

A Study of Psychological Well-Being among Police Personnel

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ABSTRACT

This study explores psychosocial well-being among male and female police personnel. Empathy and forgiveness are explored as correlates of psychological well-being. Gender and rank differences on all three variables are also assessed. Personnel in age range of 30 to 45 years, having experience of minimum three years in dealing directly with citizens were selected from Jalandhar range of Punjab police, belonging to Assistant Sub Inspector {ASI} and Sub Inspector {SI} ranks. Respondents were administered Ryff's psychological well-being scale (Ryff & Keyes, 1995), Heartland Forgiveness Scale (Thompson, Snyder & Hoffman, 2005) and Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (Spreng, McKinnon, Mar & Levine, 2009). Descriptive statistics (mean and S.D.), correlation analysis, t-test and 2x2 ANOVA was applied. Results revealed that empathy positively correlate with psychological well-being among police personnel and significant gender differences exist on forgiveness while significant rank differences exist on empathy and psychological well-being.

Keywords: Gender differences, empathy, forgiveness, rank differences, police, psychological well-being

INTRODUCTION

Police is vital part of a country's law and justice system, one that is in charge of ensuring smooth governance. The varied nature of their duty makes them work under conditions that are characterized with high degrees of stress. From dealing with criminals, to deal with personal problems like work life conflict and poor conditions for living, the stressors in life of police personnel are many in number (Kumar & Kamalanabhan, 2014). This scenario makes it necessary to focus on psychological health of men and women in uniform. Therefore, present study was designed to study psychological well-being and its correlates among police personnel.

Psychological well-being is an integral part of overall health of an

individual (Pinfield, 2017). It refers to cultivating personal strengths to the fullest and realizing one's true potential (Oprea, Buijzen & Reijmersdal, 2018). Psychological well-being is viewed in terms of two concepts viz. hedonic well-being and eudaimonic well-being. Hedonic well-being is a broader concept that includes feelings of happiness, life satisfaction and subjective notions of well-being. It refers to the extent and ways in which an individual experience positive emotion and feelings (Diener, 2000). Eudaimonic well-being on the other hand relates to purposeful side of psychological well-being. It focuses on an individual's attainment of meaning in life and self-actualization tendencies (Baselmans & Bartels, 2018). Extensive research in the field of eudaimonic well-

being is carried by psychologist Ryff. She has developed model of psychological well-being (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) that divides the domain into six key parts. It is an extensive model that takes into account the contribution of various dimensions to psychological well-being of an individual.

Empathy and forgiveness are two such variables that are important for police personnel in their line of duty and literature shows that they are closely related to psychological well-being. Empathy is important for police personnel as it helps to shape the interactions of police and members of the communities they are employed to protect (Posick, Rocque & Rafter, 2012). Empathy is an integral capacity (cognitive and emotive), of putting oneself in the place of others (Brunsteins, 2018). Empathy is related to psychological well-being as people with higher empathic tendencies tend to have higher levels of psychological well-being (Acun-Kapikiran, 2011). Empathy relates to psychological well-being in various ways. Empathy involves taking perspective of another individual (Choi et al., 2016) and when an individual is able to understand perspective of another, he is able to have better relationships with others and enhanced self-esteem and life satisfaction. All these factors contribute towards better psychological health (Dogan, Totan & Sapmaz, 2013; Sarkova et al., 2014). However, empathy is not always beneficial for psychological well-being. Stern and Divecha (2015) found that if indulging in empathy becomes default way of living one's life, it can also result in impoverishment of psychological health. It is important to have a balance between self and other individual. Thus, empathy and psychological well-being share a complex yet important relationship.

Forgiveness matters for police personnel even though they work with accused, offenders and convicts. Criminal justice system is based on the rehabilitation of convicts and police is major stakeholder in this process (Lerman, 1999). Forgiveness

refers to transformation in motives and emotions from being hostile and revengeful to advocating retribution and pro social orientation (Wenzel & Okimoto, 2010). Forgiveness by letting go off feelings of victimization and revenge results in reduction of psychological stress (Karremans, Van Lange, Ouwerkerk, & Kluwer, 2003). It replaces negative emotional states with positive ones (Worthington & Scherer, 2004) thus, contributing to psychological health. Forgiveness can be viewed in terms of a human strength that helps individual to sustain or improve psychological well-being (Karremans, Lange, Ouwerkerk & Kluwer, 2003).

