The Role of Psychological Empowerment in Reducing Job Burnout Among Police Officers: A Variable-Centered and Person-Centered Approach

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Abstract
The study aimed to assess the effect of psychological empowerment on burnout from variable-centered and person-centered perspective. Based on 363 questionnaires from police officers in China, the results of this study indicate that when police officer feel higher level of psychological empowerment, job burnout can be decreased among Chinese police officers. From the person-centered perspective, this study used latent profile analysis method to divide three different job burnouts, including low job burnout, moderate job burnout, and high job burnout. Police officers with a high level of emotional exhaustion were more likely to have the high job burnout profile compared with the other two job burnout profiles. Police officers with a low level of depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment were more likely to have the moderate and low job burnout profile compared with others. Different job burnout profiles can be impacted by psychological empowerment.

Keywords
job burnout, psychological empowerment, latent profile analysis, police, China

Introduction
The activities carried out in the police context, such as seeking suspects or witnessing traumatic events, enforcing the law, create stress for the workers (Luceno-Moreno et al., 2016). Police officers are likely to replete with stress due to the tasks and obligations of their work, such as organizing traffic or reporting offenses, mediating conflicts between citizens, providing help (Talavera-Velasco et al., 2018). Because of the high stress inherent in policing, police officers are especially susceptible to job burnout (Basinska et al., 2014). Job burnout refers to the symptoms of emotional exhaustion, diminishment of personal accomplishment, and depersonalization among career public servants (Maslach et al., 2003). Job burnout appears easily in professionals and careers involving assisting people such as teachers, social workers, physicians, and nurses (Maslach et al., 2003). Burnout in police is linked to job dissatisfaction (Hawkins, 2001), medication use (Gong et al., 2017), and family conflict (Martinussen et al., 2007). It is crucial to find how to reduce police officer’s job burnout.

According to prior research, for the American police, effort–reward imbalance impacts on cynicism and exhaustion positively (Violanti et al., 2018). In India, job involvement and job satisfaction predicted lower levels of all three dimensions of burnout (Lambert et al., 2018). Policing differs among nations, and results may vary by police in different nations. Most significantly, the coverage of police service in China is large, while the police force is seriously understaffed and underpaid (Wang et al., 2014). Police have been burdened with a heavy workload. Because the institutional constraints and environment faced by Chinese police are different from those in other countries, the research needs to find out the factors to reduce the burnout of police according to the special working environment (Gong & Zhang, 2015).

Empowerment has been considered as an effective way to unify Chinese Public Security Bureau and Chinese police force in the previous decades. However, in reality, the subject of this empowerment is considered as the leader, and the objective elements are neglected (Schilpzand et al., 2018). As empowerment was not effective, some researchers realized that the successful implementation of empowerment measures depended on the willingness of subordinates to use this power. Psychological empowerment is evolved from the concept of empowerment, and it emphasizes the degree of
empowerment as mentally perceived by individuals (Spreitzer, 1996). Organizational environment has a strong impact on the cognition of empowerment. Supportive organizational climate is significantly and positively associated with the cognition of empowerment. Increased individual degree of psychological empowerment can improve management efficiency, individual job satisfaction, organizational commitment, innovative behavior, performance, and other outcome variables (Simonet et al., 2014). Although researchers have alluded to the employee’s psychological empowerment can influence burnout, in view of police, little empirical testing has been done on this topic in China context (Gong et al., 2017).

Previous research overlooks how the different antecedents impact on job burnout and results of job burnout using a variable-centered approach (Gong et al., 2017). It is not clear that how these three dimensions of job burnout interact with each other and how the configurations of the three burnout dimensions are organized (Violanti et al., 2018). Following the variable-centered and person-centered approach, the current research aims to investigate the prevalence of burnout in China’s police officers and its correlation with their psychological empowerment, compared burnout in police by various demographics by variable-centered approach.

**Literature Review and Hypotheses**

**The Concept of Job Burnout**

The studies on job burnout have mainly focused on evaluating the cause and influencing factors of job burnout, and on solutions, measures, or approaches to prevent it (Aghaz & Sheikh, 2016; Nguyen et al., 2018; Ruddock et al., 2017; Schwarzkopf et al., 2016). The development of job burnout research has focused on different perspectives. Many researchers proposed multiple theories and models for job burnout to explore causes and interventions. These researchers have proposed that the generation of job burnout can be attributed to discrepancies, such as discrepancy between individual and work (Schwarzkopf et al., 2016); discrepancy between an individual’s efforts at work and compensation obtained from work (Gong & Zhang, 2015); discrepancy between individual’s investment in work-related resources and resources obtained from work; and discrepancy between job expectation and reality (Aghaz & Sheikh, 2016).

