

Physiological and Psychological Consequences of Job Stress on The Nigeria Police Officers in Rivers State: Implications for Counselling

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Abstract

Background: Job stress is a major occupational challenge among police officers because of demanding duties, rotating shifts, supervisory pressures, and exposure to stressful work conditions. Such stress may adversely affect officers' physical and psychological well-being and their effectiveness at work.

Objective: This study examined the physiological and psychological consequences of job stress among Nigeria Police officers in Rivers State and the implications for counselling.

Method: The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population comprised 14,920 police officers across the 23 Local Government Areas of Rivers State. A sample of 400 officers was selected using simple and systematic random sampling. Data were collected with a structured questionnaire and analysed using mean and standard deviation.

Results: Respondents accepted the identified physiological consequences of job stress, with a grand mean of 3.14. Communication problems with supervisors recorded the highest mean (3.49), followed by sleeping on duty due to rotating shifts (3.43) and tension (3.35). Psychological consequences were also accepted, with a grand mean of 3.29. General anxiety recorded the highest mean (3.42), while job dissatisfaction recorded the lowest (2.93).

Conclusion: Job stress is associated with notable physiological and psychological challenges among police officers in Rivers State.

Unique Contribution: The study highlights the need to address both physical and psychological consequences of police occupational stress through counselling interventions.

Key Recommendation: The study recommends strengthened workplace counselling services, stress-management training, psychological support, and regular wellness assessments to promote officers' well-being and effectiveness.

Keywords: Counselling, Job, Physiological consequences, Psychological Consequences the Nigeria Police Officers, and Rivers State

Introduction

Job stress is a significant occupational health concern because it can negatively affect employees' physical health, psychological well-being, work performance, and quality of life. It occurs when work demands exceed an individual's perceived ability or resources to cope

effectively. Although work can promote well-being through income, purpose, social relationships, and achievement, excessive workload, low control, inadequate support, and unsafe working conditions can create serious psychosocial risks (WHO, 2024).

Police officers are particularly vulnerable to occupational stress due to unpredictable duties, long and irregular working hours, exposure to traumatic situations, organizational pressures, and the need to make rapid decisions. Evidence shows that occupational stress among police officers is associated with psychological problems, including burnout and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Ugwu & Idemudia, 2025). Prolonged job stress can produce both physiological and psychological consequences. Physiological effects may include fatigue, sleep difficulties, headaches, muscular tension, and cardiovascular strain (Ibanga, J.U.M. & John, H. F., 2026), while psychological effects may include anxiety, emotional exhaustion, irritability, poor concentration, reduced job satisfaction, burnout, and trauma-related difficulties. These effects can undermine the alertness, judgment, emotional regulation, and interpersonal skills required for effective policing. Similarly, evidence indicates that shift work, unpredictable schedules, occupational stress, and inadequate organizational support can adversely affect police officers' physical and psychological well-being (Antunes et al., 2024).

The Nigerian context makes police job stress particularly important because officers operate under complex security demands, heavy workloads, operational pressures, and resource constraints. Ugwuoke et al. (2026), in a nationwide study of 528 police personnel, found that officers commonly worked long hours under tense conditions and inadequate logistical support, contributing to frustration, exhaustion, and emotional burnout. Thus, police job stress should be viewed as both an individual and organizational concern. In Rivers State, demanding operational responsibilities and limited opportunities for recovery and psychosocial support may increase officers' physical fatigue and psychological distress. Prolonged stress can affect family relationships, decision-making, organizational commitment, and the quality of police services. Addressing these consequences is therefore essential for both officers' welfare and effective policing.

Counselling can play an important role through preventive and remedial interventions that strengthen coping skills, emotional regulation, resilience, and psychological well-being. It can also facilitate early identification of stress-related difficulties and appropriate referral for specialized support (WHO, 2024). Despite increasing research on police occupational stress, there is limited context-specific evidence on the combined physiological and psychological consequences among police officers in Rivers State. This study therefore investigates these consequences and their implications for counselling, with the aim of informing stress-management interventions, organizational support programmes, and policies that promote police officers' health, well-being, and effectiveness.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria society today has been experiencing dramatic changes in every stratum of life development. These changes have brought a drift from the traditionally accepted way of life, especially among Nigeria police force. These changes may also bring some stressful situations to which individuals most especially law enforcement agents have to adapt and cope with.

