Sources of Stress among Police Officials with special emphasis on Bangalore City Police: A Qualitative Investigation

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Abstract: *Every human being encounters stress in one or other way, sometimes it reinforces people to achieve their goals and for some people it makes them to damage their life. Hence, stress is quite unavoidable in nature for every individual for some time or the other. Now a day's most of the organization's major concern is to manage the stress level of their employees in order to run their business efficiently. Most of the service sectors are people centric. Stress level will be more in this sector as it deals with services to the diverse people, one such department is law enforcement department, i.e., police department. Everyone feels stressed from time to time. The difference is, with most people, it's momentary. There's an end date. But for police, it's something that's related to the negative pressures that come with wearing the badge. This paper reports the results of 25 semi-structured in depth interviews carried out with police personnel housed at the police stations in Bangalore city of Karnataka, India. The purpose of the research was to identify factors that resulted in subjective experience of stress among police personnel. The results of the in-depth interview with the Inspectors and Sub-Inspectors at the police station revealed several factors that could be treated as sources of stress. As guided by thematic analysis, several categories of possible stressors were observed. These categories were found to be associated with the work, organisation and community. This paper concludes with the findings, discussions and future implications.*

Key Words: *Police, stress, potential stressors, work place, Work pressure, Bangalore city Police, Family life.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

With the winds of change, altering work roles, procedures, policies and expectations; jobs have become more complex and highly demanding. In such a competitive work environment, one of the most common side effects of work life is stress. Stress has been defined differently by several academicians over several decades. Modern definitions of stress recognize that it is a personal experience caused by pressure or demands on an individual, and impacts upon the individual's ability to cope or rather, his/her perception of that ability (Blauget al., 2007). Several professions, especially those related to human services such as nurses, psychiatrists, counselors, police etc. have been found to be prone to stress and strain (Webster, 2012). Among the human services occupations, police work has been found to be the most stressful (Burke, 1993;Anshel, 2000). In fact, psychologists agree that a police officer is under stress and pressure unequalled by any other profession (Somodevilla, 1978). Policemen can be viewed as social surgeons who make interventions in social situations to preserve law and order of the state. The job of a policeman has been said to be unique as one deliberately engages himself for which he is feared, hated and at times reviled or even assaulted in the ordinary performance of their duties(Symonds, 1970). To carry out their job of maintaining law and order and engaging in investigations, they are required to be detached, unemotional, scientific andcautious (Mathur, 1995). Considering the nature and demands of their work, police personnel are certainly prone to experiencing stress.

Stress in such a profession can be debilitating not only to the individual but also to the police organisation and the community at large. At an individual level, studies have indicated that police officers experiencing stress reported poor physical and subjective health (Berg, Hem,Lau, & Ekeberg, 2005; Kirkcaldy, Cooper & Ruffalo,1995), burnout (Brown, Cooper & Kirkcaldy, 1996),showed symptoms of depression, anxiety and drug use. Cases of suicide attempts have also been observed as an outcome of pressure and stress in the police occupation (Anshel, 2000). Work related consequences of police stress included absenteeism from work (Wright & Saylor,1991), job dissatisfaction (Norvell, Belles & Hills, 1998)and retirement at an early age (Kop, Euwema & Schaufeli,1999). Apart from the loss faced by the organisation, it is the society at large which suffers. As a result of the job, police personnel turn out to be cynical and engage in misconduct especially with the public (Vadackumchery, 1998; Niederhoffer, 1967). A stressed police force may indirectly manifest an increased turbulence in law and order and elevated crime rates. Police stress has been identified with destructive outcomes such as use of force towards the public (Burke& Mikkelsen, 2005) and immoral and callous behavior towards civilians and victims. This section of the paper elaborated on the consequences of police stress and how it impairs the personnel, organisation and the society. The following section, based on prior literature will examine the stressors in the police context.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Hans Selye's Classic "The Stress of Life" describes the effect of long-term environmental threats he calls "stressors." Selye maintains that the unrelieved effort to cope with stressors can lead to heart disease, high blood pressure, ulcers, digestive disorders, and headaches. Stressors in police work fall into four categories:

- Stresses inherent in police work.
- Stresses arising internally from police department practices and policies.
- External stresses stemming from the criminal justice system and the society at large.
- Internal stresses confronting individual officers.

