The Effects of Occupational Stress on the Job Performance of Police Officers in Sri Lanka

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Abstract: *Stress is common and general among the people in the world. It is experienced by every person physically and mentally in their day-to-day life. Hence, Policing is widely considered to be one of the most stressful occupations, wherein organizational and operational stressors put law enforcement officer's physical and mental health at risk. Occupational stress badly affects performance, and many studies revealed that the level of stress experienced differs with the type of job. Accordingly, this research paper demonstrates how Police Officers experienced occupational stress and its impact on their performance. This study is a mixed method study using quantitative data gathered from a questionnaire and qualitative data from five in-depth interviews. A sample of 110 police officers from other ranks was taken from the central province of Sri Lanka. Findings showed that lack of resources mainly influenced police performance. In contrast with previous empirical work, the findings demonstrate that operational issues and less career growth have an adverse influence on police performance. This study has drawn the linkage between organizational stressors, operational stressors and police performance of other rank officers in the Sri Lanka context. This research was based on the data of central province officers only is a limitation. Also, the findings are limited to the other ranking officers and therefore future research directions could be focused to the inspectorate officers, senior gazetted officers.*

Keywords: *Job stress, Operational stress, Organizational stress*

Introduction

The English word "stress" has diverse meanings. In philosophy, it is called 'frustration', and in medical sciences, it is discussed as 'tension'. The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of Current English explains the word stress as pressure or worry caused by problems in somebody`s life. Things can easily go wrong when people are under stress. Policing is widely recognized as a challenging and demanding profession. Police work is one of the most stressful occupations in the world. Police officers experience both operational and organizational stress throughout their careers. As per the idea of Police work is a psychologically stressful

occupation and as a consequence, officers may have an increased risk for diseases associated with stress. More specifically, in their 10-year longitudinal study, Violanti et al,(2006) and colleagues found that police officers compared with other service workers had elevated cortisol levels, more depressive symptoms, as well as more post - traumatic stress disorder (PTSD symptoms. In the police officers duties there is a demand of emotional engagement. Therefore, police officers need to suppress negative emotions at work. With reference to the turnover and intent to turnover among the police officers Wareham et al., 2015 revealed job stress as a one of factors caused to such a decision. Hence findings of Acquadro maran et al., (2015) show, due to the acute and chronic stressful events police officers are subjected to the impair their psychosocial wellbeing and physical health. It is argued that police officers are at high risk of mental health conditions including burnout, substance abuse as well as physical health conditions including heart disease, diabetes, early mortality, gastrointestinal disorders.

Literature Review

Padyab et al., (2016) found that male patrolling police officers experienced traumatic situations very hard, and these situations remained as a burden. The study also showed that no systematic coping strategies had been initiated by the police organization, indicating that patrolling police officers themselves must overcome such traumatic situations on their own.

Police is one of the organizations that discharge duties to establish the criminal justice system. The challenge of police work may result in poor job satisfaction, increased conflict within the department, poor job performance, resignation of experienced officers and increased departmental expense in recruiting and training new officers (Authors, 2016). Rather than increasing the number of officers or police stations, people expect police to perform the main duties such as curbing crime, narcotics, road accidents, maintaining law and order of the country while creating an environment in which day to day activities could be carried out normally. It is evident that the other rank police officers are more stressful than higher rank ones. Therefore, it is more important to focus on how the police officers in other ranks experience occupational stress and its impact on their performance.