Job stress has continued to attract serious concern and attention by psychologists in organizational settings. This is because the changing demands of the working condition increase the level of stress and then have negative consequences for persons working under pressure such as the law enforcement agents. The situation is more complicated due to the latest insecurity development in the country which has required the training of police officers in the handling of new electronic gadgets to curb the rise of terrorism, kidnapping and other form of

criminality. To control the situation and bring a lasting peace officers are seen working at mid-night to secure lives and property, staying under the sun or rain at check points, responding to distress calls, facing armed bandits, facing kidnappers, arresting fraudsters and ethno-ethnic disasters in the country poised the job challenges and stress the Nigerian police officers. In view of the above, the question begging for answer is, what is the physiological and psychological consequences of job stress on Nigeria police force in Rivers State?

Research Objective

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the physiological and psychological consequences of job stress on Nigeria police force in Rivers State. In specific terms, the study seeks to:

1. determine the physiological consequences of job stress on the Nigeria Police officers in Rivers State,
2. ascertain the psychological consequences of job stress on Nigeria Police officers in Rivers State.
3. find out if general fatigue is a physiological consequence of job stress of the Nigeria police officers in Rivers State, and
4. determine whether or not, general anxiety is a psychological consequence of job stress of the Nigeria Police officers in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the physiological consequences of job stress on the Nigeria police officers in Rivers State?
2. What are the psychological consequences of job stress on Nigeria police officers in Rivers State?
3. To what extent is general fatigue a physiological consequence of job stress on the Nigeria Police officers in Rivers State based on rank?
4. To what extent is general anxiety a psychological consequence of job stress on the Nigeria Police officers in Rivers State based on gender?

Conceptual Clarification

Stress is a psychological and physiological response to internal or external demands that are perceived as exceeding an individual's coping capacity. It occurs when people perceive situations as threatening or overwhelming and may result in anxiety, fatigue, irritability, tension, and reduced performance (APA, 2024; WHO, 2023). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) explain stress as a transaction between individuals and their environment, shaped by how demands are appraised and the coping resources available. Thus, stress is a natural adaptive response, but prolonged or excessive stress can negatively affect both physical and psychological wellbeing (American Institute of Stress, 2024).

Medical Theory (Model) of Stress

The Medical Theory of Stress, developed primarily by Hans Selye, explains stress as the body's non-specific physiological response to demands or stressors. Building on Cannon's concept of homeostasis, Selye proposed the General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS), which describes three stages of the stress response: alarm, where the body reacts immediately to a stressor; resistance, where the body mobilizes resources to cope and adapt; and exhaustion, which occurs when prolonged stress depletes the body's coping resources.

According to Selye, stress activates the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal system and the sympathetic nervous system, resulting in the release of hormones such as glucocorticoids, epinephrine, and norepinephrine. While moderate stress can motivate individuals and enhance adaptation, prolonged or excessive stress may cause fatigue, sleep problems, headaches, hypertension, cardiovascular problems, and psychological difficulties. However, the theory has been criticized for treating stress responses as largely non-specific, whereas different stressors may produce different physiological and psychological reactions (Mason, 1975).

Maslow's Organizational Theory of Stress

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs explains human motivation through five levels: physiological needs, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. In the workplace, unmet basic, social, or esteem needs can lead to insecurity, dissatisfaction, and stress, whereas satisfying these needs promotes motivation, wellbeing, and effective performance.

For police officers, poor working conditions, job insecurity, weak interpersonal relationships, and lack of recognition may hinder psychological wellbeing and increase occupational stress. Providing supportive organizational conditions and counselling services can help meet officers' needs, strengthen resilience and emotional wellbeing, reduce stress, and improve job performance.

Theoretical Framework

Agnew's General Strain Theory

Agnew's General Strain Theory explains that stressful experiences can produce negative emotions such as anger, frustration, and anxiety, especially when coping resources are inadequate. Strain may result from failure to achieve valued goals, loss of positive experiences or relationships, and exposure to unpleasant situations. To the police officers, prolonged stress can lead to psychological distress, emotional difficulties, and unhealthy coping behaviours. The theory therefore helps explain how work-related strain affects police officers' psychological wellbeing and behaviour, particularly when effective coping mechanisms are lacking.

