Depression, Anxiety and Stress among Police Officers

Depression, Anxiety and Stress among Married & Unmarried Police Officers

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The present study was targeted to measure and differentiate the levels of depression, anxiety and stress among married and unmarried police officers of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The inquiry included 315 randomly selected police officers from three districts of the province. Depression Anxiety and Stress Scale (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) was administered. It was hypothesized that the Police Officers would project severe levels of depression, anxiety and stress and married police officers would have higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress as compared to unmarried police officers. The results support the hypothesis and show highly significant differences between married and unmarried police officers.

Key Words: Depression, anxiety, stress

The pressure of working conditions on mental health has been studied widely over the last two decades (Karasek & Theorell, 1990; Cheng, Guo, & Yeh, 2001). Depressions, Anxiety & Stress are widespread psychological problems of working persons. These are the most commonly diagnosed illnesses in Psychology (Brown, Chorpita, Korotitsch & Barlow, 1997; Davies, Norman, Cortese & Malla, 1995; Ollendick & Yule, 1990). Depressions, Anxiety & Stress have been recognized as important outcome measures in various work environments (Bennett, Williams, Page, Hood, & Woolard, 2004; Caplan, 1994). Plaisier and colleagues (2006) suggested that poor working conditions may be an important sign of stress and may, therefore, contribute to the development of depression or anxiety. There are plentiful studies exploring the relationship between working conditions and stress, anxiety and depression (Karasek, 1979; Plaisier et al., 2006; Kawakami et al., 1996).

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 are frequently exposed to various traumatic situations ranging from threats to themselves and their colleagues, to witnessing riots, injuries or death of citizens, bombings, shootings, criminal activities and often fatal shootings of perpetrators (McCaffery, Godofredo, Domingo & McCaffery, 1990). They are required to operate in situations of conflict, apprehend violent criminals, and face hostile members of the public and deal with the inevitable political pressures of public life (Violanti & Paton, 1999). 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; 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; Darenburg et al., 2006; Hartwig & Violanti, 1999).

Marriage is one of the most significant events of one’s life affecting social status as well as the mental health of an individual. Despite of the charming attributes related to marriage, it increases the social responsibilities and liabilities of a person. The research, concerned with marital status and mental health related problems has not been consistent in general. Some studies reveal that marriage can improve mental health, while others suggest marriage as a stressful source in developing depression, anxiety and stress. Several studies suggest that men derive more emotional benefit from marriage (Aneshensel, 1992; Kessler & McRae, 1984; Menaghan, 1989), others imply that women are the true mental health beneficiaries of marriage (e.g., Thoits, 1986). Research that has examined the impact of marital transitions with longitudinal data has also produced inconsistent results. Some studies find that divorce and widowhood are more harmful for men (Umberger, Wortman, and Kessler 1992), while others show that women are more distressed by marital loss (Aseltine and Kessler 1993; Menaghan and Lieberman 1986; Simon and Marcussen 1999). The handful of studies that have assessed the effects of marital gain indicate that marriage reduces the distress of men and women, but that there are no sex differences in the emotional benefits of marriage (Horwitz et al. 1996; Simon and Marcussen 1999). Moreover, in a study based on the National Survey of Families and Households, Marks and Lambert (1998) show that individuals who transitioned out of marriage report more, while people who transitioned into marriage report less depressive symptoms than continuously married persons. In spite of a sufficient literature on the relationship between policing and psychological problems, there is a paucity of empirical evidence pertaining to the study of the influence of marital status in developing depression, anxiety, and stress among police officers. The present study was targeted to measure and differentiate the levels of...
depression, anxiety and stress among married and unmarried police officers of Khyber Pukhtoonkhwa, Pakistan. It was hypothesized that the Police Officers would project severe levels of depression, anxiety and stress and married police officers would have higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress as compared to unmarried police officers. The results supported the hypothesis on highly significant differences.

Method

Participants

The research participants were 315 randomly selected police officers who further included married (n=190) and unmarried (n=125) police officers. The participants belonged to districts of Peshawar, Abbottabad and Mardan in Khyber Pukhtoonkhwa province of Pakistan.

