

The Impact of Excessive Stress on Deviant Behaviour and the Mediation Role of Emotional Intelligence among the Royal Malaysian Police

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Abstract

Purpose – The main objective of this paper is to explore the conceptual model describing job stress as a predictor of deviant behaviour, and emotional intelligence as a factor mitigating workplace deviant behaviour among the Royal Police of Malaysia (RMP).

Design / Methodology / Approach – This conceptual paper has been developed based on a literature review related to job stress as an independent variable, deviant behaviour as a dependent variable, and mediated by emotional intelligence. It examines the effect of job stress which leads the individual to deviant behaviour.

Findings – The paper demonstrates that emotional intelligence plays a mediating role between job stress and deviant behaviour. In addition, it will examine the effectiveness of emotional intelligence as a factor mitigating workplace deviant behaviour. The important role of emotional intelligence helps to lessen the negative behaviour of an individual.

Practical implication – This paper will help organisations and management to identify the behaviour of employees at the workplace. It suggests that the RMP department should impose professional training and job stress coping strategies upon police officers.

Originality / Value – Currently, there is a lack of research on the mediating role of emotional intelligence between job stress and deviant behaviour at the workplace. This paper discusses the importance of emotional intelligence in helping an individual to understand and evaluate their own, and others' emotions. It may guide their actions and help them to cope with environmental demands and pressures in workplace.

Keywords – Police Job Stress, Deviant Behaviour, Emotional Intelligence, Coping, Demand, Threaten and Challenge.

1.0 Introduction

Governments are important agencies facing challenges and threats, either internal or external. According to the Enforcement Agency Integrity Commission Annual Report in 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020, a number of complaints of weak integrity have been made by the public

against government agencies. The Royal Malaysian Police (RMP) scores the highest number 73% of incidences of weak integrity behaviour which leads to misconduct (Enforcement Agency Integrity Commission, 2020). Policing is widely recognised as the most important agency to protect, serve, and secure the trust and confidence of the public. Failure to act ethically damages that trust and confidence in the department. The essence of a police officer's job is to prevent crime and to maintain the law. Recently, many issues have been raised regarding police conduct. Among the issues that have been raised, dishonesty, drug abuse, and theft have been reported within the police force (Berita Harian Online, 2021).

Job stress is quite common in various organisations including the RMP, and this can be considered a global issue, particularly in the modern world. A stressful working environment is inevitable in a policeman's job. General and unique work factors are the main cause of job stress in policing. Managerial structure, policies, work roles, job control, job rank, and social support are routine aspects of police work. Exposure to traumatic events, e.g. accident, being the subject of internal affairs investigations, shift work, appearing in court, and the potential threat of injury or death are circumstances unique to police work (Irniza & Saliluddin, 2015). A recent study conducted in Kuala Lumpur involving 579 police officers revealed that the overall prevalence of stress was 38.8%, with severe stress, 5.9% moderate stress, and 14.9% light stress, respectively (Masilamani et al., 2013). Many researchers have argued that the demands of the role are one of the elements that cause job stress (Hsu, Chen, Yu & Lou, 2010; Hussain & Lei, 2015; Kamarudin, Zulkafaly & Hassan, 2018). Job stress is unavoidable in the police daily working environment, especially as officers are involved with the law enforcement unit. The police officer may get deluged by the feeling of job stress encouraging them to engage in negative behaviour. Recent study has shown that job stress can have various consequences including turnover (Burki, Khan & Saeed, 2020), burnout (Queiros, Passos, Bartolo, Faria, Fonseca, Marques, Silva and Pereira, 2020), job dissatisfaction (Adebayo & Ogunsina, 2011; Ahmad, Zahid, Wahid & Ali, 2021; Naseem, 2018; Shukla & Srivastava, 2016a), absenteeism (Suparna, Herlina, Muhsin, Kusdiana, Al-Dhubaibi and Isa, 2020) and deteriorating mental health (Irniza, 2018; Lopez, Extremera, & Rey, 2017b). Moreover, job stress and other factors that cause negative emotions can lead to workplace deviance (Penney & Spector, 2005). Employees who have been exposed to a higher level of stress are more likely to lose motivation, resulting in an unhealthy, inefficient, and potentially harmful attitude towards their job (Haider, Nisar, Baig, Azeem & Hameed, 2018).

