THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL SUPPORTS ON POLICE STRESS*

FRANCIS T. CULLEN
University of Cincinnati

TERRENCE LEMMING
Burbank, Illinois, Police Department

BRUCE G. LINK
Columbia University

JOHN F. WOZNIAK
Western Illinois University

Utilizing a theoretical perspective (the "social supports model") increasingly applied by stress researchers in other fields, the present endeavor explores whether social supports operate to shield officers from the stresses emanating from police work. To investigate this issue, 91 suburban officers were administered a questionnaire that contained scales measuring four job-related stressors, four types of social supports, and two forms of psychological stress—work and life. With regard to the stressors, the data analysis revealed that feelings of dangerousness were significantly and positively related to both stress scales, while shift change and court problems increased only general life stress. It was also found that supervisory support mitigates work stress while family support helps to reduce more general psychological discomfort. These latter results reinforce the assertion that future research could profit by systematically exploring the circumstances, such as social supports, which enable police to cope effectively with the more stressful features of their work.

Over the past decade, there has been a proliferation of academic and more popular literature focusing upon the potentially stressful features of criminal justice work. While there has been no shortage of studies decrying the psychological pains burdening both custodial and treatment personnel within the field of corrections (Belcastro, Gold, and Grant, 1982; Cheek and Miller, 1979; Gardner, 1981; Johnson, Rusinko, Girard, and Tossey, 1979; Whitehead, 1982; Wickman, 1982), research on the strains inherent in the occupational role of the law enforcement officer has been particularly plentiful (Spielberger, Westberry, Grier, and Greenfield, 1981; Territo and Vetter, ...

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Indeed, it is not too much to assert that "police stress" has gained the stature of a social problem—an occupational hazard that officers must be shown how to cope with and that the public and policy makers must be alerted to without delay.¹

It should be realized, however, that the new-found salience of the stressful nature of criminal justice work is not an isolated phenomenon. Instead, by broadening one's vision, it can be quickly learned that "stress" has emerged as a central research concern in other realms of academic interest as well. For instance, numerous studies have investigated the sources and effects of stress in a variety of work settings (House, 1981; LaRocco, House, and French, 1980). Similarly, those within the field of mental health have sought to detail how stressful life events precipitate a range of mental and physical disabilities (Rabkin and Struening, 1976a, 1976b; Cassell, 1975).

This latter consideration takes on importance when it is realized that the theoretical constructs developed in these other fields might prove useful in helping to illuminate the causal factors underlying the stress endured by criminal justice employees. In this regard, it should be observed initially that stress research (including that on police) has traditionally embraced what can best be termed the "stressor-outcome model" (Kahn, Wolf, Quinn, and Snoek, 1964). Here, the logic of the analysis has been to assess how a stressful circumstance or "stressor" leads directly to a negative outcome such as psychological stress, psychiatric disorder, social disability (divorce), or physical ailment.² The working assumption of this perspective can be stated in a simple equation: the more intense the stressor (for example, death of a loved one, role conflict at work), the worse the negative outcomes.

However, in recent times, a revisionist paradigm has emerged which has captured increasing support among stress researchers (Cobb, 1976; Dean and Lin, 1977; Eaton, 1978; Gore, 1978; House, 1981; House and Harkins, 1975; Kessler and Essex, 1982; LaRocco et al., 1980; Lin, Simeone, Ensel, and Kuo, 1979; Pearlin, Lieberman, Menaghan, and Mullan, 1981; Williams, Ware, and

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¹ While it is commonly assumed that policing is an especially stressful occupation, the existing research is less than unanimous in supporting this conclusion (Terry, 1983; Malloy and Mays, 1984). An interesting puzzle that remains unsolved is why, in the face of unclear evidence, police stress has come to be defined as a social problem over the past decade (Spector and Kitsuse, 1977).

