



Short Communication

A Study on Occupational stress and Coping strategies among Police Head Constables (Grade III)

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Abstract

Occupation stress is a renowned problem in police personals. Police department is the occupation that has been identified as high level of stress. This study reveals the frequency of stressful events faced by the grade III police constables and stress coping strategies used by them. A standard questionnaire was used to find out the demographic profile, frequency of stress and coping strategies. 150 grade III constables are taken into account for this study. This study explores the most common coping strategies, in that waiting for right time to do the job is the most used coping method, because most of the police constables are having more than 16-20 years of experience (40%), second most used coping strategies is think how best he can handle the problems, because most of them are having UG level qualifications and very good experience in handling crisis situations. And also seeing criminals going free and lack of personal time are most stressful events faced by the constables, In this study it shows that poor organizational policy is the major stressor for grade III police constables.

Keyword: Occupation, police, stress, grade-II.

Introduction

Occupation stress is a renowned problem in police personals. Police department is the occupation that has been identified as high level of stress. Responsibilities of police personals are varied and may differ from one another. Usual duties of police constables relate to keeping the law enforcement, peace keeping, people protection, protection of properties, and finally investigating and interrogating of crimes. They have to respond to unexpected situations that may arise when they are on duty. More over police personals have to maintain orders and consequent reporting to the higher officials. Because of work stress police officers are experiencing interpersonal relationship problems. The rates of suicidal among the police personal keep on increasing every year. Using drugs, smoking and taking alcohol is also another problem for police personals. They are more studies available in the field, and frequency of stress, coping are well documented. Still the causes of occupational stressors are unclear and police department find difficulties in solving the problem. This study deals with frequency of stress, normally the number of days in which the stressful job related events took place and adopting coping strategies followed by the grade III police constables in Tamil nadu.

Police work has been identified as the most psychologically stressful and critical profession in the world^{1,2,3}. Paton and Smith⁴ labelled individuals in high-risk professions, particularly “those who fulfill a helping role during or after traumatic events”, as being involved in critical occupations. Selye⁵ noted that due to the inherent nature of police work, this profession is likely to be one of the most stressful occupations in the world. Lewis⁶ focused his attention on the stress associated with the

nature of police work. He referred to the hazards associated with the occupation as “danger stress” due to the characteristics and the nature of policing. The danger and trauma associated with policing therefore seem to differentiate police work from other occupations. The nature of police work will be discussed in the next section followed by a focus on the typical stressors associated with police work, along with the common stress reactions and symptoms as well as coping strategies used by police officers.

Police officers work stress reactions are always classified as physiological, emotional and behavioral reactions⁷. Physiological reactions maybe termed as having higher than normal probability of death from certain illnesses specifically heart attack⁸ and myriad of health problems such as headaches, high blood pressure and stomach problems^{9,10}. On the other hand, emotional reactions may include depression and extreme cases of suicide¹¹⁻¹³. Emotion reaction can also be so severe which may be termed as posttraumatic stress disorder (PSTD)^{14,15}. PSTD is always associated to severe and prolonged after one exposure to a series of traumatic events. This may lead to job dissatisfaction, apathy and cynicism^{8,10}. Whereas behavioral reactions may entail reduced level of job performance, errors of judgment, irresponsibility, low morale, absenteeism, tardiness, early retirement and quitting the police services altogether^{9,16} at the organizational level, however at the individual level they include aggression, violence, isolation, excessive drinking and smoking, alcoholism and drug abuse^{17,18}.

Work environment is one of the sources of police stress. It can be internally and externally. Internally work environment include factors that are related to organizational structure and

climate can be even greater sources of stress for police officers^{15,19,20} shift schedules that disrupt normal sleep patterns and social life, authoritarian, management styles, poor interpersonal-relationships^{21,22} with supervisors, interdepartmental politics, lack of adequate planning and resources, lack of promotion and transfer opportunities, excessive paperwork, lack of autonomy in performing duties and lack of recognition for work accomplishments are among the organizational stressors faced by members of the police force^{9,23,19,24}.

Objectives of the Study: i. To examine the sources of work, personal and interpersonal related stress in Grade III police constables. ii. To determine the level of stress in Grade III police constables, iii. To examine the sources of stress symptoms within Grade III police constables, iv. To suggest the coping mechanism for reducing occupational stress among Grade III police constables.

Material and Methods

In this descriptive study the sample consisted of 150 grade III police constables from eight sub divisions comprises of 52

police stations in Thoothukudi District, Tamil nadu. A questionnaire which includes two sections, were used to collect the information about the frequency of stress undergone by the grade III police constables and the adopted stress coping strategies. The first section includes police constables demographic profiles such as age, gender, marital status, year of service and monthly income and 44 stressful events and the number of days in which the stressful job related events took place to the police personals. Second section consists of 53 coping statements that are followed by the police constables in order to reduce the stress.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows that 53.3% of the respondents are belongs to 40 to 49 years old, 78% of the respondents are male, 61.3% respondents are having UG level qualifications, 65.3% of the respondents are married, 40% of the respondents are having 16 to 20 years experience and 46.7% of the respondents are getting Rs.5200-20200 plus grade pay Rs.2800 as monthly salary.

