

The Impact of Disciplinary Procedures on Police Officers' Self-Efficacy, Psychological Well-Being, and Organisational Performance

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Disciplinary proceedings are significant negative work events in policing, yet their psychological and attitudinal effects remain underexplored. We surveyed Slovenian police officers ($N = 443$; $n = 115$ with personal experience of disciplinary proceedings) to examine stress appraisal, consequences, organisational cynicism, self-efficacy, perceived changes in relationships, and coping strategies. Initiation of proceedings was generally viewed as stressful. Data reduction identified four coherent consequence dimensions: 1) Emotional distress and affective escalation (most prominent), 2) Erosion of self-worth and social insecurity, 3) Somatic strain and physiological arousal, and 4) Cognitive impairment and reduced motivation. Interpersonal strain was mainly intra-organisational (within units or supervisors), while attitudes towards citizens remained largely unchanged. Organisational cynicism exhibited a two-factor structure—Organisational (leadership, rules, and integrity) and Community—with slightly higher averages among officers with experience in disciplinary proceedings, although group differences were small. Both cynicism factors showed small-to-moderate positive correlations with adverse outcomes; in regression, procedural justice uniquely predicted lower cognitive strain, while organisational cynicism displayed positive but non-robust associations (trend-level for somatic), after accounting for demographics and self-efficacy. Finally, a brief self-efficacy scale formed a single factor; overall differences by disciplinary experience were minor, with weaknesses mainly in mastery-related items. Coping mostly involved adaptive informal strategies and union support, with limited use of formal psychological services. The findings highlight the importance of procedural justice, clear and consistent supervisory practices, and confidential support avenues to reduce emotional strain, maintain self-efficacy, and diminish cynicism.

Keywords: police, disciplinary procedures, Slovenia, stress, self-efficacy, organisational cynicism, Affective Events Theory

UDC: 351.741

1 Introduction

Disciplinary proceedings in policing are formal processes used to investigate and discipline alleged misconduct. As distinct and often challenging work events, they can affect officers' well-being, including both mental and emotional health, as well as their self-efficacy, or confidence in handling tasks and challenges. In policing, stress stems from organisational stressors (procedures, policies, internal controls) and operational stressors (fieldwork), each associated with outcomes such as sleep disturbances, depression, and performance issues (Shane, 2010; Violanti et al., 2017). Viewing disciplinary proceedings through Affective Events Theory (AET) treats them as event triggers

whose emotional impacts influence subsequent attitudes and behaviours (Ashkanasy & Dorris, 2017; Weiss & Beal, 2005; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996).

We consider disciplinary proceedings as adverse emotional work events—specific incidents at work that evoke unpleasant feelings and affect subsequent attitudes and actions. Our analysis draws on two areas of organisational behaviour – AET and organisational cynicism. The latter describes a consistently negative attitude towards one's organisation, often linked to perceived lapses in integrity among supervisors, the public, organisational rules, or the legal system. Since coping with adverse events depends on perceived ability, we also reference Bandura's (1977) concept of self-efficacy, which is the belief in one's capacity to achieve desired outcomes.

The purpose of this study is to examine how police officers perceive disciplinary proceedings as stressors and how these events relate to psychological and behavioural outcomes, perceived changes in relationships at work and with citizens, and key attitudinal constructs – self-efficacy and organisational

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cynicism. Using data from a cross-sectional online survey of Slovenian police officers that includes both respondents with direct experience of disciplinary proceedings and a comparison group without such experience, the study investigates how stressful officers find the initiation of disciplinary proceedings and which psychological or behavioural responses are most prominent; the extent to which officers perceive changes in relationships with peers and supervisors compared to relations with citizens; whether direct experience with disciplinary proceedings is associated with differences in self-efficacy, particularly mastery experiences; and how disciplinary-related stress and reported consequences relate to dimensions of organisational cynicism.

This study examines the relationship between disciplinary proceedings and officers' emotional and attitudinal reactions. It utilises AET within policing accountability, highlighting self-efficacy and cynicism as outcomes. The findings provide insights for leadership and Human Resources Development, focusing on procedural justice, communication, and officer support (Colquitt et al., 2001; Thibaut & Walker, 1975; Tyler & Lind, 1992). The article is organised as follows: first, a literature review is presented; then, the methodology is described; followed by the presentation of results. In the final section, implications, limitations, and avenues for future research are discussed.

2 Literature Review

Within the normative framework, disciplinary responsibility constitutes one dimension of accountability in employment relations, designed to ensure order and discipline while simultaneously protecting employees against arbitrary action. Disciplinary responsibility is one form of accountability inherent in employment relationships. It pertains to the accountability of an employee for disciplinary violations or breaches of work obligations. While disciplinary procedures primarily protect the interests of employers, it is equally important that public servants are protected against the potential arbitrariness of employers (Krašovec, 2002). In Slovenia, the Public Employees Act (Apohal Vučkovič et al., 2022; "Zakon o javnih uslužbencih (ZJU-UPB3)", 2007) regulates the content of disciplinary responsibility, violations, measures, records, and procedural rules, complemented by the Employment Relationships Act ("Zakon o delovnih razmerjih (ZDR-1)", 2013) and related regulations; sectoral police legislation, such as the Organisation and Work of the Police Act ("Zakon o organiziranosti in delu v policiji (ZODPol)", 2013) and the Police Tasks and Powers Act ("Zakon o nalogah in pooblastilih policije (ZNPPol)", 2013), delineates organisational powers but does not itself constitute

the disciplinary regime. In practice, heads of organisation may adopt managerial measures (e.g., temporary withdrawal of police powers) in circumstances that overlap with disciplinary concerns. However, these measures are not equivalent to disciplinary liability per se under the Public Employees Act ("ZJU-UPB3", 2007; "ZODPol", 2013). Based on his analysis and other legal contributions on this topic (Krašovec, 2002; Majcen, 2016; Zajc, 2019), it can be concluded that the process is legally regulated and meticulously designed.

Against this backdrop, police stress research provides the empirical link between formal procedures and officers' experiences. A standard distinction separates operational stressors, such as trauma exposure, threat, and shift work, from organisational stressors rooted in procedures, policies, internal controls, and managerial practices; disciplinary proceedings fall under the latter (Shane, 2010). Stress is commonly understood as a biopsychosocial process triggered by environmental demands through appraisal and coping; definitions highlight physiological change, psychological mediation, and adaptive responses (Schacter et al., 2012; Theorell, 2004; Walsh et al., 2012; Webster, 2014). In European occupational health discourse, work stress is seen as a major safety and health challenge, with significant implications for individuals and organisations (European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, 2024). The policing literature links stress with a range of outcomes: fatigue, irritability, sleep disturbance, depressive symptoms, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, impaired performance, and family strain (Austin-Ketch et al., 2012; Baughman et al., 2014; Gerber et al., 2010; Kirschman et al., 2015; Ma et al., 2015; McCanlies et al., 2014; Torres et al., 2003). Overall, syntheses agree that police stress is connected to traumatic exposure, suicidality, health issues, performance declines, and negative family consequences (Violanti et al., 2017).

AET offers a micro-process account of how such stressors operate in everyday organisational life. Discrete workplace events elicit affective reactions, which subsequently shape cognitions, attitudes, and behaviour. These effects occur both directly via emotion and indirectly through appraisal and work attitudes (Ashkanasy & Dorris, 2017; Weiss & Beal, 2005; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). In AET terms, disciplinary proceedings can be conceptualised as adverse affective work events. They are embedded in organisational characteristics such as hierarchy, formal rules, and limited autonomy. These features may intensify adverse appraisals when perceived control is low and stakes are high, leading to increased stress and potentially harmful outcomes. The theory's core elements – events, work characteristics, dispositions, affective reactions, and outcomes – align closely with the disciplinary context. Here, perceived fairness, clarity of rules, and quality

of treatment by supervisors structure how officers construe and emotionally metabolise the event. This framing connects the stress literature to behavioural outcomes in policing. It specifies the mechanism through which organisational stressors, such as formal proceedings, generate attitudinal and relational changes (Ashton-James & Ashkanasy, 2005, 2008).

