BEYOND THE BADGE

Police Officers’ Lifestyles and Health

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Akademisk avhandling

som med vederbörligt tillstånd av Rektor vid Umeå universitet för avläggande av medicine doktorsexamen i arbetsterapi framläggs till offentligt förvar i Aula Biologica, Biologihuset, torsdagen den 18 januari 2024, kl. 09:00.

Avhandlingen kommer att försvaras på svenska.

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Abstract

Introduction. Being a frontline police officer is regarded to be one of the most high-strain professions in the world, encompassing physical, emotional and cognitive stressors. These stressors may cause ill health, physically, mentally and socially, impacting both professional and private life roles and everyday activities. Despite this, there has been limited consideration of the broader complexities of police officers’ lifestyles. Thus, the primary aim of this thesis was to identify health promoters and health challenges within the lifestyles of frontline police officers using a transactional perspective. The secondary aim was to translate these findings into the initial developmental stages of an instrument targeting critical areas of police officers’ lifestyles to foster health sustainability.

Method. The thesis includes four studies. In Study I, a method for scoping reviews was used when gathering data from previously conducted studies within Europe. Studies II and III were qualitative studies using in-depth interviews. In Study II a reflexive thematic analysis was used, whereas in Study III qualitative content analysis was utilized. Study IV builds on data from the other studies. During the early development process of the instrument focus groups, cognitive interviewing methods and a content validity approach were undertaken.

Findings. Altogether, the findings offer insights into how police officers’ life contexts, roles and everyday activities transact to become their unique lifestyles. In Study I the life contexts affecting police officers’ lives and health were mapped. It was concluded that research on police officers’ private lives is limited in Europe, despite contextual and environmental influences on their lives and health. In Studies II and III it was found that balancing work with private-life activities and roles included health challenges and resources. The findings relate to balancing risk and violence with vigilance in private life, societal attitudes with the police identity, work with healthy routines and habits, and unpredictability with stability. Study IV took initial steps towards crafting a self-reflection instrument targeting the essential conditions for living a sustainable and healthy lifestyle as a police officer.

Conclusion. This thesis illuminates the complex interplay of factors that define the unique lifestyles of police officers, influenced by their life contexts, roles, and everyday activities. It highlights the importance of both organizational strategies and police officers utilizing health-promoting strategies in maintaining a sustainable lifestyle essential for fostering health sustainability. In the context of societal challenges and the need for a strong police force, maintaining police officers’ health sustainability is crucial for the benefit of both the Police Authority and society.

Keywords
Frontline police officers, Instrument development, Life balance, Life contexts, Mental health, Occupational balance, Occupational patterns, Physical health, Role balance, Social health

Language English
PDF: 978-91-8070-224-9
ISSN 0346-6612
Number of pages 94 + 4 papers