

## The meaning of workload in carrying out field tasks: A Phenomenological Study

### Pemaknaan beban kerja dalam menjalankan tugas lapangan: Studi Fenomenologis

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#### ABSTRACT

Workload in the police environment, particularly among Sat Samapta personnel, has broad physical and psychological implications. The demands of full-time readiness, sudden assignments, and dual responsibilities involving field and administrative duties make workload not only a matter of task volume but also a source of emotional pressure. This study aims to understand the subjective meaning of workload as experienced by members of the Sidoarjo Police Sat Samapta Unit. Using a qualitative approach with Colaizzi's phenomenological method, this study involved six active Sat Samapta personnel selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed to identify the central themes of their work experiences. The findings show that workload is shaped by personnel imbalance, changing organizational policies, and high public expectations. Its impacts include physical fatigue, emotional stress, health problems, and role conflict in personal life. At the same time, personnel demonstrated various coping strategies, including problem-focused and emotion-focused coping, which reflect their efforts to adapt to work pressure. This study highlights the importance of understanding workload as a multidimensional phenomenon involving perception, emotion, and adaptive action. The practical implications of this study point to the need for more humane work policies, balanced task distribution, and psychosocial support to maintain personnel well-being and sustainable police performance.

#### ABSTRAK

Beban kerja di lingkungan kepolisian, khususnya di kalangan personel Sat Samapta, memiliki implikasi fisik dan psikologis yang luas. Tuntutan kesiapan penuh waktu, penugasan yang tiba-tiba, serta tanggung jawab ganda yang melibatkan tugas lapangan dan administratif menjadikan beban kerja tidak hanya sekadar masalah volume tugas, tetapi juga sumber tekanan emosional. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memahami makna subjektif dari beban kerja yang dialami oleh anggota Unit Sat Samapta Polresta Sidoarjo. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif metode fenomenologi Colaizzi, penelitian ini melibatkan enam personel aktif Sat Samapta yang dipilih melalui teknik purposive sampling. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semiterstruktur dan dianalisis untuk mengidentifikasi tema-tema utama dari pengalaman kerja mereka. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa beban kerja dibentuk oleh ketidakseimbangan jumlah personel, kebijakan organisasi yang berubah-ubah, dan ekspektasi masyarakat yang tinggi. Dampaknya meliputi kelelahan fisik, stres emosional, masalah kesehatan, dan konflik peran dalam kehidupan pribadi. Di saat yang sama, personel menunjukkan berbagai strategi koping (coping strategies), termasuk koping yang berfokus pada masalah (problem-focused coping) dan koping yang berfokus pada emosi (emotion-focused coping), yang mencerminkan upaya mereka untuk beradaptasi dengan tekanan kerja. Penelitian ini menegaskan pentingnya memahami beban kerja sebagai fenomena multidimensi yang melibatkan persepsi, emosi, dan tindakan adaptif. Implikasi praktis dari penelitian ini menunjukkan perlunya kebijakan kerja yang lebih manusiawi, distribusi tugas yang seimbang, serta dukungan psikososial untuk menjaga kesejahteraan personel dan kinerja kepolisian yang berkelanjutan.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Excessive workload remains a significant challenge across professional sectors that require high levels of physical and mental readiness, including the police force. The security and law enforcement sector are among the professions with the highest levels of work-related stress globally, largely due to workload imbalance (Mumford et al., 2025). More than 60 percent of police personnel experience extreme work pressure due to long working hours and fluctuating task demands (Ma et al., 2015). Workload refers to the accumulation of task demands that must be completed by an individual, including physical, cognitive, and emotional effort within a specific period of time (Knisely et al., 2021).

Initial interviews with five Sat Samapta personnel at the Sidoarjo Police Resort in January 2025 revealed specific workload problems in this unit. Sat Samapta, or Samapta Bhayangkara, is a police unit responsible for preventive and responsive field operations, including patrol duties, public order maintenance, protest security, and emergency response. These duties require 24-hour readiness and strong physical and mental preparedness. One personnel member reported frequently working 14-16 hours per day without a clear rest schedule, especially during protest security operations or natural disasters. Another stated that personnel sometimes had to shift from night duty to morning duty with less than eight hours of rest, resulting in chronic fatigue. In addition, two personnel members reported feeling forced to remain on standby even when mildly ill due to limited personnel availability. All informants agreed that administrative duties, such as writing daily patrol reports, added to their work pressure but were rarely discussed during task evaluations.