Another prominent attitudinal outcome of a perceived hostile work environment is organisational cynicism. Early academic work viewed cynicism as a singular concept (Pagon, 1993; Regoli et al., 1990); more recent research distinguishes multiple domains: cynicism towards supervisors or the organisation, the public, organisational rules or norms, and the legal system (Smith et al., 2022; Smolej & Lobnikar, 2017). This multidimensional structure has practical significance. When events are judged as unfair or integrity-violating, negative feelings may solidify into a stable attitude towards specific targets (e.g., supervisors or rules), aligning with AET's indirect pathway from affect to attitudes. Slovenian studies utilise reliable tools to measure these domains and find that cynicism correlates with work experiences relevant to police environments, including the perceived ambiguity of rules and supervisory practices (Smolej & Lobnikar, 2017). The broader organisational-behaviour literature also places cynicism within perceived deficiencies in fairness and support during change. It is associated with lower levels of identification and engagement (Cole et al., 2006), underscoring its importance in situations involving formal procedures. While a comprehensive doctrinal analysis is beyond the scope of this work, classic studies on procedural justice suggest that perceptions of fair process, encompassing clarity, neutrality, voice, and respectful treatment, shape cooperation and acceptance of outcomes (Meško et al., 2012; Thibaut & Walker, 1975). This dynamic is directly relevant to officers' evaluations of disciplinary incidents.

A complementary perspective involves coping resources, particularly self-efficacy. According to Bandura's social-cognitive theory, self-efficacy – the belief in one's ability to achieve desired outcomes – relies on sources such as mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion or feedback, and emotional states (Bandura, 1977). In Slovenian policing, these sources have been adapted and tested with acceptable reliability (Frlec & Vidmar, 2001; Smolej & Lobnikar, 2017), allowing for nuanced analyses of how specific organisational events may selectively diminish mastery-based efficacy while sparing other sources. Empirical evidence shows that officers' self-efficacy correlates with work attitudes and engagement—outcomes theorised as downstream of affective events—implying that disciplinary actions, if perceived as threatening or unfair, could weaken mastery-related efficacy by reducing opportunities for success or increasing self-doubt during challenging interactions.

Synthesising these strands produces a coherent, theory-driven view of disciplinary proceedings as organisationally based, adverse affective events in the workplace. First, the legal and organisational framework places proceedings at the crossroads of managerial control and employee protections, creating conditions where officers' assessments of fairness and integrity become crucial. Second, policing's stress ecology shows that organisational stressors, including formal procedures, are significant for well-being and performance, affecting not only physiological health but also relational and attitudinal aspects (Shane, 2010; Violanti et al., 2017). Third, AET explains how specific events, such as initiating disciplinary proceedings, trigger emotional responses that influence job attitudes and interpersonal relationships, especially with supervisors and immediate teams, where control and evaluation are most focused. Finally, the complex nature of police cynicism and the various sources of self-efficacy offer measurable outcomes to explore whether and how disciplinary experiences relate to (a) increased cynicism towards particular targets and (b) specific decreases in mastery-related efficacy, beyond general emotional state or vicarious experiences (Pagon, 1993; Smolej & Lobnikar, 2017).

In summary, the literature encourages a focused examination of disciplinary proceedings as highly stressful and emotionally charged events that occur within a highly regulated organisation. The perspective presented here anticipates that officers' evaluations of these events will relate to psychological effects (e.g., anxiety, fatigue), relational changes primarily within the organisation (units and supervisors), and attitudinal patterns consistent with AET's pathways, specifically, increased cynicism towards the specific domain and varying impacts on self-efficacy. This study utilises established Slovenian tools for measuring police cynicism and self-efficacy to empirically test theoretically derived expectations in a national sample, thereby linking the legal-organisational context of disciplinary responsibility to the micro-processes of affect, appraisal, and adjustment that influence officers' wellbeing and conduct.

3 Method, Instruments, and Sample

3.1 Measures

For this study, we designed a multi-section questionnaire. Police cynicism and self-efficacy were assessed using established, previously validated Slovenian instruments (cynicism: Lobnikar & Smolej, 2017; Pagon, 1993; self-efficacy: Bandura, 1977; Frlec & Vidmar, 2001; Smolej & Lobnikar, 2017). All other scales (e.g., attitudes/behavioural impacts related to disciplinary proceedings) were developed

specifically for this project based on a systematic literature review and refined through pilot testing; their final forms demonstrated acceptable internal consistency and were employed in subsequent analyses.

Organisational (police) cynicism. Cynicism was measured with a 16-item police cynicism inventory used in Slovenia (Lobnikar & Smolej, 2017; Pagon, 1993), rated on a 5-point scale (1 – strongly disagree, 5 – strongly agree). Since facets of cynicism are expected to correlate, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using Principal Axis Factoring (PAF) with oblimin rotation. On the full dataset (N up to 443; listwise within analysis), indicators of factorability were strong (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin [KMO] = 0.848; Bartlett's $\chi^2(120) = 2146.56, p < 0.001$). Two items: "Reforms weaken the reputation of the police" and "When testifying in court, police officers are treated like criminals" showed low communalities/cross-loadings and unstable placement across solutions, so we removed them and re-estimated. To assess stability, we randomly split the sample approximately equally and performed the EFA on each half using identical settings. Both halves supported the same primary structure (organisational/leadership and public/community aspects). A possible third component (legal/system rules) was weak and unstable (small post-extraction eigenvalues, several cross-loadings, and borderline reliability in its 3-item form, Cronbach's alpha [α] = 0.69). Split-half diagnostics were satisfactory (KMO = 0.83 in both halves; Bartlett's $\chi^2(55) = 1634.82, p < 0.001$), justifying the decision to omit this fragile facet. The final instrument comprised 11 items forming two correlated subscales: 1) Organisational cynicism (8 items) – leadership/supervisors, clarity/consistency of rules, internal organisational integrity; 2) Community cynicism (3 items) – perceived public disapproval/declining police reputation. After extraction, the solution accounted for 53.69% of the variance ($F1 = 41.41\%$, $F2 = 12.28\%$). Pattern loadings were ≥ 0.48 on the intended factors with no significant cross-loadings, and the factors were moderately correlated ($r = 0.46$), justifying the use of an oblique rotation. Subscale scores were computed as the mean of available items (higher scores indicating greater cynicism), requiring at least 70% item availability per subscale; cases not meeting this threshold were listwise deleted within that construct. Internal consistency was $\alpha = 0.88$ (Organisational) and $\alpha = 0.82$ (Community).

Self-efficacy. Self-efficacy was assessed through five items adapted from the police self-efficacy battery used in earlier Slovenian studies (Frlec & Vidmar, 2001; Smolej & Lobnikar, 2017), based on Bandura's (1977) social-cognitive framework. The items covered: 1) positive work affect ("I enjoy my work and feel good while doing it"; "I feel relaxed at work"), 2) mastery/self-assessment ("My results show I am competent for

my job"; "I experience success in my work"), and 3) feedback/persuasion ("My superior tells me what they think about my work"). Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale (1 – "strongly disagree", 5 – "strongly agree"). Negatively worded items from the original set were omitted from the final index (problematic performance in diagnostics). Dimensionality was evaluated using principal axis factoring (oblimin rotation was specified, but only a single factor was extracted). Sampling adequacy and sphericity supported the factor analysis (KMO = 0.686; Bartlett's $\chi^2(10) = 240.60, p < 0.001$). A one-factor solution was retained; after extraction, it explained 32.19% of the variance. Internal consistency was acceptable for a brief scale ($\alpha = 0.686$; 5 items). A shorter, affect-only dyad (2 items) yielded a higher $\alpha = 0.75$ but was rejected on content-validity grounds, as our aim was to keep items reflecting self-perceived capability (mastery and persuasive feedback), not only affect. Scoring used the average of available items (higher = greater self-efficacy). Consistent with other measures in the study, a respondent's score was calculated when $\geq 70\%$ of items were completed (here, $\geq 4/5$); otherwise, the case was excluded listwise for this construct. These decisions balance reliability with coverage and preserve the construct's theoretical breadth for downstream analyses.

Perceived stress of disciplinary procedure. Respondents rated how stressful they found the disciplinary procedure initiated against them ("How stressful did you find the disciplinary procedure initiated against you?") on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = "Not at all stressful", 2 = "Not stressful", 3 = "Neither stressful nor not stressful", 4 = "Stressful", 5 = "Very stressful"), with an additional Don't know / cannot answer option marked as missing. Higher scores reflect greater perceived stress.

Changes in colleagues' attitudes. One section of the questionnaire investigated whether colleagues' attitudes towards officers subject to disciplinary proceedings had changed. Responses were measured on a five-point scale (from 1 = "Did not experience" to 5 = "Such behaviour was very frequent"). The internal consistency of this scale, comprising five variables, was high ($\alpha = 0.956$).

Changes in supervisors' attitudes. Another section examined whether disciplinary proceedings affected the attitudes of supervisors towards the officers involved. Responses were again rated on a five-point scale (from 1 = "Did not experience" to 5 = "Such behaviour was very frequent"). The internal consistency of this scale, which included six variables, was also high ($\alpha = 0.921$).

