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From role conflict situations to employees' extra-role and hostility behaviors. The role of cynicism

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From role conflict situations to employees' extra-role and hostility behaviors. The role of cynicism

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Abstract

Purpose: This research highlights the importance of the well-being of police professionals, as they are responsible for ensuring public safety.

Design/methodology/approach: Using structural equation modeling and multigroup analysis on a sample of 180 public police officers, the study examines the mediating role of cynicism between role conflict and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) and hostile behaviors. It also explores how personal resources—compassion and esteem—and job resources—social support—moderate these effects.

Findings: The findings reveal that cynicism fully mediates the relationships between role conflict and both OCB and hostile behaviors. Additionally, compassion moderates the relationship between role conflict and cynicism, social support moderates the relationship between cynicism and OCB, and esteem moderates the relationship between cynicism and hostile behaviors.

Originality: The study underscores the need for designing strategies focused on the human dimension and well-being of police professionals in the workplace.

Keywords: Role conflict, cynicism, extra-role behaviors, hostility behaviors, personal resources, job resources.

Introduction

Police professionals represent the government's civil authority, charged with ensuring public protection, welfare, and the preservation of law and order (Lopez-Cabarcos et al., 2023b). Their responsibilities span diverse duties, protecting life and property, enforcing laws, conducting investigations, regulating traffic, managing crowds, ensuring public safety, and handling emergencies, among other tasks (Lopez-Cabarcos et al., 2023a; Marcos et al., 2020). **As a result, police professionals are exposed to numerous organizational and operational risks, requiring them to work in**

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3 complex, high-stress environments (Kukic et al., 2022; Lopez-Cabarcos et al., 2023a). Police
4 institutions are, in turn, characterized by rigid, formalized, and hierarchical structures, together with
5 bureaucratic and regulated systems and strong values (Kukic et al., 2022; Lopez-Cabarcos et al.,
6 2023b). All this, leads to consider police work as one of the most stressful professions (Baek et al.,
7 2022) with serious implications for the psychological and physical well-being of police professionals
8 (Baek et al., 2022; Kukic et al., 2022; Marcos et al., 2020), who may experience emotional
9 disconnection, exhaustion and cynicism (Chiu et al., 2023; Zekavica et al., 2018).

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19 Cynicism can be defined as the development of negative, hostile or too distant reactions towards work
20 and people (Maslach & Jackson, 1986). Cynical police professionals show indifference, insensitivity
21 and distance towards work, colleagues, users or citizens that may result in negative, hostile or
22 unfriendly behaviors (Baek et al., 2022), making it difficult to engage in pro-social and extra-role
23 behaviors (Kumar & Narula, 2021). The relevance of police professionals' well-being on public safety
24 justifies the need for further research to analyze the antecedents and underlying causes of cynicism, as
25 well as the variables that may prevent it.

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34 Understanding the antecedents of cynical behaviors of police professionals requires consideration of
35 the demanding nature of their work and the structural characteristics of police institutions (Chiu et al.,
36 2023; Hofer, 2021). Precisely, high job demands and expectations often lead to role conflict when
37 roles, duties, and responsibilities are unclear or inadequately defined (Hofer, 2021). Police
38 professionals must simultaneously adhere to strict rules and values while responding swiftly to
39 unpredictable situations, which can exacerbate role conflict if job expectations are ambiguous. Role
40 conflict, defined as the presence of contradictory directions or expectations in the workplace (Rizzo et
41 al., 1970), can result in prolonged stress. Such exposure may prompt police professionals to develop
42 harmful, detached, depersonalized, and cynical attitudes toward their work and the public service
43 (Chiu et al., 2023; Lambert et al., 2022).

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56 According to the job demands resource theory (JD-RT) (Bakker et al., 2023) and challenge–hindrance
57 stressor framework (Cavanaugh et al., 2000), unclear and misaligned role expectations can lead to
58 cynical and indifferent attitudes among police professionals. These attitudes often result in

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3 misconduct and hostility, inhibiting discretionary pro-social behaviors. Thus, cynical police
4 professionals experience significant depletion of physical and psychological resources due to their
5 demanding work, leading to unfriendly, uncooperative, and hostile reactions (Chiu et al., 2023;
6 Zekavica et al., 2018). As a result, their focus often shifts to strictly fulfilling formal obligations rather
7 than exceeding expectations.
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14 Hostility at work can be defined as feelings of ill-will and injustice that can result in harassment,
15 intimidation or aggression (Bryant & Smith, 2001). In this sense, hostile employees frequently
16 experience resentment, anger, and impatience, contributing to counterproductive behaviors (Lopez-
17 Cabarcos et al., 2023b). Meanwhile, the organizational citizenship behaviors at the individual level
18 (OCB-I) refers to discretionary and extra-professional behaviors focused on the relationships between
19 colleagues that are not explicitly recognized and rewarded by the organizational formal system
20 (Organ, 1988). This kind of pro-social behaviors based on values such as trust, camaraderie, loyalty,
21 fellowship, cooperation or selfless behaviors, are particularly significant in the work context of police
22 professionals (Aprillia et al., 2022) considering its complexity and inherent risk (Lopez-Cabarcos et
23 al., 2023b).
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36 JD-RT also suggests that personal (e.g., compassion, esteem) and job (e.g., social support) resources
37 act as buffers against the adverse effects of job demands (Bakker et al., 2023; Lopez-Cabarcos et al.,
38 2023b). Compassion, as a personal resource, helps mitigate workplace stress and aligns professionals
39 with job expectations (Bakker et al., 2023; Eldor, 2017). Similarly, social support and esteem can
40 counteract cynicism, fostering healthy relationships, encouraging discretionary behaviors, and
41 reducing hostility.
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50 **These variables have been scarcely studied by previous research, especially in the police environment.**
51 **The relevance of police work in guaranteeing security, health and peace in society demands further**
52 **research. Thus, on a sample of 180 public police professionals and using structural equation modeling**
53 **and multigroup analysis, this study aims to (i) analyze the mediating role of cynicism between role**
54 **conflict and organizational citizenship and hostile behaviors; (ii) analyze the moderating role of**
55 **compassion on the relationship between role conflict and cynicism, the moderating role of social**
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3 support on the relationship between cynicism and organizational citizenship behaviors, and the
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5 moderating role of esteem on the relationship between cynicism and hostile behaviors.
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8 This study contributes significantly to the advancement of the knowledge in the research field by
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10 emphasizing the importance of preserving the well-being of police professionals and offering insights
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12 into the role played by personal and job resources in achieving it.
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15 **Literature review**

