

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AND LEVEL OF ALCOHOL ABUSE AMONG POLICE OFFICERS IN MOMBASA COUNTY, KENYA

Christopher Kapeto Nyamawi & Thomas Njoroge Kinga
School of Humanities, Kenyatta University, Kenya
Corresponding Author's Email: nyamawichristopher@yahoo.com

Abstract

High level of alcohol abuse among police officers is encountered in many parts of the world including Kenya today. Occupational stress among police officers in Kenya is revealed by the increasing rates of suicide cases and killing of innocent citizens by the police. Most studies locally have focused on the prevalence of occupational stress, level of alcohol abuse and its effects among police officers. However, adequate research has not been conducted on the relationship between occupational stress and level of alcohol abuse. The purpose of this study thus was to establish this relationship among police officers in Mombasa County in Kenya. The study was grounded on stress coping theory and self-medication theory developed by Finney and Moos. It employed correlation research design and was conducted in Mombasa County in Kenya targeting a population of 938 police officers. Multistage sampling was used to obtain a sample size of 273 from all police officers in Mombasa County. Questionnaires and interviews were used in collecting data. Descriptive statistics in the form of frequencies and means were used to analyze the demographic characteristics, while Pearson's product moment correlation technique was used to establish the relationship between occupational stress and level of alcohol abuse. Statistical package for social science version 23 was used in the data analysis. The study established a statistically significant relationship between occupational stress and levels of alcohol abuse, $r_s(273) = .204, p < .05$. It recommended that the national police service should come up with well-structured and equipped mental institutions within their workplaces for their employees. The National Police service should also come up with rehabilitation institutions for those officers who have alcohol abuse problems.

Keywords – Alcohol abuse, Occupational stress, Police officers

Introduction

Alcohol abuse among police officers is being encountered worldwide today at very high rates. Different researchers globally provide contradicting reasons and rates of alcohol abuse within the police department. For instance, researchers in US have suggested that around 25% of the police force show alcohol related problems, many drinks on duty and have higher rates of consumption than the general population (Violanti, 2009). A study done by Lindsay (2000) indicated that 48% of male police officers and 40% of female police officers engaged in harmful drinking in the previous 3 months (Murtagh, 2010). Another study conducted in US again revealed that 19.2% of police respondents met the criteria for alcohol use disorder, while 26% met criteria for alcohol use problems (Basangwa, 2006). In New York a research by Cox (2010) about alcohol abuse among police officers showed that male police officers abuse alcohol more compared to the female ones. In the UK, studies indicate that police officers are in the front line of alcohol abuse and other drug substances. For instance, according to Blum (2013), who examined alcohol consumption in UK police among a random sample of service personnel in 2002, of which 61.5% responded via a questionnaire about drinking and smoking. Follow up approximately 3 years later involved a 69.2% response rate of the 1382 who originally responded. The study found that alcohol consumption and binge-drinking increased over the follow up period, with increases being associated with deployment, and highest in those who thought they might be killed or experienced hostility. Another study by Siwerbarg (2000), done on a large police cohort (31,000 men and women) found that 38% of all active

duty recruits reported binge drinking (i.e, defined as 5 or more drinks on a single occasion) at least one time in the previous 30 days. They also identified some adverse outcomes, noting that 3% of those who drank reported driving after consuming five or more drinks, and 9% had been a passenger with a driver who had been drinking heavily. In the same nation, a study by Salum (2007), reported that more than 40% of their sample reported binge drinkers, most commonly among 20-35 year old police officers.

Within Africa, several scholars and bodies carried researches on the misuse of alcohol and its effects on service delivery among police services. A recent South African study of troops returning from border operations noted that alcohol abuse was high among South African service personnel (13% of a sample of almost 10,000), more common than among non-deployed colleagues (Bennet, 2003). A study of South African police also noted high rates of intense drinking and a study reported that deployment to combat zones was associated with higher alcohol related risk (Berger, 2002). The study of nearly 1600 police personnel reported that almost all (92%) were identified as hazardous drinkers, especially those deployed in the operation area with 40% meeting the criteria for heavy drinking and 15% were classified as problem drinkers (Gaston, 2010). According to Kalema (2002), police officers who work in the most insecure areas and those who spend more without visiting their families are more drinkers than those working with diplomatic areas. In the Eastern African region, the problem of alcohol abuse among police officers was also experienced. Information from the Uganda Police Headquarters showed that one hundred seventy seven officers had been admitted to Butabika Hospital due to alcohol abuse from 2002 to 2010 (Sadick, 2012). On average, at least 30% of Ugandan police officers were admitted to the mental hospital per year from an estimated population of 14,000. During the early part of 2002, at least 350 police officers were implicated in alcohol abuse. The present study was conducted to determine the magnitude and psychosocial problems associated with alcohol abuse by members of the Uganda Police Force (UPF) in Kampala district. It showed that alcohol abuse had an impact on the thinking and perception capacity among Ugandan police Force making them to use violence against the rights of members of the public and the illegal use of force and firearms (Chebogut, 2010)

