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The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic Demands on By-law Officer Wellness and Work

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Abstract

This research sheds light on how the rapid demand to enforce transitioning pandemic-related (and reopening) mandates impacts the wellness of bylaw officers in the context of resource strain. Ontario bylaw officers are at the forefront of the province's response, enforcing lockdown rules to ensure community safety. This research is imperative in understanding how bylaw officers maintain their roles in municipal enforcement, while enforcing rapidly shifting COVID-19 regulations and moving forward into a post-lockdown climate. The research focuses on identifying and understanding the demands and resources that currently typify bylaw officers working in Southern Ontario. It further examines how the COVID-19 pandemic influences the level of work commitment and engagement bylaw officers have towards their jobs. Guided by Bakker and Demerouti's (2007) Job Demands and Resource Model (JD-R Model), which suggests that an imbalance between high demands and limited resources can lead to stress and strain, this study explores the specific job demands and resources available to Ontario bylaw officers. In using a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis, semi-structured interviews with consenting bylaw officer participants (*N*=8) have been conducted. The data explores the lived experiences of bylaw officers during the announcement of the *Emergency Act*, understanding how work demands and resources impact their mental well-being, job engagement, and commitment. This study addresses a gap in the literature by investigating bylaw officers, and it clarifies the unique demands, stressors, resources, coping well-being, and occupational performance factors that have influenced their work during the COVID-19 pandemic and post-pandemic. Moreover, the study highlights the challenges they face, such as increased job demands, insufficient resources and the emotional toll of enforcing public health

measures. Additionally, it identifies coping strategies used by bylaw officers, including peer

support, mental health resources, and personal coping mechanisms.

Keywords: Bylaw Officers, COVID-19, Job Demands, Job Resources, Ontario, Pandemic,

Coping, Stress

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Dedication

To all the bylaw officers who served during the COVID-19 pandemic and who generously

participated in this study- thank you for your dedication, resilience, and service.

Introduction

In Ontario, the Municipal Law Enforcement Officers Association (2023) represents over 250 municipalities and over 2200 individual officers. Since the outbreak of COVID-19 in March 2020, many frontline workers have faced substantial physical and psychological health risks during the unprecedented challenges. In particular, the pandemic presented numerous difficulties for law enforcement organizations whose officers were tasked with rapidly emerging and sweeping laws and regulations designed to protect the community (Jennings & Perez, 2020).

Bylaw officers have been at the forefront of pandemic regulation enforcement, enforcing lockdown rules to ensure social distancing was abided among community members and conducting planning for mass casualty events. The combined effects of demands for additional services from an agency that faced a shortage of required equipment (i.e., personal protective equipment) and that was understaffed has created a great strain on resources, which may in turn have an impact on the mental health of the bylaw officers (Stogner et al., 2020). Furthermore, bylaw officers faced criticism and backlash from the public surrounding the suppression of civil liberties during the height of pandemic lockdowns (Flood et al., 2020). On April 27th, 2022, the province of Ontario announced the easing of public health and workplace safety measures as outlined in the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act* and the *Reopening the Ontario Act (1990)*. The impact of these transitions on bylaw officers remains unknown as they entered a phase toward addressing new regulations and amendments outlined by the provincial government as communities recover from the pandemic.

The objective of this study is to gain insights into the job demands and job resources of bylaw officers in Southern Ontario and how their well-being and organizational performance (e.g., commitment, engagement) have been shaped by pandemic and post-pandemic transitions,

commencing with the enactment of the *Emergency Act* (2020) and transitioning into today's post-pandemic period. The study is guided by the theoretical framework of the Job Demands and Resource Model (JD-R Model) by Arnold Bakker and Evangelia Demerouti, which suggest that the imbalance between job demands being at a high and limited resource can foster environments for stress and strain. This objective was achieved by investigating the lived experiences of municipal bylaw officers in Southern Ontario through a series of interviews.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the specific job demands and available job resources of bylaw officers during the execution of *The Emergency Act* and the post-pandemic transition? (e.g., Reopening Act).

2. How are bylaw officers navigating through their job demands, and what coping strategies are they using to manage the stress?

3. What has shaped the well-being, job commitment, and work engagement of bylaw officers throughout and after the COVID-19 pandemic?

It is essential to understand how the changing roles and responsibilities of municipal law enforcement during and after the pandemic have influenced officers' perceptions of their jobs and their long-term commitment to municipal enforcement. Understanding the experiences of bylaw officers and recognizing the impact of shifting COVID-19 regulations on their wellness and occupational performance will be key in identifying resources and supports to maintain optimal officer wellness and work performance, as well as providing further insight for future pandemic organizational planning.

The thesis is composed of the following chapters. Chapter one provides an in-depth literature review surrounding COVID-19 measures in Ontario, the role of municipal law enforcement

during the pandemic, the impact of COVID-19 on law enforcement personnel, and the demands and resources among police. Chapter two explores the theoretical framework that guides the research design. In chapter three, I provide a detailed description of the methodological framework applied in the research design, including data collection, coding, and analysis. In chapters four, five and six I discuss the empirical findings of the research. I begin by illustrating the job demands and job resources specific to bylaw officers in implementing *The Emergency Act and the Reopening Act.* I explore how bylaw officers navigated their job demands throughout the pandemic, concluding with the strategies they employed to manage the associated stress. In chapter five, I assess the factors that have influenced the well-being, work engagement, and job commitment of bylaw officers during the pandemic and compared to the period following the COVID-19 pandemic. In chapter six, I explore the job engagement and job security of bylaw officers and their commitment to municipal enforcement. Lastly, chapter seven I summarize the key contributions of this research and offer recommendations to municipal law enforcement personnel and the provincial government on resources and strategies to support bylaw officer's wellness and work performance in the post-pandemic era. Additionally, this study provides insights for future pandemic planning and helping organizations and services to better prepare for future public health crises. I conclude with a discussion of the research limitations and directions for future research.

<div align="center">**Chapter One: Literature Review**</div>

COVID-19 Public Measures Overview

The Coronavirus disease became a public health emergency (Papazoglou et al., 2020), disrupting healthcare systems worldwide. The disease first emerged in China and spread worldwide within weeks, causing the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare a global pandemic in March of 2020 (Smaggus et al., 2021). The Coronavirus is a type of disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus and causes highly transmissible respiratory issues leading to fatality. Considering the changing public health circumstances during the pandemic, municipal law enforcement officers were faced with the sudden responsibility of enforcing regulations in compliance with public health measures. In Ontario, the primary emergency legislation, the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act* (EMCPA) allowed the government to declare a state of emergency if the Cabinet believed the threat was urgent and beyond the capacity of existing powers to contain it (Watts & Newell, 2020 & Goudge, 2020). The EMCPA also extended authority to municipalities in the event of an emergency. The framework of EMCPA allowed Ontario to introduce new emergency laws in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The *Reopening Ontario Act (2020)* empowered the government to amend or extend emergency orders. In addition, Goudge (2020) points out, "[the Act] permits the government to maintain its emergency powers for one year without the democratic safeguard that its emergency orders are regularly assessed for ongoing necessity" (p.12). Scholars, Emily Blake (2021) and colleagues from the University of Oxford, demonstrate in their research that there has been no formally coordinated approach to pandemic preparedness or response among the provinces or territories, resulting in varied COVID-19 recovery and reopening plans. As such, a state of emergency enabled municipalities to address the specific needs of local communities, which differed from

one geographic location to another. In Ontario, the level of policy stringency has been changed with directives targeted to specific regions. Under the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act (*EMCPA), Ontario municipalities were required to develop an emergency management plan, including training programs for municipal employees and public education strategies (Goudge, 2020). Notably, the act granted discretionary power to municipal governments to declare an emergency of their own – this potentially permitted municipal governments to go further than provincial emergency measures to protect local vulnerabilities (Goudge, 2020).

Healthcare systems and governments were forced to adapt their response to COVID-19 and coordinate resources (Smaggus et al., 2021). On the 17th of March 2020, Ontario enacted a provincial state of emergency to help contain the spread of COVID-19. On the 23rd of March 2020, Ontario Premier, Doug Ford, announced the mandatory closure of non-essential workplaces to take effect in 14 days, prohibited gatherings to no more than five people, and further extended the state of emergency, which was set to expire on the 31st of March (Lawson et., 2022). The province of Ontario had classified a three-phase response to COVID-19: Protect and Support, which was the imposition of emergency orders and restrictions; Restart, which was the gradual reopening of the economy; and Recover, which was ensuring safety amid a "new normal" (Rocca, 2020).

In Phase 1 of the reopening phase, the emphasis would be on workplaces that can adhere to public health guidelines for physical distancing, safety measures, and limited gatherings. This phase aimed to reduce the strain on public transit and other services, allowing them to prepare safely for subsequent stages (Ministry of Health & University of Windsor, 2020). On the 8th of June 2020, Ontario announced some regions would enter Phase 2 of the COVID-19 recovery

plan (Nielsen, 2020). Phase 2 introduced new measures aimed at lifting restrictions on lockdown measures to help curb the spread of COVID-19. The focus shifted to resuming more outdoor activities and limited indoor services, gradually increasing the limit of people in social gatherings, and easing public health measures. This phase also expanded capacity limits to both essential and non-essential locations (Office of the Premier, 2021). On the 29th of July 2020, the province of Ontario entered Phase 3 of the recovery plan (Nielsen, 2020). Phase 3 permitted the resumption of indoor and outdoor services to operate at a 50% capacity with restrictions in place, such as the requirement of face covering in public settings. Most of the public health and workplace safety measures were lifted with only a few remaining in place, including requirements for screening and the need for businesses to maintain a safety plan (Office of the Premier, 2021).

Ontario introduced a new reopening framework on November 7th, 2020, which categorized regions based on five levels: green-prevent, yellow-protected, orange-restricted, red-control and grey-lockdown (Blake et al., 2021). Green is considered the prevention stage, where the focus is on education and awareness of public health and workplace safety. Restriction reflects a broad range of activities with limitations to the number of people allowed in social gatherings, but high-risk settings remain closed (Reopening Ontario Act, 2020). The Yellow Stage reflects a strengthened measure to protect the community, including targeted enforcement, fines and educating others to limit the transmission of disease and applying public health measures in high-risk areas (Reopening Ontario Act, 2020). The Orange Stage reflects intermediate measures, including restrictions and enforcement while trying to avoid unnecessary closures and the red zone impedes a broader scale measurement and restrictions across multiple sectors to control transmission (Lawson et al., 2022). Finally, the Grey Stage is considered a

declaration of emergency, maximum lockdown, including closures, widescale measures, and restrictions that are subject to change by public health.

As the province entered the second wave of COVID-19, cases continued to increase alarmingly. The Ontario government imposed a provincewide shutdown on the 21st of December 2020, implementing time-limited public health and workplace safety measures to limit the spread of transmission. As the province entered another year of lockdown, the Ontario government announced an increase in capacity throughout big box stores across the region, requiring local bylaws and police officers to ensure workers and companies were complying with COVID-19 safety requirements (Lawson et al., 2022). Continuing into the second year of COVID-19, on February 16th of 2021, stay-at-home orders were lifted for Ontario-based regions, returning to a colour-coded reopening plan in the *Keeping Ontario Safe Plan and Open Framework* (Ranger, 2021). The framework ensured that the public health measures were targeted and responsive to help limit the spread of COVID-19, including earlier preventative measures to help avoid broader closure while keeping schools and businesses open (Office of the Premier, 2020).

Additionally, health and public safety systems around the world have made efforts to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. There were more than 610 million cases and 6.5 million deaths worldwide as of September 2022 (WHO, 2022), resulting in the most consequential global health crisis since the influenza pandemic of 1918 (Cascella et al., 2021). With the rollout of large shipments from Pfizer to Canada, vaccines were made available for those 16 years and older. By December 23rd of 2020, Moderna vaccines were available for those 18 and older (Office of the Premier, 2021). On September 1st, 2021, the Ontario government announced that starting September 22nd Ontarians were required to be fully vaccinated (two doses) and provide proof of vaccination to access certain public settings and facilities (Office of the Premier, 2021).

On December 30th, the Ontario government announced that effective January 4th, 2022, proof of vaccine would be lifted, although businesses and organizations could choose to require proof of vaccination to gain access to their services. COVID-19 testing, and isolation guidelines were also updated with symptomatic testing limited to high-risk individuals, and fully vaccinated individuals who tested positive were required to isolate for only five days (Public Health Canada, 2021). The year of 2022 marked the third year that the province endured the COVID-19 pandemic. The Ontario government with the Chief Medical Officer of Health issued steps to gradually ease public health measures starting January 31st, 2022. The province began to see signs of stabilization in the health care system allowing for the increase in social gatherings (indoor and outdoor) increasing or maintaining capacity limits at 50% in shopping malls, and recreational amenities, allowing facilities such as sporting events, concerts, and theatres to operate at 50% seated capacity (Office of the Premier, 2022). Soon after, effective from 14th of March 2022, Ontario lifted all public health measures including lifting all capacity limits in all indoor-outdoor areas and religious services/ceremonies. Throughout the pandemic, there was a notable spike in the constant changes in regulations and legislative amendments, which is reflective of the fluidity of the situation. It is noteworthy that bylaw officers were tasked with enforcing the shifting protocols further emphasizing their critical role in ensuring compliance with the constantly changing directives.

Restrictions Enacted by the Province of Ontario: Role of Law Enforcement Personnel

Canadian citizens have expected their local governments to respond to the pandemic, but few know the constrained power of municipalities in Canadian law, and given that under the constitution, they are nothing more than 'creatures of the province' (Flynn, 2020). Canada's pandemic response goal has been minimizing serious illness and death while limiting societal

disruption, including heightened surveillance, testing, and providing emergency supplies to the country (Canadian Public Health Association, 2021). Canada follows decentralized federalism[1], which permits each province to enact policies that respond to local circumstances. Declaring a state of emergency allowed municipal, provincial, and territories to independently mandate physical distancing, the closing of non-essential business and public services, the closing of borders (international and interprovincial), and mandatory quarantine for travellers (McClelland & Luscombe, 2021). All legal measures deputized bylaw officers with the power to enforce all COVID-19-related mandates in compliance with public health measures.

As law enforcement officers may experience increased stress due to the prolonged threat of the virus exposure, COVID-19 has presented officers with novel stressors. The power that municipal government has received since the beginning of the pandemic has created a perplexing role among community members. Specifically, s.92 of the *Constitution Act* gives the legislature of each province exclusive responsibility for making laws related to that province's municipal intuitions (Drewing, Young, & Tolley, 2006). As such, some courts and provincial governments have come to interpret this as provinces alone getting to set the rules regarding what municipalities can and cannot do (Flynn, 2020).

After the Ontario government issued the *Emergency Order*, the Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General made several orders under s.10 of EMCPA; thus, prohibiting civilians from organizing public events and social gatherings of more than five people, and mandating the immediate closure of certain establishments and non-essential businesses (Association of Municipalities Ontario, 2020). On March 30th, 2020, the province of Ontario closed all outdoor

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[1] Decentralized federalism; the sharing of rules between a federal and sub-national government

recreational amenities[2]. However, individuals were permitted to walk through or use portions of the park/recreational areas that were not closed (Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act, 2020). Many regions faced challenges surrounding the lack of clarity in areas of shared jurisdiction with other government departments, resulting in poorly coordinated programs and disputes over responsibility (Hachard, 2020). This was exemplified during COVID-19 in Ontario when Premier Doug Ford and Toronto Mayor, John Tory, debated over who had the authority to require early bar closure. Mayor Tory argued that the province should institute the change as the *City of Toronto Act* does not grant the city power to close restaurants or bars, whereas Premier Ford said local health units could act independently (Hachard, 2020). In the end, lawyers from both the city and the province were called in to resolve the issue. Poor coordination and lack of clarity on the enforcement of regulations can not only cause strain on bylaw officers, but the community as well; thus, creating a lack of clarity in the division of responsibility and accountability.

As a result of the execution of specific regulations, local authorities and their bylaw enforcement officers (BEO) were tasked with enforcing the provincial public health orders, which specifically require BEOs to monitor closed facilities, provide advice to the public and businesses, and issue warnings to those acting in violation to public health orders (Harding, 2020). Enforcement measures undertaken by officers include educating the public or issuing tickets under the *Provincial Offence Act.* BEOs are prohibited from arresting or detaining individuals as EMCPA does not include arrest provisions for municipal law enforcement officers (Association of Municipalities Ontario, 2020).

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[2] Outdoor recreational amenities included: outdoor playgrounds, play structures equipment, outdoor sports facilities, multi-use fields, dog park areas, recreational areas including outdoor fitness equipment, community gardens and outdoor picnic sites (Canadian Covid Liberties Association, 2020).

Subsequently, local governments were to contribute to maintaining all other bylaw enforcement regulations, following the BEO's usual process in such circumstances with appropriate variances given the COVID-19 pandemic (Harding, 2020). For example, Toronto declared a public health emergency on the 23rd of March 2020 requiring all individuals in a public area to maintain a social distance of two meters from anyone outside their households (City of Toronto, 2020). Thereafter, Ontario Premier, Ford, announced the second provincial emergency under EMPCA. Immediate actions were taken to help curb the rising COVID-19 cases of deaths. The first being the stay-at-home order came into effect on the 14th of January 2021 requiring everyone to stay at home with exceptions for essential purposes[3], individuals were required to wear a mask in all indoor spaces that remain open while maintaining social distancing measures (Association of Municipalities Ontario, 2021). A new enforcement measure allowed provincial officers, including municipal bylaw officers, to issue tickets to individuals and businesses who failed to comply with the stay-at-home order and all enforcement personnel had the authority to close an area or disperse individuals who were in violation (Association of Municipalities Ontario, 2021).

