

# Themis: Research Journal of Justice Studies and Forensic Science

---

Volume 6

Article 9


---

5-21-2018

## Officer-Involved Domestic Violence: The Mediating Factors

Isaac Baron  
*San Jose State University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/themis>

 Part of the [Criminology and Criminal Justice Commons](#), [Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence Commons](#), and the [Law Enforcement and Corrections Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Baron, Isaac (2018) "Officer-Involved Domestic Violence: The Mediating Factors," *Themis: Research Journal of Justice Studies and Forensic Science*: Vol. 6 , Article 9.  
Available at: <https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/themis/vol6/iss1/9>

This Peer-Reviewed Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Justice Studies at SJSU ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Themis: Research Journal of Justice Studies and Forensic Science by an authorized editor of SJSU ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@sjsu.edu](mailto:scholarworks@sjsu.edu).

---

# Officer-Involved Domestic Violence: The Mediating Factors

## **Abstract**

Domestic and family violence has been a critical issue in contemporary society. Efforts have been made in researching the causes, effects, and mediating factors of domestic violence in relation to the workplace. Studies demonstrate that a relationship between conflict crossing over from the work to the home environment exist. Additional studies demonstrate that domestic violence does affect the workplace; however, there is little to no scientific data on the reverse relationship. The reverse relationship regards whether the workplace affects the occurrence of domestic violence. This research paper will dive into this topic, and on the lack of data available. Supporting data will illustrate that factors from the workplace do affect the likelihood of domestic and/or family violence occurring in police families. Not considering or viewing police family violence as an effect of workplace factors is shortsighted, and it demonstrates the need for education on this topic. With new data, comes new policies and implications that are reconfigurations of the existing policies. There is a need to bring this subject to light, and in view of the law enforcement community.

## **Keywords**

police officers, law enforcement, domestic violence

## Officer-Involved Domestic Violence: The Mediating Factors

*Isaac Baron*

### **Abstract**

Domestic and family violence has been a critical issue in contemporary society. Efforts have been made in researching the causes, effects, and mediating factors of domestic violence in relation to the workplace. Studies demonstrate that a relationship between conflict crossing over from the work to the home environment exist. Additional studies demonstrate that domestic violence does affect the workplace; however, there is little to no scientific data on the reverse relationship. The reverse relationship regards whether the workplace affects the occurrence of domestic violence. This research paper will dive into this topic, and on the lack of data available. Supporting data will illustrate that factors from the workplace do affect the likelihood of domestic and/or family violence occurring in police families. Not considering or viewing police family violence as an effect of workplace factors is shortsighted, and it demonstrates the need for education on this topic. With new data, comes new policies and implications that are reconfigurations of the existing policies. There is a need to bring this subject to light, and in view of the law enforcement community.

## **Introduction**

Domestic and family violence encompasses a broad area of contemporary society; therefore, a large amount of effort should be in place to review issues of the police force that consequently affect day-to-day society. Stinson and Liederbach (2012) found that police family violence is an influential issue of law and society. Violence in police families extends from multiple factors which can include, but are not limited to: experiences out in the field, burnout from overwhelming stress, relationships between police officers and authority figures, and authoritarian spillover. Each of these factors has a unique contribution to increasing the likelihood of domestic and/or family violence in police officer families. In a job environment with as many potential stressors as law enforcement, there is a theoretical approach for stressors of the job to explain police family violence (Zavala, 2013). There is a theoretical structure present for more research in this topic.

Despite the aforementioned theoretical structure, there is little to no comprehensive or empirical data available in this area concluded from research that aims to discover any existing relationships. According to Stinson and Liederbach (2012), the government does not collect data on the criminal conviction of police officers for domestic and/or family violence crimes. We can deduce that the present problem is the lack of research, and resources devoted to examining factors that cause police family violence. There is some research that examines officer-involved domestic violence (OIDV), yet the right tools to measure the effects of the work environment are lacking while the need for research grows (Summerlin, Oehme, Stern & Valentine, 2010). This research paper will focus on providing statistical data on what factors from the work environment mediate the increased

likelihood of police officers committing acts of domestic or family violence.

