

## Perceived Psychological Stress, Acting out Tendencies, and its Relationship with Judgment of Police Constables in Punjab, Pakistan

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### Abstract

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*The present study aims to explore the relationship between perceived psychological stress and acting out tendencies, and their effect on moral judgment among police constables in Punjab, Pakistan. The correlational study was conducted in five cities of Punjab, Pakistan. Participants were recruited from Lahore, Narowal, Sheikhpura, Kasur, and Farooq Abad. The police constables, who completed the study inclusion criteria, were approached after taking their written and verbal consent. The perceived psychological stress (Cohen et al. 1983), 1983) translated in Urdu by Kausar and Tahir (2013) was used to assess the stress level of an individual. The aggression test (Fulton et al., 1998) was used to assess the acting out tendencies among police constables of Punjab, Pakistan. The Moral Judgment Test (Georg Lind, 1999) translated in Urdu by Liaqat (2011) was used to assess moral reasoning while presenting different scenarios. The results were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). It revealed that all police constables have psychological stress in Punjab, Pakistan but significant relationship exists between age and moral judgment in police constables. The current study sheds light on the psychological stress that police constables face due to their job demands and different challenging situations.*

**Keywords:** Stress, Psychological Pressure, Morality, Acting Out Tendencies, Anger, Police Constables, Pakistan

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Police officers perform a highly stressful and dangerous duty that involves a complex set of environmental, psychosocial, and health risks (Arias *et al.*, 2008) as maintaining law and order in any country is a difficult task (Collins and Gibbs, 2003). Worldwide, the duty of police constables is considered very dangerous and involves physical and emotional risks (Arnetz *et al.*, 2013) It was observed that different personality characteristics are associated with the police constables by the public to portray their images such as authoritarianism, cynicism, and aggression due to different job responsibilities (Zapolski *et al.*, 2018). Research indicated that due to hectic routine, police constables suffered from distress and burn out tendencies (Rasheed *et al.*, 2018). According to a survey, due to continuous work in a stressful environment, one in five police officers feels frustrated and has anger or acting out tendencies (Horrigan, 2016). According to Dr. Muhammad Shoaib Suddle, “It was general image exhibits of whole department of police by public in Pakistan that ‘Polic[ing] was designed to be a public-frightening organization, not a public-friendly agency” (Ullah *et al.*, 2016).

Police violence is described as excessive use of force (Violanti *et al.*, 2014). In Pakistan, acting out tendencies among police constables are on the rise that include simple verbal aggressive comments to physically violating someone’s boundary (Zubair and Khan, 2014). Due to corruption allegations, highlighted malpractices, acting out tendencies, and less emphasis on good deeds, police constables have become the cause of disrespect of their department in Pakistan (Ullah *et al.*, 2016). A survey of both rural and urban areas by Gallup, Pakistan, revealed that 24% of Pakistanis themselves or the people in their neighbourhood have no trust in police, 49% have very little trust in police and 27% have significant trust in police (Saeed, 2014). This data indicates that police failed to serve public and continued to serve those in power (Imam, 2011). The same influential people seem to try to give legitimacy to violent actions and decrease moral judgment of police force by motivating them into such activities for personal or political gains (Zubair and Khan, 2014). The current study will help understand the reasons that might become the cause of lack of morality and what forces lead towards acting out behaviours.

In Pakistan, it is noted that psychologically exhausted police officers develop maladaptive behaviour and acting out tendencies towards others, either family or public (Humayon *et al.*, 2018). The aim of this study is to explore the relationship between police constables' stress and acting out tendencies, that might affect the moral judgment in police constables as they are confronted

with moral dilemmas in the course of their job. This study helped us understand the stress level of police constables in different cities and provided us with the direction to explore more underlying stress factor of police and their effects on their social morals. 'The exploration of such factors will help to improve their mental health and eventually become the cause of betterment of society.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY**

The theoretical framework of the study contains two models:

### **2.1. System Model of Stress (SMOS)**

This model focusses on "System". The model contains at three systems which become the cause of stressors *1*) open system: constantly interacting with the environment; *2*) appraisal: when stressors attack, the process of appraisal starts includes detection identification *3*) responses: the individual copes with the stressors by bringing certain important and needful changes in his responses; they can be psychological, physiological, and behavioural. The present study helps to explore the stress level in Punjab, Pakistan. The pressure of the police constables must be tackled if proper models are developed and implemented in the system.

