

Operational Stress Among Nepal Police Officers During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

This Study investigated operational Stress among Nepali police officers during the COVID- 19 pandemic. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Kathmandu Valley experienced extreme health risks and operational work stress related to the virus. This led to a traumatic impact on psychosocial groups that performed their official duties in contact with the infected and sick, including in the gender aspect. During the COVID-19 pandemic, police officers were heavily involved in anti-epidemic measures to safeguard public safety and order. The Study aims to find the operational Stress of male and female police personnel. The results showed that frontline workers with a high risk of COVID-19-related illness are six times more likely to experience high levels of operational work stress. Overall, this study offers empirical proof of the detrimental effects on police frontline officers' mental health during the pandemic of COVID-19 health risks and operational work stress. Proactive measures and resilience building through an Annual Mental Health Check-In Retreat and Research-based Mental Health First Aid Course are recommended strategies under the action plan for a Mental Health Program for the PNP in the New Normal. Strategies to improve mental health-seeking behaviors through a functional mental health surveillance system using an innovative mental health app are also recommended.

Keywords: Operational Stress, Nepal Police Officers, COVID-19, Pandemic

List of Abbreviation

COVID-19	- Corona Virus Disease-2019
PNP	- Platelet Neutralization Procedure
PPE	- Personal Protective Equipment
DIG	- Deputy General of Police
MH	- Mental Health
WHO	- World Health Organization
COPE	- Coping orientation to Problem Experienced
OS	- Operational Service
WRI	- Work Stress Inventory
SEM	- Structural Equation Model
PSQ-ORG	- Police Stress Questionnaire- Organization
PSQ-OP	- Police Stress Questionnaire - Operation

Introduction

Background

Stress is a universal occurrence that affects everyone at some point. It is a universal experience that all people throughout human history have shared. One of the unique aspects of life is Stress, which has been heavily emphasized to the point that it has been discussed in literature and the creative arts throughout history. The complexity of humans' social, personal, and ecological environments, their various and simultaneous interactions with environmental challenges, and the diversity of stress expression are the reasons behind the increased prevalence and inclusivity of Stress in human populations. Stressed-out police officers are more likely to suffer from psychological and physical problems and to be in danger during pandemics [1,2]. For police officers, risk aversion to avoid Stress is rare, unlike many other occupations. Such Stress frequently has detrimental effects on the mental health of police officers as well as undesirable outcomes. For police officers, dealing with stressful situations is nothing new. Stress is a standard part of police work, and officers are expected to be able to handle difficult situations [3].

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Chronic workplace stress is a contributing factor to several physical and psychological disorders among law enforcement personnel. Among these are higher rates of depressive symptoms, more physical complaints, and higher rates of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in comparison to the general population [4-6]. Moreover, the level of suicidality among police personnel is more than double that of the national average despite the lack of Study on the subject [7,8].

The COVID-19 pandemic brought social unrest and broken expectations for law enforcement and society. Global police services have been beneficial during the pandemic. Police had to respond to cries for assistance and carry out their duties while running the risk of contracting the virus in addition to the standard risks [9,10].

Police and the public learned during the COVID-19 epidemic that policing may extend to previously undefined behaviors and social causes in new limits. Previously, it was believed that policing could only be justified within a particular radius of the local police station.

Nepal Police is one of the country's principal and national law enforcement organizations, working under the Ministry of Home Affairs. It is primarily responsible for maintaining peace and order, crime prevention, and crime investigation under the Nepalese Constitution's jurisdiction. It works for the community, with the community. Only one group must act on the front lines during a crisis or an emergency to save and protect the general populace. Since the country's health safety situation has deteriorated since 2020, Nepal police officers have been working around the clock for the country. As a result of this ignorance, officers have had a difficult time maintaining their physical as well as mental health. However, police officers are required to deliver orders and work according to official instructions in every new crisis and emergency as it's a department that follows the rules of a chain of command. It is mandatory to report their seniors for every decision ever made. Until the situation returns to normal, it feels like they are under constant stress.

Police officers were tasked with enforcing new safety regulations, such as mask mandates and social distancing protocols, which placed them at odds with the public. Enforcing lockdowns and prohibitions, such as stopping hundreds of people in the Kathmandu Valley and educating them about the hazards of not wearing masks, became part of their daily duties. These tasks were challenging due to resistance from the public, exposing the officers to heightened levels of stress, fear, and frustration. Additionally, they were often working away from home, separated from family, and dealing with a rising number of COVID-19 cases, including illnesses among their colleagues.