Based on the initial interviews, three main problems experienced by personnel were identified: (1) Physical fatigue due to working hours that exceeded normal limits; (2) Cognitive pressure caused by the need to make quick decisions in the field with limited information; and (3) Emotional burden resulting from direct exposure to social conflict and violence. These problems show that police workload is multidimensional, involving physical, cognitive, and emotional aspects. In line with workload imbalance theory (Tan et al., 2022), when task demands exceed an individual's capacity, negative consequences such as fatigue and emotional pressure may emerge. This condition reflects the experiences reported by Sat Samapta personnel in Sidoarjo.

The urgency of this study lies in the serious impact of unmanaged workload on police personnel. Data from the Indonesian National Police Health Agency (2024) indicate that severe sleep disorders among Sat Samapta personnel in East Java reached 45 percent, while mild to moderate depression reached 38 percent. Alves et al. (2023) also found that work stress among police officers is a major risk factor for mental health problems, including insomnia and burnout. If not properly addressed, these conditions may reduce operational performance, increase errors in field decision-making, and threaten the safety of both personnel and the public. Therefore, a deeper understanding of workload from the perspective of personnel is necessary.

The workload of Sat Samapta personnel is influenced by several situational, individual, and organizational factors. Situational factors include high daily task volume, irregular shift schedules, personnel shortages, and the demand for 24-hour readiness (Qtait et al., 2025). Individual factors include age, health status, work experience, and coping strategies (Varianou-Mikellidou et al., 2020). Organizational factors, such as perceived unfairness in task distribution and limited psychosocial support from superiors, may further intensify

perceptions of workload (Sainz et al., 2023). The combination of these factors creates workload dynamics that are highly contextual and may differ across personnel.

Previous studies have examined workload in policing. Putri & Satrya (2025) quantitatively examined the relationship between workload and work stress among 200 police officers and found that workload was positively associated with sleep disorders and anxiety. Another study on Samapta personnel in Surabaya used a workload scale and found that the cognitive aspect was the largest contributor to work fatigue. Meanwhile, Yussyaf & Putra (2019) conducted a quantitative study of 80 traffic police officers in Padang and concluded that positive perceptions of workload could increase motivation, particularly among personnel with more than five years of work experience. However, these studies relied mainly on quantitative approaches and structured questionnaires, leaving the subjective meaning of workload relatively unexplored.

Given the important contributions, previous studies leave a significant gap since they have not sufficiently explored how Sat Samapta personnel interpret, feel, and respond to their workload in a holistic manner. Quantitative studies tend to measure workload levels and their relationships with other variables, yet provide limited understanding of subjective experience, cognitive appraisal, emotional dynamics, and concrete coping actions. Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in its qualitative phenomenological approach, which is applied in the context of the Sat Samapta Unit at the Sidoarjo Police Resort to explore the meanings, emotions, and coping strategies experienced by personnel from their own perspective.

Taken together, this study aims to understand the perceptions, experiences, and coping strategies of Sat Samapta personnel at the Sidoarjo Police Resort in dealing with workload. The research focuses on three main dimensions: (1) How personnel interpret the workload they receive as part of the cognitive or appraisal dimension; (2) What emotional responses emerge from this appraisal as part of the affective dimension; and (3) What strategies or concrete actions are taken to manage workload as part of the conative or coping dimension. Through this focus, the study is expected to provide policy recommendations for a more humane and adaptive work system that is responsive to the psychological condition of police personnel.

## **2. METHODS**

This study utilized a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of workload among members of the Sidoarjo Police Sat Samapta Unit. This approach allows the researcher to examine lived experiences and contribute to the development of a work system that is more adaptive to the psychological and social conditions of personnel (Sugiyono, 2020). Mainly conducted at the Sidoarjo Police Resort, this study involved six Sat Samapta personnel selected through purposive sampling, which refers to the deliberate selection of informants based on criteria relevant to the research objectives. The inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) active members of the Sidoarjo Police Sat Samapta Unit, (2) at least one year of work experience, (3) experience in dual duties, such as patrol, security, and administrative responsibilities, and (4) willingness to participate in in-depth interviews.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted either in person or online via telephone, depending on the availability and convenience of each informant. Each interview took approximately 15-20 minutes, depending on the flow of interaction and the depth of information provided. All interviews were transcribed verbatim to maintain

the accuracy and integrity of meaning during data analysis. To strengthen data validity, time triangulation was applied by collecting information at different times and in different situations to examine the consistency of participants' responses (Abdussamad, 2021).

