

ANTECEDENTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF OCCUPATIONAL STRESS IN POLICE OFFICERS: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FROM PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

This article evaluated extant literature and conceptual frameworks and identified various stressors that are main source of occupational stress in police officers in today's society. This study seeks to investigate the extent occupational stress can negatively affect police officers in Pakistan. Pakistani society has been passing through a critical time in post-9/11 climate. Civilian and armed forces, especially police force have been under attack for years. A careful review of literature suggests that there has been acute shortage of empirical evidence on the subject in context of Pakistan. As a result, this study employed qualitative method e.g. in-depth interviews for collecting empirical evidence from senior, middle and junior level police officers. The study reveals some of the key stressors and their effects police officers experience on duty. Main stressors include fear of terror attacks, encounters or working under indiscriminate firing of terrorists, dacoits and burglars, family members being on target, rude and abusive supervisors, bureaucratic mindset of boss, long working hours, loss of family and social life. In light of findings policy implications are presented in the last section of the paper.

INTRODUCTION

Occupational stress is considered ubiquitous in modern day workplaces. This study seeks to investigate causes and consequences of stress in police officers in Pakistan. Over the past several years stream of research has focused on understanding the relationship between occupational stress with employee performance, satisfaction, physical health and psychological well-being (Littig & Griebler 2005:71). Empirical evidence suggests severe consequences of prolonged stress on employee performance, satisfaction, health and psychological wellbeing

(Bandura 2004). According to a recent study of Anderson, Zutz, & Plecas (2011:1) high occupational stress causes adverse health threats such as increased blood pressure, sleeplessness, hypertension, heart problems and diabetes. In consequence, there are greater chances that stressed employees consume huge budget on health care (e.g., physicians, hospitals, sick days) with high rate of turnover costs (Sheridan, 1992; Lake, 2000). Like other professions, police and security personnel across the world are considered to be high stress professions (Pendleton, Stotland, Spiers & Kirsch 1989). In a more recent investigation Summerfield (2011) found stressed police officers report symptoms of depression, and psychological problems. In the same year another study conducted by Wessely (2011) suggested that police officers carry an enormous amount of responsibility with a comfortable degree of authority.

Ivie & Garland (2011) investigated major causes of occupational stress in police and revealed duty hours as major source of stress which are subject to change in a second's notice. Other sources of stress include rotating shifts and dealing with criminal and burglars. Usually, police officers are found complaining of their sacrifice which they believe goes unnoticed. Similarly, officers also observe political elements and members of society are ungrateful to them (Ivie & Garland, 2011). Previous research also shows that constant stress causes severe healthcare problems (Mazzola, Schonfeld & Spector, 2011). According to Finn (2000) and Karlsson & Christianson (2003) those officers who experience constant healthcare issues also face social and familial hardships. Although large amount of research elaborates the causes and effects of stress, however, there appeared several academic and research questions which need to be adequately answered. Especially, more attention is required to examine antecedents and consequences of stress among police officers (Davidson & Robinson, 1982).

Research gap: Previous research on occupational stress in police has been undertaken in western countries such as Europe and North America (Bandura, 2004). There is limited empirical evidence on third world countries like Pakistan. Since Pakistan has been frontline ally in post-9/11 war on terror, police service in the country has turned to be vulnerable facing terrorist attacks on the

police stations in Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces, federally administered areas of the country and suicide bombing across the country (ICG report, 2008; Aijaz, 2011). This causes high occupational stress among officers on duty. The main objectives of the study are: (a) to identify the effects of occupational stress on police officers and its consequences on professional and family life of officers, (b) to identify sources of stressors in police officers in Pakistan, and (c) suggest stress management techniques.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to understand the broader spectrum of occupational stress, this study presents extensive review of literature published in national and international peer reviewed journals and reports findings of empirical evidence gathered through in-depth interviews from key informants. Many researchers view their job as 'bread-and-butter' and part of social and economic status. Nevertheless, occupational stress is considered 'part and parcel' of it (Cooper *et.al.* 1976). According to Finn (2000) stress has often been described as a negative emotional, physical, or behavioural condition experienced in daily life. Although various authors and researchers have contributed different definitions of stress, however, a considerable common ground can be found among them. The main common thread that runs through most of the definitions is 'a negative physical and mental effect on the human body or mind' (McEwen & Stellar, 1993). Likewise, Finn and Tomz (1997:5) define stress as "a mentally or emotionally disruptive and upsetting condition occurring in response to adverse external influences, and a stimulus or circumstance causing such a condition".

