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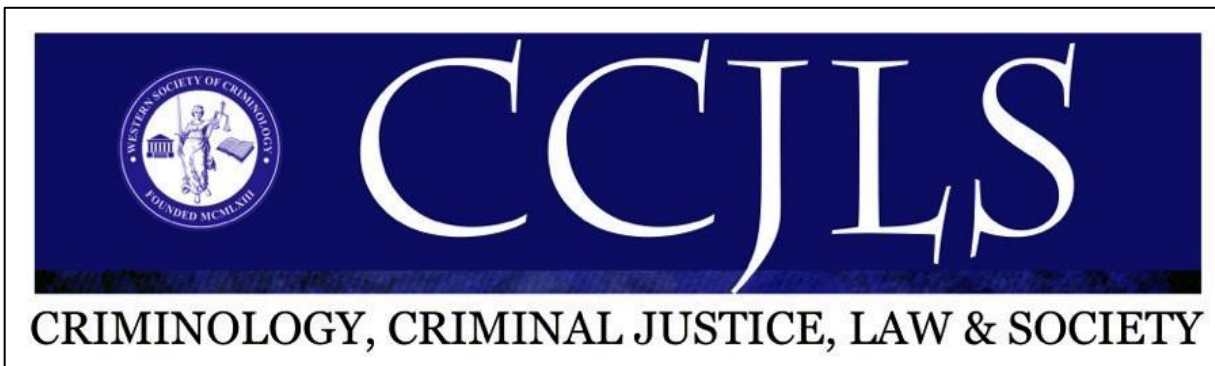
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## Job Characteristics and Perceived Organizational Support Among Police Officers

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### ABSTRACT AND ARTICLE INFORMATION

Research supports that treatment of employees, in terms of organizational policies, practices, and resources, are associated with employees' perception of organizational support. Furthermore, research supports that there is often disparate treatment between employees' work related factors. For this reason, it is reasonable to speculate that variances in police officers' perception that their organization cares about them and values their work contributions may exist. The purpose of this exploratory research was to describe how police officers' job characteristics (duty assignment, rank, tenure, and department size) might be associated with perceptions of organizational support. Utilizing OLS regression, the findings revealed that perceived organizational support varied across different job characteristics. This study extends our understanding of how the aforementioned job characteristics are associated with police officer attitudes.

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Police officers are bestowed numerous powers not granted to other public servants, such as the powers to use force and to make custodial arrests. Thus, the manner in which officers perform their duties is not

only vital to enhancing police effectiveness and efficiency but also to enhancing public support and trust. However, how officers are treated inside the department often is reflective of how officers will

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perform their duties (President's Task Force on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing, 2015). Copious research supports a link between how employees perceive support and their work related outcomes through a social exchange process (Colquitt et al., 2013; Kurtessis et al., 2015). While some research focuses on perceived supervisor support (e.g., leader member exchange, LMX), this research focuses on perceptions of organizational support (Colquitt et al., 2013). One reason is that employees often distinguish between attitudes toward supervisors and the organization, which may result in different perceptions of support (Colquitt et al., 2013). For instance, while some officers may perceive limited support by their line-level supervisors, these views do not appear to exist for the organization leadership at the same levels (see Reynolds & Hicks, 2015). Second, research supports that antecedents for and outcomes of social exchange qualities differ (Colquitt et al., 2013).

Perceived organizational support (hereafter referred to as POS) can be described as the degree to which the organization is perceived to value employee contributions and care about their well-being (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, & Sowa, 1986, p. 501). Although limited, studies support that POS is linked to work related attitudes and behaviors among officers (Armeli, Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Lynch, 1998; Boateng, 2014; Hickman, 2008; Hoath, Schneider, & Starr, 1998). Furthermore, the lack of perceived support by the organizational leadership could contribute toward distrust and resentment within the organization and among political leaders. This may have been the reason for the conflict and friction between police officers of NYPD and Mayor Bill de Blasio in 2015 in the aftermath of the grand jury inquiry into the arrest and death of Eric Garner (Linshi, 2014).

