

POLICE STRESS FACTORS AMONG LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES: A COMPARISON STUDY OF US AND TURKISH POLICE

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Abstract

Policing is one of the most stressful jobs in the world. However, the factors which cause stress (stressors) can be different among the police officers in different countries. This paper focuses on the differences about the police occupational stressors between Turkish National Police (TNP) and the United States Law Enforcement Agencies. Turkey is a developing country bordering between Asia and Europe. Not only does its geographical condition cause some international policy problems, but also it causes a lot of policing problems: Such as being a bridge for drug and gun smugglers, being a bridge for human trafficking, and being a target for terrorist organizations. On the other side, the United States of America is a developed country and also known as the superpower of the world. This study tries to answer the question of “Are there any differences between a developed country’s police force and a developing country’s police force in terms of existing stress factors?”

Keywords: Police Stress, Police Stressors, Turkish National Police

Introduction

If we had counted people’s complaints in this century, we would probably have seen that stress is the most common complaint around the world. Changing life styles, changing technologies, changing work life conditions, changing perceptions, simply changing have been causing some problems, illnesses, and stress. Stress is the disease of this century according to most people. Due to the fact that stress is the plague of this century, a lot of research is being conducted to understand the nature of stress and to cope

with the damaging results of it. These researches have shown that some people or some occupations are more likely to feel stress than others.

Policing is one of the most stressful jobs in the world. However, the factors which cause stress (stressors) can be different among the police officers in different countries. This paper will look at those differences, if any, between Turkish National Police (TNP) and the United States Law Enforcement Agencies. Turkey is a developing country bordering between Asia and Europe. Not only does its geographical condition cause some international policy problems, but also it causes a lot of policing problems: Such as being a bridge for drug and gun smugglers, being a bridge for human trafficking, and being a target for terrorist organizations. In addition to these problems, its rising population brings some policing problems, too. On the other side, the United States of America is a developed country. It is also known as the superpower of the world. This study tries to answer the question of “Are there any differences between a developed country’s police force and a developing country’s police force in terms of existing stress factors?”

Occupational stress among police officers is often viewed as an unfortunate, but inevitable part of police work (Hart & Cotton, 2002). The assumption that the police work is one of the most stressful occupations has been supported by an important body of literature about stress in law enforcement profession. Studies that examined the police stress in Canada (Burke, 1993), England (Brown & Campbell, 1990), Germany (Kirkcaldy & Furnham, 1995;), India (Suresh, Anantharaman, Angusamy & Ganesan, 2013), Turkey (Yıldız, 2008; Kula, 2011), South Africa (Pienaar & Rothmann, 2006) and New Zealand (Stephens & Pugmire, 2008) made clear that stress among police officers is not a local but an international phenomenon all over the world.

Stress and Police Job Stress

There is no consensus on the definition of stress because researchers used a number of definitions of stress. While some researchers use external stimuli, like a shocking accident or death, others use internal stimuli like anger, sadness, and anxiety to define it. Another common usage of stress refers the observable changing in a body when it faces some internal or external stimuli (Ellison, 2004). Increased adrenalin, heart pulsation, sweating, crying and yelling can be counted as body changing in a stressful situation. Hans Selye first used this term in 1949 to explain a body’s physical adaptation way to a new, changed circumstance (Treven & Potocan, 2005, p. 641). Selye (1974, p. 14) defined the stress as the “nonspecific response of the body to any demand made upon it to adapt whether that demand produces pleasure or pain.”

Dempsey (1994, p. 110), defines stress as “the body’s reaction to internal and external stimuli that upset the body’s normal state, in which the stimuli might be physical, mental, or emotional”. Ellison (2004) and Jaramillo, Nixon and Sams (2005) describe stress as a process in which a stimulus or stressor causes a stress response or reaction like behavioral or physical changes in the body. Whichever definition you use, stress has significant effects on every occupation and on every individual. Not only does stress cause the loss of hundreds of millions of workdays in every year because of absenteeism, it also causes a lot of diseases (Treven & Potocan, 2005), and even suicides.

