

# **WORKLOAD AND JOB SATISFACTION AT THE POLICE: COMMUNITY POLICE OFFICERS, TEAM MANAGERS C AND HSM-EMPLOYEES**

## **Summary and conclusions**

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## BACKGROUND, QUESTIONS AND DEFINITIONS

### Background

In the collective labor agreement (CLA) of 2015-2017, the Directorate-General for Police, the National Police (NP) and the police trade unions have agreed on a policy of integrated health management. Application of this agreement implies a shift from reactive to preventive policy. In order to facilitate this shift, the CLA states the importance of *'gaining insight into factors that cause work overload of employees and how this overload can be reduced or prevented'*.

In the CLA 2015-2017, an agreement was reached to initiate an investigation into the workload of police personnel. The study should focus on those functions where a high workload is expected, but in the long term all functions should be investigated. Hence, this study will form a blueprint for follow-up studies. The research findings must serve *'to effectively (and sometimes compulsory) implement preventive measures'*.

By performing this study, the aforementioned provision in the CLA will be complied with. In this respect, the CLA seems to focus primarily on work overload. The relatively high absenteeism at the police, signals from the work floor and the results from the Employee Monitor (MeMo) of the police, indicate that work overload is a substantial problem for the police. However, there are indications, for example from the MeMo among core teams (2016) and investigation (2017), that work underload also occurs. Since different types of burden can occur (physical, emotional, cognitive), it could be possible that someone is overloaded from one perspective and at the same time underloaded from another. This study therefore focuses explicitly on both work overload and underload of police personnel.

### Questions

The aim of the study is to *'provide insight into the mechanisms that lead to work overload or underload of police personnel'*. The acquired insights should inform decision making about possible measures to prevent or strongly reduce work overload or underload.

The central research question is:

*What is the nature of the mechanisms that lead to work overload or underload of police personnel?*

To answer the central question, the following research questions have been formulated:

#### Box 1 Research questions

1. How does existing scientific literature inform us about factors that contribute to work overload and underload of police personnel?
2. What mechanisms in Dutch police practice lead to work overload and underload for police personnel in the selected function groups?
3. In what context do these mechanisms occur?
4. What consequences are associated with overload and underload?
5. Which possible solutions exist to optimize the workload of police personnel in these function groups, in the sense that the workload is better aligned with the burden that may be expected based on the job description?

This study assesses three job categories, for which a high workload was to be expected:

1. Management level: team managers C, both team managers C Area-Bound Police (*Gebiedsgebonden Politie*, GGP) and team managers C Investigation;
2. Executive level: employees Area-Bound Police (GGP) with the work area 'community police officer', both seniors and operational experts;
3. Support level: employees Housing, Services and Resources (HSM), levels B, C and D.

We have decided to focus on factors rather than mechanisms. The concept of 'mechanism' has proven to be an unusable concept for this study. A mechanism could be defined by the fact that the influence of a factor on the workload is partly determined by another factor or even by multiple factors. But the determination of such cross effects requires much more data than we have access to. Furthermore, our investigation has shown that a limited number of factors leading to a (too) high workload can be identified. These form a sufficient basis for a solution. We therefore continue by discussing factors instead of mechanisms.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

The way the study was conducted, differs from what was originally intended. This deviation was caused by practical problems that were encountered during the execution of the study. Because one goal of our study is to provide a blueprint for future research, it is important to discuss the original design and the problems this entailed. It is expected that the circumstances leading to these problems will continue to exist in the next years and should therefore be taken into account when conducting further research.

### Initial design

In the initial design, the study (following the wishes of the WODC):

- a. primarily had a qualitative approach;
- b. used existing data and sources as much as possible.

A **literature review** was to be performed to develop a conceptual framework. Simultaneously, we would carry out a limited **secondary analysis of the MeMo data**. This analysis would serve two purposes:

- To arrive at a well-founded selection of the regional police units that we would include in our research;
- To study the relationship between indicators of work overload and underload on the one hand and energy sources, sources of stress, personal resources and contextual factors on the other hand. Since a lot of existing research focuses on the causes of work overload, we would explicitly concentrate on work underload.