² The term "stress" has frequently been used by different authors to refer both to the conditions that can give rise to psychologically felt stress or discomfort and to the psychological state itself. In order to distinguish clearly between these two entities, the current study employs the term "stressor" for a condition that may potentially precipitate stress and reserves the term "stress" for the subsequent, comforted psychological state. Finally, it should be noted that stress researchers in other fields often utilize the concept of "distress," rather than stress, to refer to the negative or unpleasant strains people face. However, since this usage is not typical in the policing literature, we have decided to stay with the term "stress" here and employ it in a manner synonymous with the concept of distress.
This new perspective—the "social supports model"—suggests that traditional thinking about stress ignores the reality that stressful experiences or stressors are not the only factors operating in a person's life. Instead, it is argued that a person may be more or less insulated against the effects of stressors depending upon whether the individual possesses social supports. Concretely, this means that those who must confront a difficult job situation or the loss of a spouse by themselves will experience higher levels of stress or other damaging consequences than will those who are able to turn to friends and co-workers for advice, comfort, or material aid. In short, the revisionist theorists reject the notion that stressors lead inexorably to pathological outcomes, asserting instead that social supports may help people cope with potentially stressful circumstances and thus mitigate the psychological stress and negative adaptations that might otherwise be expected.

In this light, it is notable that nearly all research on police stress has been informed by the traditional stressor-outcome model (Malloy and Mays, 1984; Terry, 1983). To be sure, implicit in many accounts has been the understanding that officers who can fashion meaningful affective relationships with fellow officers, family, and friends will avoid the straining features of law enforcement work. However, such insights are generally contained in essays or in the more discursive portions of research articles. Clearly lacking are systematic attempts to bring these observations to empirical test.

In contrast, the present undertaking constitutes an explicit attempt to assess the impact of social supports on police stress. In pursuing this task, an effort is made to build directly upon the "social supports model" that has emerged within the larger body of stress research. As a result, the general research question to be addressed here is: do social supports reduce the levels of stress experienced by officers both on the job and, more broadly, in their everyday lives?

**METHOD**

**SAMPLE**

In the summer of 1982, questionnaires were distributed to all officers (with the exception of the chiefs of police) in five departments located in the suburbs of a large midwestern city. Of the 161 subjects contacted, 56.5% or 91 returned a usable survey. The response rate for each department was as follows: Department 1 = 31 of 46 (67.4%); Department 2 = 22 of 54 (40.7%); Department 3 = 17 of 24 (70.8%); Department 4 = 12 of 27 (44.4%); Department 5 = 9 of 10 (90%).

Since information on a variety of the respondents' characteristics was collected, it is possible to present a rather complete description of the sample. To begin with, the sample included 59 patrol officers, 1 squad leader, 12 sergeants, 7 detectives, 8 lieutenants, 2 captains, 1 commander, and 1 person who...
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did not answer the question on rank. It should be noted that these subjects were almost exclusively white males; only two females and one black officer were in the final sample. The mean age of the respondents was 34.4, while the average length of time a person had been in police work was 9.5 years. With regard to education, 1.1% had not completed high school, 8.8% held high school degrees, 39.5% attended but did not finish college, 36.3% were college graduates, and 14.3% had undertaken graduate work. Finally, 1.1% of the sample reported earning a yearly salary of under $15,000, 12.1% between $15,001–20,000, 39.5% between $20,001–25,000, 33.0% between $25,001–30,000, and 14.3% over $30,000. The issue of possible response bias in the sample will be considered later.

MEASURES

In order to assess whether social supports help to mitigate the potentially stressful features of law enforcement work, scales were developed to measure job stressors, differing kinds of supports, and types of stress experienced by those sampled. The items composing these scales were randomly placed within a questionnaire that contained 46 statements. For each item, the respondents were instructed to use a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = very strongly agree to 7 = very strongly disagree in order to express the "extent to which you agree or disagree with the statements listed below." Also, all measures used in the analysis were pretested on a sample of 30 officers drawn from a small town and a campus police force. The scales utilized are discussed in the sections that follow and are set forth in Appendix A.

