

Review Article

Occupational stress among armed forces and police personnel: a review

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ABSTRACT

In today's world, stress is a word which is hard to avoid. If someone asks people about their stress and specifically how they know it exists- two general types were described. First, there are experiences of mental distress, - often accompanied by feelings of not being able to cope, that things are falling apart, that the person is not in control of themselves and their situation or is just a general case that without specific reasons that all is not well. Secondly, the physiological manifestations of less appetite, sleeplessness, sweating, ulcers and physical illness of various degrees. Different people have different views about it from various sources. Occupational stress can be explained as the physiological and emotional responses that originate when personnel feel an imbalance between their work demands and their capability and response to meet these demands. Purpose of this paper is to provide a general review on "occupational stress among armed forces and police personnel of India" with the help of available literature. The home ministry commissioned conducted a study to look into the reasons for premature retirements of paramilitary forces. The findings of the study revealed that lack of sleep, manpower crunch, no leaves and lack of motivation were some of the reasons responsible for people quitting the jobs. However, to the best of my knowledge, no specific research study has been carried-out in India till date to assess the rate and reason of suicides among armed forces and even the home ministry's official statement revealed that, in most of the cases of suicides, the reasons are more personnel than work related.

Keywords: Stress, Occupational stress, Armed forces, Police personnel

INTRODUCTION

"Take rest; a field that has rested gives a bountiful crop."- Ovid

If, you are an employee whether government or non-government then imagine a day when you want some break after immense work because you are feeling tired. But due to extra work of your institution, you couldn't get rest. You become increasingly irritable, and tired that you can't even focus long enough to enjoy with friends or family members. Your diet will also irregular due to work burdens. Hence, your physical, mental and social health will be disturbed due to hectic schedule. So, you can also imagine a work stress of our Jawans, Policemen and so on. Occupational stress affects both the

individual and its environment of working. Jawans working in adverse situations, in expected and unexpected emergencies, working for long hours in adverse situations, the physical and mental health of these occupational personnel always undergoes both psychological and physical traumatic experiences.¹ The paramilitary forces in India were showing clear signs of work-related stress experiencing its negative impact on mental and physical health. Different sections of the paramilitary hierarchy differ in their experience of job stress. A study conducted by the IIM, Ahmedabad on "emotional intelligence and occupational stress in BSF and CRPF" in 2012 expressed that these paramilitary forces are overburdened with work, a reason that is causing dissatisfaction in the ranks. The report submitted to the ministry of home affairs also noted high levels of

pay discrepancy, hardship due to unpaid medical claims and lack of career progression for jawans. For officers, the report said that they face a lack of recognition, frequent postings in difficult areas, lack of authority and lack of training opportunities, leading to varying psychological complications.²

Available literatures reveals that the modern era which is said to be a world of achievements is also a world of stress. In the past, societies were not entirely free from stress but now a days, most of the people feel stress. So, stress is everywhere in everyone's life. It can be in the family, business organization, enterprise, Institute or during any other economic or social activity. Stress can be the result of external situations such as an abusive relationship or poor working conditions. Stress is defined by Hans Selye as "the non-specific response of the body to any demand made upon it". Stress can also be the result of internal situations or stressors such as working or having pessimistic thoughts about future. Work being the central theme to the life and a social reality provides a status to the individual and his bond to the society by way of quality of work or position he attains.³ Stress stops being helpful and starts causing major damage to your health, your mood, your productivity, your relationships, and your quality of life. Stress is a normal physical response to events that make you feel threatened or upset your balance in some way.⁴

We had discussed about stress but occupational stress or Work stress can also be defined as the change in one's physical, mental and social state in response to workplace that pose an appraised challenge or threat to the employees. Okebukola and Jedged define Occupational stress as a condition of mental and physical exertion brought about as results of harassing events of dissatisfying elements or general features of the working environment.⁵ According to world health organization (WHO), "Occupation or work-related stress is the response people may have when presented with work demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and which challenge their ability to cope".⁶

