turnover for this population being studied, and I will carefully reflect on the participants and their many challenges.

**Definition of Terms**

Correctional Facilities are facilities which house inmates and in which inmates are not free to come and go at will, including both prisons and jails as well as other facilities (National Institute of Justice, 2023).

Direct Care Staff are individuals employed within the juvenile justice correctional facility, with responsibility for public safety and accountability, managing the behavior of youth, as well as fostering rehabilitation and youth development (Clark, 2014).

Person-Environment Fit Theory is the idea that people have a need to fit within their environment and seek out environments that match their characteristics (Van Vianen, 2018).

Turnover is an employee’s reported willingness to leave his/her organization within a given period of time (Lazarri et al., 2022).

Group Homes are facilities based in the community for juveniles who can achieve education and employment preparation (OJJDP, 2008).
Summary of the Study

Overall, the purpose of this qualitative case study is to examine the perceptions of direct care staff regarding their intent to either stay or leave their employment through the lens of the Person-Environment Fit Theory. By looking at the perception of practitioners about the person-fit environment, more can be known about where to fund facilities, what components of training could be most helpful and impactful, and how to make more long-term success come from the employability of individuals themselves. Through a qualitative approach, with face-to-face interviews if Covid protocols allow, the participants can provide insight about what they believe to be the most helpful areas of support and how such improvements could lead to positive change and more retention of employees. Recognizing the value of gaps in the research surrounding person-environment fit and turnover by understanding more about how it sources and gauges outcomes, facilities can be more efficient in offering support and understanding, as well as possibly retaining more employees.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Chapter II literature review will provide information concerning juvenile justice facilities employees, the work performed in this setting and the resulting impact on job stress. One of the major responsibilities, which can lead to higher levels of job stress, and the potential to leave the profession is the emphasis and pressure to provide high quality recidivism and reintegration programs. Although these efforts are not the focus of this study, a brief description of recidivism and reintegration programs will be given to highlight this responsibility and how it impacts stress. Other areas can be stressful to direct care workers and these areas will be discussed in Chapter II. The last section of Chapter II will provide information concerning coping strategies used by some in this profession to mitigate stress as well as training and onboarding provided to new and incumbent employees.

The literature surrounding juvenile justice facilities, employees, and the work performed embodies the stressful and difficult work of professionals in the field, leading to higher turnover rates (Russo, 2019). Within the work of direct service employees in a
juvenile justice facility, the goal is to protect its citizens, as the overall goal of a civil society is also to provide protection for its people (Palmary & Moat, 2022). As citizens offend or break laws, the idea that individuals are kept away from others to maintain safety within society brings the work of juvenile justice facilities into play (Palmary & Moat, 2002).

**Juvenile Justice Facilities**

The facilities used to house inmates give context to where direct staff supervise and dedicate their time in the workplace. Most juvenile facilities are considered ‘locked,’ with restrictions on movement and the freedom of juveniles within the centers, at a rate of 92% of facilities (Mendoza, 2019). Involved in the lockdown of juveniles are the use of mechanical restraints, like handcuffs, leg cuffs, and restraining chairs (Mendoza, 2019). There are Individualized Program Plans (IPPs) created for each juvenile in many of the juvenile justice facilities, with objectives set for each person (Federal Bureau Prisons, 2022). These objectives may include education, such as acquisition of a GED, or treatment for substances, which can be addressed at the facilities (FBP, 2022).

There are different types of juvenile justice facilities available, including group homes, correctional facilities, in-house treatment facilities, and long-term secure facilities (Sawyer, 2018). Treatment services can include mental health care, sex offender services, substance abuse services, as well as programs geared towards mentoring or life skills, behavior-specific education, as well as drug-based services and other types of evidence-based programs (White, 2017). There are a wide range of possible treatment options and
programs available, depending on funding and what is mandated by the court system for the juvenile (White, 2017).

Inmates are typically housed after the age of 12 years old, with offenders younger than 12 being placed in social service and child welfare systems (National Governors Association, 2021). Although individual states vary on minimum age, the prosecution minimum for many states is around 12 years old (NGA, 2021). The juvenile justice system typically handles cases for defendants up to the age of 18 but may have exceptions depending on offenses or situations (Sawyer, 2018). Most commonly, juveniles are placed in long-term secure facilities, which can involve the use of solitary confinement, mechanical restraints, and pepper spray usage (Mendoza, 2019).

The racial makeup of the population within the juvenile justice facilities is overrepresented in African American and American Indian youth, while white youth are not as represented in the population (Sawyer, 2018). Approximately 40% of facilities and centers use isolation, with locked rooms for four hours of more being used for inmates (Mendoza, 2019). Most facilities have a large number of inmates, with more than 51 juveniles being housed in centers, and some with more than 200 juveniles (Mendoza, 2019). The time length in which an inmate is housed is typically longer than a month, and 8% are housed for more than a year (Mendoza, 2019).

Looking at the centers for juvenile detention themselves, the literature explores the youth that reside within the facilities, as well as many components of their lives within juvenile detention. Violence within juvenile detention centers is an area of focus for research, like Flores’ (2013) work on interpersonal violence among girls in a
detention facility, as well as a punitive approach used by the facility to deal with juveniles. The treatment of the juveniles connects to these concepts and is also being discussed in the current literature on juvenile correctional facilities. The Annie Casey Foundation (2015) provided insight to maltreatment evidence for youth in facilities, with issues of sexual victimization and disciplinary isolation. After conducting preliminary research in 2011, the follow-up study showed that youth were still experiencing widespread maltreatment in facilities.

Responses to crime and delinquency for juveniles has been met with differing approaches by the detention center itself, moving from punitive to rehabilitation-based treatments. Abrams, Kyoungho, & Anderson-Nathe (2005) look at the detention center and its changing focus on the integration of social workers and youth advocacy, alongside structure, is effective or not for preparation of youth in their future. The researchers argue that detention centers should integrate both training programs and emotional support, with coverage for juveniles in responses that move past rehabilitation orientation, and neither solely control orientation (Abrams et al., 2005).

**Job Positions and Responsibilities**

Within the facilities, various types of jobs exist from the administration of such facilities to the direct care of inmates to the maintenance of the facilities. The focus of this study and literature review is strictly on those who are called ‘direct care staff’ or ‘residential treatment specialist.’ These individuals have the highest levels of contact with inmates and have a wide array of responsibilities (see appendix A for full job description). The minimum qualifications for the job are to be at least 21 years of age,
have a high school diploma or equivalent, and to be legally authorized to work in the U.S. (OKCYC, 2021). The ability to pass a Department of Human Services Background Check is a minimum requirement, as well as the completion of orientation training within two weeks of hire. A 40-hour training in policies and procedures is required, which covers emergency procedures, child safety, child abuse, neglect reporting, behavior management, and applicable licensing (OKCYC, 2021). An addition 40 hours is necessary for supervision by another staff member (OKCYC, 2021).

The job description also includes special requirements, such as the satisfactory completion of testing for fitness of the individual, as well as any pre-employment and annual physicals (OKCYC, 2021). The subject must adhere to drug testing and have a valid driver's license, as well as the ability to work assigned shifts and any day of the week with additional shifts. Certain crimes in the background of the individual may limit their eligibility.

The essential functions of the job include being a role model of appropriate behaviors, while working to deescalate behaviors and maintaining neutrality and respect (OKCYC, 2021). The work involves documenting behaviors, as well as using behavior management techniques, including restraint. The ability to restrain inmates requires physical fitness and strength, as well as the mental strength to support inmates in their daily hygiene, routines, foods, and preparation for activities (OKCYC, 2021). Being able to enforce, acknowledge, and understand the policy and procedures of the facility is necessary, while also being aware of the treatment plans in place for the inmates (OKCYC, 2021).
Depending upon the nature of the facility, direct care workers will have multiple responsibilities including efforts to reintegrate the inmates upon their departure from the facility. Literature surrounding the criminal justice system and traditional approaches to the treatment of offenders show a lack of adequate coverage for ideas like reintegration. Bazemore’s (1998) research highlights the past of the retributive paradigm and suggests new models in the criminal justice system, including concepts of reintegration and restorative justice. Roman and Travis’s (2004) research, as part of the Urban Institute, calls for ‘more than a roof’, emphasizing the need for a reform to the reintegration system.

Treatment within the facilities is a priority, as many of the youth involved in the juvenile justice system have had difficulties in life or have disabilities that have influenced their life paths (IWGYP, 2023). The influence of these issues onto juveniles can have significant impacts on their wellbeing, including their emotional mental, physical, and behavior state (IWGYP, 2023). The age of the offender gives hope that habits can be changed before further offense, as the research shows a tendency to offend after incarceration as a juvenile (Childress, 2014). It is important to consider the likelihood of reoffending, as the “continuity of offending from the juvenile into the adult years is higher for people who start offending at an early age, chronic delinquents, and young people who commit violent offenses (NIJ, 2014)”.

The professional setting for direct care staff involves the role of a guardian, a counselor, a supervisor, and serving as a role model to youth (Mixdorf & Rosetti, 1992). The professionals in this role face large stressors and demands, including service for those who may have undiagnosed mental health issues and lack coping skills (Izquierdo...
et al., 2005). Some inmates may regress while incarcerated and incur challenges in their rehabilitation efforts (Izquierdo et al., 2005).

The function of direct care staff within a juvenile justice facility comprises of many requirements. Behavioral management is a component of the work, using positive or negative consequences based on behavioral and developmental theories when involved with inmates (Clark, 2014). In addition, the use of crisis intervention is necessary, using skills to prevent and minimize harm to inmates and staff with crisis situations, while implementing policies related to security measures (Clark, 2014). Safety, including CPR and other emergency procedures is also a necessary component of the work for the well-being of inmates (Clark, 2014). Custodial care, in the assistance of treatment for health-related areas, such as hygiene and sexuality, is a demand of the work of direct care staff, as well as documentation work in record keeping, with the use of skills in observation and recording (Clark, 2014). Appendix A

**Mental Health Challenges of Inmates**

There is much to say relative to mental health issues and productivity within society. In Hellenbach, Karatzias, Brown’s (2017) research, the mental health needs of the incarcerated is evaluated, looking at mental health screenings, a response to the lack of standardized testing for inmates. The lack of current mental health services, alongside the high rates of mental health disorders among prisoners is a major concern in the deficiencies surrounding programs. Some challenges involve sporadic treatment with limited resources that underserve the population of people with high rates of mental health needs (Reingle et al. 2014). Kelly (2015) asserts that opponents of the mental
health courts believe the legal system cannot help former inmates achieve lower rates of recidivism and the appropriate treatment needed. The deficiency in understanding whose role it is to cover the need of inmates once released is an area of concern in the perception of how programs come to be successful.

The recurring trend of incarceration at a heightened rate is doubled with homelessness compared to the general population upon release (Texas Criminal Justice Coalition, 2019). The system has been called a ‘revolving door’ between the prison system and homeless shelters, showing a deficiency in the support for those released from prison (Jones, 2021).

More recent deficiencies, alongside homelessness, have also included pathways to employment, as offenders are facing licensing barriers from working. In the Institute for Justice’s (2023) work as a nationwide study, there were six states who received a zero for no protection for felons working to receive their licenses. Over time, offenders face challenges that could create the likelihood for re-offense into their futures.

**Challenges of Direct Care Staff**

As part of a stressful and demanding career choice, the work of direct care staff is known to be categorized as an ‘ill-defined profession,’ and not typically considered a desirable career choice (Clark, 2014). The pay can be inadequate compared to other roles within the criminal justice system, and there are challenges with the demanding hours, sometimes working 24-hour shifts with overtime hours (Clark, 2014). There are issues with a lack of training, such as the deficiency in preparation for programs in education, as cited in Flores & Barahona-Lopez’s (2021) research on the educational aspect of services
for youth in juvenile justice. This can create additional pressure, with an absence of
guidance for the staff in working and instructing the youth.

In addition to these challenges, direct care staff face dealing with their own
personal lives and situations, with stress placed on having a good work-life balance
(Clark, 2014). With a lack of rewarding situations within the work of direct care staff,
frustration and stress can be eminent. Compassion fatigue, in wanting to help a
traumatized person, can occur for direct care staff, as they end up becoming stressed
themselves from the trauma experienced through comforting others (Vannoy, 2022).
Working with inmates that regress or reoffend, as well as feeling discouraged about the
lack of progress for some inmates, can be disheartening (Schaefer, 2016). Secondary
traumatic stress is a real and pertinent challenge facing direct care staff, as many are
exposed to youth who have a history of bad decisions, mental and emotional issues, and
can become traumatized themselves from working with this population (Smith Hatcher et
al., 2011). Not knowing how to cope as a direct care staff member themselves, working
with the demands of the profession, can be a heavy burden to endure over time (Mikytuck
& Cleary, 2016). With these challenges, the turnover rate is high in consideration of the
context in which direct care staff work (Appling-Plummer, 2019).

Following DOC policies which can be complex and change often, “stress and job
satisfaction are more affected by elements within the job itself, such as long hours, the
social climate of the prison, job dangerousness, and organizational factors than personal
characteristics (Dial, 2020).” This further shows the high levels of stress sourcing from
various areas of the job, considering the additional factors that affect staff. The issues
relative to their job, apart from the inmates is also a problem as “work stress is
significantly related to organizational issues rather than direct contact with inmates (Dial, 2010).” Overall, the ability to understand the sources of stressors for staff is varied and comprehensive to many of their job functions, as well as their identity outside of work.

**Juvenile Delinquency**

As part of their responsibilities, direct care workers are daily face to face with a systemic issue in our society; one of juvenile delinquency. Much has been researched and written on the topic and yet no single method of curbing this societal ill has emerged. One of the prevalent topics within the idea of juvenile delinquency is how to prevent it for the future, particularly for those who are offending and are at risk. In Lane’s (2018) research, he highlights the use of the 1967 President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice report to emphasize the long-standing issues with crime reduction efforts over the last five decades. In his address on juvenile crime, Lane discusses the response from research towards the changing policies over the years, showing that evidence-based programming and investment in children and teens is essential for prevention.