STRESSORS

Those aspects of an occupational role that are considered to place excessive or unusual demands on a worker and thereby are capable of engendering psychological discomfort, physiological pathology, and social disability are commonly referred to as "stressors." As observed by Terry (1983: 439), previous literature has uncovered "at least fifty-three stressors associated with either police work or its organization." In this light, it is clear that the selection of variables from this compendium of job-related stressors for inclusion in any empirical analysis will necessarily involve a degree of arbitrariness. However, to avoid making such a choice idiosyncratic, the selection of the four stressors for this study was informed by three criteria. First, work conditions were chosen that were likely to be ongoing parts of a police officer's job as opposed to infrequent, crisis situations (for example, actually shooting a suspect). Second, an attempt was made to focus on stressors that were for the most part distinctive to law enforcement work. One exception made here was the use of a Role Problems scale. This was done because such measures are employed in nearly all analyses of occupationally induced stress. And third, circumstances were chosen that previous studies revealed were identified by police officers
themselves as being stressful (Kroes, Margolis, and Hurrell, 1974; Mitchell, 1983; Stratton, 1978, Spielberger et al., 1981).

To measure the stressor of Role Problems, a scale was adopted from Poole and Regoli's (1980) research on stress among prison guards. This five-item scale tapped the degree to which the officers experienced such problems as role conflict and ambiguity. It was found to have a reliability of .75 (Cronbach's Alpha). A second stressor scale, Court Problems, endeavored to assess the extent to which officers perceived that their roles as crime fighters was being inhibited by due process rulings and the general administration of justice by the courts. This measure had an alpha of .75 and consisted of five statements. Third, in light of the potential for physical harm that an officer faces, a five-item scale (alpha = .64) was also included that tapped the degree to which officers felt that their work was dangerous (Dangerousness). Finally, because shift changes may have a disruptive influence on an officer's life, the respondents were also asked to state how many times they had experienced a shift change within the past year. This constituted the fourth stressor employed in the analysis.

SOCIAL SUPPORTS

Based on the most comprehensive analysis of available literature, House (1981: 39) concludes that social support is best defined as "an interpersonal transaction involving one or more of the following: (1) emotional concern (liking, love, empathy), (2) instrumental aid (goods or services), (3) information (about the environment), or (4) appraisal (information relevant to self-evaluation)." House also observes that most research has focused on the impact of emotional or affective modes of social supports (Turner, 1981). In line with this orientation, nearly all of the items composing the support measures tap the degree to which officers can rely on others to provide understanding, encouragement, and general friendship.

House's (1981: 22-24) discussions further indicated that it is essential to appreciate that the effects of supports vary according to who is furnishing a person with assistance. Consistent with this insight, this study has included four scales that are differentiated by the source of the support. One of these measures, Peer Support from fellow officers, contained five items and was found to have an alpha of .74. A second scale also assessed a work-related support system: Supervisory Support. This was composed of six statements and had a reliability of .81. Of note is that both of these measures were adapted from scales used previously by Macpherson, French, and Marshall (1979; see also Seashore and Bowers, 1963). The other two measures attempted to discern the support that officers received from nonwork sources. One of these scales assessed the Family Support that an officer might receive.
for the problems confronted on the job. The alpha for this six-statement measure was .84. The other nonwork scale was that of community support (alpha = .74), and it also contained six items.

STRESS

One of the weaknesses of the current stress research is that insufficient attention is given to how the stress or psychological discomfort experienced by people may be specific to a work environment or of a more general nature. Such a distinction is important because the causal structure underlying these two forms of psychic stress might be quite different. With these considerations in mind, two separate stress scales were included in the questionnaire. The first, Work Stress, attempted to assess how anxious or pressured officers felt while on duty. This six-item scale had a reliability of .78.

The second measure, called here Life Stress, was aimed at tapping whether the officers sampled were encountering a more pervasive form of psychological discomfort—one which they endured not merely at work but throughout their everyday lives. The instrument chosen was the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CESD Scale), a measurement device that has been employed frequently in stress research (Radloff, 1977). Here, the police officers were presented with a list of 20 statements, each of which represented an element of depressive symptomatology. In responding, the officers were asked to indicate how often they had experienced a symptom in the past four weeks. Four response categories were provided and coded 1 to 4. These were as follows: 1 = less than one day per week; 2 = one to two days per week; 3 = three to four days per week; 4 = five to seven days per week. An officer's score on this scale was determined by adding together the scores for the 20 items. Scores could thus vary from a low of 20 to a high of 80. The reliability for this measure of general Life Stress was .86, and it had a zero-order correlation of .509 with the work stress scale. The 20 items composing the CESD Scale are contained in Appendix A.

