

## **The Impact of Job Stress and General Health on Burnout among Police Officers: The Moderating Role of Ways of Coping, Social Support and Attitudes toward Seeking Psychological Help**

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### **Abstract**

The current cross-sectional study examined job stress, general health and demographic variables as predictors of job burnout among police officers in Trinidad. Social support, ways of coping and attitudes toward seeking psychological help were used as moderators of the relationship between job stress and general health on burnout. Data were collected from 337 police officers. A demographic data sheet as well as the Maslach Burnout Inventory, Ways of Coping Questionnaire, Job Stress Scale, Social Support Scale, the General Health Questionnaire and the Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale were administered to respondents. Findings revealed that job stress, general health, social support and ways of coping were significant predictors of job burnout. Ways of coping and social support were found to moderate the relationship between job stress and job burnout and general health and job burnout, respectively. The study's findings are discussed within the context of interventions to reduce police burnout.

*Keywords:* police, job burnout, job stress, general health, moderators

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## Introduction

A country's populace is heavily reliant on its police service to ensure its safety and security. Police officers can perform this task effectively only if they are physically, emotionally and mentally capable. In fact, the health of a police service is regarded as fundamental, not only to a country's safety and security, but also its overall development (Rothmann & Van Rensburg, 2002). Given the importance of policing to a country, the individual and collective health and well-being of police officers are indeed paramount. Unfortunately, officers' health and well-being are constantly being jeopardized by their predisposition to experience job burnout, brought on by the inherently stressful nature of their jobs (Aydin & Tekiner, 2016).

The concept of job burnout first came into being with the work of Freudenberger in the 1970s. Following a systematic analysis and observation of his behaviour and that of his colleagues, Freudenberger, a psychologist and psychotherapist by profession, observed a state of mental decline among his colleagues and himself, and which his colleagues referred to as being *burned out* (Heinemann & Heinemann, 2017). More than a decade later, Maslach and Jackson (1981) advanced a theoretic model of the psychological syndrome of job burnout comprising three dimensions: emotional exhaustion (a weakening of affective resources), depersonalization (a sense of detachment from the job), and reduced personal accomplishment (a negative evaluation of oneself based on one's accomplishments). Employees who experience high levels of both depersonalization and emotional exhaustion and low levels of personal accomplishment are likely to experience high degrees of job burnout (Maslach et al., 1986). Conversely, low job burnout levels are reported by those exposed to low levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, and high levels of personal accomplishment (Houdmont, 2013). Job burnout is not an instantaneous occurrence, but instead is the result of chronic stress brought about by stressful events over a prolonged period, as is often evident in jobs that require intense human interaction and risk, with policing being one of them (Russell, 2014).

Attempts have been made to examine the key contributors of job burnout among police officers, revealing personal, social and organizational factors as major contributors. At the individual level, socio-demographic variables such as age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, rank, educational level, and personality variables such as self-esteem, locus of control and

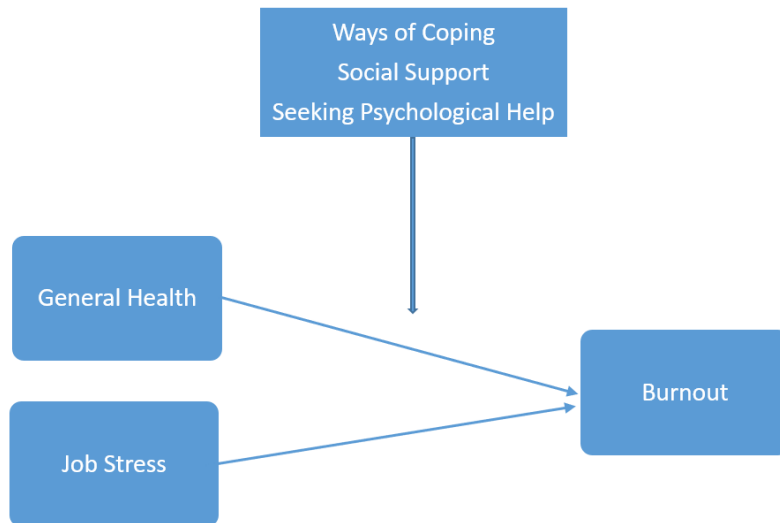
self-efficacy as well as personality type, have all been associated with employee job burnout (Anderson & Iwanicki, 1984; Glass & McKnight, 1996). Prior studies have established the importance of workplace factors such as shiftwork, duration of work hours, lack of a sense of belongingness to the organization, absence of recognition for work accomplishments, role conflict, role ambiguity and perceptions of unfair workplace treatment as some of the precursors of job burnout (Aydin & Tekiner, 2016; Bawa, 2012). Other variables associated with job burnout include organizational climate, poor prospects for promotion, salary inequities, staff turnover and inadequate staffing and resources (Glisson et al., 2008; Morse et al., 2012).

An investigation of job burnout among police officers is important for several reasons. Job burnout can affect not only officers' physical and psychological health and well-being, but can also adversely impact their family life, work relationships, job commitment and job performance, and even result in job loss (Maslach et al., 2001). Schaufeli and Enzmann (1998) claim that job burnout has been associated with job dissatisfaction, diminished organizational commitment, truancy, intent to quit and elevated turnover, all of which are related to diminished performance on the job. The excessive use of force among police officers is also associated with job burnout (Kop et al., 1999).

