SHORT ARTICLE

Stress, Coping Strategies and Social Support as Predictors of Mental Health of Police Personnel of North India

Shweta Singh, Bandna Gupta, Premchandra Mishra

[1]Additional Professor, Department of Psychiatry, King George's Medical University, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India; [2]Additional Professor, Department of Psychiatry, King George's Medical University, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India; [3]Ex HOD and Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India

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Corresponding Author

Dr Bandna Gupta, Additional Professor, Department of Psychiatry, King George's Medical University, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India
E Mail ID: drbandna@yahoo.co.in

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Abstract

Introduction: The profession of a police personnel is extremely stressful. Coping strategies and social support are known to be robust buffers of stress **Objective**: To study Stress, Coping Strategies and Social Support as Predictors of Mental Health of Police Personnel of Uttar Pradesh, North India. **Method**: This was a cross-sectional study comprising of 300 male police personnel. Assessment was done using Occupational Stress Questionnaire, Brief COPE Scale and Mental Health Inventory. Multiple Regression Analysis was used to analyze the data. **Results**: Ambiguity stress, the belonging and appraisal support are found to be the strongest predictor of mental health of constables. Stress in the area of organizational structure, the appraisal support and maladaptive coping strategies are essential predictors of mental health of inspectors. Beside this, social support, belonging support, appraisal support and active coping are significant predictor of mental health of Officers.

Keywords

Introduction

The profession of a police personnel is extremely stressful. It is associated with many mental health concerns such as anxiety, depression, aggression, substance abuse, and suicidality (1).

Coping strategies and social support are known to be robust buffers of stress. Coping strategies are perceptual, behavioral or cognitive responses used to manage stress. They can be categorized as active, adaptive, or maladaptive. Studies show that poor coping skills cause stress and suicidal thoughts in the police. Also there is an association between job stress and coping strategies based on context as different sources of job stress require different types of coping mechanisms (2).

Social supports involve the presence and products of stable human relationships It is a complex phenomenon that incorporates structural and functional interpersonal relationships. Coping and Social support reduce the adverse effects of work stress on wellbeing (3).

The application of a particular coping strategy or social support depends on the sociocultural structure of a particular country. India's unique socio-cultural and political scenario, including increasing crime rate, overpopulation, poverty, unemployment, corruption, and unstable political structure, renders Indian policing nerve-racking, particularly the Northern Province. A study showed that the upper level seldom used social coping strategy. At the district field level of Uttar Pradesh, three police personnel designations exist officially, namely constables, inspectors, and officers. The three different police designation categories have different roles, responsibilities, and work environments and subsequently report differences in occupational stress experiences. (4).

Aims & Objectives

To examine occupational stress, coping strategies, and social support as predictors of mental health in police personnel in the Northern Province of India.

Material & Methods

Study Design and Participants: This is a cross-sectional study comprised of 300 male police personnel, including 100 constables, 100 inspectors, and 100 officers from six districts of Uttar Pradesh namely Lucknow, Varanasi, Meerut, Raibareilly, Ghaziabad and Noida. The age of respondents ranged between 35 to 45 years (M= 40.8 years, SD= 8.10). Their academic qualification ranged between 12 years to 17 years, and their length of service was 10 to 20 years (M= 16.2 years, SD= 7.50).

Measures: Occupational Stress Questionnaire (OSQ) by Gmelch (5) was used to assess stress of police personnel. This Questionnaire comprises of 78 items studying five domains of stress (Ambiguity Stress, Managing people stress , Private life stress, Personal stress and Environmental stress).

Brief COPE Scale by Carver (6) was used to assess the coping strategies of police personnel. The scale consists of 28 items. For the analysis, three strategies of coping were used (a) active strategies (b) adaptive strategies (c) maladaptive strategies.

Social Support Scale (SSS) was used to measure social support developed by Cohen et al. (7). There were three areas in which social support is measured i.e. Tangible support, Appraisal support, and Belonging support.

Mental Health Inventory (MHI) by Jagdish and Srivastava (8) was used to assess police personnel's mental health. This inventory has 56 items.

Procedure: For this study, a brief pilot study was conducted in Lucknow to determine the sample's socio-demographic characteristics, including age range, strata of job hierarchy, income, and service years. . In the main study, purposive sampling technique was used and subjects were selected from the identified districts of Uttar Pradesh namely Lucknow, Varanasi, Meerut, Raibareilly, Ghaziabad and Noida and were explained the purpose of the study. The questionnaires were applied after receiving their consent for participation in the present study.

Data Analysis: Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis (MRA) was conducted to determine the relative contribution of stress, coping strategies, and social support on police personnel's mental health.

Results

([Table 1](#)) **Predictors of mental health for constables:** Results reveal that ambiguity stress is the strongest predictor of mental health of constables. The other predictors are stress due to managing people, private life, personal, and environment. Among social support, the belonging and appraisal support are found to be the predictors. This indicates that stress and social support have the potential to predict the mental health of constables.

Predictors of mental health for inspectors: In case of inspectors, stress in the area of organizational structure is the strongest predictor of mental health. The other predictors are role conflict, traveling, environmental and interpersonal stress. Besides, the appraisal support and maladaptive coping strategies also have a vital role to play. Here, it can be recalled that the regression analysis also found maladaptive coping and appraisal support as essential determinants of the mental health of inspectors.

Predictors of mental health for officers: In the case of officers, stress related to private life is the strongest predictor of mental health. Besides, stress in the area of interpersonal, travel, and overload and social support, belonging support, and appraisal support are the predictors of mental health. We also found active coping as another significant predictor of mental health.

