



The Relationship between Organizational Stress and Psychological Well-Being- A Longitudinal Mediation Model

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Published Online: 05 May 2023	<p>Introduction. Most of the specialized studies carried out at the level of the gendarme military population investigate the stress they face in theaters of operations. There is very little peacetime activity and research investigating the impact of operational stress has not been encountered to date. The present study analyzed the longitudinal relationship between operational stress faced by military gendarmes in South-Eastern Europe and psychological well-being. Also, the mediating effects of social support and coping strategies were addressed: seeking social support, positive refocusing and self-control, in the previously mentioned relationship.</p> <p>Methodology. The study investigated the relationship between organizational stress, measured at T1, and psychological well-being, measured four months later, at T2. Furthermore, the mediating role of social support and coping strategies, assessed at both T1 and T2, was examined.</p> <p>Results. Organizational stress significantly negatively predicts psychological well-being. Social support, measured at both T1 and T2, is a significant partial mediator of the relationship between operational stress, measured at T1, and psychological well-being, measured at T2. Self-control, measured at T2, is a partial mediator in the relationship between operational stress, measured at T1, and psychological well-being, measured at T2.</p> <p>Discussions and conclusions. The obtained results guide mental health specialists who work in military units towards the consolidation of intervention programs aimed at the development of social support, in order to reduce the stress felt by this population category.</p>
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KEYWORDS: operational stress, psychological well-being, social support, seeking social support, positive reappraisal, self-control.	

1. INTRODUCTION

The activity of the military, implicitly of the gendarmes referred to in this study, is risky because it involves exposure to the adverse events of high-risk missions, which can have a negative impact on mental health. There is very little research on the stress felt by soldiers in peacetime (Pflanz, 2001), and analyzes on the organizational stress of military gendarmes in South-East Europe and its impact on psychological well-being have not been found. Studies mention that public safety and order personnel frequently face critical incidents and are exposed to a highly stressful work environment (Nielsen et al. 2011).

During the missions, gendarmerie soldiers interact with people from different social categories, from people with mental disorders to criminals, and are frequently exposed to potentially traumatic events, from assaults to murder. They have continuously exposed themselves to interaction with citizens and their problems, to verbal or

physical violence. Along with operational stress factors, gendarmerie soldiers face organizational stress factors, such as militarized structure, bureaucracy, lack of support from colleagues or bosses, promotion difficulties, numerous disciplinary procedures and restrictions, excessive workload or administrative duties, elements that can have a significant effect on psychological well-being in the military environment (Kavanagh, 2005).

Military personnel frequently report high levels of job stress when presenting for tests or treatments in military medical clinics (Pflanz, 2001). Studies have thus highlighted a link between workplace stress and psychological disorders experienced by military personnel (Pflanz & Sonnek, 2002; Pflanz, 2001).

However, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to investigate the separate effects of organizational stress on psychological well-being in a population of military gendarmes in South-Eastern Europe. More specifically, we

investigated the negative association of operational stress perceived by military gendarmes with psychological well-being. Moreover, we investigated whether social support and coping strategies play a mediating role, building four longitudinal parallel mediation models. We assessed these variables twice, four months apart, exceeding previous cross-sectional correlational studies. The present study is thus the first to longitudinally address the relationship between operational stress and psychological well-being, favoring the inference of causality.

Stress represents a real or only perceived imbalance between a stressor, such as a challenge or threat, and the person's capabilities (Turliuc & Măirean, 2014). Stress can affect people's psychological well-being. It can also be defined in terms of respondents' experience and perception of their lives (Harter et al., 2002). Prolonged stress is a harmful factor for physical and psychological health in general and dangerous for the psychological well-being of individuals (Ursin & Eriksen, 2004).

Organizational stress refers to problematic organizational aspects, such as lack of trust in the leader, communication difficulties or organizational changes. These represent situations in which work-related factors interact with the physical and mental state of an individual and can disrupt their normal functioning (Beehr & Newman, 1978): shift work, understaffing, lack of recognition, high volume of documents or negative public image (Violanti & Aron, 1995), bureaucracy, lack of perceived support from leaders, lack of promotion opportunities (Stinchcomb, 2004; Burke & Mikkelsen, 2006), inconsistency of disciplinary procedures, management style and lack of administrative support (Toch et al., 2002). Brooks & Greenberg (2017), in an analysis of the factors affecting the psychological well-being of military personnel, mentioned as sources of organizational stress support from management, unit cohesion, harassment and discrimination, role conflict, overcommitment and effort-reward imbalance, the specific requests, the imbalance between private/family and professional life.

