



**Police officers' perception of community support for
policing: Implications for well-being**

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Abstract

Purpose: Community-police relations have gained increasing public attention during the past decade. The purpose of the present study was to better understand the relationship between perceived community support and police officer burnout and engagement.

Design/methodology/approach: Data were gathered via online survey from 117 officers from a city police department in the Southeastern United States.

Findings: Community support was negatively correlated with burnout and positively correlated with engagement. Moreover, multiple regression analyses showed that community support explained significant incremental variance in most dimensions of burnout and engagement, above and beyond demographic factors and community stressors. Qualitative results showed that police officers had mixed perceptions of how they were viewed by the general public, with more negative than positive responses. However, officers felt more positively perceived in their own communities, but concerns were raised that national events affected the perceptions of officers even in positive relationships with their communities. Finally, officers felt that public perceptions impacted their job satisfaction, job performance, and personal lives.

Originality: Our study is one of the few that highlights the officers' perspective on how public perceptions affect their work. This is important in understanding how to maximize quality community interactions while minimizing conditions that would increase burnout.

Practical Implications: Our results have practical implications for how to encourage positive interactions between officers and their community, with recommendations for both law enforcement leaders and civilians.

Keywords: policing, community support, burnout, engagement, police officers

Introduction

The stressful nature of police work has long been recognized. Studies have demonstrated the health-related impacts of operational and traumatic stressors, such as exposure to violence and crime (e.g., Regehr et al., 2019; Violanti et al., 2019), as well as organizational stressors associated with workload, irregular work hours, staffing, or management styles (e.g., Purba & Demou, 2019). Many such stressors have been connected to burnout, a syndrome of disengagement, emotional exhaustion, and disconnection from one's work (Demerouti et al., 2001; Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Conceptualizations of burnout have focused on dimensions of depersonalization (i.e., loss of empathy; treating people as objects), exhaustion, and reduced feelings of personal accomplishment in work (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Burnout is problematic because it can impact the officer's physical and mental health (Burke & Mikkelsen, 2006; Talavera-Velasco et al., 2018), as well as the organization and community, through impacts on officers' job performance (Bakker & Heuven, 2006; Gomes et al., 2022).

Depending on an officer's context (i.e., community, country, culture), some stressors may be more present and impactful (e.g., Kukić et al. 2022). Social stressors arising from interactions with the community may be heightened in certain contexts. The focus of the current study was on the impact of perceived community support and community stressors on burnout and engagement experienced by police officers in the United States. We use qualitative and quantitative data to consider how police officers are impacted by community perceptions. Using open-ended questions, we considered how officers feel they (as an occupational group and as an individual) are impacted by community perceptions. Using quantitative measures, we examined how perceived community demands and resources (i.e., frequency of strained interactions and perceptions of support) contribute to burnout and engagement. This study is unique because it

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3 bridges the gap between community perceptions and police officers. While many studies have
4 investigated civilian attitudes toward police, our study is among the first (e.g., Reynolds et al.,
5 2023) to examine how officers are affected by how they feel perceived in their community.
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9 10 **Police-Civilian Relationships**

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12 Recently in the United States, there has been increased attention to policing as examples
13 of police misconduct have been highly covered in the media (e.g., USA Today; Kelly & Nichols,
14 2019). A 2015 Gallup poll showed that public confidence in police as an institution was at its
15 lowest point since data collection began in 1993, with 52% of people surveyed having at least
16 some degree of confidence (Jones, 2015). It should be noted that both low points occurred after
17 major protests condemning police misconduct against people of color (i.e., 1992 excessive force
18 against Rodney King, Sastry, 2017; 2014 fatal shooting of Michael Brown, Davey, 2014). Given
19 additional incidents in recent years (e.g., 2020 death of George Floyd; Hill et al., 2020), it is
20 unsurprising that public opinion of police has worsened since 2016 (Pew Research Center,
21 2020). This is particularly true among Black Americans, where the racial gap in confidence in
22 policing has continued to widen in recent years (Jones, 2020).
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38 For good reason, there is attention to the general public's attitudes toward policing
39 following these events, but there is less attention to how such events affect officers in their desire
40 and ability to do their job. Officer's perception of the public's sentiment toward policing is
41 related to their work performance (Reynolds et al., 2023). Unsurprisingly, a study of almost
42 8,000 officers found that 86% felt that their job was now more difficult because of high-profile
43 incidents involving police (Morin, 2017). Drawing from related research, Barbier et al. (2013)
44 found that perceiving social stigma towards one's profession is associated with more burnout, as
45 these social pressures act as an additional demand. Similarly, van Dierendonck et al. (2001)
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3 found that uneven interpersonal relationships between employees and recipients of their services
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5 are associated with emotional exhaustion. Many interactions that police officers have with the
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7 public are inherently unbalanced because officers contribute significant inputs to the relationship
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9 as they are supposed to “protect and serve” the public. If the public has negative perceptions of
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11 the police, this could create a perceived deficit in “outputs” if officers desire appreciation or
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13 recognition in response to their service.
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16 17 **Theoretical Framework**

