



RESEARCH ARTICLE

ON-THE-JOB STRESS AND STRESSORS AMONG POLICE OFFICERS OF A METROPOLITAN CITY OF PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

Background: The experience of work stress can cause unusual and dysfunctional behaviour at work and contribute to poor physical and mental health. No job is immune from stress, but for the law enforcement officer, the strains and tensions experienced at work are unique, often extreme, and sometimes unavoidable. The study was intended to explore the workplace stressors responsible for stress among police officers working in Karachi which is a Cosmopolitan City of Pakistan.

Material and Methods: This descriptive cross sectional study was conducted among police officers working at selected police stations from all zones of Karachi, Pakistan. A sample of 146 police officers was selected through random sampling. Data were collected through a structured adopted self-administered questionnaire and analyzed using IBM SPSS version 18.

Results: The mean \pm SD age of study respondents was 35 ± 5 years. The mean \pm SD duration of marriage was 10.56 ± 5.44 years. Majority (85%) belonged to middle socio-economic class. Significant positive relationship has been found between the Job Demand and Stress (correlation coefficient = 0.961, sig at $p < 0.01$), Job Control and Stress (correlation coefficient = 0.937, sig at $p < 0.01$), Relationship issues and Stress (correlation coefficient = 0.939, sig at $p < 0.01$), Role uncertainty/Conflict and Stress (correlation coefficient = 0.939, sig at $p < 0.01$), Change and Stress (correlation coefficient = 0.898, sig at $p < 0.01$), and Lack of support and Stress (correlation coefficient = 0.939, sig at $p < 0.01$).

Conclusion: The current study concludes that the stress in police officers (assumed dependent variable) was highly correlated with the independent variables like Job demand, Control over one's job, relationship with in and outside the organization, role uncertainty and conflicts, changing environment with rapid pace and the lack of support for a police officer in his office, peer, family and the society.

INTRODUCTION

Police officers' job is considered to be one of the most stressful. It is hard to disagree with that assessment, as officers themselves report high rates of divorce, alcoholism, suicide, and other emotional and health problems (Burke, 1989; Delprino *et al.*, 1997). Work stress is recognized world-wide as a major challenge to workers' health and the healthiness of their organizations because workers who are stressed are also more likely to be unhealthy, poorly motivated, less productive and less safe at work. Their organizations are less likely to be successful in a competitive market (http://www.who.int/occupational_health/publications/en/oehstress.pdf). No job is immune from stress, but for the law enforcement officer, the strains and tensions experienced at work are unique, often extreme, and sometimes unavoidable (Delprino *et al.*, 1997). Exposure to violence, suffering, and death is inherent to the profession of law enforcement officer.

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There are other sources of stress as well. Officers who deal with offenders on a daily basis may view some sentences as too lenient; they may perceive the public's opinion of police performance to be unfavorable; they often are required to work mandatory, rotating shifts; and they may not have enough time to spend with their families. Police officers also face unusual, often highly disturbing, situations, such as dealing with a child homicide victim or the survivors of vehicle crashes (Leonor Boulton-Johnson, 1991). The nature of the organizations in which police officers work may also be a source of stress. Police departments historically have been structured along military lines and as a result often have been rigidly hierarchical and highly bureaucratic, with management styles that can be inflexible. Although in many instances police culture is changing, but opportunities for advancement are limited, and despite the ubiquity of the personal computer, a large amount of paperwork still is required. The current study was conducted at selected police stations from all zones of Karachi to identify the workplace stressors causing stress among police officers.

Karachi is the capital of the province of Sindh, and the largest city in Pakistan. The city is located on the coast of the Arabian Sea and largest port of the country. The metropolitan area along with its suburbs comprises of the population approximately 20 million, spread over 3,530 square kilometers. The city credits its growth to the mixed populations of economic and political migrants and refugees from different national, provincial, linguistic and religious origins. Karachi is divided into eighteen towns and three zones including, West Zone, East Zone and South Zone. The generated evidence from our study can be used for improvement of work practices or circumstances at organizational level by applying strategies for managing existing work stress focus on combating the identified risks.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A quantitative approach using a cross sectional descriptive survey design was chosen for the study. The study population in this research comprised of police officers working at selected police stations from all zones of Karachi, Pakistan. The participants were recruited using a random sampling technique during six months from June 1st to June 30th, 2013 through database available at Sindh police headquarter. Sample size of 146 was calculated by using Openepi software for cross section study design. Data was collected through a structured adopted self-administered questionnaire which were distributed and collected back after filling at Sindh Police Headquarters. Stress Triggers were measured through six items of stressors which were tested by “University and College Union of United Kingdom ([www.ucu.org.uk/ media/docs/i/s/ stresstool_ question.doc](http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/docs/i/s/stresstool_question.doc)). and “National Institute of Occupational Safety & Health, Projects run in 2001 in Canada (<http://www.noish.com.my/examination/index.html>).

