

A STUDY ON “STRESSORS FOR POLICE”

SHIKHA SINDHU¹ & NATASHAA KAUL²

¹Assistant Professor, Head of Department, Department of HR, ISBS, Pune, Maharashtra, India

²Assistant Professor, ISBS, Pune, Maharashtra, India

ABSTRACT

Stress is a complex phenomenon. Police officers, because of the unique nature of their job, are more exposed to stress. Police are integral for well-functioning of a Society, it is therefore important to study stresses for the police so that “Stress Management Interventions” can be planned which will lead to a psychologically healthy Police Force. This paper aims to find out the reasons or stressors for the Police Force. The findings are based on the secondary research.

KEYWORDS: Stress, Police, Stressors

INTRODUCTION

Everyone experiences stress in life. There are a number of different aspects of our life that lead to stress. In terms of the workplace, stress can be defined as a multi casual and a complex psychological phenomenon that results from continuous pressures and demands placed on individuals that goes beyond the tolerance limits of the person and result in psychological, physical and emotional exhaustion (Mathur, 1999). Some stress is inevitable and it can be good while other stress can be bad. The most prominent among those is the stress that a person experiences on account of the career he/she has chosen. The career and the job make demands of the person in terms of skills, efficiency, effectiveness, etc. and this causes stress to the person. This is broadly referred to as occupational stress given the source of the stress.

All jobs inevitably result in stress. Police jobs are more stressful because of the nature of the work and the expectations that society and the other stakeholders have from the role. A feature of the police work like changing work shifts requires biological adjustments as well as adjustments to the personal lives. Role conflicts may also occur between the job roles which involve serving the public, enforcing laws, upholding ethics and personal roles involving being a parent, a spouse and a son/daughter to aging parents and this can act as stressors. Some other stressors include threats to personal wellbeing in circumstances, need to be in control of emotions, carrying a gun at all times, exposure to dangerous and troubled people (public and offenders), the fragmented nature of the work- working on festivals, etc.

Stress is important to study because of the detrimental consequences associated with it. Stress has physical and psychological effects on the person. Occupational stress in the police is a widespread problem and this has a negative impact on the individuals (the officers) as well as the police department in general. Those officers who experience higher stress levels report more physical problems as well as more psychological issues that can affect their performance at work. More specifically, they have poor health and so they remain absent from work, experience burnout and have lower satisfaction and commitment and for these reasons they do not invest themselves in their job sometimes also retire prematurely. When occupational stress becomes overwhelming the individuals suffer from chronic stress, depression, physical ailments like heart diseases, stomach disorders, alcoholism and there are also cases of suicide attempts and

suicides. This makes it important to understand the sources of stress in police and to understand how they cope with this stress so that strategies to reduce stress can be implemented.

The purpose of this study is to examine the amount of job stress police officers perceive. While examining police stress another focus is to see what role peer support, administrative support, coping strategies play in policing.

SOURCES OF STRESS FOR THE POLICE

Research has established that there is high stress in policing (He et al, 2002; Roberts & Levenson, 2001). One of the reasons is that those in the police are more likely to be exposed to traumatic events. So there have been a lot of studies that have attempted to identify the sources and types of stress experienced by the police.

Mathur (1991) pointed out that the culture in the police is shared because of the set of values and outlook that the police officers develop. And police stresses are part of this culture and they can be categorized into four categories - (a) external (b) internal (c) task related (d) individual stressors. Volante (1982) stated that there were three major stressors for the police that include the bureaucratic organization of the police department to control its force and their behavior, the justice system that can undermine police idealism and the prevalence of crime and expectations of the police which they cannot control. Mathur (1999) pointed out that sources of stress can be related to personal and organizational factor. He identified sources like the nature of the police work, the nature of the organization neglected family, boredom at work, overload of work, physical strain, lack of support for seniors, etc.

Neglect of family in the course of duty is a significant factor that causes stress. The police staff and officers feel guilty for not being able to spend qualitative and quantitative time with their spouse and children. The police does not find time for the family because they keep long hours at work, cannot take long leaves frequently, cannot plan holidays, sometimes their leaves also get cancelled. This causes stress for the family members also and the police personnel can experience more stress if the family members are unable to understand their situation or they misunderstand their intentions. Job boredom can also be seen in police personnel, especially to police constables who usually engage in repetitive work and this can lead to boredom, especially if they are involved with VIP bandobast which requires long waiting. The police in India also carries a heavier burden because they are not always well trained and are not sure of what is expected from them. They are further burdened by physical aspects like the environment, the level of air pollution, and use of outdated equipment. Also, if their relationship with their superior is not amicable, it can lead to more problems. Other stresses include work assignments, the bureaucratic procedures that have to be followed, personal conduct, etc.

He, Zhao and Archbold (2002) in their study identified five sources of stress that is experienced by the police force and these are factors related to the environment, availability of support, police administration, social and family factors and ability to employ various coping strategies. McCreary and Thompson (2006) used a broader categorization of source of stress experienced by the police based on whether the stresses were inherent in the police work or in the administrative aspects of the work. The categories were stressed with operational aspects and stress from organizational aspects. On the other hand Brown, Fielding and Grover (1999) categorized stressors as traumatic or routine based on their frequency and impact (psychological and physical) on the personnel.

Thus, there have been a number of studies that have explored the different sources of stress that impact the police force. The empirical studies are examined below to get a better understanding of the work done and their context.

