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# Work and Life Stressors of Law Enforcement Personnel

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## Abstract

In early 2023, the CNA Corporation, with support from the Bureau of Justice Assistance, conducted comprehensive staff surveys in nine law enforcement agencies nationwide. These surveys encompassed personnel from all levels and roles within the agencies, including sworn officers as well as nonsworn professional staff. This report presents a detailed analysis of the written responses gathered in response to a specific survey question. This question requested respondents to articulate the factors contributing to the deterioration of their mental and emotional well-being, both in their personal lives and within the context of their work. A total of 993 responses underwent a meticulous review process, resulting in the categorization of comments into 37 distinct categories, which were further consolidated into six overarching topical areas. The first three of these topical areas focused on various facets of the work environment, including leadership and supervision, other workplace-related stressors, and workplace culture. The two subsequent areas delved into the realm of the individual's private life, examining aspects of personal life stressors and mental health. The final topical area centered on stressors originating from the public that affected the respondents' lives and work. This report provides insights into the specific stressors identified by this cross-section of law enforcement staff. It also highlights variations in the mentions of topical areas across different demographic and positional characteristics, including statistically significant differences where applicable. In conclusion, the report presents policy recommendations aimed at enhancing the overall quality of life and the effectiveness of work for law enforcement personnel.

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# Executive Summary

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Policing is widely considered to be a stressful profession, particularly compared to other occupations (Acquadro Maran et al., 2022; Adams & Buck, 2010; Dick, 2000; Gershon et al., 2009; Purba & Demou, 2019; Violanti & Aron, 1995; Zhao et al., 2002). Police stress has received considerable attention in the existing academic literature, and the passage of the Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act of 2017 renewed calls to support officer health and wellness, which has brought the topic to the forefront of conversations surrounding policing in the United States.

This brief describes the results from a single question in the CNA Corporation's (CNA) survey among nine law enforcement agencies, deployed around February 2023. The open-ended question asked sworn and professional respondents to "Please describe what causes your mental and emotional health to deteriorate in life and at work." Out of the 1,304 individuals who participated in the survey (representing a 9.0 percent response rate), a substantial 993 respondents (approximately 76 percent) provided written responses to this question. This significant engagement underscores the evident importance of the topic to law enforcement personnel.

We systematically reviewed the open-ended comments and identified 37 unique issues that were categorized into six broad topic areas, which encompassed stressors related to leadership and supervision, workplace stress, workplace culture, personal life stressors, mental health issues, and challenges associated with public support. The results are organized by ranking individual issues within topic areas, as well as detailing differences across demographic and position characteristics.

Results indicate that agencies have direct control over many areas that could reduce staff stress. Such improvements include the development or updating of policies to enhance work-life balance, which not only prevents staff from becoming overburdened during duty but can also potentially boost morale and reduce overall work-related stress. In addition, implementing comprehensive training programs for new supervisors or offering annual in-service management training can be instrumental in ensuring managers possess the skills to establish clear expectations and foster an environment of trust, thereby alleviating any sense of micromanagement among staff. These changes can enhance workplace culture and promote positive interactions among colleagues.

## Introduction

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Prior literature has generally concluded that the sources of police stress can be placed into two broad categories: occupational stressors (those related to job content) and operational stressors (those related to job context) (Shane, 2010; Violanti & Aron, 1995; Violanti et al., 2017; Zhao et al., 2002). **Exhibit 1** provides examples of these two stress group categories. Occupational stressors refer to the specific responsibilities inherent to police work, including work schedules, patrol work, long work hours, overtime, traumatic events, threats to physical and psychological health, exposure to people

**Exhibit 1.** Examples of occupational and operational stressors

Occupational	Operational	
Work schedules	Management style	suffering distress and pain, among others (Acquadro Maran et al., 2022; Adams & Buck, 2010; Burke, 1998; Dick, 2000; Purba & Demou, 2019; Shane, 2010; Violanti & Aron, 1993, 1995; Violanti et al., 2016, 2017; Zhao et al., 2002).
Patrol work	Poor communication	
Long work hours	Inadequate resources	
Overtime	Strict bureaucracy	
Exposure to traumatic events	Conflicts with colleagues	
Threats to physical and psychological health	Lack of support, autonomy, decision-making, and flexibility	

Operational stressors, also referred to as organizational stressors, arise from police organization operations and may include management style; poor communication; lack of support, autonomy, decision-making, and flexibility; interpersonal conflicts with colleagues; strict bureaucracy; and inadequate resources, among others (Acquadro Maran et al., 2022; Adams & Buck, 2010; Burke, 1998; Dick, 2000; Purba & Demou, 2019; Shane, 2010; Violanti & Aron, 1993, 1995; Violanti et al., 2016, 2017; Zhao et al., 2002).

In addition to distinguishing sources of police stress between occupational and operational stressors, some scholars have further distinguished between acute and chronic stressors (Acquadro Maran et al., 2022; Dick, 2000; Garcia et al., 2004; Violanti et al., 2018). Acute stressors generally refer to sudden events (e.g., officer-involved shooting) that may be short in duration and in which symptoms may appear more quickly, whereas chronic stressors refer to stress that has built up over time (e.g., shift work) and in which the effects may occur more slowly (Dick, 2000; Violanti et al., 2018). There does not appear to be as much literature on acute and chronic stressors for police officers as there is for occupational and operational stressors.

## Types of stress

Prior research has examined the sources of police stress, often identifying the highest-ranked stressors, the frequency of stressors, the harms of these stressors, and whether occupational and operational stressors differ in their effects on police personnel. Several studies suggest that operational stressors are more detrimental to officers than occupational stressors (Finney et al., 2013; Purba & Demou, 2019; Shane, 2010; Violanti & Aron, 1993; Violanti et al., 2016, 2017). The justification here is the routine nature of operational stressors and the fact that “officers may perceive them as oppressive, unnecessary and inescapable” (Shane, 2010: 5-6). Shane (2010) found that the average scores of operational stressors were significantly higher than those for occupational stressors; Violanti and Aron (1993) found that operational stressors had a total effect on distress of approximately 6.3 times that of inherent police stressors. Further, Violanti and colleagues (2016) discovered that two operational stressors, “fellow officers not doing their job” and having “inadequate or poor quality equipment,” were among the top 5 of 60 most frequent stressors for officers.

Despite the argument that operational stressors may be more prevalent or detrimental, research has primarily focused on occupational stressors and found them to have negative effects on officers.

Violanti and colleagues' (2016) study examined the most frequent and highly rated occupational stressors and found that the top five events included exposure to battered or dead children, killing someone in the line of duty, fellow officer killed in the line of duty, situations requiring use of force, and physical attack on one's person. Garcia and colleagues (2004) found concern for a fellow officer being injured or killed to be the top ranked stressor for officers; Violanti and Aron (1995) concluded that killing someone in the line of duty and experiencing a fellow officer being killed are the two highest-ranked stressors.

## Importance of focusing on law enforcement stress

Police stress is not an innocuous phenomenon and can have substantial negative effects on officers and their performance. The stress associated with the occupational and operational aspects of police work has consistently been shown to lead to adverse psychological, physiological, and behavioral effects in officers (Acquadro Maran et al., 2022; Adams & Buck, 2010; Burke, 1998; Can & Hendy, 2014; Garcia et al., 2004; Gershon et al., 2009; Lucas et al., 2012; Purba & Demou, 2019; Shane, 2010; Violanti et al., 2017, 2018; Vuorensyrjä & Mälkiä, 2011). Police stress can contribute to many negative psychological effects, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, suicide ideation, burnout, emotional exhaustion, and poor self-esteem, among others (Acquadro Maran et al., 2022; Adams & Buck, 2010; Burke, 1998; Can & Hendy, 2014; Gershon et al., 2009; Lucas et al., 2012; Purba & Demou, 2019; Violanti et al., 2017, 2018; Vuorensyrjä & Mälkiä, 2011). Police stress can also contribute to poor physiological outcomes, such as cardiovascular disease, headaches, and ulcers (Burke, 1998; Gershon et al., 2009; Lucas et al., 2012). Adverse behavioral outcomes associated with police stress include substance abuse and alcoholism, aggression and violence, marital and family troubles, and lower work performance (Burke, 1998; Can & Hendy, 2014; Garcia et al., 2004; Gershon et al., 2009; Shane, 2010; Violanti et al., 2017).

The potential adverse effects of police stress previously described illustrate how detrimental stress can be to officer health and well-being. They also demonstrate that the adverse effects are not only limited to officers, but can also be shared with family members, friends, and the communities that officers serve. Because the effects of police stress extend beyond the individual officer and potentially affect job performance and relationships, Gerson and colleagues emphasize that problems associated with police stress can “lead to public distrust and erosion of support for law enforcement agencies in general,” causing police stress to have “both public safety and public health implications” (Gershon et al., 2009: 277).

