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by

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An Empirical Analysis of the Relationship Between Perceived Organizational Support and Organizational Commitment in the NSW Police Service

Paul Currie and Brian Dollery **

Abstract

An embryonic empirical literature on Australian policing has established that commitment levels of police officers are comparatively low. This paper seeks to add to this literature by applying Allen and Meyer's (1990) three-component model of occupational commitment, in conjunction with the Eisenberger et al. (1986) model of perceived organizational support, to a sample of 351 sworn police officers and student officers. The results seem to confirm earlier Australian findings since occupational commitment amongst the sample of respondents was also found to be low. It is suggested that additional skills training and tuition subsidies for officers could enhance occupational commitment.

Key Words: NSW Police Service; organizational commitment; perceived organizational support

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1. INTRODUCTION

Intense adverse publicity over the performance of the various Australian state and territory police services over the past two decades has ensured that policing has become a controversial area of public policy. A crucial attribute of policing performance resides in the degree of commitment of individual police officers in the conduct of their duties and the determinants of this commitment. This question has attracted the attention of several researchers who have investigated organizational commitment in the institutional milieu of various police departments in Australia and New Zealand, and its relationship to perceived organizational support (see, for example, Beck, 1996; Beck and Wilson, 1995; 1998; James and Hendry, 1991; Savery *et al.*, 1991; and Wilson, 1991). The present paper seeks to add to this empirical literature by examining the problem of organizational commitment in the institutional context of the NSW Police Service.

In order to provide quantitative estimates of organizational commitment (OC) and its relationship to environmental factors, like perceived organizational support (POS), in the NSW Police Service, this study draws on Allen and Meyer's (1990) three-component model of OC in conjunction with the Eisenberger *et al.* (1986) model of POS. It seeks to extend this work to investigate various dimensions of OC in the NSW Police Service, including the empirical claim made by Beck and Wilson (1995, p. 38) that "perceived organizational support was the

most important factor organizational support which influenced organizational commitment” in both Australian and New Zealand police departments. In their study, officers who felt supported by the organization reported higher levels of commitment.

The problem of OC represents an important attribute of policing policy in NSW, especially in the light of the apparently increasing rate of attrition in NSW (NSW Police Service, 1999). By providing quantitative estimates of the determinants of OC in NSW, and its relationship with POS, it is hoped that this paper can make a modest contribution to the design of improved police policy in NSW.

The paper itself is divided into six main parts. Section 2 provides a synoptic survey of the relevant theoretical literature on OC and POS. Section 3 briefly discusses the Australian empirical literature on OC, POS and policing. Section 4 sets out the aims of the empirical study whereas Section 5 describes the methodology adopted. Section 6 focuses on the results of the empirical study. The paper ends with some brief concluding remarks in Section 7.

2. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Commitment is a construct that seeks to explain consistencies involving attitudes, beliefs and behavior and “involves behavioral choices and implies a rejection of

feasible alternative courses of action” (Hulin, 1991, p. 488). Thus, these consistencies are usually seen as behavioral choices devoted to the pursuit of a common goal or goals (Hulin, 1991). With the development of the concept of commitment, an associated critical literature has arisen (see, for instance, Griffin and Bateman, 1986; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Meyer and Allen, 1991; Morrow, 1983; Mowday *et al.*, 1982; Reichers, 1986; Salancik, 1977; Staw, 1977). It has become apparent that commitment is a multifaceted and complex construct that commitment can take several different forms (Meyer *et al.*, 1993). However, there is no consensus on how best to define the construct.

In their review of organizational commitment literature, Meyer and Allen (1991) identified three distinct themes in defining commitment as “affective”, “continuance” and “normative” commitment. According to Meyer and Allen’s (1991) Three-Component Model of Commitment, employees can adopt to varying degrees these three forms of commitment. Moreover, they contend “that one can achieve a better understanding of an employee’s relationship with an organization when all three forms of commitment are considered together” (Meyer *et al.*, 1993, p. 539).

In terms of this tripartite classification, “commitment is a psychological state that (a) characterizes the employee’s relationship with the organization and (b) has implications for the decision to continue or discontinue membership in the

organization. Beyond this, however, the nature of the psychological state for each form of commitment is quite different” (Meyer *et al.*, 1993, p. 539).

