

Original Article

The Impact of Self-Leadership on Work Behaviours Among Police Officers: The Mediating Role of Emotional Intelligence

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Abstract: Police officers' work behaviours (WB) must have two key characteristics, namely self-leadership (SL) and emotional intelligence (EI), in order to deal with the various challenges that arise throughout their job operations. This study investigated how police officers' job habits and self-leadership (SL) are mediated by emotional intelligence (EI). WB served as the DV, SL as the IV, and EI as the MV in the current investigation. A self-administered, pre-tested questionnaire was used to gather data from a randomly chosen sample of 256 Kampala Metropolitan Police (KMP) officers who met the inclusion criteria of having enough knowledge of both research variables. Correlation and mediation analysis (PROCESS v4.2 by Hayes) came after data analysis at a 5% significance level. A mediation analysis indicated a statistically significant direct effect of SL on work behaviours ($\beta = .5951$, $t = 6.898$, $CI [.4252; .7649]$, $p < .001$), along with a significant indirect effect via EI ($\beta = .1689$, $CI [.0617; .2764]$), suggesting partial mediation. These results indicate that, although SL directly affects positive work behaviours, it also boosts them indirectly by promoting greater EI. This underscores the simultaneous significance of fostering self-leadership techniques and enhancing emotional intelligence in law enforcement situations, since they both aid in better behavioural outcomes and, ultimately, the health and efficiency of police personnel.

Keywords: Self Leadership, Emotional Intelligence, Work Behaviours, Self-reflection, Uganda Police Force.

I. INTRODUCTION

At a global level, the performance, ethical behaviour and adaptability of police work is becoming problematic in the midst of complex social environments. Modern studies (Carroll & Yeo, 2023; Cooper et al., 2022; Knox et al., 2020) have shown that today's policing setting requires more than just efficient law enforcement tactics; it requires the ability to understand emotional situations, cultural differences, and a strong rapport with the community itself. Police tend to be expected to respond proactively and flexibly to new issues like cybercrime, terrorism, and escalating mental health crises in many countries (Carroll, 2022; Carroll & Yu, 2022). Moreover, police misconduct is a worldwide problem with organisational culture, insufficient training, and poor accountability systems frequently causing behavioural problems (Miller & Hess, 2021; Yeo & Jeon, 2021). Consequently, various agencies have started to adopt behavioural training models and evidence-based police practices that enhance professionalism and also lead to reduced force.

In Africa, two unique factors (institutional weaknesses and political interference) have earned the authorities in general, including police officers, a low level of public trust (Gillanders et al., 2024). In countries such as Nigeria and South Africa, work behaviours that undermine the effectiveness of the entire organisation can frequently be attributed to police violence, corruption, and militarisation, compromising the public trust (Govender & Pillay, 2022; Ugwuanyi & Formella, 2023). Notable improvement exists in some areas despite these challenges, with human rights-oriented community policing and training proving effective at improving conduct. Transform behaviour through policing reform. For example, the police force in Ghana has introduced pilot programs that emphasise behavioural change that prioritises accountability, transparency, and responsiveness and have seen marked improvements in officer conduct and community relations (Schwartz, 2015). These results indicate that positive work behaviours in African policing situations are highly dependent on institutional changes and leadership dedication.

In Uganda, police officers' work behaviors are shaped by the quality of training, the culture within the police force, and how the public views them as a whole, yet they are dissatisfactory (Kakumba & Kroenke, 2023). The role of officer training has been emphasized by many scholars like Sseggiiriinya (2020) who discovered that officers who completed community-policing training exhibited greater respectfulness and cooperation, particularly in areas with high conflict. Nonetheless, factors like inadequate compensation, pressure, and political pressure persist in impacting professional behavior, sometimes resulting in the use of excessive force or unjust arrests (Nalubega, 2023). Initiatives such as the Police Accountability and Reform Project (PARP) have progressed in altering officers' perspectives on misconduct and promoting ethical choices, though the transition to steady behavior change is still slow. Overall, improving police conduct in Uganda necessitates continuous investment in officer well-being, organizational integrity, and strategies for building trust within the community.



