



Correlates of Job Stress in Policing: A Comparative Study of Women and Men Police

Jayanthi P Nair and M.I. Joseph

Dept. of Social Work, SSUS, Kalady, Kerala, INDIA

Department of Psychology, Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Kalady, Kerala, INDIA

Available online at: www.isca.in, www.isca.me

Received 8th October 2013, revised 30th October 2013, accepted 9th November 2013

Abstract

Policing is generally considered as a profession which is highly vulnerable to stress. Depending upon its nature, duration, and perceived intensity, this stress may result in various physiological, psychological or behavioural indicators of strains. Making use of the 'Occupational Stress Inventory' and this each of job-related and affective strain measures, the present study examined the correlations between job stress and strains in a sample of 500 police personnel. The results revealed significant correlations between job stress and the various job related and affective strains. The magnitude of the obtained correlations was greater in the case of the women police. Moreover, the sources of stress having significant correlations with the various strains were also more in the case of the women personnel.

Keywords: job stress, job-related strains, affective strains.

Introduction

Occupation has got a central role in one's life and existence. Since the major portion of an adult's time is spent for work, the social and psychological factors on the job, in addition to the physical factors have important influences on their physical and mental health. While in the past, the concept of work environment was concerned mainly with physical aspects, now it has come to comprise the total environment of the employee, and empirical findings at large point to the significance of the psychosocial environment of work upon the health and well-being of the employees. International organizations like WHO, ILO and APA also have acknowledged the importance of psychosocial environment of work. Occupational stress research during the last 3 or 4 decades has confirmed that various sources of stressors at work are related to a variety of physiological, psychological and behavioural indices of employee strain, and also to negative organizational consequences.

Recent research has shown that the job of policing is an extremely stressful occupation¹⁻⁷. Previous researches on job stress in police has succeeded in delineating the potential stressors in the job and to bring out the consequences of these stressors upon the well-being of police personnel, and also the impacts of these stresses and strains upon their family, social, and work lives.

Research evidence from comparative studies on stress and strains among different occupational groups also provide evidence for the high costs of stress in police⁷⁻⁹. However, research on possible gender differences in stress and strains is very rare, especially among police personnel. Recent changes in the work culture of our society has resulted in more and more educated women entering the police force in order to build a career. However, due

to the very nature of police work, women police personnel are encountering atypical problems in their work, which women in other professions may not be faced with. Naturally, police work may have varying impacts on women and men. Studies over the past two decades investigating gender differences have come out with conflicting results. In their review of 19 studies, Jick and Mitz¹⁰ found that while women experienced more psychological distress, men experienced more physical distress. An earlier report of a study on the same population using the same tools¹¹ revealed that women police experience significantly higher levels of stress than men; however the two groups did not differ in the case of the strain variables examined.

The present research was an attempt to explore the correlation between various stresses and strains in policing and to examine whether there are gender differences in these relationships.

Hypotheses: i. There will be significant relationship between various job stresses and specific strains among police personnel. ii. There will be differences in the magnitude of these correlations between the male and the female police personnel.

Method

Participants: The participants comprised of 400 women and 100 men police personnel belonging to three job levels (Civil police officer, Senior civil police officer and Sub Inspector) drawn randomly from various police stations in Kerala. The respondents fall in the age group of 26 to 55 years.

Tools: Only questionnaire measures were used in the present study, and these consisted of one stress measure and six strain measures.

Stress measure: The 'Occupational Stress Inventory' developed by Joseph and Dharmangadan³ specifically aimed at police personnel were used to measure the perceived job stress. The inventory consists of 120 items divided into 26 subscales. Each item is provided with a 5-point response category from 'strongly agree=5' to 'strongly disagree=1'. The items are scored in such a way that a high score indicates greater perceived stress. In addition to the 26 subscale scores, all the subscale scores may be added to obtain a total stress score. All the 26 subscales are reported to have high reliability coefficients (cross-sectional and split-half) ranging from .67 to .97. The inventory had a correlation of .93 with the 'Occupational Stress Index'¹², indicating high validity.