Whereas affective, continuance and normative commitment represent employee commitment to an organization, Eisenberger *et al.* (1986) argued that the organization’s commitment to employees was also critical. Moreover, they suggested that “interpretations of organization commitment may be integrated and extended into a social exchange approach that emphasizes employees’ beliefs concerning commitment to them by the organization” (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986, p. 500). They maintained that the personification of the organization was exemplified by its assumption of legal, moral and financial responsibility for the actions of its agents; and organizational precedents, traditions and policies act as guides to behaviour. As a consequence, employees then develop global beliefs regarding the extent to which organizations value and reward their contributions. POS is thus influenced by “various aspects of an employee’s treatment by the organization and would, in turn, influence the employee’s interpretation of organizational motives underlying that treatment” (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986, p. 501).

3. COMMITMENT, PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT AND POLICING

Recent empirical work on policing in Australia, including the NSW Police Service, has established that commitment levels among police officers are comparatively low by international standards (see, for example, Aldag and Brief, 1977; Beck, 1996; Beck and Wilson, 1995; James and Hendry, 1991; Savery *et al.*, 1990; Van Maanen, 1975; and Wilson, 1991). For instance, Beck (1996) reported on attitudes of NSW police officers towards recommendations by Beck and Wilson (1995) for improving levels of commitment in the NSW Police Service. Respondents reported that commitment levels could be increased by both feedback and participation in the decision making process. However, respondents did not generally support the proposition that external qualifications and career development programs would assist in addressing the problem. Beck (1996, p. 17) qualified these findings by observing that “these findings indicate that there is a great deal of contention surrounding the issue of external qualifications and development programs, and that further investigation of the issue is warranted”. It is this pressing need for further research in the area of career development and its implications for organizational commitment and perceived organizational support that prompted the present study.

Given the work by Meyer *et al.* (1993) on student and registered nurses, it is possible to make some assumptions concerning expected outcomes on organizational commitment in the NSW Police Service. For example, regarding Student Police Officers (SPOs), it would be expected that satisfaction with the Constables Education Program (CEP) to correlate positively with affective commitment and possibly with normative commitment but not with continuance commitment. Moreover, it could be expected that affective and normative commitment would positively correlate with students' intentions to establish long-term careers in policing. In the case of sworn police officers, one would expect similar associations as described in Meyer's *et al.* (1993) study regarding registered nurses. It is reasonable to anticipate that the affective commitment of sworn police would be greater amongst those who were satisfied with their current employment situation. In a similar vein, continuance of commitment would positively correlate with variables that reflect investment in the profession (i.e. length of service, age, etc.). Finally, it is expected that normative commitment would be greater amongst those police with a stronger sense of obligation and loyalty.

In the light of the extant literature, it is also possible to make some assumptions regarding POS. For instance, POS should correlate positively with the perceived investment of resources, time and effort by the organization in the CEP.

Similarly, regarding sworn police, POS should initially be favorable, but later deteriorate as length of service progressed.

4. AIMS

It is thus argued that it is possible to link two separate streams of organizational research, involving an organizational commitment strand (Meyer and Allen, 1991) and a perceived organizational support strand (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986) respectively, in the institutional context of the career development to members of the NSW Police Service. In this study, we test these interrelationships given their demographic characteristics.

Three specific questions are investigated. Firstly, are there systematic associations between demographic characteristics of NSW Police and their levels of organizational commitment, perceived general organizational support, and perceived organizational support as it relates to career development, within the NSW Police Service. Secondly, are lower levels of perceived organizational support predictive of lower levels of organizational commitment, within the NSW Police Service. Finally, are lower levels of perceived organizational support, as it specifically relates to career development, predictive of lower levels of organizational commitment, within the NSW Police Service.

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1 Participants

Respondents included both sworn staff members and Student Police Officers from the NSW Police Service. Whereas sworn staff members embraced the ranks of Probationary Constable, Constable and Senior Constable, student officers included graduate and undergraduate staff studying at the NSW Police Academy in Goulburn. Questionnaires were sent to 351 eligible staff (a sample of 5 per cent). 116 responses were returned from the mail, three of which were unable to be used (an overall rate of 32 per cent). Responses were classified according to rank and gender, undergraduate versus postgraduate status, and demographic factors¹.

