THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JOB BURNOUT AND EMOTIONAL DISTRESS AMONG POLICE OFFICERS: THE MODERATING ROLE OF PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT

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Abstract:

This study examines the relationships between job stress, job burnout, perceived organizational support, and emotional distress among police officers. Using a cross-sectional survey, data were collected from police officers in multiple departments, and Pearson correlation, regression, and moderation analyses were conducted. Results revealed that job burnout was significantly positively correlated with emotional distress, while perceived organizational support was negatively correlated with emotional distress. Regression analysis indicated that higher levels of burnout were positively associated with higher levels of emotional distress. Furthermore, moderation analysis showed that perceived organizational support significantly buffered the association between burnout and distress on emotional distress, suggesting that officers who perceived stronger organizational support experienced less emotional distress under high burnout conditions. These findings highlight the critical role of organizational support in mitigating the psychological impact of job burnout. Enhancing training on emotional regulation, optimizing workload distribution, and fostering supportive organizational environments are recommended to promote police officers' psychological well-being and organizational functioning.

Introduction

Occupational burnout among police officers is a pressing occupational-health concern with clear implications for individual well-being and organizational functioning (Santa Maria et al,2019). Defined broadly by pervasive emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment, burnout undermines psychological functioning, and job performance (Ali et al,2024). Empirical studies across a range of helping and public-safety professions report that higher burnout is associated with greater prevalence and intensity of these negative emotional states（Bocheliuk et al,2020; Spiller et al,2021）.

This study narrows its focus to the triadic relationship among occupational burnout, perceived organizational support (POS), and overall emotional distress. Perceived organizational support refers to employees' beliefs that their organization values their contributions and cares for their well-being. Prior research suggests that POS is linked to lower psychological distress and may weaken the impact of adverse workplace experiences on emotional outcomes (Marchand & Vandenberghe,2016). However, questions remain about whether POS moderate the effect of burnout on emotional distress in policing populations (Zeng et al,2020)

Recent bibliometric analyses by Karakose et al. (2023) emphasize that leadership and organizational structures are critical 'motor themes' that directly influence the internal psychological states and self-efficacy of employees. Furthermore, the evolution of psychological health research has seen a significant shift from focusing solely on risk factors to investigating protective resources like resilience, a trend highlighted in the digital era by Karakose et al. (2022).

This study using multi-dimensional measures of burnout and POS, we test whether POS moderates the association between burnout and each emotional outcome. The findings are intended to inform evidence-based organizational strategies to mitigate burnout's emotional consequences and to refine theoretical accounts of how organizational support buffers occupational ill-effects.

Moving beyond a mere geographic gap in the literature, this study utilizes the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model as a universal framework to examine how organizational resources (POS) buffer the energy depletion process within a non-Western, collectivistic policing context. Specifically, it advances the JD-R model by extending the "health impairment process" beyond

traditional outcomes—such as performance or turnover—to include a tripartite model of emotional distress. By integrating anxiety, depression, and anger into this framework, we illustrate how high-intensity job demands in professional policing trigger a dense network of comorbid psychological symptoms.

Literature Review

Burnout is most commonly defined through the Maslach (1997) framework, encompassing emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment, and is associated with a broad range of negative psychological states (Brady et al., 2020). In policing and related professions, higher levels of burnout are associated with greater anxiety and depressive symptoms, increased irritability and anger, sleep disturbances, and somatic complaints; these consequences collectively reduce work performance and personal well-being (Davies et al., 2023). Given that anxiety, depression, and anger often coexist and are attributed to a common negative affective component (Suls, 2018), burnout is a crucial aspect of job performance.

Theoretically, perceived organizational support (POS) operates through social exchange and resource conservation mechanisms (Casimir et al., 2014). Employees who feel supported experience greater access to resources and a sense of reciprocity, which helps reduce their emotional vulnerability. Across occupational domains, higher levels of POS are associated with lower levels of burnout and psychological distress (Reitz et al., 2021). Importantly, in practice, POS often has multiple dimensions: material support (adequate staffing, equipment, and benefits) and symbolic/value recognition (respect, voice, and fairness) have distinct psychological impacts (Eisenberg et al., 2020). Material POS can reduce anger-inducing frustration by eliminating practical obstacles, while symbolic POS can mitigate anxiety and depression by enhancing feelings of self-worth and control (Bishop et al., 2000; Bahadir et al., 2024).

