ACADEME

Challenges and Coping Mechanisms of Work-Related Stress of Police Officers During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The study intended to explore the stress cognizance of Tagbilaran Philippine National Police (PNP) Personnel in Tagbilaran City in 2021. Research participants were asked to answer the following questions: what were their stressful experiences and how did they resolve and address their work distress during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The study utilized a qualitative method employing the descriptive-phenomenological approach using interview guide with open-ended questions in exploring the work distress of the police officers in Tagbilaran City and their experiences as front liners in the COVID-19 Pandemic. There were ten selected police officers in the Tagbilaran City Police Station. Colaizzi's method or phenomenological analysis procedure was used in analyzing the responses of the informants. From the gathered data, through the recorded response of the informants, there were eight (8) substantial emergent themes formulated as follows: Upside down, Fear is universal, Circumvention, A complication to a delinquent person, Desire of power and success, Benefits of hard work, Discontented, and Approved Responsibility.

Keywords: Social Sciences, coping mechanism, work-related stress, qualitative-phenomenological approach, Tagbilaran, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

The duties of police officers entail responding to the community's needs, preventing and suppressing crimes, and assist in prosecuting those found guilty. Everyone is affected by stress, but few people are aware of what triggers it, how it progresses, how it affects their bodies, and how they can better manage it. When you're under duress, it is a villain who is unrelenting and out of control, and it is a villain who creates havoc. Unhappiness, disease, and even death are all possibilities (Potter, 2009).

Sources of stress in policing can be divided into two categories: those caused by "job content," which include work schedules, shift work,

long work hours, overtime, and court work, as well as traumatic events and threats to physical and psychological health; and those caused by "job context," also known as organizational stressors, which refer to organizational characteristics and people's behavior that cause stress (e.g., bureaucracy and co-worker relations). In the early months of the Pandemic, street patrol officers reacted to new demands with a "medium stress level," though individual pressure levels varied significantly. A lack of work experience in the police department, or feeling unprepared, all contributed to a high-stress level. While substantial progress has been made in analyzing and treating law enforcement tension over the years, this progress has been matched by the high stresses imposed on police officers. Although police officers, like most staff, such as firefighters and nurses, will feel multiple stress levels, they are most likely to experience a particular form of anxiety known as critical incident stress (Shane, 2010).

Police officers seem to have a very demanding and stressful profession due to contemporary society's features. Burnout and Stress Measurement in Police Officers has demonstrated that policing is stressful. This stress harms police officers' mental and physical health, performance, and interactions with citizens. Because of the high rates of depression, anxiety, burnout, and even suicide among police officers, mental health in the workplace has become an issue. It is also important to monitor stress and burnout levels daily to improve workplace health (Queirós, Passos, Bártolo, Marques, da Silva, & Pereira, 2020).

Numerous studies have attempted to map police officers' stress and its causes, a subject emphasized in the 1980s by a National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health technical study (Hurrell, Pate, & Kliesmet, 1984; Norvell, Hills, & Murrin, 1993). His study focused on the influence of gender differences on law enforcement officers (Read, Brown, & Kahler, 2004) and the sources of policing stress. This has sparked increased concern about police officers' mental health, with surveys emphasizing the psychological effects of working in high-risk environments such as those characterized by brutality and injury (Cohen, Hammen, Henry, & Daley, 2004). It's important to note that everyone responds to stressful circumstances differently. How a person reacts is influenced by his history and personality and the community in which he lives. Due to the obligation of preserving public safety, the risk of exposure through encounters with the community, and the co-occurrence of COVID-19, this mixed-methods study aimed to identify the internal and external causes of police stress,

as well as the work distress during the COVID-19 pandemic approaches used by police departments to handle police stress. When city and municipalities imposed shelter-in-place orders and close down non-essential businesses, law enforcement officers will obliged enforce these. There is concern that administrative actions could result in incarceration and fines, posing additional public safety and civil liberty concerns. Local leaders' knowledge of the critical role law enforcement plays in their community will determine the effectiveness of the local government's attempts to slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

The services must be both sensitive and responsive to the needs of the impacted police officers. From an individual's viewpoint, stress-related difficulties can be avoided in two ways: by removing the source of the stress and by understanding how to cope with difficult situations before they become problems. According to the theory, understanding the sources of stress associated with those aspects is vital information for directing successful strategies for mitigating the influence of those stressors. The researchers wanted to find out about stressors and stress management. Thus, this study aims to know how police officers are subjected to work-related distress and how they cope with it. It aims to determine which facets of everyday life are the most difficult for police officers.