5.2 Sampling Limitations

The major sampling limitation is that the study did not include police of the rank of Sergeant or above. There were several reasons for this limitation being imposed: firstly, since 1987, all ranks above constable obtain promotion by merit or through assessment centre methodologies, which would have to be taken into account in regard to POS. Secondly, constables represent about 75 per cent of sworn Police and are by far the largest group within the NSW Police Service. Thirdly, only those sworn members working in the Sydney metropolitan area were

¹ Details of the sampling procedures and other methodological matters can be found in Currie (2000).

considered for this study to ensure a relatively homogeneous sample and to meet budgetary limitations.

5.3 Survey Instrument

Participants were asked to complete a 59-item mail-out questionnaire comprising of four parts: Part 1 related to demographic characteristics of respondents, which included such characteristics as duty type and the possession of formal tertiary qualifications; Part 2 related to ratings of general perceived support within the workplace (adapted from Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986); Part 3 related to ratings of commitment to the organization (adapted from Allen and Meyer, 1990); and Part 4 related to ratings of perceived support within the workplace in regard to career development. The participants were asked to complete the survey and return it in a self-addressed, stamped envelope enclosed with the questionnaire. The survey instrument contained three main elements:

General perceived support: The general perceived support scales comprised a modified version of the Eisenberger *et al.* (1986) instrument, with responses measured on a seven-point Likert-type agreement scale. The findings of Eisenberger *et al.* (1986) indicated that employees developed global beliefs concerning the degree to which the organization valued their employees' contributions and well-being.

Organizational commitment: The organizational commitment scales used were a modified version of the Allen and Meyer (1990) instrument, with responses were measured on a seven-point Likert-type agreement scale. Of the 24 items, eight items were included for each of the three component scales: Affective Commitment Scale (ACS), the Continuance Commitment Scale (CCS) and the Normative Commitment Scale (NCS). The ACS measured an employee's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization. The CCS measured the cost associated with an employee leaving the organization and focused on why an employee had to remain with an organization. The NCS measured feelings of loyalty and obligation to remain with the organization.

Perceived support relating to career development: This 9-item scale listed the types of perceived support employees expected with respect to career development and assessed the degree to which support was provided using a seven-point Likert-type agreement scale.

6. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

6.1 Preliminary Analysis

The preliminary stage of analysis assessed the reliability, mean and standard deviation of the five dimensions involving commitment and organizational support. All reliabilities exceeded the standard accepted value of 0.60, except for

Normative Commitment, which was borderline but still considered useful enough to retain.

6.2 Descriptive analysis

Descriptive analyses were conducted on the data for the purpose of creating summarized categories of each demographic variable for the commitment, POS and POSCD variables. The relevant means and standard deviations are set out in Table 1.

Table I. Means and Standard Deviations (in parentheses) of the commitment, POS and POSCD variables in relation to demographic categories.