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19 The Job-Demands Resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti et al., 2001) provides a
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21 framework for understanding how work and community factors can affect police officers’ well-
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23 being. In the JD-R Model, job demands are aspects of work that require effort (e.g., workload,
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25 time pressure) and can relate to more burnout, characterized by exhaustion and disengagement
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27 (Baker & Demerouti, 2017; Demerouti et al., 2001). Alternatively, job resources help individuals
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29 meet demands (e.g., job control; social support) and can both buffer the impacts of demands on
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31 burnout and generate a sense of engagement or mental connection with work (Baker &
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33 Demerouti, 2017; Demerouti et al., 2001). Within this model, community stressors (i.e., indirect
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35 criticism through media coverage or direct negative interpersonal interactions) can act as social
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37 demands, which require an effortful response. An effortful response could include intentionally
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39 diverting attention from a mentally taxing stressor or a behavioral response, such as responding
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41 calmly to an angry civilian. On the other hand, perceived community support (i.e., feeling people
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43 trust and have confidence in the police) can be a resource which makes addressing job demands
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45 easier and facilitates enjoyment of work.
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51 The relationship between police burnout and public relations is particularly important
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53 because of the cyclical relationships that could unfold when high demands and low resources
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3 produce job strain. Strained employees are more likely to engage in self-undermining behaviors,
4 which then leads to more demands and more strain, creating a negative feedback loop (Bakker &
5 Demerouti, 2017). Applied to police officers, job demands and/or associated burnout relates to
6 negative organizational outcomes, including counterproductive workplace behaviors (Balducci et
7 al., 2011; Smoktunowicz et al., 2015), more acceptance of violence (Kop et al., 1999), and worse
8 job performance (Maslach et al., 2001). Job performance mistakes and the inappropriate use of
9 force could lead to an unjust or violent encounter for a civilian, which harms the relationship
10 between police and their communities. Negative perceptions of police as a social demand may
11 elicit self-undermining behaviors. For example, a negative interaction with a civilian that
12 requires corrective action creates additional workload demands that would not otherwise occur.
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26 We also do not want to neglect community support as a resource in a positive feedback
27 loop recognized in the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Motivated employees are more
28 likely to engage in job crafting (i.e., adapting their work to fit their own strengths, values, etc.),
29 which leads to even more personal and job resources, enhancing future motivation. Positive
30 feedback loops tend to result in feelings of engagement, which can be defined as a sense of
31 vigor, dedication, and absorption directed at one's job (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Engagement is
32 important to study because it correlates with favorable personal and work outcomes, such as
33 better well-being and work performance among police officers (e.g., Breevaart et al., 2015; Liu
34 et al., 2019). Workplace social support has been related to more engagement among officers
35 (e.g., Wolter et al., 2019). Although research suggests that viewing one's community as
36 supportive of policing can relate to work performance (Reynolds et al., 2023), no research to our
37 knowledge has connected perceived community support to officers' engagement and burnout.
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3 Of the existing studies that explore the police-civilian interface, most focus on the
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5 elements that influence community members' perceptions of the police, such as civilian
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7 experiences and perceptions of police legitimacy (e.g., Jones et al., 2015; Reynolds et al., 2018).
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10 The effects of body-worn cameras on community perceptions have been a popular topic in this
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12 area, finding that these devices do not necessarily yield better perceptions (McClure et al., 2017;
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14 Braga et al., 2023). However, positive encounters with police officers and increased visibility
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16 may benefit community perceptions (Wentz & Schlingen, 2012; Mazerolle et al., 2012; Hawdon
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18 et al., 2003).
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22 Given that officers feel that highly publicized events affect their daily work (Morin,
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24 2017) and the connections between perceived sentiments toward policing and work performance
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26 (Reynolds et al., 2023), a better understanding of how both perceived demands and support from
27
28 the community impact officers' burnout and engagement is important. The present study answers
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30 McCarty et al.'s (2019) call for research that furthers understanding of police officer burnout, as
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32 well as Santa Maria et al.'s (2018) call for investigating new demands and resources applicable
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34 to police, using the JD-R model. Based on the JD-R model, we expect that negative community
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36 stressors (a demand) relate positively to officer burnout. Along those lines, studies have found
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38 that wearing body cameras, which may elicit greater feelings of control from the organization
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40 and/or public, can be related to higher levels of burnout (Adams & Mastracci, 2019). On the
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42 other hand, community support (a resource) could reduce burnout and enhance engagement, in
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44 line with the role of resources in the JD-R model. Based on this theoretical framework and
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46 existing literature on the impacts of positive versus negative community relationships we
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48 proposed and tested the following hypotheses.
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3 Hypothesis 1: Community stressors are positively related to burnout (1a) and negatively
4 related to engagement (1b).
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7 Hypothesis 2: Perceived community support is negatively related to burnout (2a) and
8 positively related to engagement (2b).
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12 In addition to these hypotheses, founded in the JD-R model, we explored whether
13 perceived community support explained incremental variance in burnout and engagement above
14 and beyond the impact of community-related stressors. We also explored research questions with
15 qualitative data regarding: 1) how officers feel perceived by their own community and how they
16 feel officers are perceived by the public at large, and 2) how officers feel community perceptions
17 impact them personally and professionally, as well as how they feel officers at large are affected
18 by their community.
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28 **Method**

