A STUDY ON THE STRESS LEVEL OF POLICE PERSONNEL WITH A PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO MUMBAI

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Abstract

Theories of stress have varied greatly in their basic approaches as well as in their definitions of stress. A prime source of confusion in stress research is inadequate conceptualization of the stress construct. Aggarwala, Malhan and Singh (1979) believed that this confusion in definition existed because the same term is used differently by the scholars with different orientations. Even within the organisational behaviour literature, (there is no consensus over the conceptualization of stress. It is treated as a stimulus, a response, an environmental characteristic, an individual attribute, an interaction between individual and his or her environment (Katz and Kahn, 1978; Mason, 1975). A close look at reviews of conceptualization of stress (Mason, 1975) reveals two main trends. One group of definitions, implicitly or explicitly suggests that stress is a force or situation that leads to negative consequences (e.g., Cooper and Marshall, 1977; Caplan *et. al,* 1975). Second group of definitions takes interactive and more dynamic view and contends that it is a dynamic situation that provides opportunities or constraints for behaviour (McGrath, 1976). In general, stress is said to occur when a person perceives that he is unable to cope with the demands made upon him and when the consequences of this inability to cope are threatening. Presumably the individual can alter the state of stress, by avoiding the consequences, fulfilling the demands, or altering the perception of demands, of his capabilities, and/or of the consequences. There is considerable evidence suggesting that more law enforcement personnel are killed by job-related stress than they are by criminals. For every policeman slain by an assailant in the line of duty, many more succumb to the insidious, long-range effects of job induced pressures, Psychologists and sociologists have described law enforcement as one of the most stressful occupations, reporting that law enforcement personnel experience a very high' incidence of emotional and health disruption because of their occupational roles (Kroes and Hurrel, 1975).The author has been entertaining a feeling

that there is something basically wrong with our police and police system. Review of studies conducted in India reveal that investigations in India have concentrated either on police administration or the secondary aspects of the police system without delving into the crucial problem of job stress in policemen Keeping in view the significance of job stress among Indian police personnel and paucity of research in this area, it has become obligatory In analyse the underlying components and to scientifically assess the extnti of job stress in the Indian police. Data for the present chapter was collected as part of a larger study (Bhasker, 1986).

Objectives

1. To explore different sources of job stress which are experienced by Indian police constables;
2. To provide an adequate profile of their stress experiences; and
3. To examine department-wise and hierarchical differences in stress experiences among police constables and other levels of police personnel.

Methodology

Sample

The participants in the study were 139 police constables from seven departments of the Mumbai Police Organisation. All the police constables were male and their age ranged between 21 and 45 years with an average of 36.06 years. The average job experience of the respondents was about 14 years and with intermediate as their educational qualification.

Procedure

The study was conducted in two phases. In the first phase 90 police personnel representing all ranks and departments of the organisation participated in the study. They were asked to state various factors which produced job stress and the difficulties they faced during job life. The content of their description served as a source of item pool; many items were also adapted from published literature on stress. A total of 93 items were included in the final questionnaire. Response categories were on a 4-point scale and ranged from "totally disagree"

to "totally agree". The final version of the Job Stress Questionnaire was used as part of the main study and was administered on a sample of 390 Mumbai male policemen from 8 different ranks ranging from Additional Commissioner of Police to the rank of Constable and 8 different departments of the police organisation. The 8 ranks were further grouped under 5 categories for statistical analysis of data.

Results and discussion

Assuming that stress experiences are multi-dimensional, the data were cluster analysed. As a result, eight dimensions of stress were obtained (Annexure I). Mean, standard deviation, index of discrimination potentiality and reliability co-efficient of the stress dimensions are presented in Table 1. Significance of difference between stress factors to know whether the factors are truly different in nature was also computed. Results revealed that all eight factors differed significantly from each other.

