

Police Burnout and Attitudes to Women and Domestic Violence

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Abstract

Review: Burnout is comprised of 3 factors - emotional exhaustion, lowered personal achievement and depersonalisation. The literature suggests lower rates of depersonalisation burnout amongst women human services workers. Depersonalisation is the development of negative attitudes, such as cynicism and negativism, in which coworkers and service recipients are labelled in derogatory ways and treated accordingly. The literature also demonstrates that attitudes to women contribute to attitudes to domestic violence. It was theorised that depersonalisation burnout may contribute to approval of domestic violence.

Method: Burnout and attitudes to women and domestic violence were measured by self-report in 133 Queensland women police and 602 men police. **Results:** Police had similar amounts of emotional exhaustion to other human service groups. However, police reported high personal achievement but had more depersonalisation burnout than other human services groups. Women police did not differ in emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation burnout from men, but had higher levels of personal achievement. Women police, lower ranked police and those with lower levels of alcohol use had significantly more favourable *attitudes to women*. *Police attitudes to domestic violence* were measured. After review of a domestic violence vignette, women police disapproved of the husband's physical abuse more than men police. Additionally, they also had higher level of disapproval of verbal abuse after refusal of sex by the wife. They also rated controlling (cf. overtly coercive) behaviours as more serious and disagreed more strongly than male police with the myth that "its hard to understand why women stay in violent relationships". **Conclusions:**

Police Burnout and Attitudes to Women and Domestic Violence

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Depersonalisation burnout is associated with a higher degree of approval of domestic violence perpetrators' actions in both men and women police. Men and women police report similar rates of depersonalisation burnout but report more personal achievement than other groups of human services workers. However, depersonalisation is more frequent in police than these other groups, but may be important to performance of difficult policing duties. Overall, women police appear to have greater sensitivity to identifying less overt forms of domestic violence and view domestic violence particularly seriously. Attitudinal change in male police may be possible through greater exposure to the views of women police and community expectations.

Policy and structural change in policing is necessary to identify burnout. Identification of affected police plus education directed at domestic violence community attitudes should enhance appropriate police response to domestic violence victims. Women police have a pivotal role in police peer education because of their greater sensitivity to domestic violence.

METHOD

Study Design

This was a correlational study, so no a priori group membership was assigned.

Subjects

A survey of 735 state police officers in the Brisbane North region was conducted between 2 February 1998 and 2 April 1998. Police were attending an educational program concerning a new statute changing police powers.

All police officers who agreed to participate were engaged in active duty and were included in this study.

Informed consent was obtained following an explanation of the purpose of the research, the forms of enquiry that would be made, and the time that would be required to complete the questionnaire. All participants were asked to provide written consent, although 13 individuals completed the survey but returned the consent form without signature. As the

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consent forms and completed questionnaires were submitted separately by participants, the questionnaires of these 13 individuals could not be identified and so all submitted questionnaires were used.

Of those invited to participate, 735 officers did so and 46 officers declined to participate (n=781). This represented a participation rate of 94% of invited officers and a participation rate for the Brisbane North policing region of 86%.

Police aged in range from 20 to 57 years. Male police were significantly older than females (M males = 34.5 yrs; M females = 28.8yrs; $t[269] 9.73, p < .05$). There were 602 male police (82%) and 133 female police (18%). Males were more often living with a spouse ($\chi^2(1, N = 732) = 16.39, p < .05$); Males were more often caring for children at home ($\chi^2(1, N = 730) = 37.73, p < .05$). (For tables, see Appendix E).

Educational level varied from 6 months training at the Police Academy to university qualifications. There were almost twice the proportion of female university graduates than males ($\chi^2(1, N = 663) = 36.01, p < .05$); see Appendix E.

Setting and Apparatus

Only male presenters (n=4) were involved to minimise response bias to sex of experimenter. There were 54 occasions for data collection and the experimenter was the principal data gatherer in over 70% of these.

Seminar rooms were used in which each officer had either a desk to use or extended arm rest to write on the questionnaire. The questionnaires were generally completed in silence although some officers did have queries regarding item content. No special equipment was used in this research.

Questionnaires were completed in between 20 to 40 minutes.

Variables

The following subject characteristics were measured by self-report - sex; age; whether living with a spouse or partner; whether children (under 18 years) were cared for at home; education (academy only/academy and technical education/academy and university); years served as a police officer; rank; years served at that rank (rankyrs); alcohol consumed in a week (this was transformed into a daily value for grams of alcohol consumed); coffee cups consumed in a day; whether a current smoker; illness days absent in the previous 6 months; calls to domestic violence situations in the previous 6 months ('calls'); and arrests of persons in domestic violence situations in the previous 6 months ('arrests').

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The Attitude to Wife Abuse Scale (Rigby, Whish and Black, 1994) measured respondents' views of a range of trivial to serious precipitants with a range of three behavioural responses (speaking sharply, yelling or hitting) on the part of the husband to be rated by the research subjects. Further original psychometric data for this instrument were unavailable and so the means and standard deviations of the original 12 item instrument could not be calculated (K. Rigby, personal communication 1997). In this research, the range of possible responses was extended to 7 items to increase the spread of possible responses. Also, although the original scale had 12 items, the scale used in this questionnaire was reduced to six items to reduce the time commitment required for completion of the total questionnaire.

A Domestic Violence Questionnaire instrument was derived from published data concerning a large Australian telephone interview study (Office of the Status of Women, 1995). In this research, questions concerning the seriousness of domestic violence and acceptance of domestic violence myths were presented in written form. Subjects were asked to indicate whether they regarded a range of behaviours (e.g. 'choking or hitting' or 'forcing to have sex') as domestic violence ('yes/' 'no') and if so to indicate the seriousness of it on a 4 item response grid. This was scored from '1' (not serious') or '4' (serious).

Levels of agreement with domestic violence myths in the Australian community survey (Office of Status of Women, 1995) of 2004 telephone interviews between 28 April and 15 May 1995 were compared to the responses of police in the current research using t-tests. A four item scale ranging from totally agree ('1') to totally disagree ('4') was used and compared with community mean scores derived from published scores (Office of the Status of Women, 1995).