Factors influencing juvenile delinquency have been researched to find ways to help curb the onset and recidivism of juvenile crime. In Mishra, Schwab-Reese, and, Mufree’s (2020) work on adverse childhood experiences, the researchers looked at out of home placement and its association with more negative outcomes, like delinquency. More adversity exposure, like being placed out of homes multiple times, can be factored in as a source of delinquency (Mishra et al., 2020). Juveniles, termed ‘crossover youth,’ for their transition from child welfare systems to juvenile justice, are also discussed in
research, with Kolivoski, Goodkind, and Shook (2017). This researcher centers within the lens of African American juveniles and the need to focus more research on the inclusion of minority youths in the literature.

Risk factors, like chaotic households, is also explored in Barnert and fellow researchers’ (2015) qualitative analysis on protective and risk factors for juvenile offenders. These researchers published, in the American Journal of Public Health, that the participants described unsafe home lives, and a need for love and discipline. The research associated with mental health and juvenile delinquency is also well established in the literature. Smith (1998) works in her study to understand emotional and behavior characteristics of juveniles detained at a center, with findings of higher emotional disorder with high rates of suicidal ideation and prior attempts. Basto-Pereira and Maia (2018), among many others, have also looked at the connection between mental health issues and criminal indicators. These researchers find a major role of mental health in criminal behavior, with recommendations for the juvenile justice system policies (Basto-Pereira & Maia, 2018). The advancements of work with mental health disorders for juvenile delinquents is discussed in Izquiero and fellow researchers’ (2005) case study on a detention center.

Different approaches to rehabilitation have been researched in the understanding of the best way to help juveniles with their mental health issues and wellbeing. Bohat & Singh (2020) explore the use of a meditation-based approach for juvenile delinquency, finding it as an effective treatment for emotional health issues for teens and young adults. The integration of family in the approach to rehabilitation is also a researched concept, with evidence for its applicability in helping juveniles rehabilitate while in facilities. The
Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2018) has provided insight to the use of family engagement with facilities to help further rehabilitation for offenders. In the research, various programs and strategies for working with families, such as training and therapy, are highlighted as valuable tools to increase engagement and reinforce rehabilitation efforts (OJJDP, 2018).

In terms of support for rehabilitation, the literature evidences the need for further use of its efforts. In Piquero & Steinberg’s (2007) research with the Models for Change organization, the importance of recognizing the public’s preference for rehabilitation of juvenile offenders is emphasized. The researchers highlight the evidence that rehabilitation is supported and should be prioritized as an essential component of the work of detention centers. As a direct care worker, these risk factors such as mental health issues and unsafe home lives leads to more of the job stress experienced by these individuals. The need to focus on what happens after incarceration adds yet another level of stress to the direct care worker; what happens to the inmates once they leave my care? Will they return to our facility or be able to break the chain of criminal activities?

Self-management is practiced, utilizing a variety of techniques to manage strong emotions, particularly anger, which could be triggered by service user care, including taking breaks and dealing with conflict proactively. Some using disconnection, repression, and avoidance to self-manage, including responding automatically to distressing incidents and maintaining a level of distance from service users (Frost et al., 2022).”
There are areas of needed focus in the loss of direct care staff who leave the profession, such as professional development. The need for resources was a frequently needed improvement alongside professional development in the research by Gagnon and Swank, (2021). Inadequate training of professionals is also an area of focus, as the lack of training fails to adequately support mental health services, ultimately inhibiting reintegration (Gagnon & Swank, 2021).” Research has shown both issues being most critical to the loss of staff, as they assert their lack of mental health training, particularly concerning substance abuse, and report being in dire need of professional development (PD) focusing on youth mental health needs (Penn et al., 2005).

**Conclusion**

The work of direct care staff within juvenile justice facilities is important; it is hard work and the tendency to give up and go to other jobs that might feel less challenging within the profession can become a challenge for facilities aiming to retain employees and maintain morale (Mikytuck & Cleary, 2016). To be a direct care staff member is to embrace the demanding efforts of working to improve the lives of juvenile inmates, bridging needs in treatment and rehabilitation, while prioritizing security and safety, with long hours and regression possible for the inmates (Clark, 2014). Some individuals have education in the field, receive training, find ways to mitigate the stress and maintain lifelong employment as a direct care staff (Houchins et al., 2010; Minor et al, 2014). The literature shows the importance of understanding factors in the environment that might cause an individual to not ‘fit’ or the factors in the environment
that would be barriers to keeping employees, particularly within the juvenile justice system.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In Chapter III, a more detailed explanation of the methodology of this study was provided. The purpose of the research was outlined, as well as the questions guiding the research. In addition, the chapter has explained, more fully, methodological approaches used, including an explanation of data collection and how the data was organized and analyzed.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the perceptions of direct care staff regarding their presence over an extended period of time through the lens of the Person-Environment Fit Theory.

The work of qualitative research, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explain, is to give understanding and meaning to research. Being the researcher provides the ability to learn about the experiences of the participants. For the case study, understanding what makes people stay in the field will help facilities retain direct care staff pasting.
Problem Statement

Juvenile detention centers are designed to provide confinement and help inmates develop into productive members of society, while facilitating support for the needs of the juveniles (Gilman et al., 2021; National Institute of Corrections, 2022). These juveniles often suffer from undiagnosed physical and mental illnesses (Califano, 2010, Meservey & Skowyra, 2015; Skowyra & Cocozza, 2007). Different types of individuals work in the field and include those who have supportive roles without direct interactions and those who do have direct interactions based on amount of time spent interacting with inmates (Rhineberg-Dunn & Mack, 2020). Direct care staff are employed individuals who spend the largest amount of their work time tasked with constant and daily interactions with prisoners/inmates (Clark, 2014). They often have to make quick decisions, and sometimes without all of the information necessary (NIC, 2022); (Dir, et al, 2019). Coupled with exposure to violence and overload, the result is a turnover rate of upwards of 20% of direct care staff (Mikytuck & Cleary, 2016); (Brown, et al., 2021). Effectiveness of possible rehabilitation of these incarcerated juveniles can be impacted because of frequent turnover of those tasked with this important work (Appling-Plummer, 2019; Wells et al, 2009).

Despite these stresses, some direct care staff remain in the profession for extended periods of time. Some individuals have education in the field, receive training, find ways to mitigate the stress and maintain lifelong employment as a direct care staff (Houchins et al., 2010; Minor et al, 2014). Others become overwhelmed and indicate an intent to leave and eventually leave the field (Hatcher et al., 2011; Lazzari et al., 2022). While these jobs are known to be stressful, these positions may not offer adequate support to prevent
turnover in the workplace research (Wells et al., 2009; Aalsma et al., 2019). A work-related environmental adversity scale (WREAS) was used to measure participants’ perceptions of environmental adversity (Trounson et al., 2016). Levels of environmental adversity appeared to lead to correctional officers leaving their profession frequently.

There are many factors that can influence a worker within this environment to leave. These factors can be demographic, economic and/or psychological in their origins (Wells et al, 2009; Lazzari et al., 2022). Perhaps the theory of person-environment fit could provide valuable information to why some individuals stay, and others leave. Person-environment fit theory suggests that the environment fit of the employee depends on the compatibility between the work environment and themselves. As an employee strives to adjust to the work environment, supplementary components arise such as when an employee perceives the characteristics of the work to be similar to themselves. In other cases, the theory proposes the idea of complementary fit when the individual adds their own intrapersonal and interpersonal characteristics to the work environment and develop strategies to fit within the work environment (Taxman et al, 2014; Armstrong et al., 2014).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the perceptions of direct care staff regarding their intent to stay at their employment through the lens of the Person-Environment Fit Theory.

**Research Questions**

1. What factors have encouraged these longer-term direct care employees to remain in this profession?
2. What environmental or institutional factors have influenced their decisions to stay?

3. What job related challenges have these employees encountered, and how have they addressed these challenges?

4. How does person-environment fit theory explain these findings?

Table 1 provides evidence for where data will be obtained for the research questions.

Table 1

Research Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
<th>Data Collection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What are the intentions of direct care Interview staff in a juvenile facility in their decision to maintain employment within the facility?</td>
<td>IQ 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11</td>
<td>Face-to-Face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13, 18, 19</td>
<td>Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What are the considerations Interview made by these individuals documents while making these decisions?</td>
<td>IQ 1, 4, 5, 10, 17,</td>
<td>Face-to-Face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18, 20</td>
<td>On boarding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How does person-environment Interview fit theory explain these perceptions or fail to explain this phenomenon?</td>
<td>IQ 1, 2, 6, 12, 14,</td>
<td>Face-to-Face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15, 16, 21</td>
<td>Staff Evaluations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. IQ- Interview Question
Research Design

Qualitative research allows for the perception of insight about people’s lives and concerns, building an understanding of experiences (Creswell, 2013). For example, gaining stories about working within juvenile justice facilities, or their experiences allows for a unique outlook towards person-environment fit. The study design includes the methods of data collection, where data was sourced from, the procedure for analyzing the data, as well as the work to maintain credibility, dependability, validity, and confirmability.

Qualitative research methodology was used in this study because the method is widely accepted in social sciences when the researcher is seeking to gain the perceptions of humans by asking questions (Creswell, 2013). For the research, qualitative methodology is particularly appropriate when the research questions start with “how” or “what,” with the perspective being studied complex and having no definitive theory (Yin, 2014). According to Lunenburg & Irby (2008), qualitative research occurs in a natural setting with the intent to explore and understand perspectives through participant responses, which inform the study rather than predetermined information from previous research. Moreover, a case study requires the researcher to become involved with the participants in order to tell the individual or groups’ story (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008).

In this study, the researcher utilized case study research design to examine the perception of direct care staff in juvenile justice facilities. A case study design will afford the researcher the opportunity to gain significant insights of real-life events of direct care staff (Creswell, 2014). To provide the perspectives of direct care staff, the application of
a case study, for a single context, is utilized in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). This case study reflects the use of Merriam’s (1998) approach to qualitative research design, with the selection of a sample, the collection and analysis of data, with consideration for validity, reliability, and ethics.

The research utilized a qualitative method, measuring the constructs of the environment and direct care staff at Cedar Valley to understand the participant perspectives and experiences related to the services there. The research was reflective of qualitative work, without emphasis on the thinking or beliefs or others on the environment of Cedar Valley (Merriam, 2009). In this way, the qualitative approach of a case study gave value to more understanding of the beliefs, environment, and direct influences on the direct care staff of the facility. An interview guide was utilized to ask questions related to the constructs of the study. This information was then gathered, and themes emerge. In Merriam & Tisdell’s (2016) work, the researchers assert that open coding should be used for information. The use of open coding will involve the identification of pertinent information to the research being conducted (Merriam, 1998).

The use of open coding was also present, codes are merged into categories and then categories into themes (Merriam & Tisdall, 2016). The study utilized a case study research design to examine the perception of direct care staff engaged in work at Cedar Valley. Moreover, a case study afforded the researcher the opportunity to gain insights about their experiences (Creswell, 2014). The use of a case study allowed for multiple perspectives, with the development of dominant themes in the participant responses (Creswell, 2014).
Methodological Procedures

Case Selection

There are currently ten facilities within the Oklahoma region, and the Cedar Valley facility has been chosen for research amongst these facilities. These facilities are difficult to access. Because of my previous employment with juvenile facilities in Oklahoma and a relationship with the administrator who is willing to allow research to be conducted in his facility, this facility was chosen. Its work with juveniles impacts the region in many aspects and is important to understand within the current context of recidivism in the state. Alongside Cedar Valley, there are facilities for profit and non-profit. As a for-profit facility being utilized for the research, the motivation to improve services and understand perspectives is important. Cedar Valley provides an environment with a highly structured approach to “therapeutic treatment, education, medical care, recreation, independent living, and social skills. Crisis intervention is available 24 hours a day for youth who have extreme anti-social and aggressive behavior (OJA, 2022)”. As one of the few juvenile facilities organized by the Oklahoma Office of Juvenile Affairs, Cedar Valley is an optimal facility to use for research. It is a for profit, private institution that has a history of high turnover, yet there are a few individuals who have stayed for an extended period of time.

Participant Selection

Each participant in the study has been employed by the organization in a direct care role and has worked at Cedar Valley for a minimum of three months past the probationary period of employment. The participants have been employed past the probationary period, so they have gained enough experience to have developed
competency in their work. Being currently employed at Cedar Valley, instead of being an intern or temporary employee is important, as well as ensuring they are not in a position away from the work of interaction with juvenile to some degree. Having each currently in a direct care role will help to maintain the purpose of the study. The choice to work with direct care staff in the research is because they are the ones that potentially have the most impact upon the inmates. Current research is expanding on the perspectives of direct care staff, understanding collaboration of efforts, like Ngene’s (2020) work on the perception of staff in juvenile detention centers. Previous research has also looked at the perception of staff for feedback, like Marthur & Clark (2014), conducting their own questionnaires for insight from similar perspectives as the proposed study. There is a growing emphasis on the impact of staff on understanding areas for feedback and how to overcome challenges. In this study, I have interviewed direct care staff who are part of the overall facility structure.

Theoretical Framework

The idea of Person-Environment Fit Theory began through the lens of a relationship between workers and their organization of employment. In Parson’s primary work, the idea was based in vocational congruence, later shaped by Lewin (1938). Both were able to focus on an interactional relationship between an individual and their environment, then building on the theory for the workplace. The broadest aspect of the theory involves the person-occupation fit, supported by Hollands’ (1959) research in the conducive nature of acceptance of work that meets individual needs. Research on the theory is being expanded into understanding turnover within the context of corrections
and criminal justice with a focus on the connection between employee turnover, correctional facilities, and person-environment fit.

In the figure, the terms of interpersonal and intrapersonal characteristics are being defined to mean employees personalities with an analysis of intention of turnover. Interpersonal characteristics are those that align with the skills and experience in their role within the facility, based on interaction with others (Misra et al., 2020). Intrapersonal characteristics are the knowledge of the person, openness, and one’s own self-awareness of their skills in alignment with the facility (Misra et al., 2020).

Lower in the figure, the next step of the process involves passive adaptation or optimization taking place during work at the facility. This part of the figure moves past the individual characteristics that influence the process, but now looking at the organization. The optimization component of the process is focused on training efforts, adequate staffing levels, and a structured system in place for routine and efficiency in the workplace. Later, there are influences by macro and organizational environment, leading to low or high person-environment fit. The additions to Figure 1 include appropriate training to the optimization category, as well as an alteration to environment. The passive adaptation part of the figure represents an organizational pull towards an environment that does not feel structured, without the definition and routine of roles and routines. Passive adaptation looks like conflict and confusion, without clear guidance on the work itself at the organization and the place in which each employee best serves and belongs.