While several studies have been done on job burnout, the focus has predominantly been on occupations other than law enforcement. Moreover, the few studies that have been done on job burnout among law enforcement officers have been conducted in developed nations, and to date no known study on officer job burnout has been undertaken in Trinidad and Tobago. Trinidad and Tobago is a twin-island Republic within the Caribbean, and is located just north of Venezuela. As of 2023, Trinidad and Tobago had population of 1.37 million inhabitants and approximately 7,500 police officers. Its economy is primarily based on petroleum and tourism. Trinidad and Tobago has one of the highest murder rates in the Caribbean, second only to Jamaica. Within recent times the police service has come under severe criticism from several sectors of society as a result of the increasing crime rates. The very high crime rates and consequent dangers associated with policing, coupled with ongoing criticisms of the police service, can contribute to high levels of stress and burnout among police officers in Trinidad and Tobago.

In order to contribute to an understanding of job burnout, the present study utilizes a range of demographic variables as controls, as well as job stress and general health as predictors of burnout among police officers. The study also hypothesizes that ways of coping, social support and attitudes toward seeking psychological help moderate the relationship between job stress and general health and burnout. The main research model which will be examined is presented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**  
*Research Model*



## Literature Review

### Theoretical Considerations

Several theoretical models have been developed to explain work-related burnout. The mediation model (Leiter & Maslach, 2005) suggests that job-related factors play a primary role in burnout. This theory identifies six key factors which include work overload, lack of control, insufficient reward, breakdown of community, absence of fairness and value conflict. These factors produce job stress which in turn can lead to burnout. The job strain model (Karasek & Theorell, 1990) and the job demand resources model (Demerouti et al., 2001) also identify job characteristics as important, but argue that other factors interact with such characteristics to determine whether or not job-related factors lead to burnout. The job strain model assumes that job-related factors which produce stressors interact with the level of job control and social support which employees receive. In contrast, the job demand resources model indicates that job-related demands which produce stress interact with personal or job resources to determine whether job-related stress leads to burnout.

Taken together, the models described above suggest that factors related to the job, as well as factors external to the job (which include personal as well as non-personal factors) affect burnout. While each of these models specifies a range of possible factors the present study focuses on two key factors. The first relates to job stress which can be a result of a range

of work-related factors. The second factor which will be focused upon is general health which is considered to be a personal factor. The present study utilizes job stress and general health as predictors of burnout, but does not assume that both variables will always lead to burnout. Instead, the key argument of this study is that job stress and poor health can lead to burnout, but other factors may mitigate (that is, moderate) this relationship. The mitigating factors used in this study include the use of adaptive coping strategies, the availability of social support, and attitudes toward seeking psychological help. Several other variables, including demographic variables, will be used as controls in testing the moderating effects of the aforementioned variables. The literature review will first examine several demographic variables, following which the relationships depicted in Figure 1 will be examined.

### **Demographic variables and Job Burnout**

Research regarding the relationship between the demographic variables of age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, educational level, rank and job burnout has provided inconsistent findings, which may be attributed to several factors. With respect to the age-burnout relationship, age may have been confounded by work-experience (Maslach et al., 2001) while gender differentials in job burnout levels may be due to the unique stressors faced by female police officers (McCarty et al., 2007). While the disparities in educational level and job burnout could be attributed to confounds such as occupation and status (Birch, 1986), ethnic variations in the ethnicity-job burnout relationship may be explicated by the inequalities in perceived fairness between ethnicities (McDonald, 2012). The inconclusive nature of the relationship between rank and marital status in relation to job burnout may lie in the fact that these two demographic variables are among the least studied in relation to job burnout, and as such further research may be necessary before any conclusive statement can be made.

### **Job Stress and General Health as predictors of Burnout: The moderating role of Social Support, Ways of Coping and Willingness to seek Psychological Help**

The above sections have looked at the relationship between a number of demographic variables and job burnout. This section focuses on two substantive variables, job stress and general health, as predictors of burnout. As the literature will show, there are inconsistencies in the findings with respect to the impact of each of these variables on burnout. While several researchers have hypothesized that job stress should increase rates of burnout, not all have found this relationship (Mehta, 2010). In a similar manner, several researchers have hypothesized that poor health can lead to job burnout (Peterson, et al., 2008). Despite this, other researchers have not found a relationship between health and burnout. Useche et al. (2019), for example, utilized the Maslach Burnout Inventory and examined the relationship between the subscales in the Inventory and several health-related indicators. They found no relationship between body mass index and the three subscales

of the Inventory. Alcohol consumption, another health-related indicator used by Useche et al. (2019), was not related to the emotional exhaustion and depersonalization subscales of the Inventory, while physical exercise was unrelated to the personal accomplishment subscale of the Inventory. It is a fundamental argument of this paper that job stress and poor health could lead to burnout, but that there may be some conditions under which the effects of stress and poor health could be tempered such that they do not lead to burnout. In this paper these conditions are specified as three moderating variables. More specifically, it is hypothesized that officers who receive social support, or who utilize effective coping strategies, or who are more willing to seek psychological help are less likely to experience burnout, even if they are stressed on the job or have poor health.

### **Job Stress and Burnout**

Prolonged stress has been found to result in burnout among human service professionals (Maslach et al., 2001). Several researchers have reported significant positive associations between job stress and burnout (Abarghouei et al., 2016; Jamal & Baba, 2000; Wang et al., 2014; Wu et al., 2021). These findings indicate that the likelihood of burnout increases as job stress increases. Other research, however, has not found this relationship. For example, Mehta (2010) in his examination of job stress and burnout among 153 regulatory affairs professionals in New Jersey, found no significant relationship between job stress and burnout. This finding led Mehta to conclude that the relationship between job stress and burnout requires further research in order to resolve this inconsistency. Given that job stress does not always lead to burnout, it is important to determine the conditions under which stress will and will not lead to burnout.

