

## **STRESS AMONG INDIAN POLICE AND CONCEPTUAL ISSUES**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Origin of the stress concept predates antiquity. Even prehistoric man must have recognized a common element in loss of vigor and a sense of exhaustion that overcame him after hard labour, intense fear, and lengthy exposure to cold or heat, starvation, loss of blood or any kind of strenuous exertion. The objective of this paper is to understand the meaning of stress and provide few definitions. Also to explain the methodology to measure stress among police personnel.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, stress was equated with force, pressure or strain exerted upon a material object or person which resists these forces and attempts to maintain its original state. The term stress has been used variously to refer to a) stimulus (external force acting on the organism), b) response (changes in the physiological functions), c) interaction (interaction between an external force and the resistance opposed to it), and d) more comprehensive combinations of the above factors.

In psychology, stress refers to a state of the organism resulting from some interaction with the environment. In psycho-physiology, stress is that stimulus which imposes detectable strain that can be easily accommodated by the body and so presents itself as impaired health or behavior.

In the stimulus –oriented approach, stress “ should be understood as that which happens to the man, not that which happens in him, it is a set of causes ,not a set of symptoms” Symonds (1974).According to Margetts (1975) living organisms adjust themselves to handle and maintain a reasonable input of stimuli. If the input of stimuli is insufficient or excessive for the individual, it can be considered as stress. Here stress was treated as an independent variable.

In the response-oriented approach, study of stress tend to be concerned with the specification of the particular response or pattern of responses which may be taken as evidence that the person is or has been under pressure from a disturbing environment. That response or pattern of response is either actually treated as stress or, at least, is treated as its defining parameter. Here stress is treated as the dependent variable, as a response to a stressor agent. According to Selye (1956), ‘Stress is the non-specific (physiological) response of the body to any demand made upon it.

In the interactional approach, stress arises through the existence of a particular relationship between the person and his environment. According to Cox and Mackay (1976) stress can be

most adequately described as part of a complex and dynamic system of transaction between the person and his environment. It deliberately draws from both response and stimulus – based approaches, but in doing so it emphasizes the ecological and transactional nature of the phenomenon. It treats stress as an intervening variable, the reflection of a transaction between the person and his environment and it is part of a dynamic cybernetic system.

Some of the definitions of stress are given as below:

Authors	Definitions
Holroyd & Lazarus, 1982	Psychological stress requires a judgment that environmental and/or internal demands exceed the individual's resources for managing them
Selye, 1979	Stress is 'perception.' It is the demands that are imposed upon us because there are too many alternatives. Stress is caused by being conscientious and hardworking
Pearlin, 1982	There is general agreement that stress refers to a response of the organism to a noxious or threatening condition
Skinner, 1985	Stress is a cerebral reaction of a particular individual to a stimulus event
Cox, 1985	Stress is part of a complex and dynamic system of transaction between the person and his environment
Eliot, 1988	Stress may be viewed as the body's response to any real or imagined event perceived as requiring some adaptive response and/or producing strain
Humphrey, 1992	In essence, stress can be considered as any factor, acting internally or externally, that makes it difficult to adapt and that induces increased effort on the part of the person to maintain a state of equilibrium both internally and with the external environment
Levi, 1996	Stress is caused by a multitude of demands (stressors), such as an inadequate fit between what we need and what we are capable of, and what our environment offers and what it demands of us

**Source:** Definitions compiled by the researcher

### **Police Stress**

The working conditions of the policemen are lagging behind in many aspects –social as well as human, his training deficient in equipping him to meet the task pressures, public condemnation bad enough to add to his frustration and overall work environment which is dehumanizing and deintellectualizing. A policeman, on an average has far too many frustrations most of which remain unresolved. He passes through incessant mental conflicts and inner turmoils. The unresolved frustrations and personal conflicts result in stress and anxiety and the process goes on. Everybody employs self-protective maneuvers without awareness (sometimes with awareness) to prevent anxiety and stress by disguising or screening the sources of frustration or adjusting one's responses to them. Such redirection of responses and manipulation of sources of frustration are called defense mechanisms. It is evident that the common adjustment reactions of the policemen to their work environment

may not be particularly healthy. Poor adjustments are a function of both the individuals and the situations. Stress and related health and personal problems should be the concern of every administrator not only because of the humanitarian aspects but also because a failure to deal with them can have a profoundly negative effect upon the total operation of the police organization.

A sizeable body of literature has developed that examines police stress from a variety of perspectives.

Clinton (1981) pointed out four sets of stressors:

1) external, 2) internal, 3) task related and 4) individual. External stressors include frustrations with the criminal justice system, particularly in terms of the apparent leniency of court decisions and the scheduling of court appearances, discontent with unfavorable media coverage, resentment of certain opinions arising out of minority communities and dislike of decisions and interests of government and administrative bodies affecting the performance of police work.

