HOW IMAGES OF GOD AFFECT POLICE

OFFICER STRESS LEVELS

by

Lauren M. Denman

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for departmental honors in
the Department of Criminal Justice
Texas Christian University
Fort Worth, Texas

May 3, 2013

HOW IMAGES OF GOD AFFECT POLICE

OFFICER STRESS LEVELS

Project Approved:

Jason Clark-Miller, Ph.D.
Department of Criminal Justice
(Supervising Professor)

Katherine Polzer, Ph.D.
Department of Criminal Justice

Sandra Waters, Ph.D.
Department of Modern Languages

<u>TABLE OF CONTENTS</u>

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I could not have completed this project without the help and support of my committee members. First, I would like to thank Dr. Katherine Polzer for all of her support and belief in me throughout my entire college career. Without her, I may never have realized my true passion for Criminal Justice. Second, I would like to thank Dr. Sandra Waters for her enthusiastic support throughout the duration of this project, and all of the help she provided in the editing process. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Jason Clark-Miller for his guidance and mentorship in this project. His enthusiasm for research and his support of my academic endeavors were invaluable to the successful completion of this project. Without him and his initial research, this project would never have gotten off the ground.

<u>INTRODUCTION</u>

Police officers experience high levels of stress as a result of their occupation (Anderson, Litzenberger, & Plecas 2002; Kirschman 2007; Volanti et al. 2007). If they fail to cope with stress in a healthy manner, they may experience serious mental and physical consequences such as fatigue, burnout, or even PTSD (Aaron 2000; Kirschman 2007; Violanti et al. 2007). There are a myriad of coping mechanisms available to police officers who experience critical stress. Religiosity has been studied and recognized as one of these coping mechanisms (Beehr et. al, 1995), but some researchers believe that an individual's image of God as "harsh or judgmental" or "loving and forgiving" will be a more predictive measure of behavior (and, we would argue here, coping) than religious activity or denomination (Bader et al., 2010; Greeley 1989). The purpose of this study is to determine if a police officer's image of God will be predictive of their critical stress levels.

<u>REVIEW OF LITERATURE</u>

The Experience and Consequence of Police Stress

It is widely acknowledged that police officers experience a great deal of job-related stress. (Aaron 2000; Gershon, Barocas, Canton, Li & Vlahov 2009; Kirschman 2007; Morash, Haarr, & Kwak 2006; Sigler & Thweatt 1997; Violanti et al. 2007). Otto and Schmidt (2007) define job-related stress as, "the perception of a discrepancy between environmental demands (stressors) and individual capacities to fulfill these demands" (p. 272). As a part of their job, police officers are exposed to organizational stressors that consist of negative public perception of police, dissatisfaction with the judicial system, ineffective workplace communication, rigid organizational structure, excessive overtime,

heavy workload, lack of opportunities for advancement, workplace discrimination and/or harassment, shift work, and frequent interaction with the general public, in addition to many others (Aaron 2000; Gershon et al. 2009; Morash et al. 2006; Sigler & Thweatt 1997). Police officers also experience more job-specific stressors. They often "encounter experiences of physical danger, including the threat of serious injury or death to themselves, and exposure to others who have been seriously injured, killed, or otherwise traumatized" (Aaron 2000, 438). The most stressful of these situations is death or injury to fellow officers (Gershon et al. 2009; Sigler & Thweatt 1997).

The effects of all of these police stressors can be damaging to the officers both physiologically and psychologically. Officers are known to have higher rates of cardiovascular disease, depression, suicide, alcoholism, and divorce (Aaron 2000; Beehr, Johnson & Nieva 1995; Gershon et al. 2009; Liberman et al., 2002). Some officers' stress can even carry over to their spouses and place a serious strain on their relationships (Beehr et al. 1995; Kirschman 2007)

There are several different ways that police officers cope with stress, but research is lacking (Beehr et al. 1995, 4). The two broadest categories of coping consist of problem-focused coping and emotional-focused coping. Problem-focused coping targets managing and improving the stressor, while emotion-focused coping attempts to directly reduce the emotional strain caused by the stressor. Problem-focused coping tends to be more effective than emotional-focused coping in the long run because it works to directly change the stressor (Herman & Tetrick, 2009; Violanti 2001).

