

## **Police Resilience as a Multilevel Balance: Needs and Resources for Victim Support Officers**

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Providing face-to face support to victims entails one the most intense stress- and trauma-laden exchanges of law enforcement tasks, which frequently triggers long lasting negative effects on police officer's psychological wellbeing. When exploring this phenomenon, police resilience is often interpreted as police officers' and organization's capacity to react and recover from negative experiences and impediments, and as such it may be perceived as both a trait and a trainable and promotable skill. Yet, in very recent times, police resilience has faced new or transformed challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as victims, citizens, and public institutions have encountered new needs and situations. Drawing from a unique qualitative, in-

depth research with police officers that provide support to victims of gender-based and domestic violence, this paper analyzes officers' needs and challenges regarding their interactions with victims, colleagues, superiors, and other occupational demands, as they interplay into stress and trauma that may lead to burnout and compassion fatigue. Illustrated with the empirical findings of the case study of the Catalonia's Mossos d'Esquadra police corps, the paper explores how officers negotiate individuals' expectations, needs, and procedures signals towards potential challenges and threats to their psychological wellbeing with implications for police forces and other public and private institutions. The specific needs and demands of the participants' policing, related to support to gender-based and domestic violence, presents an in-depth analysis of how stress and trauma are understood and experienced from the police officers' perspectives.

Keywords: victim support, policing, resilience, burnout, compassion fatigue

## **Police Resilience as a Multilevel Balance: Needs and Resources for Victim Support Officers**

Policing, as a professional occupation that involves both a series of tasks and work-related settings, has been studied as a stress-, burnout-, and compassion fatigue-prone occupation. Both the nature of police work and the characteristics of police organizations make police officers more prone to suffer from work-related mental health challenges and issues (Burke & Deszca, 1986; McCarty et al., 2019; Rojas Solís et al., 2021; Shaible & Six, 2016). Among the task-related stressors and inducers of other negative psychological effects of policing, the specific needs of interactions with victims and offenders (Losung et al., 2021; Schaible & Gecas, 2010), risk assessment and on-the-spot decisions in tension- and violence-laden situations (Foley & Massey, 2021; Navarrete et al., 2022), and feelings of unsafety and of lack of control may be easily linked to burnout and compassion fatigue. Regarding organizational factors, working within hierarchized organizations that may have little regard to mental health issues and needs may also affect the police officers' wellbeing and performance, whereas different forms of organizational and social support may alleviate diverse forms of stress (Baek et al., 2021; Turgoose et al., 2022).

Burnout and other occupational mental health issues have come to the forefront of police officers' needs and experiences (De Camargo, 2022; Frenke et al., 2021). Victim support officers face a series of unique challenges and needs, as their job requires them to interact with victims and other users or beneficiaries of police forces. Gender-based and domestic violence may create even more trying and demanding situations and exchanges. These officers face specific needs and challenges linked to their interactions with victims, but also to their contact with traumatic experiences and processes and their collaboration with judicial administrations and procedures, other police forces and public administrations. As such, police officers who provide victim

support depend on a wide range of factors within and outside their corps, including the victims and other social actors, whose interplay directly affect the officers' performance and wellbeing (Losung et al., 2021; Schaible & Gecas, 2010). These interactions also entail a series of expectations about where does policing end and where do social services begin, and about the urgency or priority of specific victims and cases, such as those of gender-based and domestic violence (Hoyle, 2000; Wilson & Segrave, 2011; Winkel et al., 2004).

This article aims to analyze officers' needs and challenges regarding their interactions with victims, colleagues, superiors, and other occupational demands, as these occupational dimensions interplay into stress and trauma that may lead to burnout and compassion fatigue. Police resilience is here a key concept, directly linked to contemporary debates about resilience as both a personality trait and a trainable skill (Liu & Boyatzis, 2021), and as such its relevance is not limited to the individual experience of police officers, but also to their corps and to the public administrations they depend on. Drawing from qualitative research within the regional police corps of Catalonia, the Mossos d'Esquadra (henceforth, PG-ME), this article builds on multilevel studies of job-related burnout, compassion fatigue, and workplace environments to study the experiences of police officers who provide victim support, and particularly those who deal with gender-based and domestic violence. The paper starts with a theoretical review of resilience, burnout, and compassion fatigue, both broadly and specially within police settings, as well as a conceptual model that may bridge these terms and understandings. Following this, the paper introduces the empirical field and methodology under the research, as well as the guiding themes or dimensions that structure the results. Finally, a series of conclusions links the empirical case analyzed to the wider frame of policing as an occupation.

### **Police Resilience**

Resilience is commonly understood as a reactive capacity, as a form of post-traumatic growth or ability to bounce back from negative experiences (Liu & Boyatzis, 2021; Maitlis, 2020). As such, it is composed of a) a negative experience, which in our case is of an occupational nature, and b) a recovery and/or learning process that draws from the aforementioned experience. Police resilience may thus be conceptualized as police officers' and/or police organizations' capacity to endure adversity and trauma, to mitigate their effects, and even to learn from them. Whereas organizational resilience may be more clearly seen as a collective effort or resource, even individual resilience can be understood from two perspectives: on the one hand a personality trait, or "ego resilience," and on the other hand a trainable skill, or "state resilience" (Liu & Boyatzis, 2021). Following a comparative analysis of different understandings of and approaches to the concept of resilience, this section focuses on burnout and compassion fatigue as the two main challenges for police resilience, which may be understood from a wider perspective of job demands and resources.

### **Defining Resilience**

The concept of resilience has had a steady evolution as a widely used term, with origins linked to the natural sciences and a significant growth in social sciences (Schwarz, 2018). Its contemporary applications, particularly regarding global phenomena such as the COVID-19 pandemic, range from sustainability research (Nüchter et al., 2021), tourism destinations (Traskevich & Fontanari, 2021), organizations (Hillmann & Guenther, 2021), social networks and relationships (Fernández-Prados et al., 2021), and even discussions about the relation between the definitions of trauma and resilience (Jones & McNally, 2021).

Considering psychology-based definitions, adversity and response are found in the American Psychological Association's professional practice, for which resilience may be summarized as

the capacity to bounce back after adversities, or as the “the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress” (APA, 2012). They may also be found among the most frequent definitions, such as “ability to bounce back from the ravages of chronic stress and moving to a state of renewal, thriving and flourishing” (Liu & Boyatzis, 2021), recovery experiences after workload excess and trauma (Méndez-Fernández et al., 2021), post-traumatic growth (Maitlis, 2020), an “individuals’ ability to adapt to significant adversities while maintaining good mental and physical wellbeing” (Wadi et al., 2020). For this paper’s purpose, we understand resilience as both the process and the ability to recover and/or adapt from negative experiences and phenomena. We understand that this approach combines the main lines of research and conceptualization, and it is particularly well suited for the study of both individual and organizational forms of resilience. This approach also fits within Aburn et al.’s (2016, p. 991) review of resilience definitions, in which they identified five common or shared themes: ‘rising above to overcome adversity’, ‘adaptation and adjustment’, resilience as a form of ‘ordinary magic’, ‘good mental health as a proxy for resilience’, and ‘the ability to bounce back’.