The questions in the questionnaire are divided into three sections.

Section –A is designed to collect respondents’ demographic information.

Section –B comprises of 61 questions .Respondents will be asked about their understanding and awareness of stressors presence in their work environment. Stress Triggers like Job demands (or expectations), Job Control (work hours), relationship, role uncertainty, change and support.

Section-C comprises of 20 questions covering various aspects of stress.

Two scales were used in designing the questionnaire for this research. These are: Nominal Scale (Gender, Age etc. and Yes/No questions) and Interval scale (Likert scale). Total 146 responses were entered and analyzed through SPSS version 18 software. Descriptive and inferential statistics (Correlation, Regression analysis and Scatter Diagram) were run to investigate the relationship between independent and dependent variables.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Research Ethics committee of Hamdard Institute of Management Sciences provided ethical approval for the study.

Informed verbal consent was obtained and all of the participants were informed about the nature of the study and use of the data prior to the interview. The participants were assured of absolute confidentiality regarding the information they gave.

RESULTS

A total of 146 police officers consented for the study after assurance of confidentiality of data. The mean ± SD age of our respondents was 35 ± 5 years. The mean ± SD duration of marriage was 10.56 ± 5.44 years. Majority (85%) belonged to middle socio-economic class. Results show that the mean values are high i.e. more than 3.465, which identifies that the responses mostly fall in between the categories of stressful and very stressful, as the maximum attainable value is 4 on the Likert scale.

This reflects that all the understudy independent variables (Job demand, Job Control, Relationship issues, Role, Change and Lack of Support) were deemed stressful to the majority of the respondents. (Table 1) The standard deviation remained between 0.42431and 0.46898. These values of standard deviation indicated that the responses were consistently close to each other. More or less respondents were facing similar and stressful impacts of stressors resulted into consistency of responses around a high mean value with least variation which signifies a similar response towards perceiving impact from stressors.

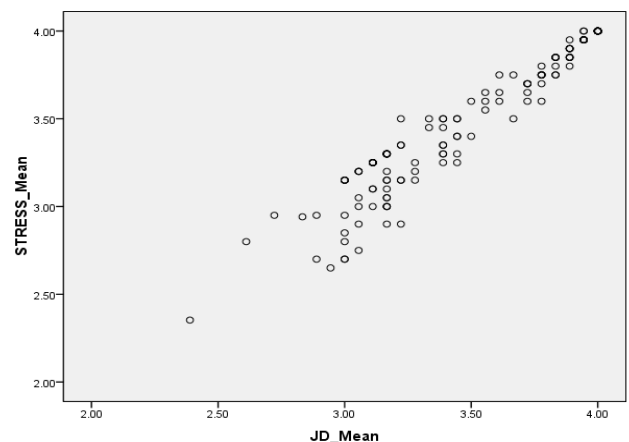


Figure 1. Scatter plot of job demand and stress

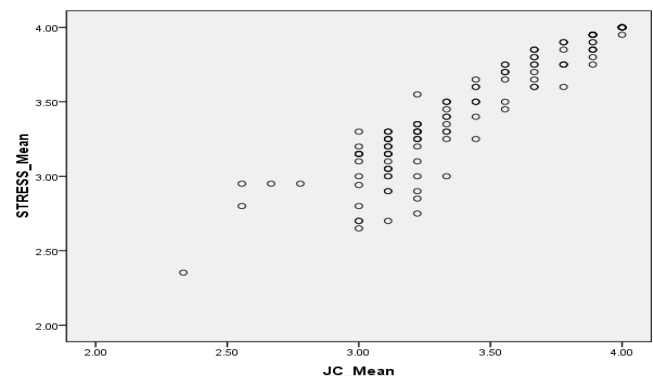


Figure 2. Scatter plot - job control and stress

Table 1.Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Job Demand	146	2.44	4.00	3.5641	.45453
Job Control	146	2.44	4.00	3.5642	.45322
Relation	146	2.44	4.00	3.5642	.45582
Role Uncertainty	146	2.38	4.00	3.5440	.46898
Change	146	2.50	4.00	3.5810	.45136
Support	146	2.67	4.00	3.6163	.42431
Stress	146	2.40	4.00	3.5486	.46424
Valid N (listwise)	146				

Table 2. Correlation (All Variables)