## Current Study

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From January to April 2023, nine law enforcement agencies participated in a staff wellness survey conducted by CNA Corporation's Center for Justice Research and Innovation and supported by the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA). Each agency administered the survey via email through an executive staff member. One or more reminder emails were issued, and responses were actively

collected for 28 days with the survey remaining open for a short period of time afterwards. The survey collected data from staff at any level and type of position, including both sworn officers and nonsworn professional staff. The partnering agencies included the following:

- Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department (NC)
- Denver Police Department (CO)
- Greensboro Police Department (NC)
- Gun Lake Tribe Public Safety Department (MI)
- Illinois State Police (IL)
- Indio Police Department (CA)
- Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department (NV)
- Sturgis Police Department (MI)
- Toledo Police Department (OH)

In total, 1,888 staff responded to one or more items, leading to an overall response rate of 13 percent across the nine participating agencies. Of those, 1,304 respondents answered more than half of the survey items and were included in a final dataset for analysis. Of those 1,304, a total of 993 were used in the following analyses, approximately 76 percent of the final sample. These participants provided written responses to a single open-ended question that is the focus of this study:

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*“Please describe what causes your mental and emotional health to deteriorate in life and at work.”*

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Response to the question allowed respondents to write in as much as they desired. The average number of words written to this response was 45 (median = 22), with more than a quarter of respondents (n=268) writing 50 words or more. All 993 responses underwent a thorough review, with comments containing language related to one or more issues coded into 37 distinct categories. These categories encompassed a wide array of work and life stressors and challenges encountered by the staff. Following the coding process, the 37 categories were consolidated into six overarching topical areas. The first three topic areas focused on the job’s various aspects and work environment, covering leadership and supervision, workplace stress, and workplace culture. The two subsequent topic areas centered on the individual’s personal life, particularly their experiences with personal stressors and mental health. The last topic addressed issues stemming from the public that contributed to stress in the respondents’ lives and work. The specific categories identified within each topic are discussed in more detail in the results section.

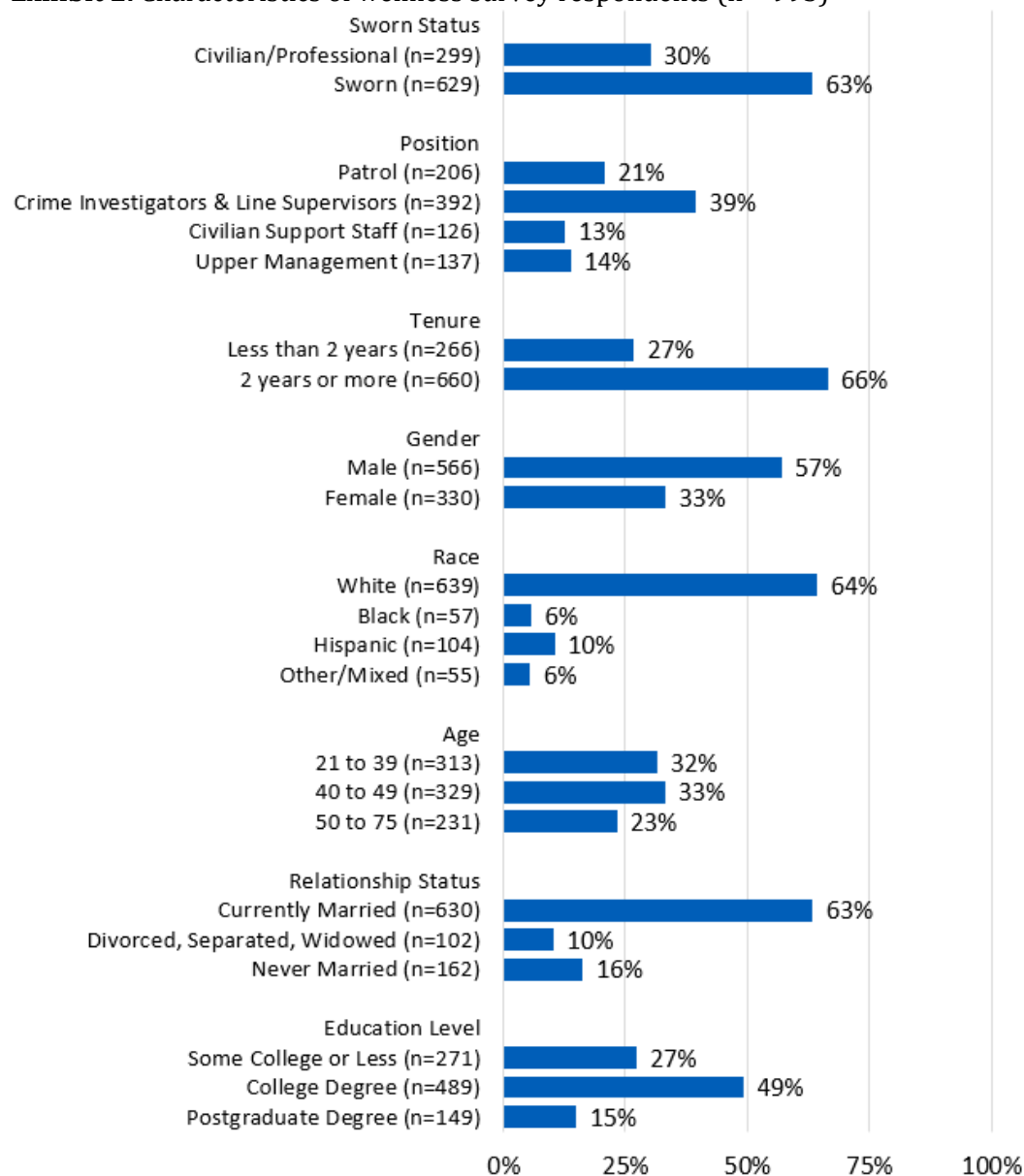
## Sample characteristics

**Exhibit 2** details the respondents’ demographic and position characteristics. The majority are sworn officers (63 percent) with more than two years at their agency (66 percent). Positions are categorized into four groupings. Patrol includes all sworn patrol staff (21 percent). Crime investigators and line

supervisors include detectives, line supervisors, civilian crime scene investigators, and forensic scientists (39 percent), essentially any staff member who would likely be present at a crime scene. Civilian support staff contains any professional staff who do not go out into the field but perform other work for the agency, such as records management, counseling, or crime analysis (13 percent). Upper management includes any sworn or professional staff who are mid-management and executive-level staff (14 percent).

Most of these respondents are male (57 percent) and white (64 percent). Ages are roughly equally distributed across the sample, with about a third being 21 to 39 years old, 40 to 49 years old, or 50 to 75 years old. Two-thirds of the sample (63 percent) are currently married and have a college degree or higher (64 percent).

**Exhibit 2.** Characteristics of wellness survey respondents (n = 993)





# Findings

In this section, we present the overall findings for the percent of comments on the six topical areas: leadership and supervision, workplace stress, workplace culture, personal life stressors, mental health issues, and challenges with public support. Results within each topic area are presented in two charts. First, we rank each identified category within the topical area. Next, we examine how mentions of the topical area differ by demographic and positional characteristics, including any statistically significant differences within each characteristic. The characteristics include sworn status, position, tenure, gender, race, age, relationship status, and education level. Finally, we examine the top 10 issues that respondents reported as contributing most to the deterioration of their mental and emotional health.

**Exhibit 3** displays the percent of comments pertaining to each of the six topics. Comments within the leadership and supervision topic are the most prevalent by the respondents, with a total of 56 percent listing one or more of its categories. Almost half of the respondents mentioned one or more categories of workplace stress (47 percent) and personal life stressors (45 percent). Roughly a third of the respondents list at least one category within the topic on mental health issues (32 percent). A total of 27 percent of the respondents mentioned workplace culture categories. Finally, 19 percent of the respondents listed one or both categories pertaining to challenges with public support.