Robinson and Bennett, (1995) defined deviant behaviour as voluntary behaviour of organisation members, which violates significant organisational norms and in doing so, threatens the wellbeing of the organisation or its members or both. Deviant behaviour is also known as an occupational crime (Peterson, 2017) that can harm both the organisational and the interpersonal. Besides that, it also decreases the productivity of the organisation, and affects both management and team members. Such behaviour also goes against the goals of the organisation, and violates the legitimate interest of organisations by harming both members and customers (Raman, Sambasivan, & Kumar, 2016). These behaviours can be categories such as gossiping about others, showing favouritism, taking a longer break (Bennett & Robinson, 2000) and major issues such as sexual harassment theft, drug and alcohol abuse at work, sabotage, disobedient behaviour towards a superior, theft, fraud, dishonesty, gambling, assault, violence, abuse, habitual absences, habitual late attendance and bribery.

Job stress, job satisfaction, job commitment, work-life balance, and the psychological well-being of police officers, are all linked to emotional intelligence (Kanesan, 2019). Emotional intelligence has been defined in a number of ways. For example, Van Rooy & Viswesvaran, 2004 defined emotional intelligence as "the set of abilities (verbal and non-verbal) that enable a person to generate, recognise, express, understand, and evaluate their own,

and others' emotions, in order to guide thinking and action that successfully cope with environmental demands and pressures". The conceptual definition of emotional intelligence refers to the capacity for recognising our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships (Goleman, 1995). Police Officers face emotional challenges in their personal and social lives and these challenges can affect their handling of an issue involving the community. A better understanding of emotional intelligence enables the police officer to manage and overcome their daily stressful working lives and avoid negative behaviour.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Job Stress

Some researchers have stated that there is no specific or clear definition of job stress (Misis, Kim, Cheeseman, Hogan & Lambert, 2013). But Salami, (2010) defined job stress as the experience of unpleasant, negative emotions such as tension, anxiety, frustration, anger and depression. Commonly job stress is used as an explanation for feelings of exhaustion, discomfort and inability to manage (Haider et al., 2018). In these instances, it can also be said that job stress is an inflicted factor on an individual in his/her workplace, that is beyond his/her available resources and facilities, and causes physiological, psychological responses (Golparvar, Kamkar & Javadian, 2012) and behavioural problems (Irniza & Saliluddin, 2015). Role overload, role ambiguity and role conflict are the most important causes of job stress (Alarcon, Eschleman & Bowling, 2009). Analytical studies have shown that stress emanates from two sources, namely organisational and environmental (Bishopp, Piquero, Worrall & Piquero, 2018). Negative emotions are elicited by uncertainty at work, but employees are still required to complete the job in hand, thus leading to stress and negative emotions (Tian, Zhang, & Zou, 2014). Uncertainty regarding workplace conditions may make it hard for the employees to maintain an effective way of coping with demands, therefore accumulating stress which later on affects their mental health, well-being and behaviour. Prior studies related to stress leading to deviant workplace behaviour for example Black & Hendy, 2018; Haider et al., 2018; Hendy, Can & Black, 2018; Nasurdin, Ahmad & Razalli, 2014; Raza & Aziz, 2017; Silva & Ranasinghe, 2017; Zhang, Liu, Wang & Zou, 2018 have been conducted primarily in the private sector. However, research on job stress and deviant behaviour in the public sector is lacking, particularly in the police department. In general, it appears that fewer studies have examined the psychometric properties of the organisational police stress questionnaire, as modified by Irniza et al., 2014, which is suitable in the Malaysian context, although it has not been tested with deviant behaviour.

2.2 Emotional Intelligence

"Emotional intelligence is an intellectual ability which allows one to understand, identify, and assess the meaning of emotions, to reason and to help in solving problems" (Al Ghazo, Suifan, & Alnuaimi, 2019; Awwad & Ali, 2012). Emotional intelligence is an important factor that can measure individuals' performance in their profession and daily lives, and increase or decrease their success. Emotional intelligence plays a critical role in the effective management of conflicts and the adoption of conflict resolution in professional life (Basogul & Ozgur, 2016). Emotional intelligence enables police officers to cope with emotional demands at their workplace (Baker & Izwar Ibrahim, 2014). Emotional intelligence is a trainable skill, capable of discouraging an unethical work attitude (Ojedokun, 2010), and enables the organisation to develop with better coping strategies.