Research on police officer work behavior has typically centered on the twofold role of law enforcement: preserving public order and upholding legal regulations. With this in mind, researchers such as Botke et al. (2022) and Ramadhani et al. (2025) have defined police work as encompassing both task execution, such as making arrests and composing reports, and discretionary actions, such as issue resolution and community interaction. This twofold understanding illustrates the intricacy of policing, as officers need to utilise legal knowledge while also demonstrating interpersonal and situational discernment. Research highlights that successful policing requires not just the technical performance of responsibilities but also the capacity to foster trust and credibility within communities (Kazim & Rafique, 2023).

Recently, researchers have broadened their understanding of police work behaviours to include proactive and community-focused actions that correlate with community policing models. Griffin et al. (2007) discovered that police officers who participate in proactive problem-solving, attend community meetings, and build alliances with local stakeholders represent a transition from reactive enforcement to proactive engagement. These actions are frequently self-directed and focus on crime reduction through trust enhancement rather than force. This expanded framework redefines successful policing as not just enforcing laws but also promoting community health and safety, thereby necessitating skills in communication, empathy, and flexibility. From the above discussion, it is evident that the expanded framework also calls for incorporating self-leadership as well as emotional intelligence.

Self-leadership, characterised as a method by which individuals guide themselves to attain self-direction and self-motivation (Manz, 1986), has been progressively examined in relation to policing because of the independent and unpredictable aspects of police work. Researchers have defined police self-leadership as the capacity of officers to manage their own actions, make moral choices, and maintain efficiency in scenarios with minimal oversight (Sylvén, 2023; Filstad, 2024). This internalised leadership style is deemed essential for frontline officers, who frequently encounter complex, high-pressure situations and must depend on self-direction to respond quickly and responsibly.

Literature has identified the cognitive and behavioural strategies that constitute self-leadership among police officers, typically encompassing personal goal setting, self-monitoring, self-rewarding and positive thinking processes that foster personal accountability and resilience in policing (de Moura et al., 2023). Research suggests that officers with high self-leadership competence also high emotional intelligence can better cope job-related stress, maintain professionalism under difficult conditions, and adapt to the growing complexity of policing (Kösterelioğlu, 2021). This has serious implications for leadership development initiatives in police organisations which continue to attempt to forge a hybrid organisation with individual autonomy as well as hierarchical command systems.

Recent research has placed self-leadership within the context of ethical policing and community involvement, considering it a means to enhance intrinsic motivation and decisions driven by values. For instance, Santa Maria et al. (2021) discovered that officers exhibiting robust self-leadership tend to participate more in proactive, community-orientated policing and are less inclined to depend on forceful methods. This viewpoint is consistent with wider police reforms that stress legitimacy, responsibility, and community trust (Kyprianides et al., 2022; Charman, 2024). Consequently, self-leadership is viewed not merely as an individual characteristic but as a professional skill that aligns officers' actions with organisational objectives and societal norms.

Research indicates that police officers who possess strong self-leadership abilities but have low emotional intelligence tend to be less reliable when demonstrating positive work behaviours, particularly under stress, conflict, or provocation. In contrast, officers exhibiting high self-leadership along with high emotional intelligence (EI) display increased organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB), fewer counterproductive work behaviours (CWB), and enhanced abilities for conflict resolution (Goleman, 2023). In this setting, emotional intelligence serves as a mental connection, converting the goals established through self-leadership into socially adept, flexible, and principled workplace behaviours. This intermediary position is especially important in law enforcement, where officers often have to navigate emotionally charged encounters with the public and make judgement calls under stress.

A) Problem Statement

The Uganda Police Force (UPF) continues to face challenges related to officer conduct, public mistrust, and inconsistent work behaviours, often attributed to poor emotional regulation, stress, and limited autonomy in decision-making (Nalubega, 2023; Ssegiriinya et al., 2023). While organisational reforms and capacity-building initiatives have aimed to improve professionalism, empirical evidence on the internal psychological factors that shape officers' work behaviours remains limited. Globally, self-leadership has been linked to improved job performance, ethical behaviour, and resilience in law enforcement settings (George et al., 2022; Lai et al., 2024). However, research suggests that emotional intelligence (EI) may serve as a crucial mediator in this relationship, enabling officers to apply self-leadership strategies more effectively by managing stress, understanding interpersonal dynamics, and maintaining emotional control in high-pressure environments (Goleman, 2023). Despite these insights, there is a significant knowledge gap in the Ugandan policing context regarding how EI mediates the

relationship between self-leadership and officers' behavioural outcomes. This study sought to address this gap by examining the relationship between self-leadership and work behaviours of Ugandan police officers while assessing the mediating effect of emotional intelligence on this relationship.