	Affective	Continuance	Normative	POS	POSCD
1. Gender					
Male	4.06(1.13)	3.87(1.04)	3.81(0.84)	3.31(0.82)	3.42(0.89)
Female	3.80(0.99)	3.83(0.99)	3.58(0.65)	3.84(0.92)	3.50(1.02)
Comparison	N.S. ¹	N.S.	N.S.	t(111)=-3.17, p=0.002	N.S.
2. Years Service					
Student	4.77(0.58)	3.69(1.14)	4.35(0.72)	4.71(0.51)	4.59(0.35)
0 – 9	4.07(1.02)	3.78(0.96)	3.65(0.60)	3.48(0.71)	3.50(0.90)
10 – 19	3.60(1.14)	4.03(1.06)	3.69(0.95)	3.24(0.90)	3.09(0.78)
20 +	3.23(1.34)	4.03(1.49)	3.75(1.46)	2.51(1.16)	2.62(0.76)
Comparison	F(3,109)=4.66, p=0.004	N.S.	N.S.	F(3,109)=12.81, p<0.001	N.S.
3. Age Range					
-20	4.50(0.88)	4.69(0.97)	4.88(0.53)	4.40(0.64)	4.39(0.55)
21 - 30	4.08(0.98)	3.82(1.00)	3.72(0.64)	3.60(0.83)	3.50(0.87)
31 - 40	3.75(1.25)	3.72(1.04)	3.51(0.80)	3.41(0.96)	3.42(1.11)
41- 50	3.75(1.31)	4.43(1.04)	4.38(1.29)	2.73(0.71)	2.97(0.52)
Comparison	N.S.	N.S.	F(3,109)=4.63, p=0.004	N.S.	N.S.
4. Rank					
Student	4.77(0.58)	3.69(1.14)	4.35(0.72)	4.71(0.51)	4.59(0.35)
Constable	4.16(1.03)	3.77(0.93)	3.67(0.59)	3.51(0.72)	3.51(0.88)
Sen Con	3.53(1.08)	4.00(1.11)	3.66(0.96)	3.17(0.91)	3.10(0.85)
Comparison	F(2,110)=8.61, p<0.001	N.S.	N.S.	F(2,110)=17.14, p<0.001	F(2,110)=14.26, p<0.001
5. Duty Type					
Students	4.77(0.58)	3.69(1.14)	4.35(0.72)	4.71(0.51)	4.59(0.35)
General	3.97(1.10)	4.05(0.93)	3.65(0.79)	3.34(0.90)	3.34(0.85)
Dets	3.58(0.89)	3.25(1.06)	3.46(0.73)	3.26(0.70)	2.77(0.93)
Traffic	3.58(1.03)	3.54(1.30)	3.99(0.59)	3.28(0.56)	2.99(0.44)
Others	3.90(1.24)	3.73(.01)	3.68(0.78)	3.53(0.71)	3.78(1.00)
Comparison	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.	F(4,108)=7.24, p<0.001	F(4,108)=8.71, p<0.001
6. Qualifications					
Nil	4.04(1.13)	4.07(0.97)	3.79(0.85)	3.43(0.83)	3.40(0.84)
Tertiary	3.89(1.05)	3.63(1.04)	3.67(0.72)	3.55(0.95)	3.51(1.02)
Comparison	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.

¹ N.S. = not significant at $p < 0.01$

The t-test and ANOVA comparisons obtained are self-explanatory. For example, in regard to gender, one is justified in concluding that male employees had a significantly lower average level of POS. In regard to Years Service, a significant difference was found with respect to Affective Commitment. For significant ANOVA results, a Post hoc Tukey HSD multiple comparison test was conducted to isolate which group means differ from which other group means, however, only those results which achieved a p -value of <0.01 will be reported and discussed.

Regarding Years Service, students had a significantly greater Affective Commitment than those employees with 10-19 years of service ($p=0.008$). Furthermore, students had a significantly greater POS than employees with 0-9, 10-19 and 20+ years of service, with $p <0.001$ in each instance. POS shows significant signs of decay as years of service increase ($p<0.001$). The inference that may be drawn from this example being that employees perceive that the level of organization support decreases as one attains seniority.

In regard to Age Range, a significant difference was found in respect to Normative Commitment ($p=0.004$) and we can conclude that employees in the 41 – 50 age range had a significantly greater Normative Commitment than employees in the 31 – 40 age range, though with $p = 0.016$, this result is only considered marginal.

Regarding Rank, we are able to conclude that students had a significantly greater Affective Commitment than Senior Constables ($p=0.001$). Further, that Constables had a significantly greater Affective Commitment than Senior Constables ($p=0.007$). Also, students had a significantly greater POS and POSCD than both Constables and Senior Constables ($p < 0.001$ in all instances).

In relation to Duty Type, we are able to conclude that students had a significantly greater POS than those employees whose the duty types were General, Dets, Traffic and Others ($p < 0.001, 0.001, 0.001$ and 0.002 respectively). Further, students had a significantly greater POSCD than those employees whose duty types were General, Dets and Traffic ($p < 0.001$ in all instances)

6.3 Model of Commitment Analysis

The hierarchical multiple regression results are presented in a specific order using each of the three criterion variables (Affective, Continuance and Normative Commitment respectively) of the commitment model. The HMR analysis for each will be presented here in that order and each of the criterion variables were predicted using two sets of hierarchical multiple regression predictor variables.

The sets were presented in a specific *a priori* order of entry commencing with the more specific demographic characteristics to the more general work

contexts involving POS and POS as it related to career development. All analyses presented here were conducted using Version 8.0 of SPSS for Windows.