Many studies have been conducted about what kind of factors increase the police job stress. Jaramillo, Nixon, and Sams (2005, p. 327) classifies the stressors in two groups. The first group contains the individual stressors such as role conflict and role ambiguity. The second group comprises the organizational stressors such as budgetary cuts, layoffs, mergers and acquisitions.

Jaramillo, Nixon and Sams (2005, p. 325) underlines that “The law enforcement work environment is more hazardous (i.e. often life threatening) and more stressful than most other service environments. Also, police officers work for organizations that have different objectives, such as, to reduce crime and increase public well-being rather than earning a profit.”

Many studies have been conducted about the factors that play an important role in increasing the police job stress. Some studies are connected with the role of organizational stressors (Brown & Campbell, 1990; Hart, Wearing & Headey, 1995). There is also research related to administrative policies, equipment, community relations, and shift work in increasing the police occupational stress (Kroes, Margolis, & Hurrell, 1974). According to Territo and Vetter (1981) most of the law enforcement stressors can be grouped into four categories: (1) organizational practices and characteristics, (2) criminal justice system practices and characteristics, (3) public practices and characteristics, and (4) police work itself.

Shane (2010, p. 807-808) grouped the sources of stress in policing as arising from “job content” and arising from “job context”. He adds that the job content stressors are also known as operational stressors and they are the aspects of police work inherent in the occupation. These are operational overtime, court overtime, outside employment and job-related violence. Job context stressors on the other hand include characteristics of the organization and behaviors of the people in them that may produce stress. The job context stressors have the potential to create stress in the police milieu. They include organizational structure such as bureaucracy, management, organizational capacity and various aspects of organizational life as coworker relations, training, resources, leadership and supervision and internal affairs.

Although stress is a common problem for all police agencies, the factors that cause the stress are changing according to the police organizations. A study made about stressors of police profession in South Africa revealed that the most important stressors identified were other officers not doing their job, inadequate or poor quality equipment, inadequate salaries, and seeing criminals go free (Pienaar & Rothmann, 2006, p. 72).

Police Stressors in the US

Policing is known to be one of the most stressful occupations in the world (Anderson, Litzenger & Plecas, 2002; Liberman et al., 2002; Newman & Rucker-Reed, 2004). Although police do the same job in every country, stress level and stressors cannot be the same in all countries. Cultures, life styles, perception of events, economical situation, and social status of police can be determinative of stress in policing in different countries. Researchers used several ways to classify stressors in the U.S. Some of them classified the stressors into four categories: Organizational practices, the criminal justice system, the public, and the police work itself. Some others used a second way by classifying the stressors in two categories: Organizational and inherent police stressors (Newman & Rucker-Reed, 2004). “Lack of administrative support, the promotion process, inadequate training or equipment, excessive paperwork, intra-departmental politics, and frustrations with the criminal justice system and court leniency” are stressors within the organization and organizational structure. Some examples of internal or inherent stressors are “shift work, work overload, anticipation of critical incident response, fear of danger or concerns of personal safety, time management, and work-home conflicts” (Anderson et al., 2002, p. 403).

The most frequent claim about police work stress by police officers is the nature of the occupation. Police officers may witness some extreme events which typical citizens don't witness in their whole life. Seeing a dead body, and even engaging with corpses as a part of the work, killing someone in the line of duty or being killed or witnessing his/her fellow being killed in the line of duty are extreme events which police officers may witness (Ellison, 2004; Liberman et al., 2002; Newman & Rucker-Reed, 2004).

Although these are rare events, they are some parts of policing, and their effects are stronger than others. These stressors may not be actual situations rather, being an open target for terrorists or other criminals because of wearing a uniform, or representing the government is as stressful as an actual incident. Actual incidents don't last very long, it can hurt or kill, but it doesn't become a chronic or everyday event. In contrast, waiting for something to happen can take years. For example, waiting a long time for

execution is accepted as a kind of torture in the European Court of Human Rights, and it is called “death corridor” (Soering / England, 07/07/1989, 14038/88).