Policing in China is deeply rooted in the 'mass-line' principle and Confucian values, where officers are viewed not just as law enforcers but as moral role models for the community. This 'collectivistic expectation' creates a unique psychological burden where perceived organizational support (POS) functions as a core component of identity and social exchange. In contrast, Western policing often emphasizes a more 'legalistic-professional' model where stress is primarily managed through individualistic coping or contractual supports.

Despite extensive research demonstrating the negative emotional consequences of burnout, three empirical and conceptual gaps remain, which this study aims to address.
First, perceived organizational support (POS) is often viewed as a single, undifferentiated concept, and relatively few studies have explored the relationships between its subdimensions and various emotional distresses.

Second, emotions such as anger and hostility—emotional domains particularly relevant to police work—have received less attention than anxiety and depression. Research that simultaneously considers anger and internalizing symptoms can provide a more comprehensive picture of the emotional burden experienced by police officers.

Third, empirical research using mediation models to simultaneously examine burnout, POS, and overall emotional distress outcomes in police samples is rare. In particular, research focusing on police data in the Chinese context is even more limited.

To address these gaps, this study aims to investigate whether overall perceived organizational support (POS) moderates the relationship between burnout and overall emotional distress (a composite of anxiety, depression, and anger). This is not presented as a novel methodological contribution. Empirical testing will utilize regression analysis with moderated regression interactions to assess conditional associations and confirm the moderating role of perceived organizational support in the relationship between burnout and overall emotional distress.

Research Design

Participants

Participants were frontline police officers who completed an online survey. A total of 250 questionnaires were distributed and 236 were returned. After data screening, 220 questionnaires met the predefined validity criteria and were retained for analysis, yielding an effective response rate of 93.2% (220/236). Descriptive statistics for the final sample are presented in Table 1.

Participation was voluntary and anonymous; informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to survey completion.

Table 1: Sample Characteristics (N = 220).

Demographic variable	Category (English / Chinese)	n	Percent (%)
Gender	Female	94	42.7
	Male	126	57.3
Age	25 years old and under	148	67.3
	26–30 years	52	23.6
	31–40 years	15	6.8
	41–50 years old	5	2.3
Education	Associate degree or below	67	30.5
	Bachelor's degree	140	63.6
	Master's degree or above	13	5.9
Years of service	5 years or less	96	43.6
	6–10 years	55	25
	11–15 years	47	21.4

	More than 15 years	22	10
Rank	Superintendent	150	68.2
	Inspector	46	20.9
	Commissioner	18	8.2
	General Police Commissioner	6	2.8
	Public Security Police	94	42.7
	Criminal Police	19	8.6
	Traffic Police	26	11.8
	Network Security	17	7.7
Police unit	Patrol Police	9	4.1
	Special Police	16	7.3
	Technical units	9	4.1
	Narcotics Police	2	0.9
	Other	28	13.7

Measures

Maslach Burnout Inventory (Mbi)

Occupational burnout was assessed with the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)(Maslach et al.,1997), which measures three core dimensions: Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization (sometimes labeled Cynicism), and Personal Accomplishment. In the present sample the internal consistency coefficients (Cronbach's α) were 0.88 for Emotional Exhaustion, 0.83 for Depersonalization, and 0.82 for Personal Accomplishment. Subscale scores were computed as the mean of their items. For interpretive consistency, when an overall burnout score was required (e.g., for supplementary analyses), the Personal Accomplishment subscale was reverse scored so that higher values uniformly reflected greater burnout.