A stressor is any external or internal factors affecting the normal function of human beings and board spectrum of occupational or sometimes hostile stressors signal threats to survival or well-being of humans and produces set of complexes, highly orchestrated responses within physiological system and their functions. Psychological stressor like emotional distress, depression and anxiety asses the subject level of stress appraisal and its affective responses will lead to elevated heart rate, blood pressure and respiratory rate.⁷ Well known sociologist 'Karl Marx', described a concept that is "Alienation" (it is a state in which a person feels isolated, humiliated, unworthy, and insignificant). Although Karl Marx had used this term in the context of capitalist society but it may a chance that after the occupational stress, they feel alienation with their occupational duty,

occupational activity, alienation from one's own specific humanity or alienation from other colleague/family members/friends.

The typically experienced sources of stress are understaffing leading to excessively long hours of duty, uncertainties in the work, increasing population pressure, increasing rates of crime, unreasonable pressures from lobby groups, unmet family commitments, marital discord, problems with children's education, chronic ill health of self or family members, poor/discouraging conditions of offices/police stations, traffic pollution, exposure to dust, contaminated drinking water, financial pressures, corruption in the system, frequent transfers, uncertainties in election and IS duties, weather calamities, natural disasters, and so on. The full spectrum of stressors is all a part of the deal, and all in a day's work.⁸



Figure 1: Major causes of stress.

LITERATURE SEARCH

This descriptive study explores occupational stress among the army forces and police personnel. Literature search were conducted to identify paper on occupational stress, experienced by armed forces and other professionals. Secondary sources have been used to collect the data, which includes: the study of books, journals, articles, published research papers, thesis and dissertations. The following key words were used; armed forces, paramilitary, police, occupational stress, stress and work stress.

DISCUSSION

In this study, we tried to cover all the available important

literature related to the occupational stress among the armed or police personnel. Shaikh and Kapadi had mentioned a preliminary survey statement in their study, that was “the Indian police faced the perform of inadequate equipment, fear of severe injury, poor working conditions, antiterrorist operations, lack of recognition, being killed on duty, work overload, shooting someone in the line of duty, tackle with the public, lack of job satisfaction and police hierarchy”.⁹ Hence, it is vital to study about armed forces/ civil police.

In a cross-sectional study, Pawar et al had measured occupational stress and life satisfaction in 413 naval personnel who serving afloat and ashore. According to results of this study naval personnel serving on board submarine and ship had lower level of occupational stress as compared to those serving on shore establishments. Another result of this study was showing that occupational stress scores higher among junior sailors (36.7%) as compared to officers and senior sailors (20%). life satisfaction scores were lower in junior sailors. This study concludes that high occupational stress in junior sailors needs to be investigated further with a larger sample.¹⁰

Singh et al were focusing on assessment and comparison of challenges among CRPF personnel and their wives. Total 180 respondent were selected for the study including 90 CRPF personnel and their wives. This study assesses physical, psychological, financial and socio-emotional challenges of personnel and their wives. PPFSE scale was developed by researcher. Frequency, percentage, means, SD and Z test were used for analyses of data. Majority of personnel and their wives experienced psychological and socio-emotional challenges at moderate level. Overall comparison of challenges in this study revealed that personnel face more challenges as compared to their wives and significant differences were observed in their experience socio-emotional challenges.¹¹

