Leadership and Management in Police Organizations

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Stress and Burnout

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Introducing Stress and Burnout . . .

Criminal investigators, depending upon their specific caseload, are likely to encounter gruesome crime scenes, emotional victims or witnesses, and/or disturbing evidence. For homicide detectives, a crime scene means a dead body and "the incumbent sights, sounds, smells, and survivors."[1] Internet crime investigators are exposed to images of child pornography or forced to interact online with sex offenders as they build criminal cases.[2] For some people, constant exposure to the negative stimuli is too much, forcing them to leave investigation units altogether.[3] For those who remain, finding ways to cope is essential. A common strategy is to emotionally detach from the work.[4] Interviews with 26 members of a single homicide unit revealed that investigators viewed crime scenes, however terrible, as evidence necessary for their jobs.[5] Because they were able to disconnect their emotions from

the work, investigators did not view crime scenes as overly stressful, especially compared to other aspects of the job.

This type of coping is largely situation. The success of detachment strategies likely declines in at least two instances: when the number of victims increases and when the crime victims are young. According to Sewell, few people, including detectives accustomed to horrible scenes, can prepare for the gruesomeness associated with mass murder sites.[6] Such was the case after the 1984 mass shooting at a San Ysidro (California) McDonald's restaurant. The gunmen killed 21 people (including children) and wounded many others. First responders interviewed after the incident displayed evidence of substantial amounts of stress: feelings of guilt, sleeplessness, shaking, loss of memory, nervousness, demoralization, and others.[7] Similarly, child homicide and Internet crime investigators report elevated levels of stress directly related to the negative stimuli associated with their work.[8] According to one study's authors,

A factor making it more difficult for the death investigator to invoke his or her normal coping mechanisms is the situation in which there is an emotional identification with the crime victim. In the case of the child homicide victim, the avoidance of this emotional identification is virtually impossible.[9]

Psychologist Vincent Parr once declared, "Police work is not stressful."[10] The statement is counterintuitive, challenging the widespread belief that policing is one of the most stressful of all occupations.[11] After all, police officers risk their own safety to protect others, are often subjected to physical threats, encounter troubling crime scenes, work long hours, suffer from arbitrary management, assume excessive workloads, and face a variety of career challenges.[12] Some of these demands are more generic, common across a range of job fields. Others, however, are unique to police work and an individual's role within the police organization, like the homicide detective's regular exposure to the deceased. Parr's statement was a cautionary one, a warning to avoid broad generalizations about the strains associated with policing. If police work is stressful, he argued, then some level of distress must plague *all* officers. Clearly, this is an overstatement. Police work is a demanding occupation, one filled with a range of substantial stressors that set it apart from other fields. Yet many police employees, sworn and civilian, perform their daily work with few or no ill effects. Parr's remarks highlight the need to address the stressors and the strains they cause, recognizing variations in officer coping responses. If these stressors are ignored, the individual and the organization are likely to suffer. The former may experience any number of psychological, physical, and behavioral consequences, and the latter may observe increased absenteeism, diminished productivity, additional work conflicts, or other negative work outcomes. Therefore, it is essential for employees to develop appropriate coping mechanisms and the organization to alleviate workplace stress in the first place. In many ways, individual well-being and organizational success are at stake. This chapter examines occupational or workplace stress, paying particular attention to common stressors and coping mechanisms within police organizations.

Defining Stress and Burnout

Occupational Stress

Everyone is familiar with the term *stress*, especially as it relates to the workplace. Indeed, a large portion of the US workforce experiences occupational stress. According to surveys, anywhere from 26 percent to 40 percent of working Americans are stressed by their jobs.[13] What does this mean? The term, while commonly discussed in casual conversations, actually lacks precision. Consider the significance of work schedules to homicide detectives. In one study, investigators reported the rotating case assignment system as a significant source of stress.[14] Although homicide unit members received days off, lead investigators were assigned in an order that required them to work anyway if they were at the top of the list when a homicide occurred. As one investigator described the situation,

> It's always a guessing game; you just don't know where it's [a homicide investigation call] gonna fall. I guess the not knowing is the biggest thing. Do I have another beer? Do I plan something with my family or whatever? So you'll start thinking about it. But what if you're the number one person for five, six, seven weeks? Now you start guessing on where's this thing gonna fall. It's just a guessing game.[15]

This investigator's remarks reflect the complexity of occupational stress. As a concept, it encompasses both a cause (the schedule itself) and a set of consequences (uncertainty, family challenges). Missing from the quote, but no less important, are details about how the investigator copes with these problems and the broader effects, if any, on the police department (e.g., job dissatisfaction, turnover, etc.). The larger point is that the ambiguity surrounding the concept of occupational stress requires a more detailed discussion, one that considers its constituent parts. The label **stress** is reserved for the overall process inclusive of stressors, strains, and coping.[16]

During the course of their work, individuals regularly encounter a variety of stimuli, and some of these are perceived as **stressors**, "taxing or exceeding [the individual's] resources and endangering his or her well-being."[17] The number of potential stressors in police work is extensive (see Figure 8.1 for examples). **Chronic stressors** are encountered regularly and are largely connected to features of the organization itself.[18] These include factors such as inadequate compensation, deleterious management practices, and risky job assignments. The homicide detective's work schedule and exposure to disturbing crime scenes are similarly enduring aspects of the job. **Acute stressors**, in contrast, occur infrequently and often suddenly; these traumatic events include situations such as police-involved shootings and notifying families of deaths.[19] While irregular, acute stressors are no less significant than chronic stressors, according to Anshel, acute stressors can affect an officer's memory, reaction time, decision-making quality, and other cognitive functions.[20] Fyfe described this phenomenon in the context of use-of-force encounters.[21] Officers are required to make rapid decisions during stressful situations, what Fyfe labeled the **split-second syndrome**. Although decisions are made based on the information available to the officer at the time, the

nature of the encounter sometimes leads to errors in judgment (e.g., the suspect was unarmed). If true, officers can avoid the split-second syndrome by taking steps to avoid potentially violent encounters or by ensuring a tactical advantage.

Individuals tend to react to stressors in different ways. In order to understand occupational stress, it is essential to understand how people interpret specific encounters and make sense of stressors. Individuals first undertake a **primary appraisal**, assessing what is happening at the time and the stakes involved.[22] Police personnel are likely to view many situations as irrelevant, having no meaningful impact on them.[23] For example, many officers might consider the introduction of new uniforms a purely cosmetic change with few consequences. However, others might consider new uni-

Figure 8.1 Relationship between occupational stressors and individual and organizational consequences
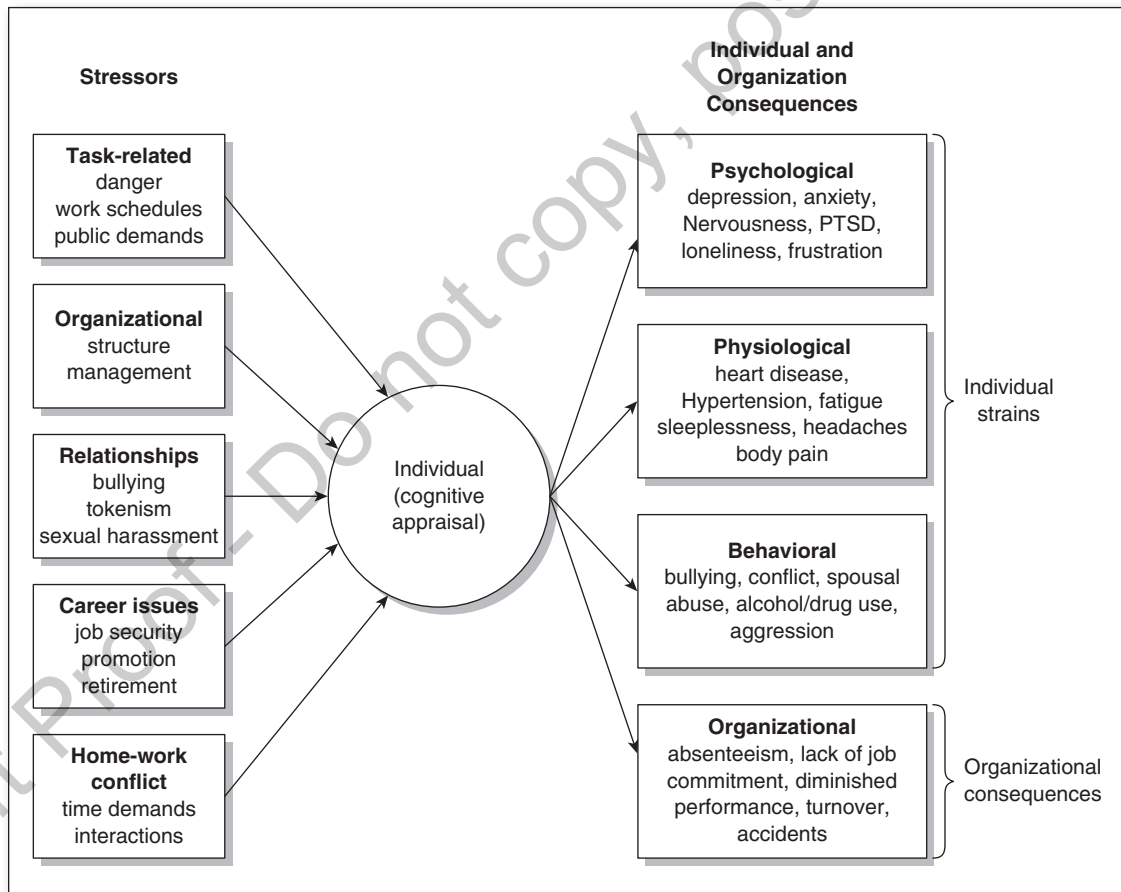
SOURCE: Susan Cartwright and Cary L. Cooper, *Managing Workplace Stress* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997).

