

Depression, Anxiety and Stress among Junior & Senior Police Officers

Waqar Husain

Department of Psychology, Foundation University,
PAKISTAN.

drsukoon@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The present study was carried out to investigate the differences in the levels of depression, anxiety and stress among junior and senior police officers of Khyber Pukhtoonkhwa province of Pakistan. The inquiry included 315 police officers from different districts of the understudied province. Depression Anxiety and Stress Scale (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) was administered. It was hypothesized that junior police officers would project higher levels of depression, anxiety and stress as compared to senior police officers. The results supported the hypothesis on highly significant differences and were consistent with the earlier studies of similar nature.

Keywords: Police, depression, anxiety, stress

INTRODUCTION

Depression, anxiety and stress are the most commonly diagnosed illnesses in Psychology (Brown, Chorpita, Korotitsch & Barlow, 1997; Davies, Norman, Cortese & Malla, 1995; Farmer, 1998; Ollendick & Yule, 1990). Several studies have associated these syndromes to numerous negative outcomes in the workplace, such as decreased performance and satisfaction (Cavanaugh, Boswell, Roehling & Boudreau, 2000; Greenberg, 1999; Poole, 1993; Seaward, 1999). The outcomes of depression, anxiety and stress are also associated with negative outcomes in other aspects of life, including general satisfaction (Kessler et al., 1994; Youngren & Lewinsohn, 1980), quality of life (Norvell, Hills & Murrin, 1993), and social interactions (Alden & Phillips, 1990; Davies et al., 1995). Traditionally, it was believed that stress, anxiety and depression were separate constructs with varying etiologies and symptoms; however, the high co-morbidity rates, especially between anxiety and depression, have gained interest and attention throughout the field (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995; Stavrakaki & Vargo, 1986; Dobson, 1985; Feldman, 1993).

Police work is generally regarded as a highly stressful occupation (Violante, 1983). Policing is considered as the most psychologically dangerous profession worldwide (Axel & Valle, 1979). Police officers perform jobs that are recognized as suffering from high levels of stress by performing tasks that are both physically and emotionally demanding (Kopel & Friedman, 1999; Schwartz & Schwartz, 1981; Stotland, 1991). Stress in police officers and other law enforcement personnel is an inspiring area for the researchers. Studies have linked various stressors of police work to psychological distress, depression, anxiety, alcoholism, burnout, cardiac disorders and suicide; as well as family and marital problems (Biggam, Power, & MacDonald, 1997; Kop, Euwema, & Schaufeli, 1999; Loo, 1999; Territo & Vetter, 1981; Violanti, 1992). Evidence also suggests that police officers are at increased risk for suicide (Violanti, 2004; Violanti, Castellano, O'Rourke, & Paton, 2006; Kposowa, 1999; Charbonneau, 2000; Darensburg et al., 2006; Hartwig and Violanti, 1999).

The current study was aimed to investigate the levels of depression, anxiety and stress among police officers on the basis of their official ranks. It was hypothesized that junior police

officers will have higher levels of depression, anxiety and stress as compared with senior police officers.

METHOD

Participants

The research participants were 315 randomly selected police officers who further included officers with low official ranks i.e. constables ($n=165$) and officers with high official ranks i.e. sub-inspectors and above ($n=150$). The participants belonged to districts of Peshawar, Abbottabad and Mardan of Khyber Pukhtoonkhwa province of Pakistan.

Instrument

Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995)

The Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS) comprises of 42 items. It is a self-report inventory that deals with three different but relevant factors i.e. depression, anxiety, and stress. Each of the three DASS scales contains 14 items, divided into subscales of 2-5 items with similar content. Reliability of the three scales is considered appropriate and test-retest reliability is similarly considered adequate with .71 for depression, .79 for anxiety and .81 for stress (Brown et al., 1997).

