

Original Research Article

On-the-job stress and challenges faced by police personnel of Bishnupur district in COVID-19 times

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ABSTRACT

Background: The pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for law enforcement agencies. Police officers are often directly or indirectly involved in the pandemic response and have a higher risk of getting the infection. Our study aims to assess on-the-job stress and challenges faced by the police personnel of Bishnupur district, Manipur, and to determine the factors associated with it.

Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted among the police personnel from December 2020 to January 2021. Occupational stress was measured using the Operational Police Stress Questionnaire and, a pre-tested questionnaire for coping mechanisms and attitude were used to collect data by interview method. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, t-test, and ANOVA. 73.2% of them have experienced moderate to high stress and the maximum was found among the Sub-inspectors (Mean score: 3.51 ± 1.20). Stress was mostly due to not having enough time available to spend with friends and family (3.58 ± 2.01), and work overtime (3.27 ± 1.84). Police personnel agreed 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 have been accepting the reality of the fact that it has happened and learn to live with it as a coping mechanism.

Conclusions: Occupational stress is high among the police personnel of Bishnupur District and it was significantly associated with age, marital status, social stigma, and willingness to take the COVID-19 vaccine. There is a need for holistic support for their job satisfaction.

Keywords: COVID-19, Job stress, Police personnel, Bishnupur district

INTRODUCTION

The Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic is a global health crisis and one of the greatest challenges that we have faced nowadays. On 11th March 2020, WHO declared Novel COVID-19 outbreak as a pandemic and reiterated the call for countries to take immediate actions and scale up responses to treat, detect and, reduced transmission to save people's lives.¹ India reported the first case of COVID-19 on January 30, 2020 speeding to various states including the state of Manipur in which the

first case was reported on 24th March 2020.² The government, since then has advocated wearing masks, physical distancing, avoiding public gathering, shutting down malls and theatres, isolation of positive cases, and quarantine of high-risk individuals as major preventive measures against COVID-19. Police were among the first responders to the COVID-19 disaster and are popularly listed among the "corona warriors," along with health care personnel. The primary responsibility of implementing the lockdown through restricting public movement and ensuring physical distancing was shouldered by the police

force during the pandemic, through the enforcement of the Epidemic Disease Act, 1987, and the Disaster Management Act, 2005.³

As the lockdown brings big lifestyle changes among the people, the police struggle to find out ways of implementing such changes.⁴

The imposition of lockdown becomes difficult because of the closely connected community life along with the street culture of everyday life, the climatic adjustments to a hot and humid climate where access to open spaces becomes a necessity and, the panic of closing of essential services shop leads to the crowd on streets despite the stay at home orders.⁵

Policing is one of the most mentally taxing occupations contending with along and often rotating shifts, threats of violence, increased need for hypervigilance, and a lack of public support creating chronic stress. As a result, law enforcement officers suffer from mental health problems at a rate greater than the general population even before dealing with an added rate greater than the general population even before dealing with added pandemic challenges, stress, and uncertainty.⁵ In addition to this, during this pandemic police personnel also carried out a variety of unconventional duties, including creating social awareness, clarifying fake news, daily inspection of people in isolation or quarantine, assisting the health department in contact tracing activities, helping migrant workers to enter shelters, and helping the needy persons to access medical and other essential services.³

As per data collected by the Indian Police Foundation (IPF), over 1.5 lakh COVID-19 cases and 913 deaths have been reported among personnel of the State Police Force and Central Armed Police Forces comprising nearly 1.87% of the country's total caseload.⁶

Lack of awareness and specific knowledge of COVID-19 prevention and inadequate or inappropriate use of personal protective gear like masks and gloves substantially increase the risk of exposure to COVID-19 among police personnel. Furthermore, concerns about carrying the infection to the family members may also be a source of psychological distress. Additionally, fear of quarantine and social stigma are possible causes of distress. This can result in a greater likelihood of police personnel developing a range of psychological problems such as burnout, emotional disturbances, psychological distress, sleep disturbances, anxiety, depression.³

So, this study aims to assess on-the-job stress conditions and the attitude towards challenges faced by the police personnel of Bishnupur District and to determine the association between stress and variables of interest.

The results of the study can help the police and health department to maintain the situation, manage stress, and to provide mental assistance to the police personnel.