forms a significant stressor if they are viewed as producing harm or threats of harm. The Lakewood (Colorado) Police Department changed police uniforms in 1970, shifting away from more traditional dress to officer-worn blazers. Crank and Langworthy reported that the new uniforms, along with other departmental changes, "generated both confusion and embarrassment in contacts with other agencies and with the public."[24] For officers at the time, the situation was likely viewed as a stressor, given the threat to their occupational status (more traditional organizational features returned in 1973). Similarly, Hunt described a rookie police officer who "earned a reputation for cowardice after he allegedly had to be 'dragged' out of the car" to help another officer.[25] Although Hunt never described the rookie officer's post-incident stress level, immediate harms, including loss of one's reputation, were likely observed. If the encounter is considered harmful, threatening, or challenging, the individual proceeds with a **secondary appraisal**, asking what can be done about the situation (see Coping With Stress and Burnout section). If remedies are available, the individual may experience few or no harmful effects from the stressors.[26]

Strain (human consequences) occurs when individuals appraise encounters as harmful or threatening without any immediate or effective coping mechanisms available. These strains, discussed later in the chapter, include psychological, physiological, and behavioral reactions to actual or perceived stressors.[27] The relationship between stressors and strain is, as Beehr explained, the core of stress research.[28] It is widely believed that **social support** moderates this relationship, serving as a buffer limiting the effects of various stressors. Support comes from within an employee's social networks—coworkers, supervisors, family, and friends. Social support behaviors include the provision of emotional support (displays of trust, respect, or empathy), instrumental support (direct assistance such as exchanging work shifts), informational support (providing information that "helps people to help themselves"), and appraisal support (information allowing individuals to assess themselves, such as acknowledging performance).[29] In many policing studies, researchers employ more general measures of support, failing to distinguish between the different types of support provided to officers. Lord asked survey respondents to indicate whether certain individuals (e.g., immediate supervisors, spouse) can "be relied on when things get tough at work."[30] The question operationalizes social support more generally without regard for the specific types of support offered. Similarly, McCarty and Skogan asked civilian and sworn officers from 12 agencies to indicate the level of support from coworkers and whether their supervisor had their back.[31] These general support questions were supplemented with questions about trust (emotional support) and supervisor acknowledgements (appraisal support).

Regardless of the measure, the effects of social support are largely consistent.[32] Increased support reduced burnout among a sample of 486 civilian and 2,078 sworn police employees.[33] Lord found that support from work (supervisors/coworkers) and nonwork (family, friends) sources limited stress in a sample of 181 Charlotte-Mecklenburg (North Carolina) police officers.[34] Work-related supports were absent for sergeants working in the same department, suggesting some degree of isolation as individuals move up the ranks. Social support by itself may not be enough to moderate the

effects of strain if the source of social support and the stressor are one in the same.[35] A supervisor's encouraging words or feedback (appraisal support) may prove ineffectual if the supervisor's actions in other realms (e.g., policy enforcement, work scheduling) represent the source of strain.

Burnout

Although the history of stress research dates back centuries, it was not until 1969 that a related concept, burnout, first appeared in the literature.[36] Bradley proposed a staffing plan affording employees of a youthful offender treatment facility time off after an extended period of work in order to avoid what he called "the staff 'burn out' phenomenon."[37] The period away from work was designed to reenergize staff. The term would reappear several years later when Freudenberger described some of the symptoms associated with burnout (e.g., fatigue, exhaustion, irritability).[38] These early works represented the origins of what would become a significant volume of research on the subject of burnout.[39]

Burnout is a condition or syndrome involving a combination of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment that most commonly affects workers in human service fields such as policing, social work, and nursing.[40] According to Bakker and colleagues, equity theory (see Chapter 5) links burnout with human interactions.[41] Recall that individuals judge their social exchanges for signs of fairness; "whenever two individuals exchange anything, there is the possibility that one or both of them will feel that the exchange was inequitable."[42] People are interested in reciprocity. Are they receiving something in return roughly equivalent to what they contributed? Although many police officers give a tremendous amount to their jobs in the form of time, energy, expertise, compassion, dedication, and their physical safety, they are still confronted by a fair number of noncompliant, ungrateful, or demanding citizens. The absence of reciprocity or equity in the exchange will, over time, take its toll on officers.

Emotional exhaustion or a sense of "depletion" represents the first part of burnout.[43] This feeling was described by Freudenberger in one of the earliest works addressing burnout and is one of the most commonly discussed components.[44] Maslach and Jackson stated that exhausted workers "feel that they are no longer able to give of themselves at a psychological level."[45] Human service workers try to keep some type of emotional distance from clients in order to cope with the job demands. For example, homicide detectives viewed bodies as evidence rather than people.[46] If this detachment becomes excessive, depersonalization occurs; cynicism is directed toward clients, coworkers, and citizens.[47] This is evident in the widespread use of labels to identify others (e.g., *junkie, con, crackhead*). Individual characteristics are removed in favor of broader, less personal classifications.[48] As depersonalization occurs, the actual quality of services provided to clients suffers, and workers start to develop a diminished sense of their own accomplishments, the third and final component of burnout.[49]

The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) is typically used to measure the prevalence of burnout in a population, and its measures provide additional examples of the three

core components.[50] The MBI asks respondents to rate the frequency of certain feelings. Sample items are shown here, labeled according to the burnout component:[51]

I feel frustrated by my job (emotional exhaustion).

I feel like I'm at the end of my rope (emotional exhaustion).

I worry that this job is hardening me emotionally (depersonalization).

I don't really care what happens to some recipients (depersonalization).

I deal very effectively with the problems of my recipients (personal accomplishment).

I feel exhilarated after working closely with my recipients (personal accomplishment).

Burnout is relatively prevalent among police personnel. Burke and Deszca found that nearly a quarter (23%) of the 828 Canadian police officers surveyed were classified as having high levels of burnout.[52] In a different study of 442 officers in four departments, roughly one in three officers reported high levels of emotional exhaustion (37.2%) and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment (33.6%), and more than half indicated high levels of depersonalization (56.1%).[53] McCarty, Zhao, and Garland also found burnout to be common. Average burnout scores in the Baltimore Police Department were approximately 10 on a 20-point scale.[54]

Is burnout conceptually distinct from job stress? Many burnout-related questions seemingly address what might be conceived of as job strains (exhaustion, callousness, etc.). According to Maslach and Schaufeli, the distinction is sometimes hard to recognize:

[B]urnout has been equated with tedium, (job) stress, dissatisfaction, (reactive or professional) depression, alienation, low morale, anxiety, (job) strain, tension, feeling "worn out," experiencing "flame-out," tension, conflict, pressure, "nerves," boredom, (chronic or emotional) fatigue, poor mental health, crisis, helplessness, vital exhaustion, and hopelessness.[55]

Scholars agree that a number of qualities distinguish stress and burnout from one another. First, the very act of burning out points to the existence of a fire in the first place. Although anyone can experience job stress, only the motivated and energetic are susceptible to burnout.[56] Moreover, work itself must be meaningful. Burnout is unlikely to occur if the work itself offers no intrinsic value to the role occupant.[57] Second, a temporal dimension is critical. Occupational stress is not a cause of burnout. Rather, burnout is considered "prolonged job stress" exemplified by an individual's inability to successfully cope with job stressors.[58] Finally, burnout contributes to negative attitudes toward clients or customers, the work, and the entire organization, something not necessarily true of job stress.[59]

Major Stressors in Policing

Developing a comprehensive list of every stressor potentially confronted by policing officers would be an impossible task. Researchers have nevertheless tried to capture the most significant and frequent sources of strain. Spielberger and colleagues, for

example, developed the *Police Stress Survey*, an instrument capturing 60 unique police stressors derived from a review of the relevant literature.[60] Table 8.1 lists the top ten stressors identified by officers in three separate studies using the survey.[61] In order to make sense of these and other stressors, they will be organized into a framework adapted from Cartwright and Cooper.[62] Five broad categories of stressors—task-related, organizational, work relationships, career issues, and work-home conflict—and the major stressors within them are discussed here (see Figure 8.1).[63]

