Stress and Its Impact on Police Personnel: A Comprehensive Study of Punjab

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Abstract

Police play a pivotal role in maintaining societal order, safeguarding lives and property, and combating crime. Their primary responsibility is to serve citizens impartially. However, contemporary life is marked by pervasive stress, and police personnel are not immune to its effects. Several factors contribute to mounting stress levels among them, including excessive workloads, extended hours, overtime, court duties, VIP assignments, personal safety concerns, superiors' attitudes, and external pressures. This stress adversely impacts both their personal and professional lives, compromising their efficiency and effectiveness. Various studies revealed that stress levels in India are notably higher than in many other countries. Alarmingly, there is a rising incidence of suicides among police officers, underscoring the perilous consequences of stress. This study employs the Interview Schedule method to investigate stress levels among a selected sample of police personnel. The primary objective of this research is to propose measures for ameliorating the well-being of police personnel.

Keywords: *Stress, Police, Crime, Safety.*

Police Administration is playing a significant role in society. Its main duty is to maintain law & order in the state, which often is not an easy task. Another vital duty of the Police is to serve the citizens without any discrimination. Stress nowadays has become a common thing in people's lives, and even police personnel also suffer from stress owing to numerous factors. People under stress behave differently compared to those who are not living under stress. During the traditional times, stress among the police was less compared to the modern period because of the emergence of new multi-dimensional challenges. The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines stress as a state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation. Stress is a natural human response that prompts us to address challenges and threats in our lives. Everyone experiences stress to some degree, and the way we respond to stress, however, makes a big difference to our overall well-being" (Stress, 2023). This stress among the police personnel affects not only their social life but also their working life, which hampers their capability and capacity to do work properly. As per the study conducted by Cigna TTK Health Insurance, stress levels in India are very high as compared to other countries of the world, either developed or developing. In today's world, we have even seen an increasing number of suicides among police personnel, which shows the dangerous effects of stress on their lives.

Just like in any line of work, if stress is left unaddressed, it can result in significant repercussions. These outcomes don't just impact the officer personally; they also extend to individuals the officer interacts with regularly, including coworkers, superiors, friends, family, and the general public (Beshears, 2017). Political interference increases stress among the police personnel, and even the Punjab Police Act of 2007 mentions the separation of law & order and investigation, but unfortunately, this objective has not been achieved yet.

There are two dimensions of stress among police personnel: internal and external. Internal dimension includes the pressure from higher officials, increasing workload, overtime, etc, and the external dimension includes an increase in crime rate, rude behaviour of the public, traumatic events like managing dead bodies, etc. Both primary and secondary data will be collected. There is no doubt on the fact that stress level decreases the productivity of police personnel in many ways. There are various studies conducted on the relationship between stress and productivity, and there is a negative relationship between the stress level and the productivity of employees. As per the University of Oxford, an extensive study into happiness and productivity has found that workers are 13% more productive when happy. With the passage of time, there has been a manifold increase in the functions of police. Earlier, people used to hesitate while approaching police, but now the situation has changed; people even approach police for their petty issues, like for getting music system shut after 10 p.m., finding their lost dog, etc.

Former **DGP Prakash Singh,** after retiring from the service in 1996, started raising his voice for the reforms in the police system. This shows that there must be pressure and stress even among the higher officials, and that honorable Prakash Singh is still working for the improvement of the police. Even he is known for the landmark judgment of 2006 in which the Supreme Court gave special directions and instructions to the state governments as the Police come under the state list (Schedule VII of the Constitution).

Theoretical Perspectives on Stress in Policing

Theoretical perspectives on stress in policing encompass a multidisciplinary examination of the various frameworks and models employed to understand the complex dynamics of stress within law enforcement. Police officers often face unique stressors inherent to their profession, including exposure to danger, trauma, and societal pressures.

