

## JOB BURNOUT IN POLICE DISPATCHERS

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### ABSTRACT

#### **Purpose**

*Job burnout is an important, multidimensional, and complex construct that we have yet to fully understand. Prior research has shown mixed findings depending upon a number of factors, and we focus on job burnout in the specific occupation of police dispatchers who are civilian employees working in highly stressful occupations and do not receive the same volume of training that law enforcement members do. Thus, understanding the stressors dispatchers encounter and how to mitigate them can provide valuable implications for police departments to consider and possibly implement to improve the health of their dispatchers and effectiveness in the occupation.*

#### **Method**

*We have survey responses from 45 police dispatchers in the south Florida area assessing the stressors they occur, the possible mitigating factors of social support, communication, and recognition, and how burned out they feel with their occupation. We run hierarchical multiple regression on our variables of interest to distinguish where levels of variance come from in the burnout construct.*

#### **Results**

*Our results were mixed depending upon the symptom of burnout used as the outcome variable. We found some supporting evidence that role stressors play an important role in leading to job burnout, but not all the time. Being a dispatcher can lead to significant depersonalization from the people they serve, but those effects can be mitigated by having strong social support from their colleagues and supervisors.*

#### **Conclusion**

*The results and use of regression analysis with moderating terms provide insights into the dimensions of job burnout that can be controlled with mitigating factors in police dispatch units.*

**Keywords:** Job Burnout, Role Stressors, Organizational Culture, Police Dispatchers

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Although police dispatchers operate in emergency situations as first responders, they do not always receive the recognition they deserve as compared to their sworn police officer counterparts (Blankenship, 1990). Police dispatchers do not respond to the scene of emergencies, but they have the daunting task of communicating with citizens and attempting to offer assistance remotely (Burke, 1995). Dealing with emergencies while being geographically distanced in terms of proximity and devoid of certain stimuli poses a unique stressor for police dispatchers (Adams, Shakespeare-Finch, & Armstrong, 2015). Being geographically distant from the victims/callers, renders police dispatchers virtually helpless (Burke, 1995; Pierce & Lilly, 2012). Additionally, dispatchers experience numerous chronic and acute stressors which include dealing with people in crisis, working midnight and overtime shifts, operating in toxic work cultures, navigating interpersonal conflicts among co-workers, and constantly having to learn new technology (Meischke et al., 2018). The performance of police dispatchers is often highly scrutinized because they are largely responsible for the distinguishing moments following an accident or crime, which are especially critical for health and safety (Adams et al., 2015). During emergency situations, police dispatchers must deal with individuals who are exhibiting high levels of various emotions such as anxiety, fear, anger, or