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17 This research defines the police as a type of public law enforcement characterized by its military
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19 structure that provides protection, care and welfare, and ensures the maintenance of law and order
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21 (Lopez-Cabarcos et al., 2023b). Police professionals face threatening, complex, and challenging
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23 situations that demand precise, discretionary, and authoritative decisions, along with rapid and agile
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25 interventions (Kukic et al., 2022; Lopez-Cabarcos et al., 2023a). Public police work, which requires a
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27 strong sense of vocation and commitment to the common good (Smith & Charles, 2010) is recognized
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29 as one of the most hazardous professions. This high-risk nature profoundly impacts the well-being of
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31 police professionals (Baek et al., 2022; Lambert et al., 2022), their stress (Kukic et al., 2022; Lopez-
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33 Cabarcos et al., 2023b) and their psychological and physical integrity (Kukic et al., 2022; Marcos et
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35 al., 2020).
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40 Public police organizations are characterized by a centralized, hierarchical, and formalized structure
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42 that emphasizes strong values such as hierarchy, discipline, authority, a sense of mission, and loyalty
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44 (Kukic et al., 2022; Lopez-Cabarcos et al., 2023b). However, these high levels of regulation can
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46 create an imbalance between expectations and actual capabilities, limiting police professionals' ability
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48 to make decisions, engage in proactive interventions, solve problems, or develop their professional
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50 skills (Baek et al., 2022; Lopez-Cabarcos et al., 2023b). Ultimately, such demanding and inflexible
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52 environments can foster negative attitudes, leading police professionals to distance themselves from
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54 their work and lose empathy and compassion for colleagues and citizen (Baek et al., 2022; Kukic et
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56 al., 2022).
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Cynicism refers to the development of negative, hostile, or excessively distant responses to work and others, often including a loss of idealism. Cynical employees display indifference, insensitivity, and detachment toward their work, colleagues, and the public, frequently treating people as mere objects (Maslach & Jackson, 1986). These attitudes typically emerge when employees feel exhausted and discouraged due to stressful and unfavorable work environments, resulting in negative, hostile, or unfriendly behaviors (Baek et al., 2022). Cynicism is particularly prevalent in helping professions such as public police, where high levels of human interaction, demanding workloads, and complex situations are common (Baker et al., 2023; Bottini et al., 2024; Zekavica et al., 2018). These situations may include threatening experiences, little positive feedback, complex relationships with colleagues or citizens, unclear objectives and expectations, centralized decision-making processes, strict discipline or the management of one's own emotions. These situations can become powerful stressors, making the work environment particularly demanding, causing insensitivity, dehumanization, and cynicism, hindering the ability to perform tasks effectively (Caplan, 2003; Chiu et al., 2023; Zekavica et al., 2018), and generating a feeling of hopelessness in the fulfillment of the professional duties and distrust regarding the judicial system (Caplan, 2003; Niederhoffer, 1967).

Police professionals often provide services perceived as negative or undesirable by citizens, requiring them to consistently justify the societal value of their work (Lopez-Cabarcos et al., 2023a). The indifference or hostility they encounter from those they serve can erode their faith in their role, foster an "us versus them" mentality, and lead to a gradual isolation from society (Marier & Moule, 2019; Zekavica et al., 2018). Thus, this detachment, combined with losing empathy and viewing others as impersonal objects, can negatively impact their well-being, performance, satisfaction, and commitment (Zekavica et al., 2018). Additionally, cynical attitudes further impair police professionals' ability to form healthy relationships (Baker et al., 2023), work collaboratively (which is crucial in this context) and engage in pro-social and extra-role behaviors (Kumar & Narula, 2021). Hence, cynicism can be particularly dangerous in this field, as it increases the likelihood of misconduct, violence, aggression, and hostility (Baek et al., 2022; Correia et al., 2023). These risks highlight the urgent need for a deeper understanding of job demands that lead to dehumanized

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3 behaviors among police professionals. Among these demands, role conflict stands out as particularly
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5 detrimental and warrants further investigation to mitigate its negative effects (Chiu et al., 2023; Hofer,
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7 2021).
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10 Role conflict refers to the incompatibilities between the subject's job expectations and the job
11 requirements (Rizzo et al., 1970). It occurs when tasks, duties, and responsibilities are poorly defined
12 or inadequately communicated (Qureshi et al., 2019). This misalignment often leads to conflicting
13 demands, unclear guidelines, and insufficient resources or information, which hinder task execution
14 (Lopez-Cabarcos et al., 2023b). In the context of police work, the demanding nature of the profession
15 and the structure of police organizations are key contributors to role conflict (Hofer, 2021).
16 Furthermore, public perceptions of policing as negative or undesirable can exacerbate role conflict, as
17 citizens may disapprove or fail to understand the rationale behind police actions and decisions
18 (Lopez-Cabarcos et al., 2023b). Additionally, the rigid rules, standards, and values that police
19 professionals must follow often diverge from their personal expectations, intensifying role conflict in
20 this high-stakes profession (Campos et al., 2023; Lopez-Cabarcos et al., 2023b).
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23 Role conflict in policing, characterized by uncertainty, complexity, and the need for rapid decision-
24 making, can severely impact well-being. It may result in unfavorable work experiences, reduced job
25 involvement (Qureshi et al., 2019), decreased job satisfaction (Cooper et al., 2012), and an increase in
26 counterproductive behaviors, such as hostility (Lopez-Cabarcos et al., 2023b). In sum, prolonged
27 exposure to role conflict can lead to exhaustion, emotional discomfort, and detachment, culminating
28 in a cynical and indifferent attitude toward work and service users (Chiu et al., 2023; Lambert et al.,
29 2022). Given the critical role of police in ensuring public safety, it is essential to prioritize the well-
30 being of police professionals. Promoting extra-role behaviors such as collaboration and altruism,
31 while minimizing counterproductive or hostile behaviors, is paramount to fostering a healthier work
32 environment and ensuring effective public service.
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35 Organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) can be defined as extra-role, discretionary behaviors that
36 enhance an organization's efficiency and effectiveness without being formally recognized or rewarded
37 (Organ, 1988). Hence, these prosocial behaviors aim to maintain a positive social environment,
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3 improve job performance, and foster collaboration (Organ, 1988). OCBs can target the organization as
4 a whole (OCB-O) or focus on person-to-person interactions (OCB-I). OCB-I includes actions such as
5 assisting supervisors or colleagues, supporting new employees, helping those with heavy workloads
6 or who have been absent, and offering emotional support after listening to colleagues' concerns
7 (Williams & Anderson, 1991). For police professionals, these behaviors are crucial for maintaining
8 trust, camaraderie, loyalty, fellowship, and cooperation, which are vital for navigating the complexity
9 and demands of their work. Additionally, OCB-I can enhance police performance by supporting
10 discretionary, accurate, and proportionate interventions, thereby improving service quality (Aprillia et
11 al., 2022). These behaviors also help mitigate excessive formalization and bureaucracy within police
12 organizations, fostering adaptability and efficiency. However, the stressful nature of helping
13 professions, such as policing, can lead to cynicism (Van Emmerik et al., 2005). Cynical attitudes may
14 cause police professionals to narrowly focus on fulfilling their formal duties while avoiding behaviors
15 that exceed those requirements. This detachment reduces communication, empathy, and support
16 among colleagues, which are essential for effective police work. Cynicism also hinders selfless
17 behaviors and undermines interpersonal relationships, impairing the creation of a positive work
18 environment. This, in turn, can decrease service quality and increase workplace conflicts,
19 counterproductive behaviors, and hostility. While OCB-I promotes collaboration and a supportive
20 workplace, cynicism poses a significant barrier to these discretionary actions, emphasizing the
21 importance of fostering conditions that encourage OCBs and reduce cynicism to ensure a healthier
22 and more effective work environment for police professionals.