Perceived Organizational Support (Pos)

Perceived organizational support was measured using the Chinese version of the organizational-support scale developed by Ling Wenquan and colleagues (2001). Prior psychometric work in Chinese samples indicates that employees tend to distinguish organizational support directed at "work" from organizational care directed at "people," and that the latter can be further subdivided into value recognition and welfare/material concern. Accordingly, the scale reflects a three-dimensional structure (Work Support; Value Recognition; Welfare/Benefits Concern) that is culturally appropriate for Chinese organizational contexts. In this study the POS instrument demonstrated acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's α = 0.83). Subscale scores were calculated as the mean item-response

within each dimension; an overall POS score (when used) was computed as the mean of all POS items.

Emotional-Distress Composite (Anxiety, Depression, Anger).

Emotional distress was assessed using the emotion-relevant subscales of the Symptom Checklist-90 (SCL-90) (Dang,2021). Items indexing anxiety, depression, and anger/hostility were extracted and used to form a composite emotional-distress score. The combined emotion measure demonstrated high internal consistency in the current sample (Cronbach's α = 0.938). Higher scores indicate more severe emotional distress

Response Format and Scoring.

All instruments employed standard Likert-type response formats. Scale (subscale) scores used in analyses were computed as the mean of non-missing item responses for each participant; participants with excessive missingness on a given scale were excluded from analyses for that measure. Higher scores on the MBI Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization subscales indicate greater burnout; higher raw scores on Personal Accomplishment indicate stronger perceived accomplishment (and were reverse scored when combined into a unidirectional burnout index). Higher POS scores indicate greater perceived organizational support. Higher SCL-90-derived scores indicate more severe emotional symptoms. Ethical approval was granted by the University of Malaya Research Ethics Committee (UMREC) under reference number UMREC_2650.All participants provided written informed consent electronically before accessing the survey. They were informed of the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of their responses.

Data Analysis and Bias Control

To address the risk of common method, bias inherent in self-reported cross-sectional data, Harman's single-factor test was conducted. The results indicated that the first factor accounted for 28.5% of the variance, which is well below the 50% threshold, suggesting that common method bias did not significantly affect the data's integrity.

Results

Descriptive Statistical Analysis of Variables

Descriptive Statistics for Occupational Burnout

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Occupational Burnout (N = 220)

Dimension (MBI)	M	SD
Emotional Exhaustion	23.1	5.95
Depersonalization (Cynicism)	17.32	5.19
Personal Accomplishment	28.24	6.09
Total Burnout (Sum of Subscales)	68.65	14.07

The sample's observed means indicate that, on average, respondents reported moderate-to-high levels on the MBI subscales. Emotional exhaustion had a mean of 23.10 (SD = 5.95) and depersonalization a mean of 17.32 (SD = 5.19). Personal accomplishment had a mean of 28.24 (SD = 6.09).

Comparing subscale scores within this sample, personal accomplishment was relatively higher than the other two dimensions, while depersonalization was relatively lower. The aggregated total-burnout score averaged 68.65 (SD = 14.07), reflecting the combined burden across the three dimensions.

Descriptive Statistics for Perceived Organizational Support

Descriptive statistics for the perceived organizational support (POS) scale and its three subdimensions are shown in Table 3 (N = 220). The values below follow the item scoring and aggregation described in Section 2.2: higher scores indicate greater perceived support.

Table 3. Perceived Organizational Support (N = 220)

POS dimension	Mean (M)	SD
Work support	32.81	8.08
Value recognition	22.02	6.32
Concern for employee welfare	21.55	6.55
Overall, POS	76.37	20.00

From Table 3, participants reported the highest scores on the Work support subscale (M = 32.81), and the lowest scores on Concern for employee welfare (M = 21.55). These results indicate that respondents felt strongest about practical/work-related support from the organization, and comparatively less about welfare-oriented or benefits-related support.

Descriptive Statistics for Emotional Distress

Descriptive statistics for the emotion-related subscales (anxiety, depression, hostility/anger) and the composite emotional-distress score (computed as the sum of the three subscale scores) are presented in Table 4 (N = 220).