Various studies on psychological well-being, empathy and forgiveness have found significant gender differences. Studying gender differences is important as social expectations; roles and rules for both genders are not equal and thus, contribute towards psychological health in unique and different ways for both genders (Roothman, Kirsten & Wissing, 2003). Men are found to have better psychological health and social strains contribute to this difference among men and women (Fuller, Edwards, Vorakitphokatorn & Sermsri, 2005). The roots of gender differences on psychological health lies in various gender roles and expectations resulting from socialization process (Hori, 2010). Gender differences are found to exist in empathy and forgiveness also. Various researchers found that women score better on empathy as compared to men (Klein & Hodges, 2001; Toussaint & Webb, 2005; O'Brien, Konrath, Grünh, & Hagen, 2013). Similarly, women are found to be more forgiving as compared to men (Miller et al., 2008; Kmiec, 2009; Conejero et al., 2014). The reason for gender differences as in psychological well-being lies in differing social roles, expectations and conditions attached to gender.

Psychological well-being of police personnel has attracted attention in the field of research but there is dearth of studies on rank differences on psychological well-

being, empathy and forgiveness. The roles, responsibilities and work conditions of police personnel differ on the basis of their ranks, therefore, it is important to explore rank differences so the work and life conditions for police personnel can be improved depending upon their rank. Psychological health of police personnel has remained a subject of worry for stakeholders' and time and again various researches (Deb, Chakraborty, Chatterjee & Srivastava, 2008; Naik, 2012; Singh & Kar, 2015) have confirmed the lower psychological well-being of police personnel. Therefore exploring any part of their lives that can affect their psychological health is important and present study explores the effect of rank on psychological well-being, empathy and forgiveness in this regard, along with gender differences.

Based on review of literature following hypothesis were proposed

1. Psychological well-being will be positively related to empathy and forgiveness among police personnel.
2. Gender differences on psychological well-being, empathy and forgiveness will exist among police personnel.
3. Psychological well-being, empathy and forgiveness will differ among different ranks of police personnel.

METHOD

Police personnel in the age range of 30 to 45 years employed in Punjab police were contacted for data collection. 300 participants [150 Assistant Sub Inspector {ASI} (75 male and 75 female) and 150 Sub Inspector {SI} (75 male and 75 female)], who met the inclusion criteria, were taken for the final analysis. The data for the study was collected from Jalandhar and Ludhiana ranges of Punjab police, India. Participants were given the standardized scales along with semi schedule questionnaires regarding age, rank and gender.

Inclusion Criteria

- The personnel working in the area for past three years.

- Personnel who had experience of working directly with public.
- Personnel who are graduates and can understand English language.

Exclusion Criteria

- Personnel on leave for a long duration.
- Personnel on deputation to other zones.
- Personnel undergoing any type of psychological treatment.
- Personnel on whom there is any criminal case pending in any court or departmental inquiry.

MEASURES

Psychological Well Being Scale

Psychological Well-Being Scale is a 42 item scale (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). All responses are made on 7-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 7 (strongly disagree). The scale consists of six sub-scales viz. autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life and self-acceptance. The measure has adequate reliability of .70 (Ryff et al., 2007).

Heartland Forgiveness Scale

The Heartland forgiveness scale (Thompson, Snyder & Hoffman, 2005) is an 18-item self-report questionnaire that measures a person's dispositional forgiveness (i.e., the general tendency to be forgiving). It has demonstrated convergent validity, satisfactory internal consistency reliability and strong test-retest reliability.

The Toronto Empathy Questionnaire

The Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (Spreng, McKinnon, Mar & Levine, 2009) consists of 16 questions, and each rated on a five point scale from 'never' to 'often'. The TEQ demonstrated strong convergent validity, and good internal consistency and high test-retest reliability.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The objective of present study was to study psychological well-being among police personnel. Correlational analysis was applied for finding correlates of psychological well-being. 2x2 ANOVA was applied for exploring gender and rank differences on all variables. Descriptive

statistics viz. mean and standard deviation along with t-test were also carried out.

RESULTS

One of the objectives of the present study was to find the relationship between psychological well-being, empathy and forgiveness. The result shows that psychological well-being ($r= 0.16^{**}$, $p \leq 0.01$) and empathy are positively correlated among male and male ASI police personnel.

