

Training in Stress Management to Regulate the Stress and Coping Strategies among Karnataka Police Personnel

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Worldwide, police work is considered extremely stressful due to its nature of work. Continuous exposure to stress, such as excessive and unscheduled working hours, leads to mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. The aim of the present research is to determine the effectiveness of stress management training to regulate stress levels and coping strategies among police personnel. Methods: The present study is a randomised controlled trial conducted at Rashtriya Raksha University's (RRU) Shivamogga campus, Karnataka. A total of 30 police personnel were randomly assigned, 15 in each group, using the simple random sampling method. Results: The present study found improvements in depression, anxiety, and stress after stress management training. Conclusion: The stress management training has shown improvements in stress and coping styles, which helps the police personnel handle work stress in a much more efficient manner.

Keywords: depression, anxiety, stress, police personnel, coping, simple random sampling.

Policing is a service organisation that is responsible for maintaining the law and order of the country and preserving its peace (Sagar et al., 2015). Worldwide police work is considered extremely stressful due to its nature of work (Singh et al., 2021). The World Health Organization defined "stress as a state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation" (WHO, 2023). Stress is considered a natural human response to address the challenges and threats that we come across in daily life (WHO, 2023). The work atmosphere of the police personnel demands multitasking, excessive and unscheduled working hours, lesser leave approval, and failure to spend time with family members (Savarimalai et al., 2023). Further, the work environment of field officers experiences a higher level of stress compared with the office posting of police personnel (Pradhan et al., 2024). It is widely

accepted in the literature that recurring exposure to chronic stress leads to mental health issues in police personnel, such as depression, anxiety, aggression, and substance intake (Singh et al., 2019). All these factors lead to an increase in the level of stress (Singh & Kaur, 2015). However, the stress is contingent on the coping strategies of the police personnel (Maran et al., 2015). Maran et al. (2015) conducted a cross-sectional study and reported that employing coping strategies such as denial, venting, and self-blame might lead to chronic distress. Similarly, Kaur et al. (2013) cross-sectionally assessed 150 police personnel working in the Police Department of Vizianagram town, Andhra Pradesh, and reported that the police personnel employ social support (72.55%), acceptance/redefinition (64.72%), and problem solving (60.46%) as coping strategies. Correspondingly, Singh et al.

(2021) assessed 300 male police personnel and documented that adaptive coping, appraisal support, belonging, and social support all have a significant mediating effect on the relationship between stress and mental health (Singh et al., 2021). Earlier literature suggested most of the studies were assessment-based (Husain, 2019) or one-day/one-hour training, which is insufficient to provide any modification in the stress. Similarly, the learning during the training needs to be implemented and monitored in real life, which is lacking in the previous studies. Another important aspect that failed to be addressed in the literature is not focusing on the emotional and cognitive dimensions of the stress (McCraty & Atkinson, 2012). Considering all the above aspects, there is a need to develop a comprehensive training module to handle the stress in police personnel that can address the emotional, cognitive, and behavioural dimensions of the stress. Thus, the aim of the present research is to explore the effectiveness of stress management training (Chinaveh, 2013) on depression, anxiety, stress, and coping strategies among police personnel.

Method

Sample

The present study is a randomised controlled trial (RCT) conducted at the Rashtriya Raksha University's (RRU) Shivamogga campus, Karnataka. A total of 30 police personnel were randomly assigned using simple random sampling method – 15 in the experimental group and 15 in the control group.

This study aims to address the gap in the literature on stress management training among police personnel by reducing their depression, anxiety, and stress through a randomised controlled trial. The present study hypothesised that there will be no significant difference in depression, anxiety,

stress and coping strategies between pre- and post-stress management training in the experimental group. And also, the post scores between the experimental group and the control group.

Tools used

Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS 21) Lovibond & Lovibond (1995) developed this 21-item self-report questionnaire. Each 7 items of this scale represent the constructs of depression, anxiety, and stress. The scores range between 0 and 3, with 0 representing never, 1 indicating sometimes, 2 indicating often, and 3 indicating almost always (Lovibond & Lovibond 1995).

Brief-COPE Questionnaire: This 28-item scale was developed by Carver (1997); it measures three coping styles, namely avoidant, problem-focused, and emotion-focused coping. It also assesses various coping facets, which include self-distraction, denial, substance use, acceptance, and self-blame to name a few (Carver, 1997).