### **General Health and Burnout**

Research between burnout and health, though limited, suggests that burnout is related to both physical and mental health, either as an antecedent to burnout or an effect of it (Golembiewski et al., 1992). As it relates to physical health, the various dimensions of burnout have been found to correlate significantly with an increased risk for somatic diseases (von Känel, et al., 2020). Research has found that the emotional exhaustion component of burnout is highly predictive of mental health outcomes (Maslach et al., 2001), suggesting therefore, that burnout leads to poor mental health. The findings of Abkhou and Janaabadi (2015) are consistent with this. In their study of job burnout and general health among high school teachers, using the General Health Questionnaire, they found that burnout accounted for 20% of the variance in teachers' general health. Further, in their investigation of burnout, job stress, job satisfaction and mental health among 500 University medical staff, Khamisa et al. (2015) reported that the highest amount of variance in mental health (21%) was attributed to burnout.

In contrast to the above, Peterson et al. (2008) posit that poor physical and mental health can lead to higher job burnout levels. Mental health is paramount in order for police officers to perform well at their jobs. Poor mental health can negatively impact officer judgment, resilience and stress levels and ability to appreciate their jobs (Kelley, 2005). Further, some researchers have reported associations between depression and anxiety and various phases of burnout (Golembiewski & Munzenrider, 1988). Given the important role that general health may have on burnout, as well as inconsistencies in previous research (for example, Useche et al., 2019), it becomes important to understand the relationship between both variables, and to determine whether there are any factors which could mitigate the relationship between health and burnout.

### **Ways of Coping as a Moderator**

Coping constitutes the cognitive and behavioural strategies that persons use to manage stressful events in their lives. A significant body of research suggests that coping strategies may play a critical role in ameliorating job burnout (Alsoofi et al., 2000). While many coping strategies exist, some are more suitable for coping with police stressors than others. According to Violanti (1992), unlike escape avoidance and self-control coping, strategies of planful problem solving and distancing were more likely to assist police officers in coping with stressful events. Specific coping strategies have also been found to attenuate the stress-job burnout association as evident in the study by Mostert and Joubert (2005) which used a sample of 340 police officers. This study found that occupational stress and job burnout was moderated by avoidance-coping. Moreover, in a later study, Betoret (2006) found that coping resources moderated the stress-burnout relationship among 247 secondary school teachers in Spain. Specifically, this researcher found that teachers who had access to more coping resources reported suffering less stress and burnout when compared to their counterparts who had fewer coping resources. Further, Wallace et al. (2010) in their study of 232 counselors reported that coping strategies either mediated or moderated the stress-burnout relationship. The study suggested that type of coping strategy determined whether it served as a mediator or moderator. Despite the above findings, police officers have been reported to use maladaptive coping mechanisms, and officers with poor mental health are more likely to utilize inappropriate coping strategies, thus not being able to mitigate the resultant burnout that may occur (Burke, 1993).

### **Social Support as a Moderator**

One factor that may mitigate the impact of stress on job burnout for police officers is social support. Social support could be provided by supportive individuals from within one's social network, which incorporates colleagues, friends, family, supervisors and the community (Cohen, 2004). Workplace stress cannot be eliminated but can be mitigated against by administrative, peer and colleague support (Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997).

Vigfúsdóttir (2017), in his study of 93 police officers in Iceland, found that less stress and job burnout were reported by officers who received higher levels of co-worker support. This study also found that social support mediated the stress-job burnout relationship, while family and friend support only impacted officers' stress levels. Abu Al Rub, et al. (2009) found that co-worker support was important in mitigating the effects of job stress. Other research has shown that supervisor support, in mitigating the effects of burnout, may be more important when compared to co-worker support (Maslach et al, 2001). While this does not negate the importance of family and friend support, it does seem to underscore the importance of co-worker support as it relates to stress and subsequent job burnout reduction among police officers. Other research suggests that emotional support could buffer the negative effects of job stress on job burnout (Zellars & Perrewé, 2001). The variation in the sources of social support makes this a variable of interest that requires additional investigation.

### **Attitudes Toward Seeking Psychological Help as a Moderator**

Seeking psychological help, like social support, could play an instrumental role in mitigating the relationship between job stress or mental health and burnout among police officers. Policing is a high-stressed profession and officers are confronted with daily hassles and traumatic events, the cumulative effect of which can increase their stress levels. If the impact of stresses on the job, or that of poor health are not addressed, this could result in burnout. While families, friends and colleagues may be able to offer some degree of support, in instances where stress levels are chronic, or where mental health issues arise, professional psychological intervention may be warranted. Trained mental health personnel are more readily positioned to offer the kind of counseling and support which may ameliorate the effects of stress as well as mental health issues. Officers who express attitudes which suggest that they are more willing to seek psychological help, on average, may be more likely to seek such help when it is needed. Even if they do not seek professional help, the propensity to seek help suggests that they may seek help from others, including family and friends. While such forms of help may differ from that offered by professional psychologists, it may nevertheless provide the support that is needed to help officers to deal with issues surrounding their stress or mental health. If such support occurs, then this should reduce the likelihood that such stress or mental health issues would lead to burnout.