Boyanagari et al had conducted a study on police personnel of South India. This study investigated the occupational stress among Police officers in India, particularly in the state of Andhra Pradesh. demographic components of this study are age, educational qualification, years of service and number of children etc. of male police constable (n=123) working in the Bellampalli subdivision of Adilabad district of Andhra Pradesh. This Study measured height, weight, body mass index (BMI, kg/m²) blood pressure, pulse the status of addiction and type of illness were extracted from the records. Prescriptive statistics were calculated and chi-square test to find an association between categorical variables was performed on SPSS version 16. The results of this study revealed that maximum of the constables (72.4%) was addicted to at least one habit such as consumption of alcohol, smoking and smokeless tobacco and eating paan. Nearly one fifth 20.3% constables were addicted to chewing tobacco/paan followed by addition to

alcohol consumption 14.6%. With the increase in age, the prevalence of hypertension also increased showing a significant association (systolic BP [SBP]: p=0.001) and increased numbers of services year (SBP) p=0.001; DBP: p=0.001 were associated with higher prevalence of hypertension. All the above condition was the impact of occupational stress among the police officers.¹²

Another cross-sectional study was conducted by Sharma et al on oncology nursing workforce of Indian Army. Study aims to find out the degree of work-related stress among the nursing staff in oncology department. Sample size was 81 out of 100 oncology trained nurses working in various oncology center of Indian army who consented to participate in this study. This study results showed that Significant association (p<0.05) was found between department of posting and level of stress. Nurses reported that they had no time for rest more than half 62.96% were suffering from moderate range of stress due to busy professional life while only one admitted because of severe stress and required remedial action. While 82.7% felt that they are able to achieve major objectives in life. About one-third 31.6% of them reported that they feel inadequately valued for their commitment at work.¹³

Singh et al had conducted study on Indian army personnel at 4th battalion Rajput Regiment, Shahjahanpur, U.P. The study aim was exploring the impact of yoga training program on occupational stress among Indian army. Sample of this study were 60 army personnel with rank of Jawans participated in this study. This study result revealed that participants experienced a statistically significant (p<0.05) reduction of stress at work place due to Yoga interventions. Findings of this study suggests the beneficial effects of yoga practices as well as yoga-based intervention in the management of emerging occupational related stress and associated hazards among armed force personnel.¹⁴

Sudhakar et al had conducted a study on job stress influence of socio-economic factors on employees of Indian army. This study examined the extent of stress experienced by Indian Army. Components of the study were socio-economic group of age, designation, experience, income and region. The study sample was 417 personnel. This study results reveals that up to an age of 40 years personnel were experiencing more stress with reference to organizational group and individual dimension of stress. According to results of this study the soldiers felt that they are working too hard and depressed by working condition. Work appears as tough and South Indian army soldiers experienced group related stress when compared to South Indian army soldiers on region.¹⁵

Another cross-sectional study carried out by Loganathan et al among the policemen under three subdivisions of Villupuram, Tamil Nadu. The study results showed that overtime demands under this dimension received the highest mean score of 5.09 and standard deviation of

2.05. In contrast, the least dimension of stress was work related stress (mean=2.7) with “Paperwork” being the statement with least mean score of 1.46 and standard deviation of 1.34, which is mild stress experienced by the policemen. Conclusion of this study highlights that the major dimension causing occupational stress among policemen, which will form a frame work for planning programs for stress management.¹⁶

Another study conducted by Kalpna et al conducted on 110 female personnel of CISF. The study purpose was investigating the relationship between work-life balance (WLB) and occupational stress among female personnel of CISF. Study results shown that half of respondents i.e., 43% were ranged in age group of below 25 years and about, 48% respondents in the study were not married. According to results of the study mean value for WLB was 38 i.e., it lies below to the median value of 24. The result witnessed high level of occupational stress in female personnel of CISF. Study results proved negative relationship between WLB and occupational stress of female personnel of CISF i.e., changes in one variable are strongly correlated with changes in other as the coefficient value was -0.73. The sig. (2-tailed) value here was 0.01. This value was less than 0.05. There was a significant correlation between the level of WLB and the level of occupational stress. The results of the study reveals that there was a moderate level of occupational stress among the female personnel. Results of correlation analysis identified a strong positive relationship between occupational stress and work-life imbalance of female personnel of CISF.¹⁷

