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RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

Why do street-level bureaucrats risk themselves for others? The case of Israeli police officers

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Abstract

What factors influence police officers' willingness to risk themselves for others? Police officers are street-level bureaucrats, who are not only given the mandate to use deadly force in order to keep public order but also risk their most important resource – their lives – to protect society. We suggest three factors that prompt police officers to risk their lives: individual characteristics (a desire to gain respect and recognition, and testing one's courage, ideology, and personality), organizational conditions (expectations of peers and supervisors, promotion opportunities), and environmental context (a hostile working environment and the importance of public opinion to them). Using an abductive approach combined with a triangulated qualitative method, our findings indicate that personal characteristics are indeed important, but so too are organizational conditions and environmental context. The practical insight, therefore, is that decision makers 'can', in various formal and informal ways, influence street-level bureaucrats' behaviour. Here, the interactions among managers, workers, and clients are a crucial element.

KEYWORDS

discretion, Israel, life-risking, police, street-level bureaucrats

1 | INTRODUCTION

Most police officers operate in environments replete with rules. Nevertheless, they also have extensive autonomy in policy implementation. In their often-unobserved interactions with citizens, they must choose which policy to apply and how. It is in the field that a police officer decides whether

to deem an action a crime and arrest a suspect to bring him or her into the criminal justice system (Portillo, Rudes, Viglione, Nelson, & Taxman, 2013). Indeed, police officers are the frontline enforcers of the state's laws. Every day, stories about the risks that police officers take are reported in the mass media worldwide, indicating that police officers, as street-level bureaucrats, go beyond their formal duties in order to help 'deserving' clients. Furthermore, despite being a sometimes-life-threatening job by definition, some police officers are more willing to risk their lives than others, even in situations where risk could have been avoided. Examples include officers who attempt to resolve very risky situations themselves, even knowing that specialized reinforcements are already on the way, and officers who intervene in crimes when they are off duty. As scholars already suggest, street-level bureaucrats should be considered the 'miners' of public policy; they dirty their hands for society and are sometimes even willing to risk their jobs to provide assistance to citizens they believe worthy (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003; Maynard-Moody & Portillo, 2010). Police officers are one of the extreme examples of such bureaucrats, as they are aware that they have been recruited to an organization that expects them to put their lives in danger in order to serve and protect society.

Our study explores the factors that influence police officers' willingness to risk themselves for others. Although we do not investigate the motivations of police officers as public servants 'to join' the public sector, we are interested in why, 'after joining their organization', police officers are willing to risk their lives to help others. In addition, we are interested in why some are more willing to do so than others, even in situations where the risks could be avoided. Thus, the goal of the current research is to identify the factors that influence police officers to risk themselves for society after joining the police force. Risk, in this regard, is treated not merely as part of police officers' job performance, meaning their investment of time and effort (Siciliano, 2017), but rather as a crucial predisposition that might endanger their life and the future of their family.

What contribution does identifying these factors make to the literature? First, we suggest several preliminary theoretical insights, some general to the literature and others specific to the implementation literature. Such insights are intended to answer questions such as: Is the willingness of street-level bureaucrats to risk themselves for others a component of their individual character or is it a product of socialization processes or organizational training? Does the environment play a role in their decision? If so, how? Furthermore, studies on street-level bureaucrats' willingness to go 'towards clients' (Tummers & Bekkers, 2014) and exhibit altruism towards them (Buurman & Dur, 2012) have concentrated on discretion. However, to date they have not considered the extreme context of risking one's life for one's clients. Hence, determining the factors that drive street-level bureaucrats into action within a risky environment has the potential to create a new framework for understanding their practices in such environments, as well as to examine, on the macro-level, its influence on policy outcomes.

We present our argument as follows. First, we review what we do know so far about people who risk their lives on duty, and utilize this knowledge in the context of police officers as street-level bureaucrats who risk their lives for others. In the second section we present our research methods, which are based on an abductive approach combined with a triangulated qualitative method using both focus groups and in-depth interviews with Israeli police officers in high-risk units. In the third section, we detail the findings and integrate the existing literature with the results of our study. Finally, we discuss our findings and offer a conclusion.

2 | STREET-LEVEL BUREAUCRATS AND RISKING ONE'S LIFE FOR OTHERS

As far as we know, the literature has not yet addressed the question of why street-level bureaucrats in general, or police officers specifically, risk themselves for their clients, nor suggested a theory for addressing this issue. Hence, we had to find a theoretical basis for our study in external literature.