Task-Related Factors

Task-related stressors relate directly to the work performed by law enforcement officers. Three specific factors are addressed: danger, work schedules, and public

Table 8.1 Top 10 Stressors Reported by Law Enforcement Officers in Three Studies

	Spielberger et al. (1981) 210 Florida Law Enforcement Officers From Multiple Agencies	Violanti and Aron (1995) 103 New York Law Enforcement Officers From Single Agency	Lucas, Weidner, and Janisse (2012) 115 Law Enforcement Officers From Multiple Agencies
1	Fellow officer killed	Killing someone in the line of duty	Killing someone in the line of duty
2	Killing someone in the line of duty	Fellow officer killed	Negative press coverage
3	Exposure to battered or dead children	Physical attack	Fellow officer killed
4	Physical attack	Exposure to battered or dead children	Inadequate support by supervisor
5	Situations regarding use of force	High-speed chases	Department politics
6	Inadequate salary	Shift work	Insufficient personnel
7	Inadequate support by department	Situations regarding use of force	Inadequate salary
8	Confrontations with aggressive crowds	Inadequate support by department	Physical attack
9	Ineffectiveness of the judicial system	Incompatible partner	Inadequate support by department
10	Inadequate support by supervisor	Accident in patrol car	Inadequate equipment

demands. The danger associated with the job is an often-cited stressor in the policing literature. Like workers in high-risk fields such as logging, fishing, roofing, and commercial trucking, police officers face the risk of accidental death or injury.[64] In 2012, 47 officers were accidently killed in vehicle crashes, falls, or other unintentional, non-criminal circumstances.[65] Officers also carry out their duties in situations where at least some individuals aim to do them harm. In 2012, 48 officers were killed in felonious situations while roughly 1 in 10 suffered an on-duty assault.[66] In a prospective study of 400 police academy recruits, 69 percent reported experiencing a direct threat to their own lives during the first 36 months of their careers.[67]

Clearly, the potential for violence looms, and officers are aware of dangers inherent in police work. They acknowledge danger-related stressors, such as using deadly force or the death of a fellow officer on survey instruments (see Table 8.1). The influence of danger, or the potential for danger, is also visible in officers' involuntary physiological responses. One common measure, an individual's heart rate, captures cardiovascular system reactions independent of individual assessments on survey items.[68] In order to examine these physiological responses, Anderson, Litzenberger, and Plecas outfitted 121 British Columbia police officers with heart rate monitors recording officer heart activity during work-shift observation periods.[69] A trained researcher recorded all officer activities during each shift, sometimes as many as nine per minute, and merged the information with heart rate data. In total, the observations occurred over nearly 76,000 minutes of police activity in 1998 and 1999. As expected, heart rates increased when officers engaged in more physically demanding tasks (e.g., fighting, climbing, pulling, running). Heart rates also increased during potentially dangerous but not necessarily physically demanding situations: hand on gun with nonsuspect present (heart rate 29 beats above resting heart rate); hand on gun with suspect present (40 beats above resting); holster snap open with no suspect present (45 beats above resting); and holster snap open with suspect present (49 beats above resting). During a major pursuit, heart rates, on average, were more than double the rate for a minor pursuit (41 vs. 17 beats above resting). According to the study's authors, the results "clearly demonstrate the psycho-social stress of police work with increased physiological reactions during situations where there is potential threat, and during periods of anticipation."[70]

In a second study, Hickman and colleagues equipped a single officer with a heart rate monitor and a global positioning satellite (GPS) unit.[71] The officer's heart rate was significantly more elevated in some locations within the jurisdiction (Seattle) compared to others, suggesting that certain stress hot spots exists (perhaps based on crime, call volume, risks, etc.). Although the findings were considered preliminary and based on the physiological responses of a single officer in one jurisdiction, the results imply that strain might be reduced by rotating officers into and out of particularly stressful beats.

It is worth pointing out that police officers seldom rank danger as the primary source of stress (see the Organizational Factors section).[72] One possibility is that danger is both an acute and chronic stressor. Although officers indicate that the death of a peer and killing of a citizen are particularly stressful, they are also quite rare. Still, experiencing these events produces negative outcomes, such as post-traumatic stress

disorder (PTSD), depression, social adjustment, and alcohol use among officers.[73] As noted earlier, two-thirds of all police recruits in one study reported a direct threat on their lives in their first three years on the job, but these experiences did not produce any of the same detrimental outcomes.[74] The more common violence or general risks associated with police work may be accepted as an inherent part of a dangerous occupation. In fact, officers may derive a sense of satisfaction from the adventure associated with the job, embracing the risky situations they confront.[75] For example, deputy US marshals reported warrant work and arresting fugitives as one of the most liked aspects of the job.[76]

For department employees who work specifically with victims of crime, the significance of the task is less about danger and more about regular exposure to the suffering of victims of crime. Victim services professionals are susceptible to secondary trauma, including emotional and behavioral disorders, and compassion fatigue as a consequence of ongoing displays of empathy. Saly Fayez, the director of the Fairfax County (Virginia) Police Department's Victim Services Section, describes both task-related stressors among the section's specialists and her attempts to alleviate workplace stress (see Policing Insights).

POLICING INSIGHTS ON . . . STRESS

Saly J. Fayez
Director, Victim Services Section
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The Victim Services Section (VSS) is a decentralized section of the Criminal Investigative Bureau of the Fairfax County Police Department. The section consists of 10 victim specialists, with a caseload of over 3,500 cases a year. The section was created in 1986 to provide victim service delivery, ensuring the fair, compassionate, and sensitive treatment of victims and witnesses of crime. The section's purpose is to respond to the psychological, emotional, and financial needs of crime victims and witnesses. This is achieved through crisis intervention, 24-hour–on-call response, crisis counseling, outreach, advocacy, education, information, and referral for victims of crime and trauma, close support to first responders, investigative units, and, on a larger scale, promotion and heightening of awareness for the neighborhoods and communities in which victims and witnesses of crime reside. The overall mission of the section is to positively impact the quality of life for the citizens of Fairfax County by assisting victims and witnesses of crime.

VSS specialists are responsible for providing rights and services, in accordance with the Code of Virginia, to individuals victimized within the police jurisdictions of Fairfax County, Fairfax City, and the towns of Herndon and Vienna. Service delivery is mandated by the Virginia Crime Victim and Witness Rights Act. VSS provides immediate crisis intervention to victims of violent crime. Just like line officers, specialists must be able to

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function within a multitude of environments and working conditions and must be willing and capable of serving in a broad role. Hence, specialists must be resourceful and able to "think outside the box." As system-based victim advocates within a law enforcement agency, VSS specialists work cases from the onset of the crime and continue to work with victims and survivors throughout the criminal justice process. While community-based advocates are specially trained in working with victims of a particular group, our advocates are trained to work with victims of all crime. System-based advocates are often better able to access information, but it also means the advocates offer services that are unique to their role, such as responding to crime scenes, assisting victims in scheduling appointments with detectives or prosecutors, offering victim transportation when needed, participating in interviews and other procedures, following the case throughout the entire court process, and providing court accompaniment.

One of the biggest issues victim advocates in a law enforcement agency often see is that we are the only ones that do this work in the department. Yet those in charge do not always understand the work we do or the importance of it. The pros certainly outweigh the cons when it comes to being located in a law enforcement agency. However, it is essential for the powers that be in any law enforcement agency to respect and include the needs of the victim-witness units in the decision-making process as it pertains to the future of the agency. Civilians in the law enforcement field are often not the priority when it comes to strategic planning, which is unfortunate because I believe civilians are the backbone of how agencies are built. In the past 13 years, while there has been an increase in caseload and assignments, our staffing levels have only increased by one. The 10 VSS specialists already carry caseloads in the hundreds and ultimately respond to a county with over a million citizens.

Another stressor is team culture. We are currently a decentralized section, which often only allows the specialists to communicate with each other and with me via e-mail. This does not align with the teamwork mentality nor does it afford the unit opportunity to lean on each other for support. All specialized units should have strong leadership and coordination and be allowed to thrive on being a "real team." What better way to debrief and talk about your day than to be able to come back to your unit and talk to those who get what you do. The way it works now often sees the specialists go back to their assigned station only to start working on their existing and new caseload with little opportunity to really talk about what they themselves experienced during their call out or their assigned murder trial.

Vicarious trauma is real and happens often in this field. Victim specialists carry the burden of ensuring that victims of violent crime are provided information, referrals, and support from the onset of the crime all the way throughout the criminal justice process. VSS specialists sit through weeklong trials involving horrific details and circumstances. We respond to crime scenes to assist family members who have just been told their son, daughter, wife, or husband has been murdered. We respond to hospitals to help a young woman who was just raped and sodomized. We sit with children before and after they have to testify about the ongoing sexual abuse they have endured at the hands of a

parent or caregiver. I myself attended an execution on a case I had been involved with since 2006. This is what we have to do for the victims we work with. Yet who is responding to the advocates to make sure they can process what they just did in providing support? Advocates are expected to do their duties and provide support, yet their own self-care is often not a priority. Self-care is becoming increasingly important because our unit is increasingly expected to do more with less.