6.4 Affective Commitment Analysis

Table 2 presents a summary of the overall contributions of the hierarchically entered predictor sets in relation to demographic characteristics and POS and POSCD.

Table II. Summary of the hierarchical multiple regression analysis of the predictor set contributions to the explanation of the variability in the Affective Commitment Scores.

Predictor sets	R ²	R ² change	F change	p-value	D-W ^a
1. Demographics	0.195	0.195	2.020	0.030*	
2. POS & POSCD	0.377	0.182	14.329	<0.001*	1.8

^a Durbin-Watson statistic; value shows no significant auto correlations in the data set.

* Significance criterion is $p < 0.05$.

From Table 2, Demographics explained a significant 19.5 per cent of the variance in Affective Commitment. POS and POSCD explained a further significant 18.2 per cent of the variance in Affective Commitment. In general, both predictor sets explained a significant 37.7 per cent of variance in Affective Commitment, ($F(14,98) = 4.24, p < 0.001$). However, Table 2 does not show which variables contributed most to their respective sets explanatory power. This will be explained in Table 3, which displays test results for the regression analysis

displaying the Beta, t – value and p – value for each of the demographic set variables.

Table III. Summary of the hierarchical multiple regression analysis of the demographic variables contributions regarding significance to the explanation of Affective Commitment Scores.

Variables	Beta	t - value	p - value
1. Gender	-0.169	-1.717	0.089*
Years Service:			
2. 0-9	0.033	0.060	0.952
3. 10-19	-0.061	-0.130	0.897
4. 20-29	-0.151	-0.744	0.458
Age Range:			
5. –20	-0.109	-0.965	0.337
6. 21-40	-0.050	-0.435	0.664
Rank:			
7. Constable	0.214	1.135	0.259
Duty Type:			
8. GD	-0.567	-1.061	0.291
9. Dets	-0.386	-1.212	0.229
10. Traffic	-0.358	-1.166	0.246
11. Others	-0.466	-1.137	0.258
Qualifications:			
12. Qual	-0.130	-1.291	0.200

* Marginally significant at $p < 0.10$

Of those variables contained in the demographic set, as displayed above in Table 3, only Gender approached any real significance, though this could only be said to be marginal. When these variables were retested after entry of the POS and POSCD set for their contributions to the variability of Affective Commitment, a marked change occurred. Of the demographic variables, only Gender will be considered, with the results presented in Table 4.

Table IV. Beta Coefficients, t – values and p – values for the demographic variable Gender and the predictor set containing POS and POSCD regarding significance to the explanation of Affective Commitment Scores.

Variables	Beta	t - value	p – value
Gender	-0.315	-3.307	0.001*
Organizational Support:			
13. POS	0.486	4.225	<0.001*
14. POSCD	0.098	0.912	0.364

* Significant at $p < 0.01$

Of the above, both gender and POS proved to be highly significant in their contribution towards predicting Affective Commitment, whilst POSCD did not. Regarding Gender, the Beta coefficient indicated that a high Gender score, in this instance females (males coded 1, females coded 2), significantly predicted a lower Affective Commitment score. Regarding POS, the Beta coefficient indicated that higher POS scores predicted higher Affective Commitment scores.

6.5 Continuance Commitment Analysis

Table V. Summary of the hierarchical multiple regression analysis of the predictor set contributions to the explanation of the variability in the Continuance Commitment Scores.

Predictor sets	R²	R² change	F change	p - value	D-W^a
1. Demographics	0.178	0.178	1.807	0.057*	
2. POS & POSCD	0.188	0.010	0.587	0.558	2.0

^a Durbin-Watson statistic; value shows no significant auto correlation in the data set.

* Marginally significant at $p < 0.10$.

In relation to Continuance Commitment, Demographics explained a marginally significant 17.8 per cent of the variance in Continuance Commitment. In contrast, POS and POSCD explained only a further 1.0 per cent of the variance in Continuance Commitment. In general, both predictor sets explained a marginally significant 18.8 per cent of variance in Continuance Commitment, ($F(14, 98) = 1.620, p = 0.087$).

Similarly to Table 3, Table 6 displays test results for the regression analysis displaying the Beta, t – value and p – value for each of the demographic variables.

Table VI. Summary of the hierarchical multiple regression analysis of the demographic variables contributions regarding significance to the explanation of Continuance Commitment Scores.