Strain measures: Three job-related strains and three affective strains were measured using the following scales.

Job - related strains (Job dissatisfaction, Work load dissatisfaction and Boredom): The 'Job Dissatisfaction Scale'¹³, was used to measure the level of satisfaction from the job. The scores on each item are added together to get a total dissatisfaction score. A high score indicates greater dissatisfaction and vice versa.

The 'Work Load Dissatisfaction'⁸ measures how satisfied are people with the work load in their jobs. The scores of the responses are added together to get the total work load dissatisfaction score. A high score indicates greater dissatisfaction with work load.

The 'Boredom Scale'⁸ measures the feelings one has about his work. The scale has both true-keyed and false-keyed items and the false-keyed item is reverse scored and the scores in all the items are added together to constitute the boredom score, a high score indicating greater feelings of boredom.

Affective strains (Depression, Anxiety and Irritation): The 'Depression Scale' developed by Cobb¹⁴ was used to assess the level of depression among the respondents. The scale consists of both negatively worded items and positively worded items and while scoring, the positively worded items are reverse scored so that a high total score indicates a high prevalence of depression.

The 'Anxiety Scale' consists of four items, of which one is positively worded. Items of this scale overlap with those by Gurin et al.¹⁵ and Spielberger et al.¹⁶. A high total score indicates high level of anxiety in the work situation.

The 'Irritation Scale' developed by Cobb¹⁴ consists of three negatively phrased items. A high total score indicates high level of irritation.

All the above measures have been extensively used in occupational stress research and have high reliability and validity coefficients as reported by the authors and were proved as valid measures in our culture also^{3, 17-20}.

Procedure: After obtaining permission to conduct the study from the concerned authority, the respondents were selected using stratified random sampling. For this, separate lists of women police personnel belonging to the different job levels were prepared and from these lists, a representative number of participants belonging to each job level were taken using random numbers. Representation was given to all the three police regions in selecting the subjects. Men police personnel were selected randomly from Ernakulam district.

Results and Discussion

The coefficients of correlation obtained between the different sources of stress and the job related strains are given in table 1. From the table, it can be seen that out of the 182 correlations obtained, 152 are significant in the case of the women police while only 101 correlations are significant in the case of the men police. The magnitude of the obtained correlations is also greater in the case of the women police personnel.

In the case of women police, job dissatisfaction has significant correlation with 22 of the 26 stress factors. Out of the 22 significant correlations, 20 are significant at the .01 level. However, as far as men police are concerned, only 16 of the 26 correlations are found to be significant. Moreover, out of the significant correlations obtained, only a few are major correlations. These results clearly indicate true gender differences, not only in the magnitude of the relationships but also with respect to the sources of stress that are correlated with job dissatisfaction.

Employed women are under high time pressure in view of their household duties and responsibilities in addition to the normal duties at job. Even though the social and familial roles of women have changed a lot, especially with the entrance of large number of women into the workforce, our women still have to perform their traditional roles such as child rearing and house maintenance. Other studies also have reported that working women are exposed to more stress and consequent strains than their male counterparts²¹. This is particularly true in the case of women police due to the nature of their job - long hours of duty, emergency calls, lack of vacation or holidays, unprescribed working time, and the like²³.

With regard to work load dissatisfaction, women police personnel is found to have significant correlations with all the stress measures other than interpersonal relations and lack of promotions, and 22 of the significant correlations are significant at the .01 level. However, the magnitudes of these correlations are low compared to that of job dissatisfaction. In the case of men police, work load dissatisfaction is found to have significant correlations only with 15 of the 26 stress variables. These results show that both the number and the magnitude of the correlations that various job stresses have with job dissatisfaction and work load dissatisfaction are greater for the women than the men police personnel. Moreover, the sources of stress which are related to workload dissatisfaction also differ in the case of the two gender groups.

