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Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Among Police Personnel in the Regional Mobile Force Battalion of Cagayan Valley: Basis for a Psychological Resilience and Mental Health Intervention Framework

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Abstract

Police personnel are continuously exposed to occupational stressors that may significantly affect their psychological well-being and professional functioning. This study examined the levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among personnel of the Regional Mobile Force Battalion (RMFB) in the Cagayan Valley Region and determined whether significant differences existed when respondents were grouped according to profile variables. Furthermore, the study explored the lived emotional experiences of police personnel to develop a contextualized psychological intervention framework. The study employed an explanatory mixed-methods research design integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data were gathered using the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21), while qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Statistical analyses included frequency counts, weighted mean, t-test, and one-way ANOVA. Qualitative data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis. Findings revealed moderate levels of anxiety and stress and mild levels of depression among respondents. Significant differences in emotional distress were identified according to age, length of service, marital status, rank, and frequency of field deployment. Qualitative findings generated themes including operational pressure and emotional exhaustion, emotional suppression and occupational resilience, family separation and psychological burden, and institutional support and mental health needs. Based on the findings, a Psychological Resilience and Mental Health Intervention Framework was developed focusing on psychological debriefing, peer support systems, resilience enhancement training, family-centered support initiatives, and institutional counseling mechanisms. The study underscores the necessity of responsive and culturally contextualized mental health programs for uniformed personnel in high-risk occupational environments.

Keywords: *depression, anxiety, stress, police personnel, psychological intervention, occupational stress, mental health, resilience, lived experiences*



1. Introduction

Police work is widely recognized as one of the most psychologically demanding professions due to constant exposure to danger, operational uncertainty, public pressure, and traumatic incidents. Police personnel are frequently required to perform physically and emotionally demanding tasks under unpredictable and high-risk conditions. Consequently, prolonged occupational stress may adversely affect mental health, emotional stability, interpersonal functioning, and work performance.

In the Philippine context, personnel assigned in specialized operational units such as the Regional Mobile Force Battalion (RMFB) encounter intensified occupational pressures due to crowd control operations, anti-criminality missions, disaster response activities, and internal security operations. Continuous exposure to operational risks, long working hours, and emotionally distressing incidents may increase susceptibility to depression, anxiety, and stress.

Depression is characterized by persistent sadness, hopelessness, emotional withdrawal, and reduced motivation. Anxiety refers to excessive worry, physiological tension, and heightened emotional apprehension, while stress involves emotional and psychological strain caused by demanding circumstances. When unmanaged, these psychological conditions may negatively affect police efficiency, decision-making, emotional regulation, and community relations.

Although numerous studies have examined occupational stress among law enforcement personnel, limited research has explored both the measurable emotional states and lived psychological experiences of police officers within the Philippine setting, particularly among RMFB personnel. Understanding both quantitative emotional indicators and qualitative lived experiences is essential in developing responsive mental health interventions.

Anchored on Lazarus and Folkman's Stress and Coping Theory and the Psychological Resilience Framework, this study aimed to assess depression, anxiety, and stress levels among RMFB personnel and develop a contextualized psychological intervention framework based on their emotional experiences and occupational realities.

2. Review of Related Literature

Research consistently demonstrates that police personnel experience elevated levels of occupational stress due to exposure to traumatic incidents, operational hazards, organizational pressure, and public expectations. According to World Health Organization, chronic workplace stress significantly contributes to psychological disorders and reduced occupational functioning.

Studies by Violanti et al. found that police officers experience heightened risks of anxiety, depression, emotional exhaustion, and burnout due to repeated exposure to critical incidents and organizational stressors. Similarly, McCreary and Thompson emphasized that operational and organizational stress negatively influence police officers' psychological resilience and emotional well-being.

Within Asian and Philippine contexts, police personnel often experience additional stress associated with insufficient resources, community pressures, political expectations, and extended operational deployments. Other studies revealed that family separation, sleep deprivation, and emotional suppression contribute significantly to mental health challenges among uniformed personnel.

Qualitative investigations further reveal that police officers frequently conceal emotional distress due to occupational culture emphasizing toughness, emotional control, and resilience. Consequently, many officers experience psychological burdens without adequate support systems.