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Hostility at work can be defined as the feelings of ill-will and injustice (Bryant & Smith, 2001).
Hostile employees often experience negative emotions such as irritation, resentment, negativism,
guilt, and mistrust toward others, including colleagues and external parties. These emotions may drive
police professionals to retaliate for prior grievances, make inappropriate discretionary decisions, or
even resort to violence in high-stress and risky scenarios (Lopez-Cabarcos et al., 2023b). Hostility
also manifests through antisocial behaviors, anger, cynicism, and detachment, which, when sustained,
may lead to feelings of depression, dehumanization, and inappropriate use of force. As a

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3 counterproductive and deliberate workplace behavior, hostility violates organizational norms and
4 values and threatens both organizational well-being and the safety of its members (Murad et al., 2021;
5 Naseer et al., 2021). For police professionals, the inherently complex and high-stakes nature of their
6 work heightens their vulnerability to stress, increasing the likelihood of misconduct and hostile
7 behaviors. Exhausted and dehumanized individuals may exhibit significant disconnection from their
8 work, often reacting with unfriendliness, reduced cooperation, and hostility toward others. These
9 dynamics can create a cycle of negative interactions, involving police professionals, colleagues, and
10 service users. In extreme cases, this may escalate to violence and aggression, posing severe risks to
11 public safety and undermining the mission of maintaining security and order.

The mediating role of cynicism between role conflict and OCB-I or hostility

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JD-RT is widely used to explain how job demands can spark an energy-depletion process -via
cynicism- that negatively influences employees' physical and psychological health. The challenge-
hindrance stressor framework categorizes job demands as either challenges or hindrances. While
challenges foster growth, learning, and development, hindrances obstruct goal achievement and harm
well-being. Role conflict, as a hindrance, depletes employees' energy and increases misconduct
(Bakker et al., 2023; Lopez-Cabarcos et al., 2023b).

Role conflict is a common stressor (Hofer, 2021) that can lead police professionals to feel physically
and emotionally drained, prompting emotional distancing to protect personal resources (Chiu et al.,
2023; Lopez-Cabarcos et al., 2023b). Misaligned and contradictory role expectations can cause police
professionals to adopt cynical, dehumanized, or indifferent attitudes toward their work, colleagues, or
service users (Chiu et al., 2023; Lambert et al., 2022). Thus, role conflict can contribute to make the
police work environment stressful and demanding, which, in turn, can lead police professionals to
show negative, cynical, and dehumanized attitudes (Hofer, 2021) that end up causing misconduct and
hostility while avoiding any type of prosocial discretionary behavior. To date, no research has
analyzed the mediating role of cynicism in the relationship between role conflict and employees'
OCB-I or hostility. The objective is still more ambitious if the work context of police professionals is
considered. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed. H1: Cynicism mediates the

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3 relationship between role conflict and employees' OCB-I; H2: Cynicism mediates the relationship
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5 between role conflict and employees' hostility.
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8 The JD-RT further proposes that some job and personal resources can buffer the unfavorable impact
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10 of job demands on employees' well-being and misconduct (Bakker et al., 2023; Lopez-Cabarcos et
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12 al., 2023b). In the following subsections, different moderation effects on the relationships where
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14 cynicism is present are analyzed with the aim of mitigating its negative influence on the well-being
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16 and misconduct of police professionals.
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18 19 *The moderating role of compassion between role conflict and cynicism* 20

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22 Compassion can serve as an effective personal resource to reduce the impact of role conflict and
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24 mitigate negative, stressful work situations (Bakker et al., 2023; Eldor, 2017). Its selection as a
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26 moderator is supported by its relevance to the public service nature of police work (Lopez-Cabarcos et
27
28 al., 2023a) and its inherently emotional quality, which helps address human needs (Eldor, 2017).
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31 Compassion is an emotional response to others' suffering, motivating individuals to alleviate that
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33 suffering and maintain social connections (Mercadillo et al., 2015). Compassionate employees exhibit
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35 care, generosity, concern, and a willingness to support others, especially when they are in need
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37 (Sprecher & Fehr, 2005). It involves the ability to selflessly care about others' suffering and the desire
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39 to help (Radey & Figley, 2007). In the context of police work, compassion is particularly valuable
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41 given the public service nature of the profession (Eldor, 2017; Mercadillo et al., 2015). It is more, it
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43 can soften the rigid structures of police organizations by promoting values like sensitivity, service
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45 orientation, and responsiveness (Eldor, 2017). Beyond maintaining order and security, police
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47 professionals must also assist victims and mitigate suffering (Lopez-Cabarcos et al., 2023). An
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49 important part of their work consists in relieving people's suffering, mitigating the stress derived from
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51 dangerous situations or avoiding the feeling of threat (Grant et al., 2019; Papazoglou & Chopko,
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53 2017). Therefore, the ability of police professionals to show compassion is essential for performing
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55 their work successfully and in alignment with the public values of serving and supporting citizens.
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57 Additionally, compassion helps them relieve stress, interpret emotional states, manage impulsivity,
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3 and foster trust with citizens. It is a crucial personal resource, especially in service-oriented, high-
4 stress environments where emotional distancing or cynicism may arise (Baek et al., 2022; Chiu et al.,
5 2023; Lambert et al., 2022). Thus, compassion plays a key role in alleviating detachment and
6 dehumanization, improving police professionals' well-being and effectiveness. To date, no research
7 has analyzed the moderating role of compassion on the relationship between role conflict and
8 employees' cynicism, which is particularly interesting in the work context of public police
9 professionals due to its own characteristics and nature. Therefore, the following hypothesis is
10 proposed. H3: Compassion moderates the relationship between role conflict and cynicism, such that
11 the moderation effect will lead to a weakening the positive relationship between both variables.
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14 *The moderating role of social support between cynicism and OCB-I*