Studies mention that organizational stressors have been identified as more likely to cause higher adverse psychological distress compared to operational stressors (Brown & Campbell, 1990; Kohan & Mazmanian, 2003; Tyagi, 2014).

Gershon (2000) mentioned that working in stressful conditions leads to dissatisfaction and burnout of police officers, affecting their psychological well-being and professional efficiency and Ortega (2007) pointed out that officers carry out activities in a stressful environment, exposing themselves to traumatic events, with negative effects on emotional and physical well-being. Research has thus highlighted that certain stressors have an impact on the well-being of police or military personnel operating in theaters of operations, in different samples and in countries around the world. However, none have distinctly investigated organizational stressors and how they may affect

psychological well-being in military gendarmerie cadres in a South-Eastern European country.

Social support provided by family or close friends represents the degree to which an individual perceives that he can rely on one or more close people in times of need (Figley & Burge, 1983), involving the sense of belonging, of being loved and accepted (Burlleson et al., 1994). Social support starts from the individual's perception of the support received from others, being a measure of the way in which the person considers social relations as available (Salami, 2010)

Social support represents a social network providing psychological and material resources that help the individual in managing stressful situations (Cohen, 2004) and is directly associated with increasing psychological well-being (Cohen & Wills, 1985), reducing work dissatisfaction and mental health problems (Moyle, 1998), increasing the level of adaptability and maintaining mental health (Kutek et al., 2011). People who have developed supportive social relationships are generally better off than those who do not enjoy such relationships (Ganellen & Blaney, 1984; Ganster et al., 1986; Etzion & Westman, 1992).

Referring to the organizational environment, social support is strongly associated with individual and organizational outcomes in the context of occupational stress (Beehr & McGrath, 1992), being directly associated with reducing job dissatisfaction and mental health problems and increasing psychological well-being (Moyle, 2007). Studies mention a strong negative association between social support, absenteeism and job dissatisfaction (Carlson & Perrewe, 1999), the support provided by colleagues is an important stress reduction factor (Etzion, 1984).

Coping is a person's cognitive and behavioral effort to manage both external and internal demands that exceed individual resources in coping with stressful situations (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988). When coping with stressors, soldiers use both adaptive strategies, such as talking to colleagues, getting counseling and exercise, and less adaptive behaviors include alcohol abuse, withdrawal from friendships and family relationships, and suicide (Richmond et al, 1998). The present research is based on the conceptualization of Folkman and Lazarus and addresses the following coping styles: self-control, seeking social support and positive reappraisal (Folkman & Lazarus, 1986).

2. ASSUMPTIONS

Based on the previously mentioned theoretical framework, but taking into account the lack of research investigating the impact of operational stress on the psychological well-being of military gendarmes, we formulated the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis H1: Organizational stress significantly negatively predicts psychological well-being.

Hypotheses H2: Social support mediates the relationship between organizational stress and psychological well-being.

Hypothesis H3: Four months later, social support mediates the relationship between organizational stress and psychological well-being.

Hypothesis H4: Positive refocusing, social support seeking, and self-control mediate the relationship between organizational stress and psychological well-being.

Hypothesis H5: Four months later, positive refocusing, seeking social support and self-control mediate the relationship between organizational stress and psychological well-being.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Measures

Organizational stress was measured using the *Organizational Police Stress Questionnaire* (PSQ-Org, McCreary & Thompson, 2013). The 20-item PSQ-Org questionnaire assesses stressors associated with organizational culture and the organization as a work environment. Each item (“*I have the feeling that I always have to prove my competences*”) is rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (“not at all stressful”) to 7 (“very stressful”) with 4 indicating moderate stress. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for this study is .978, so the instrument demonstrated very good internal consistency

