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On-the-Job Stress: Interventions to Improve the Occupational Well-being of Policewomen in Assam, India

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Abstract

This article discusses the results of a study with an all-women police station and other police stations in Guwahati, Assam, India, considering their occupational stress and hazards related to womanhood issues. In this descriptive study, a sample of 30 women police was selected by purposive sampling and analyses were performed using responses to a questionnaire method and individual/group meetings. Well-being as well as levels of satisfaction leading to the commitment of the policewomen to their organization have been identified. A majority opined about experiencing occupational stress/hazards related to issues specific to womanhood. Ergonomic, on-the-job criteria, and appropriate design interventions, may address their stress and related concerns. Women's hygiene specific issues in the workplace was a major concern. A few remedial design attempts have been proposed and some such improvements have been implemented by authorities to upgrade the women's police station. In addition to the physical and mental well-being of existing policewomen enabling them to perform their duties effectively and efficiently, such sympathetic developments have created a positive niche to motivate more young women to enter the police force.

Keywords: Indian policewomen, occupational stress and discomfort, womanhood issues

Introduction

Today in India, many women are striving for equality with men outside of the home, including making contributions to the nation by entering into once male-dominated professions such as the police force. Considered as one of the more masculine occupations, the job of police personnel is indeed a challenging one, which encompasses uncertainty in many areas, including long hours of duty, sudden, unexpected deployments and exposure to unavoidable risky circumstances, to name a few. In the prevailing socio-cultural arrangement, policewomen are often overstrained and thus, find it difficult to maintain equilibrium between their job and homemaking responsibilities. This raises some situational concerns about the women in police service, including universal gender bias within the police force; the contexts/situations that police women are compelled to bear while satisfying their job responsibilities.

The empowerment of women requires a multidimensional approach. In India, sources of change are evident across many platforms including Women's Studies scholarship and activism, which has become a vital outlet to express directions for change. Similarly, the Government has

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promoted a sequence of pioneering tactics to ensure equal opportunities and empowerment of women in all respects. (Srinivasa & Siddegowda, 2015). Within the police force, the Government of India has emphasized quotas for hiring women police up to 33% (the Parliament of India to the Ministry of Home Affairs or MHA, 2014-15). To achieve this goal necessitates augmented capacity building, and attitudinal and behavioural changes to empower women within the police force. Women Police are an integral part of police organizations globally; in India there has been a moderate increase in the number of policewomen. Assam, the largest of the North-eastern states of India, ranks last—at 36—with the lowest percentage of women in the police force (0.93%), vs. Chandigarh, in 2015, with the highest percentage of 14.60%; (Rao, 2015). The reasons for these are varied, including common social attitudes toward women, the general perception of police force being an utterly male domain, policy level hurdles such as the recruitment process, promotion and retention, including—importantly—the lack of the most basic of facilities such as toilets and housing. Beyond this, policies regarding maternity leave and child care have not been addressed (Rao, 2015). Consequently, serious attention and interventions must emerge, to address women's compromised occupational well-being, including health hazards that create stress for women currently in the force. Some of these needs include separate barracks for rest, day care facilities and toilet facilities.

The improvement of specific aspects of the workplace environment in every police station has begun to accrue attention, including ergonomic design interventions of facilities and basic amenities. The goal is to facilitate the interaction of human beings (policewomen) with their job responsibilities in their existing environments. Ergonomics and ergonomic design in general intend to enhance the human performance by providing them with lesser stress and better workspace, leading to better productivity and safety. In this context, our present research attempted to identify occupational stress factors and hazards experienced by women police officers in the workplace from the perspective of ergonomics and design intervention feasibilities, including assessment of the prerequisites for a stress-free workplace environment for policewomen.

Methodology

The study is based on primary data and secondary data. Primary data were compiled from survey-based personal interviews and individual responses to a subjective assessment questionnaire. Secondary data were amassed from the office of the Commissioner of Police, journals, newspapers, articles and other published sources. The questionnaire was administered (Table1) to thirty women police personnel (n = 30, selected by purposive, non-probability sampling) of different ranks posted in the Pan Bazar Police Station (Guwahati, Assam, India), after explaining the purpose of the study and obtaining their individual, informed consent.