Table-1
Correlations between stress and job related strains

Stress Variables	Job Dissatisfaction		Work Load Dissatisfaction		Boredom	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Quantitative overload	.36**	.07	.37**	.06	.22**	.08
Qualitative overload	.21**	.06	.19**	.18**	.09*	.05
Role ambiguity	.17**	.13	.23**	.16	.07	.32**
Role conflict	.15**	.24**	.16**	.23**	.22**	.33**
Lack of participation	.02	.35**	.09*	.44**	.08*	.44**
Lack Autonomy	.30**	.17	.28**	.09	.39**	.17**
Group pressure	.27**	.26**	.13**	.21**	.24**	.38**
Lack of challenges	.00	.28**	.08*	.46**	.12**	.32**
Lack of control	.08*	.11	.17**	.26**	.19**	.06
Interpersonal relationship	.03	.24*	.04	.02	.01	.33**
Problems with court	.60**	.08	.25**	.12	.56**	.02
Responsibility	.16**	.23**	.12**	-.01	.16**	.23**
Promotions	.13**	.21**	.007	.39**	.14**	.16
Job security	.29**	.27**	.30**	.02	.17**	.08
Victimization	.43**	.44**	.18**	.34**	.26**	.50**
Negative public attitude	.69**	.29**	.42**	.28**	.59**	.38**
Alienation	.69**	.17	.39**	.27**	.53**	.03
Perceived status	.68**	.42**	.42**	.19**	.41**	.23**
Strenuous working condition	.12**	.10	.12**	.17	.22**	.14
Emergency situation	.33**	.03	.25**	.08	.26**	.08
Inadequate grievance representation	.62**	.18	.32**	.13	.46**	.17
Rigid rules	.006	.23**	.10**	.13	.11**	.24**
Inadequate pay	.51**	.25**	.41**	.23**	.50**	.32**
Transfer policies	.43**	.34**	.18**	.21**	.44**	.21**
Schedules of working time	.81**	.23**	.43**	.34**	.59**	.54**
Home-work pressure	.55**	.19**	.41**	.28**	.36**	.25**

** Significant at the 0.01 level

From table 1, it can be seen that boredom is having significant correlations with all of the stress variables other than role ambiguity and interpersonal relations in the case of women police personnel. Out of these 24 significant correlations, 22 are significant at the .01 level. In the case of men police, only 16 of the 26 correlations are significant. This indicates that job boredom is not an important consequence of job stress for the men police personnel compared to the women personnel. The stress variables having major correlations with boredom are schedules of working time, victimization, lack of participation, group pressures, negative public attitude, role conflict, interpersonal relationships, inadequate pay, lack of challenges and role ambiguity. Here also the women and the men police differ in terms of the their nature and extent of the relationship between the various stresses and strain.

The correlations that the 26 sources of job stress have with the affective strains (table -2) reveal that for women police personnel, depression is having significant positive correlations with most of the stress measures. Twenty out of the 26 correlations are significant at the .01 level. Depression as a consequence of job stress among women police is strongly associated with the following stresses in the order, schedules of working time, home-work pressure, alienation, negative public attitude, inadequate pay, problems with courts, inadequate grievance representation, perceived status, and lack of autonomy. In the case of men police, out of the 26 correlations, only 13 correlations are found to be significant, and 12 of these are significant at the .01 level.