- **General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS)**: The GAS theory, proposed by Hans Selye, suggests that individuals exposed to stressors undergo three stages: alarm, resistance, and exhaustion. In policing, officers often face unpredictable and potentially life-threatening situations, causing them to cycle through these stages. Alarm occurs when an officer

encounters a stressful event, resistance reflects their efforts to adapt and cope, and exhaustion can manifest as burnout or physical health issues. Recognizing these stages can help law enforcement agencies implement strategies for stress prevention and management (Stephenson, Schram, Canetti, & Orr, 2022).

- **Transactional Model of Stress and Coping**: This model, developed by Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman, emphasizes the role of cognitive appraisal in the stress response. In policing, officers' perception and appraisal of stressors play a crucial role in their emotional and physiological reactions. For example, an officer might perceive a routine traffic stop as less stressful if they believe they can handle it effectively. Training officers in stress-reducing cognitive techniques can improve their coping mechanisms and overall well-being (Paulsen, 2008).

- **Social Support Theory**: Social support theory posits that individuals with strong social networks and support systems are better equipped to cope with stress. In policing, camaraderie among officers and support from their families and peers can mitigate the negative effects of stress. Law enforcement agencies can foster supportive work environments and provide resources for officers to seek help when needed, thus enhancing their resilience (Butler, 2018).

- **Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model:** The JD-R model suggests that job-related demands and resources influence employees' well-being and performance. Policing is inherently demanding, but agencies can mitigate stress by providing officers with adequate resources, such as training, equipment, and mental health support. Balancing the demands of the job with available resources is critical in preventing stress-related burnout (Frank, 2018).

- **Occupational Stress Theory:** This theory focuses on how the unique demands of a profession, such as policing, can lead to chronic stress. Policing involves exposure to trauma, shift work, and the constant need to make split-second decisions. Occupational stress theory calls for tailored interventions and support systems that address the specific stressors inherent in policing (Shaik 2022).

Implications

Understanding stress in policing through these theoretical frameworks can guide law enforcement agencies and policymakers in developing strategies to reduce stressors and promote the well-being of police officers. Prioritizing officer mental health not only benefits individuals but also leads to improved community policing, as officers who are less stressed

are better equipped to make sound decisions and build positive relationships with the communities they serve.

Factors contributing to Stress

Stress nowadays is in every field, whether that is business or any profession, but the stress level among the police is the highest. It is due to the immense stress that the profession of policing is considered one of the most stressful professions. The threats to their lives while maintaining discipline and law & order become factors affecting their cognitive abilities by increasing their stress levels. The high stress level affects not only their mental health but also their physical well-being, which further acts as a factor increasing their stress. There are many factors contributing to the increasing stress among the police personnel, which are given below:

- **High-Pressure Work Environments**: Police officers often face high-stress situations, such as responding to emergencies, dealing with criminals, and making split-second decisions. The constant need to be alert and make critical judgments can lead to chronic stress.

- **Self-Financing Policing**: Financial concerns are a common source of stress among police personnel, as they frequently find themselves in situations where they have to cover policing-related expenses out of their own funds

- **Exposure to Traumatic Events:** Police personnel frequently witness traumatic and distressing events, such as accidents, violence, and crime scenes. This exposure to trauma can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other psychological issues.

- **Long and Irregular Working Hours**: Police officers often work long shifts and irregular hours, which can disrupt their sleep patterns and affect their overall well-being. The unpredictability of their schedules can make it difficult to maintain a healthy work-life balance.

- **Public Scrutiny:** Police officers are under constant public scrutiny, and negative media coverage can add to their stress. Criticism and distrust from the community can lead to feelings of frustration and helplessness.

- **Administrative Burdens:** Paperwork, bureaucracy, and administrative tasks can be time-consuming and add to the workload of police personnel. These tasks can be seen as a hindrance to their core duty of maintaining law and order.

