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**The Effect of Job Expectations on Health
Outcomes and Job Satisfaction: The Mediating
Effects of Reality Shock Within the New Zealand Police**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree
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ABSTRACT

Research evidence has shown that job expectations are usually unrealistic prior to organisational entry, but tend to decline to more realistic levels with time and work experience (Nicholson & Arnold, 1991). The process of organisational socialisation is a useful perspective from which to view this expectation development. When organisational socialisation is unsuccessful, new employees are likely to experience 'reality shock': the physical and psychological response to the realisation that their job expectations have been inaccurate. Other immediate consequences of having inaccurate job expectations can include poor health outcomes and low job satisfaction. The primary aims of the present study were, 1) to measure a number of job expectations in a sample of police recruits, and to determine whether these job expectations change with time and experience, and 2) to investigate whether inaccurate job expectations are related to reality shock and poor health outcomes and low job satisfaction. It was hypothesised that job expectations would be related to reality shock and negative health outcomes and low job satisfaction. Furthermore, it was predicted that reality shock would mediate the relationship between job expectations and poor health outcomes and job satisfaction. These aims and hypotheses were tested by surveying police recruits during their first week of training, and again after six months' work experience. The results showed that expectations of both organisational stress and sexual discrimination were associated with reality shock. Organisational stress expectations were the only expectation variable to be related to reality shock, health outcomes, and job satisfaction. Regression analyses showed that reality shock mediated the link between organisational stress expectations and

psychological distress, negative affect, and job satisfaction. These results were discussed with reference to the reliability and validity of the measures used and possible avenues for future research. The present study's results have important implications regarding current police recruit training procedures, and the usefulness of reality shock as a construct from which to understand the consequences of inaccurate job expectations.

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OVERVIEW

Research data indicate that approximately 25% of any organisation's new employees will terminate their own employment within six months of joining (Wanous, Stumpf, & Bedrosian, 1978). Evidence suggests that inaccurate job expectations are an antecedent of voluntary turnover (Wanous, 1980). This is confirmed by research investigating reasons for police officer disengagement in New Zealand (New Zealand Police, 1998). Officer disengagement refers to those police officers that leave the organisation on psychological and/or physical grounds. Eleven percent of New Zealand police officers who disengaged between 1990 and 1996 said their decision to disengage was influenced by their unrealistic expectations of policing. Furthermore, 39% of disengaged police officers reported they were not given an accurate description of what to expect from policing. The same percentage of disengaged police officers also stated that policing was not what was expected. These figures indicate that inaccurate job expectations are an important aspect of the decision to disengage from the New Zealand Police.

Many authors have suggested that new employees with inaccurate job expectations are likely to experience 'reality shock', which is a period of uncertainty in which newcomers begin to realise that their initial job expectations have been inaccurate (Arnold, 1985; Dean, 1983; Pfifferling, 1984; M.S. Taylor, 1988). Voluntary turnover is but one extreme and long-term consequence of reality shock. Reality shock causes a host of other adverse consequences to both an organisation, and in particular, the individual. The immediate consequences of reality shock include poor physical and

psychological health, and low job satisfaction. Burnout, organisational cynicism, and absenteeism are long-term consequences of reality shock.

The first part of this dissertation is a review of the literature outlining job expectations, the processes of organisational socialisation and reality shock, and the outcomes of reality shock. Chapter one explores job expectations, focussing on job content and organisational expectations in particular. Chapters two and three address specific types of job expectations, from the perspective that potential police recruits are likely to have inaccurate expectations in these areas. The second chapter examines sources of organisational stress inherent in policing, while Chapter three highlights the experiences of sexual harassment and discrimination within the police. In Chapter four, the concepts of organisational socialisation and reality shock are introduced. The following three chapters integrate the different stages of organisational socialisation and reality shock, owing to their concordance in explaining the meeting of expectations with reality. Chapter five explores anticipatory socialisation and the honeymoon phase of reality shock. The sixth chapter outlines the encounter stage of organisational socialisation and the shock or rejection phase of reality shock. This chapter also discusses the immediate consequences of reality shock. Chapter seven addresses a number of issues. The change and acquisition stage of organisational socialisation and the recovery and resolution phase of reality shock are discussed along with the long-term consequences of reality shock. This chapter also presents a schematic model of the proposed relationships between the constructs discussed in the first part of the dissertation. In the second part of this dissertation, a study testing reality shock

as a mediator of inaccurate expectations and health outcomes and job satisfaction is described. Chapter eight states the goals and hypotheses of the study, designed to test the model introduced in chapter seven. This chapter also considers the impact of a number of demographic variables on the predicted relationships. Chapters nine and ten present the method and results of the study, while the final chapter discusses the results and conclusions of the study.

