

Perceived Stress and Coping Mechanism of Women Police Officers: An Empirical Study in Kerala.

Daliya S

*Assistant Professor,
Department of Malayalam, Govt. Arts College,
Thiruvananthapuram*

ABSTRACT

When individuals are overwhelmed by occupational stress they suffer from increased chronic stress, depression, heart disease, stomach disorders, alcohol and drug use and abuse, divorce, and even suicide attempts. The concern of impact of stress in women police officers should be given more attention now because of steadily growing demographic in Kerala Police. Added to the work related stress, women police officers encounter harassment and over hostility from public as well as the police organizational culture which is generally against them. Unique work environment, peer group support, bureaucratic characteristics, family related stress and choice of coping mechanisms all contribute to stress in women police officers. Exposure to critical incidents, workplace discrimination, lack of cooperation among co-workers, and job dissatisfaction increases perceived work stress in this population. The crimes in the urban and rural area though similar vary in several aspects. Along with that deficiency of number of staff may be seen in rural areas which affect work quality leading to stress. This study focuses on perceived stress scale among women police officers and its relation to their coping mechanisms to various stressful situations. This paper examines the stress level and coping mechanisms of women police officers in Kerala.

1. Background

Police work is highly stressful, since it is one of the few occupations where employees are asked continually to face physical dangers and to put their lives on the line at any time. They are exposed to violent, antisocial elements of society and are expected to exercise discretion in many situations. Police occupational stress is a widespread problem because of its numerous negative effects on individuals and on police organizations. High incidence of physical ailments and psychological problems are reported among people showing high stress. Absences from work, poor work quality, burnout, job dissatisfaction etc, are some of the common characteristics shared by these individuals. Stress is a product of

busyness of modern life. Tim Newton(1995) refers to stress as “an epidemic plaguing modernity”. It has assumed grave dimensions ever since the emergence of industrialisation.

2. Negative Implication of Stress

Tim Newton observes “Stress appears almost as a necessary kind of comfort discourse, a tranquillizer to cope with the diversity of competing messages about the truth of this world, and the dreadful uncertainty of our times. The stress discourse re-assures us by explain how it is normal to feel stressed in these conditions, and it provides strategies to help us cope with them by being vigilant and stress fit(Newton,1995). Negative implication of stress for the organisation may be physical, social, psychological, and behavioural aspects of people. The sources of such stress may be environmental, organisational and individual factors.

3. Practice of Stress Management

There are three forms of stress management practice: employee assistance programmes, stress management training, and stress invention. Employee assistance programmes which refers to the provision of employee counselling services by an organisation. It can enable an employee to have an easy access to trained counsellors getting personal insight and practical solutions.

4. Kerala Police an Overview

Kerala police is the state police for the Indian state of Kerala and is responsible for the statement law enforcement. Kerala police has its headquarters in Thiruvananthapuram. The state police was formed in 1659 after the taluk of Kasargodu in the south Kanara district of Madras presidency the Malabar district of Madras presidency, and the Travancore –Cochin with four southern taluks merged to form the state of Kerala under the state’s Recognition Act. The head of the state police is the Director General DGP. The local police stations are

the primary contact center for the public for their grievances Crime Branch, Vigilance, Armed police, the High tech Crime enquiry cell, Coastal Police, Cyber police etc are the various branches of police. In all the branches of police women police has its own strength and has been working in a well manner even though the strength is very limited.

4.1. Women Police

Women cops make up to only 6% of the entire police force, their numbers have only recently increased. According to the bureau of police Research and Development the number of women police personnel is increasing gradually and they are employed for various duties like Law and Order, for gathering of information checking crime especially in checking and preventing crime against women and children. The present strength is now 20%. The old concept of policing confined to law and order had become outdated and there were numerous challenges and issues that they have to be tackled by the police. As the number of women police is less in number than the male they face many problems in adjustments which finally lead to stress.

5. Statement of the Problem

In Kerala, the crime rate and work load are high in urban areas as compared to rural areas. Especially, the case of atrocities against women, violence and related crimes against women are alarmingly high which increased the toughness of the work of women police. Above all the cultures that the women are the sole responsible person in household activities and the pressure to balance the household and official work creates stress among the women police officers. The peculiarity of police job and specialties of women in household work magnifies the stress level of women police. How they cope with this situation? Is there any difference in perceived stress among women police officers working in urban and rural area? What coping mechanisms do women

police officers adopt in various stressful situations? Are some of the pertinent questions in this regard? Hence the study focuses on the perceived stress and coping mechanism among the women police in urban and rural areas.