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16 Social support can serve as a valuable job resource, offering employees motivation to enhance
17 decision-making, interpersonal relationships, and a sense of belonging, which helps restore both
18 physical and psychological well-being (Lee & Gong, 2023). Drawing on JD-RT, the choice of social
19 support as a moderating variable is especially relevant in the context of police work, which is highly
20 public and demanding (Campos et al., 2023).
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24 Social support refers to an individual's perception of being cared for, valued, and connected within a
25 social network (Cobb, 1976). It involves the provision of psychological and physical resources by a
26 social network to help individuals cope with negative situations and stress (Cohen, 2004). Supervisors
27 and colleagues contribute to a supportive environment by helping when needed, such as providing
28 advice, counseling, resources and empathy, or helping with routine tasks and resolving conflicts
29 (Kristensen et al., 2005; Patterer et al., 2023). This creates a sense of being valued, recognized and
30 cared for, promoting encouragement and support in the workplace (Patterer et al., 2023). In
31 professions like police work, where high levels of pressure, unpredictability, and exposure to
32 distressing situations are common, building positive relationships and a supportive work environment
33 is especially important (Campos et al., 2023) Supportive practices such as effective communication,
34 guidance on protocols, and fostering trust, camaraderie, and cohesion can improve decision-making,
35 interpersonal relationships, and the sense of belonging (Campos et al., 2023; Patterer et al., 2023).
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3 These strategies help police professionals feel heard, cared for, and part of a supportive environment
4 that encourages emotional expression and fosters loyalty and trust (Baek et al., 2022; Campos et al.,
5 2023; Patterer et al., 2023).
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10 Police professionals are not only expected to perform their formal duties but also to exhibit
11 discretionary behaviors toward supervisors, colleagues, and service users. In highly demanding work
12 environments, if the employees efforts go unappreciated, they may develop depersonalized attitudes,
13 which can hinder both formal and discretionary tasks. In such circumstances, a supportive
14 environment from supervisors and colleagues can provide essential resources to foster a sense of
15 belonging, recognition, and support within the organization. Therefore, social support may help
16 depersonalized police professionals avoid treating colleagues in a distant or objectified manner,
17 encouraging them to engage in pro-social behaviors. In essence, social support can protect police
18 professionals from depersonalization and cynicism, while fostering extra-role behaviors that promote
19 positive interactions with colleagues. To date, no research has analyzed the moderating role of social
20 support on the relationship between cynicism and OCB-I. The objective becomes even more
21 ambitious when considering the work context of public police professionals. Therefore, the following
22 hypothesis is proposed. H4: Social support moderates the relationship between cynicism and OCB-I,
23 such that the moderation effect will lead to a weakening the negative relationship between both
24 variables.
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42 *The moderating role of esteem between cynicism and hostility*

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45 Esteem can serve as a valuable personal resource to cope with hostile work environments, prevent
46 deviant behaviors, and restore the physical and psychological well-being of employees (Bakker et al.,
47 2023; Lopez-Cabarcos et al., 2023b). Drawing on JD-RT, the choice of esteem as a moderating
48 variable is supported by the inherently vocational nature of police professionals' work (Lopez-
49 Cabarcos et al., 2023b).
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56 Esteem refers to the extent to which employees feel valued and competent within the organization,
57 reflecting their self-assessment of competence, worth, and value as members (Pierce & Gardner,
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2004). Employees with high esteem perceive themselves as trustworthy, competent, and effective, even in challenging and conflictive situations (Lo Presti et al., 2020). Furthermore, they also feel recognized for their efforts and receive fair treatment, adequate feedback, and the sensation that their superiors and colleagues (Bakker et al., 2023; Lopez-Cabarcos et al., 2023b) trust them (Kristensen et al., 2005). Esteemed employees aim to maintain a positive self-image by performing their work diligently and effectively, achieving success (Lo Presti et al., 2020; Pierce & Gardner, 2004). For public police professionals, feeling valued and competent is crucial, given the vocational nature of their work, which emphasizes loyalty, moral obligations, and public values (Lopez-Cabarcos et al., 2023a). Esteem helps them perceive their work as meaningful, reducing depersonalization and aligning their values with those of the institution. Additionally, employees who feel esteemed are more likely to remain engaged in their work and avoid detachment, thus reducing the likelihood of hostile or counterproductive behaviors. In this sense, esteem acts as a vital resource, motivating police professionals to perform better (Lo Presti et al., 2020; Pierce & Gardner, 2004), and preventing hostile behaviors stemming from the complexity and rigidity of their work environment. To date, no research has analyzed the moderating role of esteem on the relationship between cynicism and employees' hostility, which is particularly interesting in the work context of public police professionals due to its own characteristics and nature. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed. H5: Esteem moderates the relationship between cynicism and employees' hostility, such that the moderation effect will lead to a weakening the positive relationship between both variables. Figure 1 shows the model proposed.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

Methodology

Participants and procedure

Data were obtained through a self-administered questionnaire to European public police professionals from May to June 2023. An explanatory cover letter to inform about the purpose and justification of the study and a questionnaire were distributed to a random sample of 200 police professionals,

yielding 180 usable questionnaires. The 90.2% of participants were men ($n=166$), mean age=46.15 ($SD=6.376$) [9.78% were female ($n=18$), mean age=42.06 ($SD=4.399$)]. The average service tenure was 23.84 ($SD=8.116$) years, and the workplace tenure was 13.36 ($SD=8.099$) years. Structural equation modeling, that enables the simultaneous analysis of dependency relationships between variables that can behave as dependent or independent in subsequent relationships within the same analysis, and multigroup analysis, that reveals differences between subsamples within a total population that would otherwise remain hidden when examined as a whole, with the SPSS 29.0 AMOS package was used to test the hypotheses proposed.

Instruments

The 4-item COPSOQ scale by Kristensen et al. (2005) with a 5-point Likert scale (1=*never*; 5=*always*) was used to measure role conflict (RC). It included items such as, “Are contradictory demands placed on you at work?” To measure cynicism (CYN), the 6-item MBI-GS scale by Maslach and Jackson (1986) with a 7-point Likert scale (0=*never*; 6=*always*) was used. It included items such as “I have become less enthusiastic about my work”. Scale for organizational citizenship behavior-Individuals (OCB-I) was taken from Williams and Anderson (1991). The scale included seven items, based on a 5-point Likert scale (1=*totally disagree*; 5=*totally agree*). It included items such as, “Helps others who have been absent”. To measure hostility (HOS), 3-items from the Aggression Questionnaire-refined version scale by Bryant and Smith (2001) with a 5-point Likert scale (1=*never*; 5=*always*) was used. It included items such as “At times I feel I have gotten a raw deal out of life”. To measure compassion (COMP), the 8-item scale by Perry (1996) with a 5-point Likert scale (1=*strongly disagree*; 5=*strongly agree*) was used. It included items such as “It is difficult for me to contain my feelings when I see people in distress”. To measure social support (SS), 4-item COPSOQ scale by Kristensen et al. (2005) with a 5-point Likert scale (1=*never*; 5=*always*) was used. It included items such as “How often do you get help and support from your colleagues?” Finally, the 4-item COPSOQ scale by Kristensen et al. (2005) with a 5-point Likert scale (1=*never*; 5=*always*) was also used to measure esteem (EST). It included items such as “My superiors give me the recognition I deserve”.

