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## **Victimization, Perceived Organizational Support and Perceived Danger Among Police Officers**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study used cross-sectional data from an online survey of police officers in a southern state to examine the potential moderating effect of Perceived Organizational Support (POS) on the relationship between prior victimization and perceived likelihood of victimization (PLOV) using logistic regression. Findings support that prior victimization and POS influence PLOV. However, POS does not moderate the effect of prior victimization on PLOV. This study increases our understanding of how prior victimization and POS is linked to PLOV. Further Policy implications are discussed.

**Keywords:** *anti-police sentiment, perceived organizational support, organizational support theory, police, victimization*

### **Victimization, Perceived Organizational Support and Perceived Danger Among Police Officers**

The discussion of victimization and police has traditionally focused on police officers as perpetrators of violence against particular groups or as responders to victims of crime. Only recently have scholars considered police to have fallen collectively into victim status (Mac Donald, 2016; Morgan & Pally, 2016; Pyrooz, Decker, Wolfe, & Shjarback, 2016; Rosenfeld, 2016; Shjarback, Pyrooz, Wolfe, & Decker, 2017). Although police scholars have examined violence directed toward police officers, in terms of occupational threats and hazards (Wilson & Zhao, 2008), there has been renewed interest and debate regarding increased dangers to the police due to increased public hostility and the unprecedented rise of targeted attacks directed at law enforcement by civilians (Mac Donald, 2016; Morgan & Pally, 2016; Pyrooz et al., 2016; Rosenfeld, 2016; Shjarback et al., 2017); particularly among police administrators and line officers (Nix, Wolfe, & Campbell, 2018). The United States has experienced a sharp decline in police-citizen relations in the aftermath of several highly publicized and contested officer-involved shootings of unarmed Black males. There is evidence to suggest that increased strained relationships between police and community members will lead to more retaliatory attacks directed toward law enforcement (Barrick, Hickman, & Strom, 2014; Nix et al., 2018; Wietzer, 2015; Mac Donald, 2016).

Emerging research provides insight into both officers and civilians' perception of current police-citizen relations. Overall, evidence supports a generalized consensus among both officers and civilians that the recent breakdown in police-citizen relationships and increased anti-police sentiment, post-Ferguson, has made policing more difficult for officers if not also more dangerous (Nix et al., 2018; Nix & Pickett, 2017). A Rasmussen poll conducted in 2015 found that 58% of the American public believed there was a war on police; and 60% believed that the negative comments about police by politicians made the police officer's job more dangerous (Rasmussen, 2015, paras. 2-3). Researchers cautioned that anti-police sentiment could instigate targeted attacks against police officers by angry citizens or organized groups (Barrick et al., 2014; Mac Donald, 2016; Wietzer, 2015). This fear seemed realized in July 2016, when police officers in Dallas, Texas and Baton Rouge, Louisiana were ambushed in separate incidents only 10 days apart. Altogether eight law enforcement officers were killed and 12 law enforcement officers were wounded. However, in spite of those two incidents, a review of the *FBI's Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted (LEOKA)* data indicated the number of officers killed were less in the years 2015-2017 compared to 2018, but the number of assaults in those years (2015-2017) were higher than 2018 (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2019a). Whether or not police work has become more dangerous is debatable, depending on how you examine the topic. For example, there is no evidence for either an abrupt or gradual permanent change in the line of duty deaths based on a time-series analysis (Maguire, Nix, & Campbell, 2017). Whereas, assaults and targeted attacks appear to have increased (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2019a). Regardless if policing has become more dangerous, how officers perceive danger is an important topic of inquiry, because officers' fear of victimization can influence their work-related attitudes and behaviors such as de-policing (Oliver, 2017; Nix et al., 2018; Shjarback et al., 2017).

Relevant to this study, empirical research in the field of victimization has consistently shown that prior victimization shapes individuals' fears pertaining to victimization (LaGrange, Ferraro, & Supancic, 1992; Russo & Roccato, 2010; Skogan, 1993). Furthermore, research also supports that socio-emotional support can help mitigate the negative influence of prior victimization on individuals' fears of victimization (Rühs, Greve, & Kappes, 2017). Supervisor support has been found to moderate the effects of stress (Stephens & Long, 2000; Greller, Parsons, & Miller, 1992). This paper argues that recent prior victimization does increase perceived danger among police officers. Yet, that effect may be mitigated based on one's perception of organizational support.