John M. Violanti, in his attempt referred as the Buffalo Cardio-Metabolic Occupational Police Stress (BCOPS) study, wherein more than 400 police officers have participated in the study. The clinical examination involves questionnaires on lifestyle and psychological factors, such as depression and PTSD, in addition to measures of bone density and body composition, ultrasounds of brachial and carotid arteries, salivary cortisol samples and blood samples. The officers also wear a small electronic device to measure the quantity and quality of sleep throughout a typical police shift cycle. The results from Violanti's pilot studies have shown, among other findings, that officers over age 40 had a higher 10-year risk of a coronary event compared to average national standards; 72 percent of female officers and 43 percent of male officers, had higher-than recommended cholesterol levels; and police officers as a group had higher than average pulse rates and diastolic blood pressure.

A study **(Kumar, 1995**) reported insufficient time for the family as the top-ranking stress or mentioned by 55 police men of Hyderabad city. It is important to recognize that the spouse and family are significant contributors to the success or failure in a law enforcement career. The marital and family strife, discord and unresolved emotional problems can negatively influence the police officers" development, motivation, productivity and effectiveness. The problems and frustrations encountered on the job may be brought home to the family. Conversely, an unsatisfactory home life can adversely affect the job performance and dealings with the public.

According to a study conducted by **Central Road Research Institute and the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (1990),** traffic policemen exposed for long hours to auto exhaust gases suffer from lung disorders, reduced breathing capacity, excessive carbon monoxide in blood and several other ailments. It was found that traffic policemen were subjected to as much as 200 to 500 percent larger quantities of individual noise pollution than the allowable normal level ina24-hourday. The experts commented that those policemen working constantly in adverse and extreme environmental conditions suffer damage to health and efficiency in the short as well as long run (Hindustan Times, 13.12.90). Policemen are a high-risk group exposed to a physical working environment, which also deserves greater attention than it has received so far. A "hazard allowance" maybe an innovative idea given the harmful effects on health and well-being. Out of a total of 585 police personnel killed on duty during 1994, 24 were killed in dacoit operations or other raids, 16 by riotous mobs, 161 by other criminals, 17 on border duties and 367 in accidents. It is surprising that researchers in India have overlooked this important aspect of the police job environment as a potential stressor.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAME WORK:

3.1. Meaning of stress:

Stress is Associate inevitable and ineluctable part of life because of increasing complexities and fight in living standards. The speed at that amendment is going down within the world these days is actually overwhelming and breathe taking. In the quick ever-changing world of these days, no individual is free from stress and no profession is stress free. Everyone experiences stress. The idea of stress was initial introduced within the life sciences by Selye Hans in 1936. It was derived from the Latin word 'stringere'; it meant the expertise of physical hardship, starvation, torture and pain. Selye Hans, 1936 outlined stress as "the non-specific response of the body to any demand placed upon it". Further, stress was outlined as "any external event or drive that threatens to upset the scheme equilibrium"(Selye Hans, 1956). Another definition given by Stephen Robbins (1999) stress has been stated as "a dynamic condition in which an individual is confronted with an opportunity, constraint or demand related to what he / she wishes and that the result is gave the impression to be each unsure and vital." Stress affects not only our physical health but our mental well being too. To with success manage stress in everyday lives, individual can learn to relax and enjoy life. The best thanks to manage stress is to forestall it. This may not be always possible. So, successive best things area unit to scale back stress and create life easier.

3.2. DEFINITIONS OF STRESS:

According to Selye (1956) stress is "any external event or internal drive which threatens to upset the organismic equilibrium".