Supervision is important because it is my responsibility to explore the idea that the specialists either are burned out or just need to debrief their day. This job is one of the best jobs you can have. You meet the best people at the worst time of their lives, and it is our job to take that role seriously. We owe it to the victims we work with to be the best at our best. If we do not take care of ourselves, then how do we take care of others?

I believe ongoing supervision and checking-in periods are key to ensuring that I am taking care of my staff. I try to do annual staff retreats that just focus on something fun for a change. For example, last year we went to a pottery painting class and then to lunch afterwards. It was just a nice retreat from the cases and the caseload. We sometimes meet for breakfast instead of having a staff meeting. Every year I try to do something for employee appreciation day to show them my appreciation for their hard work. During our monthly staff meetings, we start with a round table so each specialist can share/highlight any case or situation to the other specialists. This allows a sharing of information as well as the opportunity for the others to hear how things are going for their colleague. I keep an open-door policy because I believe it is those times that a staff member comes into my office that could hold the key to hearing something important that he or she is going through. Whatever I am doing can be put on hold; my priority has to be my staff. I also really try to encourage teamwork—I believe there is strength in numbers and that when we work together as team we feel more supported. Acknowledging their hard work and putting them in for awards is also something I feel is important. This can be a thankless job, and while we do not do this job for the praise, it is still nice to know that others besides me recognize the unit individually and as a group for their hard work.

The reality, though, is that this job may not be the right fit for everyone, and that is OK. This is a high-stress job with high expectations, and my job is to also work with my specialists to see if this is the right fit for them. If not, it is OK to admit that for their own health and well-being.

Work schedules serve as a second task-related stressor for many individuals, including police officers.[77] Departments must be staffed 24 hours per day in order to provide continuous protection for the communities they serve. As a consequence, officers engage in **shift work**, working outside of a typical 9-to-5 schedule and, in many instances, rotating from one shift to another on a regular basis. According to Vila, Morrison, and Kenney,

Shift work is an important source of fatigue for police and other workers because their natural circadian rhythms enhance alertness during daylight hours and encourage sleep at

night. . . . [O]fficers on night shifts struggle to stay awake when their bodies want to sleep and then later try to fall asleep at home when they naturally are primed to be most alert.[78]

The consequences of both shift work and rotating schedules are substantial. Night shift workers in the Buffalo (New York) Police Department were less likely to sleep for seven or more hours per night compared to their day/afternoon shift peers. In fact, 75 percent of all night shift officers reported getting only between 5 and 6.5 hours of sleep per 24-hour period.[79] A sample of Swiss officers assigned to a rotating shift schedule similarly described poorer sleep quality and greater levels of stress and dislike of work.[80] Perhaps more significant is the link between shift work and suicide ideation ("Have you ever thought of suicide?"). Violanti and colleagues studied a sample of 115 police officers in a single urban police department; the prevalence of suicide ideation was 25 percent among females and 23.1 percent among males.[81] The authors noted an interaction between gender, shift work, and depression in their study. Females were more likely to report suicide ideation if they worked the day shift, but males were more likely to indicate suicide ideation if they worked the midnight shift. In both cases, the relationships were magnified if the responding officer had any evidence of depression.

Why the difference between males and females? The authors speculate that the day shift exposes female officers to a male-dominated environment and increases public contacts and scrutiny. Moreover, the officer may experience strains associated with familial responsibilities (e.g., child care). In contrast, male officers are believed to value the peer interactions associated with police work, something that a midnight shift is sure to limit. Unfortunately, the problems associated with shift work are often unidentified. Vila noted that night shift officers had the lowest self-reported rates of fatigue, something attributable to the fact that "they arrive for duty when their body rhythms are at or near peak alertness levels."[82] The problem is that these officers were more likely to fail a test of alertness.

Officer fatigue and other adverse consequences are not solely the product of work shift. The length of the workday also plays a role. Although police organizations historically used 8-hour work shifts (five days on, two days off), an increasing number shifted toward compressed work weeks, with officers working longer hours per shift but fewer days per week.[83] In theory, a compressed week could improve performance, job satisfaction, morale, and work attendance. These benefits are potentially offset by fatigue, officer deployment challenges, and concerns about officers working secondary employment.[84] To test the effects of shift lengths, researchers randomly assigned more than 200 officers to one of three shift schedules (five 8-hour days, four 10-hour days, three 12-hour days) in two departments, Detroit, Michigan, and Arlington, Texas.[85] Officers assigned to work four 10-hour days reported a higher quality of life (e.g., less work-family conflict, more job satisfaction) and better sleep than those assigned to other shift conditions. Officers working the three 12-hour days were less alert and sleepier compared to others. Interestingly, work-related performance, such as driving safety, firearm proficiency, and self-initiated activity did not vary across shift types. Thus, even though 12-hour shifts are not necessarily linked to performance issues, managers must be cognizant of officer fatigue and stress if such a long workday is implemented.

The human service nature of police work also means that police department employees will generally confront a demanding public. Satisfying these requests requires balancing responsiveness, adherence to legal standards, ethical norms, and practical needs. When citizens ask law enforcement officers to advise, warn, or force others to leave, officers typically comply (or at least partially comply or promise to comply).[86] Police are less likely to fulfill a citizen's request for an arrest simply because of the high standard associated with this action (probable cause). Citizens, however, may not recognize these constraints and express dissatisfaction with the lack of officer responsiveness to their needs.

Detectives similarly face public demands. For example, millions of viewers watch TV shows like *CSI*, *Bones*, *Forensic Detectives*, or other similar programs each week, resulting in a set of often unrealistic expectations about the value of certain pieces of evidence, the way investigations should proceed, or the timeline for solving the case. These expectations are translated into demands for investigators to take fingerprints or second-guessing by the public. Investigators can either cope with these demands or deal with a dissatisfied public. For some, "it is easier to undertake a particular action, or pretend to, than to explain or argue with a civilian."[87]

Organizational Factors

For many officers, the very structure of the organization and upper management hinder everyday work activities.[88] Ayres blames the hierarchical paramilitary structure of most police organizations.[89] The vertical separation between those at the top and those at the line-level diminishes the occupational status of street officers. Bureaucratic rules and paperwork are used to control officers, stifling discretion.[90] Consider the following:

> Rules and regulations . . . are detrimental when they do not allow you the freedom to do your job according to each situation that arises. Officers who become afraid to do their job effectively because of the possibility of overstepping the bounds of the rules and the regulations are of no use to the public that depends on them.[91]

Decisions are frequently made without officer input. At other times, favoritism pervades management choices.[92]

Police officers often express resentment over supervisors who insist on pulling rank or otherwise act aggressively. Many are accused of oversupervision; "they arrive at minor scenes and quickly make a mountain out of a mole hill, issue various orders (to hear themselves and sound important), and then vanish into thin air leaving the beat officer to straighten out the mess they made."[93] These types of actions only reinforce the divisions between street cops and managers.[94]

Zhao, He, and Lovrich link these organizational factors to Hackman and Oldham's job characteristics model (see Chapter 5).[95] Overspecialization, formalization, limited communication, centralization, and lengthy chains of command limit the skill variety, task identify, task significance, autonomy, and feedback essential for self-motivation.

Moreover, these core job characteristics are linked with signs of strain. For example, in a sample of 415 officers from two Pacific Northwest police departments, autonomy and feedback were inversely related to outcomes such as depression, anxiety, interpersonal sensitivity, anger/hostility, and obsessive/compulsive symptoms. Bureaucracy (e.g., inadequate staff, excessive workload, poor working conditions) was similarly related to all five negative outcomes.[96]

Work Relationships

Relationships between supervisors, subordinates, and peers are sometimes marked by tension and strain. A coworker or supervisor's aggression (e.g., swearing, threats) may actually constitute **workplace bullying** to the extent that it represents repeated abuse.[97] Bullying behavior is not limited to just name calling or overt threats. Employees can be assigned excessive work or unreasonable deadlines, precluded from pursuing certain opportunities, or singled out for mistakes.[98] The key is that because of some power imbalance, the employee struggles to address the bullying behavior (e.g., due to concerns about repercussions from a supervisor).[99] Among British workers employed in the policing sector, 12.1 percent reported experiencing bullying behavior in the six months prior to the survey.[100] In a sample of 276 Pennsylvania police officers, supervisor conduct predicted officer aggression toward romantic partners and police partners.[101] Stated differently, officers who experienced aggression from police supervisors, though not necessarily repeated aggression, were more likely to act aggressively themselves.

Strain may also result from the social dynamics associated with an individual's status as a member of an organization's nondominant subgroup, especially if the composition of an agency is skewed to the point where any subgroup represents no more than 15 percent of the organization.[102] Within the policing industry, female and racial and ethnic minorities are particularly vulnerable to this phenomenon. Although the proportion of female and minority officers in policing has increased over the past 25 years, seldom do they achieve proportional/numerical equality with male or white officers within any given department (see Table 8.2).[103] Statistics from a 2007 survey of 2,875 municipal police, county sheriff, and state police organizations (the Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics [LEMAS] survey) show that female and black officers represented fewer than 15 percent of the sworn personnel in 85 percent and 89 percent of all agencies, respectively.