CONTROL VARIABLES

Two control variables were introduced into the analysis: what department an officer was a member of and the level of educational attainment. Other potential controls, such as age, rank, number of years the person had been a police officer, and income, were eliminated from consideration for two reasons: first, to reduce the already large number of variables in the regression equation; and second, because preliminary regressions revealed that these factors had a negligible relationship with the dependent variables.

CAVEATS

Before proceeding, it seems appropriate to review several qualifications of
the data that will be presented. First, the scales employed in the study are either perceptual (for example, officer views of role problems or of the amount of support received) or self-report (for example, of how much stress they experience). Clearly, had a methodology been employed that measured the objective conditions in which officers find themselves (for example how much role conflict there actually is in a department or how much support a family gives an officer), the findings might have been different. However, it should be noted that the use of perceptual and self-report measures for major study variables is common, if not normative, in stress research (though there is a tendency to measure physiological outcomes more objectively such as through medical records and blood or urine samples).3 Moreover, while research on the link of objective conditions to stress should be encouraged, the interpretations that people have of their social situations are important phenomena in and of themselves. Thus, commenting on the use of perceptual measures of social support, House (1981: 27) observed:

Studies of social support have most often asked people to rate how much emotional support they are receiving from others. . . . This method is . . . appropriate because social support is likely to be effective only to the extent it is perceived. That is, no matter how much your spouse or supervisor feels or acts supportive toward you, there will be little effect on you unless you, in fact, perceive them as supportive.

Second, while the present analysis is more complex than most previous research on stress—particularly that dealing with police stress—the number of variables examined has, by necessity, been limited. Specifically, we have chosen to focus on only certain work stressors, and thus have not assessed the potential impact either of other occupational dimensions of policing or of non-work circumstances (for example, economic strains, intergenerational conflict with children, or death of a loved one). Similarly, the scales used are primarily measures of affective as opposed to more instrumental (for example, financial assistance) support, while the dependent variables do not include such other types of psychic stress as feelings of alienation or job dissatisfaction. The interconnections among the full complex of stressors, supports, and stress is a topic that future research might profitably investigate (Dohrenwend and Dohrenwend, 1981).

A third caveat regarding this study is that the data are based exclusively on the response of police officers drawn from suburban communities (average population of 26,400) which are characterized by few serious, violent crimes—there were only four homicides among the five communities in 1981 (F.B.I., 1982). It can be anticipated that the stressors of a large urban department

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3. It can be further noted that perceptual and self-report measures are frequently employed in various kinds of criminological research (for example, studies on juvenile delinquency, deterrence, and judicial sentencing decisions).
would be more intense or, at the very least, potentially different. At the same
time, the study of suburban police is of some consequence. Though a less
celebrated group, it is notable that over 146,000 officers, 36.8% of the full-
time law enforcement officers working in jurisdictions reporting to the F.B.I.
in 1981, were employed in suburban departments (F.B.I., 1982: 238-239).

Finally, because the return rate on the survey was 56.5% for the sample as a
whole and varied markedly across the five departments studied, the possibility
remains that a response bias may influence the results reported below. To
assess this matter, two strategies were followed. First, by securing informa-
tion on the departments, it was possible to compare the respondents with all
officers employed in the departments along several dimensions. Notably, this
revealed that the respondents and the total group of officers contacted (that is,
respondents combined with nonrespondents) were similar in mean age (34.4
versus 34.1, respectively), average income ($25,219 versus $26,106), percent-
age of women employed (2.2 versus 3.0), and percentage of officers working on
patrol or as detectives (73.3 versus 74.6). The only area of bias was with
regard to education, where the percentage of respondents with a college degree
(50.5) exceeded that of the total group of officers in the departments studied
(34.9). As such, the sample has an overrepresentation of officers with higher
education. Since previous research has consistently shown that education
helps to reduce stress (Link and Dohrenwend, 1980), it would appear that
stress among the respondents would be less pronounced than among the larger
group initially surveyed.