Another objective of study was to study gender and rank differences among police personnel on variables viz. psychological well-being, empathy and forgiveness. Results obtained from ANOVA show that significant gender differences ($F(1, 296) = 4.84$, $p \leq 0.05$) exist on forgiveness while rank difference is found to be significant on psychological well-being ($F(1, 296) = 6.17$, $p \leq 0.05$) and empathy ($F(1, 296) = 8.32$, $p \leq 0.01$).

Table 1: ANOVA (2x2) summary table of psychological well-being, empathy and forgiveness

Variables	Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-Value
Psychological Well-Being	Rank	5034.80	1	5034.80	6.17*
	Gender	514.83	1	514.83	0.63
	Rank*Gender	439.23	1	439.23	0.53
	Error	241490.26	296	815.84	
	Total	247479.13	299		
Empathy	Rank	358.61	1	358.61	8.32**
	Gender	12.81	1	12.81	0.29
	Rank*Gender	205.01	1	205.01	4.76*
	Error	12746.54	296	43.06	
	Total	13322.54	299		
Forgiveness	Rank	32.67	1	32.67	0.32
	Gender	494.08	1	494.08	4.84*
	Rank*Gender	420.08	1	420.08	4.11*
	Error	30214.4	296	102.07	
	Total	31161.23	299		

**Significant at $p \leq .01$ level *Significant at $p \leq .05$ level

Table 2: Means, Standard Deviations and t-value of psychological well-being, empathy and forgiveness on gender

Variables	Gender				t-value
	Male		Female		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Empathy	41.52	5.99	41.11	7.31	.53
Forgiveness	80.71	8.08	78.14	11.86	2.19*
Psychological well being	140.96	25.67	143.58	31.60	.78

*Significant at $p \leq .05$ level

Table 3: Means, Standard Deviations and t-value of psychological well-being, empathy and forgiveness on rank

Variables	Rank				t-value
	ASI		SI		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Empathy	42.41	5.94	40.22	7.19	2.87**
Forgiveness	79.09	9.32	79.75	11.05	.559
Psychological well being	138.17	27.01	146.37	29.96	2.48*

**Significant at $p \leq .01$ level *Significant at $p \leq .05$ level

DISCUSSION

The current study explores psychological well-being among police personnel. Correlates (empathy and forgiveness) of psychological well-being were assessed along with gender and rank differences on all three variables. Results of correlation analysis show that empathy is positively related to psychological well-

being, partially supporting hypothesis (H1). Results of 2x2 ANOVA show that hypotheses (H2 and H3) are only partially supported. In terms of gender differences, significant differences are found on forgiveness while significant rank differences are found on psychological well-being and empathy.

Empathy is the process of understanding a person's subjective experience by vicariously distributing that experience while maintaining an attentive position (Ioannidou & Konstantikaki, 2008). It is tendency of a person to experience emotions of concern at the suffering of others and to adopt the perspective of another individual. Experiences of empathy thus, makes an individual better equipped to deal with others and varied situations at both cognitive as well as emotional level. Present study reveals that empathy is positively related to psychological well-being, the finding is consistent with various previous researches (Scott, Colquitt,

Paddock & Judge, 2010, Bourgault et al., 2015; Bellosta-Batalla, Pérez-Blasco, Nácher & Moya-Albiol, 2016; Vinayak et al., 2018). Empathy works as a protective factor against distress by preventing the occurrence of negative feelings towards self and others which lead to depressive symptoms (Schreiter, Pijnenborg, & Aan Het Rot, 2013). Model of coping when applied on empathy view it in terms of a coping strategy that assists stress reduction by providing a better emotional understanding, leading to emotional reduction of anxiety and related problems that result from emotion deregulation (Carnicer & Calderon, 2014). Police personnel due to their stressful and harsh work conditions have higher chances of experiencing stress and anxiety related problems. Empathy for them might work as a way to attain better psychological health by regulating the negative emotions arising in their day to day life due to the nature of their work. Individuals' with higher empathy feel their kindness towards other individuals is a good deed that brings happiness in others' lives and this feeling brings positive emotions for their own selves, resulting in better psychological health (Wei, Liao, Ku & Shaffer, 2011).

