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Determining the impact of trauma and daily organisational hassles on psychological distress and burnout in New Zealand police officers; and the moderating role of social support.

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Abstract

Throughout the course of their career police officers are exposed to traumatic events and work hassles. Work hassles which are minor irritating aspects of work, such as work overload, have been found to have a stronger association with pathogenic outcomes than traumatic events. Among police samples work hassles have been commonly studied in relation to psychological distress, and traumatic events have been commonly studied in relation to posttraumatic stress disorder and psychological distress. There have been fewer studies with burnout as an outcome, even though work hassles have been strongly associated with burnout in other occupations. Traumatic events are rarely studied in relation to burnout among police samples, even though they have been related to exhaustion, which is one of the core components of burnout. In relation to traumatic events and work hassles, social support has been found to have a moderating effect on both psychological distress and burnout. The moderating role of supervisor, colleague and family/friend social support was evaluated in this study, and an understanding of social support was further extended by exploratory research, which explored police officers preferences for sources of social support across different work events.

The sample in this study consisted of 603 New Zealand police officers from three separate districts, who completed a web based survey. Evaluated in this study was the impact of traumatic event exposure on psychological distress and burnout, and the impact of work hassles on psychological distress and burnout, along with the moderating role of social support. It was found that traumatic event exposure and work hassles were associated to psychological distress. Traumatic event exposure was associated to exhaustion, and work hassles were associated to exhaustion, cynicism and lower levels of professional efficacy. The

exploratory research found that police officers preferences for social support did change across events.

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Personal Statement

I (the principal researcher) am an ex sworn member of the New Zealand police, and a current police employee. I have worked for the New Zealand police for approximately 17 years in a variety of roles and I am making this disclosure as I am aware that some of my personal experiences and biases may have influenced this research.

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