### **Current study**

The purpose of this research is to examine the association between prior direct victimization, perceived organizational support (hereafter referred to as POS), and perceived danger among police officers. The three primary research questions guiding this study are: (1) *What is the relationship between prior victimization and perceived likelihood of victimization (PLOV)*; (2) *What is the relationship between POS and PLOV*; and (3) *Does POS moderate the effect of prior victimization on PLOV among police officers*? Hence, this research study adds to the literature in three ways by (1) increasing our understanding of a link between prior victimization and perceived danger among police, (2) explores the effect that POS may have on reducing PLOV and (3) how POS may moderate the negative effects of prior victimization. To answer these questions, data were collected by an online survey distributed to a non-probability sample of officers with 247 out of 606 officers fully completing the survey in five police departments in a southern state (USA) using logistic regression for analyses.

### **Review of Literature**

People operate on certain assumptions about the world that allow them to function well and interact with others. These assumptions include a benevolent world that is just and meaningful, where individuals can develop a sense of self-worth or self-esteem (Janoff-Bulman, 1989). Cultural worldviews allow people to avoid the terror of mortality salience (Greenberg, Solomon, & Pyszczynski, 1997; Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Solomon, Arndt, & Schimel, 2004). Victims' response to traumatic events can change their basic view of the world, even years after the event. When faced with an awareness of one's mortality, studies have found that people tend to associate with others who are more like them and develop hostility toward those who are different. In addition, if an individual is attacked, a desire for justice or vengeance is often triggered (Greenberg et al., 1997).

Similar findings hold true within the police occupation embedded with a distinctive worldview of "us versus them" based on dangers inherent in the job that can often lead to officers viewing citizens as potential threats (i.e., symbolic assailants) described by Skolnick (1994) as the 'working personality of police officers'. A worldview that fosters a belief in the police subculture that officers must rely on one another for support and protection generates close-knit relationships can be described as a "blue brotherhood" (Nahn, 2019, p. 33). Simply, victimization can shape the way we see the world and interactions.

### **Police Officer Victimization**

As early as 1984, researchers described police as victims if they had experienced any of the following events, killings, assaults, witness to terrorism, recovery of disaster victims, or organizational stressors such as investigating child abuse cases or experiencing violent encounters (Reiser & , Geiger, 1984). For the purpose of this study, police victimization is viewed in this context of varying forms of physical and verbal assaults directed against officers. While not directly explored in this study, research supports that the heightened vitriol and distrust of law enforcement and the criminal justice system in social media (Nix & Pickett, 2017) may increase the fear of victimization or the perceived risk of victimization among police officers. In 2017, more than 60,000 law enforcement officers were assaulted, and 46 officers were killed in the line of duty (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2019a, Table 1). According to the *FBI's LEOKA* data for 2018, ten percent of police officers in 2018 experienced an actual assault (Federal Bureau of Investigation,

2019b, Table 80). The personal experiences of those assaulted differed for each individual officer and the effects range from no emotional response to severe emotional distress. The remaining ninety percent of police officers, who were not directly assaulted have likely witnessed social media threats of terrorism or experienced the effects of fellow police officers who were killed or assaulted.

These experiences can produce a heightened threat of perceived victimization. If individuals can easily recall a memory of victimization, it is likely they will overestimate the likelihood of the event re-occurring. Tversky and Kahneman (1973) described this cognitive function as the availability heuristic. Just as each report of a police shooting of an unarmed citizen increase the public's perception that it will happen again, an assault or killing of a police officer increases fellow officers' perception the event will likely happen again. Importantly, Police officers may fail to positively cope and react to actualized or perceived threats in a number of ways from limiting their contact with particular groups in the community perceived as being anti-police (Nix & Wolfe, 2017), reducing their proactive enforcement (i.e., de-policing; Oliver, 2017) as a self-protective measure (Reynolds, Fitzgerald, & Hicks, 2018), or even react violently. For example, Van Maanen (1978) described how street justice is dealt out to those individuals, referred to as "assholes," who pose a threat to the officers' safety or who challenge their authority. Each of these aforementioned reactions further hinders the police-citizen relationship and reduces police legitimacy in direct opposition to community policing ideals (Nix & Wolfe, 2015). In order for police to effectively fulfill their role, police officers must build trust in the community with all citizens, especially citizens who have been victimized, or are in a marginalized group (Mawby & Zempi, 2018).