Systematic reviews of the psychological use of this concept have suggested its dynamic and multifaceted nature, as well as a clear evolution from stable or basic trait- or personality-based approaches to understandings that focus on processes or outcomes (Wadi et al., 2020). According to Liu and Boyatzis (2021), this complex or growing notion of resilience may be distinguished between an “ego resilience,” or psychoanalysis-based personal disposition or trait that improves post-traumatic recovery, and a “state resilience,” a dynamic process different from ego resilience, with a learning orientation and process. These two dimensions, referred to either an individual or an organization, relate to separate aspects of a recovery, such as its immediate

capacity and its growth or potential for change. It is this potential, of resilience as a trainable skill, that a growing research has uncovered a series of strategies and tools to promote resilience among individual patients, users, or professionals, ranging from meditation and relaxation to journaling, sharing experiences, physical exercise, and other individual and team activities (Bakker & de Vries, 2021; Copeland, 2021; De Simone et al., 2021; Ogińska-Bulik & Juczyński, 2021).

The multidimensional conceptualization of resilience, and the fact that resilience may also be understood as a form of inference that draws from different individuals' or organizations' recovery processes under similar forms of duress (Rutter, 2012) makes this concept's measurement a significant focus of research. Different resilience scales have focused on significantly diverse aspects of this trait and skill, such as the role of internal and external factors, or the individual, group, and organizational levels it can be measured in (Raetze et al., 2021). Resilience scales based on surveys, such as the 14-Item Resilience Scale, have been productive tools for the study of the relation between resilience and variables such as stress, anxiety, or physical health (Orrù et al., 2021; Wagnild, 2021). Furthermore, these types of surveys have also uncovered the mediator role that resilience may play regarding burnout and compassion fatigue (Ferreira & Gomes, 2021; Méndez-Fernández et al., 2021).

As for the specific study of resilience within police or police-adjacent organizations, Janssens et al.'s 2021 systematic review of literature from several academic databases highlighted how a majority of recent studies focus on physical and mental health variables, and particularly on the predictive role of resilience. This review also found that most associations studied by the analyzed research displayed weak to moderate correlations. Among the existing literature on resilience within police organizations, we might highlight the frequent context of critical or

extreme incidents, such as natural disasters or terrorist attacks (Bowler et al., 2012; McCanlies et al., 2015; Pietrzak et al., 2014; Prati & Pietrantonio, 2010). However, police resilience has also been studied from a wider range of situations and occupational contexts (see Farr-Wharton et al., 2016; Fyhn et al., 2016; Galatzer-Levy et al., 2011, 2013; Ojedokun & Balogun, 2015), which makes for a more appropriate framework for this paper.

### **Burnout and Compassion Fatigue**

Burnout and compassion fatigue, among other occupational mental health hazards, may be easily linked to resilience, as this concept has been frequently studied as a mediator for the aforementioned health issues (Burnett & Wall, 2015; Dunn et al., 2008; Ríos-Risquez et al., 2018). Resilience may thus be understood as a process and/or ability that may counter or reduce burnout and compassion fatigue. Seen otherwise, the lack, the overcoming, or the reduction of mental health issues such as burnout and compassion fatigue may be conceptually or empirically used as an indicator of individual resilience, as discussed in Aburn et al.'s (2016, p. 994) review of empirical uses of resilience.

The study of burnout can be traced to the 1970s study of excessive occupational stress among health, education, and social services professionals by Herbert Freudenberger (1974). However, current understandings of this concept conceive it as the juxtaposition of three key dimensions: emotional exhaustion, detachment or cynicism, and a feeling of inefficacy (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Rapp et al., 2021). More complete definitions or conceptualizations focus on “a critical mental health problem that leads employees to experience emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and unproductiveness” (Aldossari & Chaudri, 2021). From the perspective of occupational hazards, it is “a work-related syndrome, consisting of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a decreased sense of personal accomplishment” (De Simone et al., 2021) that arises from chronic



psychological stress and the interaction between the autonomic nervous system and endocrine and immune processes (Bayes et al., 2021).

Burnout has been defined in various and even conflicting ways, despite shared commonalities around the three dimensions highlighted by Maslach: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization or cynicism, and lack of personal accomplishment (Nápoles, 2021). However, critiques have highlighted the unspecified nature of work or the lack of a precise definition of exhaustion within this approach (Schaufeli, 2021). A wider understanding of burnout as an occupational or activity-based hazard may try to surpass these caveats, such as Bakker and de Vries's (2021, p. 2) explanation of burnout not as a chronic stress syndrome, but rather as "a continuum ranging from acute fatigue that occurs after a day of hard work (and that disappears after a relatively short recovery period), to a severe and persistent form of exhaustion and accompanying problems."

Among the most frequently analyzed consequences of burnout we can find emotional and physical exhaustion, fatigue, irritability, low self-esteem, pessimism, low work productivity, negative attitude towards other people, likelihood to suffer from depression, anxiety, cardiovascular conditions, type 2 diabetes, and premature death (Aldossari & Chaudri, 2021; Bakker & de Vries, 2021; De Simone et al., 2021; Foley & Massey, 2021). Further research has highlighted explanatory variables or factors that mediate individual relations to burnout, such as feelings of guilt among professionals (Greenmyer et al., 2021) and cultural differences between countries or societies, regarding expectations and resources (Barker et al., 2021). However, among the main factors studied are those linked to the work environment, both in its physical or material setting and its organizational and human distribution. Drawing from Leiter and Maslach (2005), we share that the six most relevant environmental factors are a) the workload as the balance between demands and resources; b) the control, influence, and autonomy perceived by

the worker; c) the economic, social, or symbolic rewards; d) the interpersonal or community dimension of the work environment; e) the procedural justice or impartiality in decision making and relations within the organization, and f) the values and motivation that mediate between the worker and the job itself.

As for compassion fatigue, it has also been studied primarily among healthcare, emergencies, and other essential workers. Xie et al. (2021, p. 2) defined it as “emotional, physical and psychological exhaustion due to chronic work-related stress exposure among healthcare providers,” whereas Edwards and Goussios (2021, p. 247) understood it as “a condition characterised by the gradual erosion of compassion over time that culminates with empathic disengagement.” Its relation to healthcare, social services, and other similar occupations have allowed experts to understand compassion fatigue as a cost for caring, or as the emotional cost paid for the reaction to stress and for the exhaustion after caring for or helping traumatized people (Figley, 1995; Pérez-García et al., 2021). Empathy and compassion are thus two central dimensions of this concept, and as such they make the interaction between officer and victim a necessary condition. According to Foley and Massey, it can be easily distinguished from burnout as its “physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion as well as feelings of hopelessness and dissociation” are linked to the empathetic effort, and its main four factors are “poor self-care, previous trauma, lack of satisfaction within the workplace and lack of control in the workplace” (2021, p. 302).