The ability model has been described by Salovey and Grewal, (2014) in their study, which states that every person has a different ability in handling emotional situations, whether in their personal life or the workplace. Hence, this helps them adapt to various situations in social environments. Individuals who are able to manage their own emotional intelligence are more likely to be healthier, physically and psychologically. They know how to appraise, express and regulate their moods in situations associated with stress (Nikolaou & Tsaousis, 2002 ; King & Gardner, 2006). Individuals with a high level of emotional intelligence may have less conflict in a relationship or be able to manage this conflict more efficiently (Lopez, Extremera, & Rey, 2017a). Therefore, it is of paramount importance to focus on this study, which has a great impact on personnel and organisations. Notwithstanding the fact that the number of studies on emotional intelligence has expanded significantly, a majority of empirical work is still conducted in Western contexts (Nasurdin et al., 2014). In many cases, these studies have focused upon various antecedents of deviant behaviour, such as counterproductiveness (Al Ghazo et al., 2019; Bibi, Karim, & Din, 2013; Jung & Yoon, 2012; Ma & Liu, 2018; Miao, Humphrey, & Qian, 2017; Raman, Sambasivan, & Kumar, 2016, presenteeism (Karimi et al., 2015), personality (Akhtar et al., 2015), misconduct and bullying (Oluyinka, 2009). Nevertheless, there are a few studies that have been conducted related to emotional intelligence and deviant behaviour for example (Ninda & Syahrizal, 2021) among hotel employees and (Panatik et al., 2015) among teachers. Hence, there is a need for further research in this area especially in the enforcement sector in an Asian context which might give a different perspective.

2.3 Workplace Deviant Behaviour

Bennett et al., (2000) used the aforementioned typology to develop psychometrically valid measures of interpersonal and organisational deviance. According to Mackey, McAllister, Ellen III, and Carson, (2019) in their meta-analysis, interpersonal and organisational workplace deviance are strongly associated with employee perceptions and behaviours. Policing is well known as one of the most stressful and psychologically dangerous professions (Baker & Izwar Ibrahim, 2014; Bishopp, Piquero, Piquero, Worrall, & Rosenthal, 2020; Husain, 2019). Interacting with public issues and problems is a key source of stress in policing. Apart from that, in some cases, the police officers who feel betrayed, angry, or frustrated when the organization fails to fulfil its obligation, tend to engage in workplace deviance. The entire police organisation is obliged to obey and follow procedures, regulations, policies, and standards. Therefore, the addition of a breach of norms distinguishes organisational deviance from other types of inappropriate work behaviour (Gul, 2020). Situation-based and person-based perspectives can both influence workplace deviant behaviour. A situation-based perspective is one that is formed as a result of an organisation's circumstances, actions, and treatment. Meanwhile, a person-based perspective is related to the personality, characteristics and emotions of the person or employee behaviour (Bennett & Marasi, 2015). Analysis of the relevant literature has helped to integrate the three constructs into a single framework (police job stress, workplace deviant behaviour and the mediation role of emotional intelligence). Past studies have been conducted on types and causes of deviant workplace behaviour (Sathappan, 2021) but there is still a lack of understanding of the influence of stress on deviant behaviour and the impact of mediating the role of emotional intelligence as a whole.

3.0 Hypothesis Development

3.1 *Relationship between Job Stress and Workplace Deviance*

Job stress is internally formed, resulting from dealing with environmental elements that are identified as threatening and lead to responses which constitute deviant behaviour (Nasurdin et al., 2014) at the workplace. Theoretical discussion of deviant behaviour often associates it with negative emotional reactions to perceived wrongdoing (Harvey, Martinko, & Borkowski, 2016). Moreover, it can be said that job stress can impel an individual to deviate from a normal working to a psychological or physiological condition (Beehr, Walsh, & Taber, 1976). Previous studies have demonstrated the positive and significant relationship between job stress and deviant behaviour (Adekanmbi & Ukpere, 2019). Similarly, employees who experience a high level of stress will not be able to perform well in their career (Ling & Bhatti, 2014), and also will be at risk of exhibiting negative behaviour, leading to increased mental withdrawal from the job, anger, lessened communication with clients and coworkers, conflict with family and friends, absenteeism at work, substance abuse, turnover, burnout, health problems and even premature death (Lambert, Minor, Wells, & Hogan, 2016), and psychological strain leading to job related suppression of emotions, tension, anxiety, frustration, and worry arising from work (Misis et al., 2013). Therefore, this suggests that an employee experiencing a high level of job stress, is most likely to engage in workplace deviance. Therefore, an employee may engage in such behaviour and tend to harm the organisation or other employees. Thus the following hypothesis can be proposed:

H1: Job stress has a positive association with workplace deviant behaviour.