Impact on work and relationships. Respondents were asked how the initiation of disciplinary proceedings affected

their attitude towards work and their interactions with others. They rated changes on a five-point scale (from 1 = “Significantly worsened” to 5 = “Significantly improved”). This section evaluated the extent to which disciplinary proceedings influenced their relationships with various activities, institutions, and individuals. The internal consistency of this scale, which included ten variables, was high ($\alpha = 0.805$).

Personal experience of disciplinary proceedings.

Officers who had personally undergone a disciplinary process rated how much they experienced 22 possible consequences as a result of the proceedings. Items measuring the personal consequences of disciplinary actions were rated on a four-point intensity scale (1 = “Very little”, 2 = “Little”, 3 = “A lot”, 4 = “Very much”). To avoid inappropriate responses when an item did not apply, respondents could select “Not applicable,” which was treated as missing for scale development. We conducted an EFA to reduce the item set and identify coherent dimensions. Sampling adequacy and sphericity supported factorability (KMO = 0.820; Bartlett’s $\chi^2(171) = 852.87, p < 0.001$). Using principal axis factoring with oblimin rotation ($\delta = 0$), we iteratively removed items showing low communalities or cross-loadings, as well as those with very sparse endorsement (e.g., nail biting, increased smoking, alcohol, or drug misuse). The final solution retained 19 items and yielded four correlated factors that were well-interpretable and theoretically consistent: F1 Emotional Distress & Affective Escalation (e.g., irritability, anger, violent outbursts, sadness, anxiety or depression, fear, helplessness, suicidal ideation, sleep problems), F2 Erosion of Self-Worth & Social Insecurity (loss of self-respect, self-confidence, sense of incompetence, social discomfort), F3 Somatic Strain & Physiological Arousal (abdominal pain or cramps; chest tightness or breathing difficulty), and F4 Cognitive Impairment & Reduced Drive (forgetfulness, reduced concentration or attention, reduced sexual interest; sleep problems loaded secondarily). The four factors explained 71.64% of the common variance (initial eigenvalues greater than 1). Factor intercorrelations were moderate ($r = 0.32$ – 0.50), justifying oblique rotation. Internal consistencies of the factor composites were acceptable to excellent (e.g., F1 $\alpha = 0.89$, F2 $\alpha = 0.91$, F4 $\alpha = 0.88$; F3 $\alpha = 0.75$). Because factor signs are indeterminate, we reversed the direction of negatively keyed factors so that higher scores consistently indicate more severe consequences. For each factor, we calculated composite scores as the mean of available items, requiring at least 70% item availability within the factor; otherwise, the factor score was set as missing for that case.

Coping mechanisms and resilience. Another section examined whether respondents took specific actions to cope with the situation or to bolster their resilience after disciplinary

proceedings began. This was assessed using a four-point scale (1 = “Very little”, 2 = “Little”, 3 = “A lot”, 4 = “Very much”), with an extra option for “Not applicable” if no actions were taken. The internal consistency of this scale, which included nine variables, was moderate to high ($\alpha = 0.757$).

Procedural justice index. Procedural justice was assessed using four statements under the prompt: “Rate the disciplinary procedure in the Slovenian police. For each statement, indicate how much you agree or disagree.” Responses used a 5-point agreement scale (from 1 = “Strongly disagree” to 5 = “Strongly agree”), with a “Don’t know” option recorded and treated as missing data. The items were: “The procedure is fair to officers involved”, “The procedure serves to preserve the integrity of the police”, “The procedure aims to establish the truth”, and “The procedure is well designed and comprehensive”. An EFA (principal axis factoring) supported a single factor (KMO = 0.834; Bartlett’s $\chi^2(6) = 608.67, p < 0.001$; first eigenvalue = 3.13, explaining 78.17% of the variance; communalities approximately 0.61–0.66), and internal consistency was excellent ($\alpha = 0.906$). We calculated a composite procedural justice index as the mean of the four items, including cases with at least three valid responses; higher scores reflect greater perceived procedural justice on the original 1–5 scale.

Besides scale-based questions, the survey included multiple-choice questions where respondents could select from predefined answers (“Yes”, “No”, and “I do not know”). These questions examined whether respondents: 1) “Sought any form of support after the initiation of disciplinary proceedings”, 2) “Considered leaving the police force during the proceedings”, and 3) “Took sick leave to avoid attending hearings”. Finally, respondents were also asked to provide basic socio-demographic information.

3.2 Research Implementation Process

The anonymous online survey was hosted on 1ka.arnes.si. In May 2022, it was distributed to all police officers via the Slovenian Police intranet; both representative police unions independently encouraged participation. The survey remained open until 15 August 2022. It consisted of 36 question blocks (multi-item scales and single-item measures), which produced 153 item-level variables in the dataset (i.e., individual statements within scales, categorical items with multiple options, and several administrative variables used for routing and quality checks).

3.3 Sample, Inclusion Criteria, and Missing Data Handling

An online survey was anonymously distributed via the Police intranet, with additional reminders from the unions. Of those invited, 532 clicked the link; 461 opened the questionnaire (87%); and 443 submitted usable data (278 fully completed and 165 partially useful responses; 52%). Break-offs included 89 at the introduction (17%) and 165 within the questionnaire (31%; total 48%). The study covered 6.06% of all employees holding police powers during the survey period. Following pre-specified rules, we analysed all usable cases. Partially completed questionnaires were eligible, and inclusion was determined on an analysis-by-analysis (available-case) basis: a respondent contributed to a given analysis only when the required variables were present. Scale scores were computed when at least 70% of items were completed. We did not impute missing data, and sample sizes (*n*) are reported for each analysis. For scale construction and factor analysis, cases missing any item within a particular scale were excluded from that specific analysis (listwise within scale); descriptive statistics and correlations used available-case data (pairwise deletion).

Demographic details are reported in Table 1. We did not weight the data; while the sample is not a probability sample, it covers all ranks and regions and offers transparent demographics (age, tenure, gender) to facilitate comparison with the police workforce. To assess comparability, we compared our sample with official 2023 workforce statistics published by the Slovenian Police (www.policija.si). The average age of the population was 44.2 years (all employees), which closely matches our sample ($M = 45.11$, $SD = 7.46$). Female police officers make up 20.2% of the Slovenian police, which is also like our sample. Regarding education, the workforce consisted of approximately 43.5% with secondary education, 22.6% with higher vocational education, 24.3% with a first-cycle/university degree, and 6.7% with postgraduate levels (with 3.0% holding a degree below secondary).

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the sample

Gender	<i>n</i>	%
Male	217	79
Female	43	16
Do not want to answer	14	5
Education	<i>n</i>	%
Secondary school	54	12.2
Higher (Police) school	65	14.7
1st Bologna degree	83	18.7

2nd Bologna degree	59	13.3
Specialist/MSc/PhD	15	3.4
Work experience	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age (years)	45.11	7.46
Total years of service	23.74	9.30
Years in current position	11.12	7.65
Field of work	<i>n</i>	%
Patrol work	62	14.0
Criminal investigation	58	13.1
Specialized units	10	2.3
Operational communication centre/station duty officer	21	4.7
Community policing officer	10	2.3
Administrative and managerial tasks	60	13.5
Other operational work	53	12.0

* Percentages are based on available cases and may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Based on this, the study sample appears somewhat more tertiary-educated than the workforce average. However, since the education categories in Table 1 are condensed, this comparison should be interpreted cautiously. For occupational mix, the workforce comprised roughly 67.9% uniformed officers, 18.9% non-uniformed officers, and 13.2% other staff in 2023. Our breakdown of fields (e.g., patrol, criminal investigation, administrative/managerial) covers the main operational streams; however, direct proportionality cannot be confirmed because the population uses different status categories than our survey typology. Overall, the sample is age-comparable, with a modestly higher proportion of tertiary education, and a broad (though not identically structured) occupational distribution—patterns typical of organisation-wide, voluntary response surveys.

3.4 Ethics, Consent, and Organisational Approval

The study complied with the University of Maribor's Code of Ethics and was validated by the University's Doctoral School. Participation was voluntary and completely anonymous; no directly identifiable or sensitive personal information was collected. Permission to contact officers and distribute the survey was granted by the Slovenian Police. In accordance with the prevailing institutional guidelines at the time, the protocol did not require additional formal review by an ethics committee; however, all ethical safeguards (such as informed consent on the first page, the option to withdraw at any time, and data minimisation) were in place.