Enforcement within different regions and municipalities would mean officers would be required to adapt to the local shifts in restrictions, and the change in workload all while meeting the needs of the community. Consequently, it is vital to gain an understanding of the role law enforcement has had throughout the pandemic and thereafter. This research is important as it creates future avenues for comparison between bylaw officers and other law enforcement personnel to analyze and clarify the different demands, resources, coping, well-being, and

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[3] Essential purposes included: trips to the grocery store, the pharmacy, accessing health care, for exercise and essential work.

occupational performance that have influenced the job of bylaw officers throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 Impact on Police Enforcement

Given that there is limited academic research on municipal bylaw enforcement, we turn to the experience of other law enforcement officers during this pandemic period for some direction. The literature speaks to the shifting day-to-day responsibilities police officers have had to manage throughout the pandemic, outlining the challenges they faced while providing services to the public with the fear of contracting the virus all while protecting themselves (Mehdizadeh & Kamkar, 2002). Police officers have been one of the direct representatives of the government and are thus forced to deal with implementing rules. As community tensions increased during the pandemic, citizens voiced concerns and resistance to stay-at-home mandates and business restrictions (Stogner et al., 2020). In certain jurisdictions, police and bylaw officers were given the power to enforce public health and emergency orders (Luscombe & McClelland, 2020).

As COVID-19 variants heightened the risk of exposure through person-to-person interaction, the communication of lockdown regulations further strained the relationship between law enforcement and community members. Officers faced additional anxiety stemming from disapproval from citizens. The routine exposure to elevated stress levels, while adhering to safety precautions and social distancing practices, made police officers more attentive on the job; these challenges limited their abilities to engage in healthy coping strategies (Stoger et al., 2020).

COVID-19 Influence on the Mental Wellness of Law Enforcement Personnel

COVID-19 has had a global impact, affecting essential workers during the pandemic who experienced increased levels of stress due to the prolonged threat of virus exposure and stay-at-home compliance enforcement (Stogner, et al., 2020). The International Labour Organization

(ILO) defines essential services as "those without which, the safety, health and welfare of the community or a section of the community would be endangered or seriously prejudiced" (Gaitens et al., 2021, p.1). As essential workers, law enforcement personnel continued to experience heightened stress due to the continuous changes and implementation of regulations to provide a service to the public (Laufs & Waseem, 2020). Essential workers are particularly vulnerable to the negative mental health impacts of COVID-19 due to the greater risk of exposure to the virus given their close contact with members of the public (Jennings & Perez, 2020). Officers faced a higher risk of intentional contamination (e.g., being spat or coughed on), and to further prevent infection CDC (2020) recommended wearing PPE and thoroughly cleaning and disinfecting all gear before reuse.

The pandemic has presented many threats for police officers in high-risk situations, where the presence of violence towards them adds to their stress levels (Mehdizadeh & Kamkar, 2020). Their job permits them to be in proximity to the public, increasing their risk of exposure to communicable diseases such as COVID-19, and further exposing their loved ones, adding further strain on their mental well-being (Mehdizadeh & Kamkar, 2020). Concerns surrounding COVID-19-related risk were apparent when Thompson and colleagues (2022) interviewed police officers amid the pandemic. Police officers openly discussed the use of PPE in the public sphere and concerns became apparent when discussing their interaction with the public and understanding of the police clientele as "unclean, uncooperative and risky" (p.8). Another officer explained "the public who regularly interact with the police do not show any concern for the health and safety of officers" (Thompson et al., 2022, p.25). In addition, officers also experience an increase in stress due to the further spreading of the virus to colleagues and reducing police capacity in the jurisdiction (Stogner et al., 2020). Likewise, law enforcement is met with

occupational stressors of adapting existing practices to what Stogner and colleagues call "virus reality". An additional level of stress was experienced due to a shortage of PPE (e.g., masks, gloves, and sanitizers) (Stonger et al., 2020). To mitigate virus spread, efforts were made by enforcement agencies to procure and utilize PPE to protect officers and those around them from disease transmission (Stogner, Miller & McLean, 2020).

Demands, Resources and Work Performance Among Police

COVID-19 presented occupational stressors to police officers due to threats and assaults from the public in connection to implementing unpopular restrictions. Consequently, officers experienced disapproval from the citizens (Stogner et al., 2020). Policing stressors can be categorized as either operational stressors or organizational stressors. An operational stressor is related to the policing specificities and the nature of police work, such as shift work, risk of injury, incidents, traumatic events and the management, structure, and processes of police work (Queiros et al., 2020; Purba & Demou, 2019). Organizational stressors among police officers include conflict with supervisors/colleagues, lack of resources (material/human), work overload, and lack of leadership (Queiros et al., 2020). Whereas organizational stressors can be caused by the "culture, conditions, rules, and procedures inherited in the organizational context in which they work" (Maran et al., 2022, p.2). It has been suggested that organizational stressors are the greater source of stress for police officers, as they are often viewed as unavoidable and uncontrollable (Purba & Demou, 2019). Police officers often attribute high stress levels to poor organizational practices and demands as exemplified by Violanti et al. (2018) who found that organizational stressors were more prevalent than operational stressors including a lack of resources, inadequate supervision, and lack of support.

Additionally, resilience plays a role in mitigating the negative effects of stressors. A study by Parnaby and Broll (2020) explores police retirees and found that resilience, particularly personal competence, defined as self-confidence, perseverance, and optimism, significantly predicts life satisfaction. These findings suggest the importance of family coherence and having strong bonds with one's family promotes well-being. Further, this suggests that to effectively meet the job demands, police officers need to develop supportive environments that promote competence and familial bonds (Violanti et al., 2018; Parnaby & Broll, 2020). As such, it is suggested that to effectively meet the demands of the job, police officers must enhance their resiliency to remain engaged, adapt to stressors, and be able to recover from negative aspects of stress (Violanti et., 2018). Bylaw officers may experience similar job demands and stressors in their roles. Scholars suggest that 'organizational stressors' adversely impact both police employees and organizations (Laufs & Waseem, 2020).

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework: JD-R Model Overview

This chapter provides a detailed description of the theoretical framework that guides the research. The Job Demands-Resource Model (JD-R model), proposed by Demerouti et al. (2001), assumes that each occupation is unique and that overall workers' well-being is dependent on the job demands and resources (Herbert, 2020). Job demands refer to a job's physical, social, or organizational aspects that may require a sustained physical or mental cost (Demerouti, 2001). Job resources refer to "the physical, psychological, social, and organizational aspects of the job that are essential in achieving work goals, reducing demands, and stimulating personal growth and development" (Bakker et al., 2017, p.312). Combined, job demands and job resources have a direct influence on any job performance. The JD-R Model focuses on the interactions between high job demands as a potential job stressor requiring adequate resources to address those demands. Such influences are a motivational factor that conversely exacerbates the emotional strain and stress of the job. Factors such as high work pressure, emotional demands, and role ambiguity all can be leading factors to burnout or exhaustion (Tomo & De Simone, 2019)

The JD-R model has been refined and continues to transform since the original model was proposed by Karasek in 1979. Karasek defined job demands as the psychological stressors that are involved in accomplishing the workload and stressors related to unexpected tasks and job-related personal conflicts (Frank et al., 2017). Based on a structural model proposed in 2001 (see Figure 1), Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, and Schaufelu proposed that the JD-R model explained that every occupation has specific risk factors associated with work-related stress and can be classified into two categories: job demands and job resources. Early JD-R models proposed two methods that led to the development of burnout. The first one is long-term excessive job demands, which the employee does not recover from, is followed by exhaustion;

and the second, the lack of resources that impede that job demand leads to withdrawal behaviour (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Therefore, job demand can be associated with exhaustion and a lack of resources has been linked to disengagement (Schaufeli &Taris, 2014).

In addition, the JD-R model explains that when law enforcement job demands are high and resources are limited due to working conditions, there is a significant increase in the stress level of officers which further decreases their motivation (Frank, Lambert & Qureshi, 2017). Bakker and Demerouti (2017) found that strained employees were more likely to engage in self-undermining behaviours, creating a loop of negative outcomes that eventually led to burnout. For example, when directions from supervisors are inconsistent and unclear, it becomes frustrating and difficult to understand job demands; thus, leading to heightened work anxiety and increased strain on the employee (Keaton et al., 2021). As prolonged exposure to high job demands continues, employees become chronically exhausted and begin to distance themselves from their work (Bakker & De Vries, 2021). When resources are absent, individuals begin to lose meaning in their job identity. Similarly, unreliable work schedules and understaffed work environments could further strain bylaw officers as they must carry on the responsibilities with limited resources to help them.

Figure 1: Job Demand and Job Resource Model[4]
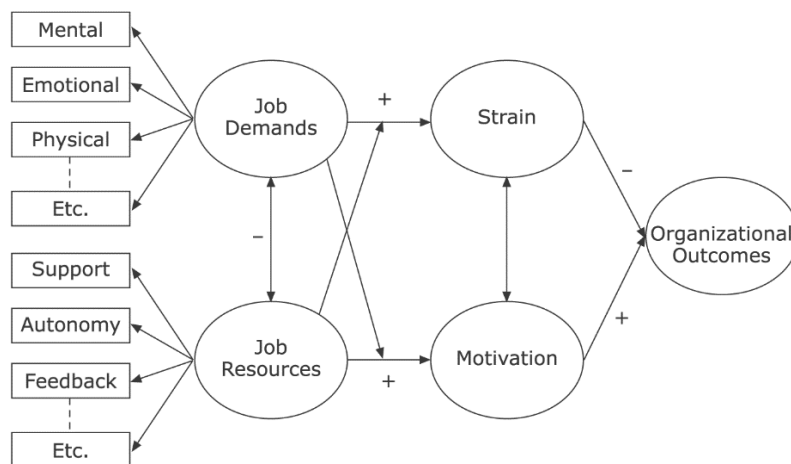
In 2004, Schaufeli and Bakker presented a revised JD-R model. This model included work engagement as an additional risk factor for burnout and was a mediator between job demand and job resources (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). This new model went further than the negative psychological state and explored the positive equivalent known as work engagement. Work engagement refers to a "positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication and absorption" (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014, p.46). Although job demands are examined as straining with limited job resources, if there are sufficient resources available, it will encourage an employee's performance altogether. Bakker (2011) states that depending on the job demand and resources ratio, the state of exhaustion and work engagement will fluctuate day to day which generates a cycle of loss and gain, consequently, impacting well-being and employee performance (Tomo & De Simone, 2019).

Another premise of the JD-R model is the identification of the two underlying psychological processes and how they play a role in the development of strain and motivation.

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[4] Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2007). The job demands-resources model: State of the art. *Journal of managerial psychology*.

Health impairments suggest that a job with chronic job demands (i.e., work overload) will exceed an employee's mental and physical resources leading to a state of exhaustion (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011). The second process consists of motivation. Job resources have the option to be motivating and lead to a high level of work engagement and performance (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011). Job resources hold importance on their own as they offer intrinsic motivation with the potential for positive engagement or extrinsic motivation, which can be used as an instrument in achieving job-related goals.

JD-R Model: Bylaw Officer Wellness During COVID-19 Pandemic

Bylaw officers are expected to be the "voice of authority, calm and guidance" (Jennings & Perez, 2020. p.695). As COVID-19 has introduced new circumstances, for this study we examine the physical demands (person-person interaction), role conflict[5], working schedules, staffing shortages, assaults and complaints from community members, and administrative stressors (e.g., lack of information, imminent implementation of new regulations and laws). With the responsibility of enforcing and communicating social-distancing measures and lockdown rules, a major obstacle is the compliance of citizens. These challenges, intensified by the stress of issuing penalties for non-compliance have strained the relationship between bylaw officers and the community. This is exemplified by situations where bylaw officers hand out penalties/tickets to civilians who fail to comply with COVID-19 rules, resulting in backlash from the community (Stogner et al., 2020). As for the job resources, variables to be examined are the mental health resources (counselling, medication, rest) and formal organizational support (supervisor, peers).

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[5] Role conflict is defined as inappropriate demands in work tasks that produced negative emotional responses at work. the term is pioneered by Khan et., (1964) who defined role conflict as the incompatibility of demands and expectations in engaging in a work role (Kamarudin et., 2018).

Organized support can act as a buffer for job demands and can help bylaw officers effectively

deal with workplace stresses (Frank, Qureshi & Lambert, 2017).

The JD-R model becomes relevant to the research as it provides a foundation to

understand the significant increase in stress among bylaw officers due to high job demands and

limited resources that affect their work environment. It is important to differentiate between the

roles of police officers and bylaw officers. Although both operate within the law enforcement

sector, their responsibilities, challenges, and support systems differ significantly. The JD-R

model can provide a foundation to discuss how certain stressors prevalent to bylaw officers

create burnout, prompting reluctance among employees to seek help. Job resources influence the

ability of employees to achieve job demands and to feel valued and respected.

Overview of Transactional Model of Stress and Coping

Within law enforcement, it is imperative to study the implications of elevated stress due

to COVID-19 among bylaw officers who have embraced numerous responsibilities enforcing

province-wide regulations and completing primary job duties. This study explores how bylaw

officers experience and adjust to stress during the pandemic through the Transactional Model of

Stress (TMS) developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1985). It builds on the insight that stress is a

result of the individual's perception of the discrepancy between the environmental demands and

their coping resources.

Coping is the process of attempting to manage the demands created by stressful events

that may exceed a person's resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Lazarus and Folkman

classified coping strategies as "approach" or "avoidant" (Ermasova et al., 2020). Approach

strategies are considered to be healthy as they attempt to address the problems head-on whereas

avoidant strategies are used to escape or avoid the problem (Webster, 2014). Exposure to

stressful events can be linked with an increased risk for negative physical, psychological, and interpersonal outcomes. Grentz (1991) indicates when police officers experience an event that is not congruent with their self-perceptions and, when it is challenged so are their coping mechanisms as they are stretched beyond capacity. This suggests when an officer encounters a situation that is beyond their control or comprehension, the way they process the situation may be beyond their scope of understanding; thus, challenging their ability to cope. Accordingly, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) explain effective coping mechanism involves two steps. First, an appraisal of the events must be conducted, which can involve both a primary and secondary appraisal. In primary appraisal, individuals are concerned about what is at stake because of the stressful event (Ermasova et al., 2020). Primary appraisal is based on the process in which a person reflects on the relevance of the situation and the degree to which it is deemed of importance to the individual's personal beliefs, values, and potential outcome if an investment occurs (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In addition, officers determine whether the stressor poses a threat while weighing the potential loss. Secondary appraisal occurs when an individual evaluates the resources or coping strategies available for addressing the perceived threat (Stangor & Walinga, 2014). Lazarus states that secondary appraisal consists of accountability as the task of assigning blame or credit for the outcome and the ability to manage the situation (Dillard, 2019). Lazarus and Folkman elaborate that each job will have different reactions to stress, as all individuals respond differently. When the individual recognizes the stressors as exceeding their coping abilities, a negative psychological state of stress ensues and becomes coupled with exhaustion.

People use various coping strategies to deal with job demands. Coping strategies can be problem-focused (i.e., addressing stressors using various problem-solving approaches); they can

also be emotion-focused (i.e., reducing emotional strains by leaning on others) (Kwon & Kim, 2020). When confronted with a stressor, a person uses the primary appraisal to evaluate the potential importance/stress and the secondary appraisal to evaluate the available coping resources (Bakker et al., 2021). Stressful events can be presented in three forms: harm/loss (i.e., damage already sustained), threat (i.e., potential damage) and/or a challenge (i.e., possibly to gain and control) (Rossa, 2014). The secondary appraisal evaluates the available coping resources and whether they help accomplish the goal (Rossa, 2014). Notably, coping mechanisms comprise behavioural and cognitive strategies to help resist stress; the appraisal of stressors and coping resources are subjected to be updated and may change rapidly depending on the circumstances (Frenkel et al., 2021; Rossa, 2012).

TMS Model Explaining Bylaw Enforcement-Related Stress

As officers face many workplace stressors, the COVID-19 pandemic places high physical and environmental demands. Law enforcement personnel face a higher risk of infection due to the nature of their job and the physical requirement to be present to protect and serve the community. The model suggests that the same environmental stimuli, such as COVID-19, will prompt different reactions from different individuals contingent upon their coping resources. When officers face a stressful situation, they appraise the potential threat and the exposure to their well-being as well as their available resources. They reflect on their ability to balance the environmental and occupational demands along with their physical and psychological responses, this then impacts their stress levels and their ability to cope (Violanti et al., 2017). In the face of the pandemic, officers will undertake an appraisal and formulate their judgements. Accordingly, workers will perceive COVID-19 as a high risk when they believe the possibility of contracting

the virus is likely. During their shifts, many officers will come into contact with civilians whose COVID-19 status is unknown (Frenkel et al., 2021).

Moreover, as public health measures were put into place within a short period, officers were expected to implement novel tasks and procedures immediately. These measures have also led to a shift in what is considered criminal behaviour (e.g., criminalizing social gatherings) resulting in officers coming into close contact with the public to implement social distancing guidelines, increasing their risk of infection (Frenkel et al., 2021). In this context, according to the TMS, officers are more likely to experience high levels of stress as they face elevated levels of pressure associated with their job duties especially when they encounter anxious community members on duty and the officers perceive the stressors as exceeding their resources (Frenkel et al., 2021).