The police work environment is the second stressor according to police officers. A number of researchers found that poor support by department, police administrators, bureaucratic structure, inadequate equipment, changing shift hours are basic stressors related to work environment (Ellison, 2004; Liberman et al., 2002; Toch, 2002). In addition to these stressors, Jaramillo et al. (2005) add promotion opportunities as an important stressor. Police officers believe that politics but not merit or achievement play a role in promotions. This belief is being expressed by this saying: “It’s *who* you know, not *what* you know.” (Toch, 2002, p. 75).

Police Stressors in Turkey

The organization of Turkish National Police is different from the United States police organization. While there are three police units in the U.S. which are federals, state-level law enforcement agencies, and local law enforcement agencies, TNP is one of the primary law enforcement agency serving 95 percent of the population in Turkey. It has a central administrative structure. General Directorate can appoint police to any one of the 81 cities of Turkey.

Stress factors in Turkish National Police are mainly based on classical problems related to the policing job, which are common in most police organizations all over the world. It is important to note that these stressors factors do not differ among different police departments because of centralized organization structure. However, we can observe different stressors related to the specific job fields. For instance, narcotic police officers may have different stressors than crime prevention police officers because of the field police officers are working on but each field has similar stressors inside the organizations. Additionally, there are some stressor sources related to the cultural and traditional issues in Turkish National Police.

The nature of the occupation is also the biggest stressor in Turkish National Police. Witnessing and possibility to witness extreme events are the most known stressors for police. Turkey has been struggling with separatist terrorism for over 30 years. Many police have been killed, and many of them have been injured. In addition to terrorism, Turkey is a bridge for drug and gun smuggling between Asia and Europe. Struggling with both terrorists and organized crimes are important stressors. Because of the group psychology and appointment policies, most of police have a martyred or injured friend. Although they do not witness them, they can hear in the media that their friends were killed or injured. That’s why; they usually face with

psychological and emotional disruptions that create stressor. Even though police officers are educated to be resistant in those kinds of situations, it is impossible not to be affected anyway because of being a human creature. Most of the crime scenes stay in police officers' minds for a long time creating stressor in the body.

Fiscal problems are the first claimed stressors among the Turkish police. The occupation is preferable among middle and low-level income families. Some social privileges, including lifetime tenure are important to choose this job. However, the salary is not satisfactory in Turkey's standards. Most studies on police motivation indicate that financial complaints is the number one problem among police officers (Sanli & Akbas, 2008; Aydin, 2003; Gokus, 2002). This problem directly leads to the job dissatisfaction creating stressors. It is essential that employees receive satisfactory financial support in order to have ideal job and personal life environment. If people have financial problems, it means that they can not concentrate on their work and responsibilities.

Most of the police officers in Turkish National Police can not act freely while planning their social life because of financial problems. They do not have an opportunity to go on a holiday with the people whom they serve. They usually limit their social life because of the financial issues. In reality, it is obvious that people having problems with social life are more likely to have stressor. However, police officers can only afford for their basic needs. They do not have financial freedom to act socially for reducing their stress levels.

The Turkish police have different types of shifts; nevertheless, the police officer is on duty for 24 hours. The actual shifts are 12/24, which means 12 hour working and 24 hour off. The city police chief can easily change this shift to become 12/12, which means 12 hour working and 12 hour off. Under these arbitrary and hard shifting hours, police do not have time to engage any social activities. Especially noteworthy is that in the latter shift, police cannot see his or her family and cannot spare time to his or her children. After 12 hour hard working, the other 12 hour is only enough to rest and recharge for the other 12 hours. Research on police and suicide revealed that long working hours and shift changes are the second most claimed stress factor that lead officers suicide (Seker & Zirhlioglu, 2009; Sanli & Akbas, 2008; Tasdoven, 2005; Gok, Ozascilar & Ziyalar, 2005; Yesilorman, 2003; Aydin, 2003).

