

PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF WORK CULTURE AMONG POLICE PERSONNEL

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ABSTRACT

Every organization may be private or public organization has their own work culture. Rules and regulations of every workplace are very important as it gives meaning to everybody's lives at work. Work culture has to be strengthened to improve quality of life of the employees. Work culture provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the different sides of work behavior. Sometimes, due to the work culture many person's life has been affected. It can affect the well being of any person physically as well as mentally. Police job is one of the hardest jobs in our society and they faces many problems due to their work culture. In this background, this present paper tried to study how the police work culture affect the well being of a person. Further, it provides factors which can be use as a coping resource.

KEY WORDS: Anxiety, Depression, Police, Psychological Problems, Stress, Work Culture

Introduction:

A person is usually identified by his job and there is no doubt that one's work is an integral part of a person's life. An individual spends many hours in the workplace and remains integrated with it even after through interpersonal relationship with his colleagues. Indians think workplace as an opportunity to build their future and put forth extensive efforts, which results in losing work-life balance (Jhunjhunwala, 2012). What job one does and the work environment greatly influence

his/her attitude, interests, thought process and behavior. This notion has come to focus with research on work culture.

Work Culture:

Work culture can be defined as the general attitude of a group, especially the one which place high morale value on hard work. Work Culture can be divided into two broad patterns, the soft work culture and the synergetic work culture. The soft work culture is a state if it yields to existing economic, political and social structures in formulating and implementing its policies and plans. The example is public sector organizations which play a developmental role for social justice, welfare of employees, employment generation etc. The synergetic work culture focuses on establishing the synthesis between organizational objectives and individual gains. The interdependence of the two helps to create a synergic work culture where the employees at all levels work towards shared goals.

Plans and policies, rules and regulations, missions and goals, facilities and treatment to the employees, style of leadership, reward and recognition and superior and subordinate relationship, all these factors influenced the work culture of any organization. In today's world the work culture decides the success and failure of an organization. Work culture of every organization is different and many employees got affected by the work culture of their organizations.

How Work Culture Affect Personal Life:

Different types of work culture influence differently on one's personal and family life. A probable explanation of this relation can be given by *social identity theory*. Social identity theory posits that the social group to which one belongs sometimes determines his/her relationships and interactions. This notion is well seen in organizational setting as the working environment involves long term contact with colleagues and thus one identifies oneself with the work environment. This identification in turn influences his thinking and behavior. It has been seen that people working in highly pressured work, night shifts, long hours, frequent postings, and managerial works with deadlines tend to face higher physical, psychological and familial problems. Enormous researches has been conducted to understand how work culture affect

personal life both physically and psychologically among various groups like doctors, nurses, bank managers, and BPO employees to name a few. However there is a dearth of study to understand this phenomenon on an important public sector organization, namely, police department. The next section is an attempt to understand the facets of police work culture.

Police Work Culture:

In our society, police is the defensive wall for the inroads of crime. The first thing that comes in mind when some problems happened in the society is the police. The most important duties of police are the maintenance of law and order and prevention of crime in the society. Manning (1989) has defined police culture as a set of 'accepted practices, rules, and principles of conduct that are situationally applied, and generalized rationales and beliefs'. Police job is one of the hardest jobs in our society as they work day and night to protect the society. Due to their work culture, police personnel face many problems which affect their personal well being. How police work culture affect personal well being is discussed in the next section.

How Police Work Culture Affect Personal Well-Being:

Policing is a challenging work with frequent exposure to crime and violence where one's safety is always in peril. There is a constant need to prove themselves as tough, fair and protector of society. Loftus (2010) emphasized a fundamental aspect of police culture, suggesting that officers view themselves as enforcers of the law regardless of whether they are working or not. This shows that they tend to carry their duty even after the office timings unlike other profession. Axel & Valle (1979) have stated that policing is considered as the most psychologically dangerous profession worldwide. Research reveals that police work culture has an influence on the cognitive and behavioral responses of police officers. These responses are not limited to work settings and are carried upon to all personal aspects of their life.

