



SOCIAL AND ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT AS RESOURCES FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL RESILIENCE AMONG LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS

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Abstract. *Law enforcement is characterised by a combination of operational pressure, high responsibility, emotional demands, uncertainty and regular exposure to potentially stressful situations. Under such conditions, psychological resilience becomes an important professional resource that enables officers to maintain emotional stability, adaptive functioning and effective decision-making. However, resilience should not be considered exclusively as an individual psychological characteristic. Contemporary research increasingly emphasises the social and organisational environment in which professional resilience develops and is maintained. The present paper examines social and organisational support as significant resources for strengthening psychological resilience among law enforcement officers.*

Keywords: *psychological resilience, law enforcement officers, social support, organisational support, occupational stress, coping, professional well-being.*

INTRODUCTION

Law enforcement activity is associated with specific psychological demands that distinguish it from many other professional fields. Officers may regularly encounter interpersonal conflict, aggression, uncertainty, responsibility for the safety of others, strict organisational requirements, time pressure and situations requiring rapid decision-making. The cumulative influence of these factors can increase emotional tension and occupational stress. Consequently, the ability to preserve psychological stability and restore psychological resources after stressful professional situations becomes an important condition for effective professional functioning.

MAIN PART

Psychological resilience in this context should not be understood simply as endurance or the ability to suppress emotional reactions. Contemporary approaches increasingly conceptualise resilience as a dynamic process through which individuals maintain or restore adaptive functioning in the presence of significant stressors.

Research conducted among police officers indicates that resilience is associated with different aspects of psychological health and occupational adaptation (van der Meulen et al., 2018). This approach is especially important for law enforcement psychology because it shifts attention from the question of whether an officer experiences stress to the mechanisms and resources that enable the officer to cope effectively with that stress.

At the same time, psychological resilience cannot be explained exclusively through individual personality characteristics. Law enforcement officers perform their professional duties within a complex social system consisting of colleagues, supervisors, organisational structures, family members and the wider community. The quality of relationships within this system may either strengthen available psychological resources or increase the negative impact of occupational demands. Therefore, social and organisational factors should be considered important components in understanding the development and maintenance of psychological resilience.

One of the most significant of these factors is social support. Social support includes emotional, informational and practical assistance received from other people, as well as an individual's perception that such assistance will be available when needed. Patterson, examining police officers, found that social support and coping resources were relevant to the relationship between stressful work experiences and psychological distress (Patterson, 2003). This suggests that the consequences of occupational stress are determined not only by the intensity of professional stressors but also by the social resources available to an officer.

Peer support has particular importance in law enforcement environments. Colleagues share similar professional responsibilities and often have a more accurate understanding of the psychological demands associated with police work. A difficult professional situation that may be challenging to explain to people outside the profession can be more easily understood by another officer with similar experience. Mutual trust, informal communication, exchange of professional experience and a sense of belonging to a cohesive team can therefore function as protective psychological resources.

However, the mere presence of colleagues does not automatically constitute effective social support. The psychological value of support depends on its quality. An officer needs to perceive interpersonal relationships as trustworthy and sufficiently safe to discuss professional difficulties without fear of negative evaluation. When the organisational culture discourages expressions of psychological difficulty, employees may formally be surrounded by colleagues while still experiencing psychological

isolation. Consequently, the perception of available support may be as important as the objective existence of professional relationships.

Recent empirical findings reinforce this assumption. Chen and colleagues, in a study involving more than two thousand police officers, demonstrated meaningful relationships between perceived stress, social support, resilience, sleep quality and professional burnout (Chen et al., 2025). These findings indicate that social resources form part of a broader psychological mechanism through which officers adapt to occupational stress. Social support may reduce feelings of isolation, facilitate emotional processing of stressful experiences and provide information or practical assistance necessary for solving professional problems.

Organisational support represents another important factor. Law enforcement institutions are hierarchical organisations in which employees' psychological experiences may be influenced considerably by supervisors, organisational procedures, workload, communication practices and perceptions of fairness. An officer may possess strong personal coping abilities but still experience prolonged psychological strain when working in an environment characterised by insufficient communication, low trust, lack of recognition or inadequate supervisory support.