3.2 *The relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Workplace Deviant Behaviour*

From the transactional theory of stress and coping, two processes have been identified which are cognitive appraisal and coping. This theory has been developed by Lazarus and Folkman, (1984). Stress and coping is one of the well-known models within the transactional perspective, though there are various model approaches (Lazarus et al., 1984). Moreover, King et al., (2006) described this model as related to psychological stress which interacts within the workplace environment, in response to demands that threaten or challenge. In turn, this leads to individual appraisal of available resources and adapting to cope with those demands. Adaptive coping includes task-focused coping, which strives to manage the demands. By contrast, less adaptive coping, involves denying or psychologically distancing oneself (King et al., 2006). According to Jordan et al., (2002) individuals who use effective coping, are more likely both to adapt to the situation and to be able to understand their reactions to demands. Increased emotional intelligence will help the individual to cope with demands, and to guard against falling into deviant behaviour at the workplace. Akhtar, Boustani, Tsivrikos and Premuzic (2015) in their findings have demonstrated that emotional intelligence plays an important role in work engagement, which is a predictor of organisational outcomes, such as an employee behaviour. Panatik et al., (2015) in their empirical tests, show that employees with a high level of emotional intelligence are better at managing their own emotions, regulations and avoid unpleasant behaviour. Emotional intelligence is known as a predictor of an individual's workplace behaviour (Mayer et al., 2008) has a vital role in mitigating deviant work behaviours related to organisational work tasks. Several studies support the argument that employees with high levels of emotional intelligence are less prone to participate, or be caught engaging in deviant behaviour, than those with low levels (Al Ghazo et al., 2019; Jung & Yoon, 2012; Miao et al., 2017). As such, it is hypothesised that:

H2: Emotional intelligence is negatively associated with workplace deviant behaviour.

3.3 Relationship between Job Stress and Emotional Intelligence

Researchers have often argued that job stress will affect the wellbeing of employees. For example, their physical health, and their emotions, influence their personal behaviour (Lu & Kuo, 2016), and their turnover intention (Ogunbamila, Balogun, Ogunbamila, & Oladele, 2014), impacts on performance, satisfaction, productivity, motivation (Tageja, Chaturvedi, Singh & Petford, 2019) and results in a lower quality of life (Min, 2014). Job stress is a subjective phenomenon, and its effects depend on the cognitive assessment of the individual, these are negligible if the person is able to manage their emotions (Tageja et al., 2019). Ogunbamila et al., (2014) in their study, found that emotional intelligence plays an important role in influencing the employee to reduce the turnover intention. Karimi et al., (2015) have stated in their literature that emotional intelligence is the potential variable that has a buffering effect on stress. In addition, employees with low emotional intelligence may experience, anger, panic, negative emotions, fear, jealousy, anti-social tendencies etc (Miao et al., 2017) and cause problems for themselves, colleagues and organisations. Salovey et al., (2014) has identified that emotional intelligence is an important resource to navigate the social environment. According to Salovey and Mayer, (1990), emotional intelligence is the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings, and to use the resulting insight to guide thinking and actions. Jung and Yoon, (2016); Salami, (2010); Shukla and Srivastava, (2016) in their literature argue that employees with high emotional intelligence are able to regulate their emotions, are more flexible and prepare themselves to cope better when facing a stressful situation. This cannot be verified as it cannot prove empirically. Leong, Bahari and Malek, (2019) discovered that higher emotional intelligence is an important factor that lessens the stress encountered by the enforcement officer. Choi, Mohammad and Kim, (2019) found that emotional demands are inevitable at the workplace, however the employee with high emotional intelligence will be able to cope with and meet the industry's demands. In short, it can be concluded that high emotional intelligence confers the ability to strive against stress and burnout situations at the workplace.