### **Literature Review**

As previously mentioned, there is hardly any empirical, statistical, or comprehensive data regarding OIDV. These data point to a minute significance regarding OIDV; however, the data collection methods are flawed, and take away credibility to the meaning of the results. The prior methods used include self-report or self-administered surveys, but these are limiting due to the police officers trying to conceal acts of violence (Stinson & Liederbach, 2012). These actions arise from police officers' own incentive to protect their careers through a code of silence and not make their fallacies known (Cheema, 2016). If the current methods of data collection are collecting inaccurate data, then new methods that are not self-administered need to be implemented instead; thus, collected data can be unbiased, and can be interpreted effectively. This highlights the trend that OIDV is often not researched in an unbiased manner, and new reform in research is necessary (Cheema, 2016). From their extensive research, Stinson and Liederbach (2012) found that elements of police culture lead to a code of silence by discouraging any acknowledgment of these crimes. The combination of these factors provides the inaccurate data collected, and is the major flaw needed to be revised.

### **Police Family Violence Data**

Various new studies have provided researchers with more valid and credible data regarding the relationship between factors of the workplace, and violence in police families. This data is collected through an unbiased manner and is more credible. Multiple small studies done regarding correctional workers residing in the state of Florida utilize the McCreary and

Thompson questionnaire created in 2006. This method provides participants with specific questions, and their answers are graded on a one (no stress) to seven (high stress) scale (Summerlin et al., 2010). The studies found that in the population of correctional officers and police officers, domestic violence occurs at rates 40% greater than the public (2010). A study conducted of 479 officers from other Eastern states found that 60% of the spouses were victims of verbal abuse. This demonstrates that verbal abuse is an existing aspect of martial disputes (Johnson, Todd, & Subramanian, 2005).

Additional studies carried out examined the Baltimore police department between 1997 and 1999. Using proctor-administered surveys as the main method, two outside studies found that 40% of police families had experienced partner violence (Johnson, 1991 as cited in Anderson & Lo, 2011). The 1,104 participants of this study were all sworn, full-time law enforcement employees of the Baltimore P.D. Of the 1,104 officers, 9% of them admitted to losing control at home, and potentially engaging in acts of domestic violence against their respective intimate partners (Anderson & Lo, 2011). A significant correlation is visible in police officer family violence because they have more cases of domestic and/or family violence than families of the public. Taken from family violence statistics presented by the U.S Department of Justice, between 1998 and 2002, only 11% of reported violence was family violence, a minute statistic when compared to that of police families (BJS, 2005).

The body of research done by Stinson and Liederbach (2012) provides the greatest amount of empirical data on OIDV to date. Their research reviews incidents in which police officers were arrested for criminal offenses that were potential cases of

domestic violence. The crimes were collected from newspaper articles available to the public, and only crimes that met a standard of reliability were considered (Stinson & Liederbach, 2012). A 97.7% degree of reliability was established upon simple agreement between two coders across all variables of the study, which is above the considered reliable percentage (Stinson & Liederbach, 2012). The degree of reliability tells us that the cases studied are perceived in a less biased manner, and provide statistically consistent data. In total, 324 cases met the requirements, and were part of the research. Of the 324 cases, 74 occurred in 2005, 116 occurred in 2006, and the remaining 138 occurred in 2007. The significance of the data comes from the fact that 98.8% of the arrests were of off-duty officers. Out of the 312 OIDV victims: 104 were the current spouse of the officer, 71 were a child or stepchild of the officer, and the remaining were other relatives (2012). These results provide the major empirical data that has been lacking because it demonstrates a significant relationship in officer-involved domestic violence. They opened the door for the future research in this topic. Overall, Stinson and Liederbach (2012) call it a “fox in the henhouse problem” because victims have “nowhere to go, no way to escape, and very few people to protect them” (p. 616). If police officers are going to protect each other, then the victims are, in a sense, outnumbered and have nowhere to turn for help.

