

## Job-Related Stress, Causal Factors and Coping Strategies of Traffic Constables

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Traffic constables play a very significant role in controlling the traffic system especially in the metropolitan cities despite several limitations. The broad objective of the present study was to understand the job-related stress of traffic constables, causal factors behind the same, coping strategies as well as other problems faced by them in discharging their duties efficiently and perceived solution. A group of 68 traffic constables under Kolkata Police were randomly selected from 11 Traffic Guards. Data were collected by using a standardized psychological scale entitled '*Occupational Stress Index*' and a '*Semi-Structure Questionnaire*'. The study disclosed that 79.4% of the traffic constables were stressed (76.5% moderately and 2.9% highly) because of a number of factors like inadequate rest, lack of communication with the family members, long duty hours, inadequate leave, political pressure, excessive number of vehicles on the road, hot weather, non-cooperation from public, lack of coordination among colleagues, seeing too many accidents on the road, problems at home and so on. The most common coping strategies adopted included sharing problems with the colleagues, family members and friends, becoming workaholic, accepting the reality, watching TV, being optimistic about future, exercise and so on. They also face some other problems like lack of manpower, offensive language from public, non-cooperation from higher authorities, lack of infrastructure and unnecessary case pressure. They suggested some solutions for addressing the problems faced by them like reduction of duty hours, recruitment of more staff, salary hike, proper interaction among all categories of staff, removal of internal politics, strict enforcement of discipline in the department, use of Euro II vehicles and so on.

**Keywords:** Stress, Traffic constable, Coping strategy

In any metropolitan city, a common man's life moves along with its traffic. For them life becomes smooth and less stressful if the traffic is smooth. The traffic police, especially the constables play a significant role to keep the traffic moving where the population density is very high. The constables' physical and psychological well-being is a crucial factor for enhancing their work efficiency. Kolkata is one of the bright examples of a city with very high population density i.e. 33, 000 per square

kilometer, in India. For proper management of traffic, there are many hindrances, which might come into the way of efficient service delivery.

The city of Kolkata is particularly challenging for those attempting to regulate traffic. The traffic population has grown ten times in the last two decades and the number of traffic policemen has remained almost the same. Imagine having a job where you have to stand in the middle of hundreds of noisy

and polluting vehicles throughout the working day. The job is physically demanding as well as mentally challenging. How efficiently one will deliver services depends on a number of factors like interest, benefits received, proper coordination and cooperation among the staff etc. If somebody works out of compulsion, then the output is not expected to be very high in terms of quality and resulting into stress. If a person has problems in the family then also he may not be able to concentrate on work.

Stress is defined as an upset in the body's balance due to physical, mental or emotional stimuli. When stress occurs, the body undergoes several physiological changes and adrenaline, sugar and fat are released. Stress manifests itself in different ways, including fatigue, chronic headaches, irritability; swings in appetite or mood, low self-esteem and diminished sex drive. Such adverse reactions are seen to contribute to mental and physical illness and several acts and regulations place a duty of care on employers to protect their employees.

It's a tough job, which has direct influence on the constables' life as it is found that many traffic constables suffer from critical respiratory problems, partial deafness, high blood pressure and gastric problems due to irregular food habits are also frequently reported. Some attempts are being made to reduce burden on traffic constables like new signal lights are being installed that will automatically detect the number of vehicles on the road and adjust signal duration accordingly – and this should help lighten the burden and increase the efficiency of the traffic department.

Stress is one of the factors which hinder the activities of traffic police for continuous six hours during summer, that also in a city like Kolkata where the summer diurnal temperatures are generally between 35-45 degrees. Owing to these factors a good number of police constables are subjected to

health problems. The reasons for stress are plenty; long working hours, irregular eating habits, sleepless nights, poor living conditions, ill treatment by seniors, disturbed personal life and the dwindling public confidence in the police force. In fact, it is said that policing is the most stressful job among all government professions. For constables, the problem is more acute. A vast section of the constabulary wastes a lot of time traveling from police station to their homes and vice-versa. Due to lack of adequate accommodation in the City, constables are forced to stay in the outskirts, usually at some distance from their stations. Some of the constables' travel more than 40 kilometers a day while a few of them works continuously for a week by sleeping in the police station itself.

