

Role Of Optimism And Hardiness In Controlling The Stress-Health Relationship: A Case Study Of Mumbai Police

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ABSTRACT

The corporate body has a moral responsibility to practice healthy work culture and environment. The employee spends most of his productive period of the day at his work place of the company. The management and the policy drafters must analyze the work environment they provide to the employees and should change in accordance to the comfort ability of the employees. It is crystal clear that there is a positive and significant relationship between stress and the practices of yoga & meditation. The current article highlights the role of optimism and hardiness in controlling the stress-health relationship.

KEYWORDS:

Optimism, Hardiness, Stress

INTRODUCTION

It is moral responsibility of the organizations to implement upon such practices that would surely build right attitude and outlook of the problems at the work place to the employees. Stress can be minimized if companies take the right initiatives at right time in right direction. Stress –free

employees perform better, work harder, happier and are more committed to the organization as compared to their counterparts.

Self-rated health as an overall health measure is becoming common around the world and is among the most frequently assessed health perception in epidemiological research. Self-rated health can be assessed by asking the participants of the study to rate their overall health on a numeric scale or by qualitative descriptors with a five-point Likert Scale categories like “excellent”; “very good”; “good”; “fair”; or “poor”. But maintain a good health level is becoming a cumbersome task in the era of rapid urbanization and modernization where an individual can hardly be at peace.

Long working hours imply the acute shortage of police personnel. They are subjected to duty hours extending well beyond the normal working capacity. Occasions such as festivals, elections, morchas are extremely taxing pushing them to inhuman extent of work. An interesting observation can be made at this juncture. Considering the fact that we are the 2nd most populous country in the world coupled with the problem of unemployment, finding manpower in the form of young aspirants should not be a difficult task.

Having said this, the fact that policing may not exactly be the 1st choice of the young generation speaks volumes of the fact that it is perceived as a stressful and thankless job. Long working hours, shift work, relatively low salaries, no time for family, delayed promotions, negative attitude of the society are some of the factors which keep the youth away from this job. An

unfortunate outcome is that they prefer to remain unemployed rather than trying hard for a job in police force.

The police are assigned as the protectors of law and order. Hence any inadequacy brings in much criticism. The high visibility of the police force is responsible for the focus on it. A sky-high expectation of the many from the few is the crux of stress.

The police force forms a significant component of the Executive wing of the Government. Hence it is expected to be well-disciplined, efficient and idealistic. As the enforcing machinery of law and order, the society places tremendous onus on the police force to deliver. Coupled with inadequate manpower, public expectations and mounting focus on efficiency, is the state of the present society marred by increasing crime rate. This results in the police personnel having hectic, demanding and challenging work schedules. Stress is the natural outcome in this situation and becomes an integral element of policing. The occupation of policing has the dubious distinction of being one of the most stressful occupations.

Policing necessitates the police personnel to imbibe certain essential attributes like accurate judgments, rapid decisions, and coordination among others. Occupational stress can gravely impair these abilities. It can lead to anxiety, depression eventually resulting in burnout. This can put their performance as well as public safety at stake.

If stress is an integral element of policing, then management of stress must be done on a priority basis. However in reality, the police force has come

across as neglected, misused and badly politicized. There is a sense of sheer indifference towards police reforms. It would be inappropriate to say that no efforts were carried out for their betterment. Nevertheless, these efforts are sporadic and far-flung. Moreover, the present scenario at their work-place is not conducive for the implementation of any consistent measures.

The urgent need of the hour is to put sound police reforms in place. The inadequacies in the police personnel are due to the inadequacies in the police system. Hence if anything warrants change, it has to be the system. It needs to be altered with a proactive backing from the Government. An indifferent attitude on the part of the authorities has to be circumvented.