## **Method**

### **Procedures**

Permission was obtained from the Ministry of National Security to administer a quantitative survey to a cross-section of in-service police officers in Trinidad. In-service officers were surveyed at randomly selected police stations in each of the eight police

divisions in Trinidad. The superintendent attached to each police division was contacted and five police stations from within each police division were randomly selected for participation in the study. Dates and times were arranged for the administration of the survey at each police station. Upon visits to the police stations, officers were informed about the purpose of the survey and were told that participation was voluntary. Officers who agreed to participate were given printed copies of the survey. Completed surveys were retrieved from an average of eight police officers per station. A total of 337 surveys were completed by in-service officers. Surveys were self-administered and trained research assistants were on hand to answer questions which arose. Each survey took approximately 35 minutes to complete. The study was approved by the University of Trinidad and Tobago Research Ethics Committee.

### **Sample**

The sample consisted of 337 in-service police officers from the eight police divisions within Trinidad. Sixty-five point six percent of the respondents were male while 34.4% were female. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 64 years (Mean = 35.7 years, SD = 9.5). Of these, 1.2% were 18 to 20 years of age, 32.2% were 21 to 30 years of age, 38.6% were 31 to 40 years of age, 19.6% were 41 to 50 years of age, and 8.3% were older than 50 years of age. Twenty-two point eight percent of the sample were of East Indian descent, 45.4% were of African descent, 31.2% were Mixed, while 0.6% were of other ethnicities. With respect to educational levels, 2.7% possessed primary education, 59.1% obtained secondary education, 20.8% had a Bachelor's degree, 3% had a Master's degree or higher while 14.5% indicated other types of educational achievements. Of the sample, 49.9% were married or in a relationship, while 50.1% were single, divorced, separated or widowed. With respect to the number of years employed, 40.9% of respondents had been employed for five years or less, 20.2% for 6 to 10 years, 16.6% for 11 to 15 years, 10.4% for 16 to 20 years and 11.0% had more than 20 years of service as a police officer (Mean = 10.3, SD = 9.2). When asked to indicate their rank, 63.8% indicated that they were constables, 16.3% were corporals, 10.4% were sergeants, 2.4% were inspectors, while 1.7% had other ranks.

### **Measures**

Data for the current study were collected via a questionnaire which included a demographic data sheet. In order to yield the demographics, participants were asked to indicate their age, gender, ethnicity/race, educational levels, rank and number of years of service. Several instruments, as indicated below, were used to collect data on the other variables used in this study. Descriptive statistics appear in Table 1 while the correlations among variables appear in Table 2.

### ***Maslach Burnout Inventory***

The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) developed by Maslach and Jackson (1986) was used to measure job burnout among police officers. The MBI is a 22-item scale with three subscales: emotional exhaustion (9 items) depersonalization (5 items) and low personal accomplishment (8 items). Each item on each of the subscales was measured using a 7-point scale ranging from 0= never, 1= a few times a year or less, 2= once a month or less, 3= a few times a month, 4= once a week, 5= a few times a week to 6= every day. All measures were computed as the mean of the responses within each subscale. A high score on the emotional exhaustion subscale reflects being emotionally overworked (mean = 2.17, SD = 1.33,  $\alpha = .896$ ). A high score on the depersonalization subscale reflects an unsympathetic and detached response to one's service (mean = 1.85, SD = 1.33,  $\alpha = .716$ ). A high score on the personal accomplishment subscale reflects feelings of incompetence (mean = 2.35, SD = 1.22,  $\alpha = .795$ ). A total burnout measure was also computed as the mean of the responses to all items (mean = 2.09, SD = 1.11,  $\alpha = .837$ ).

### ***Job Stress Scale***

Job stress was measured by the Job Stress Scale developed by McCreary and Thompson (2006). This is a 40-item scale with 20 items each measuring operational and organizational stress. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale with responses ranging from "strongly disagree" = 1 to "strongly agree" = 5. Items that measured operational stress included "*Shift work has caused me stress over the past 6 months*" and "*Traumatic events have caused me stress over the past 6 months.*" Organizational stress was measured by items such as "*Staff shortages have caused me stress over the past 6 months*" and "*Excessive administrative duties have caused me stress in the last 6 months.*" This scale was computed as the mean of the responses to all questions. This was used as a measure of total stress and items were coded such that a high score represented a high level of job stress (mean = 3.0, SD = .628,  $\alpha = .932$ ).

### ***General Health Questionnaire***

The General Health Questionnaire, developed by Goldberg (1978) is a 28-item questionnaire comprising 4 subscales (somatic symptoms, anxiety/insomnia, social dysfunction and severe depression) each of which contains 7 items. Items are rated on a 4-point rating scale ranging from 0 = "not at all" to 3 = "much more than usual". Sample items in this scale include "*Have you been getting scared or panicky for no good reason?*" and "*Have you been able to enjoy your normal day-to-day activities?*" A measure for general health was computed as the mean of the responses to all items. Items were coded such that a high score represented poor health (mean = 2.16, SD = .403,  $\alpha = .897$ ).

