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Occupational Stress and General Well-being among Police

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Abstract

Stress at the workplace is a global issue faced by individuals and organisations. Police officers are considered to be one of the most stressful occupations globally. This study aimed to determine factors that cause occupational stress and general well-being, the relationship between operational stress and general well-being, organisational stress and general well-being, and compare the level of occupational stress between departments. This cross-sectional study utilised the stratified random sampling procedure and recruited 107 police from a Districts Police Headquarters in Kedah. The Police Stress Questionnaire (PSQ) and General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) was used. The data has been entered and analysed using (SPSS) version 24. Perceived operational and organisational stress prevalence among the study population was moderate, with 50% operational stress (moderate stress in 39.3% and high stress in 10.3%), while organisational stress reported 60% (moderate stress in 36.4% and increased stress in 23.4%). The most common stressors reported for operational stress were negative comments from the public (19.6%), while organisational stress was staff shortage (30.8%). There is a significant negative correlation between operational and organisational stress and general well-being with r = -0.806 and r = -0.786. This study strengthens the findings that police job was stressful. The action needs to be taken by the organisational so that occupational stress can be reduced and increase the well-being of the police officers.

Keywords: occupational stress; general well-being; operational stress; organisational stress; police

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Stress at the workplace is a global issue faced by individuals and organisations. These occupational stress issues were increasing globally, which affected almost all countries. Annual Statistics Report stated that 440,000 was the total number of work-related stress, depression, and anxiety cases with the prevalence rate of 1380 per 100,000 workers in Great Britain [1]. Stress at the workplace negatively impacts on the workers and the country's economy. British estimated economic cost due to stress at the workplace with £14.3 billion lost in 2013 and 2014 [2].

Stress can affect an individual's life. Occupational stress can affect behaviour, depression, performance and affect personal aspects such as relationships, job satisfaction, and emotional health. In terms of health, occupational stress can increase the prevalence of metabolic syndrome and coronary heart disease [3]. Stress has a negative impact on people. Stress exposure has a significant influence on suicidal ideation and suicide attempts. [4].

Police officers were considered one of the most stressful occupations globally [5]. The previous studies among police officers conducted in Pakistan [6] and India [7] stated that 97% and 82% of the employees reported high stress in their police job, respectively. In Malaysia, the prevalence of stress among Royal Malaysian Police in Kuala Lumpur was 38.8%, strengthening that the police profession was stressful [8]. The study conducted by a group of researchers from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Medical Center stated that police officer gets the highest percentage of occupational stress with 53.7% compared to other occupations [9]. The findings of the previous study noted that police officers were more likely to die by suicide than in the line of duty. [10]

Occupational stress caused a negative impact on the police. Therefore, occupational stress among police officers is a serious concern and needs special attention to the improvements in the individual's health and work-related aspects. Hence, research about occupational stress and general well-being among Royal Malaysian Police should be conducted to investigate whether the results from the previous studies were supported or contradicted.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Study design and subject recruitment

The study design used in this research is a cross-sectional study concerning the occupational stress and general well-being among police in Kedah. The sampling method utilised was stratified sampling targeting all police who fulfilled the inclusion criteria; working as the regular police at District Police Headquarter, ranks from constable to the top management and performed more than six months.

The first letter was given to the polices as an initial approach for them to become study participants. They were given a briefing a week after that to confirm their willingness to participate in this study. Then, an arrangement for data collection was made. The study was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee (reference: USM/JEPeM/18110635). All 107 study participants were provided with research information and voluntarily signed the research and publication consent forms before data collection.

2.2 Questionnaire

Prior to data collection, the polices were given an informed consent form and a self-administrative questionnaire adapted from a previous study. The questionnaire used in this study was a combination of the Police Stress Questionnaire Malay Version and the General Health Questionnaire-12 Malay Version. Police Stress Questionnaire Malay Version was taken from another study [11], and General Health Questionnaire-12 Malay Version was taken from another previous study [12]. The questionnaire comprises Section A, which is about participants' socio-demographic characteristics. Section B is the Police Stress Questionnaire. Section C is the General Health Question-12 (GHQ-12). This questionnaire takes ten minutes to be completed.

2.2.1 Section A Socio-Demographic Characteristics

It consisted of socio-demographic characteristics such as age, race, gender, marital status, service period, working department, police rank, and level of education. The respondents were required to fill in the blank and tick the questions about their demographic characteristics.

2.2.2 Section B The Police Stress Questionnaire Malay Version

It consisted of the Police Stress Questionnaire Malay Version and measured one of the most common stressors for the operational police officers and organisation stress. There were 36 items in this section. The scales used in this section was five-point Likert scale that were (1 = no stress at all, 2 = low stress, 3 = intermediate stress, 4 = high stress, 5 = very high stress). The factors that affected stress among police officers were categorised into operational stressors and organisational stressors.