After making a first selection of three units, we would conduct three **in-depth interviews** at central/national level. One of the aims of these interviews was to make the selection of the units final. Subsequently, we would start the field work in the units by conducting three in-depth interviews within each of the selected units. Topics for the interviews were the extent to which work overload and underload occur, the factors that cause these phenomena, the current policy pursued and possible solutions.

The core of the study would then consist of nine **focus group discussions** with police employees from the three different function categories included in the research. These employees were also to be selected from the three selected units. The topics for the focus groups were similar to those of the interviews, but focused more on individual experiences and the identification of factors, both positively and negatively, influencing the workload.

After the focus groups, we would conduct an **online survey** among the police officers from the relevant job categories in all regional units using the National Police's online tool. The goal of this online survey was:

- a. To verify the acquired insights and solutions from all previous research activities (literature, interviews and focus groups in the three units);
- b. To assess whether the results of the study for the three units can be generalized to the national level or whether a re-evaluation is necessary. This way, the online survey provides an extra check for the generalizability of the research.

## Reasons why the original design was not feasible and the adjustments made

The main reasons why to the original design turned out to be unfeasible:

- The limited MeMo analysis could not be performed, because essential data (e.g. function) was removed from the original dataset for privacy reasons. For the same reason, the MeMo data could not be used for the selection of the units;
- The focus groups at the units could only be scheduled at a late stage. Moreover, they could not be executed as we wanted. Therefore the focus groups could not fulfill the central role in the study that was originally intended;
- The online survey has therefore been given a much larger role. The questionnaire has become much more extensive, because the survey had to take over the role of the MeMo analysis and the focus groups to a large extent. Additionally, the analyses have also become much more extensive;
- The online survey could not be conducted via the survey tool of the police. When it became clear that we could not make use of this tool, we first investigated whether implementation by SEOR or with the help of an existing panel for the public sector (the so-called Flitspanel). Ultimately, the online survey was carried out by the survey agency GfK.

It took considerable time before we could finally draw the conclusion that the original design was not feasible. Hence, the study was delayed significantly.

## Actual execution of the research

The actual research consisted of the following research activities:

- Literature review;
- In-depth interviews;
- An online survey;
- Focus groups.

## *Selection of the regional units*

The three regional units that we included in the study were selected based on the three interviews at central/ national level and based on absenteeism percentages per unit (source: National Police).

In the selection we used the following selection conditions:

- At least one unit with a G4 municipality (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague or Utrecht) and at least one unit in a more rural area: the interviews at central level have shown that in metropolitan areas other factors leading to imbalance (work overload and/or underload) play a role than in more rural areas.
- Variation between units with regard to the level of absenteeism due to illness: absenteeism is an indication of imbalance.
- Variation in culture between core teams: differences in culture (can) affect (the extent to which) imbalance occurs in the core team and the chosen solution directions.

Our first selection consisted of the following regional units:

- The Hague: region with a city of the G4; cultural differences between the core teams; sharply rising absenteeism;
- North Holland: cultural differences within the various core teams of which the unit consists and a slight decrease in absenteeism;
- Zeeland-West-Brabant: border location and the nature of crime, unity with lowest and decreasing absenteeism that has for years been lower than the average absenteeism at the NP.

Because the unit Zeeland-West Brabant was already involved in many other investigations according to the police, this unit was replaced by the unit Northern Netherlands.

- Northern Netherlands: a geographically extensive, especially rural area, with a slightly rising, fairly average absenteeism.

## Research activities

### Literature review

For the literature review we followed the original design. We have set up a conceptual framework for the research and screened the literature for factors that may influence work overload and underload. In addition, literature was reviewed on the context in which police officers work.

### In-depth interviews

The original design was followed. At **central/national level** we spoke with:

- a. Two employees of the HRM department, for an overarching image from the employers' side;
- b. One sector head Facility Management, to grasp what is happening within the HSM function group;
- c. One employee from the Police Academy, which connects police education/training (including the Mental Strength training) and the practice in the workplace.

In each selected **regional unit** we had a meeting with the head of operations (HBV), one or more members of the Works Council of that unit and with an company doctor of the 'blue' column, who works within that unit.

