

**THE EFFECTS OF OCCUPATIONAL STRESS ON SERVICE DELIVERY AMONG THE
NATIONAL POLICE OFFICERS IN NAIROBI CITY COUNTY, KENYA**

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ABSTRACT

Occupational stress is a known cause of myriad negative effects in most public sector institutions across the globe, the Kenyan national police officers being among them. The study, based on this sought to examine the effects of occupational stress among Nairobi City County's national police officers on their service delivery. A descriptive research design was adopted for the study, a total target population was 3524, and a sample of 374 was finally used. Questionnaires were used to collect qualitative and quantitative data that were eventually analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Ethical considerations of anonymity and confidentiality were adhered to. It was thus found that occupational stress affects officers in both personal and professional spaces, caused by work-related pressures, fuelled by political interest, low number of human resources, inadequate time to socialize with friends and relatives, and negative perceptions among officers on their jobs. Moreover, pressures during emergencies cause trauma due to dire negative experiences, among others. All these occurrences negatively affect the quality of service delivery among the police officers in Nairobi City County, calling for reforms that involve the provision of psychosocial support to tackle stressors from the occupation, build mental resilience, and improve service delivery. Moreover, there is a need to add Human resources, to ease work time pressure, and provide a conducive environment for economic, social, and emotional growth.

Keywords: *Occupational Stress, Police, Service Delivery*

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

On matters of security, the police are the fundamental unit in ensuring there is security within a country. The national police is the formal institution tasked with the authority to ensure that internal security issues are in check. Majorly, they ensure there is justice and maintain law and order within designated jurisdictions. They are the street-level bureaucrats that ensure the citizens are safe and the government smoothly runs.

To achieve the legitimacy of any political regime, the satisfaction of the citizen in terms of their safety is key, making the police service a critical component in governance. However, despite their critical role, they are reported to face myriad challenges in their occupation such as limited number of human resource to meet their goal of maintaining law and order and securing justice for victims of crime and violence, and their vulnerability on acquisition and use of critical equipment in their day to day operations (Cruz, 2010 and Vargas, 2012).

With time since the post-cold war era, the police service in both the Northern European and Western countries have implemented reforms aimed at changing the police service structure, its organization, operations and how it is governed (Fyfe *et al.*, 2013). In Scotland and Netherlands, police reforms began in 2013, transformations changing the police service through legislations (Scotland Act 2012 on the Police and Fire Reform and the Netherlands Police Act 2012) in Netherlands to a centralized police service system, with the critical area of focus being local policing, a move that called for more changes in the police service on intrapersonal skills and social support (Terpstra, 2013). The reforms in the two countries were case studies, analyzed based on their reform similarities and the eventual effects on service delivery.

An analysis carried out in 2026 revealed that despite the police reforms that spread globally, post-2024 reported a rise of civilian fatalities from police encounters (World Bank, 2016), particularly in countries such as Brazil, Venezuela, Syria, and Jamaica (United Nations Security Council, 2020). An outcry to investigate psychosocial effects affecting the police service delivery came into play, one being an inquest into their occupational environment.

In the Asian region, the changes were focused on transforming the colonial style of Administration, to eliminate the rule by a few elites and usher in one that is democratic and allowed for participation by the members of the public (Shahjahan, 2016). This resulted in a boost of the police psychosocial aspect of their duties which led to effective delivery of services. The police service culture was thus transformed through the review and enactment of legal frameworks, re-organization of the service, and introduction of favorable regulations. Moreover, other aspects were introduced to boost the police service delivery. These included: intrapersonal traits, and improving the working ecology to eliminate woes that derailed their value among citizens, such as corruption, and the pursuit of personal interests at the expense of the general public (Jackson, Bradford, Stanko & Hohl, 2013).

Malaysian National police service reported by Shahjahan (2016) faced myriad challenges that affected their service delivery. The police officers worked in uncondusive environments which hyped their level of personal and work-related stressors. They too received minimal social support in their day-to-day duties, had inadequate intrapersonal skills to tackle the challenges that came with their profession, and in cases of distress, they were unable to access adequate mental health support.

The African continent had its share of inadequacy among the police force that required reforms, especially after independence. The struggle by the countries to oust colonial power was riddled with suppression of the native countries, and this was more pronounced in Mozambique, Angola, South Africa, and Kenya. This was imported to the post-colonial government and implemented by the subsequent opposition parties, the police being at the center of the process, who adopted all other regimes (Community Policing Information Booklet, 2017; Osse & Cano, 2018).