29 **Procedure**

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33 The Institutional Review Board approved the study prior to data collection. The
34 researchers worked with leadership at a single police department in the development and
35 administration of the survey. The city police department was in a mid-sized metropolitan area in
36 the southeast United States and was selected based on existing collaborative connections to the
37 research team. Sworn officers were sent an online survey link by their Chief of Police, which
38 included a brief description of the purpose of the survey. After providing informed consent,
39 participants were presented with questions about their work and well-being. Participants had the
40 option to provide their contact information on a separate form to enter a drawing to win one of
41 23, \$20 Amazon gift cards for participating.
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53 **Participants**

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3 Of the approximately 440 sworn officers who received the invitation to complete the
4 survey, 117 responded (27% response rate). The sample included 10 (8.5%) women and 106
5 (90.6%) men, with one participant who preferred not to report their sex. This representation was
6 nearly identical to the overall department characteristics at the time of the survey (91% male, 9%
7 female). Participants ranged in age from 23 to 59 years old ($M = 40.12$, $SD = 9.86$). Average
8 length of employment with the department was 13.40 years ($SD = 8.38$). Regarding work areas,
9 48.3% of respondents worked in neighborhood policing, 29.3% in investigations, 13.8% in
10 special operations, 2.6% were professional staff, and 6% worked in other capacities.
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22 **Measures**

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24 The items or sample items for each measure are provided in the supplemental materials.
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26 *Burnout*

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28 Work-related burnout was measured with the Human Services version of the Maslach
29 Burnout Inventory (MBI; Maslach et al., 2016). The 22 questions were answered on a 7-point
30 scale, ranging from never (0) to every day (6). Average scores were created for items belonging
31 to three subscales: emotional exhaustion (EE), depersonalization (DP), and reduced personal
32 accomplishment (RPA). All subscales demonstrated acceptable Cronbach's alphas (EE= .92,
33 DP=.77, PA=.77).
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42 *Engagement*

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44 Work engagement was assessed with the 17 item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale
45 (Schaufeli et al., 2006). Questions were rated on a 7-point scale, ranging from never (0) to
46 everyday (6). Average scores were created for items belonging to three subscales: vigor,
47 dedication, and absorption. All subscales demonstrated acceptable Cronbach's alphas (vigor =
48 .82, dedication = .84, and absorption = .78).
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Perceived community support

Two questions focused on perceptions of community support. These items were developed for a concise assessment of perceived trust and confidence from one's community, mirroring work that has focused on civilian perceptions of police (e.g., Jones, 2015; Reynolds et al., 2018). Both items were rated on an agreement scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The items were positively correlated ($r = .71, p < .01$; alpha = .82) and were averaged for analyses.

Perceived community stressors

Social stressors from community interactions were assessed with eight items from the Police Stress Survey (Spielberger et al., 1981). Participants were asked to rate how frequently they experience each community or culturally based stressor (e.g., criticism of police, negative press coverage). Responses options ranged from never (1) to always (5). All items were averaged for a scale score for analysis. The scale had a good internal consistency (alpha =.83).

Open-ended questions

Four open-ended questions addressed participants' perception of civilian views of police work. These questions assessed how the officers perceive the status of their profession among US civilians and in their own community: "How do you think the general public views police work in America?", "How do you think public perceptions of police work affect officers in general?", "How do you personally feel perceived by individuals in your community?", and "Do civilian perceptions impact how you experience your job? Provide two or three examples."

Responses were coded in terms of overall sentiment (e.g., positive, negative, neutral) and more specific themes.

Demographics

Participants were asked to report their age (in years), their sex (male, female, prefer, prefer not to answer), and their tenure with the police department (in years). Their current unit was also reported, but only used for internal reporting and not for analyses in the present study.

Data Analysis

For quantitative analyses, we examined bivariate correlations between community support, community stressors, and burnout and engagement dimensions. To explore the unique contribution of support above and beyond community stressors, multiple regression analyses were conducted. Specifically, we entered community stressors and demographic variables (i.e., age, sex, and department tenure) in step 1 of the regression model and entered community support in step 2. Significance was indicated by p values less than .05.

For qualitative coding, we took an applied thematic approach (Guest et al., 2012). The first author reviewed the open-ended responses to identify key themes. Then, two undergraduate research assistants independently coded each of the responses for primary themes (e.g., overall positive/negative sentiment) and relative sub-codes. The overall structure of the coding procedure and themes used are provided in the supplemental materials. For all coding, agreement between the two raters exceeded 80%, indicating adequate reliability of ratings (Guest et al., 2012). Whenever the two raters did not agree on the codes, the first author acted as a third rater to resolve the discrepancy and assign a final code.

