Developing a Sustainable Workplace: A Study on Workplace Stress and Individual Interventions to Manage Stress in Guwahati Traffic Police

Prashanta Sharma[1], Saswati Goswami[1*]

ABSTRACT

The current study has been conducted in the field of occupational stress of traffic police personnel. Studies have found out that administrators are very much prone to stress. In line with this, as the traffic police personnel have been entrusted with administering and managing smooth functioning of road transport, it is significant that a study in this regard should be carried out. The study has covered 35 traffic police personnel working as 'Constables' and finding their prime cause of stress has been the objective of the study. For the purpose of collecting the data Operational Police Stress Questionnaire developed by McCreary and Thompson (2006) has been opted for. It shows that the study group is highly stressed as the scores are far above the cut off line. It is worth mentioning that the organization does not have any particular way (institutional arrangement) to deal with stress and related issues.

INTRODUCTION

Stress has often been discussed and researched in relation to employee health and welfare. However, there are ample evidences to suggest that there is no universally acceptable definition of stress as this field has been studied from different angles and with differences in assumptions (Motowidlo et al., 1986; Beehr & Newmann, 1978). The term occupational (or work-related or job) stress is used to describe a situation in which some characteristics of the work situation are thought to cause poor psychological or physical health, or to cause risk factors making poor health more likely (Beehr, 2014). Hence, if stress implies a state of pressure or a state of negative responses creating ill effects in and within a person, occupational stress can be understood as factors related to one's job and job environment which creates such negative responses or state of pressure. This stress has often been called as the outcome of 20th century's man's race towards modern progress and as lives are getting busier day-by-day, people seem to have caught up amidst this hustle; failing to meet the demands placed upon under different domains of life. As occupational stress is commonly studied as a negative aspect of work (Beehr & Newman, 1978), it becomes significant that it should be given due care in proper time. This holds true from both organizational and individual perspective. Studies have shown the ill effects of occupational stress on health of the employees (Motowidlo et. al., 1986; Deb et.al., 2008). Stressful events in different aspects of normal life (work, friends, and family) impose a high psychological burden, which may negatively affect people's performance at work (Rasool et. al., 2020). In a landmark case in the year 1994, a social services manager named John Walker obtained a judgment against his former employers which failed to protect him from a health-endangering workload (Industrial Relations Law Reports, 1995). Earlier, the term "damage" was largely understood in terms of physical harm. But, the judgment made it clear that there was no reason why psychological damage should be excluded from the scope of an employer's duty to take care of the employees (Cox et. al., 2003).

It, therefore, is indeed a matter of concern for the organizations too, as employees are the resources of the institute. In relation to this, it is worth mentioning that in any type of organization, irrespective of the fact that it is for profit or not-for profit, employees constitute a significant part of the entire resource base. Hence, as employees are assets, they are needed to be taken care of. Organizations take care of them in several ways and among them one way is paying attention to elements working environment that might make the employees more vulnerable to work stress. Only by addressing the issues faced by the employees in an organization, can we make the workplace sustainable.

This study attempts to assess the occupational stress of Traffic Police personnel working in Guwahati Traffic Police and also aims at finding out the individual remedies adopted by the respondents to cope up with work stress they face.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section highlights some of the significant works which the researcher had come across during review phase. There were various studies in the field of occupational stress. however, as the scope of this particular study is confined to Traffic police personnel only, the researcher has included reviews and works on police personnel only. Shaheetha (2018) studies about the work life balance of women civil police officers working in Kerala with the objective of studying interrelation between work life balance, family support, departmental support, etc. The study is based on proportionately stratified random

[1] Department of Commerce, Gauhati University, Assam, India

[*] Corresponding author's e-mail: saswatigoswami01@gmail.com

sampling and the size of sample is calculated to be 257. Various constructs (elements) have been identified including: motivations of joining the job, family support, department support, job commitment, job and life satisfaction, etc.

Kumar (2015) in his study entitled "A study on work stress among the traffic police with a special reference to Chennai city" assesses the stress of traffic police working in the city of Chennai. Specifically, the study seeks to find out the job related factors associated to traffic police. Furthermore identifying and comparing the overall demographical factors, somatic symptoms and coping styles on work stress has been another major objective of the study. It is found that work overload, work-family conflict, noxious physical environment, public support, procedural justice, distributive justice, resource inadequacy are highly influencing work stress among the traffic police. Analyzing the somatic symptoms of stress on traffic police revealed that working hours can significantly contribute to the symptoms and this is because of the noxious environment in which traffic police personnel work.