After understanding the difference in the organization towards an influence of passive adaptation or optimization, the combination of the individual characteristics with these leads to further influence from the environment, considering its size and what
characteristics it has itself as an extension of the fit analyzed in the previous stage. By taking these processes into account, I have assessed the outcomes for P-E Fit, with either low or high P-E outcomes. With poor fit, low P-E fit outcomes can include stress and lots of cognitive load, while a high P-E fit for an individual can have the opposite, with a lessened stress and more brain power to make changes and grow. The impact of those outcomes is significant for the individuals working to align within their workplace and for the workplace’s productivity itself.

**Figure**

*Person-Environment Fit Figure*

Data Collection

Procedures

The principles of case study research allow for the discovery of in-depth knowledge about situations and their meanings (Hancock & Algozzine, & Lim 2006). Although case studies provide small insight, its findings can be used for policy and research (Merriam, 1998). Case studies give the individual representation of a group or phenomenon, taking place within the natural context, bounded by space and time (Merriam, 1998). This type of research requires rich descriptions derived from sources, such as quotes from key participants (Merriam, 1998). It is more illustrative than other types of research, providing an in-depth analysis as an interaction with the social world of the participants (Merriam, 1998).

As part of the workforce of Cedar Valley, the data collection included the dynamics of direct staff at the facility. Merriam, in her 1998 research, attests that for the data collection process, it should be dynamic and recursive. The process involved dynamic participation from both former colleagues and professionals within the site. The participant interviews and collection of data will go collaboratively together, working to develop the qualitative study (Creswell, 2014).

Population

The population of the research involved the correctional facility at Cedar Valley within the state of Oklahoma in a case study format for their perceptions of person-environment fit and turnover. The Cedar Valley workers are the population of the research, with the sample being the direct care staff at Cedar Valley. Direct care staff at
the facility have been interviewed in the case study, sometimes they are called ‘residential treatment specialists. At Cedar Valley, there are 35 employee’s total. The total number of employees includes direct care staff, program directors, program coordinators, supervisors and therapist. Some of the population being interviewed work within CareerTech, helping inmates obtain their GED and Construction Technology certificates. Other staff assist with group, family and individual therapies with the residents. This is also where the residents will receive coping skills, behavior treatment plans which are specific to each client’s needs.

Sample

The total population for the study at Cedar Valley is 35 and our sample is 20 possible participants who are considered to be direct care staff. Of the 20 possible participants, I interviewed nine individuals who chose to participate. The direct care staff role is defined by the nature of their work and job description, also sometimes known as residential treatment specialists. Some associate the term, ‘direct care staff,’ as a less formal title to refer to the work itself. The eligibility criteria used to determine interview participants sought to find seven to nine potential participants. The criteria include long-term presence at the facility and work experience at the facility.

Interviews

In this study, a semi-structured approach was used where the interviewer had a list of prepared questions, which will not be shared with the participants beforehand. The researcher, using the theoretical framework of Person-Environment Fit, crafted questions to provide data to answer the research questions. A list of open-ended interview
questions was developed based on the research questions. Appendix B contains a list of interview questions. Each question also lists for the researchers use the components of the theory. This indicates the interview questions should provide adequate data to compare findings to the theoretical framework.

Each participant was interviewed for a minimum of one hour. The researcher conducted interviews individually nine direct care staff in this study, conducting the interview at Cedar Valley. The interviews are recorded with the use of password protected iPhone to allow the researcher to transcribe the recordings for analysis and themes. The voice memos app designed by apple was be used to record the interview. The iCloud upload option was turned off on this app so the interviews were be stored to a cloud server. Some of the questions involved perspectives on turnover and the program, areas of strength/weakness of the program, and how the direct care staff believe components of the system serve to support employment.

Pseudonyms were used in the interview process to protect the participants identity and maintain confidentiality. There was a choice given to participate in the research, as well as the ability to choose the setting of the interview. After three years of secured storage of the interview, the contents of the interviews will be destroyed to further maintain confidentiality.

After the interviews were conducted, a series of steps took place to analyze them. The notes from each interview was transcribed, then re-read to find similarities that were then be labeled into themes. In transcribing the interviews, the use of a professional transcription system through voice software was help to construct the data accurately and
efficiently. The transcripts of the interviews were then collected and stored on a password protected computer and flash drive.

**Observations**

Observations of this case study were completed during shift change transitions. Each observation was completed to provide a better understanding of how communication takes place between workers, what issues occurred, employee attitudes, and how the inmates were reported to have interacted with them that day. This will not involve clients or interaction with clients. This will allow for me to observe firsthand when people cannot or will not discuss the research topic (Merriam, 1998).

**Documents**

The importance of relevance and authenticity in documents is central to the case study (Merriam, 1998). Documents that have been collected include program evaluations, employee evaluations, on-boarding documents and safety documents. During the research process, I had access to information through the resources at the facility. I have also consulted procedures manuals for the facility and the Oklahoma Office of Juvenile Affairs, as well as procedural evaluations on the facility by the Office of Juvenile Affairs. The use of the documents can serve as a means to the creation of new onboarding or employee documents in the future, giving insight to research questions surrounding person-environment fit for direct care staff. Documents regarding policies and procedures, as well as program and staff evaluations, can also be impacted to include improvements from answers given to the research questions.
Data Analysis

When looking at analyzing the data, there is a need to create continuance in looking at the research, with a constant comparative method of data analysis used (Merriam, 1998.) Research itself adds to the knowledge base of other researchers’ to assist in the development of new approaches to be implemented by practitioners and can reflect merit in comparing the data (Creswell, 2013). In addition, research may affirm former studies, add to the literature, and be beneficial in progressing or enhancing practices (Creswell, 2013). This method will be applied to combine data collection with the coding of findings.

Creswell asserts that research involves three primary steps: (1) posing questions, (2) the collection of data to answer questions, and (3) presenting answers to the questions posed (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, as I have posed the research questions, I collected data. Using the data I sorted the information into categories using the categories and constant comparative method I developed codes. Once the codes were identified I listed the themes. I have analyzed the data and I have recorded the findings of the research so that I can present the answers to the questions. This has been done consistently, as Creswell (2014) encourages the ethics of consistent data checking for accurate reporting. Being cognizant of the participant’s input without adding my own perspective will be important in analyzing the data (Creswell, 2014). Protection of the participants is also important in the analysis, with the clarity of the questions presented, as well as their identity being confidential in utilizing the data (Creswell, 2014).
According to Creswell (2014), there is no specific number of sites and participants for a qualitative study, although the study will be characterized by a small number of participants. The analysis of data will involve organizing the data, coding for themes, and interpretation of the data. According to Creswell (2013), data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing the data for analysis, reducing the amount of data into themes through coding and lastly representing the data in tables. The process of data analysis is to provide order, structure, as well as interpretation which are not isolated steps, but rather interrelated. This process required the researcher to read, re-read, make notes, and read again which can make the process confusing and time-consuming (Creswell, 2013). Data analysis involves diligence, with the investigation of the findings placed into groups. With the accessibility of information through technology, the findings are to be categorized into themes for analysis. The findings were grouped by similarity and named. The groups were then formed into a theme. Through efforts to consolidate, reduce, and interpret the findings into themes, making meaning of the data is central to reporting the data (Merriam, 1998).

**Organize, Prepare, and Read Data**

Within qualitative research, data analysis can be the most complicated component of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The collection of data was within a qualitative inquiry, working to represent the data and conveying it accurately. To depict the findings accurately from the participant is part of the qualitative research analysis (Patton, 1990). The data was categorized individually by participant in a log using technology. On a password-protected iPhone I recorded and gathered the interview data for each participant. The recording of the data was then conducted through both notetaking and
recording of the interview on the iPhone. The notes were then typed into a word document and a review of the audio to ensure the interview has been transcribed accurately. As the interviews took place, the analysis of the data involved categorization of themes in the data findings, such as similar responses to the challenges of the facility. I will do this by identifying key statements made by the participants. The statements will then be grouped based on similarity to expose the findings. I will then group these finding into the themes of the study. The accuracy of the participants was represented through use of their own quotes and insight to each theme.

**Code Data or Themes**

The collection of data, its analysis, and the comparisons between the data for common themes is central to the work of qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). The data was then coded based on similar statements or information in this research, and once identified, the data themes were triangulated. The results were then analyzed to uncover more insight about the perspectives of direct care staff and its connection to the environment. I will categorized the themes of data from the transcript by using color coding and began to develop the storyline of the research (Stuckey, 2015). This brought into play more coding as I go through the transcript, found multiple codes created from a concept (Stuckey, 2015). The color-coding was highlight the major themes found within the transcript, using a variety of colors to differentiate the information into categories (Stuckey, 2015). Inductive coding was necessary to create categories of themes and be able to find similarities in the data.
Researcher Role

Researcher Bias

I have worked in various perspectives of the profession within criminal justice as an administrator and educator for over 13 years. I served as an educator for the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education Skills Center working with juvenile delinquents. I then worked in an administrative role and instructor role at Francis Tuttle Technology Center working with adult inmates. I am familiar with processes of administration being familiar with the way the court reports reflect on inmates and what that means in understanding the inmates and work itself. I have worked with inmates and direct care staff within programs that help to propel inmates forward.

From my own experiences, there is a potential for bias, with the values being brought forth by our time within that environment (Creswell, 2014). By working to actively avoid any bias brought forth from my own time at juvenile facilities, I will be able to work towards the compilation of findings without affecting the outcomes. Being aware of the collection and analysis of data, in comparison to what the research questions guide and what themes are relevant, will be central to my work in avoiding such bias (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Ethical Considerations

The consideration for ethics throughout the research is fundamental to collecting and analyzing the data. By being cognizant of ethics throughout the collection of data, analysis, and interpreting the data, all considerations have been made to avoid any issues with ethical dilemmas or lack of ethical approach. This includes minimizing any risks to
harm participants and giving them the right to withdraw from the research (Connelly, 2016). The protection of the participant anonymity and getting informed consent is also essential to consideration of ethics and in the creation of research that is not deemed deceptive (Connelly, 2016).

**Data Collection Ethics**

There are ethical procedures that can be practiced to accurately represent the research. The consent of all participants in document form was utilized, as well as Institutional Review Board approval to protect participants from any harm (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Being transparent with the facility being used in the research is important, as well as using transparency among participants for ethical data collection (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In addition, any sensitive information is to be regarded as private and kept in that regard (Creswell, 2014). This information is kept in a secure location, with the use of technology providing a locked, confidential space to house the data.

**Data Analysis and Interpretation Ethics**

Ethical considerations for data analysis involved ensuring the data is kept confidential and secured, with the understanding of interpretation that the participants were forthcoming with responses and should interpret them accordingly. The interpretation was conducted with an awareness of biases and the avoidance of their influence on the analysis and interpretation.
Trustworthiness of Findings

The work of building trustworthiness in the findings sourced from the use of triangulation of data from the interviews conducted. In addition, throughout the research process, I had data checking take place, as well as support and assistance. The engagement with participants, with rapport and trust built with the facility was prioritized, as well as utilizing purposeful criteria sampling to find meaningful data. The data can be further supported in trustworthiness through great description of the findings.

Credibility

The work of creating credibility within the research stems from qualitative research’s ability to be part of an ever-changing environment, rather than an observable or discoverable occurrence (Merriam, 1998). By utilizing sufficient data from the interviews, detail can be provided to give conclusion to the research (Merriam, 1998). Through the collection of multiple sources of data, being the interview and documents, I have successfully triangulated the research.

Transferability

The outcome of the research can be affected by the researcher’s perspective or undertones (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Instead, I will work to give detail to the site, participants, and design in a neutral way, so that the study can be best understood (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). By using an approach with thick description, the study can provide adequate detail to the work of the research. Although the research is on a case study basis, and not something utilizing a large size of participants, the research may be transferable to other juvenile facilities in the area or utilizing a similar approach to other studies.
Limitations of Study

This qualitative study will rely on each participants’ capacity to answer the questions with honesty and integrity. Direct care staff may fear their true answers will impact them professionally. Moreover, some may feel hesitation answering questions about their work lives. The study was limited to only staff in the single facility. My presence will be both a benefit and a liability (Creswell, 2014). It is difficult to access these types of facilities to facilitate research due to FERPA and DOC regulations, limiting entry and communication with those in the justice facilities. Furthermore, my presence at meetings may diminish the “normalcy” of the group. As my research will explore person-environment fit within one facility, the results may not be generalizable to all direct care staff. With a background in the field, I used member checking and field notes to minimize as much bias as possible.

As the study is designed to be qualitative, there is not research data that gives insight through numerical means about Cedar Valley or information on the rate of research at the facility. The aim of the study was to gain sufficient information through qualitative means to give enough data without the numerical aspect. Being a case study, the research was designed around one facility, and is not generalizable as a larger study would be. This research was also about a particular area and population and may not be generalizable for other areas or populations to apply the findings. Having a small number of research participants, while adequate according to Merriam (1998), does not allow for a broad depth of data across many people. Rather, the goal is to provide insight with representations of overlying themes from those who participate in the research. The case
study does not involve long periods of time, and the perspective of a long-term collection of data was not included in the research, as a potential limitation.

Summary

Chapter III gives guidance on the methodology used for the qualitative case study, while providing information on the process of the research and areas of limitation. The chapter also gives information on the credibility and validity of the research, while giving insight to my own bias and avoidance during the research. The chapter also highlighted the techniques I use for collection of data and analysis within the case study, with an emphasis on ethics throughout the research.