Some more specific coping techniques include dissociation, alcohol abuse, counseling, or religiosity (Aaron 2000; Beehr et al. 1995, Kirschman 2007). Dissociation

– a form of "psychological avoidance" – and alcohol abuse are both examples of maladaptive coping mechanisms that tend to do more harm than good for officers (Aaron 2000, p. 439; Kirschman 2007). Alcohol abuse and dissociation are both effective coping strategies in the short term, because they work to suppress the feelings of stress. However, they do not address or remove the stressors. They function as emotion-focused coping mechanisms, rather than problem-focused. Over the long term, stress will continue to build, and eventually the individual will be unable to repress it any longer (Aaron 2000; Kirschman 2007).

Counseling and religiosity have both generally been identified as adaptive coping mechanisms. That is, they allow the individual to process stress in a healthy manner. Both typically are seen as problem-focused coping strategies that allow the individual to address or change stressors (Beehr et al. 1995; Kirschman 2007). Because they directly confront the sources of stress, they tend to be more effective coping mechanisms over the long-run (Kirschman 2007).

Religiosity Mitigating Stress

Previous research has identified religion as an adaptive coping strategy that contains elements of both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping (Beehr et al. 1995). While the literature on religious coping and the link between religiosity and psychological well-being is frequently cited, the empirical research is often incomplete or inconclusive (Francis & Kaldor 2002; Green & Elliot 2010; Hackney & Sanders 2003; Idler et al. 2003; Mclntosh, Silver, &. Wortman 1993; Tix & Frazier 1998; Sigler & Thweatt 1997).

As Idler et al (2003) explained, "studies of religious coping focus on people in adverse situations seeking comfort and understanding in religion" (p. 343). There are two ways in which religion may affect coping. First, religious participation often contains social aspects that require people to form social networks. Second, the belief system itself may provide a perspective that allows people to view or handle crises better (Mclntosh et al. 1993; Green & Elliot 2010). Religious coping activities such as prayer, confessing one's sins, and seeking/giving forgiveness allow an individual to cope with stressful situations, and generally are linked to mental and physical health. For example, forgiveness is often associated with lower blood-pressure and higher psychological well-being (Idler et al., 2003).

Religiosity is often measured via overt behaviors such as religious service attendance, prayer, and confession. Francis & Kaldor (2002) tell us that those "people reporting religious experience are significantly more likely to report a high level of psychological well-being, as recorded on the balanced affect scale, than those who do not" (180). Those who attend religious services and actively participate in religious experiences, such as praying, tend to be psychologically healthier and less stressed or depressed. In fact, Green and Elliot (2010) found that "frequency of attendance at religious services has been linked to greater psychological well-being in most studies…but not all" (p. 150). The sense of community provided by religious organizations can also lend itself to psychological well-being. This is especially important and helpful during times of trauma or stress (Mclntosh et al. 1993). Another common measure of religiosity is religious affiliation, or "how strongly one identifies as a religious individual, the number of activities engaged in that are tied to one's religion,

and the fundamentalism or liberalism of one's religious beliefs" (Green & Elliot 2010, 150). The strength of an individual's personal beliefs and the social support that one gains from a religious organization are both positively linked to an individual's well-being.

However, there are a number of other factors that researchers must consider when it comes to religious beliefs. The religious beliefs themselves can affect a person's well-being. Hackney and Sanders (2003) found that religiosity correlated negatively with mental health, and while ideology produced stronger effects, personal devotion produced the strongest correlations to well-being. Just because one has a religious affiliation does not mean he will automatically be able to use those beliefs as a coping mechanism. Individuals from different religious affiliations might respond and adjust differently to different stressful situations (Tix & Frazier 1998). Green & Elliot (2010) were also careful to distinguish that religious affiliation was not related to well-being, but rather the extent to which one identified oneself as religious. In fact, they found that fundamentalist beliefs tended to be associated with poorer health yet greater happiness. They posited that the relatively strict and regimented worldview typical of fundamentalist beliefs may increase happiness by reducing uncertainty and providing a sense of optimism through which to interpret one's life and challenges.