In Kenya, studies on alcohol abuse among police officers confirmed that alcohol abuse is high within police services. A study within Laikipia County reported that the length of deployment in operation area where insecurity is high is associated with an increase in frequency and quantity of alcohol consumed. Kamau (2012), reported that the more time personnel are deployed in combat situations, the greater the levels of mental health issues including alcohol abuse. Deployments of 12 months or more are associated with an increase in distress scores and alcohol consumption (Kamau, 2012). Similarly, another study by Musembi (2016), which was conducted within the Mombasa County to find how police officers and their families stay at Mbaraki police depots. The study revealed a serious alcohol abuse among the police to the extent leading some of the officers to be deployed within Mbaraki police depot in order to prevent them from coming in contact with the members of the public with a goal of rehabilitating them.

Studies from global, regional and locally reveals that alcohol abuse is a major problem with the police department, which affect their service delivery and their well-being. They also appreciate that most of the officers encounter stress in their line of duty due to its nature causing them to psychological affected. However, there are few literatures relating alcohol abuse and occupational stress with the police. It is in this context that this research established the

relationship between occupational stress and levels of alcohol abuse among the Kenya police officers in Mombasa county Kenya.

Objective of the Study

To establish the relationship between occupational stress and level of alcohol abuse among police officers in Mombasa County in Kenya.

Hypothesis

H₀₁: There is no statistically significant relationship between occupational stress and level of alcohol abuse among police officers in Mombasa County in Kenya.

Literature review

Occupational Stressors among Police

Stress at workplace is often referred to as occupational stress. The basic rationale supporting the concept is that the work situation has certain demands, and that problems in meeting these can lead to illness or psychological distress. Occupational stress is a major health problem for both individual employees and organizations, and can lead to burnout, illness, labour turnover, absenteeism, poor morale and reduced efficiency and performance. Hence, stress is considered as one of the contributing factors that influenced the efficiency, absenteeism, increase in health care costs and other unfavourable results that associated with specific situations, characteristics of the work environment, and individual perceptions and reactions in the context of the workplace (Willis, 2005).

According to Philliber (2006), stress occurs when the demands that are being placed upon a person's tax or exceed available resources as appraised by the individual involved. When a stressful situation actually occurs, one often forgets all of the knowledge obtained on stress and how to effectively manage it. Such a response is part of being human since man is vulnerable like all other living things. The workplace stands out as a potentially important source of stress purely because of the amount of time that is spent in this setting. However, the stress inducing features of the workplace go beyond simply the time involved. With the financial security and opportunities for advancement of individuals being dependent upon their performance, the pressure to perform often makes the work situation potentially very stressful (Murtagh, 2010).

Policing is considered one of the most stressful occupations, exposing staff to occupational, organizational, and personal stressors (Cox, 2010). Workplace stress has received a great deal of attention in social psychological research (Cooper, 2011). Significant research findings have documented that prolonged stress has negative effects on individual health (Birech, 2009), as well as on employees' attitudes towards the organization (Klingeman, 2011). Kula, (2011), concurs that working under continuously stressful conditions leads to the dissatisfaction and exhaustion of police officers. The stressful conditions that law enforcement officers are exposed can affect both their work-related and their physiological well-being. Kurke et al. (2005), found burnout to be one of the most important outcomes of work-related stress because of its exponential impact on professional relationships.

Historical Perspective on Alcohol abuse among Police

From the origins of most big city police forces in 1850s up until the early 20th Century when automobiles emerged as integral law enforcement tools, the lot of the ordinary patrolman was

to walk a solitary beat, day and night, outside and under all weather conditions. The conventional wisdom of the time was that a “nip of liquor” would help to insulate one’s body from the bitter cold of winter. Thus, while official department policy may have prohibited drinking while on duty, it was tacitly acceptable for a policeman on foot patrol on cold nights to either carry a personal flask of alcohol or stop in at the bar on his beat for a quick drink. A second point to consider is that Irish-Americans, up until just a few generations ago, dominated the ranks of many big city departments, notably New York City and Chicago, and for them drinking was a big part of their cultural heritage. Furthermore, the tight-knit bond between officers (including strong peer pressure to conform), which still exists today, was forged in an era when police officers would work a 12-hour shift and then be held over at the station house as “reserves” for an additional 12 hours (Moreto, 2016). Liquor was typically kept at the station house, and traditional occasions for celebration included: the conclusion of successful operations; promotions, transfers, and retirements; debriefings and workshops; and traditional holidays such as Christmas, New Year’s and of course St. Patrick’s Day (Mambi, 2015).

