Workplace Stress and Mental Health Issues among Police Personnel: Analyzing the Effects of Personal Protective Factors

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Abstract

The major goal of the research is to examine the relationship between workplace stress and the commonality of mental disorders in the Pakistani police officers. Furthermore, effects of protective factors are also investigated in the context of mediators and moderators. Employing the survey method, 820 police officers aged 20-60 years and selected through purposive sampling technique provided data on the questionnaires of workplace stress, mental health, emotional intelligence, resilience and interpersonal tolerance. The data were analyzed through Hayes Process Macro Model 21 on Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 21. Findings revealed that a majority of the participants in the study reported significant levels of workplace stress, hence, low level of mental health. The Hayes process macro allows for the implementation of multiple moderation and mediation analyses. In the model 21, it was found that emotional intelligence does not act as a mediator between workplace stress and mental health. However, interpersonal tolerance was found to moderate the relationship between emotional intelligence and mental health disorders. This suggests that interpersonal tolerance influences the link between emotional intelligence and mental health problems. Additionally, the causal relationship between workplace stress and emotional intelligence is not moderated by resilience. On the basis of these findings, the police department should implement the strategies to address the work-related stress and psychological health to enhance the overall well-being of police personnel.

Key Words: Emotional Intelligence, Mental Health, Resilience, Tolerance, Workplace Stress

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Introduction

Workplace stress refers to the reaction individuals may have when confronted with job expectations and pressures that do not align with their skills and capabilities, hence posing a challenge to their coping mechanisms (WHO, 2017). Operating pressure,' job pressure,' 'stress of the job,' and 'service pressure' are all considered to be interchangeable when discussing workplace stress in scientific contexts. Workplace stress affects people and organizations globally. Professional stress diseases were rising worldwide and affecting almost every nation (Edwards & Buckley, 2016). The link between work stress and depressive disorders has already been shown (Larisch et al., 2003). Stress, anxiety, and sadness are common among workers. Depression is a common and serious medical condition that negatively affects how you feel, think, and act (APA, 2023). About 6.7% of people suffer depression yearly (APA, 2023). Anxiety involves worrying and discomfort about

hypothetical or abstract future occurrences like social acceptance or an exam (Puleo et al., 2011). Over 34% of Pakistanis are anxious, according to The Express Tribune (2019).

As has long been known, law enforcement is a job fraught with trauma and high levels of stress (Andersen & Papazoglou, 2015; Garbarino et al., 2013). People seeking recovery at armed forces psychiatric treatment centers often report work stress (Pflanz, 2001). Job stress is linked to mental illnesses in soldiers (Pflanz & Sonnek, 2002). Work stress has been linked to psychiatric symptoms (Kivimaki et al., 2007). The professional, organizational, and personal stress make police work one of the most demanding jobs (Bano, 2011).

Research on law enforcement personnel's psychological health has found depressive disorders (Garbarino et al., 2013), strain (Kumarasamy et al., 2016), traumatic brain injury (Violanti et al., 2007), somatic symptom disorder (He et al., 2002), exhaustion (Garbarino et al., 2013) and anxiousness (Kapade-Nikam & Shaikh, 2014). Repetition of certain stresses and situations may cause depression, anxiety, somatic symptom disorder, traumatic brain damage, and tension (Jetelina et al., 2020).

Brough (2004) utilized a structural equation model to measure traumatic and organizational pressures in police, fire, and paramedics. Compared to firefighting or medicine, law enforcement jobs have different repercussions on mental stress, such as depression or nervous symptoms and interpersonal issues. It shows that police jobs are more stressful than fire. The study found that job stress may cause psychiatric illnesses among police personnel.