According to Lazarus et al., (1984) stress stimuli may be thought of as events which are affecting the individual. The Transactional theory of stress and the coping model have delineated the interactions of threat and challenge to an individual, with the individual's ability to appraise and to cope with environmental demands Lazarus et al., (1984). Any circumstances at the workplace can be perceived and evaluated as a threat or challenge. If the individual focuses on the situation with a challenging mindset, the outcome will be positive, and the individual will be able to cope with the demands. The paper focuses on emotional intelligence in the process of job stress. Emotional intelligence is a platform to help an individual to engage with the appropriate positive outcomes through emotion-focused coping. Some coping behaviours show as a response to stress, and make individuals feel stronger in the short run but worsen their psychosocial well-being Lazarus et al., (1984). Therefore this leads to the hypothesis:

H3: Job stress is negatively associated with emotional intelligence.

3.4 Emotional intelligence as a Mediator between Job Stress and Workplace Deviant Behaviour

Deviant behaviour is unproductive and has an adverse impact on the organisation. It will also lead to disgrace and negatively impact the goals, professionalism and standards of an organisation if it is not managed strategically (Adewale, Olubusayo, Olalekan, & Adenike, 2015). Apart from that, it causes the organisation increased costs, and does serious physical, and psychological harm to individuals (Bennett et al., 2000). According to Fox, Spector and

Miles, (2001) individuals monitor and appraise negative events in the workplace environment. Certain events that threaten their well being, lead to job stress that prompts negative emotional reactions such as deviant behaviour. Every individual has a different potential manner and level of engagement in their working environment. Although numerous studies have been conducted on the impact of emotional intelligence, researchers still point out the need for more studies are required to critically examine this impact (Al Ghazo et al., 2019). The main focus of this conceptual paper is to find out whether the employees with high emotional intelligence is able to cope with job stress and resist engaging in deviant behaviour. Some empirical evidence has indicated that emotional intelligence is a personal asset that supports an individual in coping with stress (Bibi et al., 2013) and counterproductive behaviours (Jung et al., 2012). According to Jung et al., (2012), the emotional intelligence of employees is closely related to counterproductive behaviour when their level of emotional intelligence reduces. Besides that, Sarangi and Vats, (2015) have proposed emotional intelligence is a resource to sustain healthy work culture, and facilitate high levels of employee engagement at the individual and organisational level. The researchers Karimi et al., (2015) have investigated the positive impact of emotional intelligence upon job stress management and the improvement of individuals' well-being. Their results revealed that the employees with high emotional intelligence are able to meet the demands of their environment and to cope with job stress. A current study found that emotional intelligence mitigates negative life events and psychological distress. Hence, emotional intelligence can buffer the negative effect of stressful life events (Zhang, Li, Zhao, Xing, Chen, Tian & Tang, 2016) and mitigate workplace deviant behaviour. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Emotional Intelligence Mediates the Relationship between Job Stress and Workplace Deviant Behaviour

4.0 The Proposed Conceptual Framework

The literature suggests that emotional intelligence operates as an important tool to control job stress and mitigate negative behaviour, and undeniably enhances healthy working culture. Emotional intelligence may reduce the impact of job stress on deviant behaviour by functioning as a channel that drains negative feelings and behaviour instead of allowing them to control the individual and the organisation. Emotional intelligence enables individuals to cope with job stress, leading to a reduction in workplace deviant behaviour, and improving the well-being of the police officer. The organisation can support an individual by deploying various measures such as recognition, promotion, nurturing a sense of achievement or any other benefit. Job stress cannot be combated unless an individual's emotions can cope with demand. Individuals who understand their own emotions and those of others will be able to work in any situation without loss of confidence and self-doubt in their own behaviour. The following conceptual framework in Figure 1, was established based on considering the above literature discussion. It has been developed with three variables: job stress as an independent variable (IV), deviant behaviour as a dependent variable (DV), and emotional intelligence which fulfils a mediation role.