The differences between Catholicism and Protestantism are excellent examples of how those who hold different religious beliefs respond differently in different stressful situations. Tix and Frazier (1998) found that Catholics used more religious coping and evidenced less distress than Protestants when confronted with a controllable stressor. They posited that "Catholics may be better prepared for stressors that they feel they are at

least somewhat responsible for inducing because their religion seems better able to promote guilt reduction through active confession and atonement for such events" (p. 412). On the other hand, Protestants displayed less distress over time than Catholics did after exposure to an uncontrollable stressor. This may have been due to their emphasis on the faith dimension of religion in Protestantism.

Sigler and Thweatt (1997) also found that the idea of sinning in Catholicism could create stress in an individual, and that the confession and absolution of the sin could alleviate stress. Greely (1990) argues that the reason Catholics may find more solace in confession than Protestants is that Catholics tend to have a more "sacramental" religious imagination than Protestants do (p. 4). This means that they tend to believe that God is more present in our world, and that He can be understood through our worldly experiences. Protestants, however, tend to believe that God is absent from our world and that He can never truly be understood (Greely, 2000).

Images of God

Religion has been researched as a cause for behaviors and policy decisions in many different social arenas in the United States. It has been noted that religious people prescribe meaning to events based on their religious beliefs, and their interpretations of God (Greeley, 1989; Mencken, Bader & Embry, 2009). Fundamentalist Christians tend to interpret the Bible literally and believe that scripture allows other people to administer God's justice (Cook & Powell, 2003). Those who hold fundamentalist Christian beliefs are also likely to think that certain moral and political matters, such as abortion or homosexuality, are sins against God (Bader, Desmond, Mencken & Johnson, 2010). They may also believe that God will punish those individuals who commit these sins or

the societies who allow them (Cook & Powell, 2003). They believe that society should be more punitive towards those who sin.

There are a great deal of differing religious beliefs and interpretations in society, and each of these beliefs and religions have different political and social implications (Bader et al. 2010). For example, those who hold more liberal religious beliefs are less likely to hold such punitive social ideals. Today, many researchers believe that the image of God that a person carries is more important for predicting a person's beliefs and behavior than simply his/her religious denomination is.

Different Images of God

There are several different images of God that have been identified by researchers. An individual's image of God is an indispensable part of religion and often serves as the foundation of his/her spirituality (Ironson et al., 2011). Greeley (1989) has argued that images of God are actually more predictive than specific religious doctrines. These images range on a spectrum that includes God as "Judge" and God as "Lover" (Greeley, 1989, p.99). On one end of the spectrum God is seen as exacting justice, judgment, and punishment; and on the other God is viewed as having compassion, mercy, forgiveness, and redemption (Greeley, 1989; Unnever, Cullen & Bartowski, 2006; Bader et al., 2010). It is important to note, however, that images of God are not mutually exclusive. It is possible for God to be seen as judgmental and forgiving at the same time (Dickie, Ajega, Kobyylak & Nixon, 2006).

Americans have many different images of God. These God images are often predictive of positions people hold on certain moral and political issues, like homosexuality and abortion (Bader et al., 2010). Mencken et al. (2009) said, "The

characteristics we assign to God, and to how God judges human behavior, reveal something about ourselves. It transfers to God our view of human nature" (32). They claimed that our images of God were assigned based on our view of human nature, and how it should be or is perceived to be. Thus, if one views God as forgiving, he too should be forgiving. If one views God as judgmental, then he will be more likely to judge others.

Significance of Images of God

Those who hold the image of God as harsh or judgmental will be more likely to be harsh or judgmental themselves. They tend to read the Bible more literally than those who view God as loving or forgiving. They also tend to hold more punitive beliefs towards criminals (Bader et al., 2010). Some point to scripture to support their view of God as harsh and judgmental. "The devout are mandated to honor God above all others. Failure to do so invokes the fearsome wrath of God." (Cook & Powell, 2003, 72) Those who believe in a harsh or judgmental God believe that those who sin against Him deserve to be punished. People with strict moral absolutism in their beliefs are more likely to view God as harsh or judgmental, and less likely to be tolerant of others (Mencken et al., 2009). They tend to be less trusting of people in general, and intolerant of those they consider sinners (atheists, homosexuals, etc.) (Froese, Bader & Smith, 2008; Bader et al., 2010).