The loss of a colleague to the virus, especially after close contact, exacerbated their mental anguish. This new reality forced officers to operate in an environment of heightened hypervigilance and constant threat of infection. Nepal Police officers, like their counterparts worldwide, had to contend with long and irregular working hours, increased exposure to violent situations, and the added burden of enforcing pandemic protocols. These pressures, compounded by limited access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in the early stages of the

pandemic, contributed to their physical and mental exhaustion. A study by Stogner et al. noted that the pandemic introduced severe mental stress for police officers, who were already under tremendous operational pressure [11].

The situation in Nepal mirrors findings from other regions, such as a study conducted in Maharashtra, India, where 50% of police personnel reported mental disturbances due to fear of the virus, and 32.4% reported workplace stress [12]. The Nepalese police officers' experience during the pandemic highlights the importance of providing mental health support and resources to frontline workers, especially during times of crisis. Therefore, the COVID-19 pandemic placed immense strain on Nepal Police officers, significantly affecting their mental health. While they played a crucial role in controlling the spread of the virus and maintaining public safety, it is essential to recognize the psychological toll it took on them. Understanding the stress levels and mental health impacts on these frontline workers is critical to ensuring their well-being and equipping them to handle future crises more effectively.

Research Questions

Through the Study, the researcher has tried to seek the answer to the following questions: Does COVID-19 affect the operational Stress among police personnel?

How is operational Stress associated with married and unmarried police personnel?

Is there a significant difference between male and female police personnel regarding operational stress levels?

Objectives

- To find out the operational-related stressors of Police during COVID-19 in Kathmandu
- To find out the association between operational Stress and the marital status of police personnel in Kathmandu Valley.
- To find out the association between sex and operational stress level of police personnel in Kathmandu Valley.
- To find out the association between job rank and level of Stress in police personnel in Kathmandu Valley.

Hypothesis

H1: There is no significant difference between the operational Stress of male and female traffic police personnel.

H2: There is no significant difference between the operational Stress and marital status of police personnel.

H3: There is no significant relationship between operational Stress and the rank of police personnel.

Operational Stress

Operational Stress is the psychological and physiological strain that people in high-stakes occupations, such as emergency responders, military personnel, or professionals dealing with difficult situations, endure. It is characterized by increased arousal, emotional weariness, and cognitive strain due to job demands. Operational Stress includes psychological and physiological elements and is frequently brought on by the volume and type of work people do in their operational jobs.

Materials and Methods Used

Research Design and Participants

This Study used the Operational Police Stress Questionnaire to measure the operational Stress level. A close-ended, structured questionnaire was used for the data collection. The mode of collection was a face-to-face paper and pen survey. The PSQ-OP questionnaire was used to assess the stress level of the Police. This questionnaire was validated and tested by McGreary and Thompson [13]. It was done to identify the Police's level of operational Stress.

Study aimed to gather information from interviews about the experiences of law enforcement personnel during the COVID-19 pandemic. A cross-sectional study was conducted in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. Kathmandu has the most significant number of police officers in the country. The study population consisted of 200 police officers assigned to various traffic units in Kathmandu and Lalitpur for at least six months. The Metropolitan City Police Division provided the list of police names, and a convenience and purposive sampling technique was used to achieve the necessary sample size.

Table 1: Given the sample collected from Kathmandu Valley and Lalitpur

S.N	Location	Male	Female
1	Baneshwor Mahanagar Police Station	15	10
2	Mid-Baneshwor police beat	20	20
3	Mahanagariya Traffic Police, Thapathali	10	10
4	Nepal Police Durbarg Marg	10	5
5	Metropolitan Traffic Police headquarters Office, Kathmandu	20	20
6	Metropolitan Police Kalanki Kathmandu	20	10
7	Sanepa Police Station, Lalitpur	5	25
Total		100	100

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion Criteria

- Only the Police working in the field were taken as respondents.
- Respondents who have worked at least six months on a police unit.

Exclusion Criteria

- Police who were on extended leave were excluded.
- Police who are working on field duty are excluded.
- Officers who have less than six months of duration working at particular units.
- Police who have just finished their police training are excluded.

Conceptual Framework

This Study's conceptual model illustrates the connection between operational work stress and mental health risk and mental health. Using items related to Stress caused by working shifts, working alone at night, working overtime demands, getting hurt on the job, work-related activities on days off, traumatic events (such as deaths and injuries), managing social life outside of work,

not having enough time to spend with friends and family, paperwork, not being able to eat at work, finding time to stay in good physical condition, fatigue, health issues related to the occupation (such as back pain), not getting the support of family and friends, forming friendships outside of work, maintaining an image in public, negative comments from the public, limitations to social life, and the feeling of being alone were all measured in this Study.