METHODS

A cross-sectional study was conducted from December 2020 to January 2021 among the police personnel of Bishnupur District, Manipur, India. There are three blocks in Bishnupur District: Nambol, Bishnupur and Moirang. In Nambol block - Nambol police station (PS) and 23 police outposts are there, in Bishnupur block - 1 District Headquarter, Women PS, Bishnupur PS and in Moirang block - Moirang PS, Kumbi PS, Keibul Lamjao PS, Phougakchao (Ikhai) PS, Loktak PS. Police personnel posted in the following Police stations were included: Nambol PS, Bishnupur PS, Loktak PS, Moirang PS, Kumbi PS, Keibul PS, Phougakchao Ikhai PS, Women PS, District Headquarter PS, and those who were posted in INA, Chiningkhul and Sendra Police Outpost. Those who could not be contacted on the day of data collection were excluded from the study. Sample size was calculated using $N = 4PQ/L^2$, $P = 68\%$, prevalence of moderate stress (Ragesh et al)⁸, $L = 6\%$, absolute allowable error, $Q = 100 - P$. Considering a 10% non-response rate, the calculated sample size was 265. Convenience sampling was done for selecting the participants. A pre-designed, pre-tested questionnaire was used to collect data. The questionnaire consisted of demographic characteristics, Operational police stress questionnaire (PSQ-op), coping mechanism questionnaire, and questions on challenges during the pandemic. PSQ-op consists of 20 items, where individual items are 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 computing the mean for each scale. The mean total cut-off scores for low, moderate, and high stress for Operational police stress was at below 2.0, 2.1-3.4, and above 3.5, respectively.^{9,10} For coping mechanisms, there were 4 statements. A 4 point Likert scale of 1 (I haven't been doing this at all) to 4 (I've been doing this a lot) was used. 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. Face to face interview was conducted using a questionnaire maintaining COVID-19 appropriate behaviour. Data were entered and analyzed by using IBM Statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) Statistics for Windows, version 21. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, SD, frequency, and percentages) and inferential statistics (t-test and ANOVA) considering a $p < 0.05$ as statistically significant. Approval was sought from the Research Ethics Board, RIMS, Imphal, and Superintendent of Police, Bishnupur District, before the start of the study. Verbal informed consent was taken from the participants. Participants were assured that the data collected would not be linked to identify the individual in any way or data collection process would not harm the participants in any way. Confidentiality was maintained by limiting the access of data only among the investigators.

RESULTS

The total number of participants who participated in the study was 224. The mean age of participants was 35 years (± 6.5). Socio-demographic characteristics of the participants show that the majority (87%) of the

participants were males. More than half (66%) of the participants were in the age group of 31 to 40 years. 33 % of them were more than 10 years of service in the police department.

Table 1: Characteristics of the participants (N=224).

Variables	Number (%)
Age (in years)	
≤ 30	47 (20.9)
31-40	148 (66.1)
41-50	19 (8.5)
≥ 51	10 (4.5)
Gender	
Male	195 (87)
Female	29 (13)
Marital status	
Married	183 (81.6)
Unmarried	41 (18.4)
Educational qualification	
High school	88 (39)
Higher secondary	56 (25)
Graduate and above	80 (36)
Position/rank	
Deputy superintendent of police	1 (0.5)
Police inspector	5 (2.2)
Sub-inspector	15 (6.6)
Assistant sub-inspector	6 (2.7)
Head constable/havildar	16 (7.1)
Constable	113 (50.5)
VDF	68 (30.4)
Number of years in police service	
≤ 10	149 (66.5)
> 10	75 (33.5)
Working hours per day before COVID-19	
≤ 8	124 (55)
> 8	100 (45)
Working hours per day during COVID-19	
≤ 8	51 (23)
> 8	173 (77)
Co-morbidities*	
Diabetes Mellitus	9 (4)
Hypertension	4 (2)
Others	10 (5)
None	204 (90.1)
Intoxicant substances*	
Alcohol	96 (42.9)
Smoking	62 (27.7)
Chewing tobacco	81 (36.2)
None	75 (33.5)
Are you involve in any of the COVID-19 related activities?	
Yes	176 (78.6)
No	48 (21.4)
Have you tested positive for COVID-19?	
Yes	20 (8.93)

Continued.