In summary, the purpose of this qualitative research study is to examine the perceptions of direct care staff to stay at one research site. The research site is Cedar Valley. The study seeks to understand the considerations made by these individuals while making these decisions, as well as how person-environment fit theory explains these perceptions or fails to explain this phenomenon. To find the answers to these research questions, the data will be collected through the use of interviews and analysis of documents. I explored the multiple reasons that an individual makes critical life decisions regarding employment. Person-environment fit theory is the lens used in the study.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

These Juvenile detention centers help inmates develop into productive members of society, while facilitating support for their needs (Gilman et al., 2021; National Institute of Corrections, 2022). Within these facilities are direct care staff, who spend the largest amount of their work time tasked with daily interactions with inmates (Clark, 2014). Despite the stressors with the work of direct care staff, some remain in the profession while others leave. There are many factors that can influence a direct care staff within this environment to seek employment elsewhere. The theory used in the research, Person-Environment Fit Theory, could provide valuable information to why some stay. This qualitative case study examined the perceptions of direct care staff regarding their intent to stay at their employment through the lens of the Person-Environment Fit Theory. In this chapter I have described the facility, clarified terminology, described my observation of a shift change, and presented the findings from this study. Nine interviews have been conducted at Cedar Valley Juvenile Facility and their stories will be presented separately.
Problem Statement

This Juvenile detention centers are designed to provide confinement and help juveniles develop into productive members of society, while facilitating support for the needs of the juveniles (Gilman et al., 2021; National Institute of Corrections, 2022). These juveniles often suffer from undiagnosed physical and mental illnesses (Califano, 2010, Meservey & Skowyra, 2015; Skowyra & Cocozza, 2007). Different types of individuals work in the field and include those who have supportive roles without direct interactions and those who do have direct interactions based on amount of time spent interacting with inmates (Rhineberg-Dunn & Mack, 2020). Direct care staff are employed individuals who spend the largest amount of their work time tasked with constant and daily interactions with prisoners/inmates (Clark, 2014). They often have to make quick decisions, and sometimes without all of the information necessary (NIC, 2022); (Dir et al, 2019). Coupled with exposure to violence and overload, the result is a turnover rate of upwards of 20% of direct care staff (Mikytuck & Cleary, 2016); (Brown et al., 2021). Effectiveness of possible rehabilitation of these incarcerated juveniles can be impacted because of frequent turnover of those tasked with this important work (Appling-Plummer, 2019; Wells et al, 2009).

Despite these stresses, some direct care staff remain in the profession while others leave the profession. Some individuals have education in the field, receive training, find ways to mitigate the stress and maintain lifelong employment as a direct care staff (Houchins et al., 2010; Minor et al, 2014). Others become overwhelmed and indicate an intent to leave and eventually leave the field (Hatcher et al., 2011; Lazzari et al, 2022). From the environment-fit perspective, some individuals fit with the environment and can
adjust while in other cases they are not. While these jobs are known to be stressful, these positions may not offer adequate support to prevent turnover in the workplace research (Wells et al., 2009; Aalsma et al., 2019). A work-related environmental adversity scale (WREAS) was used to measure participants’ perceptions of environmental adversity (Trounson, et al., 2016). Levels of environmental adversity appeared to lead to correctional officers leaving their profession frequently.

There are many factors that can influence a staff within this environment to leave. These factors can be demographic, economic and/or psychological in their origins (Wells et al, 2009; Lazzari, et al., 2022). Perhaps the theory of person-environment fit could provide valuable information to why some individuals stay, and others leave. Person-environment fit theory suggests that the environment fit of the employee depends on the compatibility between the work environment and themselves. As an employee strives to adjust to the work environment, supplementary components arise such as when an employee perceives the characteristics of the work to be similar to themselves. In other cases, the theory proposes the idea of complementary fit when the individual adds their own intrapersonal and interpersonal characteristics to the work environment and develop strategies to fit within the work environment (Taxman et al, 2014; Armstrong, et al., 2014).

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to examine the perceptions of direct care staff regarding their intent to stay at their employment through the lens of the Person-Environment Fit Theory.
Research Questions

1. What factors have encouraged these longer-term direct care employees to remain in this profession?

2. What environmental or institutional factors have influenced their decisions to stay?

3. What job related challenges have these employees encountered, and how have they addressed these challenges?

4. How does person-environment fit theory explain these findings?

Research Site

The building was constructed in the 1980s and is a brick building with a circular entry for administration. On the south side, an additional entry exists for staff and case workers. First entering through a chain link fence, one comes into a small fully enclosed courtyard. On the north side of this courtyard is a solid door with a button and camera. By pushing the button, a staff member will ask who you are and let you in over a speaker. The entrance shows a wide hallway, with a metal detector directly to your left in the hallway.

To the left exists a small concrete room with a metal door and 2 chairs, a very dim room with poor lighting and trash on the floor. Next is the staff supervisor’s office, dirty and unorganized with lots of clutter, with a desk and chair. On the back wall, there are two more chairs with an end table between them. As you move past the staff supervisor’s office, on the left is the direct care staff office. This office is where the shift changes meetings occur, it is also used as a break room and is also very dirty and unorganized. There is a window looking out into the halls, with a desk and tables with staff personal
belongings tossed on top. There is also a short hall that leads to a bathroom, a refrigerator, and shelving with personal belongings. The rooms are impersonable with very little effort to make the rooms inviting. A total nine interviews were conducted, seven of them were on the research site and two were conducted at a convenient location to the interviewee and me.

**Terminology of the Work**

Exploring the terminology used for the environment and work of direct care staff, there are different words used to describe the inmates. The kids are considered “juvenile delinquents” by the state and most of the industry calls them “juveniles” (Coalition for Juvenile Justice, 2023). Within the facility being researched, the term used is “clients”. The source of this terminology is unknown, but as this is a for-profit organization, it may be because it is a business, and the juveniles are essentially “clients”. Some of the staff call them “kids”. As the juveniles are between the ages of 15-18. Some of the direct care staff are 40 years and older, so the juveniles probably all seem like kids.

**Shifts**

The first shift takes place between 7:00 am—3:00 pm. When direct care staff arrive, the clients are already up and eat breakfast at 7am. The clients perform chores and have an accountability group, in which they stand in a circle and give each other feedback on how to have a good day or what needs improvement. The staff will also give feedback, to both the individuals and the group. The clients go to school at 8:00 am and have a break at 9:45 am. Approximately thirty minutes later, the clients return to the classroom for school. At 12:00 pm the clients go to lunch for an hour, then go to school for an hour and a half. At 2:30 pm the clients have a snack and down time until the next shift comes
on. Also, throughout the day, counselors pull clients out for a weekly 1-hour counseling session. Clients are also being pulled out during the day for case worker visits, family visitation, and medical appointments.

The second shift takes place between 3:00 pm-11:00 pm and begins with an accountability group. Recreation follows if the client is not on Loss of Privileges (LOP). The clients can choose to play board games, card games, play basketball, or play video games. Clients can also do personal activities like reading, drawing, or homework. During this time, direct care staff will also give the clients personal phone calls to family. Supper begins at 7:00 pm and is delivered to units on trays. All meals are delivered on trays and each client is responsible for cleanup. Chores are then completed, such as mopping, cleaning tables, and wiping down doors and cabinets. Shower time follows and the clients are in bed at 9:30 pm. Throughout this shift, some are pulled out for case workers visits and family visits. The third shift is from 11:00 pm-7:00 am. Clients are in bed when this shift begins. The direct care staff do bed checks every 15 minutes throughout the night. This involves walking around the dorm assuring the clients are in their bed and no visible harm has come to them. Direct care staff wake the clients up at 6:00 am. The clients then get dressed, complete hygiene, and eat breakfast. The schedule on the weekends can vary from week to week. On the weekends the clients have weekly cleaning chores that are more detailed than the chores assigned during the week. These chores are completed between breakfast and lunch. After lunch they will have recreation throughout the day. These recreation activities are the same as other shifts. Clients will get pulled out of recreation from family visits if needed.
Shift Change Meeting

Shift change meeting take place three times a day before each shift. It is an interaction between the incoming and the outgoing direct cares staff. The meeting is an opportunity for the direct care staff to exchange information about how the clients behaved on the previous shift. The incoming staff is required to be there 10 minutes before their shift begins to allow time for the exchange. There are four employees present during this shift change which took place in a control room that appears to also be used as a break room. The room is very dirty and unorganized. There is a window looking into the halls, a desk and then tables with staff personal belongings thrown on them. There is a short hall that leads to a bathroom. There is also a refrigerator, but no one adds or removes anything from it. As the staff arrive to a shift, one staff member will call on a radio to the outgoing staff to come to shift change. It takes about 10 minutes for the staff to get there. They immediately greet each other, and the outgoing staff states how the shift went. During this observation, the outgoing staff indicates that John (pseudonym) is on loss of privileges (LOP) but is not having any problems. The outgoing staff is in a hurry; his demeanor indicates he does not want to talk to the incoming staff. The incoming staff has a very neutral demeanor, not appearing to be excited or mad about coming on the shift.

As this interaction is happening, another incoming staff member arrives to their shift and calls the staff she is replacing. The outgoing staff has a very negative demeanor stating, “the clients are wild today.” The staff member explains that she is ready to leave the facility and go home. She elaborates that Kevin (pseudonym) is trying to “get turnt up” but other residents are keeping him calm. Two clients are on LOP, she says, and are
not following the LOP rules. This interaction changes the demeanor of the incoming staff. She hangs her head and states, “I’m not in the mood for this bullsh*t.” She also makes a comment that she knew she should have called in. They quickly discuss moving clients to another area of the facility and then exit the room.

**Presentation of Data**

Nine individuals, currently employed at the research site as direct care staff, were interviewed. Seven individuals were interviewed on site with two others interviewed at a convenient location to the participants. The data that is presented for each participant are only the highlights of the interview. I made no effort to correct grammar or use of English but rather used their own words. Their own words are powerful in communicating not only the language and the meaning of the words but also giving insights into the culture and climate of the work environment. The summaries of each participant’s interviews are presented in order of length of experience in the profession beginning with Anthony who has five months experience at the research site. Table 1 provides demographic information on the interview participants.

**Table 1**

*Interview Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Years at Facility</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity/Race</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Anthony</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5 months</td>
<td>5 months</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Mary</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8 months</td>
<td>8 months</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Darrel</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10 months</td>
<td>10 months</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>African</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Kayla
American
27 10 months 10 months Female African

5. Jenny
44 3 years 4 months Female Caucasian

6. Penny
American
24 3 years 3 years Female African

7. John
29 5 years 1-year Male Caucasian

8. Daniel
American
41 11 years 2 years Male African

9. Steven
American
36 12 years 2 years Female African

Anthony

When conducting the interview with Anthony, he encouraged the use of a pseudonym to start out the conversation. He explained that he hadn’t had any experience with the juvenile correctional industry, but in the four months he had been working there, he had gained a lot of experience working with the clients. He elaborated, explaining that he has been in situations as if he were a parent. As he deals with clients, some of whom are not much younger that he is, he works to teach them and punish them as needed. The use of de-escalation strategies is then mentioned by Anthony, the pseudonym used for the employee.

Anthony was asked to explain what could help to make him more prepared. He answered that there are not enough people staffed to support the facility, and that he is alone to handle problems. The procedures in place to deal with the problems are not handled appropriately with a lack of staff, which then gives into the clients to avoid a bad situation in the moment. He was then asked to explain his roles and responsibilities in the workplace. Anthony set out his work as involvement with helping clients follow norms,
with the use of classes, like anger management and money management. Another part of his job set out by him is his assurance of safety for the clients, making sure chores are being followed as well as respect given to each other. The use of supervision as a role is also explained, especially during games and playing basketball, working to avoid conflicts. “What satisfies me is coming to work and knowing that not all kids, but sometimes enjoy my presence, because we have a good time,” he emphasized.

Moving to better understand his use of the term ‘norm,’ Anthony explained what a norm is within his facility. He described a norm as rules. An example of not following a norm is speaking without permission, stepping without permission or more than one person up at a time, would be outside a facility norm and against safety measures. Another way of calling rules is what we would call norms within the facility. Asking for more clarification of another term, ‘stepping’ was then requested. Anthony explained that stepping is getting up out of your seat without asking permission and is applicable unless they are on recreational time.

He was requested to explain what training is necessary to teach classes. He stated that employees get the packets and learn as they go with the students, as it is helpful. He was asked to describe the lessons, and answers that the classes deal with money, anger, how to pay bills, and how to get a job. As Anthony was questioned about his decision to choose this job, he explained that he, himself, had once been in trouble as a kid and that the staff during his experience helped him. He said that he, too, had been in a similar situation, and that it is what encouraged him to choose this career path. He explained that the job was satisfying in that he can teach and give information to the clients, with the hope of changing someone. He also emphasized the challenges of his work, with
juveniles that are reckless and can be dangerous, but that he has considered only changing shifts but not leaving his profession.

Anthony explained that because of money, as well as influencing the clients, he feels called to stay in his work. Days can be diverse, he explained, and his fellow direct care staff are likeable, with only challenges in moving between different shifts of staff transitions. When asking about training and development into the position, Anthony explained that there was a lot of testing by the juveniles initially towards new employees, and that training lasts about a week. We finished the interview emphasizing the challenges of initially meeting juveniles in training but staying consistent to avoid mental games to gain credibility, with the importance of his work being reflected in his description of the impact the staff have on the juveniles over time. He told the story of a fellow colleague who was perceived as not being able to handle the job, being tested by the juveniles from the first day onward. After the first day, his colleague never returned to his workplace.

Mary

The interview with Mary began with a discussion of her responsibilities, explaining that there are norms to follow, but also gaps, trying to understand where gaps are and preparing clients for what they need. When asked to elaborate on the gaps, she said that the direct care staff feel there is a need to have a power struggle and, but it should never be the goal to be in one with the clients. Mary stated, “I tell them you got three jobs... Get a job, maintain a place, maintain a job, and maintain transportation.” Teaching them that they should also take care of themselves first as people. To teach this,
she explained they have resources with packets, but most of it is from the experiences she has had herself. There was no training, she stated, outside of the packets, and that the kids behave most of the time.

When asked about the choice of career, she explained that she had previously worked in insurance for United Health Care for years and left and worked for American Fidelity. She worked to process medical claims for the Oklahoma Statute. She faced a conflict of interest with a friend who worked in a neighboring agency, and she quit her work. She applied then to her current position and felt like the job chose her. She did not wish to work in the corporate setting, and that she felt passionate about the injustice of the prison system and corruption, that she could maybe make things better by working in a facility.

When asked about job satisfaction, she reflected on her ability to help people and how she had worked in her own life to help others, raising her cousin’s children and other godchildren. Serving as a counselor, she added, is how she feels in her work and that she is really helping people. The challenges of the job, she explained, center around the lack of time, without the ability to teach them accountability and work on their character flaws. When handling challenges, she said that the differences between the staff and their perceptions of the issues in their work can be difficult.