The second strategy used to address the response bias problem was to con-
sider the consistency of the results across police departments. If nonresponse
bias is a powerful determinant of these findings, then departments with a low
response rate should show a different pattern of findings than those with a
more adequate response rate. This possibility was examined by splitting the
sample into two groups: those with low response rates (Departments 2 and 4)
and those with adequate ones (Departments 1, 3, and 5). We then tested
whether the relationship between the stressors and supports on the dependent

4. Because the comparison of respondent characteristics with those originally con-
tacted was prompted by reviewer concerns over possible response bias, we did not gather
information on the departments until the fall of 1983, or over a year after the initial data
collection. While the composition of the departments may have changed during this period,
for two reasons we do not believe that this is a major concern. First, the size of the depart-
ments remained relatively stable. Only one department showed a marked increase in size
(12%). Even here, however, the characteristics of the officers in this department were, as in
the other four departments, quite similar to those of the respondents. Second, due to a tight
job market for police in this area of the nation, turnover is unlikely to have been high.

Also, since we used income categories rather than asking for raw numbers in securing
salary information, the respondent's average income was computed by assigning each of the
subjects the mean value of the income category in which their reported income fell.
stress measures differed in these two groups. This amounts to a test of interaction between the adequate-low response rate distinction and the other independent variables on the dependent variables. No evidence was found of interaction of this sort for either Work Stress ($F_{9,70} = 1.33$, not significant) or Life Stress ($F_{9,70} = .876$, not significant). This indicates that the pattern of results that will be reported below in the data analysis on the sample as a whole tends to be consistent (at least within the bounds of the statistical power we have to detect inconsistencies) across low and adequate response rate departments. In turn, this suggests that response bias does not appear to have pronounced effects within the present analysis.

**FINDINGS**

The impact of the stressors, social supports, and controls on work stress are reported in Table 1. As can be seen, only one of the four stressors—Dangerousness—had a significant positive relationship with this stress measure. Similarly, only one support was found to mitigate Work Stress, with Supervisory Support having a significant negative relationship. Education also appears to be a factor that lessens the stress experienced by officers while on the job. Finally, in order to control for where a police officer worked, dummy variables were entered to show the effect of departmental membership. Department 5,...
which had the lowest mean stress score, was used as the suppressed or comparison category. Notably, only Department 3 had a significantly different Work Stress score, holding constant the other variables in the equation.

The effects of the major study variables on the general Life Stress (CESD) scale are set forth in Table 2. Here, not only dangerousness but also Court Problems and Shift Change appear to increase significantly the psychological discomfort officers endure. While Family Support exerted little influence on work stress, it has the strongest effect of any support in lessening the more encompassing CESD measure. Supervisory Support as well as Community Support are negatively, but not significantly, related to the dependent variable. Once again, it seems that greater Education helps to mitigate the stress officers feel. Alternatively, this time no department added significantly to the amount of variance explained, holding constant other variables.

Last, it is common in social support research to examine not only the main effects of social supports on stress but also the interaction of the supports with the stressors. The logic of pursuing this analysis is to determine whether, apart from their direct or main impact on lessening stress, supports have the additional effect of "buffering" people from potentially negative consequences as stressors become more intense (House, 1981: 33; Pearlin et al., 1981: 348-349; Turner, 1981: 363-364).

In the present analysis, this possibility was explored through a series of
eight regression equations. In each instance, the equation included the variables previously analyzed (see Tables 1 and 2) and four interaction terms. The four interaction terms were created by taking a support and crossing it with each of the four stressors. For instance, in assessing the buffering effects of Peer Support, the four interaction terms added to the original equation were Peer Support x Role Problems, Peer Support x Court Problems, Peer Support x Dangerousness, and Peer Support x Shift Change. Since this process was followed for each of the four support scales and for both stress measures, eight equations were analyzed. Notably, none of the interaction terms were found to be significantly related to either the work or CESD sales. This indicates, then, that the supports in this study do not exert buffering effects of sufficient magnitude to be detected given the sample size.