Coping Ways Scale (WCS, Folkman & Lazarus, 1985) - composed of 66 items, structured in the following dimensions: (1) confrontational coping, measured by items such as: “*I did something that I didn't think would work, but at least I did something*”; (2) distancing, measured by items such as “*I continued as if nothing had happened*”; (3) self-control, measured by items such as “*I tried to hide my emotions*”; (4) seeking social support, measured by items such as “*I accepted understanding and sympathy from someone*”; (5) acceptance of responsibility, measured by items such as “*I apologized or did something to make up for it*”; (6) avoidance, measured by items such as “*I slept more than usual*”; (7) problem solving, as measured by items such as “*I made a plan of action and followed it*”; (8) positive reappraisal, measured by items such as “*I was inspired to do something creative.*” Items are scored on a 4-point Likert scale from 0 (Not at all used) to 3 (Very much used). The Alpha Cronbach coefficient of the coping methods scale for this study is .965 (confrontational coping scale- .576; distancing scale .435; self-control scale .880; seeking social support scale .783; acceptance of responsibility scale .840; avoidance scale .602; problem solving scale .850; positive reappraisal scale .852). The scales specific to adaptive coping styles were used in the analysis: seeking social support, positive refocusing and self-control.

Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWBS, Ryff, 1989) - instrument made up of 42 items divided into 6 subscales: autonomy (“*I trust my opinions even if they are contrary to the general opinion*”), control over the environment (“*I managed to build my a home and a lifestyle that is to my liking*”), personal development (“*I think it's*

important to have new experiences that challenge the way you think about the world”), positive relationships with others (“*I like personal and shared conversations with family members or friends*”), purpose in life (“*I like to make plans for the future and make them come true*”) and self-acceptance (“*The past had its ups and downs, but in general I would not want to exchange*”) and score on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). The Cronbach Alpha coefficient for this study was .888

Interpersonal Support Evaluation List (ISEL, Cohen & Wills, 1985) - measures the functional components of social support and consists of 40 items. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient for this study was .853.

3.2. Procedure

The study involved individual testing according to individual consent. The research objectives were communicated to the subjects and anonymity and confidentiality were ensured. Subjects were informed of the possibility to withdraw from the study at any time.

The study procedure and the instruments administered were fully compliant with the Declaration of Helsinki and the University Code of Ethics

3.3. Participants

The sample consisted of 210 military officers and non-commissioned officers, 202 men (96.19%), 8 women (16.8%), the average age of the participants was 38.52 years, and the standard deviation was SD= 8.92. The average age of the participants was 14.51 years, with a standard deviation SD= 7.94.

3.4. Results

a. Descriptive statistics and correlational analyses

The first step was represented by the descriptive and correlational analyzes carried out using SPSS 28.0.1.0 software. We calculated means, standard deviations, and Pearson correlations between study variables. The second step proposed and analyzed two longitudinal parallel mediation models using Model 4 (Hayes, 2018) of Process version 4.0 with IBM SPSS 28. We adopted 5000 bootstrap samples by constructing bootstrap-based confidence intervals to estimate intervals 95% confidence (Hayes, 2017). Confidence intervals that do not include zero indicate significant effects (Hayes & Scharkow, 2013). Mediation analysis was conducted to verify the mediating role of social support and coping strategies: social support seeking, positive refocusing, and self-control in the relationship between organizational stress and psychological well-being.

Organizational stress at T1 correlates significantly negatively with psychological well-being at T2 ($r = -0.27, p < 0.001$), social support at T1 ($r = -0.19, p < 0.001$) and T2 ($r = -0.21, p < 0.001$), seeking social support at T1 ($r = -0.26, p < 0.001$) and T2 ($r = -0.20, p < 0.001$), positive refocusing at T1 ($r = -0.18, p < 0.001$) and T2 ($r = -0.23,$

p<0.001), self-control at T1 (r= -0.18, p<0.001) and T2 (r= -0.20, p<0.001)

Table 1 Means, standard deviations, and correlations among study variables

		Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	OrgS T1	33.84	14.37	1								
2	SS T1	28.41	5.25	-0.19**	1							
3	PR T1	15.65	4.00	-0.18**	0.45	1						
4	SC T1	15.80	4.00	-0.18**	0.87	-0.27**	1					
5	SSS T1	13.86	3.00	-0.26**	0.24**	0.27**	0.24**	1				
6	SS T2	29.20	6.15	-0.21**	0.89**	0.19	0.06	-0.27**	1			
7	PR T2	16.58	3.21	-0.23**	0.10	0.92**	0.45**	-0.28**	0.10	1		
8	SC T2	16.42	3.51	-0.20**	0.12	0.44**	0.93**	0.27**	0.30**	0.45**	1	
9	SSS T2	14.45	2.80	-0.20**	0.23**	0.20**	0.17**	0.92**	-0.24**	0.27**	0.21**	1
10	PWB T2	105.50	60.71	-0.27**	0.34**	0.19**	0.23**	0.19**	0.34**	0.21**	0.27**	0.17*

b. Parallel mediation analysis of the relationship between organizational stress and psychological well-being