Table 4. Emotional-Distress Scores (N = 220)

Dimension	Mean (M)	Standard deviation (SD)
Anxiety	23.38	9.08
Depression	29.95	13.02
Hostility / Anger	20.09	8.59
Total Emotional Distress (Anxiety + Depression + Hostility/Anger)	73.42	29.17

As shown in Table 4, depression scores are highest on average (M = 29.95, SD = 13.02), followed by anxiety (M = 23.38, SD = 9.08) and hostility/anger (M = 20.09, SD = 8.59). The composite total emotional-distress score (sum of the three subscales) averaged 73.42 (SD = 29.17). These results indicate that internalizing symptoms—particularly depressive complaints—are the most pronounced component of emotional burden in this sample of frontline police officers.

Relationships Among Burnout, Emotional Distress, And Perceived Organizational Support

Pearson correlation coefficients (N = 220) are reported in Table 6. Burnout was positively and moderately correlated with total emotional distress (r = .38, p < .001), indicating that higher levels of occupational burnout were associated with greater overall emotional symptoms (anxiety + depression + hostility/anger). Perceived organizational support (POS) was negatively correlated with emotional distress (r = −.22, p < .001), suggesting that officers who perceived greater organizational support reported lower overall emotional burden. The bivariate association between POS and burnout was negative but small and did not reach conventional statistical significance (r = −.13, p > .05).

Table 5. Pearson Correlations Among Key Study Variables (N = 220)

Variable	Burnout	Emotional distress	POS
Burnout	1		
Emotional Distress	0.38**	1	
Perceived Organizational Support (POS)	−0.13	−0.22**	1

Note. ** p < .01.

Correlations Between Burnout Dimensions and Emotional Distress

Pearson correlations (N = 220) between the three MBI dimensions and the three emotion subscales are presented in Table 6. Emotional exhaustion and depersonalizationshowed significant, positive associations with all three emotional outcomes (anxiety, depression, and hostility/anger). By contrast, personal accomplishment exhibited small, non-significant correlations with the emotion indicators.

Table 6. Correlations Between Burnout Dimensions and Emotional Outcomes (N = 220)

Variable	EE	DP	PA	Anxiety	Depression	H&A
Emotional Exhaustion	1	0.744**	0.424**	0.424**	0.343**	0.350**
Depersonalization (DP)	0.744**	1	0.348*	0.485**	0.411**	0.444**

Reduced Personal Accomplishment	0.424**	0.348*	1	0.105	0.087	0.094
Anxiety	0.424**	0.485**	0.105	1	0.816**	0.810**
Depression	0.343**	0.411**	0.087	0.816**	1	0.920**
Hostility / Anger(H&A)	0.350**	0.444**	0.094	0.810**	0.920**	1

Notes. EE = Emotional exhaustion; DP= Depersonalization; PA = Reduced personal accomplishment; Hostility / Anger=H&A* p < .05; **p < .01.

Emotional exhaustion and depersonalization are moderately-to-strongly intercorrelated (r = .744, p < .001) and both show significant positive correlations with anxiety (r = .424 and .485), depression (r = .343 and .411), and hostility/anger (r = .350 and .444), all p < .001. Personal accomplishment is positively correlated with the other burnout dimensions but does not show statistically significant associations with anxiety, depression, or hostility/anger in this sample (all r ≈ .09–.11, p > .05). These patterns suggest that the emotional-exhaustion and depersonalization components of burnout are the primary drivers of the observed associations with overall emotional distress.

Correlations Between Perceived Organizational Support and Emotional Distress

Pearson correlation coefficients (N = 220) between the three perceived-organizational-support (POS) subscales and the three emotion indicators are presented in Table 7. All three POS dimensions—Work Support, Value Recognition, and Concern for Employee Welfare—were significantly and negatively associated with anxiety, depression, and hostility/anger. POS subscales were strongly intercorrelated, and the three emotional indices were highly intercorrelated.

