



Original Article

Exploring Stress Levels, Job Satisfaction, and Quality of Life in a Sample of Police Officers in Greece

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 19 December 2013

Received in revised form

13 May 2014

Accepted 14 July 2014

Available online 21 July 2014

Keywords:

health promotion
job satisfaction
occupational stress
police officers
quality of life

ABSTRACT

Background: The ongoing economic crisis in Greece has affected both stress and quality of life (QoL) at all socioeconomic levels, including professionals in the police force. The aim of this study was to examine perceived stress, job satisfaction, QoL, and their relationships in a sample of police officers in Greece.

Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted during the first trimester of 2011 in 23 police stations in the greater Athens area. A total of 201 police officers agreed to participate (response rate 44.6%). The General Health Questionnaire-28 (GHQ-28) was used to assess general health, and the World Health Organization Quality of Life-BREF Questionnaire and Perceived Stress Scale-14 (PSS-14) questionnaires were used to assess QoL and perceived stress, respectively.

Results: The PSS and GHQ subscales and total scores exhibited strong, positive, and significant correlations coefficients (r): 0.52 for somatic disturbances, 0.56 for stress and insomnia, 0.40 for social dysfunction, and 0.37 for depression, yielding an r equal to 0.57 for the total GHQ score. A higher level of perceived stress was related to a lower likelihood of being satisfied with their job; in this regard, male participants and higher ranked officers reported lower job satisfaction. The PSS and GHQ scores were inversely, consistently, and significantly related to almost all of the QoL aspects, explaining up to 34% of their variability. Parenthood had a positive effect on QoL related to physical health, and women reported lower QoL related to psychological health.

Conclusion: Higher levels of stress are related to an increased risk of reporting suboptimal job satisfaction and QoL. The magnitude of these associations varied depending on age, gender, and rank, highlighting the need for stress-management training.

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1. Introduction

For several decades, the scientific community has studied workplace stress and its effects, in terms of both physical and psychological health and individual behavior. In 2005, the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work reported that 22% of workers in the European Union experience high levels of stress. In a recent European survey, the highest stress levels were reported by Greek workers (55%) [1]. Police officers also experience elevated levels of stress, anxiety, and irritability [1]. Their work has been described as one of the most stressful occupations in the world, because the physical threats in their operational field are

enormous. Police officers are charged with the apprehension of criminals, the prevention and investigation of crimes, and the maintenance of public order [2]. At the same time, they are nameless, faceless individuals, and most consider them a separate group from the rest of the society. However, organizational stressors, such as the administrative structure and working environment, are considered to be more significant compared with the operational issues that police officers handle [3–6].

Numerous reports state that the suicide rate of police officers is higher compared with other working groups, and police officers have also been reported to experience stress-related morbidity, reduced productivity, absenteeism due to illness, and premature

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retirement [3,7–10]. Increased alcohol consumption, smoking, and drug abuse are additional negative consequences that occur as a result of stress in their workplace [11–14].

During the last three years, the economic crisis in Greece has affected almost all professional groups [15]. There have been riots in various regions of Greece and public opinion has turned against police-force officers, creating preconceived notions about this particular profession and rendering it even more stressful [5]. Because this particular occupation is extremely important for social order and coherence and because stress interferes with police officers' performance, it would be very interesting to assess police officers' lives during these times and focus on possible actions that should be taken to prevent or relieve the impact of stress on their quality of life (QoL).

The aim of this study was thus to assess police officers' perceived stress levels, job satisfaction, QoL, and their relationships during these difficult times.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Study sample

A cross-sectional study was conducted during the first trimester of 2011 in 23 police stations at various district (regional) level departments of the greater Athens area. The greater Athens area was divided into four (prefectural) sampling zones, and sample sizes of at least 20% of the departments were considered to be adequate and feasible. The sampling zones were central Athens (21 departments), northeast Attica (34 departments), southeast Attica (15 departments), and west Attica (15 departments). Convenience and judgment sampling methods (quota sampling) were utilized to fulfill the predefined sampling criteria. Although quota sampling is a form of nonprobability (nonrandom) sampling, it does not introduce any bias in study results because it is unrelated to the specific research aims. After obtaining permission from the respective captain in each police station, all of the policemen were asked to participate in the study. Of the 450 police officers contacted, 201 agreed to participate in the study (response rate, 44.6%). The remaining 249 police officers either refused to participate or their captain did not give clearance and/or consent to participate. The study was approved by the Technological Educational Institute of Athens thesis committee.