The design of the study was descriptive in nature, wherein we attempted to assess the occupational concerns, health hazards, and stress policewomen experience in their workplace. The “workplace” extended to their out-station duties including patrolling, traffic duty, and the like. Individual interviews (audio recording with individual informed consent) were collected to seek follow-up information and opinions. The interview schedule helped us to explain the purpose of the survey to the respondents and anticipate gathering relevant information. Later, after analysing the responses of the questionnaire and interviews, some possible design interventions were shared with higher authorities with a two-dimensional (2D, drawing on paper) schematic working plan suggesting the framed interventions towards a better working condition of women in the police station.

Table 1. Participant response questionnaire for subjective assessment of workplace and on-job amenities

Part A: Exposure to occupational and environmental stress and perceived well-being	
Please use the following response scale to indicate the extent to which you agree with each statement regarding your job satisfaction. Please choose the scale that is most closely applicable for each statement: (1) Strongly agree; (2) Agree; (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree; (4) Disagree and (5) Strongly disagree	
1	Law enforcement is generally regarded as a masculine job, however, we feel that convenience is equally important for us
2	Consecutive shifts / intermittent repetitions of Administrative work are common
3	Staff shortages cause stress
4	Lack of resources cause stress
5	Unequal sharing of work responsibilities cause stress
6	Shift work causes stress for women's situations such as pregnancy, lactation and menstruation
7	Traumatic events affect psychophysical health
8	Social life outside the job is impacted by duty regimen
9	Occupation-related health issues in special cases like pregnancy, expecting mother, lactating mother, menstruation period
10	Not finding time to stay in good physical condition
11	Feelings like you are always on the job and other responsibilities are compromised
12	Working beyond working hours introduces boredom
13	Noisy work areas
14	Frequent interruptions bring disturbance in the work place
15	Inadequate or poor quality equipment/maintenance
16	Unfair work environment
17	Lack of a modern systems/apparatus on duty
18	Occupational health issues (e.g. back pain, neck pain, joint pain)
19	A solid infrastructure brings satisfactions while doing work
20	Lack of resources in professional/promotional
21	Working alone at night is risky, and I don't feel safe
22	Prolong standing affects physical health
23	Lack of separate modular convenience/prompt service utilities in every police station
24	Basic amenities such as isolated /separate restrooms and child care units are still a major requirement for women police personnel
25	Lack of residential accommodations, seen as one of the major impediments faced by women in joining police force
26	I am involved in outdoor activities such as patrolling, security duty on several occasions, touring in and outside the district where mobile convenience facility is a compulsory requirement, which I do not have in most cases.

27	Crèches/day care centres in the police station for working mothers will help them to take care of their children
Part B: On-the-job satisfaction	
Please respond to the following statements to indicate the extent to which you agree with each regarding your job satisfaction. Please choose 'Yes' or 'No' for each statement.	
1	Public attitudes towards women police is awkward
2	There is a lack of separate utility facilities in police stations
3	Problems related to training
4	Govt. accommodations for women's issues
5	Difficulties faced in upbringing of children—day care centre is essential
6	Need to have a better working environment in terms of infrastructure
7	Provision of separate toilet facilities at all offices/outposts
8	A modular mobile convenience facility while on outdoor duty is an immediate need
Part C: On-the-job Burn-Out	
Please use the following response scale to indicate the extent to which you agree with each statement regarding your job satisfaction. Please choose the scale that is most closely applicable for each statement: (1) Strongly agree; (2) Agree; (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree; (4) Disagree and (5) Strongly disagree	
1	My work is emotionally exhaustive
2	I feel burnt out because of my work.
3	My work frustrates me.
4	I feel burn out at the end of the working day.
5	I feel exhausted in the morning only by the thought of another similar day at work.
6	I feel quite energetic while passing time with family, friends and relations
7	I feel I am being paid a fair amount for the work I do.
8	My supervisor is quite competent in doing his/her job.
9	When I do a good job, I receive the recognition that I should receive.
10	The benefits we receive are as good as most other organizations offer.
11	Many of our rules and procedures facilitate doing a good.
12	Those who do well on the job stand a fair chance of being promoted.