2.2.3 General Health Question-12 (GHQ-12)

The General Health Question-12 (GHQ-12) was used to measure general well-being. The original version of the General Health Question was intended to detect psychiatric disturbances in the clinical setting that were not easily recognised through standard psychiatric interviewing. This General Health Question-12 has been used in non-clinical settings to provide an index of general well-being. This section consisted of 12 items

2.3 Sampling method

The sampling method used is stratified sampling and simple random sampling. First, the participants were divided into six strata based on their departments. The departments were Strategic Resources and Technology, Traffic, Internal Security and Public Order, Narcotic Criminal Investigation, Crime Prevention and Community Safety, and Criminal Investigation. The number of participants from each stratum was selected using the sampling fraction formula, equal to the number of study samples divided by the number of police for each stratum multiplied by the number of police working at the police headquarters. After the number of participants from each stratum was obtained, participants from each stratum were selected using simple random sampling. To ensure random selection, an excel random number generator was used.

2.4 Data Collection Process

The data collection process started with a briefing to the study participant. The participants signed the informed consent and answered the questionnaire received. The researcher collected the questionnaire

2.5 Data Analysis

All data was acquired from the questionnaire and analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics 2. The normality test using Kolmogorov-Smirnov was used to identify the data type distributions where results showed that almost all data were normally distributed. The descriptive analysis was used in this study for the demographic characteristics, factors that caused occupational stress and general well-being of police officers. Categorical variables are presented as frequency and percentage, while continuous variables present mean and standard deviation. One-Way ANOVA Test with Welch test was used to compare the level of occupational stress between different departments among police officers. Pearson's correlation test was used to determine the relationship between occupational stress in operational and organisational stressors and general well-being among the police officers. The statistical analysis with a p-value of less than 0.05 was set as significant.

3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics Of The Police

Table 1 shows that the mean age and period of services for the 107 police officers was 37.5 years old and 14.7 years. The participants were predominantly male (86.9%), Malay (89.7%) and married (83.4%). For the police rank, the majority of the participant rank was corporal (37.4%), followed by lance corporal (23.4%) and sergeant (16.8%). The educational level of the participants predominantly had SPM (74.8%).

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the police at Districts Headquarters in Kedah (n = 107).

Variable		n (%)	Mean (SD)
Age			37.5(10.5)
Races			
	Malay	96(89.)	
	Indian	4(3.7)	
	Chinese	1(0.9)	
	Others	6(5.7)	
Sex			
	Male	93(86.9)	
	Female	14(13.1)	
Marital status			
	Single	17(15.9)	
	Married	89(83.2)	
	Divorced	0(0.0)	
	Widow	1(0.9)	
Period of services			14.7(11.7)
Working department			
	Strategic Resources and Technology	20(18.7)	
	Traffic	17(15.9)	
	Internal Security and Public Order	16(15.0)	
	Narcotic Criminal Investigation	13(12.1)	
	Crime Prevention and Community Safety	22(20.6)	
	Criminal Investigation	19(17.8)	
Police rank			
	Constable	8(7.5)	
	Lance corporal	25(23.4)	
	Corporal	40(37.4)	
	Sergeant	18(16.8)	
	Sergeant Major	2(1.9)	
	Inspector	14(13.1)	
Education level			
	SPM	80(74.8)	
	Diploma	10(9.3)	
	Degree	17(15.9)	
	Master	0(0.0)	

3.2 Factors That Cause Occupational Stress Among Police

Table 2 shows the top five factors in an operational stressor that caused high stress and no stress with frequency (n) and percentage (%). Negatives comments from the public were the top factors in an operational stressor that causes high stress (19.6%) followed by the risk of being injured on the job (16.8%). While making friends outside the job (20.6%) and finding time to stay in good physical (19.6%) were the top factors in an operational stressor that cause no stress.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for the top five factors in an operational stressor caused high and no stress (n = 107).

Operational stressor	n (%)
Top five factors that caused high stress	
1. Negative comments from the public.	21(19.6)
2. Risk of being injured on the job	18(16.8)
3. Over-time demands	16(15.0)
4. Feeling like you are always on the job.	14(13.1)
5. Limitations to your social life (e.g. who your friends are, where you social)	14(13.1)
Top five factors that caused no stress	
1. Making friends outside the job	22(20.6)
2. Finding time to stay in good physical	21(19.6)
3. Eating healthy at work	20(18.7)
4. Upholding a "higher image" in public.	20(18.7)
5. Managing your social life outside of work.	13(12.1)

Table 3 shows the top five factors in an organisational stressor that caused high stress and no stress with frequency (n) and percentage (%). Staff shortage was the factor that has the highest percentage (30.8%) that caused high stress in organisational stressors followed by another factor was inadequate equipment with (29%). In contrast, the top five factors that caused no stress in organisational stressors were dealing with the court system (13.1%).

