

## **POLICE JOB STRESS AND STRESS REDUCTION/COPING PROGRAMS: THE EFFECTS ON THE RELATIONSHIP WITH SPOUSES**

### **Polis Meslek Stresi ve Stres Azaltma/Stresle Başa Çıkma Programları: Eşlerle İlişkileri Üzerine Etkileri**

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#### **Özet**

**P**olislik, uzun ve düzensiz çalışma saatleri, hiyerarşik yapı ve güvenlik endişeleri gibi nedenlerden dolayı en stresli mesleklerden birisi olarak kabul edilmektedir. Meslek stresinin sadece memurun kendisine değil çalıştığı kuruma ve ailesine de olumsuz etkileri olabilir. Bu çalışmada sadece bu stresin eşler üzerindeki etkileri incelenmiştir. Hipotezleri test etmek için 1632 memurun yanıt verdiği ikincil (secondary) bir veri (data) seti kullanılmıştır. Bağımlı değişken sırasal (ordinal) olduğundan, etkilerini tespit etmek için sırasal lojistik regresyon analizi (tahminleri) (ordinal logistic regression estimators) kullanılmıştır. Bulgular, meslekte yaşanan ileri seviyedeki stresin olumlu ve geçerli olarak bağımlı değişken üzerinde etkisi olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Dahası, memurlar stresi azaltma/stresle başa çıkma programlarına başvurduklarında eşleriyle ilişkileri daha iyi olmaktadır. İlginç bir şekilde eğitim seviyesi yükseldikçe aile içi sorunlar da artmaktadır. Çalışma sonucunda mesleki stresten olumsuz yönde etkilenen memurlar için polis müdürlüklerince yapılacak bir kısım önerilere de yer verilmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Polis, Mesleki stres, Eş ilişkileri, Stres azaltma/stresle başa çıkma programları.

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### Abstract

Being a police is considered one of the highly stressful occupations because of the reasons such as long irregular hours, hierarchic structure and safety concerns. Job stress might not only have adverse effects on himself/herself, but also on the officer's department and family. In this study, however, the effects of the job stress on the spousal relationship are examined. A secondary data that have 1,632 responses by police officer are used to test the hypotheses. Because the dependent variable is ordinal, ordinal logistic estimators are used to find the coefficient effects. The findings indicate that high level of stress experienced in the job is positively, strongly and significantly associated with the dependent variable. Moreover, when the officer used stress reduction/coping programs (SRCPs), the better gets the relationship with his/her spouse. Interestingly, higher level of education increases the likelihood of the spousal relational problems. At the end, several suggestions were made to the police departments in terms of helping the officers that are affected adversely by job stress.

**Key Words:** Police, Job stress, Spousal relationship, Stress reduction/coping programs (SRCPs).

### Introduction

...the price of job stress may not be limited to the costs incurred when recruiting and training replacements; there may also be an emotional price tag paid by the worker and his or her family. Upon arriving home at the end of the workday, emotionally exhausted police officers are more likely to bring with them the tensions caused by their jobs. According to their wives' reports, emotionally exhausted officers are likely to return from work upset or angry, tense and anxious, and in a complaining mood; despite their apparent physical exhaustion, they have difficulty sleeping at night. In addition to the symptoms experienced by the officer himself, the family suffers. Women married to emotionally burned out officers were less satisfied with their husbands' jobs, as were the officers themselves...Besides being less involved with friends, the depersonalizing officer is less involved with his own family and tends to spend his off-hours away from home (Jackson and Maslach, 1982:72, 74).

When compared to the other occupations, police job is considered highly stressful (Sever and Cinoglu, 2010; Gul, 2008; Buker and Wiecko, 2007; Yeşilorman, 2003; Burke, 1993; Crank and Caldero, 1991; Sigler et al., 1991; Kroes, 1976). As stated, “Stress is an integral part of the life of a professional police officer. Police often encounter stressful situations in their daily work, and these stressors have cumulative effects” (Maynard et al., 1980:495). As a matter of fact, every person is subject to stress, but police officers are at greater risk than other people (McCafferty et al., 1990). Factors like, dangerous missions, overloaded shift hours, hierarchical and disciplined structure etc., affect police psychology, physiology, and of course, his/her family relations. In another study, Maynard and Maynard (1982) stated that, the police officers have serious stress problems, and their families are suffering the effects of it. Further, it can adversely influence the job performance (Gershon, 1999), as well.