Members of these small groups risk being perceived as **tokens**, resulting in increased pressure within the workplace.[104] These pressures emerge for three reasons. First, tokens are more visible than members of the dominant group. As Kanter writes, "As individuals of their type represent a *smaller* numerical proportion of the overall group, they each potentially capture a *larger* share of the awareness given to that group."[105] The visibility may be even more intense when the token is the sole member of the subgroup. The 2007 LEMAS survey revealed that 300 law enforcement agencies employed only a single sworn female officer, and in each of these cases, the officer represented no more than 10 percent of all officers within the department.[106] In one West region municipal department, a single female worked among 81 male officers.

Table 8.2 Race, Ethnicity, and Gender of Full-Time Sworn Personnel in Local Police Departments, by Size of Population Served, 2007[1]

Population Served	Race/Ethnicity (%)				Gender (%)	
	White	Black/African American	Hispanic Latino	Other	Male	Female
All sizes	74.7	11.9	10.3	3.0	88.1	11.9
1,000,000 or more	56.0	17.6	22.9	3.5	82.1	17.9
500,000–999,999	60.6	24.1	9.3	6.1	84.5	15.5
250,000–499,999	69.5	16.5	11.2	2.7	85.7	14.3
100,000–249,999	73.7	13.4	9.1	3.8	87.2	12.8
50,000–99,999	83.6	7.0	7.5	2.0	90.6	9.4
25,000–49,999	88.2	5.0	5.1	1.7	91.8	8.2
10,000–24,999	87.5	5.6	5.1	1.8	92.1	7.9
2,500–9,999	87.9	5.1	4.4	2.5	92.5	7.5
Under 2,500	88.3	5.8	3.0	2.9	94.4	5.6

[1] SOURCE: Brian A. Reaves, Local Police Departments, 2007 (Washington, DC: US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2010).

Second, this visibility works to magnify the differences between the dominant group and the token subgroup (referred to as polarization):

> In uniform groups, members and observers may never become self-conscious about the common culture and type, which remain taken for granted and implicit. But the presence of a person or two bearing a different set of social characteristics increases the self-consciousness of the numerically dominant population and the consciousness of observers about what makes the dominants a class. They become more aware both of their commonalities and their differences from the token, and to preserve their commonality, they try to keep the token slightly outside, to offer a boundary for the dominants.[107]

For example, if a white male officer misses a promotional opportunity or is overlooked for a prestigious job assignment, he might direct his anger and disappointment toward what are believed to be discriminatory organizational practices that favor black or female officers. Racial and gender differences are much more visible than other characteristics, including merit or other qualifications. Finally, stereotypes plague tokens to the point that they are treated according to group generalizations rather than individual characteristics, leading to problems with assimilation.[108] As females entered policing

work in greater numbers during the 1970s and 1980s, a prevailing view was that they were physically incapable of handling work-related demands. Martin explained, "Women are perceived as unacceptable for patrol not only because they provide less 'muscle' to a partner but because the men feel that they cannot be relied on to behave appropriately during a physical confrontation."[109] Research evidence has debunked these stereotypes, but the perception nevertheless endures among some officers today.[110] Female and minority officers may also suffer from the skepticism of fellow officers that any promotions are undeserved, the product of affirmative action or quotas rather than experience or merit. Generalizations allow members of the dominant group to ignore the individual. Recent research indicates that racial and ethnic minorities in law enforcement experience the effects of tokenism more than females.[111] Limited evidence was found for what has been described as a "double token" effect, wherein female minorities experience the greatest levels of tokenism (see Figure 8.2).[112]
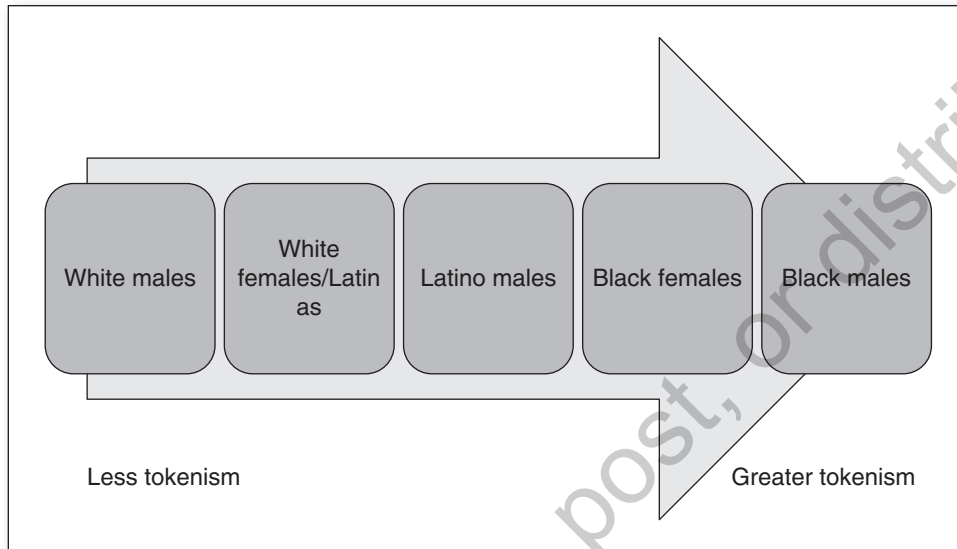
Individuals perceived as tokens must work harder, given the extra scrutiny—what Kanter equated to "life in the limelight."[113] Success, however, introduces a new dilemma; tokens must exercise restraint or risk embarrassing or showing up members of the dominant group, an act that could result in retaliation.[114] A female officer in a large midwestern city illustrated this point:

> When I first hit the streets I was the leader in DUI [driving under the influence of either alcohol or drugs] citations. I was told by my male officers and supervisors to tone it down with the citations. So I did. About a year after that a male officer was given an award for his DUI citations and was also publicly acknowledged for it. I was pissed off.[115]

When mistakes are made, those mistakes are generalized to the entire group. For example, a 1997 accidental shooting involving a female police recruit led to diminished perceptions of females in law enforcement more generally, an indication that the token female was perceived by the dominant group as representative of the subgroup.[116] The presence of tokens within a police department may contribute to divisions within the organization; officers have been found to interact with one another informally during meals or sit with one another during roll call along race and gender lines.[117] The individual is also forced to fight stereotypes or succumb to the image held by the dominant group.

The male-dominated composition of most police departments also increases the likelihood that female officers will experience an additional stressor—**sexual harassment**. Gruber found that harassment was more commonly reported in organizations with skewed gender distributions and where workplace contacts were primarily with males (this includes both colleagues and clients/offenders).[118] The specific acts that constitute sexual harassment vary, but the widely used Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ), a survey instrument designed to capture an individual's experiences related to sexual harassment, measures three broad categories of behaviors: gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion/quid pro quo harassment.[119] Some specific examples for each of the categories follow.

- Gender harassment: Told crude jokes/stories; displayed offensive materials; made sexist comments; offered offensive remarks (e.g., put women down)

Figure 8.2 Experiences with tokenism by gender and race

White males | White females/Latinas | Latino males | Black females | Black males

Less tokenism   Greater tokenism

SOURCE: Meghan S. Stroshine and Steven G. Brandl, "Race, Gender, and Tokenism in Policing: An Empirical Elaboration," *Police Quarterly* 14, no. 4 (2011): 344–65.

- Unwanted sexual attention: Someone tried to establish romantic or sexual relationship in spite of objections; repeatedly requested date; inappropriate touching (e.g., fondling victim); stared or leered at victim
- Sexual coercion/quid pro quo harassment: Subtle bribery; experienced consequences for refusing to cooperate; threatened punishments or offered rewards for cooperation

Individuals completing the SEQ are asked to report whether they experienced any of these harassing behaviors during a certain time period.[120]

Research demonstrates that sexual harassment in policing is widespread, even if not defined by the victim as such. For example, Lonsway, Paynich, and Hall conducted two different surveys addressing harassing behaviors in law enforcement.[121] In the first study, 92.5 percent of female officers within a single large police force reported experiencing at least one of the behaviors from the SEQ (gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and/or sexual coercion) in the year prior to the survey. Interestingly, 82.6 percent of males also reported at least one of the items. The similar overall prevalence rates were largely due to working in a shared environment where dirty jokes or inappropriate stories are frequently told. Female officers were more than twice as likely to report receiving unwanted sexual attention than males (48.5% vs. 18.2%) and almost twice as likely to suffer from sexual coercion/quid pro quo harassment (4.3% vs. 2.3%). In the second study, 531 female officers sampled from departments across the United States were asked about sexual harassment during their law enforcement careers (not just the prior year). Nine out of 10 (91.3%) acknowledged gender harassment, while

three-quarters (74.0%) faced unwanted sexual attention. Roughly 15 percent of female officers suffered from sexual coercion at some point during their careers.

