

## Conscientiousness, Work Family Conflict and Stress amongst Police Officers in Alice, South Africa

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**KEYWORDS** Conscientiousness. Work-family Conflict. Work Stress. Family Stress. Police

**ABSTRACT** The purpose of the study was to explore the relationship between work-family conflict, stress and conscientiousness amongst police officers. The study was undertaken at the South African Police Service station in Alice in the Eastern Cape and was based on a sample size of 101 ( $n=101$ ) police officers out of 134 police officers. The study wanted to establish if there is a relationship between conscientiousness and work-family conflict, between conscientiousness and stress (work and family) and overall to establish whether conscientiousness and work-family conflict have a combined effect on stress. The sample demonstrated high levels of conscientiousness and moderate to low levels of work-family conflict, work stress and family stress. There is a negative relationship between work-family conflict and conscientiousness ( $r = -.20, p = .05$ ) and work stress and conscientiousness ( $r = -.34, p = .001$ ), but no significant relationship between conscientiousness and family stress ( $r = -.09, p = >.05$ ). Work-family conflict contributes to both family ( $r = .42, p = .001$ ) and work stress ( $r = .33, p = .001$ ). Work stress and family stress are also positively correlated ( $r = .19, p = .05$ ). Work-family conflict and conscientiousness interact to impact upon work stress  $F(2, 98) = 9.65, p < .001, R^2 = .16$ , where those with higher levels of conscientiousness are better able to reduce the impact of work-family conflict on work stress. Conscientiousness should be taken into consideration when screening police officers for service.

### INTRODUCTION

Both work and family are central to one's life but these roles do not always readily reconcile, in particular when workers are faced with major stressors in the workplace and long working hours (Louw and Viviers 2010), such as in the police service. Work-family conflict has a significant influence on family distress, which is the experience of stress associated with one's family role. According to Mostert and Joubert (2005) balancing work and family life has become an increasing challenge for working individuals. Much as that is the case, organisations continue to foster a high level of cognitive and emotional commitment amongst employees (Rothman and Rothman 2010) resulting in employees working extra or longer hours due to work demands (Lewis and Cooper 2005). This leads to stress which gets exacerbated by their family roles. As work-family conflict increases,

so does the level of family distress. As a person experiences conflict between his work and family roles, he or she is likely to have more distress at home, in trying to deal with the conflict that has arisen from any of the two roles (work or family). Police officers in South Africa deal with high stress levels, brutality, corruption and risk of suicide (Young et al. 2012) so it is imperative that their stressors be effectively managed. When comparing police officers with other occupations, Sever and Cinoglu (2010) consider police job to be highly stressful. Sever and Cinoglu (2010) further argue that the families of the officer also get affected by the stress that an officer experiences.

Work-family conflict antecedents include work role stressors, work role involvement, work social support, work characteristics and personality (Michel et al. 2011). Work-family conflict is an inter-role conflict in which pressures from both family and work are incompatible with one another. Parental status and marital status have mixed effects on the interaction between work and home life. Some studies have reported lowered work-family conflict for unmarried police officers, whereas others have reported limited difference between married and unmarried of-

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ficers. In terms of parental status, having children appears to impact the interaction between work and home life (De Klerk and Mostert 2010).

Only certain personality traits have been associated with the likelihood of experiencing stressful circumstances in an adverse manner (Bolger and Schilling 1991; Bolger and Zuckerman 1995) the most recent studies have shown that personality moderates the impact of work family conflict (Herbst et al. 2007). The traits examined include neuroticism and locus of control (Michel et al. 2011) but, individual variables have largely been ignored in the explanation of the relationship between work-family conflicts and stress (Carlson 1999). Wayne et al. (2004) found that conscientiousness has a negative correlation with work family conflict.

Personality traits have been investigated extensively in work stress studies however, conscientiousness's role in managing stress and work-family conflict has received little attention and this can be attributed to the limited role that work performance is assumed to play in models of occupational stress (Vakola et al. 2004). Individuals who are conscientious tend to be orderly, industrious and in control of their lives. Conscientious individuals manage their time and their tasks carefully. They are also more likely to persevere in the face of adversity (MacCann et al. 2009).

There is support for the notion that conflict between work and family roles has adverse repercussions. There is a significant relationship between psychological distress and work-family conflict (Janzen et al. 2007). Police officers are exposed to multiple environmental sources of stress but their interaction with stressors may be affected by their levels of conscientiousness (Koekemoer and Mostert 2010).

