Using the Job Demands-Resources Model to Predict Burnout in Police Officers in the UK and the US

Jacquelyn Keaton, Dr. Kristen Black, Dr. Jonathan Houdmont, Dr. Chris Cunningham, Dr. Alexandra Zelin

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE AT CHATTANOOGA

Research Questions

Are the working conditions that lead to burnout in police officers universal or do they vary across cultures?

Do officers' perceptions of community support (or lack thereof) function as resources or demands within the JD-R model?

Introduction

Burnout & the Job Demands-Resources Model

- Burnout is feeling worn out or depleted, as a result of prolonged exposure to stress, and has 3 dimensions: emotional exhaustions, depersonalization, & reduced personal accomplishment[1]
- Rates of burnout among police officers vary from country to country & statistics are reported using different metrics, making international comparisons difficult
- The Job Demands-Resources model[2] was designed to explain how burnout develops, where high demands and low resources lead to burnout
- Police stressors can be categorized into operational (inherent to the job, i.e. exposure to crime, violence, court) and organizational stressors (due to the way work is structured, i.e. management styles, scheduling, and understaffing)[3]
- Officers rate organizational stressors as more common sources of their stress at work, with organizational stressors having 6.3 times more effect on psychological distress[4]
- Hypothesis 1: High demands and few resources will correlate with higher levels of burnout in both the UK and US samples.
- Research Question 1: Do certain demands and resources hold different weights in contributing to the development of burnout for officers in different countries?

Health Outcomes

- Burnout is associated with negative health outcomes and more sick absences[5]
- Police officers are at higher risk for several health problems, including certain cancers, cardiovascular disease, and suicide
- Hypothesis 2: High levels of burnout will be associated with worse health outcomes in both the US and the UK samples.
- Research Question 2a: Do negative health outcomes differ between the two samples when experiencing burnout?
- Research Question 2b: Are certain demands and resources in police work are more strongly related to health outcomes in the two samples?

Perceptions of Community Support (American sample only)

- Civilian attitudes towards police appear to fluctuate with current events that involve police, and tend to differ across demographic groups[6]
- Civilian attitudes have become less favorable towards police since 2016, with a 10-13% decrease in the number of participants who answered questions favorably[7]
- Perceiving social stigma towards one's profession was found to function as a demand within the JD-R model & was associated with burnout[8]
- Hypothesis 3: Perceptions of community support will be negatively associated with burnout.

Methods

This study will have 2 samples, one from the UK and one from the US. Data from the UK sample (n=446) has already been collected by Dr. Houdmont from the University of Nottingham. Data from the American sample will be collected between October and December of 2020 by recruiting interested officers through personal contacts with law enforcement officers. Those who are interested will receive a QuestionPro link, through which they will complete informed consent and then take the survey. Participants will be entered into a drawing to receive one of fifteen $20 Amazon gift cards.

Measures

- Human Services version of the MBI to measure burnout[9]
- Questionnaire on the Experience and Assessment of Work to measure demands & resources[10]
- Physical Symptoms Inventory (PSI)[11] & sick absences from work to measure health outcomes
- Demographics- age, sex, department assignment, tenure
- Items from the Police Stress Survey[12] to measure impact of cultural stressors
- Open-ended questions regarding officers' perceptions of civilian attitudes towards police

Discussion

Unique Contributions

Few studies on burnout in police populations report data on multi-national samples, particularly when the data was analyzed independently by country. Additionally, statistics on police burnout are reported using several metrics across the literature, making comparisons difficult. This study aims to close this gap in the literature by including samples from 2 countries which will be analyzed independently but with the same measures. Few studies have sought to combine research on police burnout and on police relationships with civilians, and this study aims to do that. Whether officer perceptions of community support impacts burnout seems a relevant question given recent events involving police misconduct and public outcry.

Possible Implications

Applying the JD-R model, our study will explore whether certain demands or resources hold different weights in contributing to the development of burnout for officers in different countries. These findings will hold practical recommendations for targeted interventions that could be offered to improve officer health and reduce burnout. Understanding what role community support plays in the burnout process could also help inform interventions to reduce burnout and provide insight on possible long-term effects of recent events.

Limitations

Perceptions of community support questions cannot be assessed in the UK data because it has already been collected

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