**Exhibit 3.** Percent of comments pertaining to topic area (n=993)

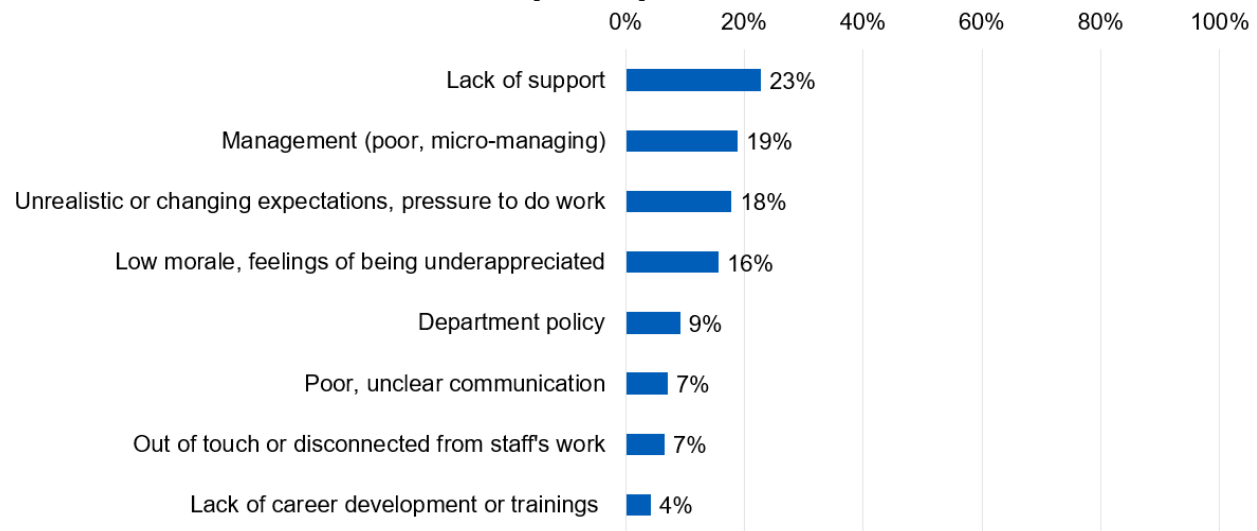


# Work life stressors

## Leadership and supervision

Categories within the leadership and supervision topic area encompassed comments pertaining to how staff are supervised and managed. As detailed in **Exhibit 3**, nearly 56 percent of survey respondents' comments included one or more issues related to leadership and supervision, representing the most prevalent topic of the six. The main issues comprising the leadership and supervision topic area are listed in **Exhibit 4**. The most prevalent leadership and supervision stressor mentioned by respondents (23 percent) was supervisors failing to offer adequate support to their staff. Roughly one-fifth of respondents (19 percent) expressed having ineffective managers or those prone to unnecessary micromanagement. At a similar level, 18 percent of respondents highlighted having unrealistic or consistently shifting expectations for work-related tasks, which heightened the pressure in their work. Roughly 16 percent of the staff specifically mentioned feeling underappreciated by their supervisors or low morale for themselves or among other staff. Stress arising from departmental policies was a recurring theme, with roughly one out of ten respondents mentioning it in their comments. About 7 percent of respondents cited issues related to poor communication, leading to uncertainty or lack of information for a task. A similar amount (7 percent) perceived department leaders as disconnected from the daily duties for which patrol officers or lower-level staff are responsible. Finally, 4 percent of staff mentioned inadequate opportunities for professional development through training programs.

**Exhibit 4.** Ranked issues within leadership and supervision

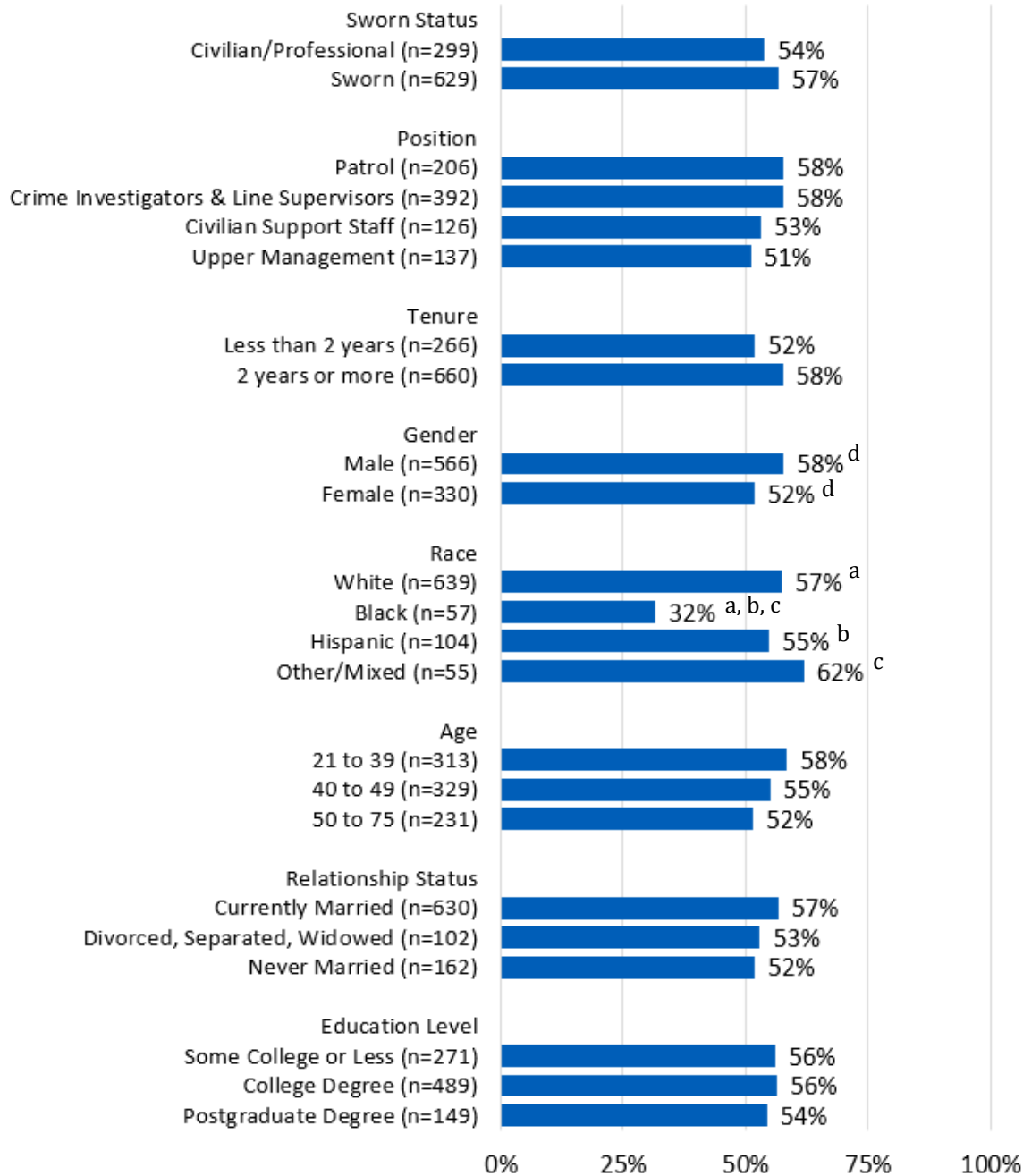


Notes: Values represent the percentage of respondent comments (n = 993) reporting that characteristic as a reason for deteriorating mental and emotional health.

The percent of comments pertaining to leadership and supervision issues were also examined by respondent characteristic. The results of these characteristic comparisons are displayed in **Exhibit 5**. Two characteristics were found to have significant differences. First, a marginally significant number of male respondents reported more leadership and supervision stressors (58 percent)

compared to female respondents (52 percent). Second, white respondents (57 percent), Hispanic respondents (55 percent), and other/mixed-race respondents (62 percent) were all significantly more likely to mention leadership and supervision stressors compared to Black respondents (32 percent). It is worth noting that Black respondents were underrepresented in the sample, with only 5.7 percent identifying as Black, compared to 12 percent nationally (DOJ, 2023).

**Exhibit 5.** Percent of comments pertaining to leadership and supervision issues, by characteristic



Notes: Values represent the percentage of respondent comments (n = 993) reporting leadership and supervision issues as a reason for deteriorating mental and emotional health.

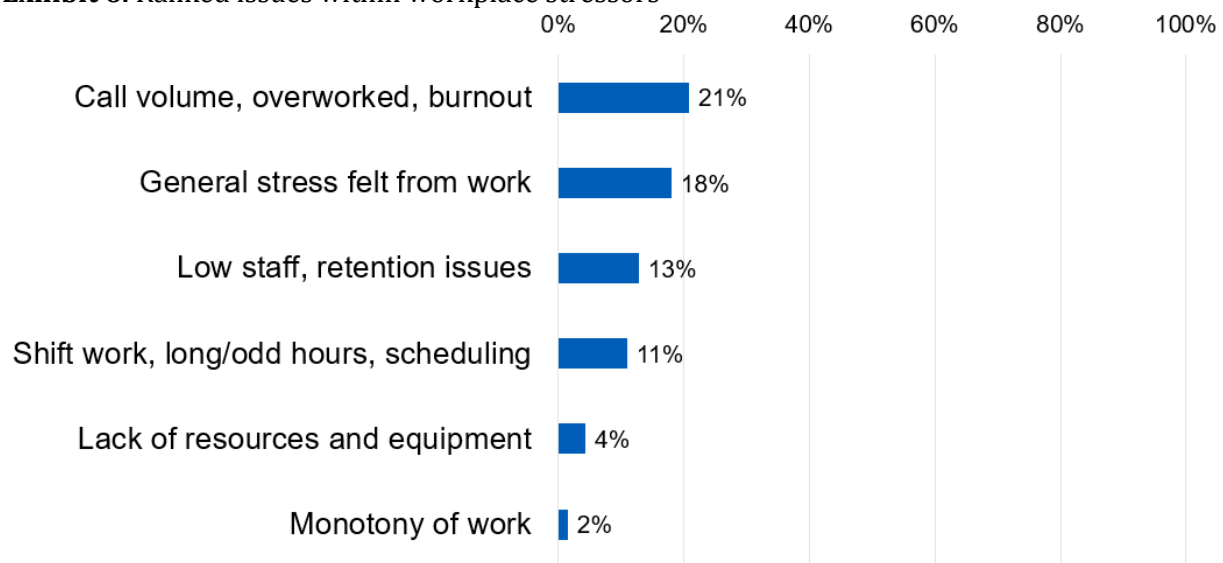
a, b, c = Differences are significant at  $p < .05$  for matched categories within characteristic.

d = Differences are significant at  $p < .10$  for matched categories within characteristic.

