

# “Social support key to cash in transit guards’ psychological wellbeing”

## AUTHORS

Paul Poisat  
Michelle Mey  
Anthonie Theron

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## SECTION 3. General issues in management

Paul Poisat (South Africa), Michelle Mey (South Africa), Anthonie Theron (South Africa)

### Social support key to cash in transit guards' psychological wellbeing

#### Abstract

Due to large amounts of cash in transit, security vehicles have become preferred targets for armed robberies. Cash-in-transit guards have to work under dangerous and life-threatening conditions, as transporting goods, particularly cash, has become an increasingly risky task in South Africa. The primary objective of this study was to investigate the potential valuable impact of social support on employees' susceptibility to job burnout. Cash in transit employees may suffer from burnout due to a prolonged response to occupational stressors and a lack of social support. Social support may serve as a buffer to occupational stress. This study argues that the level of burnout is strongly influenced by a lack of social support and a stressful work environment. A voluntary sample of cash in transit security guards ( $n = 65$ ) was obtained from two private security companies in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. A self-administered questionnaire consisting of validated scales was distributed amongst employees. Inferential statistics suggest that social support plays a potentially valuable role in reducing cash in transit employees' susceptibility to job burnout. Furthermore, the results suggest that a dangerous, unsafe and stressful work environment may increase the risk of job burnout among cash in transit employees, and certain organizational interventions are necessary to minimize the effect thereof.

**Keywords:** occupational stress, work-based social support, work environment, private security sector, burnout.

**JEL Classification:** M12, J24.

#### Introduction

Cash volumes in South Africa have doubled since 2003, with more than 60% of payments for goods and services being paid in cash (Security Focus, 2012). Due to these large amounts of cash-in-transit, financial institutions and cash in transit organizations have increasingly become victims of violent and confrontational crimes.

According to the *South African Police Service (SAPS) Crime Research and Statistics* report, 182 cash in transit robberies have been reported during the 2011-2012 period (SAPS, 2012). With the risk of robbery significantly high, the debate in the current South African landscape becomes "when", not "if", a robbery will occur (Security Focus, 2012). Most research studies on workplace violence in South Africa tend to exclude employees who handle cash (Mutsvunguma & Gwandure, 2011).

According to the 2012 Overseas Security Advisory Council's (OSAC) *South African Crime and Safety Report*, violent, confrontational crime is a major concern in South Africa. These crimes include violent attacks on cash in transit vehicles and personnel (OSAC, 2012). Due to the physical danger, shift work, and unsafe work environment, cash in transit employees may become prone to psychological disorders. Crime, violence and an unsafe work environment limit the provisioning, development and functioning of an organization's human resources (Bowman, Seedat & Matzopoulos, 2007). Bowman, Seedat and Matzopoulos (2007) further state that the impact of violence on the private security sector should become a matter of pressing concern.

When strains, such as a dangerous work environment are consistently placed upon employees, stress levels may increase (Armstrong & Griffin, 2004). Social support has a potentially valuable role in reducing stress in the workplace and increasing well-being (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Hardly any research has been done on the specific benefits of work-based social support (Allen & Ortlepp, 2000).

Taking into consideration the high crime level and unsafe work environment cash in transit employees are exposed to the overall purpose of this study is to investigate the potential impact of social support on employees' susceptibility to job burnout.

#### 1. Literature review

There are many factors that combine to cause job burnout. According to a detailed review on burnout conducted by Cordes and Dougherty (1993), the level of burnout in an individual can be due to an employee's job, occupation, organizational environment, and personal characteristics. Apart from the various antecedents available in the research, this study, however, argues that the level of burnout is strongly influenced by a lack of social support and a stressful work environment.

The theoretical model (Figure 1) depicts the influence of the independent variables, namely a lack of social support and a stressful work environment on the dependent variable, which is job burnout. Social support is classified as a job characteristic, and the employee's work environment is classified as an occupational characteristic (Cordes and Dougherty, 1993; Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001).