Common method bias

To avoid potential common method variance, data collection was controlled following the recommendations by Podsakoff et al. (2003). Respondents were requested to provide honest responses and anonymity of their answers was ensured. The dependent variables of the study were placed after the independent ones, and tested and confirmed scales from previous studies were used. In addition, Harman's single factor test (1967) was used to model all the items as indicators of a single factor that represents method effects. The results revealed six factors with eigenvalue above 1, which explained 65.86% of the total variance, and with the first factor explaining less than 26.03% of the total variance. To supplement the previous analysis and to assess the fit of the confirmatory factor analysis model, all the variables were loaded onto one factor (Korsgaard & Roberson, 1995). The results concluded that the single-factor model did not fit the data well and that the fit was significantly worse than that of the measurement model. So, most of the variance in the data was explained by individual constructs, which allowed to confirm that common method variance was apparently not a significant problem in this study (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Results

Model analysis

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, simple correlations, and estimated reliabilities of the variables used in this study. Goodness-of-fit of the measurement model showed good values: $\chi^2(df)=205.583(112)$, $p<.001$, GFI=.883, RMSEA=.068, AGFI=.840, NFI=.885, TLI=.931, CFI=.943, CMIN=1.836.

[Table 1]

Goodness-of-fit of the structural model also presented good values: $\chi^2(df)=207.927(113)$, $p<.001$, GFI=.882, RMSEA=.068, AGFI=.840, NFI=.884, TLI=.931, CFI=.942, CMIN=1.840. The results point out that role conflict accounts for 28.5% of cynicism, and role conflict joint to cynicism account for 8.3% of OCBI and 31.4% of employees' hostility.

Mediation

Table 2 shows the results of the mediation effect of cynicism in the relationships between role conflict and police professionals' organizational citizenship behavior, and between role conflict and police professionals' hostility. The results have concluded that cynicism fully mediates the relationship between role conflict and police professionals' organizational citizenship behavior. Two additional models were tested to fully confirm this result (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Table 2a shows the model-fit statistics and the path coefficients of the three models (partial mediation, full mediation, and direct effects), confirming full mediation. The chi-square of Model 2 (full mediation) is higher than the chi-square of Model 1 (partial mediation) but not significantly different ($\Delta\chi^2=1.499$, $\Delta df=1$); it is lower than the chi-square of Model 3 (direct effect) and significantly different ($\Delta\chi^2=54.453$, $\Delta df=1$). Sobel (1982) and Goodman (1960) tests also support the mediating effect of role conflict ($Z=2.2139$, $p<.0268$; $Z=2.2325$, $p<.0255$, respectively). Table 3 shows the results of the bootstrap percentile confidence intervals method for direct and indirect effects. All previous results concluded a full mediation of cynicism in the relationship between role conflict and employees' organizational citizenship behavior, supporting H1.

The results also concluded that cynicism fully mediates the relationship between role conflict and police professionals' hostility. Table 2b shows the model-fit statistics and the path coefficients of the three models, confirming the fully mediation relationship. The chi-square of Model 2 (full mediation) is higher than the chi-square of Model 1 (partial mediation) but not significantly different ($\Delta\chi^2=0.073$, $\Delta df=1$); it is lower than the chi-square of Model 3 (direct effect) and significantly different ($\Delta\chi^2=80.635$, $\Delta df=1$). Sobel (1982) and Goodman (1960) tests also support the mediating effect of role conflict ($Z=5.1252$, $p<.0000003$; $Z=5.1496$, $p<.00000026$, respectively). Table 3 also shows the results of the bootstrap percentile confidence intervals method for direct and indirect effects. All previous results concluded a full mediation of cynicism in the relationship between role conflict and police professionals' hostility, supporting H2.

[Table 2]

[Table 3]

Moderation

This paper also analyzed the moderating effects of compassion in the relationships between role conflict and cynicism; social support in the relationship between cynicism and employees' organizational citizenship behavior; and esteem in the relationship between cynicism and employees' hostility. Multigroup analyses were used to test all the moderation effects. First, factor loading invariance among the groups was conducted by testing the significance of the chi-square differences between two CFA models, one in which the factor loadings were constrained so that they were the same in both groups, and the other without constraints. Regarding the moderating role of compassion in the relationship between role conflict and cynicism, Table 3a shows that the chi-square difference was significant ($\Delta\chi^2=83.970$, $\Delta df=5$, $p<.001$), suggesting there was no factor loading invariance. Series of multiple group analyses were performed to analyze path differences. The results concluded that compassion shows a factor loading variant in the relationship between role conflict and cynicism, concluding its moderating role and supporting H3.

The moderating role of social support in the relationship between cynicism and employees' organizational citizenship behavior was also performed. Table 3c shows that the chi-square difference is significant ($\Delta\chi^2=68.682$, $\Delta df=5$, $p<.001$), and does not suggest factor loading invariance, concluding the moderating role of social support, supporting H4.

Finally, the moderating role of esteem in the relationship between cynicism and employees' hostility was also performed. Table 3d shows a significant difference in the chi-square ($\Delta\chi^2=90.771$, $\Delta df=7$, $p<.001$), and suggests there is no factor loading invariance, concluding the moderating role of positive family-work enrichment, supporting H5. Tables 4a, 4b, 4c show the paths and R^2 coefficients in the moderation relationships of compassion, social support and esteem. All the above-mentioned results are shown in Figure 2.

[Table 3a, 3b, 3c]

[Table 4a, 4b, 4c]

[Figure 2]

The above results show that the relationships between role conflict and cynicism, cynicism and organizational citizenship behaviors, and cynicism and hostility differ according to the level of the moderating variables, but it is not clear how exactly they differ. The interaction terms are positive for the first and third relationships and negative for the second one, suggesting, according to the meaning of the relationships in each case, that compassion, social support and esteem weaken them. Since the nature and the precise size of these effects cannot be estimated by merely examining the coefficients, the effects have been plotted to interpret them visually (Dawson, 2014). For the first moderating relationship (compassion moderating role conflict cynicism relationship), one new grouping variable was created categorizing compassion into three levels (low, moderate, and high) to predict the relationship already mentioned at each level of the moderator variable. Three different regression groups were obtained for this relationship (Figure 3a). The results show that a high level of compassion has a strong regression effect (R^2 Lineal=0.470) on role conflict-cynicism relationship (correlation value=0.2209); [R^2 Lineal compassion low=0.080 (correlation value=0.0064); R^2 Lineal compassion medium=0.181 (correlation value=0.03276)]. Hence, it is demonstrated that the relationship between role conflict and cynicism is weakened more with high levels of compassion than with medium or low levels.