### **Mediating Factors Data**

Along with previous data that support the fact that there are significant amounts of officer-involved domestic violence in police families, many studies demonstrate the mediating factors that contribute to OIDV. A study conducted of 295 adults whom worked full-time in law enforcement, and were in serious relationships, proposed a relationship between work-home

conflict and domestic violence (Trachtenberg, Anderson & Sabatelli, 2009). Work-home conflict refers to an interaction between the personal, and professional life of a police officer in which one role merges into the other. Using online surveys, an indirect relationship between work-home conflict, and domestic violence show that work-related stressors spillover to the personal home life in domestic violence cases (Trachtenberg et al., 2009).

These findings are complementary with the social learning theory, which states that learning can occur through observation or direct contact. Observations police officers make from crimes they see occurring or from handling calls can subsequently spillover at home, and the negative actions can be copied. This is complementary to the study's findings that work issues negatively affect marital relationships via the spillover factor.

Some officers can find difficulty in turning off the job when they are off-duty, and at home. In a study done by Johnson and colleagues (2005) of 413 officers, four mediating factors were examined: burnout, authoritarianism, alcohol use, and job withdrawal. Authoritarianism refers to being a police officer at home by upholding the authority position like at work. Burnout and authoritarianism were deemed the two most significant out of the four mediational chains. In more detail: the indirect effect of exposure to violence on spouse violence with burnout as the sole mediator, the effect of exposure to violence on external burnout, the effect of external burnout on authoritarian spillover, and the effect of authoritarian spillover on spouse violence were of significant data (Johnson et al., 2005). These results support the hypothesis that some officers find it hard to turn off the job



when off-duty, as demonstrated in the mediational chain of authoritarian spillover.

The other significant mediating factor, burnout, is supported by the occupational stress theory. When individuals are unable to deal and cope with the stressors, and strains of a job or situation, they are illustrating burnout (Johnson et al., 2005). According to the occupational stress theory, stressors and strains define an occupational stress situation (Johnson et al., 2005). A chain is visible that demonstrates how burnout, and authoritarianism can spillover to personal life at home. Both burnout and authoritarianism are mediating factors present in the work environment of a police officer.

In conjunction with the results above, a study conducted by Anderson and Lo (2011) explored how stressful events on the job affect the likelihood of police officers committing domestic violent acts. The mediating variables of the study were negative emotions, and authoritarian spillover. Data collected from the Baltimore Police study between 1997 and 1999, support the mediating variables previously concluded by Johnson and colleagues (2005). Overall, Anderson and Lo (2011) saw a negative amount of spillover of occupational stress. Police officers are trained to exhibit dominance both physically and psychologically through various means: posture, verbal gestures, pushing, grabbing, etc. With the establishment of spillover as a mediating factor of OIDV, it is evident that police officer training can be a cause of intimate partner violence at home. This includes acts of yelling, grabbing, or pushing their partner as an immediate response due to their extensive training spilling over to home life.

According to the angry aggression theory, when police officers are regularly unable to address the source of their stress

directly, they may transfer their response to their personal lives in their intermediate environment (Griffin & Bernard, 2003). Combining this theory with the findings of Anderson & Lo (2011) indicates that police officers have a diminishing capacity to handle task-related stressors; therefore, increased negative emotions and authoritarian attitudes are used as an effort to defuse stress. The mediating factors are present in a police officer's work environment, and is more common in males than females (Griffin & Bernard, 2003).