3.5 Assumption Checks, Data Screening, Analytical Strategy and Reporting

Before multivariate modelling, we examined univariate distributions and screened for bivariate relationships. For group comparisons, we verified homogeneity of variances using Levene's test and applied Welch's correction where necessary. Construct validity and reliability were assessed using KMO and Bartlett's tests, EFA (using principal axis factoring with oblimin rotation), and α . Composites were created from the validated dimensions, scoring each as the mean of available items with a $\geq 70\%$ item presence rule. Between-group differences based on disciplinary proceeding experience were evaluated with independent samples t-tests, and for the combined test of cynicism (organisational, community) and self-efficacy with MANOVA/GLM. Associations among key constructs were initially examined using Pearson correlations (pairwise deletion). To explore incremental relations with the four consequence domains, hierarchical multiple regressions were fitted with theory-driven block entry. Collinearity was checked with VIF, and 95% bootstrap confidence intervals (resampled 1000 times) were reported alongside parametric tests. All tests were two-tailed with $\alpha = 0.05$; effect sizes were reported with the results (Cohen's d , partial η^2 , and r where applicable). Missing data were handled on an available-case basis (pairwise for correlations; listwise within each model or scale), with no imputation.

3.6 Limitations of the Study Design

This study is cross-sectional and relies on self-report data from a voluntary, non-probability sample; therefore, causal inference is unwarranted, and the generalisability to the population is limited, with potential non-response bias. Several measures were brief: the self-efficacy index included five items with modest internal consistency, likely weakening associations, and stress appraisal was assessed with a single item that showed a ceiling effect among officers with disciplinary experience, reducing variance. Response formats also varied across instruments (5-point versus 4-point scales), which could limit comparability and the effective scale range. Construct dimensionality was established through exploratory factor analysis on the present sample; although sampling adequacy and internal consistency were acceptable and split-half tests supported the two-factor cynicism structure, we did not perform confirmatory factor analysis or test measurement invariance across experience groups – both should be explored in future research. Analyses employed available-case inclusion (pairwise deletion for correlations; listwise within scales and models) without imputation; while this preserves observed data, it results in heterogeneous sample sizes and increased uncertainty in multivariate estimates, particularly within the

subgroup that experienced proceedings. All variables were measured at a single time point and via the same method; despite robustness checks (e.g., Welch adjustments, non-parametric correlations, bootstrapped confidence intervals), the possibility of common-method variance and shared-rater bias remains. Lastly, the time since the most recent proceeding varied among experienced officers, introducing potential recall bias and heterogeneity in exposure intensity. These limitations restrict inference and highlight the need for longitudinal, multi-source designs (e.g., administrative records and supervisor ratings), more comprehensive multi-item stress measures, and confirmatory testing of the measurement models (including invariance) in independent samples.

4 Results

This section presents the results in a clear sequence. We start with descriptive summaries of respondents' experiences and their perceived stress related to initiating disciplinary proceedings. Next, we describe evaluations of how disciplinary procedures were conducted, the reported impact on workplace relationships and attitudes, and the key dimensions of behavioural consequences identified through data reduction. We then examine the connections between the consequences of disciplinary proceedings and self-efficacy, cynicism, and procedural justice, concluding with patterns of help-seeking and coping strategies.

The first aspect we examined was whether the surveyed police officers had personal experience in initiating disciplinary proceedings. Disciplinary proceedings had been started against 29% ($n = 115$) of the respondents. Among those with such experience, 12% had recently undergone the process, 22% more than a year ago, and 66% over five years prior to the survey date. We asked respondents how stressful they found initiating a disciplinary process against them. The average perceived stress on a 5-point Likert scale was $M = 4.30$, $SD = 0.95$, with both the median and mode at 5, indicating a strong skew towards higher stress (ceiling effect). Overall, 84.8% reported the experience as stressful or very stressful, 7.6% were neutral, and 7.6% reported low stress. Among individuals with direct experience of disciplinary proceedings, initiating the process was perceived as highly stressful.

4.1 Assessment of Disciplinary Proceedings

All respondents were asked to evaluate how disciplinary proceedings are conducted within the Slovenian Police (Table 2). Overall, responses showed limited agreement and generally low to moderate support for positive statements

about the process. A large majority either disagreed or remained neutral, suggesting that the process is well-structured and comprehensive (84%; $M = 2.3$, $SD = 1.13$; scale: from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree") and that it is fair to officers involved (80% disagreed; $M = 2.4$, $SD = 1.23$). Opinions were somewhat more varied regarding whether the proceedings aim to uphold police integrity (48% disagreed; $M = 2.6$, $SD = 1.24$) and to uncover the truth (46% disagreed; $M = 2.6$, $SD = 1.26$). The strongest support was for behavioural impact: 52% agreed that initiating disciplinary proceedings influences officers' conduct towards citizens ($M = 3.3$, $SD = 1.23$).

reliable group differences beyond perceptions of how well the process is designed. Across items, effects were small ($d = 0.12$ – 0.22) except for design/comprehensiveness.

4.2 The Consequences of Disciplinary Proceedings on Relationships at the Police Unit

Next, we examined whether police officers who had undergone disciplinary proceedings observed any changes in the behaviour of their colleagues and superiors. The findings are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 2: Comparison of assessments by experience with disciplinary proceedings

Item	Group*	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
The process is well-designed and comprehensive.	No personal experience	170	2.37	1.20	2.75	0.007	0.34
	Has personal experience	71	1.99	0.89			
The process is fair to officers involved.	No personal experience	174	2.44	1.26	1.59	0.112	0.21
	Has personal experience	72	2.18	1.13			
The process aims to uphold police integrity.	No personal experience	178	2.65	1.28	0.87	0.381	0.12
	Has personal experience	72	2.50	1.13			
The process seeks to uncover the truth.	No personal experience	175	2.69	1.29	1.65	0.110	0.22
	Has personal experience	73	2.41	1.17			
The initiation of disciplinary proceedings affects changes in officers' behaviour towards citizens.	No personal experience	172	3.41	1.23	1.41	0.160	0.20
	Has personal experience	71	3.17	1.21			

* We conducted independent-samples *t* tests. Two-tailed tests with $\alpha = 0.05$ are reported; Welch's correction was used when Levene's test indicated unequal variances. Values reported for the first (No personal experience) row reflect the comparison between the two groups for each item. Cohen's *d* is the standardised mean difference. Entries use available-case (*n*).

Respondents without personal experience of disciplinary proceedings rated the process as better designed and more thorough than those with such experience, and this difference was statistically significant. For the remaining statements: fairness to officers, upholding police integrity, seeking the truth, and effects on officers' behaviour towards citizens, group differences were not significant. Although the means consistently trended towards more critical views among officers with personal experience, the magnitudes were small, and the evidence was insufficient to confidently conclude

Table 3: Perceived change in attitude toward officers subjected to disciplinary proceedings

Perceived change in colleagues' attitude	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Median	Mode	Min	Max
Increased supervision by colleagues	87	1.91	1.32	1	1	1	5
Lack of trust in your work	87	1.95	1.34	1	1	1	5
Noncollegial behaviour, undermining	87	1.98	1.37	1	1	1	5
Colleagues avoided you	87	1.72	1.13	1	1	1	5
Felt useless and unwelcome	87	2.02	1.45	1	1	1	5
Perceived change in superiors' attitude							
Assignment of less demanding tasks	83	1.9	1.3	1	1	1	5
Lack of trust	83	2.3	1.5	2	1	1	5
Additional verification of completed tasks and increased supervision	83	2.4	1.5	2	1	1	5
Harassment or humiliation	83	2.2	1.5	1	1	1	5
Different standards in evaluating and rewarding work	83	3.1	1.7	3	1	1	5
Temporary reassignment to another unit	83	2.04	1.57	1	1	1	5

* Scale: from 1 = "never experienced" to 5 = "very often".

Among the officers undergoing disciplinary proceedings, most did not perceive increased scrutiny or negative treatment from their colleagues. Specifically, 62% reported no increased supervision (16% occasionally); 59% no distrust (14% occasionally); 59% no non-collegial behaviour or undermining (13% occasionally); 66% no avoidance (18% occasionally); and 57% did not feel useless or unwelcome (16% occasionally). Occasional avoidance (18%) was the most frequently reported change, followed by feeling useless or unwelcome (16%), increased supervision (16%), distrust (14%), and non-collegial behaviour or undermining (13%). These results suggest that most employees still feel valued and respected by their colleagues.

Officers were asked whether their superiors' behaviour changed after disciplinary proceedings were initiated against them. The most noticeable change was the application of different standards in assessing and rewarding work, reported as "very often" by 29% of respondents. Additional checks on completed tasks and increased supervision followed (12% very often). Lack of trust was next (13% very often), and harassment or humiliation by superiors was reported somewhat less frequently (12% very often). The least common change was being assigned less demanding tasks (10% very often). Overall, respondents most frequently noticed altered evaluation standards, increased oversight, signs of distrust, occasional harassment, and reallocation to less demanding tasks.

In Table 4, we present the results on changes in the attitude of police officers who experienced the initiation of disciplinary proceedings towards work and the individuals they interact with.