Despite indications that these behaviors are common in policing, officers rarely define themselves as the victims of sexual harassment.[122] In the national survey of female officers, although 93.8 percent reported experiencing at least one of the SEQ behaviors, only 27.2 percent indicated that they had ever been sexually harassed during their law enforcement careers. This is perhaps, as Haarr observed in her study of a midwestern police department, an indication that "women knew how to 'roll with the punches' and refused to take offense at sexist and/or racist comments or behaviors."[123]

Also noteworthy is the fact that formal complaints are rarely filed against the perpetrator of the harassment (more commonly a coworker rather than supervisor).[124] In Florida, the Criminal Justice Standards and Training Commission is responsible for the certification of law enforcement officers. Among these tasks, the Commission disciplines officers for violating a "good moral character" clause if they receive a sustained complaint of sexual harassment.[125] Between 1993 and 1997, the Commission addressed only 89 sexual harassment cases involving a male perpetrator even though thousands of officers work within the state's 409 municipal, county, and state law enforcement agencies. The limited number of cases does not reflect the pervasiveness of sexual harassment. Instead, it is related to reporting behaviors and the Commission's decision to focus on only those harassment behaviors involving actual physical touching or misuse of position.[126] This precludes many of the types of behaviors that would fall into the categories of gender harassment and unwanted sexual attention. Why are these behaviors underreported? Approximately half of survey respondents indicate that the situation is just not serious enough to warrant a complaint.[127] Other reasons include fear of retaliation from those involved, concern about the reaction of others, unfamiliarity with complaint procedures, and doubt (nothing would be done; no action taken in past).

Career Issues

Throughout the course of what might amount to a 20-year career, officers variously deal with issues of job security, promotion, retirement, and other career-related stressors.[128] For example, the Great Recession greatly affected many law enforcement agencies. As government budgets shrunk, departments were forced to make do with less, sometimes much less. According to the Police Executive Research Forum, 22 percent of agencies reported laying off employees, and another 43 percent imposed hiring freezes.[129] Some estimate that as many as 10,000 officers lost their jobs during and immediately after the recession.[130] Staffing in affected departments was truly decimated. In Camden, New Jersey, cuts resulted in the elimination of 163 of the department's 367 officers, nearly half the force.[131] Of course, furloughs and salary freezes also affected other departments. For officers in any of these agencies, the question was, how far were the cuts going to reach?

Many officers go on to have long and prosperous careers. Some are even content to remain at the line-level rank of officer. Berger noted that 863 of the New York City Police Department's 34,805 sworn officers (2.5%) hold the officer rank after 20 years

on the force.[132] He suggested that these long-term members of the officer rank "may not want desk jobs or the responsibilities and headaches of being a supervisor, and are either not interested in or do not feel qualified to do the painstaking spadework of investigation."[133] Some do, however, desire promotion and are stuck at a particular rank, having reached their **career plateau**. They are unable to advance due to structural issues (e.g., only a limited number of slots due to the vertical structure of the organization) or to personal deficiencies (e.g., lack of qualifications or motivation). Officers who reached a plateau tended to report greater stress, diminished job satisfaction, and a greater desire to leave the organization.[134] Given limitations on the number of promotional opportunities and the time for advancement, adequate coping mechanisms are essential for those who reach this point in their careers.

Retirement considerations are a third source of career-related stress. Although retirement from public service employment provides some degree of financial security via pensions and a relief from many of the stressors discussed in this section, thoughts of and actual retirement introduce new stressors into the lives of experienced officers. Officers must confront their anxieties about pending retirements and the isolation once it occurs. According to Violanti,

> There is a certain feeling of isolation when officers must clean out their lockers and "pack it in." Uniforms, firearms, and the most prized possession—the badge—must be relinquished. One officer described this process as "losing a part of my soul." These feelings are indicative of a cohesiveness among police officers that is not found in many other professions.[135]

The retired officer might also have to search for employment, especially if he or she has not reached the age to collect full retirement benefits. Among deputy US marshals, retirement age was a significant source of stress.[136] Those retiring at a younger age presumably tackled the strain associated with continued post–law enforcement career employment.

Work–Home Conflict

The stressors discussed to this point have primarily been isolated to the work environment. That is, they have emanated from the task itself, the organization, or other features of the workplace. Ample research suggests that work-related stress is intricately tied to home life. Simultaneously satisfying the demands associated with one's role in a work organization and a family organization may produce work-home conflict. For police employees, their career orientation—how immediate and long-term work goals are balanced against family goals—likely shapes the degree of conflict.[137] Greenhaus and Beutell argued that meeting these demands is difficult for three reasons.[138] First, both realms vie for an officer's time. Officers likely work an 8-, 10-, or 12-hour day and additional overtime hours as required. Detectives work cases during their scheduled hours but are assigned to cases on a rotating schedule, which may require them to work on a scheduled-off day.[139] The work-related commitments contend with home and familial responsibilities such as raising children and taking care of household chores.

Strain results if officers struggle to fulfill one or both of those roles or fail to complete obligations altogether. Time-based spillover is a relatively common problem. In a survey of over 1,000 Baltimore police officers, an equal percentage of male and female officers (42%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I often get home too physically and emotionally exhausted to deal with my spouse/significant other."[140] Some evidence suggests that married workers more generally (not just police officers) and those with small children are most likely to experience work-home conflict due to the time-based demands associated with both roles.[141] In a study of police officers, Kurtz found this to be true among female officers only.[142]

A second source of work-home conflict is emotional in nature. Strains associated with the workplace produce a range of emotions. Cooper, Dewe, and O'Driscoll state that "these negative emotional reactions within the work environment can lead to expressions of irritability toward family members or withdrawal from family interactions to recuperate."[143] Emotional conflict emerges most commonly in everyday interactions. To examine the effects of workplace stress on marital communication, Roberts and Levenson recruited 19 married police couples to participate in a study.[144] Among other project-related tasks, the pairs were instructed to come to a lab having avoided communicating with one another for at least eight hours. They were then placed in a laboratory and videotaped for a 20-minute session. For the first five minutes, they were to sit silently. Afterwards, they were to discuss each other's day. Afterwards, both partners were given rating dials and asked to watch the video of the interaction, continuously scoring their feelings on a scale from extremely negative to extremely positive. Generally speaking, when the officer reported high levels of work stress (established via a survey before the lab session), both the husband and wife reported fewer positive emotional periods during the interaction. Reciprocity was also absent. Positive emotion by one party was less likely to be followed by positive emotion from the other when job stress was high. This lack of positive interaction potentially stifles the development or continuation of strong relationships. Noteworthy is the fact that spouses seemingly recognize workplace stress and try to mitigate its effect on relationships. They minimized displaying negative emotions, especially in response to the negative emotions of their officer partners. In other words, "this reflects an attempt by wives to improve the emotional climate of the interaction when they sense that their husbands have had a difficult day at work."[145] Elsewhere, Roberts and colleagues reported that officers similarly work to minimize hostility during interactions, even though they might be suffering from workplace strain.[146]

Finally, Greenhaus and Beutell suggest that behavioral incompatibilities may produce work-home conflict.[147] Specifically, behaviors appropriate in one realm (police work) may be wholly inappropriate in another (the home). Although suspiciousness and authoritarianism are potentially useful traits in policing, helping officers cope with the dangers they face, they are potentially problematic at home. Approximately three-quarters of Baltimore police officers acknowledged occasions in which family members were treated like suspects.[148] Roughly 60 percent of officers indicated that they expected to have the final say in how things are done at home. These types of behaviors likely conflict with expectations at home where "loving,

supportive, accommodating, and relationship-oriented [behaviors] may be considered essential to the development of positive family life."[149]

Despite the prevalence of stressors in the occupational environment of police officers and the potential for work-home conflict, divorce rates for police officers (14.5%) are actually lower than the national average (17%).[150] Keep in mind, however, that these divorce statistics are not necessarily indicators of the degree of workplace or work-home stress. They are simply indicators of marital dissolution disaggregated by the occupation of one of the parties involved.