According to Afolabi *et al.*, (2016), the Nigerian Police force is characterized by incompetent and incapacitated personnel, thanks to little effort by the government to professionalize the force that is already struggling with organizational and structural drawbacks. As a result, the country reports heightened crime rates compared to other countries in the region. The police are reportedly reckless in their attitude and actions, causing mistrust between the force and the citizens. The recklessness has been reported to stem from occupational stressors, negating adequate service delivery. Moreover, a weak government, massive levels of ignorance, insufficient, and sometimes lack of political and social support characterize the country's police service, hence, poor service delivery (Ajike, 2014).

Kenya, according to The East African Bribery Index Report (2014), the Kenya Police was ranked 35th institution out of 115 in the corruption index. Among the 35 institutions in the county, the police was leading. Most of the public complaints were blamed on the police with 77 percent more complaints reported in 2020 compared to 2011 (World Bank, 2020). These reports are consequently affecting the police service delivery, root causes traced back to occupational stressors in the Police service.

According to Edmunds (2014), the Kenya National police officers are reported to undergo challenges, some of them being poor working environment, insufficient political and social support, poor compensation strategies targeting work-related stressors, and mental distress, calling for further analysis of the police service wholesome work environment and how it affects service delivery. A World Bank (2016) study pointed out that work-related stressors such as limited psychosocial support, stressful working environment coupled with long working hours and limited leave days, and officer's interests are directly correlated with poor service delivery.

Since 2004, Kenya's police service has been undergoing numerous police reforms. Among them are restructuring, a raise in budgetary allocations, an increase in the number of human resources in the service, and increased infrastructure through the increase in police stations across the country (Elverson & Hoglund, 2019). Despite these reforms, some forces continuously push the force to transform, emanating from globalization, changes in the population, issues of rural-urban migration, the rising adoption and use of information technology across the country, influences from both formal and informal media houses, activism, rise in radicalization and terrorist activities among others, which eventually influence the level of stress within the police force and the subsequently, service delivery (Human Right Watch, 2019).

Work-related stressors among the police officers have been evident from several reports. According to Jerop *et al.* (2019), the national police reservists in Baringo County faced occupation stressors that were positively correlated with their job performance. The stressors emanated from supervisory hitches, excessive workload, strains in the formal working environment, and inadequate training.

In Nakuru County, Jonyo (2015) contends that an effective and adequately functioning police service is key to security and its related advantages such as peace and adequate law enforcement. However, the Police officers within the county have recorded below expectations for an extended period. The drawback is blamed on slow career progression, inadequate timely training, low levels of remuneration, poor standard operating procedures, and lack of job satisfaction. Consequently, catalyzing job-related stress among the police officers in the county, negating their work performance.

In Nairobi County, the performance of officers in the National police officers was rated below expectations. A survey among the members of the public in the county indicated that the police service was riddled with poor responses to complaints filed by citizens, higher levels of absenteeism, regular arrests that do not conform to formal standards, and minimal time dedicated to formal duty. However, the behavior was correlated to their street-level constraints such as working in an environment prone to constant danger to their lives, personal stressors from inadequate remuneration and time for social and family life, and organizational hurdles that affect their service delivery quality. Intrapersonal stressors were therefore noted to have a

significant correlation with the National Police officer's job performance in the county (Chepkemoi and Wabala. 2022).

Nereah and Njiru (2022) while investigating traumatic stress disorders among police officers in Nairobi County recounted that the officers' work environment highly predisposes them to traumatic events. Their encounters in crime and violent scenes, and psychologically traumatizing events, among other adverse experiences in most instances cause post-traumatic stress disorders among the police officers, which was rated 18 percent in Nairobi County. Based on that background, therefore, the study sought to investigate the effects of occupational stress among the National Police service officers in Nairobi City County, Kenya

Statement of the Problem

Occupational stress is the situations, events, and experiences within the work environment that can cause psychological, physiological, and behavioral manifestations of stress that can eventually affect an individual's long-term health and performance in the workplace. These occupational stressors include for instance strain at the workplace which causes burnout, imbalance in the effort put to work performance for reward purposes, long hours of work, and conflict from the family, acute traumatic injuries, depression, unhealthy behaviors, among others (Landsbergis et al. 2022).