B) Purpose of the Study

This study was out to examine how emotional intelligence mediates the relationship between self-leadership and WB among police officers.

C) Specific Objectives

- To examine how self-leadership (time management and self-reflection as well as resilience and capability) is related to the WB of police officers in Uganda
- To analyse how the components of self-leadership (time management and self-reflection as well as resilience and capability) are related to EI of police officers in Uganda
- To assess the relationship between EI and WB of police officers in Uganda
- To examine the mediating effect of EI in the relationship between self-leadership and WB of police officers in Uganda.

D) Research Hypotheses

- The relationship between self-leadership (time management and self-reflection as well as resilience and capability) and WB of police officers in Uganda is insignificant.
- The relationship between the components of self-leadership (time management, self-reflection, as well as resilience and capability) and EI of police officers in Uganda is insignificant.
- The relationship between EI and WB of police officers in Uganda is insignificant.
- The mediating effect of EI in the relationship between self-leadership and WB of police officers in Uganda is insignificant.

E) Theoretical foundation

In accordance with the study objectives, the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) was utilized. Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), formulated by Bandura (1986), posits that behaviour is influenced by the continuous interaction of personal factors, cognitive processes, and environmental influences, a concept known as reciprocal determinism. A key premise is that individuals are proactive agents capable of self-regulation and reflection, with learning occurring through both direct experiences and observational learning. This makes SCT particularly relevant in understanding the mediating role of emotional intelligence (EI) on self-leadership and work behavior (WB) among police officers. Self-leadership specifically involves self-regulatory strategies, whereas EI supports the management of emotional and social interactions, both of which are well aligned with SCT's focus on individual agency and the regulation of emotion-cognition. Through EI, police officers can apply self-leadership techniques to develop adaptive and ethical behaviors within the workplace, particularly in high-pressure contexts. Yet, one limitation of SCT is its breadth and failure to capture structural or systemic factors that could influence officers' behaviors but are not sufficiently captured with the theory's focus on individuals.

F) Conceptual framework

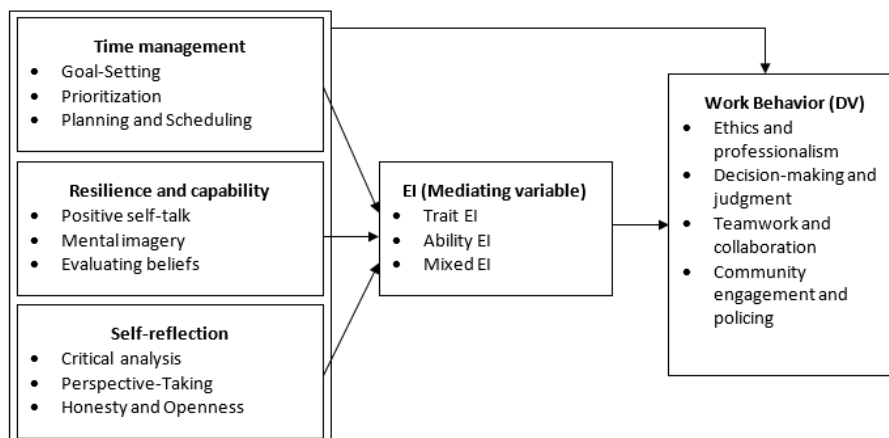


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework Illustrating the Mediating Role of Emotional Intelligence in the Relationship between Self-Leadership Components and Work Behavior of Police Officers

The conceptual framework above posits that emotional intelligence (EI) serves as a mediating element in the relationship between self-leadership and the work behaviours (WB) of police officers. Within this framework, self-leadership enhances an

officer’s ability to control their actions and sustain motivation (Manz, 1986). However, the successful transformation of these self-leadership strategies into consistent and effective work behaviour significantly depends on the officer’s level of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence enables officers to recognise, understand, and manage their own emotions as well as those of others, thus amplifying the influence of self-leadership on job behaviour, particularly in emotionally demanding and high-pressure policing contexts (also see Schutte et al., 2007). This framework is grounded in social cognitive theory, which underscores the significance of personal and cognitive factors in influencing behaviour through self-regulatory mechanisms.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study utilized a quantitative, cross-sectional correlational methodology to investigate the mediating role of emotional intelligence in the relationship between self-leadership and work behavior among police officers in Uganda. This design was chosen for its efficacy in identifying and assessing relationships between variables at a single point in time.