Germane to this study, the literature suggests that police officer attitudes may be associated with rank, career phases (tenure), assignment (Barker, 1999; Niederhoffer, 1967; Reuss-Ianni, 1993, Van Maanen, 1975), and organizational size (Dantzker, 1997). Additionally, these job characteristics are essential to police organizations and contribute to the complexity of police organizations (Barker, 1999; Crank, 2004; Reuss-Ianni, 1993; Sklansky, 2007). Yet, how these concepts are linked with POS has not been thoroughly investigated. The purpose of this study is to explore the association that the aforementioned concepts have with POS among police officers. This was accomplished by conducting a cross-sectional survey of a police officer association in a southern state (USA) using a non-probability sample of police officers ( $n = 1861$ ) about perceptions of their work environment and organizational experiences. The research question for this research is as follows: *Do*

*perceptions of POS significantly differ based on varying job characteristics?*

## Review of Literature

### Organizational Support Theory and Perceived Organizational Support

Organizational support theory (Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli, & Lynch, 1997; Eisenberger et al., 1986; Shore & Shore, 1995) explains relationships between employers and employees, which are based on social exchange theory and used as an inference to the organization's commitment to the employee and, ultimately, to employee commitment toward the organization (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Certain key processes underlie organizational support theory (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). The first is that organizational support theory is grounded in the concept of voluntary reciprocation based on social exchange theory (see Blau, 1964; Homans, 1958) and derives its name from the exchange relationships between organizations and employees (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). When an employee feels that the organization is committed to his or her success, the employee perceives an obligation to the organization and reciprocates in a manner to maintain a beneficial relationship (Eisenberger et al., 1986). As posited by Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005), "social exchange relationships evolve when employers 'take care of employees' which thereby engenders beneficial consequences" (p. 882). Second, fulfillment of individuals' socioemotional needs are met when the organization is caring and respectful toward employees (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). The third process involves performance and reward expectations. Based on a social exchange process, employees believe they will be recognized for their hard work. Thus, higher value is placed on discretionary rewards that the other person is not obligated to provide (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

The central construct of organizational support theory is POS which provides a measure of social exchange quality between the parties (Colquitt et al., 2013). POS refers to employees' global beliefs concerning the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. Most employees desire support and recognition from their organization. Prior research supports that POS is linked to many positive work related behaviors: taking beneficial risks on behalf of the organization (Neves & Eisenberger, 2012), increased self-determined motivation and work engagement (Gillet, Huart, Colombat, & Fouquereau, 2013), affective organizational commitment and proactive behavior (Wikhamn & Hall, 2012), and enhanced satisfaction

and performance (Cullen, Edwards, Caser, & Gue, 2014). In contrast, employees with low levels of perceived organizational support show increased counterproductive work behavior and reduced task performance (Shoss, Eisenberger, Restubog, & Zagenczyk, 2013). From an organizational support framework, when police officers perceive organizations as “having their backs,” officers believe their work and sacrifices for the organization are appreciated. Thus, officers will reciprocate with support and loyalty through acts of positive work performance (Boateng, 2014; Eisenberger et al., 1986), whereas, the lack of support from organizational leadership creates officers’ perceptions that the administration does not respect them and that they are expendable (Haas, Van Craen, Skogan, & Flietas, 2015; Reynolds & Hicks, 2015). For these reasons, gaining a greater understanding of factors that are associated with POS among police officers is important.

### Job Characteristics and POS

**Rank and duty positions.** An organizational support theory perspective posits that differences in perceived support among officers may be associated with their organizational rank or position due to variances in work related experiences. The extant police literature on police sub-culture suggests that officers’ organizational stressors and conflicts are based upon their status in the department and originates from job characteristics (Brown, 1998; Paoline & Terrill, 2013; Reiner, 2010). In regard to rank, the quasi-militaristic and hierarchical structure of police organizations inevitably creates tension between administration (management cops) and line-officers (street cops; Reuss-Ianni, 1993). Thus, one would expect variances in POS based on officers’ rank.

Research suggests that duty assignment may also be associated with discussions involving officers’ attitudes and behaviors (Crank, 2004). For example, an officers’ daily tasks and associated risks, dangers, and stressors vary between a patrol officer responding to calls versus an officer assigned to administrative duties (e.g., recruiting or records).

Within police organizations, the largest concentration of officers is assigned to patrol, and they perform the majority of the crime fighting and order maintenance activities (Reaves, 2015). The dynamic nature of patrol officers’ duties results in them being the most visible aspect of the organization but also contributes toward leadership scrutinizing the decisions of patrol officers more than other assignments. Thus, one would expect that patrol officers would perceive less support. Reynolds and Hicks (2015) reported that many officers expressed

trying to be reassigned from patrol as soon as possible because the nature of the assignment increases citizen complaints and exposes officers to more use of force situations, which potentially result in receiving negative sanctions. Additionally, researchers examining police “work groups” and subculture posit that police officers’ perceptions and attitudes are not consistent across police organizations, which may suggest that POS is disparate across specific job assignments (e.g., patrol, investigative, etc.; Ingram, Paoline, & Terrill, 2013; Paoline & Terrill, 2013).