Table 3: Descriptive statistics for the top five factors in an organisational stressor that caused high and low stress (n = 107).

Organisational stressor	n (%)
Top five factors that caused high stress	
1. Staff shortages	33(30.8)
2. Inadequate equipment	31(29.0)
3. Lack of resources	28(26.2)
4. Constant changes in policy/legislation.	26(24.3)
5. Inconsistent leadership style	22(20.6)
Top five factors that caused no stress	
1. Dealing with the court system	14(13.1)
2. If you are sick or injured, your co-workers seem to look down on you.	14(13.1)
3. Too much computer work	12(11.2)
4. Lack of training on new equipment	11(10.3)
5. Perceived pressure to volunteer free time	10(9.3)

Many potential stressors factors can cause occupational stress. The factors are mainly categorised into operational stressors and organisational stressors. For the operational stressors, the results of this study indicate that the negative comments from the public were the most prominent factors compared to other factors that caused occupational stress among police officers. However, the findings of this study do not support the results of previous studies [7, 13,14].

The previous studies indicate that overtime demand factors [7] and finding times to stay in good physical condition factors [13] was the significant factor that caused operational stress among the police officers. There was a possible explanation for this study's results because other studies mentioned were conducted in other countries such as India and Greece. At the same time, this study was conducted in Malaysia, which has diverse ethnicities and religions among its citizen, that sometimes have a different way to approach the police officers.

For the organisation stressors, this study found that the most prominent factors for organisational stressors were staff shortage which matches with many previous studies [7, 13,15]. A possible explanation for this might be that the police officers were recruited to be multifunction globally because the job scope of the police officers was not specific. Thus, police officers will become more stressed because of the staff shortage

3.3 General Well-Being Among The Police

Table 4 shows the mean and standard deviation of all the items of the general well-being. The highest mean for all these twelve items was the eleventh item about "been thinking of yourself as a worthless person", with a mean of 2.48. In comparison, the lowest mean of all these items was the fifth item about "constantly felt under strain", with a mean of 1.54.

Table 4: Descriptive statistic for the general well-being among the police (n = 107).

Items	Mean (SD)
1. Been able to concentrate on what you are doing	2.09(0.864)
2. Lost much sleep over worry	1.65(1.010)
3. Felt that you are playing a useful part in things	1.97(0.841)
4. Felt capable of making decisions about things	1.98(0.812)
5. Felt constantly under strain	1.54(0.934)
6. Felt you could not overcome your difficulties	1.93(0.850)
7. Been able to enjoy your normal day to day activities	2.00(0.911)
8. Been able to face up to your problem	1.96(0.812)
9. Been feeling unhappy or depressed	1.96(0.812)
10. Been losing confidence in yourself	2.39(0.774)
11. Been thinking of yourself as a worthless person	2.48(0.731)
12. Been feeling reasonably happy, all things considered	2.06(0.750)

3.4 Comparison of the occupational stress between different department

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to compare the mean score of occupational stress between six different departments. The Post Hoc Test revealed a significant pairwise difference between the mean scores for departments. There are five significant pairwise: Traffic and Internal Security and Public Order Department. The second significant pairwise between Internal Security and Public Order and Narcotic Criminal Investigation Department. The third significant pairwise between Internal Security and Public Order and Criminal Investigation Department. The fourth significant pairwise between Narcotic Criminal Investigation and Criminal Investigation Department. The last significant pairwise is Strategic Resources and Technology, and Internal Security and Public Order Department. (Table 5). All the significant pairwise with the p-value < 0.05.

There were six departments among the police officer involved in this study. Hence, this study was to test whether there was a mean difference in occupational stress between different departments. There was no previous study that supported this hypothesis. One study conducted among the police officers in different units in Gaborone covered three different units of the police departments such as Special Support Group, Criminal Investigation and Traffic. However, these study findings show the general level of stress among police officers not by different departments [16].

The highest mean among all the departments was Narcotic Criminal Investigation Department, with a mean of 134.15. A possible explanation for this result might be caused by an increase in drug addiction in Kedah. The likely reason can be shown by a drug addict case statistics according to the National Anti-Drugs Agency in 2018 in Kedah was a second-place higher among all other states in Malaysia with 2693 per case.

