



Patrol Officers' Stress: The Feeling of Not Feeling

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Introduction

- Police officers' stress is extremely intense. Call after call they face traumatic events and unbearable pain.
- "Most police officers deal with both the routine and exceptional stresses by a variety of situational adaptive coping and defense mechanisms, such as repression, displacement, isolation of feelings, humor—often seemingly callous or crass humor—and generally toughing it out" (Miller, 1995).
- No matter what is the cause of stress, dysfunctional emotions are toxic for all the officers. This is why this study is crucial; to promote awareness in police officers that any emotional impairment such as acute stress, post-traumatic disorder (PTSD), emotional numbness and burnout are common, but often preventable and surely manageable.

Hypothesis:

- I predict that as the daily stressors of the calls and the pressure of the different situations increase, emotional numbness and burnout will increase as well.

Methods

- This study involves 50 patrol officers from Columbus Police Department.
- The study utilizes five constructs. The constructs are the following: stress (specifically identify as, operational, organizational and post-traumatic), emotional numbness and burnout.

Discussion

- The present study found that the increase of stress clearly predicts the level of burnout and emotional numbness.
- This study relates with other police stress studies. Specifically, in the study *Surviving the shift: Rural police stress and counseling services* "organizational-related aspects of police stress were the strongest predictors of general life stress in police officers."
- The results of this current research also reported that the organizational stress has the highest correlation with burnout and emotional numbness. One of the factors that is responsible for this outcome regard the nature of police organization itself. Internal police structure and ranks are extremely complex; embedded with rules and policy that often change. As a result, officers are more stressed from the organizational police system than from the crime on the streets where they have more control over the subjects and the situations.
- Future research could focus on associating the surveys with face-to-face interviews. Non-verbal communication is a powerful tool that could reveal a more accurate level of stress. In addition, face-to-face interviews would promote a positive concept of openness toward someone else in order to break the lethargic silence of police stress.

PEARSON CORRELATION	BURNOUT	EMOTIONAL NUMBNESS
OPERATIONAL STRESS	.62**	0.21
ORGANIZAZIONAL STRESS	.71**	.45**
PTSD STRESS	.51**	.60**
PTSD REFLECTION	.54**	.47**

Results

- Correlation was utilized to measure the relationship between stress (identified as operational, organizational and PTSD) and Emotional numbness; Burnout.
- A positive correlation was the obtained result. As it would be expected as the level of stress increases, emotional numbness and burnout increase as well.
- The first substantial correlation was between organizational stress and burnout ($r = 0.71, p < .05$) and emotional numbness ($r = 0.45, p < .05$). PTSD and burnout were related ($r = .51, p < 0.05$), and PTSD and emotional numbness ($r = 0.59, p < .05$).
- Organizational stress reported the highest effect size Cohens's $d = 0.47$, followed by operational stress Cohens's $d = 0.24$, PTSD has a small effect size of Cohens's $d = 0.03$ followed by Emotional numbness Cohens's $d = 0.19$ and burnout Cohens's $d = 0.12$.

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Measures

Operational stress

Operational stress scale (PSQ-Op) is a 20-items scale that identifies stressful events associated to police officers. . Reliability for these scale in this study was $\alpha > 0.90$. The Cronbach's alpha for the PSQ-Op was .93.

Organizational stress

The organizational stress scale identifies events "in policing are conceptualized as originating from the 'organizational' aspects, such as supervisors and policies" (Page & Jacobs, 2011, p.15). Reliability for this scales in this study was $\alpha > 0.90$. The Cronbach's alpha for the PSQ-Org was .92

Burnout

The Maslach scale measures burnout. It is composed of 26 items with ratings. Its reliability has been empirically supported. Cronbach's coefficient alpha, which yielded reliability coefficients of 0.90. The responses to the scales are composed by 7 point "Likert like scale" ranging from 1-7; very mild to very strong.

Emotional reactivity

The emotional reactivity scale, ERS, is composed from 21 items with a 4 point "Likert like scale" ranging from 0-4; not at all like me to completely like me. This scale measure the emotional response on a "regular basis." The reliability of the scale is a Cronbach's coefficient alpha of 0.95.

Post Traumatic disorder

The post-traumatic disorder scale, PSSI, assesses the symptoms related to stress occurring after a traumatic event. The PTSD scale is composed from 17 items with a 4 point "Likert like scale" ranging from 0-4; it ranges from not at all to most always.

"Estimates of internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) is .91