



A Study on Burnout and Post Traumatic Symptoms among Police Officials

¹**Harmanpreet Kaur**, Amity School of Forensic Sciences, Amity University Mohali, 140306,
Mohali

harmanpreetdhillon120@gmail.com

²**Megha Pandita**, Amity School of Forensic Sciences, Amity University Mohali, 140306,
Mohali

meghapandita05@gmail.com

³**K Bhuvana Padmasri**, Amity School of Forensic Sciences, Amity University Mohali, 140306,
Mohali

bhuvanasri756@gmail.com

⁴**Dr. Aashna Narula** Assistant Professor (Visiting Faculty) Amity Institute of Psychology and
Allied Sciences, Amity University Mohali, Punjab, India.

narulaashna@gmail.com

Abstract

Policing is one of the most difficult, demanding, life-forbidding, and mentally hazardous occupation. Politics, bureaucracy, risk, and strained community relations are all linked to their employment. Burnout and PTSD impact police officers both professionally and personally. Police

officers often experience events that can trigger symptoms of PTSD more frequently than individuals in many other professions. The aim of the current research was to investigate the relationship between Burnout and PTSD among police officers. A total of 86 police officials in the age 27 to 65 were collected. Standardized scales were used to measure Burnout and PTSD among police officers. The results found that Post traumatic stress disorder is significantly positively correlated with Emotional Exhaustion. Additionally, there was a positive correlation between PTSD and depersonalization and personal achievement, however it was not significant. Depersonalization is significantly positively correlated with emotional exhaustion. Personal Achievement is significantly negatively correlated with depersonalization and there was a positive correlation between personal achievement and emotional exhaustion. Police officials need peer support programs, mindfulness practices, regular exercise and a supportive work environment to manage stress and improve emotional regulation.

Keywords: *Burnout, stress, post-traumatic stress disorder, police officials, ruminations, traumatic events.*

Introduction

Police officers are pivotal figures in maintaining law and order within our communities. Their roles are multifaceted, involving not just the enforcement of laws but also the provision of assistance and support to the public in times of need. The nature of their work is demanding and often places them in high-stress situations that require quick thinking and resilience. Officers frequently encounter challenging and potentially dangerous scenarios, which can have profound impacts on their mental health and well-being. Despite these pressures, they remain dedicated to their duty of safeguarding the community and upholding justice, often at great personal risk. Gomes and Afonso (2016) states that as police officers work is a high demand job and are

surrounded by chronic stressors, they not only face criminals and violent situations but also put their lives at risk to protect others.

Police forces encounter challenges and issues in the course of their daily work. The problem is made worse by the hard nature of police employment, long hours, and erratic schedules. Officers are further burdened by insufficient budget for equipment and training, which makes it more difficult for them to carry out their jobs efficiently. Increased attrition rates result from an atmosphere where burnout and discontent are common due to a lack of resources and support. Shortages in law enforcement personnel result in reduced police presence and slower response times, jeopardizing public safety. Overworked and stressed officers may be more prone to making errors or engaging in misconduct, further eroding public trust.

Researchers commonly employ assessment tools designed for other professional groups that do not relate to the unique requirements of police work, such as emotional labor and physical dangers, even though the number of studies examining occupational stress and burnout among police officials has increased. Therefore, it is essential to use tools that evaluate stress and burnout before creating intervention programs for resilience, stress management, and the prevention of burnout or suicide.

However, given the nature of their policing duties, police officers as a professional organization must carefully select such tools. A number of news sources have recently reported that France faces an increasing number of police officer committing suicide, especially after the intense work due to the “yellow vests/jackets” manifestations, while Spain and Portugal have also experienced several suicides of police officers, which motivated police officers to demonstrate in the streets and show their anger with job conditions in France and Portugal (Frias, 2017). Hard working conditions and colleagues’ suicides elicit continuous suffering and psychological pain

that affects police officers, their families, and their tasks in important domains of urban life: safety and security.

Burnout

As per WHO (2019) burnout is defined as “a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed.”

As mentioned in Encyclopedia of Applied Psychology (2004), Burnout has been defined as “a special form of strain” characterized by feelings of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, a lack of personal accomplishment, and a manifest inability to cope with even basic, ongoing demands in the work environment.

Martinussen, Richardsen and Burke (2007) conducted a study on 223 Norwegian Police officers to examine if the burnout could predict both work and health related outcomes. Results showed individual outcomes, such as psychosomatic complaints with life, job satisfaction, intention to quit and organizational commitment.

Bawa and Kaur (2011) studied 150 non gazetted police officers from Punjab, India. Two groups were identified and divided equally, low on burnout and high on burnout (N=50 and N=50, respectively). The results of the study revealed that emotional exhaustion and overall burnout have significant positive association between role overload, role conflict, group and political pressures. Other factors included strained working conditions and over all work stress. The researchers also added that police officers experience physical and psychological distress which leads to emotional exhaustion and lack of personal accomplishment.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

PTSD involves various stress responses such as anxiety, depressed mood, or feelings of guilt or shame. Individuals may experience flashbacks or nightmares and often avoid situations,

places, and activities related to the traumatic event. They may feel tense, on guard, or on edge, and have difficulty concentrating or falling asleep. Furthermore, PTSD can lead to irritability and angry or aggressive outbursts. Negative thoughts about oneself or the world, ongoing negative emotions like fear, anger, guilt, or shame, and a loss of interest in previous activities are also common. Individuals may have difficulty feeling positive emotions such as happiness or satisfaction.

Hartley et al., (2013) conducted a study on 359 Police officers to determine the frequency, risk and specific traumatic events that were associated with PTSD. The results showed that the frequency of several traumatic events was associated more with the female police officers as compared to male. But while seeing victims of assault, the results showed that the PTSD scores were higher in male police officers.