Among the police officers Polleh (2024) while analyzing occupational stress and its relationship with job satisfaction in Nairobi reported that the county had an elevated level of occupational stress among the police officers. The stress affected the officer's reaction speeds to public complaints, their decision-making ability, and their capacity to handle challenging situations. Consequently, the morale and motivation of the officers drop, calling for efforts to reduce work-related stressors among the police service.

Hassan (2023) analyzed how psychosocial factors affected service delivery in the Central police division, Nairobi. It was found that the officers carried out their duties for long hours, causing burnout, and stress, negatively affecting the officers' productivity. Chepkemoi and Wabala (2022) on job stressors among the police in Nairobi reported that lack of sound physical and mental health affected policing strategies, coupled with the rising demand of expectations from the citizens.

Studies have been carried out among the police service officers in Nairobi, on occupational stressors, but there is limited literature on its effect on service delivery. Mwasala, Asatsa, and Muasa (2024) investigated job burnout and its prevalence among police officers in the county. Kibet (2024) focused on counseling services among rapid deployment units in Nairobi County, while Buuri (2012) focused on the perception of stress levels among the administrative police officers in the county. This thus created a research gap that called for a study to determine the effects that work-related stressors have on the national police service and service delivery.

Objective of the Study

The study was guided by the following objective; to investigate the effect of occupational stress on national police service delivery in Nairobi County, Kenya

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive research design to collect, synthesize, and correctly interpret data. The positive side of a descriptive inquiry is that it is utilized to determine and report reality without any form of modification of acquired information (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003). The study was carried out in Kenya's Nairobi City County, targeting its 9 sub-counties of Makadara, Westlands, Njiru, Lang'ata, Kasarani, Dagoretti, Starehe, Embakasi and Kamukunji. Nairobi City County was chosen due to its reported high crime rates, high population, constant robbery, homicides by some officers, and defilement, among others such as high corruption rates. The study targeted 3524 National police service officers, as presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Target Population

Category of Officers	No. of Respondents
Kenya Police Service(KPS)	2000
Administration Police Service(APS)	1500
Officers Commanding Police Division(OCPD)	12
DAPCS	9
Directors of police reforms	3
Total	3524

Source: National Police Service Report (2023)

The researcher utilized both purposive and stratified random sampling techniques. A sample size of 10 percent was chosen, according to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), who reiterated that 10-30 percent of the targeted population is fit for an exploratory and descriptive study. A sample of 374 was included in the study. Semi-structured questionnaires were used to collect data from the KPS, PCPDs and the APs while the DAPCs and the police director were interviewed. Collected data was then analyzed, with the aid of SPSS software, using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics for quantitative data and content analysis for qualitative data.

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \varepsilon$$

Where,

Y =Service Delivery

X₁= occupational stress

ε =Error Term

The researcher also adhered to the required ethical considerations. A research permit was sought from the National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI), and confidentiality and anonymity were also adhered to.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research response rate: The study's targeted sample response rate was 79.8 percent. This consisted of 88.0 percent of the KPS officers, 64 percent of the Aps, 75.0 percent of the OCPD, 66.7 percent of the police reform directors, and 100 percent of the DAPCs.

Demographic Characteristics: There were 74.7 percent male and 25.3 percent female respondents, indicating the domination of males among the respondents. Their age brackets were 20.5 percent for those within 18-28, 4.1% aged 29-39, while a majority were between 40 and 50 and 4.4% aged 51-60 years. The majority of the respondents (40-50 years) were mature and experienced workforce. This age bracket, according to Quick and Henderson (2016), is mostly experienced and developed with an ability to manage stress compared to their younger counterparts. This is based on their understanding of their job's complexities over time, but some, due to the exposure, may succumb to occupational stressors that affect their service delivery (Cooper & Cartwright, 1994).

With regards to the respondent's highest academic level, a majority (86.3%) had attained a Bachelor's degree, 9.9% had a master's degree, 3.3% had a diploma and 0.4% were PhD Holders. Moreover, the respondents' work experiences ranged from less than five years reported by 3.4%, 6.8% had worked in the national police service between 6-10 years, and 3.4%, for 11-15 years. However, the majority (86.3%) had worked for over 16 years, making the respondents' information credible for the study. according to Terrill & Paoline (2013), an experienced workforce amounts to a human resource that has a strong understanding, not only of their roles, but challenges that come with their duties, can easily come up with effective coping mechanisms to manage stress, and their decision-making abilities are more credible.

