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OFFICER WELLBEING, SATISFACTION AND COMMITMENT: JOB CONDITIONS OF AUSTRALIAN LAW ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL

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Abstract
Excessive job stress caused by unreasonably high employer demands, low control over one's own work and limited support can have far-reaching effects for the individual, organisation and community. The present study sought to investigate the relationship between officer working conditions and their self-reported levels of wellbeing, satisfaction and commitment using a well-known job stress model, the demand-control-support (DCS) model. Using a large (N = 2085) sample of law enforcement personnel, findings indicated that social support from work sources was the best predictor, whilst job control and workload both had significant influences on levels of employee wellbeing, satisfaction and commitment. Additionally, non-linear relationships were found between workload and wellbeing and satisfaction, indicating that both high and low levels of workload can produce negative outcomes. The results have implications for job design and management training programs, particularly in reference to social support training and workload models.

Introduction
Over the past two decades new public management (NPM) reforms have been increasingly introduced into public agencies. These reforms have restructured public sector management strategies and ultimately aim to increase accountability and produce a commercially-oriented and entrepreneurial mind-set (Osborne and Gaebler 1992; Kearney and Hays 1998). Police reforms that have been introduced and re-introduced throughout the past twenty years have been vehemently opposed by members of the various police organisations and their associated unions (Fleming & Lafferty, 2000). Blind adoption of these private sector policies without critical analysis of the police role has been blamed for a range of negative and unintended consequences (Fleming & Rhodes, 2004; Vickers & Kouzmin, 2007). The evidence that NPM reforms have severely impacted on public sector employees is growing, of significance is the increase in work stress across all public agencies and, particularly within police organisations. There are numerous and ongoing disputes about the dangerously high levels of stress within Australian police agencies due to rising workloads and the continuous changes to guidelines, rules and policies. A recent NSW police association media release called for an inquiry into the levels of stress within the NSW police force, stating that of the 418 officers who left the force in the past year due to medical reasons, 60% were as a result of psychological injuries (PANSW, 2007). Similarly, the Western Australian Police Union's General President has recently criticised the Western Australian Police for their inflexible rostering systems, inadequate work and living arrangements and poor management styles that focus on militarism which are all impacting on the retention and recruitment of sworn officers (Dean, 2007). The present study aimed to examine working conditions within an Australian law enforcement agency using a well-known job stress model, the demand-control-support model.

Stress and Law Enforcement
Work stress has become increasingly problematic for both workers and organisations. Excessive strain from work sources has been attributed to worker burnout (Burke & Mikkelson, 2006), poor mental health and mental disorders (Bromet, et al. 1988; Fillon et al., 2007), absenteeism (Verhaeghe, et al., 2003) and physical health problems (Hammar, Alfredsson, & Johnson, 1998). It is estimated that 12.8 million working days were lost in the 2004/2005 working year where UK workers experienced stress, anxiety and depression which was either caused or exacerbated by work (Health Services Executive, 2006). In that same
year, the U.S. department of labor reported that over 50% of stress claims resulted in the employee taking 31 days or more away from work (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005). Work-related stress claims across Australia have also become more frequent, with the Victorian Workcover Authority (2006) reporting a 20% increase in the number of stress claims between 1995 and 2005. Many workers are likely to experience the negative impacts of excessive strain at some point in their careers however, certain occupational groups such as law enforcement appear to be at a greater risk (Kop, Euwema, & Schaufeli, 1999).

Police work has been identified as a demanding and stressful occupation where the risks to employee mental and physical health can be great (Johnson et al., 2005; Liberman et al., 2002).

Previous research indicates that high levels of work stress among law enforcement personnel is associated with a range of negative outcomes including reduced physical and mental health (Burke & Mikkelson, 2006; Kirkcaldy, Cooper, & Ruffalo, 1995), declining job satisfaction (Norvell, Belles, & Hills, 1998), low levels of organisational commitment (Jaramillo, Nixon, & Sams, 2005) and higher absenteeism (Tang & Hammontree, 1992). Research examining the sources of this stress has also found that stressors relating to how work is organised (e.g. employee input into decision making) and the methods for managing people (e.g. leadership styles) are better predictors of stress than stressors relating to operational duties (e.g. attending crime scenes) (Biggam, Power, & MacDonald, 1997; Violanti & Aron, 1997).