DISCUSSION

Perhaps the most instructive insight suggested by the present analysis is that the causal factors underlying police stress are complex. Thus, the data revealed that not only stressors but also social supports (as hypothesized by the social supports model) are related to the stresses law enforcement officers experience. Further, it was found that some stressors and supports have an impact on the officers' psychological state while some do not, and that the effect of stressors and supports often vary according to the type of stress under consideration. In this light, it is not too much to assert that advances in understanding the nature of police stress will be contingent on researchers fully appreciating the complexity of the circumstances that give rise to the divergent forms of stress that officers potentially confront.

With regard to the stressors included in this study, Dangerousness was the only one which was significantly related to both stress scales. At first glance, this is somewhat surprising in that the respondents work in communities that have a comparatively low rate of serious crime. However, by examining the frequencies for the items composing the Dangerousness scale, it is possible to learn why this stressor was salient in the lives of the officers in the sample. To begin with, the officers freely stated that few of their colleagues actually are harmed while at work; thus 86% disagreed with the statement “A lot of people I work with get physically injured in the line of duty.” Yet the vast majority of the sample also felt that they had a “chance of getting hurt in my job.” Taken together, these results suggest that, while officers realize that the victimization of police is not a daily or frequent occurrence, they are equally aware that the potential of being physically injured is ever-present and inherent in their occupational role. In turn, it is this latter dimension of law enforcement work that may prove difficult for many officers to negotiate and thus may precipitate stressful consequences.

Second, both Shift Change and Court Problems were significantly related to
general Life Stress but not to Work Stress. This finding is important to the extent that it sensitizes us to the possibility that officers may adjust to the more strenuous features of their occupation while at work but nevertheless suffer deleterious effects on their general psychological health. In this light, the real cost for officers who work under legal constraint and must deal with the realities of the American court may not be that they endure persistent feelings of pressure or tension (though they undoubtedly would experience situational frustrations when an offender is released or evidence is excluded). Instead, the perception that the courts inhibit effective police work may have the more general effect of dampening their hopes of making a difference by fighting crime, thus creating cynicism and ultimately robbing their work of meaning. It is thus notable that the life stress scale was a measure that tapped the psychological strain of depression. Similarly, it can be imagined that while officers may learn how to cope with Shift Changes while at work, the disruptions such a practice causes in social relations and sleep habits could prove a wearisome experience. This finding suggests that departments should begin to consider more carefully whether the benefits of rotating personnel do in fact outweigh the negative consequences for officers that are indicated by these data (Revkin, 1983).

The finding that the final stressor of Role Problems was unrelated to the stress measures was unexpected. Previous research on employees in both criminal justice and other work settings has typically reported such an association (Terry, 1983: 440). In part, the failure to discern effects in this sample may have been because the measure of Role Problems was broadly conceived and thus did not measure specific kinds of role stressors. Another possibility, however, is that such difficulties as role ambiguity and conflict are less pronounced and more easily resolved in smaller departments like those in this sample where the hierarchy of authority is less intricate and face-to-face interactions more possible. Last, it may also be true that past studies on police stress have suffered from specification error in that they have neglected in their equations to control for other stressors and support mechanisms.

In the context of the debate over the appropriateness of higher education for law enforcement officers (Goldstein, 1977: 283-306), it is interesting that those in the present sample with more Education experienced lower levels both of work and life stress. Because Education is negligibly associated with income (r = .002) and has a low negative relationship with rank (r = -.214), it is unlikely that the effects of this factor can be attributed to educated officers possessing more authority, material resources, or positions better insulated against stressors. By contrast, two other interpretations seem

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5. As mentioned previously, preliminary regressions on these data revealed that the variables of rank and income were not significantly related with either stress scale. This lends credence to the conclusion that, unlike education, neither factor insulates officers against feelings of stress.
plausible. First, Education may be a coping mechanism in that it furnishes officers with greater skills to deal with the complexities of police work and to comprehend the forces that impinge upon them due to their occupational role. In this light, it is notable that previous studies using national samples have shown that Education is inversely related to stress (Link and Dohrenwend, 1980: 123-124). Thus, the results here are consistent rather than inconsistent with those found in other populations. Second, the educational composition of the departments sampled was fairly high, with over a third of the officers having earned college degrees. With the educated officer being as much or more the norm rather than the exception, it may be that Education reduced stress by enhancing social integration with fellow officers. Alternatively, in departments where educational attainments are lower, it is possible that being a “college kid” could lessen integration and exacerbate stress. At the same time, as the tendency increases for the police labor force to be more highly educated, it can be expected that the results reported here will be increasingly generalizable.