The British version of the Attitudes towards Women Scale was used for this research. This scale measures attitudes to women's rights and roles rather than attitudes to women themselves. Subjects are invited to indicate levels of agreement or disagreement to items such as 'Women should worry less about being equal with men and more about becoming good wives and mothers'. The Attitudes to Women scale was employed as a check on police attitudes to domestic violence as the Attitude to Wife Abuse scale lacked normative adult data, and the literature suggested a robust relationship between these two attitudinal dimensions (see for example, Kristiansen & Giuletti, 1990). Incorporation of the AWS appeared to be the best compromise to provide an external check on assessing police attitudes to their client population of battered spouses.

The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) consists of 22 item responses, and takes only 15 minutes to administer. This instrument consists of a 7 point (0 to 6) Likert scale and included items such as 'I feel I treat some recipients as if they were impersonal objects'. Police indicated the frequency that they experienced such an emotion. Low frequency items such as 'never' are scored as zero whilst 'every day' was scored as a six. Three sub-scales are also scored - Emotional Exhaustion (EE), Depersonalisation (DP), and Personal

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Achievement (PA). The latter scale was reversed scored so that high scores reflect low personal accomplishment consistent with the maladjustment implications of high scores on other subscales.

Procedure

Groups in the police powers statute training were composed of between 2 and 32 officers. Police were given verbal instructions as to the nature and purpose of the research. Subjects were repeatedly informed that their participation was voluntary and that they were free to leave the training room if they wished (a time for the resumption of the training session had been previously given by the police trainer). It was expected that police subjects might react to some item content (e.g. items concerning stereotypical views of women in the AWS-B) and so an explanation was given just prior to questionnaire completion that well-established psychometric instruments were necessary to compare the research group with other research concerning police, and that as a consequence, some of the language in the questionnaire might seem “old-fashioned”. A written introduction was provided.

At the close of the questionnaire completion session there were opportunities for approach by the subjects to the researcher. Most questions or comments dealt with perceptions of ‘bias’ (e.g. in the content of the “Attitudes to Women Scale”), frustration at police management decisions (especially promotion) or individual police officers' previous participation in post-graduate study or as a researcher. Most approaches to the presenters were from uniformed police officers.

RESULTS

Statistical Analysis - Data Reduction

Given the large number of variables in this study, analysis by Principal Axis Factor with oblimin rotation was employed to examine the number of factors associated with measuring attitudes to domestic violence. This form of factor analysis was chosen so as to permit the generation of a single factor should it occur, and to permit factors to be correlated.

Using this analysis, verbal and physical abuse factors were identified in the domestic violence attitude instruments employed - the Attitudes to Wife Abuse Scale and the Domestic Violence Questionnaire.

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Attitudes to Wife Abuse Scale

This scale was subjected to Principal Axis Factoring with Oblimin rotation. Three factors were derived from this procedure. The factor matrix and pattern matrix for the domestic violence scale appear in Appendix D.

Table 0.1

Factor Correlation for Wife Abuse Attitudes Scale

Factor	Verbal	Hitting	Sex Refusal
Verbal	1.00	.02	.29
Hitting	.02	1.00	.29
Sex Refusal	.29	.29	1.00
alpha	.92	.91	.86

Verbal Factor

The 'Verbal' factor measured approval of the husband's actions of speaking or yelling. These actions followed vignettes concerning the wife's behaviours of flirting, refusing to help in the home, ridiculing husband, neglecting children, and spending housekeeping. This scale had good internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .92).

The item content of the verbal subscale is reproduced below:

Table 0.2

'Verbal' Factor

What would you think if a wife . . .

- Continually flirted with other men after being asked not to do so & her Husband spoke sharply to her
- Continually flirted with other men after being asked not to do so & her Husband yelled or shouted at her
- Always refused to help in the home & her Husband spoke sharply to her
- Always refused to help in the home & her Husband yelled or shouted at her
- Constantly ridiculed or belittled her husband & her Husband spoke sharply to her
- Constantly ridiculed or belittled her husband & her Husband yelled or shouted at her
- Seriously neglected their children & her Husband spoke sharply to her
- Seriously neglected their children & her Husband yelled or shouted at her
- Spent all the housekeeping money on herself & her Husband spoke sharply to her
- Spent all the housekeeping money on herself & her Husband yelled or shouted at her

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(Participants selected from 7 potential responses on a visual analogue scale from 'I would blame him a lot' to 'I would approve a lot.')

Sex Refusal

Approval of a husband's actions of speaking sharply or yelling after a wife withheld sex formed a separate factor ('Sex refusal') with good internal consistency, (Cronbach's alpha = .86).

The item content of the sex refusal subscale is reproduced below:

Table 0.3

'Sex Refusal' Factor

What would you think if a wife . . .

- Refused to have sex & her Husband spoke sharply to her
- Refused to have sex & her Husband yelled or shouted at her

Hitting

Approval of husbands' forcing sex (if sex was being withheld) or hitting wives (in all 'provocation' vignettes discussed above) formed a separate 'physical' factor with adequate internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .91).

The item content of the hitting subscale is reproduced below:

Table 0.4

Physical Factor

What would you think if a wife . . .

- Continually flirted with other men after being asked not to do so & her Husband hit her
- Always refused to help in the home & her Husband hit her
- Constantly ridiculed or belittled her husband & her Husband hit her
- Seriously neglected their children & her Husband hit her
- Spent all the housekeeping money on herself & her Husband hit her
- Refused to have sex & her Husband hit her
- Refused to have sex & her Husband insisted on having sex with her against her wishes

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Domestic Violence Questionnaire

This scale was formed from items concerning ratings of seriousness of various acts of domestic violence. These items were originally used in an 1995 Australian telephone community survey (Office of the Status of Women, 1995).

Table 0.5

Factor Correlation for DV Scale		
Factor	Control	Coercion
1	1.000	.497
2	.497	1.000

Principal axis factoring with oblimin rotation was performed on the item responses to the domestic violence scale. This reflected two factors. The factor matrix and pattern matrix for the domestic violence questionnaire appear in Appendix D.

Control Factor

The 'Control' factor concerned the use of power to control and verbal or physical threat. This factor had robust psychometric properties (Cronbach's alpha = .86).