**1.1. Dependent variable.** *1.1.1. Job burnout.* Stress often results in burnout, a syndrome regarded as emotional exhaustion, reduced personal accomplishment, and depersonalization (Gomez-Mejia, Balkin & Cardy, 1995).

Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001) state that there has been no standard definition of burnout, and this issue led to the development of a multidimensional theory of the term.

The labels for the three components of burnout are: exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced professional efficacy (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001). Emotional exhaustion is characterized by a lack of energy and a feeling that one's emotional resources are depleted (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). Employees are frustrated and realize that they do not have the ability to continue to give of themselves as they have been in the past. Depersonalization, on the other hand, refers to employees who have a distant attitude toward their job. This is such an immediate reaction to exhaustion that a strong correlation from exhaustion to depersonalization is found consistently in burnout research (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001). Employees display a detached and an emotional coldness, and they may behave cynical towards customers, coworkers and the organization (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). The final component of burnout, reduced professional efficacy, can be characterized by a tendency to evaluate oneself negatively, as employees experience a decline in feelings of job competence and successful achievement in their interactions with people (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993).

Burnout can lead to serious negative consequences for both the employee and the organization. The exhaustion component of burnout is more predictive of stress-related health outcomes than the other two components (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001). Kahill (1988) categorized the consequences of burnout into five categories: physical, emotional, interpersonal, attitudinal and behavioral. Physical consequences can include insomnia, headaches, gastrointestinal disturbances, chest pains and a poor appetite. Emotional problems include depression, lowered self-esteem, irritability, helplessness and anxiety (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). Interpersonal consequences may include withdrawal from friends, reduced socialization, greater impatience and moodiness. Attitudinal problems include a negative attitude towards the organization and reduced organizational commitment (Advani, Garg, Jagdale & Kumar, 2006). Behavioral consequences include work-related behaviors such as increased turnover intentions and absenteeism (Gomez-Mejia, Balkin & Cardy, 1995).

**1.2. Independent variables.** *1.2.1. Social support.* According to Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001), burnout researchers have also investigated the absence of certain job characteristics and resources. Social support has been identified as an important resource in helping employees manage and cope with work stress. Burke and Greenglass (1993) state that social support has three types of effects: a direct effect through reducing levels of job-related stress, a direct effect through improving physical and emotional well-being, and an indirect effect on the job stressor-strain relationship. Furthermore, social support is suggested to buffer or moderate the relationship between stress and strain (Allen & Ortlepp, 2000).

In a study by Constable and Russell (1986), 310 military nurses completed the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), Work Environment Scale and a social support measure. Data indicated that the major determinants of burnout were low job enhancement (autonomy, task orientation, clarity, physical comfort and innovation), work pressure, lack of supervisory support, and the interaction term involving the combined effects of job enhancement and supervisory support. The findings revealed that when supervisory support increased, the negative relationship between job enhancement and emotional exhaustion disappeared.

Allen and Ortlepp (2000) investigated the relationship between job-induced post-traumatic stress disorder and work-based social support amongst cash in transit security guards that had experienced a high incidence of armed robberies. The results indicated a moderate, negative and highly significant relationship between post-traumatic stress and work-based social support.

Given the abovementioned, the following is hypothesized:

*H1: Social support reduces cash in transit employees' susceptibility to job burnout.*

*1.2.2. The work environment.* The environments within which employees find themselves, specifically the characteristics of the work environment, are related to burnout (Visser & Rothmann, 2008). This point of view is also valid when it comes to cash in transit employees, as these employees are favorite targets for armed robbers. During an in-transit robbery, the aim of the perpetrator is to obtain money by applying violence, and the victim may have prolonged trauma after having been robbed in this manner (Maree, Van Den Berg & Pretorius, 2002).

Due to the nature of their work, and the fact that their vehicles are highly visible, cash in transit employees are under constant threat (Maree, Van

Den Berg & Pretorius, 2002). Maree, Van Den Berg and Pretorius (2002) investigated the experiences of direct victims of in-transit robberies and the effects it had on their family and colleagues. All (100%) of respondents said that they had nightmares after the in-transit robberies, where 82% of respondents had flashbacks after the in-transit robberies.