**The Concept of Psychological Empowerment**

In reality, the subject of this empowerment is considered as the leader, and the objective elements are neglected. As empowerment was not effective, some researchers realized that the successful implementation of empowerment measures depended on the willingness of subordinates to use this power, and they proposed the concept of psychological empowerment. Psychological empowerment is evolved from the concept of empowerment, and it emphasizes on the degree of empowerment as mentally perceived by individuals. Researchers proposed the concept of psychological empowerment and a four-dimensional structure. Psychological empowerment included meaning, self-efficacy, self-determination, and impact (Kark et al., 2003; Spreitzer, 1996).

Meaning is to judge the value of work objectives from the ideal or standard of employees. It means that employees pay attention to their work and feel the importance of work to them (Balcazar et al., 2014). Self-efficacy refers to the confidence that an individual thinks he can accomplish a task. Self-determination refers to an individual’s ability to control work activities. If employees feel that they are only following instructions from their superiors and have little autonomy and freedom, their degree of self-care delegation will decrease (Pieterse et al., 2010). Impact refers to the degree to which an individual influences the strategy, administration and operational results of his department or work unit, or the degree to which his department or organization attaches importance to his ideas. Therefore, an employee with high psychological authorization is a proactive problem solver who can assist the supervisor in planning and implementing the work (Gong et al., 2017).

Psychological empowerment mediated the relationship between leader-member exchanges and job satisfaction, and between empowered atmosphere and job satisfaction (Pieterse et al., 2010). It is determined by characteristics of both individuals and organizations; therefore, the input and outcome variables of psychological empowerment both contain psychological factors of individuals and organizational factors (Simonet et al., 2014). Behavioral outcomes and psychological outcomes of individuals are both affected by psychological empowerment. International studies on psychological empowerment have achieved considerable results, while research in this area has just started in China, with limited research targets (Gong et al., 2017). Therefore, investigation of psychological empowerment and its impact on police force is necessary.

**Relationship Between Job Burnout and Psychological Empowerment**

The major factors affecting job burnout mainly include working environment (an external factor) and personality and attitude of individuals (internal factors) (Zhang & Bartol, 2010). Psychological empowerment includes both internal and external factors. However, the correlation between depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment was not significant. One research showed significantly negative correlations between psychological empowerment and emotional exhaustion, as well as psychological empowerment and depersonalization (Gong et al., 2017). However, a significantly positive correlation was found between psychological empowerment and personal ability. In addition, prior research also showed a significant impact of psychological
empowerment on job burnout of employees (Sarmiento et al., 2004). However, the self-determination of employees had no impact on the job burnout.

Method

Design and Participants
This study was based on cross-sectional data collected from 390 police officers in mainland China. Some participants completed self-report individually during a special work session after their heads of department had given their permission, but all the questionnaires were completed during police officers’ work hours. The first page of each questionnaire included instructions for participants and information about the study. 363 valid questionnaires were returned (effective response rate of 95.28%).

Of the 363 participants, 20.1% were female and 79.9% were male. As for age, participants’ average age is 29.5 (SD = 1.26), 12.7% (n = 46) were under 25 years of age, 33.9% (n = 123) were 26 to 30 years of age, 20.7% (n = 75) were 31 to 35 years of age, 32.8% (n = 119) were 35 years of age above. With regard to their organizational tenure, their average professional experience is 8 years (SD = 1.34), 29.8% (n = 108) had worked for less than 5 years, 28.7% (n = 104) for 6 to 10 years, 21.2% (n = 77) for 11 to 15 years, and 20.4% (n = 74) had worked for more than 16 years. With regard to education, 85.2% (n = 309) held a bachelor’s degree or graduated from a junior college.