The first model of the study tested both the predictive effect of organizational stress at T1 on psychological well-being, as well as the mediating role of social support and coping strategies: seeking social support, positive refocusing and self-control, measured at T1 (figure 1). Similarly, in order to fully understand the causality of the relationship between the addressed variables, the second model analyzed the predictive effect of organizational stress, measured at T1, on psychological well-being, from T2, as well as the mediating role of social support and strategies of coping: seeking social support, positive refocusing and self-control, measured four months after facing the stressors (figure 2).

Multiple regression analysis was performed to estimate the components of the mediation model. For the first model, the direct effect was statistically significant, indicating that organizational stress at T1 significantly negatively predicted psychological well-being at T2 ($\beta = -0.7243$; $p < .005$), in a relationship partially mediated by social support measured at T1. The direct effect is also confirmed for the second model, organizational stress at T1 significantly negatively predicted psychological well-being at T2 ($\beta = -0.6833$; $p < .005$), in a partially mediated relationship of social support and self-control, measured at T2, confirming hypothesis H1.

Also, the results showed that organizational stress significantly negatively predicted social support at time T1 ($\beta = -0.0729$; $p < .005$) and at time T2 ($\beta = -0.0915$; $p < .001$), seeking social support at time T1 ($\beta = -0.0503$; $p < .001$) and at T2 ($\beta = -0.0401$; $p < .005$), positive refocusing at T1 ($\beta = -0.0520$; $p < .007$) and at T2 ($\beta = -0.0521$; $p < .001$) and self-

control at time T1 ($\beta = -0.0508$ $p < .005$) and at time T2 ($\beta = -0.0492$; $p < .005$). Organizational stress significantly negatively predicted psychological well-being ($\beta = -0.7243$; $p < .005$), in a relationship mediated by social support ($\beta = 3.3216$; $p < .001$) and self-control ($\beta = 2.0766$; $p < .007$) from time T1, which significantly positively predict well-being, measured at time T2. Also, organizational stress significantly negatively predicted psychological well-being ($\beta = -0.6833$; $p < .005$), in a relationship mediated by social support ($\beta = 2.7342$; $p < .001$) and self-control ($\beta = 2.9775$; $p < .005$) from time T2, which significantly positively predict well-being, measured at time T2.

Both the direct effect of organizational stress ($c' = -0.7243$; 95% CI [-1.2753; -.1734]) and the indirect effect of social support measured at T1 ($a1*b1 = -.2421$; 95% CI [-.4589; -.00359]) are statistically significant as the confidence interval does not include 0. This demonstrates that social support partially mediates the relationship between organizational stress and psychological well-being, as the direct path still remains significant. Therefore, hypothesis H2 is confirmed

Both the direct effect of organizational stress ($c' = -.6833$; 95% CI [-1.2345; -.1322]) and the indirect effect of social support ($a1*b1 = -.2502$; 95% CI [-.4710 ; -.00570]) and self-control ($a4*b4 = -.1464$; 95% CI [-.3346; -.0191]), measured at T2, are statistically significant. This demonstrates that social support partially mediates the relationship between organizational stress and well-being, as the direct path still remains significant. Therefore, hypotheses H3 and H4.3 are confirmed.

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Table 2: Direct, indirect and total effects of the relationship between organizational stress and psychological well-being, mediated by social support, social support seeking, positive refocusing and self-control, mediators acting at T1

Independent variable (IV)	Dependent variable (DV)	Social support T1 (M ₁)		Total effect	indirect	IV → M ₁		M ₁ → DV		Indirect effect		95% CI			
		Total direct effect													
		<i>c/c'</i>						<i>a1/a1'</i>		<i>b1/b1'</i>		<i>a1' * b1'</i>			
		b	SE			b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	B	SE	BootLL CI	BootUL CI
OrgS T1	PWB	-.724**	.279	-.432	.152	-.072**	.024	3.321**	.756	-.242	.105	-.458	-.037		
								*							
Independent variable (IV)	Dependent variable (DV)	Seeking social supportT1 (M ₂)		Total effect	indirect	IV → M ₂		M ₂ → DV		Indirect effect		95% CI			
		Total direct effect													
		<i>c/c'</i>						<i>a2/a2'</i>		<i>b2/b2'</i>		<i>a2' * b2'</i>			
		b	SE			b	SE	b	SE	B	SE	b	SE	BootLL CI	BootUL CI
OrgS T1	PWB	-.724**	.279	-.432	.152	-	.014	.055	1.38	-.028	.079	-.198	.129		
								.050***							
Independent variable (IV)	Dependent variable (DV)	Positive refocusing T1 (M ₃)		Total effect	indirect	IV → M ₁		M ₁ → DV		Indirect effect		95% CI			
		Total direct effect													
		<i>c/c'</i>						<i>a1/a1'</i>		<i>b1/b1'</i>		<i>a1' * b1'</i>			
		b	SE			b	SE	b	SE	B	SE	b	SE	BootLL CI	BootUL CI