TABLE 1: **Mean, Standard Deviation, Index of Discrimination Potentiality and Reliability Co-efficient for the Dimensions of Stress**

	Stress Dimensions	*No. of Items*	*Range*		*M*	*SD*	($N = 390$)
							Reliability
			Min.	*Max.*			*Co-efficient*
1	Physical factors	*9*	0.35	0.63	10.23	2.04	0.73
2	Factors intrinsic to the job	22	0.29	**0.68**	29.17	**3.34**	0.83
3	Role in the organisation	II	0.32	*0.68*	7.27	2.79	**0.77**
4	Relationships at work	**13**	**0.31**	0.62	10.03	2.89	0.83
5	Career development	**9**	0.28	**0.69**	10.34	2.41	0.82
6	Organisational structure and climate	6	0.32	**0.68**	3.5	1.87	0.96
7,	Extra-Organisational sources of **stress**	10	0.29	0.62	13.82	2,07-	**0.82**
8	Personality and behavioural factors	**13**	**0.36**	**0.64**	12.17	3.28	0.87

Profile of stress experiences

Mean scores of stress dimensions were used to provide an adequate description of profile of stress experiences of police constables. Since the number of items in each dimension of stress were not equal, a direct comparison of mean scores of stress was not possible. To overcome

this difficulty averaged mean scores were computed. The standardized scores (in the form of averages) and ranks for each of the eight dimensions of stress are presented in Table 3. The findings denote that among the police constables in Mumbai, there is a difference in the magnitude of perception of various factors towards their contribution to overall stress. Since job life consists of a portion, though quite relevant of employees dealings, a global portrayal of stress may not be regarded adequate enough to ascertain the extent of stress pertaining to various components of his job. The common-sensical conclusion that we can assume here is that stress should not be covered as an overall factor rather one should be particular about the specific factors which have a powerful dominance over the feeling of stress. We just cannot say that the stress is high or low rather we must know what are the dimensions which are most predominantly contributing towards the stressful feelings. The table shows the police constables experience in various forms of stresses in different intensities. An extra-organisational source of stress has got the highest ratings. Further, extra-organisational sources of stress aggravate job stress police constables as revealed by a significant positive correlation between the two (Table 2).

TABLE 2
Inter-correlations among Stress Dimensions and Overall Job Stress for Police constables

Dimensions of Stress	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total
1. Physical factor	—								
2. Factors intrinsic to the job	48	—							
3. Role in the organisation	47	58	—						
4. Relationships as work	35	48	66	—					
5. Career development	40	39	36	58	-				
6. Organisational structure and climate	44	55	66	45	41	-			
7. Extra-organisational sources of stress	53	45	47	56	62	41	—		
8. Personality and behavioural factors	43	47	47	54	42	49	53	—	
Overall Job Stress	65	76	79	79	70	72	76	75	—
P (.05) =. 17, P (.01) = .22 at df 137.									

Notwithstanding the fact that the police job cannot be reconciled with a stable and normal family life, it is a serious matter to keep the police constables in semi-bachelor state in barracks for most part of their youth. Due to frequent transfers, petty incomes, and long absences from home, they are not socialized in normal ways of social behaviour. Constantly tortured by this abnormality of the family situation, the police constables resort to odd ways

of bottle or religion and are notorious for their participation in vices, which their profession seeks to prevent and punish. This perverse socialization in the want of normal social institutions builds such a disjointed personality and psychic disorders that all efforts put through training are rendered ineffective. Similarly, all efforts to suppress these disorders through command or coercion of organisational discipline result in further insecurity causing tension, anxiety and bigger mental void.