Data were analyzed using Colaizzi's phenomenological analysis method. This approach was chosen because it provides systematic stages for examining the essence of individual subjective experience. The stages included: (1) Reading the entire transcript to obtain a general understanding; (2) Identifying significant statements and developing themes; (3) Describing the phenomenon; (4) Organizing the structure of meaning; and (5) Validating the findings with the research informants. Through this method, the study sought to explore the meaning of workload among Sat Samapta personnel in an authentic and representative manner. To ensure credibility, the researcher applied data triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing with fellow researchers.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Description of Research Subjects

This study involved six personnel from the Sat Samapta Unit at the Sidoarjo Police Resort. All participants were active-duty members with at least two years of experience in the unit, ensuring that they had sufficient exposure to the dynamic workload of front-line police duties. The participants varied in gender, age, rank, and years of service, allowing the study to capture diverse perspectives. Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the research participants.

**Table 1.** Demographic profile of research subjects

Subject Code	Gender	Age (years old)	Rank	Years of Service in Sat Samapta
Subject A	Male	34	Brigadier (Brigadir)	8 years
Subject B	Male	29	Brigadier (Brigadir)	5 years
Subject C	Male	41	Chief Brigadier (Brigadir Kepala)	12 years
Subject D	Female	30	Brigadier (Brigadir)	4 years
Subject E	Male	27	Police Second Lieutenant (Inspektur Polisi Dua)	3 years
Subject F	Male	36	Brigadier (Brigadir)	7 years

All participants are experienced in various field operations, including protest security, natural disaster response, routine patrols, and emergency handling. Subject D was the only female participant, providing a distinct perspective on workload as a minority gender in a physically demanding unit. Participants ranged in age from 27 to 41 years, and their years of service in Sat Samapta varied from 3 to 12 years, allowing comparisons between relatively newer and more experienced personnel.

#### Thematic Findings from Interviews

Based on the analysis of in-depth interview data, five main themes emerged regarding the workload experience of Sat Samapta personnel. Each theme is described below with representative verbatim quotes, translated to English.

### Theme 1: Workload overview

This theme captures how personnel describe the intensity, unpredictability, and subjective meaning of their workload. All subjects reported that their workload was highly dynamic, with multiple security activities occurring consecutively and surprise assignments such as demonstrations or night patrols disrupting any predictable rest schedule. Subjectively, personnel interpreted workload not merely as a burden but as a moral responsibility, a challenge for professional growth, or a form of devotion.

**Subject A:** *“The workload at Samapta is very dynamic. Sometimes there can be two to three security activities in one day, close to each other. We also often receive sudden assignments, such as protests or night patrols, so we cannot really have a definite rest period. I see the workload as a logical consequence of the police profession, which demands full-time readiness. For me, the workload is part of the moral responsibility to keep the community safe.”*

**Subject D:** *“As a woman in Samapta, the challenges are somewhat different. Physically, I have to keep up with my male colleagues. The workload is the same, but the expectations are sometimes higher because we are a minority. For me, the workload is a symbol of equality and proof that female police officers are capable of standing on par with their male colleagues.”*

### Theme 2: Work experience

This theme describes the diverse field experiences encountered by personnel, ranging from routine patrols to high-intensity emergency situations. Subjects reported being involved in mass concert security, 10-hour protest escorts under harsh weather conditions, COVID-19 pandemic duties (checkpoints, night patrols, social assistance distribution), election security, riots, and natural disasters. These varied experiences shaped their coping mechanisms and resilience.

**Subject B:** *“I once guarded a demonstration for 10 hours without stopping. It was raining and the crowd was shouting, but I still had to remain calm.”*

**Subject C:** *“During the COVID-19 pandemic, the workload was very high. I had to guard checkpoints, conduct night patrols, and distribute social assistance.”*

### Theme 3: Factors affecting workload

This theme identifies the main factors that increased or shaped workload. Participants mentioned the decreasing number of senior personnel due to transfers to other units, sudden policy changes requiring assistance outside the city, an imbalance between the number of activities and available personnel, high public expectations of police performance, sudden orders with limited advance information, and excessively long working hours.