The control subscale is reproduced below:

Table 0.6

Control Factor

How serious is this action?

- throwing or smashing objects near the person
- threatening to hurt
- yelling
- preventing contact with family and friends
- criticising to make feel bad or useless
- denying money or income

Coercion Factor

The other factor, 'Coercion' reflected the actual use of force and compulsion against the person. This factor had satisfactory psychometric properties (Cronbach's alpha = .71).

The coercion subscale is reproduced below:

Table 0.7

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Coercion Factor*How serious is this action?*

- choking or beating
- hitting or punching
- slapping or pushing to cause harm or fear
- forcing to have sex

Police Information

Experience level varied from 1 to 36 years served as a police officer. Males had served significantly longer than females (M males = 12.3 yrs; M females = 5.8yrs; (t[348] 12.77, $p < .05$; equal variances not assumed).

All ranks were represented amongst subjects, from probationary constables to commissioned officers ('inspector & above'). Males were relatively more often represented at the higher rank levels of 'sergeant and above' than females ($\chi^2(1, N = 734) = 24.399$, $p < .05$). However, males had spent longer at the same rank than females (M males = 4.9 yrs; M females = 3.3 yrs; t[286] 6.66, $p < .05$)

Police officers reported attending between 0 and more than 100 callouts to domestic violence situations in the preceding 6 months. There were 272 officers (37.8%) who had no calls to domestic violence situations.

Male police used more alcohol than females ((M males = 12.9 grams alcohol per day; M females = 6.5 grams alcohol per day; t[733] 4.105, $p < .05$). A significantly higher proportion of females were non-drinkers ($\chi^2(1, N = 735) = 4.61$, $p < .05$); see Table 9.12. However, a similar proportion of female to male officers engaged in hazardous or harmful drinking rates.

Results - Measures of Variables**Burnout - Maslach Burnout Inventory**

Police endorsed high levels of personal accomplishment in their job. Personal accomplishment levels were highest amongst younger police (M high = 33 yrs; M low or medium = 37 yrs, t[703] 2.22, $p < .05$). (High personal accomplishment levels reflect 'low' 'reverse-scored' personal accomplishment scores).

Table 0.8**Police Burnout and Attitudes to Women and Domestic Violence**

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Burnout

	Level of Burnout(%)		
	low	medium	high
Emotional Exhaustion	43.8	28.2	27.9
Deperson-alisation	21.0	24.4	54.6
Personal Achievement	96.9	3.0	.1

Due to the generally low level of endorsement in the low or medium levels for two of these subscales, low and medium groups were combined and contrasted with 'high'. Police with high levels of emotional exhaustion drank more alcohol (M high = 14.31 grams per day; M low or medium = 10.71; $t[313] 2.46 p<.05$), had more sick days (M high = 4.24; ; M low or medium = 2.53 ; $t[355] 3.01 p<.01$) and were more likely to have a clinically significant GHQ score ($\chi^2(1, N = 707) = 129.02, p<.001$).

Police with high depersonalisation were more likely to be younger (M high = 32.29; M low or medium = 34.77; $t[647] 4.12 p<.05$) and to have had less service (M high = 10.05 yrs; M low or medium = 12.18; $t[621] 3.61 p<.05$). Police with high depersonalisation were also more likely to take sick days (M high = 8.00 sick days in last 6 months; M low or medium = 4.89; $t[662] 3.10 p<.05$).

Attitudes Toward Women Scale (AWS)

Female police had more favourable attitudes to women (M = 120.78) than male officers (M = 102.49); $T[220] 14.82, p<.05$. One-way analysis of variance with different ranks as the independent variable demonstrated significant differences ($F[8, 672] = 4.83, p<.05$) on the attitudes to women scale (AWS). Post hoc analysis (Tukey) demonstrated significantly lower AWS scores in senior constables, sergeant, and senior sergeants group ($p<.05$) compared with constables and probationary constables.

There were no significant differences in attitudes toward women when police were divided into uniformed police and police detectives.

Figure 0.1

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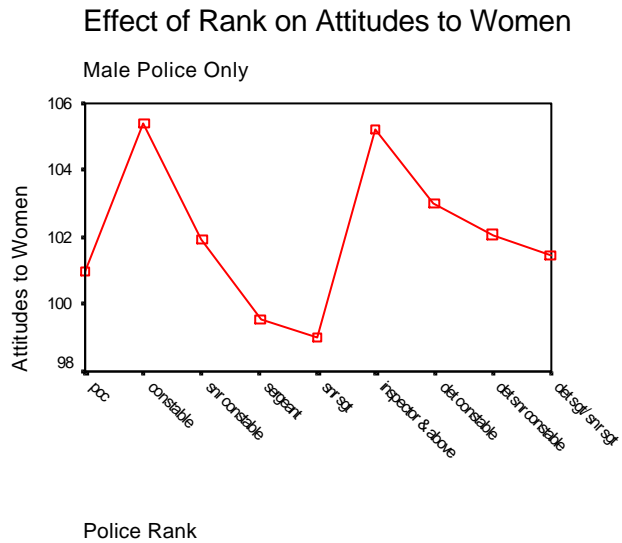
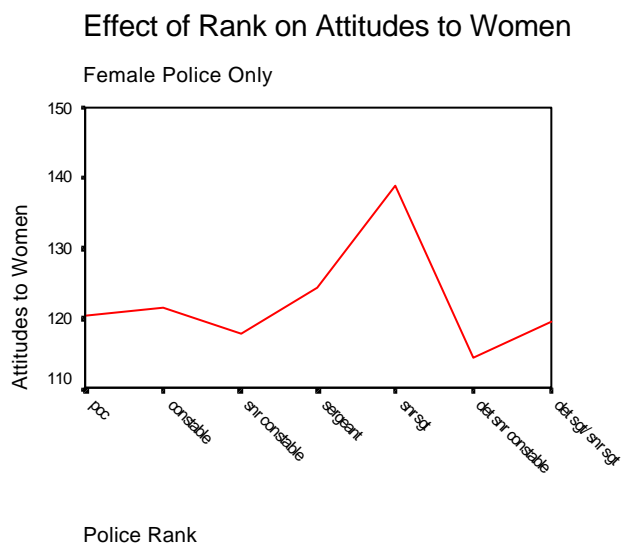


Figure 0.2



Police of constable rank or below also had more favourable attitudes to women (M constable and below = 109.90; M remainder = 102.97; T[679] 5.71. $p < .01$).