## Workplace stress

A total of 47 percent of respondents' comments included one or more issues related to the workplace stress topic area, representing the second most prevalent stressor topic out of the six as detailed in **Exhibit 3**. The main issues comprising the workplace stress domain are listed in **Exhibit 6**. The most prevalent workplace stressor category, mentioned by 21 percent of respondents, pertained to feelings of being overworked and experiencing burnout, mainly because of the high volume of calls for service. Roughly a fifth of the sample (18 percent) simply mentioned experiencing "stress" from work, and 13 percent expressed challenges of working with an insufficient number of staff, which included comments about retention issues. Eleven percent mentioned the difficulty of shift work or working irregular hours, or even the challenges associated with patrol work in general. A fewer number of respondents mentioned a shortage of resources or inadequate access to the necessary equipment to perform their duties (4 percent), and even fewer mentioned the monotony of their job (2 percent).

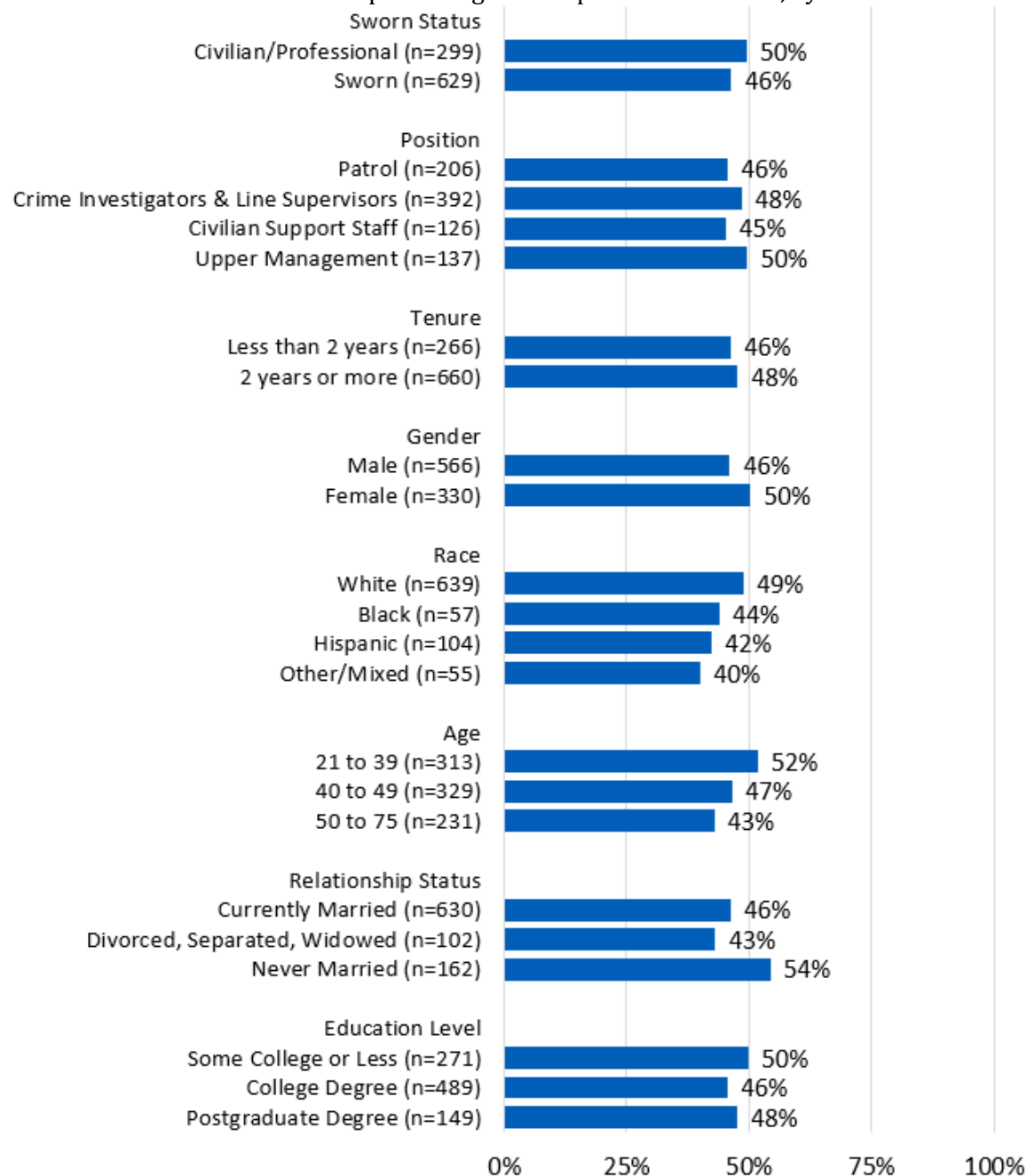
**Exhibit 6.** Ranked issues within workplace stressors



Notes: Values represent the percentage of respondent comments (n = 993) reporting that characteristic as a reason for deteriorating mental and emotional health.

We also examined the percent of comments on workplace stress issues by respondent characteristic in **Exhibit 7**. No significant differences exist in the percent of respondents who mentioned workplace stressors within demographic or position characteristics. Approximately 47 percent mentioned this topic within each characteristic, corresponding closely to the overall sample average detailed in **Exhibit 3**.

**Exhibit 7.** Percent of comments pertaining to workplace stress issues, by characteristic



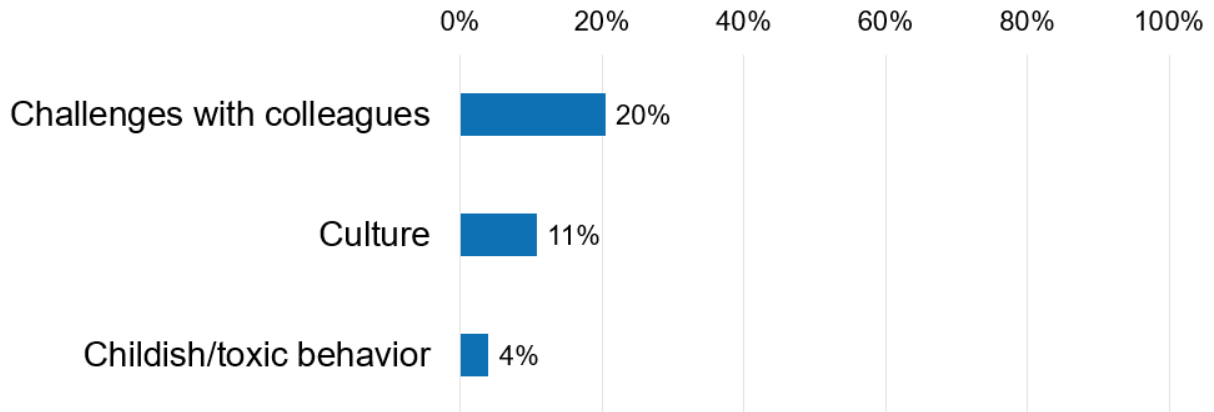
Notes: Values represent the percentage of respondent comments (n = 993) reporting workplace stress issues as a reason for deteriorating mental and emotional health.

### *Workplace culture*

The workplace culture topic area includes three categories pertaining to the culture of the respondent's workplace. As detailed in **Exhibit 3**, nearly 27 percent of respondents' comments include one or more issues related to this topic. The main categories comprising the workplace culture topic area are listed in **Exhibit 8**. Respondents mentioned challenges with colleagues (20 percent) as the most prevalent workplace culture stressor, which includes comments on colleagues

being undeservedly promoted, favoritism and nepotism, or general problems with colleagues because of poor or challenging relationships. Roughly 11 percent of respondents specifically mentioned how the “culture” or “environment” creates a stressful workplace. Finally, about 4 percent of respondents spoke to how colleagues often gossip, create rumors or drama, or act childish, all of which create a toxic or negative workplace environment.

