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JOB RELATED STRESS AND HEALTH CHALLENGES AMONG POLICE OFFICIALS: A STUDY OF CHANDIGARH POLICE

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ABSTRACT

The present paper investigates the intricate relationship between the occupational demands of police work and the health-related challenges experienced by police officials in the Union Territory of Chandigarh. The research was conducted across eleven police stations in Chandigarh, involving a sample of 231 respondents. This sample included 16 Inspectors, 31 Sub-Inspectors, 41 Assistant Sub-Inspectors, and 143 Head Constables. Through an in-depth analysis of work patterns, including shift duties, extended working hours, and irregular rest periods, the study highlights the physical and psychological toll of policing. The findings reveal that prolonged exposure to high-stress environments, combined with inadequate rest and recovery time, contributes significantly to both mental health concerns – such as stress and insomnia – and physical ailments.

INTRODUCTION

Police officials, as the frontline defenders of law and order, operate in a highly demanding and constantly evolving environment. Their role requires them to be alert, decisive, and physically capable at all times. However, the nature of their work—marked by long hours, exposure to violence, traumatic incidents, public scrutiny, and high levels of stress—poses significant risks to both their mental and physical health. These challenges can lead to issues such as anxiety, depression, sleep disorders, cardiovascular problems, and chronic fatigue, which not only impact their well-being but also their performance and decision-making on the job. Studying health-related problems among police officials is therefore essential.

According to recent systematic reviews, being a police officer seems to be a highly demanding and stressful occupation, due to the current characteristics of modern societies. For a police officer, those characteristics include: the uncertainty and danger related to the permanent threat of terrorist attacks, the increase of violence with firearms in urban areas, low human and material resources, team or supervision difficulties, criticism from citizens and society, and lack of understanding from family or friends (Magnavita et al., 2018; Purba and Demou, 2019). Researchers have highlighted that problems faced by police officials such as long working hours, lack of autonomy, political interference, disturbed personal life etc. which reflects on their health. Poor health not only interferes with their working but also cause of poor job satisfaction among officials.

Research on cardiovascular disease has found increased risk of heart disease among police officials (Reviere and Young, 1994). The other studies disclose that in comparison to the general population in the same age group, male police officials do not have a higher risk of cardiovascular disease (Franke et al. 1997; 2002; Ramey, 2003). According to Pandey (2016) nature of the duty creates stress and physical and mental exhaustion among police personnel.

Fatigue is another problem faced by police officials that relates to the characteristics of their job. Vila et al. (2002) argue that police officials on patrol duties suffer from high level of fatigue. The patrol work is not challenging physically and emotionally but unbearably boring (Vila, 1996). Other causes of officer fatigue are shift rotation, excessive overtime, and frequent court appearances (Vila et al. 2002). The major effects that fatigue can have on officials include high level stress, deterioration of alertness, defective performance (Vila, 1996). A considerable body of research indicates that policing is one of the most stressful occupations (He et al. 2005; Loo, 1986; Manzoni and Eisner, 2006; Violanti and Aron, 1994).Policing has been categorized as a highly stressful occupation, with up to 47% of officials in self-report studies cite stress as a consequence of the job (Crank et al. 1993; Davis 1993, Savery et al. 1993). According to Selokar et al. (2011) occupational stress among police personnel can reduce productivity, increase absenteeism, lower morale, cause conflict with colleagues, cause physical and emotional problems, and poor satisfaction with life. Gyamfi (2014) has found that physical environment, role ambiguity, work overload, lack of support from super-ordinates and colleagues can cause high level of stress among the police officers. Negative working environment, long working hours, lack of time for family, irregular eating and sleeping habits, take a toll on the health of police officials (Malach- Pines and Kienan,

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2007;McCarthy et al. 2007 & Water and Ussery, 2007). Suresh et al. (2013) studied the job events that were important sources of stress among Chennai police officers. Srinivasan & Ilango (2013) revealed that a lack of superiors' support to their subordinates, irregular office work hours, heavy workload and dealing with criminals were caused stress among constables in the Northern part of Tamil Nadu. Nagar (2009) reported that occupational stress was linked to health problems in police personnel, influenced by both the positive and negative aspects of the police lifestyle. Jahnavi et al. (2012) have reported specific morbidities, e.g., anemia, visual abnormalities, and varicose veins.