Cognitive Viewpoint

Ellis's Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy and Beck's Cognitive Theory propose that people's thoughts and interpretations of situations influence their emotions and behaviours (Ellis, 1994; Beck, 2011). Irrational beliefs and negative thinking can increase anxiety, anger, frustration, and stress, whereas rational and realistic thinking promotes healthier adjustment. In policing, negative interpretations of difficult workplace experiences may intensify frustration, emotional exhaustion, and psychological distress. Therefore, the cognitive viewpoint is useful for explaining police stress by showing how officers' perceptions, beliefs, and thought patterns influence their emotional responses and coping behaviours.

Empirical Review

Empirical studies show that occupational stress and exposure to traumatic events can have serious psychological and physiological effects. Eremie (1992) found that firefighters exposed to a chemical warehouse fire experienced greater demoralization, emotional distress, and fear of poor physical health. Violanti (2008) reported elevated cardiovascular risks, cholesterol, pulse rate, blood pressure, and other stress-related indicators among police officers, reflecting the demanding and hazardous nature of police work. Miles, Demi, and Mostyn-Aker (1984) also found depression, frustration, vulnerability, emotional numbness, and nightmares among rescue workers exposed to a major disaster, with many seeking counselling and social support.

Finally, the evidence indicates that demanding and traumatic occupational conditions can negatively affect both physical and psychological wellbeing. These findings justify examining job stress among Nigeria Police officers and highlight the importance of counselling and psychosocial support in promoting officers' wellbeing and effective functioning.

Consequences of Job Stress among the Nigeria Police in Rivers State

Physiological Consequences of Job Stress

Job stress can produce various physiological and physical health problems. McDowell and Hostetler (1996) noted that severe stress and anxiety may contribute to ulcers and other symptoms such as headaches, skin rashes, backaches, stomach disturbances, shortness of breath, insomnia, fatigue, and loss of appetite. Prolonged stress may also cause changes in blood pressure, muscle tension, digestion, and other bodily processes, potentially resulting in more serious health problems. Walter (2012) further observed that police work is inherently stressful and may increase the risk of sleep problems, obesity, and other health challenges. Since police officers regularly face danger, pressure, and demanding working conditions, prolonged job stress can negatively affect their physical and psychological wellbeing.

Psychological Consequences of Job Stress on Nigeria Police in Rivers State

Job stress can have significant psychological and emotional consequences, including anxiety, depression, frustration, restlessness, fatigue, withdrawal, burnout, tension, forgetfulness, and aggression. Among police officers, prolonged occupational stress may also result in job dissatisfaction, boredom, absenteeism, poor work performance, interpersonal difficulties, and premature retirement (Eremie, 1992).

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design, which was considered appropriate for collecting data on the current conditions of Nigeria Police officers. The population comprised 14,920 Nigeria Police officers serving across the 23 Local Government Areas of Rivers State, distributed among three Area Commands: Bori (13 divisions), Ahoada (17 divisions), and Port Harcourt (28 divisions). A sample of 400 officers was determined using the Taro Yamane formula. Simple random sampling was used to select respondents, while systematic random sampling was employed to select participating police divisions from six Local Government Areas representing the three Area Commands. Two assistant researchers who were police officers assisted with questionnaire administration in Ahoada Area Command, while the researcher personally administered the instruments in Bori and Port Harcourt Area Commands. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the four research questions.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the physiological consequences of job stress on the Nigeria police force in Rivers State?

Table 1: Summary of the mean score analysis of the physiological consequences of job stress on the Nigeria police force in Rivers State.

Table: Physiological Consequences of Job Stress

S/N	Items	SA	A	SD	D	Total	Mean	Decision
A	Gastrointestinal Problems							
1	Pains in the lining of stomach and duodenum	160	200	20	20	400	3.25	Accepted
2	Tendency to have gastric ulcers	50	180	150	20	400	2.65	Accepted

S/N	Items	SA	A	SD	D	Total	Mean	Decision
	Mean						2.95	Accepted
B	Tension Headache							
3	I tend to be tense always	200	150	20	30	400	3.35	Accepted
4	Constant muscle, neck, forehead and scalp contraction	70	130	180	20	400	2.63	Accepted
	Mean						2.99	Accepted
C	Insomnia (Sleep Problems)							
5	Worry and difficulty sleeping at night	160	190	15	25	400	3.16	Accepted
6	Worry but no difficulty sleeping at night	200	160	15	25	400	3.34	Accepted
	Mean						3.25	Accepted
D	High Blood Pressure							
7	Blood pressure is always 130/70 mmHg	100	120	170	10	400	2.78	Accepted
8	Blood pressure is always 140/70 mmHg	220	110	60	10	400	3.35	Accepted
	Mean						3.07	Accepted
E	General Fatigue							
9	Problems communicating with supervisors and superiors	230	150	5	15	400	3.49	Accepted
10	Sleep on duty due to rotating shift work	200	180	10	10	400	3.43	Accepted
	Mean						3.46	Accepted
	Grand Mean						3.14	Accepted