Occupational stress among National police officers

Globally, stress has been a significant health challenge, that has affected many employees, but more specifically among the service providers such as the health care givers, teachers, media practitioners all sectors in the police service. Stress in several studies has been reported as a silent killer, affecting the health of service providers, by causing emotional, physical, and mental disorders (Oweke, Muola, and Ngumi(2014), Thus affecting their performance in service provision. This study sought to determine these stressors and their effects on the National Police service providers.

In Nairobi City County, occupational stress has been reported to affect the well-being of officers, in both their personal and professional spaces. To understand the concept of stress among the officers, the study sought to understand these stressors: Organizational changes and changes in workstations were reported as some of the stressors. The study thus found that the officers' level of confidence in adapting to organizational changes was moderate (Mean = 3.0614, SD = 0.68470), similar to their enthusiasm about transformation (Mean = 3.8976, SD = 0.47876). Additionally, the respondents' optimism level was fair (Mean = 3.8976, SD = 0.30368) and a higher majority could question assumptions on innovations (Mean = 3.8976, SD = 0.30368) without fear. However, despite this positivity, a fair section of the respondents reported having undergone stress in the course of their duty (Mean =3.7406, SD = 0.43200).

The causes of stress at work among the National Police officers were work-related pressures, especially those fuelled by political interests, reported by 27.5% of the respondents, limited number of human resources at working stations to amicably meet the demand for the services by the members of the public (15.6%). 12.2% noted that the nature of their work does not allow them to have quality time with friends and family, and 14.5 % reported negative perceptions towards their formal roles. This outcome is in agreement with other previous studies: Hassan's (2020) study reported unpredictable political pressure, and Bartels (2020) found that stress due to political influence caused stress, and repercussions from the members of the public in their scrutiny of their actions.

The respondents pointed out that the primary stressor was pressure during emergencies that come with traumatic experiences while on duty. The work routine in certain instances is highly unpredictable, with long hours on duty, putting pressure on individuals, and causing burnout, due to work overload. Working in highly conflicting situations that predispose them to trauma, injury, and in some instances loss of their colleagues. Moreover, all the respondents agreed that they are facing myriad stressors at the workplace, which has in one way or another affected their mental, emotional, and physical well-being and consequently affected their work performance due to exhaustion physically, and low morale.

Previous studies have highlighted the effect of work-related stressors on job performance. Bishar and Ramay (2019) reported a correlation between work-related stress and performance in the Pakistani Banking sector, by Kitole, Idua, and Matata (2021) and Mbinya and Mose (2022) in Kenya public sector institutions, Chege (2022) in a study on Kenya National Youth service employees found that work stress had a significant effect on service productivity and delivery. The stressors were blamed on frequent supervisor abuse (50.5%), frequent supervisor run-ins (2.97%), and sexual harassment (58%). High stress lessened workplace concentration and reduced creativity.

Other stressful factors reported that affect service delivery in Kenya National Police service were poor working environment, evidenced by inadequate infrastructure, means of transportation, poor management practices, poor organizational culture, and insecure work environments. This was also reported by Nalishwa (2022) in a study carried out in the Zambian police force and was determined that occupational stress was prevalent among the CID.

These results call for measures to address these occupational stressors among police officers in Nairobi City County, This will require targeted interventions, and the creation of mechanisms for support to reduce mental

distress and handle officers' well-being. Additionally, the welfare of the officers needs to be revised, to take care of the requirements needed for their day-to-day duty, inclusive of physical infrastructure, psychosocial support, and reliable mechanisms to tackle bullying. This will reduce stress and in turn, improve service delivery.

A regression analysis was carried out to determine the relationship between occupational stress and service delivery among the national police officers, and the results are presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.862 ^a	.742	.738	1.54353

a. Predictors: (Constant), Occupational stress,

The correlation coefficient (R) of 0.862 indicates a strong positive correlation between the independent variables (occupational stress) and the dependent variable (service delivery). This suggests occupational stressors are strongly associated with changes in service delivery within the NPS in Nairobi City County.

CONCLUSION

Occupational stressors among police service officers emanate from different sources, ranging from social, economic, and political factors. The higher the stress, the poorer the services delivered by the officers, thus, there is a need to resolve the root causes of the stressors, provide avenues to access psychosocial support, and invest in aspects that will lead to effective service delivery

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