OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AND OCCUPATIONAL HAZARDS AS PREDICTORS OF EMPATHY AMONG THE NIGERIAN POLICE IN AWKA METROPOLIS

Ignatius Echobu Okpe,
The Vice-Chancellor's Office,
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka,
Anambra State, Nigeria.
Email: ie.okpe@unizik.edu.ng
Phone: +2348163910447,

and

Charles Obugo Okonkwo,
Department of Psychology,
Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University,
Anambra State, Nigeria.
Email: cokonkwo@gmail.com
Phone: +2347014186087

ABSTRACT: *This study investigated occupational stress and occupational hazards as predictors of empathy among Nigerian Police Personnel. The State Criminal Investigative Department (SCID) and the State Police Headquarters were selected for this study. Using incidental sampling, the participants were 117 (88 males and 29 females), having age range 23-62 years and SD 3.92; in which 101 (86.3 %) were married, 13 (11.1%) single, 1 (.9%) divorced, and 2 (1.7%) widowers. Measuring instruments were Occupational Stress Questionnaire, Occupational Hazards Questionnaire, and Toronto Empathy Questionnaire for measuring occupational stress, occupational hazards, and empathy respectively. Design was correlational design with multiple regression statistics. Findings show that occupational stress did not predict empathy (β= -.022, t=.059, p>.05), occupational hazards did not predict empathy (β= .503, t= .865, p>.05), and occupational stress and occupational hazards did not interactively predict empathy (β=.741, t=.899, p>.05). Recommendation is for empathy sensitization to be inculcated in the Nigerian Police personnel.*

KEY WORDS: Occupational Stress, Occupational Hazards, Empathy, Nigerian Police

Introduction

Police system is an important part of a country's governance. It is the most visible part of the government for the public and also the most approachable in need (Wakil, 2015). This makes it important to identify factors that can affect the personnel in their line of duty. Empathy is one of such factors that can influence the working as well as a perception of police personnel. Empathy helps to shape the interactions of police and members of the communities they are assigned to protect (Posick, et al, 2012).

Empathy refers to the process of understanding a person's subjective experience by vicariously distributing that experience while maintaining an attentive position (Posick, et al, 2012). In a profession like police where an individual is required to deal with various sorts of people under varied situations at daily basis, it becomes even more important to understand the perspective of others. If police personnel is helped in practicing more respectful and empathetic communication in their interaction with the public, their acceptance in the communities that they are meant to protect increases manifold (Suttie, 2016).

Occupational stress can be regarded as stressors that have to do with working in a particular occupation. This stressor could be related to the nature of the job, and generally specific to that type of job. For example, a police officer might experience stress associated with running after a criminal in a high-speed car. Policemen and women as professional law enforcement officers are subjected to a number of stress inducing activities in Nigeria. In their line of duties, they are frequently exposed to violence from criminals or even members of the public they protect, often engage in rescue operations of civilians from armed robbers and other gun men which may lead to accident or death.

In spite of the enormous risk the Nigerian police officers bear to do their jobs, an average policeman is not appreciated in the

Nigerian society; he is often criticized and maligned by the members of the public (Wakil,2015).

Occupational hazards refer to work environment activities, material, substance, process or condition that have the potential to increase the risk of injury or ill health. While, occupational hazard can be defined as a risk to a person arising from one's employment (Rajan, 2014), Occupational health hazards mean the expected risks to health and safety for those who work outside the home (Maier, 2009).

Occupational hazards were classified as biological and non-biological: Biological hazards include wounds, cuts, sharp related injuries, direct contact with infected specimens/ bio hazardous materials, blood borne disease, infectious diseases/infections, airborne diseases and pollution from soiled materials. While, non-biological hazards were including physical/ergonomic, chemical, and psychosocial hazards (Bazeyo et al.,2015).