The TMS works effectively and consistently with the JD-R model. Lazarus and Folkman propose that job demands trigger an individual's stress depending upon the assessment of the situation and/or the environment, excessive job demands are stressful and obstruct job performance (Berjot & Gillet, 2011). Hazards and risk are job demands that constrain performance (Bakker, 2007). The TMS focuses on the psychological determinants of stress and the counter-response over which people have control and will respond accordingly.

A study by Zeijen et al. (2021) explores how the JD-R and TMS models can applied to examine the personal demands and resources in a student setting. The study found that personal demands, such as the need for control can cause individuals to perceive their workload as overwhelming; thus, potentially leading to burnout. Conversely, individuals with strong resources, such as optimism and self-efficacy, tend to view demands as challenges rather than threats, resulting in increased job engagement. This is consistent with the JD-R model's focus on

job resources which mitigates the effects of job demands and promotes well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

   The results of this study suggest that, in professional settings such as law enforcement, the perceptions of job demands can be influenced by the availability of job resources. During high-demand times such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the JD-R and TMS models highlight the significance of sufficient organizational support, training, and resources can enhance employee engagement and reduce stress. Incorporating both models reveals that workplace demands can lead to high stress levels; however organizational and personal support can mitigate the negative implications and improve work performance and engagement.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The following chapter describes the methodological framework used in the study. This section begins by describing the qualitative research technique used, I then describe the process of acquiring ethics approval, the study design, participant recruitment, and the process of conducting interviews. Additionally, I discuss the coding process and how it informs the analysis of the data.

Qualitative Research Techniques

A qualitative methodological approach was used for the research design, data collection and analysis. Qualitative research seeks to explore the potential antecedents and factors that are not well understood or previously explored (Khan, 2014). These methods allow researchers to immerse themselves in the data and the participants' worlds, observing patterns and deriving meaning from their experiences (Charmaz, 2006; Gaudet & Robert, 2018). This process allows the development of "verstehen"[6] through an in-depth process of subjective interpretation and a degree of sympathetic understanding between the researcher and participants' experiences (Ferrell, 1997). Throughout this research, I employed a constructivist grounded theory approach. This research was informed by Charmaz's (2006) constructivist grounded theory, which aims to develop theories regarding significant issues in participants' lives. This approach emphasizes understanding participants' experiences, acknowledges the researchers' reflexivity, and enables using the relevant theoretical framework to interpret the data (Sanders, Langan & Agocs, 2015). Particularly, I used the JD-R model and existing bylaw enforcement research to inform the development of my study and shape the research process. By applying the JD-R model, I

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[6] Verstehen is a German word meaning "understanding in a deep way". This approach allows researchers to understand another person's experience (Keesee,2022)

explored the balance between job demands and job resources, providing a structured lens for analyzing the participants' experiences. The theoretical (thematic) analysis allowed me to examine patterns in the data, ensuring that my findings were contextually relevant and consistent with the original insights derived from my research.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics approval was received on February 27th of 2023 from the Research Ethics Board REB), at Wilfrid Laurier University, to conduct interviews with bylaw officers across Southern Ontario. The goal of the study is to explore the lived experiences of bylaw officers during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the research ethics application addressed concerns about confidentiality and anonymity, surrounding participant data and ensuring no personal identifiers were used throughout the study. While the research did not pose any physical risk, social risks were considered, particularly regarding the bylaw officers' reluctance to share their experiences due to fear of judgment and differential treatment from their workplace management and colleagues. Bylaw officers may have also been concerned about how sharing their experiences could affect their reputations among colleagues and employers. Nonetheless, there was a small risk of social harm, and precautions were taken to protect participants confidentially. Participants were informed that their personal data would remain confidential throughout the study, and all data collected would be stored and safeguarded on a password-protected computer. Participants are identified by their assigned numbers (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2) and identifying information about their municipal service was redacted in the dissemination of results to protect their identity.

Additional risks considered included the potential emotional or psychological impact of bylaw officers sharing their experiences, as discussing their mental health could cause distress.

To mitigate the risk, participants were reminded that they were not obligated to answer any questions they did not feel comfortable responding to, could stop the interview at any time, and had access to workplace mental health resources via a list provided to them.

Before participating, all participants were informed about the research aims, risks, and benefits through the interview consent forms (Appendix A). These forms, sent via email (Appendix B), outlined the participant's voluntary consent to be interviewed and recorded, as well as the research objectives, aims, risks, benefits, and the importance of their participation. The form also allowed the participants to indicate their preference for an in-person or video conference interview. Finally, each participant received compensation in the form of a $15 Tim Horton's gift card as an appreciation for their participation and for taking the time out of their day to take part in the research.

Participant Recruitment

To be eligible to participate in the study, bylaw officers had to be employed full-time or part-time by a municipality in Southern Ontario. Additionally, they must have been employed for at least six months prior to the announcement of the Emergency Act of 2020. As a result, the final group of interviews consisted of six male bylaw officers and two female bylaw officers employed across Toronto, and the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA). Bylaw officers held positions in Toronto, Vaughan, Niagara, Brampton, Oakville, Halton Hills, Waterloo, and Brantford.

To gain access to participants, I worked closely with a local Director of Municipal Law Enforcement and Regulatory Services, who served as a subject matter expert (SME). The SME reviewed the research design and research questions for occupational relevance and terminology, and they also provided organizational connections within municipalities across Southern Ontario.

I was introduced to the President of the Municipal Law Enforcement Officers Association, informed them of the thesis and data collection, and received permission to use the MLEOA Facebook page and/or website to recruit officers for the study. With their approval, I was connected with their Communications Chair, who assisted in distributing and promoting the recruitment poster across their social media platforms and newsletters to all MLEOA members. Bylaw officers expressed interest in participating in the research via email. Potential participants were sent a consent form outlining the research goals, objectives, and confidentiality concerns. Once officers consented to participate, they were provided with a date and time for the interview, with the option to choose between an online or in-person interview at the Wilfrid Laurier Brantford campus. I sent the interview links to each participant via email to ensure security and confidentiality.

Study Design and Procedure

Eight interviews were conducted between April 27th, 2023 – December 5th, 2023. The participants varied in their level of career experience, ranging from four to 16 years in the bylaw enforcement role. All interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams, lasting between one to two hours, and were recorded and transcribed digitally using the Microsoft Teams Recording Option with prior consent. Each semi-structured interview consisted of a guided conversation exploring and understanding a participant's experience, meaning, and perspective on the research topic (Charmaz, 2014).

Throughout the interviews, participants had the option to have their cameras on or off, depending on their comfort level. All participants chose to keep their cameras on, which helped us learn more about one another and build rapport. Research has shown when participants' cameras were on during the interviews, the researcher had stronger rapport compared to

interviews with the camera off (Jenners & Myers, 2019; Krouwel et al., 2019). Establishing

rapport with the participants was crucial to guarantee a positive experience, alleviate participant

anxiety, and enable the researcher to cultivate trust.

A semi-structured interview guide was developed to facilitate the flow of the interviews.

The interview questions were organized in thematic sections, addressing topics such as shifts in

demands from the beginning of the pandemic to post-pandemic, the resources available to bylaw

officers during this time, the legal parameters surrounding the enforcement of public health

regulations, responses to the *Reopening Ontario Act, 2020,* and identifying coping strategies

used by bylaw officers. Charmaz (2014) notes that the flexibility of intensive interviewing

permits the interviewer to pursue ideas and concerns that emerge during the interview. This is

crucial to ensure the participants' experiences are fully heard and understood while keeping the

interview focused on the research objectives.

Before the beginning of the interviews, each participant was asked if they were

comfortable with me taking notes during the interview. The note-taking process assisted with

accuracy and allowed for the identification of key details that could be probed further later in the

interview. While note-taking can be useful for recording concepts and observations, it has some

disadvantages. This includes the risk of inaccurate data collection, such as misinterpreting or

missing key points, which can affect the authenticity of the data. Additionally, note-taking can

slow the interview, which leaves the participant waiting and disrupts the flow of discussion and

the effectiveness of communication between myself and the participant. To mitigate these issues

and foster rapport, I opted for handwritten notes, as this approach minimized distractions and

mechanical sounds that could disrupt the discussion (Roller and Lacrakas, 2021). Recording the

interview also alleviated the need to write continuously, allowing me to be more present and responsive during the conversation.

Coding

All interviews underwent a secondary review by me to ensure the transcriptions accurately reflected the recording. After each interview was transcribed, I began the coding and analysis phase. Charmaz (2014, p.210) emphasizes the importance of coding as "[defining] what is happening in the data and [beginning] to grapple with what it means". The coding process consisted of two phases: 1) initial coding, involved a detailed, line-by-line analysis of the data, allowing for an open exploration of analytical possibilities and the creation of codes that best fit the data (Charmaz, 2014). Initial coding (sub-coding) allowed me to stay close to the data and be objective in generating codes that capture the true representation of the data. I used Microsoft Word's Insert Comment Reviewing option for this purpose.

The first group of interview transcripts was initially coded through a line-by-line process. This technique allowed for a close examination and labelling of the data with a set of codes without preconceived notions, thus allowing the data to speak for itself. Through initial coding, I identified trends and a pattern throughout the data, contributing to the development of a codebook. For example, while initially coding four interviews, I identified recurring themes and codes such as governing and regulating people, the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of bylaw officers, and organizational mandates. As the same themes continuously emerged through the initial coding process, I realized that the data had reached saturation, since no new codes were occurring. I considered the objectives of the research, the quality of the data, and the size of the dataset to ensure the credibility of the research (Charmaz, 2014). As I coded my data, I continued to see recurring themes and by the third interview, no new themes emerged from the

data. However, due to the smaller size of the sample, I initially coded the fourth interview to ensure saturation had been reached.

The second phase of coding consisted of focus (parent) coding. The objectives of focused coding are to identify recurrent patterns and the multiple layers of meaning and to delineate variation and interconnections among sub-themes (Hsiung, 2010). To focus code all eight interviews, I divided each interview into three sections (i.e., job demands, job resources, and work commitment/engagement), based on the interview guide and inserted each section into separate Microsoft Word documents. I then began to focus code each interview, labelling and analyzing the data. After all the interview transcripts were coded, common themes emerged from each section.

All the focus (parent) codes were organized into the previously noted three main themes, with the sub-codes related to the main code. For example, the parent code "Organizational Approach" had two sub-codes: "educational" and "enforcement approaches". Each focus code was operationalized, a process that defined key concepts used within the research. Defining concepts provided the labels and understandings necessary for the research, making the terms applicable to the study. As a result, my codebook was utilized to complete the remainder of the coding process.

After completing focused coding and identifying the common themes that were present in each substantive section of the interview transcripts (i.e., demands, resources, and work commitment/work engagement), I began to extract certain quotes that accurately exemplified each focus code and those that best answered each research question, ensuring the experiences of the bylaw officers were encompassed. Throughout the full coding process, I engaged in memo writing to explore and reflect on certain aspects of the data. This consisted of observations

between codes, the data, and the overlapping experiences between the participants. Moving from coding to analyzing, I used axial coding to sort, synthesize and organize large amounts of data to relate categories to subcategories (Charmaz, 2014). This method allowed me to structure the data systematically, enabling me to identify the relationships between various themes. By connecting the narrative to broader themes, I ensured that my analysis was both grounded in the data and informed by existing literature and theoretical perspectives. This approach facilitated a deeper understanding of the data, allowing me to develop a thorough framework for analysis.

In addition, memoing helps researchers expand on concepts and themes identified during coding, it is a crucial part of qualitative research that uses insights from narrative data as building blocks for constructing theoretical arguments (Hsiung, 2010). Memo writing allowed me to clarify and refine my thoughts about the data and any emerging themes. By documenting my thoughts and how different codes related to each other, the process helped me to identify connections, contradictions, and gaps within the data. Memo writing also encouraged reflexivity by prompting me to reflect on my assumptions and biases and how my background and perspective might have influenced my research.

Reflexivity Statement

An essential aspect of being a qualitative researcher is engaging in reflexivity which involves critically examining how one's subjectivity influences the research (Francisco et al., 2023). Reflexivity requires researchers to assess their judgements, practices, and belief systems during the data collection, recognizing how these biases may potentially impact the analysis and research outcomes (Delve, Ho, & Limpaecher, 2021). As a young woman, my experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic deeply shaped my perspective. Working in a retail job deemed essential during the beginning of the pandemic was a frightening experience, as I feared bringing

the virus home to my family, particularly to the elders and children with compromised immune systems. This fear of exposure influenced my initial interactions with the concepts of public safety enforcement. This awareness led me to empathize with those affected by enforcement actions during the pandemic. However, it also made me careful about letting this empathy cloud my judgement and analysis.

Transitioning to a role in law enforcement during this time, coupled with my background in criminology, added layers of complexity to my perspective. My educational background provides me with a theoretical lens through, which I view law enforcement practices, yet my personal experience as a retail worker during the pandemic created tensions between my understanding of enforcement and my empathy for those being regulated. I was mindful of the potential bias, and the dual perspective shaped how I interpreted the data, as I balanced my understanding of enforcement with my lived experiences.

Through this research process, I consciously sought to present the experiences of bylaw officers objectively, aware that my position as someone who had been on the receiving end of public health mandates might influence my findings. I made a conscious effort to portray bylaw officers' experiences fairly throughout the research process. This understanding served as a guide for me as I carefully examined the data, making sure to have an open mind to the bylaw officers' beliefs and experiences, even when they differed from mine. I was able to critically analyze how my position as a woman, a former retail employee, and a law enforcement professional affected how I interpreted the data by using reflexivity. This helped me to ensure that the discussion and findings chapters appropriately represented the officer experiences and views, which was crucial to the honesty and integrity of my research.

Chapter Four: Job Demands of Bylaw Officers During COVID-19 Pandemic

This chapter presents the research findings focusing on the challenges placed on MLEOs in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Examining challenges bylaw officers encountered while adapting to new legislative mandates, including the *Reopening of Ontario Act* (ROA) and the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act* (EMCPA) enforcement. The chapter highlights the significant increase in workload and role ambiguity resulting from evolving regulations. The findings explore job demands and resource availability, which are illustrated with the JD-R and TSM models.

At the onset of the pandemic, bylaw officers faced numerous challenges concerning the enforcement of the *COVID-19 Emergency Response Act* (2020). *The Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act* (EMCPA) served as the primary emergency response legislation in Ontario, dealing with declaring states of emergency and authorities that could be utilized in such situations (Sheppard, 2021). While some municipalities experienced an interruption of their routine duties, the themes emerging from this study indicate that Municipal Law Enforcement Officers (MLEOs) underwent a significant transition in enforcement responsibilities. As the nation grappled with escalating COVID-19 cases and fatalities, efforts by the government and essential workers aimed to curb transmission and safeguard communities intensified. Bill C-14, also known as the *COVID Emergency Act,* was enacted by the federal government in recognition of the nationwide emergency surpassing the government's ability to control the growing number of cases. However, the implementation of the legislation promoted uncertainty regarding the delegation of enforcement responsibility at the provincial level, raising questions about the oversight for enforcement and compliance. For example, one bylaw officer participant explained,

> When the pandemic first started, it was not really clear who was going to enforce the
> Emergency Management Civil Protection Act…. What ended up happening was that

every other law enforcement organization, besides the [redacted] Health Unit and us, refused to enforce this legislation. So, it became the responsibility [redacted] Bylaw's department and, other bylaw departments to enforce the Emergency Management Civil Protection Act, which later became the Reopening Ontario Act. [Participant #5].

This quote highlights the initial confusion and lack of clarity surrounding enforcement responsibilities. Such uncertainty contributed to role ambiguity, where employees feel unclear about their job responsibilities and expectations. The officer suggests that the onus of enforcing the emergency legislation was shifted onto the bylaw department and public health units.

This shift increased the job demands on bylaw officers, who were now tasked with additional responsibilities. To lessen stress and burnout, the JD-R model highlights the requirements of striking a balance between high job demands and adequate job resources. In this case, the execution of emergency legislation resulted in a large increase in the job demands among bylaw officers. In 2021, Brampton Enforcement and Bylaw Services reported 72,399 calls for service, averaging 198 calls representing a 22% increase from 2020. Over the past five years, the workload grew 88.5% except for a 3% decline in 2020 due to COVID-19 redeployment ("Year End Report 2020 COVID-19", 2020). Due to the lack of clear guidelines and the refusal of other law enforcement agencies to take on these responsibilities, bylaw officers faced challenges with limited resources and support. Stogner, Miller and McLean (2020) highlight the unclear COVID-19 regulations, and the lack of coordinated response efforts significantly increased the stress and challenges for law enforcement officers including MLEOs. Due to the ambiguity and frequent changes in legislation, there was confusion over the tasks and expectations of enforcement, making it harder for them to carry out their jobs efficiently. Local authorities and MLEOs were expected to assist in the enforcement of provincial public health

orders, specifically requiring bylaw officers to monitor closed facilities as well as provide

warnings, information, and advice to businesses and the public (Harding, 2020).

Despite these responsibilities, uncertainty persisted throughout the pandemic. As

explained by Participant #4 the ambiguity continued throughout the evolving legislative changes:

"I recall when the Reopening Act was put in place, we felt blind, we felt lost. There wasn't

anyone stepping in and saying OK this is what is happening at that time…." These officers'

experience suggests that the implementation of the ROA resulted in feelings of confusion and

uncertainty regarding their roles and responsibilities under their new mandate. Ambiguity and/or

lack of information can lead employees to experience uncertainty, confusion or doubt regarding

what changes mean for them (Cullen et al., 2014). Cullen and his colleagues have found

empirical evidence indicating that uncertainty is negatively associated with organizational

attitudes, including job satisfaction, commitment, and trust in the organization.

