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## **Internal Psychological Resources and Professional Conduct in Policing: A Review of Psychological Capital Literature (2015-2025)**

**Eko Iskandar<sup>1</sup>, Suparto Wijoyo<sup>2</sup>, Fendy Suhariadi<sup>3</sup>**

Postgraduate School, Universitas Airlangga, Indonesia

eko.iskandar-2020@pasca.unair.ac.id, supartowijoyo@fh.unair.ac.id,  
fendy.suhariadi@psikologi.unair.ac.id

**Abstract.** High operational pressure, unpredictable situations, and diverse public demands shape police officers' daily work. These conditions create differences in psychological resilience and professional behaviour, even among officers performing similar duties. This study utilises the perspectives of Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory to examine how Psychological Capital (PsyCap) literature supports officers in managing stress, maintaining emotional stability, and making proportionate decisions in the field. Scopus-indexed articles published from 2015 to 2025 and classified as Q1-Q3 journals were reviewed. The findings indicate that PsyCap, encompassing hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism, serves as a key internal resource, enabling officers to maintain adaptive performance under organizational and operational pressures. This study highlights that professionalism cannot rely solely on rules and hierarchy but must also be supported by strong psychological resources. Practically, this study recommends integrating PsyCap development into police training, supervision, and support systems to strengthen officers' emotional control, responsiveness, and service quality.

**Keywords.** Psychological Capital, Policing, Professionalism, Conservation of Resources, Human Resource Development

### **Introduction**

Police work takes place in unpredictable situations, poses significant safety risks, and involves intense public interaction. Police not only carry out law enforcement functions but also represent the state in everyday social life, so their professionalism is determined by both technical skills and interpersonal capacities (Queirós et al., 2020). In practice, officers often face role conflict when balancing adherence to procedures with diverse societal expectations, particularly in dynamic urban areas (Brough & Williams, 2007; Skogan, 2018). This is not a momentary stress but a structural part of police work. Furthermore, many tasks, such as patrolling, crime prevention, and managing security disturbances, require quick decision-making under conditions of limited information and sudden changes in circumstances. Repeated exposure to risks, both physical and emotional, has been shown to cause psychological strain and moral distress, as officers must simultaneously manage threats, maintain personal safety, and maintain professional conduct (Martinussen et al., 2007; Violanti et al., 2017). The

combination of technical, emotional, and social demands makes police work very demanding and vulnerable to a decline in psychological stability if not supported by adequate internal resources, including psychological capital or psycap.

Although the police force has a clear hierarchical structure, strict rules, and formal oversight mechanisms, a structural approach alone is insufficient to explain why officers with the same type of duties can demonstrate varying levels of performance and psychological resilience. While organizational structure provides a behavioral framework, it does not fully explain how individuals interpret stress, navigate situational ambiguity, or manage role conflict in everyday practice (Chan, 1996; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Therefore, the assumption that rules and command systems automatically produce consistent professionalism becomes less relevant. This gap is further exacerbated when individual psychological factors are not central to police human resource development. Hobfoll et al. (2018) show that responses to stress, levels of personal resilience, and the ability to maintain emotional stability are more influenced by an individual's internal state than by organizational structure. However, in practice, development policies within police institutions still tend to emphasize discipline and procedural compliance, without systematically integrating the strengthening of psychological resources, such as psycap, as the foundation of professional resilience. This imbalance makes it difficult for organizations to understand why officer professionalism does not always align with the quality of the structural system established.

The consequences of this gap are crucial to address, as poorly managed work pressure has been shown to increase emotional exhaustion, decrease self-control, and disrupt the mental well-being of police officers (Violanti et al., 2017). In practice, these conditions can trigger reactive responses, misreading situations, and defensive interactions with the public, which can degrade the quality of public services and undermine the legitimacy of the police institution (Tyler, 2006). This means that failure to manage psychosocial stress not only impacts individuals but also the quality of police-community relationships, which are the foundation of effective law enforcement. From an organizational perspective, persistent psychological stress can lower morale, increase absenteeism, and weaken performance consistency, thus disrupting the operational stability of the institution (Hobfoll et al., 2018; Skogan, 2018). Police forces that fail to integrate psychological factors into their human resource development systems risk sustained declines in performance, particularly during crises such as increased public demand. Therefore, understanding individual psychological determinants, including strengthening resources such as psycap, is not only of academic interest but also a strategic necessity to maintain the professionalism of officers and the sustainability of the police organization as a whole.