Stress among policemen would manifest in the form of fatigue, depression, inability to concentrate and impulsive behaviour. These danger signals are quite common among the traffic policemen whose nature of work is such that they hardly can control their temper. During VIP visits, the patience level of a traffic cop hits the nadir as they not only have to put in more than three hours of extra duty but also are accountable to any lapse during the convoy movement. People normally complain that policemen are rude and high-handed, but what they fail to see are the extreme conditions under which they lead their lives. Stress also has a negative effect on the health of the policemen and makes them more susceptible to heart attacks and strokes.

A number of studies were carried out in different parts of the world for understanding the level of stress among Police Personnel. In a recently conducted study among the West Bengal Police Officers revealed that 42 and 12% of the West Bengal Police Officers were suffering from moderate and high psychological stress respectively. Further analysis of data revealed that the main areas of stress included un-profitability (32%), role overload (74%), role conflict (50%),

powerlessness (28%), role ambiguity (36%), unreasonable group and political pressure (58%), intrinsic impoverishment (32%) and under participation (60%). Findings suggest that special attention is required for taking need-based measures for each of the above areas of stress for unburdening the level of stress among West Bengal Police Officers (Deb, Chakraborty, Chatterjee, & Srivastava, 2005a). In another study carried out in Kolkata Traffic Police Officers, authors found that the main causes of stress were inadequate rest, no leave, abstaining from social occasions and excessive work pressure (Deb, Chakraborty, Chatterjee, & Srivastava, 2005b). Green (2004) carried out a study among Police Officers with a view to ascertaining whether the Police Officers had severe post-traumatic stress than PTSD in civilians. No significant differences were found, although there was a tendency for higher use of alcohol and to try not to think about the trauma. Police Officers had more experiences of reliving the trauma or acting as if the trauma were recurring but, again, not to a significant degree. Yang, Wang, Lan and Wang (2004) found statistically significant difference in occupational stress and strain between doctors, Police Officers and teachers was statistically significant ( $P < 0.01$ ), and the score of the police-officers was higher than that of the doctors and teachers ( $P < 0.05$ ), but the personal resources of Police Officers were lower than those of the doctors and teachers ( $P < 0.05$ ). Further analysis of all items of personal strain revealed that the scores of vocational strain, psychological strain, physical strain, but not of interpersonal strain, were significantly higher in police Officers than in doctors and teachers ( $P < 0.05$ ).

Violanti (2004) explored suicide ideation in Police Officers and possible correlates associated with such ideation focusing on psychologically traumatic police work experiences, the development of posttraumatic stress (PTSD) in officers, and

the inordinate use of alcohol associated with this condition. Results suggest that certain traumatic police work exposures increase the risk of high-level PTSD symptoms, which subsequently increase the risk of high alcohol use and suicide ideation. The combined impact of PTSD and increased alcohol use led to a ten-fold increase risk for suicide ideation. Violanti and Gehrke (2004) concluded that increased frequency and type of traumas, especially those occurring to other co-workers and those associated with gender, might eventually lead to a secondary process of emotional compassion fatigue. Deschamps, Paganon-Badinier, Marchand, and Merle (2003) found that Police from minority groups such as ageing subjects or police officers have been reported to experience greater stress. This population is adversely affected by lack of available manpower and long working hours. In fact sources of stress in the police population are found both in the weariness of the job and private life planning. Levenson and Dwyer (2003) reported that peer support component of law enforcement and other emergency services agencies has contributed to an increase in professional mental health referrals and a decrease in on-the-job suicides, sick days, and poor work performance. Furthermore, peer participation in debriefings following a traumatic event, and peer support during a crisis facilitates the process of psychological closure and mourning and enables emergency services workers to cope more effectively with tragedy so they can continue to perform their jobs efficiently and with satisfaction.