Besides the aforementioned main consequences, among compassion fatigue’s most frequently analyzed effects we may find physical and psychological exhaustion, feelings of disconnectedness and inefficacy, fatigue, anxiety, irritability, job dissatisfaction, lack of boundaries between work and personal life, reduction of productivity, and even willingness to

quit (Carlson-Johnson et al., 2020; Edwards & Goussios, 2021; Eng et al., 2021; Pérez-García et al., 2021; Voth Schrag et al., 2021). Similar to burnout and resilience, compassion fatigue can be understood and studied from an individual perspective, but also from the point of view of organizational, ecological, or even social factors and responsibilities (Edwards & Goussios, 2021). As such, a combination of individual, interpersonal, and organizational factors may provide a series of mediating factors such as those identified by Figley (2002), among which we may highlight empathetic ability and response, exposition to other people's traumas, compassion-led stress, degree of satisfaction with the tasks, boundaries with the tasks and needs and hand, repeated exposition to the trauma and its remembrance, and changes in the worker's personal or professional life.

The fact that common definitions of burnout and compassion fatigue share relevant effects and factors highlight the messy boundaries between these and other related concepts. For instance, a recent study analyzed the commonalities between almost interchangeable uses of burnout, compassion fatigue, and secondary trauma syndrome (STS), underscoring the similarities (Eng et al., 2021), whereas another recent research underscored the links between uses of burnout, STS, and vicarious trauma as shared and related consequences of providing professional services to victims of trauma (Cummings et al., 2021). In order to distinguish between intrinsically related factors and effects of stress- and trauma-laden work with victims of trauma, for the research project that informs this article we differentiated between stress and burnout, on the one hand, and between burnout and compassion fatigue, on the other, via a series of key elements, such as the type of harm, and the role of time and empathy.

Drawing from current research literature on burnout and compassion fatigue among police and police-adjacent occupations, we may identify a growing body of studies that jointly analyze both

concepts within a wider framework of the psychological and occupational characteristics and conditions of particularly traumatic police tasks, including emergencies, rape and other violent crimes, and investigation units (Brady, 2017; Morabito et al., 2021; Ogińska-Bulik & Juczyński, 2021; Turgoose et al., 2017). After seminal works such as that of Burke and Deszca (1986), more recent studies of burnout among police officers have further diversified into case studies of specific units and corps (Foley & Massey, 2021; McCarty & Skogan, 2012), but also into specific dimensions such as the role of personality traits (Bhowmick & Mulla, 2021). The study of compassion fatigue within police organizations is also a growing field, after critiques such as Andersen and Papazoglou's (2015) on the existing gap in the research literature. Its research has also focused on particularly traumatic experiences and crimes, such as sexual and other extremely violent situations (Cronje & Vilakazi, 2020; Hurell et al., 2018). Police officers have also been found to experience low compassion satisfaction, with this dimension having a negative association with burnout and compassion fatigue (Grant et al., 2019). The role of emotion- and experience-sharing processes or instances within a police corps or even a unit may play a significant role in the improvement of occupational satisfaction for officers (Miller et al., 2009).

### **The Job Demands-Resources Model**

To study both burnout and compassion fatigue within the same police community, a theoretical model that combines explanations of shared factors and effects, as well as the role of coping and adaptation strategies is needed (Rap et al., 2021). The job demands and resources model (JD-R) is a theoretical model that focuses on the role of stress and other psychological phenomena within work environments and settings, and it has been productively used for clinical and organizational studies, including some within police corps (Santa Maria et al., 2018). The JD-R

model, despite variations and adaptations to specific contexts, shares a series of core tenets (Lesener et al., 2019; Roskams et al., 2021):

- a) Any occupation shares a series of traits definable as demands or resources, depending on their effect on workers.
- b) Demands provoke a negative process regarding the worker's health, as they lean towards effort and exhaustion. Demands direct workers towards negative results or phenomena, such as burnout. Demands include workload and time, responsibility conflicts, and so on.
- c) Resources are positive elements regarding the worker's health: stimulant, engaging, motivating elements with positive results on the worker's motivation, interest and adaptation. Resources include individual and group autonomy, support from colleagues or superiors, and organizational resources and support.
- d) The organization's dilemma is thus the maximization of resources and minimization of demands, from the understanding that a positive resources-demands balance leads to the workers' wellbeing, motivation, and productivity.

This model is particularly valuable to explore issues such as the role of occupational burnout as a consequence of a resources-demands imbalance (Rap et al., 2021), as well as nuances such as the role that may play key transformative and engaging leadership styles (Katou et al., 2021). The model's main strength and potential is its "ability to move beyond surface-level differences and identify the common characteristics that are universally associated with work outcomes" (Roskams et al., 2021, p. 27). This model is particularly productive due to the role given to time and to different individual and organizational strategies and tools that may be deployed to counter occupational strains. As such, burnout and compassion fatigue may be understood as potential outcomes of a process that has among its elements job demands, individual,

organizational, and social resources, as well as adaptive and maladaptive strategies (Bakker I de Vries, 2021; Roskams et al., 2021; Santa Maria et al, 2018).

[Figure 1: Burnout and compassion fatigue as potential outcomes of the resources-demand balance. Source: adapted from Bakker & de Vries, 2021]

Drawing from this model, resilience may be understood as the ability to cope with occupational strains due to a combination of individual, organizational, and social resources. Said resources include individual traits, trainable skills, organizational resources such as protocols or training, and social support and public policies aimed at improving workers' resilience and wellbeing. Among the model's adaptation strategies, we may identify both adaptive and maladaptive ones, according to their effects. Adaptive strategies include recovery and boundaries regarding job strains such as stress peaks and trauma, but also job crafting, the adaptation of occupational tasks, relationships, and understandings so that the worker has a more positive relation to their occupation. Maladaptive strategies, on the other hand, include the lack of flexibility when coping with occupational strains, maladaptive use of boundaries, and job dissatisfaction and self-undermining. To sum up, this model allows us to understand burnout as a consequence of an accumulation of job-related stress and tension with inadequate or insufficient adaptive strategies, whereas compassion fatigue can thus be understood as a more direct consequence of the resources-demands imbalance in the face of victims' or users' trauma.

