

Original Research Article

A study to assess the level of occupational stress and associated factors during COVID-19 outbreak among police personnel at selected police stations, West Bengal

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ABSTRACT

Background: The importance of emergency services wouldn't be significant to us if we had not faced this crisis namely, the COVID pandemic. Police service features a distinguished role to tackle this pandemic. This study aimed to assess level of occupational stress and associated factors during COVID-19 outbreak.

Methods: A descriptive study was conducted among the police personnel of Durgapur subdivision. Occupational stress was measured using the organizational and operational police stress questionnaire and structured questionnaire for associated factors. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics.

Results: 37% police personnel had reported High organizational stress, 55% and 8% as moderate and low organizational stress respectively and 57% police personnel had reported high operational stress, 43% as moderate operational stress during COVID-19 outbreak. Police personnel responded that there was an increased number of violent confrontations between the public and them while enforcing new regulations and restrictions. The majority of the participants having a fear of getting affected from co-worker, infecting family member and responded that they didn't get enough supply of protective equipment. Organizational stress was significantly associated with educational status and designation. Operational stress was significantly associated with place of posting and COVID test report.

Conclusions: This calls for urgent action from the officials as occupational stress can have extremely negative impact on their physical, mental and social health and wellbeing as well as professional life of police officers during this grim situation. There is a need for holistic support for their job satisfaction.

Keywords: Associated factors, COVID-19, Operational stress, Organizational stress, Outbreak, Police personnel

INTRODUCTION

The importance of emergency services wouldn't be more significant to us if we had not faced this great crisis namely, the COVID pandemic. Among the emergency services that are mentioned here, police service features a distinguished role to fight against or to tackle this pandemic. Police department is the bridge between the govt. and other services since the times of lockdown in our country. Police made the reluctant people follow the

COVID guidelines, announced by the government i.e., usage of masks, physical distancing etc. most vital of all of them the local department has become the communication medium for all the opposite emergency services. Number of policemen suffering from the virus rose day by day, Policemen faced a social stigma, Policemen were forced to do overtimes, these are some of the issues the department was facing throughout the pandemic. It's needless to mention that COVID pandemic has made the police job a difficult one.^{1,2}

Lack of awareness and knowledge of COVID-19 prevention and insufficient use of personal protective equipment like mask, sanitizer, shield significantly increase the risk of exposure to virus among police personnel. They have concern about carrying the infection in family which may also a cause of psychological distress. Furthermore, fear of quarantine, stigma associated with disease are possible causes of developing a range of psychological problems like sleep disturbances, anxiety, burn out etc.³

The situation of the police job has changed enormously in these years of pandemic. The stress, threats, health securities, mental strength, all are affected for a policeman. as per a recent online study in which 224 police personnel of Bishnupur district in north India, police department partook, 73.2% of them have reported moderate to high stress due. There are random incidents of suicide by police personnel associated with the fear of getting affected by COVID-19.⁴

Lockdown brings huge changes in way of living among the civilian, the police personnel tried to discover the different ways of carrying out such changes. Therefore, police personnel were forced to do something they had never done before i.e. to execute the lockdown successfully as an exceedingly small percentage of our population were keen to follow the lockdown guidelines and hence the police interference was badly needed. The on-duty police officers were also exposed to virus and isolation from their family members affected their mental health. So, it is the need of the time to evaluate the condition of the policemen by accumulation of a study that can be of some help to the dept. if they want to look forward for the improvement of the policemen who are suffering in this grave situation of the pandemic.⁵

METHODS

A descriptive study was conducted from January 2022 to February 2022 to in five selected police stations under Durgapur subdivision, Asansol Durgapur Commissionerate at Paschim Bardhaman District. The study includes police personnel those Who have worked during COVID-19 outbreak and available at police station during the time of the study. The study excluded police personnel who were ranked as Indian police service. In this study the sample size consisted of 184 police personnel. Non probability purposive sampling technique was done for selecting participants. Structured questionnaire was prepared to assess the demographic characteristics of participants and associated factors which influencing occupational stress during COVID-19. Standardized rating scale was taken to assess level of occupational stress during this pandemic. This standardized questionnaire consists of two parts that is

