

Assessment of Psychological Stress among Female Police Personnel in Kerala.

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Abstract:

Background: Policing has been described as a most stressful occupation and traditionally dominated by males, however more females are entering the police workforce and increased numbers of women are becoming police officers. In policing job, female police face stresses caused by their minority status within the department. High level of stress related problems are encountered in this population, because of personal risk of exposure, violence, and day to day involvement in traumatic incidents.

Objectives: To assess the psychological stress level among the Police women (PW) in Kerala.

Methods: The perceived stress scale (PSS) was simultaneously administered to 75 available PW of both constable and officers, between 21-60 years of age from randomly selected police stations in the three district of Kerala.

Result: In PW, those who are working for more than 12 hours in a day experienced significantly ($P < 0.05$) more stress (21.4 ± 3.40) than the 6 - 12 hours workers (17.98 ± 2.64). At the same time PW with gender inequality has significantly ($P < 0.05$) experienced high stress (27.82 ± 3.52) than the others without any gender issue (19.5 ± 4.38).

Conclusion: This study provides an understanding on the perceived psychosocial stress level of female police personnel in kerala, and Gender inequality present in their work, mainly due to their minority in the department. Exploratory studies or other studies are needed to determine the extent of difference between male and female police.

Keywords: Stress, inequality, traffic police, women

I. Introduction

Stress can easily be defined as, “a response to something in the environment (“a stressor”) when the environment changes (1). Police occupational stress is a widespread problem because of its numerous negative effects on individuals. They work under great pressure and their job is demanding and uncertain, also public expectations from the police are high. Long duty hours, pressure from superior officers, work under tough situations and personal problems were pointed out as major reasons for the stress (2, 3). Stress has been found to not only affect the officers’ job performance, but their personal lives and relationships as well (4). Because police officers are first responders to potentially stressful situations, their ability to successfully manage stress is critical not only to their own mental health but to the safety of society as a whole (5). The total strength of women police is hardly eight per cent. On the national average, women in police constitute only 3.5 percent. Kerala stands third with about 3,000 women police personnel that include seven IPS officers, 4 circle-inspectors, 12 sub-inspectors and the remaining in the constabulary. Police officers play a vital role in maintaining crime rate and peacefulness particularly in the metropolitan cities like Kerala. In fact, without their competent services it is impossible to keep the city function efficiently. At the same time, it is evenly true that they are subjected to job related stress, which sometimes becomes intolerable for them (6). Literature indicates that no such study made an attempt to address the stress faced by PW officers in the Kerala. Hence, the necessity of the present study was reinforced with a sight to achieving a well defined objective i.e. job related stress, causes behind the same.

II. Methodology

The study was done in three districts Thiruvandram, Quilon, Pathanamthitta police station of kerala located in the south-west region of India on the Malabar Coast. Stations were randomly selected and information collected from available female police personnel’s in the stations. The data collection was done in July - august 2013.

This study was approved by the institutional review board of the School of Public Health SRM university by expedited review process as the ethical risk involved were minimal. Permission from district commissioner of police Quilon was obtained before initiating the study procedure and informed consent was obtained from the all PW.

The perceived stress scale (PSS) with responses on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, where 1 stands for “never” and 5 stands for “very often” was used for assessing their stress level (7). Three questions were added from previous study regarding gender issues.

The respondents were PW officers and constables; they were provided adequate privacy for answering the questions. The administered questions were in English and Malayalam language and the researcher gave enough time for the respondents to think and answer each question.

The collected data were entered in MS Excel and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16. Simple descriptive statistics and frequencies were computed. Perceived psychosocial stress, gender issues and its association with stress was analyzed by using independent t test.

Result

Table 1 show the demographical variable of the participants. In that 53.3% of PW are under age of 31 to 40 years, 25.3% of participants 41 to 50 years, 13.3% of the participants are above 51 years and only 8% of participants are belongs to less than 30 years. Out of 72 PW, 42.7% have graduation, 28% have secondary education, 16% of them are higher secondary and 13.3% only have post graduation. 9.3 % of PW are assistant sub inspector, 45.3% of them constables and civil police officers. Table 2 shows the PSS level among the PW. In PW those who are working more than 12 hours in a day experienced significantly ($P < 0.05$) more stress (21.4 ± 3.40) than the 6 - 12 hours workers (17.98 ± 2.64). At the same time PW with gender inequality has significantly ($P < 0.05$) more stress (27.82 ± 3.52) than the others without any gender issue (19.5 ± 4.38).

III. Discussion

This study was done mainly to explore perceived psychosocial stress and gender issues in female police of kerala, and to study the association between perceived psychosocial stress and gender issues. Even though study population is very low, an attempt was made to find whether they face gender inequality in their work. Gender issues in their work are mainly due to their minority in the department. Detail study of other factors related to policing stressful job for female is needed. Study suggest that decreasing working hours, recruiting more female police in the department, flexible working time will lead to maintain their personal time, proper encouragement for their work make them satisfy with their work and motivate them.

A number of studies were carried out in different parts of the world for understanding the level of stress among Police Personnel (2, 6, 8). In a recently conducted study among the West Bengal Police Officers revealed that 42% and 12% of the West Bengal Police Officers were suffering from moderate and high psychological stress respectively (9).

Police departments, with their tense organizational structures, offer both opportunities and challenges for stress prevention programs. Although it is difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of intervention programs, these programs needed to deliver regularly throughout a police’s career to keep the rate of stress among police as low as possible.

One of the limitations of this study is the small sample size, because of the minority of female police in the department. Our findings will add important evidence to understand psychosocial stress and gender issues.

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Table: 1 Demographic variable among the police women

| Category | No (%) | PSS |
|----------------------|-----------|---------------|
| Working Hours | | |
| 6-12hours | 47(62.7%) | 17.98± 2.64 |
| Above12hours | 28(37.3%) | 21.4 ± 3.40 * |
| Gender Issue | | |
| No gender inequality | 39 (52%) | 19.5± 4.38 |
| Gender inequality | 36 (48%) | 27.82±3.52 * |

Table 2: PSS level among the women police

| Category | No (%) |
|----------------------------|-----------|
| Age | |
| 21-30 years | 6(8%) |
| 31-40 years | 40(53.3%) |
| 41-50 years | 19(25.3%) |
| 51-60 years | 10(13.3%) |
| Education Status | |
| Secondary | 21(28%) |
| Higher secondary | 12(16%) |
| Graduate/diploma | 32(42.7%) |
| Post graduate | 10(13.3%) |
| Working position | |
| Women civil police officer | 34(45.3%) |
| Constables | 34(45.3%) |
| Assistant sub inspector | 7(9.3%) |

Data expressed as Mean± SD for continuous variables and frequency with percentage for categorical variables. P<0.05 set as significant.