With regard to social supports, the data revealed that two measures had a significant effect: Supervisory Support mitigated work stress, while Family Support helped to lessen general life stress. These relationships are understandable in that supervisors frequently have the authority to control the quality of a person’s work experience and families are expected to be a major source of affective interactions for people when off the job (Farmer and Monahan, 1980). However, because police are often thought to constitute a cohesive occupational subculture (Westley, 1970), it was somewhat surprising to discover that Peer Support was not associated with either dependent variable. In part, the lack of a relationship may be an outgrowth of the style of policing that prevails in suburban departments (officers riding alone in their vehicles) that does not foster structural integration. By contrast, in departments where team policing and foot patrols are more prevalent, the occupational role may present greater opportunities for establishing affective bonds and thereby create more rewarding support systems among peers. Another possibility, however, is that the beneficial aspects of peer relations may be balanced out by exchanges which only serve to intensify stress. As one officer interviewed about police stress remarked, “talking problems over with fellow officers can do more harm than good. If your close friends are those of your own peer group, you start talking shop, so to speak, and you have a reinforcement of negativism” (Cincinnati Post, 1982: 9-B; Farmer and Monahan, 1980: 58).

Finally, the finding that supports do play a role in helping to insulate the respondents from potentially stressful circumstances indicates that the social supports model is a more promising approach than the stressor-outcome model that has traditionally informed research on law enforcement officers. More generally, it can be suggested that an exclusive focus on investigating the
source of police stressors will neglect needed consideration of the diverse resources that officers may draw upon in order to negotiate the rigors of their occupational situation. In this regard, it should be recognized that the nature of supports in the setting in which officers are enmeshed is only one factor that may prevent stressors from leading ineluctably to stress outcomes. Thus, authors seeking to extend existing social support research have recently explored both how individuals are differentially equipped with such "coping mechanisms" as self-esteem, intellectual skills, and styles of relating to others (for example, approach to conflict resolution) and how such mechanisms can be used to reduce or worsen psychological discomfort (Menaghan, 1982; Kessler and Essex, 1982; Pearlin and Schooler, 1978). Notably, investigations are beginning to emerge that specifically address the issue of the personal strengths and interpersonal strategies that police draw upon in their efforts to cope with the stressors in their surroundings (Moyer and Hopper, 1983; Luxenburg and Johnson, 1983; Violanti and Marshall, 1983; Westley, 1970). It would seem that further research on the way in which individual coping resources possessed by officers and prevailing networks of social support mediate or shape the impact of occupational stressors would furnish new insights into the problem of why some officers endure psychological stress while others are largely spared this burden (Malloy and Mays, 1984: 219).

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1982 Burnout in probation officers: Results of a survey. Presented at the annual meeting of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences.

Wickman, Peter  

Williams, Ann W., John E. Ware, and Cathy A. Donald  

Francis T. Cullen is Associate Professor in the Department of Criminal Justice at the University of Cincinnati where he also holds a joint appointment in the Department of Sociology. He is author of Rethinking Crime and Deviance Theory and a coauthor of Reaffirming Rehabilitation, Toward A Paradigm of Labeling Theory, and Corporate Crime Under Attack.

Terrence Lemming has worked as a correctional officer and is now on the police force in Burbank, Illinois. His major research interest is in the coping mechanisms that police officers use to mitigate occupationally induced stress.

Bruce G. Link is Assistant Professor of Public Health and Sociology at Columbia University. His chief research interest is in the impact of social interventions on deviant populations. He is author of Mental Illness in the United States.