**Tenure.** Research has suggested that officers’ perceptions and attitudes of their organizations, their role as police officers, and their attitudes toward the community are not consistent throughout their career (Barker, 1999; Niedorhoffer, 1967; Paoline, 2004; Paoline & Terrill, 2013). For example, Barker’s (1999) qualitative study on Los Angeles Police Department officers’ experiences identified five distinct phases through which officers transition during their career. The first phase is termed *hitting the streets*. This phase refers to the period from training until approximately the second year when officers undergo an organizational socialization process when they learn the subtleties of the job. At the conclusion of this phase, officers have generally completed their probationary status and have become comfortable in their role as police officers. The next phase was described by Barker as *hitting their stride* (3-9yr). During this phase, officers may become cynical and disillusioned with the job and develop suspicion of upper administration and citizens. The *hitting the wall* (10-14yr) phase refers to the time when officers may experience a slump in their career. According to Barker, during this phase officers may become disenchanted and stop caring about their departments and their role as police officers. They may begin to experience burn-out and contemplate other career opportunities. Conversely, other officers may seek promotion or roles in the organization to improve their work conditions (e.g., better days off or shifts). The fourth phase, *regrouping* (15-19yr), describes the period in which officers recognize that retirement is a reality. Officers have become accustomed to the strains and frustrations of the job and do not consider alternative employment. They recognize the value of retirement and the pension. They no longer worry about the disillusionment of policing. They have learned to navigate organizational and work obstacles and identify avenues to improve their work environment. During this phase, work related attitudes improve slightly. The final phase is described as *deciding to retire* (20yrs or more). This phase includes the time when an officer becomes eligible for

retirement through the time when the decision is made to retire.

As a whole, Barker's (1999) research suggests that officers begin with initial perceptions of treatment based on their training and probationary experiences, but their perceptions of support would tend to decrease due to negative organizational and occupational experiences until the mid-point of their career. As officers traverse through this transitional regrouping phase, officers' perceptions of support begin to improve as officers accept or buy-into the organizational and occupational work environment. As an officer enters the retirement phase, perceptions of support may remain stable or begin to decrease. Based on Barker's (1999) qualitative study, it is possible that differences in POS would exist based on the experiences linked during officers' career phases or length of time in the organization.

The research involving the evolution of an officer's organizational attitude is inconclusive. For instance, Niedorhoffer's (1967) research does not follow the same conclusions as Barker. Niedorhoffer's research on police cynicism supported that police recruits had the lowest amount of cynicism, which increased progressively throughout their careers until the tenth year when it began to reduce slightly. However, it was never as low as those of police recruits. Boateng's (2014) research did not categorize officer's tenure as outlined by Barker's five phases, but he found support that there were statistically significant differences in POS based upon tenure. He found that less tenured officers had higher POS than more tenured officers. However, other research used tenure as a continuous variable and found a negative relationship between years of service and cynicism (Sobol, 2010).

**Organizational Size.** As last reported in 2013, there were over 12,000 localized police departments in the United States and these organizations can vary from fewer than 10 officers to over 10,000 (Reaves, 2015, p. 2). Although the influence on organizational size on officers' work related behaviors is scarce, there is some indication that the size of the department would influence perceptions of POS. As introduced earlier, the organizational hierarchy and quasi-military design of police departments involves a rigid chain of command with supervisors and subordinates assigned to perform specific essential tasks. As the organization increases in size, employees become more specialized in tasks, but communication and relationships diminish between administrators and subordinates. One would expect that as organizational size increases, officers' relationships with the organization would decrease, and officers would perceive less support. For example, a study by Dantzker (1997)

found differences in job satisfaction among officers in varying sized agencies. Officers in agencies with 100 or fewer sworn personnel reported the most job satisfaction whereas officers in larger departments reported the least (101 to 500 sworn employees).