The development of organizational psychology provides a more relevant approach to addressing the limitations of reforms that have focused too much on structures and procedures within police institutions. If rules and command systems only form a behavioral framework, then officers' responses to work pressures in the field are largely determined by their internal psychological capacities. Using Hobfoll's (2001) Conservation of Resources Theory, this study aims to explain that individuals with strong psychological resources are better able to maintain energy, manage threats, and maintain adaptive work function in high-risk situations. Based on this framework, this study positions PsyCap as the primary mechanism explaining why officers with similar task conditions can demonstrate different response qualities. PsyCap, comprising hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism, is an internal resource that can be developed through targeted coaching and training programs (Luthans et al., 2007). By integrating PsyCap in the context of police work, this research offers a shift in focus from merely strengthening structural

discipline to strengthening psychological capacity as a foundation for professionalism, so that officers are better able to interpret pressure as a challenge, maintain greater emotional stability, and make rational decisions under pressure (Avey et al., 2011; Newman et al., 2014).

The use of PsyCap in the police context provides a theoretical contribution by expanding the discourse on officer professionalism through a positive organizational behavior perspective, a relatively rare approach in police studies. Professionalism has traditionally been understood through structural frameworks, such as compliance with regulations, hierarchy, and oversight mechanisms. Meanwhile, officer effectiveness is also determined by internal psychological capacities that help them maintain adaptive performance under the pressures of fieldwork (Luthans et al., 2007). Thus, this research shifts the focus of discussion from solely structural reforms to strengthening psychological resources as the foundation for sustainable professionalism. Practically, this framework provides a basis for designing police human resource development interventions that emphasize not only procedural discipline but also strengthening resilience, developing self-efficacy, and reflective learning mechanisms. These interventions have the potential to improve the quality of decision-making, emotional stability in crisis situations, and the consistency of professional behavior among police officers in the field.

### **Method**

This study uses a literature review to examine the role of Psychological Capital (PsyCap) in police work. This approach was chosen to identify research developments, evaluate theoretical gaps, and build a conceptual synthesis that integrates empirical findings with Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory in explaining variations in officer responses to work stress in the field (Snyder, 2019; Tranfield et al., 2003; Hobfoll, 2001). Literature sources were obtained from the Scopus database using the keywords "psychological capital" AND "police". The search was limited to English-language articles published between 2015 and 2025 and only included journals ranked in the Q1, Q2, and Q3 quartiles to maintain academic quality (Baas et al., 2020). Articles that met the criteria were then analyzed through a conceptual synthesis, mapping the relationships among PsyCap, work stress, psychological resilience, and the quality of police officers' professional responses.

### **Discussion**

#### **Work Pressure in the Field and Variations in Police Officer Responses**

Police institutions face a highly stressful work environment, comprised of exposure to violence, social conflict, situational uncertainty, and diverse and often conflicting public demands (Violanti et al., 2017; Bradford et al., 2009). This work environment places officers as first responders, routinely confronted with traumatic situations and risks to personal safety. These conditions increase vulnerability to stress, emotional exhaustion, and physical and mental health disorders (Lowery & Cassidy, 2022). At the same time, officers are required to maintain professionalism, make appropriate and swift decisions, and engage with the public fairly and proportionately. This tension between operational demands and normative expectations makes psychological well-being a central issue in the discourse on human resource management in the police force.

However, officers facing relatively similar tasks do not always exhibit the same responses. This variation suggests that external pressures alone are insufficient to explain differences in performance, emotional stability, or the quality of public interactions. As street-level bureaucrats, officers face not only field-level pressure but also organizational pressure

from internal bureaucracy, administrative regulations, and strict accountability mechanisms (Xerri et al., 2025). Xerri et al. (2025) showed that the HERO dimension explains some of the variation in organizational stress and contributes to officer well-being, which means that individual psychological factors play a significant role in the bureaucratic context. Thus, professionalism in the field is determined not only by organizational rules and mechanisms, but also by the psychological resources possessed by each individual.