When asked if she had considered leaving her work, she responded that recently she considered being a 911 dispatcher, that she passed the test, but that she doesn’t think she would like it. Rather, when she looks at the kids and their experiences it compels her to stay. On a typical day, she works second shift, she explains, and begins her work
inquiring about the unit, doing debriefing, with lots of talking going on between the clients and her throughout the day. During the group, she has a counseling approach, with lessons and talking about the day, giving advice and feedback. She also explained that she doesn’t have training for this but learns as she goes to lead the groups.

The other employees, she adds, are there because they say it’s an easy job, and goes on to explain that the job depends on what you want to do, you can come and just ‘kick it’ if you want to. Some of the staff do not take the time to enforce rules, she adds, which doesn’t help teach the clients anything for the future. When talking about the onboarding process and training, Mary stated that there are many different dynamics to learn and that focusing on multiple situations is necessary for the job, and that she had to learn that through the training.

She described ‘letting them have the place’ as a behavior seen by staff in letting the clients do what they want, and not following norms a way that staff sometimes behave, as its easier than teaching someone who doesn’t want to be taught. She added that the integration of resources for self-esteem work would be effective. The ability to teach them about hygiene and bring in better hygiene supplies and the importance it transfers into self-esteem, saying “We can improve these kids self-identity.” She told a story about her own personal life and helping someone with poor self-image, and her worries with her children about self-image, pouring out into her life with clients.

**Darrel**

The interview began with Darrel, describing his position as a direct care staff responsible for maintaining safety. He explained that he has been at the facility for ten
months, and began work in a different industry, being in heavy equipment operation, and found the job at the facility after looking for work, finding interest in being a mentor to young people. He also explained that he had a cousin who had passed away at a similar facility, and so he wanted to work within the industry to ensure that the same fate of his cousin was not met by others in that situation.

Darrel touched on the challenges of his work, and he cited inadequate staff, power struggles, and the need for more development of current staff. He stated that areas that are satisfying about his job involve the ability to have an impact, even if it’s not with every client. The biggest challenge was described as communication, but that he recently hadn’t thought of leaving his job. He explained that he did experience an episode where he felt like leaving, with a client spitting on him and another hitting him.

He explained that a typical day involves a lot of problem solving, and that he’s had to come in on days off to cover gaps, even though he’s not asked to do so. Sometimes, he said, that the job requires a wide variety of tasks, and a need for willingness to do whatever it takes, like mopping the floor. Darrel gave the answer to perception of coworkers as a 60/40 split, with 40 percent of the employees at the facility there to help, and 60 percent of the employees there to make a paycheck, with the ability to gain overtime. Some of the staff, he stated, antagonize the clients, and make it harder for them, which then turns into violence or conflict between staff and the clients.

This was part of the biggest challenge he saw in the work of direct care staff, with a lack of motivation and engagement felt by many of the people who work in the facility, and they do not have a passion for working within the juvenile justice industry. As the facility is experiencing lack of staffing, the ability to gain overtime is appealing to many,
he explains, and brings people into the environment that normally would not have sought such a position.

When asked about what changes could be made, if he were the leader of the organization, he explained that there should be more incentives for clients, depending on their level, as well as more outings. The use of more extracurricular activity for clients should be prioritized, with the implementation of a recreational room. The integration of animals could also be an area put in place, with more opportunities needed to engage with the juveniles in the facility.

When asked about clients not getting their ‘level’, Darrel explained that achieving the goals set forth by the facility for the students is their level, and sometimes it’s met and sometimes it’s not. The student could regress to poor behavior or begin to disregard the use of goals for their time spent in the facility. Thus, he stated, incentives could be used to help encourage the clients to reach their goals and not regress towards poorer behavior.

Darrel described the onboarding and training process as being an amazing experience, with challenges being the newest employee initially. Over time, it becomes less challenging to be the newest employee. Working night shift is easy, Darrel added, however, as the clients are asleep. He did not have any additional information to share, other than the ease of the overtime and his initial appeal of the position during onboarding and training.

Kayla

In conducting the interview with Kayla, she discussed her roles and responsibilities as teaching them hygiene, school, recreational time, including that she likes to teach her units to line dance. When discussing why she chose the role of a direct
care staff member, she explained that her parents had worked at that same facility in the past, and that she is studying psychology in school. She talked about the approach she has, in not judging the kids and what loss of privileges (LOP) entails.

The satisfaction she feels most from her work, she explained, sources from being the person the juveniles rely on to talk with or to get a hug, making a difference in their lives. The power struggle, as a challenge faced in the facility, was explained as a ‘nothing to lose’ scenario for some, and that they will still do what they want, but that she goes into ‘mom’ mode, causing a power struggle. She gave the example of a client that wants attention and acts out to get attention but says he doesn’t care when he receives loss of privileges.

When talking about going into a unit that is on edge, she told the story of feeling nervous, and that if the facility is short staffed, it makes her want to call in sick, as they can ‘turn up’ and cannot be stopped, without the adequate number of staff to handle the units. This can change, she explained, by the attitude and mood of the unit, moving throughout the clients. Kayla also explained that to address challenges, she relies on her supervisor to give her advice and to help her. She doesn’t consider leaving her position, however, stating that she has bad days or days she doesn’t want to be there, but she knows it’s what she wants to do for her life. With her studies in criminal justice, she explained that she is setting herself up for a lifetime in the field. When asked what about the kids makes her stay, she explains that they are special and that she doesn’t want to give up on them, that she’s built a rapport with them.
On a typical day, Kayla explains that she tries to make it fun, have conservations and make them feel more comfortable. When talking about the perception of other directors and staff, she states that some are there for the paycheck, some want power and to pick on the kids. If she were a leader, she asserted that the changes she would make in the facility would be for the staff to be able to supply the facility with things the kids may need. For those who are less fortunate, there is no access for us to bring hygiene products.

The onboarding and training process, she detailed as a fun week, with bruises and being sore from physical activities, but having a great training coordinator. The training, she answered, lasts for one full week and one day of shadowing. When asked about going to a unit for the first time, Kayla said she wanted to cry, that the kids were mean, and they tried to test her. Although, there was also a kid that was very helpful and kept the other kids calm. At the end of the interview, she wanted to emphasize that the kids are not really that bad, that they are amazing and smart, just misunderstood. She touched on the kids being in ‘flight or fight mode since they were out.’ She stated that she didn’t like when the children are called criminals, and that there is not a need to define them, as they are children.

The interview was closed with Kayla describing the importance of not judging the clients and setting a mood for the day, which “will make it a living hell.” She proudly described some of her clients, “one kid in my unit finished school and graduated in months all online, and he didn’t do GED, he got credits.” She explained that she also keeps anything the clients give her, they can draw and rap, and that each child has a talent and gift that reaches outside what people think are within the walls of the facility.
In the interview with Jenny, I began in asking her questions surrounding her work and the daily routine. She explained that she is responsible for running the day room, assigned to different rooms with counseling approaches working to de-escalate situations. She described her work as a mom role, making sure clients are following rules, participating in the program, not bullying each other, and taking their medication. When asked to elaborate on being in a parent/mother-type role, Jenny talked about the lack of parents in the lives of the clients, and that they do not receive many visitors. Instead, many of the staff become parental figures to the clients. Jenny told the story of how she chose the profession, being rebellious in her own past and being able to relate to the client. She explained that she did not want to follow rules, and that she can understand the clients she works with.

In describing what satisfies her most about her work, she cited the letters she has received from clients that are leaving. The biggest challenge, she added, was to have good staff, explaining that the newest staff are usually tested by clients to see if they can get away with anything with the new employee. Within the first five minutes being on a unit, Jenny stated, the clients will start to assess the new staff member, and that the experience is much different face-to-face with the clients rather than on paper. After making it past the first week, acceptance comes, but to expect the unexpected until being routinely put on a unit. Reasons for this issue stems from training, explained Jenny, as one week of training is not adequate to being exposed to the actual work being performed with the clients, and that training is unpaid if the staff member quits. When asked to elaborate on this, Jenny explained that the staff sign claw back clauses, with the
expectation that if you do not complete 6 months of employment, you will owe the facility $500, taken out of your last check.

When asked how she handles challenges, she explained that she doesn’t like to confront the challenges by ruffling any feathers. Then asked if she had ever thought about leaving, she said that every day she thinks about it, but every day she comes back. She stays, she explains, because it is better than her previous juvenile justice position, but that there are shortcomings, noted as ‘power struggles.’ When describing these, Jenny stated that people in power will propose ideas that are not applicable or useful in the real-life application of the unit.

During a typical day, Jenny said that there is time for do hygiene, breakfast, group sessions, and go outside, with issues on some days and others being good days with little issues. When asked about the perception of other direct care staff, that there is a diversity surrounding the other staff, and that one can tell the intentions of the staff based on how the clients perceive them, which are there for the right and wrong reasons. If the staff is perceived as ‘bad’ by the clients, they will immediately complain and begin to rebel. For those staff, Jenny was asked to describe why she thinks they are in the direct care staff position, but she said she could not answer why they would continue in something that made them miserable.

When asked what she would change if she were a leader in the facility, she cited areas of need, such as having adequate staff for every shift, with backup staff, changing the schedule type to scattered schedule. The training and onboarding process was described by Jenny, with little time to be accustomed to the position in the week-long
process, with the need for more time spent on the unit. When concluding the interview and asked about any other areas, Jenny mentioned the importance of maintenance for the facilities, issues with black mold, and the overall state of the facility and wellbeing of the clients. She added that this is an area that should be further explored by leadership, and that she believes a mold ventilation system within the facility would help clients from getting as sick.

**Penny**

The interview with Penny began with an explanation of her current role and responsibilities, as she described watching the kids, helping them with chores, taking them to school, and walking with them. When describing why she chose this field of work, she was curious, and had an aunt who had worked in the same field. She had worked in fast food before and the pay was better as a direct care staff, choosing to do it while she figured out what she wanted to do. When addressing the satisfaction of her job, she talked of the relationship with the kids, seeing them thrive and change. The biggest challenges, she stated, involved the individual level, ‘relating to the kids, because I can’t relate to all the kids…helping them work through a lot of things… I don’t have the life wisdom that some other coworkers have.’” Some clients give up, she explained, and helping them to find the positive amongst lots of negative is a challenge.

Being consistent and reassuring, while loving, was her approach, not being super strict and not focusing on the small rules or chores. She stated that she doesn’t worry much about the kids talking during school. When explaining why the students haven’t had to do school, she discussed their prior education as such that teachers didn’t care and would kick them out of class, their mothers weren’t encouraging their attendance. When
asked about leaving the job, she answered that she could not afford it, that learning to work with the clients is important to not have to be on them all the time.

She emphasized that some quit initially from the position, that “if you are chill, they will leave you alone.” Avoiding power struggles is important, while explaining that she allows for playing games and talking. Using reward systems like video games for good behavior and a loss of privileges when there is misbehavior. They are also able to work out, play basketball, and talk.

Her typical workday was described as spent on the unit and managing kids. Her perception of other staff was that people in her role believe they are somewhat counselors, mentors, with everyone in their own mentorship. She stated that they are all there for the right reasons, but some are harder than others, and there are some that will get kids mad and look for things to get them in trouble. If she were a leader, she explained she would change the activities for the kids, with more free time for recreation or take them on field trips. She explained that there weren’t enough opportunities for the kids to keep busy or engaged.

She gave insight to her training and onboarding process, with a quick hiring process, including shadowing on the unit. The emphasis was on handling situations, and preparation isn’t always applicable for unpredictable personalities, histories, and traumas of kids. She told of the potential challenges faced when first leaving training, as she stated “Kids will push you when you get there. They want to see what they can get away with. A lot of people quit right then. It would help a lot if we had more staff on the unit to help. I felt like it was good but when you are alone it’s scary, you don’t really know what the kids can do; they could hurt you for all you know.”
At the end of the interview, she wanted to emphasize that the biggest part of her work was the success she has seen in the program, and that there is an importance in using consistency with the kids. Making connections with them, even those who don’t seem open or expressive, do like to have connections, conversations, and mentors. She explained that many have a common worry about how their future will look outside the facility without a mentor.

**John**

The interview with John began with discussion of responsibilities and career choice within his role in juvenile justice. He explained that he works to minimize fighting, building relationships, and adherence to rules. The choice to work in juvenile justice was to find meaning in life, he explained, and that the day brought both good and bad parts of the job, emphasizing “I make them follow the rules if they don’t, I put them on loss of privileges (LOP).” He tells the recent experience of being able to see the clients receive Christmas gifts from a preacher, and how happy they were. He also discussed his role, being perceived as one of the harder staff, that he works to prepare the kids for the future, although it can be challenging when the clients are combative, using de-escalation the best he can. To make them calm, he explained that he encourages breathing and that he consoles them, as well as using strategies like bringing in more staff and trying to separate the clients when they are more aggressive.

He discusses the therapy used by clients each week, but that his own approaches he encourages are to channel anger into punching bags, hitting the blue mats they have, stress balls, pacing. All of this, he explained, is learned in order to de-escalate situations. When asked about leaving the job, he explained that there is a high turnover rate, that
people cannot handle clients and they leave quickly, but that he stays because he likes
helping the kids and the system. A typical day for John includes security measures, shift
change meetings, conduct a group meeting with clients, and gives examples about ways
he interacts with clients, such as listening to music as a group and giving choices on
songs, picking out a movie together, and overall, just keeping them entertained. He
discussed that the clients could have short attention spans, and that keeping them focused
can be a challenge, as they begin teasing each other or causing problems otherwise. He
states, “If they start messing around too much, it usually ends in a fight.” At the end of
the day, there is paperwork done, then a check on the clients and making sure they have
gone to the bathroom.

In exploring his perception of other direct care staff, he said that some do it for
the kids and others for the paycheck. The shortage of staff is mentioned, stating, “I’m
always nervous if I’m going to have backup, just the high turnover rate can be hard.” The
lack of coverage per unit, with the need for two people per unit is recommended, he
answered. He loved the training and thought the instructor was effective, and that the
training lasted one week in duration. He felt knowledgeable after his training ended but
was able to learn after observing how other staff did their work. He was able to shadow
another employee for one day, then was given his own unit.