### Online survey

For the online survey, SEOR developed an extensive questionnaire that covers all aspects relevant to the study (including background characteristics about the respondents and their jobs). The online survey was conducted by the police (who sent the invitations) and GfK among police officers from the three function groups. A total of 2.564 police officers were approached with an invitation email and a link to the survey: a random sample of 1.300 community police officers, all 889 HSM employees and all team managers C GGP and investigation (242 team managers C GGP and 133 team managers C investigation).

A good response rate was obtained for the community police officers and the team managers with 44 and 48 percent, respectively. The response rate from HSM employees was lower (26 percent). This can be explained by the fact that this group was also approached for the MeMo in that period. As far as we can verify, the sample is representative.

The analyses based on the survey data are the basis for the conclusions in the report.

### Focus groups

The focus groups were set up in accordance with the original design, but the execution did not go as planned. Our request was that the units would select a relatively large number of employees per function group with a certain distribution of characteristics. SEOR would then make a selection of twelve participants and approach these persons. In this way selection bias (the result of non-random selection of the participants) would be constrained. In practice, this method turned out not to be feasible. Units have made the selection themselves or have let the employees choose whether they wished to participate. Partly because of this, the number of participants in the focus groups was lower than planned. Furthermore, some focus groups had to be replaced by individual interviews.

The composition of the focus groups according to personal characteristics is sufficiently diverse. However, it is conceivable, that due to the manner of selection a certain one-sidedness has occurred in terms of situation and opinions of the participants. However, in general, the same factors emerged from the focus groups as from the survey.

## CONCLUSIONS

### Work overload and underload in terms of quantity of work

#### *Level and change over time*

If we look at the quantity of work that people perform in comparison to what they can handle, then work overload occurs more than underload in all three function groups. For community police officers and team managers C, the percentage that is (regularly or (almost) always) overloaded is clearly higher than among HSM employees. It applies to more than half of the community police officers and team managers, and to

about a quarter of HSM employees. Approximately one in seven HSM employees say that they are underloaded in terms of the quantity of work. This form of underload is much less common among community police officers and team managers.

With respect to these results, it should be noted that employees will probably more likely indicate that they are overloaded than underloaded. Therefore, the outcomes from the survey may overestimate overload and underestimate underload. On the other hand, it is also conceivable that especially employees who enjoy their work pay less attention to a high workload and are therefore less likely to indicate that they are overloaded. In those cases, therefore, an underestimation of overload could occur.

Looking at the development of the workload in terms of the quantity of work over the past three years, we observe an increase is more frequent than a decline in all three function groups. This is especially the case for community police officers. More than half of the responding community police officers have experienced an increase in workload, while only a tenth said it had decreased. The workload for the other community police officers remained more or less the same.

### *Differences in characteristics*

For community police officers we observe hardly any correlation between work overload and personal characteristics. There is, however, a link with job characteristics, especially with overtime and night work: community police officers working overtime and/or working at night are more often overloaded. Working overtime also plays a role for team managers. In this function group, age and years of service (two closely related factors) are particularly important for the chance of overload: as team managers are older and have more years of service, the chance of overload increases. Among HSM employees, it is particularly evident that people with a secondary education are more often confronted with underload in terms of the quantity of work than the lower educated. For team managers and community police officers, this underload occurs too infrequently in order to make correlations.

### **Work overload and underload in terms of skills**

#### *Extent and temporal trend*

In all function groups we observe that only a few employees indicate that they are insufficiently skilled for their job, while a large proportion says they are over skilled. This indicates an underutilization of competence. The questionnaire did not ask what kind of skills were not (fully) utilized. The focus groups have provided more insights in this.

The results of the online survey show that for the majority in all three function groups, the utilization of skills has not changed in comparison with three years ago. Among those who indicate that the utilization of skills has changed, the number of people indicating an increase and those indicating a decrease are similar.

#### *Differences in characteristics*

In all three function groups, the underutilization of skills is smaller as employees are older, longer in service and lower educated. HSM employees who have changed regions or functions indicate more often that they lack skills.

### **Causes of work overload and underload**

All three function groups mention red tape as the main cause of work overload. All three groups also name the fact that they spend a lot of time on tasks that do not align with their job description as an important cause.