Results and Discussion

A comprehensive inquiry of the present Indian scenario in the above phase included a review of the existing literature on policewomen, as well as Government and other societal awareness programs. This produced several constructive suggestions and recommendations regarding working conditions of women police both in the police station and during their patrolling duty. The Parliamentary Committee on the 'Empowerment of Women' documented the working conditions of women in the police force (in its 2013-14 and 2014-15 reports) emphasizing the lack of facilities for women. The Committee articulated that these issues can only be tackled through focused efforts and consistent follow up by the Government along with time-bound action plans. In addition, the 6th and 7th National Conferences on Women Police (2014 and Desai, 2016,

respectively) reported the lack of facilities for women personnel and initial phasing in of ergonomic adjustments in workplace facilities. Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5 outline responses from 30 policewomen of Pan Bazaar Police Station, Guwahati with before (abbreviated as B in the tables) and after (abbreviated as A in the tables) ergonomic interventions aimed at a holistic occupational improvement of policewomen.

Table 2. Survey Results on Exposure to Occupational and Environmental Stress and Perceived Well-Being

Sl No.	Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
		B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A
1	Law enforcement is generally regarded as a masculine profession, therefore we felt that convenience is equally important for us	30	30								
2	Administrative over shifting is common	30	30								
3	Staff shortages cause stress	30	30								
4	Lack of resources cause stress	30			25				5		
5	In equal sharing of work responsibilities cause stress	30	30								
6	Shift work causes stress for special cases like pregnancy, expecting mother, lactating mother, menstruation period	20	20			6	6			4	4
7	Traumatic events affect psychophysical health	30	10		9		7		4		
8	Social life outside the job is impacted by duty regimen	21	15	8	8				6		
9	Occupation-related health issues in special cases like pregnancy, expecting mother, lactating mother, menstruation period			10	10			10	10	10	10
10	Not finding time to stay in good physical condition	20	20	10	10						
11	Feelings like you are always on the job and	30	30								

	other responsibilities are compromised										
12	Working beyond working hours brings boredom	30	40								
13	Noisy work area	5	5	10	10	10	10	5	5		
14	Frequent interruptions bring disturbance in the work place							30	30		
15	Inadequate or poor quality equipment/maintenance			24	24			6	6		
16	Unfair work environment in this job	30	3		6				17		4
17	Lack of a modern system/apparatus on duty	43	43								
18	Occupational health issues (e.g. back pain, neck pain, joint pain)	27	27	10	10			6	6		
19	A good infrastructure brings satisfactions while doing work	30	10	20							
20	Lack of resources in professional/promotional	30	30								
21	Working alone at night is risky and I don't feel good	30	30								
22	Prolong standing affects physical health	30	30								
23	Lack of separate modular convenience/prompt service utilities in every police station	30									30
24	Basic amenities like isolated/separate restrooms and child care units are still a major requirement for women police personnel	30									30
25	Lack of residential accommodation which is seen as one of the major impediments faced by women in joining police force	30	30								
26	While I am involved in outdoor activities such as patrolling, security duty on several occasions,	24	30	6							

	touring in and outside the district where mobile convenience facility is a compulsory requirement.									
27	Crèches/day care centre in the police station for working mother will help them to take care of their children	20	30	10						

As stated above, the Ministry of Home Affairs has encouraged the induction and increase in the representation of women in the police force up to 33% while addressing the specific needs of women. Any percentage lower than 33% might represent a barrier to societal interaction, in order to maintain law and order; especially with respect to women specific issues of domestic violence, crimes involving women and injustice to the women. One of the major concerns expressed by the policewomen is the need to improve privacy (The Economic Times, Police and Nation, 2016, 2016). The survey also found that women police officers go for long spells with little or no water to avoid the lack of toilet facilities, while on job. Women police personnel, particularly in the constabulary, find it uncomfortable while travelling in heavy vehicles and trucks to report for work, particularly during periods of menstruation or pregnancy. Under the ‘Swachh Bharat’ mission (The Economics Time, Police and Nation, 2016), the Government recommended that sanitary pad dispensers be installed at all women’s posts and portable toilets should be provided. In addition, the parliamentary report strongly endorsed the need for more day care centres / crèches, school pickup and drop of facilities for children, and clean living quarters and toilet facilities provided to create a comfortable and stress-free workplace. These additions are regarded as factors that will increase workplace performance.