In General, the police officers are required to render their service 7 days week, 24 hours a day and different job roles assigned by the higher officers. Sri Lanka Police was constitutionally established in 1866, control trade in city of Colombo, guard the city at nighttime were some of the tasks carried out at that time. Police is the establishment which confronted all the protests and uprisings that were unleashed against the government. When looking at the Sri Lanka Police it occupies an important place among the institutions which are instrumental in ensuring accountability and responsibility of the public on behalf of the government. As of 2022 there were 600 police stations in Sri Lanka and the number of police officers on duty at the time was nearly about 86000 including the officers of the Policespecial task force. Fighting against crime, drug enforcement, riot control, carrying investigations, keeping public security, intelligence services are few of the roles carrying out by the Sri Lanka Police. Furthermore, to perform these listed tasks 76 functional divisions were established. According to the Cadre of Sri Lanka police force, there are about 80000 officers representing the other ranks. The study by (Acquadro maran et al., 2015) showed that general level of distress was higher among non-commissioned officers, patrol officers. To understand the rigour of the stress situation the researcher conducted a pilot survey with 150 police officers. In the survey it was found out that 70% of the police officers experience extreme level of stress while rest of the officers undergoes average level of stress. According to the results of the pilot survey most of the police officers experience occupational stress which results them to have many physical, psychological and behavioral outcomes.

Research Objectives

This paper aims at achieving the following objectives.

i. To identify the prevalence of operational/ organizational stress of police officers in central province

ii. To identify the stress level experienced by police officers in other ranks

iii. To analyze the impact of stress on performance of police officers in other ranks

Research Method

A mixed method research approach was selected for this study. This is based on pragmatism research philosophy. Mixed method allows the researcher to compensate for the weakness one single approach with the strengths of the other to achieve the best results. A total of 110 other police ranks officers (Police Constables, Police Sergeants) participated as respondents in the present study. All the respondents were selected from central province of Sri Lanka including Kandy, Matale, Nuwaraeliya districts. There are lot of important organizations located in Central Province including Buddhist institutions, hotels, botanical gardens and other historical places and therefore central province was selected for this study. Hence police officers have been deployed in such places to protect the objects, archives.
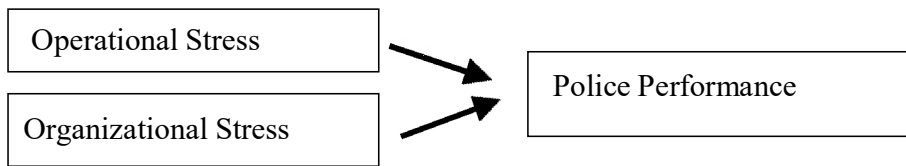

Figure 1:- Conceptual Model- Constructed by the Author based on the literature

This research examined the relationship between operational stress and organizational stress to the police performance. Based on the literature there were four indicators to describe operational stress. They are work schedule, job demand, work family balance, role strain. Organizational stress is generated due to rules, regulations and policies, work itself, leadership style of the superiors and work responsibilities. Accordingly, conceptual framework, as in the figure 1 designed to achieve the research objectives and find the solutions to the research questions. There are two independent variables were developed and in order to examine the relationship between dependent and independent variables already published questionnaire was used (MENDAGRI, 2008). Police stress presented in here captured multiple sources both on the job and within the department. Operational Police stress questionnaire consisted with 20 items which are conceptualized from the operational aspects meaning when performing the job. Organizational Police stress questionnaire consisted with 20 items which are conceptualized from the organizational aspects such as when dealing with the supervisors. Police officers respond to the measures using a 7-point Likert-like scale ranging from "no stress at all" (1) to "a lot of stress" (7). Dependent variable of police performance was measured by using 10 questions. Such as Awards received, Knowledge of departmental rules was tested through that.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis

A quantitative research approach was used to collect primary data from other rankers through administering structured questionnaires. Other rank police officers employed in the central province in Sri Lanka are included in the study. Cronbach Alpha test performed to ensure the validity and achieved 0.796, 0.775 and 0.861 for Police Performance, Operational Stress and Organizational stress respectively.

