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Police Stress, General Well-being and Job Satisfaction: The Moderating Effects of Social Support

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Abstract

Over the last few decades police stress has become a subject of burgeoning research attention. Traditionally research on police stress has focused on risks to psychological well-being as coming primarily from job content, and the operational activities undertaken by officers. An emerging contemporary view is that job context, the organisational aspects of police life, is another source of stress that can impact just as much, or even more so, on officers' well-being. As predicted, organisational stress was found to have a negative relationship with both general well-being and job satisfaction. Once organisational stress was accounted for, operational stress had a significant positive relationship with job satisfaction. A negative relationship between operational stress and general well-being only became significant when conversation with supervisors reached at least moderate levels of frequency. Conversations with supervisors about non-job, negative, positive and disturbing aspects of the job were all found to have a reverse buffering effect. Communication with peers was found to be a significant predictor of both operational and organisational stress. Conversations about disturbing incidents and negative aspects of organisational life were had positive relationships with stress, while conversations about non-job related matters and positive aspects of organisational life were negatively related to stress. These findings could be used to help inform the development of functional formal and informal social networks in policing organisations.

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The journey of this thesis has been the worst and best of my life. Submitting this piece of work is the finale of 7 very challenging years. I personally believe I became my own case in point, developing relapsing-remitting multiple sclerosis after the years of professional and personal turmoil that gave me the energy and courage to complete this piece of work. I became very sick in 2014, but I have so far, miraculously, basically recovered all of the functions I lost. The whole experience was a gift. Albeit, very challenging. I would not have been able to make it to this finish line without the unwavering support of my mum, Rose Johnston.

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Personal Disclosure

I (the principal researcher) am a currently serving uniformed member of the New Zealand Police, holding the rank of constable. I attended the Royal New Zealand Police College in 2008. I have since performed a variety of roles across the organisation, including general duties, road policing, community policing, project work, business improvement advisor, and, most recently, advisor on the national psychological services team. My operational and organisational experiences, along with that of my colleagues, were the motivation and inspiration for this piece of research. I am disclosing this information to highlight my awareness that biases may have arisen from these personal experiences that could have influenced this work.

It is also important to note that although some of the discussion (necessarily) touches on areas more closely aligned with clinical and health psychology, this research was undertaken with the goal of achieving an endorsement in industrial and organisational psychology.

Table of Contents

List of Tables.....	iv
List of Figures.....	v
Introduction: Police Stress – A Problem?.....	1
Chapter 1: Defining Stress.....	3
1.1 Response-based Definitions.....	3
1.2 Stimulus-based Definitions.....	5
1.3 An Integrated Approach.....	6
1.4 Understanding Occupational Stress.....	6
1.5 Defining Stress for this Study.....	11
Chapter 2: Understanding Police Stress	
2.1 Operational Stress.....	12
2.2 Organisational Stress.....	17
2.3 Defining Operational and Organisational Stress for this Study.....	19
2.4 Measuring the Strain of Police Stress.....	19
Chapter 3: Coping with Police Stress Using Social Support	
3.1 The Effects of Social Support: Theoretical Foundations.....	21
3.2 Operationalising Social Support.....	23
3.3 The Effects of Social Support: Research findings.....	23
3.4 The Present Study.....	27
Chapter 4: Research methodology	
4.1 Design.....	29
4.2 Power Analysis.....	29
4.3 Sample.....	30
4.4 Procedure.....	31
4.5 Measures	
4.5.1 Demographic Items.....	33
4.5.2 Police Daily Hassles Scale.....	33

4.5.3 Social Support Scale.....	34
4.5.4 General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12).....	35
4.5.5 Job Satisfaction Inventory.....	36
Chapter 5: Results	
5.1 Overview.....	37
5.2 Preparing Data for Analysis.....	37
5.2.1 Data Screening.....	38
5.2.2 Data Clean Up.....	39
5.3 Principal Components Analysis.....	42
5.4 Assumption Checking – Univariate Analyses.....	44
5.5 Hypothesis Testing: Pearson’s Product-moment Correlations.....	49
5.6 Hypothesis Testing:	
Hierarchical Multiple Regression and Moderation Analyses.....	53
5.7 Exploratory Analyses.....	65
Chapter 6: Discussion	
6.1 Overview.....	69
6.2 Operational Stress.....	70
6.3 Organisational Stress.....	73
6.4 Supervisor Support.....	74
6.5 Peer Support.....	79
6.6 Generalisability.....	82
6.7 Other Limitations.....	83
6.8 Conclusion.....	84
6.9 Practical Implications and Recommendations for Future Research.....	85
References.....	87
Appendix A. Letter to Participants.....	104
Appendix B. Information Sheet.....	106
Appendix C. Changes to PDHS.....	110
Appendix D. Social Support Scale.....	111
Appendix E. General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12).....	112

Appendix F. Job Satisfaction Inventory (JSI).....	113
Appendix G. Principal Components Factor Analysis Results.....	114
Appendix H. Descriptive Statistics.....	115
Appendix I. Pearson’s Product-moment Correlations (Hypotheses).....	118
Appendix J. Pearson’s Product-moment Correlations (Exploratory Analysis).....	121

List of Tables

Table 1. Hierarchical Regression for Organisational Stress and Operational Stress on General Well-being.....	55
Table 2. Hierarchical Regression for Organisational Stress and Operational Stress on Job Satisfaction.....	57
Table 3. Conditional Effects of Operational Stress on General Well-being at Different Levels of Total Supervisor Communications.....	62
Table 4. Conditional Effects of Operational Stress on General Well-being at Different Levels of Non-job Supervisor Communications.....	62
Table 5. Conditional Effects of Operational Stress on General Well-being at Different Levels of Negative Supervisor Communications.....	63
Table 6. Conditional Effects of Operational Stress on General Well-being at Different Levels of Positive Supervisor Communications.....	63
Table 7. Conditional Effects of Operational Stress on General Well-being at Different Levels of Disturbing Supervisor Communications.....	64
Table 8. Conditional Effects of Organisational Stress on General Well-being at Different Levels of Positive Supervisor Communications.....	64
Table 9. Hierarchical Regression of Peer Support Scores on Operational Stress.....	66
Table 10. Hierarchical Regression of Peer Support Scores on Organisational Stress.....	67

List of Figures

Figure 1. Moderating Effects of Total Supervisor Communications on the Relationship Between Operational Stress and General Well-being.....	62
Figure 2. Moderating Effects of Non-job Supervisor Communications on the Relationship Between Operational Stress and General Well-being.....	62
Figure 3. Moderating Effects of Negative Supervisor Communications on the Relationship Between Operational Stress and General Well-being.....	63
Figure 4. Moderating Effects of Positive Supervisor Communications on the Relationship Between Operational Stress and General Well-being.....	63
Figure 5. Moderating Effects of Disturbing Supervisor Communications on the Relationship Between Operational Stress and General Well-being.....	64
Figure 6. Moderating Effects of Positive Supervisor Communications on the Relationship Between Organisational Stress and General Well-being.....	64