Table 7. Correlations Between Pos Subscales and Emotional Outcomes (N = 220)

Variable	Work support	Value recognition	Concern for welfare	Anxiety	Depression	Hostility / Anger
Work support	1	0.873**	0.845**	−0.168*	−0.194**	−0.192**
Value recognition	0.873**	1	0.887**	−0.140*	−0.192**	−0.185**
Concern for welfare	0.845**	0.887**	1	−0.197**	−0.260**	−0.257**
Anxiety	−0.168*	−0.140*	−0.197**	1	0.816**	0.810**
Depression	−0.194**	−0.192**	−0.260**	0.816**	1	0.920**
Hostility / Anger	−0.192**	−0.185**	−0.257**	0.810**	0.920**	1

Notes. *p < .05; **p < .01.

Greater perceived organizational support—whether experienced as practical work support, value recognition, or welfare concern—was associated with lower levels of anxiety, depression, and hostility/anger. The largest negative correlations were observed between Concern for Welfare and depression ($r = -.260$, $p < .01$), and between Concern for Welfare and hostility/anger ($r = -.257$, $p < .01$). Effect sizes for POS → emotional outcomes are small-to-moderate in magnitude. The strong intercorrelations among POS subscales indicate a cohesive POS construct in this sample; the very high correlations among the emotional indices (ranging from $r = .81$ to $r = .92$) confirm substantial overlap among anxiety, depression, and hostility/anger and support the use of an overall emotional-distress composite in subsequent regression and moderation analyses.

Regression Analysis: Burnout Predicting Total Emotional Distress

Table 8. Regression Of Total Emotional Distress on Total Occupational Burnout (N = 220)

Predictor	Outcome	R^2	Intercept	B	F
Occupational burnout	Emotional distress	0.14	19.54	0.79	36.50**

Notes: ** $p < .01$

Results of the regression (see Table 8) indicate that occupational burnout significantly predicts emotional distress (B = 0.79, Intercept = 19.54). The model explains 14% of the variance (R^2 = .14). The overall model F = 36.50, $p < .01$.

The Moderating Role of Perceived Organizational Support in the Relationship between Occupational Burnout and Emotional Distress

Table 9 presents the results of the moderation analysis examining the moderating role of perceived organizational support. The interaction term between occupational burnout and perceived organizational support significantly predicted emotional distress ($p < 0.05$), indicating that perceived organizational support moderates the relationship with occupational burnout on emotional distress.

Table 9. Interaction Analysis of Occupational Burnout and Perceived Organizational Support

	β	t	95% CI
Constant	73.587	40.677***	[70.021, 77.153]
Burnout	10.397	5.719***	[6.814, 13.980]
Organizational Support	-5.462	-2.899*	[-9.176, -1.748]
Burnout ×Organizational Support	1.264	0.825	[-1.754, 4.281]
R^2		0.176	
F		15.326	

*Note: *p < 0.05, ***p < 0.001.