With team managers and community police officers, the latter cause is the second most frequently mentioned. Team managers indicate that they have to perform many tasks that could also be performed by less qualified employees. Community police officers state that they have to spend too much time on tasks such as emergency aid, surveillance services and the settling of reports and incidents.

Insufficient support is also mentioned as a cause by all three function groups. This mainly concerns the role of the service center (PDC): the distance that has grown between personnel and HR, the distance created by

the reorganization between 'blue' employees performing police tasks and HSM staff, and the bureaucracy for simple orders and during maintenance. For team managers, this partly overlaps with the complaint that they have to perform many tasks that could be delegated. Team managers also mention that they have to perform too many tasks and that they have to manage too many people. Especially for community police officers and team managers, this is associated with understaffing, although for team managers this mainly concerns a shortage of people to whom they can delegate tasks. Community police officers also deal with the fact that they have to familiarize themselves with their new role as director of district-oriented work: they have to signal and direct other GGP employees to tackle problems. That is one of the reasons why, in their own opinion, they spend too much time behind their desk to read reports and to pass these on to colleagues, instead of walking around in their neighborhood. Furthermore, HSM personnel state that the work is unequally distributed. Furthermore, they are not satisfied with management and mutual communication.

Underutilization of skills is common in all three function groups. For team managers and community police officers, this is partly caused by the same factors mentioned for overload in terms of the quantity of work, because the tasks that cause the overload are mainly the less qualified tasks (causing that they are not able to adequately fulfill the tasks that do appeal to their competencies). HSM employees state that many of their tasks have been outsourced since the reorganization. They must now supervise the execution of these tasks and can no longer be executive themselves. Hence, they believe that their qualities are insufficiently utilized. They also state that due to the reorganization, some have ended up in a position that does not match with their capabilities. For HSM employees it should be pointed out that in one of the three focus groups, clearly fewer problems arose than in the other two. In this unit, all support services from the former police forces (including HSM) were already housed in one service center before the national reorganization. This fact could indicate that employees also have to get used to the changes.

## Effects of work overload and underload

### *Effects of work overload*

Work overload has two important consequences. Firstly, it can affect health. For privacy reasons, direct questions about health could not be included in the survey. We did ask questions about absenteeism. For community police officers and HSM employees, the number of observations is sufficient to investigate this and this provides some indications of a relation. For team managers, the number of observations is too small and absenteeism is also very low.

Furthermore, the survey shows that almost a quarter of community police officers still suffer from emotionally shocking events that occurred during their work in the past. Approximately one in eight community police officers still suffer from physical limitations due to work-related events in the past.

The interviews provided indications that the high workload has consequences for health and for some people led to burn-outs. For example, in some focus groups with HSM employees it has been indicated that people sleep poorly due to the problems at work.

In the case of team managers, work overload is mainly expressed in the insufficient time that they can devote to management and supervision/coaching of employees and to personnel policy. This is consistent with the fact that many community police officers are dissatisfied with the manager's role. The fact that the role of team managers is not adequately covered due to lack of time, is a risk factor for community police officers, because this means that overloaded community police officers are insufficiently noticed and that little action is taken. Therefore, work overload of team managers indirectly contributes to problems of community police officers.

For community police officers, work overload means that they have insufficient time for their actual work in the neighborhoods, while this work is seen as an essential police task. For example, it plays a crucial role in fighting terrorism. If this task is pressurized because of work overload, this may have unwanted social effects. But as mentioned before, many community police officers probably still have to familiarize to their new job content, in which directing their GGP colleagues plays an important role. In this study we have not

been able to investigate whether the work in the neighborhoods is pressurized in the new situation and whether this has societal consequences.

### *Effects of work underload*

The consequences of work underload are difficult to assess based on our research data. What we do observe is that both community police officers and team managers have to spend a lot of time on tasks that are not part of their core tasks, for which they are overqualified and because of which they enjoy more irritation than satisfaction. This is definitely a source of frustration.