Table 4 shows that attitudes towards citizens and compliance with rules mostly stayed the same (88–91% experienced no change in citizen-related attitudes; 81% in rules and procedures). Relationships with family and friends also remained consistent (91% unchanged). The most notable negative changes were observed in attitudes towards the organisation, with perceptions of the police unit and superiors declining for 42% and 58% of respondents, respectively. Opinions on work and self-perception had mixed results (work: 53% worsened; view of police officers: 25% worsened, 8% improved; personal self-view: 12% worsened, 13% improved). Overall, the findings indicate that the most serious adverse effects of disciplinary measures occur in the relationships between officers and their police units and leadership, emphasising their influence on workplace morale and trust. While most respondents maintained stable self-perceptions, the decline in self-view among a notable minority of police officers is concerning, as it could affect professional confidence, job performance, and overall job satisfaction.

Table 4: Impact of disciplinary proceedings on attitudes toward work and related actors

Change in attitude toward...	Significantly worsened n (%)	Slightly worsened n (%)	No change n (%)	Slightly improved n (%)	Significantly improved n (%)	M	SD
The police organisation	18 (22%)	25 (31%)	38 (47%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2.25	0.80
The police unit where the disciplinary proceeding was initiated against you	15 (19%)	19 (23%)	46 (57%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	2.41	0.80
The superior of the police unit where the disciplinary proceeding was initiated against you	25 (31%)	22 (27%)	33 (41%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	2.12	0.87
Colleagues in the police unit where the disciplinary proceeding was initiated against you	5 (6%)	11 (14%)	63 (78%)	2 (2%)	0 (0%)	2.77	0.60
Citizens involved in the proceeding	3 (4%)	5 (6%)	71 (88%)	2 (2%)	0 (0%)	2.89	0.47
Citizens in general	1 (1%)	4 (5%)	74 (91%)	2 (2%)	0 (0%)	2.95	0.35
Rules and procedures in police work	2 (2%)	7 (9%)	66 (81%)	5 (6%)	1 (1%)	2.95	0.54
Family and friends	1 (1%)	4 (5%)	74 (91%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	2.96	0.40
Perception of oneself as a police officer	7 (9%)	13 (16%)	54 (68%)	4 (5%)	2 (3%)	2.76	0.78
Perception of oneself as a person	5 (6%)	5 (6%)	61 (75%)	7 (9%)	3 (4%)	2.98	0.74

*Scale: from 1 = "significantly worsened" to 5 = "significantly improved".

4.3 Psychological and Behavioural Consequences

As highlighted in the literature review, disciplinary proceedings perceived as stressful by police officers can have a range of effects on their personal and professional well-being. To explore this further, respondents were asked whether they had encountered any difficulties because of the initiation of disciplinary proceedings. Police officers evaluated the occurrence of various problems associated with the introduction of a disciplinary procedure.

Descriptive statistics were calculated for the original 22 consequences of disciplinary proceedings (scale: from 1 – “very little” to 4 – “a great deal”). The most strongly endorsed consequences were anger, helplessness, sadness, sleep problems, irritability, and depression/anxiety. Cognitive

and somatic sequelae were moderate: reduced concentration, reduced sexual interest, chest tightness/shortness of breath, forgetfulness, and abdominal pain/cramps. Externalised risk behaviours and self-harm thoughts were infrequent but showed a heavy-tailed distribution among those who endorsed them: substance misuse, nail biting, and suicidal ideation. In contrast, anger exhibited a negative skew (-0.48), indicating higher endorsement levels. Given the 22 individual items in the questionnaire concerning potential difficulties, we conducted a factor analysis, as shown in Table 5.

The highest average consequence is Emotional Distress & Affective Escalation ($M = 2.31, SD = 0.76$), indicating that affective reactions (anger, irritability, depressed/anxious mood, helplessness) are the most strongly endorsed sequelae. Next is Somatic Strain & Physiological Arousal ($M = 2.09, SD$

Table 5: Factor analysis

	h^2	Factor Loading	M	SD
F1: Emotional Distress & Affective Escalation ($\alpha = 0.885$; var. = 47.89%)			2.31	0.76
Irritability	0.55	0.71	2.00	1.01
Anger	0.50	0.70	2.95	1.01
Violent outbursts	0.52	0.69	1.42	0.79
Feeling down / depressed mood	0.71	0.65	2.54	1.07
Anxiety / depressive affect	0.68	0.65	2.30	1.10
Helplessness	0.50	0.53	2.55	1.09
Fear	0.55	0.47	2.17	1.03
Suicidal thoughts	0.29	0.42	1.28	0.69
Sleep problems (night awakenings)	0.78	0.41	2.22	1.06
F2: Erosion of Self-Worth & Social Insecurity ($\alpha = 0.911$; var. = 10.39%)				
Loss of self-esteem	0.97	0.99	1.80	0.91
Perceived incompetence	0.85	0.94	1.75	1.03
Loss of self-confidence	0.88	0.93	1.76	0.99
Social discomfort	0.58	0.59	1.79	1.03
F3: Somatic Strain & Physiological Arousal ($\alpha = 0.748$; var. = 7.47%)			2.09	0.82
Abdominal pain/cramps	0.64	0.71	1.69	0.90
Chest tightness/shortness of breath	0.61	0.62	1.89	1.04
Sadness	0.60	0.49	2.48	1.04
F4: Cognitive Impairment & Reduced Drive ($\alpha = .884$; var. = 5.89%)			1.88	0.93
Reduced sexual interest	0.72	0.71	1.91	1.05
Reduced concentration/attention	0.76	0.64	1.99	1.02
Forgetfulness	0.67	0.63	1.71	0.97

* Extraction method: Principal axis factoring with rotation method: Oblimin with Kaiser normalization; n per item: (63–115); Scale: from 1 = “very little” to 4 = “a great deal”.

= 0.82), suggesting moderate somatic stress (abdominal pain/cramps, chest tightness, difficulty breathing, plus some sleep disturbance). Cognitive Impairment & Reduced Drive sits lower ($M = 1.88, SD = 0.93$), reflecting milder, but present, reductions in concentration, memory, and sexual interest. The lowest factor mean is Erosion of Self-Worth & Social Insecurity ($M = 1.80, SD = 0.91$), implying that self-esteem/self-efficacy losses and social discomfort are less frequently rated as “a lot/very much” than direct emotional or somatic reactions. Overall, the pattern suggests a broad but graded impact—most intense in emotional dysregulation, moderate in somatic stress, and comparatively lower in cognitive and self-evaluative/social areas.

4.4 The Impact of the Initiated Disciplinary Procedure on Self-efficacy and the Emergence of Cynicism

We estimated a one-way GLM MANOVA to examine whether having experienced a disciplinary procedure (0 = No, 1 = Yes) is associated with officers' cynicism towards the organisation, cynicism towards the community, self-efficacy, and procedural justice (all measured on a five-point scale). Listwise deletion across dependent variables resulted in $n = 236$ (No procedure: 165, Procedure: 71). We report Wilks' lambda, univariate F tests, and partial η^2 based on Type III sums of squares; tabled values include group means and observed standard deviations (Table 6).

$p = 0.149, \eta^2p = 0.009$; organisational cynicism: $F(1, 234) = 0.10, p = 0.757, \eta^2p < .001$; community cynicism: $F(1, 234) = 0.02, p = 0.881, \eta^2p < 0.001$). Group differences were minimal ($|\Delta M| \leq 0.22$) and consistent with sampling variability.

We examined the pattern of bivariate links using Pearson correlations among consequences, cynicism, self-efficacy, and procedural justice; results are shown in Table 7. We inspected univariate distributions and normal Q-Q/P-P plots for the composite variables used in correlation and MANOVA analyses. Distributions were approximately normal with only mild tail deviations; variance homogeneity was adequate (Levene tests), and the equality-of-covariance assumption was supported (Box's M non-significant). Given that our outcomes are multi-item Likert composites, Pearson correlations are appropriate and robust to minor non-normality in samples of this size.