An important report prepared by Turkish Ombudsman Institution about police individual rights pointed out many problems of police profession in Turkey. This report revealed that totally 157 police officers commit suicide in five years between 2009 and 2013. Another remarkable finding of this report is that Turkey's average life expectancy is 73.8 while it

is 55.9 for police officers (The Ombudsman Institution, 2014, p. 18-19). This means that police officers live about 18 years less than the other people. Public Servant Law limits total working hours to 160 hours per month (4 weeks x 40 hours), however, police officers work between 240 and 300 hours per month. They are not paid for over time. About one quarter of police officers (63.723/240.939) work 57 hours a week and general average of work hour has been found 47,61 hours excluded the additional tasks (The Ombudsman Institution, 2014, p. 4).

Çam and Çakır, (2008) points out that organizational police stressors are very common in Turkish National Police and it significantly affects police officers' motivation, efficiency and performance negatively. These factors consist of inadequate wages, work load, long and irregular working hours, role ambiguity and role conflict, organizational policies, retirement and worries for the future, and career progression.

In view of Kula (2011, p. 110)'s research, the most significant organizational stressors in TNP are excessive administrative duties, staff shortages, bureaucratic red tapes, perceived pressure to volunteer free time, lack of resources, and unequal sharing of work responsibilities. In TNP the substantial operational stressors are overtime demands, mismanagement social life outside the job, occupation-related health problems, poor working environments, lack of perception by family and friends, citizens' complaints, job oriented and dominated life, and workaholic (Kula, 2011, p. 114). The results of Kula (2011, p. iii)'s study revealed that in TNP, "perceived organizational stress has a statistically significant positive effect on work-related burnout and a negative effect on job satisfaction of employees. The more TNP employees experience their organization as stress inducing, the lower their job satisfaction levels and the higher their burnout levels."

Another stress factor emerges from the military type organizational structure of the organization. TNP has strict hierarchical structure and this leads various administrative problems (Alac, 2013; Yilmaz, 2012). Strict hierarchical structure and administrative problems creates big stressors for police officers. In TNP, police officers graduate from the police high schools, and police lieutenants and upper level police administrators graduate from the police academy. Police academy is a kind of 4 years, boarding education and training university. Police high schools are 2 years, boarding education and training high schools. Police officers have limited right to promote to upper levels. They have to be successful in the exams that have not a regular schedule. In this strict hierarchical structure, police officers have few motivators. They do not have dreams to promote to upper levels, they do not receive satisfactory salary, and they have limited communication with their superiors.

Political relations and ideological behaviors are perceived as dominant criteria by officers while merit system should be the basic criteria for promotion, appointment and rewarding systems (Karaca & Ulkemen, 2012; Baycan, 2005; Sozen, 2005). If you have a powerful relative or relations, you can be appointed to every city that you want, and you can be successful in the exams to promote, or you may be rewarded if you have close relations with decision makers. This belief is very common among police officers, creating very common stressors.

Another stressor source in Turkish National Police is based on problems with public relationship originated cultural issues. There is a clear barrier between police officers and citizens (Kara, 2014; Karatepe, 2004; Ulukus, 2004). Police officers are perceived as “uniformed” by public and public is perceived as “civilian” by police officers. This creates a gap and distinction between public and police. Consequently, police officers can not feel themselves as an ordinary citizen. They have power and they usually expect concession in their personal life. For instance, some police officers do not want to wait in the line in order to pay their personal bill in the bank.

On the other hand, citizens perceive these kinds of behaviors creating bias in their mind. They perceive that police have power and arrange their relationship based on benefits. Because of these problems, it is difficult to establish sincere friendship with citizens for police officers. When they build a relationship based on benefit, they will ask help from the police officers when they have problems with any policing issues. They try to use their personal relationship in order to get benefit when they are interacted with police anyway. For instance, it is very common to call a friend of police officer when a car is towed. These kinds of circumstances usually create stressors for the police officers.