Pole, Neylan, Best, Orr, and Marmar (2003) emphasized the importance of contextual threat and suggest that laboratory measures of startle improve upon self-reported exaggerated startle alone in indexing PTSD symptom severity in urban police officers. Collins and Gibbs (2003) confirm previous findings of organizational culture and

workload as the key issues in officer stress. Given that the degree of symptom appears to be worsening, management action is required. Further research is indicated within the police population into a possible increased susceptibility in female officers. Literature review indicates that no such study has been carried out among the traffic constables with a view to understanding their level of stress. From the above discussion it is also clear that no attempt had, however, been made to study the other problems the traffic constables face during service life. Accordingly the present investigation was aimed to achieve the following objective:

**Objective:**

The broad objective of the present study was to understand the job-related stress of traffic constables, causal factors behind the same, coping strategies as well as other problems faced by them in discharging their duties efficiently and perceived solution.

**Method**

**Sample:**

Data were collected from 68 traffic constables proportionately selected from 11 Traffic Guards in Kolkata following random selection method and their informed consent was obtained explaining the objective of the study. All the 68 constables filled up the psychological test while 62 filled up the Semi-structured Questionnaire.

**Tools:**

*Occupational Stress Index* developed by Srivastava and Singh (1995) was used for achieving the objective of the present study. This scale aims to measure the extent of stress, which the employees perceive arising from various constituent and conditions of their job. The stress researchers have developed the scales which the stress arising exclusively from job roles. The scale consists of 46 items, each to be rated on the five-point scale. Out of 46 items 28 are 'true-keyed' and rest 18

are 'false-keyed'. The items relate to all relevant components of job life which causes stress in some way or the other, such as, role over-load, role ambiguity, role conflict, group and political pressures, responsibility for persons, under participation, powerlessness, poor peer relations, intrinsic impoverishment, low status, strenuous working conditions, and unprofitability. This apart, one Semi-Structured Questionnaire was used for understanding the causal factors, coping strategies and other allied problems faced by the traffic constables in Kolkata as well as their perceived solutions.

**Results**

Analysis of the overall score shows a mean score of 154.5 on a scale of 46 - 230 and a standard deviation of 18.33. The mid point/mid value was calculated using the formula like Mid Value= (Lower Limit + Upper Limit)/2, which in this case was 138. The constables who got score above mid point have been regarded as suffering from occupational stress. Further, they were divided into two groups i.e., moderately stressed and highly stressed. Moderately stressed are those who got score between 138-184 and highly stressed are those who got score above 185 and above. Findings revealed that 76.5 and 2.9% traffic constables were suffering from moderate and high psychological stress. Moderate psychological stress means the constables who got the score between 138-184 and highly stressed means who got score between 185-230 ranges. Further effort was made to analyze the data domain-wise.

Domain-wise analysis of data revealed that the traffic constables were found to be highly stressed particularly in the domains: under participation (82.4%), powerlessness (80.9%), role overload (77.9%), Unprofitability (76.5%), poor peer relations (61.8%), strenuous working conditions (66.2%) and

intrinsic impoverishment (57.4%).

Further, in order to cross check the information of psychological stress of constables collected through a standardized psychological scale, one direct question was asked to all the constables. In this case 62 traffic constables responded to the semi-structured questionnaire out of 68. More than three-fourth (77.4%) stated that they suffer from job related stress while through standardized psychological scale it was found to be 79.4%. It confirmed the problem of job-related stress of traffic constables following two methods of data collection.

The main cause of stress as perceived by the constables was inadequate rest (83.9%), followed by lack of communication with the family members (82.3%), no leave/holiday (79.0%), excessive job/time pressure (72.6%), political pressure/interferences (72.6%), abstaining from social occasions (59.7%), hot weather (50%), and excessive number of vehicles on the road (50%). In addition, a large number of them also referred other causes like non-cooperation from the public (48.4%), lack of coordination among colleagues (48.4%), seeing two many accidents on the road (40.3%), problem at home (40.3%), pressure from higher authorities (33.9%) and so on (Table 1).