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Independent variable (IV)	Dependent variable (DV)	Total direct effect		Total effect	indirect	IV → M ₂		M ₂ → DV		Indirect effect		BootLL CI	BootUL CI
		<i>c/c'</i>				<i>a3/ a3'</i>	<i>b3/ b3'</i>	<i>a3 * b3/ a3' * b3'</i>	b	SE	B		
		b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	B	SE	b	SE		
OrgS T1	PWB	-.724**	.279	-.432	.152	-.052**	.019	1.096	1.10	-.057	.067	-.214	.059

Table 3: Direct, indirect and total effects of the relationship between organizational stress and psychological well-being, mediated by social support, social support seeking, positive refocusing and self-control, mediators acting at T2

Independent variable (IV)	Dependent variable (DV)	Total direct effect		Total effect	indirect	IV → M ₁		M ₁ → DV		Indirect effect		BootLL CI	BootUL CI
		<i>f/f'</i>				<i>d1/ d1'</i>	<i>e1/ e1'</i>	<i>d1 * e1/ d1' * e1'</i>	b	SE	b		
		b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE		
OrgS T1	PWB	-.683**	.279	-.473	.156	-	.029	2.734*	.651	-.250	.106	-.475	-.056

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Independent variable (IV)	Dependent variable (DV)	Total direct effect		Total effect	indirect effect	IV → M ₂		M ₂ → DV		Indirect effect		95% CI	
		c/c'				$d2/d2'$		$e2/e2'$		$d2' * e2'$		$d2' * e2'$	
		b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE		
OrgS T1	PWB	-.683**	.279	-.473	.156	-.040**	.013	.212	1.46	-.008	.065	-.139	.133

Independent variable (IV)	Dependent variable (DV)	Positive refocusing T2 (M ₇)		Total effect	indirect effect	IV → M ₁		M ₁ → DV		Indirect effect		95% CI	
		c/c'				$d3/d3'$		$e3/e3'$		$d3' * e3'$		$d3' * e3'$	
		b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE		
OrgS T1	PWB	-.683**	.279	-.473	.156	-	.014	1.314	1.35	-.068	.077	-.234	.074

Independent variable (IV)	Dependent variable (DV)	Self control T2 (M ₈)		Total effect	indirect effect	IV → M ₂		M ₂ → DV		Indirect effect		95% CI	
		c/c'				$d4/d4'$		$e4/e4'$		$d4' * e4'$		$d4' * e4'$	
		b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE		
OrgS T1	PWB	-.683**	.279	-.473	.156	-.049**	.016	2.977*	1.22	-.146	.080	-.326	-.015

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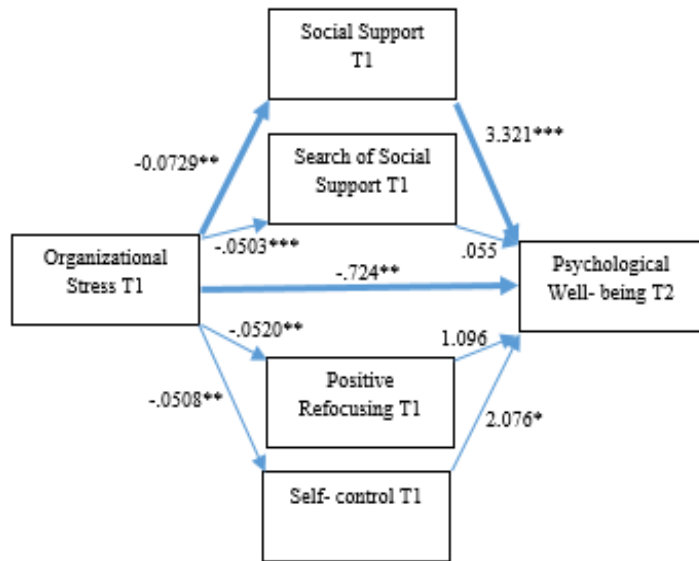