### ***Social Support Scale***

The Social Support Scale developed by Cullen et al. (1985) was used. This comprised 23 items and was subdivided into 4 subscales measuring peer, supervisor, family and community support. Items were rated on a Likert-type scale ranging from “strongly agree” = 1 to “strongly disagree” = 5. Higher scores on this scale indicated higher levels of social support. Sample items on this scale included “*My fellow officers often encourage each other to do the job in a way that we would be really proud of*” (peer support); “*My supervisors often encourage us to do the job in a way we would really be proud of*” (supervisor support); “*I have people in my family I can talk to about problems I have at work*” (family support) and “*Residents in the communities that I serve are supportive of police officers*” (community support). Total social support was computed as the mean of the responses to all items (mean = 3.46, SD = .468,  $\alpha = .811$ ).

### ***Ways of Coping Scale***

Developed by Folkman and Lazarus (1988), the Ways of Coping Scale is a 66-item process measure, containing a variety of thoughts and actions utilized by people to deal with internal and external stressful encounters. Items are rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 0 = “Does not apply or not used” to 3 = “Used a great deal”. The questionnaire comprises 8 subscales; positive reappraisal, planful problem solving, escape avoidance, accepted responsibility, seeking social support, self-controlling, distancing, and confrontive coping. Sample items on the scale included: “*I tried to forget the whole thing,*” “*I talked to someone about how I was feeling,*” and “*I changed something about myself.*” Factor analysis indicated a one-factor solution, and the scale was computed as the mean of the responses to all items. Items were coded such that a high score represented the use of effective coping strategies (mean = 1.45, SD = .531,  $\alpha = .875$ ).

### ***Attitude Towards Seeking Psychological Help - Short Form***

This scale developed by Fischer and Farina (1995) measures one’s attitude towards seeking psychological help. It is a 10-item scale with items rated on a five-point Likert scale with response choices ranging from 1= “disagree” to 5 = “agree”. This measure was computed as the mean of the responses to all items. Higher scores on the scale indicate greater willingness to seek psychological help (mean = 3.39, SD = .813,  $\alpha = .662$ ). Items include: “*I might want to have counseling in the future*”, “*I would want to get psychological help if I were worried or upset for a long period of time*” and “*The idea of talking about problems with a psychologist strikes me as a poor way to get rid of emotional conflicts*”.

**Table 1**  
*Descriptive Statistics*

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Cronbach's Alpha
Job Stress	3.00	.628	.932
General Health	2.16	.403	.897
Social Support	3.46	.468	.811
Ways of Coping	1.45	.531	.875
Seeking Psychological Help	3.39	.813	.662
Burnout (Total)	2.09	1.11	.837
Burnout (Emotional Exhaustion)	2.17	1.33	.896
Burnout (Depersonalization)	1.85	1.33	.716
Burnout (Low Personal Accomplishment)	2.35	1.22	.795

**Table 2**  
*Correlation among Variables*

	Job Stress	General Health	Social Support	Ways of Coping	Seeking Psychological Help	Burnout (Total)	Burnout (Emotional Exhaustion)	Burnout (Depersonalization)
General Health	-.314**							
Social Support	-.230**	.352**						
Ways of Coping	.139**	-.055	.114*					
Seeking Psychological Help	-.070	.143**	.110*	.103*				
Burnout (Total)	.488**	-.493**	-.283**	.164**	-.141**			
Burnout (Emotional Exhaustion)	.481**	-.557**	-.329**	.181**	-.153**	.974**		
Burnout (Depersonalization)	.396**	-.507**	-.224**	.170**	-.206**	.803**	.675**	
Burnout (Low Personal Acc.)	-.010	-.128*	-.145**	-.282**	-.268**	-.049	-.075	.051

\* p < .05, \*\* p < .01

## **Results**

Multiple regression analysis was used to determine whether the predictors which were specified were significant predictors of job burnout and whether social support, ways of coping, and attitudes toward seeking psychological help moderated the relationship between job stress/general health and burnout. Four models were computed. The dependent variables were total burnout, as well as the three subscales in the Maslach Burnout Inventory (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and low personal accomplishment). Predictors included age, gender, level of education, rank, number of years of service, marital status, job stress and general health. Moderation effects were computed using the method specified by Aiken and West (1991) where moderators were specified as interaction terms.

Prior to computing the regression models, several tests were conducted to ensure that the basic conditions required for analysis were met. Linearity tests were conducted using scatterplots, while tests for univariate and multivariate outliers were conducted using the criteria specified in Tabachnick and Fidell (2014). Variance inflation factors as well as an examination of correlations among the predictors indicated that there were no issues of multicollinearity. Tests for homoscedasticity, normality and independence of errors, and autocorrelation of residuals were also conducted and indicated no issues.

Regression models appear in Table 3. Significant predictors of total burnout were job stress ( $\beta = .327, p < .001$ ), general health ( $\beta = .336, p < .001$ ), social support ( $\beta = -.079, p < .05$ ), ways of coping ( $\beta = .128, p < .001$ ) and health \* social support ( $\beta = -.090, p < .05$ ). The results indicate that officers who experienced high levels of job-related stress or officers who had poor health were more likely to be burnt out. Officers who received high levels of social support were less likely to be burnt out while officers who used adaptive ways of coping were more likely to be burnt out. The significant health \* social support interaction term indicated that officers who had poor health but who received social support were less likely to be burnt out.

Significant predictors of emotional exhaustion were job stress ( $\beta = .273, p < .001$ ), general health ( $\beta = .405, p < .001$ ), social support ( $\beta = -.095, p < .05$ ), ways of coping ( $\beta = .151, p < .001$ ) and job stress \* ways of coping ( $\beta = -.113, p < .05$ ). These findings indicate that officers who are stressed on the job or who have poorer health are more likely to be emotionally exhausted. The results also indicate that officers who receive more social support are less emotionally exhausted. The results also indicated that officers who utilized better coping strategies were emotionally more exhausted. The significant job stress \* ways of coping interaction term indicated that officers who were stressed on the job but who utilized more effective coping strategies were less emotionally drained.