Reviewing the more general literature shows that in classical decision theory, risk is measured either by non-linearities in the revealed utility for money or by the variance in the probability distribution of possible gains and losses associated with a particular alternative (Arrow, 1965). The notion that risk taking may be intentional and rational seems unacceptable to the psychometric approach. So too, in the sociological literature dominated by the writings of Beck (1994), the human actor is portrayed as anxious about and fearful of risk, and eager to learn how to avoid becoming a victim (see in Lupton & Tulloch, 2002).

The existing literature posits two main theories about why people risk their lives for others: biological altruism and learned expectations. In evolutionary biology, an organism is said to behave altruistically when its behaviour benefits other organisms at a cost to itself (Biological Altruism, 2013). Other theories discuss the origins of goodness, stressing that humans have the biological potential to care about the welfare of others (Simner, 1971). This potential develops with experience (Staub, 2015). Although these theories provide us with a sense of why a person might endanger his/her life, they do not identify the factors that prompt one to do so at work. This question is especially intriguing when it comes to street-level bureaucrats who enjoy a wide range of personal discretion in their work.

Most of the research on why people risk their lives for others has focused on soldiers. Although we realize that this group is not quite the same as police officers, given that police officers use violence as a last resort and soldiers have permission to kill the enemy, much can be learned about risk taking through soldiers. Soldiers may serve in the army and fight for different reasons, most of which are difficult to examine methodologically. The literature on this multifaceted subject largely developed in the years following World War II and identifies several factors pushing soldiers into battle. Some are intrinsic, such as hating the enemy (Gray, 1998), being driven by ideology (Moskos, 1970), getting pleasure from fighting, and increasing one's chances of personal survival (Van Creveld, 1991). Others are extrinsic, such as sacrificing oneself for friends within a fighting group (Jr et al., 2014), mere membership in a military organization (Keegan, Holmes, & Gau, 1986) and the organization of the army in a way that promotes the will to fight (Baynes, 1967; Van Creveld, 2009).

Although never applied to the case of police officers, the above-mentioned literature emphasizes several characteristics evident in our empirical study on police officers. Because there is no one theory that can explain why police officers risk their lives for others, we cannot create hypotheses based on the literature. Therefore, we investigate this question empirically using the theory of street-level bureaucrats.

Street-level bureaucrats are considered pivotal players in the making of public policy mainly due to the considerable discretion they enjoy in the performance of their jobs (Brodkin, 2011; Evans & Harris, 2004; Hupe, Hill, & Nangia, 2014; Lipsky, 1980; Thomann, 2015). However, no single theory can fully explain how street-level bureaucrats exercise their discretion (Brodkin, 2011). In addition, when it comes to discretion that involves risking one's life for one's clients, the task seems even more challenging. Following Brodkin (2011), we may conclude that 'personal preference is not irrelevant, but it is mediated by organizational conditions…' (p. 260).

Furthermore, Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2000) confirm that street-level bureaucrats' discretion is based on normative choices that are defined in terms of their relationships to citizens, clients, co-workers, and the system. One way to classify these interactions is to differentiate between the street-level bureaucrats' *personal characteristics* (e.g. ideology, attitudes, preferences, and values or self-interest), *organizational conditions* (e.g. organizational constraints, social organizational networks, organizational culture or interactions with peers and managers), and the *environmental context* (e.g. influence of bureaucrats in other bureaucratic agencies and non-governmental organizations, political control or culture).

Street-level bureaucrats are said to behave altruistically when their behaviour benefits others (e.g. citizens–clients) at a cost to themselves. Indeed, the literature points to various elements that fall within the category of street-level bureaucrats' *personal characteristics*. Riccucci (2005) highlights their attitudes and emotions towards clients (e.g. compassion). Hupe and Hill (2007) and Keiser (2010) point to the degree to which these bureaucrats feel accountable to their clients as well as how they feel about the goals of their organization. Tummers and Bekkers (2014) underscore the degree to which street-level bureaucrats want to make a difference in their clients' lives. Other scholars point to street-level bureaucrats' values, attitudes, personal opinions, preferences, and ideology (Brodkin, 2011; Keiser, 2010; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003; Meyers & Vorsanger, 2007; Wood & Vedlitz, 2007). On the other hand, Brodkin (2011) as well as Cohen and Gershgoren (2016) and Cohen, Benish, and Shamriz-Ilouz (2016) emphasize street-level bureaucrats' self-interests, which might include becoming respected and recognized in the organization. These self-interests may also involve professional and financial goals.

