

**JOB-RELATED BURNOUT, MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS
AND WELL-BEING IN POLICE OFFICIALS IN PAKISTAN**

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to examine the relationship of burnout with mental health problems and well-being in Police officials in Pakistan. The sample comprised of 318 police officials with age range of 20 to 58 years recruited from various police stations across Pakistan. To measure the relevant variables, the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (Demerouti & Nachreiner, 1998), the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995), and the Psychological Well-Being Scale (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) were utilized. The results of linear regression analyses reveal burnout as a significant predictor of stress and psychological well-being in police officials however the association of burnout with depression and anxiety remained insignificant. These findings illuminate the challenges faced by police officials and underscore the importance of addressing burnout to enhance overall well-being. This further highlights the need for stress-management training and regular well-being screening to enhance the functioning of police officials.

Keywords: Burnout, Anxiety, Depression, Stress, Well-Being

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INTRODUCTION

The role of police officers is undeniably regarded as one of the most challenging professions (Acquadro Maran et al., 2022). In the context of contemporary society, embarking on a career in law enforcement is seen as exceptionally high-stress and demanding (Suresh et al., 2013). Though, stress is a common element across all work fields, however, police profession is more stressful (Violanti et al., 2016) as police officers at work are at the risk of injuries and even death (Acquadro Maran et al., 2022). The multiple challenges involved in the profession include combatting with terrorism, dealing with the political involvement while simultaneously facing the issues due to lack of resources and vulnerable administrative structure resulting in job related stress (Magnavita et al., 2018; Purba & Demou, 2019).

Job-related stress has been found to have negative consequences on both individual officers as well as their organizations. From the organizational perspective, the impacts of stress can be reflected in many different aspects like applying unnecessary force, a reduction of performance, lack of responsibility and inappropriate behavior towards the public (Adams & Mastracci, 2019; Bertilsson et al., 2019; Smoktunowicz et al., 2015). While at the individual level, there appears to be the association between mental distress, work-family conflict, unhealthy coping strategies, emotional strain and burnout (Baldwin et al., 2019; Castro et al., 2019; Griffin & Rosa et al., 2015).

Burnout, recognized as a harmful long-term result of the work performed by law enforcement personnel, has been the focus of extensive research (Adams, et al., 2020; McCarty et al., 2019). Maslach and Leiter (2008) considered burnout as complex phenomenon comprising of three dimensions: depersonalization, decreased personal accomplishment, and emotional exhaustion. Demerouti et al. (2003) proposed a revised understanding of burnout, suggesting it arises from two fundamental aspects: exhaustion and disengagement from work (Demerouti et al., 2003, 2010). The exhaustion dimension refers to emotional, cognitive and physical tiredness that is caused due to prolonged work-related stress. Disengagement dimension reflects an individual's distance and detachment from negative attitudes (Demerouti & Nachreiner, 1998)

Numerous studies have focused specifically on stress related to policing and the phenomenon of burnout among officers and its impact on their mental health and psychological well-being (Adams & Mastracci, 2019; Aguayo et al.,

2017; Baldwin et al., 2019; Ermasova et al., 2020; Gutshall et al., 2017; Husain, 2020; Husain, 2014; Johnson et al., 2019; Maran et al., 2015; Wassermann et al., 2019). Burnout is regarded as one of the risk factors in deteriorating the psychological well-being and escalating mental health problems (Alvi et al., 2022; Bakusic et al., 2017; Bianchi et al., 2015a; Chitra & Karunanidhi, 2013; Li et al., 2023).

While the prevalence of burnout and other mental health problems is high among police officials everywhere in the world, such problems are worsened in developing countries such as Pakistan where the rate of crime is on the rise (Macrotrends, n.d). The political interference, lack of resources and administrative problems add to the reasons of burnout (National Commission for Human Rights, 2018). There is also no documented source of mental health support or any other program to focus on their well-being (Junaidi, 2020). Keeping in view the literature related to the stressful nature of police job, it is significant to get insight into the mental health related problems and the psychological well-being in the face the demanding job-related burnout. So that needful strategies and policies can be framed according to the outcomes for the mental health and well-being of the professionals combatting under challenging situations. Therefore, this study emphasizes on the associations of job-related burnout with mental health problems (i.e. depression, anxiety, and stress) and psychological well-being in police officers of Pakistan.