Significant predictors of depersonalization were job stress ( $\beta = .215, p < .001$ ), general health ( $\beta = .375, p < .001$ ), ways of coping ( $\beta = .143, p < .01$ ) and willingness to seek psychological help ( $\beta = -.114, p < .05$ ). The results indicate that officers who experience a high level of job stress or those who have poorer health feel unsympathetic and detached from their jobs (that is, have a high level of depersonalization). Officers who utilized more effective coping strategies experienced higher levels of depersonalization. The results also indicate that officers who were more willing to seek psychological help experienced lower levels of depersonalization.

Significant predictors of low personal accomplishment were ways of coping ( $\beta = -.245, p < .001$ ), willingness to seek psychological help ( $\beta = -.208, p < .001$ ), job stress \* ways of coping ( $\beta = -.151, p < .05$ ) and health \* social support ( $\beta = .125, p < .05$ ). The results indicate that officers who use adaptive coping strategies as well as officers who are willing to seek psychological help when faced with stressful situations have high feelings of personal competence. The results also indicate that officers who experience stress on the job but who utilize effective coping strategies have high feelings of personal competence. Finally, the results show that officers who are unhealthy but who receive social support have high feelings of personal competence.

Overall, the most important predictors of the dependent variables were job stress, general health, social support and ways of coping. Not surprisingly, high levels of job stress was a predictor of total burnout and was also related to high levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Social support acted as a buffer against burnout and also reduced levels of emotional exhaustion. Poor health was also related to total burnout, emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. While ways of coping was an important predictor, its impact was in a direction which was predominantly not what was expected. More specifically, officers who used adaptive coping strategies were more likely to be burnt out, had higher levels of emotional exhaustion and higher levels of depersonalization. In contrast, officers who used effective coping strategies had higher feelings of personal competence.

Ways of coping was an important moderator where job stress was concerned. More specifically, officers who were stressed but who utilized effective coping strategies were less likely to be emotionally exhausted and had high feelings of personal competence. The findings also show that social support was an important moderator where general health was concerned. More specifically, officers who had poor health but who received social support were less likely to be burnt out. In addition, officers who were unhealthy but who received social support had higher feelings of personal competence.

**Table 3**  
*Predictors of Job Burnout*

	Total Burnout			Emotional Exhaustion			Depersonalization			Low Personal Accomplishment		
	$\beta$	Std. Error	t	$\beta$	Std. Error	t	$\beta$	Std. Error	t	$\beta$	Std. Error	t
Age	-.090	.008	-1.363	-.063	.010	-.882	-.074	.011	-.960	-.034	.011	-.397
Gender	.005	.092	.126	-.008	.123	-.175	-.071	.133	-1.47	.066	.135	1.223
Education	.024	.079	.623	.059	.104	1.36	.052	.112	1.12	-.032	.114	-.616
Years of Service	-.012	.008	-.210	.035	.010	.483	-.046	.011	-.591	-.091	.011	-1.053
Marital status	.011	.091	.275	.006	.117	.137	.028	.126	.589	-.002	.129	-.047
Rank	-.041	.119	-.897	-.061	.350	-1.42	-.067	.376	-1.46	-.010	.384	-.194
Job Stress	***.327	.073	7.948	***.273	.087	5.81	***.215	.094	4.24	-.040	.096	-.705
General Health	***.336	.121	-7.668	***.405	.172	-7.91	***.375	.185	-6.79	.067	.189	-1.087
Social Support	*-.079	.099	-1.909	*-.095	.133	-2.00	-.007	.143	-1.42	-.060	.146	-1.056
Ways of Coping	***.128	.081	3.288	***.151	.105	3.50	** .143	.112	3.07	***-.245	.115	-4.715
Seeking Psychological Help	-.063	.053	-1.628	-.065	.072	-1.49	*-.114	.078	-2.41	***-.208	.079	-3.937
Job Stress * Social Support	-.059	.147	-1.455	-.063	.175	-1.37	.021	.189	.427	.023	.193	.412
Job Stress * Ways of Coping	.064	.119	1.452	*-.113	.144	2.23	.026	.155	.475	*-.151	.158	-2.484
Job Stress * Seeking Psych Help	.005	.078	.120	-.016	.092	-.338	.031	.099	.621	.068	.101	1.206
Health * Social Support	*-.090	.243	2.216	-.062	.348	1.31	-.034	.374	.667	*.125	.383	-2.181
Health * Ways of Coping	.008	.204	-.176	-.043	.283	.848	.021	.304	-.376	-.009	.311	.154
Health * Seeking Psych Help	.047	.137	-1.142	.049	.186	-1.07	-.068	.200	1.38	-.081	.205	1.474
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.392			.427			.334			.172		

\* p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001

## **Discussion**

The current study examined the extent to which job stress and general health as well as several demographic variables (age, gender, marital status, rank, educational levels and years of service) predicted job burnout among police officers in Trinidad. The moderating roles of social support, willingness to seek psychological help and ways of coping were also examined. It was expected that these variables could moderate the relationship between job stress and general health, and the dependent variable, job burnout. In examining these relationships job burnout was conceptualized as total burnout as well as three subscales which included emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and low personal accomplishment.