Figure 1. The relationship between OrgS and PWB with mediators at T1

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.001$

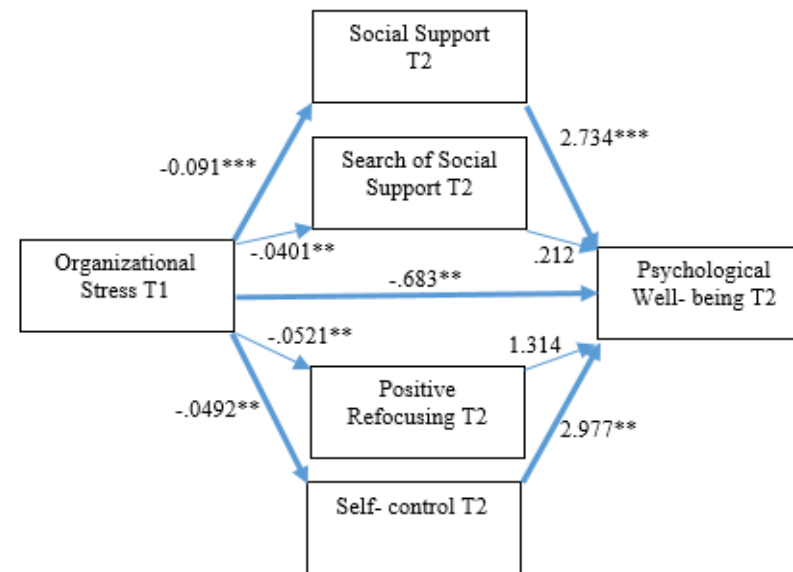


Figure 2. The relationship between OrgS and PWB with mediators at T2

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.001$

5. DISCUSSIONS

The present research aimed to investigate the impact that organizational stress has on psychological well-being, on a population of military gendarmes from South-Eastern Europe. In accordance with the objectives of the study, two longitudinal parallel mediation models were proposed to investigate the explanatory mechanisms of the relationship between organizational stress and psychological well-being, a relationship mediated by social support and coping strategies. The results show a significant negative association of organizational stress with psychological well-being. These results confirm our first hypothesis and support the results of previous research that stated that work in the field of public order and safety is one of the most stressful occupations, being associated with the lowest levels of job satisfaction (Johnson et al., 2005).

The relationship between organizational stress and psychological well-being

The present study confirms that the military personnel of the gendarmerie can be considered a high-risk group in the occurrence of psychological dysfunctions due to the numerous stress factors they face at work. The results are consistent with previous research that stated that organizational factors are the strongest predictor of psychological stress and low quality of life (Hart et al., 1995; Hart & Cotton, 2002).

Organizational stress factors are represented by the specific aspects of work, such as poor communication, lack of support, difficult relationships with bosses or colleagues. Although organizational stressors may be underappreciated compared to operational ones that endanger life and personal integrity, the present study demonstrates that the exposure rate is higher for organizational stressors compared to operational tasks. This result is in agreement with previous research that stated that organizational stressors can be a source of stress for police officers because, compared to operational stress, they are perceived as oppressive, unnecessary and unavoidable (Shane, 2010), not being balanced by appropriate rewards (Basinska & Wiciak, 2013). Also, organizational stressors have been identified as likely to cause higher psychological distress among law enforcement personnel compared to operational stressors (Kop & Euwema, 2001). The working schedule, the heavy workload, the culture and the organizational changes have a significant impact on the mentality of this category of personnel (Purba & Demou, 2019). The high demands of this occupational group are associated with burnout, greater use of force, poor interaction with the public, health problems,

strained relationships, and low quality of work (Richardson & Burke, 2007). Furthermore, organizational structure and culture influence beliefs, attitudes, identity, and cognitions, affecting employees' ability to perform their roles under stressors (Kapade-Nikam & Shaikh, 2014).

Research indicates that organizational stressors have a significant negative effect on psychological well-being due to the rigidity and bureaucratic nature of the organization, as well as resistance to change and refusal to correct traditional practices (Stinchcomb, 2004).