With regards to the banking sector, Mutsvunguma and Gwandure (2011) compared the psychological well-being of bank employees who handled cash with those who did not. The findings support existing research evidence, which shows that exposure of employees to unpredictable and violent working environments could result in employees experiencing psychological distress and impairment in employee effectiveness. Furthermore, the study found a significant difference in work-related stress between employees who handled cash and employees who did not handle cash. The sample consisted of 50 participants who were drawn from a bank in inner city Johannesburg. There were 25 participants who handled cash and 25 who did not handle cash

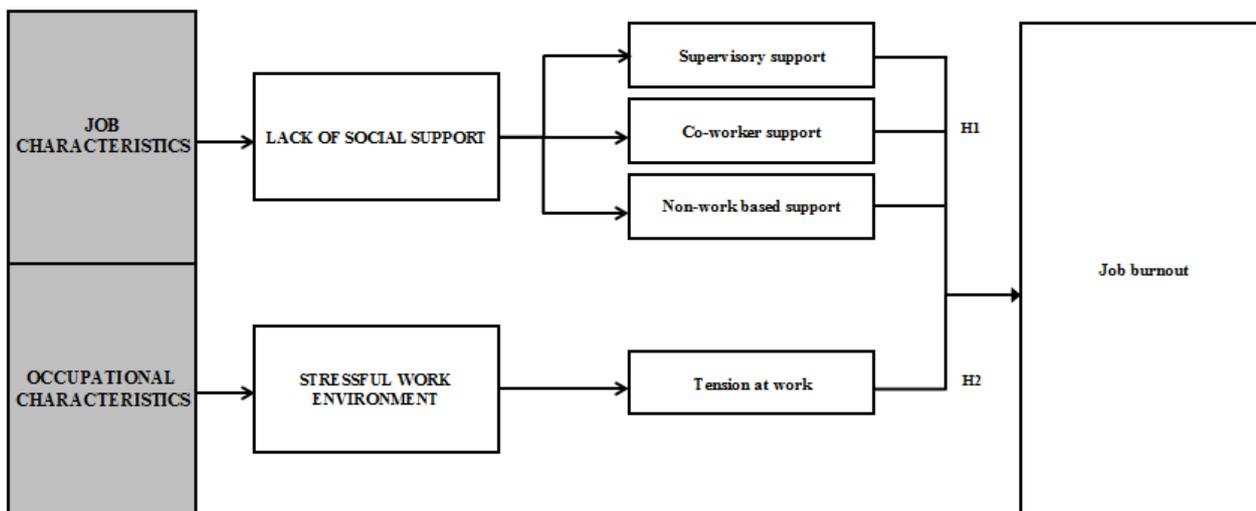
(Mutsvunguma & Gwandure, 2011). These results are in line with Maslach’s theory, which states that the potential for emotional strain is greatest for employees who are in professions where there are many emotional challenges (Maslach, 1978).

Against this background, the following hypothesis is subjected to further testing:

*H2: A dangerous, unsafe work environment increases the risk of job burnout among cash in transit employees.*

**2. Method**

**2.1. Research approach.** The empirical research is quantitative in nature. Pearson product-moment correlations were used in calculating the strength, direction and significance of the relationships depicted in the theoretical model and hypotheses. Furthermore, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to further investigate whether the independent variables, as identified in the theoretical model (Figure 1), exerted a significant influence on the dependent variable.



**Fig.1. Theoretical model and hypotheses**

**2.2. Measures.** *2.2.1. Participants.* An anonymous self-report questionnaire was administered to a voluntary sample of cash in transit security guards (*n* = 65). The questionnaires were distributed to two security companies in the Eastern Cape Province. A total of 100 surveys were distributed to employees,

of which 65 (65% response rate) completed, usable questionnaires were returned and captured for analysis. While the response rate is somewhat average, difficulties with the guards’ relatively unpredictable shift schedules prevented the questionnaires from reaching some staff members.

