Correctional officers (COs) are the largest category of front-line correctional employees and are viewed as key agents in the process of rehabilitation. The quality of relationships between COs and inmates is also likely to promote more stable institutional environments whereby offenders are easier to manage on a day-to-day basis.

This study focuses on three dimensions of CO attitudes toward offenders or "correctional orientations": empathy, punitiveness and support for rehabilitation. Empathy refers to the COs' willingness to understand the affective states of inmates (e.g., trust, compassion, advocacy for offenders). The punitiveness dimension is concerned with the degree to which COs endorse retribution and punishment for offenders as important correctional goals. Support for rehabilitation simply refers to belief in the efficacy of rehabilitation and agreement that programming is a valuable function within the correctional domain.

The study was based on data from the Correctional Service of Canada's staff survey conducted in 1994. A total of 1,970 COs participated in the national survey, which represented an overall response rate of 48% for this occupational group. The CO respondents were 83% male, had a mean age of 39.6 years and a mean of 11.4 years of work experience in the Service.

The 1994 survey results indicated that 23% of COs exhibited empathetic views of offenders, 76.2% held punitive views of corrections and 53.6% supported rehabilitation. The data also showed that COs varied significantly from other occupational groups in their attitudes toward offenders. COs were less empathetic, more punitive and less supportive of rehabilitation than each of eight other occupational groups within the Service.

The study presents findings on CO gender differences regarding the three dimensional approach as well as job satisfaction analyses.