Studies identifying antecedents to police stress, and its subsequent consequences, are immensely valuable, however a key shortcoming is that these studies have largely looked at stressors assumed to have linear relationships with the outcome variables and acting independently of each other. Very few studies have considered potentially non-linear relationships between variables or the interactional effects of certain conditions. One model that has been found to capture the effects of multiple job stressors and, at the same time, also account for large portions of variance in job stressors is the Demand-Control-Support (DCS) model (see below). The DCS model is a parsimonious work stress model that has been applied successfully to a range of occupations (for a review see De Lange, et al. 2003) however, as of yet there is little evidence of it being applied to law enforcement agencies. One study used the demand-control framework (without support) to examine cardiovascular responses of male patrol officers in Asia (Bishop et al., 2003). Specifically, the researchers found that there were significant interactions between the demand and control measures, where high demand and low control conditions were associated with elevated heart rates and increased myocardial oxygen demand (both indicators of the development of coronary heart disease). In the present study we aim to expand research within the law enforcement arena and examine the effects of the full DCS model. Further, we will add to a growing body of literature by investigating whether linear and non-linear relationships exist between the DCS variables and officer wellbeing, satisfaction and commitment.

The Demand-Control (Support) Model of Work Stress
The Demand-Control-Support (DCS) model of work stress has been successfully applied to work stress research since its conception by Karasek in 1979. Originally the DCS consisted of two elements, job demands and decision latitude/control, which interacted to influence worker’s experiences of stress and ill health. Job demands refers to workload pressures felt by the employee whereas job decision latitude refers to the amount of control an employee has over their completion of tasks throughout the day. Later this model was expanded to allow for the buffering effect of social support (Johnson & Hall, 1988; Karasek, Triantis, & Chaudhry, 1982).
This expanded model posits that levels of stress are directly related to the relationship between demands placed on the employee and the resources (i.e. control and support) available to them. Accordingly, 'high strain' positions are characterised by high workloads in combination with low decision latitude and/or isolation from the support of supervisors and colleagues. Workers who are employed in high strain positions are more likely to suffer from a range of work and health-related problems such as cardiovascular disease (Johnson & Hall, 1988), poor psychological and physical wellbeing (Muhonen & Torkelson, 2003), heart attack (Hammar et al., 1998), low commitment and satisfaction (Dollard, et al. 2000; Shaubrock & Fink, 1998) and even alcohol-related problems (Bromet et al., 1988). Lower levels of strain would be expected in ‘low strain’ positions characterised by the combination of low demands and high control/support. Two hypotheses are reached from the combination of these variables, the additive hypothesis and interaction hypotheses.

Generally, support for the demand × control × support interaction hypothesis of the DCS model is limited, although main effects of the DCS variables are consistently reported. One aspect of the model that is underrepresented in the job stress research, however, is the non-linear relationship between the dependent and independent variables. Where direct effects have been reported, it is often assumed that these effects are linear (Rydstedt et al., 2006). That is, the impact of the work characteristic increases in proportion the magnitude of the characteristic. In contrast, there is evidence suggesting that an under or over-supply of a particular working condition can harm health (De Jonge et al., 2000; Warr, 1990; Xie & Johns, 1995). While there are firm signs that a non-linear relationship may provide additional predictive power over the linear model, this support is not universal and greater clarity on the relationship between work characteristics and employee-level outcomes is required (De Jonge & Kompier, 1997; Jeurissen & Nyklíček, 2001).

The purpose of the present study is to apply the DCS model to a large sample of law enforcement personnel to test the interaction and additive hypotheses on the health and organisational/productivity outcomes; wellbeing, job satisfaction and organisational commitment. Additionally, testing for both linear and non-linear relationships between the DCS variables and these employee-level outcomes provides a unique contribution to the literature and can enhance our understandings of how work and job design impacts on officer health and wellbeing.

Method

Participants

The study sample consisted of operational staff from a state law enforcement agency within Australia. Whilst the agency employed both operational and non-operational staff, for the purposes of this study only operational staff were included. All operational employees were invited to participate (N = 5794; after taking into account the 685 employees on leave for 20 to 30 days during the survey period). A copy of the questionnaire along with a covering letter from the police chief commissioner was sent to potential participant’s work addresses. Employees were requested to complete the questionnaire and return it in the supplied reply-paid envelope to the researchers. A total of 2085 operational employees returned their questionnaires, representing a response rate of 36%. To summarise the demographic characteristics of the sample, the majority were male (81%) and were aged between 30-49 (72%). Half of the respondents reported that their highest level of education was secondary school, whilst a quarter reported that a tertiary degree or diploma was the highest level they attained. There was a relatively even spread in terms of tenure when grouped into three
categories (9 years or less, 10-19 years and 20 years or more) with almost a third of respondents in each category.