Alcohol use demonstrated a significant correlation with less favourable (traditional) attitudes to women (AWS) Pearson correlation (N= 681) $-.15$, $p < .01$)

Individuals with high emotional exhaustion had more favourable attitudes to women (higher AWS scores) (M high EE = 106.85; M remainder = 103.77; T[669] 2.26, $p < .05$).

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Research Hypotheses

Approval of domestic violence will be predicted by depersonalisation scores

Attitudes to Wife Abuse

Stepwise regression analysis demonstrated a significant contribution to variance in Verbal factor (Attitude to Wife Abuse Scale) scores from depersonalisation scores (R square change = .018; $F(4,610) 22.27$, $p < .01$). This model utilises officer age, daily alcohol use, depersonalisation burnout and attitudes to women to account for 13% of variance, of which depersonalisation contributes 2%.

Table 0.9

Predictors of Attitudes to Verbal Abuse (AWAS)

	R Square Change	Standardized Coefficients
		Beta
Age	.079	-.286
Alcohol (grams)/day	.020	.124
Depersonalisation	.018	.128
Attitudes to Women	.011	-.107

(AWAS) Approval of Abuse by Perpetrator - higher score

Depersonalisation also accounted for a small amount of additional variance (1.3%) in predicting police attitudes to a husband's verbal abuse after his wife refused to have sex. (Stepwise regression, $F(3,573) 32.00$, $p < .01$).

Table 0.10

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Predictors of Verbal Abuse Attitudes after Sex Refusal (AWAS)

	R Square Change	Beta Co'efft (Std'd)
Attitudes to Women	.116	-.276
Sex of Police Officer	.017	-.140
Depersonalisation	.013	.114

Males =1; Females = 2

Domestic Violence Questionnaire

When predictors of the 'Control' factor of the (community-derived) domestic violence questionnaire were sought by stepwise regression, depersonalisation again made a significant but small contribution $F(3,584) 23.62, p<.01$. This 'control' subscale of the Domestic Violence scale did not present 'personalised' item content in the husband-wife scenario or vignette used in the previous Attitudes to Wife Abuse Scale.

Table 0.11

Predictors of Rating 'Control' Behaviours as Serious

	R Squared Change	Beta Standardized Coefficients
Attitudes to Women	.083	.265
Depersonalisation	.016	-.120
Education Level	.010	.104

DVQ Ratings of Seriousness of DV Behaviours - higher scores

Depersonalisation not associated with traditional attitudes to women

This hypothesis that higher levels of depersonalisation would be associated with more traditional attitudes to women (lower AWS scores) was **not** supported. Using a between group comparison method (ANOVA) no significant relationship was found, $F(2, 716) = 1.50, p = .224$ between depersonalisation level and AWS scores.

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Similarly, using a within-group partial correlation method and controlling for possible co-variables (age, educational level, rank, years at that rank, daily alcohol and coffee consumption, sick days in prior 6 months, domestic violence attendance and arrests, total GHQ score, verbal abuse (AWAS) score, emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment levels), there was no significant relationship between depersonalisation and attitudes towards women scores ($p=.856$).

Attitudes towards women (AWS) scores were best predicted by sex of officer, which contributed to 18.8% variance, $F[1, 547] = 126.63, p<.01$. However, a measure of burnout contributed to variance in attitudes to women (AWS) scores - low levels of personal accomplishment.

Table 0.12

Predictors of Police Attitudes to Women		
	R Square Change	Beta Co'efft (Std'd)
Sex of Officer	.188	.410
Personal Accomplishment	.022	.154
Years of Service	.012	-.116

a. Sex: Male=1. Female=2
Personal Accomplishment - reverse scored

Sex of Police Officer will influence Depersonalisation Status

This hypothesis was **not** supported. An independent samples T-test failed to demonstrate any difference between males and female police with regard to their depersonalisation scores (M males = 13.73, SD=7.3; M females = 13.12, SD = 7.34), $t(718) = .859, p = .708$.

However, significant gender differences compared with the Maslach Burnout Inventory normative sample of 2247 males and 3421 females (Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, 1996) were obtained.

SEX	N	Emotional Exhaustion		Depersonalisation		Personal Achievement	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Male (Current Research)	589	19.74	11.59	13.73	7.30	31.47	7.85
Female	128	19.34	10.26	13.12	7.34	29.83	7.71

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Loo (Police Managers)	135	18.96	9.67	8.45	6.02	33.63	7.45
Stearns & Moore	110	16.9	8.91	10.34	6.54	32.17	7.51
Anson & Bloom	43	21.0	13.0	14.0	8.0	34.0	7.3

Figure 0.3 Police officer norms for the MBI subscales

(Minimum numbers of officers for subscales displayed).

Male police officers had significantly higher levels of depersonalisation, $t(588) = 20.40$, $p < .001$, and higher levels of personal accomplishment $t(579) = -14.77$, $p < .001$ compared with the males in the normative sample of Maslach, Jackson & Leiter (1996).

Female police officers had significantly higher levels of depersonalisation, $t(130) = 9.51$, $p < .001$, and higher levels of personal accomplishment $t(127) = -9.80$, $p < .001$ compared with the normative sample of Maslach, Jackson & Leiter (1996).

Neither male or female officers significantly differed from the normative sample emotional exhaustion scores for each sex.

Police and Community acceptance of domestic violence myths differed

The hypothesis that police attitudes would not differ from previously published Australian community data (Office of the Status of Women, 1995) about domestic violence myths was **not** supported.