Procedure

After acquiring a written permission from the Inspector General of the Frontier Police Force, the participants of the research were individually approached by the researcher in three districts of the province i.e. Peshawar, Abbottabad and Mardan. The officers in-charge of different police stations facilitated the research procedure. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their consent to participate was obtained. The participants responded to the instrument in individual settings and the issues of confidentiality and secrecy were also made clear to them. Demographic information was collected after establishing a satisfactory level of rapport with them. This information did not include their identities. The instructions which were already mentioned in the instrument were also made clear to them. The researcher was available for the respondent in case the respondent needed help in translating / understanding difficult words. The subjects and the facilitators were acknowledged for their cooperation. The scores obtained were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

RESULTS

In order to see the difference in the scores of the police officers for Depression as an effect of their official ranks (Low and High ranks), the scores of the two groups were compared as under:

Table 1. Means, standard deviations and t-value of the Depression scores of the Police Officers with Low and High Official Ranks on Depression, Anxiety & Stress Scale

Group	n	M	SD	t-value
Low Ranks	165	25.47	4.82	11.59
High Ranks	150	18.18	6.30	

df= 313; $p<.001$

The above table shows highly significant difference between the Police Officers with Low and High Official Ranks on Depression, Anxiety & Stress Scale by Depression Scores ($t=$

11.59, $p < .001$). The figures show that Police Officers with Low Official Ranks have more depression ($M=25.47$, $SD=4.82$) as compared to Police Officers with High Official Ranks ($M=18.18$, $SD=6.30$).

In order to see the difference in the scores of the police officers for Anxiety as an effect of their official ranks (Low and High ranks), the scores of the two groups were compared as under:

Table 2. Means, standard deviations and t-value of the Anxiety scores of the Police Officers with Low and High Official Ranks on Depression, Anxiety & Stress Scale

Group	n	M	SD	t-value
Low Ranks	165	26.10	4.93	9.46
High Ranks	150	20.28	5.97	

df= 313; $p < .001$

The above table shows highly significant difference between the Police Officers with Low and High Official Ranks on Depression, Anxiety & Stress Scale by Anxiety Scores ($t= 9.46$, $p < .001$). The figures show that Police Officers with Low Official Ranks have more anxiety ($M=26.10$, $SD=4.93$) as compared to Police Officers with High Official Ranks ($M=20.28$, $SD=5.97$).

In order to see the difference in the scores of the police officers for Stress as an effect of their official ranks (Low and High ranks), the scores of the two groups were compared as under:

Table 3. Means, standard deviations and t-value of the Stress scores of the Police Officers with Low and High Official Ranks on Depression, Anxiety & Stress Scale

Group	n	M	SD	t-value
Low Ranks	165	25.72	5.29	7.91
High Ranks	150	20.64	6.11	

df= 313; $p < .001$

The above table shows highly significant difference between the Police Officers with Low and High Official Ranks on Depression, Anxiety & Stress Scale by Stress Scores ($t= 7.91$, $p < .001$). The figures show that Police Officers with Low Official Ranks have more stress ($M=25.72$, $SD=5.29$) as compared to Police Officers with High Official Ranks ($M=20.64$, $SD=6.11$).

DISCUSSION

The results of the current study reveal that the junior police officers reflected higher levels of depression, anxiety and stress as compared to senior police officers. The officers understudied were having easily observable psychological distress due to severe workload and departmental difficulties. This workload is usually considered socially and financially unrewarding by the police and reduces the levels of job satisfaction among them. Insufficient remuneration and disrespect from the society were the two major stressors which were found while conducting additional interviews with officers of different ranks.

The previous studied conducted in this regard also reveal that Depression, anxiety and stress are significant outputs in stressful working settings (Bennett, Williams, Page, Hood &

Woollard, 2004; Caplan, 1994). Researches specifically focusing on the ranks of police officers in relation to depression, anxiety and/or stress are also found in alliance with the findings of the current study. Bartol (1982) studied 102 police officers in Vermont and reported that low level officers had more psychological problems as compared to high level officers. Other researchers (Brown & Campbell, 1990; Gejdenson & Adlam, 1985) reveal that non-managerial and younger police officers experience a greater frequency of serious operational tasks than other police, whereas managers, middle managers and investigators experienced more job pressure. These differences are most likely a result of rank and the main task.

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