

INFLUENCE OF CRIME EXPOSURE ON BEHAVIOURAL RESPONSE: A GENDER-BASED DIFFERENCE BETWEEN POLICE OFFICERS

SANTOLINA ASHWINI

B.Sc. Forensic Science final year, Jeppiaar University.

Ms. SYLVIA NITHILA ILLAVARASI

Assistant Professor, Department of Forensic Science, Jeppiaar University..

Abstract - Police officers are frequently exposed to traumatic and stressful situations such as violent crimes, accidents, abuse cases, and emergencies during their professional duties. Continuous exposure to such incidents can significantly affect their psychological well-being and behavioural responses. This study examines the influence of crime exposure on police officers with a special focus on gender-based differences in behavioural and emotional responses.

The study used survey and comparative research methods to analyze stress levels, coping mechanisms, emotional reactions, and behavioural patterns among male and female police personnel. The findings reveal that occupational stress and crime exposure have a strong impact on police officers, leading to emotional strain, stress-related symptoms, and behavioural changes.

Female officers showed higher emotional sensitivity in certain situations, while male officers adopted more task-oriented coping strategies. The study highlights the importance of stress management programs, counselling services, and supportive workplace policies to improve the mental health and professional performance of police officers.

INTRODUCTION

Crime exposure is an unavoidable aspect of police work. Police officers are regularly involved in handling violent crimes, traumatic incidents, accidents, abuse cases, and other stressful situations. Such repeated exposure can influence their emotional stability, stress levels, decision-making abilities, and professional behaviour.

Behavioural responses to crime exposure may differ between male and female officers because of differences in emotional processing, workplace experiences, and coping mechanisms. Understanding these differences is important for improving police effectiveness, mental well-being, and occupational support systems.

IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH

This research is important because police officers are continuously exposed to crimes, violence, accidents, and traumatic situations during their professional duties. Such exposure can significantly affect their psychological well-being, emotional stability, and behavioural responses. Understanding these effects is necessary to improve the mental health and work efficiency of police personnel.

The study is also important because it focuses on gender-based differences among police officers. Male and female officers may react differently to stressful situations due to differences in emotional processing, coping strategies, social expectations, and workplace experiences. Identifying these differences can help police departments create better support systems and gender-sensitive workplace policies.

OBJECTIVES:

The main objectives of the study were:

- To examine the level of crime exposure among police officers.
- To analyze behavioural responses to crime-related situations.
- To study the psychological impact of occupational stress.
- To compare behavioural responses between male and female police officers.
- To identify coping mechanisms used to manage stress.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

1. John M. Violanti (1996) studied traumatic stress among police officers and explained that repeated exposure to violent crimes and traumatic incidents causes occupational stress, emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and behavioural changes. The study highlighted that continuous crime exposure negatively affects psychological well-being and professional performance among police personnel.

2. Ni He, Jihong Zhao, and Carol Archbold (2002) examined gender differences in police stress. Their research showed that male and female officers experience stress differently because of workplace conditions, coping styles, and social expectations. Female officers were found to experience greater emotional stress and work-family conflict.
3. Mark H. Anshel (2000) discussed coping mechanisms used by police officers during stressful events. The study stated that emotional regulation, social support, and problem-solving skills are important factors influencing behavioural responses and stress management among police personnel. ♦
4. Donald R. McCreary and Mark M. Thompson (2006) developed operational and organizational police stress questionnaires to measure occupational stress among police officers. The research identified factors such as violence exposure, workload, and paperwork as major stressors affecting police behaviour and mental health.
5. Nicolien Kop, Martin Euwema, and Wilmar Schaufeli (1999) studied burnout and violent behaviour among police officers. The study found that prolonged occupational stress contributes to burnout, aggression, emotional fatigue, and reduced job satisfaction.
6. Charles R. Marmar and colleagues (2006) researched predictors of post-traumatic stress among police officers and first responders. Their findings showed that repeated exposure to traumatic events can increase PTSD symptoms, emotional instability, and psychological distress among police personnel.
7. World Health Organization (2019) identified burnout as an occupational phenomenon resulting from chronic workplace stress. The report emphasized that unmanaged occupational stress can negatively affect emotional health, productivity, and behavioural responses among professionals, including police officers.
8. American Psychiatric Association (2022) explained in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders that repeated exposure to traumatic incidents can contribute to PTSD symptoms such as anxiety, emotional distress, disturbing memories, sleep problems, and hypervigilance.

MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY:

Materials used:

- Google Forms questionnaire
- Structured questionnaire (40 questions)
- Likert scale (for measuring stress and behavioural responses)
- Printed/online survey format for data collection
- Basic statistical tools (percentage analysis and comparison tables)

Research Design:

The present study adopted a descriptive and comparative research design to examine the influence of crime exposure on the behavioural responses of police officers and to identify gender-based differences in stress perception, emotional reactions, and coping mechanisms.

Study Population:

The study population consisted of male and female police officers who are regularly exposed to crime-related and traumatic incidents during their professional duties. Participants were selected to understand the behavioural and psychological effects of occupational stress among police personnel.