The following table summarises these differences in agreement with domestic violence myths:

Table 0.13

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Police and Community Differences concerning Domestic Violence (DV) Myths

	Police	Community	Qld	Differential Direction of Police Response
“dv is a criminal offence”	1.47	1.224***	1.206***	disagree
“most people who experience dv are reluctant to go the police”	1.73	1.320***	1.276***	disagree
“most people turn a blind eye to or ignore dv”	1.92	1.619***	1.551***	disagree
“its hard to understand why women stay in violent relationships”	1.68	1.758*	1.768**	agree
“dv is more likely to occur in migrant families”	3.09	3.268***	3.316***	agree
“dv is a private matter to be handled in the family”	3.68	3.398***	3.163***	disagree
“dv rarely happens in wealthy neighborhoods”	3.70	3.613**	3.630**	disagree
“dv can be excused if alcohol is involved”	3.96	3.838***	3.79***	disagree

Notes

- 1 Agree a lot → 2 Agree a little → 3 Disagree a little → 4 Disagree a lot
- Significance Level: p<.05* p<.01** p<.001***
- ‘Community’ refers to the telephone responses of an Australian 1995 national survey.
- ‘Qld’ refers to the discrete responses of Queensland (state) community members who formed part of the above national survey.

Police had a significantly higher level of disagreement with the statement that "Domestic violence is a criminal offence" than the Australian community, $t(722) 8.259, p<.001$. Also, police more frequently disagreed with the statement that most victims of domestic violence are reluctant to contact police, $t(721) 14.773, p<.001$.

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Also, compared with the Australian community, police expressed higher levels of agreement with the statement that it was difficult to understand why women stayed in violent relationships, $t(723) 2.375$, $p = .018$, and that domestic violence was more likely to be found in migrant families, $t[533] 4.343$, $p < .001$.

However, compared with the Australian community, police expressed a higher level of disagreement concerning myths excusing domestic violence if alcohol was involved, $t(726) 11.442$, $p < .001$, that domestic violence should be dealt with only in the family, $t(725) 11.187$, $p < .001$, and that domestic violence was rare in wealthy homes, $t(688) 3.359$, $p < .01$.

Domestic Violence Myths

Myth 1: Domestic Violence is a criminal offence

Police officers who agreed that "Domestic violence is a criminal offence" drank significantly less alcohol (Mean = 11.3 g alcohol/day; Mean dissenters = 15.4 g/day) $t(721) -2.08$, $p < .05$, held more liberal views concerning women (Mean AWS score = 106.6; Mean dissenters = 100.4) $t(670) 3.19$, $p < .01$, and were more likely to rate spousal control measures as serious (the Control Factor of the Domestic Violence Questionnaire) (Mean seriousness score = 17.87; Mean dissenters = 16.89) $t(643) 2.10$, $p < .05$.

Myth 2: Most people who experience domestic violence are reluctant to go the police.

Police officers who agreed that "Most people who experience domestic violence are reluctant to go the police" were significantly younger (Mean age = 33.1 years; Mean dissenters = 36.1 years old) $t(714) -3.25$, $p < .01$, had less years of police service (Mean service = 10.6 years; Mean dissenters = 14.5 years) $t(713) -4.34$, $p < .001$, and had lower levels of emotional exhaustion burnout (Mean EE score = 19.3; Mean dissenters = 22.3) $t(710) -2.28$, $p < .05$.

Myth 3: Most people turn a blind eye to or ignore domestic violence

Police officers who agreed that "Most people turn a blind eye to or ignore domestic violence" had significantly less approval for husbands' verbal abuse in the Attitudes to Wife Abuse scale (Mean approval score = 47.8; Mean dissenters = 49.8) $t(682) -2.01$, $p < .05$.

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Myth 4: It's hard to understand why women stay in violent relationships

Police officers agreement with the statement that "It's hard to understand why women stay in violent relationships" differed significantly with their level of education ($\chi^2(2, 655) = 8.59, p < .05$) as lower levels of agreement were associated with increasing education.

Police officers who agreed with this statement drank significantly more alcohol (Mean = 12.3 g alcohol/day; Mean dissenters = 9.1 g/day) $t(722) -1.99, p < .05$, had higher levels of depersonalisation burnout (Mean DP score = 13.96 years; Mean dissenters = 12.27) $t(710) -2.35, p < .05$ and lower personal accomplishment (Mean PA score = 17.1 years; Mean dissenters = 15.5, reverse scored) $t(698) -2.10, p < .05$.

Myth 5 : Domestic Violence is more likely to occur in migrant families

Police officers who agreed that "Domestic Violence is more likely to occur in migrant families" had significantly more traditional views concerning women (Mean AWS score = 104.0; Mean dissenters = 107.2) $t(501) 2.14, p < .01$.

Myth 6: Domestic violence is a matter to be handled in the family

Police officers who agreed that "Domestic violence is a matter to be handled in the family" also had significantly more traditional views concerning women (Mean AWS score = 95.0; Mean dissenters = 106.7) $t(671) -4.78, p < .001$. These police officers had higher levels of emotional exhaustion burnout (Mean EE score = 23.0; Mean dissenters = 19.4) $t(713) 2.15, p < .05$ and were rated spousal control measures as (the Control Factor of the Domestic Violence Questionnaire) less seriously. (Mean seriousness score = 16.5; Mean dissenters = 17.9) $t(645) 2.62, p < .05$.

Myth 7: Domestic violence rarely happens in wealthy neighbourhoods

Police officers who agreed that "Domestic violence rarely happens in wealthy neighbourhoods" had significantly higher levels of approval for husbands' verbal abuse in the Attitudes to Wife Abuse scale (Mean approval score = 52.1; Mean dissenters = 48.1) $t(653) -2.33, p < .05$.

Myth 8: Domestic violence can be excused if alcohol is involved

Police officers who agreed that "Domestic violence can be excused if alcohol is involved" were significantly older (Mean age = 42.3 years; Mean dissenters = 33.4 years old) $t(719) 2.91, p < .01$, had spent longer time at the same rank (Mean = 7.0 years; Mean dissenters = 4.6 years) $t(702) 1.97, p < .05$, and had significantly more traditional views concerning women (Mean AWS score = 84.3; Mean dissenters = 106.11) $t(672) -3.36, p < .05$.

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DISCUSSION

Subjects

The sample of police officers exhibited a number of significant demographic differences which could have confounded the research hypothesis. This sample of police officers exhibited heterogeneity for age, gender, educational level, alcohol consumption and apparent promotional opportunities (as measured by less time at the same rank). Changing police attitudes may also be influenced by contemporary recruitment practices, enabling a wider range of applicants to join the police service, but producing diminished response homogeneity.