He told about his first efforts as a direct care staff, and that the clients tried to
push his buttons, but that they learned not to mess with him. He stated that he would have
benefited from more time in the shadowing process, that there were many problems
initially to overcome. Learning that there are some rules that simply are not followed, and
that it causes more problems to enforce those particular rules, had to be learned over time.

When inquiring about which of the rules are not followed, he explained that if a client is on LOP talking is a rule that is not enforced. There is not to be conversation happening amongst clients, but he does allow some talking, as it is very difficult to govern complete silence. He also sometimes allows for them to play games, such as cards or monopoly, but not to the degree that they are watching television or playing video games. In concluding the interview and asked if there was anything else pertinent to discuss, John explained that there is a lot of disdain in the facility about the food for the clients. The kids are saying frequently that they wished for better food, and that part of the work is to show empathy and that you care to the kids. In doing so, you realize that the food is garbage, and that more money should be put towards more quality food for the clients.

**Daniel**

During the interview with Daniel, he explained that his job is to make sure clients get what they need and bring structure to the place as a father figure. He emphasized that he wants to make a change, helping kids avoid bad decisions as he did. He told a story about his own juvenile years, that he was in a gang and that he didn’t know how to fill out a job application at 20 years old. He told how he leaned on his wife and has learned a lot through working at the facility, becoming a better person and influencing the kids in the facility as a role model. He told the story of working overnight shifts in Walmart for two years, then to Target working in different positions, then becoming store manager.
He explained that his gang-related tattoos were different than those he worked with, and that it could influence the kids he works with now to show them changing is possible.

In asking what satisfies Daniel, he explained that he loves to be present with the kids and help them, to bring laughter and excitement to them. The most challenging aspect he explained is that there are good and bad days, and that there is lack of staff present to handle problems. To address this, Daniel explained that having a compassionate leadership structure is helpful, as the retention is low and the job is tough. When asked if he had ever considered leaving, he explained that he did because of the structure, with examples given about haircuts being restricted for clients that do not follow the rules.

Daniel then described what helps him stay in the position, as he reflects on his influence on the clients and how he had once quit for three days. After the three days, he recounted that a friend called him and said the clients were asking for him, that they would be tearing the place down if Daniel didn’t return. The workday, Daniel stated, was normally focusing on what the needs of the clients were, being called to give therapy over clients issues was common. When asked about the perception of other direct care staff, he explained that everyone has different styles, some should loosen up, especially on weekends, as they will act better because of it. Some of the staff want to always be strict. When asked what he would change about the facility if he were the administrator, he described a change in the way things are handled, with hiring in particular. The pay is poor considering job requirements, he emphasized, as well as the need for counseling with the staff for the trauma experienced through the job.
When asked about the onboarding and training process, Daniel elaborated on the tools necessary that you would need in a time of crisis, preparing the professionals for things that can happen. He told the story of a recently hired person who was in training, and immediately quit once they saw a fight breakout. Being able to visually see and assess issues, particularly with low functioning kids, is important, he added.

When asked if there was anything else Daniel wanted to share, he explained how much he loved his job and wanted to continue in the profession to help others. He reflected on his own past in hoping there had been someone like himself in his own story, and there is suffering happening with a lack of family and support. The clients give back to him, he explained, and he gets pictures and gifts from them. He gets pictures drawn for him, as he tells their perspective of not having money, but wanting to pour their love into someone. He has a client that emphasizes that his gifts, in writing a letter or drawing a picture, be put on his refrigerator, and we closed the interview with Daniel reflecting on his time away from work, adding that he worries about his clients when he is away from them.

Steven

To start Steven’s interview, the discussion of roles and responsibilities was the first topic, as Steven explained that he monitors the clients, helps kids follow norms, and gives needed support- “I just hang out and make sure everyone is safe.” He told his story of falling into the field, as he had worked at the Lighthouse boy’s group home, had worked there for ten years, and had a friend mention making the job transition. When asked what satisfies him most, he explained that being able to have a connection with the kids and being able to help them. “I like it when they come back to visit and are doing
good. Even when they leave and get in trouble, I don’t feel good, but it’s like I knew that would happen. I’ve done this long enough that I can tell if they’re going to make it.” When asked how he could tell, he said that issues would be had with those kids, that they can fake it for a while to get rewards but not very long, not being able to hide the fact they don’t care. He stated that some of the kids try to emulate behavior seen from their parents, as there are some who also have incarcerated parents.

In understanding the biggest challenges, he explained that it wasn’t the kids, but just overall support, as there are not enough staff. He said that sometimes he may even work with a different, new staff member every day of the week, that they go through a lot of employees. He said that it could be challenging, as the staff is scarce and those who are there may not know how to help.

He said that he doesn’t do anything about those challenges, as it is a waste of time. “I talk to whoever I need to about it, but they don’t care. You know, I try to make some suggestions, like maybe we can do things a bit differently, so that maybe this will go a little bit better.” He stated that he has not considered leaving the job, as it pays a lot more than the other places he has worked. He explained that he stays because he wants to see the kids successful.

Looking at his typical workday, he gave a rundown, including a morning meeting, with a review of what happened the shift before, then moving into the unit, helping the kids, and giving them what they need. The perceptions of other direct care staff varied for him, as he explained it could go either way, “you can run into some people who don’t care at all and you can tell are just here for a paycheck, ‘I’m just trying to get my check and go home, ‘I don’t really care what’s going on.’ But there are some who do care and
are there to help and not there for the money. When asked what he would change if he were a leader of the organization, he said that there is no say in the clients’ levels, adding that staff, counselors, teachers, caseworkers, and supervisors should get together and evaluate how kids are doing and if they are being moved to a different level.

These meetings and treatment plans are made by the staff supervisor, he added, without much say from direct care staff. This affects his work, he explains, because one cannot understand how a kid is doing from the evaluation, and that direct care staff should be able to go to the meetings to talk about how the kids are really doing, and what improvements have been made “I’ve seen pretty bad kids get moved up and rewarded and good kids not.” He elaborated that some kids are easy to score down, as they don’t argue and do as told, but some kids are not easy targets and power trips occur between staff and kids. He believed there should be more of a reward system, with more to look forward to like more video games, TV, or basketball.

When asked about his training, he explained that it went well, that he got what he needed from the trainer, and gave details of slides about mental health, CPR training, an understanding of medicines, and real roleplay with other direct care staff. She also taught the new staff how to complete paperwork, then moved them onto a unit to begin working.

**Data Analysis and Coding**

When looking at analyzing the data, there was a need to create continuance in looking at the research, with a constant comparative method of data analysis used (Merriam, 1998.) Research itself adds to the knowledge base of other researchers to assist in the development of new approaches to be implemented by practitioners and can reflect merit in comparing the data (Creswell, 2013). In addition, research may affirm
former studies, add to the literature, and be beneficial in progressing or enhancing practices (Creswell, 2013).

The collection of data, its analysis, and the comparisons between the data for common themes is central to the work of qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). The data was coded based on similar statements or information in this research, and once identified, the data themes were triangulated. The results were then analyzed to uncover more insight about the perspectives of direct care staff and its connection to the environment. On a password protected iPhone, I recorded and gathered the interview data for each participant to be typed in a word document. I then read and re-read the transcripts, multiple times in order to get an idea of what themes were emerging (Stuckey, 2015). While reading the transcripts I highlighted statements that stood out as impactful. Categorizing the statements of data from the transcript by open coding was completed next. I completed this by grouping similar statements and naming that group based on the similarity. There were 15 groups of statements that were then merged into four themes: My role as a direct care staff, My preparedness as a direct care staff, My entry and retention into the job as a direct care staff, My relationship as a direct care staff with administration.

**Thematic Findings**

**Theme #1: My role as a direct care staff**

**Introduction**

A better understanding of the role of direct care staff emerged from the interviews. The participants indicated a sense of being a teacher and a counselor, the
importance of helping, a similarity to being a parent and lastly the reward of gifts from the clients to be some of the ways they saw their role as a direct care staff.

**Teacher and Counselor**

Through the analysis of the collected information, the coding revealed a pattern of major themes throughout the responses of the participants. The first, the role as a direct care staff, was found to be a major area of focus for the responses given. During the interviews, there was a recurring discussion of the function of their work stemming from serving as a teacher or counselor. During Mary’s interview, she shared that she teaches the clients main concepts, including getting a job, a place to live, a job, and transportation. In addition, she mentioned instruction for mental health, teaching them that they should also take care of themselves through experience she has had.

This same theme came about during John’s interview, as he discussed being a therapist of sorts with the clients each week. He described the use of channeling anger into punching bags, hitting the blue mats they have, stress balls, and pacing, all learned in order to de-escalate situations. When the clients are combative, using de-escalation strategies is important to help and calm the clients, he explained. The importance of acting as a teacher and counselor was not understated during the interviews, as John recounted the story of trying to quit the job at one point.

**Helping**

A prominent theme throughout the participant responses was about helping the clients. For Kayla, she took time in her interview to emphasize that the kids are not really that bad, that they are amazing and smart, but misunderstood. She touched on the kids
being in ‘flight or fight mode since they were young.’ During Steven’s interview, he explained that what satisfied him most was to have a connection with the kids and be of help to them. “I like it when they come back to visit and are doing good. Even when they leave and get in trouble, I don’t feel good, but it’s like I knew that would happen.”

**Parenting**

A frequent theme heard throughout the interviews was the idea of parenting and serving as a parental model for the clients. During the interview with Daniel, he explained his job is to make sure clients get what they need, hygiene, and bring structure to the place as a father figure. He emphasized that he wants to make a change, helping kids avoid bad decisions as he did. In the interview with Jenny, she described her work as a mom role, making sure clients are following rules, participating in the program, not bullying each other, and taking their medication. When asked to elaborate on being in a parent/mother-type role, Jenny talked about the lack of parents in the lives of the clients, and that they do not receive many visitors.

**Gifts**

During Kaylas interview, she explained that she also keeps anything the clients give her, they can draw and rap, and that each child has a talent and gift that reaches outside what people think are within the walls of the facility. The responses also included that receiving letters from the clients brought satisfaction to their work, and that making things for the direct care staff was the only thing they could provide, as the clients had no money.
Theme #2: My Preparedness as a Direct Care Staff

Introduction

Preparedness is part of any job, and the direct care staff job is no different. Along with the requirements from the Department of Corrections as a licensed juvenile facility, other requirements for the site are also a given. Participants sensed the need for more staff which greatly impacts their ability to provide the type of environment that might be needed. Not having sufficient staff led in many cases to no rules being followed as there simply were not enough people to maintain the rules. Although most felt like the training was good, once on the unit, they saw the shortcomings of the training. Faced with reality, the training fell short in providing the needed skills.

Training

Discussing the training of the direct care staff and how prepared they felt during the initial weeks of work was a commonality. All of the participants seemed to connect with the individual who had done the training. After making it past the first week, they feel they are prepared to handle a unit, they explained, but to expect to be tested when first encountering clients. The gap between training with no clients or actual incidents to the reality of dealing with clients and incidents was expressed by participants. The lack of adequacy of the training became apparent very quickly to the participants. During the training, participants indicated it felt like this is good and I am prepared. Once they were on the unit, the discrepancies between the training and reality were apparent. Jenny described that employees sign a claw back clause as they are onboarded at the facility. The training is completed at no cost to the employee unless the employee does not
complete six months of employment. If that is the case, the employee owes the facility $500 which is taken out of their last check. Most of the direct care staff mentioned liking their training, but many also felt there was not much time to learn their role.

Short Staffed Environment

Darrel gave the answer to perception of coworkers as a 60/40 split, with 40 percent of the employees at the facility there to help, and 60 percent of the employees there to make a paycheck, with the ability to gain overtime. Some of the staff, he stated, antagonize the clients, and make it harder for them, which then turns into violence or conflict between staff and the clients. This was part of the biggest challenge he saw in the work of direct care staff, with a lack of motivation and engagement felt by many of the people who work in the facility. They reported being thankful to have a job, but do not have a passion for working within the juvenile justice industry. As the facility is experiencing lack of staffing, it can bring in employees that are not well prepared.

Lack of Preparation

The lack of time in training and preparation for the employees was a common theme throughout the interviews. Penny described challenges faced when first leaving training, as she stated “Kids will push you when you get there. They want to see what they can get away with. A lot of people quit right then.”

During Anthony’s interview, he told the story of a fellow colleague who was perceived at not being able to handle the job, being tested by the juveniles from the first day onward. After the first day, his colleague never returned to his workplace.
No Rules

The idea of not adhering to rules or the absence of rules, and how it affects the clients and staff was discussed throughout the interviews. John described that, when asked about which of the rules are not followed, talking is a rule that is not enforced. There is not to be conversation happening amongst clients, but he does allow some talking, as it is very difficult to govern complete silence. He also sometimes allows for them to play games, such as cards or monopoly, but not to the degree that they are watching television or playing video games. Penny discussed how not enforcing every rule helps to avoid power struggles, and that she allows games and talking.

Theme #3 Entry and Retention as a Direct Care Staff

Introduction

The data provided an interesting picture of the entry and retention of direct care staff. In most cases, participants indicated they ‘fell into it’ and stayed because of the good pay. In some cases, employees considered leaving even to go as far as completing job applications for other positions, only to go ahead and decide to stay at the facility. Daniel actually quit for three days and then returned. Four participants came into the job as a result of wanting to help others avoid their mistakes of involvement in the criminal justice system.

Fell Into It

A recurring theme of acquiring the position out of chance was stated by different staff members. Darrel, for example, began work in a different industry, being in heavy equipment operation, and found the job at the facility after looking for work, finding
interest in being a mentor to young people. Steven also described his work as something unplanned, “it wasn’t something I thought would be my career.”

**Quit**

Most of the participants during the interviews reporting considering leaving their positions at some point. John stated, “I quit once, not because of the kids, but because of how things were structured”. Darrel also touched on reasons for quitting, stating that he felt like leaving after being spit on by an client and another hitting him. Others cited the potential for careers elsewhere, with Mary describing the process of passing the test for work as a 911 dispatcher.

**Criminal Background**

The idea that some of the participants had experienced trouble with the juvenile justice system themselves was brought forth by more than one participant. Anthony reflected, “I’ve been through the same thing being locked up, so I tell them it’s not worth it.” Daniel also talked about his years as a juvenile, elaborating that he was in a gang and that he didn’t know how to fill out a job application at 20 years old. He explained that his gang-related tattoos were different than those he worked with, and that it could influence the kids he works with now to show them it’s possible.