Table 3. Survey Results for on-the-job Satisfaction

		Yes		No	
		B	A	B	A
1	Public attitude towards women police is awkward			30	30
2	Lack of separate utility facilities in police stations.	30			30
3	Problems related to training.	30	30		
4	Govt. accommodation for women’s hygiene and health issues			30	30
5	Difficulties faced in upbringing of children–day care centre is essential			30	30
6	Need to have a better working environment in terms of infrastructure	30			30
7	Provision of separate toilet facility at all offices/outposts	30			30
8	A modular mobile convenience facility while outdoor duty an immediate need	30			30

Job satisfaction is a pivotal component of an organization’s effective and efficient productivity. Most women in the police force are not satisfied with their working conditions (Rizvi, 2015). In order to address these problems, the Government of India issued guidelines in February 2013, through the Modernization of State Police Force Scheme, asking the Government of India

at large, extended to Assam Government, to provide women officers with separate toilets, crèches, and restrooms (Rao, 2015). This is still in the implementation stage in Assam.

TABLE 4. On-the-job Burn-Out

		Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
		A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B
1	My work is emotionally exhaustive	10	9	5	10	9	5	6	6		
2	I feel burnt out because of my work.	30	30								
3	My work frustrates me.							30	30		
4	I feel burn out at the end of the working day.	30	30								
5	I feel exhausted in the morning only by the thought of another similar day at work.	30	30								
6	I feel quite energetic while passing time with family, friends and relations	30	30								
7	I feel I am being paid a fair amount for the work I do.	20	20	10	10						
8	My supervisor is quite competent in doing his/her job.	30	30								
9	When I do a good job, I receive the recognition for it that I should receive.	30	30								
10	The benefits we receive are as good as most other organizations offer.									30	30
11	Many of our rules and procedures make doing a good job simple.					9	9	10	10	11	11
12	Those who do well on the job stand a fair chance of being promoted.							25	5	25	5

Occupational stress unavoidably leads to the development of negative outcomes for women police personnel. Deprivation of general well-being, reduced levels of satisfaction and obligations to the organization have each been acknowledged as the sources of occupational stress experienced

by employees. The outcome of this stress is harmful to the entire society in addition to the organization (Nikam, 2014). Additional features of workplace dissatisfaction include late night duties, lack of regular holidays and work schedules and gender discrimination from male officers. These communal needs should be addressed urgently; ergonomic design interventions can constitute an improved, amiable workplace, most importantly to enhance job satisfaction and improved workplace attitudes.

Ergonomic Recommendations

To address the above findings, a 2D schematic design layout of a police station was prepared, taking into consideration workplace comfort and basic amenities for both women and men. These include women's restrooms with toilet facilities; officers' rooms for both male and female police; one reporting room; one office for male police and one for female police, separate restrooms, canteen, jail, day care centres, a records room, reception, WC (toilet for visiting women) and an officers' room [Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPRD), 2015]. A layout of the Bazar Police Station was created, including the interior with the arrangement of furniture, fitting and fixtures (Fig. 1 & Fig. 2). As mentioned earlier, these plans were shared with higher authorities of Assam Police and the designs were provisionally approved. Some of them have been implemented as the component of preliminary stage action plan for all women police station.