The target population comprised police officers from various divisions within the Uganda Police Force, including both operational and administrative sectors. A stratified random sampling method was utilized to ensure equal representation across ranks, departments, and regions. By applying Margin of error sample size formula (at 5% error) for finite populations, the study aimed to include a minimum of 384 participants, thereby providing sufficient power for mediation analysis. The study utilized standardized and validated instruments to evaluate the three primary variables:

- Self-Leadership: Evaluated using the Revised Self-Leadership Questionnaire (RSLQ) created by Houghton and Neck (2002), which consists of 35 items divided into three dimensions: behavior-focused strategies, natural reward strategies, and constructive thought patterns.
- Emotional Intelligence: Assessed with the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS), a tool comprising 16 questions that explore four domains: self-emotion evaluation, evaluation of others' emotions, emotional usage, and emotion regulation.
- Work Behavior: Evaluated through the Individual Work Performance Questionnaire (IWPQ), which assesses three facets of work behavior: task performance, contextual performance, and counterproductive work behavior.

Each item was rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“Strongly Disagree”) to 5 (“Strongly Agree”). A pre-test involving 20 officers outside the sample was conducted to ensure contextual relevance and comprehension.

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board as well as the leadership of the Uganda Police. Surveys were distributed in person and collected anonymously to ensure privacy and encourage honest responses. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Quantitative data were entered into SPSS (Version 22) and analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Mediation analysis was performed with the PROCESS macro (Model 4) developed by Hayes (2017), employing bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples to assess the significance of the indirect effect of emotional intelligence. An indirect effect was considered statistically significant if the 95% confidence interval for it did not include zero.

III. RESULTS

The study results were generated using two methods of analysis i.e. correlation analysis as in tables 1 to 4 as well as mediation analysis in figures 1-3 (using PROCESS v4.2 by Andrew F. Hayes) at a 5% significance level.

Table 1: Relationship between WB and SL Components

		WB
WB	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	N	256
Time Mg't	Pearson Correlation	.310**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	256
Resilience & Capability	Pearson Correlation	.422**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	256
Self-reflection	Pearson Correlation	.486**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	256

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

As in the table above, it is found that there existed moderate positive and significant relationships between WB of police officers and the components of self-leadership (p<0.05). However, the relationship between police officer self-reflection (r =

.486; $p < 0.05$) and WB was greater in comparison with the relationships between WB and the other components of SL. The more significant connection between self-reflection and WB in police officers, as opposed to other aspects of self-leadership, could be attributed to the essential function that self-awareness serves in their job performance. Self-reflection allows officers to evaluate their behaviors, choices, and engagements in intricate and frequently unpredictable situations, fostering ongoing enhancement and moral behavior. This increased self-awareness may result in more reflective, responsible, and flexible work behaviors, which are crucial in law enforcement positions. Other self-leadership elements, like self-goal setting or self-reward, though significant, might not impact behavior in high-stress, real-time situations as efficiently as the capacity to reflect and adapt based on prior experiences.

Table 1: Relationship between EI and SL Components

		EI
EI	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	N	256
Time Mg't	Pearson Correlation	.575**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	256
Resilience & Capability	Pearson Correlation	.337**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	256
Self-reflection	Pearson Correlation	.350**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	256

As in the table above, it is found that there existed moderate positive and significant relationships between EI of police officers and all the components of self-leadership ($p < 0.05$). However, the relationship between police officer time management ($r = .575$; $p < 0.05$) and EI was greater in comparison with the relationships between EI and the other components of SL. The enhanced correlation between time management and Emotional Intelligence (EI) in police officers, relative to other self-leadership aspects, is due to the necessity of emotional regulation, self-awareness, and stress management for effective time management. In the challenging and unpredictable field of police work, officers with greater emotional intelligence are more adept at prioritizing tasks, staying focused under pressure, and managing their time effectively, even in stressful conditions. This regulation of emotions fosters improved planning, decreases procrastination, and enhances decision-making, all essential for effective time management. Consequently, emotional intelligence directly boosts and improves time management abilities more than other self-leadership elements that may depend less on immediate emotional control.