According to the study on the Role of Police Perceptions and Practices in the Development of Public Disorder, crowd conflict can be viewed as an interaction between the crowds and out-groups like the police. This paper describes a questionnaire survey in which 80 police officers from two U.K. forces were questioned about crowd attitudes, acceptable "public order" policing strategies, and attributions of blame for crowd conflict. Police officers saw crowds as mixed, as expected. Still, they also created a dichotomy between a powerful minority capable of exerting dominance in the service of disorder and a majority incapable of resisting this influence. Police officers did not unanimously support the idea that crowds pose a homogeneous hazard. They advocated for crowd control and swift intervention to prevent crowd violence from escalating but denied that such tactics could lead to conflict. The use of path analysis suggests that these crowd perceptions are linked as part of a unified ideology. Overall, these findings support the established social identity model of crowd behavior as a complex intergroup process (Drury, Stott, & Farsides, 2003).

Personal negligence, hazardous circumstances, police brutality, discipline, the management of disturbances, the justice system, public and

media scrutiny, special job assignments, and changes in work conditions are all sources of police occupational stress. Stress management entails determining how much pressure is tolerable, understanding stress physiology, and balancing the competing demands of life (Anderson, Swenson, & Clay,1995).

Academicians, police officials, and police officers will benefit from the readings of stress's principles and vocabulary while summarizing some of its most important psychological, physiological, and social implications. Papers on police officer stress examine how officers cope with stress and what incidents they consider the most stressful (Sewell, 1999).

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) is successful in treating posttraumatic stress disorder but It is not effective as a stress management technique for ordinary people in high-stress employment. There were sixty-two police officers were randomly assigned to either EMDR or a regular stress management program (SMP), all lasting six hours (Wilson, Tinker, Becker, & Logan, 2001).

The psychologically dynamic field of contemporary policing is addressed in Practical Police Psychology. The street cop to the departmental brass explores both the significant and daily problems that all law enforcement professionals encounter. Practical Police Psychology is a theoretical book beyond empirical research to include functional, down-to-earth (Miller, 2006).

After adjusting for the effects of work satisfaction, this study takes an interdisciplinary research approach to comprehensively explore the impact of internal police stress (i.e., position uncertainty, role conflict, supervisor support, group cohesiveness, and advancement opportunities) on organizational engagement (Jaramillo, Nixon, & Sams, 2005).

According to the Mediators of Change in Emotion-Focused and Problem-Focused Worksite Stress Management Interventions: first, research to date has sought to enhance the individual's ability to cope with work-related strain, and very little has systematically targeted the workplace stressors that give rise to the pressure. Second, it appears that no study has directly examined the psychological mechanisms by which an SMI works (Bond, 2000).

According to Job, control mediates change in a work-realization intervention for stress reduction. This quasi-experiment looked at whether a work reorganization intervention would boost stress-related results by giving people more power over their jobs. The authors achieved this

by implementing a participatory action research (PAR) intervention to reorganize work to improve people's discretion and choice. The PAR intervention was found to be successful (Bond, 2001).

The Development of a Framework for a Comprehensive Approach to Stress Management Interventions at Work Organizations use several programs to avoid and handle stress at different levels, as seen in this summary. The goals, structure, and target audiences of programs differ widely. There is some concern about the practicality of using off-the-shelf programs created without considering particular organizational requirements (Giga, 2003).

A structure is given for identifying the various forms of stress management strategies and their potential outcomes. The results of numerous observational studies into worksite stress management interventions are then analyzed in light of this paradigm. There are concerns about the effectiveness of these approaches in terms of personal and organizational outcomes, as well as where future research should be focused (DeFrank & Cooper, 1987).

Preventing stress at work, for policymakers in government departments, employers' and workers' organizations, health practitioners, trainers, consultants, administrators, and workers' representatives associated with this dynamic and challenging issue, the Conditions of Work Digest on preventing stress at work is critical reading. (Kompier & Cooper,1999).