Bivariate Pearson correlations showed that the four consequence factors were moderately related (correlations approximately 0.48–0.69), indicating a consistent stress response with distinct yet connected dimensions (Table 7). Cynicism towards the organisation was positively associated with all four consequence factors: emotional distress (F1), self-worth erosion (F2), somatic strain (F3), and cognitive impairment/reduced motivation (F4), with small to moderate effects (e.g., $r = 0.35$ with F1; $r = 0.34$ with F2; $r = 0.32$ with

Table 6: MANOVA comparing officers with and without a disciplinary procedure

	No discipline procedure ($n = 165$)		Discipline procedure ($n = 71$)		F	η^2p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Cynicism toward the organisation	3.71	0.78	3.75	0.76	0.10	0.000
Cynicism toward the community	4.06	0.79	4.07	0.85	0.02	0.000
Self-efficacy	3.20	0.67	3.33	0.57	2.10	0.009
Procedural justice	2.50	1.10	2.28	0.91	2.17	0.009

* Multivariate test: Wilks' lambda = 0.976, $F(4, 231) = 1.41, p = .231, \eta^2p = .024$

Officers with experience in disciplinary procedures did not differ significantly from those without. The multivariate effect was not significant (Wilks' lambda = 0.976, $F(4, 231) = 1.41, p = .231, \eta^2p = .024$), and all univariate tests also showed non-significant results (procedural justice: $F(1, 234) = 2.17, p = 0.143, \eta^2p = 0.009$; self-efficacy: $F(1, 234) = 2.10,$

$F3; r = 0.27$ with F4; all $p < 0.01$). Cynicism towards the community generally exhibited weaker and less consistent positive links (e.g., $r = 0.23$ with F2, $p = 0.025$; correlations with the other factors were small and mostly non-significant.

Table 7: Correlation matrix

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
F1 Emotional	-						
F2 Self-worth	0.60**	-					
F3 Somatic	0.68**	0.49**	-				
F4 Cognitive	0.69**	0.62**	0.63**	-			
Self-efficacy	-0.17	-0.19	-0.07	-0.19	-		
Organisational cynicism	0.35**	0.34**	0.32**	0.27**	-0.34**	-	
Community cynicism	0.19	0.23*	0.01	0.07	-0.19**	0.41**	-
Procedural Justice	-0.29**	-0.22*	-0.29**	-0.29**	0.23**	-0.53**	-0.16*

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed).

Perceived procedural justice was negatively related to all consequence factors ($r = -0.29$ with F1; $r = -0.22$ with F2; $r = -0.29$ with F3; $r = -0.29$ with F4; all $p \leq 0.046$) and was negatively associated with both forms of cynicism (organisation: $r = -0.53, p < 0.001$; community: $r = -0.16, p = 0.016$). Self-efficacy was negatively related to cynicism towards the organisation ($r = -0.34, p < .001; n = 275$) and towards the community ($r = -0.19, p = 0.002; n = 275$), and showed small, consistently negative correlations with the consequence factors.

As a robustness check, we had also computed Spearman's ρ ; the pattern of effects was substantively identical to Pearson's. To further examine robustness, we estimated partial correlations while controlling for sex, education, age, job tenure, and a dummy variable indicating whether disciplinary proceedings had been initiated. The main associations remained consistent. Procedural justice remained negatively associated with emotional distress (F1; $r_p = -0.28, p = 0.022$) and somatic strain (F3; $r_p = -0.25, p = 0.042$), exhibiting similar negative trends for F2–F4. Cynicism towards the organisation remained positively linked with the consequences (F1: $r_p = 0.28, p = 0.023$; F2: $r_p = 0.33, p = 0.007$; F3: $r_p = 0.34, p = 0.005$), and negatively associated with procedural justice ($r_p = -0.48, p < 0.001$). Cynicism about the community displayed a small positive partial correlation with self-worth erosion (F2; $r_p = 0.25, p = 0.046$). Self-efficacy stayed negatively related to cynicism towards the organisation ($r_p = -0.29, p = 0.016$) and towards the community ($r_p = -0.25, p = 0.043$). Overall, these findings indicate that lower perceived procedural justice and higher organisational cynicism are distinctly connected to greater psychological and somatic effects, even after adjusting for demographics and exposure to proceedings.

Effect sizes were small to moderate by conventional benchmarks but remain theoretically coherent: higher

organisational cynicism correlates with greater downstream consequences, while higher procedural justice correlates with fewer consequences and higher self-efficacy. The consistency of Pearson and partial correlations strengthens confidence in these patterns. Given the cross-sectional design, causal direction cannot be determined; however, the results suggest that procedural justice may serve as a protective factor and organisational cynicism as a risk factor for adverse outcomes following disciplinary processes.

4.5 Coping Mechanisms and Resilience

We asked officers who had undergone disciplinary procedures about their responses. First, we inquired whether they had considered leaving the police because of these procedures. Among officers against whom procedures had been initiated and who answered this question ($n = 62$), about half had thought about leaving the police (48.4%), while just over half had not (51.6%). This suggests that a substantial number of affected officers view disciplinary procedures as a potential trigger or reinforcement for thoughts of leaving the force. We also asked whether they took sick leave to avoid work. Among officers with experience of disciplinary proceedings (80 respondents to this question), 15.0% reported taking sick leave to avoid work, while 85.0% did not. This shows that a small but notable proportion of affected officers use workplace-avoidance strategies during proceedings.

Officers subject to disciplinary proceedings primarily relied on informal support sources. The majority sought assistance from people within their close social networks (59%), and more than one-third consulted a union representative (36%). In comparison, formal healthcare and organisational channels were less frequently used: 16% contacted their primary-care doctor, and 9% sought specialised psychological or psychiatric help. Internal psychosocial resources (police confidant, 4%)

and the 24-hour crisis intervention service (3%) were utilised even less often. Religious or alternative providers were the least consulted (priest/chaplain, 1%; bioenergy healer, 3%). Seventeen per cent reported seeking “some other form of help.”

Patterns in coping behaviour align with this reliance on informal avenues. When proceedings began, officers most commonly engaged in adaptive, low-threshold strategies: just over half reported talking “a lot/very much” with those closest to them (52%), around two-fifths withdrew to a quiet place to regain composure (40%), and a similar proportion strengthened healthy lifestyle habits (40%). Contemplative practices

(reflection, meditation, prayer) were less frequently emphasised (24% “a lot/very much”). Maladaptive or pharmacological strategies were comparatively uncommon: increased alcohol use (5%), overeating (11%), use of prescribed sedatives (6%), and unsupervised sedatives (4%); drug use was virtually negligible (~1%).

Overall, the results show that, when faced with disciplinary exposure, officers tend to rely on nearby social support and everyday self-regulation methods rather than seeking formal psychological services. From an organisational perspective, this presents two related implications: firstly, there is potential

Table 8: Hierarchical multiple regression predicting disciplinary-consequence factors

	<i>B</i>	95% CI (LL, UL)	β
Panel A. Emotional distress & affective escalation (F1) (<i>n</i> = 42, R^2 = 0.06, Adj. R^2 = -0.10, $F(6, 35)$ = 0.37, p = 0.891)			
Intercept	2.73	0.07, 7.29	-
Gender (1 = men)	-0.79	-1.27, -0.33	-0.14
Years of experience	0.01	-0.03, 0.06	0.05
Procedural justice (PJ)	-0.12	-0.66, 0.32	-0.12
Self-efficacy	0.01	-1.17, 0.50	0.01
Organisational cynicism	0.10	-0.48, 0.50	0.10
Community cynicism	0.03	-0.43, 0.47	0.03
Panel B. Erosion of self-worth & social insecurity (F2) (<i>n</i> = 42, R^2 = 0.14, Adj. R^2 = -0.01, $F(6, 35)$ = 0.96, p = 0.463)			
Intercept	2.04	-1.03, 5.74	-
Gender (1 = men)	-1.19	-1.69, -0.72	-0.18
Years of experience	-0.02	-0.07, 0.05	-0.11
Procedural justice (PJ)	0.01	-0.51, 0.48	0.00
Self-efficacy	0.07	-0.66, 0.74	0.04
Organisational cynicism	0.35	-0.04, 0.75	0.30
Community cynicism	-0.04	-0.64, 0.38	-0.03
Panel C. Somatic strain & physiological arousal (F3) (<i>n</i> = 41, R^2 = .32, Adj. R^2 = 0.20, $F(6, 34)$ = 2.67, p = 0.031)			
Intercept	3.32	1.28, 6.29	-
Gender (1 = men)	-2.02	-2.41, -1.57	-0.39
Years of experience	0.02	-0.02, 0.07	0.20
Procedural justice (PJ)	-0.23	-0.52, 0.05	-0.26
Self-efficacy	0.06	-0.74, 0.52	0.04
Organisational cynicism	0.33	-0.08, 0.64	0.36
Community cynicism	-0.23	-0.52, 0.12	-0.24
Panel D. Cognitive impairment & reduced motivation (F4) (<i>n</i> = 46, R^2 = 0.18, Adj. R^2 = 0.06, $F(6, 39)$ = 1.44, p = 0.225)			
Intercept	3.77	1.04, 7.64	-
Gender (1 = men)	-0.56	-0.98, -0.08	-0.08
Years of experience	0.00	-0.04, 0.06	0.01
Procedural justice (PJ)	-0.42	-0.77, -0.02	-0.37
Self-efficacy	-0.02	-0.79, 0.43	-0.01
Organisational cynicism	0.20	-0.30, 0.57	0.17
Community cynicism	-0.28	-0.82, 0.17	-0.24

* Unstandardised coefficients (B) are accompanied by 95% bootstrap confidence intervals and standardised coefficients (β). Bias-corrected 95% bootstrap CIs are based on 1,000 resamples. Predictor coding: Gender = 1 (men). Models used listwise deletion and showed low collinearity (VIF = 1.0–1.6).

to improve the visibility, accessibility, and confidentiality of professional support options; secondly, utilising naturally preferred channels (such as peer or union networks) as entry points to stepped-care or early referral could increase uptake while respecting officers' help-seeking preferences.