Those who believe in a loving or forgiving God may be more likely to forgive others and treat them with compassion. They will also be less likely to impose punitive measures or absolute moral judgments on those who may be labeled as sinners. (Unnever et al. 2006; Mencken et al. 2009). People who see God as loving or forgiving tend to see

themselves as lovable and worthy of being cared for (Dickie et al. 2006). Unnever et. al (2006) looked toward scripture to explain that those who believe in a loving or forgiving God tend to be more merciful and forgiving of those who have sinned and then repented. They also use scripture to explain that God's love endures all and that God is forgiving and compassionate towards His human followers.

Ironson et al. (2011) conducted a study to determine whether an image of God as loving and forgiving or as harsh and judgmental could predict HIV disease-progression in patients over a 4 year period. Their research is especially applicable to our project because people with HIV face many more stressors and stigmatizations than the average person does, just as police officers face more stressors in their line of work than the average person does. Just as individuals with HIV experience critical stress from their diagnosis and the resulting stigmatization, police officers experience critical stress from their employment. Both groups must live with their stressors on a day to day basis.[1] Since people often turn to religion as a coping mechanism, it is important to understand how images of God affect their ability to cope. Ironson et al. (2011) found that those HIV patients who viewed God as being more loving or forgiving could be predicted to be healthier, while those who believed God to be harsh or judgmental were predicted to deteriorate in health more rapidly.

With police officers facing health issues in relation to job stress, we believe that this research can be applied to their circumstances as well. It is our belief that those police officers who hold an image of God as more loving and forgiving will experience less

---

[1] It is important to acknowledge that police officers differ from HIV positive patients in that officers theoretically can walk away from their stressors (i.e. their jobs) at any time, while HIV positive patients cannot. However, when dealing with critical stress, we must remember that some officers may experience psychological or even physical health problems that they cannot walk away from either. For example, some officers may develop PTSD or heart conditions as a result of critical stress (Kirschman, 2007).

stress, and therefore fewer health issues, than those who hold a harsh or judgmental image of God.

Problems in the Existing Literature

One inconsistency in the literature is the standardization of image of God measures. There is no standard survey or method for measuring people's images of God, so the descriptors used vary by study. It is also important to note that images of God are not necessarily mutually exclusive. That is, it is possible to believe that God is both loving and judgmental (Dickie et al., 2006). This becomes problematic when it comes to accurately measuring those who hold these complex images of God (Bader, Desmond, Mencken & Johnson, 2010). It is important to remember that this is a relatively new area of research, which may explain the lack of consistency in measurements and measuring tools.

<div align="center">

Images of God among Police Officers

</div>

We know that religiosity can be used to mitigate stress, so it would make sense that it would affect police officers' stress levels as well. In Koch's (2010) study on the psychological impact of officers being first responders to suicides, he explored several different coping strategies, faith (or religiosity) among them. Koch tells us that one of the ways to cope with the stress brought on by responding to suicides is to attempt to make meaning out of the event. "The central task in adapting to a traumatic experience is to find a way to incorporate it into the life narrative" (Koch 2010, 97). He found that prayer allowed the officers to feel as if they were able to take some action in response to the tragedy instead of feeling completely helpless. Religion offered a way to relieve some anxieties, but it fell short of allowing the officers to make meaning from the event.

Police officers and their spouses who use religious coping have been found to experience less occupational stress (Beehr et al. 1995). Current research shows that images of God are more accurate measures of individual's religious beliefs when it comes to predictability, than traditional measures of religiosity (Greeley, 1989). Just as images of God help everyday citizens provide meaning and coping mechanisms (Ironson et al. 2007), they also help police officers cope with the day to day stress of their jobs.

Hypothesis

Those police officers who believe in a loving and forgiving God will have lower stress levels than those who believe in a harsh and judgmental God.

DATA AND METHODS

In order to determine whether or not an officer's Image of God affects their critical stress levels, we used data from the TCU Police Project collected for research on critical stress and religiosity in police officers. The survey was administered to police officers in a large urban city in Texas. Their target population was comprised of 1,153 active duty police officers in the department. In addition to the research questionnaire, each officer was given a request from the researchers for the officer's help in completing the questionnaire, a statement guaranteeing the officers that all participation was on a voluntary basis and all responses would remain confidential, as well as a form that officers could fill out if they were willing to participate in a follow-up discussion or wanted to be informed of the findings.