For instance, “If a worker’s job has a strong, negative impact on family life, as might be the case when job stress is ‘taken home’, the worker may consider giving up the job preserve the family. An alternative is to relinquish family and continue the job” (Jackson and Maslach, 1982:65). The stress does not only affect the officers, but also their families, as well (Sever and Cinoglu, 2010; Havassy, 1994; Scrivner, 1994; Gershon, 1999). The law enforcement officers suffer relatively high rates of suicide (Friedman, 1967), and high divorce rates (Kelling and Pate, 1975). Therefore, “the stressful nature of police work, along with other occupational demands, can have a great impact on the family life of police officers” (Delprino et al., 1995). As stated “both the manifestations and effects of police stress can be dangerous to the individual officer, his or her family and department, and the community at large” (Sewell, 1984:515). Moreover, broken marriages can also be a result of the job stress (Burgin, 1978).

This study will examine the effects of job stress and the stress reduction/coping programs (SRCs) on spousal relationship. Some pertinent questions associated with this analysis include: Do the job stress and working conditions influence the officer’s relationship with his/her spouse? Does it make any change whether the officer is highly/lowly educated? Do attitudes of the spouse to the officer matter? How about if the officer uses stress reduction/coping programs?

## 1. Literature Review

Police job stress is believed to be one of the most stressful jobs and the officers are under the risk of psychosocial work stress. As stated, “This police work stress can adversely impact the delivery of effective law enforcement, as well as pose a threat to the safety of police officers, their coworkers, their family and friends, and the general public” (Gershon, 1999:1). There are a variety of studies regarding police and job stress in the literature. Some scholars studied and provided the etymology and definition of the word “stress” in their studies (Pehlivan, 1995; Yeşilorman, 2003), whereas several others have studied the sources of police job stress (Gul, 2008; Buker and Wiecko, 2006; Coman and Evans, 1991; Crank and Caldero, 1991; Violanti and Aron, 1993; He et al., 2002; Kroes, 1985). And yet some others studied the effects of the job stress (Sever and Cinoglu, 2010; McCafferty et al., 1992).

Sever and Cinoglu (2010) found in their study that highly stressful officers are 4 times more likely to commit domestic violence. Further, they found that gender matters in domestic violence, as the male officers are more inclined to commit domestic violence compared to female officers. Finally, when officers are involved in negative and critical situations at work, they are more likely to act violently at home.

Gul (2008) studied law enforcement officers’ depression on their profession and examined the stressors in policing. He found that officers that make violent arrests were more likely to feel negative/depressed about their work. In addition, he found that officers who attended a police funeral were more likely to feel negative/depressed about their profession and African American officers were less likely to feel negative or depressed about their jobs than whites. Finally, patrol officers were more likely to feel negative/depressed about their work compared to other ranks.

Buker and Wiecko (2007) conducted a survey research on civilian officers, police officers, and mid-level supervisors (a total number of 811 respondents) working for the Turkish National Police Organization. They found that the organizational factors are the most stressful ones among other causes of stress. Moreover, there are differences in some stressors depending on the size and structure of the department. One another study

also examined the effects of police profession stress on the job performance (Shipley and Baranski, 2002).

Kroes (1985), on the other hand, found that bad administration policies, job conflict, moonlighting, underload-overload work, shift work and line-of-duty situations, courts, and negative public image are some important factors and stressors which affect police family life negatively. Barling (1990) studied the relationship between job experiences and marital functioning and found that positive work experiences (i.e., job satisfaction) are associated with positive marital functioning, whereas negative work experiences (i.e., work stress) are associated with marital dysfunction. Mauno and Kinnunen (1999) examined the relationship between the job stressors and marital satisfactions. They state that “the effects of job stressors on marital functioning are primarily indirect” (891). Thus, their results are paralleling several other studies, which particularly focused on the indirect nature of the relationship between negative work experiences and marital functioning (Higginbottom et al., 1993; MacEwen et al., 1992; Matthews et al., 1996).