Violanti (1982) found three major forces in the police system that exacerbate a stress condition: 1) the police organization is generally a quasi-military, bureaucratic styled organization, designed to exert systematic control over members; 2) the criminal justice system undermines police idealism and legitimation of law; 3) the prevalence of crime and expectations of the police; officers perceive the crime situation as beyond their control.

Reeves (1982) saw the perceived notions people hold about what is masculine and feminine in society as the primary cause of police stress. Sex roles are learned and can therefore be changed. A more humanistic orientation toward sex roles is a prerequisite for structural changes to occur in the work place, home and the community. When there is less sex role stereotyping there will be less negative stress for police officers and their families.

Internal stressors cover a large number of problem areas, many of which are organizational including training that is felt to be inadequate, equipment, that is thought to be substandard or in a state of disrepair, poor pay and ambiguously defined reward structures, as well as inadequate career development guidelines, offensive departmental policies, excessive paper work and intradepartmental political favoritism.

Task related stressors include role conflicts, the rigors of shift work, boredom, fear, danger of being exposed to the miseries and brutalities of life, and work overload. Hageman (1978) explored the inter role conflicts of law officers, especially the conflict between occupational and marital roles. Findings indicate that role conflicts do affect marital relationships to some degree. The commitment to twenty four hour day and the changes of shifts had a negative effect on marriages and on non-police friendship. The wives reported that husbands often exhibited emotional detachment and repression of feelings. Kroes and Gould (1979) in an empirical study of job stress in policemen found that a major stressor on officers is that of emotional injury. Officers who do get hurt suffer emotional injury as a result.

Individual stressors include fears about job competence, individual success and safety. It also includes stressors arising out of performing police work, particularly health problems, alcoholism, marital problems, divorce and suicide. Confrontation with physical violence of citizens seems to nearly always generate significant stress in the police officers involved. Law enforcement officers perceive as stressful those incidents relating to violence, severe personnel/disciplinary matters and administrative issues, all of which may be

considered as threatening because of their potential damage to an officer's person, career or self image.

Results from various studies indicate that most of the subjects tested, strongly or moderately agree that the following factors would reduce occupation stress experienced by police officers:

1. A behavioral profile of each policeman. (Daviss, 1982; Black, 1982)
2. A programme from training supervisors to train needs, recognize problems and initiate remedial actions. (Teten and Minderman, 1977; Daviss, 1982)
3. Counseling programmes for groups as well as for families and individuals (Carson, 1982; Yeblosky,1979)
4. Self-monitoring of reactions to stressful situations, muscular relaxation and development of adaptive self statements (Fennell,1979; Gudjonsson and Adlam,1982).
5. Training in biofeedback, progressive relaxation, T group or sensitivity sessions, hypnosis, anger management (Pelsmaekers,1981; Meadows,1981;Lustman and Sowa,1983 and Lester et al,1984)
6. Recognize the value of the job and set goals so that there is something to work toward, to accomplish (Black,1982)
7. Efforts by police organization to cut back on department caused stress (Daviss,1982)
8. Increase fitness through physical exercise, nutritional habits and psychological well being (Prentice and Servatius,1982)
9. Development of in-house strategies including peer counseling, recruit training and spouse orientation(Leonard and Tully,1980)
10. Personal participation in problem identification, problem solving, performance evaluation and decision making so that likelihood of job satisfaction increases and there is reduction of some of the organizational stresses otherwise active (Schilling,1980)

In the Indian context there is dearth of empirical studies on police professionals. Pillai (1987) highlighted the percentage of police personnel and their wives who experienced stress as a result of this particular occupation. Reviewing the literature on stress among police personnel, he noted 10 types of relevant organizational stressors;

1. Courts including frequent appearance and leniency by courts
2. Administrative backup including lack of support in different situations
3. Lack of support from the public
4. Lack of career development opportunities
5. Inadequate rewards
6. Excessive paper work
7. Ineffective measures against criminals

8. Distorted press reports
9. Poor pay
10. Working in isolation

The infrastructure in the police force is orthodox autocratic regimented form providing little scope for smooth flow of interaction. It is mainly order giving and order taking. The natural human relations based on mutual understanding are sadly missing. Thus the emergence of relationships at work as a factor having maximum co-variance with total stress is hardly surprising. Buch (1972) found that considerate behavior of supervisors was related inversely to feelings of job pressure.