The present research demonstrates the fact that social support is a significant mediator of the relationship between organizational stress and psychological well-being, a mediation effect that is also preserved longitudinally. Thus, organizational stress significantly negatively predicts social support, social support has the power to significantly positively influence psychological well-being. Military gendarmes who have high social support, show a lower level of organizational stress and will experience a higher level of psychological well-being. The mediation is partial, maintaining a significant negative effect of organizational stress on psychological well-being, thus military gendarmes with a higher level of organizational stress show a lower psychological well-being, compared to those who feel a lower level of stress.

Social support prevents the occurrence of stressful events or reduces the likelihood that events will be perceived as stressful, according to the stress prevention model (Dignam et al., 1986). It also ensures a high level of psychological well-being by influencing emotions, cognitions and behaviors in a positive sense (Cohen et al., 2000). Social support functions as an adaptive resource in relation to stressful events or situations, being a crucial factor in social development (Pierce et al., 1996). It gives gendarmes the feeling of belonging, security, identity, especially when dealing with organizational stress factors, determining, through beneficial interactions, a higher level of psychological well-being.

Military gendarmes are frequently faced with organizational stressors, and the support provided by the social network is particularly important for cushioning the potentially negative impact of workplace factors on psychological well-being. The present study categorized social support into tangible, evaluative, and belonging support. Tangible support denotes material help, in the form of offering money, tools or support in solving a task. Evaluative support refers to verbal or action feedback provided by a trusted person, leading to increased self-esteem

and belonging support refers to the existence of a group of belonging with which the military gendarmerie can socialize

Social support retained a significant, albeit partial, mediating effect, even four months after the stressors. Partial mediation is due to the significant direct effect between organizational stress and well-being. These statistical results lead to the following conclusions: the level of organizational stress decreases the well-being of military gendarmes, not only directly, but also indirectly, through the longitudinal mediating effects of social support and self-control.

Regarding coping strategies, four months after the action of the stressors, self-control intervenes as a partial mediator of the relationship between organizational stress and psychological well-being. Organizational stress has a significant negative effect on self-control. Also, self-control has a significant positive effect on psychological well-being. Police officers with a higher level of organizational stress will exhibit less self-control compared to those with a lower level. Also, military gendarmes with a high level of self-control show a higher level of psychological well-being, compared to those with a lower level. The significant mediation of self-control, along with that of social support, remains a partial one, preserving the significant effect of organizational stress on psychological well-being. The study confirms the results of previous research that states that self-control is a coping strategy frequently used by police officers when facing stressful or traumatic factors (Eckelton-Moreira, 2011; Moller, 2008; Violanti, 1993).

Practical implications

The results of this research have important practical implications for improving the psychological well-being of military gendarmes, by influencing empirical psycho-social interventions. First of all, the study could represent the basis for strengthening intervention programs that increase awareness of the importance of social support among this population category. This could be applied by strengthening a support network at the unit level, which could assist the military in recognizing the value of social support providers at the organizational level, but also regarding the support available from peers. Second, educating staff about the type of behaviors and support that are beneficial in policing could help increase perceptions of available support and improve organizational awareness of support given and received, which could have a direct impact on increasing psychological well-being. Third, managers and mental health professionals, through intervention programs, could strengthen an organizational culture based on mutual social support.

Also, special attention should be paid to military personnel identified as vulnerable, susceptible to experiencing a reduced level of well-being. These employees could be offered specialized support, by learning and practicing strategies effective in improving psychological well-being.

6. Limits and future research directions

The limits of this research start from the method of data collection. The analyzes were carried out on the quantitative results obtained following the application of the self-report scales, which prevented the actual observation of the analyzed processes. Also, the research sample is represented by the cadres of a single military unit, and there is a possibility that the results may not be general for other structures in the field of public order and safety. Data collection was difficult, both because of the reluctance with which the military approached completing the instruments, and because of the lack of trust shown in the mental health specialist. Taking into account these limits, the following research directions can be outlined: conducting longitudinal studies, using qualitative methods and analyzing the relationships between variables and other workers in the field of national security.

7. Conclusions

The present research analyzed the effect that organizational stress manifests on psychological well-being, through the mediating intervention of social support and coping strategies. Thus, operational stress manifests a significant negative effect on psychological well-being and social support manifests a longitudinal mediating effect between the two variables. Also, self-control shows a mediating effect four months after the confrontation with operational stress factors.

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