Variables		JD_ Mean	JC_ Mean	RSP_ Mean	ROLE_ Mean	CHANGE_ Mean	SUPPORT_ Mean	STRESS_ Mean
JD_Mean	Pearson Correlation	1	.966**	.974**	.970**	.919**	.895**	.961**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	146	146	146	146	146	146	146
JC_Mean	Pearson Correlation	.966**	1	.974**	.939**	.877**	.831**	.937**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	146	146	146	146	146	146	146
RSP_Mean	Pearson Correlation	.974**	.974**	1	.964**	.908**	.873**	.939**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	146	146	146	146	146	146	146
ROLE_Mean	Pearson Correlation	.970**	.939**	.964**	1	.878**	.867**	.915**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	146	146	146	146	146	146	146
CHANGE_Mean	Pearson Correlation	.919**	.877**	.908**	.878**	1	.844**	.898**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	146	146	146	146	146	146	146
SUPPORT_Mean	Pearson Correlation	.895**	.831**	.873**	.867**	.844**	1	.882**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	146	146	146	146	146	146	146
STRESS_Mean	Pearson Correlation	.961**	.937**	.939**	.915**	.898**	.882**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	146	146	146	146	146	146	146

Table 3. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.967 ^a	.935	.932	.10539

a. Predictors: (Constant), SUPPORT_Mean, JC_Mean, CHANGE_Mean, ROLE_Mean, RSP_Mean, JD_Mean

Correlation

In Correlation coefficient we measured the degree of linear association between two variables.

The data shown in table 2 clearly reflects that all the independent variables seems to be highly associated with the dependent variable in a positive linear relation (values ranging between 0.831 and 0.974).