**Subject C:** *“The main factor is the number of personnel, which is not balanced with the number of activities. Sometimes we still have to assist other units. Not to mention the pressure from superiors to remain on standby 24/7.”*

**Subject E:** *“Sudden orders and a lack of advance information make it difficult to manage our personal time.”*

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Figure 1. Hierarchical meaning of workload for Sat Samapta personnel

### Theme 4: Impact of workload

This theme describes the consequences of high and uneven workload on personnel's physical and psychological well-being. Reported impacts included burnout, sleep problems, emotional instability, irritability at home, stomach aches due to irregular eating patterns, stress from missing important family events, guilt, mood swings, and difficulty maintaining focus at work.

**Subject A:** "Honestly, a high workload can quickly lead to burnout. I've experienced sleep problems. My emotions also become unstable, especially when I have not spent enough time with my family."

**Subject D:** "I was stressed because I couldn't attend important family events. I felt guilty, but a task is still a task."

### Theme 5: Strategies for dealing with workload

This theme captures the coping strategies used by personnel, which varied according to individual experience and available support systems. The strategies included problem-focused coping, such as maintaining sleep and eating patterns, resting between assignments, prioritizing urgent tasks, and sharing duties with team members. They also included emotion-focused coping, such as light exercise, sharing experiences with colleagues, accepting the situation, listening to music, and seeking social or spiritual support through discussions with seniors, spiritual activities, and eating together with colleagues.

**Subject A:** *"I try to maintain a regular sleep and eating pattern. Whenever possible, I sleep in my free time. And when I'm bored, I make the most of my time off."*

**Subject B:** *"I make it a habit to do light exercise and talk with colleagues. I also learn to prioritize which tasks are urgent and which can be shared with the team."*

**Subject F:** *"My strategy for dealing with excessive workload is listening to music to relax."*

### **The Meaning of Workload for Personnel**

Based on the thematic analysis, the meaning of workload among Sat Samapta personnel can be structured hierarchically, from general interpretations to the core meaning that emerged from their lived experiences. Figure 1 illustrates this progression.

### **Discussion**

This study aimed to explore the subjective meanings, experiences, and coping strategies of Sat Samapta personnel at the Sidoarjo Police Resort in dealing with workload. Using a phenomenological qualitative approach, the findings show that personnel face a highly dynamic, unpredictable, and high-intensity workload characterized by 24-hour readiness, sudden assignments, irregular shift rotations, and insufficient rest time. These conditions contribute to physical and psychological consequences, including chronic fatigue, sleep problems, emotional instability, and role conflict between work and personal life. Despite these challenges, personnel demonstrated various coping strategies, including problem-focused coping, such as time management, task delegation, and maintaining physical health, as well as emotion-focused coping, such as seeking social support, engaging in spiritual activities, and sharing experiences with colleagues. These findings indicate that workload in the police context is multidimensional and subjectively interpreted, rather than merely an objective measure of task volume.

The first theme concerns how personnel interpret workload as a form of moral responsibility and professional devotion. Several informants viewed the demands of their work not simply as a burden but as a logical consequence of the police profession, which requires full-time preparedness to maintain public safety. For these informants, workload became a way to fulfill their oath of office and demonstrate loyalty to the institution and the public. This positive meaning helped transform pressure into motivation and enabled personnel to endure long working hours and unpredictable tasks. The second theme shows that some personnel interpreted workload as a professional challenge that tested their mental and physical resilience. They viewed work pressure as a means of developing maturity, discipline, patience, and self-control. Difficult situations, such as securing a chaotic demonstration or responding to emergencies at night, were understood as opportunities to prove competence and dedication. This interpretation helped personnel reframe difficult experiences as part of professional growth.

The third theme highlights a deeper interpretive layer, in which workload was understood as a duty that could not easily be refused and was often framed within a spiritual or religious context. Some informants stated that their work was part of devotion and worship,

giving a sacred meaning to the pressures they faced. This spiritual interpretation may function as a psychological resource because it connects daily work struggles with a higher purpose beyond organizational demands. For these personnel, even exhausting assignments could be understood as meaningful acts of service. The fourth theme emerged from the female informant, who interpreted workload as a symbol of equality and self-proving in a male-dominated environment. As a minority in the Samapta Unit, she viewed the same physical and mental demands as proof that female police officers could stand on equal terms with their male colleagues. This meaning transformed workload from a potential source of pressure into a platform for demonstrating competence and challenging gender stereotypes. Together, these themes show that the subjective meaning of workload varies according to personal values, spiritual beliefs, gender identity, and professional self-concept.