Variables	Beta	t - value	p - value
1. Gender	-0.001	-0.014	0.989
Years Service:			
2. 0-9	-0.286	-0.520	0.604
3. 10-19	-0.311	-0.658	0.512
4. 20-29	-0.242	-1.182	0.240
Age Range:			
5. <20	0.062	0.539	0.591
6. 21-40	-0.108	-0.926	0.357
Rank:			
7. Constable	-0.230	-1.207	0.230
Duty Type:			
8. GD	0.643	1.191	0.236
9. Dets	0.106	0.329	0.743
10. Traffic	0.182	0.587	0.559
11. Others	0.328	0.791	0.431
Qualifications:			
12. Qual	-0.201	-1.983	0.050*

* Marginally significant at $p < 0.10$.

Of those variables contained in the demographic set, as displayed above in Table 6, none of the demographic set, except Qualifications, approached any real significance.

The Beta coefficient indicated that a high Qualification score significantly predicted a lower Continuance Commitment score, though this result was marginally significant at best. The POS and POSCD set did not significantly predict Continuance Commitment.

6.6 Normative Commitment Analysis

Table VII. Summary of the hierarchical multiple regression analysis of the predictor set contributions to the explanation of the variability in the Normative Commitment Scores.

Predictor sets	R ²	R ² change	F change	p - values	D-W ^a
1. Demographics	0.196	0.196	2.036	0.028*	
2. POS & POSCD	0.254	0.057	3.766	0.027*	2.0

^a Durbin-Watson statistic; value shows no significant auto correlation in the data set

* Significance criterion is $p < 0.05$.

As shown in Table 7, Demographics explained a significant 19.6 per cent of the variance in Normative Commitment. POS and POSCD explained a further significant 5.7 per cent of the variance in Normative Commitment. In general, both predictor sets explained a significant 25.4 per cent of variance in Normative Commitment, though both are only marginally significant ($F(14,98) = 2.380, p = 0.007$).

Similarly to Table 3 and Table 6, Table 8 displays test results for the regression analysis displaying the p – value for each of the demographic variables.

Table VIII. Summary of the hierarchical multiple regression analysis of the demographic variables contributions regarding significance to the explanation of Normative Commitment Scores.

Variables	Beta	<i>t</i> – value	<i>p</i> - value
1. Gender	-0.085	-0.868	0.388
Years Service:			
2. 0-9	0.113	0.209	0.835
3. 10-19	0.068	0.146	0.884
4. 20-29	-0.083	-0.411	0.682
Age Range:			
5. –20	-0.073	-0.643	0.522
6. 21-40	-0.346	-2.988	0.004*
Rank:			
7. Constable	0.088	0.465	0.643
Duty Type:			
8. GD	-0.590	-1.105	0.272
9. Dets	-0.369	-1.159	0.249
10. Traffic	-0.191	-0.625	0.534
11. Others	-0.448	-1.095	0.276
Qualifications:			
12. Qual	-0.077	-0.771	0.443

* Significant at $p < 0.01$.

Of those variables contained in the demographic set above, only Age Range (21-40) achieved significance, and this could be said to be highly significant. Hence, when tested in conjunction with POS and POSCD, some change occurred and the results are presented in Table 9.

Table IX. Beta Coefficients, t – values and p – values for the demographic variable Age Range and the predictor set containing POS and POSCD regarding significance to the explanation of Normative Commitment Scores.

Variables	Beta	t - value	p – value
Age Range (21-40)	-0.395	-3.457	0.001*
Organizational Support:			
13. POS	0.253	2.010	0.047*
14. POSCD	0.083	0.703	0.484

*Significant at $p < 0.05$.

Of the above, Age Range (21-40) proved to be very highly significant in its contribution towards predicting Normative Commitment. POS proved to be significant, whilst POSCD explained no further significant variation in the Normative Commitment Score. In regard to Age Range (21-40), the Beta coefficient indicated that a high Age Range (21-40) score significantly predicted a lower Normative Commitment score. The remaining variables contained in the Demographic data set explained no further significant variation in the Normative Commitment score. Regarding POS, the Beta coefficient indicated that higher POS scores predicted higher Normative Commitment scores.