Results

Quantitative Results

We began by examining descriptive statistics and correlations among our study variables (Table 1). All variables met assumptions for normality with skewness and kurtosis values between +/- 2. Descriptive statistics indicated that this sample of officers averaged around the

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3 midpoints of the scale for all continuous variables. Community support was negatively correlated
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5 with all three burnout subscales and positively correlated with the three engagement subscales.
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8 Nearly all the correlations were moderate in magnitude, using Cohen's (1988) criteria.
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11 Community stressors exhibited moderate positive correlations with emotional exhaustion and
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13 depersonalization, but no significant relationships with reduced personal accomplishment or any
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15 of the engagement subscales. In reference to Hypotheses 1 and 2, these initial findings suggest
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17 that community support seems to play a role in both burnout and engagement, while community
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19 stressors relate more to emotional and interpersonal elements of burnout, but not engagement and
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21 sense of accomplishment.
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24 Next, we sought to understand how community support uniquely contributes to burnout
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26 and engagement, above and beyond community stressors and demographic factors (i.e., sex, age,
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28 tenure). The full results of these multiple regression analyses are provided in Table 2 (burnout)
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30 and Table 3 (engagement). Community support explained significant incremental variability in
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32 emotional exhaustion ($\beta = -.30$, $\Delta R^2 = .06$). Community stressors remained a significant predictor
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34 of emotional exhaustion ($\beta = .25$), but other control variables were non-significant. When
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36 considering reduced personal accomplishment, community support again explained significant
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38 incremental variance ($\beta = -.44$, $\Delta R^2 = .13$); the effects of community stressors and control
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40 variables were non-significant. Concerning depersonalization, community support did not
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42 explain significant incremental variance ($\beta = -.12$, $\Delta R^2 = .01$). Only community stressors were
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44 significant predictors of depersonalization ($\beta = .35$).
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50 Focusing on engagement as the outcome, community support explained significant
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52 incremental variability in vigor ($\beta = .45$; $\Delta R^2 = .14$). The effects of community stressors and
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54 demographic variables were non-significant. Community support also explained significant
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3 incremental variance in dedication ($\beta = .33$; $\Delta R^2 = .07$); community stressors and demographic
4 controls were non-significant predictors. Finally, no variables in the model were significant in
5 uniquely predicting the absorption dimension of engagement.
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10 In sum, community support explained significant incremental variance in burnout and
11 engagement for most of the subscales, above and beyond demographic factors and community
12 stressors. The exceptions were for the depersonalization and absorption subscales. Notably,
13 looking at the unique effect sizes (sr^2), community support explained more unique variance in
14 burnout and engagement than the community stressors, except in the case of depersonalization,
15 where stressors had a stronger impact.
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23 **Qualitative Results**

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26 The first pair of questions concerned how police felt that 1) officers were viewed in
27 general in America and 2) how they felt perceived in their own community. All 117 officers in
28 our sample responded to the first question; only one did not respond to the second question.
29 Responses were first coded as negative, positive, mixed, or neutral. Then sub-codes were
30 assigned, if applicable, to capture themes provided in the thoughts supporting a more positive or
31 negative evaluation.
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40 When asked about the general public's views of police in America, most officers had a
41 mixed response ($n = 67$, 58%). More provided strictly negative ($n = 37$, 32%) than strictly
42 positive responses ($n = 10$, 9%). Those who felt the public had negative views cited racial
43 tensions ($n = 6$), a lack of understanding of police work ($n = 10$), and media portrayals ($n = 38$)
44 as common reasons for those negative views. For instance, one officer said:
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51 People in America do not understand police procedures, and are also uneducated on our
52 own local, state, and federal laws. People are also quick to pass judgment without
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3 understanding how or why a police [officer] did what they did... I don't think views on
4 police officers will change for the better unless everyone can swallow their pride and try
5 to understand one another.
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10 Another officer commenting on media influence remarked, "Police are no longer
11 respected as they used to be. The media has played a huge role in making police look like the
12 'bad guys'." Officers who gave mixed responses described a general mix in opinions (n = 38) or
13 described it more specifically as a polarizing divide (n = 15). One officer explained:
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19 I feel like America is split in its take on police work in America right now. Some believe
20 that police work is essential to the American population and safety, however there is the
21 other side that believes police work is involved in too much of the American population
22 and is actually contributing to the unsafe feeling a lot of Americans are feeling within
23 these uncertain times.
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31 One officer with mixed feelings stated, "I believe the general public is grateful for police work,
32 although it does need some reform."
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36 When asked more specifically how they feel perceived in their own community,
37 responses were more positive, as compared to their views of how police in America are generally
38 viewed. Positive remarks were most common (n = 48; 40%), followed by mixed (n = 39; 34%),
39 and negative (n = 24; 21%). When reflecting on their personal community, similar themes came
40 up, but less frequently (i.e., racial tensions n = 3; lack of understanding of police work n = 1;
41 media portrayals n = 4). Those indicating more positive experiences felt personally valued and
42 trusted in their community. For those who were mixed, they often cited differences based on
43 situations and communities. One officer wrote:
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3 I am aware of many people who appreciate and trust me and many who do not. I know
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5 many see me as a hero and servant and many see me as an enemy, a racist or a threat to
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7 them or their family. So how I personally feel perceived is situational, not consistent.
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10 Several officers voiced concerns that more national or international events affect policing in their
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12 own community, even if they have generally positive relationships. One example of this
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14 sentiment was, "Individuals I work directly with see me as a good person, but some have
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16 difficulty reconciling their ideological commitments about police to the reality that we are in fact
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18 people". A second participant endorsing local challenges based on the national context said:

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22 It would be much more achievable for local police departments to build trust in their
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24 respective communities if they only had to address local problems... Unfortunately,
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26 because the media is constantly bombarding the public about police conflicts from around
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28 the country, local Police are viewed as constantly being in conflicting situations with the
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30 citizenry.
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34 For the next pair of questions about the impact that public perceptions have on officers,
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36 both in their own community and officers in America in general, coders assigned responses a
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38 main code of either does not impact or does impact. Nearly all respondents answered both
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40 questions (n = 115 for America in general; 116 for personal impacts). For responses coded as
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42 does impact, sub-codes were given as appropriate to indicate the nature of the impact. Most
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44 officers felt that the public's perceptions of police did affect officers in general (n = 108, 93%).
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46 Additional sentiments behind those impacts were more negative (n = 80) than positive (n = 1) or
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48 mixed (n = 7). Officers cited effects on motivation (n = 37), ability to perform/follow procedure
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50 (n = 29), officer's well-being (n = 26), and impacts on the overall organization/institution of
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52 policing (n = 12). Concerning motivation, one officer said:
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3 The majority of officers got into this job to help people but when we feel like everyone
4 hates us and we can never do anything right, we don't have much motivation to get up
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6 and go to work because no one cares anyways.
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10 Concerning the nature of work, one officer remarked that how officers carry out their work
11 changes, where it is difficult "attempting to curb violent crime in neighborhoods who make it
12 clear the police are not wanted". Some officers felt public perceptions and the media in particular
13 "affects an officer's mental, physical, and emotional well-being greatly". Finally, concerning
14 systemic influences, one officer commented that public perceptions affect "morale, hiring, and
15 retention... when officers feel they are not valued and unaware of their impact, then it damages
16 the profession".
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26 When asked the same question but focusing on how perceptions impact them personally
27 in their job, officers were more mixed. More officers felt that public perceptions do impact their
28 experience (n = 66, 60%) compared to those who did not feel the public affects them (n = 44,
29 40%). For those who elaborated, the sentiments of these impacts were still more negative (n =
30 37) than positive (n = 6) or mixed (n = 15). Similarly, officers cited impacts to their motivation
31 (n = 26) and well-being (n = 10), as well as their ability to carry out procedures (n = 30) and the
32 broader organization (n = 6). Some officers noted good and bad impacts on their motivation:
33 "during the protests morale was low but at the same time when people randomly thank you just
34 for being an officer it is a little boost in morale". Officers cited their well-being impacted by
35 negative perceptions of police in their own networks and communities. One officer remarked,
36 "social media posts from people that used to be close friends talking about how racist police are
37 has the biggest impact... it is mentally exhausting to see this often". Some officers felt that
38 public perceptions affected their ability to do their job, providing examples of reporting to a
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3 crime scene and trying to gather information, “As we attempt to ask community members, their
4 response is often, it’s your job, don’t ask me”. Finally, several officers felt that public
5 perceptions affected organizational or systemic responses in challenging ways. For example:
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10 We feel like people in higher power making decisions over our jobs and livelihoods is a
11 clear example of misunderstanding what we do every day... They only ever see the
12 negative parts and don't see us as human beings or see that we make a difference and
13 work hard in the majority of our calls...
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18 **Discussion**

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21 The goal of the present study was to understand how community support verses
22 community stressors may be associated with police officers’ well-being. While researchers have
23 given much attention to the stressors involved in police work, few have focused on the impact of
24 community stressors and even fewer have considered perceived community support as a resource
25 (e.g., Reynolds et al., 2023). Aligning with the JD-R Model (Demerouti et al., 2001), we found
26 that community stressors (a demand) primarily related to higher levels of burnout. However,
27 community support as a resource exhibited stronger relationships with some dimensions of
28 burnout and was also related to engagement. This aligns with the idea that resources can have a
29 buffering and motivational capacity (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), where feeling supported by
30 one’s community can reduce burnout and enhance work engagement.
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45 These findings suggest that attempting only to reduce demands from the community may
46 not be as helpful for officer well-being as trying to enhance perceived resources. Indeed, early
47 studies of burnout among helping professions found similar instances of nurses recounting
48 absence of positive experiences as unique stressors from the presence of negative conditions
49 (Pines & Kanner, 1982). Similarly, in policing, a sense that the community being served is
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3 supportive may be more powerful than the absence of negative interactions. Particularly, for
4 officers with high levels of public service motivation, the presence of support likely offers a
5 powerful resource to enhance engagement and prevent burnout, even when demands are high
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10 (Bakker, 2015).