Most police obtained a sense of personal accomplishment from their work. Police characteristics did not vary from those reported in other studies, although female officers' shorter period at the same rank, better education and greater alcohol abstinence in this group are noteworthy. Days taken off work due to illness were related to hazardous alcohol use patterns, psychological ill-health (clinically significant GHQ scores), lengthy periods at the same rank, emotional exhaustion burnout and depersonalisation burnout.

Depersonalisation

The relationship between the demographic variables reported by the police officers and high depersonalisation scores was important. As predicted by the burnout literature (Kottkamp & Mansfield, 1985), younger police in earlier career phases manifested more depersonalisation. High self-reported sick leave was associated with high emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation, as previously noted by Price and Spence (1994) in non-police human service professionals.

Importantly, some predicted findings were absent, such as male sex or career plateau (years at the same rank) being independently associated with higher burnout levels. The relationship between career plateau and burnout progression appears to be complex.

Attitudes to women and wife abuse

Sex of police officer was an important factor in determining attitudes to women. Less favourable attitudes to women were present among longer serving officers and those above the rank of constable. Police in this study had more traditional attitudes to women than

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Australian community samples (Hillier & Foddy, 1993) and university undergraduates (Innes, Dormer & Lukins, 1993).

Burnout does appear to exert some effect on attitudes towards women, although it is not solely mediated by the predicted uncaring attitudes of depersonalisation. Higher levels of emotional exhaustion and lower levels of personal accomplishment were associated with less favourable attitudes to women. This observation is not accounted for by the age of police or career plateau (years at the same rank).

However, factors other than burnout, such as the officers' increasing exposure to relatively homogenous police culture through years of service may also affect attitudes to women.

Traditional attitudes to women in these police groups are an important finding. Such attitudes have been related to attitudes to wife abuse in the work of Kristiansen and Giuletti (1990) and others, and this current research suggests that more senior police or more emotionally exhausted police may have less disapproval of domestic violence perpetrators or differentially blame women for their victimisation.

Davis (1984) found that the main source of police knowledge about domestic violence was professional experience. It is possible that the apprenticeship model of professional experience may imbue younger officers with more negative, traditional or cynical attitudes more prevalent amongst older police (Graves, 1996) or police experiencing burnout, especially in the absence of formal reading or training in the area of domestic violence (Davis, 1984). Educational programs concerning gender issues and domestic violence may be necessary, but may not be effective in producing long term change (Young, 1990).

Although alcohol use and attitudes to wife abuse has been previously examined in community samples (Kantor & Straus, 1987), the current research demonstrated a modest but significant correlation between police officer daily alcohol use and more traditional attitudes to women generally.

Research hypotheses

Depersonalisation related to Approval of Domestic Violence

Summary

The primary research hypothesis that "Approval of domestic violence will be predicted by depersonalisation scores" was accepted. Police officers with cynical or negative attitudes toward recipients of police services have higher approval (or less disapproval) of husbands' verbal abuse of wives compared with officers without these attitudes.

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The task of testing this hypothesis was aided by the robust psychometric properties of the scales to measure the dependent variable, a revised version of the Attitudes to Wife Abuse Scale originally devised by Rigby, Whish and Black (1994) and by the use of a domestic violence questionnaire based on an Australian community survey (Office of the Status of Women, 1995).

Data reduction techniques demonstrated that police do not view domestic violence as a unitary concept. The Attitudes to Wife Abuse Scale yielded a 'verbal abuse' factor of a husband speaking sharply and yelling in a variety of non-sexual 'provocations' by a wife and a 'sex refusal' factor concerning police attitudes to the husband speaking sharply or yelling in a separate scenario where the wife refused sex. Analysis of the Attitudes to Wife Abuse Scale also demonstrated a separate 'physical abuse' factor, concerning police attitudes to the husband hitting the wife and forcing sex.

In contrast, the domestic violence questionnaire (DVQ) omitted references to sex, did not use 'provocation' elements and did not present a personalised vignette or scenario. However, factor analysis yielded similar results with a 'control factor' (analogous to the AWAS verbal factor) and a 'coercion factor' (analogous to the AWAS physical factor). This suggests that police officers distinguish between verbal and physical types of domestic violence if they are asked for their views, irrespective of the instrument used, provided the research tool enquires about both verbal and physical domestic violence.

It was also clear that testing for a significant association between burnout and attitudes to domestic violence involving physical abuse alone would be likely to be fruitless, as the data concerning the latter variable was not normally distributed (for example, 99.2% of police rated 'choking or beating' as serious). This suggests that other instruments dealing exclusively with physical domestic violence (see for example, Briere, 1987) would be unlikely to have demonstrated the significant association tested for by the principal research hypothesis.

Explanation of finding

Depersonalisation was confirmed in this sample as a separate factor on the Maslach Burnout Inventory contributing to overall burnout. Depersonalisation was a small but significant contributor to variance in attitudes of police officers to domestic violence.

Police officers' depersonalisation scores reported the extent to which they held negative, detached feelings about general recipients of police service. These depersonalisation scores accounted for 2% of the variance of attitudes to verbal abuse (AWAS) and 2% of variance in ratings of seriousness of 'control' measures in domestic violence (DVQ), an analogous concept measured with a different instrument.

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Depersonalisation also made a small but significant contribution to variance in police attitudes to a husband's verbal abuse after sex refusal ('sex refusal factor', AWAS).

Convergence or divergence with past literature

Explanations

Using data reduction techniques, it was apparent that the police did not view domestic violence as a unitary concept. This observation has important implications for attitudinal scores in previous studies where factor analysis has not been conducted or the scale itself is brief (see, for example, Briere, 1987) or the vignette focused exclusively on physical violence (see, for example, Stewart & Maddren, 1997) and negative findings have been noted.

Community surveys in Australia concerning domestic violence have addressed domestic violence behaviours including non-physical (see for example, Public Policy Research Centre, 1988; Office of the Status of Women, 1995) as well as physical abuse. However, within the police attitudinal literature, empirical research has not previously addressed this distinction between verbal and physical domestic violence.