Table 1. Frequency distribution of the demographic variables of the sample (*n* = 65)

Demographic variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender (n=65)		
Male	44	68%
Female	21	32%
Total	65	100%
Home language (n = 65)		
Afrikaans	18	27.7%

Table 1 (cont.). Frequency distribution of the demographic variables of the sample ( $n = 65$ )

Demographic variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
English	14	21.5%
Xhosa	33	50.8%
Total	65	100%
Age ( $n = 65$ )		
24-34 years	20	30.8%
35-44 years	28	43.1%
45+ years	17	26.2%
Total	65	100%
Marital status ( $n = 65$ )		
Married	27	41.5%
Divorced	17	26.2%
Single	21	32.3%
Total	65	100%
Children ( $n = 65$ )		
Yes	45	69.2%
No	20	30.8%
Total	65	100%

Table 1 lists the demographic profiles of the respondents, and indicates that the majority of the sample were male (68%). A total of 50.8% of respondents were Xhosa speaking, where only 21.5% was English speaking. Afrikaans-speaking respondents constituted only 27.7%. The large proportion of Xhosa speakers denoted in Table 1 reflects the predominantly African composition of the organization's demographics.

With regards to age distribution, the vast majority of the sample ranged between the ages of 35 and 44 years (43.1%). A large proportion of respondents are married (41.5%), where 69.2% of respondents indicated that they have children.

**2.2.2. Measuring instruments.** In order to operationalize the variables, a measuring instrument was constructed with validated measures (House & Rizzo, 1972; Pines & Aronson, 1988; Caplan, Cobb, French, Van Harrison & Pinneau, 1980) that assessed respondents' level of tension in the work environment, job burnout and employee perceptions of social support.

**2.2.2.1. The work environment.** The questionnaire incorporated items that describe an employee's psychological or psychosomatic symptoms associated with tension experienced in the work environment. The measure, developed by House and Rizzo (1972), includes the extent to which tension from work tends to keep employees awake at night and be constantly on an employee's mind. Coefficient alphas ranged from 0.71 to 0.89 (Fields, 2002). Responses were obtained as true, coded 1, or false, coded 2.

**2.2.2.2. Job burnout.** Job burnout was measured by drawing on the work of Pines and Aronson (1988).

This measure assesses physical and emotional states by asking respondents to rate how frequently they experience 21 stress-related occurrences. Responses were obtained by using a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from "never" to "always". According to Fields (2002), the Burnout Measure is considered to be the second most widely used burnout measure after the Maslach Burnout Inventory. Fields (2002) further states that the measure is considered the better of the two measures, as it can be used outside the human service professions. Coefficient alphas ranged from 0.88 to 0.95 (Fields, 2002).

**2.2.2.3. Social support.** The Social Support Measure, developed by Caplan, Cobb, French, Van Harrison and Pinneau (1980), includes subscales to describe the support an employee perceives is available from his or her supervisor, coworkers, spouse, and family or friends. A five-point Likert-type rating scale with anchors ranging from "not at all" to "very much" was utilized. This measure has been widely used and has remained one of the most established scales applied to measure social support in a job (Lim, 1996).

Coefficient alphas for the supervisor support subscale ranged from 0.86 to 0.91, where alphas for co-worker support was 0.79 (Fields, 2002). Perceived social support, in the present study, is seen to be available from three sources, namely supervisory support, co-worker support and non-work based support (family, friends, etc.).

**2.3. Design.** Before the research study was conducted, ethical protocol was followed. Permission was obtained from the branch managers before the questionnaires were distributed to the cash in transit guards. A cover letter explaining the procedure and

instructions to complete the questionnaires was attached. The cover letter also stressed the voluntary and confidential nature of the research. Return envelopes were attached to the questionnaire and cover letter, and respondents were instructed to put completed questionnaires into the envelopes. This method ensured more confidentiality and anonymity.

**2.4. Analysis.** The statistical processing of the data is presented in terms of quantitative procedures and techniques. Descriptive and inferential statistics were analyzed with the SPSS statistical programme (Version 20.0.). The quantitative procedures included the use of descriptive statistics to describe the basic elements of the data. Inferential statistics included the Cronbach's alpha to determine the reliability of the measuring instrument.