Table 3: Relationship between EI and WB

		WB
WB	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	N	256
EI	Pearson Correlation	.531**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	256

Table 3 revealed that at a 5% significance level, the relationship between police officer WB ($r = .531$; $p < 0.05$) and EI was moderate, positive and significant. This is clarified by the notion that EI enables officers to identify, comprehend, and handle their own feelings and those of others, which is crucial in a high-pressure and emotionally intense field such as law enforcement. Officers with elevated emotional intelligence can better manage work-related stress, efficiently resolve conflicts, and sustain emotional stability in difficult encounters. This emotional intelligence fosters psychological resilience, decreases burnout, and boosts job satisfaction, all of which aid in enhancing overall well-being. Consequently, EI acts as a safeguard that enhances the mental and emotional well-being of police personnel.

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OUTCOME VARIABLE:
EI

Model Summary
      R      R-sq      MSE      F      df1      df2      P
      .7090      .5027      .4626      256.7680      1.0000      254.0000      .0000

Model
      coeff      se      t      p      LLCI      ULCI
constant      -.6883      .2512      -2.7405      .0066      -1.1829      -.1937
SL      1.1100      .0693      16.0240      .0000      .9736      1.2464
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Figure 2. Mediating Effect of EI on the Relationship between SL and WB: Path 1

For path a, $\beta = 1.11$, $p < .001$: generally, elevated SL scores in police officers correlate with increased EI, and it is significant at the stated significance threshold. This result aligns with our expectations if the study’s mediation model holds true.

Direct effect of X on Y						
	Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
	.5951	.0863	6.8984	.0000	.4252	.7649
Indirect effect(s) of X on Y:						
	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI		
EI	.1689	.0545	.0617	.2764		

Figure 3. Mediating Effect of EI on the Relationship between SL and WB: Path 2

A mediation analysis was conducted to examine the mediating effect of EI on the relationship between SL and WB. It was found that there was a statistically significant direct effect, $\beta=.5951$, $t=6.898$, CI [.4252; .7649], $p<.001$. In addition, a statistically significant indirect effect was also found, $\beta=.1689$, CI [.0617; .2764]. These results suggest that EI partially mediated the relationship between SL and WB. This partial mediation indicates that although SL directly affects WB, it also indirectly impacts it by promoting higher EI, which subsequently enhances well-being. These results emphasize the significance of self-leadership techniques and the advancement of emotional intelligence in enhancing the overall well-being of police officers.

IV. DISCUSSION

The discovery that emotional intelligence (EI) partially influenced the connection between self-leadership (SL) and well-being (WB) among police officers aligns with current literature, although some differences are significant. For example, Carmeli (2003) discovered that EI plays a significant role in psychological well-being by improving emotional regulation and stress management, reinforcing the current study's recognition of EI as an essential factor through which SL influences WB. In a similar vein, Rodrigues et al. (2020) showed that self-leadership has a positive effect on well-being mainly via emotional competence, supporting the partial mediation noted here. In contrast to research positing that EI functions as a complete mediator, like the work of Schutte et al. (2007), which highlighted that emotional self-awareness and empathy wholly account for how personal competencies affect well-being. The findings here indicate that SL also exerts a direct impact on WB, in addition to its influence through EI.

V. CONCLUSION

The mediation analysis reveals that EI partially influences the connection between SL and WB of police officers. The notable direct effect suggests that SL affects positive WB on its own, while the notable indirect effect illustrates that SL improves these behaviours by promoting greater EI. Importantly, while the analysis concentrated on WB, the indirect pathway emphasizes EI's role in enhancing both interpersonal interactions and emotional regulation, essential for optimal performance. These results highlight the necessity of cultivating self-leadership abilities and EI in law enforcement, as this can result in more flexible, ethical, and efficient work practices that ultimately advantage both officers and the communities they support

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