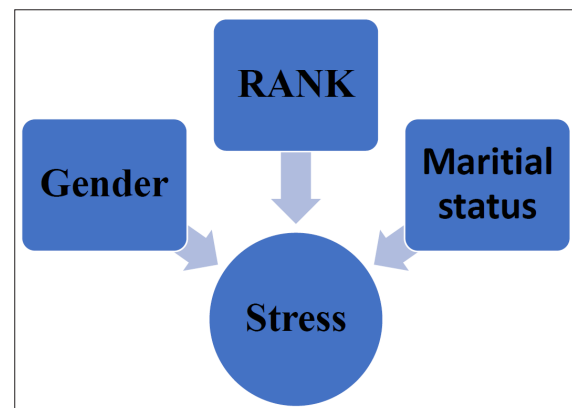


Figure 1: Operational stress among Nepal police officers during the COVID-19 pandemic situation.

Data Collection Tools

Operational Stress (PSQ-OP) has been proven to be a reliable measure of police stress. Each PSQ is brief, which lessens the workload for the officers who complete it and gives researchers more freedom to concentrate on organizational or operational Stress. Police use a 7-point Likert-type scale to rate their response to the measures. Starting at “no stress at all” (1) and ending at “a lot of stress” (7). Higher scores on the scale indicate a higher degree of perceived Police-related Stress.

Data are collected using a set questionnaire. The standardized instrument utilized by was created to measure operational Stress among Police [13]. The PSQ-OP has 20 items. Police respond to the measure using a 7-point. Answers on the scale range from 1-7 points with 1, 2, 3 = No stress at all, 4, 5, 6 = Moderate Stress, and 7 = A lot of Stress. Higher scores on the measures indicate more significant levels of perceived Stress related to policing. To generate unique PSQ-OP scale scores, the 20 items from each PSQ are averaged and added up.

According to the operational police stress questionnaire (PSQ-OP), stress-related issues stem from “operational” factors like carrying out the job. Additionally, this scale considers the connection between life and work, frequently overlooked by other police stress measures.

Likewise, secondary data are gathered from previous dissertations, journals, websites, etc.

Data Collection Procedure

At first, the researcher took verbal permission from the headquarters authorities to contact Police working in the field to collect data. After fulfilling the required criteria for conducting research, the police officer was approached at their stations. To collect quantitative data, after giving verbal consent and clearly describing the purpose and process of data collection, a

questionnaire related to operational Stress was distributed to the respondents. Additional instructions were given as needed. Each participant took 15-20 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire that served as the survey instrument was simple to administer and grade. Since a questionnaire is the most cost-effective way to gather data on this scale, participants finished the surveys at their own pace after receiving a uniform set of instructions in the cover letter. Self-administered questionnaires were used to collect data— participants and standard demographic questions filled out in the Operational Police Stress

Questionnaire (PSQ-Op). The anonymous individuals were instructed to fill out the questionnaire and return it in an envelope with their address already on it. The answers and their identity were kept private.

Data Analysis Techniques

The quantitative data file from the survey was first tabulated on Microsoft Excel, edited, and transferred to Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS V.21) for further coding and analysis. In SPSS, variables and value labels were attached to the data file. The variables were subjected to a frequency and percentage descriptive analysis. Chi-square tests measured the degree of association between the independent and dependent variables.

The collected information was presented in tabular form and was explained according to the variables. The operational Stress scores were analyzed per the recommendations of the PSQ- OP measuring scale. The means of the dependent and independent

variables must be compared to ascertain whether there is a statistically significant difference between the variables. The stress level of officers is the dependent variable for this thesis (operational), and setting (traffic police bit) and gender (male or female) are the independent factors.

Results and Analysis

Table 2: Demographic Information (in percentage)

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Female	64	32.1%
	Male	136	67.9%
Marital status	Married	70	35%
	Unmarried	130	65%
Rank	Senior officer	50	7.5%
	Junior officer	50	17.5%
	Constable	50	25%
	Traffic police officer	50	50%

Table 2 shows the respondent characteristics. More male than female police officers experienced operational Stress during the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the married and unmarried respondents, married respondents were operationally stressed. The respondents' profiles show that most police officers are under operational Stress during the pandemic. However, according to rank, working as a constable and at other junior levels present operational Stress during the pandemic.