Stress is a part of life changes that occur in one's life such as, going to school or college, getting married, changing jobs, or dealing with health issues are all examples of stressful circumstances. Reviewing similar research helps understand the issue.

Job-related stress is a natural reaction that arises when the workload increases. Occupational well-being affects the representative's soundness and the association's strength. Workplace stress is a real and growing problem in today's environment. Such a major problem that must be addressed. And that steps are taken to address the ramifications for both individuals and associations. This is where people work. This paper discusses the concept of work-related stress, the many types of work-related stress, and the effects of work-related stress on an organization's efficacy and performance.

Nonetheless, while not all job-related stress is detrimental, it may serve as a morale booster. Additionally, it is a morale booster for the staff. These should be considered by senior management in order to boost work

performance while minimizing work-related stress (Harshana, 2018).

Stress has resulted as a reaction of an employee when demands, pressures, and professional aspects have to be faced at the workplace which does not match their knowledge levels, thereby posing damage to the employee's talents, resulting in a battle for survival in terms of employment in a certain location (Steve, 2011).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To achieve the objectives of the study, the researchers utilized a qualitative method in phenomenological approaches in portraying the stressful experiences of police officers in work-related distress and how they cope with it. This method tried to make the interview flow like a natural conversation.

The researchers conducted the research in Tagbilaran City Police Station located in Calceta St, Cogon District, Tagbilaran City, near Tagbilaran City Hall. The informants of this study were the (10) ten PNP Personnel in Tagbilaran City, (5) five men, and (5) five women, who have been engaged in the field during the Pandemic. These informants started as patrolmen then becoming high-ranking officials serving more than (3) three years in the police organization.

This study used an interview guide prepared by the researchers and their adviser consisting of open-ended questions that deal with the stressful experiences of the informant's cognizance of work distress during the Covid-19 Pandemic and how did the informants resolved and addressed the work distress during the Covid-19 Pandemic. The interview was conducted and supplemented with field notes and a voice recorder to document the police officer's responses accurately.

To ensure that the ethical consideration has been adequately addressed, the study was submitted for ethics review by the University of Bohol Research Ethics Committee (UB-REC). Consent forms were obtained from the respondents. This is to make sure the information gathered and the respondents involved were treated with the utmost confidentiality. Before the interview was conducted, they were told that they have the right to withdraw or decline if they decide to.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings were analyzed using Colaizzi's data analysis method (1978). There were sixteen (16) cluster themes identified and re-grouped to form eight (8) emergent themes.

The stressful experiences of the informants' cognizance of work distress during the COVID-19 Pandemic. During the interview, the different experiences of the informants were stated. These categorical themes were strengthened through the responses of the informants. In particular, we have created (5) emergent themes that centered on the PNP personnel's cognizance of work distress during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

1. Upside down: This first theme answered the different bad experiences encountered by the informants.
2. Fear is universal: This theme presents the Stressful different experiences they encountered in doing their jobs. Most of their answers were pulled out from their sympathy towards everything, which creates stress for them, when we asked what were their stressful experiences encountered during the Covid-19 Pandemic.
3. Circumvention: This theme presents how the PNP personnel responded to this bad experience, which causes them to have stress during their work.
4. A complication to the delinquent person: This theme presents what particular challenges that a PNP Personnel faced as a front liner during the Covid-19 Pandemic.
5. Desire of power and success: this theme answered how the PNP personnel deal with those challenges they have been encountered during their work.

Resolving and addressing work distress during the COVID-19 Pandemic. They resolved and addressed some stressful and bad experiences , and had different ways on how they solved those problems, especially for those who experienced the Covid-19 virus.

1. Benefits of hard work: in this category, the informants stated that Government never left them in spite of everything that happened.
2. Discontented: The initial Response of the PNP Personnel is that the Organization initiates to maximize resources to help.
3. Approved Responsibility: This theme presents as a motivation of PNP Personnel who experience stress and bad experiences

during the Pandemic. In their experience, they include the part where Government provides them with what they deserve.

