

Age and Length of Police Service Adds To The Stress of Police Officers



Home Science

KEYWORDS : police, age, occupational stress.

Shajini Judith Diana

Assistant Professor, Dept of Home Science, Women’s Christian College, Chennai: 600 006.

Dr. Sheila John

Associate Professor and Head, Dept of Home Science, Women’s Christian College, Chennai 600 006

ABSTRACT

Police job or work is considered as one of the most stressful and dangerous occupations because of exposure to violence, confrontation and a variety of traumatic incidents. The incidence rate of heart diseases is higher in police than the general public as occupational stress is a major contributing factor. A non-experimental cross sectional survey was adopted to elucidate the relationship between age, years of experience with the stress levels of police personnel of the Chennai Police Commissionerate. A sample size of 1069 male police officers was chosen by convenience sampling method. The finding of the study strongly indicate that age and length of police service contributes significantly to the stress of police personnel.

INTRODUCTION

Workers form an important part of any organization (Tsai et al., 2011) and workplace directly influences the physical, mental, economic, and social well-being of employees which is considered as an important environmental and social determinants of health (Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, 2012).

Stress is defined as “the non-specific response of the body to any demand placed upon it” (Muthuvelayutham and Mohanasundaram, 2012). Occupational stress affects individual’s health when stress at workplace exceeds the employee’s ability to have control over the situation (Walvekar et al., 2015). Depending on the nature of work and time spent at the work place, work stress increases and it has a direct impact on health leading to many complications.

Police personnel play a pivotal role in any society by ensuring security and stability. They constitute a special stressful occupational group with exposure to confrontation, violence and traumatic incidents, including the possibility of being injured or dying (Chen et al., 2006). Though police officers are considered to be a relatively young and presumably healthy occupational group, according to Van Hasselt et al., 2008, it is estimated that 25-30% of police officers have stress-related physical health problem such as hypertension or coronary heart disease.

Prolonged exposure to work stress may affect the autonomic nervous system and neuroendocrine activity directly contribute to the development of chronic illnesses. Belkic et al., (2000) examined the link between workplace factors and cardiovascular disease outcomes and suggested that work stress increases blood pressure, glucose, triglyceride which are components of metabolic syndrome. Vincent et al. (2007) suggested that oxidative stress and inflammation are the biological mechanisms through which obesity leads to cardiovascular and other chronic diseases. Adverse health behaviors associated with stress such as cigarette smoking, excessive use of alcohol and a sedentary lifestyle which may be used as coping responses and subsequently increase risk of metabolic syndrome and CVD (Hartley et al., 2012).

METHODOLOGY

The participants of the study included 1069 male police officers aged 25-55 years drawn from different departments like Law and order, Traffic, Crime and Armed Reserve of the Chennai Police Commissionerate by the purposive sam-

pling technique. A non-experimental correlational study design was adopted to elucidate the relationship between age, years of experience with the stress levels of the police officers.

The participating officers were briefed about the purpose of the study after which the questionnaire designed for the purpose of data collection was administered to elicit information regarding age, demographic details, occupational details and years of experience. The stress level of the police personnel was assessed using the police operational stress scale adopted from a study ‘Impact of Psycho-Social Factors on Performance. An Analysis of Police Officers in Tamil Nadu.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1
Demographic characteristics of the study participants

Particulars		Police officers N=1069	
		Frequency	Per cent
Marital Status	Unmarried	249	23.3
	Married	820	76.7
Educational Qualification	SSLC	214	20.0
	Higher secondary	344	32.2
	Under graduation	442	41.3
	Post-graduation	69	6.5
Family Income	Deprived (Below Rs 90,000)	-	-
	Aspirers (90,000-2,00,000)	679	63.5
	Middle Class (2,00,000-10,00,000)	390	36.5
	Rich (Over Rs 10,00,000)	-	-

76.7% of the police officers who participated in the study were married and 32.3 and 41.3% had higher secondary and university education respectively. Based on family income it was found that a greater percentage of the police officers (63.5%) came under the category of aspirers and had a family income of Rs. 90,000 – 2,00,000 while the others (36.5%) belonged to the middle class category with an annual income of Rs. 2,00,000 – 10,00,000 (classification given by the National Council of Applied Economic Research – Centre for Macro Consumer Research analysis (2010).

Majority of the respondents who participated in the study were police constables (63.5%). 12.1 percent and 23.9 percent of the respondents were sub inspectors and inspectors

respectively. Most of the police officers (83.8%) worked in day shift at the time of the study and over 60 percent of the police officers were putting in more than 15 hours of work.

Table 2
Distribution of police personnel by age

Particulars		Police officers N=1069	
		Frequency	Per cent
Age	<25- years	170	15.9
	26-35 years	347	32.5
	36-45 years	224	20.9
	>45	328	30.7

It is evident from table 2 that one third (32.5%) of the study participants were between 26-35 years of age and around 20 percent of the participants were between 36-45 years of age. 15.9 percent of the police officers who participated in the study were below 25 years of age and another one third (30.7%) of the study respondents were above 45 years of age.

Table 3
Comparison of stress scores of police personnel by age level

Stress scores	Age of the police officers (Years)				F value
	<25	25-35	36-45	>45	
	27.04	29.61	37.45	37.73	

** p <0.001

Table 3 shows the total stress levels of the police officers classified in terms of 4 major age categories. On comparing the stress levels of all the four age groups, the arrived F value (54.684) was greater than the table value at 0.01 level. It indicates that distinct and significant differences exist between the police officers stress levels and their age. A linear trend was seen as the stress scores increased with age. The stress scores of officers less than 25 years of age was the least (27.04) while officers above 45 years of age had the highest stress score (37.73).