Procedure

At the start, ethical approval from Rashtriya Raksha University was obtained, followed by permission from Superintendent of Police Shivamogga District Police. Subsequently, based on the police register of Shivamogga district, 30 police personnel were randomly assigned, 15 police personnel each in the experimental and control groups, using the simple random sampling method. After explaining the purpose and objective of the training, consent was taken from each member of personnel for the training. Subsequently, a socio-demographic data sheet, a depression, anxiety, and stress scale (Lovibond & Lovibond 1995), and the Brief-COPE Carver (1997) were administered before and after the five-day stress management training for both the experimental group and the control group.

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 16.0 version was used for descriptive statistics and socio-demographic data. A paired sample t-test was also analysed to compare the pre- and post-scores of the training (SPSS Inc. 2007).

Table 1 shows the Stress management training sessions (Chinaveh, 2013)

Session No.	Description of stress management training
Session 1	Rapport building: Introduction about the group members and orientation about the training.
Session 2	Baseline assessment: Socio-demographic data sheet, DASS, job stressor questionnaire, brief COPE
Session 3	Interactive session: Feedback of the assessment and challenges faced by the police personnel
Session 4	Nature of stress: What is stress, types of stress, eustress, distress, acute, chronic, learned helplessness, potential source of stress at work, consequence of stress, fight or flight, stress biological reaction, GAS model.
Session 5	Relaxation training: Deep breathing, guided imagery, Jacobson Progressive Muscle Relaxation
Session 6	Behavioural training: Sleep hygiene, time management, social support, and journaling.
Session 7	Affective training: Mind-body communication, Mindfulness (raisin, brushing, eating, walking, showering) and Body Scan.
Session 8	Interpersonal relationship: Conflict negotiation skills, assertiveness training, communication skills.
Session 9	Cognitive training: Cognitive restructuring and thinking errors. Problem solving techniques and dialectical skills.

Session10	Post assessment: DASS-21, job stressor questionnaire, and brief-COPE
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Results

Table 2. Socio-demographic details of the experimental and control groups

Variables	Experimental Group Mean± SD/n (%)	Control Group Mean± SD/n (%)
Age	40.26± 10.45	43.40± 7.66
Education	14.46± 1.64	14.53± 2.03
Marital status		
Married	11 (73.3%)	13 (86.7%)
Unmarried	4 (26.7%)	2 (13.3%)
Gender		
Male	10 (66.7%)	9 (60.0%)
Female	5 (33.3%)	6 (40.0%)
Occupation		
ASI	7 (46.7%)	7 (46.7%)
HPC	2 (13.3%)	3 (20.0%)
PC	6 (40.0%)	5 (33.3%)

Note: N=30(n=15 for each group).

Table 2 shows the socio-demographic details of the police personnel. The mean age of the experimental group was higher than the control group. Education level is similar in both groups. Unmarried police personnel were more in the experimental group than the control group. In contrast, married police personnel were higher in the control group than the experimental group. Gender-wise, both groups were somewhat similar in terms of male and female ratio. Likewise, in both groups, there is an equal ratio of assistant sub-inspectors and a somewhat similar level of head police constables and police constables.

Table 3 shows the comparison of pre- and post-scores of depressions, anxiety and stress among police personnel in the experimental group using the paired sample “t” test. In the experimental group, the post scores for depression, anxiety and stress were significantly lower than the pre-scores. No significant difference was found between pre- and post-scores in depression, anxiety and stress in the control group. No significant difference was found between the experimental and control groups on post scores in depression, anxiety and stress.

Table 4 shows the comparison of pre- and post-scores of coping strategies among

police personnel in experimental groups using a paired-sample t-test. In the experimental group, post-scores for avoidance coping were significantly lower than the pre-scores. No significant difference was observed in problem-focused and emotional-focused coping. Similarly, no significant difference was observed in avoidance coping, problem-focused coping and emotional-focused coping in the control group. Likewise, no significant difference was observed in avoidance coping, problem-focused coping and emotional-focused coping between post scores of experimental and control groups.

Table 3. Comparison of Pre- and Post scores of depressions, anxiety and stress in the experimental and control group among police personnel.