Wolf and Goodell (1968) defined stress as a dynamic state within an organism in response to a demand for adaptation.

Cofer and Appley (1964) defined stress as a state of an organism where he perceives that his wellbeing is endangered and that he must direct all his energies to its protection.

Lazarus (1966) referred stress a state of imbalance with in an organism that is elicited by an actual/perceived disparity between environmental demands and the organism's capacity to cope with these demands; and is manifested through variety of physiological, emotional and behavioral responses.

McGrath (1970) defined stress as a perceived imbalance between demand and response capacity under conditions where failure to meet demand has important consequences.

Cox (1978) has described three classes of definitions. Stress can be variously thought of as a response, i.e. the stress response to an extreme stimulus; as a stimulus i.e. as the stressor itself as an intervening variable.

4. METHODOLOGY:

Since stress and its experience is a subjective concern, any investigation into stress is best treated qualitatively through narratives, enabling an understanding of the lived experiences of the participants (Bryman, 2004).Thus, to meet the objective of the study, the authors devised a semi-structured interview schedule. The questions in the interview schedule were guided by factors identified as stressors in the past literature. A total of 25 police personnel were interviewed, out of which 15 were Inspectors and 10 Sub-Inspectors working in 8 different police stations for Bangalore City Police. Sampling technique employed for the study was purposive sampling as the inclusion criteria for the study was police personnel with minimum 2 years of experience in police station/district police unit. The age range of the sample varied from 25 to 45 years. The sample had a good balance for sex, 12 female and 13 male personnel. Interviews with each of the participant ranged from 45to 65 minutes. Recorded interview responses were summarized and transcribed verbatim. The 8 paged transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis, a qualitative method used for 'identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (Braun & Clarke,2006). On analysis of each of the interview, a coding framework was devised. Transcripts were read repeatedly to identify the key themes and categories for coding. Themes were generated and identified through an iterative process. The transcripts were further shared with seven subject matter experts for validation of the themes.

5. FINDINGS:

The results of the semi-structured interviews with the Inspectors and Sub-Inspectors at the police stations revealed several factors that could be treated as sources of stress. As guided by thematic analysis, several themes of possible stressors were observed. These factors were found to be associated with the nature of work/job, organisational and community factors. The identified themes and their respective narratives and verbatim are elaborated in the following section.

Work Overload

The most common potential stressor noted during the interview was work overload. Both Inspectors and Sub-Inspectors described about the amount of work they had to perform all through the day which included tasks like investigation, maintaining law and order, court duty and emergency situations. They stated that too much work in too less time was extremely demanding. They unanimously stated that juggling these competing tasks were a source of stress. They asserted that there was a lack of division of work among personnel and lack of man power led to work overload and over piling of work.

"We end up doing unexpected things. The work that is allocated is at random due to which work is never ending and we feel loaded with work. There have been several days when, while dealing with criminal cases, investigation and interrogation, we have been called for other tasks such as VIP security or dealing with public, etc. This way we are overloaded with several tasks with too less time due to which there happens a delay in the work, leaving us stressed."[Respondent 2] The participants unanimously agreed that prioritizing work was stressful for them, since they worked according to deadlines. Excess work and the need to meet the deadlines lead participants to a state of distress. The following example helps understand this better.

"When to do what is always a concern for me. There are too many tasks to accomplish. Due to overload of work, I am unable to prioritize work and eventually become helpless and give up. When performing one task, I often think about the pending tasks. Since the time I have joined, I have been overburdened with work. It is impossible to meet deadlines."[Respondent 17]

Long Working Hours

The second potential source of stress, that was highlighted in the analysis of the interview was long hours of work. The participants complained that there was no limit on the working hours and experienced great suffering due to unfixed timings. Participants agreed that there were days when they did not sleep. They described that the police job with respect to time was too demanding and imposed significant pressure, leaving them stressed. This is evidenced in the respondent comment given below.