To further interpret the moderating effect, a simple slopes plot was generated (Figure 1). As shown by the slopes, when perceived organizational support is high, the positive association between burnout and emotional distress becomes weaker. In other words, higher levels of organizational support buffer the adverse association with occupational burnout on emotional distress. Conversely, when organizational support is low, emotional distress increases more sharply with rising burnout. These results indicate that perceived organizational support plays a protective moderating role in the relationship between occupational burnout and emotional distress.
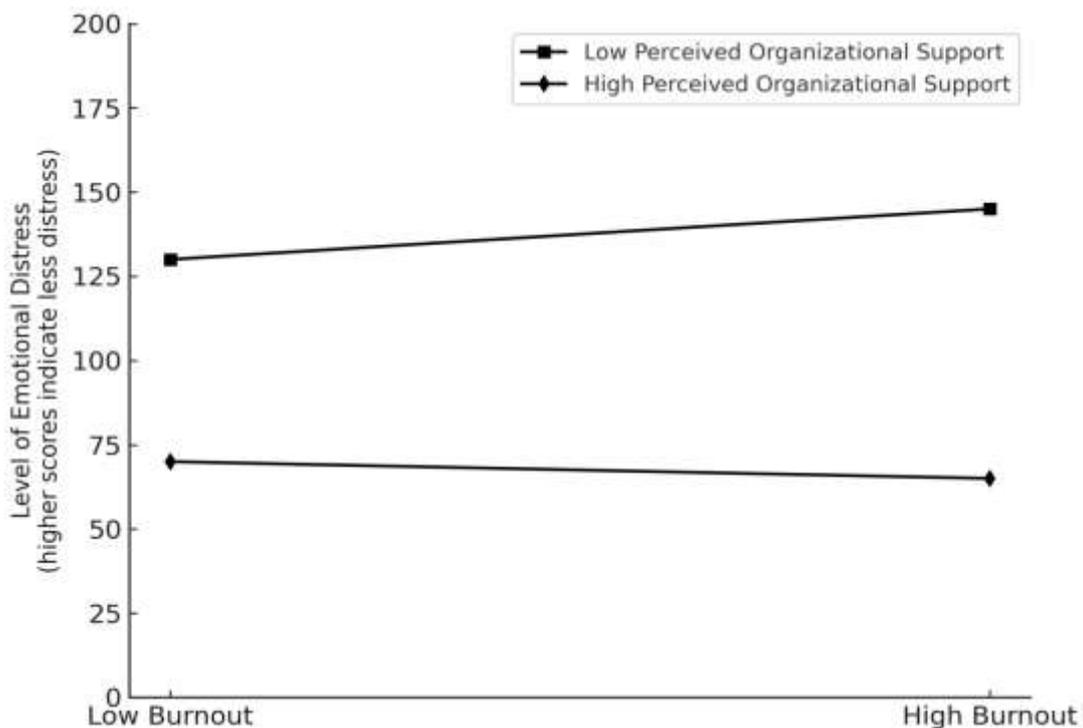

Figure 1: The Moderating Effect of Perceived Organizational Support on The Levels of Job Burnout and Emotional Distress

Discussion

Overall Levels of Occupational Burnout, Perceived Organizational Support, And Emotional Distress Among Police Officers

First, police officers exhibit relatively high levels of burnout. Descriptive statistics show that over 60% experience varying degrees of burnout, manifested as emotional exhaustion, decreased work engagement, and reduced job satisfaction. This is consistent with previous research showing that policing, due to its high emotional and operational demands, is one of the professions most susceptible to chronic stress and burnout (Queirós et al,.2020). Several factors may contribute to this phenomenon. Regarding work hours, police officers are often required to be on-call and frequently called back to work during holidays for emergencies or unexpected events. Due to staffing shortages, they must handle multiple cases simultaneously within a limited timeframe, work overtime, and rotate night shifts in three shifts. These conditions have been shown to disrupt circadian rhythms and increase fatigue (Luo & Ruiz, 2012). Furthermore, their work environment often requires them to mediate conflict and navigate unpredictable and stressful situations. Long-term heavy workloads, coupled with limited career advancement opportunities, can lead to increased burnout over time, which supports research showing that organizational constraints and limited control can exacerbate emotional exhaustion among police officers.

Second, police officers perceive relatively high levels of organizational support. Survey data show that overall perceptions of organizational support among police officers are relatively high, with the strongest perceptions of job support. This finding aligns with previous research showing that organizational support plays a key role in enhancing police officers' psychological well-being, job satisfaction, and loyalty (Caballero et al.,2024). This trend may be attributed to recent efforts by the government and agencies to improve police officers' living conditions, working environment, and external benefits. Initiatives such as ensuring stable income and benefits, providing career development opportunities, and fostering a more humane work environment have collectively strengthened police officers' perceptions of organizational support. These measures align with research showing that tangible resources, fair treatment, and supportive leadership contribute to officers' perceptions of organizational care and value (Sørengaard& Langvik, 2022). Furthermore, when police officers perceive higher organizational support, they are more likely to experience reduced stress and increased job engagement, which contributes to better organizational performance and lower turnover intentions.