Much of the existing literature emphasizes general stressors and their psychological impact, but there is limited focus on how specific work-related challenges—such as shift work, fatigue, political interference, and inadequate support systems—directly contribute to health problems. An effort was made in the present paper to explain impact of hectic work schedule on the health of the Police Officials.

OBJECTIVE

* To examine the impact of occupational demands—such as shift work, extended working hours, and irregular rest periods—on the physical and mental health of police officials at U.T Chandigarh.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study focused on medium and lower rank male police officials i.e. Inspector, Sub-Inspector, Assistant- Sub Inspector, Head-Constable posted in sixteen police stations in UT Chandigarh. Out of total strength of 449 male police officials in sixteen police stations, 50 percent of the sample was drawn i.e. 231 respondents were interviewed depending on their availability and willingness to take interviews that included 16 Inspectors, 31 Sub-Inspectors, 41 Assistant Sub-Inspectors and 143 Head Constables. There were two Inspectors each in three police stations in Sector 17, Sector 19 and Manimajra police stations. It was decided to take one Inspector from each of these police stations. A structured interview schedule was used to collect information.

RESULTS

Socio-Demographic Profile

There were 56.2 percent Inspectors, 76.2 percent Head Constables, 58.1 percent Sub Inspectors and 46.3 percent ASIs who were above the age of 50 years. 58.3 percent respondents were from general caste background and 74.4 percent respondents belonged to Hindu religion. Majority of Head Constables were educated up to High School and majority of Inspectors were either Graduate or Post Graduate. 14.7 percent Head Constables, 29.3 percent ASIs, 32.3 percent Sub-Inspectors and 87.5 percent Inspector rank officials were Graduates. 70.9 percent respondents belonged to rural background. All the respondents were married but very few spouses of the respondents were working. 96.9 percent of the respondents were residing in nuclear household and had small family. Although a majority of the spouses of the respondents were educated they were not engaged in any kind of paid work .A majority of respondents had children of both sexes and they were educated and engaged in paid work also.

Shift Duties

Police officials, due to their unique work environment have multiple duties. Generally police are on duty round the clock and duties are assigned in shifts. Police officials work in shift duties. Davey et al. (2001) find that police officials who work in shifts report lower levels of job satisfaction. The police profession is one of the emergency occupation responsible for ensuring the security and safety of the public. Therefore the nature of job requires shift duties. All the 231 respondents admitted that they work in shift duties. The respondents were asked to specify the duration of their shifts.

Duration of The Shift

Results reveal that all police officials irrespective of their rank have to work in shift duties. Selokar et al. (2011), reveal that most of the police officials i.e. (82.4%) work for more than eight hours daily. Although they are working in periodic shifts, their working hours exceed 12 hours daily. Umranikar (2004) while giving example of Mumbai police, mentions that due to shortage of manpower, high crime rate, policemen have to work 16 hours at a stretch. Long working hours appear to be an important factor leading to stress among police personnel. It is in this context attempt has been made to find out the duration of shift duties.

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Table No.1 Rank wise distribution showing duration of the work shift of the respondents

Duration of shift	Rank								Total	
	Head Constable		ASI		Sub Inspector		Inspector			
Up 8 hours	18	(12.6%)	_		5	(16.1%)	1	(6.2%)	24	(10.4%)
Up to 10 hours	45	(31.5%)	2	(4.9%)	3	(9.7%)	2	(12.5%)	52	(22.5%)
Up to 12 hours	57	(39.9%)	16	(39%)	10	(32.3%)	_		83	(35.9%)
More than 12 hours	23	(16.1%)	23	(56.1%)	13	(41.9%)	13	(81.2%)	72	(31.2%)
Total	143	(100)	41	(100)	31	(100)	16	(100)	231	(100)