The demographic characteristics of the sample were similar to the population characteristics. Specifically, 75% were male, 69% were aged between 30-49, and 40%, 32%, and 28% had been with the organisation for 9 years or less, 10 to 19 years or 20 plus years respectively.

Measures

The questionnaire used in this study consisted of three sections. The first section included scales to address the outcome variables, wellbeing, job satisfaction and organisational commitment. Both wellbeing and job satisfaction are the most common foci of research within this field, however in order to assess the impact of new public management on officers a broader set of outcomes is useful. Organisational commitment in particular is a valuable outcome measure to address broader employee attitudes and behaviours. Organisational commitment has strong links as an antecedent to a range of other outcomes such as burnout (Lee & Henderson, 1996) and absenteeism (Somers, 1995). Importantly, organisational commitment may have greater managerial utility in that decreasing levels of commitment can signal that there may be greater problems developing.

The second section addressed the predictor variables, job control, job demands and support from work sources, whilst the third section required respondents to supply basic demographic information.

Wellbeing. Wellbeing was measured using the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ 12), developed by Goldberg and Williams (1988). The focus of the scale is on a break in normal functioning. The twelve items were answered on a four point likert scale of the items ranging from ‘More so than usual’ (3) to ‘Much less than usual’ (0), and the remaining six items ranging from ‘Not at all’ (0) to ‘Much more than usual’ (3). Higher scores on the GHQ 12 indicate higher levels of wellbeing.

Job Satisfaction. Job Satisfaction was measured using a scale developed by Warr, Cook and Wall (1979). The scale consisted of fifteen items that measures the degree to which respondents reported global satisfaction with their job. Respondents were required to rate the degree to which they were satisfied with specific elements of their job (e.g. the physical work environment, prospects for promotion) on a seven-point scale, ranging from ‘Extremely satisfied’ (1) to ‘Extremely dissatisfied’ (7). After reverse-coding the fifteen items they were summed to create an overall job satisfaction score, with higher scores associated with higher levels of job satisfaction.

Organisational (Affective) Commitment. Research has identified that organisational commitment can take various forms. Only one form of commitment (affective) was used for the purposes of this study as it has been shown to have the most relevance to employee stress and performance outcomes (Luchak & Gellatly, 2007; Meyer, et al., 2002). Affective commitment was measured using 8 items taken from the commitment scales developed by Allen and Meyer (1990). Respondents rated each item on a five-point scale, ranging from ‘Disagree strongly’ to ‘Agree strongly’, according to their degree of commitment to the organisation. After reverse-coding the negatively oriented items, they were summed to form an affective commitment score, with high scores indicating high levels of commitment.

Job Control. Job control was measured using a nine-item scale designed by Karasek (1985). Respondents were required to record their answers on a five-point likert scale ranging from
‘Strongly disagree’ (1) to ‘Strongly agree’ (5), with high scores indicating high levels of job control.

**Job Demands.** Job demands were measured using a quantitative workload scale developed by Caplan and colleagues (1975). The scale assesses both physical and psychological demands and consists of eleven items measuring the amount of work performed by the employee and the pace that it is performed at. Responses were recorded on a five-point likert scale ranging from ‘Rarely’ (1) to ‘Very often’ (5). High scores on the scale indicate high job demands.

**Support from Work Sources.** Social support from within the organisation was measured using a scale developed by Etzion (1984). The scale contained eight items, one of which required three responses relating to three specific roles in the respondents work environment (i.e. their supervisor, their co-workers and their subordinates). Responses were recorded on a seven-point likert scale ranging from ‘Very little’ (1) to ‘Very much’ (7), with high scores indicating high levels of social support.

**Results**

Prior to analyses the data were screened for univariate and multivariate outliers and assessed for violations of assumptions for the multiple regression analyses (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). The evaluation of these assumptions indicated that the data met all requirements. In order to analyse the effects of the demographic variables these variables were dummy coded according to the procedure outlined in Tabachnick and Fidell (2001). Descriptive statistics, reliabilities and correlations are presented below in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>α</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Wellbeing</td>
<td>22.80</td>
<td>6.09</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Job Satisfaction</td>
<td>69.22</td>
<td>13.95</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.47**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Affective Commitment</td>
<td>26.56</td>
<td>5.35</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.21**</td>
<td>0.45**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Demand (Centred)</td>
<td>41.34</td>
<td>6.59</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>-0.25**</td>
<td>-0.30**</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Control (Centred)</td>
<td>32.32</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.18**</td>
<td>0.46**</td>
<td>0.35**</td>
<td>0.07**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Support at Work (Centred)</td>
<td>39.01</td>
<td>9.96</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.40**</td>
<td>0.69**</td>
<td>0.39**</td>
<td>-0.19**</td>
<td>0.33**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. **p<.01