Third, the sample showed relatively high levels of emotional distress: over 40% of officers reported experiencing symptoms of anxiety and depression. This is consistent with previous research documenting high rates of internalizing symptoms and compassion fatigue among police officers (Grant et al.,2019), as well as the high prevalence of emotional burnout across various socio-occupational groups (Bochelyuk et al., 2020). Several factors may contribute. Daily administrative demands, strict procedural constraints, and the need to regulate emotional expression increase cognitive load, making individuals more susceptible to anxious and depressive reactions (SHofstee,2021). High-intensity work and repeated exposure to negative or traumatic events can undermine resilience and potentially lead to the formation of toxic emotional networks in which distressing states such as anxiety, depression, and hostility reinforce each other (Roodbari,2025). Furthermore, the coexistence of anger, anxiety, and depression has substantial implications for both physical and mental health, as these affective

states are interrelated risk factors for broader health problems (Suls, 2018). Together, these findings highlight the importance of developing organizational and clinical strategies that target both acute trauma exposure and chronic work-related demands to reduce the overall emotional burden on police officers.

Correlation And Regression Analyses

Correlation analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between burnout and emotional distress among police officers. Higher levels of burnout were associated with greater emotional distress, consistent with established concepts of burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment) and its psychological consequences (Maslech et al., 1997). Police officers with high levels of burnout tend to be irritable and experience conflict both inside and outside of work, accumulating negative emotional energy that can manifest as negative affective states such as depression, anxiety, and hostility. Conversely, alleviating anxiety and depressive symptoms may help reduce burnout.

Furthermore, perceived organizational support is significantly negatively correlated with emotional distress. Officers who perceive higher levels of organizational support experience lower levels of emotional distress, consistent with organizational support theory and meta-analytic findings linking perceived organizational support (POS) to reduce stress and improved psychological well-being (Caesens et al.,2016; Aggarwal-Gupta,2010). Specific research on police officers has also found that perceived organizational support can alleviate burnout in law enforcement settings (Zeng et al., 2020). When encountering difficulties, officers who perceive lower levels of organizational support are more likely to experience anxiety, depression, anger, and hostility, which exacerbates their emotional distress.

From a theoretical perspective, these associations align with the Job Demands-Resources Model (JD-R) and Conservation of Resources Theory (COR): High job demands deplete psychological resources, triggering emotional exhaustion and negative attitudes, which in turn increase internalizing (anxiety, depression) and externalizing (hostility/anger) responses (Barello,2021). Perceived organizational support, a key job resource, can compensate for resource depletion or enhance coping ability, thereby alleviating emotional distress. It is important to note that correlational analysis cannot establish causality: emotional distress may also weaken employees' perceptions of organizational support. Finally, given the established link between toxic emotions and broader health risks, the co-occurrence of anger, anxiety, and depression has implications for both physical and mental health among police officers.

Recommendations For Strengthening Police Management and Team Building

The results of this study demonstrate a close interaction between burnout, emotional distress, and perceived organizational support. This provides important theoretical basis and practical implications for strengthening police management and team building. To this end, targeted improvement suggestions can be proposed in the following areas:

First, strengthen police education and training, as well as emotional distress management. In high-pressure, high-risk law enforcement environments, emotional distress is often a significant contributor to burnout（Costa & Moss,2018）. Therefore, police leaders should incorporate emotional health education into their training programs and regularly organize specialized training on mental health and emotional regulation to help officers master scientific

methods for stress management, emotional regulation, and cognitive restructuring. For example, evidence-based techniques such as resilience training, mindfulness-based interventions, or solution-focused brief therapy could be introduced to enhance officers' ability to cope with emergencies and chronic stress. Furthermore, police officers should be encouraged to conduct regular mental health self-assessments or emotional distress screenings to promptly identify potential risks. Anonymous psychological counseling or referral channels should also be provided to mitigate stigma that impedes help-seeking.