### **The relationship between workload and job satisfaction**

The fact that the workload is particularly a problem for community police officers and team managers, is also evident in the survey. Between 40 and 50 percent of these function groups are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with this aspect. Approximately 20 percent is satisfied with the workload, while only few are very satisfied. In the case of HSM employees, more are satisfied than dissatisfied with this work aspect, confirming that work overload is less of a problem in this function group.

If respondents are asked to contemplate on all aspects of their work, positive and negative, and to give a general opinion about the satisfaction with their work and working environment, a large majority turns out to be (very) satisfied. 80 percent of team managers is (very) satisfied and about 70 percent of community police officers and HSM employees. Even for those who are dissatisfied with the workload, overall satisfaction with the job is still positive, although it is lower than for respondents satisfied with their workload. This means that the weight of the workload in job satisfaction is not predominant and that other factors are more decisive.

The same result is obtained when we explain the general satisfaction from the satisfaction from the different aspects of the work by means of regression analysis. Work content then clearly appears to have the greatest importance for all three function groups. The importance of workload for all three groups is about half of that of the work content. Contact with colleagues does not play a major role in overall satisfaction in any of the function groups and is not significant.

The importance of the other work aspects differ per function group. For community police officers, the role of the supervisor also has a fairly large weight, as well as the scheduling. The appreciation that one gets for the work and the salary is a significant factor for community police officers, but they have a relatively small weight. The support from the operational management only has a small weight for community police officers, whereas this has a relatively large weight for team managers.

Work autonomy has a fairly large weight in general satisfaction among community police officers and team managers. The supervisor's role does not play a major role for team managers in general satisfaction and is not even significant. This also applies to the salary. For HSM staff, it is striking that in addition to work content and workload, appreciation, salary and cooperation with the 'blue' colleagues have a considerable weight.

Looking at the satisfaction scores on the various work aspects, the general satisfaction of employees can be increased the most in the following ways:

- For community police officers by reducing the workload and strengthening the role of the team manager;
- For team managers by reducing the workload and improving support from the organization;
- For HSM staff by increasing salary.

### **WHAT IS BEING DONE TO REDUCE WORK OVERLOAD AND UNDERLOAD?**

Different actors could do something about work overload and underload. The survey asked about the extent to which employees have in recent years discussed their workload with their manager, company doctor or colleagues and to what extent this has led to measures to adjust it. Team managers have spoken most with their supervisor (more than 80 percent at least once) and their colleagues (almost all) about work overload.



It is somewhat lower for community police officers (70 and 80 percent respectively). It is lowest among HSM employees (respectively 64 and almost 70 percent), but it should be noted that work overload plays a smaller role for this group. Only in a limited number of cases, these conversations lead to adjustments (10 to 20 percent). This is highest for team managers and lowest among HSM employees.

Conversations with company doctors are less frequent. This is highest at 15 percent for community police officers. The fact that fewer conversations with company doctors take place stems from the fact that company doctors nowadays no longer play a preventive role within the police organization.

For community police officers, multivariate analyses have been carried out in which the overburdening in terms of the quantity of work and the change in the workload have been linked to the conversations, job characteristics and personal characteristics. We have found some indications that these conversations do indeed lead to a reduction of the workload. In the other function groups, the number of observations is too small for such analyses.

Employees themselves can also improve their resiliency. In all three function groups, the majority of people is paying attention to this. This is highest among team managers and lowest among HSM employees. A healthy diet and sports are the main ways in which employees increase their own resiliency.

The police organization also has instruments to increase the resiliency of employees. However, the awareness of the existence of these measures is limited. Only Fit@NP is reasonably well known: the familiarity with Fit@NP is highest at 70 percent among team managers; of the two other function groups, only between 30 and 40 percent know this instrument. In all three function groups the use of this measure is small: only 5 to 10 percent of the total group. The main reason for non-use is that people think that they are already doing sufficiently themselves. The familiarity of self-tests and learning modules that are available via the internet is considerably lower. These instruments are known to less than 10 percent of employees from the three groups.