Ideology among street-level bureaucrats may account for their beliefs about how the social world operates, including convictions about what outcomes are desirable and how they should be achieved (Simons & Ingram, 1997). Indeed, organizations often have distinct ideological leanings, which serve as magnets for other individuals who have the same inclinations, in a reinforcing spiral (Gupta, Briscoe, & Hambrick, 2017). Such ideological inclinations include attitudes, personal opinions, preferences, and values derived from their ideological perspective. Such a perspective may include patterns of thought that are a shared set of ideas, and values that characterize a specific type of social group (Minar, 1961, pp. 324–325). Shared attitudes such as patriotism, meaning strong emotions of love of country (MacIntyre, 1984), may promote good will toward its citizens. Indeed, studies have demonstrated that good will activates altruistic sentiments (Galston, 1993).

Another explanation for such behaviour may be the conservation of resources theory, which maintains that people seek to build and defend that which they value. Therefore, people try to control the resources needed to accomplish this goal. The theory proposes that individuals try to create the circumstances that will protect and promote their integrity. For police officers, their integrity may mean their willingness to risk their lives for others. Thus, people must always be viewed in their social context. The actions they take and the attachments they make to preserve their sense of self are designed to establish themselves within this social context. Failure to do so may cause psychological distress (Hobfoll, 1989, 1991), affecting their decision-making and risk taking.

Street-level bureaucrats' biological potential for caring for the welfare of others is not only innate, but also develops with experience and interactions with others. Moreover, the will to help clients or serve society is not always enough. Helping often requires the confidence in the particular street-level bureaucrat's ability to do so. Here, both organizational conditions and the environmental context may influence the willingness and ability to risk oneself for others. Indeed, Lipsky (1980) and Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2003) claim that the definitive characteristic of street-level work is the 'interaction' between workers and clients.

With regard to *organizational conditions*, Brodkin (2011) as well as May and Winter (2007) mention management requirements and organizational constraints, whereas Tummers, Steijn, and Bekkers

(2012) point out the influence of organizational implementation. Some scholars regard social networks, interactions with peers (Sandfort, 2000), and what their peers think and believe (Keiser, 2010) as key factors. Others point to the subjective norms of managers (Tummers et al., 2012), organizational resources and incentives (Brodkin, 1997), and the organizational culture (Cohen, 2018).

With regard to the *environment*, the literature mentions the influence of politicians (May & Winter, 2007) as well as bureaucrats in other bureaucratic agencies (Keiser, 2010), non-governmental organizations, and political control (Meyers & Vorsanger, 2007). Others highlight the political and general culture (Cohen, 2018), neoliberal ideology (Liebenberg, Ungar, & Ikeda, 2013), the New Public Management wave of reforms (Brodkin, 2011), and the content of the designed policy (Tummers et al., 2012).

Given the fact that these factors influence street-level bureaucrats' discretion and practices, the organizational conditions and the environmental context may increase street-level bureaucrats' willingness to risk themselves for others. Indeed, the environment, especially a life-threatening one, is also a crucial factor in street-level bureaucrats' exercise of their discretion. Attacks and assaults with deadly weapons upon officers also reflect police discretion, at least to some extent (Meyer, 1980).

Hence, we may conclude that the main factors driving police officers, as well as other street-level bureaucrats, can be divided into three groups: *personal characteristics*, *organizational conditions*, and *the environmental context*.

3 | RESEARCH DESIGN

In this study, our goals are to determine why police officers are willing to risk themselves for clients, to understand the factors that encourage them to do so, and to identify the situations in which they would be more willing to risk themselves than others. In order to do so, we asked our participants about their willingness to risk their lives and then asked them to provides examples of their actual behaviour. Using these examples, we assessed their willingness to risk their lives. We also asked our participants about their attitudes towards situations where such risks could have been avoided, and then asked them to provide examples of such occasions. Again, using these examples, we assessed when such risks could have been avoided.

The empirical approach most appropriate for accomplishing these goals is abduction. We used an abductive approach because we integrated the existing literature with our empirical results to explain our findings. Indeed, abduction refers to a creative, inferential process of producing new hypotheses and theories based on research evidence (Pouliot, 2014; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). It formulates an explanation for the results, meaning a category into which the observations fall (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012, p. 171). Empirically, we used a triangulated qualitative method (Flick, 2004), which allowed us to explore the factors prompting Israeli police officers to work in life-threatening positions.