## Method

According to organizational support theory and POS, employees form a generalized belief regarding how committed their organization is to them based on how they are treated (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Based on police literature, one may assume that treatment would be shaped by varying aspects of a police officer's job characteristics and central to value judgements. Thus, POS should be associated with police officers' characteristics. Consistent with previous research on police and organizational support theory, the following broad hypothesis has been generated: *There are statistically significant differences in POS among officers depending on officers' rank, duty position, career phases, and the size of their department.*

The data for this study were collected from administering an online survey to police officers who were dues paying members of a police association in a southern state. Prior to distributing the survey, the research was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the university the primary author was affiliated at the time. This cross-sectional survey contained items that inquired about officers' POS along with personal and agency specific statements. The association represented members who were a cross-section of officers from the state that included campus, rural, suburban, and urban police departments that ranged in size from three to over 5,000 officers. Officers reported that they primarily belonged to the association for the legal protection that accompanied membership. The association claimed to have approximately 21,000 members but only had 15,861 working emails at the time of distribution. In addition to local police officers, the membership included state police, dispatchers, and other law enforcement related personnel (e.g., retired officers). Thus, researchers requested that the survey only be distributed to currently sworn local police officers (approximately 6,000).<sup>1</sup>

Police officers are often skeptical of research inquires and are reluctant to participate. For example, Gordon (2010) found that officers do not trust agency leadership or researchers even when the officers are assured that their responses will be aggregated and no identifying information would be provided to others. He found that during qualitative interviews, officers routinely asked if he was a spy for the administration (p. 268). Therefore, in anticipation of officers'

reluctance to participate in agency sponsored research, the researchers accessed the state-wide police association to survey officers. It was also believed that officers would provide more trustworthy information. The survey was then emailed to the association membership with an introductory letter from the association president encouraging participation, along with a letter from the researchers explaining the purpose of the study and ensuring that participation among officers was voluntary and that their personal and agency identity would be anonymous. Two weeks after the initial email, a follow-up email was sent to the membership encouraging participation. The leadership refused to send out a third email request to encourage participation, emphasizing their views on respecting officers' rights and privacy expectations. A total of 1,681 officers completed the survey. Although the response rate (~28%) was low, the response was consistent with the average response rate (30%) for online surveys (see Tourangeau, Conrad, & Christian, 2014). Given the low response rate, there is a possibility of selection bias. For example, only officers who were interested in the study or had strong feelings about the topic may have volunteered to participate.

Consequently, the final results of the study may be skewed.

Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics for the sample that indicated the distribution of the respondents according to duty assignment, supervisory status, career phase (tenure), department size, and demographic variables. Approximately half of the sample was assigned to patrol (44.2%), and two-thirds were first-line employees who did not have supervisory responsibilities (64.1%). A third of the officers had at least 20 years' experience, and a quarter had three to nine years' experience. Small, large, and extra-large departments each represented approximately 20% of the sample, and medium departments represented a third of the sample (34.9%). The respondents were primarily male (89.1%), White (91%), and non-Hispanic (84.9%). Overall, the sample demographics were consistent with police officers in the state. According to the state's law enforcement licensing commission, the majority of officers are male (89%), White (92%), and non-Hispanic (75%), which provided confidence that the sample may be reflective of the officers in the state.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics**

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Range
<b>Perceived Organizational Support</b> ( $\alpha=0.916$ )	24.391	4.657	10-40
<b>Duty Assignment</b>			
Patrol	0.442	0.497	
Detective	0.110	0.313	
Special Assignment	0.086	0.280	
<b>Supervisory Status</b>			
Non-Supervisor	0.641	0.480	
Mid-Level	0.280	0.449	
Command-Level	0.079	0.271	
<b>Tenure</b>			
Hitting the Street	0.038	0.191	
Hitting their Stride	0.247	0.432	
Hitting the Wall	0.197	0.398	
Regrouping	0.179	0.384	
Deciding to Retire	0.339	0.473	
<b>Department Size</b>			
Small	0.199	0.400	
Medium	0.349	0.477	
Large	0.224	0.417	

Extra Large	0.228	0.420	
<b>Control Variables</b>			
Male	0.891	0.312	
White	0.910	0.286	
Hispanic	0.151	0.358	

**Dependent Variable**

The dependent variable for this study was officers’ POS. Research suggests that POS among officers has an effect on their perceptions of officer effectiveness (Boateng, 2014). The items used in the current study to develop a POS measure are derived from the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (SPOS) developed by Eisenberger and colleagues (1986).<sup>2</sup> The 36-item scale and subsequent abbreviated versions have shown to have high internal reliability and to be uni-dimensional (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Items taken from the SPOS for use in this study have been used previously and are consistent with POS research on policing (Armeli et al., 1998; Boateng, 2014). This study consisted of the following items:

1. The organization values my contribution to its well-being.
2. The organization strongly considers my goals.
3. The organization really cares about my well-being.
4. The organization would grant a reasonable request for a change in my working conditions.
5. The organization is willing to help me when I need a special favor.
6. If given the opportunity, the organization would take advantage of me (reverse coded).
7. The organization shows little concern for me (reverse coded).