Averaged Means and Rank of Job Stress for Police constables

Table 3: Means, Averaged Means and Rank of job stress Dimensions for police Constables

Dimensions of Stress	Mean Score	Averaged Mean	Rank
1. Physical factors	10.75		4
2. Factors intrinsic to the job	30.28	1.38	2
3. Role in the organization	7.08	0.64	7
4. Relationships at work	10.42	0.8	6
5. Career development	11.05	1.23	3
6. Organisational structure and climate	3.17	0.53	8
7. Extra-organisational sources of stress	14.38	1.44	1
8. Personality and behavioral factors	13.88	1.07	5

At the second place are stresses arising from factors intrinsic to the job. Stress can be caused by too much or too little work, time pressures and deadlines, fatigue from physical strains of work environment, excessive travel, long hours, having to cope with changes at work and the expenses (monetary and career) of making mistakes. The amount of social prestige and esteem police constables in India enjoy do not require any elaboration. Low pay, odd hours of duty, life of occupational hazards, lack of leisure, having to deal with socially maladjusted type of people, deprivation of finer things of life, further psychological pressure cast by the requirements of wrongly conceived discipline, all out condemnation and no appreciation even

of their limitations and difficulties, all these create a big vacuum which they try to fill by their outer personality, i.e., of a policeman through crude display of his power as if telling the world that he is working not for a bad bargain.

Besides the creation of a mental and physiological void, police constables also have other attendant circumstances further aggravating the problem. Task pressures and wrong type and even unproductive training that do not equip them to meet the task pressures in a healthy manner lead them to take recourse to questionable means some of which are not consistent with human dignity.

Stress arising due to lack of career development opportunities appeared at the third place. Very few policemen gel their career promotions al reasonable intervals. At lower levels the situation is worse and most of the policemen retire on the posts on which they are initially appointed. The functional limitations of the career not only rule out the lateral exodus, but force the meritorious and the promising ones to reconcile with their lot or to seek promotional pleasures of their frustrated psyche somewhere outside the normal course of their bureaucratic careers.

Stress arising due to physical factors, relationships at work and personality and behavioural factors are prevalent in moderate intensity as revealed by the average ratings of these stresses. Although prevalent in moderate intensity they do reveal positive significant correlations with total job stress (Table 2).

In the profile of stress experienced by police constables, stress arising due to role in the organisation and organisational structure and climate are present, (as revealed by their positive significant correlation with overall job stress) but with weaker intensity and lower priority in terms of their seriousness. In the Indian context, it is observed that for police constables psychologically demanding work, conflicts at work, authoritarian boss and fewer social contacts accumulate resulting in increased job stress among policemen.

TABLE 4

Inter-correlations among Job Stress Dimensions and Personal and Background Variables for Police Constables

Personal and Background	Dimensions of Job Stress								
Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total

1	Age	10	12	13	23	49	30	21	28	31
2	Educational qualifications	20	16	5	23	40	29	18	22	29
3	Marital Status	10	0	1	6	17	1	8	2	6
4	Native place	1	1	8	1	1	7	1	19	7
5	Present salary	16	18	20	22	48	36	23	30	36
6	Total years of service	16	17	19	22	49	38	22	27	35
7	Years of service in present position	0	10	2	1	7	11	6	1	1
8	Jobs changed	21	3	7	6	11	23	3	14	13
9	Family size	19	25	25	16	20	36	11	22	29
10	Number of dependents	14	6	9	3	10	1	9	2	4
11	Number of children	16	9	20	12	35	35	18	18	26
12	Total family income	0	2	2	08 '	11	5	9	9	7

P (.05) =. 17, P (.01) = .22 at df 137.

Another potential source of stress for Indian police constables is 'simply being in the organisation' and the threat to an individual's freedom, autonomy, and intensity this poses. No participation in decision-making process, no sense of belonging, lack of effective consultation, poor communication, restrictions on behaviour and office politics lead to poor physical health, escapist drinking, depressed mood, low self-esteem and low life satisfaction. Although police constables rank organisational structure and climate the least important source of job stress, it reveals a positive significant correlation with job stress.