Instrument

Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) 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. The Depression scale measures dysphoria, hopelessness, devaluation of life, self-deprecation, lack of interest/involvement, anhedonia, and inertia. The Anxiety scale measures autonomic arousal, skeletal muscle effects, situational anxiety, and subjective experience of anxious affect. The Stress scale is sensitive to levels of chronic non-specific arousal. It measures difficulty in relaxing, nervous arousal, and being easily upset/agitated, irritable/over-reactive and impatient. Respondents are asked to use 4-point severity/frequency scales to rate the extent to which they have experienced each state over the past week. Scores for Depression, Anxiety and Stress are calculated by summing the scores for the relevant items. Gamma coefficients that represent the weight of each scale on the overall factor (total score) are .71 for depression, .86 for anxiety, and .88 for stress. Anxiety and stress may weigh higher than depression on the common factor as they are more highly correlated and, therefore, dominate the definition of this common factor (Lovibond and Lovibond, 1995). 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). Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses have sustained the proposition of the three factors (p <.05; Brown et al., 1997). The DASS anxiety scale correlates .81 with the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI), and the DASS Depression scale correlates .74 with the Beck Depression Scale (BDI).

Procedure

After acquiring a written permission from the Inspector General of the Frontier Police, the participants of the research were individually approached by the researcher in three districts of the province i.e. Peshawar, Abbottabad and Mardan. The officer's 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

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Married Group</th>
<th></th>
<th>Unmarried Group</th>
<th></th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>24.29</td>
<td>6.08</td>
<td>18.52</td>
<td>5.95</td>
<td>8.29*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>25.20</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>20.49</td>
<td>5.051</td>
<td>7.12*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>24.59</td>
<td>6.23</td>
<td>21.34</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td>4.67*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

df = 313; *p<.001

According to the above table, the mean depression score of Married Police Officers is 24.29 which is interpreted as Severe Depression, whereas the mean depression score of Unmarried Police Officers is 18.52 which denotes Moderate Depression. The above table also reveals highly significant difference in the depression scores of Married and Unmarried Police Officers on Depression, Anxiety & Stress Scale(t= 8.29, p<.001). The figures show that Married Police Officers have more depression (M=24.29, SD=6.08) as compared to Unmarried Police Officers (M=18.52, SD=5.95).

According to the table above, the mean anxiety score of Married Police Officers is 25.20 which is interpreted as Extremely Severe Anxiety, whereas the mean anxiety score of Unmarried Police Officers is 20.49 which also mean Extremely Severe Anxiety. The results also reveal highly significant difference in the anxiety scores of Married and Unmarried Police Officers (t=.712, p<.001). The figures show that Married Police Officers have more anxiety (M=25.20, SD=5.88) as compared to Unmarried Police Officers (M=20.49, SD=5.51).

Table 1 shows that mean stress score of Married Police Officers is 24.59 and that of Unmarried Police Officers is 21.34. Both these scores indicate Moderate Stress. The results also reveal highly significant difference in the stress scores of Married and Unmarried Police Officers (t= 4.67, p<.001). The figures show...
that Married Police Officers have more stress (M=24.59, SD=6.23) as compared to Unmarried Police Officers (M=21.34, SD=5.71).

Discussion

The results of the current study revealed that the police officers reflected moderate and extremely severe levels of depression, extremely severe levels of anxiety, and moderate levels of stress. The results further elaborated that the Married Police Officers projected higher levels of depression, anxiety and stress as compared to the Unmarried Police Officers. The findings of the current study for depression, anxiety and stress in police officers are completely in alliance with earlier studies of similar nature. 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. Law enforcement is constantly identified as one of the most stressful occupations (Burke, 1994; Carlier, Lamberts & Gersons, 1997; Kirkcaldy, Cooper & Ruffalo, 1995; Norvell, Hills & Murrin, 1993).

There are very few but notable studies focusing on marital status as an additional psychosocial factor for developing depression, anxiety and stress in police officers; hence the literature is not rich in this regard. Violanti and colleagues (2008) studied 105 male and female police officers and found that the levels of depression were higher in married female police officers as compared to unmarried female police officers. Another significant study was conducted by Wenz (1979) on death anxiety among the law enforcement officers and revealed that married officers had more anxiety than unmarried officers.

Pakistan, being an underdeveloped country, does not offer an easy access to basic facilities in life. People, in general, have to strive harder and harder to gratify their necessities. The police force is comparatively less paid and it is a well established understanding that police officers remain unable to survive within their monthly income. Marital life, in this case, obviously brings more responsibilities and liabilities which causes several psychological problems. As policing is considered a full-time job, the officers get insufficient time to spend with families. It is a common observation that the officers remain unable to "enjoy" their lives being humans. The present study focused on the same grounds and found that the officers had developed depression, anxiety and stress on alarming degrees. The study, furthermore, revealed that married officers had higher levels of depression, anxiety and stress than the unmarried.

References


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