According to Wolf and Finestone (1986) occupational stress might go up or down keeping in view of the ability of an employee to balance job satisfaction with job frustration. More recently, Arnetz *et.al.* (2011) found out that better workplaces reduce the level of stress and improve mental well-being of employees or vice versa. Similarly, Mark & Smith (2011) investigated relationship between job characteristics and attitudinal styles to predict anxiety and depression. They found out that workplace demands and negative coping is associated with high level of stress. Earlier, Finn

(2000) investigated antecedents and after-effects of occupational stress in police officers. The major factors of occupational stress identified include rapid changing in shifts from night to day and vice versa, the overtime, social and familial problems and officers inability to express their feelings to boss.

Stress is direct consequence of an incidence that leaves a harmful outcome on employees' mental or physical well being. Constant occurrence of stress can cause severe consequences of healthcare which decreases officers' performance (McEwen and Stellar, 1993). Table 1 presents some of the major health problems that stressed officer's experience at work.

Table-1
CATEGORIES OF ADVERSE RESPONSES TO STRESSFUL SITUATION

Emotional	Behavioural	Physical
Apathy	Withdrawal (avoidance)	Preoccupation with illness
Recreation no longer pleasurable Sad	Social Isolation Work related withdrawal Reluctance to accept responsibilities Neglecting responsibilities	Intolerant of / dwelling on minor ailments
Anxiety Restless Agitated Insecure Feelings of worthlessness	Acting out Alcohol abuse Gambling	Frequent illness Actually sick
Irritability Overly sensitive Defensive Arrogant and argumentative Hostile Mental fatigue Preoccupied Difficulty in concentrating Inflexible	Desperate acting out (getting attention; cry for help) Administrative infractions Poor appearance Poor personal hygiene Accident prone Shoplifting Traffic violations Fights Child/spouse abuse	Physical exhaustion Use of self medication Somatic indicators Headache Insomnia Change in appetite Indigestion Nausea Vomiting Diarrhea Constipation Sexual difficulties

Effects of stress on police: An enormous body of published literature has focused on the way police officers manage occupational stress. Violanti and Marshall (1983) examined occupational stressors and their relation with individual difference and coping strategies. Study reported cynicism, deviance and rudeness as common symptoms among officers. Similarly, Evans, Coman, and Stanley (1992) and Dempsey (1994) also found out that individual temperaments and attitudes of officers relate to lengths of service. Further, they identified personality traits such as suspiciousness, aloofness, cynicism and authoritarianism help officers manage workplace stress.

Adding to the ongoing debate and discourse of understanding compounding occupational stress and its residuals in police officers Territo and Vetter (1981) identified varying consequences on officers' personality, health, job performance and family life. According to them, the chronic and recurring stress in police officers leads them to: (a) chronic depression, alienation, or alcoholism; (b) ulcers, high blood pressure or diabetes; (c) low job satisfaction, poor performance as decreased productivity, or slower reaction time; and (d) social isolation, loss of friends, disturbance to family life ending usually in separation or divorce. Literature also demonstrates the ways and means to cope with extreme stressful occupations. Hibler (1978) categorized stress into three types, i.e. emotional, behavioural and physical.