Individual personality facets of an officer that increase the effect of stressful occurrences are referred to as personal stressors. These may include officer's ways of coping and ways of reacting to situations (Patterson et al. 2011). A police officer is exposed on an everyday basis to violence (Young et al. 2012). Naidu (2006) reported that the murder rate of South African police is high in comparison with international figures.

Work-family conflict is exacerbated by work pressures, inflexible work schedules and time demands of work (Carlson and Perrew 1999). Two people may experience the same objective

work or family situation yet differ in their experience of conflict between work and family roles (Michel et al. 2011). Two police officers may be exposed to similar stressors, but may react differently, dependent on their levels of conscientiousness.

### Statement of the Problem

Police in South Africa are under immense pressure and this has been found to be associated with suicidal ideation (Meyer et al. 2003). On the 21st of June 2012, Minister of Police in South Africa, Mr Nathi Mthethwa issued statistics that indicate that South African Police Services attempted suicide rate in 2010 was 84. A further 10,636 police officers were believed to be suffering from depression with 2,763 suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. The minister indicated that policing remains a difficult and challenging duty and it requires a committed and selfless personality (South African Press Association 2013).

Hitchens (2012) reported that about 100 to 130 police officers commit suicide every year in South Africa due to stress caused by the nature of police work. Police officers are obligated to provide a safe environment to those residing in South Africa but their duties are not always carried out in a safe environment. Organisations like the South African Police Services have been greatly affected by escalation of criminal actions and violence. Societal changes both political and socio-economic resulting from a transition from apartheid to a democratic government also affected South African Police Services in the mid 1990s (Marks 1995; Nel and Burger 1995).

News reports have indicated that South African Police Service officers are under severe stress caused by the nature of their work, poor pay, uncertainty about their future, including heavy exposure to crimes and their failure to manage family demands which has resulted to these officers killing their family members (Naidu 2006). South African former minister of police Charles Nqakula reported in 2002 that 508 police officers committed suicide due to stress (Naidu 2006). Police Minister Nathi Mthethwa reported a recent reduction in police suicides, but an increase in police brutality in 2012- attributing this to an increase in stress (South African Press Association 2013).

De Vries and Van Heck (2002) found that conscientiousness is associated with higher per-

sonal accomplishment and that low conscientiousness relates to higher emotional exhaustion. On that note, the present study deduces that if an individual has high conscientiousness they will be less affected by stress. Occupational stress in South African Police Services has been attributed to job demands and a lack of resources in the past- resulting in burnout (Mostert and Joubert 2005) and this study seeks to ascertain whether conscientiousness may mitigate these stressors.

Police officers are expected to exercise discretion under very critical circumstances. According to Louw and Viviers (2010), police officers have a social support base that can include spouses, partners, children or friends; however this support base may also serve as a source of stress.

Mathews et al. (2003) allude to the fact that no one is immune to stress however, the impact stress has on people differs depending in part upon one's personality traits. Jonker found that South African Police Services members with willingness to work hard and with an orientation to achieve are less affected by stress (2004).

### Objective of the Study

This study aims to explore the role of conscientiousness in the relationship between work family conflict and stress and to explore the relationships between work-family conflict, stress, work stress and family stress amongst police officers in Alice in the Eastern Cape. The study also seeks to verify Jonker's (2004) findings that illustrated a negative relationship between conscientiousness and stress. Jonker writes that "low conscientiousness and low emotional stability lead to burnout of police officials" (2004:35).

### Hypotheses

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Police officers with higher conscientiousness will experience lower levels of work-family conflict

**H<sub>2</sub>:** Police officers with higher conscientiousness will experience less work stress

**H<sub>3</sub>:** Police officers with higher levels of conscientiousness will experience lower levels of family stress

**H<sub>4</sub>:** Police officers with higher levels of work-family conflict will experience higher levels of work stress

**H<sub>5</sub>:** Police officers with higher levels of work-family conflict will experience higher levels of family stress