### **2.2. Rest model of moral development**

The six stages of moral reasoning, developed by Rest (1979), are based on Kohlberg's development theory. Each of these stages' schemas includes representative characteristics. *Stage 1*: Obedience, *Stage 2*: Instrumental Egoism and simple Exchange, *Stage 3*: Interpersonal concordance, *Stage 4*: Law and duty to the social order, *Stage 5*: Societal consensus, *Stage 6*: Non-arbitrary social cooperation

## **3. METHOD**

The current study will be conducted in Pakistan to explore the relationship between Perceived Psychological Stress and Acting Out tendencies, and its effect on moral judgment among police constables of Punjab, Pakistan.

### 3.1. Study Design

The Correlational research design was used to study perceived psychological stress, acting out tendencies and its relationship on morality among police constables. The data was collected by purposive sampling technique. The sample of  $N=250$  police constables were included in the study. The participants ( $N=50$ ) were taken from the District jail of Sheikhpura, ( $N=50$ ) were taken from District jail of Lahore, ( $N=50$ ) were taken from District jail of Kasur, ( $N=50$ ) were taken from District jail of Narowal, ( $N=50$ ) were taken from District jail of Farooq Abad.

### 3.2. Study Setting

Permission was taken from five district jails of Punjab that included Sheikhpura, Lahore, Narowal, Farooq Abad, and Kasur. Consent was taken from the participants before the study.

#### *Inclusion Criteria:*

Police constables will be included if they:

- are aged 18 and above
- are able to give written informed consent
- are able to participate in the study on volunteer basis
- have been on duty at least on one occasion for the safety of the public

#### *Exclusion Criteria:*

Police constables will be excluded if they:

- are not able to provide full consent
- present a diagnosed physical or intellectual disability as it can may become the cause of psychological stress among police constables

### 3.3. Assessment Measures

Following instruments were used to collect data for the study:

#### 3.3.1. Perceived Psychological Stress (Cohen, 1983)

Perceived psychological stress was developed by Sheldon Cohen (1983). The scale was translated by Amna Tahir and Prof. Rukhsana Kausar

(Institute of Applied Psychology, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan) in 2013. The 14-item scale rates from “0 to 4” in which 0 means Never, 1= almost never, 2= sometimes, 3 means almost frequent and 4 means very frequently. The higher score of the scale shows higher stress levels in the participants. The reliability of the scale in the present study was .61.

### **3.3.2. Aggression Test (Fulton *et al.*, 1998)**

Aggression Test was used to measure the acting out tendencies in the police constables participating in the present study. The psychological measure specifically measures the overt aggression tendencies in the individuals. The Urdu translated version of the scale was used in the present study. The reliability of the scale was recorded at .61.

### **3.3.3. Moral Judgment Test (Georg Lind, 1999)**

The Moral Judgment Test has been constructed by Lawrence Kohlberg (1964) to assess a subject's moral judgment competence. It measures the subject's moral ideas and attitudes. The Urdu translated version was used in the present study (Liaqat, 2011). The scale consisted of two moral dilemmas in the form of two very brief stories (euthanasia dilemma and workers' dilemma). Each dilemma provides a fictitious but a real-life situation on which a decision is made by the characters of a story and participants rate how much they agree with the solution on a 7-point scale (-3 to +3).

## **4. PROCEDURE**

Ethics approval was sought from the Ethical Board of Government College University, Lahore. After approval of the University Board, permission processes were completed from all the authors before using the assessment measures in both English and Urdu. At the third level, permission processes were started from all district jails on the reassurance that the data will be kept anonymously and be kept confidential, and it will only be used for research purposes. Researchers assessed the eligibility of the police constables by using inclusion/exclusion checklist as the screening instrument. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants and a participant information sheet was provided to them both in English and Urdu languages. Written consent was taken from all eligible and volunteer participants. Consent process and verbal consent was recorded for those who are unable to read and write. The police constables who showed restrictions during administration of assessment

measures due to the associated stigma about mental health were briefly psycho-educated and the researchers elaborated the purpose of the study again.