## SOLUTIONS

### Solutions for work overload

What solutions do police employees from the three function groups indicate? Table 1 gives an overview of the most important solutions for reducing work overload. The following measures are most important from the perspective of community police officers and team managers:

- Unburdening of team managers by adding staff members that take over the tasks that are not part of the core tasks of team managers and by reducing the administrative burden;
- Spend the regained time of team managers on personnel policy and personnel care for police employees within their team. In this case, administrative tasks must also be able to be delegated;
- Unburdening of community police officers by reducing administrative burden;
- Reducing the workload of community police officers by expanding the formation and/or setting more priorities for the police deployment, allowing community police officers to focus more on their core tasks.

There are also solutions that receive remarkably little support in some of the function groups. For example, relatively few team managers think it is a good idea that community police officers get more influence in the scheduling. This is where the opinions of team managers differ from community police officers. For community police officers and especially for team managers, there is little support for the idea of making access to company doctors easier. For community police officers, there is little support for the idea of reducing work overload by relocating employees from teams that are less busy to teams that are busy. Also the idea that the police profession is tough, that not everyone endures this and that external mobility can prevent employees from getting stuck, finds little support among community police officers. The same applies to the idea of making it easier for people who already have relevant work experience in other sectors to start working with the police with a shortened training.



**Table 1 Solutions that receive a lot of support among the three function groups**

Solution	Community police officers	Team managers C	HSM employees
<i>From the survey (statements)</i>			
Reducing the administrative burden			
People who apply to the police must be better tested for their suitability			
Managers must be more alert when it comes to identifying the first signs of overloaded employees			
More effort should be taken to train employees who lack skills that are important to their work			
The police must focus more on matters that are important and spend less time on other matters			
More work must be done in permanent teams			
Employees must be more alert in signaling the first signs of overloaded colleagues			
Managers must spend more time on personnel care and personnel policy			
Employees should get more influence on the scheduling			
The distance between the execution and the support by the PDC must be reduced			
Employees must take more action to remain employable			
<i>From the survey (open questions)</i>			
Expansion of the formation			
A more equal distribution of the formation between the units and teams			
Stimulating a healthier diet and participation in sports/fitness			
Improving the policy for older employees			
More possibilities to delegate non-core tasks to other employees (and receive extra formation for that)			
<i>From the focus groups</i>			
Improvement of ICT systems			
Improvement of the communication and information provision especially the communication with the PDC, but also within the teams			
Improvement of the management by the supervisor			

### Solutions for underload

We think that when community police officers and team managers get the opportunity to focus more on their core tasks, this will greatly reduce underload. It is also important to identify employees with potential to grow and to offer them opportunities to continue growing. Due to the current shortages within the police and the outflow of older employees in the coming years, this should be possible.

For HSM employees, the cause of underload can be found mainly in two consequences of the reorganization: the placement in a function below their capabilities and the outsourcing of part of the work they did previously to external companies. Perhaps it could be re-examined whether HSM employees who are currently working below their level can get a new job that better matches their capabilities. The second point could be solved by reversing part of the outsourcing and having HSM employees do more executive work again. There is also a lot of dissatisfaction among community police officers and team managers about the fact that simple repairs and purchases now entail enormous bureaucracy. In this context, the interviews often indicated that it would be desirable to be able to arrange these matters on a decentralized level and to receive a budget for them. Perhaps one should also reconsider the two-column structure, in which HSM employees are often placed at the units but are controlled nationally via their own column next to the 'blue' column. Many HSM employees now feel that they are not part of the work floor of the unit.

## Other solutions

There is a fairly large minority among community police officers and HSM employees who indicate that they receive too little appreciation (recognition) for their work. We have seen that appreciation has a clear influence on the overall satisfaction of employees. This is therefore typically a factor which gives employees energy and can increase their efforts. If managers get more time for staff policy, this is certainly a point to pay attention to.

HSM employees also advocate better communication and information (both between colleagues and with the manager). This could possibly be improved if HSM employees located at units were also managed within these units.

Finally, we heard many complaints about the ICT systems currently in use by the police. The interviews were, however, not suitable to derive concrete recommendations from.