### **A qualitative approach to resilience**

Resilience may thus be understood as a mediating factor within a systemic understanding of burnout and compassion fatigue as potential outcomes of a mismatch between occupational demands and resources. Following this conceptual framework on resilience and burnout and

compassion fatigue as potential outcomes of an adaptive or maladaptive process, this article aims to contribute to the growing literature on police resilience, understood as the officers' ability to cope with occupational hazards and strains. Grounded on key research on police burnout and trauma-led health issues (see Bhowmick & Mulla, 2021; Burke & Deszca, 1986; Foley & Massey, 2021; McCarty & Skogan, 2012; Ogińska-Bulik & Juczyński, 2021), this paper posits that police resilience should be understood from the perspective of the corps' work environment or social ecology, and as such not only individual but also organizational and social factors, demands, and resources should be taken into account (Ghazinour & Rostami, 2021). To this aim, a qualitative in-depth research was designed and conducted within the regional police corps of Catalonia (Spain), with a geographically representative sample of officers who provide support to victims of gender-based and domestic violence. The research focused on in-depth interviews with individual officers and focus groups in order to uncover expectations, experiences, and practices that directly and indirectly affect their resilience and their capacity to cope with the stress and trauma that characterize police work with victims.

### **Research Setting**

The *Policia de la Generalitat-Mossos d'Esquadra* (PG-ME) is the regional police corps of Catalonia, an Autonomous Community or self-autonomous region within Spain. Despite having its origins in the early XVIII century, the PG-ME became an integral police force in Catalonia in 1983, following the growing devolvement of responsibilities to regional governments in Spain (Mossos d'Esquadra, n.d. a). As an autonomous police force of Catalonia, the PG-ME replaced most roles of the Spain-wide police forces Guardia Civil and National Police, with the combined roles or responsibilities of public safety and order, administrative policing, judicial policing, criminal investigation, but also rural agents and victim support. Their prerogatives lie under the

Spanish Penal Code (Código Penal) and Penal Procedural Law (Ley de Enjuiciamiento Criminal), as well as Catalonia-specific administrative laws. The PG-ME has as of 2021 17,360 officers according to the corps' open database, distributed between eight ranks and nine police regions that encompass Catalonia (Mossos d'Esquadra n.d. b).

It is within this police force that the research analyzed the various occupational strains and psychological issues faced by officers who deal with victims, and particularly by those who provide support to victims of gender-based and domestic violence. Regarding the functional task division within the PG-ME, this research aimed at three distinct units that interact with victims in different stages or moments in time: the public safety units (USC, or *Unitats de Seguretat Ciutadana*), the citizens' attention offices (OAC, or *Oficines d'Atenció al Ciutadà*), and the victim support groups (GAV, or *Grups d'Atenció a la Victima*). Even though all three units formally belong to the USC, their roles and tasks greatly vary: the USC conduct street patrols and respond to emergency calls, the OAC remain at police stations and receive the formal complaints, and the GAV provide specialized support to victims of gender-based, domestic, hate crime violence and other sensitive cases. Each unit's needs and challenges differ, even if considering only officer-victim interactions, and as such their sources of job demands and their resources vary.

Besides this functional diversity even within victim support services from the PG-ME, this police force encompasses nine different geographical regions throughout Catalonia with significant demographic, human resources, and occupational demands and resources. Ranging from densely populated Barcelona and its metro area to the sparsely populated Pyrenees region, the nine police regions (RP or *regions policials*)<sup>i</sup> are the main geographical units within the PG-ME, and each of them is divided into basic police areas (ABP, or *àrees bàsiques policials*), and further into police



stations. In order to design a research sample with geographical representativeness, all nine regions were compared according to their 2020 workload of gender-based and domestic violence cases, and they were divided in three groups based on their caseload. Following this distinction of three great groups of police regions, one police region from each group was selected, in order to explore the geographical differences among regions. Even though individual data was anonymized for each interview and focus group, the data management strategy also had to consider the sensitive nature of geographical details shared throughout the interactions with participants.

## **Methods**

Due to the fact that current research of police resilience may lack in-depth evaluations of stress and experiences by specialized units and roles in police forces (Dabney et al., 2013), we opted for a qualitative research that allowed us to delve into the experiences, expectations, and explicit and implicit cognitive dissonances lived by the participant agents. The sensitive nature of police work, as well as the information and images within the PG-ME police stations, made participant observation unfeasible as a methodology, as the research team could neither obtain nor justify lengthy stays within police stations or while accompanying officers, as researchers such as Didier Fassin (2013) or John van Maanen (1973, 1975) have conducted. Consequently, we did manage to obtain permission for a two-phase research process that included both individual and group interviews, the latter having the form of focus groups. Thanks to the funding of public institutions, we could benefit from access and full collaboration from different police regions' administration officers, and we chose those regions with which we could obtain sufficient geographical and functional diversity, as previously explained. From within each police region, it was their administration officers' contacts and the participant officers' availability and voluntary

participation the main factors that ended up forming our sample size. It was thus a combination of geographically and functionally stratified sample with a convenience nature that depended on availability and access.

Interviews and focus groups were programmed as a two-phase research that aimed to maximize the exploratory nature of the in-depth interviews and the confirmatory and contrastive nature of focus groups (Lambert & Loïselle, 2008; Michel, 1999). The first phase of individual interviews aimed to uncover experiences, whereas the focus group-based phase sought to compare and contrast different individual experiences, as well as the perceptions between a wider geographical range of participants. A total of eleven in-depth individual interviews were conducted with two USC agent, two OAC officers, and seven GAV officers. As for the focus groups, a total of twenty-six officers contributed, with groups ranging from three to seven participants. Different personal and occupational issues affected the composition and number and participants, including both the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on some agents, as well as some emergencies that made several officers unavailable for focus groups. The use of print questions for the participants to respond in individual writing, for instance, was a significant analytical device that allowed us to contrast the interactive flow and the power relations among the group, on the one hand, and the actual individual attitudes and responses, on the other one (Kitzinger, 2005). The strategic use of moments of individual written responses also allowed us to better control the flow of information and dynamics between participants, such as those that could be affected by past relations or hierarchical ranks (Farnsworth & Boon, 2020; Sim & Waterfield, 2019).

[Table 1: Interview participants' characteristics.]

[Table 2: Focus group participants' characteristics]

The analysis of the data produced throughout the in-depth interviews and the focus groups was formulated on the grounds of thematic indicators, based on a series of guiding themes that allowed to do conduct a comparative and insightful analysis into the expectations, practices, and needs regarding the occupational conditions of victim support officers. The comparative nature of our analysis, a consequence of the geographical and functional diversity within the PG-ME and the three selected regions, required a series of guiding themes that allowed us to conduct lateral comparisons, understood as comparative analyses of analogous or similar units of analysis (Candea, 2018a, 2018b; Cook, 2018). These guiding themes were conceived of as flexible heuristic devices that arose from the theoretical revision of the conceptual framework, as well as from a previous research on the needs of victim support professionals at the PG-ME (Vivolas & Vallès, 2020). The flexibility of this type of analysis made our initial list of themes not redundant but changeable and malleable, and as such throughout the analysis several dimensions, codes, and contrasts were added as the interviews' and focus groups' data provided new insights (Braun & Clarke, 2012, 2021; Herzog et al., 2019; Neuendorf, 2018).