The literature strongly supports the importance of institutional mental health programs including counseling services, stress management seminars, peer support initiatives, resilience-building activities, and psychological debriefing programs.

3. Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on Lazarus and Folkman's Stress and Coping Theory, which explains that psychological stress results from individuals' appraisal of environmental demands exceeding their coping capacities. The theory highlights the importance of coping mechanisms and emotional adaptation in stressful occupational environments.

The study was likewise grounded on the Psychological Resilience Theory, emphasizing the ability of individuals to adapt positively despite exposure to adversity, trauma, and occupational stressors.

4. Methodology

This study employed an explanatory mixed-methods research design integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to comprehensively examine the depression, anxiety, and stress levels among police personnel assigned to the Regional Mobile Force Battalion (RMFB) in the Cagayan Valley Region. The quantitative component assessed the respondents' emotional states using measurable statistical data, while the qualitative phase further explained and enriched the findings through an exploration of the participants' lived experiences, occupational stressors, coping mechanisms, emotional challenges, and perceived mental health support needs. The participants of the study consisted of police personnel assigned to the RMFB, wherein 130 respondents for the quantitative phase were selected through stratified sampling to ensure representation across demographic and occupational profiles. Meanwhile, 15 participants were purposively selected for in-depth qualitative interviews based on their operational exposure, professional experience, and willingness to participate in the study but 15 respondent found out to have experienced depression. The study utilized the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21) as the primary quantitative research instrument to determine the respondents' levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. For the qualitative component, semi-structured interview guides were employed to gather detailed narratives regarding occupational experiences, emotional burdens, coping strategies, and institutional mental health concerns. Prior to data collection, approval was secured from concerned authorities, and ethical considerations such as confidentiality, informed consent, voluntary participation, and anonymity were strictly observed throughout the conduct of the study. Survey questionnaires were administered personally to the respondents, while interviews were conducted in secure and confidential settings to ensure openness and participant comfort. In analyzing the quantitative data, frequency counts, percentages, weighted mean, t-test, and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were utilized to determine the levels of emotional distress and significant differences according to profile variables. On the other hand, qualitative data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns related to the lived psychological experiences of the respondents.

5. Quantitative Findings

Table 1

Level of Depression Among Police Personnel of the Regional Mobile Force Battalion, Cagayan Valley Region

Indicators	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
Feeling emotionally exhausted	2.41	Mild
Feeling hopeless about work situations	2.18	Mild
Difficulty finding motivation	2.29	Mild
Feeling emotionally withdrawn	2.11	Mild
Experiencing sadness and emotional fatigue	2.47	Mild
Overall Mean	2.29	Mild Depression

Interpretation

Table 1 presents the level of depression among police personnel in the Regional Mobile Force Battalion of the Cagayan Valley Region. Findings revealed an overall mean of 2.29, interpreted as **Mild Depression**. This indicates that while respondents generally maintained emotional functionality, they still experienced occasional feelings of sadness, emotional fatigue, hopelessness, and reduced motivation associated with occupational demands.

Among the indicators, “Experiencing sadness and emotional fatigue” obtained the highest mean of 2.47, suggesting that operational stress and prolonged work exposure contributed to emotional exhaustion. Meanwhile, “Feeling emotionally withdrawn” registered the lowest mean of 2.11, indicating that respondents generally maintained social and professional engagement despite emotional strain.

The findings imply that police personnel are vulnerable to mild depressive symptoms due to occupational stressors, prolonged duty exposure, and operational fatigue. Although the level of depression remained within the mild range, persistent exposure to emotionally demanding situations may increase psychological vulnerability if left unaddressed.

The findings support the study of Violanti et al., who explained that repeated exposure to operational stressors contributes to emotional exhaustion and depressive symptoms among police officers. Similarly, World Health Organization emphasized that prolonged occupational stress significantly affects emotional stability and psychological functioning among high-risk professionals.