METHOD

Participants

For the study, total 318 participants aged between 20-58years were approached from different police departments across Pakistan. The participants were selected on the basis of following inclusion and exclusion criteria:

- Police officials from all over the Pakistan were included in this study.
- Only those participants were included in this study who served for at least one year.
- Police officers who were facing psychiatric issues excluded.
- Police officers with work experience of less than a year were excluded.
- Police officers with any acquired disability or were on Disability Quota were also excluded.

Measures

Demographic Form

The demographic form inquired about participants' gender, age, ranks, marital status and duration of service.

Oldenburg Burnout Inventory

Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI) (Demerouti & Nachreiner, 1998) is a tool that is widely used to assess burnout and its related two core dimensions: exhaustion and disengagement. The OLBI includes both positively and negatively worded statements in order to reduce the response bias. Participants rated items on a 4-point Likert scale that goes from "*strongly agree*" to "*strongly disagree*".

The total of the burnout can be calculated by summing or by averaging the scores on both the dimensions. The scale has strong psychometric properties. Both subscales demonstrated strong internal consistency in this study, with exhaustion showing $\alpha = .87$ and disengagement $\alpha = .81$, indicating that the scale measured burnout effectively.

Depression, Anxiety, Stress Scale

Depression, Anxiety, Stress Scale (DASS-21) is a self-reporting measure that assesses three constructs: depression, anxiety and stress (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). The scale has a total of 21 items and each subscale is comprised of 7 items. Respondents rate each statement on a 4-point Likert scale that ranges from 0 to 3. The DASS-21 is valid and reliable tool used among both clinical and non-clinical populations and it is mostly used in the assessment of psychological functioning.

Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale

To measure psychological well-being, Ryff Psychological Wellbeing Scale (PWS) (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) was used. The scale assesses eudaimonic well-being along with six core dimensions of psychological functioning that includes autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life and self-acceptance. The responses are rated on Likert

type scale that reflects their agreement or disagreement. The scores of all the six dimensions can be summed up to calculate an aggregated score for global psychological well-being. The internal consistency (ranging from .86 to .93), construct validity and cross-cultural applicability of the scale is widely supported by research literature (Ryff, 1989).

Procedure

Initially the research proposal and material were approved by the university research board. Then permissions from the authors of the scales were taken. Furthermore, the higher authorities of Pakistan Police Officials Deputy Inspector Generals (DIGs) belonging to all regions including Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Baluchistan and Gilgit Baltistan were approached to seek permission for data collection.

Written permission was sought from the DIGs of Police of different regions of Pakistan. The OLBI, DASS-21 and PWS were administered online by using Google Forms, for which a link of the questionnaire was shared with the Pakistan police officials. At the commencement of the process of data collection the objectives of the research were explained and consent from the police officers was taken. Measures were taken to ensure confidentiality. The information of individual officers was not shared with the authorities and the name and other identities were also kept optional and anonymous. The research measures were then administered to the consented police officers following the demographic information. All the measures were then scored according to standard scoring procedures provided by the authors.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics were applied to get the demographic characteristics of the sample and linear regression analysis was used to study the association of burnout with depression, anxiety stress and psychological well-being of the police officers. All the statistical computations were done with the application of SPSS Version 23.

RESULTS

Table 1
Descriptive Characteristics of the Participants (N=318)

Variables	<i>f</i>	%
Gender		
Male	276	86.79
Female	42	13.21
Marital Status		
Married	249	78.30
Single	62	19.50
Separated	07	2.20
Ranks		
Constables	125	39.31
Head Constables	25	7.86
Assistant Sub-Inspectors	6	1.89
Sub-Inspectors	64	20.13
Inspectors	98	30.82
Age		
20-35 years	137	43.08
36-50 years	148	46.54
51-58 years	33	10.38
Duration of Service		
<5 years	100	31.45
5-10 years	80	25.16
11-20 years	60	18.87
>20 years	78	24.53

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Table 2

Burnout as a Predictor of Depression in Police Officials in Pakistan (N=318)

Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	R^2	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Constant	3.66	1.38				
Burnout	-.03	.038	-.06	.00	0.95	.32

$p > .05$

Table 3

Burnout as a Predictor of Anxiety in Police Officials in Pakistan (N=318)

Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	R^2	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Constant	4.47	1.36				
Burnout	-.06	.03	-.09	.01	3.16	.076

$p > .05$

Table 4

Burnout as a Predictor of Stress in Police Officials in Pakistan (N=318)

Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	R^2	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Constant	10.39	1.83				
Burnout	.163	.051	.178	.03	10.31	.00*

* $p < .05$

Table 5

Burnout as Predictor of Psychological Well-being among Police Officials in Pakistan (N=318)

Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	R^2	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Constant	21.77	5.19				
Burnout	-.91	.14	-.33	.11	40.47	.00*

* $p < .05$

DISCUSSION

The present study intended to examine the associations of job-related burnout with mental health problems (i.e. depression, anxiety, and stress) and psychological well-being in police officers of Pakistan. The results reveal some interesting trends. With regard to mental health problems, burnout is revealed to be a significant predictor of stress (Table 4) whereas insignificant predictor of depression (Table 2) and anxiety (Table 3) in police officers. Pertaining to psychological well-being (Table 5), the burnout significantly predicted psychological well-being in police officers.