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12 The qualitative remarks provided deeper insight into officers' beliefs about civilian
13 perceptions and how they are affected by those perceptions. Very few responses were purely
14 positive when asking how they felt officers were viewed in America. However, purely positive
15 comments were much more frequent when asked how they think their local community perceives
16 them. An interesting conclusion is that officers may consider views of policing broadly as more
17 negative than what they experience in their day-to-day life. This could be a function of the
18 specific department that participated in our study, as our sample worked in a city where the
19 predominant racial groups and political affiliations are those that tend to have more positive
20 views of policing (Pew Research Center, 2020). The trend could also be a more common
21 phenomenon that individuals perceive attitudes as more negative than what they truly
22 experience, particularly if media influences highlight negative encounters that evoke more
23 negative attitudes around policing (e.g., Chermak et al., 2005).

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40 Officers also shared how they felt public perceptions impact the police in general and
41 them personally. Again, positive answers were less common in responses about police in general
42 compared to personal experiences. Regardless of the framing of the question, negative effects of
43 community perceptions were described more frequently than positive effects. Paralleling our
44 quantitative findings, it was not uncommon for officers to talk about interactions with the public
45 (stressful ones and encouraging ones) affecting their motivation toward work, as well as their
46 personal mental health. Officers also talked about negative community perceptions creating
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3 additional difficulty in carrying out their job, aligning with recent research that connects
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5 community perceptions to work performance (Reynolds et al., 2023). These qualitative remarks
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7 suggested experiences of both positive and negative feedback loops (Bakker et al., 2017), where
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9 positive interactions may be motivational and performance-enhancing whereas negative
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11 interactions may relate to burnout, job performance concerns, and additional demands.
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14 **Practical Recommendations**

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17 Our results have several practical implications for communities and policing institutions.
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19 First, our findings point to the importance of community support. The President's Task Force on
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21 21st Century Policing under President Obama recommended building community feelings of
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23 legitimacy and trust in police as the foundational tenants of community building and police
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25 reforms (Meares, 2017). The use of community-oriented policing, which emphasizes involving
26
27 the community in crime prevention, has been associated with beneficial outcomes (Gill et al.,
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29 2014), but these efforts to generate a positive culture require intentional effort. For instance, law
30
31 enforcement leadership will have to model community policing and reward these efforts to
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33 engage positively with the community. Related, leaders can be intentional to intervene in more
34
35 negative feedback loops. If it seems that civilian stressors are creating a heightened sense of
36
37 burnout, leaders can consider actions to disrupt those feedback loops by facilitating more
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39 positive community interactions or helping officers to find meaning in their work. Leaders can
40
41 encourage strategies that humanize the civilians they serve to combat risks for depersonalization
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43 and other burnout symptoms. As one example, some departments have supplemented
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45 interpersonal interactions with a social media presence to humanize police and build trust with
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47 their community (Mayes, 2021).
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3 Our results also highlighted that broader views of policing may not mirror what officers
4 are experiencing in their own day-to-day work. Particularly in times when there are high-profile
5 events that may magnify distrust or negative attitudes toward officers, even outside of the area of
6 the actual events, leaders may have to intentionally direct officers' attention to minimize burnout
7 risks. For instance, during protests against police brutality, officers in our sample were often
8 reminded that their community by and large supported them. Leaders encouraged officers to
9 strive for continuous improvement, rather than disengaging when met with disapproval.
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19 Leaders can also encourage officers to make themselves more accessible and visible to
20 have opportunities to be "thanked" by community members. For instance, rather than sitting in a
21 patrol car with windows up, take time to be more present in the community to create
22 opportunities to foster connections. Related to this point, an experimental study found that police
23 officers are perceived more favorably when on a bike or walking as compared to driving through
24 a community (Simpson, 2017). These types of positive interactions could also be created through
25 events to spend time around officers (e.g., coffee with a cop) and news coverage or social media
26 campaigns that highlight positive police-civilian interactions, rather than just focusing on
27 negative events if/when they occur. News coverage and social media could simply highlight that
28 the community's support matters to officers. As our study found, community support can make
29 difference in an officer feeling engaged and motivated in their work verses burned out and
30 detached.
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47 Focusing on recommendations for civilians, community members can be encouraged to
48 consider officers as humans, and even keep in mind that past exposure to stressors and
49 potentially trauma may affect officer's abilities to build connections. A willingness to empathize
50 with law enforcement could help to increase civilian trust and openness to building stronger
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3 relationships. Community members could also consider opportunities to increase interactions and
4 interpersonal connections with the police, whether that is inviting them to their workspaces,
5 classrooms, or other community events and settings. Such opportunities can help with those
6 efforts to humanize police.
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12 **Limitations and Future Directions**

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15 Several limitations need to be considered in the interpretation of the results. First, our
16 sample included city police officers from a single department located in the Southeastern United
17 States. As views of policing can vary widely in geographical regions with different predominant
18 political affiliations and racial demographics (Pew Research Center, 2000), some findings may
19 not generalize to other regions. In addition, cross-cultural studies are warranted to determine
20 whether our results are similar or different to perceptions in other countries outside of the United
21 States.
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31 Second, our data were gathered at a time when community relations with the police were
32 extremely salient (early 2021). Responses were likely influenced by the 2020 George Floyd
33 protests and 2021 insurrection at the United States Capital Building. Both events were mentioned
34 directly in some open-ended responses. It would be important to replicate this study at a time
35 when police brutality and political stressors are less salient. Third, our study was cross-sectional,
36 so we cannot test for causal relationships. While we infer the possibility of negative or positive
37 feedback loops involving civilian perceptions, longitudinal studies would be needed to examine
38 how these effects may unfold over time. Further, longitudinal studies could use advanced
39 statistical approaches to examine how changes in support or stressors, such as following a major
40 public event, could impact changes in officer well-being.
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53 **Conclusion**