The Perceived Stress Scale is the most widely used psychological instrument for measuring the perception of stress. it is a measure of the degree to which situations in one's life are appraised as stressful. Items were designed to tap how unpredictable and overloaded respondents find their lives.

6. Objective of the Study

The present research is conceived with the purpose of study the correlation between Perceived Stress and Coping Mechanism of Women police officers. In view of this purpose, following objectives are carried:

- i. To study the perceived stress among the women police officials in Kerala Police Force
- ii. To study coping mechanisms of women police officers in various stressful situations
- iii. To suggest suitable intervention based on the results obtained.

7. Methodology

7.1. Source of Data

The study uses both primary data and secondary data. The primary data is collected from the women police officers and secondary data is from websites, previous project reports, books, journals, news papers etc.

7.2. Design of sample selection and data collection

Sampling method – convenient sampling method is adopted and a structured questionnaire is used for the study. Total 100 samples were selected (50 from 5 urban police stations and 50 from 5 rural police stations) in Thiruvananthapuram district, Kerala state who are apparently healthy individuals of age group 25-50years.

7.3. Tools for data analysis

Consent is obtained from all selected individuals. Perceived stress is measured using “perceived stress scale (PSS 14)” developed by Cohen and coping mechanism is measured using coping strategies inventory (CSI). Thorough physical examination is done prior to commencing the study to avoid bias. ‘Perceived stress score 14 (PSS-14)’ developed by Cohen constitutes 14 questions that ask about one’s feelings and thoughts during the last year. In each case, one is asked to indicate his/her response by placing an “x” over the circle representing how often they felt or thought in a certain way. All participants were asked to treat each question as a separate question. PSS-14 scores are obtained by reversing the scores on the four positive items, e.g., 0=4, 1=3, 2=2, etc. and then summing across all items. Items 4, 5, 7, and 8 are the positively stated items. Coping methods is measured by COPE inventory. COPE is a questionnaire containing a wide range of thoughts and acts that people use to deal with the internal and/or external demands of specific stressful encounters. The respondents are asked to indicate what they generally do and feel when they experience stressful events. Different events bring out somewhat different responses, but think about what they usually do when they are under a lot of stress. The Questionnaire contains 60 questions to which the responses are marked as “1 = I usually don't do this at all, 2 = I usually do this a little bit, 3 = I usually do this a medium amount, 4 = I usually do this a lot “and then sum is calculated using no reversal of codes. The COPE scale incorporates five conceptually distinct scales. Belief in Religion, Acceptance, use of drug and alcohol, coping with self, and coping with others, this scale helps to categorize various coping mechanisms used by individuals during stressful time. This study aims to compare between perceived stress among women police officers working in urban and rural area and various coping mechanism used by them. The tools for data analysis may include mean, chi square etc.

8. Analysis and Discussion

The analysis part is divided into three, first part is the personal profile of respondents, followed by the perceived stress level and last part deals the coping mechanism of female police officers.

8.1. Personal Profile of respondents

The personal profile of the respondents includes the age, location and education of the respondents. The personal profile is depicted in table 1. Out of 100 respondents 52 is from urban and 48 is from rural of which the highest number of respondents is from the age group between thirty and forty which include 42 respondents, and the next is from above forty age group which include 40 respondents and 30 respondents is from the age group of below 30.

Highest educational qualification of the participants is Post graduation which comprises 38 respondents and the second educational qualification of the participants is graduation which includes 44 the highest group and the diploma group comprises 10 and the Higher secondary group is the least which includes eight. Highest number of the respondents is from the degree holders. Highest educational qualification of the respondents is Post graduation. The least number of the respondents are from Higher secondary education.

Table 1.
Profile of respondents

	Classification	Frequency	Percent
Age	Below 30	8	8.0
	Between 30 and 39	42	42.0
	40 and Above	40	40.0
	Total	100	100.0
Location	Urban	52	52.0
	Rural	48	48.0
	Total	100	100.0
Education	Higher Secondary	8	8.0
	Diploma	10	10.0
	Degree	44	44.0
	Post Graduation	38	38.0
	Total	100	100.0

8.2. Perceived Stress Level of Women Police Officers

This part of analysis shows the perceived stress level of Women police Officials and the analyses is done to compare the perceived stress level on the basis of age, Location (means rural or urban) and education qualification.