ROLE OF OPTIMISM AND HARDINESS IN CONTROLLING THE STRESS-HEALTH RELATIONSHIP

The focus should shift from management of stress to curtailing it. The earlier time-tested measures such as Yoga and Meditation can be implemented but with discretion. There is no doubt that these measures are excellent stress-busters. The police department has inculcated these practices as a part of stress-management programmes. But it is necessary to rethink about the exact utility of such programmes for the policemen. Giving full credit to the advantages of Yoga and Meditation, it is a paradox that their benefits cannot always be truly extended to the police personnel. They can act as a stop-gap arrangement but not as a permanent solution.

More manpower would contribute in bringing down the long working hours. Normal duty hours would allow them to give more time towards their personal life. This can reduce their frustration and stress to a very large extent.

It is imperative to integrate the police with the public. This will create a conducive atmosphere of mutual trust. Acknowledgement and appreciation by the society in general for the police personnel would go a long way in enhancing the relation between the police and the public. The common perception among the police personnel about their job being a 'thankless job' can be scrapped. This will provide a huge boost to their morale.

Lack of political interference would ensure that the police personnel can enforce the rules and laws without any pressures. They can perform the basic functions of prevention and investigation of crime in a fair manner. This can contribute not only to improved performance but also to improved relation with the common people.

Discipline is an integral element of police hierarchy. It lends respectability and integrity to the occupation of policing. It is something which cannot be compromised. But discipline need not mar the humane aspect of policing. A better rapport between the superiors and the subordinates can go a long way in uplifting the spirit of the policemen at the lower rungs of hierarchy. An impartial and efficient system of grievance redressal can improve the vertical interaction within the police force.

The policemen are blamed for being insensitive and brutal. But behind the veil of insensitivity and brutality lies an abused and misunderstood category whose actions are conditioned by the perpetual neglect at the hands of the State and other authorities. Physical and mental burnout which are a fall-out of an exacting occupation create stress. Hence a makeover is necessary which can keep the essence of policing intact.

The policemen have not shied away from serving the society. Whatever be the situation, whatever be their state of mind they have stood firmly whenever their duty has beckoned them. Occupational stress has seldom stood in the way in carrying out their responsibilities. To conclude, it's time that the society takes cognizance of their problems and extends a helping hand. A multitude of social, psychological and organizational interventions can definitely play a huge role in finding suitable solutions. Favourable societal attitudes, coping mechanisms and supportive system will go a long way in restoring the faith of the police force.

In India, the presence of stress among policemen is felt but still not recognized as a major enemy of law-enforcement professionals as yet. Media reports of police brutality and indiscipline can be perceived as warning signals of job stress, emphatically pointing to the mismanagement of this crucial problem so far. Society views the police not only as a law enforcing agency but also as an instrument of social service, an agent of social change and the protector of rights and duties of the people. The numerous incidents of police brutality and highhandedness, excessive use of physical violence

and verbal abuse, negative image of the police as being discourteous, inhuman, sadistic and inefficient prompt a curious observer to look beyond the surface and discover the underlying strain that exists.

DISCUSSION

The highly paradoxical nature of the policemen's job makes it like tightrope walking and deserves a closer scrutiny than accorded to it so far in our country. Due to constant and prolonged stress, anxiety disorders, depressive disorders, dysthymia, adjustment disorders, somatoform disorders, alcohol-related problems and other psychiatric disorders are some of the mental health problems among police personnel.

There are specific work setting variables that are linked to occupational stress and how they relate to intervention. They are role characteristics, job characteristics, interpersonal relationships, organizational structure and climate, human resource management practices, and physical qualities and technology.

Increasing rate of negative incidences calls for urgent empirical research pertaining to police organization in order to take remedial measures. It is important to eliminate the sources of stress, to reduce the effects of stressors and to develop a police specific module to help the stressed police personnel.

