

How to Cite:

Sundaresan, J. P. V., & Sharma, C. B. (2022). A review of work done with the police force and the need for change. *International Journal of Health Sciences*, 6(S5), 4895–4903.
<https://doi.org/10.53730/ijhs.v6nS5.9655>

A review of work done with the police force and the need for change

Jayant P V Sundaresan

Research Scholar, Manav Rachna International Institute of Research and Studies, Faridabad, Haryana, India

Email: jayant.sundaresan@gmail.com

Prof. (Dr.) Chavi Bhargava Sharma

Former Executive Director and Dean, Faculty of Behavioral and Social Sciences, Manav Rachna International Institute of Research and Studies, Faridabad, Haryana, India

Abstract--A number of studies have been conducted and published on police personnel across the world. Studies have shown that younger police personnel experience fear on the job while older police personnel are more fearful of being negatively appraised on the job. The work of the police is both demanding and stressful and these are associated with burnout and increased incidence of mood disorders. Increases in stress levels has also been associated with suicidal ideation. Our emotions are a product of the culture that we are brought up in and live in. which points to the need to reduce the stigma associated with police personnel seeking help for mental health. There is a need to shift to community based policing where police personnel are seen as helpful guardians, rather than being military like in uniform. In addition there is a need to have better measures of assessment of the stress levels of police personnel. Better wellbeing has been significantly associated with increased job satisfaction, lower levels of depression, reduced frustration and lower work related stress. These have all been exacerbated during COVID-19 pandemic times particularly with the use of police personnel for implementing strict COVID-19 protocols, geographical lockdowns and social distancing whilst ensuring that they do not carry the infection home to their families. It is suggested that additional interventions to further foster a positive work environment and steps to increase job satisfaction for the policing work would lead to increase in better mental health particularly in pandemic times.

Keywords---personnel experience, COVID-19 protocols, work environment.

Introduction

One of the most primal and basic emotion that is within us is fear. Much of our life as we live it is based on decisions that we make which have been shaped by the emotion of fear itself. It is this emotion that keeps us safe by moving us away from what could potentially be quite dangerous for us. At the same time, it is this very emotion that pushes us to fulfil our own latent potential that lies within us. (Dozier Jr., 1998)

When we consider the role of fear in the mind of the typical common individual, it is the experience of crime against them or in their neighbourhood that then remains with them long after the actual incident of crime has passed. An individual whose home has been burnt down or who has been severely beaten or who has been robbed will continue to feel fearful much longer over the years. (Moore, 1988)

Gudjonsson (1984) did a study of how police officers experience fear when they are on the job. His findings were that in comparison, younger police officers were more fearful of getting harmed themselves and the more experience police officers were more fearful of failing at the task that they were in charge of. He felt that it could be explained by the amount of exposure gained over time on the job for the more experienced police officers. The more experienced police officers would be used to the levels of threat and risk over time and concurrently with seniority would be more wary of been seen in a negatively appraised light in terms of their own individual performance.

In terms of the work done by police personnel in the field, it is a job that is both demanding and stressful, particularly in terms of dealing with the high risk challenges that are faced by the police force on a daily basis in the field. This leads to an increase in the possibility of mental illness due to the stressful nature of the work including mood disorders like depression, anxiety disorders, burnout and even thoughts of suicide. This was based on the analysis of numerous studies done on stress and burnout in police officers. (Queiros et al, 2020)

Pogrebin and Poole (1991) in their study found that police personnel who experience events which tragic, have the notion that they should not share their emotions at the workplace as they would be viewed as unreliable and other police personnel may then be reluctant to work in the field with them. Thus police personnel tend not to share and express themselves as they have to remain in control and calm, which in turn leads to increased risk to mental health issues.

Our cultural context particularly in terms of upbringing and the work culture that we are immersed in has an effect on our emotions. While American culture would tend to reinforce individualism, on the other hand, Asian culture would tend to reinforce collectivism as these are the foundations on which both representative societies are based. Our emotions are thus affected by the cultural context in which we live (Kitayama& Markus, 1994).