Figure 3b shows that a high level of social support has a strong regression effect (R^2 Lineal=0.053) on the cynicism-employees' organizational citizenship behaviors relationship (correlation value=0.002809); [R^2 Lineal social support low=0.004 (correlation value=0.000016); R^2 Lineal social support medium=0.006 (correlation value=0.000036)]. Hence, it is demonstrated that the relationship between cynicism and employees' organizational citizenship behavior is weakened more with high levels of social support than with medium or low levels.

Figure 3c shows that a medium level of esteem has a strong regression effect (R^2 Lineal moderate=0.357) on cynicism-employees' hostility relationship (correlation value=0.127449); [R^2 Lineal esteem low=0.073 (correlation value=0.005329); R^2 Lineal esteem high=0.173 (correlation

value=0.029929)]. Hence, it is demonstrated that the relationship between role conflict and employees' hostility is weakened more with medium levels of esteem than with high or low levels.

[Figure 3]

Discussion

Based on JD-RT and the challenge-hindrance stressor framework, the findings indicate that depersonalized and dehumanized behaviors can be intensified in role conflict situations, preventing police professionals from engaging in extra-role behaviors and promoting hostile behaviors. The results show that cynicism fully mediates the relationship between role conflict and extra-role behaviors (OCB-I) as well as between role conflict and hostility. In police work environments, where the high demands and complexities of the job make it difficult for employees to meet expectations, negative and distant responses toward work, colleagues, and citizens can be exacerbated. This leads to increased hostility and the avoidance of pro-social or discretionary behaviors. In line with previous research, role conflict and cynicism are common in police work (Baker et al., 2023; Hofer, 2021) and their presence can have serious consequences for employees and service quality, making their study especially relevant. The findings highlight the importance of mitigating dehumanizing behaviors in police work, particularly if role conflict situations occur, with cynicism acting as a key mediator. This suggests that addressing cynicism can help prevent misconduct, encourage positive behaviors, and ultimately improve service quality.

Compassion helps police professionals mitigate the negative effects of role conflict, particularly cynicism. The findings show that compassion moderates the relationship between role conflict and cynicism. It is a valuable resource due to its alignment with the public service nature of policing. Compassionate employees provide supportive responses in stressful situations, helping to cope with conflicting demands. This aligns with prior research on the positive role of compassion in high-stress work environments like policing (Bakker et al., 2023; Eldor, 2017).

Police professionals can draw on job and personal resources, such as social support and esteem, to shield themselves from the negative effects of cynicism and the stress of their demanding roles, while

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3 also enhancing their well-being and pro-social behaviors. Specifically, results show that social support
4 moderates the relationship between cynicism and OCB-I. Given the public and demanding nature of
5 police work, social support is particularly valuable when police professionals exhibit cynical or
6 distant attitudes toward colleagues. It helps them feel supported, recognized, and aligned with the
7 values of policing and public service. This supportive work environment discourages detachment or
8 fosters discretionary and selfless behaviors toward colleagues. Strengthening social support, with its
9 public and vocational focus, can encourage the desired extra-role behaviors. Similarly, the findings
10 suggest that esteem moderates the relationship between cynicism and employees' hostility. Esteem
11 acts as a moderating personal resource due to the vocational nature of police work and its alignment
12 with public values (Lopez-Cabarcos et al., 2023b; Lopez-Cabarcos et al., 2023a). Esteem helps police
13 professionals view their work as meaningful and purposeful, while seeing themselves as trustworthy,
14 competent, and effective. It enables them to reconnect with the core ideals of public service, such as
15 altruism, selflessness, and commitment. This fosters a stronger sense of the positive impact of police
16 work on citizens, reinforcing both its public and vocational aspects, and mitigating hostile behaviors.
17 In line with previous research, both social support and esteem are key moderating resources that
18 motivate employees to improve their work behaviors and well-being within organizations (Lee &
19 Gong, 2023; Lo Presti et al., 2020; Pierce & Gardner, 2004).

20 21 22 **Practical implications**

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The challenge for police professionals to uphold public values, service standards, and societal duties
requires them to be emotionally, physically, and mentally healthy. This study highlights that role
conflict can exacerbate cynicism, leading to destructive behaviors such as misconduct and incivility.
Since role conflict is particularly stressful and fosters cynicism, it is essential to design training
programs focused on improving communication, increasing responsibility and participation in
decision-making, fostering cooperation, and creating open and agile communication channels. **These
training programs should be conducted on a regular basis and adapted as much as possible to the
needs of the participants. They should also address a diverse and representative range of topics related
to police professionals' work, including operational protocols, ethical standards, core police values, or**

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3 mindfulness techniques. To maximize their effectiveness and reinforce their presence, these programs
4 should be conducted by both internal and external experts. While insiders can provide valuable
5 insights into the specific culture, challenges and dynamics of the police work to foster trust and a
6 sense of ownership among participants; outsiders can bring fresh perspectives, experience, and an
7 objective viewpoint that may be less influenced by internal biases.
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14 In turn, superiors play a crucial role in preventing dehumanized behaviors by setting clear
15 expectations, providing timely feedback, and encouraging focus on work performance while aligning
16 personal and organizational objectives. In particular, effective communication between superiors and
17 police professionals is essential, as it fosters mutual understanding, reduces ambiguity, and supports a
18 healthier work environment. From an organizational perspective, police institutions should implement
19 stress management programs aimed at reducing role conflict, mitigating cynicism, and providing
20 stress management training. Thus, organizational programs should aim to reduce role conflict by
21 promoting role transparency, well-defined job design, clear work objectives, precise job descriptions,
22 appropriate task assignments, and effective communication channels. Promoting compassion through
23 emotional and behavioral training, including caring, affection, and generosity, can help shield police
24 professionals from the negative effects of cynicism. Furthermore, fostering a supportive environment
25 through socialization practices, such as promoting public service values, providing guidance on police
26 protocols, and encouraging camaraderie, can enhance extra-role behaviors and strengthen
27 relationships among colleagues and supervisors. Finally, psychological programs emphasizing the
28 vocational and public nature of police work can help professionals find greater meaning and
29 significance in their roles, boosting their sense of competence and reducing counterproductive
30 behaviors. It is crucial for public decision-makers and HR managers to develop strategies and
31 programs that promote positive workplace experiences and healthy environments. Given the vital
32 impact of police work on society, effective approaches are necessary to prevent cynicism derived
33 from role conflict situations and create work environments that encourage employee well-being and
34 performance at all levels.
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Conclusions and future research

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3 The main purpose of the current study is to advance in understanding of depersonalized and
4 dehumanized behaviors in employees' behaviors when role conflict is present. This study allows
5 concluding that: (i) cynicism behaviors are very common among police professionals, so an in-depth
6 analysis is needed to ensure both their well-being and positive behaviors; (ii) strategies to avoid role-
7 conflict situations and cynicism must be undertaken to correct and prevent their negative
8 consequences on the work of employees, (iii) job and personal resources are required to mitigate the
9 negative effects derived from role conflict experiences and cynicism, and (iv) in public work contexts,
10 particularly those where employees are vocational, great efforts must be made to develop strategies
11 that focus on the human dimension and well-being at work.