Behavioral health professionals suggest the therapeutic response to trauma is governed by the event, the experience, and effects (Colwell, Lyons, Bruce, Garner, & Miller, 2011). The event refers to the actual threat or harm committed; whereas the experience encompasses how the individual perceives the event. This can include any meaning the individual assigns to the event that can result from a number of factors, such as cultural beliefs, stigma, social supports or age. The effects can be immediate or delayed and can vary in length. Victims of violent crime suffer a decrease in mental health well-being (Cornaglia, Feldman, & Leigh, 2014). Victims can suffer physical ailments (Gidycz & Koss, 1991), experience an inability to cope with normal stressors (Norris, Kaniasty, & Thompson, 1994), and suffer economic difficulties due to inability to fulfill job requirements (Van Dorn, 2004).

### **Prior Victimization and Perceived Danger**

Copious research supports the relationship between fear and victimization (LaGrange et al., 1992; Russo & Roccato, 2010; Skogan, 1993). Much of the research centered on the basic assumptions or cultural world views discussed earlier. In order to reestablish meaning and control and increase their self-esteem, victims often search for new meaning in their experiences and attempt to gain control. The fear of crime causes victims to develop coping mechanisms to address the increased fear of crime. The coping strategies, in essence, were the result of victim's fear of crime, indirectly correlating victimization and fear of crime (Petrosino, Fellow, & Brensilber, 1997).

The experience of victimization can be direct or indirect. Direct victimization causes individuals to respond emotionally and cognitively (Ferraro & Grange, 1987). Perceived risk of victimization is a cognitive response that presents itself by motivating individuals to take action, such as avoiding risky behavior, increasing defense strategies, or

countering the negative experiences with positive experiences (Ferraro & Grange, 1987). Cognitive and emotional coping mechanisms help victims reduce their fear of a repeated negative event (Ulrich & Lutgendorf, 2002) by maximizing the effect to reduce stressors (Esterling, Antoni, Fletcher, Margulies, & Schneiderman, 1994), but cognitive processing has a more important role as focusing on emotional processes can actually increase feelings of helplessness (Ulrich & Lutgendorf, 2002).

Indirect victimization can refer to a manipulation of a social network to intimidate victims (Leenars & Rinaldi, 2015), the harmful ripple effect on family members or friends of the victim (Lurigio, 1990), or media exposure to terrorism toward an individual or group (Slone & Shoshani, 2008). Indirect victimization greatly increases the victim's fear of crime because it is more widespread and diminishes the victim's ability to develop specific coping mechanisms as a response (Hale, 1996; Skogan & Maxfield, 1981). Similar to direct victimization, indirect victimization can lead to psychological, economical, or physical harm by the victims. However, unlike direct victimization, the victims suffer primarily from the fear of perceived risk or threat of risk than a physical traumatic event. This perceived risk, not an actual experience, leads to a fear that an event could take place (Ferraro & Grange, 1987). Often these victims develop constrained behaviors, defined by Rader (2004) as "the behaviors people take to protect themselves from the threat of victimization or the behaviors people avoid to deal with the threat of victimization" (p. 690). However, Rader (2004) argues that instead of victimization culminating in fear of the actual event, the end result is actually the threat of victimization. She postulates that perceived risk spurs constrained behaviors, which in turn increases fear of being victim, thereby increasing the overall threat of victimization.

### **Why Support Matters for Victims**

The effects of victimization vary from no emotional consequences to clinical diagnoses of post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD), financial losses, and other adverse effects (MacMillan, 2001; Orth, Cahill, Foa, & Maercker, 2008; Rühls et al., 2017; Shapland & Hall, 2007). The National Crime Victimization Survey continues to gather data about victims and in 2014 released a report by Langton and Truman (2014) on the socio-emotional impact of violent crime. More than 68% of the victims reported serious emotional distress, increased relationship problems, or disruptions in school or work. Only 12% of those reporting significant distress received victim services, even though the majority experienced problems for one or more months (p. 1).

