

Work stress associated with adverse mental and physical health outcomes in police officers

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Exposure to critical incidents, workplace discrimination, lack of cooperation among coworkers, and job dissatisfaction correlated significantly with perceived work stress among urban police officers, according to a study by researchers at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health. Work stress was significantly associated with adverse outcomes, including depression and intimate partner abuse. The paper, "Mental, Physical, and Behavioral Outcomes Associated with Perceived Work Stress in Police Officers" is published in the March 2009 issue of the *Journal of Criminal Justice and Behavior*.

To examine the impact of a wide range of police stressors on potential [health outcomes](#) while controlling for various coping strategies in a large sample of urban police officers, the Mailman School researchers developed a five-page, 132-item survey instrument to address police stressors, perceived [work stress](#), coping strategies, and adverse outcomes.

Five major categories of stressors identified by the study include exposure to critical incidents (e.g., attending a police funeral, being the subject of an internal affairs investigation), job dissatisfaction, perceived organizational unfairness, discrimination, and lack of cooperation and trust. Of these, lack of organizational fairness and job dissatisfaction were most strongly correlated with self-reported [perceived work](#) stress.

Perceived work stress was also correlated with adverse psychological, physical, and behavioral outcomes. Individuals who reported experiencing depression were nearly 10 times more likely to report perceived work stress, and individuals reporting anxiety were six times more likely to report work stress. Individuals who reported aggression or interpersonal conflict were two times more likely to also report work stress.

Perceived work stress was strongly associated with avoidant and negative coping behaviors. "One interesting finding from this study was that officers reporting high work stress and who relied on avoidant coping mechanisms were more than 14 times more likely to report anxiety and more than nine times more likely to report burnout than were officers who did not rely on avoidance as a coping strategy," commented Robyn Gershon, DrPH, professor of clinical Sociomedical Sciences at the Mailman School of Public Health and principal investigator.

"There are two paths to improvement," continued Dr. Gershon, "One is to improve the coping mechanisms of officers who may be exposed to stress, and the other is to identify and address modifiable job stressors. Both of these approaches can help to mitigate the effects of work stress among police officers."

Source: Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health

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