Psychological hazards is defined as passive self-perception, negative view on life in general, and shifts in mood such as; irritation with anything, loss of self-confidence, feeling of emptiness, loss of self- control, feeling of bitterness, feeling of defeat, crying for no visible reason, willingness to give everything up, long standing feeling of despair, passive image of self and difficulties to concentrate (Eljedi, 2015). Furthermore, social hazards, is defined as a difficulty in family relationships and feeling of isolation, insensitivity towards others, affective relation difficulties, social life difficulties, barriers in making friends, social isolation, difficulty in decision making about personal life, and uncontrolled aggressiveness (Branco et al. 2010).

Statement of Problems

There have been many allegations leveled against the Nigerian police and its personnel, some of which include; excessive use of force, corruption, perversion of justice, harassment, and delay in responding to distress calls, and so on. Many of these allegations have been observed to be true, giving the society a negative impression about the Police, and also tend to project a negative image of the Nigerian Police. Very prominent and recent among these allegations is the incessant killings by the SARS that led to the end-SARS protest. Suttie (2016), opined that if police is helped in practicing more respectful and empathetic

communication in their interaction with public, their acceptance in the communities that they are meant to protect increases manifold. Many factors may account for the lack of empathy among the Nigerian Police Personnel. According to Figley (2002), when the professional work environment places individuals in consistent states of vulnerability and tension, empathy and compassion can become weakened. If the issue of empathy is not address properly among the Nigerian police, the relationship between the citizens and the police would remain jeopardized.

Literature Review

Occupational stress is recognized world-wide as a major challenge to workers' health and the healthiness of their organizations (WHO, 2004). Various research findings indicate that prolonged stress poses threat to the health of workers and in turn to the organization (Brown et al., 2012; McShane & Von Glinow, 2010).

According to International Labor Organization (2012), Physical hazards in the police force can occur due to high levels of noise, related to the firing range or emergency horn. Two studies provided details regarding noise induced hearing loss (NIHL) in the police force.

Many studies have examined the relationship between empathy and other variables such as working personality, cynicism and poor working environment (Figley 2002). But, to the best of researchers' knowledge, little or no study in Nigeria, has examined the relationship between occupational stress, occupational hazards, and empathy among the Nigerian police personnel; which is why this study is intended to close the gap in the already existing knowledge.

Hypothesis

1. Occupational stress will significantly predict empathy among the Nigerian Police Personnel in Awka metropolis.
2. Occupational hazards will significantly predict empathy among the Nigerian Police Personnel in Awka metropolis.
3. Occupational stress and occupational hazards will have a significant interaction effect on empathy among the Nigerian Police Personnel in Awka metropolis.

METHODS

Participants: One hundred and seventeen police officers participated in the study. They were selected from the State Criminal Investigation Department, and the police headquarters, Awka, using convenience sampling method. They consist of eighty-eight males (75.2%), and twenty-nine females (24.8 %). The ages of the participants ranged from 23 to 62 years with mean age of 51.63 and standard deviation of 3.92. 101 (86.3 %) of them were married, 13 (11.1%) were single, 1 (.9%) divorced, and 2 (1.7%) widowers. They were selected using convenience sampling. Only fully filled questionnaires were recorded.

Instruments: The occupational stress questionnaire developed by Arthur (2016) was used to measure occupational stress. Another instrument that was used in this study was occupational hazards questionnaire developed by Mona et al., (2019), to measure occupational hazards. The Toronto empathy questionnaire (TEQ) developed by Spren et al., (2009) was also employed in this study to measure empathy among the police officers in Awka Metropolis. A pilot study was conducted to validate the instruments.

Occupational Stress Scale: This scale was developed by Arthur (2016); it contains 15 items measuring police operational stress; it also contains demographic information, such as age, gender, and rank, year of experience, marital status, department, and highest educational qualification. The scale utilized five-point Linkert response pattern, with responses ranging from; Never=1, Rarely =2, Sometimes=3, Often = 4, Very often = 5. 1 is the lowest ranking order, while 5 is the highest. The researcher carried out a pilot test to enhance the reliability of the instrument and obtained a Cronbach's alpha of α = .95.