Sweeney (2021) underlines the need to shift to community policing wherein the police officers are not to be seen at military like personnel in uniform, but rather

they should be experienced as being helpful citizens in uniform. This is in line with the shift from the use of excessive force and confrontation between police and general public as being the base level interaction in a democracy.

Rahr and Rice (2015) talk about the shift of policing from being guardians as envisaged by Plato and Aristotle to the concept of police officers being warriors who are in conflict with the very same people of whom they should be guardians. Chae and Boyle (2013) studied the risk factors that are associated with increase in suicidal ideation. They found that the abuse and consumption of alcohol, the presence of problems in personal relationships, the rigours of working in shifts, the exposure to traumatic events during the job and the overall stress levels within the organization are all risk factors that are together contributing to the greater incidence of suicidal ideation.

Garner (2008) said that there is additional stress that is experienced by the police officers when they are required to reprimand or have to provide feedback to their subordinates when that feedback is not positive. The study also found that it is beneficial to have training programs to help build the capacity and capability of the police personnel with respect to dealing with stress.

Easton and Laar (2013) highlighted in their study that the quality of life as perceived by the police personnel is impacted by both the negative experiences and the positive experiences that the individual has during work and at the workplace.

Velazquez and Hernandez (2019) highlighted in their research the need to reduce the stigma associated with police personnel seeking treatment for mental health related trauma. The research indicated that continued avoidance of treatment increases the possibility of the occurrence of depression, risk of suicide and stress disorder.

Rabbing et al (2022) in their research have highlighted the need for better measures and techniques for the measurement of the stress levels particularly for the target group of police personnel. They also found that many of the measures being used were more focused on illness and there was a need to use measures that were more focused on the specific stressor to be investigated with respect to police work.

Stanley et al (2016) in their study underscore the importance of providing first responders, including the police officers, the support required to deal with stressors exposed to on the job. This also included other first responders like medical personnel and fire fighters who over time are exposed to trauma on the job.

Lane et al (2021) in their study found that the more experienced police officers, particularly those who had training on mental health were more likely to seek help and interventions for better mental health as compared to police officers whom had much less experience and were not additionally trained in mental health.

Kirkcaldy et al (1994) in an older study of a large number of police officers found that mental ill health was associated with low job satisfaction, increased occupational stress and increased physical ill health. Nelson and Smith (2014) in their study of occupational stress and mental health amongst police officers from Jamaica found that the presence of work characteristics that were negative was linked to higher levels of depression. They also found that the Jamaican officers were more prone to bouts of anxiety when their occupational stress was high at their workplace.

In a cohort study conducted by Velden et al (2013) it was found that police personnel did not show significantly higher levels of problems in mental health as compared to self reports of other groups such as bank employees or soldiers who are not deployed at high risk locations. The study goes on to suggest that this could be because of the strong selection process of police personnel and the resilience levels of the police personnel itself.

Rasdi (2018) in the study of Malaysian traffic police officers found that the extent of mental health issues was high in the police officers, with air pollution being a stressor that was statistically significant for the urban traffic police and organizational stressors being statistically significant for non urban traffic police officers.

Garbarino et al (2013) in their study on police officers of the Special Forces in Italy were found to have higher levels of mental health symptoms when there were higher levels of stress which was related to work. The findings particularly pointed to a higher incidence of depression amongst the police officers.

Adegoke (2014) in the study of Nigerian police personnel found that psychological wellbeing was significantly associated with depression, levels of frustration and the amount of work related stress experienced by the police personnel. This study was conducted across 250 police personnel of the Ibadan area of Nigeria, covering five districts.

Kelley (2005) in a study covering prospective recruits of police personnel found that in-depth training on positive mental health was useful in working towards increasing future job satisfaction of the police personnel to be recruited.

Walter et al (2018) in a study of German police officers found that job resources like perceived fairness, support from the team and values that were shared were directly associated with wellbeing. They also found that job demands like stress from administrative work, level of workload and verbal assaults from people during work were directly associated with feeling emotionally exhausted. Their study recommended that an organizational climate for the police personnel which was fair and supportive would contribute positively to better mental health.