Individuals who display empathy towards others are also taken in high regard by fellow beings and as a result they have more successful and fulfilling interpersonal relationships and they also get immense social support to deal with any difficult situation in their life (Noda, Takahashi & Murai, 2018), resulting in better psychological well-being. Empathy for others is marked by increased feelings of relatedness, sense of belongingness to community, autonomy, and healthier sense of self to deal with any adverse situation, and thus reduces distress and enhances well-being of an individual. Police personnel go through such feelings as part of their work life on daily basis. They have a sense of belongingness and relatedness as they go on working for betterment of communities they serve and difficult/ harsh working conditions prepare them to deal with

difficult life situations in a better way. As empathy implies to understand others' perspective while remaining detached, it works towards the direction of protecting against damage to psychological well-being (Gerdes & Segal, 2009). Understanding difficult situations of others without getting affected by their consequences also equip an individual to deal with any such situation when it arises in their life. Due to the nature of their job, police personnel deal with various kinds of negative and distressing events. But they may not have to suffer the consequences of such events like the victim being handled by them. They might learn from such situations vicariously which can help them to deal with similar situations more easily as and when they arise.

Results also reveal that there exist significant gender differences on forgiveness among police personnel. The finding is in line with previous researches (Toussiant & Webb, 2005; Kmiec, 2009; Rijavec, Jurcec, Mijocevic & Zagreb, 2010). Men score high on forgiveness as compared to women. The reason for men being better at forgiving than women can be in the way men and women are socially taught to experience emotions. Men are not expected to be dependent on their emotions as much as women, whether in relationships or while making decisions in life. Therefore, any transgression or wrongdoing results in less emotional toll on men, making forgiving easier for them (Benenson & Wrangham, 2016). Men are more forgiving as they focus on their personal benefits, moral obligations for others and goodwill in work and society (Root & Exline, 2011), rather than overindulgence in emotional consequences of adverse situations. Men are easily forgiven by society for their wrong doings while it is less forgiving towards women resulting in men viewing forgiveness as easily achieved and hence can be easily given. Men when feel that being humans, they are also capable of similar actions as the offender, they are more forgiving (Exline, Baumeister, Zell, Kraft & Witvilet, 2008). Moreover, for present study sample

of women are from a sphere of work life that has been traditionally dominated by masculine ideals (Alston, 2017) and forgiveness is traditionally viewed as a feminine behaviour (Ermer & Proulx, 2016). Therefore, in order to preserve their image as being tough for the required job, women may show less signs of being forgiving as compared to men.

In addition to gender differences, rank differences on psychological well-being, empathy and forgiveness were also analysed. Result revealed that ASI and SI rank police personnel differ on their psychological well-being and empathy. SI rank police personnel scored better than ASI rank police personnel on psychological well-being. Personnel of SI ranks has more experience of working in the system and thus have better chances of learning to manage their lives and well-being by not letting the challenges of work life influence any sphere of their well-being. ASI rank on the other hand being the entry point into force for individuals pose more challenges to which they have to learn to adapt. Significant rank differences are also found on empathy. ASI rank personnel have higher levels of empathy as compared to SI rank personnel. When an individual enters the police force, he is motivated to work in accordance to theoretical principles of his duty. Being empathetic towards others is one such principle for police personnel. However, the practical situations arising in the course of work-life may slowly lead to lower levels of empathy as a result of compassion fatigue (Papazoglou, Koskelainen & Stuewe, 2016). Lower empathy in itself is a risk factor for burnout (Duarte, Branco, Raposo, & Rodrigues, 2015), and this circle repeats itself and accumulates over years of duty resulting in lower levels of empathy among police personnel with more years of experience in the force (SI) compared to personnel (ASI) who have comparatively less experience.

One of the limitations of present study is that it only took into account Assistant sub inspector and sub inspector

ranks. For a clearer and broader picture of psychological health of police force, other ranks should also be taken into consideration. In terms of gender differences, the sample belongs to working men and women, for non-working women and working men or working women and non-working men the gender differences might influence psychological well-being, empathy and forgiveness in different ways.

On basis of this study, it can be concluded that empathy and psychological well-being are positively related. Empathy training must be included as a part of police training for better psychological health of men and women in uniform. Study also shows that there exist significant rank differences on empathy and psychological well-being. ASI rank police personnel have lower levels of psychological well-being as compared to their seniors (SI rank), therefore, it must be ensured that the young individuals entering the force (ASI rank) are provided with better environment and help to manage and integrate themselves with the force, so that their psychological well-being can be taken care off. Results revealed that SI rank police personnel are low on empathy in comparison to ASI rank personnel. Stakeholders must ensure that police personnel serving in the force for years could be prevented from long term occupational hazards such as compassion fatigue. Police personnel should be provided with necessary and required counselling and psychological help, so that they can have long and satisfying career with intact psychological health.

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