**3. Results**

This section reports on the results obtained from the statistical procedures and are discussed in light of the research model (Figure 1).

**3.1. Reliability analysis.** Cronbach alpha coefficients were calculated to assess the internal consistency of the measuring instruments. Table 2 shows that the coefficients of all the measuring instruments are

considered to be acceptable compared to the guideline of  $\alpha > 0.70$  (Nunally, 1978), varying from 0.83 to 0.93. Evidence is therefore provided that reliable measuring scales were used to measure the constructs under investigation.

Table 2. Results of reliability analysis ( $n = 65$ )

Code	Measuring instrument	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha
SB	Work environment characteristics	8	0.83
SC	Job burnout	21	0.91
SD (A)	Supervisory support	4	0.90
SD (B)	Coworker support	4	0.92
SD(C)	Non-work based support	4	0.93

**3.2. Descriptive statistics.** *3.2.1. Work environment characteristics.* Table 3 shows a summary of the items and responses related to tension in the work environment. With regards to work environment characteristics, 76.9% of respondents indicated that their job tends to directly affect their health. The majority of the sample (81.5%) indicated that they work under a great deal of stress, where 80% of respondents have felt fidgety or nervous as a result of their job. More than half (66.2%) of cash in transit guards indicated that they have been a victim of crime, as a result of their job.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for items related to Section B: work environment characteristics

Questionnaire items	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
My job tends to directly affect my health	True	50	76.9%
	False	15	23.1%
	Total	65	100%
I work under a great deal of tensions	True	53	81.5%
	False	12	18.5%
	Total	65	100%
I have felt fidgety or nervous as a result of my job	True	52	80%
	False	13	20%
	Total	65	100%
I have been a victim of crime, as a result of my job	True	43	66.2%
	False	22	33.8%
	Total	65	100%

*3.2.2. Job burnout.* The results indicated that respondents experience the physical and emotional symptoms associated with burnout on a regular basis. For job burnout, the majority of the sample indicated that they often experience each of the following burnout-related symptoms:

- ◆ Feeling depressed (32.3%);
- ◆ Being physically exhausted (35.4%);
- ◆ Being emotionally exhausted (26.2%);
- ◆ Being “wiped out” (38.5%);
- ◆ Feeling run-down (33.8%);
- ◆ Feeling worthless (32.3%); and
- ◆ Being troubled (38.5%).

A vast majority of the sample indicated that they often feel disillusioned and resentful (36.9%), where 36.9% of respondents feel weak and susceptible to illness.

*3.2.3. Social support.* The majority of the sample (60%) indicated that when the work situation becomes stressful, their immediate supervisor cannot be relied upon. With regards to coworker support, 56.9% of respondents indicated that they do not rely on their coworkers when things get stressful at work. More than half of the respondents felt that their immediate supervisors (60%) and coworkers (58.4%) are not willing to listen to their personal problems. Interestingly, the majority of respondents indicated

that non-work based support is available when they need to talk to someone about their personal problems (50.8%), and when the work situation becomes stressful and dangerous (49.2%).

### 3.3. Inferential statistics.

*Hypothesis 1: Social support reduces cash in transit employees' susceptibility to job burnout.*

Table 4. Pearson product-moment correlation matrix for all variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Work environment		0.582**	0.438**	0.641**	0.376**
2. Job burnout	0.582**		-0.552**	-0.629**	-0.401**
3. Supervisory support	0.438**	-0.552**		0.750**	0.388**
4. Coworker support	0.641**	-0.629**	0.750**		0.472**
5. Non-work based support	0.376**	-0.401**	0.388**	0.472**	

Note: \*\* correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.

As shown in Table 5, a multiple regression analysis confirmed an inverse relationship between supervisory support (-0.175), personal support (0.127) and job burnout.

Table 5. Regression summary for dependent variable: job burnout

Independent variable	<i>b</i> *	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value
Supervisory support	-0.175	-1.187	0.240
Coworker support	<b>-0.438</b>	<b>-2.842</b>	<b>0.006</b>
Non-work based support	-0.127	-1.149	0.255

Note:  $R^2 = 0.423$ . Significant effects are in bold.