- **Personal and Professional Life Balance**: Balancing the demands of a law enforcement career with family and personal life can be challenging. The stress from the job can spill over into their personal lives, affecting relationships and overall well-being.
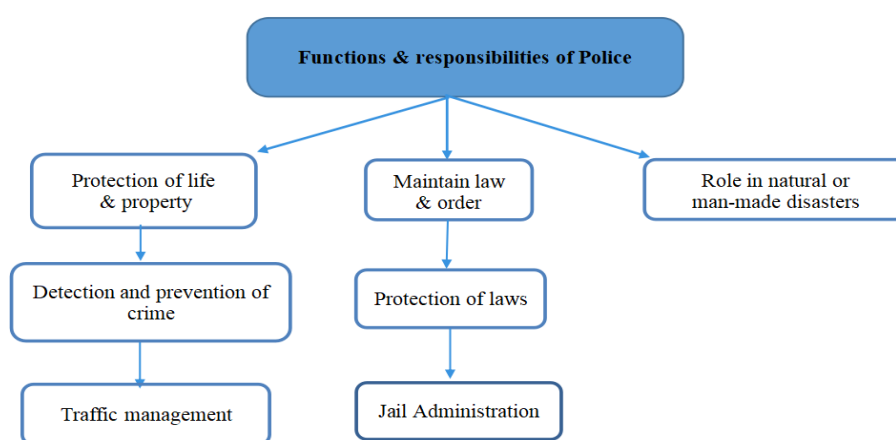
- **Lack of Mental Health Support:** In some cases, there may be a lack of adequate mental health support and resources for police officers, making it difficult for them to seek help for stress-related issues.

- **Peer Pressure and Stigma:** There may be a culture of not discussing or seeking help for mental health issues within the police force, which can create a stigma around mental health and prevent officers from seeking assistance.

COVID-19: New Challenges for Police Personnel

Police officers served as the initial responders in high-risk situations. Nevertheless, the emergence of COVID-19 posed a fresh peril to them, as they, like any other citizen, faced the risk of virus exposure. The distinction lay in the fact that police, similar to other vital services like healthcare professionals, firefighters, paramedics, and others, were obligated to answer calls, typically entailing encounters with unfamiliar circumstances. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the mental stress experienced by police officers and law enforcement personnel around the world. Several factors have contributed to this impact: Mehdizadeh, S, & Kamkar, K. (2020).

- **Increased Workload:** Police officers have been tasked with enforcing lockdowns, monitoring quarantine protocols, and ensuring public safety during the pandemic. This has led to an increased workload and longer working hours, which can contribute to heightened stress levels.

- **Health Concerns:** Police officers have faced higher risks of exposure to the virus due to their frontline roles in enforcing restrictions and interacting with the public. Fear of contracting the virus, potentially spreading it to their families, and concerns about personal protective equipment (PPE) availability have added to their stress. This exposure heightened the risk of infection for police officers, leading to anxiety about their health and the health of their families.

- **Changing Roles and Protocols:** Law enforcement agencies had to adapt to new protocols and procedures to ensure the safety of both officers and the public. Adapting to new ways of interacting with the public while maintaining social distancing and using PPE can be challenging and stressful.

- **Uncertainty and Fear**: The uncertainty surrounding the pandemic, its duration, and its economic and social impacts has led to increased stress among police officers. The fear of potential exposure to the virus during routine interactions or arrests can take a toll on mental well-being.

- **Risk to Families:** The fact that police officers' daily interactions with the public can put them at risk of exposure to COVID-19, and in turn, may further expose their loved ones to the virus, also adds stress. In some cases, they may be returning home to family members with compromised immune systems for different reasons, such as illness, medication, or pregnancy.

- **Dealing with Public Reactions**: Enforcing pandemic-related restrictions and regulations has sometimes led to confrontations with the public, resulting in negative reactions, verbal abuse, or even physical altercations. Such interactions can be emotionally draining and increase stress levels.