The police personnel have been working under severe and chronic stressful situations. A high mean level of stress can have very serious repercussions. The most manifest ones are the physiological and psychological health of the

police personnel being at stake, the brunt of which is borne by the family. However the latent repercussions are equally grave. Under stress, they may be at a greater risk of committing errors, overreacting and being brutal. This can compromise the public safety and bring them under scrutiny for all the wrong reasons. The point in reference is the incidences of third degree torture and custodial deaths in police stations as reported in the media. These instances seem to be a fall-out of the high level of stress.

Comparative high level of stress experienced by the middle level brings to fore another important dimension of policing. The middle level gets sandwiched between the top and the lower levels. Moreover, majority of the police personnel in the sample belonging to the middle levels were younger in age and having less duration of service in comparison to top and lower levels. As a result, adapting to the demanding nature of the job must have been stressful.

The present research study was restricted to understanding the stress levels of police personnel within the police stations. The top level within the police station comprised of Senior Police Inspectors (Sr. P.I) and Police Inspectors (P.I). However in the larger picture of hierarchy within the police force, they form the middle level. As a result, they get caught between the top order police officers on one hand and their subordinates at the police station who form the lower order on the other hand. These middle level officers receive orders from their superiors which are to be enforced on the lower levels. The lower level police personnel may have grievances which have to be looked

into by the Sr. P.I and the P.I within the police station as the top officers such as the DCPs and the ACPs are not into picture. Thus the daily interactions within the police stations can become a major source of stress.

The police personnel having duration of service upto 15 years experience slightly more amount of stress. Similarly the amount of stress pertaining to the category of job profile is more significant. This implies a slightly lesser coping ability on their part to adjust with the demands of the job.

The physiological effects of stress are found to be more significant for the police personnel having duration of service more than 15 years. Similarly, the impact of the psychological effects is also slightly more than those having duration of service upto 15 years. This implies that the age factor does play an important role. As the age increases, the impact of stress becomes more apparent through nagging physical and mental health issues.

An overview pertaining to causes indicates that the category of societal factors is more stressful as compared to the other categories. This indicates that the complacent and negative attitudes of the society towards the police force play a very strong role in determining the amount of stress. The police personnel put in long working hours to directly serve the society. They have to compromise on their family life, important events and even special occasions or festivals to give their 100% and more to the job. Hence a complacent or indifferent attitude of the society can prove to be extremely stressful.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

An overview pertaining to effects indicates that the physiological effects are more pronounced as compared to the other categories of effects. Factors such long working hours, shift work, working conditions, etc. are bound to affect the health of the police personnel. They experience unrealistic expectations and demands from the society which contributes strongly to stress and subsequently to health problems.

Since the police are looked upon as protectors of law and order, the instance of continual and chronic occupational stress reflects a gravely disturbing situation. In order to shoulder the vast responsibility, it goes without saying that the police need to be in a state of physical and mental well-being. However the present job profile provided them with little or no opportunity to be so.

A single-most widely stated stressor was long working hours which denied them any quality time for themselves as well as for their families. Many voiced the opinion that relatively lesser salary was not always a major stressor. Increasing salaries would not really help as they may have more money at their disposal to spend but ironically still not have the time to enjoy the money.

The police personnel spoke about the lack of any platform to voice their grievances. Their dissatisfaction had to be invariably curtailed due to issues of protocol and disciplinary actions. This created a sense of helplessness and hopelessness.

CONCLUSION

A senior police officer spoke about the concept of 'police caste'. According to him, the police force was like a caste group, bound by rigid rules and regulations and fenced by typical attitudes and behavior patterns. Hence the outside world is unable to understand their problems. Only police personnel who have been through the nitty-gritty of this job can fathom the real situation.

However a contrasting viewpoint was also presented by some respondents. The topmost police officers are IPS cadre and are recruited directly. Hence they fail to understand the problems of the police personnel at the grass root level as have never been a part of that level. It implied that not all police personnel were sensitive to the problems of their counterparts. Some respondents hoped to have a system where a policeman climbs the hierarchy to go from the lower level to the top post and only then would he understand the real problems.

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