McKenna et al (2015) in their study found that even though first responder police officers take individuals with crisis in mental health to emergency care centres, it is common to find that these emergency departments are not the best equipped to provide the optimal care required for those having mental health crisis. Therefore there is a need to train and equip these centres to be able to provide the adequate

care required during mental health emergencies. The availability of the same would also then be available to the police personnel themselves.

Steadman et al (2000) in their study found that police personnel are frequently the gatekeepers to mental health centres for those people who are reported to be emotionally disturbed or unstable and require intervention on the street. The intervention by the police personnel ensures that the people requiring help for their mental health are referred to the mental health centre rather than being put into the criminal justice system.

Lamb et al (2002) in their study also highlighted the need for police personnel to both receive adequate training in dealing with persons with mental health problems as well as to build strong working relationships with the service providers of mental health services for the people with mental health problems.

McLean and Marshall (2010) in their study found that a deeper collaboration of mutual trust and respect between the police officers and the service providers for mental health services was conducive in providing a higher level of resolution of the typical difficulties faced by the challenges of mental health issues on the street.

Wood and Watson (2016) found that their study pointed to both agreements of mutual co-operation and specific training between the health sector and the police personnel has led to more positive attitudes towards mental health and an improved understanding of mental health.

Maurya and Agarwal (2015) in their study of police personnel from Uttar Pradesh found that there was a significant positive correlation between job satisfaction and psychological well-being. It was also seen that for male participants, job satisfactions was positively significantly correlated with leadership that was supportive towards the police personnel. In another study (2018) they found that in comparison of female and male police constables at Uttar Pradesh, there was a positive correlation between job satisfaction and psychological wellbeing. They also recommended that the same wellbeing can be increased by improving the job conditions under which both the female and male police constables were working on a day to day basis.

Singh et al (2019) in their study also of police personnel from Uttar Pradesh found the need for having effective coping mechanisms and measures to promote a healthy work environment in place due to the high levels of occupational stress as was being experienced by the police personnel from the different bands of seniority at the police force.

Stogner et al (2020) in their study pointed out that despite being underfunded and understaffed, during the Covid 19 situation, the law enforcement officers were required to enforce location wide lockdowns and enforce social distancing. The additional stress during the Covid 19 times has been associated with being a significant stressor for the police personnel in terms of the work that they have to do.

Edwards and Kotera (2021) in their research have pointed out the high levels of stress that has been experienced by the Covid 19 pandemic particularly in terms of the increase in risk to the police personnel in terms of mental and physical health. They have suggested the need to put interventions in place to help the police personnel to be able to cope up effectively with the challenges that have been thrown up by the pandemic in the day to day work of the police force. Police personnel also need to be trained and made ready for the next world wide emergency like the emergency public health pandemic drew on all the resources available in the region.

Roberts et al (2021) in their Covid – 19 situation studies of Australian police and paramedics found that there was a high level of burnout experienced by the personnel and the main factor that was associated with that was the level of workload that had been assigned to the individuals.

Drew and Martin (2021) in their study of the family of police personnel and themselves during the Covid 19 situation found that the higher levels of continuing stress experienced by the police personnel and their families particularly in terms of risk of carrying infection home was associated with an impact on mental health that was more harmful and long term as compared to short duration critical incidents. In their earlier study (2020) they highlighted the need for the police leadership to focus on taking specific measures to prevent the incidence of PTSD amongst police personnel due to the Covid 19 work situations and to foster positive police mental health.

Conclusion

In terms of the research and work done on police personnel in the field, there is a clear indication that there are high levels of stress that are experienced by the law enforcement officers across the world. These factors that contribute to the stress levels experienced by them are also associated with higher levels of mental health issues. This has particularly been seen during the Covid 19 situation especially when law enforcement personnel have had to implement strict Covid 19 protocols, geographical lockdowns and social distancing whilst ensuring that they do not carry the infection home to their families. It is suggested that additional interventions to further foster a positive work environment and steps to increase job satisfaction for the policing work would lead to increase in better mental health particularly in pandemic times.