Rapid implementation of the EMCPA coupled with efforts to mitigate escalating hospital

admissions due to COVID-19 propelled bylaw officers into enforcing both the EMCPA and the

Reopening of Ontario Act (ROA). As Participant #8 explained:

> I remember in the office, we would be watching Justin Trudeau's announcements,
> so we were finding out what was happening at the same time as the rest of the
> world. So, we would have to just run and hit the ground like jump, jump, jump,
> jump, jump, figure it out, read the new regulations. We never had the heads up. So,
> it's like we were in the boat with everybody else. [Participant #8]

As discussed above, the COVID-19 pandemic brought heightened ambiguity and uncertainty

(Combe & Carrington, 2015) brought on by the pandemic, where bylaw officers must adapt to

the evolving regulations without prior notice or clear guidance. Bylaw officers faced a sudden

and dramatic shift in job demands overnight, accompanied by numerous questions concerning

the new legislation. Participant 8's quote illustrated the urgency and ongoing nature of bylaw

work, highlighting the need for resilience and mental agility in interpreting new regulations. The statement, *"we were in the same boat with everybody else"* suggests that bylaw officers did not receive any preferential treatment or additional support despite their essential role in enforcement. This immediate response and adaption to evolving regulations placed extraordinarily high job demands on officers.

Indeed, bylaw officers expressed frustration and concerns over having to quickly learn new regulations and mandates, interpret the legislation, and enforce it within the given time frame, all while staying up to date with constantly changing rules and regulations affecting both the public and businesses. As the following officer highlights,

> I'm mostly just really frustrated because, once again, we received very little communication in terms of how the legislation was supposed to be interpreted or how we were supposed to apply that legislation. You know, it was more or less, 'hey, this is going to come out every few days, and you guys have to read it and enforce it.' So, mostly just frustrated. And like you mentioned earlier, the interpretation part was most difficult aspect. I am pretty good at reading and interpreting legislation, but I'm also not a lawyer. We do employ lawyers here … but they would always tell us that they were too busy to interpret the legislation. [Participant #5]

The quote delves into the frustration experienced by bylaw officers during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly stemming from the lack of clear communication and guidance in interpreting and enforcing new legislation. Participant #5 highlights not only the cognitive strain and the challenges involved in understanding complex legislation but also the lack of resources needed to interpret and apply them. Although, bylaw officers were expected to enforce these legislations, the lack of organizational resources, including both legal support and transparent communication from management, further highlights the inadequate infrastructure in place to effectively support bylaw officers.

According to the JD-R model, cognitive demands are a type of job demand that requires mental effort that can lead to strain if not effectively managed (Meyer & Hunefeld, 2018). The constantly changing legislation during the pandemic likely heightened the cognitive demands placed on the bylaw officers, contributing to their frustration and potentially leading to stress and burnout. The quote from Participant #5 above emphasizes the importance of job resources, such as clear communication and access to legal expertise, in mitigating the negative effects of job demands. The dissatisfaction and sense of being overwhelmed by the demands of their job may have been exacerbated by the lack of adequate direction and support from legal experts within the city's administration. Research on organizational communication during crises has consistently shown that unclear communication contributes to employee dissatisfaction. Heath and O'Hair (2009) argue that effective crisis communication is characterized by timely, accurate, and consistent messaging to stakeholders. However, during rapidly evolving situations, such as the pandemic, organizations often struggle to provide clear and consistent guidance to frontline workers (Coombs, 2007). As such, the discontent and uncertainty expressed by Participant #5, above, may be the result of poor communication and information sharing.

Bylaw officers across the study expressed the struggle with interpreting legislation. The officers' concerns were indicative of larger problems concerning organizational communication, interpreting the law, and allocating resources in times of crisis. As a result, MLEOs were placed into a precarious position where each municipality collaborated closely with their coworkers, supervisors, and managers to interpret the law and develop a unified understanding of what constituted COVID-19 enforcement in the hopes that the provincial mandate would be carried out.

In addition, bylaw officers emphasized the significant shift in priorities and workload, driven by a sudden influx of complaints and demands associated with COVID-19 regulations. Bylaw officers faced many disruptions in their workflow, facing challenges such as: high numbers of complaints, insufficient staff to respond to each call, and a lack of resources to address the issues. One participant described:

> It was a complete 180, where all our bylaw files were essentially put on hold. I mean, I think in our downtime we still did some of the inspection for our general bylaw stuff. For the most part, it was put on hold because, at the beginning of COVID-19, we were getting a lot of complaints dispatched to us from the police. It is just impossible to plan your day by scheduling your bylaw inspections when you might get a call at any moment, and suddenly you have to run. [Participant #4]

MLEOs were deployed by police to enforce COVID-19 legislation, which included monitoring adherence to safety protocols. Rapid implementation of the EMCPA coupled with efforts to mitigate escalating hospital admissions propelled bylaw officers into enforcing both the EMCPA and subsequently, the ROA. Participate #4, above, shows a marked increase in the pressures placed on bylaw officer roles. Officers were unable to organize and schedule their inspections due to the sudden surge of complaints being re-directed by police services which also increased their workload. The job demands of bylaw officers had escalated due to the increased workload and the unpredictable nature of their assignments. Conversely, the quote indicates a depletion of essential job resources, such as time and organizational support, which are crucial for effectively managing these heightened demands.

Although, bylaw officers spoke to the high levels of stress associated with their roles, balancing personal safety and navigating through changing regulations, they managed these stressors through various coping mechanisms. This demonstrates that despite the difficulties brought on by the pandemic, bylaw officers exhibited a degree of resilience and adaptability.

However, the evolving and often unpredictable nature of their work continued to present unique

challenges, as expressed by another officer:

> But a lot of my other coworkers were pretty stressed out about it because the group
> sizes changed several times. It was like 'can't have a gathering of 50' then 'can't have a
> gathering of 100' then it became 25-20 and then five and then nobody. So, you know
> we were often going up to large groups of people at parties, in parks, and dealing with
> the public on a mass scale, which we do not normally do. Normally we would just go to
> individual properties and deal with maybe a handful of people. But in this instance, we
> were doing crowd-control-type work. So, it is just very different from our regular job, to
> be honest. [Participant# 5]

Throughout the pandemic, bylaw officers faced a variety of stressful situations due to the unique

demands placed on them. The quote above illustrates the resilience and adaptability shown by

the bylaw officer during the pandemic. The participant described how their colleagues were

significantly stressed due to the constantly changing regulations regarding group sizes. These

changes required by law officers to manage large gatherings such as parties and public events,

which was a significant shift from the usual duties of dealing with smaller groups or individual

properties. The transition to crowd control and large-scale public interaction represents a major

adjustment from their regular responsibilities, highlighting the challenging and dynamic nature

of their work during the pandemic.

COVID-19 introduced further challenges for bylaw officers, as they were constrained by

limited discretionary powers, restricting their ability to adapt enforcement actions to specific

circumstances, and resulting in rigid approaches to enforcement. One participant shared,

> There was zero tolerance - our discretion was removed. We typically have the ability
> to use our discretion on a normal basis. You know, if we get a call for a loud party,
> we can go assess if the people are willing to have some guests leave or turn the music
> down, and we don't have to charge you. We can work that out with them, and again,
> that's our officer discretion. But during that time, we had no discretion; it was black
> and white. If it was supposed to be five people in the house and you saw seven, you
> were laying the charge. The only discretion you had at that time was how many
> charges you were giving out. So, you could either issue one ticket to the tented or
> give everyone a ticket, which was a lot of work. [Participant #8]

The quote above highlights a reduction in job resources, particularly officer discretion. Bylaw officers typically have the autonomy to make decisions in their enforcement duties, such as issuing warnings or resolving situations informally. However, during the pandemic, the loss of discretion limited their autonomy and flexibility in decision-making.

The quotes offer an insight into the challenges faced by bylaw officers during the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically the challenges they faced interpreting and enforcing rapid changes in legislation. Bylaw officers expressed frustration over the lack of clear communication and guidance from provincial authorities, who issued regulatory changes without providing clear enforcement guidelines. As Participant #5 noted, "*this frustration was worsened by the absence of readily available legal expertise at both the municipal and provincial levels to help interpret the legislation.*" Similarly, Participant #3 emphasized the challenges:

> "We didn't have any direct communication with the government of Ontario for us to be able to understand the legislation and interpret it and to know the changes, I'd see the legislation in the media, then wait for it to be officially published. I had to interpret it myself, share it with my team and then enforce it". [Participant #3]

The ambiguity and evolving circumstances likely increased stress levels among bylaw officers, coupled with limited discretion creating a significant impact on their job satisfaction, well-being, and job performance. This frustration was worsened by the absence of readily available legal expertise at both the municipal and provincial levels to help interpret the legislation. Without clear directives and support, MLEOs felt ill-equipped to navigate the pandemic effectively. This lack of clarity and support led to communication issues, shifted priorities, and a loss of autonomy in decision-making, ultimately hindering their job performance.

COVID-19 Anxiety and Job Demands

The section examines the increased job demands faced by bylaw officers during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on the relationship between enforcement responsibilities and the fear of the virus. Upholding evolving public regulations while grappling with personal concerns about infection created challenges for many bylaw officers. This section explores how bylaw officers managed these expectations and demands, often relying on personal and social resources to cope with stress. The experiences varied with some officers finding the pandemic stressors overwhelming, while others perceived the impact on their job demands as relatively moderate. This section also considers how bylaw officers handled the unpredictable and evolving nature of their work during the pandemic; hence, showcasing their adaptability and resilience.

As bylaw officers navigated through the pandemic, they were faced with unique challenges and uncertainties, including concerns about enforcement duties, adapting to rapidly changing regulations, as well as contracting the deadly virus. The participant below highlights the experiences and perceptions of stress among bylaw officers during the COVID-19 pandemic:

> Early on, for about a year and a half, it was quite stressful. Dealing with enforcement responsibilities while also worrying about health concerns - like the fear of bringing COVID into my household, affecting my significant other, or my family- added to the stress. While my significant other was working from home and taking precautions, I would have been isolated for that year and a half if not for their support. Overall, the stress level was high due to the daily COVID-related challenges. [Participant # 2]

Bylaw officers experienced an unparalleled struggle during the initial phases of the pandemic due to the emotional toll it took on them. Many had to juggle dual responsibilities, enforcing regulations, and managing anxieties about their personal and familial health. The fear of exposing their families – particularly officers with newborns or vulnerable family members (elderly or immunocompromised) combined with the need for isolation, contributed to prolonged

periods of stress and fear. The enforcement duties combined with health concerns contribute to heightened job demands for bylaw officers. The quote above underscores the importance of personal resources, such as social support from a significant other, in mitigating job demands and promoting mental well-being. This observation aligns with Baker and Demerouti's (2007) research, which highlights the critical role personal resources play in reducing the negative impacts of job demands on employee well-being. Their study demonstrates that personal resources help buffer stress and can also enhance overall job performance and satisfaction, further emphasizing their value in demanding work environments. According to the Theory of Transactional Stress, people will evaluate stresses according to how well they think they can handle the circumstances (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). For Participant #2, above, the presence of their social support system appears to have reduced their stress level and made their situation more manageable.

When reflecting on their experiences working during the pandemic, bylaw officers highlighted the complexities of their work, the impact their work had on their mental health, and the challenges they experienced in trying to manage organizational expectations and provincial mandates. For example, an officer described anxiety and fear about contracting COVID-19, particularly when dealing with large groups, as well as the uncertainty of the virus's side effects. As Participant #1 explained:

> They pointed me to the right resources and apps to recognize when I was anxious. I was afraid of getting COVID, and when my fears intensified, I became paranoid. I would start taking time off, thinking I had COVID even though the test showed I didn't. I felt that I couldn't function and couldn't go to work. [Participant #1]

For this participant, working through the pandemic was extremely difficult because of the anxiety and fear they felt around contracting COVID-19 while performing their duties, which adversely affected their mental health. Participant #1 described a fear of infection that resulted in

heightened paranoia and anxiety, ultimately impairing their work performance and effectiveness.

This constant state of stress not only undermined their mental well-being but also hindered their

ability to carry out their responsibilities efficiently. A study conducted by Knowles and Olatunji

(2020) highlights that feelings of anxiety and an increased number of safety behaviours in

response to COVID-19 can be seen as an adaptive reaction to the threat. The fear of

contamination is also likely a prospective predictor of distress associated with the pandemic

(Knowles & Olatunji, 2021). The officers' feelings of anxiety are indicative of the pandemic's

broader effects on their mental well-being, further contributing to heightened stress and anxiety

levels.

      While many officers discussed the challenges of working through a pandemic, one bylaw

officer felt they navigated the onset of the pandemic better than others, as affirmed by the

officer:

> Um, it wasn't that bad. I mean, I don't think it was any different than the normal
> stress levels from our job. Yeah, I guess there was the added stresses because I had a
> young kid at home too at the time and you're like, you don't want to bring this virus
> home to your house, and your kind of stressed about that. But the job itself, I mean,
> there were changes to it. You know, we had to get PPE, we had to do this, we had to
> do that. But I wouldn't say it was overly stressful. I don't know. I'm probably more
> stressed out in my job right now than I was in 2020 I would say. [Participant# 4]

The officer indicates that their stress levels during the COVID-19 pandemic did not differ

significantly from their usual job stress. They noted that while there were additional stressors

related to home life, such as bringing the virus home to their family, the job duties themselves

were not perceived as overly stressful. This perspective represents a specific job demand, the

preventative measures that bylaw officers had to adopt throughout their duties. COVID-19-

related job demands were perceived as relatively manageable. Research by Pappa et al. (2020) on

the psychological impact of COVID-19 on healthcare workers, involving 33,062 participants

across 12 cross-sectional studies, provided early evidence of significant levels of anxiety, depression, and insomnia experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. This finding is consistent with the JD-R model that indicates job demands require continuous effort and may have physiological and psychological consequences (Demerouti et al., 2001). The officer mentioned changes in their work, including the implementation of new procedures and the purchase of PPE, as tools to mitigate the pandemic's impact on the workplace. Morgantini et al. (2020) also emphasized that having appropriate access to PPE helps healthcare professionals cope with stress and anxiety during the pandemic. Their research is consistent with the JD-R model's claim that job resources can alleviate the detrimental effects of job demands on well-being (Demerouti et al., 2001). The officer concluded that, despite the challenges and additional strains posed by COVID-19, their overall job stress did not significantly increase. This reflects a nuanced perspective - while the officer experienced concerns about exposing their child to the virus, the officer did not find their job duties to be excessively stressful. This contrasts with the broader perceptions of increased stress among other bylaw officers, suggesting that individual experiences and coping mechanisms significantly influence how job stress is perceived and managed.

Another officer had a similar experience, highlighting the personal fears and subsequent adjustments to the pandemic.

> Well, at the beginning of that pandemic, I was scared, and I wasn't sure if I still wanted to do it [my job]. My mom was also contributing to my fear because she was concerned about me getting the virus due to my exposure. Those negative thoughts got to me. But then I just decided I was going to work through it and just do my job. So, at the time, I was scared. But now I think I've just gotten used to it. [Participant #7]

Here, the bylaw officer reflects on the initial apprehension and fear of the pandemic. Despite this hesitation, the officer ultimately decided to continue with their duties and, over time adapted to the challenges. As the bylaw officers learned to adapt and educate themselves, they began to acclimatize to their circumstances. The adaptations align with the appraisal process described in the Transactional Stress Model. The mother's worries, combined with personal anxieties, contributed to the officer's fear and uncertainty. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), individuals evaluate stressors based on their ability to handle the demands. For this bylaw officer, the potential for infection combined with their family's worries deemed the situation to be dangerous. However, the officer's decision to "*work through it*" reflects an active coping strategy, while support from their mother represents a form of social support. Hobfoll (2002) emphasizes the importance of social support in reducing the negative effects of stress during a crisis. The officer's experience of initial fear followed by adjudgment aligns with themes of adaptability and resilience in the face of adversity.

Organizational Shifts in Bylaw Enforcement During the Pandemic

Given the organizational shifts within bylaw enforcement during the COVID-19 pandemic, this study focused on how these changes affected bylaw officers' duties, responsibilities, and interactions with the public. As the pandemic unfolded, bylaw officers observed changes to their organizations, including new mandates and increased enforcement duties. This section discusses the emotional toll these changes had on bylaw officers, particularly as they navigated higher job demands in a rapidly changing environment. It explores the impact of limited resources and training on a bylaw officer's ability to manage these new challenges, highlighting the need for better organizational support. The section concludes by addressing how the sudden changes in work schedules and priorities disrupted some bylaw officers' work-life

balance, increased stress, and contributed to job ambiguity, providing a deeper understanding of

the factors influencing their well-being and job performance.

During the pandemic, officers observed significant modifications to organizational

administration, mandate, and overall urgency. These shifts were linked to an increase in

encounters for MLEOs often marked by heightened tensions and hostility from the public.

Participant #2 explains:

> You know people and the whole atmosphere were not very pro-enforcement at that
> time. It was a constant battle, even just going up to talk to people, they were already
> on edge like people's mental health and some people lost their jobs. So, you're out
> here wearing a uniform and you're a city employee and you're going up to people in
> the park who may have just been laid off, or you know struggling financially like a
> lot of people were on edge. [Participant #2]

As individuals faced significant restrictions on their usual activities and were isolated from their

friends and family, many people found it difficult to adapt to the new realities. The psychological

effects of the pandemic on mental health and well-being, as well as its ramifications for

interactions between law enforcement and the public, are evident in this statement. Research by

Brooks et al. (2020) illustrates the psychological effects of the pandemic, showing higher-than-

average levels of stress, anxiety, and depression among the public. The economic repercussions,

such as job losses and financial instability, further exacerbated psychological distress,

contributing to heightened tensions and conflicts during interactions with law enforcement.