Results show that 31.2 percent respondents admitted that they have to work more than 12 hours. Data also indicates that 39.9 percent Head Constables, 39 percent ASIs and 32.3 percent Sub Inspectors reported that shift duty last up to12 hours. Further data reveal that a majority of the Inspectors i.e. 81.2 percent reported that they work for more than 12 hours per shift. There were 12.6 percent Head Constables, 16.1 percent Sub inspectors and 6.2 percent Inspectors who reported that their shift duty lasts for 8 hours. There were 31.5 percent Head Constables, 4.9 percent ASIs, 9.7 percent Sub Inspectors and 12.5 percent Inspectors who reported that they work for 10 hours. The most cited reason is the shortage of employees in police Force. There were others who reported that police officials have long working hours because police men are also performing the job of forest guard, fire man etc. Whenever there is a distress call like snake or wild animal enters residential premises, there is a call for police similarly during fire incident instead of calling fire brigade people call police. Further, police men are called during road accidents. It is their duty to take the injured to hospital and catch the culprit. It is very rare that they get free after eight hours shift and those who report shift duty for eight hours are privileged few who have political patronage. The results coincide with the findings of Selokar et al. (2011) and Umranikar (2004) who reported that most of the police officials are working more than 12 hours.

Work more than 10 hours a day

There are no fixed working hours in police department. As per the rule, they work seven days a week, and it's rarely less than 12 hours each day. The reason given to justify this is they have the responsibility to protect all citizens and maintain law and order, therefore they are required on duty 24x7 . In this regard information was gathered.

Table No.2 Rank wise distribution showing how many times in a month respondents work more than 10 hours a day

Response	Rank								Total	
	Head Constable		ASI		Sub Inspector		Inspector			
Less than 10 days	18	(12.6%)	3	(7.3%)	1	(3.2%)	_		22	(9.5%)
10-20 days	62	(43.3%)	17	(41.5%)	9	(29%)	5	(31.2%)	93	(40.3%)
More than 20 days	63	(44.1%)	21	(51.2%)	21	(67.7%)	11	(68.8%)	116	(50.2%)
Total	143	(100)	41	(100)	31	(100)	16	(100)	231	(100)

The above table shows that 50.2 percent of respondents reported being on duty for more than 10 hours a day for over 20 days in a month. This includes 68.8 percent of Inspectors, 67.7 percent of Sub-Inspectors, 51.2 percent of ASIs, and 44.1 percent of Head Constables. Higher-ranking officials are required to be on duty more frequently than their lower-ranking counterparts. The public-to-police ratio clearly indicates that the police force is overburdened. Furthermore, the data reveals that only 9.5 percent of respondents reported working more than 10 hours a day for fewer than 10 days in a month. This may be attributed to a small group of relatively privileged officials. Notably, this group includes 12.6 percent of Head Constables, 7.3 percent of ASIs, 3.2 percent of Sub-Inspectors, and no Inspectors.

Work on Sundays Per Month

Sunday is generally considered a holiday in India, as well as in many other parts of the world. It is a declared holiday for government organizations in India. However, Umranikar (2009) reported that police officers are often unable to avail themselves of holidays or leave. They frequently miss out on weekly offs, casual leave, earned leave, and other gazetted holidays. On festive occasions, police personnel are typically on duty in public spaces rather than celebrating with their families or relatives. Given that the police force operates 24/7, Sundays are not observed as holidays for them. India's current police-to-population ratio stands at 145 personnel per

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one lakh population, which is significantly lower than the UN-recommended ratio of 222 personnel per one lakh population. This disparity underscores the extent to which police personnel are overworked and overburdened. In light of this, an effort was made to gather information from respondents regarding whether they receive weekly offs on Sundays.