 The surveys were distributed to shift commanders with help from several current and former police officers. The shift commanders distributed the questionnaires to officers at roll call meetings and encouraged them to participate in the study. Two weeks

after the initial distribution of the surveys the researchers requested that shift

commanders remind the officers about the survey, provide them with additional paper

copies, and/or direct them to a website where they could access it. After four weeks a

follow up letter, endorsed by the police chief, was e-mailed to the officers to further

encourage their participation and direct them once more to a website where they could

access the survey.

Data

Of the 1,153 active duty officers in the department, 811 of them returned a

completed survey, which gave a response rate of 70.3%. The descriptive statistics for

this population can be found on Table 1. The majority of the officers that were surveyed

were white males (71.6%) in their 50s and 60s. Only 12.3% of respondents were female.

The average number of years of police experience was 15 years. Just over 90% of the

officers had completed at least two years of college, and 2.2% had completed an

advanced degree. More than 77% of the respondents were patrol officers. When all of

the respondents were broken into broad categories, 50.4% were Protestant, 24.8% were

Catholic, and less than 5% belonged to each of the remaining orientations.

Table 1
Demographic characteristics of survey respondents ($n = 811$)

	%	Mean (Std Dev)
Mean Age		41.08 (9.40)
Gender		
Female	12.3%	
Male	87.7%	

	%	Mean (Std Dev)
Race/Ethnicity		
Anglo	71.6%	
African American	8.3%	
Asian-American	2.8%	
Native-American	2.3%	
Hispanic	10.9%	
Other	4.1%	
Education		
High School Grad	8.7%	
Assoc.'s Degree	59.6%	
Bachelor's degree	29.5%	
Graduate Degree	2.2%	
Mean Experience		15.12 (9.20)
Rank		
Officer	69.3%	
Corporal	6.1%	
Sergeant	12.3%	
LT	2.3%	
Deputy	3.6%	
Detective	6.5%	
Duty Assignment		
Patrol	77.7%	
Operations	6.6%	
Detective	7.3%	

	%	Mean (Std Dev)
Tactical	1.6%	
Other	6.8%	

Dependent Variable

Critical stress was conceptualized as psychological and/or emotional distress and was measured using a variant of the Critical Incident History Questionnaire (Clark-Miller & Brady 2012; Liberman et al. 2002; Weiss et al. 2010). The scale assessed how officers were emotionally affected by critical incidents that they encountered in the line of duty. Examples of critical incidents include: personally knowing a victim, attending a police funeral, or responding to a bloody crime scene.

Independent Variables

Images of God

Images of God were conceptualized as either a belief in a loving or forgiving God, or a belief in a harsh or judgmental God. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with certain statements about their perceptions of God. For example, a response of "strongly agree" to the statement, "Those who violate God's rules must be punished," would be an indication of a belief in a harsh or judgmental God. Conversely, a response of "strongly disagree" would indicate a belief in a loving or forgiving God.

Coping

We conceptualized coping as general adaptive strategies in response to a constant level of stress, rather than determining specific coping responses to specific stressful incidents. Coping was measured using eleven items such as, "when dealing with stress

events at work, how often do you make a plan of action and follow it?" Respondents indicated their answer on a seven point scale ranging from "never" to "always" (Beehr et al. 1995).

Controls

We used demographic variables as controls in our analysis. These variables included: religious denomination (0 = Catholic; 1 = Protestant), minority status, gender (0 = female; 1 = male), education level (0 = less than a BA; 1 = BA and above). We also included religious outlook (as a rough measure of religiosity), coping scale, and years of experience in policing. We included officer age and age-squared as well. The age-squared measure was used due to prior findings of a curvilinear relationship between age and critical stress (Clark-Miller & Brady, 2012).

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

To test our hypothesis we used an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis which allowed us to look at the effect of each of the variables on critical stress. Table 2 shows the results of the ordinary least squares regression analysis predicting critical stress from images of God and other control variables. Age was not determined to be a significant factor in stress levels through both the age and age-squared measures. Education level was also found to be an insignificant factor in critical stress levels. Coping was not found to be a significant measure, but those who used coping methods tended to have lower critical stress levels and/or to handle stress better than those who did not.

Minorities were found to have faced less critical stress than non-minorities. This seems contradictory on its face, but one possible explanation for this is that minorities

may be faced with more stress, but they are better accustomed to coping with it.   Perhaps minorities face more stressors from society at large than do non-minorities simply because of their minority status (Gonzales et al. 2005). Because of this, they may be used to dealing with stressors on a daily basis, and ultimately this allows them to have lower levels of critical stress.