Individuals facing financial hardships or unemployment might view enforcement actions as

unfair, intensifying their stress. Furthermore, the participant illustrated the need for empathy and

understanding when interacting with the public, especially during high-stress situations. To

establish clear expectations and achieve mutually beneficial negotiating positions, proficiency in

communication is considered crucial in law enforcement to obtain voluntary cooperation and

reduce the possibility of further escalating the situation (Bennell et al., 2022). Indeed,

communication skills are underscored in Participant #8's statement, "*To be honest with you, we had to be very creative with our vocabulary. We had to be very good at talking our way out of situations. We had to be quick on our feet and quick on de-escalation*". Understanding the public's pressures and responding with empathy can foster more positive interactions with communities. Without such empathy, officers risk becoming emotionally depleted, which contributes to job stain.

Adaptive coping mechanisms are essential for managing job demands and maintaining psychological well-being, as outlined by the JD-R model. One of the challenges faced by bylaw officers during the COVID-19 pandemic was the limited access to training and resources for handling situations involving individuals experiencing mental health crises. Job resources, such as training and support, play a crucial role in reducing the impact of job demands on employee stress and burnout (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). Participant #7 discussed the need for further training due to expanded roles during the pandemic:

> Like I said, [redacted]. I was able to get us. By us, I mean myself and the chief building official, some de-escalation training. That de-escalation training does talk about people going through a mental health crisis. That was more [training] post-pandemic. During the pandemic, we didn't get any of that training. [Participant #7]

The absence of de-escalation training during the pandemic indicated a lack of resources, which likely contributed to increased stress and strain among bylaw officers. This discrepancy between job demands and available coping resources aligns with the TSM (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Lack of training on de-escalation tactics during the pandemic likely contributed to increased tensions and conflicts among bylaw officers. Similarly, stress occurs when an individual perceives that environmental demands (stressors) exceed their coping resources (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Participant #8 expressed concerns about the lack of de-escalation training, which is crucial for resolving tense situations, particularly when people had demonstrated against

pandemic regulations. Many bylaw officers had to strategize and adjust based on the skills they already possessed. Research by Gillet et al. (2013) shows that police officers' work engagement increases with organizational support. Many people understand the value of human interactions and being able to speak with the public and simply listen to their concerns. Offering relevant training, such as de-escalation techniques and mental health crisis management, can enhance employee resilience and well-being, ultimately reducing stress and improving job stratification. As illustrated above, Participants #7 and #8 expressed the need for more comprehensive training programs, particularly in areas of de-escalation techniques and provincial legislation to equip officers with the necessary skills to navigate diverse enforcement situations safely and effectively.

In addition to training needs, bylaw officers also faced significant changes in their work schedules and job priorities, reflecting broader organizational shifts during the pandemic. These included sudden changes to shift schedules, which were often implemented abruptly, Participant #5 explains:

> It wasn't like some formal thing that they brought in. So, what happened was they're like, OK, you guys still have your regular job, but that's not a priority anymore. And now you're going to enforce this legislation because nobody else is. And so, they ended up changing our shifts. So, we went from working Monday to Friday 9:00 to 5:00 to 10-hour shift work, and that just changed on a dime. They were like, you guys are enforcing this now. This is going to become the priority of your job, and your shifts are changing [Participant #5].

Abrupt changes in work schedules and priorities, such as those highlighted by Participant #5, can disrupt work-life balance and contribute to role ambiguity and stress (Kunda et al., 2022). The participant described how sudden shifts in responsibilities and scheduling, including adapting to new response protocols and working unconventional hours, impacted their ability to manage work and personal life. The challenges reflect broader issues faced by many bylaw officers

during the pandemic, where sudden changes in job demands and priorities led to increased uncertainty and stress. Unanticipated changes can cause confusion and dissatisfaction for individual bylaw officers and the broader bylaw enforcement community.

These changes present additional job demands, requiring officers to adjust their practices to ensure compliance with public health guidelines. The increased workload, along with the resumption of traditional duties, resulted in work overload and role conflict, leading to additional strains. Insights into the experiences of bylaw officers during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the complexities of their work environment, the impact on their mental well-being, and the challenges of navigating organizational expectations and regulations. This analysis enhances the understanding of the factors influencing frontline workers and holds significant implications for organizational practices.

<u>Chapter Five: Job Resources during COVID-19</u>

The data revealed that the impact of COVID-19 on bylaw job demands and resources

raised concerns regarding resource allocation, training, and workload management. Participants

reported a shortage of essential safety equipment, such as vests, leaving some officers feeling

that their safety was jeopardized while on duty:

> So everyday duties suddenly changed. We were coming in a lot, and then we were
> not allowed to go into the office. We did not have the resources such as laptops. [The
> municipality] suddenly had to scatter to get laptops. We had to come in every day.
> Sometimes we were allowed a couple of minutes in the office, to grab what we
> needed, PPE and sanitizer wipes. We would spend probably half an hour at the
> beginning of our shift sanitizing a vehicle. We did not have enough vehicles, so we
> were trying not to share the vehicles. They did not say, 'hey, people cannot ride
> together'. And because of possible exposure, now you're sanitizing your workstation
> that you're in for 12 hours. [Participant #1]

This participant highlighted the sudden demand for resources such as laptops, which became

essential for remote work, and the requirement for each officer to have their own to comply with

social distancing regulations. Additionally, the lack of vehicles and personal safety equipment

compromised the officers' productivity and safety while on the job. The sudden and substantial

changes in work conditions, such as accessing necessary resources and adapting to new safety

protocols (e.g., sanitizing workstations and vehicles), potentially increased workload stress.

Research emphasizes the importance of balancing job demands and job resources to mitigate

burnout and promote job engagement (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007; Xanthopoulou et al., 2007).

According to the model, job engagement occurs when the workplace resources are sufficient;

however, low resources coupled with high demands can lead to emotional exhaustion and

burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Bylaw officers may experience increased workload stress

due to abrupt changes in work conditions coupled with a lack of municipal support, representing

heightened job demands. Job resources must align with job demands for employee engagement

to develop (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) proposed that stress occurs when an individual perceives the environmental demands (stressors) to exceed available coping resources. This concept emphasizes the importance of organizational support and resources in mitigating the effects of job demands on employee well-being. Ultimately, bylaw officers have had to adapt and alter working environments throughout the pandemic, highlighting the need to create and foster a balance between job demands and job resources to promote employee well-being and commitment.

Bylaw officers were able to adapt to the situation by gaining access to job resources to help facilitate goal achievement, reduce job demands, and contribute to employee engagement. Participant #5 explained:

> So, in terms of PPE, that is the one thing they did a great job of. They made sure to always supply us with the latest and greatest type of masks. When they wanted face shields and safety glasses, they would also supply us with all that. Like as soon as they possibly could. Same with hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, basically all PPE stuff. [Participant #5]

This quote centres on the importance of providing PPE to frontline workers during the COVID-19 outbreak as a vital support strategy. Ensuring the health and safety of workers at risk of infection during an outbreak requires the provision of appropriate PPE. The officer noted the organizational efforts to provide PPE were excellent. The proactive approach to safeguarding employee health demonstrated the organization's commitment to ensuring the well-being of its employees amidst the pandemic. Song et al. (2021) highlight the role of PPE in reducing the risk of infection among healthcare workers, emphasizing the importance of adequate supply and use of masks, face shields, and other protective gear. Aligning with the principles of the JD-R model, job resources such as PPE are essential for mitigating the negative effects of job demands on employee well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Organizations play a significant role in

fostering a supportive work environment that encourages employee resilience and adaptation to challenging circumstances by providing access to safety equipment. (Brown et al., 2014; Rangachari & Woods, 2020). The timely supply of PPE reflects a recognition of the evolving nature of the pandemic and the necessity to adapt quickly to changing circumstances. Participant #5 spoke of the commendable efforts of their municipality in supplying adequate PPE to its MLEOs. The support from the organization is indicative of the proactive stance towards safeguarding the health and safety of its workforce, thereby enhancing job resources, and mitigating potential job demands.

Participant #4 also expressed appreciation for the organizational support, which included the provisions of personal protective equipment (PPE) such as gloves, masks, safety visors, and other essential tools like bullhorns, ensuring both safety and operational efficiency in work settings:

> Um. I mean, full PPE was provided. We were provided: gloves, masks, and safety visors covering our eyes at one point. We are provided big bullhorns to talk to people from far away if we had to, you know, in like a large group setting, that kind of thing. It was anything we wanted; it was approved. We were provided vaccines for ourselves, you know, on work time. We could go and get vaccinated and not have to take time off work to do it. [Participant #4]

Participant #4's quote demonstrates organizational support by reflecting on the organization's facilitation of easy access to vaccines during working hours and the supply of PPE. This not only highlights the improvements in job resources and the potential reduction in job demands, but also demonstrates the organization's proactive approach to ensuring workplace health and safety. By providing a safe working environment that promotes productivity and well-being, the organization ensures employees have appropriate safety gear and efficient communication equipment in the field. The quote also highlights the importance of the rollout of PPE resources in response to the evolving understanding of COVID-19 transmission dynamics. "*Cleaning*

blitzes of the office where people would come in hazmat suits and just spray down the office"

[Participant #3] is an example of an organization's commitment to maintaining a safe working

environment for its employees, further contributing to their officer's well-being and job

commitment. As a result, access to specific job resources not only enhances bylaw officers'

ability to perform their duties safely but also fosters a strong sense of organizational support

amidst a pandemic (Van Der Ross, Olkers & Schaap, 2022), thereby mitigating stress and anxiety

related to high-risks job duties.

Considering the importance of organizational support during the pandemic, some bylaw

officers experienced disparities in their work arrangements across different sectors within the

municipality. For example, Participant #3 explains:

> Well, during COVID, let's say the vast majority of the municipality was "work-from-home". There were very few divisions that were coming into work, and we had to continue to come into work, which was difficult. Not only do we have to come into work, but we are also now getting exposed to COVID. While everybody else has the freedom to stay away, we're being effectively told to go to these gatherings that are at high-risk exposure. And so that has rubbed people the wrong way. And there's issues with sick time because people that are working from home don't call in sick. Or the perception is that they don't call in sick. They just stay home anyway, and we're the ones showing up to work..... And you know, officers are frustrated. We're the ones that got put through the ringer during COVID. Everybody was home on their couch. And our reward is that when we call in sick, we're penalized for not showing up to work. [Participant #3]

This officer's experience emphasized the disparities in work arrangements between many city

employees who worked from home while bylaw officers were required to continue working in

person, exposing them to potential COVID-19 risks. The differences in work arrangements led to

frustration and a sense of disparity among bylaw officers. The experiences highlight the

challenges and risks faced by bylaw officers required to navigate protentional dangerous

situations while performing their duties. Some MLEOs expressed frustration and inequality

within their workforce regarding sick leave, further underscoring the need for equitable support

and acknowledgment of the challenges faced by frontline workers.

Coping Mechanisms Utilized by Bylaw Officers

This section explores the challenges bylaw officers encountered in managing job

resources during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research draws attention to the most important

problems with workload management, training, and resource allocation. I begin by examining

the challenges officers encountered due to the abrupt increase in job demands and the availability

of essential resources, such as PPE and technological tools required for remote work. The section

then discusses the impact these limitations had on the officers' ability to perform their tasks

safely and effectively, highlighting the need for organizational support to mitigate the adverse

effects of these challenges. Reflecting on these experiences, I aim to provide a comprehensive

understanding of the organization and operational changes that influenced the work environment.

It also addresses the coping mechanisms bylaw officers employed during the COVID-19

pandemic, specifically in seeking support from both professional and personal networks. Officers

relied on colleagues and supervisors for emotional support within their municipalities and leaned

on family relationships to build resilience in managing job-related stressors. Despite the

availability of Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) within their agencies, officers exhibited

skepticism regarding the confidentiality and effectiveness of the internal support systems.

Consequently, some individuals opted for external therapeutic interventions.

Additionally, bylaw officers adopted diverse personal coping strategies, such as engaging

in physical activities (e.g., gym, outdoor pursuits), seeking comfort in familial bonds,

participating in recreational pursuits like riding, and photography or finding contentment in the

companionship of their pets. Notably, some bylaw officers contravened organizational order by

gathering with colleagues to promote and foster a positive social relationship for emotional

release and understanding among colleagues facing similar challenges:

> I mean for me I mostly just spent time with my girlfriend and my family, talking about the situation that was going on. But like, you know, these days I would just spend time with my friends, but back then you could not do that. [Participant #5]

The statement above conveys the significance of seeking support from personal relationships

during times of stress, indicating a reliance on social support as a coping mechanism. Social

support systems are vital to help bylaw officers navigate the hurdles posed by the pandemic.

Segovia (2024) showed that a law enforcement officer's capacity to manage occupational

stressors and maintain overall well-being was positively related to familial support and

communication. Family members are essential in assisting officers with emotional support and

they play a pivotal role in helping them decompress and recharge (see also Newell et al., 2021).

Another study determined that participation in family leisure activities promotes a sense of

normalcy and connectedness which further contributes to job satisfaction and fulfilment

(Fernandez-Ruiz et al., 2020). This is important because law enforcement jobs are highly

demanding, and social support systems become a critical resource for navigating these

challenging circumstances. Understanding the resources that are crucial and effective for bylaw

officers is essential to ensuring their well-being.

Alternatively, Participant #3 described a different experience during the COVID-19

pandemic where they were exploring their coping mechanisms.

> Um, personally. Well, professionally, not really. I started seeing a therapist. I'm sure a lot of people did because people were in similar situations, but it was hard. …. I think connecting with people during that time was probably the best coping mechanism. So, I remember dealing with parties and we would go and break up a kid's birthday party or something like that. And people would always be upset when you would show up at their house. I would say the line "The only person that wants me here less than your, is me". I just wanted to make it clear to everybody that I don't want to do this, but I'm doing it because it's my job. So, I think my coping

> mechanism or what I've kind of taken from COVID is to properly connect with
> people. [Participant #3]

This officer mentions seeking therapy as a personal coping mechanism during the pandemic.

They suggest that recognizing the need for professional support outside of the workplace reflects

proactive coping behaviours in response to heightened job demands. By reaching out to a

therapist, the officer demonstrated self-awareness of the psychological strain during the

pandemic and took the initiative to seek resources to address the stress they were experiencing.

This aligns with Bakker and Demerouti's (2017) explanation that certain aspects of an

individual's job can require and sustain effort, often leading to psychological and physiological

costs. The use of coping strategies is thus considered adaptive rather than maladaptive.

In addition, the officer highlights the value of connecting with their social circle during

the pandemic. Social support systems align with the concept of job resources, which becomes

essential to coping with job demands. Tadic et al. (2015) suggest daily social support can help

employees cope and manage the demands of their jobs by providing them with support and

protection from the consequences of stress. This quote highlights how social resources foster

resilience and assist individuals in coping with stressors. Furthermore, many bylaw officers

adopted personal coping mechanisms to manage their job demands. As another officer explains:

> So, one of the coping mechanisms was actually just before the pandemic I was
> riding, I began riding a motorcycle. So, a lot of times after work, I'd come home and
> I'm like, you know what? I was telling my wife at the time that I needed to clear my
> head. I just need 'me time', put on headphones and get on my bike. And I would ride
> a lot of times. I will take my motorcycle to and from work and I will take the scenic
> routes. I would take, instead of getting home in half an hour, I would take an hour
> and a half. I would go for a long motorcycle ride. [Participant #1]

The bylaw officer described riding a motorcycle as a therapeutic activity that allowed them to

decompress after work. This suggests that motorcycle riding served as a relaxation strategy,

helping the officer unwind from the job-related stressors. Research suggests that leisure activities

provide a positive focus, helping individuals feel rejuvenated and gain a sense of renewal

(Iwasaki et al., 2005). Leisure activities serve as an effective coping mechanism for managing

stress and promoting emotional well-being. The bylaw officer elaborates on how they would put

on their headphones and take a scenic route while riding their motorcycle, suggesting a

deliberate effort to detach from work-related stressors. This approach aligns with the importance

of mentally disengaging from work during off-hours and engaging in hobbies. Such activities

"provide[s] opportunities for personal fulfillment, skills acquisition and emotionally rewarding

'mastery' experiences…these activities arguably stimulate the pleasure/reward brain center"

(Demerouti et al., 2009; Winwood et al., 2007). Similarly, Participant #8 offered their own

coping strategies:

> I used my own personal escapes, hiking and photography. Those are where I can just
> escape, let my mind go and then kind of get centered again. I've been very lucky
> where I'm able to walk out the door and take my uniform off, I'm off work. So, like
> through those hard days I utilize, 'OK, I need to go for hike' or 'I need to take my
> camera' and just get lost in my little space and find peace in nature and that helped
> me a lot [Participant #8]

In addition to seeking therapy outside of the agency, Participant #8 explains various personal

coping mechanisms, such as engaging in physical activities (i.e., gym, riding) spending time

outdoors, and seeking comfort from family and pets. These strategies represent adaptive coping

mechanisms aimed at reducing stress and maintaining psychological well-being, consistent with

the Transactional Stress Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Participant #6 recounted their emotional response during a challenging period,

emphasizing feelings of isolation and fear amid significant changes in their job role:

> I cried a lot. I did. I cried a ton. Because it was the unknown, right? The shock, like
> my whole job felt different… I would say I felt isolated. I felt fear obvious fear.
> And I think the way I coped was I studied the ROA. I knew it word for word. I just
> immersed myself in the ROA itself, even while it was changing. So, I guess I had to
> keep myself educated and up to date, so I felt in control when I felt out of control.