Sharma (2012) explains that the changes in the workplace have added to the level of stress of different occupations. In particular, the study has been conducted in the field of army stress. Occupational causes included occupational hazards like increased workload, zero-error syndrome, non-grant of timely leave, and lack of sleep and rest for Jawans. The study aims at exploring occupational stressors and their subsequent effects on Indian soldiers. It further studies the effect of ongoing coping strategies in reducing occupational stress of Army soldiers and differences in the opinions of soldiers on the basis of their demographic profile. Surveying a total of 412 soldiers the study finds out: Mental ill-health, job burnout and cognitive intentions were identified as strong effects of occupational stress. The strongest contributor to mental ill-health was lack of positive thinking and mental alertness. In addition to this, Workload and lack of operational freedom contributed the most towards occupational stress.

Hunnur (2014) in the study entitled Work place stress among the employees of police department studies about causes and coping strategies of police stress. For measurement of stress, Occupational Stress Index developed by Singh and Srivastava has been used. Among the different items of the scale to measure occupational stress, scores of Powerlessness, Unprofitability, Role overload have been found to cross the cut offs. However, Role overload has been found to be the major cause contributing to job stress; and this is so due to staff and resources shortage. It is important to mention that the coping styles of the respondents were found to be under rational category, which implies that the respondents show the tendency to solve the issues faced.

Shanmugapriya (2018) in her study entitled "Job stress and stress management among police officers in tamilnadu" assesses the stress level of police personnel along with testing the impact of socio-economic factors on stress level. The study is based on surveying 450 police personnel from whom data have been collected using structured questionnaire. Female police employees were found to have higher stress. The study has assessed the influence of personal factors such as gender, age, religion, educational qualification, designation, place of working, monthly salary, year of experience, marital status, nature of family, time spent with family members, etc on stress. Stress was found to become less with advancement of age. Salary, experience, place of working, etc were found to be significant factors related to creation of stress among police personnel. Among the organizational factors, inter-personal relation, policies, facilities, amount of work and power, etc. were studied. However, the overall organizational scenario was found to be good and not contributing towards stress.

Maran (Maran et al., 2018) comparatively studies about occupational stressors; both operational and organizational along with coping styles adopted of two groups: indoor patrol police officers and outdoor patrol police officers. The Patrol Police Officers' scores on the PSQ-Op and PSQ-Org scales did not generally reveal high levels of distress (as their responses were not above point 5 on the scale of 1 to 7). Regarding coping strategies adopted, outdoor patrol officers were found to be more willing to use different coping styles, whereas the indoor ones used avoiding strategies. Outdoor officers were also found more vulnerable to both sources of occupational stress: organizational and operational

Feldman (Feldman et al., 2002) in the study entitled "Sources of Social Support and Burnout, Job Satisfaction, and Productivity" examines 211 traffic enforcement agents in the New York city to find out the relationship of social support to burnout, job satisfaction, and productivity. The analysis has revealed negative relationships of support to burnout and positive relationships of support to job satisfaction and productivity. The respondents were found to be well supported by family and friends and moderately supported by coworkers, immediate supervisors, and unit supervisors. Another noteworthy finding is: higher levels of productivity were associated with lower levels of burnout and Job satisfaction was not associated with productivity.

Deb (Deb et al., 2008) in their study entitled "Job-Related Stress, Causal Factors and Coping Strategies of Traffic Constables" surveyed 68 traffic constables with the motive of understanding the job-related stress of traffic constables and the causal factors behind the same. A number of factors were found responsible including: inadequate rest, lack of communication with the family members, long duty hours, inadequate leave, political pressure, excessive number of vehicles on the road, hot weather, noncooperation from public, lack of coordination among colleagues, etc. Moreover, sharing problems with colleagues and family members were found to be mostly used coping strategies among the respondents.

Liberman et al. (2002) studied about different stressors and how these are perceived by the police personnel. The study reviews different previous works wherein 'critical incidents' inherent to police work have been considered to be less stressful as compared to the routine police work. The reason behind this is probably the frequency of occurrence of the events, or the perception that the routine works are unnecessarily stressful. However, contrary to this, the current study finds that routine police works are more stressful than the critical and danger incidents. The routine occupational stressors (such as: administrative aspects, work environment, lack of support, community relation, changing shifts, etc.) of the urban police act as stronger predictor of psychological distress amongst the target group. Moreover, the study also reports to find women and minorities getting a discriminatory working environment.

Phukan (2015) in his dissertation report on the topic "Swadhyay: Lives of Police Constables in Assam" assesses the lives of police force in the state of Assam and named them 'the last one standing'. This study will focus on issues that a constable in the Assam Police face in his day to day life and what it actually means for the person to be a policeman at the lower level. The various stressors, pressures and challenges and their implications on the police constable will be addressed through the study. organizational stressors with lack of facilities in every aspect, shift work, irregularity in food and sleep, low pay, low living standards, lack of opportunity to develop in the profession, added health implications and lack of any form of support service highly affects the respondents.