Table 2

Level of Anxiety Among Police Personnel of the Regional Mobile Force Battalion, Cagayan Valley Region

Indicators	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
Feeling worried during operations	3.26	Moderate
Difficulty relaxing after deployment	3.11	Moderate

Indicators	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
Feeling tense in high-risk situations	3.42	Moderate
Overthinking operational uncertainties	3.35	Moderate
Feeling nervous during field assignments	3.18	Moderate
Overall Mean	3.26	Moderate Anxiety

Interpretation

Table 2 presents the level of anxiety among police personnel. Results revealed an overall mean of 3.26, interpreted as **Moderate Anxiety**. This suggests that respondents frequently experienced emotional tension, nervousness, and excessive worry associated with operational uncertainty and high-risk assignments.

The indicator “Feeling tense in high-risk situations” obtained the highest mean of 3.42, indicating that operational dangers significantly contributed to heightened anxiety levels among respondents. Conversely, “Difficulty relaxing after deployment” registered the lowest mean of 3.11, although still interpreted as moderate, suggesting persistent emotional carryover following operational activities.

The findings indicate that anxiety emerged as the most prevalent emotional condition among police personnel due to unpredictable operational environments, safety concerns, and continuous exposure to potentially dangerous situations.

The findings corroborate the study of McCreary and Thompson, who emphasized that operational police stress significantly contributes to anxiety and emotional strain among law enforcement personnel. Likewise, studies by Purba and Demou revealed that operational uncertainty and traumatic exposure increase anxiety vulnerability among police officers.

Table 3
Level of Stress Among Police Personnel of the Regional Mobile Force Battalion, Cagayan Valley Region

Indicators	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
Feeling mentally exhausted after operations	3.18	Moderate
Difficulty balancing work and family life	3.07	Moderate
Feeling pressured by operational demands	3.39	Moderate
Experiencing physical and emotional fatigue	3.29	Moderate
Feeling overwhelmed during prolonged deployment	3.33	Moderate
Overall Mean	3.25	Moderate Stress

Interpretation

Table 3 presents the level of stress among police personnel. Findings revealed an overall mean of 3.25, interpreted as **Moderate Stress**. This indicates that respondents frequently experienced emotional and psychological strain associated with demanding operational responsibilities and prolonged field assignments.

Among the indicators, “Feeling pressured by operational demands” obtained the highest mean of 3.39, suggesting that work expectations and operational intensity significantly contributed to stress levels. Meanwhile, “Difficulty balancing work and family life” registered the lowest mean of 3.07, although still interpreted as moderate, indicating that occupational responsibilities continued to affect family and personal functioning.

The findings suggest that police personnel experience sustained occupational stress resulting from operational workload, deployment schedules, and emotional demands. Persistent exposure to stressful operational environments may negatively affect mental health and professional functioning when insufficient recovery mechanisms are available.

The findings align with the study of Shane, which revealed that police officers frequently experience chronic stress associated with operational exposure and organizational pressure. Similarly, Garbarino et al. explained that prolonged stress exposure among police personnel contributes to emotional fatigue, burnout, and psychological strain.

Table 4
Significant Difference in Depression, Anxiety, and Stress When Grouped According to Profile Variables

Profile Variables	Depression value	p- Anxiety value	p- Stress value	p- Interpretation
Age	0.021	0.018	0.015	Significant
Length of Service	0.014	0.009	0.011	Significant
Marital Status	0.033	0.027	0.030	Significant
Rank	0.025	0.019	0.022	Significant
Frequency of Operational Deployment	0.006	0.004	0.005	Significant

Level of Significance = 0.05

Interpretation

Table 4 presents the significant differences in depression, anxiety, and stress when respondents were grouped according to profile variables. Findings revealed that all identified profile variables obtained p-values lower than the 0.05 level of significance, indicating statistically significant differences in respondents' emotional states.

Results indicate that age significantly influenced emotional distress, with younger personnel demonstrating heightened anxiety and stress associated with adjustment pressures and operational adaptation. Length of service likewise showed significant differences, suggesting that prolonged exposure to operational environments contributes to cumulative psychological strain.

Marital status emerged as another significant factor, implying that family responsibilities and work-family conflicts may influence emotional well-being. Rank also significantly affected emotional states, possibly due to varying leadership responsibilities and operational expectations across hierarchical positions.

Notably, frequency of operational deployment obtained the lowest p-values, indicating that repeated field exposure strongly influences depression, anxiety, and stress levels among police personnel. Personnel with frequent deployments experienced greater emotional exhaustion and operational strain.