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) advocates for behavioral specialists' use of trauma-informed therapies to support victims. Self-regulation has an important role in victim support and early results reveal it has a moderating role on victimization and fear (Rühls et al., 2017). If victims are provided methods to inhibit impulsive behavior or thoughts, they can focus on cognitive processes which help them achieve control, increase self-esteem, and reduce negative psychological effects. Psychological support can help victimized persons cope with the physical and emotional consequences that affect most victims of crime (Aaron, 2000; Russo & Roccato, 2010, p. 99). Given the duties and responsibilities expected of police officers and the inherent difficulties and dangers associated, the need for officers to feel supported by the organization is critical to both officers' and their organization's success (Zhao, He, & Lovrich, 2002).

### **POS, Victimization, and Police**

Within the general occupational and management literature, researchers have consistently found support for the association between one's perception of organizational support and varying

organizational attitudes and behaviors (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Zhao et al., 2002). Organizational support theory (Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli, & Lynch, 1997; Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986; Shore & Shore, 1995) explains relationships between employers and employees based on social exchange (Blau, 2017) and reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960). The central construct of organizational support theory is perceived organizational support (POS) and is often used to infer an organization's commitment to the employee and ultimately contributes to the employee's commitment to the organization (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Generally, POS refers to the extent that an employee believes that their employer cares about their wellbeing and values their contributions to the organization (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

Meta-analyses have shown that POS is a predictor for many types of employee work behaviors and attitudes, such as organizational commitment, performance, counterproductive work behaviors, and extra-role behaviors (Colquitt et al., 2013; Kurtessis et al., 2017). Studies utilizing POS to examine how support influences police work-related behaviors parallel the findings in the general occupational literature. For example, POS has shown to increase police performance (Armeli, Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Lynch, 1998), police effectiveness (Boateng & Wu, 2018), and decrease police deviance (Helfers, Reynolds, & Maskály, 2019). In regard to attitudes, POS is linked to organizational commitment (Johnson, 2015) and the fulfillment of socioemotional needs (Armeli et al., 1998).

Based on organizational support theory, POS should promote social exchange between officers and command staff as well as further confidence that the organization has the officers' best interest at heart; thereby fulfilling the emotional support needed by officers to help mitigate officers' fears and concerns (Armeli et al., 1998; Tucker, 2015). For example, Helfers and colleagues (2019) recently used POS to explain the relationship between organizational treatment and police deviance. They found that when officers felt the department had their best interests at heart, they were less likely to engage in self-protective behaviors. Furthermore, research supports that officers were more willing to seek help for stress and utilize intervention services when they felt their administration supported them (Tucker, 2015). Based on review of POS and victimization literature, one could assume that if officers view their department as "having their back," concerns about potential dangers may be reduced.

### **Methods**

The data for this study were obtained by contacting seven small to mid-sized suburban police agencies in a large metropolitan area of a southern state in the United States. These agencies were selected due to the researchers knowing personnel within the agencies who were used as a conduit to the chief to determine if access to the officers within the agency would be granted. This approach was taken due to the difficulty obtaining access to police officers for research (Nix, Pickett, Baek, & Alpert, 2019; Helfers et al., 2019). Five of the agencies' police chiefs agreed to allow the distribution of an online survey to be accessible to officers in the agency. Most online surveys yield approximately a third of responses (Tourangeau, Conrad, & Couper, 2013), and police research often suffers from low response rates (Nix et al., 2019; Reynolds & Helfers, 2018), but this survey's response rate reached 45.8%; where 276 officers out of 602 officers responded to the survey. Once researchers accounted for missing data through listwise deletion, the useable response rate was 41% (247 completed surveys out of 602 officers that were surveyed).<sup>1</sup>

The survey asked respondents about their working environment in regard to the number of instances they have been assaulted, their level of agreement about the support their agency leadership provides to them, and their perception that they may become victimized due to their role as a police officer; along with demographic questions. The descriptive statistics for the sample are presented in Table 1. The sample contained officers that were primarily white (85.5%), male (84.4%),

non-Hispanic (94.7%), and with 16.6 years' experience in policing.