Matthews et al. (1996:74) found in one of their models that “psychological distress resulting from work-family conflict influences marriage negatively by increasing hostility and decreasing warmth and supportiveness in marital interaction”. Lord (1996) found that work and non-work (i.e. spousal support) support have a helpful impact on the officer’s attitude and performance. In his study, Jackson (1992) found that support from spouses did not have any buffering effect on the relationship between marital and parental stress, whereas it has effect on the negative effect of work stress. In addition, “Long irregular hours, being on call, safety concerns...have all been postulated as reasons for the marital difficulties experienced by police officers” (Jackson and Maslach, 1982:65).

With respect to education, it is found that officers with more education are more likely to report more organizational work events and greater stress (Patterson, 2002). The paramilitary model of the organization is also the source of stress for highly educated officers that may feel that they are not given the opportunity to take part in decision making and contribute in the development (Goldstein, 1990). Similarly, the higher ranking officers have reported more stress and working condition events.

This might be because “Higher ranking officers have more administrative duties and supervise low ranking officers, while at the same time experiencing their own share of organizational events and situations, and consequently they experience more events and greater perceptions of stress” (Patterson, 2002:615).

Looking at the issue from a different angle, “Because so many police families are adversely affected by an officer’s profession, [stress coping] programs in home and family life” (Sewell, 1984:521) can be helpful. “One of the basic issues in the occupational stress domain concerns coping, or ways in which the individual can attempt to deal with the job stressors to ward off the aversive strains” (Beehr et al., 1985:3). Therefore, stress management programs can be helpful for police officers (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Wilson et al., 2001; Patterson, 2003) that are weak in controlling and reducing stress. Stress-related disorders “can be reduced if a person understands the function of stressors, how these stressors can damage him or her physically and emotionally, and how he or she can cope with stressors to reduce stress” (Pollak and Sigler, 1998:120). Moreover, the awareness of stress and its control is the main focus of stress management (Apgar and Callahan, 1982; Charlesworth and Nathan, 1982).

## **2. Data and Methods**

The purpose of the current study is to lay out how job stress and the conditions of police profession influence the officers’ spousal relationships. To test the hypotheses, the researchers used the data of “Work and Family Services for Law Enforcement Personnel in the United States” by Delprino, O’Quin, and Kennedy’s (1995, from ICPSR-2696). The unit of analysis is police officers who work in the agencies in Northeast, Midwest and Southwest of U.S. 1,632 officers responded to the questionnaire. Because the dependent variable is a rank ordered one, maximum likelihood estimates (MLE)<sup>1</sup> is applied. The researchers used ordinal logistic regression in order to estimate the probable effects. All the statistical analyses are done with the statistical package of intercooled\_9 STATA. The alternative hypotheses are:

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<sup>1</sup> MLE maximizes the probability of observing the outcomes that were actually observed (Long and Freeze 2006:152).

**Alternative Hypothesis (H<sub>a</sub>)-I:** The police job stress and working conditions influence the officer's relationship with his/her spouse.

**Alternative Hypothesis (H<sub>a</sub>)-II:** When the officer uses stress reduction/coping programs (SRCPs), this makes the officer's relationship with his/her spouse get better.

## ***2.1. Dependent Variable***

### ***2.1.1. Spousal Relationship***

The dependent variable is the officer's relationship with his/her spouse. The question for the dependent variable is: "How does your career as a law enforcement officer influence your relationship with spouse/partner?" and the statement for this question is: "What occurs on the job influences my relationship with my spouse/partner." The ordinal answer scale is "1=Never", "2=Rarely", "3=Sometimes", "4=Often", and "5=Always". There are 170 number of missing data in this variable.

## ***2.2. Independent Variables***

### ***2.2.1. Job Stress***

The key Independent variable is the stress experienced in the job. The question for this variable was "Overall, how much stress are you experiencing on the job?" the number of missing data is 17. The level of measurement is ordinal ("1=Not at all", "2=A little", "3=Some", "4=Quite a bit", and "5=A lot".)