**Table 1: Causes of Stress as Perceived By Traffic Constables (N=62) (Multiple Response)**

Main Causes of Stress	F	%	Rank
■ Inadequate rest	52	83.9	1
■ Lack of communication with family	51	82.3	2
■ No leave/holiday	49	79.0	3
■ Excessive job/time pressure	45	72.6	4

■ Political pressure/interferences	45	72.6	4
■ Abstaining from social occasions	37	59.7	5
■ Unable to give time to family	37	59.7	5
■ Hot weather	31	50.0	6
■ Excessive number of vehicles on the road	31	50.0	6
■ Non-cooperation from public	30	48.4	7
■ Lack of coordination among colleagues	30	48.4	7
■ Seeing two many accidents on the road	25	40.3	8
■ Problems at home	25	40.3	8
■ Pressure from higher authorities	21	33.9	9
■ Unhealthy work atmosphere	21	33.9	9
■ Fear of punishment from superiors	21	33.9	9
■ Pollution – air and sound	20	32.3	10
■ Stereotype work	17	27.4	11
■ Lack of independence	15	24.2	12
■ Various tension	15	24.2	12
■ Others like keeping road clear for VIP's, red tapeism	8	12.9	13

Base: All constables

The present study also probed the coping strategies of constables for job related stress as stated by them. Sharing problems with the colleagues was the main coping strategy as stated by the constables. The study reveals that constables adopt one or more coping strategies from the following: sharing problems with colleagues (72.6%), family members (62.9%) and friends (59.7%), becoming workaholic (64.5%), accepting the reality (58.1%), viewing TV/listening music (56.5%), doing exercise (50%), becoming optimistic about future (43.5%), spending more time with the family members (40.3%), smoking more cigarette (29%) and devoting more time in religious activities (25%) (Table 2).

**Table 2: Coping Strategies of Stress as Reported by Traffic Constables (N=62) (Multiple Response)**

Coping Strategies of Stress	F	%	Rank
■ Share problems with colleagues	45	72.6	1
■ Become workaholic	40	64.5	2
■ Share problems with family members	39	62.9	3
■ Share problems with friends	37	59.7	4
■ Accept the reality	36	58.1	5
■ View TV and/or listen music	35	56.5	6
■ Do exercise	31	50.0	7
■ Become optimistic about future	27	43.5	8
■ Spend more time with family	25	40.3	9
■ Smoke more cigarette	18	29.0	10
■ Pray to god and/or devote more time in religious activities	16	25.8	11

Base: All constables

For improving the traffic control system in Kolkata city, it is important to ascertain what sorts of problems traffic constables face while discharging their responsibilities. Findings revealed that lack of manpower was one of the main problems (72.6%) they face, followed by political pressure/interferences (67.7%), long duty hours during hot summer (61.3%), non-cooperation from the public (58.1%), pressure for discharging duties (51.6%), offensive language from public (48.4%), non-cooperation from higher authorities (40.3%), lack of infrastructure (38.7%) and unnecessary case pressure (17.7%) (Table 3).

**Table 3: Problems Faced by the Traffic Constables While Discharging Assigned Responsibilities Efficiently (N=62)**

Main Problems Faced	F	%	Rank
■ Lack of manpower	45	72.6	1
■ Political pressure/interferences	42	67.7	2
■ Long duty hours during hot summer	38	61.3	3
■ Non-cooperation from public	36	58.1	4
■ Pressure for discharging duties	32	51.6	5
■ Offensive language from public	30	48.4	6
■ Non-cooperation from higher authorities	25	40.3	7
■ Unlawful public	25	40.3	7
■ Lack of infrastructure	24	38.7	8
■ Unnecessary case pressure	11	17.7	9

Base: All constables

Replying to a question, constables also offered solutions of their problems. Reduction of duty hours (59.7%), recruitment of more staff (48.4%), salary hike (40.3%), proper interaction among all categories of staff (35.5%) and removal of internal policies (32.3%). About 15.0% and less stated that strict enforcement of discipline in the department, use of Euro II vehicles, and educating public through media about traffic rules were the other measures for solution of problems of constables (Table 4).

