

Original Article

Probation Officers Reduce Their Stress by Cultivating the Practice of Loving-Kindness with Self and Others

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Abstract

Probation officers (POs) who provide community supervision are susceptible to stress. Their clients can be manipulative, uncooperative, and difficult to supervise. It is essential for the officers to treat their clients with human dignity, and motivate them to comply with supervision while remaining non-confrontational, empathic, attentive, caring, and directive. The stress of supervising this population can compromise the officer's health, job performance, and effective supervision. Caring Science (CS), Caritas Process One (CP1): Cultivating the practice of loving-kindness and equanimity towards self and others (Watson, 2008, pp. 47- 60) can lower the POs' stress while promoting a professional, authentic presence, and a positive human interaction with their clients. This nursing theory can be applicable to forensic professionals because the practice of loving-kindness for self is necessary in order to develop a state of balance and composure under stressful situations. This study compares the perceived level of stress using the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) in a sample of 28 POs in the State of Hawaii, before and after the workshop on Caritas Process One. A paired samples *t* test was conducted to compare the difference of the PSS mean scores of the two trials. There was a statistically significant difference between trial 1 and trial 2. Higher than average total scores in trial 1 before implementing Caritas Process One could increase the POs' vulnerability to compromised health and the development of stress-related illness. The significantly lower scores in trial 2, after the application of Caritas Process One, indicate a decrease in the POs' susceptibility to stress-induced illnesses. Post training the officers reported improvement in positive regard towards clients, a greater sense of being present with clients, and being more caring and authentic. The results of this study suggest that the implementation of CP1 is a valuable practice for lowering the stress of POs and facilitating a caring supervision relationship.

Keywords: probation officers, Society's Safe-Keepers, caritas, Caring Science, stress