**Good Pay**

The rate of pay was a frequently considered factor for staying in the job, and why people are brought initially to the work. When describing why Penny chose this field of work, she was curious, and had an aunt who had worked in the same field. She had worked in fast food before, and the pay was better as a direct care staff. Other participants
explained that direct care staff were frequently brought on, motivated by the pay rate, rather than wanting to help others.

**Theme #4 Relationship as a Direct Care Staff with Administration**

**Introduction**

One challenge experienced by most all of the participants was the environment of the facility. The environment in any workplace is more than the physical space and involves those who are in roles of administration. The physical space was unorganized and dirty which gave a perception of a lack of ownership and pride in the facility. Added to that was the lack of voice felt by direct care staff in terms of their work and a situation develops that can lead to the environment not being a fit for a given employee. Administrators are in positions of power and often are not taking the time to get the opinion or voice of the direct care staff.

**Power**

The perceptions of other direct care staff varied for participants, as some explored the concept of power. Steven reflected, “You can run into some people who don’t care at all, and you can tell they are just here for a paycheck.” Steven went on to reflect those individuals seemed to have the attitude of “I’m just trying to get my check and go home, and I don’t really care what’s going on.” Steven did recognize though that “there are some who do care and say they are there to help and not there for the money.” Moreover, many reported there being power struggles between staff and clients, and their different approaches to managing clients.
No Voice

Not having the ability to give input was a frequent complaint. Jenny mentioned the importance of maintenance for the facilities, issues with black mold, and the overall state of the facility and wellbeing of the clients. She added that this is an area that should be further explored by leadership but has not been addressed thus far. Steven also addressed a similar feeling of helplessness and not being heard. “I talk to whoever I need to about it, but they don’t care. You know, I try to make some suggestions, like maybe we can do things a bit differently, so that maybe this will go a little bit better.”

Administration

The administration themselves was also reported as a factor in how direct care staff felt about their roles and work overall. Meetings and treatment plans are made by the staff supervisor, explained Steven, without input from the direct care staff. This affects his work, he explained, because one cannot understand how a kid is doing from the evaluation, and that direct care staff should be able to go to the meetings to talk about how the kids is really doing. The state of the facilities, such as the mold, and lack of quality of the food, were also discussed, with a lack of resources being cited as challenges for the effectiveness of their work with the clients.

Research Questions

The research questions are answered below using the data collected in Chapter IV. In Chapter V the conclusions were drawn for each of the research questions
RQ 1 What factors have encouraged these longer-term direct care employees to remain in this profession?

The two factors that seemed to encourage employees to remain at Cedar Valley most often were good pay and the role of helping as a direct care staff. These factors were expressed through the interviews with Daniel, having been at the job for 11 years, Steven with 12 years, and John with 5 years. Their responses reflected the ideas of serving as helpers, with John explaining that he stays because he likes helping the kids in the system. During Steven’s interview, he also reflected on his role, stating that he would not leave his position because he wants to see the clients succeed. Even those who had only been at the facility a few months, indicated the same two factors influenced their decision to stay: good pay and the ability to be in a helping role.

RQ 2 What environmental or institutional factors have influenced their decisions to stay?

The decision to stay was expressed through major themes of helping, good pay, and serving as a teaching/counselor, as part of the environment or institution. The idea of helping the clients was a recurring response during the interviews, with relationship building being a focus of their work and part of the institution. For Penny, for example, building relationships with the clients was how she sought satisfaction in her work. The amount of pay was also discussed by several participants, with the perception that other staff are there for the pay, rather than for any personal impact. Service as a teacher or counselor was also a common occurrence as a response, with the majority of the participants reflecting on some form of counseling or teaching in their daily role.
RQ 3 What job-related challenges have these employees encountered, and how have they addressed these challenges?

The strongest responses to challenges experienced by the employees included the themes of being short-staffed, no rules, and being unprepared. Being short-staffed was a persistent challenge reported by direct care staff, and the fear felt surrounding the work because of the lack of staff present. There was repeated discussion of rules, and how variance between direct care staff about the use of rules could make their job challenging. Feeling unprepared, with little time to train and learn about their role, was also a continual challenge reported by the participants.

In some cases, the job-related challenges have not been met successfully. Given the situation where the direct care staff does not feel like they have a voice with administration, needed remedies are not available or being provided. In other cases, the participants have simply learned to accept what is and to bend the rules as needed to avoid confrontational situations with clients. Steven indicated he provides coping strategies to the clients in an effort to help the client learn more appropriate methods of dealing with their own behavior. It seemed that the longer serving employees have reached a place of acceptance in order to survive the environment. The employees with less experience appear to still be struggling with issues of power and the rules.

RQ 4 How does person-environment fit theory explain these findings?

Person-environment fit theory suggests that the environment fit of the employee depends on the compatibility between the work environment and themselves. These findings reflect a sense that the environment of the direct care staff does play a role in the
compatibility of the employee and how likely they are to stay. Through the responses
during the interviews, it was evident that the direct care staff felt that their environment
and alignment as a staff member, with the clients, served as a purposeful responsibility.
How well the direct care staff were able to adapt and acclimate to the environment, the
more likely they were retained and continued to serve as a direct care staff, which was
emphasized continuously throughout the interviews.

Summary

The chapter has provided insight to the participants of the research, the site of the
interviews, and the responses of the direct care staff for analysis. These perspectives have
been presented through a thematic evaluation of the most recurring concepts during the
interviews. These have then been explored. In addition, a response to the research
questions has been provided, answering the areas of focus with the findings from the
interviews. The findings have reflected a confirmation in the application of the person-
environmental theory onto the work of direct care staff and found that it was a central
concept in how successful a direct care staff’s job would be.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Introduction

Chapter V will include the findings of the research connecting with the proposed theoretical framework. Through the lens of the Person-Environment Theory, the data will be discussed to understand the reasons behind the outcomes, as well as aspects of the theory. This will include the interpersonal/intrapersonal characteristics of the participants, as well as passive adaptation, optimization, the environment within the facility, and the fit of the participant in their workplace. These components of the Person-Environment Theory will be supported through examples in the interviews with staff to demonstrate the alignment of the theory with their experiences. Based on the theory of Person-Environment Fit, the exploration of the research is to understand the factors that retain the staff and whether the findings support the idea that person-environment fit plays a role in retention. Through an analysis of the outcomes for P-E Fit, it is understood that low P-E fit outcomes can include stress and lots of cognitive load, while a high P-E fit for an individual can have the opposite, with a lessened stress and more brain power to make
changes and grow. The interviews have been used to analyze the alignment between the staff members and the facility, and examples given to compare their experiences with the components of the theory, relative to the time in the position as a direct care staff.

**Person-Environment Fit Theory**

The following section will compare and contrast the findings from the study with the various components of Person-Environment Fit Theory. The components of the theory include interpersonal and intrapersonal characteristics, adaptation, optimization, environment, and low or high P-E fit. The theory proved to be valuable as I coded and analyzed the data and suggested important implications.

**Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Characteristics**

The person component of the Figure 1 included interpersonal and intrapersonal characteristics, considering the way in which the direct care staff gave their stories, what their natural tendencies and personality was, and how they perceived their workplace. In the Figure 1, the terms of interpersonal and intrapersonal characteristics involve employee’s personalities with an analysis of intention of turnover. Interpersonal characteristics are those that align with the skills and experience in their role within the facility, based on interaction with others (Misra et al., 2020). In contrast, Intrapersonal characteristics are the knowledge of the person, openness, and one’s own self-awareness of their skills in alignment with the facility (Misra, et al., 2020). The theory's application in understanding the characteristics of communication, empathy, and work skills, are part of their interpersonal skills for the job.
The intrapersonal characteristics of the participants include their personality traits, like self-awareness. From the research, the integration of these characteristics can be noted. For example, John described his role perceived as one of the harder staff, compared to others in the facility. This reflected his sense of self-awareness as part of his intrapersonal characteristics coming into play within the environment. Moreover, the characteristics relating to parenting were seen throughout the findings of staff behavior. Mary, for example, discussed being a good parent, and that she, too, had trouble early on in life, so she can use empathy to understand the clients. Another staff member, Daniel, reflected on his own role of a father at home, and how his skills are then applied to the clients at the facility.

The interpersonal characteristics are harder to uncover in the data. The interviews were about 45 minutes to one hour and did not provide sufficient time to really delve into interactions with each other as direct care staff. I did not observe any of the participants on the unit to see their interactions with each other. Most of the staff have a very short tenure so skills and experience in the facility are limited. It is also unknown how well they interact with each other in the course of their work. The opportunity for interaction during a shift change seems to be lost for the most part as the employee finishing their shift is eager to leave the facility. Steven stated that they do not have staff meetings or treatment team meetings. The facility is so short-staffed it is an impossibility for the safety of the facility to have these meetings and still maintain the order and structure needed.
Passive Adaptation

The use of passive adaptation was a major theme throughout the interviews with staff members, acclimating to their environment over time. Passive adaptation, as a subsequent component to the figure, is represented by role ambiguity and conflict. The presence of passive adaptation was seen in the interviews through the perceptions some had about the fluidity of rules, and how conflict was a major part of their work with clients. There was also a discussion of shift change being of minimal communication, without supporting each other much in the transition to a new shift. During the shift change observation, there was a lot of passive body language and lack of communication between staff workers.

Optimization

The idea of optimization in the theoretical framework was based around the ability to make the environment fit be the most effective as possible. For the staff, using learning packets to instruct the clients on concepts of money management, hygiene, and other life skills, were used to help optimize both their role as a leader, and for the time spent by the clients themselves in the facility. The support given to the staff, in learning how to de-escalate client behaviors, was also a topic of discussion, helping to show self-soothing techniques to avoid conflict. For example, one staff member described his use of punching bags and stress balls to help optimize his own work impact, as well as the time being spent by the clients. Optimization was supported through the data, representative of good training and routine. Throughout the interviews, participants reported having good training experiences. There were also routines, such as Loss of Privileges (LOP),
used to redirect behavior or motivate clients to have good behavior. For example, staff explained that they did not enforce all of the rules all the time, because there was not ample staff to support disciplining the clients. Participants are optimizing the situation to survive in the facility; letting the rules go in order to avoid confrontation and finding ways to control behavior despite being short staffed.

**Environmental**

Looking at aspects of the environment, the facility itself had benefits that retained staff, including good pay and training. This was a common theme throughout the interviews, as many reported being attracted to the work because of its pay, and they enjoyed their time in the training classes. This brought to light the opportunities within the facility for more environmental benefit, making communication more of a priority, particularly at shift changes. Moreover, it brought forth the consideration of the most desired aspects of the job for recruiting purposes and further research. This part of the figure focuses on the structural and program changes. This was represented through depiction of the training experiences of the staff, as well as the teaching packets provided to staff to instruct clients on life skills. The environment, including its lack of support for varying areas of client wellbeing, such as a presence of mold or lack of activities, seemed to be an ever-present concern among the participants.

**P-E Fit**

As outcomes, the figure followed the progression of answers given by the participants, then ending with a sense as to whether they have a high or low fit within their environment. It was found that each employee showed a high fit within their environment that participated in the interviews. Although there were stressors expressed
by the direct care staff, it seemed to outweigh the sense they wanted to leave their job, or that they felt the job was negatively affecting them. Rather, the participants reflected a sense of comfortability, their approach to work, and serving the clients to help them be successful. There is a surface-level knowledge of the skills had by each staff member and how these skills connect with their environment. Looking at the skills mentioned by the members themselves, and how they have used such skills within the facility, has provided me with somewhat of an understanding to the relationship between the two concepts.

Discussion of Findings

This chapter presents the findings of this qualitative case study through answering the research questions. It also addresses the limitations and conclusions of the study as well as implications for practice, research, and theory. Research for the future is also recommended. The research questions were:

RQ 1 What factors have encouraged these longer-term direct care employees to remain in this profession?

The longer-term direct care employees in the study expressed several factors that encouraged them to remain in their profession. Foremost among these factors was the aspect of pay, which was reported as being relatively good compared to other job opportunities experienced by the employees. Beyond financial considerations, a sense of purpose and fulfillment emerged as significant motivators for staying in their roles. Many employees highlighted the importance of their role as educators or counselors, providing support and guidance to the clients. Additionally, the opportunity to serve as a parental figure for those who lacked it was deeply meaningful to several staff members. Overall, one major conclusion was a strong sense of dedication to helping others, met with the
desire to witness the clients' success, which served as powerful incentives for these
longer-term direct care employees to remain in their profession.

**RQ 2 What environmental or institutional factors have influenced their decisions to stay?**

The direct care staff's decision to stay in their roles was notably influenced by several institutional factors within the juvenile facility. Stability emerged as a significant factor, with the job offering a consistent environment where employees could reliably report to work. Adequate pay also played a crucial role in incentivizing staff retention, highlighting the importance of financial stability and fair compensation in retaining personnel. The conclusion from this data is that pay does matter as well as a job that offers a reliable environment and setting.

**RQ 3 What job related challenges have these employees encountered, and how have they addressed these challenges?**

The employees in the study faced significant job-related challenges, including shortages of staff across the facility, lack of preparedness, and absence of adhering to rules. These challenges likely contributed to increased workload, role ambiguity, and heightened stress levels among the staff. In response, employees employed various coping mechanisms, such as adapting to the shortage by adjusting their workflow or finding ways to prioritize tasks effectively. Additionally, in the absence of clear rules, employees may have relied on their own judgment or informal guidelines to navigate their responsibilities. However, it's essential to note that while these strategies may have helped mitigate immediate challenges, addressing systemic issues such as staff shortages and the lack of clear guidelines would require organizational interventions and support.
A conclusion concerning job related challenges is the need for additional staff and a better more collaborative relationship with administration. Without these measures individual direct care staff are passively adapting and trying their best to simply optimize the situation in which they find themselves.

**RQ 4 How does person-environment fit theory explain these findings?**

Person-environment fit theory offered valuable insights into the findings, suggesting that individuals were more likely to remain in a particular environment when there is a match between their personal characteristics and the demands of that environment. In the context of Cedar Valley, the interpersonal and intrapersonal characteristics of staff, such as their communication skills and empathy played a crucial role in their ability to effectively navigate the challenges inherent in working with youth in custody.