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3 How an officer feels perceived by their community can impact their well-being. While
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5 stressful encounters seem to increase an officer's risk for burnout, the potential positive benefits
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7 from community support seem to be even more impactful. Police officers and leaders who
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9 facilitate perceptions of community support may help officers to experience more work
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11 engagement and less burnout. In turn, we expect that these more positive states of well-being
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13 could contribute to more positive police-civilian interactions in local communities.
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Table 1.*Correlations and descriptive statistics among study variables.*

	M	SD	N	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Sex	1.10	0.33	117	--										
2. Age	40.12	9.86	113	-0.17	--									
3. Tenure	13.39	8.38	115	-0.16	.90**	--								
4. Community support	3.03	0.97	117	0.04	.32**	.25**	(.82)							
5. Community stressors	3.12	0.73	116	0.08	-.32**	-.21*	-.54**	(.83)						
6. Emotional Exhaustion	3.52	1.31	117	0.04	-0.02	0.02	-.37**	.35**	(.92)					
7. Depersonalization	3.33	1.37	117	-0.11	-.19*	-0.12	-.34**	.42**	.64**	(.77)				
8. Reduced Personal Accomplishment	2.90	0.98	117	-0.02	0.16	0.16	-.30**	0.04	.20*	.19*	(.77)			
9. Vigor	4.41	1.01	113	-0.01	-0.15	-0.18	.35**	-0.14	-.53**	-.33**	-.63**	(.82)		
10. Dedication	4.39	1.23	114	-0.05	0.14	0.04	.31**	-0.15	-.39**	-.30**	-.57**	.71**	(.84)	
11. Absorption	3.14	1.30	112	0.06	0.08	0.06	.23*	-0.15	-.25**	-0.08	-.37**	.54**	.61**	(.78)

Notes. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .001$. Cronbach's alpha is displayed in parentheses along the diagonal. Sex was coded 1 = male, 2 = female. Emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment represent three burnout subscales. Vigor, dedication, and absorption represent three engagement subscales.

Table 2. Multiple regression models predicting burnout subscales.

	<u>Emotional Exhaustion</u>				<u>Depersonalization</u>				<u>Reduced Personal Accomplishment</u>										
	b	SE	β	sr ²	Model R ²	ΔR^2	b	SE	β	sr ²	Model R ²	ΔR^2	b	SE	β	sr ²	Model R ²	ΔR^2	
Step 1					.15*						.21**							.04	
Sex	0.09	0.36	.02	.000			-0.66	0.37	-.16	.025			-0.04	0.30	-.01	.000			
Age	0.00	0.03	.03	.000			-0.03	0.03	-.24	.057			0.01	0.02	.07	.005			
Department tenure	0.02	0.03	.10	.002			0.03	0.03	.18	.031			0.02	0.03	.13	.016			
Community stressors	0.72*	0.17	.40	.141			0.77**	0.17	.41	.164			0.13	0.14	.10	.009			
Step 2					.21**	.06*					.22**	.01						.17*	.13**
Sex	0.24	0.36	.06	.003			-0.59	0.37	-.14	.019			0.13	0.28	.04	.002			
Age	0.01	0.03	.11	.002			-0.03	0.03	-.21	.007			0.02	0.02	.19	.035			
Department tenure	0.01	0.03	.08	.001			0.03	0.03	.17	.005			0.01	0.03	.09	.008			
Community stressors	0.45*	0.19	.25	.042			0.65*	0.20	.35	.082			-0.17	0.15	-.12	.014			
Community support	-0.40*	0.14	-.30	.061			-0.17	0.15	-.12	.010			-0.45**	0.11	-.44	.197			

N = 111. *p < .05. **p < .001. Sex coded as 1 = male, 2 = female.

Table 3. Multiple regression models predicting engagement subscales.

	<u>Vigor</u>				<u>Dedication</u>				<u>Absorption</u>										
	b	SE	β	sr^2	Model R ²	ΔR^2	b	SE	β	sr^2	Model R ²	ΔR^2	b	SE	β	sr^2	Model R ²	ΔR^2	
Step 1					.07						.05							.03	
Sex	-0.07	0.30	-.02	.000			-0.10	0.36	-.03	.001			0.33	0.40	.08	.007			
Age	-0.001	0.02	-.01	.000			0.05	0.03	.41	.166			0.01	0.03	.06	.003			
Department tenure	-0.03	0.03	-.23	.052			-0.05	0.03	-.36	.126			-0.001	0.04	-.01	.000			
Community stressors	-0.27	0.14	-.20	.038			-0.18	0.17	-.10	.011			-0.22	0.18	-.12	.015			
Step 2					.21**	.14**					.12*	.07**					.05	.02	
Sex	-0.24	0.28	-.08	.006			-0.26	0.35	-.07	.005			0.26	0.40	.06	.004			
Age	-0.02	0.02	-.14	.020			0.04	0.03	.32	.104			0.002	0.03	.02	.000			
Department tenure	-0.02	0.03	-.17	.030			-0.05	0.03	-.33	.112			-0.001	0.04	-.01	.000			
Community stressors	0.03	0.15	.02	.001			0.09	0.19	.05	.003			-0.06	0.21	-.03	.001			
Community support	0.47*	0.11	.45	.205			0.41*	0.14	.33	.106			0.24	0.16	.18	.033			