Prior to our research, in April–May 2017 we conducted an initial exploratory study to develop the themes for the questions that we later used in our research. The exploratory study involved a focus group and seven in-depth interviews. Examples of the questions include: What makes police officers risk their lives for others? What would make them not risk their lives? How often do they risk their lives, and on what occasions?

Based on the preliminary insights from the exploratory phase and the literature review, we began our main research using two focus groups of 15 participants each. The idea behind the focus group method is that group processes can help people explore and clarify their views in ways that would be less easily accessible in a one-to-one interview (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008; Kitzinger & Barbour, 1998). The discussion focused on the participants' general perceptions and those of their

associates regarding their willingness to risk their lives for others in the workplace. They also elaborated on their personal experiences.

We also conducted 22 in-depth, face-to-face interviews during 2017–2018, in order to obtain a more detailed understanding of the police officers' personal perspectives. The interviewees were asked to describe their risky work. Specifically, we were interested in understanding their perceptions regarding the current, as well as the desired, degree to which they risk their lives for others.

All of the respondents were adults between 22 and 45 years of age and had volunteered to be part of the study at the university. They served in policing units located throughout the country. Most of them had begun their career at the age of 18 as part of their obligatory military service, when they were drafted into policing units. They were educated, and regarded the police as their lifetime career. They were all involved to various degrees in risky positions within the police, serving as riot police and detectives and in Special Weapons And Tactics teams and counter-terrorism units. Nevertheless, naturally, some of them operated in more dangerous environments than others.

3.1 | Data analysis

We analysed data using the conventional approach in qualitative content analysis. Conventional content analysis is generally used with a study design whose aim is to describe a phenomenon, in this case, the supply of alternative services. Its advantage is gaining direct information from study participants without imposing preconceived categories or theoretical perspectives (Kondracki, Wellman, & Amundson, 2002), instead, allowing the categories and names for categories to flow from the data. In our study, the categories that emerged were perceptions, challenges, goals, expectations, opportunities, and achievements. These categories helped us identify three factors that, in combination, might lead police officers as street-level bureaucrats to risk their lives for others: individual, organizational, and environmental.

4 | FINDINGS

The exploratory study provided us with several initial insights that associated the willingness to risk one's life with several factors. The first set of factors related to the individual and was self-serving. They included the officers' personal welfare, and the economic security of employment in a steady governmental organization in which one could develop a successful and challenging career that provided interest and self-fulfilment. The second set of factors was value based and revolved around altruism: love of country, meaning patriotism, ideology such as Zionism, and a desire to contribute to the common good. Interestingly, the police officers indicated that the only de facto reason for risking their lives was to save an innocent citizen's life or neutralize a threat to the security of the country.

Overall, police officers reported that they are willing to risk their lives for others as part of their job. Indeed, all participants argued that they do and would risk their lives for the citizens and for the country. They believe their colleagues would do the same. They also believe that if officers will not risk their lives, they are either cowards or have some other flaw in their character. Examples of life-threatening encounters described by the participants include shootings, chases, entering high-risk areas, dealing with riots, engaging in high-risk missions that include jumping from heights, climbing, and donning a disguise to work undercover among a certain population. Most officers argue that risk is not a constant and is more frequent in periods of political and social unrest.

Integrating the existing literature with the results of our study revealed three factors that influence the willingness of police officers to risk their lives for others: individual characteristics, organizational

TABLE 1 Factors and features

Main factors	Specific features
Individual characteristics	Desire to gain respect and recognition
	Testing one's courage
	Ideology (Zionism)
	Personality (risk-aversion or risk-taking)
Organizational conditions	Peers' expectations
	Expectations of supervisors and the organization
	Employment security and promotion
Environmental context	Hostile working environment
	Importance of public opinion

conditions, and the environmental context. As Table 1 shows, for each main factor, we found specific features.