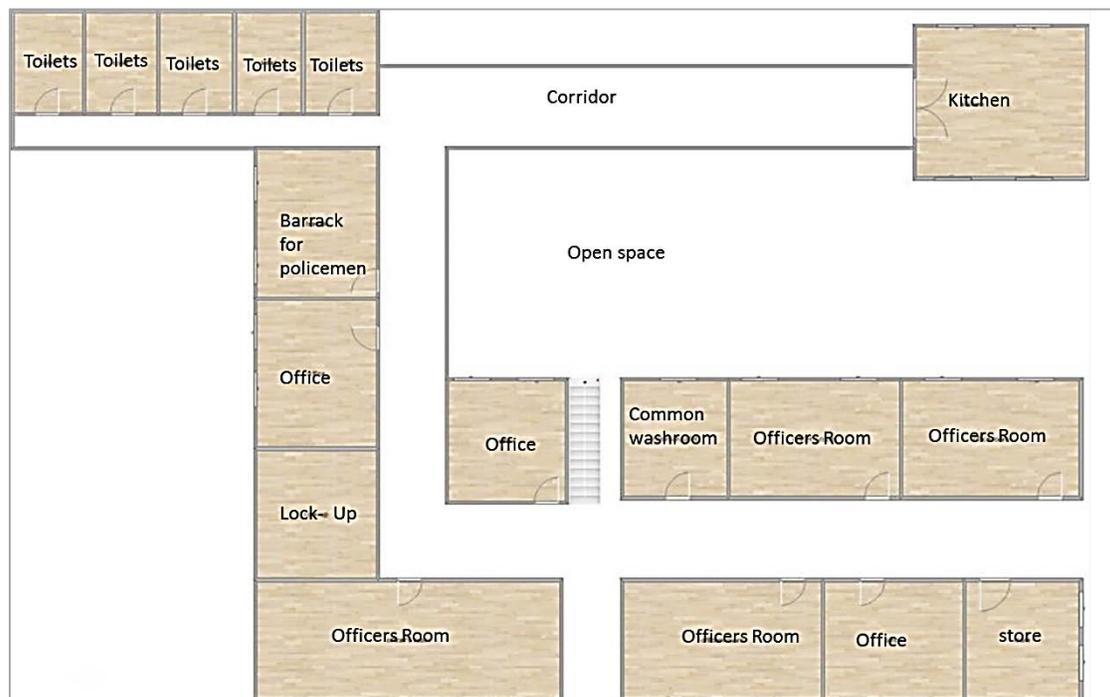


Figure 1: Layout of an existing police station of Pan Bazar



Figure 2: Design layout of a Pan Bazar police station along with arrangement of furniture, fittings and fixtures

In addition, flexibility will improve overall workplace productivity. A mobile utility van for women police officers during patrol duty is imperative due to lack of adequate facilities in the vicinity. Ideally, multi-utility vans with a washroom and pantry, and restroom, will allow police officers who stand for hours together to freshen up or rest for a bit. Exhaustion and abstinence from basic physiological necessities produces various medical problems, including kidney stones and pregnancy-related problems (Bhula et al, 2015). In the north-eastern part of India, Assam is reportedly lagging behind in this regard.

In addition to the workspace, the researchers developed a schematic model of a dismantlable and modular mobile utility van for policewomen, with an interior plan aiming to reduce occupation hazards, increase job satisfaction and reduce work burnout while on duty (Fig. 3). In addition, police personnel requested a model of a utility van with a schematic interior combined male and female facilities, to ensure improved working conditions of both the genders (Fig. 4).



Figure 3. Schematic interior concept of utility van for women police



Fig.4. Schematic interior concept of utility van for both men and women

Conclusion

The study examined the need to address the concerns of women police officers, contributing to occupational stress in Assam. Ergonomic design interventions in basic areas such as implementation of a separate convenience facility would offer them a better workplace at Pan

Bazar Police Station, Guwahati. The layout and schematic design plan of a better police station as well as a better utility van was shared with the higher authorities of Assam Police. They have agreed that the models would definitely help policewomen to cope with various kinds of on-the-job stresses; and they felt persuaded to implement the changes in the next few years.

The limitation of a relatively small sample size in the present study was due to the fact that, only 60 policewomen are posted in Guwahati assigned to differential duties. At any time, however, there were 2-3 policewomen available at the police station, and others were on duty citywide. As the Assam police force works to build the numbers of women police officers, with the assistance of the Government (overseeing the implementation of the 33% quota for Assam and elsewhere) the demands of women's workplace concerns will become intensified. This research reflects the need-of-the-hour, representing a workforce in transition to meet the goals of gender equality and equal opportunity. The success of integrating women into male dominated professions depends on attention to the new needs introduced by women employees and the support of both the Government and the workplace in meeting them.

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