While the lowest mean among all the departments was Internal Security and Public Order Departments, with a mean of 87.44, the possible explanation for these results might be caused by the workload and nature of work in these departments and working environment not so stressful. It can be handled enough by the police officers in this department.

There were five pairwise that have significant mean differences, as mentioned before. Four out of five pairwise involved the Internal Security and Public Order Department. This means that the Internal Security and Public Order Department make the means difference significant. A possible explanation may be explained by the result of the mean square between groups of all departments being higher than within the department. Therefore, it confirms a significant mean difference between different departments among the police officers.

Table 5: One-Way ANOVA for comparing the mean of the occupational stress between different department (n = 107)**.**

Departments	Mean (SD)	F (df)	*p*-value
Strategic Resources and Technology	112.70(30.076)	6.187(5.101)	<0.001
Traffic	117.59(16.745)		
Internal Security and Public Order	87.44(19.065)		
Narcotic Criminal Investigation	134.15(25.202)		
Crime Prevention and Community Safety	104.18(20.297)		
Criminal Investigation	119.26(31.928)		

Note: One-Way ANOVA with Welch test, with post hoc, * $p < 0.05$

3.5 Correlation Between Occupational Stress And General Well-Being

Occupational stress was divided into operational and organisational stress. There were two relationships; first, the relationships between operational stress and the general well-being among the police officers. Second, the relationship between organisational stress and general well-being among the police officers. (Table 6). This study's objective was to test whether there is a correlation between occupational stress and the general well-being of police officers.

This study found a significant correlation between operational stress and general well-being with ($p < 0.001$, $r = -0.806$). The negative of the r-value means direction; as the value of the operational stress variable increases, the value of the general well-being variable decrease. The magnitude of the correlation interpreted using Cohen's (1988) guidelines indicated a strong negative relationship, $r \geq 0.50$. The study's findings were consistent with [17], which shows the negative correlation between operational stress and general well-being.

There were several possible explanations for these findings. It might be that the more stress the police officers will cause, the general well-being becomes lower in the aspects of being thinking of yourself as a worthless person since this aspect gets the highest mean with 2.48. Therefore, this correlation test can determine how more substantial the magnitude of the correlation is. The weakness of these findings is that we do not know how subjective well-being itself because well-being means the difference to every person who defines it.

The result of this study also parallels the previous finding [18] that shows that work among police officers was considered to have a negative impact on health, leisure, and economic well-being. In contrast, this study found a significant correlation between organisational stress and general well-being with ($p < 0.001$, $r = -0.786$). The negative of the r-value means direction; as the value of the operational stress variable increase, the value of the general well-being variable decrease.

According to the magnitude of the correlation interpreted using Cohen's (1988) guidelines, it indicated a strong negative relationship, $r \geq 0.50$. The findings of this study were consistent with the results [19], which shows the negative correlation between organisational stress and general well-being with r value of -0.29. Thus, it shows that the magnitude of the correlation between organisational and general well-being was stronger than operational.

Table 6: Pearson's Correlation for the relationship between organisational stress and general well-being (n = 107).

Occupational stress	General well-being	
	r	*p*-value
Operational stress	-0.806	0.001
Organisational stress	-0.786	0.001

Note: Pearson's Correlation test, *$p < 0.05$

3.5 Limitation and strength of the Study

There were some limitations in this study that as the number of respondents in each department was relatively small, this does not fully represent the whole population in each department. Next, the word well-being was too subjective; it needed to be more specific. This study also did not provide coping strategies or mechanisms. This study also did not stress female police because the number of female police officers was limited in the Districts Police Headquarters, Kedah.

This study's strength is that the results provide more precise types of occupational stress, which were operational and organisational. Other than that, all the questionnaire or research tools used was established. This helps to lend some credibility to the study results.

4.0 CONCLUSION

This study aimed to determine occupational stress and the general well-being of police officers. This study shows that police officers undergo significant occupational stress that may result in poorer general well-being. This study also indicates a mean difference in occupational stress in different departments, with the highest mean from the Narcotic Criminal Investigation Departments.

The staff shortage was the most dominant factor for the organisational stress that caused high stress among the police officer. At the same time, the negative comments from the public were the most dominant factors for the operational stress. Organisational stress also was higher as compared to operational stress. Conclusively, occupational stress was moderate compared to other Asian countries such as India.

In conclusion, since the organisation stress was higher than the operational stress, the action from the organisation of the police officers needs to be taken so that the occupational stress among the police officers can be reduced; thus, the well-being of the police officers can be reduced be increased. An increase in well-being was significant, especially for the police officers, so that they can improve their work performance and satisfaction.

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