Eventually, another important stress factor exists from political influences on the organization. Police officers are exposed to political pressure since the organization is mostly depend on political design (Aydin, 2003). Politicians may easily intervene the duty of police officers since they have power over the TNP. Most of the time, politicians may pursue their interests or protect their supporters by demanding some privileges from police officers such as cancelling traffic fine ticket, releasing a person under detention etc. They may insist police officers to act illegally for their benefits. In some cases, police officers are threatened to be dispatched to the places where nobody wants to work such as the Eastern part of the country. Therefore, police officers face with dilemmas while performing their duties and this lead to different stressors for police officers.

Another type of political influence on police officers emerges from pursuing political ideology over the organization (Dikici, 2009; Goksu, Sozen & Cevik, 2008; Gultekin & Ozcan, 1999). Each ruling party may

design police organization based on their political ideology by using appointment power over the organization. Since politicians have the power to appoint police officers wherever they want, they prefer to suspend or send away the police officers who contradict with their political ideology. To dominate their political ideology, the politicians may reform the organization and change some rules and regulations in order to be legalized the actions they perform. So, police officers who are specialized in specific areas which are considered as strategic and important may easily appointed to other places which are considered as passive or pointless. In most cases, police officers are appointed to different cities all around the countries. This also affects police officers and their families negatively creating stress.

Discussion

At first glance, there seem no differences about main stressors between two countries' law enforcement agencies. The occupation itself, and some other work related stressors seem to be the same. However, when it is examined carefully, it is possible to realize that there are some differences.

Although American police report that killing somebody or being killed by someone in the line of duty is one of the most important stressor, researchers point that these events are rare in the U.S. The meeting of the U.S. police forces with terrorism is comparatively new when compared to the Turkish police forces. Turkish police are more likely to face terrorism related stressors than the U.S. counterparts.

The United States is a developed country, and it has one of the most powerful economies in the world. A powerful economy presents better life standards, and better pecuniary resources. Turkey is a developing country, thus its economy is growing, but not enough to present satisfactory pecuniary resources for all of its employees. That is why Turkish police is claiming about their fiscal problems as a significant stressor, and why the U.S. police officers do not to the same degree. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs Turkish police have some problems about their physiological needs, although the organization has been doing good efforts. Fiscal problems also cause problem of bribery, and some underground relations with smugglers. Some police officers can do illegal works for a huge amount which they cannot see that amount of money in their whole life. After engaging these illegal relations, they can feel stress, and stuck between their pockets and their consciences. Also, problems with public relations and political influence are important stressor factors that differ than US police officers.

Besides these stressors, shift hours is another stressor which can be seen same in both countries. However, while American police officers are claiming about the changing shift hours, Turkish counterparts are claiming about the length of the shift hours. Changing shifts can be a problem; it can

cause a disorder in life, so it can be a stressor. The length of shift hours can cause more serious problems. Most of Turkish police is working 12 hours in a day and relaxing 24 hours. If the city police chief wants the shift can be 12 hours working and 12 hours off. In addition to this, no police officer can go home when their shift hours end until the police chief let them go which is known as “second order”. One of the main differences between two countries is that police officers can get money for extra working hours in the U.S. In contrast, there is no extra working hour’s payment in TNP.

Other stressors seem the same in both countries’ police organizations. Administrative problems, lack of merit system to promote, replacement and awarding, and political issues look same.

Much less expected is that the coping strategies with stress are somewhat the same in both countries’ law enforcement agencies. Turkish and American Police officers use both maladaptive and adaptive coping strategies. The most frequent maladaptive coping strategies are using alcohol, depression, somatic problems, using excessive cigarettes, and isolation from the society. American police officers are also using adoptive coping strategies like exercising, talking to a counselor or a psychologist, time management, and meditation (Anderson et al., 2002; Gokus, 2002; Paterson, 2003). TNP have some obstacles to use adoptive coping strategies. These obstacles are not only affording problems but also the perception of police officers about stress.

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