Variables	Number (%)
No	204 (91.07)
Was there any social stigma from your locality, given the nature of your job during the lockdown?	
Yes	132 (58.9)
No	92 (41.1)
Have you ever participated in any awareness programme given by the health officials regarding COVID-19?	
Yes	22 (9.9)
No	202 (90.1)
Have you ever been a part of any awareness programme conducted by your department regarding COVID-19?	
Yes	129 (57.6)
No	95 (42.4)
Are you aware about the COVID-19 vaccination?	
Yes	188 (83.93)
No	36 (16.07)
Are you willing to take the COVID-19 vaccine?	
Yes	168 (75)
No	56 (25)

*Multiple options allowed

Table 2: PSQ-Op stress level of participants (N=224).

Stress level	Frequency (%)
Low	60 (26.8)
Moderate	101 (45.1)
High	63 (28.1)

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, 45% of the participants worked for more than 8 hours per day but it was increased to 77% during the COVID-19 pandemic. The majority (78.6%) of the participants were involved in any COVID-19 related duties and half of the participants were involved in enforcing the lockdown activities and 36% of them were involved in quarantine and containment zones. Half of the participants have faced social stigma from their locality and have stayed in the police station during the pandemic. The majority (75%) of them are willing to take the vaccine and 96% of them cited the reason as the prevention and protection from the virus (Table 1).

45 % of the participants had reported moderate stress, 28.1% as high stress, and 26.8% as low stress (Table 2).

For the operational police stress responses, participants reported high stress due to work shifts, overtime demand, traumatic events, fatigue, occupational-related health issues, unavailable to find enough time to spend with family and friends, and limitation to social life (Table 3).

No significant association was found between mean stress scores with gender, rank, educational qualification, use of any intoxicant substances, comorbid conditions, duration of service, their involvement in COVID-19 related activities, awareness conducted by the health department. Mean stress score (2.93 ± 1.05) was maximum in the age group of 31-40 years, and it was found to be statistically significant. Married police personnel had more stress (2.91 ± 1.01) than unmarried and it was significant. Police personnel who had faced social stigma and were willing to

take the vaccine had high stress and it was significant. Personnel who had participated in awareness programs by their department had lesser stress and it was also significant. (Table 4).

Table 3: Mean, and standard deviation of the PSQ-Op items.

Operational stressors	Mean stress (SD)
Shift work	3.25 (1.79)
Working alone at night	2.47 (1.83)
Over-time demands	3.27 (1.84)
Risk of being injured on the job	2.90 (2.34)
Work related activities on days off	2.83 (1.74)
Traumatic events	3.00 (1.91)
Managing your social life outside of work	3.18 (1.91)
Not enough time available to spend with friends and family	3.58 (2.01)
Paperwork	2.06 (1.73)
Eating healthy at work	2.37 (1.67)
Finding time to stay in good physical condition	2.29 (1.55)
Fatigue	3.21 (1.79)
Occupational-related health issues	3.26 (1.85)
Lack of understanding from family and friends about your work	2.19 (1.71)
Making friends outside of job	2.70 (2.62)
Upholding a "higher image" in public	2.76 (1.69)
Negative comments from the public	2.92 (2.00)
Limitations to your social life	3.11 (1.76)
Feeling like you are always on the job	3.01 (1.86)
Friends/family feel the effects of the stigma associated with your job	2.77 (2.10)

Table 4: Mean score of stress \pm SD with p value.