4.1 | Individual characteristics

Scholars have argued that when street-level bureaucrats' coping strategies vary, especially within similar organizational and environmental contexts, it is due to individual policy-relevant attitudes (Baviskar & Winter, 2017). The psychological desire to gain respect and recognition may affect police officers' choice to risk their lives. The literature shows that street-level bureaucrats appear to work hard to gain respect for their work and for themselves among their clients. Through their work, they can become well-known and respected for trying to make their working environment a better place (Kaler & Watkins, 2001). One of our participants emphasized that the desire for respect, both socially and publicly, is one of his reasons for being willing to take risks (interviewee 12). Furthermore, the police officers stated that they operate at the heart of society: 'We talk to people. We serve them. We assist them and protect them, and their gratitude simply makes us feel proud' (interviewee 10). Other participants also said that they risk their lives despite the danger in order to achieve what they referred to as victory – 'defeating the other side'. One participant stated: 'I did not want my rival to win; it would have made me feel like one big nothing' (interviewee 18). In some cases, the police officers claimed that they risked themselves more than was needed due to their ego. One participant said: 'I am healthy today and not in a wheel chair due to pure luck. I let my ego get the best of me and continued the chase in order to win'. I paid heavily for that' (interviewee 20).

Ideology is another component of the personal factors (Bergen & While, 2005). In his explanation of the policy-making–implementation continuum, Lipsky (1980) highlights the individual practitioner by underscoring the importance of ideology and training for the process. Literature on public attitudes towards policy issues finds that street-level bureaucrats' personal attitudes and values, in addition to their perceptions of others in the bureaucracy, affect how they interpret information presented by their clients (Keiser, 2010). According to this claim, the police officers' choice to risk their lives for others is driven by the ideological views and values they hold.

Indeed, ideological reasons were the most common responses our participants gave when asked why police officers risk their lives for others. The majority noted that Zionism and patriotism, meaning 'the love of the motherland' and the sense of mission associated with protecting the country, are one of the most important factors that leads them to risk their lives for others (interviewees 1, 3–5, 7, 9, 11–16, and 20, focus group 1, 2). 'Ideology is the basis; the love for the country and the people.

There is nothing more important than that, since this work will not make you rich' (interviewees 1 and 3). On the practical level, some referred to the job as a way to 'do more', that is contribute to the country (interviewees 2 and 7). Finally, one interviewee stressed that: 'It has to come from the heart' (interviewee 19).

The personality of street-level bureaucrats is also a factor in their choosing to risk their lives. Generally, our participants noted that some people are simply born braver than others (focus group 2). Our participants noted that risk per se encourages them to risk their lives. One of our participants articulated: 'At the end of the day, there is a very personal aspect to do this kind of work. It is undeniably evident that we love the job – the excitement associated with danger. It makes us feel good' (interviewees, 3, 10, and 20). Police officers who risk their lives for others are also perceived as seeking this form of 'unusual work' and see themselves as unable to perform regular 'behind the desk' office work. They state that they were 'born to work outside', where there is danger (interviewees 10, 12, 14, and 19). The terms 'action' and 'adrenalin' were used multiple times during the interviews and in the focus groups. One participant stated: 'People love the action associated with "special operations"; Our unit always arrives first at the scene. This is why there are 8–10 men competing for any job opening in our unit' (interviewee 17). Other participants simply stated that they 'seeks action and take risks' as part of self-fulfilment on the job (interviewee 7, focus group 2). Furthermore, one of the officers admitted that this was his dream job: 'I have always stated that I want an interesting job, ever changing, where nothing is permanent. In my case, it answers all these criteria' (interviewee 5). Another noted: 'Our line of work is quite similar to extreme sports and I love it' (interviewee 14). Furthermore, when asked what would make police officers not risk their lives when needed, the participants citied the officers' personality (interviewees 2–4, 15–16, 18–19, focus group 2), cowardice (interviewees 10 and 12), and the way they were educated at home (interviewees 5–6, 8–9, and 19–20) as elements that cause officers not to do the right thing. Finally, 'being a family man' was given as a reason discouraging police officers from risking their lives (interviewees 2, 9, 11, 13, and 20). One participant suggested: 'Maybe as a bachelor I would risk myself more than when I became a family man' (interviewee 13).