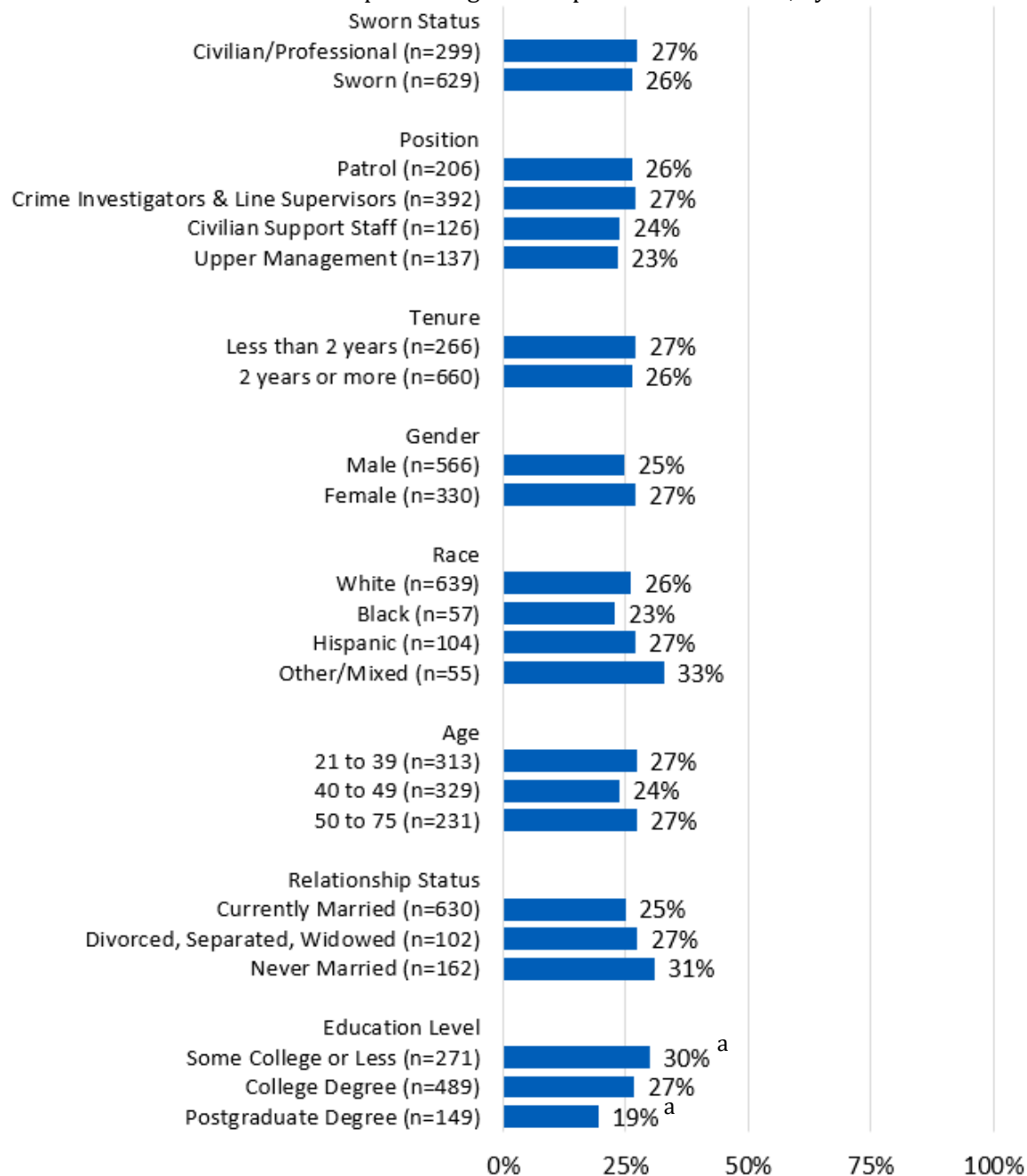
**Exhibit 8.** Ranked issues within workplace culture



Notes: Values represent the percentage of respondent comments (n = 993) reporting that characteristic as a reason for deteriorating mental and emotional health.

We examined the percent of comments pertaining to workplace culture issues by respondent characteristic in **Exhibit 9**. Roughly a quarter of respondents within each characteristic mentioned at least one workplace culture category. Interestingly, just 19 percent of respondents holding postgraduate degrees, such as master's, doctorate, or Juris Doctorate degrees, mentioned workplace culture in their comments. These characteristics are significantly lower than the percentage of respondents who attended some college or had less education, among whom a greater proportion reported workplace culture-related stressors (30 percent).

**Exhibit 9.** Percent of comments pertaining to workplace culture issues, by characteristic



Notes: Values represent the percentage of respondent comments (n = 993) reporting workplace culture issues as a reason for deteriorating mental and emotional health.

a = Differences are significant at p < .10 for matched categories within characteristic.

## Private life stressors

### *Personal life stressors*

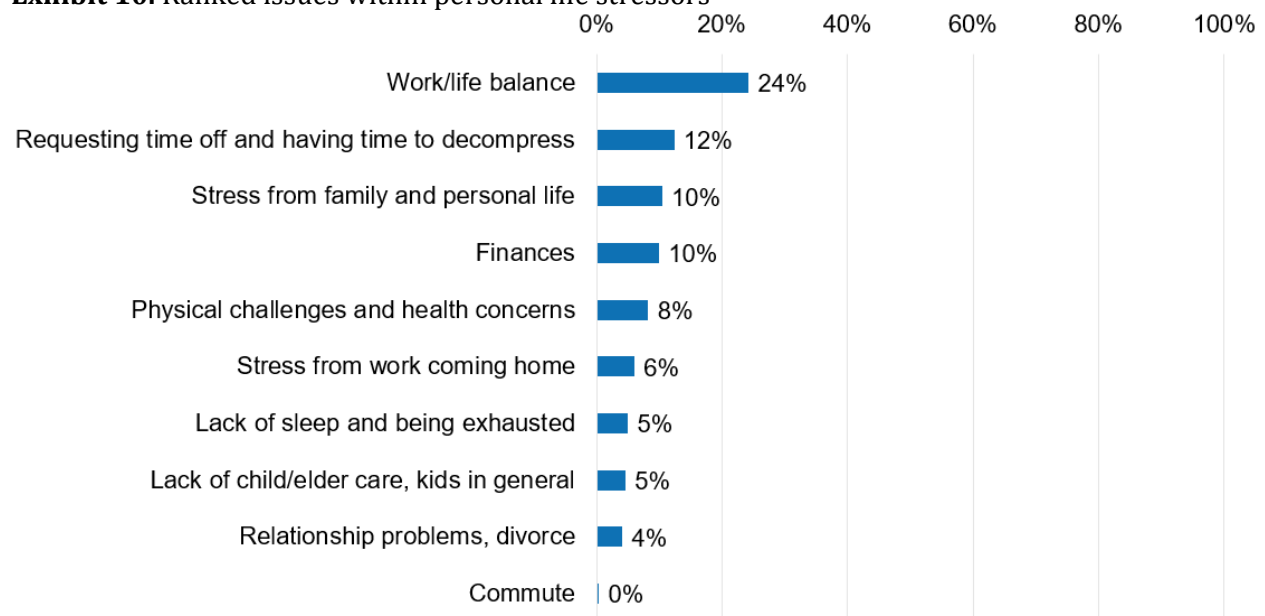
A total of 10 categories were identified pertaining to personal life stressors, the most categories within a specific topical area. As detailed in **Exhibit 3**, 45 percent of survey respondents' comments

included one or more of these issues related to the personal life stressors, representing the third most prevalent stressor topic. The main issues comprising the personal life stressors topic are ranked in **Exhibit 10**. Roughly a quarter of respondents (24 percent) expressed that having poor work-life balance was a leading reason for a deterioration in their mental and emotional health. Related to this, 12 percent of respondents reported difficulties in obtaining time off from their jobs. Specifically, they mentioned challenges such as supervisors denying leave requests or feeling overwhelmed with their workload, making it difficult to comfortably take time off. This category also included comments about having insufficient time between calls to decompress or for a suitable lunch break.

One out of ten respondents (10 percent) expressed general stress from their family or personal life. Related to this, 5 percent mentioned challenges associated with child or elder care, or stress from their children in general; 4 percent separately expressed issues in their relationship with their partner or experiencing a divorce.

A total of 10 percent of respondents specifically described having financial troubles, namely due to earning a low salary. About 8 percent felt that their physical abilities—either an increase in age or weight—made their work more stressful. Similarly, 5 percent mentioned having difficulty sleeping or feeling exhausted while working. Only a handful of respondents (0.4 percent) specifically mentioned that their commute to work caused stress.

