

# The role of religious coping on problematic alcohol consumption by police officers

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## ABSTRACT

Problematic alcohol consumption by police officers is well documented in the literature. It also shows that critical incident stress is correlated with this behavior. A separate body of research indicates that religious coping exerts a moderate protective effect on various types of problematic behavior, including problematic alcohol consumption. We merge these literatures in an effort to determine if religious coping reduces problematic alcohol consumption by police officers and whether it mitigates the positive relationship between critical incident stress and problematic drinking. Data from the *Police Stress and Domestic Violence in Police Families in Baltimore, Maryland, 1997–1999* are analyzed to examine these propositions ( $n = 1004$ ). Results indicate that police officers with higher levels of religious coping were in fact less likely to report problematic alcohol consumption. However, religious coping did not mitigate the positive relationship between critical incident stress and problematic alcohol consumption. The implications of our findings and suggestions for future research are discussed.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

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## KEYWORDS

Problematic alcohol consumption; police officers; religious coping; stress

## Introduction

A review of the literature shows that among the most common crimes committed by police officers are those involving alcohol, like bars fights, public drunkenness, and driving under the influence (DUI) of alcohol (Stinson, Liederbach, Brewer, & Todak, 2014). Indeed, problematic alcohol consumption by police officers is a major concern. For example, Davey, Obst, and Sheehan (2000) found that 30% of a large sample of Australian police officers fell in the ‘at risk of harmful consumption’ category of the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT). Such a finding is perhaps not a surprise given that law enforcement is one of the most stressful occupations in the world (Anshel, 2000), and critical incident stress has been linked to problematic alcohol consumption among police officers (Violanti et al., 2011). Because research shows that critical incident stressors negatively influence an officer’s health and behavior around the world (Berg, Hem, Lau, & Ekeberg, 2006; Chopko, Palmieri, & Adams, 2013), it is important for scholars to continue devoting significant time determining what factors might mitigate problematic drinking among officers, as well as what might mediate the relationship between stress and problematic drinking for this group. Such research is highly relevant given that studies have documented problematic alcohol consumption among police officers in non-United States law enforcement samples as well (Davey, Obst, & Sheehan, 2001). Documenting the factors that may decrease critical incident stress on police officers around the world is important