John F. Wozniak is currently Assistant Professor of Sociology at Western Illinois University. His research has focused on the development of humanistic criminology, avenues of criminal justice reform, models of police stress, and the elderly offender.
Appendix A. Items Composing Stressor, Support, and Stress Scales

I. Stressor Scales

Role Problems:
1. When a problem comes up here, the people I work with seldom agree on how it should be handled.
2. The rules that we're supposed to follow here never seem to be very clear.
3. There are so many people telling us what to do here that you never can be sure who is the boss.
4. The rules and regulations are clear enough here that I know specifically what I can and cannot do on my job.
5. A problem in this profession is that no one really knows what his fellow officers are doing.

Court Problems:
1. All the different rulings handed down by the courts really make this job difficult.
2. Because of the courts’ rulings, you really don’t know what you can or cannot do anymore.
3. The courts are really more concerned with the welfare of the criminal than they are with the welfare of the officer.
4. After a police officer puts in a lot of hard work to catch a criminal, the courts usually just end up letting them go free or putting them on probation.
5. The courts don’t do too much these days to back up all the efforts policemen put in trying to put criminals behind bars.

Dangerousness:
1. I work in a dangerous job.
2. My job is a lot more dangerous than other kinds of jobs.
3. In my job, a person stands a good chance of getting hurt.
4. There is really not much chance of getting hurt in my job.
5. A lot of people I work with get physically injured in the line of duty.

II. Social Support Scales

Peer Support:
1. My fellow officers often compliment someone who has done his/her job well.
2. My fellow officers often blame each other when things go wrong.
3. My fellow officers often encourage each other to do the job in a way that we would really be proud of.
4. My fellow officers often encourage each other to think of better ways of getting the work done which may never have been thought of before.
5. My fellow officers spend hardly any time helping me work myself up to a better job by showing me how to improve my performance.

**Supervisory Support:**
1. The people I work with often have the importance of their job stressed to them by their supervisors.
2. My supervisors often encourage the people I work with to think of better ways of getting the work done which may never have been thought of before.
3. My supervisors often encourage us to do the job in a way that we really would be proud of.
4. My supervisors often encourage the people I work with if they do their job well.
5. My supervisors often blame others when things go wrong, which are possibly not the fault of those blamed.
6. When my supervisors have a dispute with somebody on the force, they usually try to handle it in a friendly manner.

**Family Support:**
1. I have people in my family that I can talk to about the problems I have at work.
2. No one in my family can really understand how tough my job can be.
3. When my job gets me down, I always know that I can turn to my family and get the support I need to feel better.
4. There is really no one in my family that I can talk to about my job.
5. My spouse (or girlfriend/boyfriend) can’t really help me much when my job gets me tense.
6. It's a good thing that I have my spouse (or girlfriend/boyfriend) around when things aren’t going well at work. She/he can really understand me and make me feel better.

**Community Support:**
1. I like the neighborhood that I live in.
2. I like the people who live in my neighborhood.
3. I talk a lot with the people who live in my neighborhood.
4. Not counting guys that I work with, I have close friends that I can get together with pretty often.
5. I have a friend that lives nearby that I can confide in and tell all my problems to.
6. Not counting my fellow officers, I have friends that will help me out when things are going wrong.

III. Stress Scales

Work Stress:
1. When I'm at work, I often feel tense or uptight.
2. A lot of times, my job makes me very frustrated or angry.
3. Most of the time when I am at work, I don't feel that I have much to worry about.
4. I am usually calm and at ease when I am working.
5. I usually feel that I am under a lot of pressure when I am at work.
6. There are a lot of aspects about my job that can make me pretty upset about things.

Life Stress (CESD Scale):
1. You were bothered by things that don't usually bother you.
2. You did not feel like eating; your appetite was poor.
3. You felt that you would not shake off the blues even with help from your family and friends.
4. You felt that you were just as good as other people.
5. You had trouble keeping your mind on what you were doing.
6. You felt depressed.
7. You felt that everything you did was an effort.
8. You felt hopeful about the future.
9. You thought your life had been a failure.
10. You felt fearful.
11. Your sleep was restless.
12. You were happy.
13. You talked less than usual.
15. People were friendly.
17. You had crying spells.
18. You felt sad.
19. You felt that people disliked you.
20. You could not get going.