Table 1: Correlation Analysis

WS			JD	WFB	RS	OP	PP
WS	Pearson Correlation	1	.819**	.819**	-.037	.034	-.037
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.702	.722	.702
	N	110	110	110	110	110	110
JD	Pearson Correlation	.819**	1	1.000**	.011	-.007	.011
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.908	.944	.908
	N	110	110	110	110	110	110
WFB	Pearson Correlation	.819**	1.000**	1	.011	-.007	.011
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.908	.944	.908
	N	110	110	110	110	110	110
RS	Pearson Correlation	-.037	.011	.011	1	.209*	1.000**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.702	.908	.908		.028	.000
	N	110	110	110	110	110	110
OP	Pearson Correlation	.034	-.007	-.007	.209*	1	.209*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.722	.944	.944	.028		.028
	N	110	110	110	110	110	110
PP	Pearson Correlation	-.037	.011	.011	1.000**	.209*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.702	.908	.908	.000	.028	
	N	110	110	110	110	110	110

Correlations

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) between work schedule and PP is -0.037 with the significant level of 0.702 (which gives the probability of being the relationship is true is 100%). This implies that there is a significant moderate negative linear correlation between the independent variable of work schedule and the dependent variable PP. This indicates as work schedule increases, PP is decreased. r value for the JD and PP is 0.011 with the significant level of 0.908. This implies that there is a no correlation between the independent variable JD and the dependent variable PP. r value for the WFB and PP above correlation is 0.011 with the significant level of 0.908 This implies that there is a no correlation between the independent variable WFB and the dependent variable

PP. r value for the RS and PP is 1.000 with the significant level of 0.000. This implies that there is a significant strong linear correlation between the independent variable role strain and the dependent variable PP. Hence the data are perfectly linear.

r value for the organizational police is 0.209 with the significant level of 0.028. This implies that there is a weak correlation between the independent variable OP and the dependent variable PP. The findings shows that Shift work, finding time to stay in good physical condition are fully supported to the high stress in the work schedules. Working alone at night appears to be giving a moderate effect for work schedules. It was also found that fatigue has high impact on work schedule stress.

The findings proposed that traumatic events, paperwork, eating healthy at work, upholding a "higher image" in public, Negative comments from the public would have higher effect on JD stress. Further mean results indicated Over-time demands, work related activities on days off are also giving a higher impact to the JD stress.

The results from the role strains show that risk of being injured on the job, feeling like you always

have to prove yourself to the organization are contributing to significant influence to the stress level of the police officers.

Work family balance posited that managing your social life outside of work, not enough time available to spend with friends and family, Lack of understanding from family and friends about your work, making friends outside the job, Friends / family feel the effects of the stigma associated with your job would have a significant impact to the stress.

Results indicated that dealing with supervisors, Lack of resources, internal investigations, dealing the court system, the need to be accountable for doing your job, inadequate equipment were positively impacted to the organizational police stress. Excessive administrative duties, Staff shortages, Bureaucratic red tape, perceived pressure to volunteer free time are also giving high impact to the police stress. The results bring that the greatest number of police officers are receiving the awards for their good performance.

Qualitative Analysis

This study is done through two stages. Quantitative analysis was employed in the stage one while qualitative analysis was employed in the stage two. Thematic analysis is the main statistical tool to analyze the Qualitative data..

Table 2: Thematic Analysis

Theme	Indicator
Public pressure	Youth are coming to debates Pressure from known parties when investigating the facts.
Pressure from senior officers	OIC`s pressure to release certain suspects Pressure from higher officers
Political Influence	Political influences to raids against illegal activities Document preparation (B reports)
Lack of resources	Lack of Police jeeps, Stationery Less officers to perform the duties No fuel allowance for the bikes No proper vehicles Lack in Police officers Lack in chairs for sitting purposes No A4 sheets.
Leadership issues	Lack of senior police officer support OIC is lack in experience (Came from STF)
No career growth	Delay in the promotions Different operations in different times No on time promotions
Operational Issues	Continuous night patrol duties Long hours of work High workload in courts No harmony in the police No proper holidays

The above Table 2 indicates that police officers have been stressed due to the lack of resources. Accordingly, police officers lack in stationery items, police jeeps, human resources, no fuel allowance. It is very likely that police officers become stress with this organizational factor. Majority of participants from officers explained that the biggest problem for them is the high workload/volume of work. Three out of five police officers said that they feel that their career development is in a slow pace. The other two officers answered they do need to work in different operations throughout a year. Some police officers bought the view for the operational stress as pressure from the superiors including higher officers, politicians.