4.2 | Organizational conditions

At the organizational level, street-level bureaucrats are co-dependent in their work. The relationship within a team of police officers is also extremely close and co-dependent. Indeed, Walker and Gilson (2004) argue that teams and peer support are an important part of street-level bureaucrats' coping strategies. Generally, our participants stated that the organization 'brainwashes' them into believing that police officers are meant to risk their lives 24 hr a day. It is a part of the organizational socialization process (focus group 1, 2). Risk is perceived as their call of duty. For example, our participants noted that they would definitely risk their lives when their colleagues (i.e. partners) are in danger. They told us: 'It is for the brotherhood of warriors, the ideals, the good of the group' (interviewee 19) that, 'you storm forward into the danger in order not to let your team, your friends, down' (interviewee 13), and that, 'the safety of the team comes first' (interviewees 16 and 20). Another participant stated: 'Officers risk their lives in order to protect themselves, their people, their team, people operating on their watch, and to protect anyone who's in danger' (interviewee 3). One argument that was brought up constantly during the interviews involved cases when police officers 'freeze' during risky situations (interviewee 17). If this happens, their peers seem to not judge them, but rather take over the situation, while protecting their fellow officers. One of our participants described: 'A member of my team went up on the roof in order to shoot to disperse a violent protest – and suddenly just stood there in shock. I immediately went up there and took over. It happens to the best of us' (interviewee 18).

While street-level bureaucrats actually implement policy, they have many supervisors who oversee their work and enforce the agency's demands (Prottas, 1978). Managers employ performance indicators to measure outputs and use eligibility criteria to ration access to services (Lipsky, 1980). Indeed, our participants highlighted just how important the support of their supervisors is in order for them to perform as well as possible. One argued: 'If the professional environment is strong, supportive, consolidated and devoted to the cause – police officers will storm forward into danger. At the end of the day you do not want to let your commanders down' (interviewee 13). Furthermore, police officers will risk their lives if they feel appreciated and empowered by their commanders and the organization in general: 'Much is dependent upon the treatment of the commanders, how much they appreciate you. It goes up to the police commissioner' (interviewee 13).

In addition, there is an organizational expectation that street-level bureaucrats will do their work to the utmost. In order to deal with policy violations, control mechanisms are often put in place to achieve compliance (Tummers & Bekkers, 2014). Although our participants noted that they operate according to the guidelines of their organizational framework in life-threatening incidents, they admit it is also a reason for not risking their lives. One interviewee stated that officers are afraid to be judged by the organizational investigating units for their discretion in 'grey area' situations: 'This is why officers would choose not to act, in order to not 'get in trouble'' (interviewee 5). Another officer noted: 'It is not the fear of risking your life, but the fear of getting into an internal organizational investigation, with trials, lawyers, and so on, that would prevent officers from risking their lives' (interviewee 1).

Finally, the promise of a promotion may prompt street-level bureaucrats to risk their lives as a calculated gamble whose purpose is to maximize their socio-economic and status-related interests. Our participants noted that they enjoy 'employment security'. Belonging to an organization within the public sector provides the officers with a sense of security in providing for their families (interviewees 2–4, 8–9, 12–15, and 18–19). One interviewee stated that: 'Everything is framed, organized, comfortable – good conditions, fine salary. You do not have to worry about anything' (interviewee 3). Within this framework, 'People are aware that risking your life is valued within the organization (i.e. commanders) with regard to future prospects within the organization. This is an incentive when you are facing danger 24/7' (interviewee 9). One participant stated: 'My unit has a path that promotes officers and develops their careers. There is the commanders' route and a professional one. Yet, not everyone is offered a promotion. It is very desirable' (interviewee 5). Others even specified that this line of work is a platform for a move to the private sector (interviewee 2).

4.3 | Environmental context

The conditions in which street-level bureaucrats work may affect their implementation of policy. New challenges, such as cybercrime, terrorism, and immigration, put growing demands on police officers in an increasingly complex task environment (Masal & Vogel, 2016). In their role as implementers of policy, street-level bureaucrats negotiate their responses to the situation, adjusting their actions to the multiple demands, priorities, and values in their environment and the effective authority of the policy itself (McLaughlin, 1987). The literature also establishes that if local-level implementers are not given the freedom to adapt the program to local conditions, it is likely to fail (Matland, 1995). This is why a very dangerous environment requires that they adjust their daily conduct differently than a less risky context. Indeed, all of our participants noted that they operate in very hostile environments, which require them to be constantly alert and aware of danger. One officer stated: 'There is nothing to laugh about in our line of work. We go into dangerous places, where we are constantly shot at. We take the risk into consideration' (interviewee 12). Another officer stated: 'We go into hostile environments, highly risky. But this is the job' (interviewee 11). Another participant distinguished between environments

involving risky practices, where accidents can occur, and operational environments, where they might be attacked or ambushed. In both cases, the risk is taken into consideration (interviewees 3 and 19). 'We operate in risky conditions 24/7' (interviewee 18, focus group 2). 'We chose to work within this "ball of fire"; otherwise we would choose a non-risky job' (interviewee 8). One interviewee noted that: 'Each suspect that approaches us is both "accessible and sensitive" with regard to using firearms. We need to face them fearlessly and wisely' (interviewee 5).