### ***2.2.2. Stress Reduction/Coping Programs (SRCPs)***

There were five stress management programs<sup>2</sup>, none of which are individually significant in the first model. Therefore, the researchers added up "counseling for law enforcement families", "stress reduction

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<sup>2</sup> All of the five variables are dichotomous variables. The question asked for these five stress related variables is "Have you ever used [any of] this program/service?" Counseling for families (27 missing); stress reduction (23 missing); stress education for recruits and families (31 missing); group therapy (29 missing); family orientation (32 missing).

programs”, “stress education for recruits and families”, “group therapy”, and “family orientation programs”, and created a new variable called Stress Reduction/Coping Programs (SRCPs). Then, this new variable was generated by interacting it with the stress variable.

### 2.2.3. Supportive Attitudes

The spousal support variables<sup>3</sup> are “communicates well”, “maintains good sense of humor”, and “maintains positive or supports job”. Not all of them were statistically significant, and the significant ones were not strongly associated with the dependent variable. Therefore, the researcher added them all to create a stronger variable, which he called as supportive attitudes.

### 2.2.4. Organizational Hierarchy and Danger in Job

The working conditions consist of organizational hierarchy (30 missing) and danger in job (19 missing). Both of these explanatory variables have ordinal level of measurement: “1=Not at all”, “2=A little”, “3=Some”, “4=Quite a bit”, and “5=A lot”. They also have the same question on the questionnaire: “How much does [hierarchy/danger in job] impact your family?”

### 2.2.5. Demographics: Education and Rank

Two demographic variables are included in the model: education and rank. Education has an ordinal level measurement and 3 missing data. The answer scale is: “1=High School”, “2=Some College”, “3=Associate Degree”, “4=Bachelors Degree”, “5=Some Graduate School”, and “6=Graduate Degree”. Rank was ordinal, but the researcher made it a dummy variable. The non-ranking officers (plain officers) were recoded

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<sup>3</sup> All of these variables measurement level is ordinal. The question for maintains positive (124 missing), maintains good humor (118 missing), and communicates well (121 missing) is: “how does your spouse/partner provide support for you?” Different than others, the question for support job (122 missing) is “Answer the scale below: My spouse/partner is supportive of my career in law enforcement?”

as “0”, and the ranking officers (sheriff, chief, captain, lieutenant, sergeant) were recoded as “1”.

In summary, the missing data on each variable were recoded and reported. The researchers checked multicollinearity and found that it is not a problem in the model. Further, outliers<sup>4</sup> were also checked. The standardized residual Delta-Beta influence statistic (dbeta) graphs illustrate that there are some influential cases in the model. Therefore, the researcher deleted five of the most influential cases (863, 976, 986, 1579, and 1613) in the data and observed that the model and findings got better.

Finally, there is a problem with the measurement of the content of the stress reduction/coping variables, since no information is provided in regards to the contents of them. The information given on these variables are either the officer used them or did not use them. Content is an important issue due to the fact that simply attending a stress reduction program may not have the expected impact on police officers. In short, there is content validity problem in the study.

### **3. Findings**

Table 1 presents the results of having regressed the relationship with the spouse on job stress, danger in job, organizational hierarchy and stress coping/reduction programs as well as education and rank of the officers. It reports the ordered logistics estimates. The coefficient of the job stress is positive, large, and statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ). In other words, the stress variable is strongly and positively related ( $z = 8.44$ ) to the dependent variable.

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<sup>4</sup> “Although no methods for detecting influential observations and outliers have been developed specifically for the ORM, Hosmer and Lemeshow (2000) suggest applying the methods for binary models to the J-1 cumulative probabilities...the disadvantage of this approach is that you are evaluating only an approximation to the model you have fitted, because coefficients of the binary models differ from those fitted in the ordinal model” (Long and Freese, 2006:200).

**Table 1:** Estimates of the Effects of the Explanatory Variables on the Officer's Relationship with Spouse

Independent Variables	Spousal Relationship
Police Job Stress	.63*** (.07)
Danger in Job	.33*** (.05)
Organizational Hierarchy	.22*** (.04)
Supportive Attitudes of Spouse	-.15*** (.02)
Stress Reduction/Coping Programs	.77* (.31)
Interaction (Stress & SRCPs)	-.21* (.10)
Education	.19*** (.04)
Officer Title (ranking = 1, non-ranking = 0)	.13 (.11)
$\tau_1$	-.56
$\tau_2$	1.66
$\tau_3$	4.19
$\tau_4$	6.28
Log likelihood	-1564.19
LR chi2 (8)	354.07
P > chi2	0.0000
Pseudo R-squared	0.1017
N	1350