> The fact that I wasn't asking anyone else questions, people were coming to me, including [redacted] Police, including the university, including, you know, our team. I felt like I read everything word for word. [Participant #6]

Acknowledging emotional distress and allowing oneself to express vulnerability is an important aspect of coping with stress, indicating a willingness to confront and process the emotions one is experiencing. The quote above captures the emotional and mental challenges that the bylaw officer had in the face of COVID-19. The pandemic created a context of uncertainty regarding their line of work. The officer described experiencing intense emotional distress characterized by frequent crying. Despite these challenges, the officer demonstrated resilience by immersing themselves in studying new legislation, thus maintaining a sense of control and adapting to the shifting demands of their role. According to the JD-R model, the uncertainties and challenges brought on by the pandemic can be classified as a job demand. When these job demands are high and resources are limited, they have the potential to induce emotional distress and contribute to burnout. However, the bylaw officer's engagement with the ROA serves as a job resource that allows one to effectively cope with and manage expectations. This cognitive strategy provides a sense of control amidst uncertainty, facilitates adaptations to the changing nature of the work, and reinforces the officer's confidence in their ability to manage the challenges posed by the pandemic and fulfill their job responsibilities effectively.

According to Xanthopoulou et al. (2007), job resources, such as autonomy and social support, can mitigate the negative impact of the job. Personal resources are the perceptions of one's capacity to influence and exert control over their environment. These resources aid in "achieving goals, protecting oneself from threats and associated physiological and psychological cost and stimulating personal growth" (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007, p.236). The officer used the ROA and their role as an information resource for other peers to go to for guidance. This

exemplifies the role of job resources and the importance of continuously staying engaged and informed in high-stress situations. In addition, the bylaw officer shifted from feeling out of control to being in control through their proactive efforts. Scholars Schwarzer and Knoll (2007), explain the value of social support in the face of stress. According to the Transactional Stress Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), social support is a resource component that affects how stressful experiences are cognitively assessed. This is a result of cognitive appraisal and coping becomes much easier when there is greater help. As a result, resources affect coping and typically lead to a variety of adaptive outcomes.

Some bylaw officers sought out internal organizational support as a coping strategy. However, their experiences highlight the limitations of internal supervisory support and underscore the importance of personal connections. Participant #5 stated:

> Yeah, it was mostly about personal connections. So, you know, significant others, friends and family, stuff like that…. We have more employees. We have senior officers and supervisors and then upper management. Back then we really just had one manager and that was the only type of supervisory support we had, our one manager at the time was amazing and understanding as one can be. [They] only had so much information as well. So, there's only so much guidance [they] could give. So, it really did feel like it was kind of up to us and our interpretation and how we were going to apply it. [Participant #5]

Here, the officer emphasizes the significance of personal connections, such as those with family and friends as a support system. Further aligning with Bakker and Demeroti (2005) social support is an essential job resource that mitigates the negative effects of job demands on the well-being of the employee. By maintaining a personal support system, the bylaw officer was able to receive emotional support and a sense of belonging, which was comforting during a time when officers were still navigating their roles as law enforcement personnel in a global pandemic. Similarly, the participant highlights the lack of organizational support. Despite the hierarchical structure that includes senior officers, superiors, and upper management, guidance

and support during the early stages of the pandemic were limited. The absence of guidance

suggests a gap in job resources, particularly in terms of information support, which is essential

for employees to effectively navigate changing situations. Leaders are instrumental in connecting

employees with organizational resources such as Employee Assistance Program (EAP)[7] and

providing them with EAP job accommodations to help reduce job demands (MacLeod, 2009).

Despite the availability of EAP, some officers expressed great skepticism about the

confidentially and effectiveness of the internal support services provided by the municipal

government. Participant #6 offered, "*I do things along those lines that are self-care. I didn't have

anything structured in place and to be fair, I didn't feel comfortable opening up to a counsellor

during that time about what was going on and what was happening. I didn't feel safe.*" Bylaw

enforcement personnel experience unique stressors relative to other law enforcement agencies;

thus, creating a need for specific job resources. Although EAP programs are designed to provide

law enforcement with mental health support, some officers believe they cannot trust the program

because of potential confidentiality gaps, the risk of facing disciplinary actions, or the stigma

associated with their experiences. The distrust may have led bylaw officers to seek external

services, such as private therapy, indicating a lack of perceived job resources within the

organization. According to Viswesaran et al. (1999), supervisor support is essential to buffer

against the effect of stressors on employee's health by systematically moderating the stressor-

strain relationship. The claims above suggest that bylaw officers relied on their professional

network, including colleagues and supervisors, for emotional support and guidance. Bylaw

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[7] An employee assistance program is a confidential short term counseling service for employees with personal difficulties that affect their work performance- (Government of Canada, Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, 2015)

officers sought support from their families to help them navigate the stressors and demands of their job. Family support acts as an external resource that can provide emotional stability and resilience. This is consistent with the JD-R model's focus on using personal and professional resources to mitigate the costly impacts of job demands. While the officer sought out support from personal connections outside of the work environment and external coping mechanisms, their experience reflects the limitations of internal supervisory support within the organization and the need to address the communication gap, particularly in times of crisis.

<u>Chapter Six: Bylaw Officer's Job Engagement and Job Security</u>

This chapter presents the findings on job security and engagement among bylaw officers during the COVID-19 pandemic. It explores how bylaw officers' perceptions of job security influenced their commitment to their municipalities and examines the varying levels of job engagement observed among bylaw officers, especially in light of their experiences during the pandemic. Highlighted are the viewpoints of bylaw officers, providing an understanding of how job requirements, available resources, and the organizational culture shaped their perspectives.

The commitment of bylaw officers to their municipality was significantly influenced by their perceptions of job security. Officers expressed a diminished sense of purpose regarding the efficacy and significance of the regulations. Notably younger or newer officers appeared to report lower levels of engagement, as their experiences did not align with their initial expectation of the role. As an officer who has been in municipal enforcement for four or five years stated, *"I think my job is interesting and it's certainly fun and exciting, but I think my job has little to no impact on the world and that bothers me. So, in that sense, I don't enjoy my job in the grand scheme of things, but day-to-day my job is kind of fun, I suppose."* [Participant #5]. Similarly, Participant #3 is in their 30's stated:

> I would say it has been unprecedentedly low. I think it's certainly changed me. I mean you can argue that I'm less committed than I was because I was very committed to the [redacted] and some changes certainly came because of the pandemic where I started to look for other options. [Participant #3]

Conversely, longer-serving officers approached their duties pragmatically, viewing them as essential tasks to be fulfilled. Participant #3 further explains:

> I liked being able to go out and just at the beginning of this interview, I've listed you know a whole slew of jobs that I've had within bylaw enforcement because I've always sought change, and I welcomed the change. And in a chaotic time, it was almost comforting to hop in your vehicle and get dispatch calls and go out to these different locations. And I know I'm in the minority in this, but I would rather have

> done it than not have done it. I think I was better off for doing it. I'm keeping
> myself busy being out and about, dealing with the public. And even though the job
> itself changed; it really didn't change. You could tell me to enforce any law, and it
> will feel like the same job…. So, in a way, I welcomed it. [Participant #3]

Participant #3 explained how job security significantly influenced their commitment to their municipality and their adaptation to changes in their role as a bylaw officer, especially amidst the chaotic circumstances of the pandemic. Despite the upheaval caused by the crisis, the individual found comfort in the familiarity of their duties, emphasizing consistency and familiarity among new challenges. This perspective underscores the significance of job demands and resources in shaping the officer's adaptability and resilience during evolving circumstances. Participant #3 expressed a positive attitude and openness to change within their role and found comfort in the normalcy of the routines, such as attending calls and interacting with the public. This reflects a coping mechanism involving cognitive strategies like positive reframing and openness to change.

According to Finstad et al. (2020), positive attitudes, social networks, peer support, teamwork self-reliance, problem negotiation and self-care play a significant role in reducing stress and boosting resilience. Alessandri et al. (2015) support this by noting that a positive outlook on oneself, life, and the future is crucial for coping with adversities as it fosters resilience. Furthermore, the self-regulation of behaviour theory suggests that individuals who are self-confident and optimistic about achieving positive outcomes, exert more effort, and succeed more often (Carver & Scheier, 1998; Orkibi & Brandt, 2015; Scheier & Carver, 2003). These individuals are more likely to use problem-focused coping strategies and adaptive emotion-focused strategies, such as acceptance, humour, and positive reframing when direct solutions are not possible (Orkibi & Brandt, 2015; Simione et al., 2023). Thus, an officer's positive attitude in routine engagement exemplifies effective cognitive coping mechanisms that mitigate the psychological impact of high-stress situations.

Bylaw officers reflect a strong occupational identity that serves as a coping mechanism enabling the officer to navigate through various challenges that arise on the job and give them a sense of purpose. The ability of the bylaw officer to find value in their role contributes to their overall work engagement and fosters a sense of motivation and fulfillment. The ability of the bylaw officer to find value in their rule significantly contributes to their overall work engagement fostering a sense of motivation and fulfillment. As the following bylaw officer expressed:

> I felt my work was purposeful back in March 2020 when everything was shut down and the *Act* came into play. But I feel like it was less purposeful when things started flip flopping and things were changing all the time and it's like 'what am I really enforcing and for what amount of time?' There were days when I still felt a sense of purpose, but there were also times during the day when I wondered, 'what is the point of this, and what are we actually trying to achieve?' Looking back now at those 2-3 years, it feels like none of it was very purposeful in the grand scheme of things. At the time, I felt like I was making a difference, especially with handling gatherings. But with the constant changes, I don't feel the same sense of purpose now as I did then. [Participant #2]

This quote highlights how the bylaw officer perceived purpose and their engagement varied throughout the pandemic. At first, the participant felt fulfilled and engaged because they had a sense of purpose in enforcing the new regulations; however, as the situation evolved and regulations became inconsistent, their sense of purpose began to diminish. After initially feeling a strong sense of purpose in enforcing rules to curb the spread of the virus, the individual later struggled with disappointment and disillusionment due to the lack of lasting influence amid changing mandates. The interactions between employment demands, such as regulatory changes, and their effects on job engagement and perceived meaningfulness emphasize how work demands, such as adapting to shifting regulations and lack of clear directions, interact and impact job satisfaction and sense of purpose. The constant regulatory changes and the lack of clarity in enforcement directives led many bylaw officers to feel frustrated and defeated. This illustrates

the transactional nature of stress, where the appraisal of the uncertain environment and unclear clear goals contribute to a decline in job satisfaction (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

During the initial stages of the pandemic, the implementation of COVID-19 regulations tasked bylaw officers with new responsibilities aimed at combating and containing the spread of the virus which at the time placed significant strain on the healthcare system (Hutchings, 2022). Within the framework of the JD-R model, job security is recognized as a fundamental job resource and motivator that enhances an employee's engagement and dedication to their professional roles. Moreover, the challenges associated with pandemic enforcement efforts created opportunities for skill acquisition and professional growth, aligning with the principles elucidated in the model. Participant #3 offers their perspective in response to the questions about their work engagement during the pandemic, "*I think the quality and quantity of work that I produce is still there. I think my loyalty or the sense of loyalty that I have isn't quite there*" [Participant 3]. The quotation captured the officer's appraisal of the job demands and resources within the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) and the Transactional Stress Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The officer acknowledged that despite performance and productivity levels remaining constant, they felt a lack of loyalty towards their job and organization. According to Demerouti and Bakker (2007), this pattern shows that although job demands might not have changed significantly, there might be other factors contributing to work stress, such as organizational support or work-life balance. While the officer acknowledged that the quality and quantity of their work are still present, they expressed that their loyalty to the organization has waned. Suggesting that while officers may fulfill their job responsibilities, there may be underlying factors that influence their job satisfaction and commitment. The organization plays an important role in promoting employee engagement and well-being; through recognition

of employee hard work, an officer may feel they are being appreciated and their work has an impact on their communities (Ver Der Ross, Olckers & Schaap, 2022). Investigating the impact of organizational practices on employee engagement reveals that fostering an environment of transparency and open communication in regulatory decisions plays a crucial role. This approach not only enhances employees understanding of their contributions but also sustains their sense of purpose within the workplace.

Furthermore, participants highlight the importance of cultivating a supportive work environment, as it has been shown to enhance employee loyalty. Participant 1 specifically expressed this emphasizing the value of job security, "*So the job security, let's start with the job security portion, I guess it was just that we knew we were important. We knew a lot of us weren't losing our job*" [Participant #1]. The quote underscores the importance of job security, especially considering that during the COVID-19 pandemic, many people were facing uncertainty in the job market as others were losing their jobs. Early in the pandemic, over 153,000 Ontario residents lost their jobs (Charlebois, 2021). As such, bylaw officers perceived their job security as a source of stability and reassurance, and according to JD-R theory, this serves as a protective factor against the detrimental impacts of job demands on their well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

This sense of stability contributes to a sense of job commitment to their roles and responsibilities. Every employee contributes to the organization in some capacity, and it becomes necessary to keep employees motivated and satisfied for them to perform their best (Shagholi & Hussin, 2009). However, some participants felt their motivation had decreased during the pandemic. As the following participant explains,

> So right now, I'm finding it hard to get motivated. And the only thing that motivates me sometimes going to work is the fact that I'm getting paid good money for it to do my job. Yeah, also the positive interactions with the public. The people that you meet along the way, whether it's other officers, whether it's members of the public.

> Sometimes it makes it all worth it… I would say my commitment overall to the industry, the municipal law enforcement association, it stayed. If anything, it grew stronger. My significant other, who when we met, hated law enforcement, hated everything law enforcement started appreciating us, and I like helping people, I really do. So that keeps me going, I don't need to go and make arrests. [Participant #1]

The participant's quote above exemplifies how work demands and resources interplay with each other. The participant highlights that while a lack of recognition (a job demand) other factors such as good pay and positive interactions (job resources) help support and sustain motivation. The participant's commitment to their job and personal growth is reinforced by external validation from their partner, who grew to value and appreciate law enforcement. This support demonstrates how personal relationships and societal perceptions (external resources) can influence an individual's motivation and commitment despite the stressors inherent in their profession.

When an organization provides security and fair treatment, employees will exhibit a positive attitude along with an increased level of job engagement. They will show more commitment to the organization, and this ultimately leads to an increase in organizational productivity (Majeed, Imran & Ayub, 2015). Therefore, the recognition of organizational policies and the ability to foster a stable environment where bylaw officers experience job security is vital for job commitment. Organizations need to prioritize and create initiatives that are aimed at providing supportive work environments and opportunities for professional growth and progress. Despite challenges and feelings of being unrecognized, many individuals' dedication to their profession remained unwavering. This commitment was fueled by their intrinsic values and a sense of duty to their community.

In addition, Participant #4 highlights the importance of supportive leadership and access to resources in maintaining job engagement:

> Probably our manager because she's just so good at providing us with all the means necessary to do our job. And you know, she's been in our role before. She worked as a bylaw officer for many years. So, I mean I think that typically helps having someone lead your group that's done the job before and knows the stresses and knows the hardships out there and can sort of guide you and give you all the tools that you need. [Participant #4]

Participant #4 attributes their engagement in their roles to operational management practice. Supportive managers and supervisors who understand the challenges and provide necessary resources can help mitigate the impact of external stressors, thereby fostering a sense of purpose and commitment among team members. Consistent with Bakker and Demerouti (2007), who illustrate that effective leadership is a critical job resource that enhances employee engagement, these findings show that a manager's ability to provide the necessary resources, guidance, and support play a contributing factor in making bylaw officers feel empowered and motivated to do their jobs effectively.

The participant further mentions that the manager's prior experience as a bylaw officer gave them insight into the difficulties and expectations of the profession allowing them to empathize with their team and offer the relevant support and guidance they needed. This leadership atmosphere creates a positive and supportive environment where employees feel they are understood, valued, and respected. Participants emphasized the prominence of leadership and how organizational support can influence employee well-being, commitment to their job, and loyalty to the organization. This sentiment underscores the value of understanding the needs and desires, as well as the benefits of fostering a culture of open communication and feedback. Such practices strengthen the relationship between managers and employees, ultimately, fortifying trust and collaboration.

Bylaw Officer's Identity and Job Commitment

This section presents the results regarding the identity and commitment of bylaw officers during the COVID-19 outbreak. It analyzes the sense of purpose and commitment that officers experienced during the early stages of the pandemic, followed by the decline in these mindsets as the pandemic progressed and emergency measures were lifted. Exploring the challenges faced by bylaw officers resulting from management's lack of acknowledgement and support, while also examining how officers' perceptions of public attitudes impacted their professional identity and commitment.