Without repeating specific analyses, perusing the various results and outcomes indicates that in many instances, though not in all, varied aspects of perceived organizational support (POS), and perceived organizational support as it relates to career development (POSCD), predicted different facets of

organizational commitment (OC), as did demographic factors in regard to OC, POS and POSCD.

What pertinent empirical results can we draw from this analysis? In the first place, the strength and significance of the t-test, ANOVA and HMR analyses lent some support to the first of the three questions under investigation. Put differently, there does indeed appear to be statistically systematic associations between the demographic characteristics of NSW Police and their levels of organizational commitment, perceived general organizational support, and perceived organizational support as it relates to career development within the NSW Police Service. Addressing each of the demographic characteristics in turn, the following trends were detected: Male employees had a significantly lower average level of POS than their female colleagues. Thus, male officers sampled in this study apparently believed that the degree of support that the NSW Police Service would be expected to provide was less than that expected by those females sampled. HMR analysis results indicated an association between Gender and Affective Commitment, where female employees showed significantly lower Affective Commitment than their male colleagues. Accordingly, female employees had less desire to remain with the NSW Police Service than their male counterparts.

With respect to the Years Service variable, the results indicated an association between students had a significantly greater level of Affective Commitment than those employees with 10-19 years of service. Hence, in line with the literature described in Meyer *et al.* (1993), students' experiences within the organization could be deemed to be more consistent with their expectations and therefore satisfy their basic needs. Conversely, those employees with 10-19 years of service may have found their experiences to be less than satisfying. Similarly in regard to POS, students perceived that levels of support offered by the NSW Police Service were significantly greater than all other categories of police defined by years of service. Furthermore, in each category, POS could be seen to decrease to lower levels as years of service increased. Hence, employees perceived levels of support to be less than expected as tenure within the NSW Police Service increased.

From ANOVA results and though only marginally significant, those employees categorized as being in the 41-50 age range showed higher levels of normative commitment than those in the 31-40 age range. This heightened sense of obligation towards the NSW Police Service, may, according to Meyer *et al.* (1993), be due to the receipt of benefits such as skills training or positive socialization experiences.

ANOVA results indicated an association between Rank and levels of Affective Commitment, POS and POSCD. Regarding Rank and Affective Commitment, students showed a significantly greater Affective Commitment than Senior Constables, as did Constables compared to Senior Constables. The inference that may be drawn from these results is that Affective Commitment decreases significantly as employees attain a greater rank within the NSW Police Service. In regards to Rank and levels of POS and POSCD, similarly, students showed significantly greater levels of POS and POSCD than both Constables and Senior Constables. Once again, the inference that may be drawn from these results is that levels of POS and POSCD decrease significantly as employees attain a greater rank within the NSW Police Service.

Regarding Duty Type, an association was found between this characteristic and levels of POS and POSCD. ANOVA results indicated that students had a significantly greater level of POS than all other employees sampled, and a significantly greater level of POSCD than those employees whose duties included general duties, detectives and traffic. The conclusions that may be drawn from these results are that students' perceptions of the general support offered by the NSW Police Service were significantly greater than all other employees, and furthermore, that support in regard to career development was perceived to be superior to all employees other than those classified as performing duties other

than general, detectives and traffic. These perceptions of students may be due to their belief in that they receive a far greater amount of general support whilst training at the NSW Police Academy, given they are under instruction, than their sworn counterparts. In regard to career development, students' perceptions were similar to employees whose duties had been classified as "other", as sworn employees whose duties include specialist roles such as anti-theft, intelligence, task forces and youth liaison may be of the belief that they receive a greater level of training or similar which could lead to future rewards such as an increase in salary and rank.

Regarding Qualifications, an association was found between this characteristic and Continuance Commitment. HMR results, though only marginally significant, indicated that those employees who possessed tertiary or post secondary qualifications were predictive of lower continuance commitment. Hence, those employees who possess tertiary qualifications, in line with the literature described in Meyer *et al.* (1993), may recognize that the availability of comparable alternatives is not as limited as their counterparts who do not possess similar qualifications.