Source- Created by the authors

Objectives

1. To find out the stress level among the Punjab Police
2. To find out the consequences of increasing the workload
3. To analyse the political interference in the Punjab Police
4. To examine the role of stress in disrupting the social life of police officials
5. To suggest the measures for improving the conditions of the Police

Research Methodology

The primary emphasis of the research centers around the stress experienced by Punjab Police personnel. The study will utilize both primary and secondary data to gather the necessary information from Punjab Police personnel. It is a descriptive and analytical study that delves into the on-field experiences of the Punjab Police. A sample size of 100 police personnel from the S.A.S. Nagar district has been chosen for the study. Questionnaires will be developed for data collection, and stratified random sampling will be employed at the Thana level. Secondary

sources for information will encompass articles, books, newspapers, online resources, government documents, and more.

Each on-duty police officer had the opportunity to participate in the research, and involvement was completely voluntary, with no incentives provided. The researchers conducted in-person visits to the S.A.S Nagar district in Punjab, taking place in the post-COVID-19 period between November 2024 and March 2025. During these visits, they informed the officers about the project and discussed ethical considerations to obtain informed consent. The majority of the officials were from the thana level (Police stations).

Analysis of Police

Table 1

	Age					Gender		
	20-30	30-40	40-50	50-60	Total	Male	Female	Total
No. of Respondents	32	36	26	06	100	84	16	100
Percentage	32%	36%	26%	06%	100%	84%	16%	100%

In this research work, 32% of the participants fell within the 20-30 age bracket, while 36% were in the 30-40 range, 26% were aged 40-50, and merely 6% represented the 50-60 age category. The study also indicated that 84% of the participants identified as male, whereas 16% identified as female.

Table 2

Qualification	No. of Respondents	Percentage	Designation	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Metric	38	38%	Constable	28	28%
Higher Secondary	24	24%	Head-Constable	26	26%
Graduate	30	30%	ASI	18	18%
Post Graduate	08	08%	SI	12	12%
MPhil/Ph.D.	0	0%	Inspector	16	16%
Total	100	100%	Total	100	100%

When the respondents were asked about their qualification, 38% were found to be matriculate, 24% were higher secondary, 30% were graduates, and 08% were postgraduate. There were no respondents who were MPhil or Phd.

As the study was conducted at Thana level, 28% of the respondents were Constables, 26% Head Constables, 18% Assistant Sub Inspectors (ASI), 12% Sub Inspectors, and 16% Inspectors.

Table 3

S. N.	Questions	Yes/%		No/%		Sometimes/%		Total/%	
1.	Do you have enough time for your family with the job?	14	14%	26	26%	60	60%	100	100%
2.	Do you think your job is stressful?	86	86%	14	14%	-	-	100	100%
3.	Do you get enough respect from the public?	32	32%	20	20%	48	48%	100	100%
4.	Do you face any pressure from your higher officials for doing inappropriate work?	76	76%	24	24%	-	-	100	100%
5.	Are you satisfied with your working hours?	22	22%	78	78%	-	-	100	100%
5.1	If not, then do you think it increases your stress?	58	74.35%	20	25.65%	-	-	78	100%
6.	Do you get enough time for recreational activities?	18	18%	30	30%	52	52%	100	100%
7.	Is leave sanctioned during urgent situations?	32	32%	16	16%	52	52%	100	100%
8.	Do you face political pressure in your work?	22	22%	06	06%	72	72%	100	100%
9.	Do you think your stress level affects your work?	42	42%	16	16%	42	42%	100	100%
10.	Does your job stress affects you social life?	38	38%	12	12%	50	50%	100	100%
11.	Are you satisfied with the behavior of your higher officials?	58	58%	42	42%	-	-	100	100%

Key Insights: These findings reveal several key insights about respondents' work experiences:

- **Work-Life Balance:** 60% sometimes have time for family, 26% don't, and only 14% feel they have enough time for family.

- **Job-Related Stress:** A significant 86% experience job-related stress, while only 14% do not.