A bunch of physiological problem has been noticed among police officials. Slate et al. (2007) noted that there is a higher occurrence of problems like cancer, heart disease, stomach disorders, high blood pressure, insomnia, headaches, reproductive impediments, foot and back difficulties, among police. The harmful impact is not only limited to physiological conditions but extends to

personal mental health, interpersonal and familial scenario. The psychological impact is seen to be more pronounced and numerous studies have highlighted the concern and emergency to understand it and work on ways for betterment of this important organization.

Psychological Impact of Police Work Culture:

Police work culture influence an individual from many aspects ranging from physical to mental state. However this section is an attempt to understand the psychological impact and thus focus has been given primarily on the mental state of the people associated with this highly pressured work culture. Burke (1994) stated that high level of stress in police work culture results in various negative consequences including deteriorating work performance, low morale, emotional burnout, frustration, depression, anger and even psychosomatic and physical conditions.

Police Personality: Skolnick (1966) stated that as a consequence of the work environment of police especially work conditions like danger, authority, and efficiency, police develop a unique personality which he called working personality. According to him, there exist a perceived similarity in the mindset of police personals and there exist a consistency in the way they look on the world. His work is considered a pioneer in the field of police personality. This notion is supported by another research by Adlan and Gudjonsson (1983) who also found notable similarity in the personality pattern of British police officers. Police frequently come in contact with undesirable or negative section of the society and tends to develop a cynical and distorted view of the society. Above that public did not appreciate their role and are often associated with negative news which might be a reason that there is a strong sense of depersonalization among police personals and do not feel themselves integrated with the society they serve. Skolnick's research (1966) suggested that police officers see the world through distinctive 'cognitive lenses'. This clearly indicates that police work culture molds the perception of society in a particular way.

Stress: The high pressured nature of this job has been discussed above and stress is an unavoidable consequence of such work culture. Of all the psychological impact faced by police officials, stress is considered the most prominent. Many studies have reported high level of stress among police in various states like UK and Brazil (Collins et al., 2003; Lip, 2009). Similar

results were also seen in Indian setting. Deb et al. (2008) conducted a study on stress among traffic police constables of Kolkata. An interesting result was found which showed that 79.4% of the sample reported moderate or high level of stress. Robinson, Sigman and Wilson (1997) conducted a study on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder among police officers and they found that there was a high prevalence rate of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder of up to 13% which was four to six times higher than that of the rest of society. Increasing stress levels among police officers has been attributed to an increase in public expectations, a decline in support from colleagues and a new focus on political correctness and cultural diversity (Scaramella et al, 2011). The pressure of constant watch over their conduct may also work as a key stressor. Evans, Coman, Stanley and Burrows (1993) have investigated methods of coping with stress and concluded that alcoholism, authoritarianism, cynicism, depersonalization and emotional detachment are all methods drawn on by officers in an attempt to manage their emotions.

Depression: Depression, in simple words, means feeling sad but it happens to an extent that it interferes normal functioning. This constant feeling of sadness can lead to many emotional and physical problems. A high prevalence of depression has been observed among police officials. A study conducted by New York Police Department in 1992 found out that depression is one of the primary reasons for police suicide. This trend is seen cross culturally and very much seen among our police officials. Husain (2014) conducted a survey to assess the level of depression on 315 police officials from three districts of Pakistan. He reported that the police officials had severe levels of depression. Kohli and Bajpai (2006) studied frustration, depression and feeling of deprivation on two groups, viz., serving police officials and trainees. A significantly higher degree of depression was seen among the serving police officials as compared to trainee police officials. The difference in the degree of depression clearly indicates that police work culture might be a primary contributor of depression as the newly joined trainees were significantly less depressed. The authors have stated that the pressures faced and the contradictory role performance might be a reason to push policeman into such situation.

Anxiety: Anxiety is considered one of the most commonly found psychological problems among police officials. It is a mood characterized by feelings of fear, uneasiness, worry, unfocused, and often an overreaction to a perceived threat. Anxiety among police officials has long been a focus

of researchers and it has been noted that police are high on anxiety. It can be exemplified by Husain's (2014) study on Pakistani police officials who reveal there was a severe level of anxiety among them. Several studies have associated anxiety with various negative consequences.