organizational police stress questionnaire (PSQ-org) and operational police stress questionnaire (PSQ-op).¹² PSQ-org and PSQ-op consists of 20 items, where individual items were scored by 7-point Likert scale that ranges from “no stress at all” to “a lot of stress” with 1 (no stress at all), 4 (moderate stress), and 7 (a lot of stress). Stress caused by each item within the past six months was asked, and summary scores were created by calculating the mean for each scale. The mean total cut-off scores for low, moderate, and high stress for organizational police stress were 2.6 and lower, 2.7-3.9 and 4.0 and higher respectively and operational police stress was at below 2.0, 2.1-3.4, and above 3.5, respectively. Structured questionnaire was prepared on associated factors of occupational stress during COVID-19 outbreak which influence the stress level among police personnel. Respondents are asked to read each question and place in ‘yes’ or ‘no’ according to their opinion. Data were collected after explaining the purpose of the study and informed consent was taken from all the participants. The participants were reassured about their anonymity and the importance of honest answers at the time of the interview.

Statistical analysis

Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics (chi square).

RESULTS

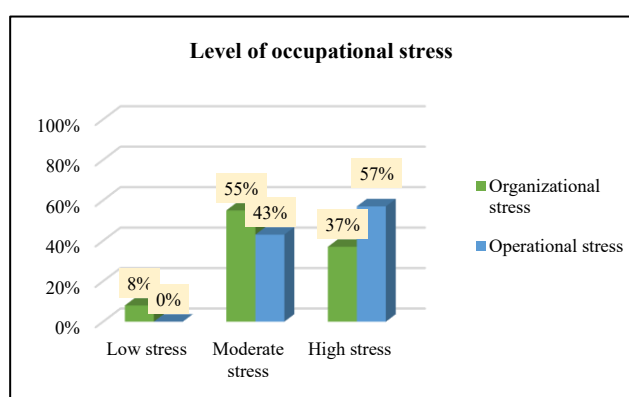
The total number of participants who participated in the study was 184. Socio-demographic characteristics of the participants show 43% police personnel were under age group of 25-35 years. 41% police personnel were under the age group of 36-45 years and 16% police personnel were under the age group of 46-55 years.

Majority (89%) of the police personnel were male personnel followed by 11% participants were female. Maximum (51%) police personnel were passed higher secondary. More than half of the (79%) police personnel belong to nuclear family. Most of the (95%) police personnel worked more than 8 hours/day. Majority of the police personnel were designated as constable followed by 18%, 14% and 20% participants were designated as auxiliary force (civic and home guard), SI and ASI respectively. More than half of participants (59%) were posted away from home. More than half of police personnel (61%) police personnel have tested covid positive (Table 1).

Occupational stress was further divided by organizational stress and operational stress in which 57% police personnel had reported high operational stress and 55% police personnel had reported moderate organizational stress (Figure 1).

Table 1: Frequency and percentage distribution of police personnel according to demographic characteristics (n=184).

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Age (in years)		
25-35	79	43
36-45	76	41
46-55	29	16
Sex		
Male	163	89
Female	21	11
Educational status		
Secondary	33	18
Higher secondary	94	51
Graduation	57	31
Marital status		
Married	154	84
Unmarried	30	16
Family type		
Nuclear	145	79
Joint	39	21
Extended		
Working hours/day		
≤8 hours	10	5
>8 hours	174	95
Designation		
Auxiliary Force	34	18
Constables	86	47
ASI	37	20
SI	26	14
Inspector	1	1
Place of posting		
Near home	75	41
Away from home	109	59
Tested covid positive		
Yes	112	61
No	72	39

**Figure 1: Percentage of level of occupational stress.**

All participants (100%) had reported that their stress level was increased due to sudden increase of working hours,

civilian complaining about lockdown, night curfew, facing difficulties to make people wear mask, fear of getting affected from co-worker and infecting family member during this pandemic situation. Most of the participants (80% and 82%) responded in more night duties and standby duties during pandemic respectively which influence their stress level. Majority of the police personnel (88%) police personnel had responded frequent changes of rules and regulations during pandemic by which their stress level was increased. More than half of the participants have found hard to manage impatient behavior of civilian in vaccination center and also faced social stigma from their locality.