Variable (n)	Mean score of stress \pm SD	P value
Age of participants (years)		
≤ 30 (47)	2.85 \pm 0.90	0.049*
31 - 40 (148)	2.93 \pm 1.05	
41 - 50 (19)	2.63 \pm 1.13	
≥ 51 (10)	2.06 \pm 0.83	
Gender		
Male (195)	2.82 \pm 1.04	0.160
Female (29)	3.11 \pm 1.04	
Marital status		
Married (183)	2.91 \pm 1.01	0.048*
Unmarried (41)	2.56 \pm 1.10	
Educational qualification		
High School (88)	2.68 \pm 1.04	0.134
Higher Secondary (56)	2.90 \pm 1.01	
Graduate and above (80)	3.00 \pm 1.03	
Number of years in police service		
≤ 10 (149)	2.94 \pm 1.04	0.661
> 10 (75)	2.67 \pm 1.10	
Position/Rank of police personnel		
Assistant Sub-Inspector and above (27)	2.95 \pm 1.22	0.076
Constable (129)	3.08 \pm 0.97	
Village Defence Force (68)	2.62 \pm 1.05	
Use of any intoxicant substances		
Yes (149)	2.81 \pm 1.35	0.304
No (75)	3.19 \pm 0.94	
Co-morbidities		
Yes (20)	2.9 \pm 0.96	0.670
No (204)	2.8 \pm 1.01	
Involvement in any of the COVID-19 related duties		
Yes (176)	2.90 \pm 1.06	0.139
No (48)	2.65 \pm 0.90	
Working hours per day before the COVID-19		
> 8 (100)	2.94 \pm 1.04	0.267
≤ 8 (43)	2.78 \pm 1.02	
Working hours per day during the COVID-19		
> 8 (181)	2.87 \pm 1.07	0.344
≤ 8 (43)	2.71 \pm 0.85	
Have you tested positive for COVID-19?		
Yes (21)	2.50 \pm 0.80	0.981
No (202)	2.95 \pm 1.06	
Was there any social stigma from your locality, given the nature of your job during the lockdown?		
Yes (132)	3.01 \pm 1.11	0.006*
No (92)	2.62 \pm 1.12	
Participation of awareness program on COVID-19 by police department		
Yes (129)	2.63 \pm 1.01	0.001*
No (95)	3.2 \pm 1.84	
Participation of awareness program on COVID-19 by Health Department		
Yes (53)	2.98 \pm 0.91	0.332
No (169)	2.82 \pm 1.07	
Are you aware of COVID-19 vaccination?		
Yes (188)	2.84 \pm 1.04	0.564

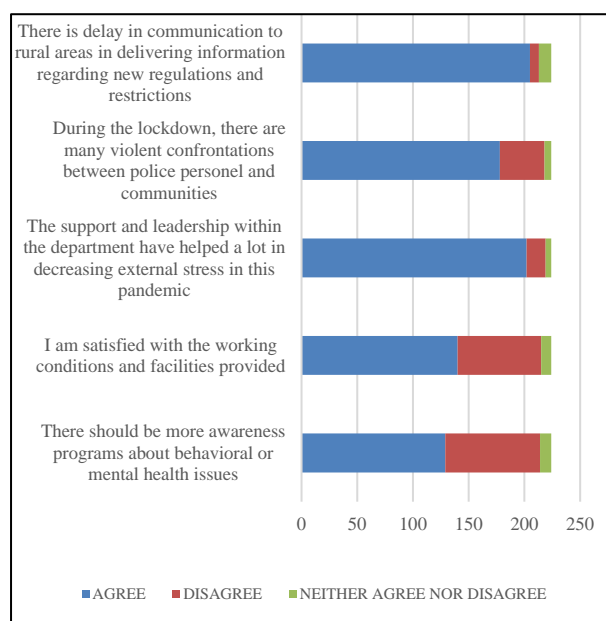
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Variable (n)	Mean score of stress \pm SD	P value
No (36)	2.95 \pm 1.05	
Are you willing to take COVID-19 vaccine?		
Yes (168)	3.09 \pm 1.02	0.001*
No (56)	2.56 \pm 1.01	

*p<0.05

Table 5: Coping behavior of the participants (N=224).

Statements on coping behaviour	Responses n (%)			
	I haven't been doing this at all	A little bit	A medium amount	I have been doing this a lot
I've been doing other activities such as going to movies/watching TV/reading/meditating/ advice from other people/emotional or mental support	31 (13.8)	67 (29.9)	64 (28.6)	62 (27.7)
I've been giving up trying to deal with the situation by making fun of it	84 (37.5)	60 (26.7)	42 (18.8)	38 (17)
I've been criticizing myself/blame myself for the things that happened	123 (54.9)	51 (22.8)	31 (13.8)	19 (8.5)
I've been accepting the reality of the fact that it has happened and learn to live with it	13 (5.8)	22 (9.8)	63 (28.1)	126 (56.3)

**Figure 1: Attitude towards challenges faced by police personnel during COVID-19 (N=224)**

The majority of the participants have been accepting the reality of the fact that it has happened and learn to live with it as a coping behavior of participants (Table 5).

Half of the police personnel agreed that during the lockdown, they were violent confrontations between the public and police personnel. The majority of the participants agreed that the support and leadership within the department have helped them in decreasing stress and

more awareness on mental health issues should be there (Figure 1).