When staff members possessed the necessary skills and traits that align with the demands of their role, they were more likely to report a sense of fit within the environment, leading to greater job satisfaction and reduced turnover. Staff members demonstrate skills of communication, commitment to the job and a sense of purpose that align with their roles. Environmental factors such as training opportunities, support systems, and facility conditions also contributed to person-environment fit by influencing staff perceptions of their workplace and their ability to perform their duties effectively.

**Summary of Conclusions**

Four major conclusions are evident from the themes and data. The first finding is the role of pay in keeping employees in the facility. The issue of good pay was repetitive in the interviews and was a powerful reason to stay at the facility. The second finding is
the sense on the part of the employee to make a difference in someone else’s life. The idea of helping, being a parent and wanting to help these clients avoid their own mistakes is a clear finding of the study. The third finding is the challenge that is faced by this facility and others like it; keeping good staff while providing a mechanism to provide input and change aspects of the environment. Without a voice, the employees are hampered in not being able to facilitate changes they know would make their work less stressful. This obviously includes more staff to better handle the number of clients. It is also however, does include more focused training to better prepare the staff to handle confrontational situations in the reality of the unit.

The fourth finding relates to the Person-Environment Fit Theory and whether or not the theory has application in workplace settings like these. The research investigated Person-Environment Fit, focusing on direct care staff experiences. It explored interpersonal and intrapersonal characteristics, such as personality traits and self-awareness, and how they influenced staff dynamics. Passive adaptation, observed through role ambiguity and conflict was explored, and optimization efforts, including training and routine implementation, were highlighted. Environmental factors, like pay and training, impacted staff retention. The study concluded with an assessment of P-E fit, indicating a high alignment between staff and environment despite expressed stressors, emphasizing the need for further exploration of staff skills and their relationship with the facility environment.

**Limitations**

Several limitations should be acknowledged in this qualitative research. Firstly, the study's findings are based on a limited sample size of direct care staff members from
specific juvenile facility. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data from interviews could introduce response bias, as participants may provide socially desirable responses or fail to accurately recall their experiences. Furthermore, the study's focus on qualitative methods may limit the depth of understanding regarding the quantitative aspects of staff retention, such as turnover rates or demographic trends.

Finally, the study's reliance on data collected at a single point in time may not capture the dynamic nature of retention factors, as staff experiences and perceptions may change over time. Despite these limitations, the findings provide valuable insights into the interpersonal, intrapersonal, and environmental factors influencing staff retention in juvenile justice facilities, offering avenues for future research and intervention.

**Implications**

The implications of this qualitative research study are multifaceted and significant, shedding light on the importance of hiring and training practices that prioritize individuals with the necessary skills and self-awareness to thrive in this challenging environment. Moreover, the recognition of passive adaptation and optimization strategies underscores the need for organizational interventions aimed at reducing role ambiguity, conflict, and improving training programs to enhance staff satisfaction and efficacy.

One implication arises from the training and its dissonance with the reality of the unit. Perhaps those who are training could benefit from a solid understanding of adult learning theories and instructional strategies. The training appears to cover the basics as indicated by the participants but seems to lack a contextualization of the unit. Currently the training is one week in duration and the employees are not on the floor or unit at all.
The participants suggested putting them on the unit at the midpoint of training. At that point, the employees could experience situations and then return to the training. It is also not known if additional training occurs after the initial onboarding training. One idea might be to have periodic short training sessions where employees could bring situations to the group to get ideas for alternative ways to handle confrontation and other challenging issues that arise. Principles of adult learning indicate that most adults learn when they are faced with a need or a situation that needs to be resolved.

The findings highlight the crucial role of environmental factors, such as pay, training opportunities, and facility conditions, in shaping staff retention rates. By addressing these factors, Cedar Valley can improve staff morale, reduce turnover rates, and ultimately enhance the quality of care and outcomes for the youth under the supervision of direct care staff. The study's insights into the complex relationship between staff characteristics and the facility environment can guide policymakers, administrators, and practitioners seeking to develop more effective retention strategies tailored to the unique needs of direct care staff at Cedar Valley.

**Recommendation for Practice**

It is recommended that administration establish a way to gain feedback from direct care staff to facilitate effective systemic improvements. Prioritizing the recruitment of additional staff is central to alleviating workload burdens and to enhance the quality of support for clients. Furthermore, recognizing the intrinsic motivations that drive direct care staff, such as the profound impact they have on individuals' lives, is essential for fostering job satisfaction and retention. The creation of an environment that promotes
pride in both the facility and the work being done therein is crucial for sustaining morale and productivity for direct care staff and is recommended for implementation in practice.

**Recommendation for Theory**

In the context of theory, the study emphasizes the need for administrations to adapt their strategies in response to the nature of the environment within juvenile justice facilities. Traditional perspectives often overlook the profound impact of adequate staffing and job satisfaction among direct care staff. Our findings show the impact of intrinsic motivations, such as the desire to make a meaningful difference in someone's life, underscores the importance of fostering a supportive environment to sustain staff morale and retention. By integrating this understanding of Person-Environment Fit theory into juvenile justice facilities, administrations can proactively address challenges and optimize the effectiveness of their strategies.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

For future research, quantitative studies could complement the findings by providing a broader understanding of turnover rates, demographic trends, and the effectiveness of new approaches to retention. Longer studies could also be used to assess how staff experiences and perceptions change over time, offering insights into the nature of retention factors. Moreover, comparative research across different types of juvenile justice facilities, such as detention centers versus residential treatment programs, could show variance in retention challenges and strategies. Another area of research could be about possible differences between a state-run facility or a private run facility.

Research should move into the future, exploring the perspectives of youth in juvenile justice facilities regarding staff turnover and its effects on their rehabilitation
experiences as well. This could provide valuable insights for enhancing staff-youth interactions and facility environments. Overall, future research efforts will contribute to a better understanding of retention and help develop interventions to support direct care staff in juvenile justice settings.

Having spent much of my professional life in the corrections field, I understand full well the significance of this research. It was a stark reminder of the importance of efforts to retain direct care workers. Direct care workers have an important role to fill and all efforts to better treat juveniles. These efforts can better enhance society. Any and all efforts to better treat juveniles can only enhance our society. The potential of juvenile facilities to show a different way of life, one without criminal actions can perhaps reduce the likelihood of recidivism. One juvenile who does not reoffend is one less adult criminal incarcerated.

Template is best used for directly typing in your content. However, you can paste text into the document, but use caution as pasting can produce varying results.
REFERENCES


Ketkaew, C., Manglakakeeree, O., & Naruetharadhol, P., Amankwah-Amoah, J. (2020). The interrelationships of work-related factors, person-environment fit, and


https://nicic.gov/resources/resources-topics-and-roles/topics/strategic-inmate-management-sim

https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/corrections/correctional-facilities


APPENDICES

Appendix A

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JOB DESCRIPTION
Position Title: Residential Treatment Specialist (RTS)
Classification: Hourly, non-exempt

POSITION SUMMARY
The primary duties of the Residential Treatment Specialist (RTS) are to provide supervision and assistance to program clients as they participate in the treatment program. This includes but is not limited to role modeling appropriate pro-social behaviors and values as denoted in the program handbook.

Each RTS must be able to effectively facilitate program skills development activities. These are the Verbal Redirection System, Anger Replacement Group, Basic Living Skills and Social Skills Redevelopment, Client Progression Review, and the behavior management system, Handle With Care.

Additionally, RTS must be able to competently document specific notes for each client under their care on their shift daily. These notes include shift summaries, daily and weekly progress notes and daily skill building. Skill building notes will require specific goals and objectives as specified in the client's Individual Treatment Plan (ITP).

QUALIFICATIONS
Education: High school diploma or equivalent
MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS
• Must be at least 21 years of age.
• Must have a high school diploma or equivalent.
• Legally authorized to work in the United States and able to provide verification.
• Able to pass a Department of Human Services Background Check.
• Within two weeks of hire date, completion of orientation training, including but not limited to:
  pasting.
Successfully complete the following required competencies. Initial 40-hour training in policies and procedures, including emergency procedures, child safety, child abuse and neglect reporting, behavior management and applicable licensing requirements.

Additional 40 hours direct supervision by another staff member during supervision of residents.

Maintenance of status in all mandatory training throughout employment.

PREFERRED QUALIFICATIONS:
Bachelor’s degree, preferably in Behavioral Health related field
Valid Driver’s License to transport residents in vehicles.

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POSITION RELATIONSHIPS
SUPERVISORY RELATIONSHIP:
Supervised by – Program director or designee.
Workers Supervised - None


Physical Demands: Must have satisfactory health, stamina, and strength as position requires frequent walking, standing, sitting, lifting, assisting in physical interventions.

ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS
● Provide constant & continuous supervision of clients and consistently role model appropriate behaviors.
● Effectively re-direct and deescalate client's behaviors while remaining neutral and respectful.
● Participate in and facilitate specialized therapy groups and activities as directed.
● Document client behavior and services provided in accordance with policy and procedures.
● Appropriately administer behavior management techniques when required. It is a requirement for all employees to successfully complete restraint training before they can be employed. Behavior Management, Restraint training typically involves physical techniques that may be physically demanding for participants. These techniques may require the use of force, such as holding or restraining an individual, and may involve prolonged periods of standing, kneeling, or crouching. Participants may need to engage in repetitive motions, such as practicing restraint techniques or performing drills, which can be physically demanding. Additionally, restraint training may require participants to demonstrate a certain level of physical fitness and strength to perform the techniques safely and effectively. This may involve practicing exercises to improve strength, flexibility, and endurance. It is important for individuals participating in restraint training to be aware of the physical demands of the training and to take any necessary precautions, such as notifying the Training Coordinator of any limitations prior to beginning, warming up and stretching before training, to prevent injury.
● Provide all basic needs and rights of residents including but not limited to hygiene and assistance with their bedtime/morning routines, including wake-up, breakfast,
preparation for school, and transportation to school, as needed.

- Ensure that residents are living in a safe, abuse-free environment, including reinforcing behavior limits accepted with the program and community.
- Understand and adhere to all agency policies and procedures.
- Know and follow written agency policies and procedures. Be familiar with the milieu program and implement treatment techniques as outlined in agency policies and procedures. Be familiar with each resident's treatment plan and objectives and facilitate implementation.

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- Maintain continuity in the daily schedule of activities and tasks. Assure safety of residents and always know the whereabouts of assigned residents.
- Set and enforce consistent behavioral limits to establish appropriate behaviors, skills, and attitudes. Consult with team members and assist in crisis situations, taking constructive actions to protect clients from danger to self, others or environment.
- Review and initial the log at the beginning of each shift.
- Write clear and concise documentation for each client during each shift.
- Communicate significant issues to appropriate staff members.
- Assist residents in developing appropriate social, behavioral, interpersonal skills and attitudes useful in community living.
- Develop appropriate, positive, and professional relationships with residents.
- Serve as an appropriate role model for residents through dress, demeanor, conversation, and attitude.
- The RTS may conduct various groups as directed by their supervisor.
- The RTS is to be current in their mandatory training at all times.
- RTS will attend training related to the operation of the assigned treatment unit.
- As assigned complete daily tasks such as meal/snack count, medication Dispensation, large muscle activity (LMA) and documentation.
- Complete other duties as assigned by supervisor or mandated by agency policy and procedures.
Appendix B
Interview Questions

1. What is (are) your current role/responsibilities at this facility?

2. Why have you chosen your current position/career in juvenile justice?

3. What about the position satisfies you the most?

4. What about the position challenges you the most?

5. How have you addressed the challenges you have faced?

6. Have you ever considered leaving your position? If so, please explain those experiences.

7. What factors caused you to stay/persist?

8. What does a typical workday in this facility look like?

9. In your opinion, what are perceptions of other direct care workers a Cedar Valley?

10. If you were the leader of this organization, what changes would you make?

11. How would you describe the onboarding process and training of staff?

12. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Other probing/clarifying questions will be asked.
## Appendix C
### Alignment of the Theory and Interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory Components</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agency and Power</td>
<td>#1, #7, #9, #10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate Training</td>
<td>#7, #11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased Role Conflict</td>
<td>#4, #7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal Characteristics</td>
<td>#2, #4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrapersonal Characteristics</td>
<td>#2 #4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intra- and Inter- Organizational Characteristics</td>
<td>#7, #8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low P-E Outcomes</td>
<td>#5, #6, #9, #12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low/High P-E Outcomes</td>
<td>#5, #6, #9, #12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macro-environment</td>
<td>#7, #8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimization</td>
<td>#3, #5, #9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive Adaptation</td>
<td>#3, #5, #9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Ambiguity</td>
<td>#3, #5, #9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. IQ- Interview Question*
Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: 01/03/2024
Application Number: IRB-23-553
Proposal Title: A Case Study of Career Decisions Made by Direct Care Workers in Juvenile Facilities

Principal Investigator: Brett Chase
Co-Investigator(s):
Faculty Adviser: Mary Jo Self
Project Coordinator:
Research Assistant(s):

Processed as: Exempt
Exempt Category:

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in 45CFR46.

This study meets criteria in the Revised Common Rule, as well as, one or more of the circumstances for which continuing review is not required. As Principal Investigator of this research, you will be required to submit a status report to the IRB triennially.

The final versions of any recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are available for download from IRBManager. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:
1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be approved by the IRB. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI, adviser, other research personnel, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any unanticipated and/or adverse events to the IRB Office promptly.
4. Notify the IRB office when your research project is complete or when you are no longer affiliated with Oklahoma State University.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact the IRB Office at 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu.

Sincerely,
Oklahoma State University IRB
VITA

Brett Chase

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Dissertation:  A CASE STUDY OF CAREER DECISIONS MADE BY DIRECT CARE STAFF WORKERS IN JUVENILE FACILITIES

Major Field: Educational Administration

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Education in Educational Administration Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, May, 2024.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in Teaching, Learning and Leadership at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, May, 2011.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice at Southwestern Oklahoma State University, Weatherford, Oklahoma, May, 2001.

Experience:

Southwestern Oklahoma State University 2017 – Present
Francis Tuttle Technology Center 2015 – 2017
Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education 2004 - 2015

Professional Memberships:

International Counsel on Systems Engineering
Society of Manufacturing Engineers
American Society of Quality Engineers