Measures

Job burnout. A translated Maslach Burnout Inventory–General Survey–Chinese Version was used to examine the level of burnout among Chinese police (α = .94) (Gong & Zhang, 2015). This questionnaire re-edited according to the questionnaire from the Maslach Burnout Inventory ( Wang et al., 2014) and revised by Chinese scholar and tested reliability by prior research ( Fang, 2017). It contains 15 items and each dimension contained five questions. Each question was loaded on the corresponding factor and had relatively high loadings. The cumulative variance accounted for by the three factors reached 82.3%. We used items score in one subdimension to test on dimension’s internal coefficients by SPSS. The internal consistency coefficients of each dimensions were .82, .77, and .67, two of them were higher than the recommended value of .70, one score is close to .70. This is one limitation of this survey.

Psychological empowerment. Spreitzer (1996) developed the psychological empowerment scale. The scale includes four parts: meaning; work self-determination; self-efficacy; and job impact (Spreitzer et al., 1997). The scale contains 12 items, with each of the four parts containing three questions. Respondents expressed their agreement with the statements in the questionnaire using 5-point Likert-type scale ratings. Each question was loaded on the corresponding factor and had relatively high loadings (α = .85). The cumulative variance accounted for by the four factors reached 73.8%. Internal consistency coefficients of the factors work meaning, competency or self-efficacy, determination, and job impact were .82, .72, .83, and .86, respectively, all of which were higher than the recommended value of .70 (Perry et al., 2013).

Ethics Statement
This study was carried out in accordance with the recommendations of the ethics committee of Liaocheng University with written informed consent from all participants (17_7_14).

Results

Table 1 showed significant correlations among different dimensions of job burnout and psychological empowerment. The results show that different dimensions of job burnout were negatively related to different dimensions of psychological empowerment. The results of the correlation analysis generally supported the negative effects of job burnout and psychological empowerment.

To further understand the impact of psychological empowerment on job burnout, we used the psychological empowerment scores as an independent variable and job burnout and each dimension as dependent variables to perform multivariate and hierarchical regression analysis. Results of the multivariate regression analysis showed that job meaning impacts emotional exhaustion significantly; job meaning and self-efficacy impact depersonalization significantly; and job meaning, self-determination, and self-efficacy impact reduced personal accomplishment and job burnout (Table 2).

The fit statistics for profile structures are presented in Table 3. When considering all three of the fit statistics, the three-profile solution had lower Bayesian information criterion (BIC), sample-size-adjusted BIC (SSA-BIC), and Akaike information criterion (AIC). As such, we used the three-profile solution (see Figure 1). The largest profile (n = 136, 38.20% of the respondents) was a moderate job burnout, characterized by above-average levels on emotional exhaustion and below-average levels on depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. The next largest profile (n = 135, 38.19% of the respondents) was a low job burnout, characterized by below-average level on all dimensions. The last profile (n = 92, 25.61% of the respondents) was high job burnout, characterized by highest emotional exhaustion and depersonalization and low reduced personal accomplishment (see Table 4). We found two profiles were fairly similar, and one profile that was different.
One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with post hoc comparisons were performed to investigate any difference in burnout levels and burnout’s dimensions. The results indicate that there are statistically significant differences between the burnout levels and burnout’s dimensions. The results of the Turkey HSD post doc test indicate that police who were in high burnout level had significantly higher emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment levels than those who were in moderate and low burnout level, and police who were in moderate burnout level had significantly higher emotional exhaustion and depersonalization levels than those who were in low burnout level (see Table 4).

At last, using the R3STEP approach (see Table 5), our results found that experiencing higher psychological empowerment made individuals more likely to belong to the low level job burnout, followed by the moderate level job burnout profile. Experiencing higher level of impact made individuals are more likely to belong to the low and

### Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of all Measures.

| Variables                              | 1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  | 7  | 8  | 9  |
|----------------------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 1. Emotional exhaustion                |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| 2. Depersonalization                   |    |  .35** |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| 3. Reduced personal accomplishment     | .1* | .51** |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| 4. Job burnout                         |    |    | .73** | .81** | .65** |    |    |    |    |
| 5. Job meaning                         |    |    |    | .35** | .51** | .54** | .62** |    |    |
| 6. Self-determination                  |    |    |    |    | .19** | .22** | .44** | .37** | .4** |
| 7. Self-efficacy                       |    |    |    |    |    | .25** | .37** | .4** | .44** |
| 8. Job impact                          |    |    |    |    |    |    | .17** | .1* | .24** | .23** |
| 9. Psychological empowerment           |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | .32** | .39** | .54** |

**Note. n = 363. SD = standard deviation.**

*p < .05. **p < .01.