Marchand et al., (2015) conducted a study on the development of PTSD among 83 Police Officials and found that traumatic events linked to PTSD contribute to mental health disorders.

Purpose

The purpose is to study the relationship between Burnout and Post traumatic stress disorders among police officials.

Hypothesis

There will be a significant relationship between Burnout and Post traumatic stress disorders among police officials.

Method

Sample

A sample of 86 Police Officials in the age from 27 to 65 was taken from Chandigarh, Vizag (Andhra Pradesh), Srinagar and Jammu City, India.

Measures

- **The PTSD Checklist:** The scale was used to measure Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. The PTSD Scale as developed by Civilian Version (PCL-C) is a standardized rating scale given by Weathers, Litz, Huska and Keane (National Centre for PTSD (2003). It comprises 17 questionnaires that correspond to the key symptoms of PTSD. The rating response of the scale included 1 (Not at all), 2 (a little bit), 3 (moderately), 4 (quite a bit), 5 (extremely).
- **The Burnout Self-Test, Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI):** The scale was used to measure Burnout and its three sub dimensions. It comprises 3 subdimensions, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, personal achievement, having a total of 21 questionnaires that correspond to the Burnout symptoms. The rating rate of the scale included 0(Never); 1(A few times per year); 2(Once a month); 3(A few times per month); 4(Once a week); 5(A few times per week); 6(Everyday).

Procedures

The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and the questionnaires were filled face to face, each participant was thanked for their cooperation. Standardized Psychological tests were administered to the participants.

Analysis of Data

Results

Table 1: *N, Mean and Standard Deviation*

	Emotional Exhaustion	Depersonalization	Personal Achievement	PTSD
N	86	86	86	86
Mean	6.86	5.33	35.2	32.0

Descriptives				
Standard Deviation	4.01	3.93	10.4	5.72

Table 2: *Correlation between Burnout and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder*

	Emotional Exhaustion	Depersonalization	Personal Achievement	PTSD
Emotional Exhaustion	—			
Depersonalization	0.239*	—		
Personal Achievement	0.211	-0.470***	—	
PTSD	0.303**	0.089	0.067	—
Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$				

Discussion of Results

The current study aimed to investigate the relationship between burnout and post-traumatic stress disorder among police officers. Maslach (1982) conceptualized burnout as having three core components. Emotional exhaustions refer to lack of energy and feeling that one's emotional resources are messed up. Depersonalization refers to negative or excessive detachment response to various aspects of job. Lack of Personal Accomplishment refers to feelings of incompetence and a lack of achievement at work.

The results found out that Post traumatic stress disorder is significantly positively correlated with Emotional Exhaustion ($r=0.303$, $p < .01$). There was a positive correlation between PTSD and Depersonalization ($r=0.089$) and personal achievement ($r=0.067$). However, the results were not significant. The results found out that Depersonalization is significantly positively correlated with Emotional Exhaustion ($r=0.239$, $p < .01$).

The results found out that Personal Achievement is significantly negatively correlated with Depersonalization ($r = -0.470$, $p < .01$).

The result suggests that higher levels of PTSD symptoms are associated with higher levels of Emotional Exhaustion in police officers. Emotional exhaustion, a core component of burnout could stem from the chronic stress and trauma experiences in the line of duty. Additionally, police officers who experience higher levels of depersonalization (cynicism and emotional detachment) are also likely to feel emotionally exhausted. The results also revealed that as depersonalization increases, feelings of accomplishment and professional efficacy significantly decrease. Thus, police officers who feel emotionally detached from their work may struggle to see their efforts as meaningful and rewarding.

Akhtar and Naithany (2023) did a study on 120 police personnels from Ranchi, India. The results found that there was a significant positive correlation between occupational stress and burnout among Assistant Sub inspectors and Sub inspectors. However, the researchers found no significant difference among inspectors and sub inspectors in the studied variables.

Shah and Afreen (2019) conducted a study to find out the relation of family and economic status and the mental health of 50 police officers of Kishanganj, Bihar. Results revealed that police officers have a statistically significant negative correlation of mental health with family type and statistically significant positive correlation of mental health with salary. Selokar et al. (2011) asserted that the reasons for mental stress amongst police department included factors such as criticism by superiors, excess workload, lack of rewards and inadequate value given to their potential. Alam (2019) conducted a study on 50 police officers of Kishanganj, Bihar. The results of the study revealed that police officers have a significant negative correlation of mental health with family type and significant positive correlations of mental health with salary. Bhaskar (1986)

asserts that police officers are hardworking and organized, however, their job leads to mental stagnation and psychological stress.

Conclusion

Policing is a highly demanding and mentally taxing profession, with officers often facing chronic stress due to job uncertainty, political pressures, and community relations. This stress significantly impacts both their professional and personal lives.

The study found that post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is significantly positively correlated with emotional exhaustion among police officers. There is also a positive correlation between PTSD and depersonalization, although not significant. Depersonalization is significantly positively correlated with emotional exhaustion, and personal achievement is significantly negatively correlated with depersonalization.

To address burnout, it is recommended that police organizations provide supportive measures such as flexible schedules, professional development opportunities, and peer support systems. Mindfulness interventions and self-care strategies, including regular exercise and a healthy diet, are also crucial for maintaining officers' well-being.

Evidence-based treatments for PTSD, such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), can help officers cope with traumatic experiences. Outpatient programs tailored to the needs of police officers, offering therapy sessions and support groups, are beneficial for those who wish to continue working while undergoing treatment.

By implementing these measures, police organizations can help mitigate the negative effects of stress and burnout, ensuring that officers maintain their mental health and continue to perform their duties effectively.

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