Protective variables are personal and environmental traits that help people adapt and grow in life-threatening and cultural environments (Lopez et al., 2018). Hamby et al. (2018) define resilience as adversity, great functioning after adversity, and ways to prevent or recover from adversity. Stress buffering resilience is becoming more important. The study examined resilience and job stress experimentally. Resilient people experienced lower job stress (McCormac et al., 2018). Resilience has been studied as a protective factor against depression in older adults, emotional weariness, and PTSD in particular occupational groups. Female police officers' endurance, productivity, mental health, and occupational stress were improved by resilience-building training (Chitra & Karunanidhi, 2021). Mental stability requires resilience and coping. Kaur and Konnur (2022) found that depression, anxiety, and stress inversely affect resilience. Previous study has linked emotional intelligence (EI) to reduce job tiredness, stress, and health issues (Oginska-Bulik, 2005). Ciarrochi et al. (2001) found that emotional intelligence affects mental health, especially occupational stress. Slaski and Cartwright (2002) found that emotionally intelligent chief executive officers (CEOs) had less stress and better mental and physical health. Gardner and Stough (2002) found that EI and job stress are negatively correlated. Working stress and EI have been studied in health care providers (Burnett & Pettijohn, 2015) and call centers (Sharma & Sharma, 2014), with positive findings for problem-solving and collaboration. People with higher EI have less psychological stress, which may minimize occupational stress (Burnett & Pettijohn, 2015). Many studies show that trait EI mediates the relationship between job stress and quality of life (Mikolajczak & Luminet, 2008). Kousha et al. (2018) found that general practitioners with higher emotional intelligence had lower stress, anxiety, and depression.

Several countries have studied workplace stress, mental health problems, and protective factors. These variables were used alone or with others, but their combined analysis was not done. The link between occupational stress, poor mental health, and company

protective characteristics has received little attention. Pakistan Punjab Police Personnel encounter several problems, which might increase stress. Despite their high risk of mental health difficulties and occupational stress due to danger exposure, there is little research on Pakistani police personnel' mental health. The study addressed the dearth of research on this problem. Therefore, the present study was designed to examine the relationship between workplace stress and mental health issues among police force. Further, the study examined the protective factors in terms of the role of emotional intelligence as mediator; and tolerance and resilience as moderators.

Figure 1
Hypothesized Model
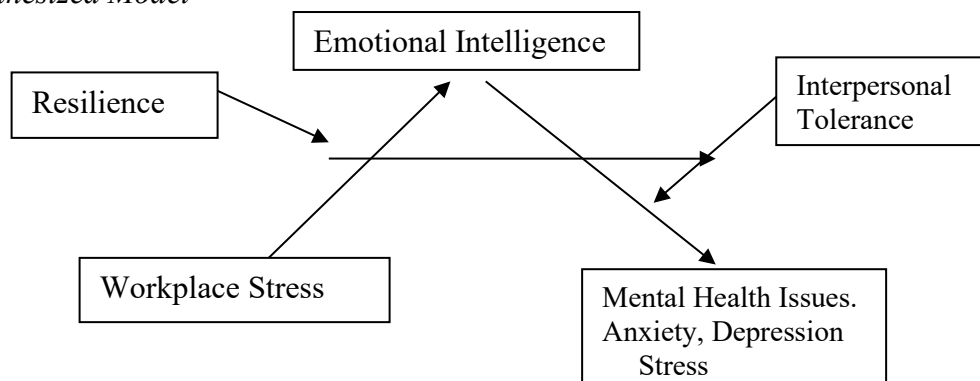
Method
Participants
Participants of this study were 820 police personnel aged 20-60 years (M=39.48, SD=10.37) employed in Multan Police. All the participants were males performing their duties in police department of Multan City.
Instruments
Following Urdu translated versions of questionnaires were administered to the participants:
The Brief Resilience Scale (BRS)
Resiliency was assessed using the six-item BRS. The BRS measures a person's ability to bounce back from adversity (Smith et al., 2008). A month of testing yields a BRS coefficient α of 0.8 - 0.9 (Smith et al., 2008). Items 1, 3, and 5 are positively expressed, whereas items 2, 4 and 6 are negatively phrased. Responses are recorded on a 5-point Likert scale wherein 1 indicates severe disagreement and 5 as strong agreement. After reversing the scoring on items for unfavorable components, the mean score was computed on six items.

Depression, Anxiety, and Stress-21 (DASS-21) Scale
In a not-so-clinical individual sample, the DASS-21 revealed sufficient validity of the constructs and high consistency (α 0.88 for depression, α 0.82 for anxiety, and α 0.90 for stress) (Henry & Crawford, 2005). Each domain has seven questions that are graded on a scale using 4-points Likert, with scores varying from zero (did not seem relevant to my situation in any way) to three (totally applicable to me). Each domain's score was determined by summing the appropriate item scores and multiplying by two. Standard cut points were utilized to assess elevated levels of depressive symptoms (10 points), anxiousness (8 points), and feelings of stress (≥15 points) in individuals (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1996).
Workplace Stress Scale (WSS)
Marlin Company in North Haven, Connecticut, and American Institute of Stress in Yonkers, New York, created the WSS in 2001. The WSS assesses job satisfaction in eight ways. This scale may contain "Work