Sreelekha (2019) in her article on Kerala Police entitled 'Helping Police Officers to Cope With Occupational Stress' writes down about police stress which is inevitable in the department due to different factors. The major stressors have been identified as: Constant exposure to suffering, distress and pain, Threats to safety/ health, The gap between actual and perceived responsibility, The inconclusive nature of police work, Fatigue, Having to be in control of emotions even when provoked, Slump in relationships, etc. The author also talks about different stress management initiatives under Kerala Police including: HATS (Help and Assistance to Tackle Stress' functioning since 2016), Police associations under which regular programs and meetings are organized to address the issues of the police personnel, Police Welfare Bureau that offers different types of assistance including scholarship to the children of police personnel, etc.

'Factors Leading to Stress of a Law Enforcement Officer and the Coping Mechanisms Adapted' by Arpan Bag (2019) aims at finding out the existing stressors in the police station in Indian context, as well as understanding their perception of the various identified stressors. However, the study was based on one police station of Maharashtra and included 20 police personnel. Critical incidents, Negative public image, Lack of social life, political interference, irregular eating, lack of resources, work load, effect on physical health were found to be the prime stressors. The work of police personnel has been agreed to be stressful in nature by many authors (Rajesh Kumar, 2015; Saha, 2010; Dixit, 2018). Along with its nature which is stressful, another feature is: it is exhaustive as well (Dixit, 2018). Moreover, apart from different perspectives on stress, the political stress which has been studied by Dixit (2018), reveals that the influence of political elements through transfers is also another significant factor creating stress.

The researcher has gone across relevant researches conducted in the field of work stress and its management among different occupations, including traffic police stress in particular. These studies have been conducted in different parts of India including different people of varying age groups and gender. Even if some studies have been conducted in the police and traffic division, yet such studies cover only the specific area (geographical) chosen. However, the researcher has not come across any researches in the field of work stress and its management with a special reference to Traffic Police working in the city of Guwahati, Assam.

Further, no such researches have been carried on to understand stress and causal factors among different levels of Guwahati Traffic Police as well. All these together, have necessitated the researcher to carry on the current study on occupational stress among the traffic police working in the city of Guwahati under Guwahati Traffic Police.

Objectives of the study

The current study has been carried out with the following objectives:

1. To assess the causes of operational stress among Guwahati Traffic Police personnel.

2. To find the stress management techniques adopted at individual level by the respondents.

Materials and method: the study is based on primary data and the data has been collected through questionnaires. A total of 35 respondents have been interviewed which were selected on the basis of convenience. These respondents have been selected from the rank 'Constable', who are working under Guwahati Traffic Police.

For the purpose of measuring stress of respondents, there are numerous tools of scales developed over the period of time. However, the work of police is recognized to be unique and stressful, which makes it significant to use a scale or questionnaire, which is specifically designed for the police job. The researcher has therefore gone across a number of studies showing such scales. After a careful analysis on the basis of number of items on such scales and reliability level of those, Police Stress Questionnaire-Operational developed by McCreary and Thompson has been found to be appropriate for the study (McCreary and Thompson, 2006). This is so because of the aforementioned criteria (number of items/questions in the questionnaire and reliability of the scale/measuring tool/questionnaire). Moreover, to achieve the 2nd

objective of finding out the individual stress management intervention, a separate questionnaire has been developed by the researcher.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

For the purpose of attaining the 1st objective, i. e. to assess the operational stress of traffic police personnel, PSQ-Op has been used. The scale consists of 20 items in which perceived stress is to be ranked from 1 to 7. 1 represents no stress at all and 7 represents high stress.

Again, on the basis of individual responses, the total score needs to be found out and further, the average is needed to be calculated. The cut off scores for determining the degree of stress under PSQ-Op are: if the score per individual is below 2.0, it implies low stress. Again, if the score ranges from 2.1 to 3.4, it implies moderate stress and lastly, if the score is more than 3.5, it implies high level of stress (McCreary et. al., 2017). In line with this, the following section has been developed exhibiting the analysis of the study.