### **Key Issues in Police Victim Support**

The research among victim support police officers who deal with victims of gender-based and domestic violence confirmed assumptions and previous research on the stressful and trauma-laden nature of their job. Whereas the needs and tasks of work at the USC, OAC, or GAV significantly vary along a hypothetical victimization experience or trajectory, all three police experiences share key dimensions: the interactions with victims and other citizens, the role of discretion and assessments, a series of bureaucracy-related procedures and needs, and interactions with other police officers. The specific combinations of these factors in all three police regions that we studied uncovered a series of distinct experiences regarding functional and

geographical differences. The commonalities allowed us to identify related fields of improvement for the psychological wellbeing of police officers dealing with victims, and particularly those of gender-based and domestic violence. These factors may be easily linked to the burnout and compassion fatigue model we outlined (Figure 1), as they may be analyzed from the perspective of job demands, individual and collective resources, and interactions that end up with adaptive or maladaptive strategies. For instance, how police officers understand and experience agency and discretion draws from both individual and organizational resources—how the officers themselves cope with their responsibilities and capabilities, and how the force allows them or not to have discretion, whereas their experience of the job with these resources is linked to adaptive or maladaptive strategies regarding how they deal with their discretion, their limits, and the consequences of their actions. As such, the key dimensions analyzed must be seen under the light of the systemic relations between resources, demands, strains, and resources.

### **Victim-Officer Interactions**

The job... I always compare it, right? To a job in which we'd work with objects... If this was an assembly line and we worked with thinks, obviously if you stop working you screw things up with the assembly line, right? But of course, in our case we work with people... and sometimes the person can only talk to you at 13:30, which just happens to be your lunch break, and that's it. [...] They tend to be very thankful, and there's a connection with victims. I've always thought that victims end up taking small fragments from us, a small piece from inside me, and they also leave us with pieces from them. (IRP1\_3)<sup>ii</sup>

Due to the immediate needs and tasks related to the three units' victim support dimension, interactions with victims make up the most significant factor or reality regarding the officers' satisfaction, but also the job's negative effects. Throughout three typical daily routines informed by the interviews and focus groups, all officers interact frequently with victims, and particularly with their needs and expectations. A typical day for OAC officers, for instance, entail a series of victims filing formal complaints with average times that vary according to the case type.

Domestic and gender-based violence cases are considered among the most complex ones and among those that require more time. They receive victims with or without appointments so they must often negotiate perceptions of urgency with both victims and other officers to balance victims, management, and other unit's needs. As for GAV officers, their usual day involves series of interactions with both victims and other public and private institutions. While OAC officers are in charge of a first screening on whether cases are to be classified as GBV or not, it is GAV officers who conduct the risk assessment. Once a victim's case enters their GAV, the relationship with officers becomes more intense and closer, particularly for high-risk victims. Their interactions entail recurrent phone calls to reassess risks and offer support to the victim (the periodicity of which is determined by the level of risk) and to channel communications regarding judicial procedures, protection orders, and referrals to other services. As for said services, GAV officers interact almost daily with social services and judicial authorities but despite their close collaboration, these are seen as a key source of malaise for GAV officers. GAV officers perceive judicial authorities as uncooperative, disregarding their job and reaching risk assessments and procedural conclusions that often do not match their own. Similarly, their policing role may cause frictions with social services, who are less likely to regard GAV victims' assistance from a penal perspective. Finally, USC officers have the most varied expectations regarding a typical workday, as they may provide assistance and triage at the police station, patrol the streets, respond to emergency calls, or conduct the requirements dictated by a judge, so their interactions with victims and other services will also be more varied, including more exposure to tension and violence.

Interactions with victims and other non-officers are thus among the most relevant job-related demands for USC, OAC, and GAV officers. Such interactions involve negotiations of needs,

expectations, and manners, as well as translation or interpretation processes between the victims' experiences and narratives and the police procedures and forms. Beyond a previous calling or lack thereof, most participants value working with victims and they perceive these interactions as overwhelmingly positive or favorable. Close contact with victims also entails the participants' core set of training needs, regarding psychological tools to better manage the victims' and their own feelings and needs during their interactions. Both these tools and notions of a calling or of past experiences with psychological, volunteer, or victim attention jobs play a key role as individual resources (see Figure 1) that add up to adaptive strategies for occupational strain. All participants explained adaptation and learning processes, sometimes including traumatic or stressful episodes, thanks to which they learned or identified how to better deal with other persons. Flexibility and empathy are among the most prized traits or skills shared by most officers, and particularly by those participants from GAV and OAC. Previous relations or interactions with a specific victim, including close ones in towns or small cities, are seen either as a hindrance or as a facilitating factor. We identified a significant disparity on this matter between agents from rural RP1 with mostly negative evaluations and those from dense RP3: even though familiarity or previous knowledge with victims may help when providing support, the difficulty in maintaining boundaries between personal and professional life is clearly seen as a negative experience. This may be clearly understood as a form of maladaptive boundaries (see Figure 1), or lack of productive boundaries that help officers endure the strain produced by their occupational demands.

Knowing how to adequately interact with victims, their needs, and their expectations has been identified as a conscious and explicit combination of personal trait or predisposition, training, and most importantly experience. Personality traits, also linked to previous caring or voluntary

activities which entail empathy towards vulnerable people were among the most frequent explanations for an officer's fitness for victim support policing (IRP2\_2, IRP3\_2), understood as "a personal tendency or some personality trait that drives you to help" (IRP3\_3). The lack thereof was also explained as a factor in many officers quitting victim support, particularly GAV: "we need a calling and those who have it... we manage, we stay, and we feel fine. Those who don't, they end up leaving along the way" (IRP3\_2).

Regardless of the potential fitness between an officer's personality traits and their work, all participants discussed the significance of adaptive or learning processes, overwhelmingly considered even more relevant than training. Experience was explicitly contrasted by several officers to the academy training, understood as an initial base upon which to build. Not only procedural and technical information, but also how to deal with victims and with other individuals and groups, or with an officer's feelings and emotions, are among the most relevant elements of the individual adaptive experience. Most officers explained these adaptations drawing from an inflexion point or a moment in which they were aware they lacked knowledge or skills.

A key element of the interactions between officers and victims is that of the consequences of job-related situations identified or experienced by the participant officers as excessive stress or trauma. Among most officers there is a clear-cut division between specific moments of peak stress, consequences of the job or of momentary needs, and chronic or excessive stress levels that negatively affected them. Similarly, participant officers contrasted cases and victims that could affect them due to the trauma experienced and shared, on the one hand, from excessive experiences or expositions to trauma, as well as the lack of distance or disconnection from them, on the other hand. A relevant key to the officers' identification of a problem, be it stress- or

trauma-related, is the need to share it with colleagues, friends and family, or other professionals. As we will see when discussing interactions among police officers, participants share the notion that the PG-ME has an organizational culture that hinders or blocks discussions of mental health and emotions and, as such, officers need to individually find outlets with which to vent and share. These two last notions may be analyzed under the light of the burnout and compassion fatigue model (see Figure 1), as the identification of issues that need to be shared is clearly a use of recovery strategies, mediated by the individual resources required to identify needs and issues, whereas the organizational culture is a lack of corps-wide resources that limits the development or use of adaptive strategies.