Multiple responses were accepted

Most of the participants had found hard to identify containment zones in different wave (86%), manage

social distancing (95%), make people understand to use sanitizer (98%) and to isolate effected people in quarantine center (90%) which influences their occupational stress independently. Majority of the police personnel (58%) were suffering from different

comorbidities and more than half of the participants (61%) responded that they didn't get enough supply of protective equipment. These factors are definitely influencing stress among majority of the participants (Table 2).

Table 2: Frequency and percentage distribution of police personnel according to associated factors which influences occupational stress level during COVID-19.

Associated factors	Frequency (%)
Work demand	
Sudden increase of working hours since pandemic	184 (100)
More night duties during pandemic	147 (80)
Standby duties	151 (82)
Behaviour of the civilian	
Civilian complaining about lockdown and night curfew	184 (100)
Civilian complaining about frequent change of rules and regulations laid by government during pandemic	162 (88)
Finding hard to manage impatience behaviour of civilian in vaccination centre	131 (71)
Facing social stigma from locality	136 (73)
Rules and Regulations during pandemic	
Facing Difficulties to make people wear mask	184 (100)
Facing trouble to make people understand to use sanitizer	180 (98)
Finding hard to identify containment zones in different wave of COVID-19	158 (86)
Having difficulties to isolate covid effected people in quarantine centre	166 (90)
Facing problems in maintaining social distancing among people	175 (95)
Fear of getting affected	
Getting fearful for infecting co-worker	184 (100)
Getting fearful for infecting family member	184 (100)
Suffering from any comorbidities	77 (42)
Got enough supply of protective equipment	72 (39)

Significant association was found between designation and educational status with organizational stress and between place of posting and getting affected by corona virus with operational stress.

DISCUSSION

There is scarcity of literature on the occupational stress among police personnel during COVID-19 outbreak. This study revealed that occupational stress is moderate to high among police personnel of Durgapur subdivision. This study aimed to assess level of occupational stress among police personnel during COVID-19 outbreak. This study demonstrated a very high prevalence of occupational stress- 100% reported operational stress (high stress by 57% and moderate stress by 43%). This prevalence of operational stress is higher than a similar study which was explored and reported in Bishnupur district during COVID-19 times by Nameirakpan et al among 224 police personnel, out of them 73.2% participants had moderate to high stress. Whereas in current study 100% participants had reported operational stress during COVID-19 outbreak.⁴

According to the study explored that 92% reported organizational stress (high stress by 37% and moderate stress by 55%). Prevalence of organizational stress in current study is also higher when compared to a similar study which was conducted and reported on occupational stress among police personnel in India by Ragesh et al who found organizational stress to be 72% (moderate stress by 68% and high stress by 14%) and operational stress to be 83% (moderate stress by 67% and high stress by 16.5). This difference might be due to the fact that current study conducted during this grave pandemic situation.¹¹

This study aimed to assess associated factor which influence their stress level during COVID-19 outbreak which shows that 100% police officers responded that their families were at risk of getting affected because of COVID-19. This is almost similar to the findings of Bapna et al who claimed that 68.8% police personnel said that their families were at risk of getting affected because of COVID-19.¹¹

The present study revealed operational stress associated with the place of posting and getting affected by corona

virus. This is contrary to the study findings of Nameirakpan et al who claimed that operational stress is significantly associated with age, marital status, social stigma and willingness to take the COVID-19 vaccine.⁴

CONCLUSION

The study aimed to assess level of occupational stress and associated factors during this pandemic outbreak among police personnel of Durgapur subdivision. Perceived organizational and operational stress prevalence was as high as 37% and 57%. Maximum participants had responded in sudden increase of working hours, complaining about lockdown and night curfew, frequent changes of rules and regulations, hard to manage impatience behavior of civilian in vaccination centre, facing difficulties to make people wear mask or use sanitizer, identify containment zones during COVID-19 outbreak which influences their stress level. Majority of the participants had a fear of getting infected or infecting family member. Organizational stress was significantly associated with educational status and designation. Operational stress was significantly associated with place of posting and COVID test report. This calls for urgent action from the officials as occupational stress can have extremely negative impact on their physical, mental and social health and wellbeing as well as professional life of police officers during this grim situation.

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