It is interesting to note that a significant inverse relationship exists between coworker support and job burnout (-0.438). Previous research conducted by Kaufman and Beehr (1989) indicated that social support provided by coworkers is more important in reducing work-related stress than non-work based social support (family members, friends, etc.).

*Hypothesis 2: A dangerous, unsafe work environment increases the risk of job burnout among cash in transit employees.*

Hypothesis two (H2) is supported. Table 4 shows a significant positive relationship between work environment characteristics and job burnout (0.582).

Table 6. Regression summary for dependent variable: job burnout

Independent variable	<i>b</i> *	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value
Work environment characteristics	0.582	5.678	0.000

Note:  $R^2 = 0.339$ . Significant effects are in bold.

As reported in Table 6, the multiple regression analysis confirmed a significant positive relationship between negative work environment characteristics and job burnout (0.582).

The findings provide support for hypothesis one (H1). Looking at Table 4 it is evident that a significant relationship exists between the three types of social support and job burnout. Table 4 indicates an inverse relationship between supervisory support (-0.552) and job burnout. Furthermore, an inverse relationship was found between co-worker support (-0.629), non-work based support (-0.401) and job burnout.

## 4. Discussion

**4.1. Practical implications.** Not enough attention has been given to victims' need for support from significant others (Maree, Van Den Berg & Pretorius, 2002). Jonker (1998) reported the following statement made by a victim of a cash in transit robbery:

*"I will never be able to work as a security guard again. The job is too dangerous and you never know if you will see your family again".*

The present study highlighted the need for organizations to provide their cash in transit security guards with support structures. Organizations need to become aware of the dangerous nature of cash in transit guards' jobs and do more to ensure their safety. Based on the descriptive results, the bulk of respondents indicated that they do not perceive that support is available from their supervisors and/or coworkers. The descriptive statistics also revealed that the majority of respondents perceived their work environment as stressful, tense, dangerous, and negatively affecting their health. Furthermore, the inferential statistics confirmed the potentially valuable role of social support in reducing stress and increasing well-being amongst cash in transit employees. At the eighth (8<sup>th</sup>) World Conference on Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion, the following statement was made by a cash in transit guard during an interview (Verwey, 2006):

*"I experience fearful thoughts of not coming back alive...because of the long hours you cannot think straight".*

Organizations need to become more proactive and assist with stress management, medical compensation, financial aid to cover funeral expenses, access to psychological services, drug and alcohol rehabili-

tation, and the introduction of effective staff rotation programs (Verwey, 2006). Other strategies may include therapy groups, self-help groups and learning interventions. These support structures may assist cash in transit guards to effectively cope with stress, and add value to the services they provide.

## 5. Limitations and recommendations

As with most research, this study is subject to a number of potential limitations. A limitation of the study was the relatively small sample size. Although a sample size of 65 is adequate for conducting inferential statistical analysis, these findings cannot be generalized based on this study alone. Furthermore, a small sample size will lead to less power in the statistical test to detect significant differences between variables. When the sample size is small, a study is particularly susceptible to produce results which are not statistically significant, and may be insufficiently powerful to detect real differences between variables (Freedman & Bernstein, 2000). Another limitation of this study is that the proposed theoretical model focused exclusively on a limited

number of factors affecting job burnout among cash in transit guards. The results of this study should be interpreted in terms of the limitations. Despite the limitations identified, this study has added value to the empirical body of burnout research. The authors hope that future research may replicate the current findings in various contract forms, organizations and countries.

## Conclusion

The interaction of employees with their work environment could result in psychological distress. Employees working in environments that are perceived to be unsafe tend to show high levels of work stress (Mutsvunguma & Gwandure, 2011). The inferential statistics suggest that an unpleasant, stressful and dangerous work environment may cause continuous stress for employees, therefore increasing their risk of burnout. The present research results confirm the need to give attention, in the South African context, to cash in transit employees' psychological well-being.

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