This methodological omission may have been a result of police attitudinal researchers being criminal justice professionals or educators. Johnson, Sigler and Crowley (1994) noted that Social service professionals were more likely to define spouse abuse in terms of mental abuse (55.5%) whereas justice agencies defined spouse abuse as physical assault (54.3%). (p. 243).

An example of the problem of previous research assessing attitudes based solely on physical abuse is the current study's finding that Queensland police officers' attitudes to women made a small but significant contribution to variance in their attitudes to verbal abuse; this result stands in contrast to Stewart and Maddren's (1997) study of 97 Queensland police officers who were apparently presented only with physical abuse vignettes. Stewart and Maddren found that there was "no support for police officers' gender stereotypes influencing their attitudes toward family violence." (p.930).

In the current research, the small but significant contribution of depersonalisation (2%) to verbal domestic violence attitudes is interesting. The size of the contribution of burnout to other dependent variables found in previous studies is similar. For example, Wright and Bonett (1997) found that emotional exhaustion accounted for about 5% of variance in subsequent work performance ratings in human service workers.

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In this study, the contribution of depersonalisation burnout may have been reduced as there may have been confusion about the use of the term 'recipients' in the Maslach Burnout Inventory as police were asked to consider their attitudes to all people who received police services. Police considered their attitude to perpetrators and victims of crime as well as other community members. This may have diminished the true range of burnout responses to people they tried to assist. Conversely, there is evidence that in policing domestic violence, police do not make clear-cut distinctions between perpetrators and victims, as reflected in the problem of high arrest rates of domestic violence victims (Saunders, 1995). Moreover, depersonalisation scores were broadly consistent with United States and Canadian police samples (see for example, Anson & Bloom, 1998; Stearns & Moore, 1990).

The burnout literature suggests that depersonalisation burnout does occur more frequently amongst police officers than in other populations (Esposito, 1990) or emergency service workers such as fire fighters or ambulance officers (Anson & Bloom, 1988). However, it has been suggested that depersonalised emotion may develop in police officers during police socialisation and training and act to protect officers from ambiguous relationships outside the organisation or assist in danger preparation (Violanti, 1981). For example, in a study of police - citizen encounters, Moyer (1986) noted that "One strategy for coping with stressful situations is to establish social distance between oneself and the other actor and/or the situation of stress." (p. 366).

It is possible that officers with high reported levels of depersonalisation may be viewed by coworkers or supervisors as functioning well in their routine police duties. In a study of a related construct, police officer cynicism, Anson, Mann and Sherman (1986) found that moderate to high levels of cynicism toward the public were associated with high performance evaluations by supervisors. Amongst 100 professional staff of a public sector, human services department, Wright and Bonett (1997) found that depersonalisation was not related to a superior's subsequent rating of their work performance three years later. However, Wright and Bonett cautioned that this finding should not be considered definitive and noted that

It is possible that depersonalization and diminished personal accomplishment could be predictive of performance in situations where quantitative or client-centered measures of performance or productivity are available. For instance, regarding depersonalization, future research endeavours could include measures of provider performance from the perspective of the client (i.e. degree that the provider blames clients for their problems etc.) (p. 497 - 498).

The link between police depersonalisation and cynicism concerning stereotypical service recipients requires further research. Moyer (1986) anecdotally observed that following a situation of danger, police officers engaged in joking concerning stereotypic homosexuals

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and stated "Goffmen suggested that this type of joking establishes "role distance" and is also a mechanism of anxiety management." (p. 368).

Implications

Future police research concerning attitudes to domestic violence must include materials related to verbal and other non-physical forms of domestic violence. If researchers do not address this distinction, the lack of variance in police attitudes to overt physical violence will prevent statistical analysis of possible contributions by police officer demographic characteristics and other independent variables of interest. As a consequence, research directed solely at physical domestic violence is likely to inhibit understanding of police attitudes to domestic violence.

For example, police referral of victims to third party agencies during a call-out has been described as an "evasive measure in place of arrest" (Belknap & McCall, 1994, p. 224) or "the way police washed their hands of the matter" (Bayley, 1986, p. 342). Police attitudes to utilisation of social service agencies may be related to their attitudes to domestic violence. However, an exploration of police attitudes would not produce significant variance or enable meaningful statistical analysis unless the research instrument included questions concerning controlling (rather than coercive) domestic violence, as this type of spouse abuse does (eg verbal abuse of a wife) not usually lead to perpetrator arrest.

Contrary to burnout literature in other fields, future research should attempt to explore the possibility that depersonalisation may assist officers to attend, but emotionally detach from the distress of domestic violence call-outs. A majority of police dislike or feel resigned to such attendances (Hatty & Sutton, 1986). Service recipients may be particularly unhappy with their experience of police in these circumstances; for example, victims relate that police may trivialise the violence or appear reluctant to get involved (Mugford, Mugford, & Easteal, 1990). However, depersonalisation may allow attending police to feel less emotionally concerned about their recent domestic violence call-out attendance by reducing the victim and perpetrator behaviour to a stereotypical and repetitious script.

Limitations related to finding

This research is limited to police officers working in an urban environment. Police officers in rural areas appear to experience different levels of burnout (see for example, Anderson, 1996) and this may diminish the association with attitudes to domestic violence. Also, the finding that police in rural areas commonly hold the belief that domestic violence is a private matter (Samyia-Coorey, 1987) may also diminish the association between depersonalisation burnout and attitudes to domestic violence.

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Specific research needed to clarify or extend finding

Research to assess the relationship between depersonalisation burnout and efficacy of policing (for example, supervisors' evaluations) and the relationship between attitudes to domestic violence and actual behaviours during domestic violence call-outs is required. The observational model of Bayley (1986) attending police call-outs would be especially useful, but observer-related effects (eg observer gender, age, service-related background) should be closely controlled.

The association between depersonalisation and attitudes to domestic violence may differ in rural police and this should also be the subject of further study.

Depersonalisation scores and attitudes toward other victim groups (eg bashing of gay men, rape victims) should also be addressed in future studies to address the generalisability of this study's empirical demonstration of the theoretical construct of depersonalisation.

Sex of police officer does not influence depersonalisation status

Summary

The hypothesis that sex of police officer would be significantly associated with depersonalisation status was not accepted.