## 5. RESULTS

The demographic information of the sample includes gender, education, family system, age, and marital status. The sample consists of 250 police constables from five different cities of Punjab province. Qualification categories of participants consists of nil qualification ( $f=3$ ,  $\% = 1.2$ ), matriculation ( $f=140$ ,  $\% = 56.0$ ) and graduate ( $f=107$ ,  $\% = 42.8$ ). Family system of participants consists of nuclear ( $f=139$ ,  $\% = 55.6$ ) and joint ( $f=111$ ,  $\% = 44.4$ ). The marital status shows that most police constables are single ( $f=147$ ,  $\% = 58.8$ ) and less participants are married ( $f=103$ ,  $\% = 41.2$ ). The age categories of participants divided into two subgroups, young participants ( $f=176$ ,  $\% = 70.4$ ) and middle age participants ( $f=74$ ,  $\% = 29.6$ ). The income of participants has been divided into two categories ( $f=20.8 > 50,000$ ,  $79.2 < 50,000$  respectively).

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the sample

Demographics	F	%
Gender		
Male	250	100.0
Age		
Young	176	70.4
Middle	74	29.6
Education		
Illiterate	3	1.2
Matriculation	140	56.0
Graduate	107	42.8
Family System		
Nuclear	139	55.6
Joint	111	44.4
Marital Status		
Single	147	58.8
Married	103	41.2
Income		
Less than 50,000	52	20.8
More than 50,000	198	79.2

Note: f= frequency, % = percentage.

It was hypothesized that there will be a significant relationship between income, perceived psychological stress, and moral judgment in police constables.

Table 2. Correlation matrix of Income, Perceived Psychological Stress, and Moral Judgment (N=250)

Variables	1	2	3
1. Income	-	.14*	.28**
2. Perceived Psychological Stress	-	-	.20**
3. Moral Judgment Test	-	-	-

Note = \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < .001$ .

Results of Pearson product moment correlation indicated that there is a positive correlation between income and perceived psychological stress ( $r = .14^*$   $p < .05$ ). Moreover, there is significant correlation ( $r = .28$ ,  $p < .001$ ) between income and moral judgment in police constables.

It was hypothesized that the higher the age the higher will be acting out tendencies (AOT) and Moral judgment (MJT) in police constables.

Table 3. Correlation matrix of Age, Acting out tendencies and Moral Judgment in Police constables (N=250)

Variables	1	2	3
1. Age	-	-.06	-.39**
2. Acting out Tendency	-	-	.25**
3. Moral Judgment	-	-	-

Note = \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < .001$ .

The result indicated that age is negatively correlated to moral judgment ( $r = -.39$ ,  $p < .01$ ) in police constables. It also indicated that age was not significantly related to acting out tendencies ( $r = -.06$ ,  $p < .05$ ) in police constables. Moreover, acting out tendency is significantly correlated ( $r = .25$ ,  $p < .05$ ) with Moral Judgment in police constables.

It was hypothesized that perceived psychological stress and acting out tendencies are likely to predict moral judgment among police constables.

Table 4. Simple Linear Regression Predicting Moral Judgment (MJT) from Perceived Psychological Stress (PPS) and Acting out Tendencies (AOT) in police constables (N=250)

Variable	B	SE	B	p	Moral Judgment	
					95% CL	
SE	-25.9	7.0		.00	.39	-12.0
Perceived Psychological Stress	.70	.23	.17	.00	.23	1.1
Acting out Tendency	1.2	.31	.23	.00	.62	1.8
R <sup>2</sup>	.31					
R2	.09					
F	13.3					

Note: \*p < .05, CI = Confidence Interval.

The results indicated that both perceived psychological stress (PSS) and acting out tendency (AOT),  $F(2.247) = 13.3, p < .001$  are the positive predictor of moral judgment (MJT) in police constables. The results indicated that the variance R2 is significantly accounted ( $R2 = .09$ ), which emphasizes the accountability for 90% variance in the model.

It was hypothesized that age and income are likely to predict moral judgment among police constables.

Table 5. Simple Linear Regression Predicting Moral Judgment from Age and Income (N=250)

Variable	B	SE	B	p	Moral Judgment	
					95% CL	
SE	-.42	7.7	-.53	.58	-19.5	10.9
Age	-1.2	.16	-.42	.00	-1.5	-.93
Income	.002	.00	.38	.00	.001	.003
R <sup>2</sup>	.50					
R2	.25					
F	43.0					

Note: \*p < .05, CI = Confidence Interval.