Table (1) Descriptive statistics, reliabilities and correlations among the study variables

**Hierarchical Regression Analyses**

Hierarchical multiple regressions were performed for each of the outcome measures (wellbeing, job satisfaction and affective commitment). Blocks of independent variables were entered in the order of: (1) demographic variables, (2) the DCS variables, (3) squared job demands, workload and support, and (4) the interaction terms. The squared variables and the interaction terms were used to allow for non-linear relationships and moderated effects, respectively. The DCS variables and their subsequent quadratic and interaction terms were centered prior to inclusion in the regression analyses in order to minimise the problems associated with multicollinearity. Results of the regression analyses are presented in Table 2.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Wellbeing</th>
<th>Job Satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender - Male</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age - 29 years or less</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age - 30 to 39</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age - 40 to 49</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure - 9 years or less</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure - 10 to 19 years</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td>.04*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demand centred</td>
<td>-0.18</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control centred</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support at work</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3</td>
<td>.54*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demand centred²</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control centred²</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support at work centred²</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 4</td>
<td>.01*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demand centred × Control centred</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demands centred × Support centred</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control centred × Support centred</td>
<td>-0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demand centred × Support centred</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (2) Summary of hierarchical regression analyses for variables predicting wellbeing, job satisfaction.

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The results of the multiple regression analyses in Table 2 indicate that the demographic variables account for significant, but relatively small amounts of variance in all three outcome variables, with 4% for job satisfaction, 3% for wellbeing and 2% for affective commitment. The DCS variables in the second step accounted for much larger amounts of variance, ranging from 19% and 20% for wellbeing and affective commitment respectively, and 54% for job satisfaction. Although the next step, with job demands, job control and support squared was significant for job satisfaction and wellbeing, these variables contributed only 1% to the model overall. The final step, which included the interaction terms, was not significant for any of the regression models. Overall the model used in this study accounted for a significant amount of variance in the outcome measures wellbeing (R²adj = 0.23, F (16, 1789) = 31.939, p< .001), job satisfaction (R²adj = 0.59, F (16, 1737) = 157.47, p<.001) and affective commitment (R²adj = 0.22, F (16, 1790) = 33.20).

All three DCS variables were predictive of the three outcome variables. Higher levels of control and support were associated with higher levels of wellbeing, satisfaction and affective commitment. Conversely, low levels of demand were associated with high levels of wellbeing and job satisfaction with the higher-order analyses indicating that there were non-linear aspects to these relationships (see Step 3 in Table 2 – demands²). A further, unexpected, finding was that high demands were associated with high levels of affective commitment.

Discussion

New public management reforms and workplace changes within Australian public agencies have generally focused on management strategies and performance targets that can be measured quantitatively (O’Donnell & Allan, 1999). The resulting workplace has meant that public sector employees are working more intensively than ever before, and are experiencing greater levels of stress (O’Donnell & Allan, 1999). Their satisfaction with their jobs and their supervisors have declined and there is greater imbalance between work and family life (O’Donnell & Allan, 1999). Organised labour in Australia has a significant. This study used the demand-control-support model of work stress to examine the relationships between current police working conditions and their overall wellbeing, job satisfaction and organisational commitment. The results indicate that the additive model of the DCS is a useful framework for examining officer’s attitudes towards their employer organisation as well as their levels of psychological wellbeing. Unlike previous job stress research involving law enforcement personnel, the present research sought to examine both the additive and interactional effects of support, control and demand. The results of the regression analyses indicated that the additive hypothesis of the DCS model was strongly supported. All three components of the DCS were significantly associated with the outcome variables. Support at work was the strongest predictor, with higher levels of support correlating with higher levels of commitment, satisfaction and wellbeing. Similarly, job control was positively related to the outcome variables. Specifically, higher levels of commitment, satisfaction and wellbeing were related to higher levels of job control.

Analyses for the main effect of job demands indicated that there was a negative relationship between workload and wellbeing and satisfaction. However, the higher order analyses indicated that there was an inverse-U relationship between workloads and, officer satisfaction and wellbeing. Specifically, the result suggests that officers who reported either excessively low or excessively high levels of workload were more likely to report dissatisfaction or lower wellbeing than those officers who fall in the middle ranges. Interestingly, the relationship between job demands and affective commitment did not follow the same pattern. Whilst a positive association between demands and commitment was not expected, the affective
commitment scale measures employee involvement in, and subsequently commitment to, their organisation. The more involved an employee becomes, the more likely it is that their workloads will increase, due to the cross-sectional nature of the present research however, the exact nature of the relationship could not be determined.