Table 3: Data Triangulation

Quantitative Results	Qualitative Results
Role strain (OIC special operations, ASP special operations, SSP division special operations, DIG special Operations, SDIG operations) Organizational Performance (No new expectations from the OIC Lack staff in police operations, Leadership issues)	Continuous night patrol duties Long hours of work High workload in courts No harmony in the police No proper holidays Lack of Police jeeps, Stationery items Less officers to perform the duties No fuel allowance for the bikes No proper vehicles Lack in Police officers Lack in chairs for sitting purposes No A4 sheets. Lack of senior police officer support OIC is lack in experience (Came from STF)

Triangulation results in the Table 3 showed that the findings of quantitative analysis and the qualitative analysis are quite similar. In here this strategy validated convergence of information from different sources. Staff shortage of the police has caused to increase the stress proves from both techniques.

Conclusion

Two of the most important stressors in explaining operational performance are high workload and lack in police officers to perform the police work. This is in line with previous study's (Saravanan et al., 2019) recommendations extended working hours, assign of much work in less time should have to be streamlined. This study also found a significant direct relationship between negative comments from the public would have higher effect on JD stress and organizational commitment.

It is very likely that group cohesiveness helps police officers to build a network of support from their peers, which is a critical element of stress management. Due to the job nature, police officers can hardly enjoy public holidays and spend time with family. Further to resolve the matters associated with stress, the initiative of "career breaks"(a period of time during which one choose not to work but keep the job) which is regarded by Hong Kong employees as a popular and feasible measure can be put on trial in the Sri Lanka police organization.

The findings confirmed that both quantitative and qualitative data show police organizations are tasked with a wide variety of duties and therefore, officers often encounter stressful situation. As per the findings of (Qureshi et al., 2019) Policing is already a demanding occupation and therefore police organizations should not make it more difficult by failing to minimize workplace stressors. The ineffectiveness of the police system has long been another concern. The main reason for that may be not only the problems within the police system but also other issues that have emerged outside the police system. For example, getting adequate funds for the proper functioning of the department is one of the major challenges faced by the department. While a large portion of the national budget is allocated to the defense sector, the resources allocated to the Sri Lanka police is insufficient for the many duties assigned to the department. Therefore, it is recommended to allocate enough resources to Sri Lanka Police. Other serious stress found is that police is that unwanted influence of 'politicians'. This may be the result of several decades of mal administration. However, for whatever reason, there has been serious mistrust of the department. This is mainly because the police are supposed to operate on a top-down, command-and-control principle, but they don't. Responsibility doesn't work that way.

External forces are undermining the internal command structure and those in charge of the internal command structure have succumbed to this interference. Therefore, independent police commissioned should be further strengthened.

Implications

Senior Gazzetted officers in the Sri Lanka police or Human Resources Management division should consider stress symptoms of the police officers and its effects on police performance, turnover intention. One implication is that a senior managerial focus on rewarding for good works is positively affect in the police performance. This could be accomplished by training officer in charges or superintendents to adopt a positive mindset and positive communication in the workplace, which in turn will result a positive influence on their subordinates. Further workshops should be conducted by National Police Academy to enhance the police officer's psychological capacity to workout with ongoing challenges and demands.

Future Research Direction

More research on this issue should be undertaken with police officers at different levels in Sri Lanka Police to explore the generalizability of findings. Also, scholar believes that further research could offer more insight into individual stressors.

Finally, results of this study are based on responses of officers from central province Sri Lanka. A limitation of this study is that such sample may not be representative of all Sri Lanka Police. Future research may be conducted to investigate the generalizability of the findings of this study. There are few limitations of this study. The study findings are based on responses of 110 officers from Central Province in Sri Lanka. Results may not be representative of all SL police. Further the results are not covered the gazette officers responses.

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