Data Collection Method:

Data for the study were collected using a structured questionnaire prepared through Google Forms. The questionnaire consisted of 40 questions including closed-ended and Likert scale questions related to crime exposure, occupational stress, emotional reactions, behavioural responses, and coping strategies. The responses were collected anonymously to ensure confidentiality and encourage honest participation from the respondents.

Variables of the Study:

The study included both independent and dependent variables.

Independent Variable: Crime exposure, which refers to the extent to which police officers are exposed to violent crimes, accidents, abuse cases, and other traumatic incidents during their professional duties.

Dependent Variable:

Behavioural response, which includes emotional reactions, stress levels, coping mechanisms, decision-making patterns, and professional behaviour among police officers.

Comparative Variable: Gender was used as a comparative variable to analyze differences between male and female police officers.

Research Methods Used:

The following methods were used in the study:

Survey Method – Structured questionnaires were used to measure stress levels, behavioural changes, and emotional responses among police officers.

Interview Method – Interviews helped in understanding the personal experiences, emotional reactions, and coping mechanisms of police personnel exposed to stressful situations.

Observation Method:

Behavioural patterns of police officers during work-related situations were observed to understand real-time responses to stress and trauma.

Psychological Testing Method – Standardized psychological scales were used to measure stress, anxiety, emotional stability, and resilience among police officers.

Comparative Method – Male and female police officers were compared to identify gender-based differences in behavioural responses and coping strategies.

Data Analysis:

The collected data were organized and analyzed using percentage analysis and comparative analysis. Responses from male and female officers were compared to identify patterns, stress levels, emotional reactions, and behavioural differences related to crime exposure. Tables and charts were used to present the findings clearly and effectively.

Ethical Considerations:

Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were maintained throughout the study. The responses collected through Google Forms were used only for academic and research purposes. Participation in the study was voluntary, and the information provided by the respondents was kept secure and private.

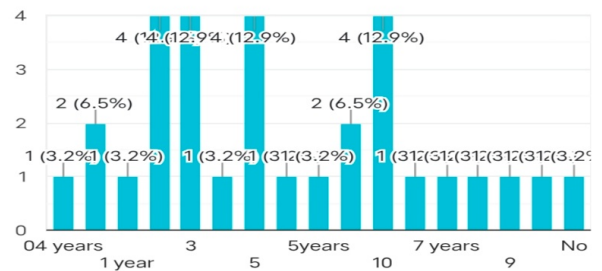
patterns. Many officers reported experiencing work-related stress, emotional pressure, and the need to develop coping mechanisms to manage the challenges of their profession.

The observations also indicated differences between male and female police officers in their responses to crime exposure. Female officers tended to show higher emotional sensitivity and stress in certain situations, while male officers were more likely to adopt problem-focused or task-oriented coping strategies.

These variations suggest that gender plays an important role in shaping how police officers perceive and respond to stressful or traumatic events encountered during policing duties. Overall, the findings highlight the need for better psychological support and stress management systems within police departments.

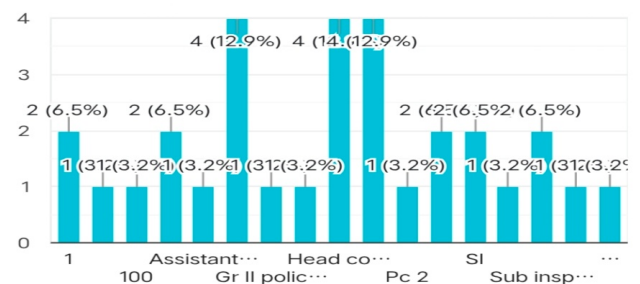
Years of experience

31 responses



Rank

31 responses



PROCEDURE:

- A questionnaire was prepared using Google Forms.
- It was distributed among selected police officers.
- Responses were collected and recorded automatically
- Data was organized based on gender.
- Statistical analysis was performed using percentage comparison.
- Results were interpreted to understand behavioural differences.
- Reliability and Validity.

OBSERVATION:

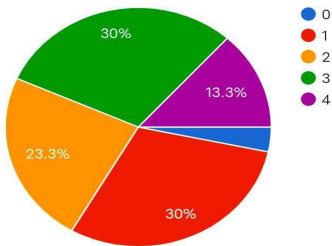
The data collected through the Google Forms questionnaire consisting of 40 questions provided important insights into the level of crime exposure and behavioural responses among police officers. It was observed that most police officers are regularly exposed to various types of crimes such as violent incidents, accidents, abuse cases, and other traumatic situations during their duty.

Continuous exposure to such incidents was found to influence their emotional reactions, stress levels, and behavioural

Feeling very upset when something reminded you of the stressful experience?

 Copy chart

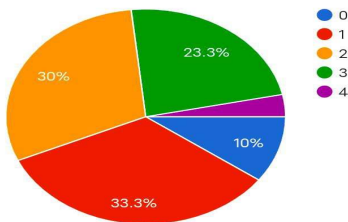
30 responses



Suddenly feeling or acting as if the stressful experience were actually happening again (as if you were actually back there reliving it)?