Stress dimensions and personal and background variables

Inter-correlations among stress dimensions and personal and background variables of police constables are presented in Table 4. A perusal of Table 4 suggests that older police constables are more affected by stresses arising due to orthodox, autocratic, regimented infrastructure of the Indian police force which provides little scope for smooth flow of interaction, lack of career development opportunities, organisational Structure and climate and personality and behavioural factors. It is seen that most of the policemen especially at the lower levels retire on posts on which they were initially appointed. Fear of redundancy, frustration at having

reached their career ceiling, lack of timely promotions, rewards and pay-rise result in insecurity causing tension and job stress especially in older and married police constables. Further, as age of police constables advances, they tend to strive more diligently towards achievement and are unable to relax. As a result, they develop conflict and experience authoritarianism.

It is seen that majority of police constables hail from rural areas who are ill-equipped to meet the challenges of modernisation and fast social change. They enter the police organisation with great expectations, fantasies and ideals. However, low education and lack of mass awareness make them ill-equipped to meet the new challenges. They refuse to accept the challenge of attitudinal change and many fail to adjust to task pressures and demanding work environment. The unresolved frustrations and personal conflicts result in anxiety and job stress.

TABLE 5
Comparison of Mean Scores of Job Stress Dimensions for Police Personnel from Different Ranks

Dimensions of Job Stress		Constables	Head Constables		Assistant Sub-inspectors		Sub-Inspectors		Senior Officers	
	Mean Score	Averaged mean	Mean Score	Averaged Mean	Mean Score	Averaged Mean	Mean Score	Averaged Mean	Mean Score	Averaged Mean
Physical factors	10.75	1.19	10.5	1.17	10.2	1.13	11 20	1.24	8.49	0.94
Factors intrinsic to the job	30.28	1.38	29.47	1.34	28 99	1.32	30.8	1.4	26.31	1.2
Role in the organisation	7.08	0.64	7.07	0.64	6 19	0.56	8.29	0.75	7.34	0.67
Relationships at work	10.42	0.8	9.94	0.76	971	0.75	11.4	0.88	8.63	0.66
Career development	11.05	1.23	9.31	1.03	9 . 35	1.04	11	1 23	[7] 8.51	0.95
Organisational structure and climate	3.17	0.53	2.8	0.47	3.4	0.57	4.01	0.67	3.81	0.64
Extra-Organisa-tional sources of stress	14.38	1.44	14 11	1.41	3.89	1.39	1460	I 46	13.23	1.32
Personality and behavioural factors	13.88	1.07	13.11	1.01	11.83	0.91	12.8	0.99	9.33	0.72

A life of dignity and high social esteem and prestige, good and equitable remuneration and a reasonably good career planning are the conditions to attract the best talent to the police service. It is foolish to expect steel out of simple sand. We have been looking for the strength of steel in our police but are never willing to pay for it. Present salary of police constables has significant effect on stress course and its dimensions. However, the situation could be reversed by evolving a suitable pay structure for the police as in (he Indian society the pay scales largely determine status also.

Total years of service put in by constables reveal positive relation with job stress and its dimensions. In any organisation, the personnel have to be made aware that there is something better they can and should look for through good performance. This provides them with the motivational force for sustained good work. Blocking or obstructing these state results in frustration and demoralization.

Positive significant correlations are also found between size of the family of police constables and job stress and its various dimensions. It is seen that on an average, a police constable has

about 6 members in his family, 4-5 dependents and 3 children. The physical conditions of work, enormous and killing work load, meagre pay packets and sub-human standard of living aggravate the stresses of supporting large families.

The findings so far tell us about sources of job stress as well as crucial role played by personal and background variables in the perception of job stress by Indian police constables.