**H<sub>6</sub>:** Police officers with higher levels of family stress will also experience higher levels of work stress

**H<sub>7</sub>:** Conscientiousness and work-family conflict interact to influence work stress.

### Theoretical Framework

#### Role Theory

Past research and discussions around conflict between work and family has drawn causal relationships between the work and family domains from role theory (Edwards and Rothbard 2000). Smoot (2005) defines a role as the behaviour expected of an individual based on their status in a given society. With regards to work and family, a role can be viewed as the assigned responsibilities and behaviours that a person has in either domain. According to role theory, it is assumed that both work and family entail multiple roles, each of which places demands on a person (Edwards and Rothbard 2000). Rewards from meeting the demands of these roles enhance a person's role performance and that will bring extrinsic and intrinsic rewards which are assumed to lead to positive mood whereas a lack of reward will lead to stress. Conflict between work and family roles that arises according to role theory may be time-, strain-, or behaviour-based which are also dimensions of work-family conflict (Edwards and Rothbard 2000).

#### Identity Theory

According to Burke's (1980) identity theory, individuals have numerous roles that are arranged in order of salience, priority and importance to that person. The role that an individual identifies with will spur on certain actions in support of the identity.

Depending on factors at play between the two roles, the theory purports that strain, time and behaviour-based conflict may arise (Burke 1980). There are two perspectives that have looked at the identity issue in terms of role salience which are the scarcity perspective and multiplicity perspective. Scarcity is concerned with resources that an individual does not have to fulfil various roles and as a result cannot iden-

tify with both roles at once meaning they can only participate on one role and make the other role suffer (Bailyn 1978). However, the multiplicity perspective asserts that one is able to commit to both roles and identify with more than one role without the other suffering as long as commitment is there (Marks 1977). Conscientious employees may be able to better reconcile the divergent roles required.

### **Conscientiousness as a Positive Force in the Workplace**

Positive organisational scholarship (POS) attempts to promote the positive, through an affirmative bias as a value orientation (Bernstein 2006). The focus is on abundance, elevation and virtuousness. It centres on organisational aspects that are positive, examining organisational states and contexts in which positivity and generativity occur. Organisational theory is used to understand, explain and also to predict the causes of positivity in organisations and the consequences of this positivity and the POS paradigm draws from multiple theories and academic disciplines (Dutton et al. 2003). The paradigm examines excellence, positive deviance, extraordinary performance and positive spirals of flourishing (Fineman 2006). Positive deviance pertains to exceptions that are positive, the exceptions to the norm who manage to succeed in trying times (Pascale et al. 2010). Conscientiousness is characterised by dependability and prosocial motivation. Those who are conscientious are dutiful, competent, disciplined, orderly and cautious (Cameron and Spreitzer 2011). Conscientiousness has been linked to job performance amongst police officers, but limited attention has been paid to its role in the management of stress (Salgado et al. 2013). Police work is amongst the most stressful work in South Africa, as the work is fraught with danger and officers are exposed to trauma causing work stress to fill into family life. Long hours place further pressure on the officers leading them to feel like they are neglecting their family roles (De Klerk and Mostert 2010).

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Population, Sample and Sampling Procedure**

The current study used a sample of 101 police officers ( $n=101$ ) out of a total population of

134 ( $N=134$ ) police officers in the Alice police station in the Eastern Cape. The study used simple random sampling. A sample of 101 provides a confidence level of 95 percent.

### **Measurement of Variables**

Questionnaires were administered to the sample. These comprised four sections which were biographical, the conscientiousness scale, work-family conflict scale and stress scale. The work-family conflict scale was used to measure work-family conflict and had 18 items measuring both work-family conflict and family-work conflict (Carlson et al. 2000). The coefficient alpha was  $\alpha=0.89$  for the work-family conflict in this study.

Conscientiousness was measured using Goldberg's international personality item pool conscientiousness (IPIP-C). According to Costa and McCrea (1992) the IPIP-C showed high correlations with NEO-PI-R and Hogan's Personality 40 Inventory which both measure personality. Goldberg's 20 item scale of conscientiousness was used and responses were based on five-point scale ranging from 1=very inaccurate, 2=moderately inaccurate, 3=neither inaccurate nor accurate, 4=moderately accurate and 5=very accurate. The measure has an established alpha of  $\alpha=0.88$ , in this study the alpha was  $\alpha=0.81$ .