When these themes are examined holistically, they point to one core meaning: workload is experienced by Sat Samapta personnel as a dual reality of sacrifice and self-actualization. On one hand, personnel recognized the negative impacts of workload, including physical exhaustion, emotional instability, health problems, family role conflict, guilt, and burnout. They did not deny the difficulties inherent in their profession. On the other hand, they also interpreted the same workload as a source of meaning, identity, and spiritual fulfillment. The pressure they endured became a way to demonstrate moral responsibility, develop professional maturity, fulfill devotion, and prove personal worth. This duality does not necessarily represent a contradiction. Rather, sacrifice and self-actualization are experienced together as part of the same work reality. Personnel did not view workload solely as a burden to be endured or solely as an opportunity for growth. Instead, they experienced it as both at the same time. This core meaning, workload as a necessary sacrifice that also enables personal and professional actualization, reflects the interpretive framework through which Sat Samapta personnel make sense of their work lives.

The findings of this study differ from previous research in several ways. First, prior quantitative studies, such as Inegbedion et al. (2020), have generally conceptualized workload as a predictor of negative outcomes, including stress, sleep problems, and fatigue, without examining how personnel subjectively interpret these demands. Such approaches often assume that higher workload leads to poorer psychological well-being. In contrast, the present study shows that workload is not experienced as entirely negative. Its impact depends partly on the meaning assigned by personnel. Those who interpret workload as devotion or challenge may show resilience despite high demands, whereas those who perceive it as injustice may experience greater distress. Second, unlike Fahmi & Riyanto (2024), who found that positive perceptions of workload tend to emerge after five years of service, this study suggests that positive meanings may arise earlier and may be more closely related to personal values and spiritual beliefs than to tenure alone. Third, previous studies have not clearly identified the dual nature of workload meaning, namely the simultaneous experience of sacrifice and self-actualization. While Lazarus & Folkman's (1984) coping theory emphasizes cognitive appraisal, it does not fully explain how individuals can hold different meanings of the same stressor at the same time. This study addresses that gap by showing that, for police personnel, workload is not simply appraised as either a threat or a challenge but is experienced as a combination of suffering and meaning-making.

The meanings that personnel attach to their workload have important implications for how they manage their professional lives. When workload is interpreted as devotion, challenge,

or self-actualization, personnel may be more likely to use adaptive coping strategies, maintain work engagement, and sustain performance under pressure. Positive meaning may serve as a psychological buffer against burnout, emotional exhaustion, and turnover intentions. Conversely, when workload is perceived as coercion, injustice, or meaningless suffering, the risk of distress, demotivation, and dysfunctional behavior may increase. This suggests that organizations should not rely only on reducing objective task volume to improve personnel well-being. It is also important to foster a work culture that supports positive meaning-making. Recognizing personnel sacrifices, affirming their professional identity, and helping them understand the broader purpose of their role may influence how they experience work pressure. Practical implications include the need for fair task distribution, transparent communication regarding policy changes, access to spiritual and psychological support services, and leadership that acknowledges both the burden and the potential meaning of police work. By addressing both the structural and interpretive dimensions of workload, police institutions can support personnel performance, psychological resilience, and long-term well-being.

#### **4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study demonstrates that the workload of personnel in the Sat Samapta Unit at the Sidoarjo Police Resort is dynamic, intense, and unpredictable. Sudden assignments, irregular work rotations, and the demand for full-time readiness create significant physical and psychological pressure. Workload is influenced not only by task volume but also by structural factors such as personnel shortages, sudden policy changes, and public expectations. Nevertheless, each personnel member interprets workload differently, including as a form of responsibility, dedication, patience, and self-actualization. These findings demonstrate that workload is shaped by subjective meaning and personal values in coping with work pressure.

In addition to causing fatigue and emotional stress, workload also encourages the use of adaptive strategies among personnel. They apply problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies, such as time management, social support, and spiritual activities, to maintain balance. These results confirm that workload in the police context is multidimensional, involving physical, psychological, and social aspects, and is influenced by individual perceptions and meanings. Therefore, fair, flexible, and psychologically oriented work management policies are needed to maintain personnel performance and resilience in a sustainable manner.

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