**Exhibit 10.** Ranked issues within personal life stressors



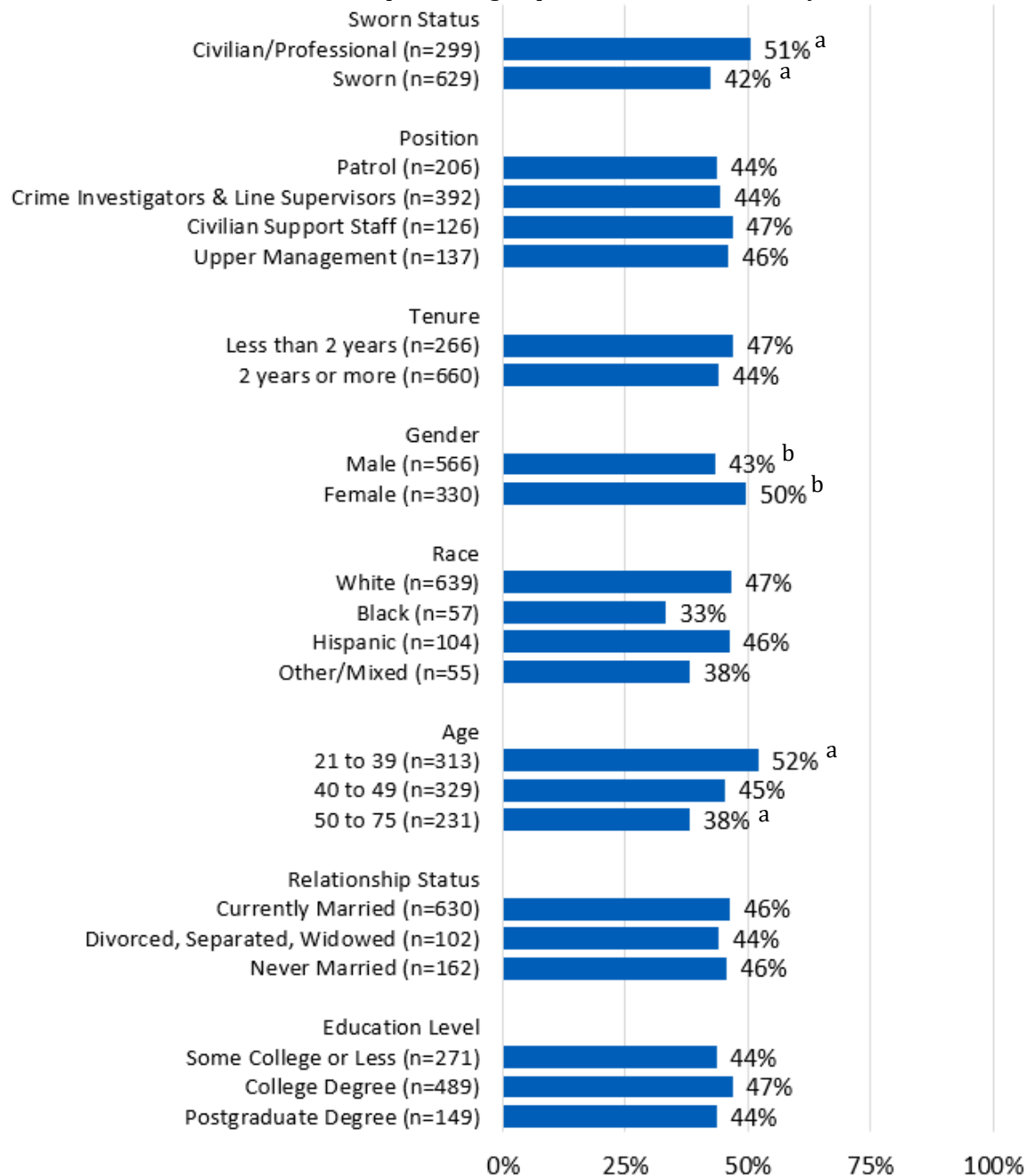
Notes: Values represent the percentage of respondent comments (n = 993) reporting that characteristic as a reason for deteriorating mental and emotional health.

We also examined the percent of comments pertaining to personal life issues by respondent characteristic displayed in **Exhibit 11**. Three characteristics were found to have significant differences, including sworn status, gender, and age. A greater percentage of professional respondents reported personal life stressors (51 percent) compared to sworn respondents (42



percent). For gender, more female respondents reported personal life stressors (50 percent) compared to male respondents (43 percent), although this difference was only marginally significant. And finally, respondents aged 21 to 39 were more likely to report personal life stressors (52 percent) compared to respondents aged 50 to 75 (38 percent).

**Exhibit 11.** Percent of comments pertaining to personal life stressors, by characteristic



Notes: Values represent the percentage of respondent comments (n = 993) reporting personal life stressors as a reason for deteriorating mental and emotional health.

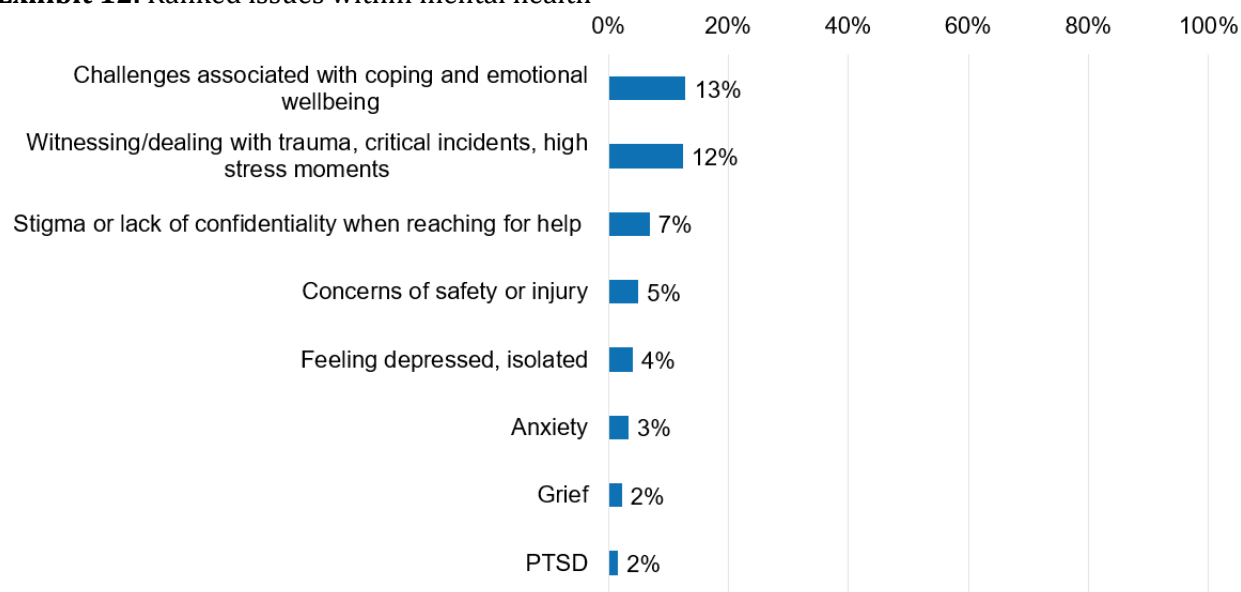
a = Differences are significant at  $p < .05$  for matched categories within characteristic.

b = Differences are significant at  $p < .10$  for matched categories within characteristic.

## Mental health

A total of eight categories were identified in respondent comments that pertained to mental health issues as a reason for deteriorating health. As displayed in **Exhibit 3**, approximately 32 percent of survey respondents' comments included one or more issues related to the mental health topic. The main issues comprising the mental health topic are listed in **Exhibit 12**. The most prevalent mental health stressor, mentioned by 13 percent of respondents, focused on challenges with coping and emotional well-being, including access to programs to improve mental health. More than one out of ten respondents (12 percent) expressed difficulty with the amount of trauma that they witnessed, which included injuries and deaths of community members, critical incidents, and frequent high-stress moments in their work. Fewer respondents mentioned the remaining categories, although they are worth detailing. Seven percent expressed experiencing a stigma when reaching out to colleagues or supervisors for help with their mental health. This stigma included feeling that such outreach would not remain confidential within their workplace. About 5 percent of respondents specifically mentioned feeling depressed or isolated, 3 percent mentioned anxiety or feelings related to anxiety, and 2 percent mentioned PTSD. Two percent also noted that they were dealing with grief associated with the death of a family member, friend, or work colleague.