Modern police culture remains tight and the extent to which drinking has become ingrained in it varies from station to station, department to department. Yet empirically, police officers face heavy pressure to drink, to where non-drinking officers are often viewed as suspicious or anti-social by their colleagues. Muraya, (2016), in a recent survey of police officers found that nearly 25% reported drinking in order to “be part of the team” while 25% reported that they were negatively affected by a co-worker’s drinking. Whereas alcohol abuse, substance abuse, other associated health-related problems can create liability for a police department and compromise its effectiveness, police officials typically do nothing to prevent or mitigate the problems, but instead react punitively once a troubled officer’s behaviors get out of hand (Patswa, 2016). There are opportunities for prevention specialists and mental health professionals to partner with police agencies to reduce the incidences of alcohol abuse among law enforcement personnel, providing they are presented in such a way as to overcome officers’ barriers of cynicism and suspicion.

Alcohol Abuse among the Police

Researchers in US have suggested that around 25% of the police force show alcohol related problems, many drinks on duty (Birech, 2009), and have higher rates of consumption than the general population (Violanti, 2009). A study done by Blum (2013), indicated that 48% of male officers and 40% of female officers drank excessively or engaged in hazardous or harmful drinking in the previous 3 months. A study conducted in Uganda revealed that 19.2% of police respondents met the criteria for alcohol use disorder, while 26% met criteria for alcohol use problems (Basangwa, 2006).

Law enforcement is a stressful occupation. Shift change, trauma, administrative challenges, and daily exposure to the terror on the missions of the street enervate even the most highly resilient and most skilled officer. However, officers are never completely bullet proof from the physical, emotional and spiritual challenges of this stressful career. Stress that becomes internalized over time may eventually result in the use of maladaptive coping skills. One of the most historically prevalent and culturally acceptable maladaptive practices in law enforcement is the use of alcohol. Gaston (2010), reported that problematic alcohol use has been an extensive issue in the past and present both in the United States and other countries. A study of 2,200 officers in 29 departments indicated approximately 23% of the police officers sampled had serious issue with alcohol use (Momanyi, 2013). Lindsay (2007), noted police officers were more at risk for alcohol issues than the general public, as a result of the types of stressors

they face. Frone (2016), concluded that officers are exposed to various types of stressors such as internal, external, personal and routine. Internal stressors, such as administrative and agency stress include lack of support, low wages, long hours, overtime, no room for advancement, and personnel shortages. Internal organizational stressors are often emotionally suppressed by officers and become problematic when they begin to affect his or her ability to maintain self-care and maintain overall wellness.

The correlation between work stress and alcohol consumption among the law enforcement community may be much higher than what is reported. Alcohol is legal, and highly accessible. In addition it is an acceptable form of coping for officers. Approximately 17 million, or 1 in 12 Americans abuses alcohol or are alcoholic (Emmanuel, 2016). Violanti (2009), noted alcohol abuse among U.S. police officers was approximately double that of the general population.

Methodology

The study employed correlation research design and was conducted in Mombasa County Kenya targeting a population of 938 Kenya police officers. Multistage sampling was used to obtain a sample size of 273 from all Kenya police officers in Mombasa County. Questionnaires and interviews were used in collecting data. Reliability of the questionnaire was established using split-half technique where the test item was divided into halves, each half was scored independently. The test-retest reliability of 0.8 was considered appropriate. Pearson's product moment correlation technique was used to establish the relationship between occupational stress and level of alcohol abuse. Statistical package for social science version 23 was used in the data analysis.

Findings

Relationship between Occupational Stress and Level of Alcohol Abuse

The objective sought to establish the relationship between occupational stress and levels of alcohol abuse among police officers in Mombasa County. Chi-square cross tabulation and Spearman rank correlation coefficient was used to determine the relationship between occupational stress and the level of alcohol use among Kenya police offices in Mombasa County. The findings are presented in table 1 and 2.