Variables		Pre-Score Mean ± SD	Post-Score Mean ± SD	t	df	p
Experimental Group	Depression	11.60±3.81	6.26±2.54	11.00	14	.001*
	Anxiety	9.93±3.26	8.26±2.40	3.851	14	.002*
	Stress	15.86±6.30	10.13±3.52	4.82	14	.001*
Control Group	Depression	7.73±2.91	7.33±2.99	6.28	14	.189
	Anxiety	7.33±3.08	7.06±3.19	1.468	14	.164
	Stress	11.46±4.24	11.33±4.38	.564	14	.582
Experimental group	Depression		6.26±2.54	1.051	28	.302
Control group			7.33±2.99			
Experimental group	Anxiety		8.26±2.40	1.162	28	.255
Control group			7.06±3.19			
Experimental group	Stress		10.13±3.52	.826	28	.416
Control group			11.33±4.38			

Note: N=30(n=15 for each group) *p<.05

Table 4. Comparison of Pre- and Post scores of coping strategies among police personnel in experimental group

Variables		Pre-Score Mean ± SD	Post-Score Mean ± SD	t	df	p
Experimental Group	Avoidance Coping	17.26±3.21	15.13±3.31	4.14	14	.001*
	Problem focused	25.40±4.22	23.86±2.69	1.31	14	.208
	Emotional focused	32.53±4.10	31.13±3.70	1.35	14	.198
Control group	Avoidance Coping	15.13±3.31	17.60±3.31	2.039	28	.051
	Problem focused	23.86±2.69	24.80±3.58	.180	28	.427
	Emotional focused	31.13±3.70	32.93±3.08	1.448	28	.159
Experimental Group	Avoidance Coping		18.00±3.29	1.468	14	.164
Control group			17.60±3.31			
Experimental Group	Problem focused		24.86±3.02	.180	14	.860
Control group			24.80±3.58			
Experimental Group	Emotional focused		33.33±2.82	1.468	14	.164
Control group			32.93±3.08			

Note: N=30(n=15 for each group) *p<.05

Discussion

The present study found that the mean age of the police personnel in the experimental group was greater than the control group. In contrast, the experimental group had fewer married police personnel. Further, education level was similar in both the groups. Similarly, gender-wise, both groups were somewhat similar in terms of the male and female ratio. Likewise, in both groups, there is an equal ratio of assistant sub-inspectors and a somewhat similar level of head police constables and police constables.

The present study found that there was a significant improvement in the level of depression, anxiety, and stress among police personnel after the stress management training in the experimental group. This finding supports a meta-analysis of 2298

police personnel enrolled in psychological skill training who reported improvements in depression and anxiety (Lu & Peterson 2023). One possible explanation is that the police officers had cognitive errors such as mindreading, unfair comparisons, and catastrophising; reconstructing these thoughts might have reduced the distorted thinking (Beck, 1999). Additionally, a highlight of the current study is that it addresses cognitive, behavioural, and emotional stress components that were lacking in earlier studies (McCraty & Atkinson, 2012). Furthermore, the participants in the current research had an opportunity to implement these skills, such as assertiveness, mindfulness, cognitive restructuring, and relaxation techniques, in their workplace and with family members; this was lacking in previous research (Hesketh et al., 2016).

The present study found that there is a decrease in the use of avoidance coping post-training in the police personnel, reflecting the effectiveness of assertiveness training. This finding is in accord with a study examined by Singh, Gupta, and Mishra (2021), who assessed 300 male police personnel and found that adaptive coping has a significant mediating effect on the relationship between stress and mental health. The present study reported decreased use of the denial and self-blaming method of coping; this is in harmony with earlier research (Kaur, Chodagiri, and Reddi 2013). However, there is an increase in using problem-focused coping such as planning. This finding is in support of the previous research conducted by Kaur, Chodagiri, and Reddi (2013), which reported that 60.46% use problem-focused coping. Qualitatively, the police personnel in the present study reported that their children have noticed there has been a reduction in their anger level for the past few days. Also, they have incorporated mindfulness techniques at home during eating, brushing, and showering. A few police personnel reported they have started using relaxation techniques during stressful situations, and it is beneficial. The present study designed the research based on the RCT method to examine the police personnel. This report is in accord with the previous research conducted on 114 police officers on mindfulness intervention (Grupe et al., 2021).

Conclusions

The present study found that this stress management training has shown a positive outcome in terms of regulating the stress and coping styles of police personnel. We should mention several limitations, including the short duration of the training (five days), which restricts the opportunity to test learnt strategies in real time. Furthermore, the group was heterogeneous in terms of ranking; this restricts the police constables

from opening their issues in front of the assistant sub-inspector and head police constable. Additionally, future studies evaluate the group a month following the training to determine its long-term effectiveness.

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