Finally, we performed a hierarchical multiple regression analysis (Table 8) to determine whether perceived procedural justice and various dimensions of cynicism explain unique variance in the disciplinary-consequence factors. This approach was chosen over stepwise methods because it permits theory-driven block entry of predictors and evaluates the incremental validity (ΔR^2) of the key constructs. Alternative frameworks (e.g., SEM) were not employed due to the small sample size and because our focus was on prediction and adjusted associations rather than testing a comprehensive latent-variable model.

Predictors were entered in four blocks (Block 1: gender, years; Block 2: procedural justice; Block 3: self-efficacy; Block 4: organisational & community cynicism). For F1 Emotional distress & affective escalation, $\Delta R^2 = 0.026$, $+0.022$, $+0.000$, $+0.012$ (final $R^2 = 0.060$). For F2 Erosion of self-worth & social insecurity, 0.066 , $+0.006$, $+0.000$, $+0.070$ (final $R^2 = 0.142$). For F3 Somatic strain & physiological arousal, 0.159 , $+0.073$, $+0.000$, $+0.088$ (final $R^2 = 0.320$). For F4 Cognitive impairment & reduced motivation, 0.021 , $+0.118$, $+0.000$, $+0.042$ (final $R^2 = 0.181$). Thus, gains were largest for Somatic strain and physiological arousal (driven by procedural justice and cynicism), and Cognitive impairment and reduced motivation (mainly driven by procedural justice). Self-worth benefited mainly from cynicism, while emotional increments were modest.

Results of regression analysis can be summarised in four points.

1. Panel A. Emotional distress & affective escalation (F1). $R^2 = 0.06$, adj. $R^2 = -0.10$, $F(6, 35) = 0.37$, $p = 0.891$. No parametric predictors reached significance. Gender (men) showed a negative association ($B = -0.79$; 95% bootstrap CI $[-1.27, -0.33]$), indicating lower emotional strain among men. Procedural justice, self-efficacy, and cynicism were not supported.

2. Panel B. Erosion of self-worth & social insecurity (F2). $R^2 = 0.14$, adj. $R^2 = -0.01$, $F(6, 35) = 0.96$, $p = 0.463$. Gender (men) again showed a negative association ($B = -1.19$; 95% CI $[-1.69, -0.72]$). Organisational cynicism trended positive ($B = 0.35$; 95% CI $[-0.04, 0.75]$), while community cynicism, self-efficacy, and procedural justice were not supported.

3. Panel C. Somatic strain & physiological arousal (F3). $R^2 = 0.32$, adj. $R^2 = 0.20$, $F(6, 34) = 2.67$, $p = 0.031$. Gender

(men) predicted fewer somatic symptoms ($B = -2.02$; 95% CI $[-2.41, -1.57]$). Organisational cynicism was positively related to somatic strain ($B = 0.33$; 95% CI $[-0.08, 0.64]$; CI includes 0). Procedural justice showed a protective trend ($B = -0.23$; 95% CI $[-0.52, 0.05]$). Community cynicism and self-efficacy were not supported.

4. Panel D. Cognitive impairment & reduced motivation (F4). $R^2 = 0.18$, adj. $R^2 = 0.06$, $F(6, 39) = 1.44$, $p = 0.225$. Procedural justice uniquely predicted lower cognitive strain ($B = -0.42$; 95% CI $[-0.77, -0.02]$). Effects of cynicism, self-efficacy, experience, and gender were not supported in this domain.

As a robustness check, we created a z-score composite (average of standardised F1–F4; higher = greater burden). Results mirrored the domain-specific models: higher procedural justice was linked to lower overall burden; male gender with lower burden; and higher organisational cynicism with higher burden, while community cynicism contributed little. Considering the modest N and listwise deletion, these findings should be viewed as exploratory.

Three consistent messages emerge from our analysis. First, perceived justice functions as a protective factor, especially against cognitive strain, with both bootstrap and parametric tests supporting this finding. In somatic strain, the trend is similar but less conclusive due to limited power. This aligns with justice and occupational stress theories: fair procedures and interactions are likely to reduce cognitive overload and, to a lesser extent, physiological symptoms. Secondly, emphasising cynicism is crucial. Cynicism directed at the organisation or leaders shows the strongest link—greater cynicism towards the organisation correlates with more somatic symptoms, while cynicism towards the community does not significantly explain differences across areas. This suggests that immediate, leadership-related disillusionment is more closely associated with strain than broader community attitudes. Third, men consistently report lower strain, with the most notable and reliable difference in somatic symptoms, and bootstrap-supported differences in emotional outcomes and self-worth. This may indicate genuine exposure or response differences, or reporting styles; future research should explore the underlying mechanisms.

5 Discussion

Anchored in AET, we conceptualised the initiation of disciplinary proceedings as a distinct, high-stakes organisational event that triggers emotional reactions and subsequently influences thoughts, attitudes, and behaviour (Ashkanasy & Dorris, 2017; Weiss & Beal, 2005; Weiss &

Cropanzano, 1996). The initial phase of our analysis focused on event appraisal and consequence profiles. Officers generally viewed the start of proceedings as highly stressful. Data reduction identified four coherent consequence dimensions of disciplinary proceedings: Emotional distress & affective escalation, Erosion of self-worth & social insecurity, Somatic strain & physiological arousal, and Cognitive impairment & reduced motivation. These dimensions were moderately connected, indicating a shared stress core with diverse expressions across affective, self-evaluative, somatic, and cognitive-motivational domains. This pattern aligns with research on prolonged organisational stress in policing and supports AET's prediction that negative events cause immediate affective reactions, followed by evaluative and behavioural adjustments.

Because the triggering event was organisational, the relational fallout was inward-facing: tension focused on daily interactions within units and supervisory relationships rather than attitudes towards citizens. Perspectives on citizens remained largely unchanged, while deterioration was most noticeable in evaluations of the unit and supervisors—particularly in the perceived inconsistency of “different standards in evaluating and rewarding work.” Such signals of rule- and standard-inconsistency plausibly channel increased arousal into sceptical assessments of authority, thereby fostering organisational cynicism and undermining trust in supervisory integrity.

In multivariate tests (MANOVA), officers with and without first-hand experience of proceedings did not differ significantly in organisational cynicism, community cynicism, self-efficacy, or procedural justice; estimated marginal means were closely aligned. This suggests that appraisal processes, particularly perceived procedural justice, rather than exposure itself, are the more immediate correlates of psychological strain and attitudinal hardening.

Bivariate correlations revealed small to moderate positive relationships between organisational cynicism and each consequence factor, while community cynicism showed weaker and less consistent associations. Procedural justice was negatively correlated with all consequence factors, and self-efficacy was also negatively linked to cynicism and, to a lesser extent, with the consequence factors. These patterns remained consistent in partial correlations that controlled for demographics and disciplinary experience, supporting the idea that lower perceived justice and higher organisational cynicism are associated with stronger emotional and somatic outcomes.

In hierarchical regressions, effect sizes were modest (reflecting limited power), and confidence intervals were

wide. Notably, procedural justice uniquely and negatively predicted cognitive impairment or reduced drive, even when controlling for demographics and experience status. This supports the idea that transparent, neutral, and respectful procedures can lessen the cognitive-motivational consequences of disciplinary events, even when emotional arousal remains high.

Self-efficacy did not significantly differ based on disciplinary experience status. The scale functioned as a single factor, so we did not analyse Bandura's efficacy sources separately; consequently, we found no evidence of a selective decline in mastery-based efficacy. At the correlational level, self-efficacy showed small, negative associations with organisational cynicism and the outcome factors, indicating that any links between efficacy and strain are modest and, in this study, are overshadowed by perceptions of procedural justice, which demonstrated stronger relationships with outcomes. Although our main analyses foreground mastery-based self-efficacy, Bandura's social-cognitive theory specifies vicarious experience – observing similar others succeed or fail – as a distinct source of efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997). In police units, officers may learn indirectly from colleagues' disciplinary cases: negative exemplars can dampen efficacy and fuel cynicism if observers identify with the sanctioned officer and perceive the process as unfair, whereas credible role models (e.g., supervisors who transparently correct errors and model fair treatment) may buffer stress and sustain efficacy over time. Our abbreviated self-efficacy index did not separately capture vicarious learning, so this pathway could not be tested directly; future work should measure exposure to peers' proceedings, identification with models, and the quality of supervisory modelling to clarify whether observational learning translates affective events into durable changes in efficacy and attitudes.