Police officers often experience extended work schedules, shift work, traumatic events, and job dissatisfaction due to negative interpersonal interactions with supervisors and/or coworkers and perceived organizational unfairness which causes a lot of stress (Violanti and Gehrke, 2004; Barger et al., 2009; Gershon et al., 2009).

Police officers experience alarmingly high rates of other non-communicable diseases and stress than the general public due to behavioral changes, like alcoholism and smoking. Franke et al, 1997 and Vena et al., 1986 have reported significantly high prevalence of stress related disorders like hypertension, diabetes and coronary heart disease among the policemen and found police occupation as a prominent risk factor for coronary heart disease.

Table 4
Comparison of stress scores of police personnel by years of police service

Stress scores	Length of police service (Years)					F value
	1-5	6-10	11-15	15-20	> 20	
	28.0	29.58	36.07	39.56	38.57	

** p <0.001

Table 4 shows the total stress levels of the police officers classified in terms of 5 major occupational experience categories. On comparing the stress levels of all the four age groups, the arrived F value (53.834) was greater than the table value at 0.01 level. It indicates that distinct and significant differences exist between the police officers stress levels and their experience. A positive linear trend was seen between the stress level and the length of police service. The stress scores of officers in the minimum experience category (1-5 years of police service) was 28.0 while officers with the maximum years of police service (more than 20 years) had the highest stress score (38.57). Sharma (2007) reported a finding from a study by the Defense Institute of Psychological Research (DIPR) which revealed that increase in the occupational factors such as years of job experience and job hierarchy increased the levels of stress among officers, junior commissioned officers (JCO) and *jawans*.

Similar findings have been reported by Balakrishnamurthy and Shankar (2009) who in their study on impact of age and level of experience on occupational stress experienced by the non-gazatted officers of the Central Reserve Police Force have shown that there is a strong relationship between stress and demographic variables such as age and level of experience. CRPF's personnel with years of experience between 11 and 20 years (119.58± 16.22) had markedly higher amounts of stress than their counterparts.

CONCLUSION

From the study it can be understood that age and length of police service significantly impacted the stress levels of the police personnel. The work of a police officer appears glamorous and exciting only in movies while in reality it is a highly stressful profession. The pressures of law enforcement put officers at risk for high blood pressure, insomnia, increased levels of destructive stress hormones, heart problems, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Health and wellness programs become mandatory to help officers deal with this difficult and stressful occupation. It is a must to educate the police officers about the physical and psychological impact that a career in law enforcement can have.

REFERENCES

- Balakrishnamurthy, C., and Shankar, S. (2009). Impact of age and level of experience on occupational stress experienced by non-gazette officers of the central reserve police force. *Industrial Psychiatry Journal*, 18(2): 1-3.
- Barger, LK., Lockley, S.W., Rajaratnam, S.M., and Landrigan, CP. (2009). Neurobehavioral, health, and safety consequences associated with shift work in safety-sensitive professions. *Current Neurology and Neuroscience Reports*, 9: 155-164.
- Belkic K., Landsbergis P., Schnall P., Baker D., Theorell T., Siegrist J, et al. Research findings linking workplace factors to cardiovascular disease outcomes: Psychosocial factors: Review of the empirical data among men. In: Schnall PL, Belkic K, Landsbergis P, Baker D, editors. (2000). *Occupational medicine: State of the art reviews*, 15: 24-46.
- Chew, GT., Gan, SK., Watts, GF. (2006). Revisiting the metabolic syndrome. *Medical Journal of Australia*, 185: 445-9.
- Franke, WD., et al. (1997). Coronary Heart Disease Risk Factors in Employees of Iowa's Department of Public Safety Compared to a Cohort of the General Population." *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, 733-737.
- Gershon, RM., Barocas, B., Canton, AN., Li, X. and Vlahov, D. (2009). Mental, physical, and behavioral outcomes associated with perceived work stress in police officers". *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 36: 275-89.
- Hartley, TA., Burchfiel, CM., Fekedulegn, D., Andrew, ME., Knox, SS., Violanti, JM. (2012). Association between police officer stress and the metabolic syndrome. *International Journal of Emergency Mental Health*, 13(4):243-256.
- Muthuvelayutham, C., and Mohanasundaram, H. (2012). A study on the impact of occupational stress among teachers on job satisfaction and job involvement-an empirical study. *European Journal of social sciences*,

- 30(2):339-51.
9. National Council for Applied Economic Research-Center for Macro Consumer Research. (Internet): NCAER; 2010 (cited 2012 July 16); Available from: <http://www.ncaercmcr.org/an-india-for-you/cmcr-in-themedia/low-income-families>.
 10. Sharma R (2007). Occupational Factors No.1 cause for suicides in Army: Report. The Hindu, Dated:08.08.2007. PP 9.
 11. Van Hasselt, VB., Sheehan, DC., Malcolm, AS., Sellers, AH., Baker, MT., and Couwels, J. (2008). 'The Law Enforcement Officer Stress Survey (LE-OSS): Evaluation of Psychometric Properties.' *Behavior Modification*, 32: 133-151.
 12. Vena, J., Violanti, J., Marshall, J., and Fiedler, R. (1986). Mortality of a municipal worker cohort: III. Police officers. *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, 10:383-97.
 13. Victorian Health Promotion Foundation. Reducing prolonged sitting in the workplace, an evidence review: summary report, 2012. Available from www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/workplace (Accessed May 16, 2014).
 14. Violanti, JM., and Gehrke, A. (2004). Police Trauma Encounters: Precursors of Compassion Fatigue. *International Journal of Emergency Mental Health*, 6(2): 75-80.
 15. Walvekar, SS., Ambekar JG., Devaranavadagi BB. (2015). Study on serum cortisol and perceived stress scale in the police constables. *J Clin Diagn Res*, 9(2):10-4.