## BLUEPRINT

At the start of the research, it was indicated that this study is intended to provide a blueprint for future studies about other function groups. During the execution of the research we encountered many problems, which meant that we had to deviate considerably from the original design. To a large extent, these problems have to do with the central topic of this research: the overload of police personnel. It is not expected that this problem will be solved any time soon. That is why we advise to use the approach we ultimately chose also for future studies. This approach is less demanding for the police organization. The emphasis shifts to an (online) survey. Interviews and focus groups play a more deepening role. Furthermore, this approach is probably more useful, because the survey (in contrast to interviews and focus groups) produces statistically reliable results, while the interviews and focus groups can still provide important deeper insights. It is even possible to consider to conducting and analyzing the survey first and then conduct the focus groups, when repeating this study for other function groups. It is advisable to keep a limited number of interviews at central and unit level in advance.

Extra surveys should be avoided as much as possible in the future. For our study we could not use the individual MeMo data, which meant that a new survey had to be conducted. Privacy protection<sup>1</sup> was the reason that we were not able to use the individual MeMo data with background characteristics of police officers. But through the survey conducted for our research, we have obtained a data file that deals partly with the same matters as the MeMo and which also contains personal characteristics. This is difficult to explain. Moreover, this unnecessarily burdens police officers. As we have seen with HSM employees, too many surveys can also lead to a lower response.

If more could be done with the MeMo data, new surveys will often not be needed. This requires that the individual MeMo data, including background characteristics, become available for research. Some adaptations of the MeMo questionnaire may be needed to make it more useable for studies of the workload of police staff.

## FINAL REMARKS

As we have shown in this study, a great deal of research and evaluation studies has already been carried out with respect to the police. Also, there are already extensive plans to solve the problems. As a result of the evaluation of the 2012 Police Act, the unions concluded that their criticism of the organization and formation of the National Police from 2012 still remains. Many respondents, interviewees and participants in the group discussions also indicate that it is already known what is wrong and what needs to be done.

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'lawfulness of processing' from the General Data Protection Regulation (AVG)

Our findings are also in line with what has been observed before. According to the people we spoke to, it is important that something is actually done. Not everyone is optimistic about that. According to these people, the police has developed plans in the past, which were then not (sufficiently) implemented. In a study of a few years ago about working conditions at the police, we also found this in relation to personnel policies (see De Koning et al., 2014). The shortage of personnel has always been a factor. To cite an example from current research: as long as team managers are overloaded, their role in the personnel policy – which is of vital importance – remains pressurized. Meanwhile, based on the Coalition Agreement, expansion of the formation has been promised and there is an action plan to reduce absenteeism.

In view of the number of measures that are planned or being implemented and the observation that it is precisely the implementation of policy that is a weak link within the police organization, it is important that these measures are properly monitored and evaluated. This requires that administrative data on participation in measures become available for research and that they can be linked to other data (e.g. to the data from the MeMo). In the future, this requires asking respondents for consent to use the MeMo data for other studies as well.

In order to reliably establish whether measures in the area of personnel policy are effective, longitudinal data are indispensable. From this perspective, it would also be wise to re-evaluate the design of the MeMo. More links of data require stricter preconditions with regard to privacy. The microdata at Statistics Netherlands (CBS) are an example of how this can be arranged.

The police leadership is aware that it is a big challenge to keep up the staff numbers in the coming years and to reduce the staff shortage. Many police employees will retire in the upcoming years and the number of young people entering the labor market is decreasing. Moreover, for the time being, there seems to be a shortage on the labor market, making it even more difficult to attract young people. Many respondents in our survey do not expect that staff numbers will be kept up and therefore argue for more prioritization in what cases the police takes on. Some even argue that if this is done in a clever way, the police can be maintain its effectiveness or even increase it.

Owing to the decreasing number of young people entering the labour market and the ageing of the workforce, a further increase in the proportion of older employees in the police force is inevitable. Every sector has to deal with this. Promoting sustainable employability should therefore play an important role in the plans of the police. A number of interviewees and respondents in our research indicated that they would prefer older police officers to take early retirement and be replaced by young employees who, in their opinion, are more flexible and know more about ICT. We think that this is not realistic and that it does not do justice to the experience of older police officers. Furthermore, in view of developments in the labor market, it seems sensible to focus recruitment not only on young people but also on employees in other sectors. However, the idea of making it easier for the latter group to come to work for the police, for example by means of a shortened training program, finds little support from our respondents.