EMPIRICAL STUDIES ON STRESS MANAGEMENT IN POLICE

Volante and Aron (1994) conducted a study to determine the intensity of stress experienced by police officers. They found that police officers were most stressed about matters related to death and disaster- killing someone on line of duty (79.4) and death or injury to fellow officer (76.7). Others included physical attacks (71.0), battered child (69.2), high speed chases (63.7), use of force (61.0), accident in a patrol car (59.9), felony in progress (55.3) etc. Organizational stressors like shift workers (61.2) also ranked as a high stressor. Others included inadequate support of the department (60.9), incompatible patrol partner (60.3), insufficient personnel (58.5), excessive discipline (53.2) and inadequate support by supervisors (52.4). They also reported that this job stress and physical exhaustion had an impact on their family and marital relationships. Roberts and Levenson (2001) found that stress at work affected the marital relations of the officers and this in turn caused more stress to them, leading to more chances of divorce, emotional disturbance and domestic violence in their households.

Cullen's et al. (1985) tried to understand the sources of stress for the police officers and also to see what role social support played in protecting the officers from stress. The most significant contributing factor of stress. In contrast, administrative support and family support were found to be helpful in reducing stress. Administrative support helped to reduce work stress for the officers, whereas family support helped to reduce life stress and help the psychological state of the officers. As opposed to Cullen's et al. (1985) research, Kroes, Margolis and Hurrell, Jr's. (1974) findings indicate that danger was not a significant source of stress, whereas administrative support was found to be a stressor. Kroes et al.'s (1974) findings relating to danger and administrative support are interesting. This is because, crucial or dangerous situations were not found as stressors for the officers. The researchers claimed that this may be because the officers may not want to think about the seriousness of their job and therefore do not perceive danger as a source of stress. And also, administrative support was found to be a source of stress. Administrative duties were divided into two parts: administrative policy and administrative support. More officers said that their abilities were undermined when they were asked to respond to animal issues or when they acted as a taxi service while on patrol. Another reason was excessive paperwork. Officers also said the time spent on completing paper work could be used more efficiently patrolling the streets.

Patterson (2003) has explained that the source of support is important in examining sources of stress because different types of support have different impacts on stress levels. For example, if police officers receive support from a person at work who he is in stress, their stress may increase rather than decrease (Kaufmann & Beehr, 1989). Also, while discussing support and stress, Patterson explained the main effects and buffering effects of social support and coping. Thus, these are factors that are indirect sources of stress.

There have also been a number of studies on stress conducted in the Indian context. Umranikar (2009) conducted research in Mumbai on the police force and he found that on festivals the police force in Mumbai is on the streets rather than celebrating the festival. Police officers are unable to avail of leaves on festivals. He also stated that labor laws in India mandate that labor should work only 8 hour shifts, but the police often keep 12 hour shifts. The reasons for this are the manpower shortage and uncertain law and order duties. The police have trouble availing weekly holidays, casual leave, earned leave and the other gazetted holidays. The result of this is that police personnel are overworked and they suffer from stress related diseases like diabetes, high blood pressure, ulcers, etc. Upadhyaya (1993) studied police personnel in rural Nagpur and he reported that the suicide rate in Maharashtra Police force was 17 per 1 lakh, while the national average was

10.5 per 1 lakh population. The BPR&D conducted a study (1993) to identify the stressors of police constables in the UP police and reported that some of the stressors are atmosphere of mistrust at all levels, negative public image, negative self-image, increased incidence of stressful events and daily hassles, incursion of several ideation and depressive problems, negative health outcome due to life style characterized by hostility, dissatisfaction due to non-grant of leave, inadequate housing / security of the family, irregular working hours, inadequate provision for children's education, lack of medical services, inconsistent policies regarding evaluation, accountability, promotion and transfer and insensitive handling of personnel. They identified five events that are more stressful than the others. These are staying away from the family and children, dismissal / removal / suspension from services, severe injury / loss of limb, death of colleague on duty and departmental enquiry. Yadav (1994) studied stress in the Rajasthan Police force and he observed that in the sample police personnel he studied, the stress score was lower as was the score on emotional issues as compared to the normal group that had served for the same time. He found that the rank of the personnel had a role on the stress experienced. The sub inspectors and inspector's group was the most stressed.

Thus there have been studies that have used qualitative and quantitative techniques to explore the stressors for the police department in several states in India. There have been a number of factors which a number of studies agree on and some that are unique to specific studies.

coping effort.

Folkman and Lazarus have defined coping as "constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands, that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person" (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984, p.141). This implies that coping mechanisms are behavioural and cognitive strategies one uses to resist stress. They have also defined the immediate outcome as a person's evaluation of the degree of success in resolving the stress causing situation. Depending on that evaluation of the outcome of the chosen coping strategy, it is considered either favorable (adaptive) or unfavorable (maladaptive). They have also argued that one's personal resources like health, energy level, existential beliefs and commitments, problem-solving skills, availability of social support determine the coping strategy. Also coping is affected by personal constraints like internalized cultural values beliefs as well as environmental factors like competition for the same resource or agencies/institutions that hinder coping efforts, etc. Therefore it is important to consider the role that the organizational factors can have on how the police officers experience and cope with stressors at work.

CONCLUSIONS

There are thus many factors which causes stress among Police Personnel viz. changing work shifts, Role conflicts, Exposure to Danger, Neglect of Family, Fragmented nature of work, Lack of support etc. It is important to understand these stressors so that steps can be taken towards "Stress management for Police Force".

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