**Table 4: Perceived Solutions of Problems Faced by the Traffic Constables (N=62)**

Perceived Solutions of Problems	F	%	Rank
■ Reduction of duty hours	37	59.7	1
■ Recruitment of more staff	30	48.4	2
■ Delegation of authority	27	43.5	3
■ Salary hike	25	40.3	4
■ Proper interaction among ranks	22	35.5	5
■ Removal of interval policies	20	32.3	6
■ Enforcement of discipline	15	24.2	7
■ Use of Euro II vehicles	15	24.2	8
■ Educating public through media about traffic rules	10	16.1	9

Base: All constables

In order to find out whether constables are de-motivated to join their duties owing to job-related stress or not, one indirect question was asked i.e., Do you like to go to office? Although an overwhelming number of them stated that they very much feel like to go to office, about 18.0% openly stated that they do not like to go to office (Table 5). The issue requires attention of the administrators of Police Department (Traffic). It is quite likely that some of the constables who are not eager to go to office stated that they like to go to office out of a fear of disclosure of information that if they share the truth it might affect their future promotion.

**Table 5: Eagerness to Go to Office (N=62)**

Eagerness to Go to Office	F	%
■ Very much	51	82.3
■ Not so eager	4	6.5
■ Do not feel like going to office	5	8.1
■ Do not feel like going to office at all	2	3.2

Base: All constables

Job environment is important in any working situation. If the environment is friendly office staff wishes to work hard. Hence the issue of interpersonal relationship within the traffic department was probed. Study revealed that about half of them feel that interpersonal relationship among the colleagues is not friendly (Table 6). This issue also requires attention of the administrator. Immediate attention should be paid to improve the interpersonal relationship among the colleagues.

**Table 6: Relationships among the Colleagues (N=62)**

Relationship	Frequency	%
■ Very friendly	22	35.5
■ Friendly	8	12.9
■ Not so friendly	32	51.6
■ Discordant		

Base: All constables

Although interpersonal relationship in case of 50.0% of the colleagues was not so friendly, in case of personal problems they were supportive and cooperative to each other (Table 7).

**Table 7: Cooperation and Support from the Colleagues In Case of any Personal Problems (N=62)**

Receive Cooperation and Support	Frequency	%
➤ Always	23	37.1
➤ Sometimes	27	43.5
➤ Occasionally	10	16.1
➤ Not at all	2	3.2

Base: All constables

Sometime personal and/or family problems affect the efficiency and/or become a cause of stress in the job situation. Therefore, in the present study an effort was made to understand whether constables have any problems in the family. More than half (56.5%) stated that they have some problems in the family (Table 8).

**Table 8: Any Problem in the Family (N=62)**

Any Problem in the Family	Frequency	%
➤ Yes	35	56.5
➤ No	27	43.5

Base: All constables

In case of any problem, they mostly share the same with their close friends other than colleagues, followed by colleagues, close family members and with others. A large number of them (43.5%) do not share their problems with anybody (Table 9).

**Table 9: Preference for Sharing Family/ Personal Problem as Reported (N=62)**

Preference	Frequency	%
➤ Friends, other than colleagues	25	40.3
➤ Colleagues	24	38.7
➤ Close family members	32	51.6
➤ Do not share with anybody	27	43.5
➤ Others	9	14.5

Base: All constables

### Discussion

Traffic constables play a crucial role in maintaining traffic especially in the metropolitan cities like Kolkata. In fact, without their efficient services it is next to impossible to keep the city function smoothly. At the same time, it is equally true that they are subjected to job related stress, which sometimes becomes unbearable for them. Literature indicates that no such study made an attempt to address the problems faced by traffic constables in the metropolitan cities in India. Hence, the necessity of the present study was reinforced with a view to achieving a well defined objective i.e. job related stress, causes behind the same and their coping strategies adapted by the traffic constables in Kolkata city as well as problems faced by them in discharging their duties efficiently.