Shirotriya et al Conducted a comparative study to compare occupational stress and frustration tolerance among BSF, CISF and PAC with some selected rank and age categories. Total study subjects were 150 male subordinate officers and other personnel of different rank from selected three forces. This study result, shown a significant difference in occupational stress among the three paramilitary groups i.e., BSF, CISF and PAC as the obtained f value was 28.55 which is much greater than tabulated f value (3.06). The study finding reveals that occupational stress level of paramilitary forces i.e., BSF, CISF and PAC are of significantly different level. According to post hoc comparison of occupational stress between PAC and CISF, PAC and BSF, CISF and BSF are significantly different as the mean difference values were found to be 25.86, 13.18 and 12.86 respectively which are greater than the criterion mean difference i.e., 3.42. According to results PAC having the highest level of occupational stresses compared to BSF and CISF. Study results shown there is no significant difference in frustration tolerance among the three paramilitary groups i.e., BSF, CISF and PAC as the obtained f value was 1.16 which is less than tabulated f value (3.06). Study findings reveals that frustration tolerance level of paramilitary forces i.e., BSF, CISF and PAC are not significantly different. This study findings may attribute to the fact that all three forces have

difficult working conditions, relationship with co-workers, transitions lifestyle, living arrangements, pattern of leave and same system of administration.²

A conceptual study has done by Jitendra et al on occupational stress (job stress/work stress) and its impacts. This descriptive study explores the concept and impact of occupational stressors. According to this study occupational stress relates to one's job. Occupational stress often results from unexpected responsibilities and pressures that do not correspond to person's knowledge, skills or expectations, thereby inhibiting the ability to cope. Job stress and job satisfaction are negatively correlated. Occupational stress is a manifestation of environmental, organizational and individual variables. Stress is found to be additive and there is also a positive relationship between role stressors and job stress. Occupational stress needs to be kept harnessed and minimized to provide conducive work environment in organization.¹⁸

Another study done by Babatunde et al it has also become necessary that these proactive interventions be integrated within structural context of work (e.g., job control, work schedule, staffing levels, physical work environment and organizational structure) and psychological frame of employee engagement and affective well-being initiatives.¹⁸ Primary measures such as managerial stress awareness training, workload adjustment, hazard identification, creation of social structures that moderate stress effects and role clarification are effective strategies that are suggested for better organizational outcomes. It is also of practical implication that working conditions are adapted to differences in people's physical, mental and contextual situation of life. Organization should pay more attention to the WLB of their employees by seeking to implement a variety of WLB practices and policies such as flextime, job-sharing, part-time work, subsidized recreational and leisure activities among other family-friendly policies.

CONCLUSION

“Stress is nothing more than a socially acceptable form of mental illness” as said by Richard Carlson. Stress is everywhere, but a relatively new phenomenon. Mathur has defined stress in his work as: Stress is a multi-causal, complex psychological phenomenon, often created by insidious, long range continuous Pressures, threats and demands on individuals much beyond tolerance limits resulting in psychological, emotional and physical exhaustion. Hayman et al indicated that intrusion of work demands in to personal life was related with reports of heightened stress and emotional exhaustion for employees. In addition, employees felt that the intrusion of work obligations into their personal lives negatively affected their health. Work stress is often defined as the gap between occupational demands and individual abilities, capabilities, and aspirations of the workers.

According to the available literature, occupational stress

was present among the study subjects. Day-to-day work activities often put armed forces and police personnel in potentially life- exposure to violence, threatening situations, pressure to perform efficiently, and public ambivalence contribute to an atmosphere of chronic stress. Therefore, we can conclude that Chronic high levels of stress affect physical and mental health. Poor physical health also leads to poor mental health, negative quality of life, and a dip in professional efficiency. It is evident that the nature of work in armed forces and policing requires optimal mental health. We sleep well because we know they are outside for our safety. They are crucial pillar for our society. Although our government are focusing to resolve the occupational stress and mental issue but they should take serious due to importance of armed forces and police personnel.

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