The composition of the officers that responded to the survey was consistent with the demographics as reported by the state police chief association for the area the agencies were sampled. However, the sample contained higher percentage of White, non-Hispanic, and male officers than the national statistics provided by the Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Survey (Reaves, 2015).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Range
<b>Dependent Variable</b>			
Likelihood of Victimization ( $\alpha=0.892$ )	0.472	0.50	0-1
<b>Independent Variables</b>			
Victimized ( $\alpha=0.813$ )	0.974	2.109	0-16
POS ( $\alpha=0.920$ )	26.372	9.216	8-46
<b>Control Variables</b>			
White	0.855	0.353	0-1
Male	0.844	0.364	0-1
Hispanic	0.053	0.225	0-1
Tenure	16.6	9.692	1-55

### Dependent Variable

The dependent variable for this study was the perception police officers have about the likelihood they may be victimized in the future (PLOV). This variable was operationalized from using nine survey items. A scale was created from the survey items that asked respondents Likert-scale questions ranging from not being concerned (1) to being very concerned (6). The survey items that created the scale inquired about respondents level of concern toward being physically threatened with a weapon, being physically threatened without a weapon, being cursed or verbally degraded, having increased resistance to arrests, having increased non-compliance to lawful commands, being falsely accused by a citizen, having personal threats directed toward your family, having verbal insults directed toward your family, and having family members physically assaulted. The items were summed to create a likelihood of victimization scale which yielded a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.89, indicating a strong correlation among the items and thus, there is internal consistency reliability (George & Mallery, 2003). However, DeVellis (2017) argues the reliability of a scale should not rely upon Cronbach's alpha and recommends using factor analysis to confirm the items in the scale have an underlying construct. Thus, factor analysis was completed that indicated there was a one factor solution with an eigenvalue (4.352) and loadings ranging from 0.580 to 0.780. Due to the non-continuous nature of the dependent variable, ordinary least squares regression (OLS) analysis was not used. The scale for the dependent variable was examined and a dichotomous variable was created. Those officers that were at or above the mean for having perceptions that they were likely to be victimized ( $=1$ ) were compared to those that had perceptions of the likelihood of being victimized below the mean ( $=0$ ).<sup>2</sup>

### Independent Variables

There were two independent variables used in this study: victimized and perception of organizational support (POS). The victimized variable was operationalized using the same items used

to measure PLOV. However, instead of using a Likert-type scale, the survey used a count format. Respondents self-reported how many times they have been victimized in the last six months. These items were summed to create the scale to calculate Cronbach’s alpha of 0.813, which indicated a strong correlation among the items and thus, there is internal consistency reliability (George & Mallery, 2003). Again, not relying on the reliability of only Cronbach’s alpha, the researchers also performed a factor analysis which confirmed a one factor solution with an eigenvalue (2.72) and loadings (0.574 to 0.873). Over two-thirds of the officers reported they had not been victimized. See Table 2 for the distribution of officers reporting being victimized.

Table 2. Distribution of victimization of officers

Incidence of Victimizations	Number of Officers Reporting Victimization	%
0	167	67.6
1	22	8.9
2	28	11.3
3	11	4.5
4	11	4.5
5	2	0.8
6	2	0.8
7	1	0.4
8	1	0.4
10	1	0.4
16	1	0.4

In addition, the POS variable consisted of a scale derived from eight items contained within the survey. The items contained statements in regard to their level of agreement using a six point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6). The statements were as follows: my organization cares about my opinions, my organization cares about my well-being, my organization considers my goals and values, help is available from my organization when I have a problem, my organization shows little concern for me (reverse coded), my organization is willing to help me if I need a special favor, if given the opportunity—my organization would take advantage of me (reverse coded), and my organization would forgive an honest mistake on my part. The items were summed to create the perceived organizational support (POS) scale. This scale yielded a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.920, which is excellent (George & Mallery, 2003). Factor analysis was also used which indicated a one factor solution; thus, the statements had an underlying construct. The eigenvalue for the scale was 4.800 with loadings between 0.647-0.888.

Additionally, to examine the effect that POS had on an officer’s victimization, a moderating variable was created. A moderating variable is an interaction variable between component predictors (Kaufman, 2019). In this case, the researchers examined if a moderating effect was present and to accomplish this, an interaction term between officers’ victimization and POS was created. It was hypothesized that officers’ perception of their likelihood of future victimization would be moderated by the interaction of the number of past victimizations with their POS.