**Notes:** Ordered logit estimates. Standard errors in parentheses.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

Increased job stress is associated with increased likelihood of problems in spousal relationship. Because an ordered logit estimator was used, the researcher also computed the change<sup>5</sup> in predicted probability associated with increasing stress level from 1 to 5. Looking down each column of changes in predicted probability in Table 2, one sees that increased level of stress experienced in the job is associated with dramatic increase in the probability of spousal problems. To make the process concrete, the number at the top second right corner, .0216, is subtracted from the value in the bottom, second right corner of Table 2, .1992. In other words, the change in predicted probability of the relationship with spouse, associated with the lowest level and highest level of stress is:  $.1992 - .0216 = .1776$

Danger in job ( $z=6.50$ ) and organizational hierarchy ( $z=5.35$ ) are also positively and statistically significant. The more danger associated with job increases the likelihood of spousal relational problems. Similarly, increased level of organizational hierarchy is associated with increased likelihood of adverse effect on the relationship with spouse.

Supportive attitudes of spouse ( $z= -8.13$ ) to officer are negatively, strongly and significantly associated with the dependent variable. Increased level of spousal support is associated with the likelihood of decreased level of problems with relationship.

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<sup>5</sup> The change in predicted probability was computed using SPost (Long and Freese, 2006).

**Table 2:** Change in Predicted Probability Associated with Job Stress

Stress Level <sup>a</sup>	Never Effects Relationship	Rarely Effects Relationship	Sometimes Effects Relationship	Often Effects Relationship	Always Effects Relationship
	Not At All	0.2525	0.5047	0.2180	0.0216
A Little	0.1532	0.4723	0.3292	0.0395	0.0059
Some	0.0883	0.3837	0.4465	0.0705	0.0109
Quite A Bit	0.0493	0.2744	0.5341	0.1219	0.0202
A Lot	0.0270	0.1770	0.5597	0.1992	0.0371

**Notes:** The change in predicted probability is the difference between the probability associated with the officer's relationship with his/her spouse depending on the stress level experienced in the job. Predicted probabilities calculated using SPost (Long and Freese, 2006)

<sup>a</sup> The stress level is coded as 'Not At All=1', 'A Little=2', 'Some=3', 'Quite A Bit=4', and 'A Lot=5'.

Table 1 also reports that just one of the demographics in the model is statistically significant. When education level ( $z=4.35$ ) increases, the level of the probability of the spousal problems also increases. Put differently, highly educated officers (regardless of the rank), have more likelihood of spousal problems. The rank variable is not statistically significant.

None of the stress reducing program variables was statistically significant. Since stress is a complex issue that might have multiple causes (Yeşilorman, 2003), then coping with it might require multiple strategies. Thus, none of the stress coping programs alone might be adequate for a success in coping with stress. Therefore, adding up all the stress reducing programs into a new variable provides us with a more comprehensive measure for dealing with stress, that is, the variety of stress coping programs that a police officer has used. This new variable, namely Stress Reduction and Coping Programs (SRCs), was not

significant, either. However, interacting SRCPs with stress variable has turned out to be negatively significant ( $z = -2.18$ ) with the dependent variable. This result implies if police officers, who suffer from high level of stress, use a variety of stress coping programs, they have decreasing effect on the probability of spouse related problems. Again, the ordinal logistic estimator is used to calculate the change<sup>6</sup> in predicted probabilities, associated with the increase of using stress reduction and coping programs.

Table 3 reports the predicted probabilities of the change. Looking down each column of changes in predicted probability, we can see that increased level of use of SRCPs is associated with a decrease in the probability of spousal problems. To make the process concrete, the number at the top second right corner, .1935, is subtracted from the value in the bottom, second right corner of Table 3, .0787. The change in predicted probability of the relationship with spouse, associated with the lowest level and highest level of stress is:  $.0787 - .1935 = -.1148$ .

Finally, the log likelihood (-1564.19), LR chi2 value (354.07) and probability level (0.000) is quite good and satisfying. The most closely approximated R2 value<sup>7</sup> is .251. According to the above-mentioned findings, the researchers rejects the null hypotheses.