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14 This research has some limitations. Data were collected from a single source using self-report
15 measures, which may introduce bias. Although steps were taken to address this, future research could
16 use multi-source data to enhance reliability. Additionally, the study's scope suggests opportunities for
17 further research, such as examining other hindrance demands (e.g., destructive leadership) and job
18 resources (e.g., public service motivation), as well as exploring the impact of cynicism on outcomes
19 like job performance or satisfaction. While policing remains a male-dominated field, conditioned by
20 gender norms that consider traditionally masculine traits as the norm for effective policing (Cubitt et
21 al., 2022; Marier et al., 2025; Poikela et al., 2025), the number of female police professionals
22 continues to increase. This fact, together with the fact that previous literature seems to find important
23 differences in how men and women understand the exercise of the police profession (Cubitt et al.,
24 2022; Marier et al., 2025), leads to the need for further research to deepen the understanding of how
25 gender can influence police work. Finally, testing the models in other sectors and geographical areas
26 could also help generalize the findings obtained in this study. It would be also very interesting and
27 valuable to propose a longitudinal study to draw causal inferences regarding the study variables and
28 establish solid relationships between them in a more conclusive way.

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Table1. Correlation matrix

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	RC	CYN	OCBI	HOS	COMP	EST	SS
RC	1.1000	.298	.825						
CYN	3.1196	.75076	.484**	.896					
OCBI	2.1196	1.43281	-.080	-.235**	.845				
HOS	3.9363	.60659	.286**	.487**	-.214**	.727			
COMP	3.7120	.54228	-.061	-.151*	.249**	-.122	.635		
EST	2.6291	.75022	-.524**	-.531**	.212**	-.324**	.094	.767	
SS	3.1399	.75823	-.462**	-.464**	.331**	-.369**	.211**	.644**	.799

Note: N=184; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$; Cronbach's α on the diagonal.

Table2. Fit results and path coefficients for structural equation models

Table2a. Mediating role of cynicism between role conflict and organizational citizenship behaviors									
	$\chi^2(df)$	GFI	RMSEA	AGFI	NFI	TLI	CFI	χ^2/df	
Model1	109.235(41)	.900	.095	.839	.905	.916	.937	2.664	
Model2	109.308(42)	.900	.094	.843	.905	.919	.938	2.603	
Model3	189.943(43)	.853	.137	.074	.934	.828	.865	4.417	
Standardized coefficients and (<i>t</i> -values)									
	Model1			Model2			Model3		
CYN←RC	.528(7.54)***			.527(7.42)***					
OCBI←CYN	-.297(-2.88)**			-.225(-2.32)*					
OCBI←RC	.132(1.45)						-.02(1.98)*		
Table2b. Mediating role of cynicism between role conflict and hostility									
	$\chi^2(df)$	GFI	RMSEA	AGFI	NFI	TLI	CFI	χ^2/df	
Model1	109.235(41)	.900	.095	.839	.905	.916	.937	2.664	
Model2	109.308(42)	.900	.094	.843	.905	.919	.938	2.603	
Model3	189.943(43)	.853	.137	.074	.934	.828	.865	4.417	
Standardized coefficients and (<i>t</i> -values)									
	Model1			Model2			Model3		
CYN←RC	.530(7.57)***			.529(7.56)***					
HOS←CYN	.562(5.68)***			.544(6.97)***					
HOS←RC	-.031(-.30)						.266(2.86)**		

Note: Model1: partial mediation; Model2: fully mediation; Model3: direct effects.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table3. BC percentile method - direct and indirect effects

Direct effects	Effect	BootSE	<i>p</i>	BootLLCI	BootULCI
RC→CYN	.528	.070	.001	.356	.649
CYN→OCBI	-.227	.100	.016	-.415	-.029
RC→CYN	.531	.069	.001	.361	.651
CYN→HOS	.543	.077	.001	.382	.688
Indirect effects	Effect	BootSE	<i>p</i>	BootLLCI	BootULCI
RC→CYN→OCBI	-.120	.053	.010	-.235	-.024
RC→CYN→HOS	.288	.058	.001	.173	.401

Table3a. Moderation effect of compassion

Multiple group CFA							
	$\chi^2(df)$	χ^2/df	$\Delta\chi^2(\Delta df)$	RMSEA	CFI	<i>p</i> -value	Invariant
Baseline (no constraints)	349.319(230)	1.519		.053	.929		
Factor loading invariance	433.289(235)	1.844	83.970(5)	.068	.082	.000	No
Multiple Group SEM Models				Moderation			
	$\chi^2(df)$	<i>Path invariance</i>		<i>p</i> -value	Invariant		
Const RC→CYN	352.899(231)	352.029(7)		<.10	No	Yes	

Table3b. Moderation effect of social support

Multiple group CFA							
	$\chi^2(df)$	χ^2/df	$\Delta\chi^2(\Delta df)$	RMSEA	CFI	<i>p</i> -value	Invariant
Baseline (no constraints)	350.965(230)	1.526		.054			
Factor loading invariance	419.647(235)	1.786	68.682(5)	.066		.000	No
Multiple Group SEM Models				Moderation			
	$\chi^2(df)$	<i>Path invariance</i>		<i>p</i> -value	Invariant		
Const. CYN→OCBI	354.880(231)	354.775(7)		<.05	No	Yes	

Table3d. Moderation effect of esteem

Multiple group CFA							
	$\chi^2(df)$	χ^2/df	$\Delta\chi^2(\Delta df)$	RMSEA	CFI	<i>p</i> -value	Invariant
Baseline (no constraints)	376.022(228)	1.649		.060	.907		
Factor loading invariance	466.793(235)	1,986	90,771(7)	.074	.854	.000	No
Multiple Group SEM Models				Moderation			
	$\chi^2(df)$	<i>Path invariance</i>		<i>p</i> -value	Invariant		
Const CYN→HOS	381.747(229)	379.832(7)		<.05	No	Yes	

p<.1*(.90 confidence), *p*<.05**(.95 confidence), *p*<.01***(.99 confidence)

Table4a. Paths and R² coefficients - Compassion moderator

	Low	High	Low	High	
<i>Relationships</i>	β		R^2		<i>Mod. Confidence(%)</i>
RC→CYN	.490	.589	.246	.352	.90

