

Depression, Anxiety and Stress of Police Officers in Sensitive and Insensitive Police Stations

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Abstract

Policing is globally considered the most dangerous profession for mental health. A part from the routine psychosocial stressors, the police officers of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan have been additionally facing challenges caused by terrorism and war against terror. The current study, within the same perspective, was carried out to measure how appointment at sensitive or insensitive police stations could create differences in the most common psychological problems i.e. depression, anxiety and stress. The inquiry included 315 police officers from 3 major districts of the understudied province. Depression Anxiety and Stress Scale (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) was administered. It was hypothesized that police officers appointed at sensitive police stations would project higher levels of depression, anxiety and stress as compared with police officers appointed at insensitive police stations. The findings confirmed the hypothesis highly significantly and were consistent with the similar studied carried out in other parts of the world.

Keywords: Police, Police Stations, Depression, Anxiety, Stress, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

INTRODUCTION

Maintaining law and order is not an easy task at all. Policing, a highly stressful occupation (Violante, 1983; Norvell, Hills, & Murrin, 1993; Burke, 1994;; Kirkcaldy & Furnham, 1995; Carlier, Lamberts & Gersons, 1997) is the most dangerous profession worldwide (Axel & Valle, 1979) and involves several physical and emotional risks (Schwartz & Schwartz, 1981; Kopel & Friedman, 1999; Stotland, 1991). There can be a series of traumatic situations faced by police officers which may harm them physically or psychologically e.g. witnessing riots, injuries, deaths, bombing, shooting, etc. (McCafferty, Godofredo, Domingo & McCafferty, 1990). Public and political pressures, on the other hand, increase their stress even more (Violanti & Paton, 1999).

Researchers in Pakistan have not yet unfortunately investigated the psychological problems of police. These problems, however, have been an interesting area for researchers worldwide. Psychological problems or mental disorders have a wide variety ranging from mild levels of stress to mental

retardation and schizophrenia. Studies have linked various stressors of police work to psychological distress, depression, anxiety, alcoholism, burnout, cardiac disorders, family and marital problems, etc. (Biggam, Power, & MacDonald, 1997; Kop, Euwema, & Schaufeli, 1999; Loo, 1999; Territo & Vetter, 1981; Violanti, 1992). Evidence also suggests that police officers are at increased risk for suicide (Violanti, 2004; Violanti, Castellano, O'Rourke, & Paton, 2006; Kposowa, 1999; Charbonneau, 2000; Darensburg et al., 2006; Hartwig and Violanti, 1999). Depression, anxiety and stress are considered as the most commonly diagnosed psychological problems in almost every population (Ollendick & Yule, 1990; Davies, Norman, Cortese & Malla, 1995; Brown, Chorpita, Korotitsch & Barlow, 1997; Farmer, 1998). Researcher have specifically studied the relationship between these problems and work environment or work pressure (e.g. Karasek, 1979; Caplan, 1994; Kawakami et al., 1996; Bennet, Williams, Page, Hood, & Woollard, 2004) and have found that depression, anxiety and stress lead to decreased or negative performance at workplace (e.g. Poole, 1993; Seaward,

1999; Greenberg, 1999; Cavanaugh, Boswell, Roehling & Boudreau, 2000). Moreover, depression, anxiety and stress are also responsible for dissatisfaction with life (Youngren & Lewinsohn, 1980; Kessler et al., 1994), quality of life (Norvell, Hills & Murrin, 1993) and social interaction (Alden & Phillips, 1990).

The data of the current study was collected in 2011 when the police force of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (formerly North West Frontier Province of Pakistan) was facing several new obstacles on the line of duty due to a significant wave of terrorism. There were some police stations, usually urban, which were perceived to be comparatively more sensitive and risky to work at. The police stations in remote villages, on the other hand, were not facing terrorism related extra loads. The study, therefore, intended to find out if the police officers working in sensitive police stations differ in having depression, anxiety and stress as compared to the officers working in insensitive stations. It was hypothesized that the officers working in sensitive stations would have higher levels of depression, anxiety and stress as compared with their counterparts. The study was thought to be the very first of its nature in Pakistan having a significant contribution to the existing body of scientific knowledge and a proper contribution to help the stakeholders plan well.