Table 2
Comparison of Age and Stress Level

Age		Stress Grouped			Total
		Rarely	Sometimes	Often	
Below 30	Nos	0	12	6	18
	%	.0.	66.7	33.3	100.0.
Between 30 and 39	Nos	12	26	20	42
	%	23.1.	61.9	15	100.0.
40 and Above	Nos	10	20	10	40
	%	25.0.	50.0.	25.0.	100.
Total	Nos	22	58	20	100
	.	22.0.	58.0.	20.0.	100.0.

Source: Primary Data ,

Chi square: 10.14, df. : 4, Significance level 5% P Value: 038**

Table no 2 shows the relation between age level and stress level. It is clear that overall 58percentage of the total respondents having moderate stress and 20 percent having high stress level. The stress level of persons between the age of 30 and 39and above 40 are having more stress when compared with the youngsters.75% of the persons who belong to the age group of above 40 have moderate or high level of stress. The persons who belong to the age group of below 30 have more stress than compared to other age group. It may be due to the ignorance in handling the stress or due to lack of experience or may be due to the thinking about the consequences. The statistical test states that there is significant differences in the stress level and age and the null hypothesis is rejected at 5 percent level of significance. It can be concluded that all the woman police officers are affected with average or moderate stress. Lower age group has the highest level of stress.

Table 3**Comparison of Stress Level of Rural and Urban**

Location		Stress Grouped			Total
		Rarely	Sometimes	Often	
Urban	Nos	8	28	16	52
	%	15.4.	53.8	30.8	100.0.
Rural	Nos	14	30	14	48
	%	29.2.	62.5	8.3	100.0.
Total	Nos	22	58	20	100
	%	22.0.	58.0.	20.0.	100.0.

Source: Primary Data

Chi square.76, df. : 2 , Significance level 5%, P Value: .013**

Table no 3 shows the relation between location and stress level. It is clear that overall 58percentage of the total respondents having moderate stress and 20%having high stress level. 31% of the urban people have more stress while the 8% of the rural people have more stress. It is evident that urban persons have more stress than that of the rural people. It can be concluded that the stress level is high in people working in urban areas. The statistical test also approve that the hypothesis stating that significant difference exists with regard to Perceived Stress of Women police officers in rural and urban areas and it is accepted at 5 percent level of significance. It may be due to the complicated nature of the work. There is a relationship between location and stress level. More than half of the respondents (58%) are having moderate stress and 20% having high stress level. Urban persons have more stress than that of the rural people. Significant difference exists with regard to Perceived Stress of Women police officers in rural and urban areas and it is accepted at 5 percent level of significance.

Table no 4 shows the relation between education and stress level. It is clear that 58%of the total respondents are having moderate stress and20%having high stress level. It is evident that Degree and Post Graduates are having more stress

than compared to Higher secondary and Diploma holders. It can be concluded that as the stress level is high in those having higher level of education.

Table No. 4
Stress level and Education

Education		Stress Level			Total
		Rarely	Sometimes	Often	
Higher Secondary	Nos	2	6	0	8
	%	25.0.	75.0.	.0.	100.0.
Diploma	Nos	6	2	2	10
	%	60.0.	20.0.	20.0.	100.0.
Degree	Nos	4	32	8	44
	%	9.1.	72.7.	18.2	100.0.
Post Graduation	Nos	10	18	10	38
	%	26.3.	47.4.	26.3.	100.0.
Total	Nos	22	58	20	100
	.	22.0.	58.0.	20.0.	100.0.

Source: Primary Data

Chi square: 16.11, df. : 6, Significance level 5% P Value: .013**

The statistical test also prove the hypothesis stating that high education in women police professionals leads to high stress and is accepted at 5 percent level of significance. It may be due to the awareness of laws and its consequences. There is a relation between education and stress level. High education leads to high stress level.

Table: 5
Coping Mechanism: Belief in Religion

Location		Don't depend	A little bit of dependency	Medium dependency	Extreme dependency	Total
Urban	No.	0.0	0.0	20.0	32.0	52.0
	%	0.0	0.0	38.5	61.5	100.0
Rural	No.	2.0	6.0	12.0	28.0	48.0
	%	4.2	12.5.	25.0	58.3	100.0

Table No. 5 clearly depicts that among the total number of 52 respondents from urban area; 62% of them extremely depends on religion for coping the stress and 39% are medium dependents. Among the 48 respondents from the rural area; 25% of the respondents show medium dependency and 58% extreme and another

13% of them cope stress with religion in a little bit of. People are fond of seeking religion as a strong asylum for stress relief. Urban people are more dependent than the rural in coping stress with religion in common. The tendency of extreme dependency with religion for stress relief is more powerful in urban area than that of the rural.