References

1. Adegoke, T. G. (2014). Effects of occupational stress on psychological well-being of police employees in Ibadan Metropolis, Nigeria. *African research review*. Vol. 8 (1), Serial No. 32, 302-320
2. Chae, M.H. and Boyle, D.J. (2013), "Police suicide: prevalence, risk, and protective factors", *Policing: An International Journal*, Vol. 36 No. 1, pp. 91-118. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13639511311302498>
3. Drew, J.M., & Martin, S. (2020). Mental health and well-being of police in a health pandemic: Critical issues for police leaders in a post-COVID-19

- environment. *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being*, 5(2), 31-36. <https://doi.org/10.35502/jcswb.133>
4. Drew, J.M., & Martin, S. (2021). Policing during a global health pandemic: Exploring the stress and well-being of police and their families. *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being*, 6(3), 104–111. <https://doi.org/10.35502/jcswb.195>
 5. Easton, S. and Laar, D.V. (2013), Quality of working life and the police, *Management*, 3(3): 135-141
 6. Edwards, A. and Kotera, Y. (2021), Policing in a pandemic: a commentary on officer well-being during Covid-19, *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, 36:360-364. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11896-021-09469-4>
 7. Garbarino S, Cuomo G, Chiorri C, (2013) Association of work-related stress with mental health problems in a special police force unit. *BMJ Open* 2013;3: e002791. doi:10.1136/ bmjopen-2013-002791
 8. Garner, R. (2008). Police stress: Effects of criticism management training on health. *Applied Psychology in Criminal Justice*, 4(2), 243-259.
 9. Gudjonsson, G. H. (1984). Fear of 'failure' and 'tissue damage' in police recruits, constables, sergeants and senior officers. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 5,233-236.
 10. Howard, C., Stephens C., &Tuffin, K. (2000) Unspeakable emotion: A discursive analysis of police talk about reactions to trauma. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 19, 295-314.
 11. Kirkcaldy, B. D., Cooper, C. L., Shephard, R. J., & Brown, J. S. (1994). Exercise, job satisfaction and well-being among superintendent police officers. *European Review of Applied Psychology / Revue Européenne de Psychologie Appliquée*, 44(2), 117–123.
 12. Kitayama, S., & Markus, H. R. (1991). Culture and the Self: Implications for Cognition, Emotion and Motivation. *Psychological Review*, Vol. 98, No. 2, 224-253 American Psychological Association, Inc.
 13. Kitayama, S., & Markus, H. R. (1994). The cultural construction of self and emotion: implications for social behaviour, Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
 14. Kelley, T.M. (2005), Mental health and prospective police professionals, *Policing: An International Journal*, Vol. 28 No. 1, pp. 6-29. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13639510510580959>
 15. Lamb, H. R., Weinberger, L.E. and DeCuir Jr., W. J. (2002) The police and mental health, *Psychiatric services*, Vol 53, No 10
 16. Lane, J., Le, M., Martin, K., Bickle, K., Campbell, E. and Ricciardelli, R. (2021) Police attitudes toward seeking professional mental health treatment, *Journal of police and criminal psychology*. 37: 123 – 131
 17. Maurya, M.K., and Agarwal, M. (2015) Relationship between supportive leadership, mental health status and job satisfaction of civil police constables. *Journal of the Indian academy of applied psychology*, Vol 41, No 3 (102 – 111)
 18. Maurya, M.K., and Agarwal, M. (2018) Relationship between motivation to lead, mental health status, and job satisfaction of male and female civil police constables. *Journal of police and criminal psychology* 33, 9–20. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11896-017-9230-4>
 19. McKenna, B., Furness, T., Oakes, J. and Brown, S. (2015) Police and mental health clinician partnership in response to mental health crisis: A qualitative