Females were found to have faced more critical stress than males. This could be due to the highly patriarchal nature of policing. Policing always has been, and continues to be, a male dominated workplace (Kirschman 2007). Women must work harder to belong to the group. Women officers differ from racial/ethnic minority male officers in that they tend to be much more openly discriminated against in the workplace, as opposed to society at large. They must constantly prove their toughness, and learn to balance their femininity with their strength (Kirschman 2007). If they are too feminine they may be seen as dependent, weak, or incapable. If they are too tough they may be seen as butch, masculine, or intimidating. Either way, they may face discrimination.

Years of experience were also found to be related to critical stress levels. This makes sence because longer exposure to stressors leads to higher levels of critical stress (Anderson, Litzenberger, & Plecas 2002; Kirschman 2007; Violanti et al. 2007). This helps to explain higher levels of burnout or PTSD in officers who have been on the job for longer periods of time (Kirschman 2007; Violanti et al. 2007). Interestingly, Catholics were found to have less stress than Protestants. This is congruent with Greeley's research on the Catholic imagination (Greeley 1990).

It is important to note that images of God are not mutually exclusive, however we found the correlation between the two measures to be negative. This indicates that the

officers tended to have more beliefs on one side of the continuum than the other. So, while it is not impossible for an individual to have an image of God as both loving and judgmental, we found that it was unlikely. Having an image of a more harsh or judgmental God was found to have a significant positive relationship with critical stress levels. That is, an officer with a belief in a harsh or judgmental God was more likely to have higher critical stress levels. Having an image of a more loving or forgiving God was found to have a significant negative relationship with critical stress levels. That is, those who held a belief in a loving or forgiving God, were more likely to have lower critical stress levels.

Table 2
OLS regression analysis predicting critical stress from images of God and control variables

	Std. Error	B	t
Harsh/Judgmental	.153	.348	2.267**
Loving/Forgiving	.189	-.617	-3.263*
Catholic	.323	-.240	-.745
Age	.115	.120	1.039
Age2	.001	-.001	-.969
Minority	.321	-1.274	-3.973**
Gender	.377	.612	1.624
Education	.175	-.108	-.617
Religious outlook	.315	.468	1.486
Coping Scale	.072	-.124	-1.732
Years of experience in police	.022	.054	2.474*
(Constant)	3.001	8.249	2.749*
R Square			0.516

$*p < .01, **p < .05$

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Critical stress was found to be significantly lower among those with a belief in a loving or forgiving God, and significantly higher among those with a belief in a harsh or judgmental God. This is concurrent with our hypothesis that those officers who believe in a loving and forgiving God will be more likely to have lower stress levels than those who believe in a harsh and judgmental God. This finding is in line with Greeley's (1989) research, and indicates that an individual's image of God is actually more predictive than their religious denomination or classification (Bader et al., 2010; Greeley 1989).

These findings are important for a couple of different reasons. First, it adds to the literature on images of God. This is a relatively new area of research, but images of God have been found to be predictive measures in many studies already (Bader et al., 2010; Greeley 1989). Second, it runs contrary to the commonly held conception that religion is a positive coping mechanism. We have found that if an individual holds a harsh or judgmental image of God, they are more likely to have higher levels of critical stress. This means that for those individuals, religion may add to the stressors they are already experiencing, instead of alleviating them.

Our data indicated that peoples' images of God are not consistent over time. This is in line with previous research that has been done on images of God. Unnever et al. (2006) claimed that a person's image of God tends to emerge in early childhood due to socialization processes. They could not find any study that showed that images of God remain the same throughout an individual's life, but they did find that images of God tended to be stable among different age groups. Dickie et al. (1997) found that parents' qualities were more important predictors of children's images of God than children's self-

concepts were. However, studies of adults reported that adults' self-concepts were the most important predictors of adults' images of God. The parents become less influential over time. While children's images of God relate most closely to their parents', young adults' images of God relate more closely to their self-concept (Dickie, et al., 2006).