Beyond the need to share the stress or trauma issues, participant officers identified them easily due to the lack of a disconnection or separation between their job and their personal life (IRP1\_2, IRP1\_3, IRP3\_4). As for the negative consequences in the officers, anxiety problems linked to police work are easily identified by most officers as a consequence of excessive stress (IRP3\_3, FGRP2\_2). Further consequences, derived from both excessive stress and from trauma, are linked to cynicism or to changes in the officers' ability to adequately treat victims: "respond badly, you may have an intervention with people in which you may... end up grumpy when it's not the time" (IRP1\_3). Cynicism may also affect how officers deal with the victims' expectations: for instance, when officers repeatedly experience a clash or a contrast with the victims' expectations of getting court-mandated protection order from them at the police station, a commonly shared situation, they may end up having tense conversations that draw from cynicism and even from a superiority complex of knowing the law and how justice works (IRP3\_4).



Another type of negative effects is that linked to burnout's emotional fatigue and to compassion fatigue's emotional cost. These concepts refer to the psychological and even physical exhaustion that may limit the officers' ability to adequately face their job demands and to manage their own and the victim's emotions. Trauma-related consequences were identified as particularly linked to expositions and remembrances of victims' trauma shared by participants (IRP1\_1, IRP2\_2, IRP2\_4), and were experienced as "mental fatigue" (IRP2\_1) or "situations that if you make them yours they end up affecting you a lot" (IRP1\_1). We may thus see how officers were knowledgeable about a systemic relation or interaction between how they deal with their job demands and strain and the resources, strategies, and techniques at their disposal, on the one hand, and the consequences of said strain.

### **Agency and Discretion**

A second crucial dimension of victim support police work identified throughout the research was that of the officers' agency and discretion, as necessary consequences of how policing entails constant risk assessments and decisions limited to a specific agent. Agency and discretion were identified as particularly crucial dimensions when dealing with victims' needs and expectations, and as officers evaluate the potential mismatch between them and their own time and resources. Whereas the training at the PG-ME's academy was identified by participants as a basis for technical decisions, experience is agreed upon as the most relevant factor for an officer's ability to make sensible decisions. Officers shared instances in which their work with victims involve making said decisions and how protocols may be followed, managed, or even avoided depending on their experience and on the flexibility they assign to their cases. This explicit knowledge is linked to how officers manage their expectations and their responsibilities, as they are both directly related to their satisfaction. Consequently, how officers understood their own agency,

discretion, and the limits and consequences of their actions, was directly and knowingly linked to issues such as job satisfaction or dissatisfaction, self-undermining, recovery, and other adaptive or maladaptive strategies present in the burnout and compassion fatigue model (see Figure 1).

Learning where one's possibilities and responsibilities end lists among the most significant processes for most GAV officers, as it is linked to a more satisfactory work experience: "you see how your job is limited and you don't have enough tools, but that's it, you're part of a structure and you reach what you can reach" (IRP2\_2). Another significant learning need that most officers relate to their own experiences is how to manage their frustration when interacting with victims who violate protection orders, who return with their offenders, or who do not want to file a complaint. Linked to the officers' management of their responsibilities and limitations, how they experience agency as in margin of action also plays a crucial role in how they work around their expectations and demands, and how they manage the interplay between resources and occupational strain. Officers in USC, OAC, and GAV have different priorities and urgent matters, whose assessment and management become part of learning processes, as explained by different interviewees. The sum of urgent matters, for instance when working as USC and patrolling, or when managing the risk assessment and the needs for a victim, become a source of stress and reflection about one's responsibilities and effects.

Boundaries, understood as conscious tools, are one of the most shared responses to responsibility and familiarity issues, and may arise from learning processes. Both interviews and focus groups revealed a wide range of experiences and tricks with which the participant officers try to disconnect from their job, daily or for specific needs and moments. Besides learning to log off the work email during holidays and weekends, establishing boundaries or distance between the victims and them is shared by many officers, and they may be part of either adaptive or

maladaptive boundary strategies. During interactions with victims, they may distance themselves thanks to the use of the police uniform and to protocols that recommend avoiding the personalization of cases: except for single-officer GAVs, teams may distribute cases and even avoid revealing their given names so that it is the team who manages a victim's case and needs<sup>iii</sup>. All agents do not necessarily follow this protocol, as within their flexibility and agency they might prefer a closer approach. The use of the police uniform may also aim to “create distance” because “it provides safety and a feeling of protection” (IRP1\_3), as it may act as “some form of emotional armor” (IRP2\_2).

An additional relevant dimension of police discretion is linked to protocol- or court-ordered actions, locally known as “*oficis*” or *ex officio* actions. When interacting with victims or with other institutions, such as social services, police officers are clearly aware that they must file a report for any crime they know of, and as such they negotiate the boundaries of their knowledge. They may interrupt victims to tell them not to continue talking about a crime if they do not want the officers to prosecute or report it (IRP2\_2, IRP3\_4). This contextual negotiation of knowledge is even more relevant for GAV officers dealing with victims that only wanted to be informed about their possibilities. As unwanted reports to courts may facilitate negative reactions from victims, participant officers prefer to leave agency in this particular matter for the victim: “Once you’ve got the information, it’s your choice. If you’ve lived this for twenty years, it may not be a matter of a single day, ok? With the information... think about it” (IRP3\_4).

### **Bureaucratic Demands**

A third basic dimension of the police officers’ job involves the effects of bureaucratic demands, as tasks and consequences demanded by protocols and guidelines, as well as by policy changes. Bureaucracy-related needs and demands directly interact with an officer’s relations with victims,

but also with how they understand their own needs and resources. As for bureaucratic and protocol-based tasks, most officers explained how the PG-ME requires a meticulous register of every single interaction and action, including phone calls, email exchanges, and meetings. As such, particularly in those GAV made up of just one person, registering everything according to the force's protocols and needs is felt as a hindrance, and as part of the job demands directly linked to the organizational resources and procedures. A different effect of bureaucratic needs is that of organizational changes, such as the fact that GAV officers are expected to file formal complaints, sharing that task with OAC. Several years before the research GAV officers did file them, but they stopped doing so to focus on victim support and case management. Most officers, including those from GAV, share the idea that "it was a mistake to stop filing complaints" (IRP1\_3) or that "the complaint was very interesting, mostly the victim's narrative" (IRP3\_4), as well as the notion that without reinforcements "if we file the complaints with the same officers we are now, we'll stop doing some things that we are currently doing and that I think that work" (IRP2\_4). These ideas intersect with the role of organizational resources, and how the corps' human resources practices inform the officers' ability to cope with occupational demands.