METHOD

Participants

The research participants were 315 randomly selected police officers who further included officers in sensitive stations ($n=180$) and officers in insensitive stations ($n=135$). The participants belonged to districts of Peshawar, Abbottabad and Mardan of Khyber Pukhtoonkhwa province of Pakistan.

Instrument

Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995)

The Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS) comprises of 42 items. It is a self-report inventory that deals with three different but relevant factors i.e. depression, anxiety, and stress. Each of the three DASS scales contains 14 items, divided into subscales of 2-5 items with similar content. The Depression scale measures dysphoria, hopelessness, devaluation of life, self-deprecation, lack of interest/involvement,

anhedonia, and inertia. The Anxiety scale measures autonomic arousal, skeletal muscle effects, situational anxiety, and subjective experience of anxious affect. The Stress scale is sensitive to levels of chronic non-specific arousal. It measures difficulty in relaxing, nervous arousal, and being easily upset/agitated, irritable/over-reactive and impatient. Respondents are asked to use 4-point severity/frequency scales to rate the extent to which they have experienced each state over the past week. Scores for Depression, Anxiety and Stress are calculated by summing the scores for the relevant items. Gamma coefficients that represent the weight of each scale on the overall factor (total score) are .71 for depression, .86 for anxiety, and .88 for stress. Anxiety and stress may weight higher than depression on the common factor as they are more highly correlated and, therefore, dominate the definition of this common factor (Lovibond and Lovibond, 1995). Reliability of the three scales is considered appropriate and test-retest reliability is similarly considered adequate with .71 for depression, .79 for anxiety and .81 for stress (Brown, Chorpita, Korotitsch, & Barlow, 1997). Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses have sustained the proposition of the three factors ($p < .05$; Brown, Chorpita, Korotitsch, & Barlow, 1997). The DASS anxiety scale correlates .81 with the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI), and the DASS Depression scale correlates .74 with the Beck Depression Scale (BDI).

Procedure

After acquiring a written permission from the Inspector General of the Frontier Police Force, the participants of the research were individually approached by the researcher in three districts of the province i.e. Peshawar, Abbottabad and Mardan. The officers in-charge of different police stations facilitated the research procedure. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their consent to participate was obtained. The participants responded to the instrument in individual settings and the issues of confidentiality and secrecy were also made clear to them. Demographic information was collected after establishing a satisfactory level of rapport with them. This information did not include their identities. The instructions which were already mentioned in the instrument were also made clear to them. The researcher was available for the respondent in case the respondent needed help in translating/ understanding

Depression, Anxiety and Stress of Police Officers in Sensitive and Insensitive Police Stations

difficult words. The subjects and the facilitators were acknowledged for their cooperation. The scores obtained were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

RESULTS

To measure the reliability of the instrument used in the study i.e. Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS), the following analyses were made:

Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha reliability of Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale and its sub scales

Scale	No. of Items	Alpha
DASS overall	42	.910
Depression	14	.782
Anxiety	14	.741
Stress	14	.768

The Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS) was found reliable by measuring its reliability on Cronbach's alpha whereas the Cronbach's alpha reliability for the overall scale was excellent (.910); and for its subscales i.e. depression (.782), anxiety

(.741), and stress (.768) was acceptable.

To measure the difference in Depression of the police officers working in sensitive and insensitive police stations, the scores of the two groups were compared as under:

Table 2. Means, standard deviations and t-value of the Depression scores of police officers in Sensitive and Insensitive Police Stations on Depression, Anxiety & Stress Scale

Group	N	M	SD	t-value
Officers in Sensitive Stations	180	24.46	5.72	8.36
Officers in Insensitive Stations	135	18.72	6.39	

df= 313; p<.001

Table 2 reveals highly significant difference in the depression scores of police officers working in sensitive and insensitive police stations (t= 8.36, p<.001). The officers working in sensitive police stations had higher levels of depression (M=24.46, SD=5.72) as compared to the officers

working in insensitive police stations (M=18.72, SD=6.39).