In order to achieve the objective, the present study combined both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods to understand the issue in-depth. A group of 68 traffic constables were randomly selected from 11 Traffic Guards of Kolkata. However, out of 68, 62 provided qualitative data.

Findings revealed an alarming scenario in regard to job related stress of traffic constables in Kolkata i.e., 79.41% are stressed. Further in order to confirm the data collected through quantitative approach qualitative method was also adopted which reveals the same picture with minor variation i.e., 77.41% constables reported to be stressed. This finding also shows the strength of qualitative data collection approach that is easier and less monotonous for the subject to respond. Recent study findings on stress of West Bengal Police Officers revealed slightly better picture i.e., 42% and 12% were suffering from moderate and high job related stress (Deb et al., 2005a).

So far as causes of stress are concerned findings clearly stated that long duty hours especially during the summer season and/or

inadequate rest is the principal cause of stress followed by lack of communication with family members, unable to avail leave, political pressure/interferences, excessive pressure of vehicles on the road, lack of coordination among the colleagues and abstaining from social functions. In addition, about one fourth stated eye witness of many accidents on road, problems at home, non-cooperation from the public, air and sound pollution, pressure from higher authorities, unhealthy work atmosphere, fear of punishment from superiors and stereotype nature of job are the other secondary causes of job related stress.

Coping strategies adopted by the constables include sharing of problems with colleagues, family members and friends, followed by watching television, spending more time at home, being optimistic about future, accepting the hard reality, exercise and becoming more dependent on tobacco. Undoubtedly, it may be stated that the coping strategy adopted by the Traffic Constables are not harmful or damaging to health except those who became dependent on 'Bidi' or 'Gutka'.

Replying to a question 'what sorts of problem do they face while discharging their responsibilities efficiently'; lack of manpower is found to be the most serious constraint followed by political pressure/interferences, non-cooperation from public and higher authorities, too much pressure from higher authorities for prolong duties and abusive language from public. Lack of infrastructure is considered to be one of the major constraints as reported by more than half of the traffic constables. Physical health problem of some of the constable owing to prolonged duty hours is reported to be one of the barriers for discharging their duties efficiently. The constables have also offered some solutions to overcome the problems, which they face in discharging their duty efficiently. Reduction of job hours is one of the important measures



they have suggested followed by recruitment of more staff, participation of constables in policy formulation and/or allocation of duty, increase in salary, proper coordination of interaction of different categories of staff irrespective of political categorization. Traffic constables also emphasized on some of the important issues like introduction of Euro II vehicles which will in turn reduce the level of air pollution and enforcement of strict discipline in the department along with creating awareness among common people about the rules of traffic through media.

Healthy interpersonal relationship is a very important motivating factor for the staff in discharging their duties efficiently. Therefore the present study also explored the issue. Findings indicated a positive picture that the constables also extend support and cooperation to one another in case of personal problems of their colleagues. Personal problems and/or problems in the family also affect the efficiency of the staff while discharging their duties. Findings suggests that more than 50.0% of the constables have major problems in their families like financial crisis, chronic illness of family members, mental disturbances for not being able to give minimum time to their family members, which adds to their mental disturbances. At times of crisis, close family members and friends are the most preferred choices followed by colleagues and neighbors for sharing their problems.

#### **Recommendations:**

On the basis of the findings of the present study, the following points are recommended for immediate attention of higher authorities.

1. Some recreational and/or group activities should be introduced and practiced religiously in the traffic guard to release the job related stress of 79.4% constables.
2. Providing a platform for the constable to share their problems with the higher authorities frankly and openly.
3. Guard-wise more and more rewards for all the categories of traffic police in the form of memento should be introduced to increase their self-worth and level of motivation.
4. Higher authorities of the Traffic Department should take the initiative to initiate dialogue with different television channels in creating awareness of traffic controlling system among general public.
5. Involvement of representative constables in decision-making process.
6. Adequate staff at all levels in the traffic department should be recruited.
7. A common fund should be generated for extending support to any staff during severe health and other family problems.

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