The instrument contained a six-point Likert scale for each item, ranging from strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), somewhat disagree (3), somewhat agree (4), agree (5), to strongly agree (6). These items were summed to create the POS scale, and Cronbach’s alpha was 0.92. The distribution regarding the responses is located in Table 2. The authors recognize the arguments regarding reliance on the alpha for the internal reliability of the scale; thus, factor analysis was also performed to determine if the items identified an underlying construct. The results of the factor analysis with varimax rotation indicated that this was a one factor solution with an eigenvalue above 1.0. Additionally, the factor loadings ranged from 0.757 to 0.871. DeVellis (2017) argues that even with the weaknesses associated with Cronbach’s alpha as a measure of reliability, it is a conservative measure and should not be discounted (p. 60), and factor analysis is a method to enhance confidence in the reliability coefficient. The alpha coefficient (0.92) in the current study was consistent with previous research that has used similar POS scales (see Boateng, 2014; Byrne & Hochwarter, 2008; Hutchison, 1997).

**Table 2: Percentage Responses for Dependent Variable Scaled Items**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
<b>Perceived Organizational Support</b>						
1. Organization values my contribution to its well-being	9.74	15.14	17.15	27.62	23.50	6.85
2. Organization strongly considers my goals and values	14.42	21.38	19.88	23.44	16.37	4.51
3. Organization really cares about my well-being	13.08	19.15	16.48	25.28	19.38	6.63
4. Organization would grant a reasonable request for a change in my working conditions	9.81	18.77	18.66	26.69	21.23	4.85

5. Organization is willing to help me when I need a special favor	9.35	14.70	15.65	30.01	22.33	7.96
6. If given the opportunity, the organization would take advantage of me <sup>R</sup>	8.24	17.98	15.81	20.99	20.43	16.54
7. Organization shows little concern for me <sup>R</sup>	11.69	24.16	19.21	19.10	15.98	9.86

<sup>R</sup> = Reverse Coded

### Independent Variables

The four independent variables in this study were duty assignment, supervisory status, tenure (career phase), and department size. Duty assignment was operationalized as the officers' primary assignment within an organization (patrol, detective, and special assignment). Each assignment was operationalized as a dichotomous variable, and in the analysis, patrol was the reference category. Supervisory status was operationalized as whether the respondent was not a supervisor, a supervisory officer (first and second line), or a command level supervisor. The non-supervisor category was the reference category in the analysis. Tenure was operationalized into five career phases, as consistent with previous research (Barker, 1999): hitting the streets (1 to 2 years), hitting their stride (3 to 9 years), hitting the wall (10 to 14 years), regrouping (15 to 19 years), and deciding to retire (20 years or more). The reference category was hitting the streets. Lastly, department size was operationalized as small (less than 25 officers), medium (25-99 officers), large (100-249 officers), and extra-large (250 plus officers). These departments were operationalized according to data provided in the Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Survey (LEMAS; Reaves, 2015).

### Control Variables

The control variables included in this study were gender, race, and ethnicity. Gender was operationalized as male (=1) and female (=0). Race was operationalized as White (=1) and non-White (=0). Ethnicity was operationalized as Hispanic (=1) and non-Hispanic (=0). These variables were included in the models and are consistent with previous research (Harris & Worden, 2014; Shane, 2013; Tyler, Callahan, & Frost, 2007).

### Analysis Plan

To answer the research question whether POS differed based upon job characteristics, Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression was used, while controlling for gender, race, and ethnicity. The assumptions associated with OLS (linearity, independence of errors, homoscedasticity, unusual points and normality of residuals) were met. Furthermore, since

multicollinearity is a concern with regression models, the variance inflation factor (VIF) statistics were examined and no variable, nor the model, exceeded 4.0; thus, multicollinearity was not a concern (Gujarati, 2003). Furthermore, to examine whether a nesting effect was present, the authors examined the models using clustered standard errors, and there was no difference in the results. The authors also considered a multi-level model, but the preliminary results for the ICC value were near zero, which indicated nesting of the data was not a concern (Garson, 2013).