Table 3: Level of Operational Stress and Rank (N=200)

Rank	Level of satisfaction				Chisquare score	Df	P- value
	No stress at all	Moderate Stress	A Lot of Stress	Total			
Senior	102(92.7)	3(2.7)	3(1.8)	108(100)			
Junior	64(87.0)	7(9.1)	3(3.9)	74(100)	3.460	6	.749
Constable	7(100.0)	2(0.0)	0(0.0)	9(100.0)			
Traffic police officer	8(88.9)	1(11.1)	0(0.00)	9(100)			

Source: Field study, 2020

Table 3 shows the relationship between the level of operational Stress and the rank of the Police. It was found that more level of operational Stress was found in the case of the senior officer than more operational stress constable police than another rank officer. However, no significant relationship was found between the education of traffic police and the level of satisfaction ($p > 0.05$).

Table 4: Level of Operational Stress and marital status (N =200)

Rank	Level of Operational Stress				Chisquare score	Df	P- value
	No stress at all	Moderate Stress	A Lot of Stress	Total			
Unmarried	122(92.2)	6(6.5)	2(1.3)	130(100)	3.165	3	.367
Married	53(81.1)	13(14.5)	4(4.4)	70(100)			

Source: Field study, 2020

Table 4 shows the relationship between the level of operational Stress and marital status among police officers in a pandemic situation. More married police personnel had higher operational Stress levels than unmarried police officers. No significant association was found between marital status and level of efficiency ($p > 0.05$).

Table 5: Level of Operational Stress and Gender of the police personnel (N =200)

Sex	Level of Operational Stress				Chisquare score	Df	P- value
	No stress at all	Moderate Stress	A Lot of Stress	Total			
Male	122(92.2)	6(6.5)	2(1.3)	130(100)	3.165	3	.367
Female	53(81.1)	13(14.5)	4(4.4)	70(100)			

Source: field study, 2020

Table 5 shows a relationship between the level of operational Stress and the gender of police officers. Regarding the gender of Police, a more normal level of operational Stress was found in female than male Police. However, no significant association was found between sex and level of satisfaction ($p > 0.05$).

Table 6: Association between level of operational stress and shift work (n=200)

	Low stress no (%)	Moderate stress no (%)	High stress no (%)
Male	13 (12.1)	22(29.9)	101(58.0)
Female	8(25.0)	14(33.3)	42(41.7)

Source: Field study, 2020

Table 6 shows that the above data revealed a correlation between work duration and operational Stress. The longer the work duration, the higher the level of Stress. It also shows that the percentage of Stress is higher in males than in females.

Table 7: Association between level of operational stress and limitation of social life

Gender	Low stress no (%)	Moderate stress no (%)	High stress no (%)
Male	8(14.7)	42(28.0)	86(57.3)
Female	8(10.4)	14(37.5)	42(52.1)

Table 7 shows that most male police personnel had a high operational Stress level due to the limitations of their social lives.

Table 8: Association between level of operational Stress and Relationship with Family (n=200)

Gender	Low stress no (%)	Moderate stress no (%)	High stress no (%)
Male	80(44.1)	26(38.2)	30(17.7)
Female	4(9.3)	8(20.3)	52(70.4)

Table 8 revealed a correlation between family relationships and operational Stress. It shows that a higher percentage of females had more Stress than males.

Table 9: Association between level of operational stress and Work-related activities on day off

Gender	Low stress no (%)	Moderate stress no (%)	High stress no (%)
Male	80(44.1)	26(38.2)	30(17.7)
Female	4(9.3)	8(20.3)	52(70.4)

Table 9 reveals a co-relationship between operational Stress and work-related activities on a day off. The percentage shows a higher stress level in females who have to work on their day off than in males, which shows a lower stress level in the percentage of females who have much Stress.

Table 10: Association between operational stress and Overtime demands

Gender	Low stress no (%)	Moderate stress no (%)	High stress no (%)
Male	-	8(8)	62(92)
Female	20(5.4)	54(46.5)	56(48.1)

Table 10 shows the relationship between overtime work demands and operational Stress. It shows that married police personnel had a higher percentage of people who were stressed than unmarried police personnel. Female police personnel face much Stress when balancing their work and professional lives.

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

The Study's findings strongly correlate police officers' well-being and their perception of occupational Stress. Studies indicate that job stress substantially impacts psychological health, although there is no discernible impact on family contentment. The Study's findings are erratic and at odds with those of other earlier investigations that have demonstrated, through empirical evidence, the detrimental effects of work stress on family life [14,15]. The sample used for the Study, which consisted of the most significant number of police officers assigned to administrative units, particularly those from the police headquarters' research section, may be partially responsible for the Study's findings.