conditions tend to be uncomfortable and possibly dangerous at times" and "I believe that my occupation adversely impacts either mine psychological else physical health." Assertions 6-8 are ranked backwards. From "never," a one, to "quite frequently," a five are given. Stressful jobs get high ratings. Fifteen or less indicates reasonable calmness, sixteen to twenty indicates relatively little stress, twenty-one to twenty-five indicates mild stress, twenty-six to thirty indicates severe stress, and thirty-one to forty indicates potentially unsafe work stress (The Workplace Stress Scale, 2001).

Wong Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS)

Trait EI was assessed using the WLEIS (Wong & Law, 2002). It comprises sixteen brief statements. Self, Others, Regulation, and Use of Emotion are the scale's four categories. Self-Emotion Appraisals assess a person's ability to understand and express deep emotions. OEA is the ability to perceive and understand others' emotions. ROE is the ability to manage emotions, which speeds mental agony recovery. UOE is the capacity to control emotions to improve performance and success. A Likert scale with five points ranges from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (absolutely agree). Higher scores indicate emotional intelligence. WLEIS accuracy and truthfulness are high (Kong et al., 2012a, 2012b; Kong & Zhao, 2013; Wong & Law, 2002).

Interpersonal Tolerance Scale

Interpersonal Tolerance scale (Thomae et al., 2016) was used to assess interpersonal tolerance. Four dimensions comprise the scale: warm tolerance, cold tolerance, and limit tolerance. In this study, however,

subscale warm tolerance was used. It has 13 statements ranging from one (completely disagree) to seven (completely agree) on a Likert scale with seven points. The ultimate score was obtained by adding together each individual score. Participants' cumulative scores are calculated in the following manner: 0-65 indicates a low tolerance; 65-91 indicates a high tolerance.

Procedure

This study was completed during August 24-25, 2022 at Punjab Police Department in Multan City. Initially it was requested by the City Police Officer (CPO) Multan to measure these variables for mental health profiling of police personnel, then after obtaining the approval from CPO, Data were analyzed to draw the findings for the research purpose. Informed consents were also obtained from the participants. Police personnel were assured that the information sought from them will be kept confidential and will be used only for research purpose. Data were collected on a booklet measuring study variables along with demographic sheet through survey method. The collected data were then analyzed using SPSS-21 through Model-21 on Process Macro.

Results

The hypothesized model was analyzed through Process Macro Model-21 on SPSS. The correlation matrix is presented in Table 1 among all study variables. Path analyses indicating the direct and indirect effects of independent variable, mediators, and moderators on dependent variable are presented in Table 2. Overall analyses of moderated-moderated mediation are given in Table 3.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations among Study Variables (*N*=820)

	Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1	Resilience	3.90	.64	-				
2	Workplace Stress	21.01	2.75	-.19*	-			
3	Mental Health	16.46	11.58	-.37**	.43**	-		
4	Interpersonal Tolerance	79.04	8.14	.21**	-.17*	-.25**	-	
5	Emotional Intelligence	4.23	0.53	.26**	-.17*	-.26**	.46**	-

*p>.05, **p>.001

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients among all variables. Findings demonstrated the significant relationship among workplace stress and resilience, emotional intelligence, interpersonal tolerance and mental health. Results also showed the significant correlation between emotional intelligence and mental health.

Table 2

Direct and Indirect Effects of WS & RS on EI; EI & IT on MH (*N*=820)

IV		DV	Coeff	t	p
WS	→	EI	-.026	-2.55	.01
RS	→	EI	.191	4.43	.00
WS * RS	→	EI	.101	.135	.02
EI	→	MH	3.33	3.73	.00
IT	→	MH	.18	3.01	.01
EI * IT	→	MH	.19	2.14	.03
WS	→	MH	1.64	9.84	.00

WS= Workplace Stress, RS = Resilience, EI = Emotional Intelligence,
IT =Interpersonal Tolerance, MH = Mental Health

Table 2 indicates a direct and indirect effects of workplace stress and resilience on emotional intelligence. It also shows direct and indirect effects on emotional intelligence and interpersonal tolerance on mental health. Finally, the above table revealed the direct effect of workplace stress on mental health.