### **Control Variables**

There were four control variables used in this study: gender, race, ethnicity, and length of time employed as a police officer in the respondents’ current agency. Gender, race, and ethnicity were operationalized as dichotomous variables. Gender was operationalized as male (=1) and female (=0), race as white (=1) and non-white (=0), and ethnicity as non-Hispanic (=1) and Hispanic

(=0). Length of employment as a police officer was a continuous variable and identified as tenure. All of the control variables were operationalized similar to previous police related survey research (Helfers et al., 2019).

### Analysis Plan

Logistic regression was used to examine the potential moderating effect of POS between actual (past) victimization and perceived likelihood of victimization (PLOV) in the future. Aforementioned, the measure for PLOV collapsed to a dichotomous variable with officers perceiving future victimization at or above the mean (=1) and those with lower than average perceptions of future victimization (=0). For a dichotomous variable, logistic regression is the appropriate statistical modeling approach to examine the relationship between the dependent variable and independent variables (Long & Freese, 2006). Furthermore, prior to completing the analysis, the researchers confirmed the logistic regression assumptions were satisfied including the absence of high intercorrelations. The variance inflation factor statistic (VIF) was also reviewed to ensure multicollinearity was not present. The VIF statistics (individual variables and model) were all under 2.0 which indicated multicollinearity was not a concern (Gujarati, 2003). However, when interacting two variables the likelihood of having multicollinearity can occur. Thus, when the moderating (interaction) variable was included in the model, multicollinearity was present with that term, but Kaufman (2019) argues one should not be concerned about multicollinearity with a moderating variable in the equation (p. 14).

### Results

Logistic regression analysis was used to explore the relationship between prior victimization and POS have with officers' perceptions that they may be victimized in the future, and to determine if there was a moderation effect with prior victimization and POS. The first model is the base model that included the two independent variables. Officers' previous victimization variable was statistically significant at the 0.01 level and indicated for each additional victimization, the odds the officers would perceive the likelihood of future victimization, the odds increased 43.1%. Officers' POS was also statistically significant at the 0.01 level and suggested that for each additional unit of POS is associated with a 4.0% reduction in the odds of perceiving the likelihood of a future victimization.

Our first goal of the study coinciding with our two research questions regarding the relationship between both prior victimization and POS with PLOV (future victimization). Results support that prior victimization and POS have a statistically significant relationship with PLOV but in different directions. Victimization increases the odds of PLOV while POS reduces the odds ratios of PLOV among participants.

The second goal of this study was to examine if there was a moderating effect on officers' future perceptions of the likelihood of victimization and the effect between officers' past victimization experiences and POS in their agency. However, the model with the moderating term was not statistically significant and thus, the moderating term was not included in the results (Table 3) and not included in the second model with the control variables. Therefore, the findings addressed the third research question suggesting, at least with this sample, that POS does not moderate the negative effects of prior victimization incidents have on PLOV.

Table 3. Logistic regression results, odds ratios.

Variables	Model 1	Standard Error	Model 2	Standard Error
Prior victimization	1.431**	0.190	1.355**	0.166
POS	0.960**	0.0161	0.961*	0.162
White <sup>a</sup>			1.205	0.622

Hispanic <sup>b</sup>			3.339*	1.884
Male			1.188	0.502
Tenure			0.995	0.016
Log likelihood	-174.836		-168.108	
McFadden R <sup>2</sup>	0.159		0.186	
N	247		247	

\* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01

<sup>a</sup> compared to non-white, <sup>b</sup> compared to non-Hispanic

The second model included the control variables in addition to the independent variables. Past victimization and POS remained statistically significant, past victimization at the 0.01 level and POS at the 0.05 level as it was just above the 0.01 level at 0.018. While controlling for gender, race, ethnicity, and tenure, each additional incident of a past victimization increased the odds of the perception of the likelihood of having a future victimization by 35.5%. Whereas, a one unit increase in an officers' POS decreases the odds of perceiving the likelihood of a future victimization by 3.9% holding all other variables constant.

The model fit was acceptable as the data correctly classified 77.8% of the cases. The pseudo R<sup>2</sup> captured 18.6% of the variance in the dependent variable (officers perception of their likelihood of future victimization).<sup>3</sup> After eliminating potential outliers in the number of past victimization variables, the coefficients, nor the level of statistical significance for the variables was altered; thus the potential outliers remained in the final analysis.