N range = 106-108. *p < .05. **p < .001. Sex coded as 1 = male, 2 = female.

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Supplemental Materials for “Police officers’ perception of community support for policing: Implications for well-being”

Information on Survey Measures

Burnout (Source: Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Copyright ©1981 Christina Maslach & Susan E. Jackson. All rights reserved in all media. Published by Mind Garden, Inc., www.mindgarden.com)

Per the licensing agreement, only three sample items are included.

Emotional Exhaustion

1. I feel emotionally drained from my work.

Personal Accomplishment

2. I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job.

Depersonalization

3. I don’t really care what happens to some recipients.

Engagement (Source: Schaufeli et al., 2006; measure information and rights for use provided at <https://www.wilmarschaufeli.nl/downloads/>)

Vigor

1. When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work.
2. At my work, I feel bursting with energy.
3. At my work I always persevere, even when things do not go well.
4. I can continue working for very long periods at a time.
5. At my job, I am very resilient, mentally.
6. At my job I feel strong and vigorous.

Dedication

7. To me, my job is challenging.
8. My job inspires me.
9. I am enthusiastic about my job.
10. I am proud on the work that I do.
11. I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose.

Absorption

12. When I am working, I forget everything else around me.
13. Time flies when I am working.
14. I get carried away when I am working.
15. It is difficult to detach myself from my job.
16. I am immersed in my work.
17. I feel happy when I am working intensely.

Community Stressors (Source: Socially-oriented items from the police stress survey developed by Spielberger et al., 1981. Note, response options were adapted to a five-point frequency scale instead of number of times per year for simpler responding)

1. Distorted or negative press coverage of police work

2. Lack of recognition for good work
3. Public criticism of police
4. Personal insult from a citizen
5. Experiencing negative attitudes towards police
6. Public apathy toward police
7. Strained relations with non-police friends
8. Racial pressures or conflicts at work

Community Support (Developed for the study to assess officer perceptions of community support; modeled after existing measures of civilian attitudes toward police; Jones, 2015; Reynolds et al., 2018)

1. I feel respected by the community that I serve.
2. I feel that the community has a great deal of confidence in the police as an institution.

Perceptions of Community Support/Impact (Open ended items developed for the study)

1. How do you think the general public views police work in America?
2. How do you think public perceptions of police work affect officers in general?
3. How do you personally feel perceived by individuals in your community?
4. Do civilian perceptions impact how you experience your job? Provide two or three examples.

Coding guide summary for qualitative remarks

For each response, coders indicated one primary code for the sentiment of the response. Then coders listed all subcodes for more specific themes that applied to each response or left the subcodes blank if none applied. More than one sub-code could be applied to any single response.

Coding theme for questions on public/community perceptions

How do you think the general public views police work in America?

How do you personally feel perceived by individuals in your community?

1= Negative Response; Response is entirely negative, no mention of positive/mitigating factors

Subcodes

1a = Racial; public holds negative views with specific mention of race-related issues

1b = Lack of understanding; public holds negative views, specific mention of negative views being related to the public misunderstanding the nature of police work

1c = Media Portrayals; public holds negative views, specific mention of negative views being rooted/observed in media portrayals/news

2= Mixed Response; Response indicates a mix of positive and negative perceptions of police

Subcodes

2a = General Mixed; public holds variety of views about police, different people believe different things

2b = Polarized Mixed; public holds split views at two extreme ends of a spectrum

2c = Mixed Feelings; individual people in the public have mixed feelings, seeing both positive and negative aspects

3= Positive Response; Response is entirely positive, no mention of negative or worsening factors

4= Neutral Response or Unclear

Coding theme for questions on effects of public perceptions

How do you think public perceptions of police work affect officers in general?

Do civilian perceptions impact how you experience your job? Provide two or three examples.

1= Does not affect; Officers are not impacted by public perceptions

2= Does affect; Officers are impacted by public perceptions

Subcodes

2a = Negatively; officers are impacted by public perceptions in a negative way

2b = Positively; officers are impacted by public perceptions in a positive way

2c = Mixed; officers are impacted by public perceptions in both positive and negative ways

2d = Neutral; officers are impacted by public perceptions, but the impact is neither positive nor negative

Sub-code for what is affected.

W= Larger system or societal impacts (laws, policy, culture, community, etc.)

X= Wellbeing/ Mental or emotional health of officers

Y = Procedure / Officers' ability to do the job

Z = Motivation / Morale of officers