Second, systematically address police workload and burnout. Burnout is not merely a personal psychological issue; it is also closely linked to organizational management and work systems. Police managers should strengthen dynamic monitoring of officers' workload, work schedules, and career development, using questionnaires, interviews, and regular assessments to gain a timely understanding of the true status of grassroots officers. Management measures should include rationally allocating tasks to avoid chronic overload and irregular shifts, providing adequate human and material resources, improving work facilities and environments, reducing repetitive and ineffective work processes, and reducing stressors at the institutional level. Furthermore, managers can help officers achieve a work-life balance by establishing flexible work schedules, optimizing shift schedules, and ensuring leave, thereby effectively alleviating burnout and emotional distress.

Third, strengthen team building and enhance organizational support. Research shows that a strong sense of organizational support is a key protective factor against the negative impact of burnout on emotional distress（Daghash, 2022)）. Police organizations should strive to foster a team atmosphere of mutual trust, cooperation, and support, enhancing team cohesion and collective efficacy. First, management should encourage open communication between officers and leadership, establish regular channels for feedback and suggestions, and promptly respond to the legitimate demands of frontline officers to strengthen their sense of value and belonging. Second, team-building activities, group counseling, and collaborative training can foster mutual understanding and support among officers, reducing internal competition and feelings of isolation. Third, organizations should provide clear career development paths and diverse training opportunities to help officers achieve self-growth, foster work enthusiasm, and foster a sense of professional fulfillment. These measures can foster a virtuous cycle of "high support, low burnout, and positive emotions" within the police system.

In summary, strengthening education and training, optimizing work systems, and enhancing organizational support are key pathways to alleviating police emotional distress, reducing burnout, and improving overall team effectiveness. These suggestions are not only practical and feasible but also provide important reference for the promotion of mental health and human resource management in the police system in the future.

Limitations And Future Directions

Although this study yielded valuable insights, it also has several limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to draw causal inferences about the relationships between burnout, organizational support, and emotional distress. Although regression and moderation analyses indicated significant relationships, the directionality of these effects remains uncertain. Longitudinal or experimental studies are needed to elucidate the temporal dynamics and causal mechanisms underlying these associations.

Second, the data in this study were collected via self-administered questionnaires, which may introduce issues such as social desirability bias, recall error, or common method bias. Police officers may underreport negative emotions or overestimate perceived organizational support due to cultural or professional norms. Future research should consider incorporating multi-channel information data, physiological indicators, or behavioral measures to enhance the objectivity and reliability of research findings.

Third, this study's sample was drawn from a specific region of police officers, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Differences in organizational culture, administrative structures, and job requirements exist across regions or countries, and these differences may influence the relationships observed in this study. Comparative research involving multiple regions or international samples would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the generalizability or specificity of these patterns.

Fourth, although this study focused on the moderating role of organizational support, other relevant factors such as leadership style, team climate, coping strategies, and personal resilience were not examined. Including these variables in future models may provide a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the psychological mechanisms influencing police mental health.

Finally, this study primarily employed quantitative research methods, which may overlook the subjective experiences and contextual factors underlying burnout and emotional distress. Future research could employ mixed methods or qualitative research approaches to capture the actual experiences of police officers, thereby enriching theoretical interpretations and providing insights for the development of more targeted intervention strategies.

Overall, addressing these limitations in future research will not only strengthen the field's empirical foundation but also provide more practical and evidence-based guidance for organizational policy development and mental health interventions within police systems.

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Ethics Statement:	This study was conducted in accordance with internationally recognized ethical research standards. All procedures involving human participants were reviewed and approved by the Universiti Malaya Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), Universiti Malaya, Malaysia (Reference No. UM. TNC2/UMREC_2650). The ethics approval was granted on 19 June 2023 and is valid until June 2026.
	Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly ensured throughout the research process, and all data collected were used solely for academic and research purposes.
Author Contribution Statement:	All authors contributed significantly to the development of this manuscript. Mao Xueying was responsible for the overall analysis of the study, including research design, data collection, data analysis, and manuscript writing. Fonny Dameaty Hutagalung provided guidance on the overall conceptual framework and research structure of the study. Rosila Bee Mohd Hussain contributed by offering substantive revisions and constructive feedback on the manuscript content. All authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript prior to submission.

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