Relationship between Occupational Stress and Level of Alcohol Abuse among Police Officers in Mombasa County, Kenya

Table 1

Chi-square Cross-tabulation on the Relationship between Occupational Stress and Levels of alcohol Abuse

			Level of alcohol Abuse			Total
			No alcohol problem	Borderline alcohol problem	Alcohol abuse problem	
Occupational stress	Low occupational stress	Count	65	4	33	102
		Expected Count	55.7	7.8	38.5	102.0
		% within Occupational stress	63.7%	3.9%	32.4%	100.0%
		% within Alcohol abuse level	43.6%	19.0%	32.0%	37.4%
		% of Total	23.8%	1.5%	12.1%	37.4%
	Moderate occupational stress	Count	74	15	55	144
		Expected Count	78.6	11.1	54.3	144.0
		% within Occupational stress	51.4%	10.4%	38.2%	100.0%
		% within Alcohol Abuse level	49.7%	71.4%	53.4%	52.7%
		% of Total	27.1%	5.5%	20.1%	52.7%
	High occupational stress	Count	10	2	15	27
		Expected Count	14.7	2.1	10.2	27.0
		% within Occupational stress	37.0	7.4%	55.6%	100.0%
		% within Alcohol Abuse level	6.7%	9.5%	14.6%	9.9%
		% of Total	3.7%	0.7%	5.5%	9.9%
	Total	Count	149	21	103	273
		Expected Count	149.0	21.0	103.0	273.0
		% within Occupational stress	54.6%	7.7%	37.7%	100.0%
		% within Alcohol Abuse level	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	54.6%	7.7%	37.7%	100.0%

As shown in Table 1, for respondents who had low occupational stress, the actual count was more than the expected count for no alcohol problem, while the expected count was more than the actual count for alcohol abuse problem. For the respondents who had high occupational stress, the expected count was more than the actual count for no alcohol problem, while for high occupational stress; the actual count was more than the expected count for alcohol abuse problem. This implies that high occupational stress was associated with high levels of alcohol use.

Table 2 presents Spearman rank coefficient findings on the relationship between occupational stress and levels of alcohol abuse.

Table 2

Relationship between Occupational Stress and levels of Alcohol Abuse

		Level of Alcohol Abuse
Spearman's rho Occupational stress	Correlation Coefficient	.204**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001
	N	273

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As indicated in table 2, Spearman's rank-order correlation was run to assess the relationship between occupational stress and levels of alcohol abuse among police officers in Mombasa County. The findings of the study revealed that there was a weak positive correlation between occupational stress and levels of alcohol abuse, $r_s(273) = .204, p < .05$. This implies that higher levels of occupational stress were correlated with higher levels of alcohol abuse.

The above findings of the study are in line with several other studies that explored in the relationship between occupational stress and levels of alcohol abuse among police officers. A study in the USA conducted by Wakil (2015), indicated high levels of alcohol abuse among USA police who work in operation area which are more stressful than the general duties. The findings further concurred with a research conducted in South Africa by Violanti (2012), which established that high levels of alcoholism were established among South African police officers under anti-terror section which is considered the most stressful police unit. Another study conducted by Ursitti (2011), showed that police officers exposed to various kinds of stress experienced high levels of alcohol abuse than those doing less stressful duties. The findings differed with past studies on the relationship between occupational stress and levels of alcohol abuse among police officers. A study by Gaston (2010), established that high levels of alcohol abuse among Nigerian police were correlated with easily availability of alcohol in the police camps. A study by Wesonga (2006), reported that high levels of alcohol abuse among the Ugandan police were as a result of the low cost of the alcohol in police canteens. The finds are in line with stress coping theory developed by Finney (2003), based on the hypothesis that alcohol is mean of tension. In this sense, Kenya police officers in Mombasa County abuse alcohol to treat stress. The findings also concurred with the self-medication theory of addiction, which is based on the idea that people abuse, substance such as alcohol to cope with stress. This established that Kenya Police officers in Mombasa County abuse alcohol as a means of treatment for occupational stress.

Conclusion

This study found that there is a positive correlation between occupational stress and alcohol abuse among police officers in Mombasa County in Kenya. The finding means that occupational stress leads to alcohol abuse among police officers in Mombasa County.

.

Recommendations

Based on the finding of this study, the Kenya National police service should come up with well-structured and equipped psychological counselling centres within their workplaces for their employees. This will ensure that officers can access psychological help efficiently, which will reduce levels of occupational stress. The National Police service should also come up with rehabilitation institutions for those officers who have an alcohol abuse problem. This will provide curative measures in dealing with alcohol use problems among police officers.