Hierarchical profile of police personnel

A comparative picture of stress experiences of police personnel belonging to different ranks is provided in Table 5. The findings denote that among various ranks of Mumbai police force there is no particular trend in the hierarchical position of job stress factors characteristic of that particular rank. Rather, we observe a remarkable similarity in the perception of various factors towards their contribution to overall stress. The micro-analysis also reveals extra-organisational sources of stress to be the most dominant factor followed by factors intrinsic to the job whereas the least important contributor towards stress is organisational structure and climate followed by role in the organisation. Thus, we may conclude that although the police force may differ on the basis of ranks, the pattern of specific factors which have a powerful dominance over the feeling of stress is more or less same.

Critical ratios to ascertain the significance of difference between means among ranks within each of the departments were computed for job stress (total) and its components. The trend of significant differences observed between each department reveals that sub-inspectors and senior officers are maximally different from police constables as well as other ranks lor each of the departments on total job stress scores and all the eight dimensions.

It is seen that in the Indian police force, increased accountability of any act within their area of jurisdiction, political interference, fear of explanation of any indiscipline or irresponsibility on the part of subordinates, fear of unknown, lack of co-operation and communication from other departments results in unresolved frustrations and personal conflicts which further lead to stress and anxiety among officers at higher levels.

Critical ratios were also computed to ascertain the significance of difference between mean scores among departments for job stress (total) and its eight dimensions for police constables.

Trend of significant differences observed between each department reveals that Crime and Railways and Security departments are maximally different from all other departments for police constables on total job stress scores and its eight dimensions.

India has one of the largest railway networks with Mumbai being the focal point. The mesh widths of the railway network result in large amount of population commuting daily for various activities. Increased industrialization, high level of unemployment, overcrowded population and alarming disparities and inequalities lead to increase in crime rate. As a result, the duties of police force working under Crime and Railways are neither specified nor physically contained. Similarly, with the increasing threats to national unity, insecurity, increased communalism create immense work load and increased responsibilities for policemen working in the security department. Since these two departments have great importance in the police set up, they should be dealt carefully since they are maximally different on total job stress scores and its eight dimensions.

Conclusion

On the whole, we conclude from these findings that intra-organisational practices and characteristics, police work itself, police constables himself and his personal and family background variables constitute the variety and complexity of sources of job stress which manifest themselves within the context of police force in Mumbai

Approaches to alleviating stress among police constables should target the individual worker and specific work environment that is the primary carrier of job stress. Further, efforts in this direction must look beyond the individual and the walls of the work environment to broader social and cultural sources of stress. While these are more difficult to change in the Indian context they must nonetheless be tackled, as they form and shape the work environment of police force.

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ANNEXURE I

The eight dimensions of job stress are briefly described below:

- Physical factors (9 items) : Poor visibility, noise, vibration and motion, heat, cold and wind, heavy work and physical fitness, work overload and under load night shifts and loss of sleep are considered under physical factors.

- Factors intrinsic to the job (22 items): These include time pressures and deadlines, having too many decisions, fatigue from physical strain of work environment, excessive travel, long hours, having to cope with changes at work and the expenses (monetary and career) of making mistakes.

- Role in the organisation (11 items): It includes factors such as role ambiguity arising due to inadequate information about work role and lack of clarity of work objectives associated with role, role conflict arising out of conflicting job demands and responsibility.

- Relationships at work (13 items): These include relationship with superiors, subordinates and colleagues.

- Career development (9 items) : Two major clusters of potential stressors can be identified in this area :

  Lack of job security ; fear of redundancy, obsolescence or early retirement; and

  Status incongruity: under or over-promotion, frustration at having reached one's career ceiling.

- Organisational structure and climate (6 items): No sense of belonging, lack of effective consultation, poor communications, restrictions on behaviour and office politics constitute this factor.

- Extra organisational sources of stress (10 items): Family problems, life crisis, financial difficulties, conflict of personal beliefs with those of the organisation, conflict of organisation with family demands constitute this factor.

- Personality and behavioural factors (13 items) : These include adaptability, rigidity and flexibility in perceiving different types of situations as stressful, susceptibility to rush jobs, dependence on others and openness to influence from other people.

Bio

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