2.2. Study instruments

The following instruments were used in this study:

- A questionnaire, which was used to collect demographic information.
- The General Health Questionnaire-28 (GHQ-28), which is one of the most commonly used tools to assess mental well-being. This is a screening tool, which was developed to detect individuals who are likely to have or be at risk of developing psychiatric disorders. The tool measures the common mental health problems/domains of depression, anxiety, somatic symptoms, and social withdrawal. Although it is available in a variety of versions comprising 12, 28, 30, or 60 items, the 28-item version is the most widely used one because of time considerations and has been the most widely questionnaire in other working populations, allowing for more valid comparisons [16]. At present, there are four scoring methods for the GHQ-28, but the most common ones are the Likert and the GHQ scoring methods. In general, patients suffering from psychiatric problems can be distinguished from individuals with good mental health if they have a score of 5 or more on

the Likert scale, or 24 or more on the GHQ scale. Higher scores indicate a higher probability of mental disorder. The GHQ-28 questionnaire has been translated and validated in Greek previously [17]. In addition, a question regarding perceived health status (How would you rate your health status overall?) was included and scored on a 3-point scale—"Good or Worse," "Very good," and "Excellent."

- The World Health Organization Quality of Life-BREF Questionnaire (WHOQOL-BREF), which was developed by the WHO, assesses an individual's QoL. The instrument is a self-report inventory of generic QoL questions with 26 original items, and is divided into the following four subscales: physical health, mental health, social relationships, and social environment. Higher scores indicate a better QoL [18]. Having been translated and validated in Greek previously, the WHOQOL-BREF contains four additional questions [19] and seems to be a well-developed instrument for assessing QoL.
- The Perceived Stress Scale-14 (PSS-14) is a 14-item self-report instrument with a 5-point scale (0 = never, 1 = almost never, 2 = sometimes, 3 = fairly often, 4 = very often). Stress is commonly measured using (1) the environmental approach, that is, the occurrence of demanding events (stressors); (2) the psychological approach, that is, the perceived individual stressfulness of each stressor; or (3) the biological approach that focuses on the biological elements of the stress response. The PSS-14 assesses the perception of stressful experiences (i.e., the psychological approach) by asking the respondents to rate the frequency of their feelings and thoughts related to events and situations that occurred over the previous month. Half of the items in the PSS-14 represent perceived helplessness (perceived distress), whereas the remaining half represents self-efficacy (perceived coping) [20]. Longer lasting and higher levels of self-perceived stress, indicated by a high score, are considered a risk factor for a clinical psychiatric disorder [21]. The instrument has also been translated and validated in Greek previously [20].
- *Job satisfaction questionnaire*: We developed this as a five-item self-reporting tool with the scoring scale ranging from 2 to 3 points depending on the question. This questionnaire qualitatively measures job satisfaction, which is considered to be one of the most important determinants of QoL. The following questions were included: (1) "How satisfied are you with your job?" This question had a 4-point scale—"Very satisfied," "Somewhat dissatisfied," "Very dissatisfied," and "Somewhat dissatisfied." The last two categories were combined in the regression analysis, which lead to a three-level dependent variable. (2) "Would you recommend your job to a friend?" This question had a 3-point scale—"No, I'd discourage it," "I doubt it," and "I would highly recommend it." (3) "Would you choose the same job all over again?" This question had a 3-point scale—"Without a doubt," "It is likely," and "Definitely not." (4) "How likely will you find a new job within the next year?" This question had a 3-point scale—"Likely," "Very likely," and "Unlikely." (5) "Are you satisfied with your salary?" This question was dichotomized into "yes" and "no" answers.

2.3. Statistical analysis

The Pearson's Chi-square test and the Kruskal–Wallis test were used to investigate possible associations between police rank and other variables. The statistical analyses were based on regression modeling techniques because we wanted to estimate the effect of stress on the various outcomes after adjusting for potential confounders. The self-reported job satisfaction as an ordinal variable was assessed using the ordered logit model. When the proportional

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