It is seen that in Indian police force, police men in higher ranks have increased work load and areas of jurisdiction. Further, there are conflicting job demands, responsibilities of subordinates, time pressure and deadlines, physical strain of work environment, long hours and having to cope with changes at work and expenses (monetary and career) of making mistakes. It is seen that since subordinates are incapable of performing their tasks properly, the senior officers tend to take on their responsibilities also. Increased accountability of any act within their area of jurisdiction, political interference, fear of explanation of any indiscipline or irresponsibility on the part of subordinates, fear of unknown, lack of communication and cooperation from other departments result in unresolved frustrations and personal conflicts which further lead to stress and anxiety among officers at higher levels. Studies suggest that stress course and its dimensions will be significantly different among levels and departments of police personnel.

It is seen that in Indian police force policemen in higher ranks (senior officers and sub-inspectors) have increased areas of supervision, work overload, increased accountability, responsibilities and areas of jurisdiction. As a result they tend to score high on job stress (total) and its components. Therefore, their perception of job stress differs from policemen at other levels.

The amount of social prestige and esteem the police in India enjoy does not require any elaboration. The subordinate ranks are so low paid that corruption has become an accepted thing. The fact that a police officer is supposed to be all the twenty four hours on duty should be duly reflected in the pay scales. Besides, he or she does not enjoy even the fundamental rights that other public servants enjoy. He has to do night duty not less than fifteen days a month and need to be compensated for night duty, working overtime and occupational hazards.

Most policemen are emotionally starved and starved of finer things of life. Their normal physiological and psychological needs are not fulfilled and that too right from 19-20 years till the retirement day. There are several limitations to the existing police stress research literature, however. First, much of the extant research has been qualitative in nature, using focus groups and one-on-one interviews with officers to identify the stressors and the impact it has on them (Kroes et al., 1974a, b; Toch,2002). Although a qualitative approach gives researchers an excellent snapshot into the lives of police officers, it cannot be used to quantify how much stress officers are under or the degree to which those stressors are associated with outcome variables such as job satisfaction.

Second, in the instances where police stressors have been quantified, there are limitations to the measures. One concern revolves around scale availability. For example, the Police Stress

Survey (PSS; Spielberger, Westberry, Grier, & Greenfield, 1979, 1981) is a 60-item measure developed and initially validated using samples of police officers from Florida. Although it is very comprehensive, the PSS has not been widely adopted, in part because it has never been published in the open scientific literature. A second concern is survey burden. For example, the Police Daily Hassles scale (Hart et al., 1993) contains 86 stressors from 10 organizational and 9 operational dimensions.

However, when combined with other types of measures often included in surveys (e.g., outcomes, mediators, moderators, and demographics), a large police stress measure can contribute too much to the survey burden faced by already overworked police officers.

A third limitation involves the fact that much of the existing police stress research is overly focused on the job itself and does not recognize that work–family boundaries are permeable. Researchers have argued that occupational stress is not only a function of the stressors found in the immediate work environment but also those from the individual's family life (Greenhaus

& Parasuraman, 1986; Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 2002). More specifically, Greenhaus and Parasuraman (1986) emphasized that work and family boundaries overlap and that family concerns also have a negative impact on both occupational stress and organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction.

Thus, when assessing occupational stressors among police officers, researchers should consider measuring the impact of the job on the family (Alexander & Walker, 1996; McCreary, Thompsen, & Pasto', 2003), as well as the impact of family life on an officer's ability to do the job. In one study the researcher sought to address these limitations in the police stress literature during development of two reliable and valid measures of police stress. In Study 1, the themes for these measures were developed using a focus group methodology. The use of focus groups during the initial stage of research is especially important because they provide essential insights into the depth and complexity of an area (Coyne & Raccioppo, 2000; Lazarus, 2000). Once the substantive themes and issues were identified, questionnaire items were created and quantitative psychometric analyses were then used with fresh samples of officers to determine the reliability, as well as the construct, discriminant, and concurrent validity, of the measures (Studies 2 to 4). Thus, the measures were developed utilizing relevant stressors obtained from focus groups of experienced police officers. The surveys were short to limit survey burden issues in future research. Finally, the development of items will take into consideration the permeability of work and family lives.

To conclude stress is the demands made on an organism or a person, which the person is unable to cope with. A policeman, on an average, has far too many frustrations most of which remain unresolved. He passes through incessant mental conflicts and internal turmoils. The unresolved frustrations and personal conflicts result in stress and the process goes on. One might abstain from, control or redirect one's reaction in such situations, depending on one's ability to modify one's conduct. Everybody employs self-protective maneuvers without awareness (sometimes one may be aware also) to prevent stress by disguising or screening the sources of frustration or by adjusting one's responses to them. The adjustment reactions and behavioral outcomes of the policemen in response to stress are not particularly healthy. Poor adjustments are a function of both the individual and the situation. In the case of the police, action is called for on both fronts.

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