INTRODUCTION

A profession is a special type of occupation. Members of a profession are characterized by high levels of expertise, tend to work autonomously, believe that the services provided by members of the profession are of particular importance, and support the notion that the profession should be regulated by its members (Blau, 1999).

Turnover has been recognized as being of particular importance as it relates to professionals, (Aryee, Wyatt, & Min, 1991; Blau, Tatum, & Ward-Cook, 2003) including police officers (Doerner, 1995; Fry, 1983; Harris & Baldwin, 1999) and much work has been done to explain it and offer remedies. Most of the explanatory work has been devoted to the relationship between the intent to quit and subsequent turnover behavior (Blau & Boal, 1989; Blau & Lunz, 1998; Farkas & Tetrick, 1989; Parasuraman, 1982). The consensus is that intent to quit the organization and intent to quit the profession are significantly related to leaving the organization and the profession, respectively. The preponderance of this work is based upon the theory of reasoned action (TRA) which proposes links between attitudes, behavioral intentions, and subsequent behavioral action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). That is, behavioral intentions mediate the relationships between attitudes related to the behavior and the behavior itself. The basic turnover format implied by the TRA is that various attitudes proceed the intent to quit which proceeds
actual turnover; and that intent to quit is the more proximal determinant of turnover behavior.

However, with the exception of behaviors directly related to the turnover event (e.g. job search), the possible relationships among intent to quit and other job related behaviors has not been explored. That is, research with respect to what occurs following an individual’s withdrawal cognition (intent to quit) but before he or she leaves is lacking. An examination of this issue is important because alterations in one’s job related behavior, and therefore job performance, may be based upon whether one intends to continue working with the organization and/or in the profession. Furthermore, in a study extending over two and one-half years Doerner (1995) found that, in a sample of recently recruited police officers, of those who left the department, 50% found employment in other law enforcement agencies while the other half left the law enforcement profession altogether. This begs the question, “Are there differences between the relationship intent to quit the organization has with performance are the relationship intent to quit the profession has with performance? Therefore, one purpose of this research is to examine the relationships among intent to quit the organization and intent to quit the profession with two types of performance: in-role job performance and organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB).

Research supports relationships between organizational commitment and intent to quit the organization (Aryee, Wyatt, & Min, 1991; Bishop, Scott, & Burroughs, 2000; Blau, Tatum, & Ward-Cook, 2003) and between professional commitment and intent to quit the profession (Blau & Lunz, 1998). At the same time, scholars have proposed that professional identity transcends the employing organization (Van Maanen & Barley, 1984) and professional commitment is likely to be more stable and enduring than commitment to a particular organization or feeling about a specific job (Morrow, 1993). This suggests that the relationships organizational and professional commitment have with other constructs are likely to differ. Furthermore, while the relationship organizational commitment has with intent to quit the organization and the relationship professional commitment has with intent to quit the profession have been examined separately, the simultaneous relationships among them have not been examined. (It should be noted that Blau, Tatum, and Ward-Cook (2003) included both organizational commitment and professional commitment in a model that included both intent to quit the organization and the profession, however, the professional commitment they defined, measured, and tested was behavioral rather than attitudinal.) Therefore, the second purpose of this research is to examine the relationships organizational and professional commitment have with the intent to quit constructs as well as other commitment related attitudes (see Figure 1). Examining relationships simultaneously is important since the various attitudes and cognitions compete within an individual simultaneously to determine his or her behavior.

Prior research has shown that perceived support from various entities are important correlates of commitment (Bishop, Scott, & Burroughs, 2000; Bishop, Scott, Goldsby, & Cropanzano, 2005; Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa 1986). Hence, our model includes perceived support variables related to entities that police officers encounter in meaningful ways as they practice their profession and, we believe, are related to the commitment they have for their department and the law enforcement profession. These variables include perceived organizational support (POS), perceived supervisor support (PSS), and perceived community support.
We also included job satisfaction in our model, a variable related to the job itself. Job satisfaction has been shown to be related to organizational commitment (Bateman & Strasser, 1984; Curry, Wakefield, Price, & Mueller, 1986; Farkas & Tetrick, 1989; Mathieu, 1991; Vandenberg & Lance, 1992; Williams & Hazer, 1986) and professional commitment (Aryee, Wyatt, & Min, 1991; Blau, 1999; Blau & Lunz, 1998; May, Korczynski, & Frenkel, 2002).

By definition professionals tend to work autonomously and believe that their services are particularly important. This suggests that professionals are likely to be especially aware of and accept the responsibility concomitant with practicing their profession. Therefore, our model also includes felt responsibility. Salancik (1977) proposed a theoretical relationship between commitment and responsibility. He argued that, “In general, any characteristic of a person’s job situation which reduces his felt responsibility will reduce his commitment” (Salancik, 1977: 17). To our knowledge, this relationship has yet to be subjected to an empirical test.

Therefore, this study extends research on professional commitment and performance in a number of ways. First, it considers behavior related to withdrawal cognitions other than turnover itself, that is, job performance and OCB. Second, the model considers the simultaneous relationships among organizational and professional commitment, intent to quit, and desired performance related behaviors. Third, the model includes antecedents of commitment associated with different levels, the job itself, the immediate supervisor, the organization, and the community in which the professionals practice. The latter entity is of particular interest since it represents the constituency which police officers are sworn “to protect and serve.” Fourth, we consider the role of felt responsibility, an important professional attribute, as it pertains to commitment and the outcome variables. Fifth, our use of path analysis allows us to examine the degree to which organizational and professional commitment mediate the relationships among the sources of employee support and felt responsibility, intent to quit the organization, and intent to quit the profession. It also allows us to examine the degree to which felt responsibility and intent to quit the profession mediate the relationships between the commitment variables and the performance variables. Sixth, this model offers the possibility of clarifying the relationship between job satisfaction and job performance. The notion that a happy worker is a productive worker is intuitively and ethically appealing. However, research findings with respect to this relationship are ambiguous and the empirical linkages are weak (Organ, 1988). By including felt responsibility as a mediating variable between job satisfaction and the performance variables, much needed clarification of this issue may be obtained. Finally, the resulting model will establish links between the general professional commitment literature and the literature specific to law enforcement. It will also link the withdrawal cognition literature and the performance literature.

NOTE: The full paper and references may be obtained by contacting the first author.