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<sup>6</sup> The change in predicted probability was computed using SPost (Long and Freese, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> For ordinal outcomes, the most closely approximated R<sup>2</sup> is McKelvey and Zavoina's R<sup>2</sup> (Long and Freese, 2006).

**Table 3:** Change in Predicted Probability Associated with Stress Reduction/Coping Programs (SRCPs)

Used SRCPs <sup>a</sup>	Never Effects Relationship	Rarely Effects Relationship	Sometimes Effects Relationship	Often Effects Relationship	Always Effects Relationship
0	0.0281	0.1824	0.5602	0.1935	0.0357
1	0.0365	0.2228	0.5560	0.1573	0.0275
2	0.0474	0.2675	0.5379	0.1261	0.0211
3	0.0614	0.3150	0.5075	0.1000	0.0161
4	0.0790	0.3630	0.4670	0.0787	0.0123

**Notes:** The change in predicted probability is the difference between the probability associated with the officer's relationship with his/her spouse depending on the use of any stress reduction/coping programs. The stress level is held constant at the highest ("A Lot = 5"). The predicted probabilities are calculated using SPost (Long and Freese, 2006)

<sup>a</sup> The numbers refer to the number of Stress Reduction and Coping Programs (SRCPs) used.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The secondary data analyzed in this study provide maximum leverage for the question of whether stress experienced in the job does have any effect on the officer's relationship with his/her spouse. Unlike several previous studies that examined the sources of police job stress (Gül, 2008; Buker and Wiecko; Gross, 1991; Coman and Evans, 1991; Crank and Caldero, 1991; Violanti and Aron, 1993; He et al., 2002) this paper explored the effects of job stress on the spousal relationship. It is found that police work and stress can have an impact on the probability of spousal relationship (Barling, 1990; Mauno and Kinnunen, 1999). This study also found that spousal support to the officer helps the relationship get better, which parallels the literature (Lord, 1996; Jackson, 1992).

Different than the previous studies, five diverse stress related programs were added up to generate a stronger and more comprehensive

(and explanatory) variable. In addition, the interaction effect of the stress reduction/coping programs is calculated. It is found that the SRCPs influence the effect of the stress on the spousal relationship. Put differently, it can be said that SRCPs can be helpful for an officer's family life (Sewell, 1984; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Wilson et al., 2001; Patterson, 2003). Therefore, the police departments should encourage officers, especially the ones who are under risk of high stress, to attend such programs.

Education is unexpectedly positively associated with the spousal relationship. Clearly, the education increases the likelihood of adverse spousal relationship. However, this finding is consistent with the literature. Highly educated officers are more likely to report more organizational work events and greater stress (Patterson, 2002) and they may feel that they are not given the opportunity to take part in decision making and contribute in the development (Goldstein, 1990).

In summary, findings in this study support the hypotheses as well as the literature that police job stress and working conditions increase the likelihood of the officer's relationship with his/her spouse adversely (Sever and Cinoglu, 2010). When the spouse shows supportive attitudes such as communicates well, maintains positive and shows good sense of humor, as well as supports job, the better gets the likelihood of relationship. This should inspire police departments to organize and give seminars to police spouses in order show how important the spouses' support is. As it is suggested, stress seminars might be helpful for officers and their spouses before and during the job (McCafferty et al., 1992). Another suggestion for the police departments is that they should provide a less stressful working environment and atmosphere for the officers. In addition, they should be aware of their officers, their families, and their situations, not to control but to help them. Another way of saying that is monitoring their "adaptive and maladaptive coping skills" (Gul, 2008:11) is important. Further, they should employ psychologists and psychiatrists (McCafferty et al., 1992). A good policy for the departments would be not to underestimate the officers problems, even if they look small.

In conclusion, this study has answered several questions regarding police job stress and spousal problems, and offered some suggestions regardingly. It should be noted that the data for exploring those questions

are limited to agencies in Northeast, Midwest and Southwest in the U.S., only, even though the results are generalizable. Therefore, still much remains to be explored. Does the effect of job stress change in larger/smaller departments? In other words, does the department size and population density served matter? Would it be better if the officers had stress reduction/coping hints and lessons during the academy training?

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