DISCUSSION

There is a paucity of literature on on-the-job stress among police personnel during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study shows that occupational stress is high among the police personnel of Bishnupur District, Manipur. Our findings match with many other studies.^{3,5,8,11-14} Operational stress is more in younger officers and it may be because of their early service period and our finding matches with previous studies.^{13,14} The mean score of stress (3.08 \pm 0.97) was maximum among the constables. However, in the study conducted by Singh et al among the police personnel of North India, the inspector in charge of the police station had maximum stress as they are responsible for maintaining law and order in his jurisdiction.¹³ Operational stress was higher among lower-level rank officials and it may be because they straightaway deal with law and order maintenance, confrontation with the public during the lockdown, and in crime investigation. It was also seen that operational stress is more in female police personnel compared to males, though not significant and it may be due to the multiple roles that are expected by the society and performed by females without adequate support. In a study done in Kerala among the female police personnel, high operational stress was reported by 70 % and moderate stress by 20%.¹⁰ Operational stress was more among the married police personnel and high stress was also found for not enough time available to spend with friends and family. In a study done in North India, 70% of police personnel

reported stress due to role conflict between “being family person” versus “police person,” adjusting with seniors and not being able to spend time with their family.¹³ More than half of the participants had at least one of the habits such as alcohol (42.9%), using smokeless tobacco (36.2%), and smoking (27.7%). Lifestyle studies of policemen showed a very high rate of addiction to tobacco and alcohol as they worked under tremendous stress and pressure making them alcohol and smoking dependent.¹⁵⁻¹⁸ For our study, half of the participants reported stress due to occupational-related health issues. Previous studies done in South India and the national capital region in India found that the most prevalent occupational-related health issues were related to metabolic and cardiovascular (n = 54, 36.2%), musculoskeletal (n = 47, 31.5%), vision (n = 44, 29.5%), respiratory system (n = 38, 25.5%), etc. and it might be due to heavy burden of lifestyle risk factors due to stress, long duty hours, overwork and sustained postures.^{15,16}

During the COVID-19 pandemic, participants working for more than 8 hours per day was increased by 32% and it may be due to COVID-19 related activities for enforcing lockdown, manning the containment zones, and quarantine centers. Citizens refusing to comply with the new government guidelines and fear of contracting the virus were the reasons cited by the participants while ensuring compliance with the new regulation and restrictions. Staffs shortage, police personnel, or their family members contracting the virus, and fear of stigma from the public were some of the limiting factors faced by the participants in their department. The concern about being infected from the community and workplace may also be a potential source of fear among police personnel furthermore concerns about carrying the infection to the family members may also be a source of psychological distress. Additionally, fear of quarantine and social stigma are possible causes of distress. According to the study on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on European police officers, the participants had cited uncertainty about whether they have been infected or whether a colleague has been infected is psychologically very stressful, as there is a high probability that they will infect their own family.⁵ This can result in a greater likelihood of police personnel developing a range of psychological problems such as burnout, emotional disturbances, psychological distress, sleep disturbances, anxiety, depression, substance use, and post-traumatic stress disorder.³ According to the study mental health impact of COVID-19 on police personnel in India, it appeared that police personnel were 8.78 times more likely to get affected by COVID-19 compared to the general population.³ For our study, significant high stress was found among police personnel who had faced social stigma during the lockdown and the majority (83.3%) of them stayed in police stations due to it. Negative appraisals of the pandemic as stressful, threatening, uncontrollable, and challenging significantly increased officers' strain during the pandemic.⁵ The majority (75%) of them were willing to take the COVID-19 vaccine for prevention and protection from the virus and few because of mandatory government guidelines. Stress was more among those who

were willing to take COVID-19 vaccine and it was found to be significant. It may be because of the uncertainty of the new vaccine. Fear of side effects of the vaccine was one of the major reasons for not being willing to take the vaccine. Stress was lesser among those who had attended awareness programs given by their department. Due to their work shift, the sample size could not be achieved. Our study gave an insight into the stress and the challenges faced by the police personnel during the lockdown and similar studies from the North-Eastern part of India were not found during our literature search. These findings can help the police officers to cope with stress positively ensuing increase job satisfaction. During the COVID-19 pandemic, police professionals went through stress. Long hours of duty with multiple shifts, inadequate personal protective equipment, limitation to social life, and not enough time for friends and family had drained the police force mentally and physically. There is a need for holistic support for the well-being of police personnel. Public following the standard operating procedure given by the Government, mock drill activities for emergency response, improvement of working conditions and, support and understanding from the public were few of the suggestions given by the police personnel for effective battling of a similar pandemic in the future. Stress management programs like support group therapy, counseling, routine health check-ups at the workplace, mock drills can be done by collaborating with the Health Department.

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