- study, International journal of mental health nursing, Vol 24, Issue 5 (386 – 393)
20. McLean, N. and Marshall L. A., (2010) A front line police perspective of mental health issues and services, Criminal behaviour and mental health, Vol 20, Issue 1 (62-71)
 21. Nelson, K.V. and Smith, A.P. (2016), Occupational stress, coping and mental health in Jamaican police officers. Occupational medicine, 66: 488-491s
 22. Pogrebin, M. R., & Poole, E. D. (1991). Police and tragic events: The management of emotions. Journal of Criminal Justice, 19, 395-403.
 23. Queirós C, Passos F, Bártoło A, Marques AJ, da Silva CF and Pereira A (2020) Burnout and Stress Measurement in Police Officers: Literature Review and a Study With the Operational Police Stress Questionnaire. Frontiers in Psychology 11:587. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00587
 24. Rabbing, L., Bjorkelo, B., Fostervold, K.I., Stromme, H. And Lau, B. (2022) A scoping review of stress measurements and psychometry in police research, Journal of police and criminal psychology, 37:457 – 482 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11896-022-09498-7>
 25. Rahr, S. and Rice, S.K. (2015) From Warriors to Guardians: Recommitting American Police Culture to Democratic Ideals. New Perspectives in Policing Bulletin. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, NCJ 248654.
 26. Rasdi, I. (2018), Generic and police-specific occupational risk factors of mental health and well-being among urban and sub-urban Malaysian traffic police officers, Malaysian journal of medicine and health sciences, 14(SP2): 87-94
 27. Roberts R, Wong A, Jenkins S., (2021) Mental health and well-being impacts of COVID-19 on rural paramedics, police, community nurses and child protection workers. Australian journal of rural health. Vol 29:753-767. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajr.12804>
 28. Singh S, Gupta B, Sharma D, Mishra PC. (2019) A study of stress, coping, social support, and mental health in police personnel of Uttar Pradesh. Indian journal of occupational and environmental medicine;23:73-8
 29. Stanley, I.H., Hom, M.A. and Thomas, E. (2015) A systematic review of suicidal thoughts and behaviours among police officers, firefighters, EMTs and paramedics. Clinical Psychology Review, Vol 44, 25 – 44
 30. Steadman, H. J., Deane, M. W., Borum, R., & Morrissey, J. P. (2000). Comparing outcomes of major models of police responses to mental health emergencies. *Psychiatric Services*, 51(5), 645–649. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.51.5.645>
 31. Stogner, J., Miller, B.L. and McLean, K., (2020) Police stress, mental health, and resiliency during the Covid – 19 pandemic. American journal of criminal justice, 45: 718 – 730, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-020-09548-y>
 32. Sweeney, K. (2021). Understanding emotion as a strategy in policing. The Police Journal: Theory, Practice and Principles, XX (X), 1-19.
 33. Velazquez, E. and Hernandez, M. (2019), "Effects of police officer exposure to traumatic experiences and recognizing the stigma associated with police officer mental health: A state-of-the-art review", Policing: An International Journal, Vol. 42 No. 4, pp. 711 - 724. <https://doi.org/10.1108/PIJPSM-09-2018-0147>

34. Suryasa, I. W., Rodríguez-Gómez, M., & Koldoris, T. (2021). The COVID-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Health Sciences*, 5(2), vi-ix. <https://doi.org/10.53730/ijhs.v5n2.2937>
35. Velden, P.G., Rademaker, A.R., and Vermetten E, (2013), Police officers: a high risk group for the development of mental health disturbances? A cohort study. *BMJ Open*; doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2012-001720
36. Wood, J.D. and Watson, A.C. (2017) Improving police interventions during mental health-related encounters: past, present and future, *Policing and Society*, 27:3, 289-299, DOI: 10.1080/10439463.2016.1219734
37. Gaibullaeva, N. N. (2021). The role of clinical examination early diagnosis of glaucoma. *International Journal of Health & Medical Sciences*, 4(3), 333-337. <https://doi.org/10.31295/ijhms.v4n3.1745>
38. Wolter, C., Maria, A.S., Worfel, F., Gussy, B., Lesener, T., Klieber, D. and Renneberg, B., (2019) Job demands, job resources, and well-being in police officers – a resource-oriented approach, *Journal of police and criminal psychology* 34:45-54, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11896-018-9265-1>