Table 1: Table showing total scores, mean scores and item wise frequency

Items on the scale	Total scores given by the respondents	Mean scores (n=35)	Percentage of respondents
Shift work	150	4.28	31.4
Working alone at night	147	4.20	34.2
Over-time demands	188	5.37	31.4
Risk of being injured on the job	181	5.17	37.1
Work related activities on days off	210	6.0	57.1
Traumatic events	154	4.40	28.5
Managing your social life outside of work	183	5.23	37.1
Not enough time available to spend with friends and family	198	5.66	57.1
Paperwork	134	3.83	20
Eating healthy at work	182	5.30	37.1
Finding time to stay in good physical condition	197	5.62	48.5
Fatigue	188	5.37	40
Occupation related health issues	192	5.49	31.4
Lack of understanding from family and friends about your work	173	4.94	37.1
Making friends outside the job	157	4.49	25.7
Upholding a higher image in public	172	4.91	22.8
Negative comments from the public	193	5.51	40
Limitations to your social life	163	4.66	28.5
Feeling like you are always on the job	186	5.31	40
Friends/family feel the effects of the stigma associated with your job	161	4.60	17.1

Source: primary data

On the basis of the survey, the above table has been presented showing the total score obtained, mean score and item wise frequency. The questionnaire has 20 items against which responses have been collected. Out of these 20 items, 'Work related activities on days off' has scored highest, giving a mean score of 6. Second main cause of stress as perceived by the respondents is 'Not enough time available to spend with friends and family'

which has a mean score of 5.66.

The table also exhibits item wise frequency of highest score. The highest score depicting high stress has been given by rank 7. Among the items, this rank has been assigned to all the items. However, out of these items, 'Work related activities on days off' and 'Not enough time available to spend with friends and family' have attracted it the most.

Table 2: Table showing major causes of stress (ranked on the basis of mean score)

Items on the scale	Rank* assigned
Work related activities on days off	1
Not enough time available to spend with friends and family	2
Finding time to stay in good physical condition	3
Negative comments from the public	4

Occupation related health issues	5
Fatigue	6
Over-time demands	6
Feeling like you are always on the job	7
Eating healthy at work	8
Managing your social life outside of work	9
Risk of being injured on the job	10
Lack of understanding from family and friends about your work	11
Upholding a higher image in public	12
Limitations to your social life	13
Friends/family feel the effects of the stigma associated with your job	14
Making friends outside the job	15
Traumatic events	16
Shift work	17
Working alone at night	18
Paperwork	19

Source: primary data. (*rank: 1 being top rank having highest mean score).

The table shown above has been presented to rank the items on the basis of their mean scores. Accordingly, 'Work related activities on days off' has been ranked 1st, 'Not enough time available to spend with friends and family' has been ranked 2nd and 'Finding time to stay in good physical condition' has been ranked 3rd.

Table 3: Table showing standard cut off scores and interpretation of actual cut off

Degree of stress	Scores (cut off as per Questionnaire)
Low	Below 2.0
Moderate	2.1 to 3.4
High	More than 3.5

Source: Developed by McCreary et al., 2017

On the basis of the above range of cut offs, the primary data collected by the researchers reveal that the average cut off achieved by the respondents of the current study is 4.85, which implies more than the cut off against high degree of stress. Table 4 shows the data regarding individual coping strategies used by the respondents. This includes both positive and negative strategies and out of 6 specified options, 'Accepting the duties without walking away' has attracted highest responses, i. e. 77% of total response. 'Walking away from work pressure' was not responded by any. However, the respondents also resort to smoking as a result of work pressure (66%).

Table 4: Table showing Individual coping strategies

Coping strategies at individual level	Percentage of responses received
Smoking/Tobacco	65.7
Listening to music	57.1
Travelling	11.4
Yoga/exercise	48.5
Walking away from work pressure	Not responded by any respondent
Accepting the duties without walking away	77.14

Source: primary data

RECOMMENDATION

Having analyzed the collected data, the study reveals that:

1. The respondents have exhibited a high degree of stress. This is calculated by the average stress scores achieved by the respondents. The cut off score of high level of stress is 3.5 or above. However, the average of the score comes as 4.85.

2. Prime cause creating operational stress among respondents is 'Work related activities on days off' (mean score of 6) and second responsible cause is 'Not enough time available to spend with friends and family' (mean score of 5.66).

3. The respondents, as individual measure of coping against stress, accept the duties as they are and perform

their duties without walking away from it (77% of total response). Moreover, they also resort to smoking which they perceive to have reduced their stress (66% of total response).