Finally, public perceptions are also an important element in street-level bureaucrats' work. Our participants acknowledged that citizens look up to them as police officers with the ability and means to protect them and the country. They admitted that it is expected of them to protect citizens in risky events of any sort. According to one participant: 'This expectation does not leave you any choice. You do not think. You simply say "This is on me. This is my job" and go in' (interviewee 2). Another stated: 'Citizens' appreciation of the police force keeps us going' (interviewee 13). In fact, when asked 'why would you risk your life on the job'? all of the participants replied: to save citizens' lives. 'This is the line of thought. Who is more important? The citizens or myself? The country or myself?' (interviewee 11). 'An officer risks his life to save citizens' lives. Not for misdemeanours such as theft' (interviewee 12, focus group 2). Another argued: 'I cannot see innocent bystanders get hurt, especially the elderly and children. This is our work, and the public expects this of us' (interviewee 20).

5 | DISCUSSION

We began our article with the question of the nature of the factors that influence police officers' willingness to risk their lives for others. Our findings clearly demonstrate that this willingness cannot be attributed to one specific dominant factor but to three different ones. Personal characteristics are indeed important, but so too are organizational conditions and the environmental context.

The emergence of personal characteristics as one factor accords with the conservation of resources theory, which maintains that people seek to build and defend that which they value (Hobfoll, 1989, 1991). Interviewees' repeated statements about their ideological beliefs and goals of protecting their beloved country and citizens attest to their willingness to run towards danger in order to defend that which they value. Moreover, they enjoy it and feel satisfied when they can realize their goals.

We did find different levels of willingness to risk one's life for others among street-level bureaucrats who are working in the same organization and in a similar environmental context. One explanation for this difference may be simply that some individuals love taking risks, whereas others seek to avoid as many risks as they can (Wildavsky & Dake, 1990). Another example of individual considerations relates to one's personal status. Police officers are aware that their spouses and children worry about the danger they face every time they leave the house (Waters & Ussery, 2007). Thus, it is likely that risking one's life involves considerations about what one has to lose. As the data showed, having young children at home may discourage police officers from risking their lives. This finding increases the importance of individual characteristics in explaining street-level bureaucrats' willingness to risk themselves for others.

Nevertheless, our findings suggest that this willingness is not rooted only in the characteristics of the individuals. It also develops with experience and interactions with others. Indeed, police officers are expected to enforce laws, but are required to follow the proper procedural rules and regulations (Brown, 1981). They are required by their organization to handle problems on the street with efficiency and certainty, but know that they can be held accountable by 'watchful administrators' at a later date (Skolnick, 2011). Both the organizational conditions and environmental context may influence the willingness to risk one's life for others. Hence, police officers will risk their lives as part of the

guidelines and expectations of their supervisors within the organizational framework, but may not do so if they fear sanctions. The practical insight, therefore, is that decision makers 'can', in various formal and informal ways, influence street-level bureaucrats' behaviour. Here, the interaction between workers and clients, managers and co-workers are a crucial element.

Having established that decision makers can influence street-level bureaucrats' willingness to risk themselves for others, we must then ask whether we want them to do so. To answer this question, we must explore the consequences of such a decision for street-level bureaucrats, the public, the organization, and the state. Certainly, such a decision is potentially advantageous for improving the wellbeing of the public and promoting citizens' welfare. On the macro level, such willingness has the potential to increase solidarity and social capital in society, which is one of the most important elements of democracy.

However, such decisions create many dilemmas as well. For example, is it ethical to ask a civil servant to risk his/her life and his/her family's future for others? Should we reward him/her for such action, and if so, how? This is an important issue, because engaging in practices beyond the job's requirements, and for which neither sufficient organizational resources nor rewards are received, might entail heavy personal costs in terms of one's work and personal life. Another important question is how we can ensure that this burden is distributed equally among all groups in society. Given the street-level bureaucrats' low-level position and the fact that they may fail to see the broader picture, one can argue that urging them to go above and beyond the requirements of their job should come from the top management. On the other hand, decision makers may signal street-level bureaucrats to go beyond their duty only to support privileged groups and in specific geographical areas. Finally, research shows that structural variables, such as salaries, attract people to a certain job and are more closely linked to levels of involvement and satisfaction in an organization (Lambert, Qureshi, Klahm, Smith, & Frank, 2017). In light of this evidence, it might be argued that in some instances people who join the police force are of low socio-economic status. This risky line of work allows them to provide for their families and offers them social mobility. This reality raises the question of how ethical it is to ask these people to risk their lives for others, given that they do not have many alternatives.