The findings suggest that demographic and occupational characteristics significantly shape the psychological well-being of police personnel. Continuous operational exposure and organizational demands may heighten emotional vulnerability among uniformed personnel.

The findings support the study of Violanti et al., who found that operational exposure and occupational demands significantly affect police officers' psychological health. Similarly, Karaffa and Koch emphasized that demographic and occupational variables influence stress vulnerability and emotional functioning among law enforcement personnel.

6. Qualitative Findings

Theme 1: Operational Pressure and Emotional Exhaustion

Participants described operational duties as emotionally and psychologically exhausting.

One participant shared:

"Every deployment carries uncertainty, and prolonged exposure to dangerous situations becomes mentally draining."

Another respondent explained:

"There are times when physical fatigue becomes emotional exhaustion because of continuous operations."

The findings indicate that operational demands contribute significantly to emotional stress and psychological fatigue.

Theme 2: Emotional Suppression and Occupational Resilience

Participants revealed that police culture often discourages open emotional expression.

One participant remarked:

"As police officers, we are expected to stay strong even when emotionally affected."

Another respondent stated:

"Sometimes we suppress emotions because showing vulnerability may be seen as weakness."

The findings suggest that emotional suppression may intensify psychological burden despite outward resilience.

Theme 3: Family Separation and Psychological Burden

Participants emphasized the emotional effects of prolonged duty assignments and family separation.

One officer explained:

"Being away from family during operations creates emotional stress and loneliness."

Another participant stated:

"Family concerns remain in our minds while performing dangerous duties."

The findings demonstrate that family-related concerns significantly affect emotional well-being.

Theme 4: Institutional Support and Mental Health Needs

Participants emphasized the importance of institutional mental health support systems.

One participant shared:

“Regular counseling and stress debriefing would greatly help police personnel.”

Another officer remarked:

“Mental health programs should become part of police organizational support.”

The findings underscore the necessity of proactive institutional psychological interventions.

7. Discussion

The study confirms that police personnel experience considerable occupational psychological distress due to operational risks, emotional suppression, and demanding work conditions. Consistent with Stress and Coping Theory, emotional strain emerges when occupational demands exceed coping resources.

The significant differences across profile variables indicate that operational exposure and demographic characteristics influence mental health vulnerability. Younger and operationally exposed personnel may experience greater adjustment-related anxiety and stress.

Qualitative findings deepen understanding of police officers’ emotional realities by revealing emotional suppression, family-related stress, operational exhaustion, and the need for institutional support. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings highlights the importance of holistic and context-sensitive psychological interventions for uniformed personnel.

Proposed Psychological Intervention Framework

Psychological Resilience and Mental Health Intervention Framework

1. Psychological Debriefing Program

- Post-operation debriefing sessions
- Trauma-processing interventions
- Emotional processing workshops

2. Peer Support and Counseling Mechanisms

- Peer support groups
- Confidential counseling services
- Mental health referral systems

3. Resilience Enhancement Training

- Stress management seminars
- Emotional resilience workshops
- Mindfulness and coping strategy training

4. Family-Centered Support Initiatives

- Family counseling sessions
- Family engagement activities
- Work-family balance programs

5. Institutional Mental Health Policy Strengthening

- Integration of mental health protocols
- Mental health awareness campaigns
- Regular psychological wellness assessments

8. Conclusion

The study revealed that police personnel in the Regional Mobile Force Battalion of the Cagayan Valley Region experience varying levels of depression, anxiety, and stress influenced by operational exposure and demographic factors. Significant differences were observed across selected profile variables, highlighting the complexity of psychological distress among uniformed personnel. Lived experiences further revealed emotional exhaustion, occupational resilience, emotional suppression, and the urgent need for institutional mental health support systems. The proposed Psychological Resilience and Mental Health Intervention Framework provides a responsive and contextualized approach to strengthening psychological wellness programs among police personnel.

9. Implications of the Study

The findings may help:

- Police institutions strengthen mental health services;
- Administrators implement proactive psychological wellness programs;
- Policymakers formulate mental health-supportive organizational policies;
- Counselors develop contextualized intervention programs for uniformed personnel;
- Police personnel improve emotional resilience and coping strategies.

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