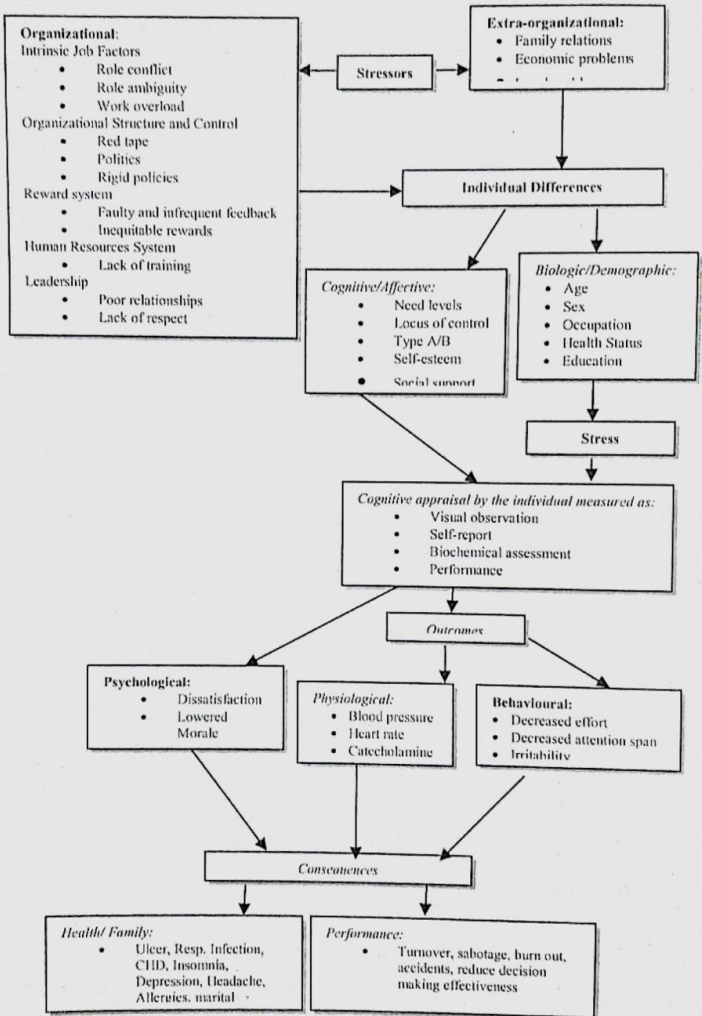
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Recently, large body of literature on occupational psychology has identified sources of police stress. Generally, sensitive nature of the police service, bureaucratic management hierarchy, routinely exposure to violence, long working hours and doing duty in the line of fire are considered major stressors (Cooper *et.al.*, 1976; Ivie and Garland, 2011; Mazzola *et.al.*, 2011). Additionally, another significant stressor expressed by police officers is locking up of dangerous criminal who get lenient sentencing in courts and they intend to avenge (Finn, 2000; Toch, 2002). Additionally, rules and regulations, quasi-military structure, bureaucracy, career growth, shift work, and abusive supervision are considered as organizational stressors (Ivie & Garland, 2011; Cooper *et.al.*, 1976).

Although some job stressors can be reduced by departmental changes (Toch, 2002; Martelli and Walters, 1989). However, there appears consensus in literature that police service has been more challenging, difficult and stressful than most other occupations. The inherent danger lies in the state of being exposed to repeated encounters with violent burglars and criminals (Dempsey, 1994; Swanson et al., 1998). Storch & Panzarella (1996) classified police stress into two groups (see Figure 1). First group is known to be organizational group of stressors which include organizational variables such as those of relationships with superiors, personnel policies and work conditions. The second group of stressors consisted of relationships with those who were not police officers, i.e., the public, the media, and the legal system.

Likewise, Ostrov (1986) typology reported organizational, managerial and situational stressors. Couple of years later, Violanti (1988) presented a model of stress in police service. The taxonomy categorized four categories of occupational stress in police service. First category is said to be intra-group stressors which elaborate justices, working of the criminal court system and pressure on family members. Secondly, study reported organizational stressors which relate to organizations' procedural issues to unleash stress on employees. Such stressors are called: administrative stressors which require paper work and red-tapism, too many demands of boss, poor feedback and communication. Thirdly, interpersonal stressors indicate disturbances in social, familial and personal relations. Lastly, individual stressors include day-night shifts, monotony, negative public perception (Burke & Mikkelsen 2006).