### Discussion

Since the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014, there has been increased public hostility and targeted attacks toward police officers and their families. These changes necessitate a broader discussion of victimization to include police officers. For example, on September 12, 2020 two Los Angeles Sheriff Deputies were ambushed sitting in their patrol car outside a bus station when an individual walked up and fired multiple shots into the patrol car wounding both officers (Smith, Ormseth, Winton, & Wigglesworth, 2020). Without question, these types of events coupled with increased scrutiny by the media and displays of public hostility toward law enforcement, influence officer's perception of the likelihood of being victimized beyond reasonable expectations of danger that coincide with the job.

Our survey found that 23.4% of the officers had actually been assaulted in the last six months, which is higher than the national statistics of nearly 11% of police officers assaulted while performing their jobs in 2018 (Federal Bureau of Investigations, 2019b, Table 80)<sup>4</sup>. Importantly, findings support that each incident of prior victimization increases the odds that officers will perceive a likelihood of being victimized in the future. Regardless of prior victimization, many police officers in our survey indicated it was likely or very likely they would be victimized in the future (for instance, 24% felt this way about being physically threatened with a weapon, 45% injured without a weapon, 77% being cursed or verbally degraded, 69% indicating increased resistance to arrests, and 58% being falsely accused by a citizen). While organizational support does reduce odds that officers will perceive future danger, this study found no statistically significant evidence that POS curbs the negative influence of prior victimization. Simply, departments may need to develop policies and best practices to address the potential psychological and emotional harms of victimized officers directly. Simply, just "having an officer's back" in terms of organizational support, may no longer be enough to ease officers' concerns once they have already been victimized.

Given our current understanding of coping mechanisms and reactions to traumatic stressors, it is imperative that administrators provide officers with socio-emotional support

and intervention services to help provide positive coping mechanisms so as to limit any negative reactions that may lead to harm toward others or the officers themselves. The closer police officers are to mortality salience, (i.e. being a victim of an assault, witnessing a fellow officer killed or assaulted, knowing a fellow officer who was assaulted or killed, or knowing about fellow officers who were assaulted or killed) the greater likelihood of high stress or PTSD (Colwell et al., 2011; Robinson, Sigman, & Wilson, 1997). Therefore, it is critical that organizations, particularly first line supervisors, continuously monitor officers' well-being even after relatively minor incidents of victimization (e.g., name calling, false allegations, being spit on) as these experiences can impact an officer's mental health and ultimately their work performance. A number of coping mechanisms have been identified to address work-related stressors (Newbold, Lohr, & Gist, 2008; Zhao, He, & Lovrich, 2002), in particular the importance of teaching coping skills to police officers in order to reduce psychological damage (Aron, 2000).

Police administrators possess an important role in ensuring their police officers receive support immediately following victimization by reducing the stigma associated with getting help and ensuring employee assistance programs offer a variety of evidence-based treatment. Since higher levels of stress, anxiety, fear, and anger are experienced by victims, it is important that police officers receive treatment, such as cognitive therapies or debriefings, needed to help reduce negative responses or other psychological damage. Although debriefing following traumatic events has been self-reported as helpful by police officers (Bohl, 1991), a meta-analysis of therapies found that debriefing did not decrease psychological stress (Rose, Bisson, & Wessely, 2001). Cognitive therapies, including a focus on self-regulation have been found to be more helpful than debriefing (Foa et al., 2005). Perhaps the most important resource for police officers who have been victimized or fear being victimized is the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The EAP allows police officers to work with professional counselors to build self-regulation skills to lessen negative effects of victimization or the fear of victimization (Newbold et al., 2008).