Table No.3 Rank wise distribution showing number of working Sundays per month of the respondents

Response	Rank								Total	
	Head Constable		ASI		Sub Inspector		Inspector			
One	8	(5.6%)	4	(9.8%)	2	(6.5%)	3	(18.8%)	17	(7.4%)
Two	79	(55.2%)	17	(41.5%)	12	(38.7%)	2	(12.5%)	110	(47.6%)
Three	51	(35.7%)	12	(29.3%)	5	(16.1%)	_		68	(29.4%)
Four	5	(3.5%)	8	(19.5%)	12	(38.7%)	11	(68.8%)	36	(15.6%)
Total	143	(100)	41	(100)	31	(100)	16	(100)	231	(100)

The data reveals that 18.8 percent of Inspectors, 6.5 percent of Sub-Inspectors, 9.8 percent of ASIs, and 5.6 percent of Head Constables reported receiving only one Sunday off per month. Further, a majority of Head Constables (55.2 percent) mentioned that they get two Sundays off per month. The data also shows that 29.3 percent of ASIs, 16.1 percent of Sub-Inspectors, and 35.7 percent of Head Constables reported receiving three Sundays off per month. Notably, most Inspectors—68.8 percent—stated that they get all four Sundays off each month.

It is important to note that while all police officials are entitled to a weekly off, most Inspectors take their leave on Sundays, whereas lower-ranking personnel typically take their days off on weekdays. Regardless of rank, police officials—including Head Constables, ASIs, Sub-Inspectors, and Inspectors—are required to be present at police stations, outposts, or crime scenes as needed. These findings support the observations of Umranikar (2009), who reported that police officials are so overburdened that they are often unable to take Sundays off.

Health Related Problems

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), "Health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." Police officials play an important role in society and are tasked with a wide range of responsibilities that can sometimes lead to health problems. Policing has been categorized as a high-stress occupation (Crank et al., 1993). Given the nature of their duties, police officials must maintain both physical and psychological fitness. In this context, an attempt was made to assess the health status of the respondents.

Table No. 4 Rank Wise Distribution Showing Health Related Problems of the respondents

Response	Ranks								Total	
	Head Constable		ASI		Sub Inspector		Inspector			
Yes	21	(14.7%)	7	(17.1%)	12	(38.7%)	5	(31.2%)	45	(19.5%)
No	122	(85.3%)	34	(82.9%)	19	(61.3%)	11	(68.8%)	186	(80.5%)
Total	143	(100)	41	(100)	31	(100)	16	(100)	231	(100)

The results show that a majority of the respondents—80.5 percent—reported that they do not have any health problems. However, the data also indicates that 31.2 percent of Inspectors, 38.7 percent of Sub-Inspectors, 17.1 percent of ASIs, and 14.7 percent of Head Constables reported experiencing health-related issues. Most of these respondents were above the age of 50 and were posted at police stations in the Industrial Area, Sector 39, and Maulijagran. It is important to note that these police stations are not considered very safe, as they are located near slum areas with relatively high crime rates. Despite this, the majority of respondents—regardless of rank—reported that they do not suffer from health problems.

Type of Health Problems

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Those who faced health related problems were asked to report the type of health problems. There is a direct relation between Good Health and level of job satisfaction of an employee. Good health enhances the job satisfaction**.** Loo (1986) has observed that policing is a high stress job. In this regard an attempt was made to know the types of health problems faced by respondents.

Table No. 4.1 Rank wise distribution showing type of health problems faced by respondents

Response	Rank								Total	
	Head Constable		ASI		Sub Inspector		Inspector			
NA	122	(85.3%)	34	(82.9%)	19	(61.3%)	11	(68.8%)	186	(80.5%
Physical ailments	4	(2.8%)	3	(7.3%)	6	(19.4%)	2	(12.5%)	15	(6.5%)
Mental ailments	17	(11.9%)	4	(9.8%)	6	(19.4%)	3	(18.8%)	30	(13%)
Total	143	(100)	41	(100)	31	(100)	16	(100)	231	(100)

The results indicate that 18.8 percent of Inspectors, 19.4 percent of Sub-Inspectors, 9.8 percent of ASIs, and 11.9 percent of Head Constables reported suffering from mental ailments such as insomnia, stress, and related conditions. The findings suggest that a larger number of respondents experienced psychological problems, which could be attributed to long working hours, extended shifts without relaxation, and a lack of time for family.