Figure-1
ORGANIZATIONAL STRESS FRAMEWORK



Another taxonomy classified police officers stress into three categories such as: (i) the ambient environment (ii) the organizational environment and (iii) extra-organizational stressors such as dysfunctional family relationships, economic conditions and legal issues. Ambient environment stressors include both physical and physiological conditions that have the potential for affecting officers performance. Examples of this category include acceleration, fatigue, heat, noise and vibration (Boff & Lincoln, 1988). Organizational stressors include HRM policies and practices, motivational factors and training of using gadgets and technical tools. Ivancevich & Matteson (1987) proposed a framework (see figure 1) pertaining to (a) demographic factors such as age, gender, occupation, health status and education; and (b) cognitive and affective differences which includes locus of control, personality types (A and B), self-esteem and social support available to the individual.

Occupational Stress Research in Pakistan: According to Aycan et al. (2000) Pakistan has been under-researched country in the field of social science and management. Subsequently, Khilji (2002; 2003), Baig (2006) and Khilji and Wang (2007) also revealed dearth of research undertaken in social sciences and management. Whereas Khowaja et al. (2005) reported high occupational stress in nursing profession which raised concerns for hospital management. In more recent years, empirical evidence contributed by Noor and Maad (2008) and Afza, Mujtaba, and Habib (2011) examined effects of occupational stress in marketing executives in Pakistan and found that job stress causes employee turnover, dissatisfaction and poor performance. Similar findings have been reported by Khattak *et.al.* (2011) in banking sector employees in Pakistan.

Occupational Stress in Police Officers of Pakistan: Occupational stress in police service appears to be embedded in its strength, structure, authority and hierarchy that is used and misused by superiors and civil-military elite in power. Current police service in Pakistan has its roots deep down in British colonial history which was set up in the aftermath of Indian Mutiny of 1857-58. British *Raj* introduced Police Act 1861 with

predetermined objectives to suppress down future revolts and maintain law and order (Daruwala *et.al.* 2005). Since the Police Service of Pakistan has inherited colonial merits and demerits to maintain law and order at any cost, it has been misused by every successive civil and military government in the country (ICG Report, 2008). Law-enforcement personnel at both the federal and provincial levels estimated at about 575,000 to serve the nation of about 180 million (Aijaz, 2011). Although, current police force is enough to match the UN standards of one police official for every 304 citizens which matches with the UN standard for policing (one police officer for every 400 citizens). On the contrary, domestic and international humanitarian organizations bitterly criticize police service for its corruption, malpractices, overstepping authority, brutalities, abuse of human rights, failing to combat crime, upholding law and order and police are deemed incompetent to protect civilians (ICG report, 2008; Aetraz, 2008; Aijaz, 2011). Several attempts have been made to reform the service which largely failed to sprout the results as the service is considered 'too-flawed to fix' (ICG report, 2008; Aijaz, 2011).

Most recent police reforms were promulgated by former military regime of General Musharaf as part of the devolution plan. He replaced the colonial Police Act of 1861 with the Police Order 2002. Nevertheless, it is believed that former military regime sacrificed reforming police for political expediency (ICG report, 2008). Main stressors that cascade down from top to bottom may be increasing political interference in the posting, transfer and promotion of police officers. More recently, the police service has been under attacks of terrorists and militants in large cities of Pakistan. On the contrary, police officers seem not adequately trained for counter-terrorism (ICG report, 2008; Aijaz, 2011). Terror attacks on police stations, police posts and non-meritorious decision making regarding recruitment, selection, promotion, appraisal and transfer may supplement stress in officers and negatively affect their performance. A careful review of literature identified that there appears limited research undertaken on antecedents and consequences of occupational stress in police service in Pakistan. Consequently, this study investigates occupational stress in police officers which is a timely effort and much needed in post-9/11 climate.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data Collection: In-depth interviews were conducted with twenty police officers representing senior to junior officers. The face-to-face interviews focused on investigating antecedents and consequences of occupational stress. The interview schedule was designed in light of the literature review and research objectives. A careful attention was paid to build a research sample (interviewees) from different age groups, educational backgrounds, and ethnic groups and from different levels of management e.g. senior to junior. All interviews were conducted in English and taped with prior consent of participants. All interviews were transcribed, coded and analyzed accordingly.