**Table-1
 Demographic Profile**

Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
Age		
20-29 Yrs.	31	20.7
30-39 Yrs.	23	15.3
40-49 Yrs.	80	53.3
50-59 Yrs.	16	10.7
Gender		
Male	117	78
Female	33	22
Qualification		
School Level	26	17.3
UG	92	61.3
PG	32	21.3
Marital Status		
Married	98	65.3
Unmarried	40	26.7
Divorced	5	3.3
Separated	7	4.7
Experience		
<5	28	18.7
6-10	16	10.7
11-14	19	12.7
16-20	60	40
>20	27	18
Monthly Income		
Rs.5200-20200 Plus Grade Pay Rs.2400	52	34.7
Rs.5000-20000 Plus Grade Pay Rs.1900	28	18.7
Rs.5200-20200 Plus Grade Pay Rs.2800	70	46.7

Table-2
Mean Intensity of Frequency of Stress (Within Last Six months)

	Stressful events	Mean	SD
1.	Seeing criminals go free (for example because of lack of evidence)	5.6067	2.40496
2.	Insufficient personal time (e.g., coffee breaks, lunch)	5.5067	2.58739
3.	Lack of recognition for good work	5.4067	2.41666
4.	Working overtime	5.3733	2.18152
5.	Having to deal with the media	5.3133	2.55447
6.	Fellow workers not doing their job	5.2467	2.27604
7.	Having to go to court	5.1600	2.29408
8.	Lack of opportunity for advancement	5.1600	2.28822
9.	Performing tasks not in job description	5.1200	2.23132
10.	Meeting deadlines	5.1133	2.53972

Table-3
Mean Coping Strategies used by the Police Constables

	Coping strategies	Mean	SD
1.	I force myself to wait for the right time to do something.	2.9933	1.2397
2.	I think about how I might best handle the problem.	2.9467	0.9884
3.	I make sure not to make matters worse by action to soon.	2.9133	0.8894
4.	I get used to the idea that it happened.	2.9133	0.9758
5.	I restrain myself from doing anything do quickly	2.9067	0.9717
6.	I get upset, and am really aware of it.	2.9000	0.9323
7.	I take additional action to try to get rid of the problem	2.8733	0.9986
8.	I do what has to be done one step at a time.	2.8467	0.8803
9.	I try to see it in a different light to make it seem more positive.	2.8467	0.9881
10.	I just give up trying to reach my goal.	2.8067	1.0278

Table 2 shows that mean intensity of frequency of stressful events happened within last six months. In that “seeing criminals going free because of lack of evidence and court leniency” (Mean ± SD = 5.6067 ± 2.40496), “Insufficient personal time” (Mean ± SD = 5.5067 ± 2.58739), “Lack of recognition” (Mean ± SD = 5.4067 ± 2.41666), for good work are the most frequent stressful events.

Table 3 shows that mean coping strategies used by the grade III police constables. In that “I force myself to wait for the right time to do something” (Mean ± SD = 2.9933 ± 1.2397), “I think about how I might best handle the problem” (Mean ± SD = 2.9467 ± 0.9884), “I make sure not to make matters worse by action to soon” (Mean ± SD = 2.9133 ± 0.8894) are most used coping strategies among the grade III police constables.

With regards to the frequency of stressful event happened in last six months, this research reveals that “seeing criminals going free because of lack of evidence and court leniency” created the most stress for grade III police constables. And also lack of personal time for taking tea and lunch, lack of recognition for good work, work overtime, having to deal with the media, fellow workers are not doing their jobs, having to go to court, lack of advancement in job, performing job not in the job description are the most common stressors in their job.

This study explores the most common coping strategies, in that waiting for right time to do the job is the most used coping method, because most of the police constables are having more

than 16-20 years of experience (40%), second most used coping strategies is think how best he can handle the problems, because most of them are having UG level qualifications and very good experience in handling crisis situations. In this study it shows that poor organizational policy is the major stressor for grade III police constables. Because they are all well experienced and they can able to handles hard situations. But they are still finding difficult with poor of organization policies like legal leniency, unspecified job profile, lack of recognition, lack of advancement and career development. There is an association between seeing criminals going free (most stressful event) and I force myself to wait for the right time to do something (most used stress coping strategy). Taking alcohol or drink drugs and admits to myself that I can't deal with it, and quit trying are the low used stress coping strategies. Rational conflict and period of inactivity are the low stressful event faced by the grade III police constables.

Findings: It was found that 53.3% of the respondents are belongs to 40 to 49 years old, 78% of the respondents are male, 61.3% respondents are having UG level qualifications, 65.3% of the respondents are married, 40% of the respondents are having 16 to 20 years experience and 46.7% of the respondents are getting Rs.5200-20200 plus grade pay Rs.2800 as monthly salary.

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Conclusion

Police officers are having considerable powers and are often supported by higher authorities. Work place stress might carry out many criminal acts for the ruling command with impunity. In some cases they carried out some misconduct. Their level of performance also reduced due to work related stress. This study concludes that grade III police constables are having good knowledge about the stressful events and because of their experience; they are following positive stress coping strategies. Still police department must carry out some future research on these sources of stress and coping strategies. That must be documented properly. These documents can be used at the time of training for the new comers, to understand the stressful events and useful coping strategies.

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