Individual and Organizational Consequences

As noted earlier, the strains experienced by officers as a result of various stressors depend upon the primary appraisal process and certain moderating factors (e.g., social support, personality). When strains are actually recognized and felt, they extend into three domains: psychological, physiological, and behavioral.[151]

1. Psychological: Commonly reported psychological consequences include anxiety, boredom, confusion, depression, frustration, irritation, and loss of self-confidence.[152] Psychological strains are relatively common, especially among officers reporting high levels of stress. Over 70 percent of highly stressed Baltimore police officers surveyed in 1999 to 2000 reported symptoms of depression.[153] Other strains, including anxiety (65.9%) and posttraumatic stress (62.2%), were common as well. Officers reporting low stress experienced these strains at roughly half the rate (e.g., 34.1% of low stress officers reported anxiety). In a separate study, Collins and Gibbs assessed psychological well-being of a large sample of constables in the United Kingdom using the General Health Questionnaire.[154] The instrument asks questions such as "Have you been getting edgy and bad tempered?" and "Have you been getting scared or panicky for no good reason?"[155] Approximately 41 percent of officers crossed a threshold on the survey that would indicate they were at risk for the development of psychological disorders.[156]

2. Physiological: Symptoms include body aches and pains, high blood pressure, heart disease, headaches, ulcers, and fatigue.[157] As previously discussed, heart rates increase as a result of certain stressors (e.g., danger, activity).[158] Highly stressed police officers in Baltimore also reported heart disease (63.9%), migraine headaches (63.5%), chronic back pain (62.6%), and foot problems (61.9%).[159]

3. Behavioral: Kahn and Byosiere group behavior consequences into five broad categories: disruption of the work role (e.g., diminished job performance, accidents), aggressive work behavior (e.g., conflict, bullying), flight from the job (e.g., absenteeism, turnover), disruption of other life roles (e.g., spousal abuse), and self-damaging behaviors (e.g., alcohol/drug use, accidents).[160] Roughly one-third of the highly stressed Baltimore officers reported aggression (69.2%), intimate partner violence (68.8%), and alcoholism (60.4%).[161] Domestic or intimate partner violence is one manifestation of behavioral strain. In their review of the existing research, Johnson, Todd, and Subramanian noted wide variation in reported prevalence rates; some studies suggest that officer-perpetrated domestic violence is quite low while others suggest that as many as 40 percent of all officers "had lost control and behaved violently toward their spouse."[162] In their own

study of 413 officers in two large police departments, the authors found a link between spousal violence ("out of control and behaved violently toward spouse") and burnout. Specifically, the job-related exposure to violence (a task-related stressor) increased burnout that was then directly related to violent actions toward a spouse. It was the stress of the job, not the job itself, that affected family relationships.

The organization as a whole also experiences the effects of workplace stress and burnout. Strained or burned-out workers are frequently absent, lack commitment to the work, suffer diminished performance, disrupt operations, and/or leave the workplace altogether (turnover).[163] It is therefore critical for organizations to formulate strategies to successfully address the sources of strain and aid individuals in coping with stressors.

Coping with Stress and Burnout

Once a threat or challenge is recognized (primary appraisal), individuals look for ways to manage stressors and mitigate strains.[164] A single classification method is lacking, but many scholars group coping behavior into two categories: emotion-focused and problem-focused.[165] **Emotion-focused coping** includes attempts to endure emotional strains, suppress or vent feelings (e.g., cry, exercise), or redefine the situation as less threatening (e.g., other things to worry about).[166] In contrast, **problem-focused coping** is specifically intended to remedy the strain-causing situation. Individuals may seek out information in order to alleviate the problem, develop a plan of action, or gain something positive from the situation.[167] Lazarus and Folkman argue that emotion-focused coping is more likely to occur when a strained individual believes nothing can be done to address the stressor itself.[168]

These two categories emerge in studies of police officers, but they do not seem to capture the full range of coping behaviors. Beehr, Johnson, and Nieva asked a sample of police officers in two cities to identify probable coping behaviors in response to one of two vignettes: a supervisor blaming the officer for some action (work-related) or a family placing demands on the officer at the end of a bad work shift (home-related).[169] Officers reported approximately the same frequency of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping behaviors (4.67 vs. 4.56 on a 7-point scale ranging from *never* to *always*). In addition, the authors found two other types of coping behaviors: **religiosity** and rugged individualism. Although not as common as problem- or emotion-focused coping, many officers did report looking to God, praying, or meditating to deal with job-related stressors (religiosity). A similar pattern was found among Baltimore police officers. Approximately one-third of officers relied upon their faith as a coping strategy.[170] Some officers asserted their own individualism, ensuring that they are not pushed around. Beehr, Johnson, and Nieva argued that these additional strategies are not easily placed into either of the two original coping mechanisms and are perhaps deserving of greater attention.[171]

Gershon and colleagues further distinguished between negative or maladaptive coping strategies and positive or adaptive strategies.[172] Although smoking and alcohol

consumption are commonly viewed as emotion-focused coping mechanisms, they are considered maladaptive since "stress intensity would likely increase rather than decrease, and the outcomes could result in poorer mental health and well-being."[173] For example, 68.7 percent of Baltimore police officers identified themselves as drinkers of alcoholic beverages.[174] Officers were also asked about three problem drinking behaviors: worrying about alcohol consumption, drinking more than planned, and not remembering actions after drinking. More than half (54.8%) of those who identified themselves as drinkers reported at least one problem behavior; over 6 percent acknowledged all three problems. Strain and maladaptive coping are sometimes confused with one another.[175] Swatt, Gibson, and Piquero's work disentangles the relationship between these concepts.[176] Work-related stressors (e.g., experiencing a needle stick injury, making a violent arrest) contributed to anger, anxiety, and depression (strains), with the latter predictive of both drinking prevalence and problematic alcohol consumption (maladaptive coping).

Suicide is similarly a negative coping response to distress. In spite of the widespread belief that suicide rates are abnormally high in policing compared to other occupations, the data suggest otherwise. Marzuk et al. determined that police suicide rates in New York City from 1977 through 1996 were actually lower than the rates for the city's population as a whole.[177] Similarly, Stack and Kelly found similar rates across 16 states.[178] Hem, Berg, and Ekeberg reviewed the US and international literature on police and suicide and found little recent evidence that police rates are higher than nonpolice rates.[179] These findings notwithstanding, suicide is still a concern within law enforcement circles. The combination of chronic and acute stressors is particularly salient. As Chae and Boyle stated, "Low level stressors punctuated by emotionally intense experiences increase risk for suicidal ideation."[180] The organization then must facilitate an environment that addresses stress and helps individuals cope with strain.

Addressing Stress and Burnout

There is little doubt that police leaders recognize the significance of occupational stress. Many organizations have implemented programs or strategies to facilitate individual coping or improve employee health. These efforts, while valuable, are also misguided. As Stinchcomb summarized,

> [Law enforcement agencies] have tended to view stress as an *individual disorder* rather than an *organizational dysfunction*. That means attacking stress as a problem of personal adjustment, and therefore placing accountability on individual employees.[181]

Consequently, **primary interventions** that specifically target the sources of stress (including organizational stressors) are relatively uncommon.[182] Potential strategies include shift length and shift rotation changes to improve morale but reduce fatigue, organizational redesigns that empower lower-level employees and decentralize decision-making, and conflict resolution procedures to ensure strong work

relationships. Other recommendations are designed to reduce work-home conflict. Webb and Smith stated that these strategies—family ride-alongs, orientations, and counseling sessions—are intended to help family members better understand the nature of the police role, potentially limiting conflict during off-duty hours.[183]

Secondary interventions do little to change the presence of the stressor. Instead, the emphasis is on the individual's interpretation or appraisal process. Cooper writes, "The implicit assumption is that the organization will not change but will continue to be stressful; therefore, the individual has to develop and strengthen his/her resistance to that stress."[184] Even recommendations focused on better recruitment and selection fit this category. The organization's workforce presumably becomes more resilient to the unchanged job demands. **Tertiary interventions** provide aid once strains become manifest. If individuals suffer some adverse consequence as a result of a stressor (e.g., heart disease, drug/alcohol use, etc.), then programs should be available to assist employees.

Many departments offer secondary or tertiary interventions to their employees. A 1980s survey of over 200 municipal and state police organizations revealed widespread use of psychological services within police agencies.[185] More than half of responding agencies used psychologists to counsel officers regarding job-related stress, and most departments (78.5%) recognized the need. A sizeable portion of agencies also offered counseling to officers regarding family problems (52.3%) and provided services to the families of officers (41.47%). The counseling can work to minimize felt strains (secondary intervention) or alleviate harm once strains emerge (tertiary interventions). Of course, these psychologists also served other duties within departments including, but not limited to, screening new recruits, providing crisis intervention, assisting in hostage negotiations, and developing psychological profiles for criminal investigations.

Physical fitness programs represent both secondary and tertiary interventions. They work to minimize or prevent some of the ill effects of job strain (e.g., heart disease, high blood pressure) and "exercise is more often recommended as means of alleviating tension, anxiety, depression, and the like."[186] More than half of state police organizations (55%) offer fitness programming to employees, but seldom is on-duty exercise time provided or fitness incentives offered.[187] Exercise facilities are not always available in decentralized district or regional buildings. Counseling services, a tertiary intervention available once strains become evident, are available in many organizations. Alcohol and drug-treatment programming is available in 71 percent of state police organizations.[188] New Jersey created the COP-2-COP counseling program, a hotline for officers and their families dealing with stress.[189] The service is staffed by volunteer retired officers who, during the first half-decade of the hotline's existence, fielded over 18,000 calls.

Two initiatives illustrate both the promise and perils of comprehensive stress intervention programming. One of the Australian state police services established the Healthstart program in 2002 as an early intervention program.[190] Participating officers would undergo physical and psychological assessments under the direction of a Healthstart team. Confidential results are given to officers, along with referrals to other

service providers when necessary. Although participants noted some improvements in their overall health (e.g., reduced cholesterol, better fitness), they reaffirmed a common criticism of organizational interventions—they rarely focus on the organizational sources of stress (primary interventions).