### Table 2. Regression Analysis Between Psychological Empowerment and Dimensions of Job Burnout.

| Variable                     | Emotional exhaustion | Depersonalization | Reduced personal accomplishment | Job burnout |
|------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------|-------------|
| Gender                       | 0.10                 | 0.14              | 0.03                            | 0.13        |
| Age                          | −0.04                | −0.17             | 0.04                            | −0.08       |
| Job tenure                   | 0.1                  | 0.07              | −0.08                           | 0.05        |
| Educational level            | 0.13                 | −0.14             | −0.15                           | −0.04       |
| Job meaning                  | −0.31**              | −0.41**           | −0.35**                         | −0.48**     |
| Self-determination           | −0.04                | −0.05             | −0.27**                         | −0.14*      |
| self-efficacy                | −0.08                | −0.15**           | −0.13*                          | −0.16**     |
| Job impact                   | 0.01                 | 0.09              | 0.01                            | 0.42        |
| $R^2$                        | 0.18                 | 0.33              | 0.41                            | 0.43        |
| $\Delta R^2$                | 0.15                 | 0.31              | 0.39                            | 0.41        |
| $F$                          | 7.2**                | 16.91**           | 23.65**                         | 25.87**     |

**Note. n = 363.**

*p < .05. **p < .01.

### Table 3. Fit Statistics for Profile Enumeration.

| LL  | FP  | AIC  | BIC  | SSA-BIC | LMR(p) | BLRT(p) | Entropy |
|-----|-----|------|------|---------|--------|---------|---------|
| 2   | −1,660.84 | 10 | 3,341.69 | 3,380.24 | 3,348.51 | 0.00 | 0.10 | 0.71 |
| 3   | −1,636.24 | 14 | 3,300.49 | 3,354.46 | 3,310.05 | 0.11 | 0.00 | 0.82 |
| 4   | −1,605.91 | 18 | 3,247.83 | 3,317.22 | 3,260.12 | 0.36 | 0.34 | 0.76 |

AIC = Akaike information criterion; BIC = Bayesian information criterion; SSA-BIC = sample-size-adjusted BIC; LMR = Lo–Mendell–Rubin; BLRT = bootstrap likelihood ratio test.
moderate level job burnout profiles compared with the high level job burnout.

Discussion

According to our findings, different dimensions of job burnout were negatively related to different dimensions of psychological empowerment in Chinese police officers. Job meaning had a significant impact on all dimensions of job burnout, self-determination, and self-efficacy. Psychological empowerment impact on reduced personal accomplishment negatively from both the variable-centered and person-centered perspectives. Three job burnout profiles were identified, namely, low job burnout, moderate job burnout, and high job burnout.

Theoretical Implication

Among the dimensions of job meaning, self-determination, and competency or self-efficacy, job meaning was the most

![Figure 1. Job burnout profiles.](image-url)

Table 4. One-Way ANOVA Comparisons of Different Profiles of Job Burnout.

| Profile                        | 1. Low job burnout | 2. Moderate job burnout | 3. High job burnout | F   | p   | 1 vs. 2 | 1 vs. 3 | 2 vs. 3 |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|-----|-----|---------|---------|---------|
| Emotional exhaustion          | 2.09              | 4.05                    | 4.26                | 295.14 | 0.00| -2.17** | -2.75** | -0.58*  |
| Depersonalization             | 1.50              | 1.97                    | 4.07                | 414.40 | 0.00| -0.46*  | -2.56** | -2.10** |
| Reduced personal accomplishment| 1.54              | 1.58                    | 2.83                | 59.91  | 0.00| -0.04   | -1.29** | -1.25** |

Note. ANOVA = analysis of variance.
*p < .05. **p < .01.