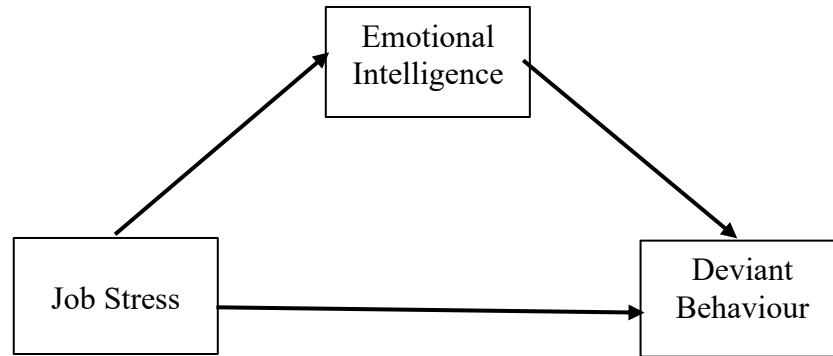


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study

5.0 Findings

Literature aids understanding of police job stress which leads to workplace deviant behaviour. This study looks into the impact of job stress on deviant behaviour at the workplace and the mediating role of emotional intelligence. In addition, the review gives a better understanding what is the best approach to assess better emotions. Little attention has been given to RMP job stress and workplace deviant behaviour. The future findings of this study might help the police department to make improvements.

6.0 Discussion and Conclusion

The discussion clearly holds important implications for the workplace, especially in the RMP. This conceptual paper is intended to understand the impact of excessive job stress that influences the behaviour of the police officer. The framework has been developed based on empirical review and practical discussion. Even though job stress is the most prevalent concern in the RMP, there are still numerous issues that contribute to negative behaviour. This conceptual paper gives a better understanding of excessive job stress leading to workplace deviant behaviour. Furthermore, such behaviour has a negative impact on performance, job satisfaction, creativity, decision making, motivation and self-esteem. Instead of enhancing these qualities, it causes fatigue, exhaustion, mental illness, tiredness etc.

The findings led us to draw conclusions about the factors that affect the behaviour at the workplace and make recommendations for future research to develop a conceptual framework that will indicate how to measure it and additionally, what other factors that cause job stress. Understanding these factors will not just help to improve the organisation, but also help police officers to understand their own emotions and those of others. The biggest challenge facing the RMP in the 21st century is to re-establish public trust in the organisation. Hence, emotional intelligence has been called for to mitigate policing stress and behavioural problems. Relevant literature and studies suggest that an employee with high emotional intelligence is able to meet demands and cope better with their job.

This concept paper is relevant because it will provide a legitimate and accurate method for identifying the consequences of stress and deviant behaviour of police officers. The findings will be useful for RMP management evaluation and professional development, as well as police force reform of decision-making and policy-making, and as a predictor for future staff. This paper presents research proposals for the future.

7.0 Practical and Social Implications

The overview of this paper provides an explanation of job stress, deviant behaviour and the mediating effect of emotional intelligence. Deviant behaviour can bring harm to the person and organisation, if it is not treated from the beginning. This behaviour can lead to serious damage and low productivity in the organisation. The organisation and its management can benefit by practising mediation through emotional intelligence in order to prevent unfavourable behaviour by their employees. Stress happens when high demands lead to pressure which exceeds the ability to cope or mediate. Furthermore, stress occurs when environmental demands are not matched by an individual's appraisal of the resources available to cope with those demands, or when there is an imbalance between demands and resources (Lazarus, 1999). The RMP can reduce deviant behaviour by putting effort into reducing stress among police officers. Therefore, understanding emotional intelligence will enable the RMP to develop better coping strategies in order to increase the performance and well-being of the employee in the organisation.

8.0 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Limitation: This study has several conceptual limitations that need to be considered in the future. First, this study does not consider the difference between organisational and interpersonal deviant behaviour, which would give different perspectives. Secondly, the inclusion of demographic factors might help to see a more complete picture and further differences. For example, education, years of service or gender would yield different results.

Suggestion: To develop new findings and adding to the body of existing knowledge, it is recommended that the latest measurement is obtained for every construct. The items of the questionnaire should be translated into a Malay version so the respondent can understand them more easily. This study will need to obtain approval from the police department before to proceed further. It is recommended that University Ethical Committee approval be obtained, before proceeding to RMP approval. Research by Irniza, (2018) shows that 44.30 per cent of police officers from urban areas have mental health issues compared to those in sub-urban zones. Therefore, it is suggested that future research obtains sample sizes from urban areas.

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