Coping and help-seeking followed a consistent pattern. Officers preferred adaptive, informal strategies (e.g., talking with close others, retreating to a quiet place, and strengthening healthy habits) and informal union channels (e.g., a close person or a union representative) over formal psychological services and crisis support. Although causal inferences are unwarranted, this pattern likely reflects barriers to access, trust, or stigma, and aligns with transactional stress-coping perspectives that highlight proximal social resources as primary regulatory tools (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Interpreting the limited uptake of formal psychological services through a multilevel lens of police culture clarifies how micro-, meso-, and macro-level dynamics can suppress overt help-seeking. At the meso level, workgroup culture functions as a collective property; its “strength” (the degree

of shared cultural views) is linked to officers' behaviours across squads, indicating that local norms around toughness and respect can discourage formal help-seeking as a sign of weakness (Ingram et al., 2018). At the micro/attitudinal level, current evidence disputes a monolithic culture and identifies segmented subcultures through which officers respond differently to occupational stresses (Paoline, 2004). At the macro level, police culture can be understood as an occupationally grounded response marked by continuity and change, embedded in organisational signals about confidentiality and the legitimacy of care (Cockcroft, 2013). Overall, this framework contextualises our findings on the underuse of formal services and suggests next steps: future research should use multilevel designs to examine whether workgroup culture (and its strength) and department-level climates influence help-seeking behaviour and the uptake of support during disciplinary proceedings (Ingram et al., 2018).

The findings directly address our objectives: 1) regarding well-being, disciplinary proceedings act as a high-intensity stressor with multiple psychological effects; 2) for work attitudes and relationships, strain is confined within the organisation (unit/supervisors) rather than towards citizens; 3) for self-efficacy, effects are focused on the mastery source; and 4) for organisational cynicism, the structure is solid and its emotional connection to psychological strain is clear through consistent, though modest, correlations.

In reflection of the theoretical framework of our study, we conceptualise the experience-based trust gap as a systematic divergence in trust evaluations between officers who have personally undergone disciplinary proceedings and those without such experience. Direct exposure provides highly diagnostic justice information about voice, neutrality, consistency, quality of explanations, and respectful treatment – the core features in procedural/interactional justice and the relational model of authority. When these cues are negative or ambiguous, officers update judgments of the procedure's trustworthiness and legitimacy more harshly than their non-experienced peers (Bies & Moag, 1986; Colquitt et al., 2001; Meško et al., 2012; Thibaut & Walker, 1975; Tyler & Lind, 1992). A second mechanism follows Fairness Heuristic Theory and related uncertainty-management accounts: under uncertainty, individuals rely on fairness judgments as a shortcut to decide whether to accept authority and cooperate. First-hand, high-stakes procedures heighten uncertainty; therefore, justice signals become more salient, and ambiguous or unfavourable signals widen this gap (Lind, 2001; Lind & van den Bos, 2002; van den Bos & Lind, 2002).

Third, within the AET framework, beginning proceedings is a highly intense, identity-related event that provokes

negative emotions (e.g., threat, anger, shame) which extend to nearby organisational targets (supervisors, unit norms), diminishing trust beyond the immediate situation (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). At the same time, the Conservation of Resources theory indicates that perceived losses of control, status, and predictability during proceedings initiate resource-loss spirals, further decreasing trust (Hobfoll, 1989).

Finally, a perceived breach of the psychological contract (e.g., opacity, inconsistent standards) erodes the foundations of trust in ability, benevolence, and integrity within leaders and the system (Mayer et al., 1995). This deepens the experiential divide: those who have experienced proceedings interpret greater violations and consequently rate the system as less "well-designed and comprehensive," with marginally lower scores on fairness and truth-seeking (Morrison & Robinson, 1997).

The constellation of the study's findings points to three practical levers. First, managers should enhance process quality, voice, clarity, neutrality/consistency, reason-giving, and respectful treatment to reduce cognitive-motivational strain and prevent the development of cynicism (Colquitt et al., 2001; Thibaut & Walker, 1975; Tyler & Lind, 1992). Second, increasing supervisory consistency and communication to uphold integrity is crucial, as it signals threats that foster organisational cynicism. Third, incorporate credible role modelling and vicarious learning into supervisory training and post-incident debriefs to maintain effectiveness following adverse events. Given officers' preference for informal coping mechanisms and union channels, low-threshold, confidential entry points that connect informal support with professional care may promote engagement without increasing stigma.

Let us reiterate the limitations and outline directions for future research. Inferences are constrained by the cross-sectional, self-report design; modest analytic sample sizes ($n = 41-46$ after listwise deletion) and variable pairwise N ; several effects near conventional significance thresholds; and a single-item stress indicator that shows ceiling effects and potential range restriction. Nonetheless, the agreement between parametric estimates and bootstrap percentile confidence intervals (1,000 resamples) enhances confidence in the observed patterns—namely, the protective association of perceived justice, the risks associated with organisational cynicism, and the lower strain reported by men.

Future research should strengthen statistical power, employ multilevel models to distinguish organisational from community effects, use multi-item stress assessments to improve reliability and variance, and track officers over time through key procedural milestones. It should also investigate plausible moderators (e.g., tenure, role, unit climate/culture)

and evaluate the effects of procedural reforms and supervisor skills training on attitudinal (procedural justice, cynicism, self-efficacy) and psychological outcomes (affective, somatic, cognitive).

In summary, disciplinary proceedings are emotionally charged organisational events. Their most consistent correlates in our data are not work experience or status alone, but rather procedural justice evaluations and organisational cynicism — mechanisms through which stress becomes embedded into enduring attitudes and cognitive-motivational strain. Improving fairness signals, supervisory consistency, and role model qualities offers a tangible way to reduce harm and sustain officers' effectiveness and engagement.

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Vpliv disciplinskih postopkov na samoučinkovitost policistov, psihološko blagostanje in organizacijsko uspešnost

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Študija obravnava disciplinske postopke kot intenzivne negativne afektivne delovne dogodke ter njihove povezave s samoučinkovitostjo, organizacijskim cinizmom, delovnimi stališči in spoprijemanjem pri policistih v Sloveniji. Spletni vprašalnik je izpolnilo $N = 443$ policistov ($n = 115$ z osebno izkušnjo disciplinskega postopka). Udeleženci so ocenili stresnost uvedbe postopka, psihološke in vedenjske posledice, organizacijski cinizem, samoučinkovitost, spremembe v odnosih ter oblike spoprijemanja/iskanja pomoči. Uvedba postopka je bila praviloma ocenjena kot zelo stresna. Zmanjševanje podatkov je pokazalo štiri koherentne dimenzije posledic: 1) čustvena stiska in afektivna eskalacija (najizrazitejša), 2) erozija samospoštovanja in socialna negotovost, 3) somatska obremenitev in fiziološka vzbujenost ter 4) kognitivna oslabitev in znižan zagon. Učinki so bili pretežno intraorganizacijski (enota/nadrejeni), medtem ko se stališča do državljanov večinoma niso spremenila. Organizacijski cinizem se je izkazal za dvodimenzionalno-organizacijski (voditeljstvo/pravila/integriteta) in skupnostni - z nekoliko višjimi srednjimi vrednostmi pri izkušanih, vendar brez statistično pomembnih medskupinskih razlik. Organizacijski cinizem je bil majhno do zmerno pozitivno povezan z vsemi štirimi dimenzijami posledic; postopkovna pravičnost je bila negativno povezana tako s posledicami kot s cinizmom, samoučinkovitost (enodimenzionalni indeks) pa negativno s cinizmom in šibkeje z posledicami. Vzorci spoprijemanja so favorizirali prilagoditvene, neformalne strategije in sindikalno podporo, medtem ko je bila uporaba formalnih psiholoških storitev nizka. Ugotovitve poudarjajo pomen postopkovne pravičnosti, jasnih in doslednih nadrejenih praks ter zaupnih poti do podpore za blaženje čustvenih in somatskih posledic, ohranjanje samoučinkovitosti in omejevanje cinizma.

Ključne besede: policija, disciplinski postopki, Slovenija, stres, samoučinkovitost, organizacijski cinizem, teorija afektivnih dogodkov

UDK: 351.741