Table-2
Correlations between stress and affective Strains (N=400)

Stress Variables	Depression		Anxiety		Irritation	
	women	men	women	men	women	men
Quantitative overload	.28**	.09	.12**	.09	.06	.06
Qualitative overload	.22**	.04	.08*	.04	.24**	.17
Role ambiguity	.09**	.14	.11**	.06	.30**	.28**
Role conflict	.16**	.24**	.27**	.19**	.23**	.27**
Lack of participation	.04	.33**	.18**	.13	.16**	.10
Lack Autonomy	.29**	.08	.19**	.14	.15**	.27**
Group Pressure	.19**	.24**	.25**	.13	.24**	.28**
Lack of challenges	.07	.19	.27**	.24**	.37**	.30**
Lack of control	.01	.01	.33**	.01	.39**	.10
Interpersonal relationship	.04	.21**	.11**	.27**	.22**	.16
Problems with court	.45**	.10	.09**	.00	.03	.05
Responsibility	.16**	.05	.11**	.34**	.07	.21**
Promotions	.01	.19**	.25**	.10	.34**	.04
Job security	.18**	.09	.06	.01	.00	.15
Victimization	.27**	.40**	.10**	.24**	.001	.27**
Negative public attitude	.50**	.37**	.12**	.12	.06	.39**
Alienation	.51**	.02	.08*	.09	.14**	.08
Perceived status	.38**	.30**	.09*	.00	.01	.15
Strenuous working condition	.19**	.18*	.19**	.03	.18**	.15
Emergency situation	.27**	.01	.17**	.00	.10**	.09
Inadequate grievance representation	.41**	.12	.03	.13	.60	.21**
Rigid rules	.04	.03	.13**	.14**	.19**	.14**
Inadequate pay	.50**	.24**	.22**	.19**	.20**	.21**
Transfer policies	.24**	.19**	.11**	.02	.19**	.14**
Schedules of working Time	.60**	.26**	.16**	.12**	.04	.21**
Home-work pressure	.53**	.18**	.19**	.18**	.05	.07

** Significant at the 0.01 level; * Significant at the 0.05 level

Anxiety is having significant correlations with most of the stress variables in women police. Out of the 26 correlations, 24 correlations are found to be significant; 20 correlations significant at the .01 level, and 4 correlations at the .05 level. Stress variables which are not having significant relationships with anxiety are job security, and inadequate grievance representation.

Both these stresses are found related to anxiety in many studies. Being permanent government employees, the police personnel may not be highly apprehensive about job security, and consequently do not feel anxious in this respect. The magnitude of the relationships obtained between stress and anxiety show that even though most of the correlations are significant, only one is above .30 (between lack of control and anxiety). In the case of men police personnel, only nine correlations are found to be significant. This indicates that the relationships obtained between the stress variables and anxiety are not strong, which means that anxiety is not an important consequence of job stress in men police, predictable by the above sources of stress.

Irritation is a natural response to situations which are deficient or frustrating. From table 2, it can be seen that the affective strain of irritation is having significant positive correlations with most of the stress variables for the women police. Out of the 26 correlations, 16 correlations are significant at the .01 level. But in the case of men police, only 13 correlations are found to be significant at .01 level. Thus, the affective strains of depression and irritation are found to be the major correlates of job stress for both the female and male police personnel. Earlier studies also have reported depression and irritation as major correlates of job stress in police.

Thus, the results presented above indicate that job stress is significantly related to the various job related and, affective strains. An examination of the magnitude of the correlations between the different stress measures and the strain measures show that they are different for the different measures. In previous studies Burke²⁴ and Hall and Lawler²⁵ observed that not only the level of stress, but the type of stress also can determine the outcomes of stress.

Conclusion

The results of the present investigation have highlighted the prevalence of various job stresses in policing and their consequences in terms of job - related and affective strains. More than factors intrinsic to the job such as role conflict, role ambiguity, overload, etc., the women police are more affected by psychosocial aspects of the job such as negative public attitude, victimization, schedules of working time, strenuous working conditions, home- work pressures, etc., in terms of their consequences. This points towards the fact that many of these sources of job stress can be dealt with by making appropriate policy decisions. It is high time that steps be initiated to better police- public relations in order to produce changes in the public's attitudes toward police, and also to protect the police from victimization.