Further data reveals that 12.5 percent of Inspectors, 19.4 percent of Sub-Inspectors, 7.3 percent of ASIs, and 2.8 percent of Head Constables reported suffering from physical ailments. Rank-wise analysis indicates that Sub-Inspectors and Inspectors faced more physical and psychological health issues compared to lower-ranking officials. This may be due to the particularly stressful nature of their responsibilities. The primary accountability of the police station lies with the Inspector, and in their absence, the Sub-Inspector assumes that role.

These results are consistent with the findings of Loo (1986), which identified policing as a highly stressful occupation.

Present Health status

It is an essential job requirement that police officials have to remain fit both physically and mentally. Policing has been categorized as a high stress occupation (Crank et al., 1993). Gyamfi (2014) has found that physical environment, role ambiguity etc. lead to high stress among the police officials. In this regard an attempt was made to know the present health status of the respondents.

Table No. 4.2 Rank wise distribution showing the present health status of the respondents

Response	Rank								Total	
	Head-Constable		ASI		Sub Inspector		Inspector			
Very good	59	(41.3%)	15	(36.6%)	7	(22.6%)	5	(31.2%)	86	(37.2%)
Good	55	(38.5%)	16	(39%)	8	(25.8%)	4	(25%)	83	(35.9%)
Not so good	22	(15.4%)	6	(14.6%)	11	(35.5%)	4	(25%)	43	(18.6%)
Very bad	7	(4.9%)	4	(9.8%)	5	(16.1%)	3	(18.8%)	19	(8.2%)
Total	143	(100)	41	(100)	31	(100)	16	(100)	231	(100)

Table No. 4.2 shows that 4.9 percent of Head Constables, 9.8 percent of ASIs, 16.1 percent of Sub-Inspectors, and 18.8 percent of Inspectors rated their health as very bad. Further data indicates that 15.4 percent of Head Constables, 14.6 percent of ASIs, 35.5 percent of Sub-Inspectors, and 25 percent of Inspectors rated their health as not so good. The most commonly cited reasons for poor health were long working hours, work-related stress, and work overload. On the other hand, 37.2 percent of respondents—including 41.3 percent of Head Constables, 36.6 percent of ASIs, 22.6 percent of Sub-Inspectors, and 31.2 percent of Inspectors—rated their health as very good. Additionally, 35.9 percent of respondents—including 38.5 percent of Head Constables, 39 percent of ASIs, 25.8 percent of Sub-Inspectors, and 25 percent of Inspectors—rated their health as good.

A large majority of the respondents, therefore, rated their health as good or very good. These findings contradict the results of earlier studies by Crank et al. (1993) and Gyamfi (2014), which highlighted more severe health concerns among police personnel.

DISCUSSION

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The findings reveal substantial occupational health challenges faced by police officials in UT Chandigarh, largely stemming from their demanding work schedules and the nature of their duties. Police personnel across all ranks are required to work in shifts, often extending well beyond a standard workday. Among higher-ranking officials, especially Inspectors, extended shifts are more common, often surpassing 12 hours. This pattern suggests a heavier burden of responsibility and potentially inadequate staffing at senior levels.

The irregularity and infrequency of rest days further compound the issue. While some officials receive regular weekly offs, many report limited rest, with only a few days off each month. The variation in rest schedules is particularly evident among lower and mid-level ranks, indicating inconsistencies in duty allocation and possibly a lack of structured planning in weekly scheduling.

Mental and physical health issues are prominent among the respondents, with signs of stress, insomnia, and other psychological concerns being reported. These problems appear to be more prevalent among those in mid to senior positions, which may be attributed to the dual pressure of administrative duties and field responsibilities, combined with long, erratic working hours and minimal time for rest and recovery.

Similarly, physical ailments are more commonly observed in certain ranks, particularly those who are more actively involved in field operations. The combination of extended physical exertion, inadequate sleep, and insufficient time for personal care or medical attention likely contributes to the development of such conditions.

Overall, the data clearly point to a high-stress work environment with inadequate rest and recovery opportunities. These factors collectively impact the health and well-being of police personnel, suggesting an urgent need for systemic changes. Implementing structured shift rotations, ensuring adequate weekly offs, and providing access to mental health resources could help alleviate the stress and improve overall health outcomes among police officials.

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