Another element of bureaucratic or PG-ME-related consequences for the police officers' wellbeing is that of the expected or actual workload, also linked to the aforementioned organizational changes explained by participant officers who fear or distrust the future trends of task allocation. Expectations about what victim support police work entails contrast with the descriptions of what USC, OAC, and GAV officers experience daily. Fieldwork revealed an overwhelming perception of excessive stress and too little time for each case of victim, as well as the role of colleagues as pillars that allow officers to vent or to take a break.

Q: How would you describe your usual workload? In one or two words?

1: Overwhelming.

2: Frustrating.

3: It's difficult to manage to disconnect completely. In USC you leave a report and go home and you disconnect, this way you can't take your work home. It's more than two words...

4: Lack of disconnection. We do this. I have been paralyzed for a long time.  
(FGRP2\_2)

The effects of how the officers' workload is understood and conceived of by the PG-ME as an organization, however, varies depending on the police region. The geographical diversity within the PG-ME has a significant effect in their work descriptions and in the perceptions of stress, as officers from RP1 explained that they experience a greater quality of life and a wider range of policing tasks and experiences than their colleagues. Rather than considering RP1 a special police region, we must consider this analysis the consequence of relevant factors that vary along the demographic and geographical characteristics of all police regions. A first specificity is the wide range of needs and tasks faced by RP1 officers, particularly when compared to regions in which officers are perceived to conduct monotonous, regular tasks: "We do many things. You do traffic. You do GAV, not the case management but... You act as a therapist for the town [laughs]. You do OAC. You patrol" (IRP1\_2). This functional diversity, however, is linked to a greater need of training, as well as to an equally greater difficulty for setting aside professional and personal life, as officers have a much closer relationship with their neighbors.

### **Interactions with Other Officers**

Relations with other police officers within PG-ME are a final key dimension identified throughout the research, ranging from the training received at the police academy to interactions with colleagues, but also to demands for help or support to colleagues or superiors. These interactions are equally a crucial part within the interconnectedness of the analyzed dimensions,

as how victim support officers feel to have organizational support, or their colleagues' cooperation when dealing with specific victims, influences how they value and understand their resources, as opposed to their needs. Consequently, and drawing from the burnout and compassion fatigue model (see Figure 1), these interactions are an integral part of the officers' job satisfaction or dissatisfaction, but also of issues such as self-undermining, recovery strategies, or the role of boundaries. The officers' experiences with colleagues and superiors were particularly relevant within the second phase of focus groups, as victim support officers shared and contrasted their individual experiences and issues with other colleagues. The comparison between the intra-corps relations within specific police stations, for instance, provided fruitful lines of discussion.

Training at the police academy (*Escola de Policia*) is considered by all participants as a necessary basis after which experience adds more relevant knowledge and techniques. The wide range of knowledge needs involved in police work is often given as an explanation of how limited basic training was considered by most participants, despite an overwhelmingly favorable opinion of trainers and contents. As for continuous training, police officers may apply to courses on specific contents, including special training for units such as GAV or OAC. However, the limited number of possible attendees, as well as the fact that training is centralized near Barcelona, makes its accessibility and availability heavily criticized. Similarly, psychological and other forms of support as offered by the PG-ME force are equally valued and criticized due to the limited resources and centralization, making both training and psychological resources limited organizational resources in the interplay between demands and resources. Even for those few police officers open to discuss their feelings and needs, an in-corps psychological support office may also see a limited response as psychological evaluations and support are not an

ordinary practice in this force. Every participant advocated for better and more accessible psychological resources, and those officers from GAV who participated in a short-lived venting and sharing exercise with the PG-ME psychologists advocated for its return: GAV specialists from each police regions met periodically, every two or three months, and shared their experiences with the support of psychologists, in small groups.

Among the experiences discussed were the contrasts and comments by other police officers. The comparison between police units frequently entails a negative experience of how victim support work is perceived by most PG-ME officers. Most participants share the same evaluations of how their work is not well understood or appreciated, and particularly that of the GAV due to the centrality of victim risk assessment and case management. GAV officers share that “not everyone values it” (IRP2\_1), “we all share the same... misunderstanding sometimes, from colleagues” (IRP3\_3), or “the feeling I have is that the GAV is not well appreciated” (IRP3\_3). As such, the participant officers identified a lack of social support that directly affects their management of the demands-resources interplay, leading to effects on their job satisfaction. The main evidence they provide for this feeling is the fact that “no one wants to volunteer to work in the GAV” (IRP3\_1), as well the lack of resources or reinforcements. GAV officers understand that their job is seen or understood as a series of phone calls and chats with victims over a coffee, whereas they contrast this image with their actual tasks and caseloads. Similarly, the OAC unit may be one of the most well-known among police officers, according to the participants, but it is not a desired destination due to the tasks they do, such as interactions with victims (IRP1\_2, IRP1\_3). A common thread that joins the experiences of officers from both units is the notion that the PG-ME is understood as a male-centered force in which “they value more the task... the

physical fortitude, cuffing people, [...], a public safety police service, more masculinized” (IRP3\_1).

## **Conclusion**

As the evidence from the field has revealed, policing with victims, and particularly those of gender-based and domestic violence, is a stress- and trauma-laden occupation, with relevant effects regarding the officers’ psychological wellbeing and preparedness for the job. The interaction with victims and other individuals, such as offenders, may be the most significant ones, as they are the source of the most pertinent effects vis-à-vis wellbeing and mental health. How officers interact with the victims’ needs and expectations relate to their preparedness, training, experiences, and adaptive processes, but also to their anxieties, responsibilities, and fears. Yet, the way in which officers interact with their colleagues and superiors, as well as with other institutions, and with the bureaucratic needs inherent to a police organization also play a key role in how an officer is prepared to face their job’s demands and obstacles. These wide range of factors can be analyzed from the perspective of how occupational demands and resources interplay as a way for officers to experience and manage their job-related strain. Drawing from a model that connects said resources and demands to potential burnout and compassion fatigue, police resilience must be understood as an individual-cum-organizational-cum-social set of resources and abilities that inform strategies for officers to cope with their occupational demands (see Figure 1).

Our research intersects within current and recent research on the psychological perspective of policing as an occupation, particularly regarding burnout and compassion fatigue. As in the literature reviewed above, we have identified a relevant relation between exposure to traumatic cases (see Hurell et al., 2018; Morabito et al., 2021) and the workload, experience, and



responsibilities as opposed to the resources (see Brady, 2017; Turgoose et al., 2017), on the one hand, and compassion fatigue and burnout, on the other hand. Similar to Grant et al.'s (2019) study, we have identified a significant role of empathy and compassion satisfaction within the recovery or adaptation process undertaken or experienced by officers, when evaluating their occupation. From the perspective of a qualitative study, we may suggest a potential relation between the role of empathy and compassion and occupational satisfaction, on the one hand, and the reduction of burnout and compassion fatigue, on the other hand. However, as a significant weight was given by several participant officers to personality- or experience-based abilities to recover from stress or trauma or to deal with emotions and needs, further qualitative and quantitative research is needed to distinguish the potential mediating role of these individual abilities or personality traits, drawing on studies such as that by Miller et al. (2009) or Bhowmick and Mulla (2021).