References

1. Davidson M.J. and Veno A., Multifaceted aspects of stress in police service, A.C.T. Australian Institute of Criminology Press, Monograph, (1977)
2. Joseph M.I., Stress in Police work: A preliminary study, *Psyc. Studies*, **34**, 47-54 (1989a)
3. Joseph M.I., Occupational Stress: An analytical study. Unpublished Ph.D thesis; Trivandrum: Department of Psychology, University of Kerala (1989b)
4. Kores W.H., Society's victim the policeman: An analysis of job stress in policing. Springfield, Illinois: Charles C Thomas (1976)
5. Kores W. and Hurrell J.J. Jr., Job stress in policemen. *J. of Police Science and Administration*, 2145-15 (1974)
6. Nair J.P., Job stress in women police. Unpublished Ph.D dissertation, Kalady: Department of Psychology, Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit (2007)
7. Nair J.P. and Joseph M.I., A Comparative Study of Job Stresses and Strains in Women Professionals. *The Psychospace*, **2**, 1-13 (2008)
8. Caplan R.D., Cobb S., French J.R.P., Van Harrison R. and Pinneau S.R., Job Demands and Worker Health: Main effects and occupational differences. HEW (NIOSH). Publication No.75-160, Washigton, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing office (1975)
9. Dharmangadan B., Stress at work: A comparison of five occupations, *Psyc. studies*, **33**, 162-69 (1988)
10. Jick T.D. and Mitz L.F., Sex differences in work stress, *Academy of Management Review*, **10**, 408-420 (1985)
11. Nair J.P. and Joseph M.I., Job stress and strains in police: A search for gender difference, *The Psychospace*, **3**, 1-7 (2009)
12. Srivastava A.K. and Singh A.P., Manual of the Occupational Stress Index, Varanasi: Department of Psychology, Banarus Hindu University (1982)
13. Quinn R.P. and Shepard L.J., The 1972-1973 quality employment survey: Descriptive statistics with comparison data from 1969-1970 survey of working conditions, Ann Arbor: (1974)
14. Cobb S., Class A Variables from the Card sort test, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Institute for Social Research (1970)
15. Gurin G., Veroff J. and Feld S., Americans view their mental health, New York: Basic Books (1960)
16. Spielberger C.D., Gorsuch R.L. and Lushene R.E., Manual for the state-trait anxiety inventory. Palo Alto: Consulting Psychologists press (1970)
17. Joseph M.I. and Varghese G., Moderating effects of social support and job-category on stress- strain relationship in a manufacturing organization, *The Creative Psychologist*, **1**, 47-59 (1988)
18. Joseph M.I. and Dharmagadan B., Union Commitment among white collar employees: An examination of certain correlates, *Psyc. Studies*, **32**, 104-110 (1988)
19. Nair J.P. and Joseph M.I., Job related strains and Psychosomatic Complaints: A comparative study of professional women. National Seminar on Mental Health Status and Quality of life of Women, 7-9 October, 2004, Union Christian College, Aluva, Kerala (2004)
20. Vidyeeswari V., Impact of Job stress on psychosomatic complaints and job satisfaction. Unpublished Ph.D dissertation; Kalady :Department of Psychology, Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit (2007)
21. Brief A.P. and Weiss H.M., Organizational behavior: Affect in the workplace. *Annual Rev. of Psychology*, **53**, 279-307 (2002)
22. Barnett R.C. and Gareis K.C., Reduced-hours employment, The relationship between difficulty of trade-offs and quality of life, *Work and Occupations*, **27**(2), 168-187 (2000)
23. Jacobs J. A. and Gerson K., Overworked individuals or overworked families? Explaining trends in work, leisure, and family time, *Work and Occupations*, **28**(1), 40-63 (2001)
24. Burke R.J., Occupational stresses and job satisfaction, *The J. of Occupational Stress and Social Psychology*, **100**, 235-244 (1976)
25. Hall D.T. and Lawler E.E., Job pressures and research performance, *American Scientist*, **69**, 64-73 (1971)