The variable stress was divided into work and family stress. Work stress was assessed using a modified version of the State Anxiety Inventory (SAI) (Spielberger et al. 1969). According to O'Neil et al. (1969), the estimated alpha coefficient of original version of SAI was  $\alpha=0.88$ , and for this study  $\alpha=0.98$ . The responses of participants were assessed using a five point scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always) where participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they experience certain feeling/s. High scores indicated a high level of situational stress, while low scores indicated a low level of stress. Family stress was assessed using a modified version of the Reeder stress inventory (Reeder et al. 1968). The coefficient alpha reliability estimate for the 5-item measure in previous studies was  $\alpha=0.72$  rated on a five Likert scale, and was  $\alpha=0.87$  in this study.

### **Data Collection, Capturing and Analysis**

Self-administered questionnaires were used, with data coded, captured and scored electroni-

cally. Descriptive and inferential statistics were calculated, including Pearson Product-Moment correlations and Multiple Regression Analysis.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Demographic Profile of the Sample

Most respondents were male (59.41%), married (56.44%) and employed full-time (99.01%), working 12 hours per day (81.19%). In terms of age, 62.38% were younger than 40 and more than half of the respondents surveyed had worked for the South African Police Service for less than ten years (57.43%). Less than ten percent of respondents did not have children and just over a quarter only resided with one family member or resided alone, indicating that most respondents had family responsibilities. Just under half (47.52%) of the respondents were also the primary breadwinners in their households as illustrated in Table 1.

Respondents reported high levels of conscientiousness ( $M=4.01$ ,  $SD=0.52$ ,  $n=101$ ), indicating that they perceived themselves to be careful, methodical and painstaking in their work. The mean levels of work family conflict were on the lower end of the scale, indicating limited work-family conflict ( $M=1.59$ ,  $SD=0.50$ ,  $n=101$ ), coinciding with low levels of family stress ( $M=1.40$ ,  $SD=0.72$ ,  $n=101$ ). Work stress was higher than family stress, with a mean of 2.19 and standard deviation of 0.65 ( $n=101$ ) (Table 2). The findings present a scenario where police officers are conscientious and where there is evidence of work-family conflict and work stress, with limited family stress.

The possible range for the variables was one to five, with the obtained range for conscientiousness being between 2.75 and 4.95, a range of 2.75. The work-family conflict scores range was 2.11, with a minimum of 1.00 and a maximum of 3.11. The highest score for work stress was 4.25, and the lowest 1.00, the range being

**Table 1: Demographic Profile of the sample (n=101)**

| Variable                    | Category    | f   | Cum. f | %     | Cum. % |
|-----------------------------|-------------|-----|--------|-------|--------|
| Gender                      | Male        | 60  | 60     | 59.41 | 59.41  |
|                             | Female      | 41  | 101    | 40.59 | 100.00 |
| Marital Status              | Single      | 36  | 36     | 35.64 | 35.64  |
|                             | Married     | 57  | 93     | 56.44 | 92.08  |
|                             | Divorced    | 5   | 98     | 4.95  | 97.03  |
|                             | Separated   | 3   | 101    | 2.97  | 100.00 |
| Employment Status           | Full time   | 100 | 100    | 99.01 | 99.01  |
|                             | Part time   | 1   | 101    | 0.99  | 100.00 |
| Age                         | 21-30       | 34  | 34     | 33.66 | 33.66  |
|                             | 31-40       | 29  | 63     | 28.71 | 62.38  |
|                             | 41-50       | 26  | 89     | 25.74 | 88.12  |
|                             | 51-60       | 12  | 101    | 11.88 | 100.00 |
| Tenure                      | <1 year     | 10  | 10     | 9.90  | 9.90   |
|                             | 1-5 years   | 29  | 39     | 28.71 | 38.61  |
|                             | 6-10 years  | 19  | 58     | 18.81 | 57.43  |
|                             | 11-15 years | 22  | 80     | 21.78 | 79.21  |
| Number of Children          | 16 or more  | 21  | 101    | 20.79 | 100.00 |
|                             | None        | 10  | 10     | 9.90  | 9.90   |
|                             | 1           | 22  | 32     | 21.78 | 31.68  |
|                             | 2           | 23  | 55     | 22.77 | 54.46  |
|                             | 3           | 17  | 72     | 16.83 | 71.29  |
| Number of Household Members | 4 or more   | 29  | 101    | 28.71 | 100.00 |
|                             | 0           | 20  | 20     | 19.80 | 19.80  |
|                             | 1           | 7   | 27     | 6.93  | 26.73  |
|                             | 2           | 27  | 54     | 26.73 | 53.47  |
|                             | 3           | 13  | 67     | 12.87 | 66.34  |
| Hours Worked                | 4           | 22  | 89     | 21.78 | 88.12  |
|                             | 5 or more   | 12  | 101    | 11.88 | 100.00 |
|                             | 8           | 18  | 18     | 17.82 | 17.82  |
|                             | 9           | 1   | 19     | 0.99  | 18.81  |
|                             | 12          | 82  | 101    | 81.19 | 100.00 |
| Main Breadwinner            | Yes         | 48  | 48     | 47.52 | 47.52  |
|                             | No          | 53  | 101    | 52.48 | 100.00 |