Likewise, our research allows us to confirm Galatzer-Levy et al.'s (2011) idea about police officers being broadly speaking resilient individuals, as the participant officers from the PG-ME explained different ways in which they combine formal training, informal learning from colleagues, varied informal venues for them to share experiences and emotions, as well as implicit or explicit adaptation processes to overcome trauma- and stress-related negative occupational hazards and situations. These findings resonate with the aforementioned model of burnout and compassion fatigue, and allow us to highlight the systemic and complex nature of the interplay between resources and demands that make up the experiences of occupational strain and job satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Despite this positive evaluation, participant officers also explained how colleagues may leave victim support tasks and units due to them not being able to adapt to the nature of the tasks, and they also criticized the PG-ME's formal training and

resources regarding psychological learning and adaptation, such as resilience building, echoing the relevance of this forms of training, as informed by Ojedokun and Balogun (2015), Farr-Wharton et al. (2016), or Galatzer-Levy et al. (2013). To sum up, our research posits that police resilience is a multifaceted ability and process, with both individual and organizational factors. Further research is needed, however, to distinguish the specific role or weight of individual factors within police resilience.

The qualitative and in-depth nature of the research widens the findings' usefulness for police forces beyond the PG-ME, as current literature on policing and on victim support underwrites commonalities in the needs and challenges faced particularly by police officers who provide victim support. Interactions with victims and their needs and expectations, for instance, are a common context in which not only police officers but other emergency, health, and support professionals find themselves, within and outside pandemic or extreme circumstances.

Interactions with a changing organization, as well as with colleagues and superiors, have also been found to be significant factors for police professionals, and as such this research signals towards common ground related to a police service's role within a corps, its organizational and even societal footing or evaluation, and how its officers interact with their own and other expectations. Qualitative research into the officers' experiences and expectations is thus a much-needed approach to provide new insights to the abundant quantitative perspectives into policing and the officers' wellbeing.

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## Footnotes

<sup>i</sup> The nine police regions are RP Girona (RPG), RP Pirineu Occidental (RPPO), RP Ponent (RPP), RP Central (RPC), RP Metropolitana Nord (RPMN), RP Metropolitana Sud (RPMS), RP Metropolitana Barcelona (RPMB), RP Camp de Tarragona (RPCT), and RP Terres de l'Ebre (RPTE).

<sup>ii</sup> Henceforth, “IRPX\_Y” refers to the Y<sup>th</sup> interview conducted in police region X, whereas “FGRP\_X\_Y” refers to the Y<sup>th</sup> focus group conducted in police region X.

<sup>iii</sup> This is, however, a common practice in most GAVs, victims will often address GAV officers by their given name and request to deal with a particular officer, while this is not at all a common practice among USC or OAC officers. It is within this context that some GAVs avoid this practice to gain some personal distance.

## Tables

*Table 1: Interview participants' characteristics.*

| <b>Interview</b>    | <b>Police<br/>Region<br/>(RP)</b> | <b>Basic Police Area (ABP)<br/>population</b>          | <b>Functional<br/>unit</b> | <b>Interview<br/>length<br/>(minutes)</b> |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| <b>Interview 1</b>  | RP1                               | Large (small rural town within a large population ABP) | GAV                        | 33                                        |
| <b>Interview 2</b>  |                                   | Large (small rural town within a large population ABP) | USC                        | 35                                        |
| <b>Interview 3</b>  |                                   | Large                                                  | GAV                        | 59                                        |
| <b>Interview 4</b>  | RP2                               | Large                                                  | GAV                        | 62                                        |
| <b>Interview 5</b>  |                                   | Large (small station within a large population ABP)    | OAC                        | 56                                        |
| <b>Interview 6</b>  |                                   | Medium                                                 | USC                        | 51                                        |
| <b>Interview 7</b>  |                                   | Large                                                  | GAV                        | 61                                        |
| <b>Interview 8</b>  | RP3                               | Large                                                  | GAV                        | 43                                        |
| <b>Interview 9</b>  |                                   | Large (small station within a large population ABP)    | GAV                        | 55                                        |
| <b>Interview 10</b> |                                   | Medium                                                 | OAC                        | 54                                        |
| <b>Interview 11</b> |                                   | Small                                                  | GAV                        | 56                                        |

Table 2: Focus group participants' characteristics

| Focus group (FG)                 | Police Region (RP) | Basic Police Area (ABP) population                  | Functional unit                              | Focus group length    |
|----------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>FG RP1 (7 participants)</b>   | RP1                | Medium                                              | OAC                                          | 1 hour 19 minutes     |
|                                  |                    | Medium                                              | URPAC<br>(proximity and community relations) |                       |
|                                  |                    | Large                                               | URPAC                                        |                       |
|                                  |                    | Large                                               | USC                                          |                       |
|                                  |                    | Large (small station within a large population ABP) | OAC                                          |                       |
|                                  |                    | Large                                               | USC                                          |                       |
|                                  |                    | Small                                               | USC                                          |                       |
|                                  |                    |                                                     |                                              |                       |
| <b>FG RP2_1 (4 participants)</b> | RP2                | Small                                               | GAV                                          | 1 hour and 42 minutes |
|                                  |                    | Medium                                              | GAV                                          |                       |
|                                  |                    | Small (small station within a small population ABP) | GAV                                          |                       |
|                                  |                    | Large                                               | URPAC                                        |                       |
| <b>FG RP2_2 (4 participants)</b> |                    | Large                                               | GAV                                          | 1 hour and 34 minutes |
|                                  |                    | Large                                               | GAV                                          |                       |

|                           |     |                                                       |     |                       |
|---------------------------|-----|-------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----------------------|
|                           |     | Large (small station within a large population ABP)   | GAV |                       |
|                           |     | Large (small station within a large population ABP)   | GAV |                       |
| FG RP3_1 (3 participants) | RP3 | Small                                                 | GAV | 1 hour and 28 minutes |
|                           |     | Small                                                 | GAV |                       |
|                           |     | Small                                                 | OAC |                       |
| FG RP3_3 (4 participants) |     | Large                                                 | OAC | 1 hour and 36 minutes |
|                           |     | Large                                                 | GAV |                       |
|                           |     | Large (small station within a large population ABP)   | GAV |                       |
|                           |     | Large                                                 | GAV |                       |
| FG RP3_3 (4 participants) |     | Medium (small station within a medium population ABP) | GAV | 1 hour and 35 minutes |
|                           |     | Medium (small station within a medium population ABP) | GAV |                       |
|                           |     | Medium                                                | GAV |                       |
|                           |     | Large                                                 | GAV |                       |

Figure 1 Burnout and CF