To date the curvilinear aspects that are expected between the demand (and in fact control and support) measures and employee wellbeing have received varying degrees of support (Taris, 2006). Whilst the present research failed to find higher order effects for the control and support variables, the curvilinear relationship between workloads and the outcome variables suggests that additional research is needed to clarify this relationship. Whilst it was beyond the scope of the present research, future studies should consider the influence of various workload/demand measures that are selected and the effect that the occupation-type or participant pool (i.e. largely physical/largely administrative work or homogenous/heterogenous samples) has on the interpretation of the results and whether this may have lead to some of the inconsistencies in prior reports.

Implications

The strong influence of support from work sources in this study adds to a growing body of literature that finds social networks and resources at work essential in preventing adverse health outcomes (e.g. Oginska-Bulik, 2005) and improving satisfaction and commitment (e.g. Brough & Frame, 2004). Consistent with previous research using police samples, support is one of the highest rating factors to influence officer attitudes and behaviours (Baruch-Feldman, Brondolo, Ben-Dayan, & Schwartz, 2002; Brough & Frame, 2004). Strategies designed to enhance job control and social support should not be seen as separate initiatives that require independent action. Instead, efforts to improve job control and social support can be mutually reinforcing. The overall purpose of work-based social support is to provide individuals with advice, feedback or assistance that can help them tackle work problems. In the case of tight deadlines and work overload, peers or supervisors can help employees complete time-consuming tasks more efficiently and effectively by providing ideas and assistance. Feedback from supervisors can also give employees a clearer understanding of their work performance and what they need to do to achieve key objectives. Ultimately, high levels of support are a critical resource that can enable individuals to have greater control over their work. Just as social support can enhance job control, improvements in the level of job control can also boost worker support. For example, semi-autonomous work teams give people the opportunity to exchange ideas, obtain feedback, identify each other’s needs and share concerns. If properly designed and facilitated, such structures then increase opportunities for giving and receiving effective social support.

The curvilinear relationship between workloads, and wellbeing and satisfaction, indicates that managers of officers should recognise that whilst it is important for their subordinates to feel challenged by their work, it is equally important that these demands are not excessive. Recent changes to legislation (i.e., WorkChoices) covering the working conditions of law enforcement personnel has meant that job conditions are no longer secure and officers can now be asked to sign individual agreements that change their basic work arrangements. Policing has traditionally been one of the most highly unionised workplaces and they have been instrumental in creating and maintaining acceptable working conditions. The role of unions within this occupation will continue to have great importance. Current attempts by police unions to change or maintain working conditions such as the ‘12-hour rosters’ campaign (The Police Association Victoria, 2007; the campaign aims to give police in Victoria the choice to continue working 12-hour shifts which enable employees to balance their work and life commitments more effectively) run by The Police Association within

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Victoria are exactly the kinds of strategies and policies that should be embraced and can enable officers to organise their own work schedules and reduce their stress levels. Police organisations have historically shown resistance to focusing on the relatively ‘softer’ elements of work possibly due to the traditional command-and-control nature of police organisations however, structures and strategies such as those mentioned above are viable solutions to the needs of a police organisation and can be a practical solution to a complex issue.

Limitations
There are some limitations that should be addressed, namely the cross-sectional design of the research and the subjective nature of the data. Specifically, a longitudinal design would allow for greater understanding regarding the nature of the relationship between stressor and outcome. The use of subjective reports of wellbeing, satisfaction and commitment can be troublesome especially within an organisational setting. Using objective data or multiple informants would have enhanced the validity of the findings. However, the consistency of the present study’s findings with previous research suggests that the officers’ responses were valid.

Conclusion
Overall the DCS model demonstrated good utility in predicting officer’s attitudes and wellbeing. Social support at work had the greatest influence on officer satisfaction, wellbeing and commitment, whilst control was also significantly associated with all three outcome variables. A non-linear relationship was found between workload, satisfaction and wellbeing, which indicated that both high and low workloads were associated with negative outcomes. The results have implications for the management of police officers and their working conditions, particularly in regards to the development of workload models, leadership and support programs. There is considerable potential for future studies to investigate the effect of additional moderator variables and to further validate the study’s findings with objective data.

References

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