### Results

OLS regression analysis was used to explore the association of job related characteristics and how POS differs among police officers. The overall model was statistically significant,  $F(14, 1664) = 10.78, p < 0.001$ , and explained 9.3% of the variance in POS. Table 3 reports the OLS regression results and revealed that duty assignment, supervisory status, tenure phase, department size, and gender have a statistically significant association with POS.

The results revealed that POS varied among officers based on duty assignment. However, not all duty assignments are equal. The patrol officer category was the reference category, and officers assigned to special assignments had a positive and statistically significant association with POS, indicating that officers in a special assignment role, compared to patrol officers, resulted in a 0.089 standard deviation increase in POS, holding all other variables constant. Being assigned to detectives also had a statistically significant association on POS compared to patrol officers. Being a supervisor also had a positive and statistically significant association with POS. Supervisory officers, compared to non-supervisors, resulted in a 0.123 standard deviation increase in POS, and command supervisors had a 0.175 standard deviation increase in POS, holding all other variables constant. All tenure phases, except the retirement phase, had a negative and significant relationship with POS when compared to officers with one to two years' experience. Officers in the hitting the wall phase (10-14 years' experience) had the greatest impact on POS. Officers in this tenure phase had a



0.124 standard deviation decrease in POS compared to officers in the hitting the streets phase (1-2 years' experience). There was also a difference in POS based on department size. When compared to departments with fewer than 25 officers, all departments that have

more officers have a negative and significant relationship with POS. Among the control variables, only gender had an effect. Male officers experienced a 0.058 standard deviation increase in POS compared to female officers, holding all other variables constant.

**Table 3: Regression Analysis of Police Officers' Perceptions of Perceived Organizational Support**

Independent Variables	Model 1 (n=1681)			Model 2 (n=1679)		
	B	Standard Error (Robust)	β	B	Standard Error (Robust)	β
Duty Assignment	0.774	0.359	0.052*	0.797	0.360	0.052*
Detective	1.408	0.412	0.083***	1.498	0.419	0.089***
Special Assignment						
Supervisor <sup>b</sup>	1.844	0.282	0.123***	1.838	0.282	0.123***
Supervisory	2.138	0.489	0.176***	2.141	0.492	0.175***
Command-level						
Tenure Phases <sup>c</sup>	-1.208	0.558	-0.102*	-1.298	0.554	-0.110**
Hitting the Stride	-1.333	0.544	-0.122**	-1.349	0.539	-0.124**
Hitting the Wall	-1.028	0.582	-0.083	-1.138	0.581	-0.092*
Regroup	-0.619	0.552	-0.062	-0.759	0.551	-0.076
Deciding to Retire						
Department Size <sup>d</sup>	-1.357	0.322	-0.138***	-1.329	0.322	-0.135***
Medium	-1.843	0.345	-0.163***	-1.807	0.346	-0.160***
Large	-2.503	0.355	-0.223***	-2.480	0.354	-0.221***
Extra Large						
Control Variables				0.878	0.352	0.058***
Male <sup>e</sup>				-0.252	0.388	-0.015
Hispanic <sup>f</sup>				-0.332	0.317	-0.025
R <sup>2</sup>	0.085			0.093		

<sup>a</sup> reference category is patrol  
<sup>b</sup> reference category is non-supervisor  
<sup>c</sup> reference category is hitting the street  
<sup>d</sup> reference category is small size department  
<sup>e</sup> reference category is non-White  
<sup>f</sup> reference category is non-Hispanic  
 \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001

**Discussion**

A dearth of research on POS exists in the policing literature. Thus, knowing how perceptions of support differ among officers, learning what shapes these perceptions and, ultimately, how these perceptions influence work related behaviors and attitudes is paramount for police administrators. While all three areas provide avenues for further research and are

necessary to reduce the literature gap, this research focused solely on examining the differences in the perceptions of support among officers. Specifically, this study collected data from police officers affiliated with a police association in a southern state in the United States and examined the association that job characteristics (duty assignment, supervisory status, career phase [tenure], and department size) have with police officers' POS. Therefore, this study contributes to the POS literature by exploring if differences in