A survey of 309 police officers employed in Colorado, aimed to explore the attitudes, and perceptions that these police officers have about domestic violence cases. According to Gover, Paul, and Dodge (2011), a significant source of officer frustration that can influence their physical behavior, and emotional state may arise from the inconsistent way police departments handle responses to domestic violence calls. Of the 309 surveyed participants, 84% felt that domestic violence calls take up too much time and effort which can make them a source of frustration (Gover et al., 2011). Because it is a source of frustration, domestic violence calls can affect how officers handle a dilemma in their personal life. An example of this concept is when an officer gets into a verbal argument with their partner. This can go together with the social learning theory; thus, supporting the findings as a factor of officer-involved domestic violence.

In keeping the social learning theory in mind, a study conducted on Turkish police officers by Karagoz, Can and Hendy (2015) found significant implications noting that OI DV can be applied on an international scale. In the male dominated survey of Turkey where 96% of the 233 Turkish police officer participants were male, the police officers regarded their

departments as a second family. This concept of a police department family explained 74% of variance in police partner aggression (Karagoz et al., 2015). This is mainly because police supervisors are seen as father figures. When a supervisor displays a negative reaction or emotion to an individual, whether it be an intimate partner or not, the police officers can imitate or copy that reaction in their personal lives (Karagoz et al., 2015).

Similarly, in the Baltimore Police Department study of the late 1990s, it was found that police officers who indicated that their parents were physical with them were more likely to report being physical with a spouse or child (Zavala, 2013). According to Karagoz and colleagues (2015) violence in the home family explained 42% of variance in partner aggression. The two-differing means of maltreatment, through the home family or the work family, are significant means of copying negative behavior and applying it at home. Similarly, social learning theory is the significant mediating factor of the positive relationship between child and, family maltreatment, and OIDV. Considering abuse as a child as the social behavior learned, it is not an existing factor of the work environment for police families, so it is not a mediating factor. It can be considered as a corroborating factor or a potential cause of domestic violence. On the other hand, the aspect of observing father figures in the work family being violent, and then copying that behavior at home, is an existing part of the job. Both aspects are significant mediating factors of OIDV.

### **Implications**

Statistical, empirical, and comprehensive data is now present to support the hypothesis that police officers are more likely to engage in domestic or family violence due to their work conditions and environment. The next step is to reform existing

policies to effectively prevent officer-involved domestic violence.

A general start for reformation is to decrease the level of strain, burnout, and spillover, or in other words, get rid of the contributing factors to OIDV. This can be done by increasing social capital in the police officer work environment. An additional finding of the Baltimore police department study from 1999 found that negative aspects of stress are lowered through generating trust, and cooperation between units via passing on coping strategies and colleague support (Gätcher, Savage, David & Targler, 2011). Employee assistance programs, with the participation of police supervisors, as well as a model for non-violent conflict resolution can be two effective tools. New programs can be set forward to recognize child and family maltreatment more effectively; since, through the social learning theory, maltreatment can lead to OIDV. The daily tasks of the police force directly affect the public. An increase in public awareness concerning officer-involved domestic violence will educate more people about the sociolegal issue, and provide a step forward to resolving the discussed mediating factors.

Domestic violence counselors can become available in the workplace for officers as another tool for handling work stressors in a positive manner, and not leading to burnout. From the attitude study of police officers, continued domestic violence training sessions were postulated to being beneficial after officer graduation (Gover et al., 2011). It is important to note that for these programs and resources to be effective, participation of both police officers and their authority figures are key.

Findings from Stinson and Liederbach (2012), demonstrate how some police officers can escape conviction of domestic and/or family violence due to loopholes, and

discretionary decisions of power figures in the system. Policy makers should become aware of these loopholes to begin a reformation of police training, and the stressors of the workday. Change is difficult without legal backing; therefore, if policy makers accept and see the issues at hand, methodologies that are more effective can be enforced to lessen the stress of being a police officer. Awareness is further needed to define victims of OIDV, specifically outside the boundaries of spouse (Stinson & Liederbach, 2012).

The police force is the helping entity for victims, but when police culture impedes this help, victims of OIDV are alone and cannot receive the wanted aid. This is an area of concern and needs to be fixed through new policies of officer training, and proper responding to domestic or family violence crimes inside the police force by the authority figures.