Data Analysis Strategy: Grounded Theory (GT) technique was employed for data analysis. GT was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1968) as an important tool for qualitative data analysis. The transcribed interviews data were broken down into themes and highlighted accordingly. The highlighted themes were named as first-order themes which were compared with rest of the data. If similar themes were identified in other text then they were grouped into second-order themes (Strauss & Corbin 1998). Similarly, second-order themes were analyzed and clustered into conceptual categories. This process followed the coding principles of GT for rest of the all interviews.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic information: Table 2 presents personal details of sample size. All participants had first class university degree. Vast majority of the participants (18 with 90 percent) were male whereas only two female officers with 10 percent participated in the study (there is limited employment of women in police service). About 50 percent of the officers had between 6 to 10 years of experience. About 70 percent of the officers come from the middle level management.

Table-2
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Demographics	Specifications	n	Percentage
Age	25 to 35 years	8	40
	36 to 45 years	12	60
Gender	Male	18	90
	Female	2	10
Experience	Less than 5	5	25
	Between 6 to 10	10	50
	Between 11 to 15	5	25
Position in the Organization	Senior	2	10
	Middle	14	70
	Junior	4	20
Geography	Urban	16	80
	Rural	4	20

MAJOR THEMES

Organizational Stressors: Extant literature and conceptual framework discussed earlier identified main factors of occupational stress referring to institutional, managerial and cultural. During interviews, the participants were given list of organizational and managerial factors that cause stress at work. Participants were requested to rank them according to their experience at work. Table 3 and 4 provide top-ten organizational and managerial factors that contribute to occupational stress at work. A vast majority of officers ranked 'fixation of duties in sensitive areas where incidence of terror could occur, raiding terrorists or dacoits as top stressor. Abusive behaviour of boss has also been ranked as second highest stressful. In words of one officer:

"Doing job in lower police ranks has been disgraceful and very dangerous. It is disgraceful because police department has long culture where boss humiliates subordinates regularly and senior colleagues make fun and it is dangerous when we go out to encounter terrorists and dacoits. Every police officer is in the line of fire, several colleagues have been martyred or permanently impaired in terror attacks and cross fire. In that case, department retires impaired officers from the service and they are partially or impartially unable to other jobs anywhere. Society makes fun of

such disabled and retired officers. Virtually, personal and family life suffers and we are losers at the end. In consequence, officers punish innocent civilians by beating them up”.

Table-3
TOP TEN ORGANISATIONAL STRESSORS

Organizational Stressors	Ranking
Fixation of duties in sensitive places where terror incidences, encounters, raids on dacoits, terrorists could take place, etc.	1
Behaviour of boss (Abusive and tyranny)	2
Highly hierarchical organizational structure	3
Low pay and perks	4
Poor and unpleasant working conditions	5
Lack of transparency in promotion and transfer	6
Lack of autonomy to perform	7
Role ambiguity	8
Absence of organizational justice	9
Disturbances in social and family life	10

Another officer spoke frankly and said:

“Police department is highly structured with extremely poor working environment, bosses are highly bureaucratic, tyrants and abusive. Moreover, low pay is major source of stress, dissatisfaction and compelling factor for officers use extortion, accept bribery or sometimes we get aligned with burglars and criminals. At present, the security situation in the country is highly sensitive and we always feel insecure and go through fear of being attacked by terrorists and dacoits. I always think of my family after me if I am killed in some terror incidence or cross fire”.

One female officer gave different view by saying:

“Causes of my stress are many: the very first for me is the way colleagues stare at me. They hardly wink their eyes whilst staring. Honestly, I have come across many people who believed as if I fell in love with. All bosses and senior (male) officers I happened to assist harassed me in different manners. They talked loosely and expected much. Working in police department is hell for female. Everyday everybody makes our fun. I and some of female colleagues tendered resignation several times but it was declined”.

Managerial Bullying Characteristics: Top ten stressors experienced by the majority of officers at work are presented in table 4. Officers view bureaucratic style of boss as top stressor at work followed by the unquestionable power boss exercises. Additionally, participants experience constant threats of loss of job, annual increment or transfer to remote stations. Participants believed that if they say 'no' to the boss or do not comply with the 'orders' they may face severe consequences. The threats of disciplinary action were ranked in fourth position. One officer expressed his feelings as: "My boss fabricates complaints, sets unrealistic deadlines and keeps high expectations from subordinates". Boss and senior colleagues normally pass belittling remarks for officers' ethnic, religious, cultural, linguistic, education and alumni affiliations.