Organizational pressures become even more complex when they are intertwined with red tape and managerial support structures. Red tape has been shown to increase stress and to be associated with decreased discretionary power and increased turnover intention when not balanced by adequate management support (Brunetto et al., 2017a). In a cross-national context, the quality of organizational and supervisory support also shows significant differences, impacting police officers' experiences of stress (Farr-Wharton et al., 2016). Furthermore, not all job demands are negative. Meng et al. (2025) showed that challenge demands can enhance work well-being, while hindrance demands decrease it, especially when moderated by psychological capital. This means that perceptions of job demands are influenced by an individual's psychological capacity to interpret the pressure.

The literature on resilience and psychological capital in the police context also shows that internal psychological capacity does not automatically guarantee positive outcomes but rather has varying predictive power depending on research design and context (Janssens et al., 2021). This finding is important because it prevents the simplification that increased PsyCap always results in a significant impact on performance. However, a longitudinal study of prospective officers showed that a high PsyCap profile was associated with lower stress levels, higher engagement, and better training performance (Gillet et al., 2024). Thus, variations in officers' responses to work pressure in the field and within the organization can be understood as an interaction between job demands and internal psychological resources.

Conceptually, these findings suggest that organizational structure, regulations, and formal supervision do not fully explain differences in professionalism quality in the field. An individual's capacity to manage stress is a significant differentiating factor, especially in high-risk work environments such as the police force. The positive organizational behavior perspective positions psychological capital as a psychological resource that can shape how individuals interpret and respond to work stress (Luthans et al., 2007; Avey et al., 2011). In the police context, this means that professionalism relies not only on procedural compliance but also on psychological stability that helps officers remain adaptive, proportionate, and service-oriented under pressure.

### **PsyCap as a Psychological Mechanism from a Conservation of Resources Perspective**

Within the Conservation of Resources framework, individuals strive to acquire, maintain, and protect their resources when facing stress (Hobfoll, 2001). Intense work pressure can lead to a gradual loss of resources if the individual lacks sufficient internal capacity to compensate. In the police context, such pressure is not merely incidental but recurring and systemic, increasing the risk of psychological resource depletion. In such situations, Psychological Capital can be understood as a core resource that serves to prevent further loss while strengthening adaptive capacity. Hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism are not merely personal attributes but regulatory mechanisms that maintain the stability of work functions under demanding operational conditions (Luthans et al., 2007; Newman et al., 2014).

Xerri et al. (2025) demonstrated that HERO, as a proxy for PsyCap, significantly explains variations in organizational stress and improves well-being in street-level police bureaucrats. In line with the Job Demands-Resources (COR) model, these findings suggest that PsyCap serves as a buffer against resource loss under bureaucratic and operational pressures. Siu et al. (2015) also found that PsyCap reduced turnover intention by improving work well-being, suggesting that psychological resources play a role in maintaining sustained work engagement. Thus, PsyCap not only mitigates the negative impact of stress but also maintains affective resources that support professional stability.

The protective role of PsyCap becomes clearer when linked to the dynamics of job demands and organizational resources. Using the Job Demands-Resources framework, Meng et al. (2025) found that PsyCap mitigated the impact of inhibiting job demands and strengthened the positive effects of organizational resources on work well-being. From a COR perspective, this suggests that PsyCap strengthens the process of resource accumulation. Research by Brunetto et al. (2017b) also demonstrated that positive supervisory relationships enhance PsyCap, thereby reducing stress and turnover intentions among its members. This means that PsyCap operates within a cross-level mechanism, influenced by the organizational context while also influencing individual outcomes.

Gillet et al. (2024), in a longitudinal study spanning four stages, found that PsyCap trajectories during police training formed distinct developmental profiles, with high PsyCap trajectories associated with better engagement, identification, and performance. Conversely, trajectories with low PsyCap correlated with higher stress and cynicism. This is consistent with the COR, which explains that individuals with greater resource reserves have more stable adaptive capacity over the long term. Sutrisno et al. (2024) also showed that PsyCap increases career adaptability, which, in turn, can strengthen organizational commitment, suggesting that PsyCap operates through a mediating mechanism to maintain professional engagement.