References

- Ballenger, J. F., Best, S. R., Metzler, T. J., Wasserman, D. A., Mohr, D. C., Liberman, A & Marmar, C. R. (2011). Patterns and predictors of alcohol use in male and female urban police officers. *The American Journal on Addictions*, 20(1), 21-29.
- Basangwa, D. (2016). *Alcohol and Substance and Mental Disorders*. In David M Ndeti (3rd Ed). *The African textbook of Clinical Psychiatry and Mental Heal*. Nairobi: African Medical Research Foundation.
- Bennet, C. (2011) Couples at risk for Transmission of Alcoholism: Protective influences. *Family Process*.
- Bennet, L., Wolin, S. & Reiss, D. (2013). Deliberate Family Process: A strategy for Protecting Children of Alcoholics. *British Journal for Addiction*.
- Berger, G. (2012). *Alcoholism and the family*. New York: Franklin Watts
- Bennet, L. A. *Family Alcohol and Culture*. In M. Galanter: *Recent developments in alcoholism: Vol 7 Treatment issues* New York: Plenum Press.
- Birech, J. (2009). *Alcohol Abuse and its impact in family life: A study done in the Nandi Community of Kenya*, Unpublished thesis.
- Blum, T. Roman, P. & Martin J. (2013). *Alcohol Consumption and Work Performance*. *Journal of studies on Alcohol*, SU (1) 61-70
- Government of South Australia (2010) *Alcohol and It's Effect*.
- Chebogut, J. (2010). *The effect of Domestic Violence in the family*. Paper presented in Association of Professional Counselors conference in Safari Park Kenya
- Cox, A. (2010). *Drugs and alcohol in the workplace*. Retrieved on 25 June 2017 from <http://www.google.co.uk> 2017.
- Emmanuel, A. O., & Collins, A. (2016). Relationship between occupational stress and demographic variables: a study of employees in a commercial bank in Ghana. *Current Journal of Applied Science and Technology*, 1-9.
- Frone, M. R. (2016). Work stress and alcohol use: developing and testing a biphasic self-medication model. *Work & Stress*, 30(4), 374-394.
- Gaston, F. (2018). *Alcohol consumption*. BRFSS Survey Results Gaston County .North Carolina.
- Klingemann, H. (2011). *Alcohol and its social consequences the forgotten Dimension*. WHO regional office of Europe.
- Kula, S. (2011). *Occupational stress and work-related wellbeing of Turkish national police (TNP) members*.
- Kurke, M., & Scrivner N. (2005). *Police psychology in to the 21st century*. Hillsdale, NJ, Laurence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Lindsay, V. (2007). *Police Officers and Their Alcohol Consumption Should We Be Concerned?*
- Mambi, T. (2015). *Exploratory Study on Officers at Senontein Prison Pietermaritzburg*. South Africa: Zuruland University.

- Momanyi, M. K. (2018). *Effects of job stressors on work performance of police officers in Kenya: a case of Nairobi County* (doctoral dissertation, Kisii University).
- Moreto, W. D. (2016). Occupational stress among law enforcement rangers: Insights from Uganda. *Oryx*, 50(4), 646-654.
- Muraya, J. (2016). IPOA report exposes chronic police housing scarcity in Kenya. Retrieved from; <https://www.capitalfm.co.ke/news/2016/02/ipoa-report-exposes-chronic-police-housing-scarcity/>
- Murtagh, C.(2010). *Police stress and alcohol abuse*. PhD thesis, Brandeis University, Massachusetts.
- Pastwa-Wojciechowska, B., & Piotrowski, A. (2016). Sources, consequences and methods of coping with stress in police officers. *Journal of Alcoholism and Drug Dependence*, 4(4).
- Philliber, S.(2016) .*Comprehensive Stress Management's*.(6thEd).New York: McGraw- Hill.
- Salum, I.,&Chande, H.(2007).Prevalence and features associated with alcohol consumption in Temeke. *East African Journal of Public Health*. Vol. 4.
- Silverberg, C. (2010).*Alcohol use and abuse in policing*, A report to Calgary police Commission.
- Ursitti, A. M. (2011). *A Quantitative Assessment of Spirituality in Police Officers and the Relationship to Police Stress*.
- Violanti, J. M., Slaven, J. E., Charles, L. E., Burchfiel, C. M., Andrew, M. E., & Homish, G. G. (2011). Police and alcohol use: A descriptive analysis and associations with stress outcomes. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 36(4), 344-356.
- Wakil, A. A. (2015). Occupational stress among Nigerian police officers: an examination of the coping strategies and the consequences. *African Research Review*, 9(4), 16-26.
- Willis, J. (2015).Stress a Major Risk in Compensation Consultant. *Journal on Business Insurance*.