Interpretation: The grand mean of 3.14 indicates that respondents generally accepted the identified physiological consequences of job stress. The highest mean was for communication problems with supervisors (3.49), followed by sleeping on duty due to rotating shifts (3.43) and being tense (3.35).

Research Question 2: What are the psychological consequences of job stress on the Nigeria police force in Rivers State?

Table 4.2: Summary of the Mean Score Analysis of the Psychological Consequences of Job Stress on the Nigeria Police Force in Rivers State.

Table: Psychological Consequences of Job Stress

S/N	Psychological Consequences/Items	SA	A	SD	D	Total	Mean	Decision
F	General Anxiety							
1	I tend to worry about my unmet needs	250	100	20	30	400	3.43	Accepted
2	I tend to worry about losing my life	210	160	15	15	400	3.41	Accepted
	Mean						3.42	Accepted
G	General Hostility							
3	I work in a dangerous job	230	150	10	10	400	3.42	Accepted
4	In my job, a person stands a good chance of getting hurt	190	140	30	40	400	3.20	Accepted
	Mean						3.31	Accepted
H	Job Dissatisfaction							

S/N	Psychological Consequences/Items	SA	A	SD	D	Total	Mean	Decision
5	I am very happy with my work	200	180	5	15	400	3.35	Accepted
6	I am not very happy with my work	150	120	60	70	400	2.50	Accepted
	Mean						2.93	Accepted
I	Inefficiency							
7	My computer knowledge makes me efficient in my work	250	100	15	35	400	2.96	Rejected
8	Lack of computer/electronic-gadget knowledge makes me inefficient	300	80	10	10	400	3.68	Accepted
	Mean						3.32	Accepted
J	Lack of Coordination							
9	When too many things happen at once, I tend to be confused	220	130	10	40	400	3.55	Accepted
10	When supervisors attack me unnecessarily, I feel destabilized	150	130	80	40	400	2.98	Accepted
	Mean						3.27	Accepted
	Grand Mean						3.29	Accepted

Interpretation: The grand mean of 3.29 indicates that respondents generally accepted the identified psychological consequences of job stress. General anxiety recorded the highest category mean (3.42), while job dissatisfaction had the lowest (2.93). Overall, the findings suggest that anxiety, hostility, dissatisfaction, inefficiency, and lack of coordination are notable psychological consequences of job stress among the police officers studied.

Research Question 3: To what extent is general fatigue a physiological consequence of job stress on Nigeria police force in Rivers State?

Table 3: Summary of the Extent to which General Fatigue is a Physiological Consequence of Job Stress on Nigeria Police Force in Rivers State.

S/N	General fatigue	HE		LE		Total	Mean	Decision
		SA	A	SD	D			
1	I tend to have problems communicating with supervisors and superiors	210	180	2	8	400	3.48	Accepted
	Mean		3.45		0.03			
2	I tend to sleep on duty often due to rotating shift work	230	150	5	15	400	3.49	Accepted
	Mean		3.43		0.06			
	Grand mean		3.44		0.045		3.49	Accepted
	Total mean difference			3.40				Accepted

Results in table 3 above show that the two items were accepted as the extent to which general fatigue is a physiological consequence of job stress on Nigeria police force in Rivers State. Also, the grand mean which is 3.46 (greater than the standard mean of 2.5) indicated that general fatigue is a physiological consequence of job stress on the Nigeria police force in Rivers State and were significantly accepted. Finally, upon comparison, the total mean difference was

found to be 3.40, which is greater than the standard mean of 2.5. This means that general fatigue was generally accepted to a high extent as a consequence of physiological job stress of the police officers.

Research Question 4: To what extent is general anxiety a psychological consequence of job stress on Nigeria police force in Rivers State?

Table 4 Summary of the Extent to which General Anxiety is a Psychological Consequence of Job Stress on Nigeria Police Force in Rivers State.