Regarding the second research question posed, the results of HMR analyses indicated that there was some evidence to support the finding that lower levels of POS were predictive of lower levels of OC within the NSW Police

Service. These results require some qualification though. In relation to Affective Commitment, higher levels of POS proved to be highly significant in predicting higher levels of Affective Commitment. Regarding Continuance Commitment, higher levels of POS proved to have no real significance in predicting Continuance Commitment. Regarding Normative Commitment, higher levels of POS proved to be only marginally significant in predicting higher levels of Normative Commitment. These results therefore tended to support, in some respects, the findings of Eisenberger *et al.* (1986), though not in totality, that higher perceived levels of POS will strengthen an employee's commitment to the organization.

In regard to the third research question posed, the results of the HMR analyses indicated that there was no evidence to support the result that lower levels of POSCD were predictive of lower levels of OC within the NSW Police Service. In each instance, the p – value was determined to be 0.364, 0.449 and 0.484 for each of Affective, Continuance and Normative Commitment, respectively.

7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

From a public policy perspective, it is important to consider whether or not the results of this study can be generalized to the NSW Police population as a whole. Put differently, are the results valid for the sampled subjects only or are they valid for the broader population from which the sample was drawn? Since random

selection was used as a method for drawing the sample from a defined population, and given the adequate size of the sample population, probability arguments may be used to infer that results found in the sample are also likely to be valid of the population as a whole, although of course “external validity can never be settled finally and objectively” (Smith and Glass, 1987, p. 146).

It can be argued that the present findings do provide preliminary evidence for the generalizability of the sample to the population. Moreover, these findings also provide tentative evidence on two further counts: The generalizability of Meyer and Allen’s (1991) three-component model of commitment; and that employees formed global beliefs on the extent to which the organization (in this instance the NSW Police Service), valued their contribution and cared about their well-being, following Eisenberger *et al.* (1986).

For example, continuance commitment was positively related with years of service - a finding consistent with the expectations of Meyer *et al.* (1993) that continuance commitment will increase with the accumulation of investments by employees in an organization. Hence, as employees advance with respect to tenure they acknowledge their contributions in terms of time, effort and money and the increasing cost of terminating their employment. Moreover, in common with Meyer *et al.* (1993), it was established that both affective and normative commitment, in general, decreased as continuance commitment increased.

Accordingly, a student officer's commitment to the organization was based more on desire or obligation rather than cost considerations to remain with the NSW Police Service, whereas the reverse was largely true of long-term police officers.

Similarly, regarding POS, Eisenberger *et al.* (1986) assumed that an employee's increase in work effort resulted from an affective attachment to the organization that was dependent upon an exchange ideology that favoured a trade between additional work effort and symbolic and material rewards. This exchange ideology stems from the norm of reciprocity. The results in this study appear to support the proposition that affective commitment weakened as POS weakened. Furthermore, since both affective and normative commitment are associated with desirable outcomes, it is not surprising that normative commitment also weakened in line with both affective commitment and POS.

Analogous results were also found in relation to POSCD, so that as continuance commitment strengthened, and POS, affective and normative commitment correspondingly weakened, POSCD weakened.

As we have seen, previous empirical studies conducted in Australian state police departments reported low levels of organizational commitment (Beck, 1996; Beck and Wilson, 1995; 1998; James and Hendry, 1991; Savery *et al.*, 1991; and Wilson, 1991). In the present study this finding was confirmed; organizational commitment was low regardless of gender, duty type and the possession of

external qualifications. Furthermore, organizational commitment decreased as years of service, age and rank increased. Similar results, in general, were also obtained in regard to both POS and POSCD.

If we accept that low or decreasing levels of commitment, POS and POSCD are detrimental to both the organization and the individual employee, then it follows that the organization should formulate and implement mechanisms that strengthen or maintain initial high levels of these dimensions. With the exception of continuance commitment, all other such variables were found to decrease over time and rank.

In the specific case of the NSW Police Service, broad recommendations may be made with respect to these findings. For example, affective commitment can be expected to increase when involvement with the organization proved to be a satisfying experience. Accordingly, this may be addressed by providing police officers with the opportunity to participate in satisfying work or acquire additional training and skills. Normative commitment derives from the receipt of benefits that create a sense of obligation. For instance, if an officer were to receive skills training or tuition payments, then this could strengthen that police officer's normative commitment to the NSW Police Service. Moreover, if commitment is tackled along these lines, then both POS and POSCD may also be addressed, which results in the positive reinforcement of all dimensions.

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