We believe that our research could also indicate a relationship between images of God, levels of stress, and a police officer's Belief in a Just World (BJW). The Belief in a Just World hypothesis states that "quite justly, good things tend to happen to good people and bad things to bad people," (Furnham, 2003, p. 795). Similarly to images of God, BJW can be used as a way to bring meaning to a situation and has even been cited as a coping mechanism (Furnham 2003). It makes sense that those individuals with an image of a harsh or judgmental God would have high BJW because they tend to believe that God judges those who deserve to be judged and are also more likely to believe in Biblical literalism (Bader et al. 2010; Greeley 1989). Since those who believe in a loving or forgiving God would be more inclined to forgive others, or to not pass absolute moral judgments about others, they would most likely have a very low BJW (Greeley, 1989; Mencken et al. 2009; Unnever et al. 2006). That is, they would not just assume that because something bad happened to an individual that individual was a bad person. While we were unable to measure police officers' Belief in a Just World with our current data, this is an area that future research should certainly explore.

One possible weakness with our research could be the measure of images of God that was used. First, the survey data that we used was not designed specifically for this research question, so it may not accurately measure it. Second, since there is still no standard measure for images of God, we faced the problem of not being able to account

for those respondents who have an image of God as both loving and judgmental (Dickie et al., 2006; Bader et. al. 2010). Creating a standardized measure of images of God is certainly something that future researchers should focus on.

<u>REFERENCES</u>

Aaron, J. D. K. (2000). Stress and coping in police officers. *Police Quarterly*, 3, 438-450.

doi: 10.1177/109861110000300405

Anderson, G.S., Litzenberger, R., Plecas, D. (2002). Physical evidence of police officer

stress. *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies and Management,*

25, 399-420.doi: 10.1108/13629510210429437

Bader, C. D., Desmond, S. A., Mencken, F. C., & Johnson, B. R. (2010) Divine justice:

The relationship between images of God and attitudes toward criminal

punishment. *Criminal Justice Review* 35, 90-106.

doi: 10.1177/0734016809360329

Beehr, T. A., Johnson, L. B., & Nieva, R. (1995). Occupational stress: Coping of police

and their spouses. *Journal of Organizational Behavior* , 16, 3-25.

Clark-Miller, J., & Brady, H. C. (2012). Critical stress: Police officer religiosity and

coping with critical stress incidents. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology.*

Retrieved from http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11896-012-9112-

8/fulltext.html

Cook, K. J., & Powell, C. (2003). Christianity and punitive mentalities: A qualitative

study. Crime. *Law & Social Change*, 39, 69-89.

Dickie, J. R., Ajega, L. V., Kobylak, J. R., & Nixon, K. M. (2006). Mother, father, and

self: Sources of young adults' God concepts. *Journal for the Scientific Study of*

Religion, 45, 57-71

Dickie, J. R., Eshleman, A. K., Merasco, D. M., Shepard, A., Vander Wilt, M., &

Johnson, M. (1997) Parent-child relationships and children's images of God.

Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 36, 25-43.

Francis, L. J., & Kaldor, P. (2002). The relationship between psychological well-being

and Christian faith and practice in an Australian population sample. *Journal for*

the Scientific Study of Religion, 41, 179-184. URL:

http://www.jstor.org/stable/1387720

Froese, P., Bader, C. D., & Smith, B. (2008). Political tolerance and God's wrath.

Sociology of Religion, 69, 29-44.

Furnham, A. (2003). Belief in a just world: Research progress over the past decade.

Personality and Individual Differences, 34, 795–817.

Gershon, R. R. M., Barocas, B., Canton, A. N., Li, X., & Vlahov, D. (2009). Mental,

physical, and behavioral outcomes associated with perceived work stress in police

officers. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 36, 275-289.

doi: 10.1177/0093854808330015

Gonzales, N. A., George, P. E., Fernandez, A. C., Huerta, V. L. (2005). Minority

adolescent stress and coping. *Prevention Researcher,* 12, 7-9

Greeley, A. M. (1989). *Religious change in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard

University Press.

Greeley, A. M. (1990). *The Catholic myth: The behavior and beliefs of American*

Catholics. New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Greeley, A. M. (2000). *The Catholic imagination.* Berkeley, CA: University of California

Press.