"There are days when we don't get enough sleep. We are actually required to work for limited hours, but that is only on papers. I suffer from a sense of guilt that I am unable to give time to my family. I barely get to see my family. We just go

on and on and on. This has impacted me mentally and physically too. And despite this, our job is a thankless job."[Respondent 10]

The participants attributed long working hours as taxing their mental, emotional, physical and intellectual abilities. Most agreed that they were distressed since the working schedule did not permit them to spend time with their family. The following verbatim reflects and supports long hours of work as stressful.

"I don't remember the last time I spent quality time with my children, husband and parents. My life revolves around police station since I dedicate most of the time of my life at work. I don't have time for myself too. Limitless working hours have made my life meaningless and challenge my mental, emotional, and intellectual competence." [Respondent 25]

Lack of participation in Decision-making

The Inspectors and Sub-Inspectors reported that lack of participation and involvement in decision making contributed to work stress. They asserted that they were not heard; they were not asked or consulted on trivial issues related to their own work at the police station. Interviewees stated that there was no scope for them to express and question the process of decision making. They speculated that it was the bureaucratic structure of the police organisation that did not allow them to participate in the decision making affairs. An example of this finding is characterized in the following comment.

"I feel undervalued in this place. We are just given orders and we have to blindly obey them (seniors). There is no freedom of speech in this environment. We are not considered in the decision making process. We are here only to nod our heads. They (police organisation) must know that we are not in the Army!"[Respondent 7]

Interviewees further shared that they felt underestimated about their competence to be involved in the decision making process and perceived themselves as worthless. The following quote from an interview describes it well.

"I have never been asked to take decisions at work. In fact, whenever I have taken decisions, I have been embarrassed and humiliated (by seniors/supervisor). My words hold no value to this system. Only those sitting at higher positions are valued and we end up following their decisions, irrespective of whether right or wrong. I feel worthless because I have never been involved in any decision making process. Maybe we are not considered capable enough to make decisions."[Respondent 18]

Lack of fairness at Workplace:

Lack of fairness in the organisation was found to be associated with work stress. The interviewees emphasized that the most observable partial practice was unequal distribution of work. Another frequent manifestation of bias at work was granting opportunities to only a few. They expressed that transfers and promotions were based on favouritism and nepotism. The practice of bias at work led the participants to believe that there was injustice and discrimination prevalent in the system. They also commonly agreed that this practice was conscious and rampant and it had no solution. However, coping in such an unfavorable environment was arduous for the respondents eventually leading to experience of stress. The following verbatim illustrates the findings and supports lack of fairness as a stressor.

"There is no transparency at all in this system. I have been transferred from one station to the other without any justification. Also there is favoritism that persists. I have seen some of my peers sitting without any work while some overloaded with work. Some are granted leaves, while some are not. I have never been recognised for my work in my fifteen years of service while those who have not made significant contribution have been constantly pushed into limelight. It is caste, religion, gender and other reasons that introduce bias."[Respondent 24]

The sample narrated their personal episodes of how unfair treatment was evident in their daily lives at work. They confessed that police system is vulnerable to inequitable and discriminatory traditions. The following comment reflects the above viewpoint.

"The police system as an institution is driven by prejudice and discrimination. I have struggled and still struggling with the unfair practices that prevail in this system. I have been denied promotions twice, because my colleague was favoured as he belonged to a particular section of the society. I have worked day and night, while those who are favoured have spent nights at home. There is preferential treatment practiced outright and experiencing these unjust instances everyday is distressing."[Respondent 3]

Lack of Resources for investigation:

Another likely stressor that was highlighted in the interviews was inadequate, insufficient and inappropriate tools and techniques for investigation. They attributed the conventional methods and techniques used for examination for the delay in investigation, and reasoned it as a cause for piled up work. As an example, a common response observed was unavailability of breath analyser in the police station. The following excerpts from the interviews describe poor resources as a source of stress.