A good representation of action is the legislation enacted by the state of Washington and New Jersey. This legislation requires all police agencies to adopt OIDV-specific policies. Other states, such as Illinois (Chicago P.D.), and Tennessee (Nashville P.D.) have enacted similar legislation; however, only a quarter of the 56 largest police departments have adopted these kinds of policies (Cheema, 2016). With only a fraction of police agencies adopting officer-involved domestic violence policies, there are remaining concerns. These include educational programs, screening of police officer candidates, officer counseling, the response to OIDV complaints, and investigations of accused police family violence. Continuous community effort in implementing the above ideals can aid in discussing these areas.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this research paper supports the hypothesis that police officers are more likely to commit acts of domestic or family violence due to specific mediating factors of the job conditions, and environment. These include burnout, negative emotions, observations of fieldwork, observations in police department families, relationships within the work family, authoritarianism, and work-home spillover. This research paper presents the relevant research and connects it back to social learning theory, occupational stress theory, and angry aggression theory. The studies discussed all contained limitations, which stresses the point for continued research about officer-involved domestic violence; however, all the studies conducted research in an unbiased manner, and present credible findings. It is important to note that OIDV is a contemporary social issue, and must not be ignored. The above concerns can be addressed in a feasible manner, just as empirical data on officer-involved domestic violence was found. Further research is needed to diffuse the situation.

### **References**

- Anderson, A.S., & Lo, C.C. (2011). Intimate partner violence within law enforcement families. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 26*(6), 1176-1193.
- Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2005). Family violence statistics including statistics on strangers and acquaintances. Retrieved from: <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/fvs02.pdf>

- Cheema, R. (2016). Black and blue bloods: Protecting police officer families from domestic violence. *Family Court Review, 54*(3), 487-500.
- Gatcher, M., Savage, David A., & Targler, B. (2011). The relationship between stress, strain, and social capital. *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies & Management, 34*(3), 575-540.
- Gover, A.R., Paul, D.P., Dodge, M. (2011). Law enforcement officers' attitudes about domestic violence. *Violence Against Women, 17*(5), 619-636.
- Griffin, S.P., and Bernard, T.J. (2003). Angry aggression among police officers. *Police Quarterly, 6*(1), 3-21.
- Johnson, L. B., Todd, M., & Subramanian, G. (2005). Violence in police families: Work-family spillover. *Journal of Family Violence, 20*(1), 3-12.
- Karagoz, T., Can S, & Hendy, H. M. (2015). Models for violence by Turkish police officers towards romantic partners and police partner. *International Journal of Police Science & Management, 17*(2), 98-103.
- Stinson, P. M., & Liederbach, J. (2013). Fox in the henhouse: A study of police officers arrested for crimes associated with domestic and/or family violence. *Criminal Justice Policy Review, 24*(5), 601-625.
- Summerlin, Z., Oehme, K., Stern N., & Valentine, C. (2010). Disparate levels of stress in police and correctional officers: Preliminary evidence from a pilot study on domestic violence. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, 20*(6), 762-777.
- Trachtenberg, J., Anderson, S., & Sabatelli, R. (2009). Work home conflict and domestic violence: A test of

conceptual model. *Journal of Family Violence*, 24(7), 471-483.

Zavala, E. (2013). Testing the link between child maltreatment and family violence among police officers. *Crime & Delinquency*, 59(3), 468-483.

*Isaac Baron graduated from San Jose State University in 2018 with his degree in Forensic Science with a concentration in biology and a minor in chemistry. Isaac would like to gain work experience in general laboratories and in forensic crime in labs before going back graduate school and specializing in DNA investigations and/or forensic molecular biology. He is currently collaborating with SJSU forensic science professors on investigating specific protein degradation as tool to determine time of death. While not in class, Isaac is heavily involved in the Forensic Science Students as the club's treasurer and roaming around downtown San Jose exploring the city. He hopes to adopt a corgi or husky in the future.*