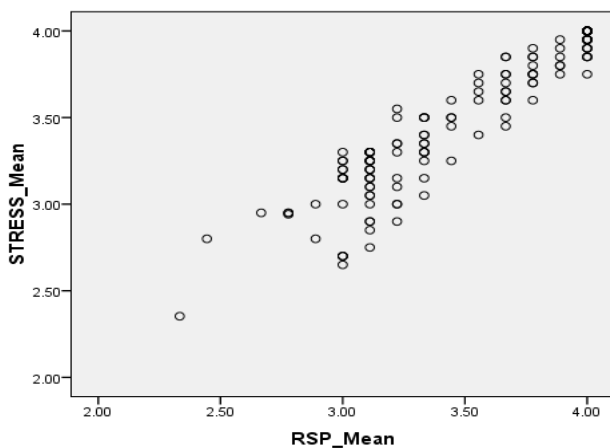


Figure 3. scatter plot – relationship & stress

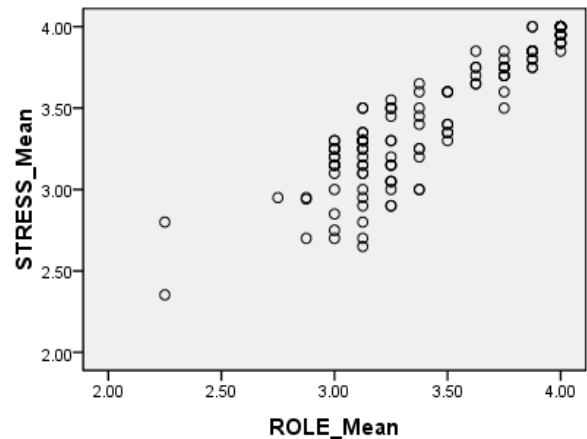


Figure 4. Scatter plot – role uncertainty & stress

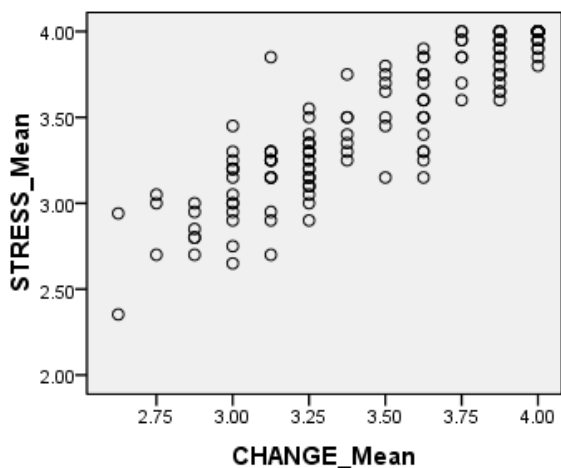


Figure 5. 4.12.5 Scatter Plot – Change& Stress

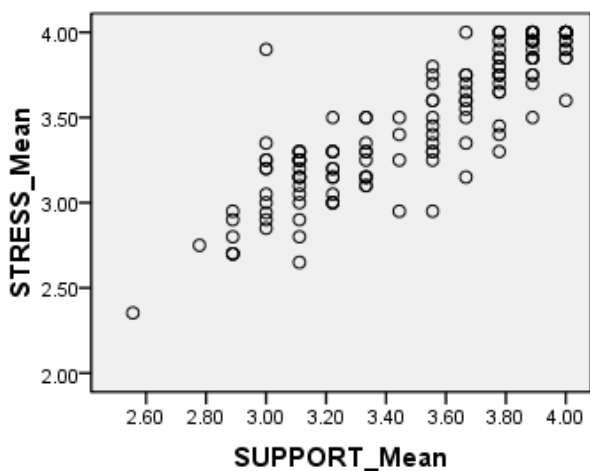


Figure 6. Scatter plot – lack of support & stress

Regression Analysis

The regression analysis of independent variables (Job demand, Job control, Relationship issues, Role uncertainty, Change and Lack of support and dependent variable Stress was done. Table 3 reflects the model summary. Over all the stress triggers explain 93.5% variation in the stress (R squared shows the proportion of variation of the dependent variable explained by the regression model. It ranges from 0 to 1. Small values indicate that the model does not fit the data well and vice versa. In order to ensure that model is more closely fit to population, adjusted R squared corrects R squared and also reflects the goodness of fit. The R squared values 0.935 and Adjusted R squared values 0.932, both these values ultimately support that the model is a fit.

Scatter Diagram

Scatter plot were run for each independent variable and dependent variable to confirm the findings.

DISCUSSION

Organizational stress is recognized world-wide as a major challenge to workers’ health and the healthiness of their organizations.

No job is immune from stress, but for the law enforcement officer, the strains and tensions experienced at work are unique, often extreme, and sometime unavoidable. Stress results from a mismatch between the demands and pressures on the person, on the one hand, and their knowledge and abilities, on the other. It challenges their ability to cope with work. This includes not only situations where the pressures of work exceed the worker’s ability to cope but also where the worker’s knowledge and abilities are not sufficiently utilized and that is a problem for them. Our study results are in agreement with the previous studies by Greenhaus *et al.* (1987), Miller & Ellis (1990) and Roberts *et al.* (1997) that the Job demand bear significant influence on stress of police officers. Excessive and otherwise unmanageable demands and pressures can be caused by poor management and unsatisfactory working conditions.

Similarly, these things can result in officers not receiving sufficient support from others or not having enough control over their work and its pressures. This study found that the job control positively affects the stress of police officers. This also supports the findings of Robin Jacobs (Robbins, 2001), Karasek and Jones & Bright (2001), Van Yperen, N. & Hagedoorn, (2003). A healthy job is likely to be one where the pressures on employees are appropriate in relation to their abilities and resources, to the amount of control they have over their work, and to the support they receive from people who matter to them. As health is not merely the absence of disease or infirmity but a positive state of complete physical, mental and social well-being (WHO, 1986), a healthy working environment is one in which there is not only an absence of harmful conditions but an abundance of health promoting ones.

Our study results reveal that the relationship issues substantially influence the stress of police officers. Similar results were documented by Tepper *et al* in 2001 and J¹⁵. Organiz. Behav in 2002. The current study observed that the role uncertainties /conflicts aggravate to the stress of police officers. This also validates the findings of Roberts *et al.*, (1997), Kammeyer-Mueller and Wanberg, (2003). We evaluated the relationship between the change and stress by identifying the continuous change of environment positively affects the stress of police officers. This finding is in agreement with a study conducted by Marcelina. H in 2012 (Marcelina Hardy, 2016). The more support officers receive from others at work, or in relation to work, the less likely they are to experience work stress. Our study further reported that the lack of support also act as a protagonist of stress among police officers. The similar studies done by Mirovisky & Ross (1986), Eugene (1999), North *et al.* (1996) and Vahtera *et al.*, (2000) also reported that the same findings.

Conclusion

The current study along with its limitations and strengths concludes that the stress in police officers (assumed dependent variable) was highly correlated with the independent variables like Job demand, Control over one’s job, relationship with in and outside the organization, role uncertainty and conflicts, changing environment with rapid pace and the lack of support for a police officer in his office, peer, family and the society.

Recommendation

Police officers who are stressed are also more likely to be unhealthy, poorly motivated and less productive at work.

There is a need of continuous assessment of risks to health, the provision of appropriate information and training on health issues and the availability of health promoting organizational support practices and structures to the law and enforcement employees. A healthy work environment is one in which health and health promotion a priority and part of their working lives.

Limitation of Study

The participation in the study was voluntary so the data gathered for this study may not be generalized.

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Conflict of Interest

We have no pecuniary or other personal interest, direct or indirect, in any matter that raises or may raise a conflict with our duties as researchers.

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