Aligning with the findings of current study previous studies reveals significant association of burnout and psychological well-being (Arial et al., 2010; Backteman-Erlanson et al., 2013; Purba & Demou, 2019; Xavier & Prabhakar, 2016). A number of studies indicate that burnout and its various components significantly create psychological distress and may result in poor mental health outcomes, including overall well-being (Purba & Demou, 2019; Queirós et al., 2020; Santa et al., 2018). Research shows that burnout either in mental or physical capacity results in mental health challenges among police officials (McCarty & Skogan, 2013). Studies repeatedly report that higher levels of stress tend to affect the well-being of officers by reducing levels of life satisfaction and influencing positive emotions, as well as the ability of officers to maintain emotional balance. These associations are mostly based on the nature of police work itself. Officers are routinely exposed to traumatic and high-risk situations ranging from personal threats and violent confrontations to an officer's routine exposure to riots, severe injuries, fatalities, and major criminal incidents

such as shootings and bombings. Constant exposure to such events puts an enormous emotional burden on officers and makes them more susceptible to stress and burnout as these pressures mount over time (Violanti & Paton, 1999). Along with dangers on the front lines, the work environment of the police involves facing conflict and antagonistic encounters. The organizational and political pressures further complicate their work which affects the decision-making and job expectations (Papazoglou & Andersen, 2014). These different demanding tasks cause difficulty in managing heavy mental pressures. Their daily work is a mix of danger, pressure, and responsibility, which makes the role far more complicated (Papazoglou & Andersen, 2014).

The insignificant predictive association of burnout with depression (Table 2) doesn't align with previous studies which consistently demonstrated a strong link between depression and burnout (Bianchi et al., 2013, 2014, 2015a). Measures of burnout, especially emotional exhaustion - the core element of burnout are generally highly correlated with the symptoms of depression (Shin et al., 2014). Some scholars have even argued that the consistent and significant overlap between the two conditions raises the possibility that burnout might not be completely separate from depression, rather being a specific expression or dimension of it (Bianchi et al., 2015b). Nonetheless, literature also shows inconclusive findings and researchers' disagreement regarding the overlap of burnout, anxiety and depression and considered them as different robust concepts (Panagioti et al., 2019). Several of the cross-sectional and longitudinal studies also provided varied findings related to the association of burnout and depression (McKnight & Glass, 1995; Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2012). There are some studies revealing that burnout and depression do not associate with each other and considered burnout is distinguished from depression (Bakker et al., 2000; Schaufeli et al., 2001; Toker & Biron, 2012). The most important differentiating factor is that burnout is associated with work and specific situations, on the other hand depression is more persistent and not only dependent on the situations (Freudenberger & Richelson, 1980; Iacovides et al., 2003; Maslach et al., 2001).

One of the potential explanations for insignificant association of burnout with anxiety (Table 3) can be that such associations can be explained in terms of the job descriptions at different positions and incidences they experienced. Studies extracted that officers working in the areas with fatal fire experienced are more anxious compared to ones who work in hospitals (Renck et al., 2002). Similarly, the incidences experienced by the police also contribute to the anxiety, when the incidents involve violence related to duty; officers show high arousal of

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anxiety than when the incident involves the civilian death. Similarly, researches also show that higher anxiety occurs before and during the critical events as compared to general duties (Anderson et al., 2002).

In conclusion the study findings can be helpful to understand the working environment and related stress of police officers in Pakistan. Such findings are important in addressing stressors at the workplace that are unique to policing to protect and promote the psychological health of officers (Chitra & Karunanidhi, 2013). Burnout, though doesn't link with anxiety and depression; however, it causes stress and ultimately the impact on the well-being of the police officers. These findings of the current study are impactful however, for the future studies it is recommended to assess the construct at different posts and positions of the police personnel to get comprehensive and clearer picture. In addition to quantitative and correlational studies, qualitative approaches and emphasis on longitudinal studies would provide more insightful findings and their implications on broader level.

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