"We are still using old methods of investigation. There is immense technological advancement yet we are not provided with such tools. Even basic computer facility is not offered. Using computers and newer technologies for tracking lost property, or for interrogation would have made our tasks efficient and effective."[Respondent 20]

"Our police is very far from development as compared to other state police. We lack basic resources to carry out investigation. Equipments are not provided on time and are very scarce. The only tool that is available throughout the day and across all police stations is the wireless communication equipment. However equipments required at the crime scene, or at the time of investigation are rarely available. Sometimes we go to other police stations to borrow such equipments. A small example includes unavailability of torch light for a crime scene at night." [Respondent 13]

Poor relations with the Public

Participants of the study described public's negative perception towards police as a source of stress. There was a wide agreement on the ill status of the police in the eyes of the public. They felt themselves to be hated by the society and instead wanted to be perceived as friendly protectors. The following verbatim reflects the above mentioned stressor.

"Although we work for the citizens and protect them, but we are loathed by the society. They (public) perceive us as their enemies. When not in uniform, I am greeted well. But when I am in my uniform, I am stared at and abused. This brings down my morale and motivation to work for the public. My child is teased in school because I am in police. My family has not been accepted by the society yet. I don't have friends beyond police circle. Why are we treated this way?" [Respondent 21]

Another issue that appeared prominent in the interviews public was the unrealistic demands of the public such as completion of investigations within a week. This seemed impractical and inordinately demanding to the interviewed personnel. This is supported by the below mentioned verbatim.

"Public has very high expectations from us. They think that we should solve their problems in no time. They are unaware of the work load that we have. They also lack awareness on what issues they should bring to us. Sometimes even marital or property issues are brought to us. But such issues are actually dealt by civil courts. When we try to educate the complainant on this, they brand us as somebody who tries to run away from their responsibility and unprofessional. While walking on the road, they (public) view us with hatred and sometimes with fear. We do not share friendly relations with community rather they (public) do not want to maintain cordial relations with us." [Respondent 8]

Poor relations with Media:

Media (print and audio-visual) was also found to be a constant stressor for the participants. They were of the opinion that media published and highlighted negative views about the police personnel and the police organisation. Media reports of alleged police wrong doing affected their status in the society. Media, according to the interviewees, highlighted what police 'could not' achieve. They further shared that journalists encounter them with questions, the answers to which are highly confidential and restrictive. This consequently creates a rift between media and police. The narratives below stands testimony to the above mentioned viewpoint.

"Media highlights only what we have not achieved. If criminal cases are on a rise, are we to be blamed? We do our work from our end. It is sad see that no one is concerned about our accomplishments. Public loses faith in us because of what media publishes."[Respondent 4]

"Media has been chasing us since time immemorial and has been adulterating our status in the society. What they publish and talk on television affects our mental health because we are viewed in negative lights."[Respondent 19]

The following section presents the discussion of the current findings in light with the previous literature and current state of Bangalore city Police.

5. DISCUSSION:

Keeping in view the widespread belief that police is one of the most stressful occupations (Kappeler et al., 2000),the present study aimed to explore and identify the sources of stress at work among two specific ranks, Inspectors & Sub-Inspectors housed at various police stations, using in-depth interviews. The 25 narratives showed high levels agreement with International and Indian literature. Work overload was a major stressor for the participants, as indicated in the findings section. This factor not   their work life in terms of prioritising work but also affected their family life. Similarly, findings also revealed that exceedingly long working hours was a major stressor for the participants. Long and unfixed working hours as a source of stress may be attributed to the nature of the job which mandates the police personnel to be alert and available throughout the day. , this might hold true in case of Bangalore, the capital city. Apart from Bangalore's historic relevance, it of the VIP cities where The Governor, Chief Minister & their cabinet ministers resides, session proceeds and a shed for several political parties. This makes the city further vulnerable and sensitive, imposing and urging the police department to be alert and vigilant. In the current context, long working hours may also be a result of work   mentioned by the participants earlier. Further, the escalation in crime rates in the city may be attributed to the increase in the workload and long hours of work. Within policing, there is limited support for this finding (Webster, 2012). Deschamps et al. (2003) found that excessive work load was related to symptoms of job stress in police officers. A study by Davey et al. (2001) found that working long hours and working overtime were also highly predictive of job stress. In fact, they found that, more number of hours the officers worked, the higher were the level of job stress. The above findings can be supported by recent empirical quantitative research conducted in India which stated that long working hours and work overload were root causes of stress among police personnel (Naik, 2012; Tyagi