POS exist among police officers based on job characteristics examined in this study. Unfortunately, this research is not able to explain why these differences exist or how POS is linked to officer work related behaviors. Whether officers' POS is consistent between patrol and detectives or special assignments is unknown in the literature. Previous studies regarding POS among police officers have focused on patrol officers in the United States (Arneli et al., 1998) and international police forces (Boateng, 2014; Caesens, Marique, Henin, & Stinglhamber, 2015; Gillett et al., 2013). Thus, this study helps address this gap. The findings suggest that patrol officers have the lowest POS when compared to any other assignment, followed by detectives. Importantly, it is within these two assignments that the bulk of police officers are assigned in any department (Reaves, 2015). Police administrators should be aware of how officers in these assignments perceive administration because this could improve morale and officer performance. Furthermore, POS is related to employee commitment to their organization and how they behave (Caesens et al., 2015; Loi, Hang-yue, & Foley, 2006). Since officers assigned to special assignments have higher POS, administrators should be cognizant of this and adopt methods to meet the needs for all officers to feel supported, regardless of their duty assignment.

Administrators should be sensitive toward guarding against the perception that officers in special assignment positions receive preferential treatment. Although, not tested in this study, there are many plausible reasons why differences in POS may exist regarding duty assignments. For instance, special assignment positions may have better performance records or special/technical skills that enabled them to be assigned to special work related duties. Or, have special assignment officers attained these positions for other reasons unknown that increases their POS? Furthermore, special assignment officers may have higher POS due to more flexibility within their assignment, the organization has more invested in these officers, or other factors.<sup>3</sup>

Not surprisingly, supervisors of any rank have higher POS than non-supervisors, and the difference is larger for command level supervisors than for supervisory officers, which coincides with earlier work. Eisenberger and colleagues (1986) suggest that rank often equates to higher POS. Command level supervisors are the administrators who develop policy for the agency, but the supervisors are integral to how POS is formed by officers. Supervisory officers are the first and second line supervisors who are expected to support the policy decisions of agency administrators, but they also must make the important day-to-day personnel decisions. These supervisory officers are the individuals who have the ability to provide

concessions to individuals to enhance their work environment and provide an avenue for officers to have a voice in the organization. These supervisors are also closer to the decision making authority of command officers and naturally have access to the reasons policy decisions are made. Thus, it was expected that supervisory positions would have higher POS compared to non-supervisors.

This study also contributes to the literature regarding the association between tenure and POS. Boateng (2014) reported that the more experience an officer has, the lower his or her POS will be. He hypothesized that the reverse would occur and discussed the need for future research to examine tenure more closely. The current study examined tenure phases as proposed by Barker (1999). All the tenure phases were referenced to the earliest tenure phase (i.e., hitting the streets). The findings suggest that all phases have lower POS than the least tenured officers. However, even though the association for officers in the retirement phase is negative, there is not a statistically significant difference between officers in the retirement and hitting the streets phases. This may suggest that once officers are eligible to retire, they may no longer value organizational support. Anecdotally, the authors, as former police practitioners, often heard from officers in the retirement phase that they will retire when the numbers are right, indicating that the pension may be more important than how they are treated in the organization. In a sense, these officers have survived and can visualize the proverbial "light at the end of the tunnel." This study builds upon Boateng's research because he used an arbitrary tenure variable and reported officers with one to four years' experience have higher POS than the more tenured officers. He found that the greatest POS was with new officers, and then it decreased with each tenure phase. As he suggested, research should delve further into this finding. The current study supports Boateng's research that the newest officers have the highest POS, but it deviates because there is not a continuous reduction. This study found that officers in the hitting the wall phase have the lowest levels of POS compared to officers in the hitting the streets phase, and there was not a statistically significant difference with officers in the retirement phase. This research is consistent with Barker's (1999) view that officers often become disillusioned after a couple years of work until they confirm that policing is a career. Once an officer has approximately 15 years' experience, the officer accepts that certain "things" cannot change, which may provide a reason for the reduction in the difference in POS. Further studies are needed to find why the differences may occur.