To measure the difference in Anxiety of the police officers working in sensitive and insensitive police stations, the scores of the two groups were compared as under:

Table 3. Means, standard deviations and t-value of the Anxiety scores of police officers in Sensitive and Insensitive Police Stations on Depression, Anxiety & Stress Scale

Group	n	M	SD	t-value
Officers in Sensitive Stations	180	25.02	5.77	5.90
Officers in Insensitive Stations	135	21.08	5.99	

df= 313; p<.001

Table 3 reveals highly significant difference in the anxiety scores of police officers working in sensitive and insensitive police stations (t= 5.90, p<.001). The officers working in sensitive police stations had higher levels of anxiety (M=25.02, SD=5.77) as compared to the officers working in

insensitive police stations (M=21.08, SD=5.99).

To measure the difference in Stress of the police officers working in sensitive and insensitive police stations, the scores of the two groups were compared as under:

Table 4. Means, standard deviations and t-value of the Stress scores of police officers in Sensitive and Insensitive Police Stations on Depression, Anxiety & Stress Scale

Group	n	M	SD	t-value
Officers in Sensitive Stations	180	24.61	6.20	4.44
Officers in Insensitive Stations	135	21.55	5.84	

df= 313; p<.001

Table 4 reveals highly significant difference in the stress scores of police officers working in sensitive and insensitive police stations ($t= 4.44, p<.001$). The officers working in sensitive police stations had higher levels of stress ($M=24.61, SD=6.20$) as compared to the officers working in insensitive police stations ($M=21.55, SD=5.84$).

DISCUSSION

The results of the current study revealed that police officers working in sensitive police stations had higher levels of depression, anxiety and stress as compared to the officers working in insensitive stations. The nature of duty station surely plays a vital role in increasing or decreasing workload, employees' performance and job satisfaction; thereby putting its impact of employee's mental health. A workplace 'stressor' is a significant feature and is associated with the work environment (Cox & Mackay, 1981). Workload, on the other hand, is reported to be negatively related to job satisfaction and is positively related to depression, anxiety and irritation (French, Caplan & Van Harrison, 1982). Police officers, when transferred or placed at those police stations which are not preferred by them or which require more risk, are more prone to psychological distress. Rothman and Pienaar (2003) reported that the environmental aspect of policing is a significant source of stress. Studies among South African police officers by Rothman and Van Rensburg (2002) also indicated decreased levels of job satisfaction and high levels of occupational stress associated with the work surroundings. The nature of the external work environment differs from place to place as different localities may not have similar crime. Some Police Stations may require additional time and involvement of the officers as compared to other stations. Previous research indicates that stress results from a negative workplace environment and interactions at work are recognized as a major problem for police officers (Waters & Ussery, 2007; Malach-Pines & Keinan, 2007). In addition to the operational stressors inherent in police work, numerous studies have pointed out that factors related to organizational structure and climate can be an even greater source of stress for the police officer (Cooper, Davidson & Robinson, 1982; Kirkcaldy & Furnham, 1995). Shift schedules that disrupt normal sleep patterns and social life, authoritarian management styles, poor interpersonal relationships with supervisors, interdepartmental politics, lack of adequate planning and resources, lack of promotion and transfer opportunities, excessive

paperwork, lack of autonomy in performing duties and lack of recognition for work accomplishments are among the organizational stressors faced by members of the police force (Cooper, Davidson, & Robinson, 1982; Stotland & Pendleton, 1989).

Apart from the increased responsibilities imposed on the police officers in the war against terror, the element of terror itself was seemed to be commonly present. Within the perspective of the overall security concerns in the understudied province, some police stations, usually in the urban / military settlements, were considered to be more dangerous as compared to others. Counterterrorism was a new phenomenon for the police and the officers were not formally trained in the psychosocial issues involved in combating against terrorism. It was a common observation that the law enforcement agencies including police and military were more "at risk" and more threatened as compared to the general public. The findings of the current study projected the same perceptions and reported that the officers working in sensitive police stations had higher levels of depression, anxiety and stress as compared with their counterparts. The study also intended to sensitize the police makers and police department to take significant measures to uplift the mental health of the officers so that they could perform better.

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