Operational Stress among Nepal police officers during the COVID-19 pandemic situation. Results from various interactions between workers and the environment where they perform their duties. Location, gender, environment, and many other factors contribute to the buildup of Stress. Job stress results from the worker's interaction with the work conditions. Views differ on the importance of worker characteristics versus working conditions as the primary cause of job stress. The present Study showed that the traffic police knew the adverse effects of air pollution on their health.

A further investigation by Jhonston. has consistently revealed a negative correlation between organizational Stress and overall well-being and job satisfaction [16]. Additionally, the Study demonstrated the moderating and significant effects of social support's involvement in the link between stressors and strain. Conversely, it was discovered that increased frequency of communication regarding certain subjects with people became

detrimental rather than beneficial due to the reverse buffering effect of supervisor communication. In a study on stress-related symptoms and mental health, Collins and Gibbs employed a sample of 1206 police officers [17]. They consistently found that workload and organizational culture were the leading causes of officer stress. Due to excessive levels of Stress, mental illness appeared to have gotten worse rather than better.

They were aware that breathing difficulties, wheezing, lung cancer, bronchial asthma, and pneumonia could all be brought on by air pollution. Studies in India have also revealed that prolonged exposure to contaminated air by traffic police increases the likelihood of developing various respiratory issues. Traffic cops must understand the problems in places like Kathmandu, particularly those related to breathing. Fewer traffic police felt like getting regular health checkups, even though most of them knew they should wear antipollution masks.

Every one of the quantitative conclusions our research presents comes from cross-sectional data collection. Cross-sectional surveys are intended to evaluate a particular characteristic within a predefined population at a given time. However, it is crucial to recognize that choosing predictor and outcome variables depends on the investigators' hypothesis and that cross-sectional studies have a substantial problem in proving causal linkages based on the data obtained within a constrained timeframe [18]. The cross-sectional study methodology used in this Study made it more difficult to understand the causal connections between sexual and gender based on the Study's data; work-related Stress and job satisfaction were identified. The theoretical framework used in the investigation impacted the selection of the predictors and outcome variables.

Conclusion

The work stress results showed that male and female police personnel identified "operational stress" as the most stressful subscales of work-related Stress. However, male officers reported having higher stress levels on the measuring scale than females. This gender difference underscores the higher level of work pressure. To reduce mental strain and provide traffic police officers with time to recover before reporting back for duty the following day, the department should establish a cap on the total number of hours an officer may work on a given day.

Findings from the work stress subscales revealed that the two most highly rated types of work-related Stress were "operational stress" and "impact on significant others," which were reported by both male and female police personnel. In all work stress subscales, female police officers outperformed their male colleagues, with statistically significant differences in "impact on significant others" and "operational stress." Policing is vital to society, and the well-being of police officers should be of great concern to society. Traffic Police are constantly exposed to health hazards due to their occupation.

When comparing sociodemographic factors, it was found that individuals in the 18-27 age range including single and male police officers had elevated COVID-19 stress levels. Being the primary source of COVID-19, the majority of the officers were afraid of foreigners. Concerns about contracting COVID-19 were also reported to be elevated. In light of the

current pandemic, police officers require social support and psychological evaluations.

The research found that the most common fears were those of outsiders, contamination, and compulsive checking. While there is no way to prevent Stress from these situations entirely, individuals may be able to manage their Stress by strengthening their coping mechanisms through training. Owing to COVID-19-related responsibilities, police officers are significantly more likely to experience Stress, anxiety, and depression. The number of working hours per day, discontent with duty hours, fear of the pandemic, and the possibility of catching the coronavirus from COVID-19 duties were all recognized risk factors.

Implication of the Study

The implication of this Study extends to contributing to a deeper understanding of these issues and guiding future research endeavors, particularly in Nepal. This research implication would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between operational Stress and gender, marital status, and rank of the police force. The results of this Study have significant implications for higher-level authorities in enhancing the working environment. These results highlight the need to address substantial stressors at work and as a chronic critical issue in the police work environment.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

This research has examined the operational Stress among police officers during COVID-19. While exploring all these things, this research will cover the limited cities, specifically Lalitpur and Kathmandu. This research was based on the quantitative method of research, which means it is not based on their personal experience; instead, they will be forced to answer the questionnaire. Besides that, this research has not evaluated the overall mental health status of the police officer, nor has it examined their mental health history. Eventually, this research was limited to Nepal police officers; it did not include another rank's stress level. It incorporates the rank from constable to Deputy of the General Police Officer (DIG); all together, there were five officers in this research. Finally, this research is based on the recent situation, which means it needed to dig out the past issues they have faced that might cause today's problems.

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