Perceived organisational support refers to employees' beliefs that their organisation values their contribution and cares about their professional and psychological well-being. Within law enforcement institutions, such support may be reflected in constructive communication between supervisors and employees, fair distribution of responsibilities, recognition of professional effort, access to psychological services, appropriate responses to critical incidents and opportunities to seek assistance without fear of stigmatisation.

Leadership is particularly relevant in this process. The behaviour of a supervisor influences more than task performance. It may shape interpersonal trust, team cohesion, psychological safety, willingness to seek help and employees' attitudes towards psychological services. A supportive leader can contribute to an environment in which discussing occupational difficulties is perceived as a normal component of professional adaptation rather than evidence of weakness. In contrast, an organisational climate characterised by excessive criticism or low psychological safety may discourage officers from seeking assistance even when support services are formally available.

Recent research increasingly considers resilience, organisational support, emotional regulation, professional identity and healthy leadership as interconnected

protective resources in police work. This broader approach is important because it prevents psychological resilience from becoming solely the responsibility of the individual employee. If resilience is interpreted only as an officer's personal capacity to tolerate stress, organisational sources of psychological strain may remain unnoticed. A social-psychological perspective instead recognises that resilient functioning emerges from interaction between individual capacities and environmental resources.

Family relationships also represent a significant source of psychological resources. After demanding professional experiences, family members may provide emotional stability, a sense of belonging and opportunities for psychological recovery. Nevertheless, law enforcement work may create specific barriers to family support. Officers may be reluctant to discuss distressing professional experiences because of confidentiality requirements, concern about burdening family members or the belief that people outside the profession will not fully understand the situation. This means that family support is potentially protective but should not be assumed to function automatically.

Community attitudes may constitute an additional social factor. Officers interact continuously with members of the public, and perceptions of social recognition or rejection may influence professional well-being. When officers perceive that their professional role is understood and supported by the community, this may strengthen professional identity and a sense of meaningfulness. Conversely, prolonged experiences of social distrust or conflict may become an additional psychological burden. Thus, psychological resilience can be viewed as developing within several interconnected social levels: close interpersonal relationships, professional teams, organisational structures and the broader social environment.

This perspective also has practical significance for psychological work with law enforcement personnel. Traditional resilience programmes often focus primarily on individual skills such as stress management, emotional regulation, relaxation or cognitive coping. These methods remain useful, and research suggests that psychological skills interventions can positively affect several indicators of police personnel's psychological functioning (Lu & Petersen, 2023). Nevertheless, individual training alone may be insufficient when the officer returns to an organisational environment that does not support the use of those psychological resources.

Therefore, resilience-development programmes should combine individual and social-organisational approaches. At the interpersonal level, peer-support mechanisms can be strengthened so that officers have access to trusted colleagues who are prepared

to provide appropriate psychological and informational support. At the supervisory level, leaders can be trained to identify signs of excessive occupational strain and communicate constructively with employees. At the organisational level, procedures for obtaining psychological assistance should be accessible, confidential and free from stigmatising interpretations.

An important task is to normalise psychological support within professional culture. In occupations traditionally associated with discipline, strength and emotional control, seeking psychological assistance may sometimes be perceived as inconsistent with professional competence. Such attitudes can prevent early help-seeking and allow occupational stress to accumulate. A psychologically healthy organisational culture should therefore communicate that the use of professional psychological resources is a form of responsible occupational behaviour rather than a sign of personal weakness.

CONCLUSION

Psychological resilience among law enforcement officers is formed through the interaction of individual psychological capacities and social-organisational resources. Social support from colleagues and family can reduce psychological isolation, facilitate adaptive coping and provide emotional and practical resources during periods of occupational stress. Organisational support contributes by creating conditions of trust, recognition, psychological safety and access to professional assistance. Supportive leadership and a constructive professional climate therefore represent important social-psychological resources for maintaining stable professional functioning.

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