- **Public Respect:** 32% receive enough public respect, 20% do not, and 48% receive it occasionally.

- **Workplace Pressures:** A concerning 76% face pressure from higher officials for inappropriate work, while 24% do not.

- **Working Hours:** Only 22% are satisfied with their working hours, and 74.35% believe longer hours lead to more stress.

- **Leisure Time**: 18% have enough time for recreation, 30% do not, and 52% have occasional opportunities.

- **Urgent Leave:** 30% get leave during urgent situations, 16% do not, and 26% sometimes get leave.

- **Political Pressure**: 22% experience political pressure at work, 6% never do, and 72% encounter it occasionally.

- **Stress Impact:** 42% report stress affecting work, 38% affecting their social life.

- **Satisfaction with Higher Officials**: 58% express satisfaction, while 42% are not satisfied.

These findings highlight various challenges and dynamics within respondents' workplaces and underscore the importance of addressing work-related stress and balancing professional and personal life.

Table 4

Have you ever suffered from stress or depression due to your work?

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	26	26%
No	18	18%
Frequently	56	56%
Total	100	100%

The data indicates that a substantial portion of respondents (56%) have experienced work-related stress or depression frequently ("Many times"). A significant minority (26%) reported experiencing it at least once ("Yes"). In contrast, 18% stated they haven't faced work-related stress or depression ("No"). These results underscore the need to address workplace mental health issues and implement strategies to reduce stress and depression among employees.

Suggestions

- The state governments should appoint the required number of psychologists for counselling policemen.

- There should be a provision for periodic psychiatric evaluation of the police personnel, which will show their mental health.

- Police should be provided the basic facilities. There should a proper funding focusing on fuel, police vehicles, which should be maintained properly.

- Taking into consideration the Digital India policy, the Police should be provided with high-speed Internet, as low-speed Internet often increases the frustration among the policemen.

- The state should work on the principle of time management. Although the Punjab Government declared that the personnel would be deployed on an eight-hour shift and would be given a weekly off on a regular basis. This should be implemented properly as soon as possible.

- Punjab Government, in order to decrease the workload, should recruit more staff as per the requirements of time.

- The state government should work on the demand of separating politics and the police, as this political interference in police work not only increases the stress of police personnel but also affects society as a whole, as very often the poor and needy are denied justice.

- There should be a proper mechanism for giving rewards to the well-performers, which would act as a motivating force among them.

- The state should establish a grievance redressal system where the police personnel can lodge a complaint without any hesitation or fear of the higher officials.

- There is an urgent need for a stringent law to protect police personnel from attacks while their jobs. Many times, the culprits, after attacking cops, roam freely by getting bail easily.

- India should proactively manage police stress through comprehensive support systems, involving collaboration among law enforcement, mental health professionals, and support networks.

- In addition to this, practices such as yoga, meditation, and psychological counseling can contribute significantly to maintaining the mental well-being of police personnel.

Conclusion

This study aimed to analyze the stress levels among police personnel and identify the underlying reasons behind the increasing stress. In addition, the study aimed to suggest measures for improving the working conditions of police officers. The police department is one of the most crucial arms of the government, and as crime rates continue to rise, public expectations from law enforcement have similarly increased. While much attention is given to these expectations, it is equally important to consider the growing demands and pressures placed on police personnel. Various studies have consistently highlighted the challenging and often miserable conditions faced by police officers, from long working hours to exposure to traumatic events. Unfortunately, the recommendations put forward in these studies are

frequently ignored or inadequately addressed by state governments, which exacerbates the situation.

There is no doubt that police forces across the country are in dire need of reforms to address these issues. Effective law enforcement can only be achieved if the well-being of police personnel is prioritized, ensuring they have the support, resources, and work-life balance necessary to perform their duties effectively. A comprehensive reform in the police sector is essential, not just for the benefit of the officers but for the betterment of society as a whole, enabling law enforcement agencies to serve the public more efficiently and responsibly.

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