Table 5. R3STEP Results for Psychological Empowerment for Job Burnout.

|                   | Low vs. moderate | Low vs. high | Moderate vs. high |
|-------------------|------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Meaning           | 0.77**           | 2.27**       | 1.51***           |
| Self-determination| 0.36*            | 0.79**       | 0.43***           |
| Self-efficacy     | 0.84**           | 1.90**       | 1.06**            |
| Impact            | 0.36*            | 0.42**       | 0.05              |
| Psychological empowerment | 1.03** | 2.48**       | 1.45**           |

Note. n = 363.
*p < .05. **p < .01.
effective predictor for the three symptoms of job burnout. Police officers with good job meaning, stronger self-determination, competence, and feeling of job impact exhibited lower levels of job burnout, while police officers with high degrees of burnout usually reported less psychological empowerment (Prati & Zani, 2013). The generation of psychological empowerment in police force members on this basis can motivate their sense of responsibility and affiliation (Violanti et al., 2018). They then believe that they are responsible to promote the development of the entire police force and will not merely calculate their gains and losses when they have to make sacrifices while on duty (Talavera-Velasco et al., 2018). We showed that job impact was not included in the regression equation of any symptoms of job burnout, suggesting that job impact had no effect on job burnout. The role of job impact mainly appeared in the performance aspect but not emotional and behavioral aspects, which were also confirmed in this study (Pines et al., 2012).

We identify three job burnout profiles, namely, low job burnout, moderate job burnout, and high job burnout. These job burnout profiles provide additional empirical insights into what combinations of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment Chinese police officers have, which have not been identified by the previous research (Li et al., 2019).

**Practical Implication**

Given the above discussion and analysis, this study suggested that the degree of job burnout in Chinese police force members might be relieved through improving psychological empowerment. For this reason, we propose the following recommendations for the management of Chinese police forces: First, creating a high support and high care working atmosphere. In the social support system of Chinese police forces, the support function of leadership should be emphasized in the unit to apply different management models in different situations, such as the relationships between subordinates and seniors, the educational levels and maturation of subordinates. Job recognition of the police force members should be strengthened. For example, leaders can complement individuals with excellent performance, both privately and publicly, and adopt more of the comments, opinions, and perspectives from subordinates. Leaders should maintain social and daily contact with subordinates, provide general guidance for work by giving positive and constructive feedback, supervise the work process in timely ways, and respond to work-related problems with understanding and assistance (Gong & Zhang, 2015).

Second, maintaining police force’s interest and safety in the system. To maintain the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese police force members, the enforcement powers of the Chinese police force should be improved. A complete and secure system for the police officers to file complaints and charges should be established in the police force, thereby effectively protecting the rights of members of the police profession. In the security guarantee and organizational structure, the characteristics of each police category and the job function should be fully considered to protect the personal safety of each police officer and to establish crisis and stress intervention system.

Third, establishing a social support network in Chinese police forces. To establish a social support network, it is important to create a good atmosphere of trust between police force members and the public. Leaders’ support of public security authority should be reinforced. In addition, activities which are not related to policing affairs should be reduced to optimize the environment for law enforcement. Finally, adequate understanding and support of the police force’s duties by family members is the most important backup for each police officer. Social support mainly refers to emotional support in the action and the decision-making of police force members to further help the subordinates and employees of police forces to reduce stress and let the police understand and deal with the stress-related negative feeling and to disclose their feeling to the leaders.

**Limitations and Future Research**

First, Chinese police sample may exhibit lower in psychological empowerment. There may be some restrictions in using psychological empowerment to predict profile of job burnout only in Chinese respondents. Second, we used cross-sectional data, and we could therefore not draw any causal inferences. Thus, future studies might start from similar experimental designs that clarifies the causal relationships among the studied variables. Third, the small sample size reported here may have affected the generalization of results. An internal reliability value of .67, while above the cut-off of .60, is low.

**Conclusion**

The results of this study indicate that when police officer feel higher level of psychological empowerment, job burnout can be decreased among Chinese police officers. From the person-centered perspective, this study used latent profile analysis method to divide three different job burnout profiles, including low job burnout, moderate job burnout, and high job burnout. Employees with a high level of emotional exhaustion were more likely to have the high job burnout profile compared with the other two job burnout profiles. Employees with a low level of depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment were more likely to have the moderate and low job burnout profile compared with high job burnout profile. Different job burnout profiles can be impacted by psychological empowerment. All the statistical indicators support three classification model of job burnout.

**Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.
Funding
The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This research was funded by grants from the National Natural Science Foundation of China (71801120 and 71802019), the Ministry of Education of Humanities and Social Science Research youth fund project (18YJC630038), the grant from China Scholarship Council (Award ID: 201908370108), Youth Scholar Key Training Plan Research Special Project of Shandong Province (19CQXJ05), and University Outstanding Youth Innovation Team Project of Shandong Province (S201910447026).

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