Table-4
TOP TEN MANAGERIAL STRESSORS

Managerial stressors	Ranking
Bureaucratic style of boss	1
Unquestionable power/authority	2
Intimidation for loss of job, promotion, demotion, increment/bonus, transfer	3
Threats of disciplinary actions	4
Belittling remarks	5
Non-meritorious decisions recruitment, promotion, transfer, etc.	6
Fabrication of complaints	7
Excessive workload and longer working hours	8
Placing unreasonable expectations	9
False accusations and leg pulling	10

The majority of participants talked about the managerial or co-workers' derogatory remarks regarding political, religious, ethnic and surname affiliations. This is surprising to note that employees freely pass offensive racial, ethnic, tribal, linguistic, religious and communal remarks. There appears no legal framework that may explicitly prohibit employees of passing offensive comments. Amongst the common stressors include political rivalries, exerting political influence, cronyism, sycophancy, nepotism, red-tapism, bribery, corruption, leg-pulling and backbiting. One senior male officer said:

“This job has given me diabetes, high blood pressure and chronic sleeplessness. I am left with limited time for my family and social life. I, most often, visit hospital with lots of health complaints. Several colleagues experience physical and mental health problems such as high stress, financial worries, intent to quit the job, low self-esteem, sleeplessness, or digestive problems”.

In addition, police officers in Pakistan face numerous other factors such as political involvement, social pressure, bureaucratic elitism, red-tapism, frequent encounters with violent criminals like dacoits, burglars, low pay, and irregular sleep schedules.

CONCLUSIONS

Police is considered as major organ of the state to serve and protect communities irrespective of any prejudice and discrimination. Policing reflects mechanism of governance and societal values to uphold law and individual rights. As a consequence, police officers enjoy higher degree of authority and responsibility. Nevertheless, policing is an extremely stressful occupation to balance their act of serving and protecting society by upholding law, human rights, fighting corruption, malpractices, facing burglars and criminals. This study reviewed potential occupational stressors that could affect performance of police officers at work. Study gathered first-hand empirical evidence and analyzed to answer research concerns raised in the study. This study identified a number of organizational and managerial stressors in police officers which produce negative impact on mental and physical health of officers. Officers shared their feelings that police has been difficult profession for several reasons especially after post-9/11. Although, in post-9/11 scenario police service has been very significant organ of the state to help facilitate war on terror in the country, this however, has made police stations and officers suffer direct attacks. This has been the major cause of stress among officers followed by the bureaucratic organizational structure and attitude of boss. This requires more attention from government and policy makers to reform the police service to ensure officers security with updated training to combat terror and making service community-friendly and officers work in a stress free environment. Academic and research community should take the service actively in debate of empirical research to guide

concerned decision making authorities. In order to manage some degree of stress, police department needs to focus on training of officers for greater physical and mental wellbeing.

In light of the findings discussed earlier, this study comes up with policy recommendations such as introduction of training, education, recreational leave and market-based pay to help officers manage stress and socioeconomic challenges they face. Environment of mentoring, social support and counseling could also help them perform their job much more efficiently and cope up their stress effectively. Officers also encounter stress from departmental strict rules and regulations, hierarchical structure, elitism, limited career growth, and inadequate support from supervisors. These findings are in consonance with that of Ivie and Garland (2011) and Cooper *et.al.* (1976). Therefore, there is strong need of introducing reforms in the service structure and hierarchical authority to make service community friendly and a good place to work. Strict rules and grievance redressing procedures need to be introduced to prohibit officers passing racial and communal remarks. Study identified several consequences of occupational stress in officers such as dishonesty, emotional instability, dissatisfaction, low performance, and intention to retire early, aggression, social and family problems. Further, this study also found out some of the organizational and managerial stressors which can be lessened by changes at organizational level, however, due to hierarchical control department appears to be reluctant or slow in making noteworthy changes.

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