Convergence or divergence with past literature

Explanations

This was a surprising finding, as a number of previous studies demonstrated higher depersonalisation scores in men (see, for example, Dale & Weinberg, 1989).

However, consideration of this police group with the MBI standardisation sample (Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, 1996) confirms that both male and female officers in this study had significantly higher depersonalisation scores in the presence of significantly higher personal accomplishment (lower MBI subscale scores).

Implications

As previously noted this failure to find an association between officer sex and differential depersonalisation levels may be a reflection of artefactual problems in police interpretation of the term service recipients.

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Alternatively, the observation in this research that female police have more traditional attitudes toward women than community samples may indicate that a convergence of female police attitudes with those of male police occurs in the course of police socialisation.

Limitations related to finding

The study has not sought to match individual male and female officers on demographic characteristics and there were many more male officers than females. However, Stewart and Maddren (1997) observed that 12% of Queensland police officers are female; the 133 female police (18% of group) studied in the current research sample does not indicate under-representation of women as a factor confounding this lack of association and is similar to the proportion of female police in American studies (see for example, Johnson, 1991; 20% of sample) and Canadian studies (see for example, Stearns & Moore, 1993; 19.5% of an 'experienced' police group).

Specific research needed to clarify or extend finding

Consideration of the use of the cynicism scale, a revised depersonalisation scale, in the MBI - General Survey (Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, 1996) is suggested in future police research as it refers to cynicism concerning the work itself, not to personal relationships at work. Subsequent replication of this lack of significant differences between the sexes should then lead to opportunities for exploration of police socialisation and training, and in particular, the in vivo utility of holding cynical or detached attitudes to police service recipients.

Study limits

Although this data represents almost all of the population of police officers in the Brisbane North policing region, these findings may not be representative for other police groups, such as rural police officers.

This study did not seek to identify causes of burnout, but its effects, and so did not examine personality characteristics or coping strategies. Hart and Wearing (1995) noted that, in order of importance, stable personality characteristics, organisational characteristics, operational demands and the use of personal coping strategies were the strongest determinants of employees' psychological outcomes. In the emotionally ambiguous environment of policing it is possible that any or all of these factors may interact with attitudes to domestic violence or the arrest decision.

Hart and Wearing (1995) found that organisational issues may exceed stereotypical operational stressors, such as dealing with victims, as a source of distress. A detailed police organisational analysis was not conducted in this research as this was not central to the research hypothesis.

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There is only a limited literature concerning the potentially protective effect of positive personality attributes and personal experiences with clients (Hart & Wearing, 1995). In this research, there was no attempt to examine police officers' positive experiences with domestic violence victims because of the absence of an empirically-derived suitable instrument. Similarly, no assessment of personality was conducted because of the extensive time demands of even uncomplicated personality inventories.

Potential study confounds also include those of social desirability (e.g. endorsement of high levels of 'personal accomplishment'). However, Maslach, Jackson and Leiter (1996) found that burnout subscales were not significantly correlated with the Crowne-Marlowe (1964) Social Desirability (SD) Scale in social welfare graduate students.

Another possible confound is minimisation of pathology (e.g. amounts of alcohol drunk, endorsement of items associated with suicidality by police officers). Paradoxically, in this population with high levels of group cohesion, there may also have been a tendency to 'overstate' items associated with extreme attitudes, although this is more likely to have affected the potential emotionally-laden 'dependent' variables.

Conclusions

This research successfully measures attitudes toward physical and non-physical domestic violence for which there was no readily available instrument of adequate psychometric validity. Depersonalisation, the other variable in the primary research hypothesis was described by Maslach, Jackson and Leiter (1996) as

Negative, cynical attitudes and feelings about one's clients. This callous or even dehumanized perception of others can lead staff members to view their clients as somehow deserving of their troubles (Ryan, 1971). (p. 4).

The current study's primary hypothesis that there would be a significant relationship between depersonalisation burnout and these attitudes (toward domestic violence victims) was accepted. This finding is a novel and important empirical contribution to burnout theory.

In the Violence against Women in Australia Indicators Project (VAWIP) Putt and Higgins (1997) reviewed the extant Australian research, and stated

Because the research community is so small, and funding difficult to come by, empirical research and sophisticated analysis of aggregate data is thin on the ground. . . Rigorous quantitative and longitudinal research projects are notably scarce and the reasons for this can be attributed in part to the structural and organisational environment in which Australian social science research operates. (p. 8).

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The current findings add to the body of research knowledge by demonstrating that large scale, systematic studies of police officers concerning potentially sensitive subjects such as domestic violence and attitudes to women are possible if senior police approval is obtained. Also, police officers can provide psychometrically differentiated responses on the basis of age, gender, rank and other variables to a variety of novel instruments assessing attitudes to domestic violence and attitudes to women. Police also appear to be amenable to enquiries about their psychological health when provided with an opportunity for confidential data collection.

In this study, greater police educational level made a significant contribution to ratings of seriousness of domestic violence. Although data concerning the effects of specific domestic violence education are equivocal, education concerning gender-related issues and the recruitment of police with higher educational qualifications should be medium term objectives to improve domestic violence policing.

Police training programs should ensure adequate entry data is collected concerning recruits, including demographic data concerning psychological health and use of alcohol, attitudinal data concerning women and domestic violence and measurement of burnout levels at the end of training prior to the commencement of duties.

The putative relationships outlined in this study suggests that a wealth of change information should be available in future prospective longitudinal studies of police. These studies would enable delineation of causal from spurious variable relationships with domestic violence attitudes and may enhance public policy decisions (Hart & Wearing, 1995).

Some studies have demonstrated that careful selection including simulated stress predicts better performance both at the academy and in job efficiency (Mills, 1975). Amongst the recommendations of Hart & Wearing (1995) is the use of personality screening during selection and placement of employees. Psychologically resilient individuals are likely be of advantage to any workplace. Another recommendation, that employees be taught to recognise ineffective coping strategies underlines that the appreciation and effects of stress are a dynamic process and that capacity to function with emotional effort and regard for clients is likely to fluctuate with organisational and environmental factors.

Also, the interface of personality, psychiatric disorder, burnout and attitudinal change in a long-term post-induction study of police officers would provide a wealth of information about the effect of the police career and organisation on its officers.

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