S/N	General anxiety	HE		LE		Total	Mean	Decision
		SA	A	SD	D			
1	I tend to worry about my unmet needs	250	100	20	30	400	3.43	Accepted
	Mean	3.25		0.18				
2	I tend to worry about losing my life	210	160	15	15	400	3.41	Accepted
	Mean	3.3		0.11				
	Grand mean	3.28		0.15			3.42	Accepted
	Total mean difference	3.13						Accepted

Results in table 4 above show that the two items were accepted as the extent to which general anxiety is a psychological consequence of job stress on Nigeria police force in Rivers State. Also, the grand mean which is 3.42 (greater than the standard mean of 2.5) indicated that general anxiety is a psychological consequence of job stress on the Nigeria police force in Rivers State and were significantly accepted. Finally, upon comparison, the total mean difference was found to be 3.13, which is greater than the standard mean of 2.5. This means that general anxiety was generally accepted to a high extent as a consequence of psychological job stress of the police officers.

Discussion of Findings

The findings showed that demographic factors significantly influenced how police officers experienced the consequences of job stress. Specifically, insomnia was significantly related to age, suggesting that age-related pressures may affect officers' sleep. General fatigue was significantly associated with location, supporting evidence that working conditions and shift patterns can influence fatigue and occupational performance. The study also found a significant relationship between general anxiety and gender, indicating that male and female officers may experience or respond to anxiety differently. In addition, job dissatisfaction was significantly related to age, suggesting that age and changing work-related needs may influence satisfaction with policing. On the overall, the findings demonstrate that age, gender, and location are important demographic factors in understanding the physiological and psychological consequences of job stress among police officers. The results further emphasize the need for targeted counselling and stress-management interventions that consider officers' demographic and work-related circumstances.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concludes that job stress has important physiological and psychological consequences for Nigeria Police officers in Rivers State. General fatigue was significantly related to officers' rank, while general anxiety, general hostility, job dissatisfaction, inefficiency, and lack of coordination showed statistically insignificant relationships with gender, educational level, age, location, and rank, respectively. The findings

suggest that demographic and occupational characteristics may influence some experiences of job stress, particularly fatigue, while other stress-related outcomes may occur irrespective of these characteristics.

Implications for Counselling

The findings highlight the importance of counselling in helping police officers manage the psychological and emotional effects of job stress. Counsellors should provide empathetic, accepting, and supportive environments based on Carl Rogers' Client-Centred Therapy to promote self-acceptance, adjustment, and effective coping. Counselling should also address officers' career interests, expectations, and goals to enhance professional development and job satisfaction. Furthermore, police authorities should provide training in modern technologies, equipment, and policing techniques to improve competence and reduce work-related stress. Thus, counselling interventions should integrate emotional support, career guidance, coping-skills development, and organizational support to enhance officers' wellbeing and effectiveness.

Recommendations/ and Policy Implications

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. **Stress Management Training:** The Nigeria Police Force should provide regular stress-inoculation and stress-management training for officers, with emphasis on relaxation techniques, coping skills, and effective management of occupational stress.
2. **Counselling in Police Training:** Counselling should be incorporated into the training and certification programmes of Nigeria Police officers. Qualified and professionally certified counsellors should be employed to provide psychological support and guidance to officers.
3. **Establishment of Counselling Centres:** The Nigeria Police Force should establish counselling units in all Area Commands and, where feasible, at divisional levels. These centres should provide accessible support for officers experiencing emotional, psychological, occupational, and developmental challenges, thereby promoting their overall wellbeing and effectiveness. A preventive, integrated occupational-health approach combining counselling, stress management, healthcare, supportive supervision, and improved working conditions is essential for protecting the physical and psychological well-being of Nigeria Police Officers in Rivers State.

Ethical clearance

Ethical consent was sought and obtained from the participants used in this study. They were made to understand that the exercise was purely for academic purposes, and their participation was voluntary.

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Conflict of interest

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Authors' contributions.

John U. M. Ibanga conceived the study, planned, wrote the initial manuscript, while Joseph Igwe-Okomiso designed the study, collated the data, and managed the analysis and interpretation. All authors have critically reviewed and approved the final draft and are responsible for the content and similarity index of the manuscript.

Availability of data and materials.

The datasets on which conclusions were made for this study are available on reasonable request.

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