Results indicated that the simple linear regression determined whether age and income are predictors of moral judgment. The results indicated that both age and income are significant predictors of moral judgment (MJT),  $F(2.247) = 43.0, p < .001$  in police constables. The results indicated that the variance R2 is significantly accounted ( $R2 = .25$ ), which emphasized the accountability for 25% variance in the model.



It was hypothesized that there will be a difference in perceived psychological stress, acting out tendencies, and moral judgment by five cities of Punjab, Pakistan ( $N=250$ ).

Table 6. One Way Analysis of Variance of Perceived Psychological Stress, Burn-out (Exhaustion and Disengagement), Acting out Tendency, and Moral Judgment by five cities ( $N=250$ )

Variables	Sheikhupura		Lahore		Narowal		Kasur		Farooq Abad		<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
PSS	26.1	5.8	27.6	5.7	22.2	5.0	25.3	6.0	27.8	5.1	.000
Acting out tendencies	11.0	3.9	12.6	4.5	12.0	4.4	11.3	4.0	13.5	5.2	.040
Moral judgment Test	-5.9	9.3	22.4	26.0	-4.2	7.9	-4.7	-9.2	28.5	27.0	.000

The results indicated that there is a significant difference in perceived psychological stress (PSS), acting out tendency, and moral judgment in police constables living in different cities. Further, Post Hoc analysis indicated that perceived psychological stress is significantly higher among the police constables of the five cities. Moreover, results showed that the Acting out tendencies are significantly different in the five cities of Punjab, Pakistan.

## 6. DISCUSSION

The objective of the study was to explore perceived psychological stress, acting out tendencies and its relationship on moral judgment among police constables. The descriptive analysis indicated that the majority of the police constables was between the ages of 18 -35 years, with educational qualification till matriculation, and most of them were living as part of joint family system. The sample was drawn from five cities of Punjab, Pakistan.

The results of the study concluded that there is a positive correlation of income with both psychological stress and moral judgment among police constables. According to the system model of stress (SMOS), psychological stressors or physiological demands are interlinked and interrelated with each other (Lumsden *et al.*, 2019) and it has been revealed that physiological needs such as high living demands, job pressure, and maintaining morality become the cause of psychological stress among high income police constables. Furthermore, a study by Narweez (1999) examines that the police constables do not prefer money to their morality. Thus, the results suggest that if the

income increases then stress level and morality both increase to fulfil the responsibilities either towards family or towards the society.

The results also concluded that age has no significant relationship with acting out tendencies and it has also been shown in the studies of criminal activity that acting out tendencies can be developed in any individual from preadolescence or early adolescence (Juvenile crime, 2001) and its chances to develop in later age decrease. Furthermore, Violanti (2006) also investigated that the police constables will be able to understand the system of the department with the passage of time and it might affect their morality according to their job demands.

It is also predicted in the current study that the age and income are positive predictors of moral judgment in the police constables of Punjab, Pakistan, as the demands of promotion, high ranks, and decent salary are associated with the satisfaction of police constables (Andreou *et al.*, 2011). Different factors such as negative media coverage, public criticism, workload, departmental pressures, and poor salary were highly associated with the age and years they spend in service of police departments (Xavier and Prabhakar, 2013). Furthermore, it has been indicated that police are the main point of security and safety for the public; Punjab as the main province, indicates the security of the whole country. This helps explain why the ratio of stress in police constables of the provincial capital, Lahore, is high as compared with other cities.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The main findings of the study indicate that police constables are at the high risk of psychological stress, contributing both occupational and personal stressors that need to be tackled so they do not affect their level of morality and not become the cause of developing acting out tendencies towards society or family due to pressurized environment.

### 7.1. Limitations and Suggestions

- The sample was restricted to five cities of only one province. The data may be collected from the entire country to enable generalization.
- Qualitative analysis should be incorporated to explore the factors associated with each variable among police constables.
- Trainings and psychological refresher courses for dealing with stressors must be introduced to maintain police constables' good mental health.

## 7.2. Implications

- The research establishes that the perceived psychological stress, morality, and acting out tendencies are associated with each other according to the occupational demands in the police constables of Punjab, Pakistan.
- As seen in the research, the stress level of the Punjab police constables is addressed so that the authorities might notice and work for the betterment of the constables' psychological health.
- Through this research, stress factors were explored in detail and suggestions for working toward a better work environment for police constables at government level were noted.

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