CONCLUSION

The authors have gone through detailed discussion with the respondents regarding other matters such as provision of any stress management intervention from organization or appointing authority. However, there was no positive answer to this query. The department merely organizes certain health camps which are general for all and not specific to the needs of the respondents. This brings a very vital issue going on in the department that needs to be solved. The work of traffic police personnel never seemed to be easy, especially in the current time when number of cars is increasing day by day, but the size of the roads remain same. In such a scenario, working day and night in polluted environment makes it immensely important on the part of the Government and the Department itself, to take care of these human resources. There are studied which give evidence that occupational stress can create severe health issues if not taken due care in proper time. The organization can arrange stress management programs and create awareness drive on stress, which when implemented, can enhance the productivity and effectiveness of the traffic police personnel. Moreover, sustainability need not always be thought from the environmental perspective. Rather, it can be and should be implemented within organizational framework as well. To make sure that an organization and its resources provide return in the long run, it is indeed a necessity on the part of the organization to inculcate sustainable practices. Future scope of research works in this field can be widened up by considering a larger sample. Moreover, other scales of stress might give different outcomes and hence, researchers might take these points into consideration for working in this area.

REFERENCES

Acquadro Maran, D., Zedda, M., & Varetto, A. (2018). Organizational and occupational stressors, their consequences and coping strategies: a questionnaire survey among Italian patrol police officers. *International journal of environmental research and public health, 15*(1), 166.

Bag, A. (2019). Factors Leading to Stress of a Law Enforcement Officer and the Coping Mechanisms Adapted, *The Indian Police Journal 66*(3), 124-133.

Baruch-Feldman, C., Brondolo, E., Ben-Dayan, D., & Schwartz, J. (2002). Sources of social support and burnout, job satisfaction, and productivity. *Journal of occupational health psychology, 7*(1), 84-93. https://psycnet. apa.org/doi/10.1037/1076-8998.7.1.84

Beehr, T. (2014). Psychological stress in the workplace (psychology revivals). Routledge.

Beehr, T. A., & Newman, J. E. (1978). Job stress, employee health, and organizational effectiveness: A facet analysis, model, and literature review 1. *Personnel psychology, 31*(4), 665-699.

Cox, T., Griffiths, A., & Randall, R. (2003). The Handbook of Work and Health Psychology. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Deb, S., Chakraborty, T., Chatterjee, P., & Srivastava, N. (2008). Job-related stress, causal factors and coping strategies of traffic constables. *Journal of the Indian Academy of Applied Psychology, 34*(1), 19-28.

Dixit, A. (2018). An Empirical Analysis of Occupational Stress in Indian Police With Special Reference to Uttar Pradesh Police Officers. Retrieved from. http://hdl. handle.net/10603/323124

Hunnur, R. R. (2014). Work place stress among the employees of police department. Retrieved from http://hdl.handle.net/10603/81950.

Liberman, Akiva M.; Best, Suzanne R.; Metzler, Thomas J.; Fagan, Jeffrey A.; Weiss, Daniel S.; Marmar, Charles R. (2002). Routine occupational stress and psychological distress in police. Policing: *An International Journal of Police Strategies & Management, 25*(2), 421–441.

McCreary, D. R., Fong, I., & Groll, D. L. (2017). Measuring policing stress meaningfully: Establishing norms and cut-off values for the Operational and Organizational Police Stress Questionnaires. *Police Practice and Research, 18(6*), 612-623.

McCreary, D. R., & Thompson, M. M. (2006). Development of two reliable and valid measures of stressors in policing: The operational and organizational police stress questionnaires. *International journal of stress management, 13*(4), 494.

Motowidlo, S. J., Packard, J. S., & Manning, M. R. (1986). Occupational stress: its causes and consequences for job performance. *Journal of applied psychology, 71*(4), 618

Phukan, P. N. (2015). Swadhyay: Lives of Police Constables in Assam (Doctoral dissertation, Tata Institute of Social Sciences).

Sreelekha (2019). Helping Police Officers to Cope with Occupational Stress, *The Indian Police Journal 66(*3), 112-116.

Rajesh kumar, G. (2015). A study on work stress among the traffic police with a special reference to Chennai city. Retrieved from http://hdl.handle.net/10603/54301

Rasool, S. F., Wang, M., Zhang, Y., & Samma, M. (2020). Sustainable work performance: the roles of workplace violence and occupational stress. *International journal of environmental research and public health, 17*(3), 912.

Saha, A., Sahu, S., & Paul, G. (2010). Evaluation of cardio-vascular risk factor in police officers. *International Journal of Pharma and Bio Sciences, 1*(4), 263-271.

Shaheetha, K. S. (2018). Work Life Balance Among Women Civil Police officers in Kerala. Retrieved from http:// hdl.handle.net/10603/299938.

Shanmugapriya, E. (2018). Job stress and stress management among police officers in tamilnadu. Retrieved from http://hdl.handle.net/10603/240239

Sharma, S. (2012). Management of Occupational Stress Among Army Personnel Retrieved from http://hdl. handle.net/10603/78442