&Dhar, 2014). Water & Ussery (2007) explained police stress as a result of inherent occupational reasons which requires police personnel to be highly vigilant even when off duty, eventually taking a toll on their level of resilience. Another reason contributing to these stressors may be shortage of manpower in the police station. This holds true for a Bangalore city Police, as evidence reports that there is a discrepancy in police-population ratio. As per 2013, Police-population ratio was 1 per one 541 persons (Times of India survey,2017) as against the sanctioned strength of 420.49 (National Crime Record Bureau). This may indicate shortage of manpower in the police station which may have led to work overload and long hours of working eventually contributing to work stress.

Studies on police stress have also demonstrated that organizational factors such as participation in decision makingcan reduce stress (Morash & Haarr 1995; Morashet al. 2006) justifying the current findings of the study which indicates that lack of involvement in the process of decision making is a contributor to stress among the interviewees. Lack of participation as a stressor may beexplained by the bureaucratic structure that the Police organisation follows. Studies have shown that a rigid communication system characterised by a bureaucratic structure has significantly affected police personnel's level of stress (He et al. 2002; Violanti & Aron, 1993).In fact, a bureaucratic structure has been found to be responsible for several workplace factors such as work overload, red tapism, man power shortage, and poor supervision/leadership ensuing stress among police officers (Buker & Weiko, 2007). In the present study, lack of fairness and prevalence of bias at the workplace has been found as a stressor. There is a small but growing body of research which suggests perceptions of fairness make a unique contribution to perceived job stress among police community (Morashet al., 2006; Abdollahi, 2002). The sole reason for existence of Police force is society. However, this study found that relations with society which includes public and media are a key source of stress for police. Lack of support from community, poor relations and criticisms from public and media further decimates the police-community relations. The respect that a policeman deserves for protecting the citizens remains discontented, which lowers police morale and eventually leaves them stressed. Figley (1999) stated that lack of appreciation by public and media causes police personnel to become cynical towards the community. The above findings are consistent with previous literature (Garcia et al., 2004; Mathur, 1995;Suresh et al., 2013). This study greatly contributes to the literature on sources of police stress. When viewed from managerial lens, this study gives insight into the policies, its renewal and implementation. The findings of this study are suggestive of introducing reforms as a primary intervention to deal with stressed officials.

6. CONCLUSION:

The outcomes of stress can be deleterious as chronic stress may lead to development of burnout and lower the engagement levels of police personnel. This may further cause work impairment which may be a heavy toll on the police organisation and the State and Central government. This study has usefully generated knowledge on sources of stress (among Inspectors and Sub-Inspectors) prevalent in Bangalore city Police. These stressors namely work overload, long working hours, job insecurity, lack of participation in decision making, unfair practices, improper tools and techniques for investigation, poor public image of police and criticizing role of media warrants immediate attention and consideration to improve the well being of the police, police organisation and the society at large.

7. FUTURE IMPLICATIONS:

The present qualitative study paves way for and warrants an empirical research. The stressors that are discussed in this paper can be quantitatively tested in a model to determine the stressors. An extensive study based on the present results can be fruitful to the police organisations as the findings will aid in developing interventions for mitigating distress among Inspectors and Sub-Inspectors at the Police station. The results of the study will guide the practitioners and academicians to further empirically test the stressors and further devise a plan of action to combat stress

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