**Table 2: Conscientiousness, work stress, family stress and work-family conflict (n=101)**

|                      | <i>M</i> | <i>Me</i> | <i>Mo</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>Min</i> | <i>Max</i> | <i>Range</i> |
|----------------------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|--------------|
| Conscientiousness    | 4.01     | 4.00      | 4.60      | 0.52      | 2.20       | 4.95       | 2.75         |
| Work-family conflict | 1.59     | 1.44      | 1.11      | 0.50      | 1.00       | 3.11       | 2.11         |
| Work stress          | 2.19     | 2.20      | 1.60      | 0.65      | 1.00       | 4.25       | 3.25         |
| Family stress        | 1.40     | 1.00      | 1.00      | 0.72      | 1.00       | 5.00       | 4.00         |

3.25. Finally, family stress ranged from 1.00 to 5.00.

There was a significant negative correlation between conscientiousness and work-family conflict ( $r = -.20, p = .05$ ). Hypothesis one is accepted. Thus, it may be concluded that conscientiousness may lead to lowered experience of work-family conflict. Work stress also proved to be negatively associated with conscientiousness ( $r = -.34, p = .001$ ), hypothesis two can therefore also be accepted. Conscientiousness does not correlate significantly with family stress ( $r = -.09, p = >.05$ ), leading to the rejection of hypothesis three. Family stress ( $r = .42, p = .001$ ) and work stress ( $r = .33, p = .001$ ) both related positively to work-family conflict, allowing us to accept hypothesis four and five respectively. Family stress and work stress also positively correlated ( $r = .19, p = .05$ ) and hypothesis six is accepted. (Table 3).

**Table 3: Correlations (n=101)**

|                         | 1.     | 2.    | 3.   |
|-------------------------|--------|-------|------|
| 1. Conscientiousness    |        |       |      |
| 2. Work-family conflict | -.20*  |       |      |
| 3. Work stress          | -.34** | .33** |      |
| 4. Family stress        | -.09   | .42** | .19* |

\* $<.05$ , \*\* $<.001$

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to evaluate how well conscientiousness and work-family conflict predicted work stress. The predictors (conscientiousness and work-family conflict) were significantly related to the criterion work stress  $F(2, 98) = 9.65, p < .001, R^2 = .16$ . Hypothesis seven is also accepted.

## CONCLUSION

The study wanted to establish if there is a relationship between conscientiousness and work-family conflict, between conscientiousness and stress (work and family) and overall to establish whether conscientiousness and work-family conflict have a combined effect on stress.

There is a negative relationship between work-family conflict and conscientiousness and work stress and conscientiousness, but no relationship between conscientiousness and family stress. Work-family conflict contributes to both family and work stress. Work stress and family stress are also positively correlated. Work-family conflict and conscientiousness interact to impact upon work stress, where those with higher levels of conscientiousness are better able to reduce the impact of work-family conflict on work stress.

Participants that scored higher on conscientiousness were better than less conscientious people in balancing their time and energy. No one is immune to stress. However, the impact stress has on people differs depending partly on one's personality traits. The findings suggest that conscientiousness may affect how police officers react to challenges at work, and at home, and in turn, the extent to which they experience work stress. Work and family stress may be influenced by the amount of conflict experienced between the role requirements of work and home.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

South African police service continues to be under severe pressure caused by the environment they work under and the attitude of the public towards the police service. The findings suggests that South African Police Services (SAPS) should consider prioritising personality testing and particularly screening for conscientiousness during the selection of new police officers and also more studies of this nature must be carried out to eliminate or reduce the effects of Work Family Conflict with the SAPS. The aim should be to recruit an police officers who will be able to manage work family conflict and stress through employing conscientiousness and provide a community driven policing service that will enable harmonious relations between the police and the public they serve.

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