A significant contribution of this study is the inclusion of department size when examining differences in POS among officers. To the authors' knowledge, this is one of the first studies that examined the impact that department size had on POS. Due to the dearth of research examining the effect that department size had on POS, the researchers used the LEMAS survey as a guideline to classify department size. The findings illuminate the potential importance that organizational interpersonal-relationships may have on perceptions of police personnel. Research suggests that interpersonal relationships between employees and supervisors have an effect on employee perceptions of management (Gillett et al., 2013). When organizations are small and individuals interact with one another on a daily basis, an open communications model is more likely to develop. Gillett and colleagues (2013) argue that communication is salient for the development of POS among officers, and it must be a frequent activity. While the findings may be consistent with previous research that argued that small departments' communication may be more effective among all police personnel resulting in higher levels of POS, this relationship was not tested. There are enumerable reasons why differences in POS may occur between officers in different sized departments.

### Limitations

There are limitations that must be addressed to caution the reader on the generalizability of the findings. The purpose of this research was to explore the association between job related characteristics and POS; thus, this research was descriptive in nature. Therefore, this research does not provide support that job characteristics have direct effects on POS but merely that differences in POS exist based on varying job related characteristics. This study utilized a cross-sectional research design, which prohibits reference to causality. In addition, data were collected from a non-probability sample of police officers. For this reason, the results are not generalizable beyond the sample. However, the sample statistics were consistent with the demographics of sworn officers in the state, which provides some assurance that the findings from this sample may be similar. The ability to generalize findings is also limited due to the low response rate and potential for results to be skewed because of self-selection bias, as previously discussed. However, the response rate is consistent with previous police research that reported police officers are skeptical of participation in research (Boateng, 2014; Gordon, 2010) and online surveys in general (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014; Tourangeau et al., 2013). Lastly, the authors were unable to associate respondents to specific agencies, which precluded the authors from

controlling for agency type. This variable was not included in the instrument due to the belief that it would hinder officer participation. The researchers were sensitive to the need to ensure that officers' anonymity would not be compromised, nor would their participation be connected to their organization. This was done in anticipation that officers would be more comfortable participating in the study, and thus, the response rate would be improved.

In support of our hypothesis, statistically significant differences in POS among officers with varying job characteristics were found. Yet, this study does not explore why these differences occur or how these differences may influence officer work related behaviors and attitudes. Given that only a small variation in POS was accounted for by the variables in the model, stronger factors need to be examined and identified. Research suggests that fair treatment is one of the strongest predictors for POS and a vital component of the social exchange process (Colquitt et al., 2013). Although, beyond the scope of this study, one area for police research that could further our understanding, and has continued to gain interest in the policing field over the past decade, is procedural justice (President's Task Force on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing, 2015). Procedural justice has shown to be linked to numerous police officer attitudes and behaviors (Donner, Maskaly, Fridell, & Jennings, 2015; Haas et al., 2015); thus, this may provide a practical framework to examine how changes in organizational treatment may enhance POS and, ultimately, officer work behaviors (Boateng, 2014). POS has shown to mediate the relationships between perceptions of fairness in organizations and employee work related behaviors such as task performance (Colquitt et al., 2013).

### Conclusion

Even though there are limitations to the study, the findings provide a description of how police officers' job characteristics are associated with POS. It is also one of the first studies to examine how POS may differ between officers working in different size departments. This study is also one of the few that examined tenure as career phases versus years of service. This study advances our knowledge of police officers' POS by providing insight into which areas of the police department exhibit the lowest POS. The findings provide police administrators' knowledge about where their attention should be devoted toward improving the internal environment. Future research should continue within this area and concentrate on replicating the findings from this study, along with examining why POS differs with duty assignments, rank, tenure, and department size. In addition, research

should focus on how we can enhance officers' perceptions of support in police organizations.

There is reason to believe that intra-organizational tension will increase due to current pressures for police administrators to curb perceived police malfeasance through instrumenting stricter policies, oversight, and accountability due to allegations of police mistreatment that have occurred across the United States (President's Task Force on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing, 2015). As police administrators continue to recognize the desire for improvements in organizational image and community relations, the first step may be to improve relationships between police officers, especially patrol officers, and administrators in regard to POS.

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### Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> A true response rate is unknown as the organization only provided researchers an approximation of officers that matched the research criteria. The researchers were not able to ascertain how many members actually received the email that met the research criteria, opened the email, or how many emails were returned as undeliverable.
  - <sup>2</sup> Permission to use items from the original SPOS scale was obtained via email communication with Robert “Bob” Eisenberger, Ph.D. when developing the instrument.
  - <sup>3</sup> Specialized training could be a salient factor for enhancing POS for officers assigned to special assignments.