 Copy chart

30 responses



From the analysis, it was observed that crime exposure has a measurable impact on both male and female police officers. Officers reported experiencing occupational stress, emotional pressure, and psychological strain due to repeated exposure to violent and distressing situations. The study also revealed the presence of post-traumatic stress-related symptoms among officers, although the overall intensity was found to be low to moderate in most cases. However, certain individuals reported higher levels of distress, indicating variation in personal coping ability.

The comparative analysis between male and female police officers suggests that gender plays a role in shaping behavioural responses. Female officers were found to experience relatively higher emotional sensitivity and stress reactions in certain situations, whereas male officers tended to adopt more task-oriented and problem-solving coping strategies. These differences may be influenced by variations in emotional processing, social expectations, workplace environment, and coping mechanisms.

The occupational stress analysis further highlighted that workload-related factors such as paperwork burden, court-related responsibilities, maintaining public image, and balancing personal life significantly contribute to stress among police officers. A moderate positive relationship between occupational stress and PTSD symptoms indicates that increased job stress may contribute to psychological distress.

Overall, the findings of this study emphasize that crime exposure has a significant influence on the behavioural responses of police officers. It affects not only their emotional and psychological health but also their professional functioning. Therefore, there is a strong need for effective stress management strategies, mental health support systems, and organizational interventions within police departments.

Providing counseling services, regular psychological assessments, stress reduction programs, and improved work-life balance initiatives can help enhance the well-being of police officers. Such measures will also improve their efficiency, decision-making abilities, and overall job performance in maintaining law and order in society.

LIMITATION OF STUDY:

- Although the study provides important insights into the influence of crime exposure on behavioural responses among police officers, certain limitations were observed during the research process.
- One of the main limitations of the study is the limited sample size, which may not fully represent the entire population of police officers. A larger and more diverse sample could have provided more generalizable results.
- Another limitation is the reliance on self-reported data collected through questionnaires. Since responses are based on personal perception, there is a

RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY:

- Standardized scales were used to ensure accuracy.
- Anonymous responses improved reliability.
- Internal consistency of scales was strong (as supported in results section of study).

CONCLUSION:

The present study was conducted to examine the influence of crime exposure on the behavioural responses of police officers, with a special focus on gender-based differences. The findings of the study clearly indicate that police officers are frequently exposed to a wide range of traumatic and crime-related incidents as part of their daily professional responsibilities. This continuous exposure plays a significant role in shaping their psychological well-being, emotional stability, stress levels, and behavioural responses.

possibility of response bias, social desirability bias, or underreporting of stress levels due to professional sensitivity.

- The study also focuses primarily on gender-based differences, which limits the exploration of other important factors such as age, years of experience, rank, and type of duty assignment. These variables may also significantly influence behavioural responses but were not deeply analyzed in this study.
- Time constraints during data collection also acted as a limitation, as the study was conducted within a limited academic period. This restricted the scope for longitudinal analysis, which could have provided deeper insights into long-term psychological effects.
- Furthermore, the study mainly used basic statistical tools such as percentage and comparative analysis, which may not capture more complex relationships between variables. Advanced statistical techniques could have provided more detailed interpretations.
- Finally, environmental and organizational differences between police departments were not extensively considered, which may also affect stress levels and behavioural responses.

8. Gershon, R. R. M., Barocas, B., Canton, A. N., Li, X., & Vlahov, D. (2009). Mental, physical, and behavioral outcomes associated with perceived work stress in police officers. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 36(3), 275–289.

9. Patterson, G. T. (2003). Examining the effects of coping and social support on work and life stress among police officers. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 31(3), 215–226.

10. Violanti, J. M. (2014). *Dying for the job: Police work exposure and health*. Charles C Thomas Publisher.

REFERENCE:

1. Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders

American Psychiatric Association. (2022). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (5th ed., text rev.)*. American Psychiatric Publishing.

2. World Health Organization

World Health Organization. (2019). *Burn-out an occupational phenomenon: International classification of diseases*. WHO.

3. Violanti, J. M., & Aron, F. (1995). Police stressors: Variations in perception among police personnel. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 23(3), 287–294.

4. McCreary, D. R., & Thompson, M. M. (2006). Development of two reliable and valid measures of stressors in policing: The operational and organizational police stress questionnaires. *International Journal of Stress Management*, 13(4), 494–518.

5. Kop, N., Euwema, M., & Schaufeli, W. (1999). Burnout, job stress and violent behaviour among Dutch police officers. *Work & Stress*, 13(4), 326–340.

6. Marmar, C. R., McCaslin, S. E., Metzler, T. J., et al. (2006). Predictors of posttraumatic stress in police and other first responders. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1071(1), 1–18.

7. Anshel, M. H. (2000). A conceptual model and implications for coping with stressful events in police work. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 27(3), 375–400.