However, Janssens et al. (2021) found, in their systematic review, that the associations between resilience and PsyCap, and between PsyCap and health outcomes and professional functioning, tended to be weak to moderate, especially in longitudinal designs. These findings serve as a reminder that PsyCap is not a single solution, but rather one resource within a broader system. Wild et al. (2020) also demonstrated that group-based resilience interventions do not always produce significant improvements compared to psychoeducation. This indicates that strengthening PsyCap requires an integrated, context-specific intervention design.

Other research expands the understanding that PsyCap works interactively with other resources. Lowery and Cassidy (2022) demonstrated that PsyCap, along with self-compassion, social support, and physical activity, contributes to the health and well-being of first responders. Chen et al. (2021) found that psychological ownership enhances PsyCap, which in turn can improve job performance and organizational citizenship behavior. Even in the context of the pandemic, Ravikumar (2023) demonstrated that PsyCap mediates the relationship between occupational stress and psychological well-being. Consistently, Rodriques and Pieters (2019) found that hope, as a dimension of PsyCap, is a significant predictor of satisfaction with life, especially among police officers.

Thus, from a Conservation of Resources perspective, PsyCap can be positioned as a strategic psychological resource that strengthens resource accumulation and sustains the sustainability of police officers' adaptive performance. However, its impact depends not only on the presence or absence of PsyCap but on how this capacity is built, maintained, and supported by the organization.

## **Reframing Professionalism and Implications for Police Human Resource Development**

Psychological Capital contributes to task performance, adaptive performance, and consistent professional behavior in high-risk jobs (Avey et al., 2011; Newman et al., 2014), including those in the police force. Performance is measured not only by achieving operational targets, but also by the quality of decision-making, emotional control, and the ability to maintain fair and proportional interactions with the public. Adaptive performance is a crucial dimension because officers often face rapidly changing situations, dynamic social conflicts, and diverse public demands (Jundt et al., 2015; Bradford & Jackson, 2010). Empirical evidence shows that officers with high PsyCap are better able to maintain cognitive and affective stability under field work pressure (Xerri et al., 2025; Meng et al., 2025). Therefore, police professionalism is not simply defined as adhering to rules, but also as the ability to remain calm and appropriately respond to changing situations.

This reframing is important because several previous studies have shown that without psychological resource support, work pressure can increase stress, absenteeism, and turnover intentions (Brunetto et al., 2017a; Siu et al., 2015). In fact, a low PsyCap trajectory profile during training is associated with higher levels of stress and cynicism, as well as lower performance (Gillet et al., 2024). Conversely, strong PsyCap is associated with higher engagement, commitment, and job satisfaction (Sutrisno et al., 2024; Rodrigues & Pieters, 2019). However, research by Janssens et al. (2021) also cautions that the relationship between PsyCap and professionalism is not always strong in longitudinal designs, suggesting that strengthening PsyCap cannot stand alone without adequate organizational support. This means that sustainable professionalism requires integrating individual resources and institutional systems.

The implications for police human resource development are strategic. Coaching programs should not simply emphasize discipline, procedural compliance, and structural controls; they should also incorporate the strengthening of hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism as part of an ongoing training curriculum (Luthans et al., 2007). Interventions based on supervisor support and quality work relationships have also been shown to increase PsyCap and reduce stress and turnover intentions (Brunetto et al., 2017a; Farr-Wharton et al., 2016). Furthermore, a multifaceted approach integrating social support, self-compassion, and stress management can enhance the impact of PsyCap development on officer health and well-being (Lowery & Cassidy, 2022). Therefore, strengthening PsyCap can be understood as a long-term psychological investment that supports emotional stability, high-quality decision-making, and consistency in serving the community, thereby shifting police human resource reform from a purely structural approach to one that strengthens adaptive and sustainable internal capacity.

### **Implications**

#### **Theoretical Implications**

This study confirms that PsyCap is a relevant framework for understanding police professionalism in work environments with heavy workloads, frequently changing situations, and recurring mental stress. Research on the police force has largely focused on regulations, hierarchies, and formal procedures as determinants of professionalism (Chan, 1996; Skogan, 2018), but this approach does not adequately explain why officers with relatively uniform duties exhibit different response qualities. By integrating a positive organizational behavior perspective, this study demonstrates that professionalism is also determined by internal psychological capacities, namely hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism (Luthans et al., 2007;