Data collected showed that during the initial phase of the pandemic, bylaw officers experienced a heightened sense of purpose characterized by a commitment to safeguarding their communities from the threats posed by the virus. This commitment was driven by a desire to ensure the safety and well-being of community members, particularly vulnerable populations, such as those who are elderly or immunocompromised. To illustrate the heightened sense of purpose and commitment to keeping the community safe, one participant shared their experiences of navigating the challenging dynamics between public health concerns and individual behaviours during the pandemic:

> I sympathize with those people calling in complaints saying 'There is a lot of cases in my neighbourhood, and all these people are gathering together, and they don't care' trying to convey to a family that 'you cannot have your family over' while the person next doors afraid COVID will spread and their immunocompromised. [Participant #2]

However, as the pandemic progressed over two years, their sense of purpose declined. This was compounded by a perceived lack of recognition from the government regarding their pivotal role in pandemic response efforts. Additionally, at the conclusion of emergency measures bylaw officers returned to their pre-pandemic operational duties, which led to a diminished sense of

impact compared to their expanded roles during the crisis period. Consequently, this change required them to reconsider their commitment to their roles as the continued absence of acknowledgment and support from governmental bodies undermined their sense of purpose and responsibility in community safety. Participant #5 indicated:

> For the most part, during the pandemic it was a little bit different because we were involved in something greater, it was massive at the time. We were the people enforcing this legislation that impacted everybody. But a lot of people didn't agree with those restrictions. Like I said, it was different for me because I like general bylaw work. I could not feel more like I have zero impact on the world around me and this job is not fulfilling me at all. I could be alone in that opinion, though. Like, it did feel like we were doing something… So, but for me personally, the pandemic made me feel like I was doing something important and now it's back to the status quo, which is like what I do is s*** that I don't give a f*** about. [Participant #5]

The subsequent experiences provide a nuanced perspective on how the COVID-19 pandemic influenced bylaw officers' perceptions of their roles. Initially, the enforcement of COVID-19 regulations offered a sense of purpose and importance, as officers felt they were contributing to a larger collective effort during the crisis. One officer's description of feeling like they were "doing something important" reflects the positive impact of aligning their work with personal values and experiencing a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment. However, the return to routine bylaw work post-pandemic led to a feeling of disillusionment and insignificance. Despite their crucial role in enforcement throughout the pandemic, there was a noticeable lack of acknowledgment and support from both federal and provincial governments.

The officers observed a decline in commitment among their colleagues, attributed to the lack of recognition and support from management, particularly concerning the additional responsibilities and risks taken during the pandemic. Organizational support is critical for maintaining employee commitment and engagement (Nadeem et al., 2019). Recognition and support are essential for job stratification, as they provide employees with the validation and

resources necessary to perform their duties effectively (Deshpande, 2023). Such support fosters a

sense of purpose that many employees seek in law enforcement roles, ensuring they feel valued,

understood, and equipped to meet their challenges. This, in turn, contributes to overall well-

being and productivity. Organizations need to recognize and strive towards opportunities for

meaningful experiences at a professional level that creates stability and support to prevent

feelings of disengagement among their employees.

Participant #3 provided a perspective on the lack of recognition and support from

management in the context of pandemic-related role changes. The officer explains:

> Certainly, my observation of other officers is that they are less committed, largely
> because they don't feel valued. During the pandemic, we were leaned upon
> incredibly heavily, but when it came to job evaluation, management was unwilling
> to acknowledge the additional responsibilities, like enforcing the *Reopening Act*
> and the *Emergency Management Civil Protection Act.* Despite changes that
> elevated our roles- like being able to charge people with obstruction of justice- they
> refused to recognize these changes with appropriate compensation. This lack of
> recognition has led to a widespread decline in devotion to the job and a reluctance
> to go above and beyond for the organization after seeing how we've been treated
> over the past few years. [Participant# 3]

Despite facing increased job demands and new job responsibilities during the pandemic,

including the implementation of changing legislation and the power to lay obstruction charges

typically reserved to police authorities, officers felt they were undervalued and neglected by their

organization. The JD-R model explains that with the lack of organizational support and an

increase in job demands, organizations will see a decrease in employee motivation and well-

being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). This aligns with the idea that the appraisal of stressors and

coping mechanism impact employee well-being (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The officer

conveyed discontent regarding the management's inability to recognize their contributions and

changes in job roles, nor provide adequate compensation and acknowledgement. The experience

of the officer stresses the importance of creating a supportive and inclusive work culture. When

organizations recognize and reward their employee's hard work, provide opportunities to grow,

and encourage open communication channels between management and the team, an atmosphere

is created where officers will thrive and engage in their work (Gostick & Elton, 2007; Kinne,

2024).

Another contributing factor to the job commitment of bylaw officers includes their

encounters and relationships with the public. Throughout the interviews, many officers mention

the challenges they faced in managing public perceptions and building rapport. For example,

Participant #2 described:

> There was a negative response from the public because they perceived that the
> public felt their rights and freedoms were being infringed upon and they felt their
> authority was in question and they weren't respected. Negative media portal, the
> public shame and name calling towards officers trying to disperse large crowds or
> protest "Nazis". Officers were just doing their job and wanted the public to know
> that they weren't happy about enforcing it, end of the day it was just the job. They
> wanted that humanity from the public, there's more to the uniform. [Participant #2]

This participant sheds light on the hurdles faced by bylaw officers in maintaining public trust and

navigating perceptions of their authority. During the COVID-19 pandemic, social media became

the primary platform for disseminating information and reporting new COVID-19 cases, recent

fatalities, changes in regulations and new virus strains (Yas et al., 2021). Empirical evidence

demonstrates that the degree to which the public perceives law enforcement officers as legitimate

and trustworthy has a significant impact on the compliance of law enforcement officers (Jones,

2020). Consequently, when law enforcement is not seen as legitimate, the community will be

less likely to comply and cooperate, and instead will show resistance. Participant #2 reflected on

the negative responses from the public rationalizing that they felt their rights and freedoms were

being infringed upon by law enforcement officers. This sentiment was exacerbated by negative

media portrayals and public shaming directed towards officers, leading to instances of name-

calling and derogatory labels such as "Nazis". Despite this, officers emphasized that they were merely carrying out their duties. Officers thought to explain their actions, emphasizing that they were following protocol and adhering to policy rather than acting on personal judgment. This highlights how they attempted to navigate the complex balance between enforcement and community relations, highlighting that their responsibilities went beyond simply following the law and included resolving complaints from the public and maintaining trust. The bylaw officer's experiences with public criticism exacerbated stressors that impacted their well-being and job performance.

Many officers sought recognition from the public to mitigate the emotional toll of the job. As the following bylaw officer explains:

> The biggest challenge was definitely the US versus THEM mentality, sometimes the public kind of viewed us with because it wasn't always that way - not sure if you've heard this a lot from any other officers- but bylaw is a majority of the time complaint- based. So, we're not often going out looking to pick up problems. We have enough complaints coming in on a daily basis. We don't need to add more. So oftentimes the general public thought we were out to pick on them and that's just not the case. Oh, getting back to that side of OK, yes, I am a representative of whatever municipality or any government figure how they want to view it. OK, I'm still here to work through this. Let's just figure out the situation as best we can, and we'll move on. So, I guess realistically, the approach of trying to still approach every situation with not that heavy hand, if you can bring some more respect into it and humanization, that definitely made a big difference. [Participant #8]

Here, the officer discusses the combative mentality adopted by some members of the public, highlighting the effectiveness of respectful and relational approaches to communication and community engagement strategies in fostering positive relationships and mitigating conflict. By emphasizing communication and empathy, bylaw officers can utilize their resources to de-escalate situations and build rapport with community members. The officer notes that their work is primarily complaint-based, meaning that they are responding to calls for service by the public, as opposed to actively searching for rule violations in the community. Circumstances in which

officers are faced with heavy workloads coupled with reactive tasks, such as engaging with hostile community members, contribute to emotional exhaustion, especially when officers are continuously met with these situations for long periods of time without adequate resources to help them cope with work stress. This pattern can result in increased stress and burnout (Euwema et al., 2004; Queiros et al., 2020). Further, continuous exposure to hostile or high-stress situations without support or resources can affect job satisfaction (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Therefore, these experiences highlight the need for organizational intervention and provide resources that help officers establish healthy and resilient work conditions. By fostering a supportive work environment, officers will feel valued, enhancing their job engagement, and reducing burnout.

By examining the complex experiences of bylaw officers during the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasizing changes in their sense of purpose, commitment, and job stratification. Initially, the pandemic fostered a heightened sense of duty among bylaw officers, as they felt a sense of responsibility as they had a vital role in protecting public health. However, as the pandemic progressed and emergency measures were lifted, many bylaw officers experienced a decline in their sense of purpose and felt undervalued due to a lack of recognition from government bodies and diminishing job satisfaction. Furthermore, the challenges faced in managing public perceptions and building rapport during the pandemic exacerbated stress levels and overall well-being. The findings highlight the importance of organizational support and recognition in maintaining employee engagement and well-being. To promote a positive work environment and enhance job satisfaction, organizations must acknowledge the contributions of their employees, provide the resources necessary, and address the challenges faced in their roles.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

This research study explored the lived experiences of bylaw officers tasked with enforcing COVID-19-related regulations in Ontario, as well as their experiences in the post-pandemic period. It represents one of the first academic analyses of bylaw enforcement focusing on their job demands, resources, engagement, and commitment while providing a firsthand understanding of their roles and responsibilities during and after a global pandemic. Through this qualitative study, I aimed to address knowledge gaps by providing a deeper understanding of bylaw officers experiences during their enforcement duties. The findings reveal several key themes, offering insights that directly inform recommendations for future support and policy development.

Bylaw officers faced significant increases in job demands, including lockdown compliance, enforcing social distancing mandates, and managing business closures, which were exacerbated by frequent changes to the *Reopening of Ontario Act* and COVID-19 restrictions. The evolving regulations created role ambiguity and stress, as officers had to interpret legislation and enforce it under tight deadlines. The lack of adequate resources, such as PPE and access to individual-use equipment, heightened these challenges, emphasizing the critical need for improved resource allocation and clear communication during crises.

According to the JD-R model, balancing high job demands with adequate job resources is crucial to mitigating stress and burnout (Schaufeli, 2014). However, the implementation of the emergency legislation led to a substantial increase in job demands for bylaw officers, while resources remained insufficient. Officers expressed frustration and concern about learning new regulations, interpreting legislation, and enforcing it within specific time frames. The demands placed on bylaw officers during the pandemic, coupled with inadequate support, including

insufficient guidance from upper management and external stakeholders, left many bylaw officers feeling overwhelmed. This highlights the importance of organizational reforms that provide comprehensive training, equitable resource distribution, and improved communication channels.

The COVID-19 pandemic imposed a significant emotional toll, particularly in the early stages. Officers had to juggle dual responsibilities of enforcement and concerns about their personal and familial health. The fear of exposing their families- especially those with elderly, newborns, or immunocompromised relatives- along with isolation precautions, contributed to prolonged periods of stress and fear. The combination of enforcement duties and health concerns heightened job demands for bylaw officers.

To cope with the challenges, bylaw officers employed various strategies, relying on peer support and personal coping mechanisms, such as mindfulness, physical activities, familiar bonds, and recreational pursuits. Seeking therapy as a proactive response to increased demands highlighted the importance of professional support, aligning with the JD-R model's emphasis on utilizing personal and professional resources to mitigate job demands. However, skepticism about the accessibility and confidentiality of available mental health services suggests a need for more robust support systems. While officers appreciated the organizational efforts to provide PPE and early access to vaccines, gaps in support and the lack of recognition from governmental bodies diminished their sense of purpose and engagement over time. As the pandemic progressed and emergency measures lifted, bylaw officers expressed feelings of frustration and a diminished sense of purpose.

According to the JD-R model, the balance between job demands and resources significantly influences officers' well-being (Demerouti et al., 2014). High job demands paired

with sufficient resources help mitigate stress and burnout while supporting job engagement.

Support from supervisors and managers boosted morale and job stratification, making bylaw

officers feel valued and supported by their organization. However, some officers felt their efforts

during the pandemic were not recognized at the provincial or federal level, which impacted their

commitment and engagement. Positive community interactions also contributed to job

satisfaction and engagement, while negative interactions posed challenges to their well-being and

overall relationship with the community. The constant adaptations to regulatory changes, without

adequate recognition or support, led to a decline in their job engagement and commitment to

their municipalities. The commitment of bylaw officers to their municipality was significantly

influenced by their perceptions of job security. Initially, heightened job engagement was

observed due to the stimulating changes in enforcing COVID-19 regulations. However, as the

pandemic progressed, officers experienced a diminished sense of purpose regarding the efficacy

and significance of the regulations. The constant changes in regulations and lack of clear

enforcement directives led to frustration and a sense of defeat.

The interactions between job demands, such as regulatory changes, and job resources,

such as a sense of purpose and physical resources, reflect the constant adaptation required of

bylaw officers. When these changes failed to provide a sense of accomplishment, officers'

resources were depleted, reducing their sense of purpose and engagement. Despite fulfilling their

job responsibilities, many officers expressed waning loyalty to the organization, suggesting that

job satisfaction and commitment are crucial for promoting employee engagement and well-

being. The results highlight the significance of improving communication within the

organization, allocating adequate job resources, and fostering a sense of purpose through

recognition and support to sustain bylaw officers' well-being and job engagement during and after public health emergencies.

Future Recommendations for Bylaw Enforcement

This research illuminated the experiences of bylaw officers during the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath, emphasizing the need for further studies to fully comprehend their challenges. The findings serve as a foundation for understanding the evolving role of bylaw officers in our communities during a crisis such as the pandemic and beyond. Comprehensive research is needed to further explore how such crises impact job performance and mental well-being.

Several key takeaways and recommendations arise from this study to enhance the support and effectiveness of bylaw officers. First, the research highlights the critical need for ongoing and comprehensive training for bylaw officers. This should include de-escalation techniques, mental health crisis management, and updates on provincial legislation. By ensuring officers are equipped with the necessary skills, municipalities can foster increased confidence and commitment among their workforces. Municipal governments should prioritize the continuous development and training programs that are responsive to evolving challenges. Practical training, including role-playing exercises, should be incorporated to ensure officers can apply these skills in real-world scenarios. Furthermore, specialized training for emergencies should be mandated, ensuring that bylaw officers are prepared to manage public safety and collaborate with other emergency services during future crises.

In addition to training, resource allocation is a significant concern. Bylaw officers reported lacking essential tools such as vehicles, remote work technology (e.g., laptops), and PPE, which are crucial to safeguarding officers' health during outbreaks and other high-risk

scenarios. Municipal enforcement agencies must ensure that officers have the necessary resources, as it will not only enhance their job performance but also contribute to their overall sense of safety and well-being.

Access to mental health resources is crucial, especially during emotionally challenging periods, such as a pandemic. Providing officers with access to mental health resources could include counselling and therapy services outside of the EAP program. This could involve expanding existing EAP services to offer more tailored support for bylaw officers or establishing partnerships with external mental health professionals who specialize in the unique stressors they face. These partnerships should focus on resilience-building through tailored support programs aimed at helping bylaw officers manage stress and enhance coping mechanisms. Additionally, peer support networks can foster a sense of community and reduce isolation, allowing officers to share experiences and offer mutual support. Managers should also participate in regular communities of practice to discuss emerging challenges, share best practices, and collaborate on developing strategies to support their teams. Schaufeli (2017) explains the importance of engaging leaders and the role they play in providing their employees with social resources (good atmosphere and role clarity). This approach would help to enhance managerial capacity in addressing mental health concerns. Furthermore, offering mental health days should allow officers to recuperate, thereby maintaining well-being and job performance.

To maintain job engagement and commitment, fostering an environment of transparency and open communication is essential. One of the major challenges officers faced during the pandemic was the lack of advanced warning regarding policy changes, which hindered their ability to prepare and respond effectively. Clear, comprehensive and consistent communication from leadership and relevant provincial bodies is essential to reduce confusion and stress.

Establishing designated points of contact or support channels for officers to seek clarification on policy changes would further improve their engagement and ensure they are better equipped to carry out their duties with confidence. Therefore, by providing employees with additional tools and resources, further burnout may be avoided, and engagement is increased. Providing adequate training, resources, and support in navigating changes in the workplace can aid in maintaining a sense of efficacy and purpose in their roles (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Expanding communication channels, including direct links with government bodies, can help officers stay informed and equipped to handle evolving responsibilities.

Implementing formal recognition programs that acknowledge the dedication and achievements of bylaw officers is essential. Regular recognition of their contributions to community safety can enhance job satisfaction and foster a sense of purpose. Offering clear pathways for career advancements and professional growth within the organization can bolster long-term engagement and commitment. This approach not only benefits the officers but also contributes to the overall safety and well-being of the communities they serve.

Limitations and Imposter Participants

Although this study provides an in-depth analysis of bylaw officers' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and post-pandemic it is not without limitations. First, the research involved a relatively small sample of eight bylaw officers from municipalities across southern Ontario. While this sample size allowed for a detailed exploration of their experiences, it limits the extent to which the findings can be generalized, particularly to bylaw officers in regions outside of Ontario. The research was also geographically confined to Ontario. As municipal governments across Canada operate under varying regulations and enforcement protocols, the findings may not be fully representative of the experiences of all bylaw officers in other regions.