Table 3

Index of Moderated-Moderated Mediation (*N*=820)

Index	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
.000	.003	-.005	.007

Table 3 shows the overall analysis of moderated-moderated mediation. Findings indicate that the mediation of emotional intelligence between workplace stress and mental health is further moderated through resilience and interpersonal tolerance. The model fits significantly.

Discussion

The job in police department is considered among the most rigorous, tough and difficult professions. It is also one of the most stressful career choice (Bano, 2011). Considering the review of the literature related to psychological burden among police personals, the current study was carried to

examine the impact of workplace stress on mental health of police personals. It was hypothesized that emotional intelligence will play the role as mediator among these variables. The present study also highlighted resilience and interpersonal tolerance as moderators for this mediated relationship.

The first objective was to find the relationship among study variables. First hypothesis indicated negative correlation between workplace stress and mental health. This finding is supported significantly ($p<0.01$). This result is also supported using previous literature (Bennett et al., 2004; Mark & Smith, 2012).

Second hypothesis mentioned emotional intelligence as mediator among the relationship between workplace stress and mental health. Findings given in the Table 2 showcased that the findings are significant, hence the hypothesis was accepted. Research shows that emotional intelligence mediates occupational stress and mental health issues (Gardner & Stough, 2002; Oginska-Bulik, 2005). The relationship between emotional intelligence, work-related stress, and mental health is complex. Emotional intelligence may also affect the study indirectly or in combination with other factors.

Third hypothesis was about the interpersonal tolerance as moderator among the relationship between emotional intelligence and mental health issues. This hypothesis was supported at a significant level. There is limited literature on interpersonal tolerance and psychological issues and professional stress in law enforcement. This research may provide early insights and inspire additional study.

Fourth hypothesis was about resilience as moderate among the connection between workplace stress and emotional intelligence. As the results were statistically significant, the hypothesis was accepted. Prior research suggests that resilience moderates the association between workplace stress and

emotional intelligence (Aljarboa et al., 2022; Hwa, 2022).

Conclusion

Workplace stress and mental health issues were examined in this study. The study examined how emotional intelligence, resilience and interpersonal tolerance may affect work-related stress and mental health among Punjab Police personals. Most sample members reported moderate to severe workplace stress and mental health issues. Workplace stress and mental health are mediated by emotional intelligence. Interpersonal tolerance moderates the relationship between emotional intelligence and mental illness. Resilience also moderate workplace stress-emotional intelligence. The agency must reduce working stress and psychological difficulties and promote police wellness.

Limitations and Suggestions

Researchers try to address all essential factors, yet inconsistencies may occur. This research has limitations, including a lack of consideration for gender inequities in police. Sexual orientation was not included in relationship analysis. Excluding female officers is a significant limitation, as they face gender inequalities and challenges in law enforcement.

The data collected from Multan may not accurately represent the nationwide law enforcement officer community. Future academics should use several data sources particularly the potential impact of geographic and demographic constraints of participants to make more exact generalization. Due to the cultural differences among the provinces of Pakistan, the study should include the sample from all cultural areas to see the differences and generalizability of findings. Also, the cross-sectional study technique may have limited causality and variance analysis across time. The use of self-reported measurements may lead to bias.

Keeping the limitations of the study, future researchers are encouraged and recommended to replicate the study with a larger sample from all geographical and cultural areas. Further, addressing the gaps identified in this study, future research is invited to examine the phenomenon under study in context of more variables such as the exploration of gender and sexual orientation factors.

Implications

This study expands the knowledge on job-related stress and psychological well-being in law enforcement. Understanding police personals emotional intelligence, resilience and interpersonal training may help create training programs and methods to strengthen their wellness. Despite working challenges, this practice may improve health and strength.

The research may be exploratory without previous literature to provide first results and observations. These early results may inspire new theoretical frameworks or models for police structure and mental health. These findings may spur law enforcement research on interpersonal tolerance, psychological issues, and occupational stress.

Contribution of Authors

Shahnoor Sarfraz: Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft
Sarwat Sultan: Methodology, Writing - Reviewing & Editing, Supervision
Humaira Latif: Methodology, Writing - Reviewing & Editing

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest declared by the authors.

Source of Funding

The authors declared no source of funding.

Data Availability Statement

The datasets of the current study are not available publicly due to ethical reasons but are available from the corresponding author [S.S.] upon the reasonable request.

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