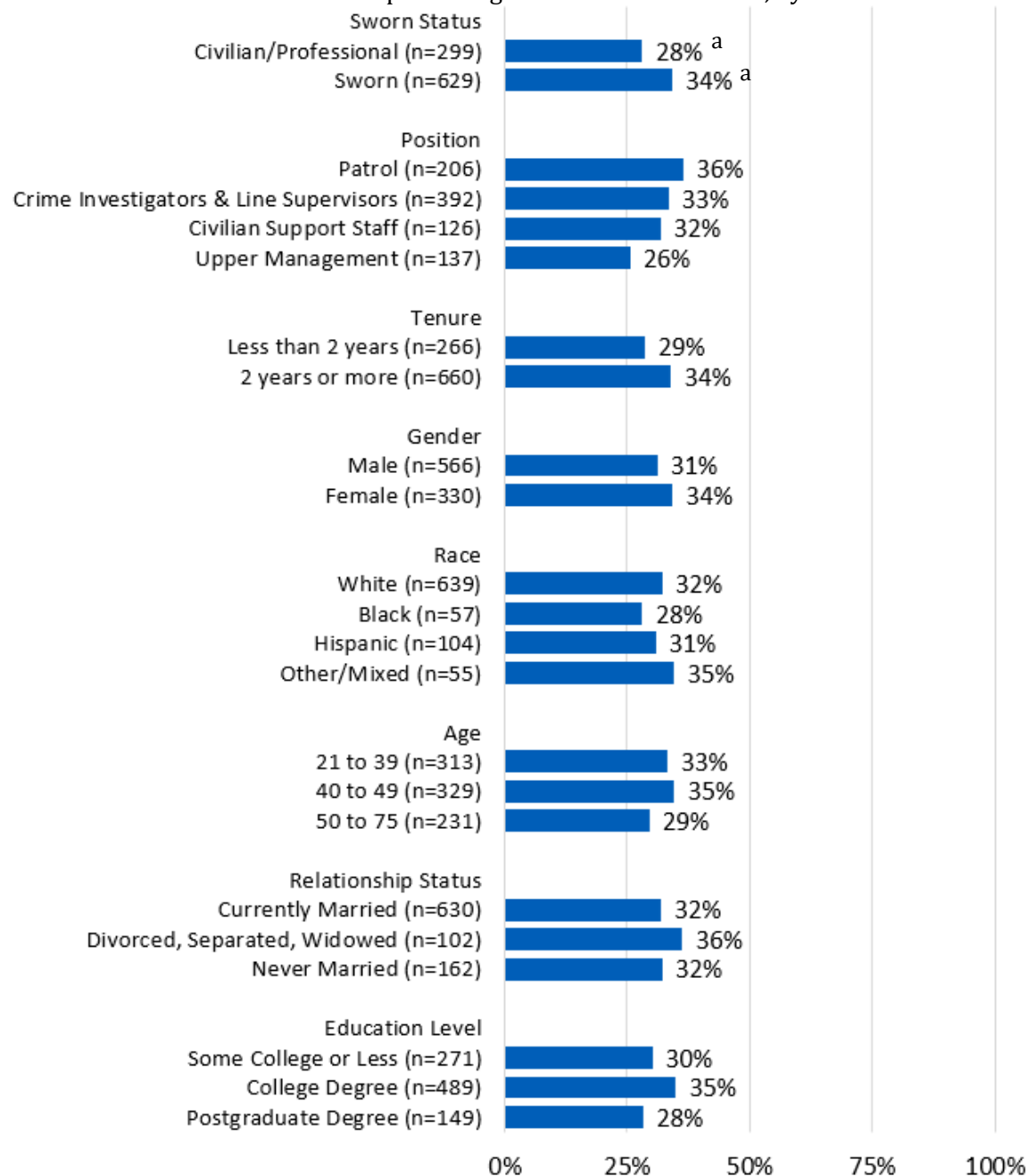
**Exhibit 12.** Ranked issues within mental health



Notes: Values represent the percentage of respondent comments (n = 993) reporting that characteristic as a reason for deteriorating mental and emotional health.

In addition to ranking the most prevalent mental health stressors mentioned by respondents, we also examined the percent of comments pertaining to mental health issues by respondent characteristic, displayed in **Exhibit 13**. The only significant difference found was between professional respondents and sworn respondents, with sworn respondents (34 percent) reporting significantly more mental health stressors than professional respondents (28 percent).

**Exhibit 13.** Percent of comments pertaining to mental health issues, by characteristic



Notes: Values represent the percentage of respondent comments (n = 993) reporting mental health issues as a reason for deteriorating mental and emotional health.

a = Differences are significant at  $p < .10$  for matched categories within characteristic.

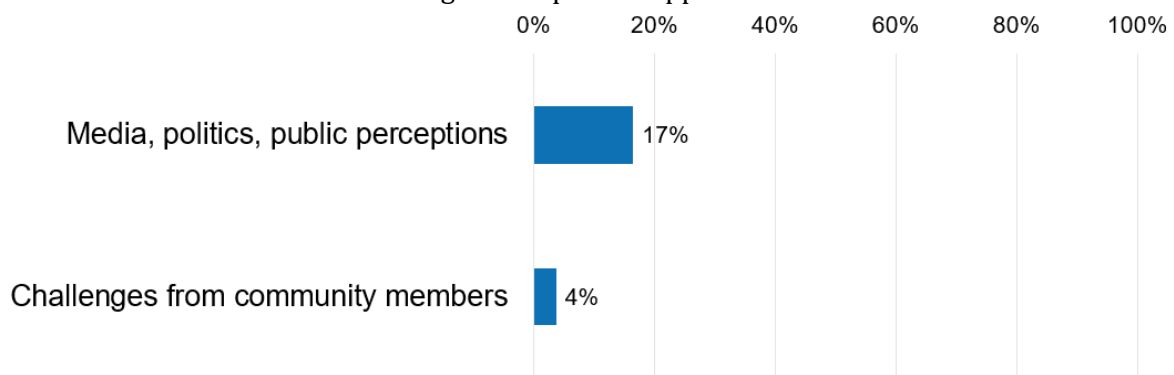
## Public stressors

### *Challenges with public support*

The final topical area pertained to challenges experienced with public support. Two categories were identified in the respondents' comments, as detailed in **Exhibit 14**. Approximately 18.5 percent of

comments, shown in **Exhibit 3**, included one or both issues related to the challenges within the public support topic, representing the least prevalent stressor topic out of the six. The most prevalent challenge with public support, mentioned by 17 percent of the respondents, related to how the media or local politicians within a city (e.g., the mayor) portrayed police officers, especially those involved in a critical incident. More broadly, this 17 percent also encapsulated comments on the negative public perceptions toward policing in general. The other category, mentioned by 4 percent of respondents, related more specifically to community members being challenging or disrespectful to staff when interacting in person.