Newman et al., 2014). Furthermore, this study extends occupational stress theory by applying PsyCap to the police environment, which is fraught with moral, emotional, and social risks, rather than solely to business organizations, as has been widely studied (Avey et al., 2011; Peterson et al., 2011). In the context of public service and social legitimacy (Tyler, 2006; Bradford et al., 2009), PsyCap functions as a psychological mechanism that helps officers maintain emotional stability and quality decision-making under stress. Conceptually, this study also strengthens the resource-based perspective that aligns with Conservation of Resources Theory, by positioning PsyCap as a resource that maintains energy and prevents decline in work function due to prolonged stress (Hobfoll, 2001; Hobfoll et al., 2018). However, the effectiveness of PsyCap remains influenced by organizational support, such as the quality of relationships with superiors and organizational justice (Brunetto et al., 2017a; Meng et al., 2025), thus this study contributes to the integration of police literature, particularly on positive organizational psychology, and resource-based stress within a more comprehensive framework.

### **Practical Implications**

This research demonstrates that police human resource management needs to complement discipline and supervision by strengthening officers' psychological capacity. Regulation and hierarchy remain important, but their effectiveness depends heavily on the psychological preparedness of the officers who implement them. Therefore, strengthening PsyCap can be positioned as a psychological foundation that encourages officers to exercise their authority professionally, consistently, and adaptively, as confirmed by research on job demands-resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) and positive organizational behavior (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017). Furthermore, PsyCap development is needed in police training and development systems. Training should not only focus on technical skills and understanding of work rules, but also on strengthening hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism. Luthans et al. (2006) and Avey et al. (2011) show that even relatively short training-based PsyCap interventions can significantly improve individual performance and psychological well-being. In the context of policing, this approach is relevant to support more rational decision-making, emotional control in public interactions, and the ability to learn from field experiences. From a managerial perspective, leadership plays a crucial role in creating a work environment conducive to the development of PsyCap within police organizations. Fair, supportive, and consistent leadership has been shown to strengthen subordinates' psychological resources, particularly in stressful work contexts (Hannah et al., 2009). Therefore, PsyCap development is inextricably linked to leadership practices and work system design that provide role clarity, social support, and learning opportunities for police officers.

### **Conclusion**

PsyCap is a strategic element in understanding and strengthening police professionalism amid high field work pressures and recurring psychological risks. Organizational structure, regulations, and formal procedures remain important, but they do not fully explain differences in the quality of officers' responses in similar task situations. Internal capacities such as hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism play a role in maintaining emotional stability, decision-making quality, and adaptive performance under pressure. Drawing on positive organizational behavior (Luthans, 2002) and the Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 2001), this study positions PsyCap as a psychological resource that supports the sustainability of officer performance and well-being. The main contribution of this discussion lies in integrating the literature on policing and positive organizational psychology into a single

framework that emphasizes that strengthening psychological capacity is a crucial part of human resource development reform in the police force. By implementing development strategies focused on strengthening PsyCap, police institutions can build a more professional, stable, and responsive system that better meets community needs..

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Further research is recommended to empirically test PsyCap in the police context using a more robust quantitative design, such as a longitudinal study or multilevel analysis. A longitudinal approach is crucial for capturing PsyCap as a long-term psychological capital, as demonstrated by Peterson et al. (2011), while distinguishing it from transient psychological states. Meanwhile, multilevel analysis helps researchers understand the interaction between individual PsyCap and organizational factors such as working conditions, leadership style, or institutional pressures. Future research should also examine the mediating and moderating mechanisms underlying the relationship between PsyCap and police performance. Variables such as emotional exhaustion, self-control, perceived organizational support, and procedural justice could serve as psychological mechanisms that mediate the influence of PsyCap on performance and professional behavior (Tyler, 2006; Hobfoll et al., 2018). This approach would enrich theoretical understanding and provide a more precise basis for policymaking.

It is also recommended that future research combine quantitative and qualitative methods and use in-depth interviews or case studies to explore how police officers interpret work pressure and the role of PsyCap in their daily field experiences. This mixed-methods approach is important to understand the complexities of the police context that cannot be fully explained through surveys (Queirós et al., 2020). Overall, further research that develops PsyCap in the police context has the potential to make significant contributions to public organization theory and to the establishment of police human resource management policies that are more oriented towards sustainable performance and professionalism.

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