Occupational Hazards Scale: This scale was developed by Mona et al., (2019). It contains 12 items, comprising different dimensions and aspect of occupational hazards, such as accidental hazards, psychological hazards, and physical hazards. The scale utilized five-point Likert response pattern, which measures the frequency of bullying, fight and victimization in school, with responses ranging from; Never=1, Rarely =2, Sometimes=3, Often = 4, Very often = 5. The researcher carried out a pilot test to enhance the reliability of the instrument and obtained a total Cronbach's alpha of α = .79

Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ): This scale was developed by Spren et al., (2009), it contains 16 items measuring the emotional aspect of empathy. The scale also utilized five points Likert response pattern such as Never = 1, rarely = 2, Sometimes = 3, often =4, always =5. 1 is the lowest ranking order while 5 is the highest. The researcher carried out a pilot test to enhance the reliability of the instrument and obtained a Cronbach's alpha of α =. 80

Procedure: The approval to conduct the research was collected from the Department of Psychology, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam. The researchers created a rapport with the police personnel, and brief them about the purpose of the research, after which the questionnaire was distributed to them. Out of the one hundred and twenty-five questionnaire distributed, only one hundred and seventeen questionnaires were completely filled and analyzed.

Design and Statistics: This research is a survey research and it adopted a correlational design and moderated multiple regression was adopted for the statistical analyses. The justification for this design and statistics is based on the fact that the researcher measured the relationship between operational stress, occupational Hazards, and Empathy. Statistical package for social sciences SPSS Inc., (version 23) was used to process the data.

RESULTS

Table 1: Descriptive table

Variables	*M*	*SD*	*N*
Occupational Stress	50.7436	9.31180	117
Occupational Hazards	40.4530	10.54260	117
Age	39.5897	9.06029	117

The above table 1 shows the Mean and standard deviation of the variables of the study. Occupational Stress ($M = 50.7$, $SD = 9.3$). Occupational Hazards ($M = 40.5$, $SD = 10.5$) and Age ($M = 39.6$, $SD = 9.06$).

Table 2

Summary Table of Predictive and Interactive Effect of Independent Variables on Empathy *(N = 117)*

Empathy Independent Variables	*B*	*SE B*	*β*	*t*	*P*
Occupational Stress	-.026.439	-.022	-.059	.953	
Occupational Hazards	.530.613	.503	.865	.389	
Occupational Stress * Hazards	-.010.011	-.741	.899	.371	
R^2		.125			
Durbin-Watson					2.304
F					5.385*

P<.05

Hypothesis 1 of this study stated that Occupational stress will significantly predict Empathy. However, the result shows that Occupational stress did not significantly predict Empathy ($β$ = -.022, t= .059, p>.05). This showed there is no statistically significant prediction because the significant value of Occupational stress (p>.953) is above .05 level of significant. Therefore, hypothesis 1 was not accepted.

Hypothesis 2 also stated that Occupational Hazards will significantly predict empathy. Thus, the result table above showed that Occupational Hazards does not predict empathy ($β$= .503, t= .865, p>.05). This indicates that Occupational hazards does not significantly predict empathy statistically, due to the significant value of Occupational hazards (p>.389) is above .05 level of significant. Therefore, hypothesis 2 was not accepted as well.

Hypothesis 3 which states that Occupational stress and Occupational Hazard will have a significant interaction effect on empathy. Thus, the result shows that the interaction of the two (2) independent variables does not significantly predict empathy, ($β$= .741, t= .899, p>.05). Therefore, hypothesis 3 was not accepted too.

DISCUSSION

The first hypothesis which stated that occupational stress will significantly predict empathy was rejected. Many people assumed that the stress in which the police go through on daily bases could have accounted for the lack of empathy among them. This finding is contrary to the finding of (Claus et al., 2016), who found that the neural empathy network reacted more strongly to image of painful medical procedures while under stress. In order words, people show more empathy and are more prone to helping others when they are under stress.