Table: 6
Comparison of Age and Coping Mechanism

Age		Don't do this at all	Do this a little bit	Do this in a medium amount	Do this a lot	Total
Below 30	No	0	0	8	10	18
	%	0	0	44.4	55.6	100
Between 30 to 39	No	2	4	12	24	42
	%	4.8	9.5	28.6	57.1	100
Above 39	No	0	2	12	26	40
	%	0	5	30	65	100
Total	No	2	6	32	60	100
	%	2	6	32	60	100

Table 6 clearly depicts the relationship between age level and coping. From all of the respondents 65% from the age group of above 39, 57% from the age group ranging from 30-39 and, 56% from the age group of below 30 age level use relief by positive coping as a coping mechanism in a moderate amount where as 44% from the age group of below 30 age level 27% from the age group of below 30 to 39 age level use relief by positive coping as a coping mechanism in a medium amount. Respondents from the age group of 30 to 39 use coping mechanism in all time

Table no 7 clearly shows the relationship between location and coping. From all of the respondents 16% of the respondents from rural and 12% from the urban shows extreme dependency in coping mechanism in general whereas 81% of the respondents from urban and 54% from rural shows medium dependency in coping mechanism.

Table: 7

Comparison of Location and Coping.

Location		Don't depend	A little bit of dependency	Medium dependency	Extreme dependency	Total
Urban	No	2	2	42	6	52
	%	3.8	3.8	80.9	11.5	100
Rural	No	6	8	26	8	48
	%	12.5	16.7	54.1	16.7	100
Total	No	8	10	68	14	100
	%	8	10	68	14	100

Extreme dependency in coping mechanism is shown more by rural than urban. Medium dependency in coping mechanism is shown more by 2urban than rural.

9. Observations

The purpose of research is to arrive at conclusions and generalizations based on interpretations. The analysis of data and interpretations of results need to be discussed under the broader perspective of the related findings. In this chapter the investigator attempts to discuss the findings and finally to draw valid conclusions and suggest implications of the study in the light of finding s of the present study.

9.1. Comparison of Stress Level of Rural and Urban

- There is a relationship between location and stress level.
- More than half of the respondents (58%)are having moderate stress and 20% having high stress level.
- Urban persons have more stress than that of the rural people.
- Significant difference exists with regard to Perceived Stress of Women police officers in rural and urban areas and it is accepted at 5 percent level of significance.

9.2. Stress level and Education

- There is a relation between education and stress level.
- High education leads to high stress level.

9.3. Coping Mechanism

9.3.1. Coping mechanism and belief in Religion

- People are fond of seeking religion as a strong asylum for stress relief.
- Urban people are more dependent than the rural in coping stress with religion in common.
- The tendency of extreme dependency with religion for stress relief is more powerful in women police officers of urban than that of the rural.

9.3.2. Comparison of location and Coping.

- Extreme dependency in coping mechanism is shown more by rural than urban.
- Medium dependency in coping mechanism is shown more by urban than rural.

10. Suggestion

The researcher has made his earnest efforts to study stress and coping mechanism and is coming up with recommendations. Irrespective of the age all of the respondents are undergoing through stress. The location, educational qualification etc are not acting as a barrier against the stress. The extreme stress is affecting them in their daily life and is reflected in all their walks of life including health and family. In some cases they are even opting negative coping mechanism including the usage of drug and alcohol. To cope them positively against stress reducing strategy should be adopted either by themselves or through the department. As they are highly occupied with their work they will rarely find time to do it by themselves. The department should take the initiative to do it in the places they work itself. The coping mechanisms which includes classes on the origin of stress and its management, practicing yoga ,relaxation techniques, meditation ,progressive, relaxation techniques, mindful meditation, stress inoculation meditation techniques, and bio feedback.

11. Conclusion

The study without any doubt proved that all the women police officers those who are working in rural and urban are affected with stress and the extreme stress affects them in their work. Very few of them are using it in the positive way but at the same time others are coping with it negatively. As they are busy with their official work and house hold affairs they rarely find time to manage it effectively. The police department or the state government should take the initiative to start stress management practices to the women police officers irrespective of their rank, age and educational qualification. Women police officer are not good enough to manage the stress by themselves which even ends in suicide, divorce, quarrel with the family, and clients they deal with etc. Proper stress management techniques will help them to work properly with positive mind and with motivation which results good output through the communication, job satisfaction, and with good morale.

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