

"A man is  
great by  
deeds, not by  
birth"  
-Chanakya

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**Strong Identities in Unexpected Quarters:  
Identity Construction by Traffic Police Personnel**

**Unnikrishnan K Nair <sup>1</sup>**

**Ankita Tandon <sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup>Professor, Organizational Behaviour Area, Indian Institute of Management Kozhikode, IIMK Campus PO, Kunnamangalam, Kozhikode, Kerala, India – 673 571  
Phone: +91 495 2809247 (O), Email: unni@iimk.ac.in

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor, School of Business, FLAME University, Gat No. 1270, Lavale, Mulshi, District Pune – 412115, Maharashtra, India. Ph: +91 – 9763065146, Email: nikytandon@gmail.com

## ABSTRACT

Traffic police is a central yet inconspicuous part of social life. Their role, positioned at the interface between public services and society, involves multiple challenges for effective performance. Yet, there is little academic knowledge about this group of professionals. Through qualitative data collected from 93 traffic police personnel from a south Indian city attending a motivational session conducted by one of the authors, this study examined their identity conceptions. Analysis revealed emergence of unexpectedly strong occupational identities in an otherwise generally routine and mundane job. Traffic police personnel constructed strong occupational identities rooted in the concept of being in *public service* by going beyond their operational roles to focus on the perceived impact of their work on the society. They strengthened this identity by engaging in behaviours congruent with it, and consequently having positive job experiences either through direct observation of outcomes or through positive feedback from relevant stakeholders. They continually sought to strengthen their identity by seeking appreciation, recognition and support from critical stakeholders. Events which led them to perceive themselves as ineffective in their duty, and therefore went against their self-image, threatened their identity. Our study provides theoretical insight into occupational identity construction and the factors which impact its strength positively and negatively. Inferences can also be drawn for developing suitable motivational interventions for enhancing work engagement, performance and effectiveness of traffic police and similar other groups, particularly working at the interface.

**Keywords:** Traffic police, occupational identity, public services, qualitative research.

Research Office

Indian Institute of Management Kozhikode

IIMK Campus P. O.,

Kozhikode, Kerala, India,

PIN - 673 570

Phone: +91-495-2809238

Email: [research@iimk.ac.in](mailto:research@iimk.ac.in)

Web: <https://iimk.ac.in/faculty/publicationmenu.php>