The researcher utilized the Colaizzi's method in phenomenological tradition in extracting the following emergent themes from the re- grouping of clusters through the formulated meaning. Thus, these themes categorically explain and describe to know how police officers are subjected to work-related distress and how they cope with it. This aim is to determine which facets of everyday life are the most difficult for police officers.

This study was anchored on of the Strain Theory, Theory of Preventive stress management, A State Control Theory of adaptation and Individual Differences of stress management, Psychological Theories of Stress, and Theory of work-related stress.

The Strain theory, in sociology, proposes that societal pressures, such as a lack of money or a lack of access to a decent education, motivate people to commit crimes. The ideas underlying strain theory were first advanced in the 1930s by American sociologist Robert K. Merton, whose work on the subject became incredibly influential in the 1950s. Other researchers set forth similar ideas, including American criminologist Albert Cohen and American sociologists Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin. The basic premise of general strain theory is that people who are depressed or anxious become distressed or disturbed, which can cause them to commit crime as a coping mechanism. Emotion as a motivator for violence is one of the theory›s primary purposes.

On the other hand, the Theory of Preventive stress management provides a guide for practicing positive stress prevention. The book starts with a comprehensive overview of the stress field, from its medical and physiological roots in the early 1900s to its psychological elaborations in the second half of the century, to its current application and practice in businesses.

A State Control Theory of adaptation and Individual Differences of stress management, after a preliminary examination of stress symptoms, a more comprehensive, more broadly applicable mechanism for adaptive behavior control is proposed. Individual variations may be derived from a variety of sources, according to this theory. This may emerge from the control system and inherent variability in cognitive and energetic resources.

Psychological Theories of Stress, since stress is one of the most fascinating and enigmatic topics we've studied since the dawn of time,

it's not only about what happens to the body during a stressful situation but also about what happens to an individual's psyche. The different psychological theories of stress suggested by James & Lange, Cannon & Brad, and Schachter & Singer will be discussed in this article.

According to the most widely accepted transactional theory, Theories of work-related stress are the direct result of a transaction between a person and their environment, which can tax their resources and thus jeopardize their well-being.

CONCLUSION

The ten (10) informants were police officers assigned in the Tagbilaran City Police Station. Seven of them were married, and three were single. The gathered data produced eight (8) emergent themes and formulated meanings and clustered themes into special categories. These themes were formulated as follows: Five (5) themes were generated for the stressful experiences of the informants' cognizance of work distress during the COVID-19 pandemic, namely: *Upside down, Fear is universal, Circumvention, A complication to a delinquent person, and Desire of power and success*. As to How did the informants resolve and addressed their work distress during the COVID-19 Pandemic, three (3) themes were created, namely: *Benefits of hard work, Discontented, and Approved Responsibility*.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Police Officers and other front liners in PNP should strengthen awareness and safety on how they can handle things like a Pandemic. The PNP should coordinate and partner with the Department of Health (DOH) to convince individuals to get the Covid-19 vaccine.
2. The PNP and Provincial Government must conduct a rigorous consultative meeting on Oplan Bandillo. A campaign on public education and outreach aimed at raising awareness about criminal elements in the community should become a tool for encouraging individuals to follow the minimum health safety standard routine.

3. A need for training and seminars, with the assistance of professionals in the field. COVID-19 pandemic preparedness, like other emergency planning activities, should be a multi-disciplinary, multi-agency endeavor. As part of the police department's education and planning activities, public health and medical professionals must be included in jurisdiction-wide planning initiatives so that they may aid law enforcement.

4. The researcher recommends the conducts of in-depth inquiry on the following topics:
   - **An evaluation of the services and help extended by the Local Government, DOH and PNP.** This future research will hopefully reveal some effective practices on how they can determine which facets of everyday life are the most difficult for police officers and how they cope with it.
   - **Inquiry into using existing connections.** To guarantee a successful execution of the plan, law enforcement agencies must identify local public health and medical professionals early in the planning phase. Identify relevant public health laws and authorities. In the event of a COVID-19 pandemic in the Philippines, officers must be informed of the applicable public health regulations. When it comes to enforcing public health regulations, police and other law enforcement agencies need to know what is expected of them. Local public health authorities may help police departments locate appropriate laws and regulations, as well as build their own pandemic response plans and training programs, and coordinate with other agencies.

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