Job stress, general health, social support, ways of coping and a health \* social support interaction term were found to be significant predictors of total burnout. Regression models using the three subscales of job burnout provided further insight into the relationships which were examined. Job stress, general health, social support ways of coping and job stress \* ways of coping were found to be significant predictors of emotional exhaustion. Significant predictors of depersonalization included job stress, general health, ways of coping and willingness to seek psychological help. Significant predictors of low personal accomplishment included ways of coping, willingness to seek psychological help, job stress \* ways of coping and general health \* social support. Ways of coping was found to be a significant moderator in the job stress-burnout relationship, while social support was found to be a significant predictor in the general health-burnout relationship.

Overall, the findings suggest that officers who are stressed, or who have poor health or receive low levels of social support are more likely to experience job burnout. Contrary to expectations, officers who utilized effective coping strategies were also more likely to be burnt out. In addition, officers who experienced job stress, but who utilized effective coping strategies were less likely to have emotional exhaustion and low personalized accomplishment, and officers who had poor health, but who received adequate social support were less likely to be burnt out. These findings have implications for police organizations as they seek to institute measures to mitigate against officer burnout.

Job stress increased the likelihood of job burnout among police officers. This finding is consistent with prior research (for example, Russell et al., 1987). There are numerous measures that police administrations can introduce to mitigate the effect of employee stress. Stress reduction programmes and interventions can be implemented to mitigate the effects of job stress and therefore pre-empt the issue of job-burnout among officers. Instituting such actions would serve to not only lower job burnout levels, but may also reduce absenteeism, prevent job turnover and increase productivity among officers. It is not surprising that high job stress levels are related to emotional exhaustion and

depersonalization among officers. This is consistent with Günüşen et al. (2014) who found that nurses who experience greater amounts of stress tend to suffer from emotional exhaustion. The finding that higher levels of depersonalization were exhibited by officers who experienced greater stress is also not surprising. It might be expected that such officers can become somewhat detached from their jobs and treat persons in a callous and insensitive manner.

The literature on general health and burnout has not provided clear findings. While researchers contend that a relationship exists between health and burnout (for example, Masouleh et al., 2007) the body of literature has been largely inconclusive on whether burnout leads to poor health or whether poor health increases the likelihood of burnout. Leiter et al. (2013) and Tang et al. (2001) assert that burnout leads to poor mental health, while Peterson et al. (2008) argued that poor physical and mental health lead to job burnout. In addition, other researchers contend that burnout is a “work-related mental health impairment” (Awa et al., 2010). In the current study, poor health (physical and mental) was related to job burnout among police officers. Overall, the findings in this study suggest that officers who are in excellent health, mentally and physically, are less likely to experience burnout on the job. While burnout arises due to prolonged stress, such officers may be able to manage their stress levels well because they do not have health issues to contend with. Better health may also imply a greater level of resilience and resistance to the effects of stress.

While it is difficult to say whether burnout leads to poor mental health, or the reverse, it seems less likely that burnout could lead to poor physical health since there are many other factors which may play a more important role in overall physical health (for example, diet and exercise). As such, it seems more likely that officers who are in poor physical health may be prone to a range of outcomes, one of which may be burnout. The measure of general health which was used in the current study included measures for mental health, but also included a somatic symptoms subscale which measured physical health. This suggests that it may be possible to determine whether physical or mental health is more important as a predictor of burnout. In this regard, regression analysis showed that somatic symptoms ( $\beta = -.411, p < .001$ ) and anxiety/insomnia ( $\beta = -.557, p < .001$ ) were significant predictors of total burnout while social dysfunction ( $\beta = .112, ns$ ), and severe depression ( $\beta = -.172, ns$ ) were non-significant. Unfortunately, these findings do not lend sufficient clarity to the issue. While the somatic symptoms subscale is related to burnout, so too is the anxiety/insomnia subscale. While it can be argued that anxiety/insomnia are physical symptoms which could be related to physical health, these have also been shown to be related to mental health (Castellano & Soderstrom, 1997; Dammeyer & Nunez, 1999). It is interesting to note, however, that the depression subscale is not related to burnout. Depression is an important component of mental health, and this finding appears to suggest that physical health may be more important than mental health as a predictor of burnout.

Social support was found to be a significant predictor of job-burnout among police officers. The findings indicate that officers who received social support from their community, peers, supervisors or families were less likely to experience burnout on the job. This suggests that social support may have acted as a buffer, mitigating the effects of stresses on the job which could lead to burnout. This finding is consistent with previous literature (for example, Russell, 2014; Vigfúsdóttir, 2017). Social support could also lead to reduced levels of emotional exhaustion, one of the three key components of job burnout. Given that emotional exhaustion suggests that one has become emotionally overextended and tired at one's job, it makes sense that if they receive support, such support could circumvent the occurrence of becoming emotionally exhausted and therefore reduce the likelihood of experiencing burnout on the job.

An unexpected finding was that officers who utilized adaptive coping strategies reported higher levels of burnout. Given that adaptive coping strategies are usually positive and constructive, this finding suggests that the type of coping strategy alone may not necessarily be the only aspect of coping that needs to be investigated when examining coping in relation to job burnout. According to Heffer and Willoughby (2017), it is not only important to investigate what strategies are utilized, but also how many. These researchers found that the use of a greater number of positive coping strategies led to more positive adjustment than using a smaller number of positive coping strategies. They further argued that when confronted with stress, having access to a large number of positive coping strategies equips individuals with more resources with which to deal with stress. Another possible explanation for the unexpected finding is that officers who are under excessive stress (that is, those who are tending toward burnout) may develop better coping strategies to deal with the increasing demands on the job. This argument suggests that the use of more adaptive coping strategies is a response to burnout. Additional research is required to determine whether this is an anomalous finding. Coping strategies can be taught, and if future research shows that the use of better coping strategies reduces the likelihood of burnout, then this can represent an approach to mitigate job burnout.