Deisinger reviewed the Law Enforcement Assistance and Development (LEAD) program, a collaboration between three rural Iowa law enforcement agencies and mental health personnel.[191] The range of services offered was extensive: a crisis assistance hotline, critical incident debriefings (i.e., after exposure to child abuse situations), officer and family counseling, stress and health education programming, comprehensive programming from recruitment through the postretirement period, mandatory counseling (e.g., three consultations in first year of employment), and outreach efforts. One particular activity falls under the heading of *social norming*. If officers believed that most colleagues disliked their jobs and management, morale suffered. This was, however, an erroneous perception. LEAD program staff members tried to create a more favorable work environment by providing feedback on work-related attitudes. Overall, the program improved officer assessments of their own health and quality of life; moreover, families benefited greatly from LEAD services.[192] Unfortunately, the program suffered from funding issues. It was costly, and the participating agencies were not able to sustain it on their own. This is a caution for other departments interested in similar comprehensive programming.

Regardless of the program, encouraging officers to take advantage of services is often a difficult endeavor. Officers remained skeptical of the Healthstart program's operations, expressing worry that the screening results would somehow be used against them. As the study's authors suggest, "It is interesting to note that the main obstacle to participation in the programme may be the very issue that causes occupational stress in the first place, viz. a lack of trust in management intentions and motives."[193] Without addressing chronic stressors, even more comprehensive programming may produce less-than-stellar results. In other cases, officers are simply concerned about how their own use of services would appear to others. According to one Texas police officer,

> Pride and fear get in the way of many officers reaching out for help when it comes to personal struggles. We are viewed by the community and each other as tough individuals that should be able to handle just about anything. Personally, I reached out for counseling when I felt like there was no other option left.[194]

An officer recommended restricting the ability of management or the court to view counseling-related records. Increasing service utilization likely depends on preserving true confidentiality.

All three intervention types are necessary for police organizations to create a resilient workforce, one that has "the ability to rebound after adversity."[195] This requires a recognition that reducing the harms associated with stressors takes more than addressing them after they have already emerged. Organizations must be willing to alter from within, tackling some of the chronic stressors that are salient to many officers.

YOUR TURN . . .

This chapter should leave no doubt that police officers confront various stressors during the course of their work. As discussed, many of these stressors are enduring aspects of organizational life, linked to management, worker roles, and work-family conflict. Others, like disasters, occur infrequently. These events, triggered by human action, technology, or nature, are typically large and disruptive with substantial negative consequences.[196] Examples of disasters include the 9/11 terrorist attacks, 1992 Los Angeles riots, 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill, 1989 San Francisco earthquake, and 2012 Superstorm/Hurricane Sandy. First responders (police, fire, ambulance) often play a major role in disaster response, including search and rescue, protection, and recovery. For example, officers in Scotland served a critical role in recovering and identifying many of the 167 individuals killed in the 1988 explosion of the Piper Alpha oil rig off the United Kingdom coast. According to Alexander and Wells, many of the bodies were still missing several months after the disaster, having been lost in a part of the rig's structure.[197] After this portion of the rig was retrieved and brought to land, officers assumed responsibility for body handling during the recovery process:

> The accommodation module, about the size of a three storey hotel, was a dangerous and unpleasant environment to search [by police officers]. Seventy-three bodies were successfully recovered; not surprisingly, many were in very poor condition. They were taken to a temporary mortuary on the outskirts of Aberdeen. There, another group of police officers stripped, washed, and photographed the bodies, and aided the team of local pathologists in the post mortems.[198]

The officers indicated afterward that the work was more stressful than typical police work. In fact, exposure to disasters is linked with a wide range of negative outcomes or strains, including PTSD and depression.[199]

Officers within the New Orleans Police Department similarly experienced disaster-related stressors when Hurricane Katrina slammed the Gulf Coast region in 2005. The storm, a Category 3 hurricane by the time it struck Louisiana on Monday, August 29 (though, at one point, a Category 5 storm), brought with it winds and a storm surge of at least 18 feet.[200] The heavy rains and water moving into the areas surrounding New Orleans would ultimately breach the city's levee system and produce massive flooding (see Photo 8.1).[201] The storm was devastating for the city and police department tasked with search, rescue, evacuation, and curtailing purported acts of violence and looting. The department's efforts to fulfill this complex mission were hampered by a multitude of challenges: flooded police buildings, damaged equipment, limited number of boats, and weakened personnel resources.[202]

New Orleans officers suffered immensely; the officers were supposed to help others, but they were victims of the storm themselves. According to Brinkley, 890 officers in one of the largest police departments in the country lost their homes and another 400 were trapped.[203] In one case,

> Sergeant Michael Levassier had stayed in New Orleans East to take care of his wife, who was recovering from breast cancer surgery; a seven-year-old daughter; and his mother with Alzheimer's disease. "The roof just came off my house," [he told the deputy chief]. "I saw a body just float by my house." Nevertheless, once the Coast Guard rescued the family, Levassier voluntarily reported for duty to save others stuck in the deluge."[204]

The strain associated with the work proved too much for some. A number of officers committed suicide, while roughly 200 turned in their badges or abandoned their posts altogether.[205] In making the announcement that officers were resigning, the New Orleans Police Department's superintendent stated, "They lost everything . . . and they didn't feel it was worth taking fire from looters and losing their lives."[206] The department's image was further tarnished by media reports of internal disarray after Katrina. People knew of the suicides, defections, and reports of officers partaking in looting.[207]

Officers attempted to cope with the strains in different ways. Many acknowledged relying on communications with fellow officers, while others exhibited detachment (e.g., considered it a job

Photo 8.1 Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans and other areas of the Gulf Coast and affected the first responders involved in rescue and recovery.

SOURCE: Marty Bahamonde/FEMA, https://www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/images/45880.

that had to be done, did not think about it).[208] The storm still exacted a toll on officers. Eight weeks after Hurricane Katrina made landfall, 31 percent of the 912 members of the NOPD surveyed reported symptoms of depression or PTSD.[209] These symptoms were more common among officers who experienced personal challenges during the storm (e.g., uninhabitable home, injured family member, limited contact with family). The nature of the work assignment during and after the storm also mattered. For instance, officers who suffered an assault or were responsible for recovery of bodies were more likely to report PTSD symptoms.

1. Waters and Ussery point out that NOPD officers were caught between two oaths: "to protect and serve" and "to love, honor, and obey."[210] If you were an officer in New Orleans in August and September 2005, how would you have simultaneously handled your commitments to your work and family?

2. An officer in New Orleans received permission from supervisors to evacuate his sick wife as Hurricane Katrina approached. He expected to return in a matter of days, but the hunt for a place to stay after the flooding kept him away for nearly a month. Consequently, he was considered a deserter.[211] Assume you are the department's superintendent. Would you permit the officer to retain his job? Why or why not?

3. Are aspiring police officers well informed about the diverse responsibilities that they may be called upon to handle? In other words, even if officers expect law enforcement and service responsibilities, do you believe they understand the roles they might serve in the event of a disaster?

Key Terms

acute stressors

burnout

career plateau

chronic stressors

emotion-focused coping

primary appraisal

primary intervention

problem-focused coping

religiosity

secondary appraisal

secondary intervention

sexual harassment

shift work

social support

split-second syndrome

strain

stress

stressors

tertiary intervention

tokens

workplace bullying

Discussion Questions

1. This chapter reinforced the idea that individuals interpret stressors differently. For any one officer, does the primary appraisal process remain constant for the duration of a career? In other words, are factors that are deemed stressful early in one's career equally stressful later in one's career? Explain. Which of the five broad categories of stressors discussed in this chapter is most susceptible to seeing change in intensity (the primary appraisal process) over a career?

2. Most female police officers report experiencing some form of harassing behavior—gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and/or sexual coercion—during their careers, even if they refrain from specifically labeling the conduct as *sexual harassment*. Why, if these behaviors are so prevalent, do those who suffer from them avoid acknowledging them as sexual harassment? Are they simply tolerated or accepted? Are they not within an individual's legal understanding of sexual harassment? Are they not viewed as harassing at all (e.g., jokes viewed as funny rather than inappropriate)?

3. Research suggests that officers are sometimes reluctant to seek stress-reduction services due to the image it conveys to others. How can police departments convince officers that their anonymity will be preserved? In addition, how can the culture of policing be changed so that those who seek help are not perceived as weak?

Web Resources

Cop2Cop: Site of organization providing mental health and suicide prevention services to law enforcement officers: http://ubhc.rutgers.edu/cop2cop/main.htm

Law Enforcement Peer Support Network: Group of officers in Philadelphia area who assist other officers in need; several resources are available on stress management, PTSD, and suicide prevention: http://lepsn.org/

Wives Behind the Badge: Organization devoted to providing support to law enforcement families (e.g., support forums, scholarships): http://www.wivesbehindthebadge.org/