Different provinces and municipalities may have implemented diverse COVID-19 regulations and guidelines, which could affect the applicability of this research to other jurisdictions. In addition, the quality of qualitative research is often contingent upon the skills and biases of the researcher (Anderson, 2010). Qualitative research is inherently vulnerable to reliability and validity concerns due to its subjective nature. Personal perspective and interpretation can influence the study's findings. Although efforts were made to minimize biases through methodological rigour, such as employing a semi-structured interview method and developing theory driven research questions, the potential for subjectivity remains an inherent limitation. The semi-structured interviews offered flexibility, enabling an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, while the theory-driven approach aimed to provide a structured framework for interpreting the data. However, despite these methodological efforts, the subjective nature of the qualitative research means that some degree of interpretation bias cannot be entirely eliminated.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, university researchers had to shift recruitment and data collection methods and faced many recruiting challenges. After the first course of data collection with the MLEO Communication Chair, the researcher received several interested participants. During the recruitment process, one participant misrepresented their identity and participated in multiple interviews with their camera off, likely for the purpose of obtaining additional compensation. This behavior aligns with the concept of 'imposter participant', which, as described by Roehl and Darci (2022), is "dishonest, fraudulent, fake or false participants in qualitative research [who] completely fake their identities or [exaggerate] their experiences in order to participate in qualitative studies" (p.247). Throughout data collection, responses were received from emails addresses that were not linked to professional bylaw municipalities, raising

suspicion. The participant provided vague and inconsistent responses, and further analysis revealed voice similarities across the multiple interviews. As a result, the data from this individual was deemed unreliable and was excluded from the study. To prevent similar issues in future research, it is essential to establish stringent identity verification protocols. This should include requiring professional email addresses, video confirmation and pre-screening interviews to mitigate such problems in future studies.

Future Research Direction

To build on the findings of this study and enhance the understanding of bylaw officers' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and post-pandemic several avenues for future research are recommended. First, future research should extend beyond the province of Ontario to include other provinces and territories across Canada. This broader geographical scope would enable a more comprehensive analysis of how bylaw officers' experiences and challenges varied across different regions. Such research could investigate regional patterns in enforcement practices, regulatory adaptations, and the impact of varying local government protocols on officers' roles and responsibilities. This could reveal how diverse municipal regulations and enforcement strategies shaped officers' responses to the pandemic and influenced their overall job satisfaction.

Furthermore, there remains a significant gap in research on bylaw officers, whose role in municipal law enforcement has often been overlooked. Future studies should explore their positions within law enforcement, particularly in the post-pandemic context where issues such as mental health support, job security, and changing enforcement responsibilities remain critical. Further, research is needed to investigate how bylaw officers can be effectively supported in

their roles, given the increasingly complex nature of their responsibilities and the possible long-term implications of the pandemic on their professional identity and well-being.

Future research should also focus on evaluating current policies and guidelines for emergency preparation and response, specifically regarding the role of municipal bylaw enforcement officers. This research should aim to develop a concrete guideline that can be applied uniformly across jurisdictions to improve the effectiveness of bylaw enforcement during crisis across the country. Analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of existing policies will be crucial for informing the development of an emergency response framework and ensuring the bylaw officers are adequately supported.

Another important area for future research would be to explore job engagement and satisfaction among bylaw officers following the rollback of pandemic-related regulations and the subsequent decrease in perceived recognition and importance. This is particularly pertinent considering the study findings, which demonstrated how the officers' increased responsibilities for implementing public health measures during the pandemic gave them a sense of purpose. The challenges officers faced in managing public perceptions alongside inadequate organizational support further compounded this decline. Understanding how to maintain job engagement in a post-crisis environment is vital for ensuring long-term job commitment and well-being, highlighting the need for strategies that promote recognition, organizational support, and a sense of purpose in their roles.

By addressing these research gaps, future studies can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of bylaw enforcement officer experiences which can inform the development of effective policies and support systems. This study aimed to give bylaw officers a much-needed voice, allowing them to share their experiences and challenges. This study contributed to a

deeper understanding of their evolving roles and the need for sustained recognition and support. The findings highlighted the resilience and adaptability of bylaw officers who showcased their unwavering commitment to community safety throughout the pandemic. As we move forward, it is necessary that we not only acknowledge their contributions, but also ensure they receive the recognition they truly deserve for this vital role in safeguarding our communities.

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Appendix A: Consent Form

Informed Consent Statement

   The Impact of COVID- 19 Pandemic Demands on By-law Officer Wellness and Work
Principal Investigator: *Harveen Randhawa, Graduate Candidate, Department of Criminology*
Supervisors: Drs. *Jennifer Lavoie, Carrie Sanders, Dept. of Criminology*

You are invited to participate in a study!

Who are we looking to talk to?

Participants must be aged 18 and over, employed as Municipal Bylaw Officers within the
Southern Ontario Region, and have commenced their position before September 2019.

Why are we doing this study?
The purpose of this study is to shed light on how demands and resources available to enforce
pandemic-related and reopening mandates has shaped the mental wellness and job engagement
of bylaw officers in Southern Ontario. This research is imperative in understanding lived
experiences of bylaw officers during COVID-19 and moving forward into a post-lockdown
climate.

What will happen during the study?

You will be asked to *take part in a 45–60-minute interview.* You can choose to have the
interview take place *in person at Wilfrid Laurier University (Brantford Campus) or virtually on
Microsoft Teams.* With your permission the interview will be audio-recorded. During this
interview you will be asked to talk about your experiences as a bylaw officer during the
pandemic and post-pandemic period.

Potential harms, risks or discomfort

Some of the questions asked during the interview may make you uncomfortable. You do not
have to answer these questions if you don't want to. You can skip any question you don't want to
answer. You can also ask for the recording to be turned off, ask to take a break, or end the
interview entirely.
You will be provided with a list of resources that offer 24-hour phone-supports as well as walk in
supports. You are encouraged to access any needed mental health services available through your
place of work.

Benefits

Participating in this research project will allow you to talk about your experiences and contribute
your voice to the conversation illuminating bylaw officers' pandemic roles. Your contributions
will help identify gaps in resources, provide insights into fostering work engagement, and inform
policy to enhance officer wellness for the future.

Privacy and confidentiality

All of your information will be kept secure. Data will be stored in a secure and safe location on a password protected computer and kept for a maximum of 5 years before being destroyed by the investigator. Only authorized research team members will have access to the data. All direct identifiers will be removed from your personal information and replaced with a pseudonym of your choosing to ensure anonymity. This pseudonym will also be used for any quotes that are used from your interview. If you consent to the use of quotations in publications, they *will not* contain information that allows you to be identified. Virtual interviews will be completed through a secure Microsoft Teams link that will be sent to you exclusively. You have the right to refuse to be *recorded*. The *recordings* will be deleted immediately following transcription. You *will also* be able to request to review the transcripts of your recording to check for accuracy and to remove any information you do not wish to be included.

Can I decide if I want to be in this study?
Your participation in this study is voluntary, you may decline to participate without penalty. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to. You can also take a break or end the interview at any time for any reason, without explanation. There is no consequence to withdrawing your participation in this study. You will still receive $15 if you choose to withdraw from the study. If you withdraw from the study, you can request to have your data removed/destroyed by emailing the principal investigator and making this request until July 1st, 2023.

Incentives

You will receive a *$15 gift card*. If you withdraw from the study, prior to its completion, you will still receive this amount.

Rights of Research Participants

If you have questions related to this study or the procedures, or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study, you may contact the principal researcher, *Harveen Randhawa*, at rand8820@mylaurier.ca.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board (REB# *insert REB project number*). If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, or if you have any questions for the board, you may contact Jayne Kalmar, PhD, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-0710 x 3131 or REBChair@wlu.ca.

Feedback and publication

The results of this research might be published/presented in a , course project report, book, journal article, conference presentation, and class presentation. An executive summary of the findings from this study will be available by *September 1st, 2023*. You can provide your email address to the researcher to receive the executive summary.

Consent

	YES	NO
I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study in accordance with the terms set out above.		
I agree to have the interview digitally recorded.		
I agree to the researcher taking notes throughout the duration of the interview		
I understand that I can request to review the interview transcript and add, delete, or change it to ensure accuracy and comfort level for 2 weeks following receipt of the transcript.		
I agree to allow the use of de-identified quotes from my interview in publications and presentations.		
I would like a copy of the executive summary emailed to me. My email is: _____		

By providing your consent, you are not waiving your legal rights or releasing the investigator(s) or involved institution(s) from their legal and professional responsibilities.

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

Appendix B: Recruitment Email

Dear [Insert Municipality],

My name is Harveen Randhawa and I am a graduate student in the Criminology program at Wilfrid Laurier University. I am conducting my master's thesis which explores the experiences of Bylaw officers during and after the COVID-19 pandemic The objective of the research project is to shed light on how enforcement officers have transitioned since the pandemic, the availability of resources, and officer wellness. I aim to conduct 15 confidential interviews with bylaw officers who have been employed during COVID-19 to the present time. Interviews will be conducted online for about 45-60min to capture the voices of bylaw officers. I am writing to ask if you would kindly share this research advertisement with bylaw officers in your municipality. Interested officers can contact me by email. This research study has been approved by the university Research Ethics Board #8468. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me. I look forward to hearing from you.

Best,

Harveen Randhawa

Appendix C: Recruitment Poster

PARTICIPANTS WANTED

Harveen Randhawa, MA Candidate at Wilfrid Laurier University, is looking for Bylaw Officers in Southern Ontario to participate in a study examining the experiences of Bylaw Officers during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

- Participation involves a 45min-1hr confidential interview, either online or in person at Wilfrid Laurier Brantford Campus

- The study will explore how the COVID-19 Pandemic has impacted the lived experiences and wellness of Bylaw Officers as essential workers.
- This research aims to give a voice to Bylaw Officers who have been on the front line of Ontario's pandemic response.

Requirements:

- Employed Bylaw Officer during COVID-19 Pandemic
- All genders and sexualities are welcome

To participate or to learn more about this study please contact

Rand8820@mylaurier.ca

Participants will recieve :

- $15 gift card to Tim Hortons

BYLAW ENFORCEMENT

LAURIER

This study has been approved by WLU's Research Ethics Board ####

Appendix D: Interview Guide

Demographic/Introduction Questions

Hello, my name is Harveen Randhawa - Firstly I would like to thank you for taking part in this study. I hope you consider this a safe place and can talk freely. No personal identities will be used throughout the study. I want this to be a platform for you to openly talk about your experience as a bylaw officer throughout the COVID-19 pandemic

Just so this is on record you have signed the consent sheet to be interviewed and recorded. Thank you so much, you don't have to turn on your camera if you don't wish to. I just wanted to ask if you are okay with me taking notes during the interview.

As you know I am interested to learn about your role throughout the pandemic, looking at the job demands and job resources that are specific to bylaw officers and how the responsibilities of a bylaw officer have changed if at all during the pandemic but also in what we are calling this "post-pandemic" period that we are in currently.

1. Hi, can you tell me a little about yourself?
2. What is your job title?
3. How long have you been in your job?
4. What made you choose municipal enforcement?
5. What drew you to participate in this study?
6. Could you tell me about your job? What are your duties and responsibilities as a bylaw officer?

Demands
One of the ideas that I am interested in is understanding a bylaw officer's job demands and resources. When I refer to **job demands**, I mean the job's physical, social, or organizational aspects that may require a sustained physical or mental cost. This can be how quickly officers learn bylaws, scheduling, shift work etc. (Demerouti, 2001).

1. When the province enacted the *Emergency Act* in March of 2020, could you explain your job duties/demands during this time (beginning of COVID)? (1)
2. What changed in terms of your everyday duties? (1)
3. How have your duties/demands changed as a bylaw officer during the pandemic? If so, in what ways? (1)
    a) How did you deal/cope with these job demands? What coping techniques or resources have you used throughout the pandemic? (2) Prompt: Has this helped in any way?
4. How would you describe your experience as a bylaw officer amid a pandemic?
    a. Prompt: How did this make you feel? (2)
5. How would you describe your stress levels during this time? Prompt: I know it is a complex question and you might want to take some time to think about it (2)
    a) This time may have been difficult to adapt to, how would you describe the state of your mental health (2) Prompt: How are you dealing with this transition in practice?

<u>Resources: Ask if they need a break.</u>
Thank you so much for that insightful information. Moving forward let talks about job resources. When I refer to **job resources**, I mean the job's physical, psychological, social, and organizational aspects that are essential in achieving work goals, reducing job demands, and stimulating personal growth and development (Bakker et al., 2017, p.312). Examples: PPE, wellness center counselling, time away from work, social support (family and friends), supervisor support, and organizational aspects.

1. What job resources were available to you during the enactment of *The Emergency Act*? (Which came into effect in March 2020) (1)
2. Where there any shortage of resources during the implementation of the *Emergency Act* (i.e., during the pandemic)? (1) Prompt: How did you manage this?
3. What additional resources would help fulfil the present roles and responsibilities of bylaw officers? (2)

<u>Work Commitment/Work Engagement</u>
Finally, I would like to understand the work commitment and engagement officers have in their job. When I refer **"engagement"** is popularly used to indicate an employee's involvement, commitment to the organization and their work and experiencing a sense of significance, pride, and challenge) and being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in the work (Dixie & Upadhyay,2021; Schaufeli 2017) (i.e., providing employees with the tool they need to succeed, a safe/comfortable workspace, benefits package, and job security)

1. How would you describe your work engagement throughout the pandemic? (3) - prompt- what do you believe has helped you maintain that engagement with your work? (3)
2. How are you managing all this? (2)
3. What resources would you find helpful to stay engaged in your work? (3)

Another concept that I mentioned earlier was **job commitment** by that I mean the willingness to stay in your position, the emotional attachment to the organization and/or the continuance commitment/ desire to stay with the organization (*Bakker & Schaufeli, 2014)* – Intention to stay, to go to work each day, looking forward to the job.
1. Reflecting on your experience throughout the pandemic, how would you describe your job commitment? (3)
2. Were you motivated to do your job throughout the pandemic? (3)
3. Can you tell me about some of the biggest challenges you faced in your job during the pandemic? How did you manage these challenges? (3)

<u>Conclusion</u>
1. Is there anything else that you have experienced during the pandemic as a bylaw officer that you would like to talk about, or feel is important for others to know and understand?
2. What would you like to see come out of this research study?

Appendix E: Focused Codebook

CODE	DEFINITION
Changes related to work. - Changes in bylaw - Changes in region - Changes in work	The shifts and changes that may occur in a bylaw officer's daily job. These changes can happen at different divisions of their work, or jurisdictions where bylaws officers operate and enforce by-laws.
Personal Coping mechanism - Positive: family, friends, hobbies etc. - Negative: drug use, anger, no indication of help required.	The conscious and unconscious adjustments, and adaptions that decrease tensions and anxiety in stressful experiences or situations. (Chowdhury, 2019; Algorani & Gupta,2023)
COVID-19 Pandemic anxiety - Impacts on friends and family. - Impacts on the job.	The worries, uncertainties and anxieties experienced by bylaw officers surrounding COVID-19 virus.
COVID-19 Precautions	The preventive measures and safety protocols taken to minimize the risk of infection and transmission of COVID-19 among bylaw officers.
Governing and Regulating People - Power dynamics (police vs bylaw)	Policies and practices established by governing bodies to guide, regulate, and enforce laws and regulations within communities to ensure compliance and safety.
Interactions - Public - Business	The communication between bylaw officers and the community.
Perceived Impacts of COVID-19 on the mental health of bylaw officers - Increased stress and anxiety - Burnout (DEFINE) - Coping strategies: effective Positive: engaged	The ways in which COVID-19 pandemic is perceived to influence the mental health and well-being of bylaw officers.
Job commitment	The willingness to stay in your position, the emotional attachment to the organization and/or the continuance commitment/ desire to stay with the organization (*Bakker & Schaufeli, 2014)*
Job security	The state of having a job and being able to retain the job for long periods of time, without the fear of dismissal.
Job Demands	The job's physical, social, or organizational aspects that may require a sustained physical or mental cost. This can be how quickly officers learn bylaws, scheduling, shift work, etc. (Demerouti, 2001).
Job Resources	The job's physical, psychological, social, and organizational aspects that are essential in achieving work

	goals, reducing job demands, and stimulating personal growth and development (Bakker et al., 2017). Examples: PPE, wellness center counseling, time away from work, social support (family and friends), and supervisor-based support.
Organizational Approach - Educational - Enforcement	The strategies and understandings implemented by each municipality in regulating and enforcing COVID-19-related mandates and regulations to ensure compliance within the area that is served. Educational Approach: Communicative strategy where bylaw officers focus on educating the public about rules and regulations surrounding the COVID-19 mandates. Enforcement Approach: Reactive strategy, where bylaw officers focus on compliance to COVID-19-related regulations resulting in fines for non-compliance.
Organizational support - Positive support - Negative support	The policies, practices, and resources provided to bylaw officers by their organization, during the COVID-19 pandemic, to support them to carry out their enforcement duties. Positive support: The presence of resources, assistance, and recognition provided to bylaw officers to enable their job performance and enforcement. Negative support: The absence of resources, and recognition from the municipal organization, impacting job performance and enforcement.
Public perceptions of bylaw enforcement	The attitudes and beliefs held by members of the public regarding the interactions they hold with bylaw officers.
Regional Collaboration - Positive relationships - Working relationship between agencies - Info sharing	The partnerships established during the COVID-19 pandemic among different agencies/organizations to address challenges in enforcement activity, public safety, and community compliance with regulations.
Roles and Enforcement - Police officer - Bylaw officer	The roles and responsibilities associated with law enforcement; exhibiting the difference in the laws they enforce, level of authority, and level of involvement in public compliance and safety. Police officers: responsible for maintaining public safety and order, preventing and investigating crimes, and enforcing provincial and federal laws

	Bylaw officer: responsible for enforcing municipal/ non-criminal laws, and local bylaws and regulations such as: zoning laws, property standards laws, and local business licenses.
Work engagement - Present - Absent	Refers to the employee's involvement, commitment to the organization, and their work and experiencing a sense of significance, pride, and challenge), and being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in the work (Dixie & Upadhyay,2021; Schaufeli, 2017)