### **Strengths and Limitations**

Inherent in all social research; there are several limitations in this study that should be noted. First, this study used a cross-sectional design that precludes any reference toward causality. Second, the data were collected from a non-probability sample via an online survey. However, the sample demographics were consistent with the police agencies and demographics reported by the state police chief association. Third, this paper did not measure the direct or indirect influence that police officer perceptions of anti-police sentiment (i.e., community hostility) may have on perceived likelihood of victimization. For this reason, the authors assume that increases in anti-police sentiment influences officers' work-related beliefs and attitudes; in particular their perception of perceived likelihood of victimization. This assumption is based on prior research (see Nix & Pickett, 2017) and researchers' professional relationships with police officers. Fourth, this study assesses the influence of direct victimization and did not include potential indirect influences that may also impact PLOV. Finally, the authors recognize that results have a potential to be biased due to using a convenience sample. Simply, it is possible that only officers concerned about officer safety or increases in anti-police sentiment decided to participate. However, our response rate is above the average for online and web surveys according to Tourangeau et al. (2013) and police research (Nix et al., 2019).

Despite the limitations, this study does enhance our knowledge of how prior victimization and organizational factors shape officers' work-related perceptions. Secondly, this study provides

additional information on officer victimization post-Ferguson based on officer self-reported data. Third, this research furthers administrators' and scholars' knowledge of how organizational factors (i.e., POS) can help shape officers' attitudes regarding victimization.

### **Conclusion**

This study used cross-sectional data from an online survey collected from a convenience sample of police officers ( $n=247$ ) working in five different agencies in a southern state. Logistical regression was applied to examine the potential moderating effect of perceived organizational support on the relationship between prior victimization and perceived likelihood of being victimized (PLOV). Findings support that prior victimization and POS were linked to PLOV with prior victimization increasing PLOV and POS decreasing PLOV among officers. While it was hypothesized that POS would moderate the influence between prior victimization and PLOV through our third research question, this study found no statistically significant evidence it existed. In other words, POS does reduce the odds officers will perceive the likelihood of (future) victimization, but POS did not minimize or remove the influence that prior events of victimization have on PLOV.

Consistent with general victimization research (Ferraro & Grange, 1987; Russo & Roccatto, 2010; Skogan, 1993), our findings support that victimization is linked to perceived likelihood of victimization in the future. If prior victimization is linked to perceived danger and we know from police literature (Oliver, 2017; Nix et al., 2018; Shjarback et al., 2017; Reynolds et al., 2018) that officers will adapt their work-related attitudes and behaviors based on these perceptions, then it is imperative that police administrators find ways to increase officer safety and also provide support for officers that experience victimization. Given the rise in ambush-style attacks and use of firearms towards law enforcement officers, police administrators need to not only focus policies regarding the emotional and psychological health of officers in terms of victimization, but also for officer safety in general. As the likelihood for officers to become victimized increases with the rise of police hostility within the American society, meeting the treatment needs of police officers should be at the forefront of police administrators' priorities.

While police administrators have limited influence shaping the daily occupational hazards and stressors officers confront, administrators do have the ability and the responsibility to provide a safe and supportive organizational work environment that fulfills officers' socioemotional needs (Armeli et al., 1998; Helfers et al., 2019) and help address operational stressors (Chapin, Brannen, Singer, & Walker, 2008). The need for officers to believe that their organization "has their back" may be even more important when police-citizen relationships are strained (Oliver, 2017). These steps could include implementing procedurally just policies throughout all levels of the organization (Donner, Maskaly, Fridell, & Jennings, 2015; Reynolds et al., 2018) or providing cognitive therapy or other support services (Foa et al., 2005). While administrators cannot control external stressors, they can minimize internal stressors.

Additionally, future research needs to examine how other factors influence officers' perceptions of danger (e.g., anti-police sentiment) or how perceived danger may shape officers' work-related behaviors (e.g., de-policing) and attitudes (e.g. police-citizen interactions) both in the U.S. and abroad as findings from this study supported that prior victimization does influence PLOV (perceptions of future victimization). While not a focus of this study, further research should continue to examine the best types of therapy to help officers adjust emotionally and overcome victimization.

## **End Notes**

<sup>1</sup> The researchers also accounted for missing data using mean imputation and multiple imputation, but the results were similar.

<sup>2</sup> An anonymous reviewer made the suggestion logistic regression would be an appropriate method to examine the data.

<sup>3</sup> The model fit statistics for the two models were similar. The second model with the control, even though none of the variables were statistically significant remained in the model as the controls are consistent with other police related research. It was apparent the independent variables are the variables that explain the variation in the dependent variable.

<sup>4</sup> The percentage of officers assaulted may be higher than reported by the FBI due to the wide variety of actions used to capture the concept of police officer victimization in this study.

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