Table4b. Paths and R² coefficients - Social support moderator

	Low	High	Low	High	
<i>Relationships</i>	β		R^2		<i>Mod. Confidence(%)</i>
CYN→OCBI	-.179	-.194	.049	.050	.95

Table4c. Paths and R² coefficients - Esteem moderator

	Low	High	Low	High	
<i>Relationships</i>	β		R^2		<i>Mod. Confidence(%)</i>
CYN→HOS	.507	.560	.264	.328	.95

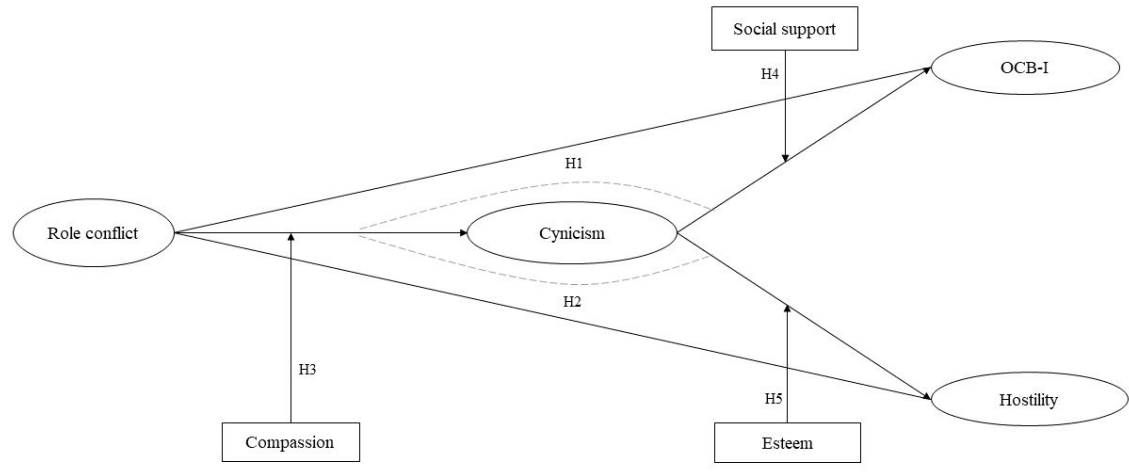


Figure 1. Proposed model

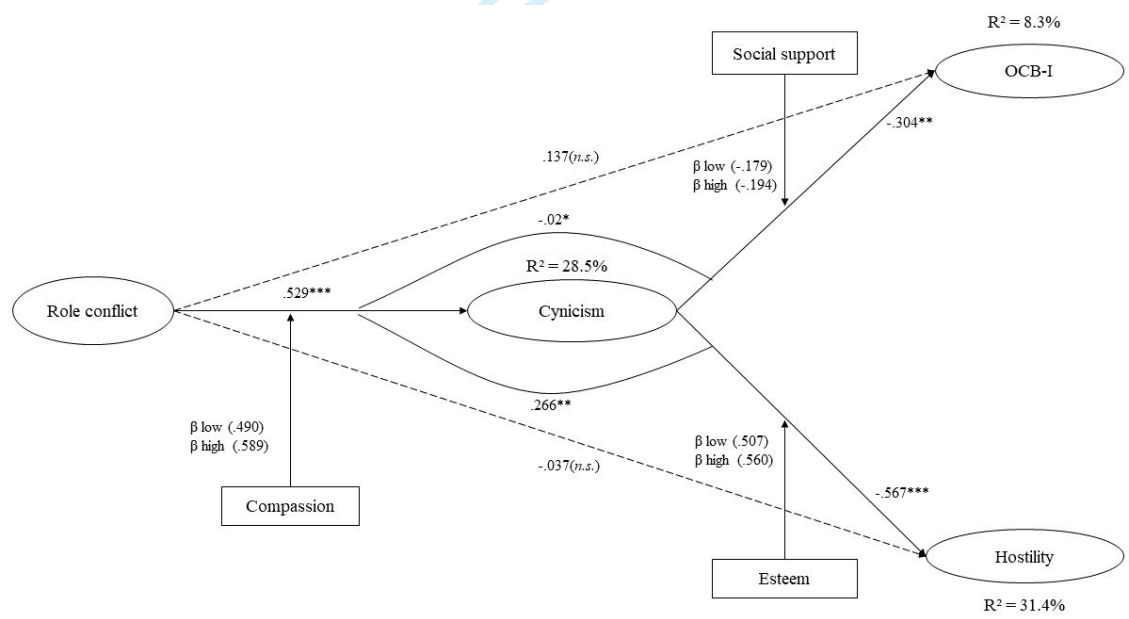


Figure 2. Structural model

Figure3. Regression effects on different levels of compassion, social support and esteem

Figure3a. Role conflict vs cynicism – Compassion moderator

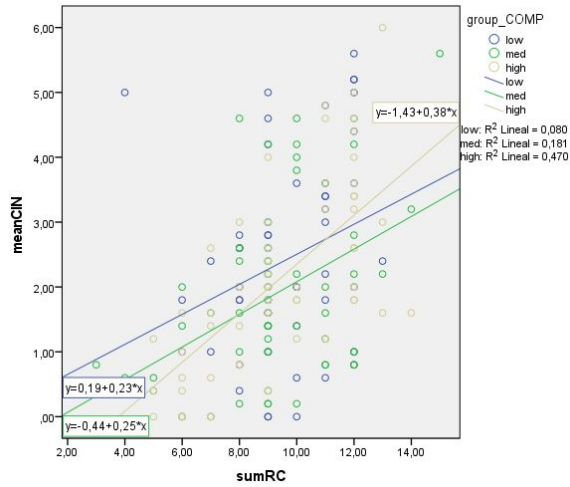


Figure3b. Cynicism vs OCBI – Social support moderator

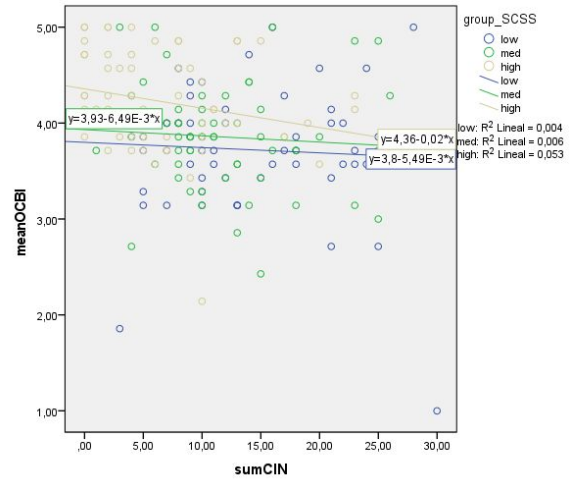


Figure3c. Cynicism vs hostility – Esteem moderator