Suicide Ideation: Suicide ideation is thoughts associated with committing suicide. These thoughts interfere the day-to-day functioning and decreased productivity. This concept has recently been noticed with people associated high demanding jobs like police. Police personals are among top on the list of suicide groups and suicide rate among police is higher than general population (Aamodt & Stalnaker, 2001). This trend was also seen in Indian scenario and according to a report by National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), 200 cases of police suicide cases were reported from 2006 to 2011 in Maharashtra alone (The Times of India, March 25, 2013). Much attention is needed to understand this psychological condition which is mushrooming among police personals.

Interpersonal and family relations: Kerley (2005) stated that police personnel tend to take their work stress home resulting in negative influence on their interactions with their families. Johnson, Todd and Subramanian (2005) argued that police culture can have a multitude of negative consequences for partner relationships including; inability to express emotion, excessive control at home, paranoia, over-protectiveness, an inability to help with work related problems, and even domestic violence. Kirschman (2000) believed the biggest risk to officers' families is that officers become so self-involved they alienate their families by relying too much on their colleagues for emotional support which does not provide them with adequate coping mechanisms.

Factors Which May Serve as a Positive Resource to Combat These Negative Consequences:

Although police work culture has been associated with an enormous amount of harmful effect on the people working in this department. Several research literature have highlighted negative aspect of police work culture like rigid work environment, high demanding, and frequent association with violence have been often related to negative outcomes as has been discussed above. Does this mean that police work culture takes a toll on its officials? Is there no way to improve it? Slate et al. (2007) stated that there are three means for alleviating police stress:

eradicate the stressors, enhance an officer's ability to cope with the stressors, and provide assistance to the officer who is stressed. This shows that the harmful consequences of working in the highly pressured police department can be deal with in three ways:

Improving the police work culture – It has been well noted that a good, healthy and co-operative work culture not only enhance the performance of the organization but also imbibe positive character and skills to the employees. Police organization is no exception. Providing better working conditions, more transparent working system, less political influence, better vertical communication among officials in different ranks, promoting the feeling of brotherhood, and enhanced welfare facilities would tremendously protect the employees from the ill consequences.

Enhancing the ability to cope on a personal level - Besides improving the work culture, working on enhancing skills of the officials is also considered a must. There are various training programs which help in the development of skills to handle these negative influences in a better and effective manner. There is a plethora of studies which have proved the effectiveness of such programs. A very effective training program was developed by Martin Seligman, the pioneer of positive psychology, called “Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness” which has shown enormous positive results among US soldiers. Hence, some training programs must be associated with this department to enhance the personal skills.

Provide assistance – Last but not the least, an important aspect to improve the mental health of the police officials is organizing different support groups. Research literature has shown the importance of social support on an individual's life. A model of social support known as *the stress buffering model* states that a strong social support serves as a buffer when a person undergoes a stressful life event. Above that “*the direct effect of social support*” has also gain much acceptance which states that social support enhance one's well-being irrespective of whether he person is experiencing stress or not. Both this model shows that having a strong support from family and friends enhance an individual's happiness and work as a shield towards negative events. Anderson (1994) proposed that engagement in positive support groups outside the workplace can help to ameliorate stress for police officers.

Conclusion:

It is well accepted that police work culture is one of the most demanding and has enormous effect on the police official's personal and familial life. More attention has been given on the consequences of various negative and stressful environment of this organization despite the fact that police work culture also imbibes many positive characteristics like courage, bravery, and discipline among them. The researches in this field shed knowledge on the drawbacks and pitfalls of the work culture of this important public organization and these findings should be used to develop implementations on the better functioning and protection of police personals from the negative consequences. Proper psychological screening at the time of job selection, intervention programs to train the officials for more resilient skills, counseling groups and peer groups to counsel them at the time of need, better work culture with more transparency and free communication in the hierarchy of ranks may extremely help in better functioning of police and better mental health of the officials.

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