Green, M., & Elliot, M. (2010). Religion, health, and psychological well-being. *Journal*

of Religion and Health, 49, 149-163. doi: 10.1007/s10943-009-9242-1

Hackney, C. H., & Sanders, G. S. (2003). Religiosity and mental health: A meta-analysis of recent studies. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* , 42, 43-56

Herman, J. L., & Tetrick, L.E. (2009). Problem-focused versus emotion-focused coping strategies and repatriation adjustment. *Human Resources Management*. 48, 69-88

Idler, E. L., Musick, M. A., Ellison, C. G., George, L. K., Krause, N. Ory, M. G., …Williams, D. R. (2003). Measuring multiple dimensions of religion and spirituality for health research. *Research on Aging,* 25, 327-365. doi: 10.1177/0164027503025004001

Ironson, G., Stuetzle, D., Ironson, D., Balbin E., Kremer, H., George, A., …Fletcher, M.A. (2011) View of God as benevolent and forgiving or punishing and judgmental predicts HIV disease progression. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 34, 414-425. doi: 10.1007/s10865-011-9314-z

Kirschman, E. (2007). *I love a cop: What police families need to know*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Koch, B. J. (2010). The psychological impact on police officers of being first responders to completed suicides. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, 25, 90-98 doi: 10.1007/s11896-010-9070-y

Liberman, A. M., Best, S. R., Metzler, T. J., Fagan, J. A., Weiss, D. S., & Marmar, C. R., (2002) Routine occupational stress and psychological distress in police. *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies & Management*, 25, 421 – 441. doi: 10.1108/13639510210429446

Lindsay, V., & Shelley, K. (2009). Social and stress-related influences of police officers' alcohol consumption. *Journal of Police and criminal psychology.* Retrieved from

http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11896-009-9048-9/fulltext.html

McIntosh, D. N., Silver, R. C., & Wortman, C. B. (1993) Religion's role in adjustment to a negative life event: Coping with the loss of a child. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 65, 812-821

Mencken, F. C., Bader, C., & Embry, E. (2009). In God we trust: Images of God and trust in the United States among the highly religious. *Sociological Perspectives*, 52, 23-38

Morash, M., Harr, R., & Kwak D.H. (2006). Multilevel influences on police stress. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice,* 22, 26-43. doi: 10.1177/1043986205285055

Mencken, F. C., Bader, C. D., & Embry, E. (2009). In God we trust: Images of God and trust in the United States among the highly religious. *Sociological Perspectives*, 52, 23-38.

Otto, K., & Schmidt, S. (2007). Dealing with stress in the workplace: Compensatory effects of belief in a just world. *European Psychologist*, 12, 272-282. doi: 10.1027/1016-9040.12.4.272

Sigler, R.T., & Thweatt, D. R. (1997). Religiosity and stress for police officers. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, 12, 13-24. doi: 10.1007/BF02813807

Tix, A. P., Frazier, P. A. (1998) The use of religious coping during stressful life events: Main effects, moderation, and mediation. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology,* 66, 411-422. doi: 10.1037/0022-006X.66.2.411

Unnever, J. D., Cullen, F. T., & Bartkowski, J. P. (2006). Images of God and public support for capital punishment: Does a close relationship with a loving god

matter? *Criminology*, 44, 835-866.

Violanti, J. M. (2001). Coping strategies among police recruits in a high-stress training

environment. *The Journal of Social Psychology*. 132, 717-729

Volanti, J. M., Andrew, M., Burchfiel, C. M., Hartley, T. A., Charles, L.E., & Miller, D.

B. (2007). Post-traumatic stress symptoms and cortisol patterns among police

officers. *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies and*

Management, 30, 189-202.

doi: 10.1108/13639510710753207

Weiss, D. S., Brunet, A., Best, S. R., Metzler, T. J., Liberman, A., Pole, … Marmar, C.R.

(2010). Frequency and severity approaches to indexing exposure to trauma: the

critical incident history questionnaire for police officers. Journal of Traumatic

Stress, 23,734–743.

ABSTRACT

This article addresses whether or not police officers' job related stress levels are affected by their image of God. Police officers have very high levels of occupational stress, and how they cope with it is vital to their physical and emotional health. Religiosity has been studied as a coping mechanism for stress, but images of God may have higher levels of predictability than religiosity when it comes to coping. The purpose of this article is to determine if stress levels can be predicted by an officer's image of God as loving and forgiving or as harsh and judgmental.