These dilemmas, as well as many others which are not discussed here, are intensified in the context of divided societies. Street-level bureaucrats in culturally divided societies are an interesting case for investigating whether the factors we have revealed exist in such a cultural context. In the literature concerned with ethnic relations in the context of street-level bureaucrats, emphasis has been placed on bureaucrats' attitudes and the use of ethnic stereotypes, and on how they affect their choice of strategies in dealing with clients (see Hagelund, 2010). Race, commonly referred to as a factor believed to have an impact upon street-level bureaucrats, may affect the treatment of clients. Indeed, the literature shows that street-level bureaucrats may have a tendency to favour clients who resemble themselves and discriminate against those from different racial backgrounds (Lipsky, 1980). Street-level workers are attentive to who their clients are, and they make decisions based on an assessment of people's character and identity (Hupe & Hill, 2016; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003). It is generally agreed that public officials need to be more flexible, and more responsive to their clients and their cultures (Crook & Ayee, 2006).

Finally, one of the limitations of our study is that the case presented here is specific with regard to time, place, and context. Thus, we do not claim that precisely the same mechanism will operate in all circumstances. Nevertheless, although other or additional factors may influence street-level bureaucrats' willingness to risk themselves for others in other settings, the three factors presented here suggest a preliminary framework for future research. Exploring the theme of risking oneself for one's clients and society is important not only among police officers but also in other professional contexts. Future research focusing on police officers in other countries and contexts may shed light on

street-level bureaucrats in mixed societies and the willingness to risk one's life from a cultural viewpoint. Other fruitful research directions, such as focusing on other types of street-level bureaucrats, as well as on different types and levels of risk, will improve our understanding about this neglected aspect of street-level bureaucrats' discretion.

Another limitation is our focus on male police officers. Future research should investigate the case of female police officers to determine whether there is any gender-mediated variation in the factors we identified that prompt police officers to risk their lives for others.

6 | CONCLUSION

Our findings suggest that the combination of three factors influences street-level bureaucrats' willingness to risk their lives for their clients. Although the characteristics of the individual are important, the willingness to risk one's life also develops with work experience and interactions with the environment.

Therefore, our practical insights are rooted in these three factors. First, on the individual level, the notion that personal characteristics influence street-level bureaucrats' behaviour underscores the importance of the recruitment process. Analytical tools designed to identify potential employees who possess the necessary characteristics for the specific job must be used. Second, on the organizational level, both managers and colleagues have a strong influence on street-level bureaucrats' behaviour. Therefore, healthy organizational competition can encourage colleagues to achieve better results. Incentives such as bonuses and promotions can prove useful in providing such motivations. Furthermore, given that managers and decision makers can, in various formal and informal ways, influence street-level bureaucrats' behaviour, creating an intra-institutional mechanism that ensures that such influences are professionally based and transparent would be beneficial. Finally, on the environment level, we established that even if the two abovementioned factors remain constant, the environment has a direct influence on street-level bureaucrats' behaviour. Managers should realize that the policy as designed cannot be implemented equally in every situation. Therefore, they must provide street-level bureaucrats with additional tools that help them adjust the policy to the situation rather than simply relying on their discretion. Doing so will help resolve the problem of hesitation that some police officers reported when considering how their actions will later be interpreted by review boards.

Ultimately, we must remember that street-level bureaucrats are people. Of the three factors that influence their behaviour and demeanour on the job, at least two of them – the organizational and the environmental – affect them in return. Hence, despite the justified organizational goal of maximizing outputs, there is a need for mechanisms to protect street-level bureaucrats from the outcomes of their jobs. This study dealt with the most extreme outcome that street-level bureaucrats might face – giving up their lives. Nevertheless, in other areas such as social work or medical services, these bureaucrats pay a tremendous price in terms of stress, fatigue, and depression, and, in some cases, experience violence from their clients. Helping protect street-level bureaucrats from these outcomes is the responsibility of the organizations they serve.

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