The results also show that social support served as a moderator of the relationship between general health and burnout. The findings indicate that officers who have poor health, but who also receive social support, are less likely to become burnt out, than officers who do not receive social support. Supplemental analysis which used interaction terms with general health and each source of social support as predictors of burnout revealed that the only interaction term which was a predictor of burnout was health \* social support from family. Interaction terms with social support from other sources (peers, supervisors and the community) were non-significant as predictors of burnout. These findings suggest that the family is the most important form of social support to mitigate the effects of poor health. This is not surprising as health issues are

normally treated as a personal issue, and persons tend to turn to personal settings such as the family for support with health-related issues.

The results seem to indicate that the police organization may not be able to mitigate the effects of poor health on burnout, even if organizational support is provided. At the same time, police organizations should recognize the important role which mental and physical health can play in job burnout and can put measures in place to improve the health of officers. Psychological support, or the provision of opportunities for physical exercise are examples of things which can be provided by police organizations. Where officers are experiencing health issues, measures should be taken to reduce the levels of job stress which they experience. Officers should also be made aware of the important role which familial support plays in mitigating the effects of poor health.

Ways of coping was found to moderate the relationship between job stress and burnout. More specifically, the findings show that officers who experience job stress, but who use effective coping strategies are less likely to experience emotional exhaustion and more likely to feel a sense of personal accomplishment. This suggests that officers who are stressed, but who utilize effective coping strategies, are less likely to experience job burnout. There is an abundance of literature that points to an association between coping strategies, stress and burnout (Montero-Marin et al., 2014). Research suggests that coping strategies are seen as a psychological intervention in the stress-strain relationship (Lowe & Bennett, 2003; Tidd & Friedman, 2002). Stresses on the job can come from many sources and occur over time. Where officers are able to utilize effective coping strategies, they are able to more effectively deal with the stresses which they encounter, and mitigate their effects. This reduces the likelihood that stress could accumulate and build up to the point where they become unmanageable, reducing the likelihood of burnout and other negative consequences of job stress. These findings suggest that police organizations can provide training to increase the usage of effective coping strategies by officers.

The Trinidad and Tobago Police Service has a Support Unit which may be able to assist in the provision of social support and which can foster the development of more effective coping strategies. The Support Unit is staffed with social workers and psychologists who provide counseling and other services to officers who experience traumatic events in the course of duty. The Support Unit can also refer officers to private consultants in instances where the Unit does not have the capacity to carry out counseling or interventions which are needed. The costs of support services, whether provided internally or by external consultants, is borne by the Police Service. This Unit can also engage in training which, among other things, can be used to improve coping effectiveness and to build a more supportive environment within the TTPS. Unfortunately, many officers within the TTPS are reluctant to utilize the services of the Support Unit. This is consistent with research in other countries which show that police officers are unwilling to seek psychological help (Blum, 2000; Cooper et al., 2003;

Toch, 2002; Violanti, 1995). This suggests that measures must be put in place to encourage officers to utilize support services when they are needed. The results of this study suggest that the Support Unit can be used to reduce the incidence of burnout among officers and that in order to do so, the Unit can focus on reducing job stress, improving social support and developing effective coping strategies among officers.

### **Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

There are several limitations to this study. The correlational nature of this study does not allow for an assessment of causal relationships. In addition, the study was cross-sectional in nature. Longitudinal designs where predictors occur prior to outcomes would be useful in this area of research and would help to establish causality. There was also a reliance on self-report data obtained through the use of various standardized measures. Self-report data are subject to bias and responding in a socially desirable way. The common method bias may also have occurred since all measures were assessed at the same time using the same method. Future research could utilize different approaches to collecting data (such as a combination of official records, behavioural outcomes and survey data) to minimize this effect.

It is also not possible to determine the extent of generalizability of the findings. While police stations were randomly selected within each of the eight police divisions in Trinidad, the study relied on voluntary participation within each police station. It is also not possible to compare the demographic characteristics of the sample to that of the Police Service as a whole, as the Service was unwilling to release personnel data.

It may be important for future studies to focus on different types of stresses to determine which ones are more important as determinants of job burnout. In addition, future studies could examine the relative importance of different coping strategies to determine which types are more important for mitigating the effects of job stress.

### **Conclusion**

This study found that officers who are stressed, or who have poor health or receive low levels of social support are more likely to experience job burnout. Contrary to expectations, officers who utilized effective coping strategies were also more likely to be burnt out. Ways of coping was found to be a significant moderator in the relationship between job stress and job burnout, while social support was found to be a significant moderator between general health and job burnout. These findings underscore the need for law enforcement to educate and sensitize their officers via a range of strategies. These can include organizing stress management workshops and lectures, emphasizing the importance of officer health to their job performance, providing the necessary

support to mitigate stress levels, and exposing officers to a variety of positive coping strategies, bearing in mind that no one strategy could adequately eliminate all the stress being experienced. A combination of such measures is likely to diminish the occurrence of job burnout among police officers.

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