**Exhibit 14.** Ranked issues within challenges with public support

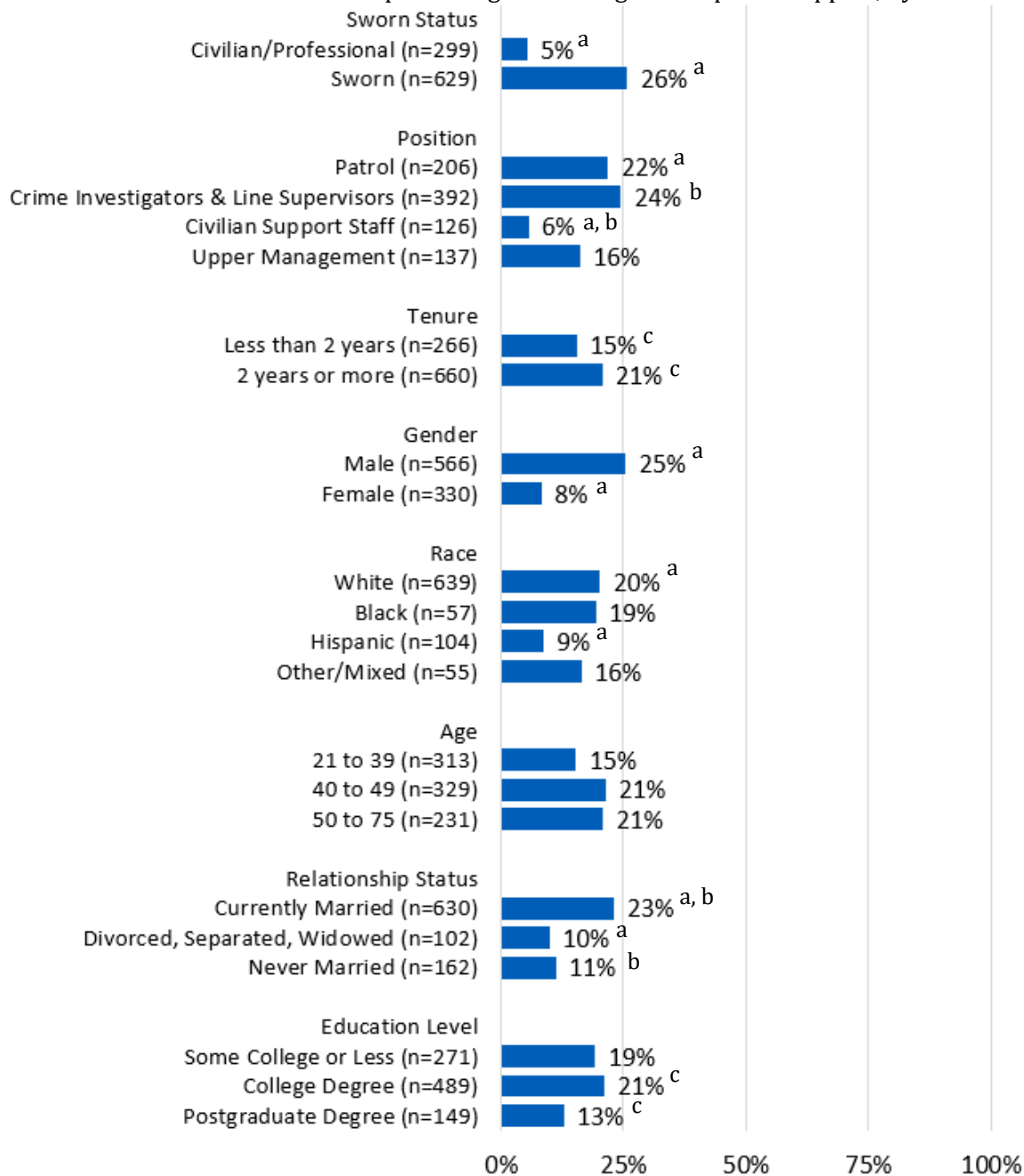


Notes: Values represent the percentage of respondent comments (n = 993) reporting that characteristic as a reason for deteriorating mental and emotional health.

Although this topical area was the least mentioned across the entire sample—18.5 percent of the respondents mentioned one or both categories—differences by demographic and position characteristics were the most distinct, as detailed in **Exhibit 15**. Seven characteristics were found to have significant differences, including sworn status, position, gender, race, relationship status, tenure, and education level. Sworn personnel were five times more likely to report challenges with public support compared to professional personnel (26 percent compared to 5 percent, respectively). By position type, 22 percent of patrol officers and 24 percent of crime scene investigators and line supervisors reported challenges with public support, significantly more compared to professional support staff (6 percent). A total of 25 percent of male respondents reported challenges with public support compared to only 8 percent of female respondents. Only one significant difference by race appeared; 20 percent of white respondents reported these challenges compared to 9 percent of Hispanic respondents. Respondents who were currently married were more likely to report challenges with public support stressors (23 percent) compared to respondents who were divorced, separated, or widowed (10 percent) or respondents who never married (11 percent).

Marginally significant differences were noted among two characteristics. Staff with two years on the job were more likely to report challenges with public support than staff with less than two years on the job (21 percent and 15 percent, respectively). Lastly, respondents with a college degree were more likely to report challenges with public support stressors (21 percent) than respondents with a postgraduate degree (13 percent).

**Exhibit 15.** Percent of comments pertaining to challenges with public support, by characteristic



Notes: Values represent the percentage of respondent comments (n = 993) reporting public support issues as a reason for deteriorating mental and emotional health.

a, b = Differences are significant at  $p < .05$  for matched categories within characteristic.

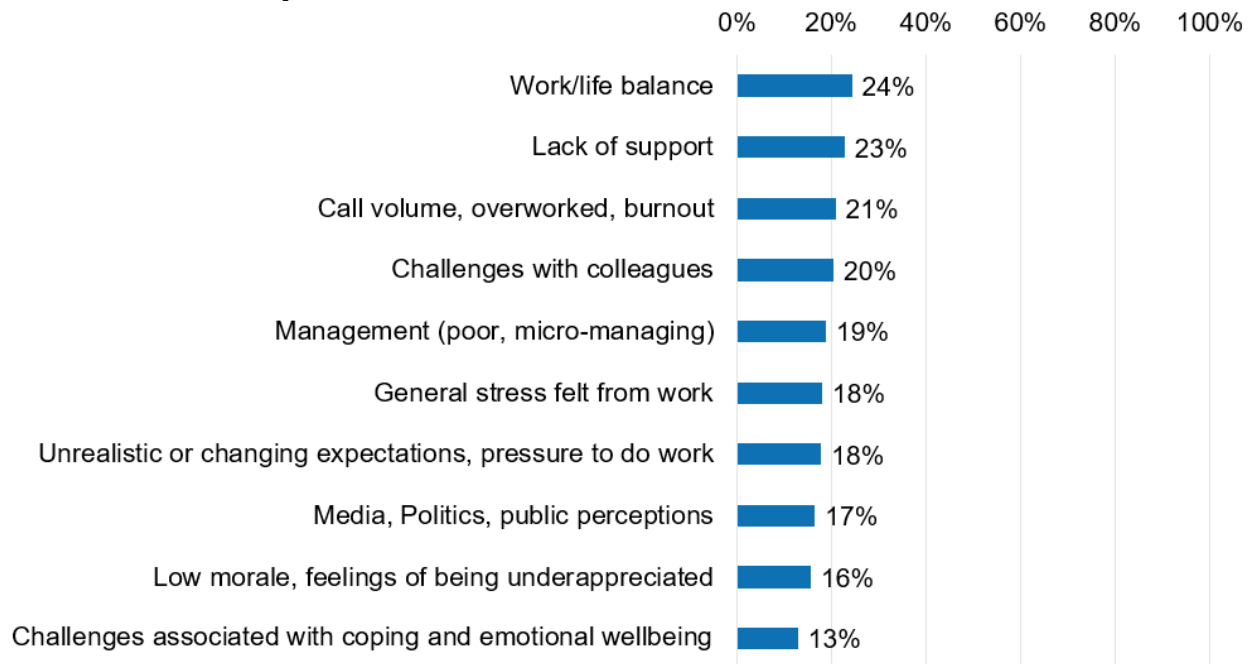
c = Differences are significant at  $p < .10$  for matched categories within characteristic.

# Conclusion and Recommendations

The preceding sections provided insights into the 37 categories grouped within six topical areas, illustrating the percentage of law enforcement staff who cited each category in response to the question, "Please describe what causes your mental and emotional health to deteriorate in life and at work." Categories within the leadership and supervision topical area were the most salient, with 56 percent of respondents mentioning one or more of its categories. Close to half of the respondents mentioned a category on workplace (47 percent) or personal life stressors (45 percent), and a third (32 percent) commented about mental health challenges. Comments pertaining to workplace culture were mentioned by 27 percent of respondents, and 19 percent listed concerns with public support.

Although organizing these categories by topic is valuable, **Exhibit 16** offers a different perspective by ranking the top 10 categories. This method sheds light on the primary concerns driving staff stressors, with a noteworthy result that 88 percent of the sample mentioned one or more of these issues in their comments.

**Exhibit 16.** Ranked top 10 identified issues that cause mental and emotional health to deteriorate



Notes: Values represent the percentage of respondent comments (n = 993) reporting issue as a reason for deteriorating mental and emotional health.

In review of **Exhibit 16**, only 2 of the top 10 categories are outside of an agency's direct ability to manage or control. These categories include concerns among staff on how the media, politicians, and the public portray and perceive police, as well as an individual's ability to cope and manage their emotional well-being. The other eight categories involve issues that a law enforcement agency can directly respond to by developing better work policies and culture that can improve the lives of its staff.

For instance, policies that address staff workload and hours can significantly enhance work-life balance. An example from one of the larger agencies involved in the study highlights the benefits of implementing 10-hour workdays over four days a week instead of the traditional 8-hour workdays spread across five days. According to feedback from staff at this agency, this adjusted schedule allowed for more field time to respond to calls, increased overall time off with families throughout the year, and provided the flexibility to manage personal matters during the week. Such policy changes can have additional advantages, including bolstering staff support, boosting morale, and mitigating overall work-related stress.

Moreover, instituting comprehensive training programs for new supervisors or conducting annual in-service management trainings can further support staff. These initiatives would provide managers with the skills to set clear expectations and foster a work environment where staff feel empowered and trusted to complete their tasks without experiencing excessive micromanagement. These changes can potentially enhance workplace culture and, ideally, promote better interactions among colleagues.

Law enforcement agencies must proactively engage with and attentively listen to their staff. Despite the abundance of surveys and inquiries confronting many law enforcement staff, those originating from their own agency are better received, provided that the information collected is presented transparently and followed by concrete actions. Staff members desire to have their voices heard and to witness positive changes based on their input. An agency can markedly enhance staff perceptions of its legitimacy and workplace culture by actively listening to and instituting policies designed to enhance the quality of staff lives and the effectiveness of their work.

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