Discussion

The constables belong to the lowest strata of police hierarchy, consisting of head constable, police naik, police constables, and police 'shipais'. This study findings reveal that job ambiguity, managing people stress, private life, personal and environmental stress are the strongest predictors of constables' mental health. Among social support, belonging and appraisal support are found to be the strongest predictors.

Job ambiguity is a predictor of the mental health of constables which implies that they are not sure about the scope of their responsibilities and job expectations compared to other groups. This nature of ambiguity can be attributed to frequent transfers and changes in postings, unstable governments, political interferences, and lack of clarity in the distribution of work.

Environmental stress deals with working conditions such as weather changes, overpopulation, availability of necessary facilities, and seating arrangement. The constables feel that their work environment is most uncomfortable. As shown by the previous study's findings, the constables were shown to have the lowest stress levels. They used moderately active and adaptive coping and reasonable use of maladaptive coping compared to inspectors (9).

Therefore, it is implied that if we intend to improve the mental health of constables, we need to make their work less ambiguous by giving sufficient information about their duties, responsibilities, scope and objectives and expectations of their job, boss, and colleagues. We need to reduce the pressure stemming from increased duty hours so that they can full fill the demands by family and friends.

The inspectors are placed at the intermediate level, they are expected to investigate cases and register First Information Report and are accountable for law and order in their jurisdiction area and work supervision at the police station. In the case of inspectors, it is shown that stress in the area of organizational structure is the strongest predictor of mental health. The other predictors of mental health are role conflict, traveling, environmental and

interpersonal stress. Also, appraisal support and maladaptive coping strategies have a vital role to play.

Once the inspectors are recruited, it is often seen that their frequent promotions are gratuitously delayed. Besides, the out of turn promotion to well-deserving ones often does not happen. Due to the unsteady political scenario and quick government changes, they face frequent transfers and are subject to alterations in the Government Orders. A recent study of conducted in India which included the inspector's majority, found that in the police personnel, the organizational, social, and political issues related to their department are more stressful than the environmental and the physical aspects (10). The regression analysis also suggested that maladaptive coping and appraisal support are essential determinants of inspectors' mental health.

They also require social support to approve their praiseworthy behavior by senior officers, the media, the public and the government. Maladaptive coping strategies, such as denial and withdrawal, are generally associated with psychological distress.

The officers include Circle Officers (Cos), Superintendent of police (SP), Assistant SP (ASP), and Senior SP (SSP). They entertain administrative control over crime and law-and-order situation of the town. They also take care of public complaints and grievances and supervise police officers' work subordinate to them. In the officers' case, stress related to private life is the strongest predictor of mental health. Besides stress in the area of interpersonal, travel and overload, social support, belonging support, and appraisal support are the predictors of mental health. We also find active coping as another significant predictor of mental health. The officers are noticed with lesser stress compared to the inspectors.

It can be stated that all three variables in this study, namely occupational stress, social support, and coping strategies, strongly predict the mental health of police personnel. It is observed that stress in organizational structure, private life, ambiguity and overload are the strongest predictors of police personnel's mental health. The avoidance of maladaptive strategies and enhancing active and adaptive systems positively impact police personnel's mental health. The limitation of the study is that, since there were very few females, only male subjects were included in the study.

Conclusion

The constables, inspectors, and officers experience occupational stress and mental health subject to the type of coping strategies used and the nature of social support they obtain. Therefore corrective measures and interventions are needed at different hierarchical levels keeping in mind their differences.

Recommendation

The police personnel have various occupational stressors, though with little different presentation with different designations but a routine screening and appropriate management for mental health issues is required.

Limitation of the study

It was a small study conducted in four districts of Uttar Pradesh only so might not be representative and generalized to all police personnel.

Relevance of the study

The existing working and functioning of police personnel needs to be modified in view of mental health of police personnel.

Authors Contribution

SS:Concept and design of study, data acquisition, interpretation of data and drafting the article. BG: Drafting the article and revising it critically. PM: Analysis of data and revising it critically for important intellectual content.

Acknowledgement

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Tables

TABLE 1 SUMMARY OF MRA PREDICTION FOR MENTAL HEALTH OF POLICE PERSONNEL

SI.	Variables	R	Adjusted R square	F	SIG.
Constables					
1	Ambiguity Stress	0.493	0.211	7.630	**
2	Belongingness social support	0.511	0.222	6.643	**
3	Appraisal social support	0.525	0.229	5.894	**
4	Managing people stress	0.530	0.226	5.123	**
5	Private life stress	0.536	0.224	4.575	**
6	Personal stress	0.539	0.220	4.104	**
7	Environmental stress	0.544	0.217	3.744	**
Inspectors					
1	Organizational structure stress	0.723	0.503	26.072	**
2	Maladaptive coping	0.729	0.506	21.321	**
3	Appraisal social support	0.736	0.512	18.283	**
4	Role conflict stress	0.737	0.509	15.633	**
5	Travel stress	0.738	0.504	13.577	**
6	Environmental stress	0.738	0.499	11.954	**
7	Interpersonal stress	0.738	0.494	10.655	**
Officers					
1	Private life stress	0.769	0.569	27.169	**
2	Interpersonal stress	0.775	0.574	23.250	**
3	Active coping	0.780	0.579	20.450	**
4	Belonging social support	0.784	0.581	18.188	**
5	Overload stress	0.787	0.581	16.232	**
6	Travel stress	0.788	0.578	14.550	**
7	Appraisal social support	0.788	0.574	13.126	**
**= p<0.001					