The findings of this study also disagreed with the findings of (Kyung et al., 2015; Sarafis et al., 2016), who found negative correlation between stress and empathy. The variation in the finding of this study and the previous ones may have occurred as a result of the fact that the previous studies were conducted in a foreign nation while this present study was conducted in Nigeria. In Nigeria, stress has become part of many people that they no longer perceive it as a threat neither does it affect their relationship with their fellow human being.

The second hypothesis which states that occupational hazards will significantly predict empathy was also rejected. This means that the physical, psychological and emotional injuries inflicted on police officers while carrying out their duties does not affect the feelings they have for people. The finding of this study is not in line with the findings of (Ford &Tetrick 2011; & Ofoegbu et al., 2013), who found a correlation between occupational hazards and work performance, and productivity. According to their findings, when employees are being affected by occupational hazards, the level of their productivity and performance would drop. Their studies were conducted using cement factory workers and other organization outside the law enforcement agency. However, the present study focused on the police and that may account for the variation.

The third hypothesis which stated that occupational stress and occupational hazards will jointly predict empathy was also rejected. This means that occupational stress and occupational hazards does not interactively affect police's perception of other people's feelings. Since occupational street and occupational hazards have no correlation with empathy, one may attribute the lack of empathy among the Nigerian police personnel to empathy failure.

Police cynicism and police culture may be some leading causes of empathy failure among the police personnel. Police cynicism, according to Captan (2003) is characterized by pessimistic and suspicious stance of police

officers toward either or both of their job, the public and the society as a whole.

Implications of the Study

The study shows that there is relationship between stress and occupational hazards, but their relationship is not statistically significant. Standing for a longer period, lack of support from superior, working without shift, and lack of functional working tools contributed to police occupational stress and invariable contributed to low empathy among the Nigerian Police. More so, Police officers are not being appreciated by the public whom they are protecting. Many a times, we have observed civilians insulting, assaulting, beating, harassing, and even killing police officers which are part of their occupational hazards. These actions taken by civilians can lead to police cynicism and even aggression among the police personnel towards the civilians.

These results will add to the knowledge of the general public that occupational stress and occupational hazards does not predict empathy among the Nigerian Police. The results will assist other researchers to look into other factors such as police culture, drugs, alcohol, and cynicism that may affect empathy among the Nigerian Police.

Conclusion

This study investigated the relationship between occupational stress, occupational hazards, and empathy. The findings of the research indicated that there is no correlation between occupational stress and empathy. This is and indicative that under a stressful working condition, police officers are likely or not to demonstrating empathy.

Occupational hazards also did not predict empathy. Injuries inflicted on police officers, insults rained on them, accidents and other occupational hazards they encountered does not affect their perception of the feelings of others. Finally, occupational stress, and occupational hazards did not interactively predict empathy. This means that police officers can be going through stressful conditions and at the same time occupational

hazards but still understand the feelings of others.

Recommendations

The study in view of the findings made the following recommendations:

1. The public should be educated and sensitized on how to relate and comply with the police to reduce occupational stress among the police.

2. Although occupational stress and occupational hazards does not statistically predict empathy among the police personnel but it has other negative effects on them. Therefore, its recommended that police authority should try as much as possible to ensure that adequate training coping strategies for stress are being taught among the police personnel.

3. Police authority should buy new modern equipment for its personnel and organize training that would reduce the level of occupational hazards among them.

4. Police authority should partner with academicians to seek for solutions for their challenges through academic research.

Suggestion for Further Studies

The researchers made the following suggestions:

1. Further studies should cover a larger number of police personnel from various States in Nigeria, instead of focusing on Anambra State alone.

2. The relationship between factor such as alcohol, marijuana, police cynicism and empathy should be studied by other researchers.

3. Also, factors such as gender, ethnicity and religion should be studied as mediator when studying empathy and other variables.

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