Determinants of Job Stress among Royal Malaysian Police (RMP): A Conceptual Framework

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

Stress in the workplace has developed into a popular subject matter and also received a significant amount of interest from previous and present researchers due to the growing concern in various occupational sectors. Workplace stress has been found to have a detrimental effect on the health and wellbeing of employees, and also reflected negative impact on individual and organizational productivity and profits. Stress has been regarded as a major issue in relations to law enforcement officers including police officers. The aim of this paper is to review related empirical literatures and highlight the need to investigate the influences of workloads, working conditions, role conflict, role ambiguity and workplace relationships with job stress among Royal Malaysian Police (RMP) personnel. Toward the end of the paper, a conceptual framework will be offered. Based on discussion on related empirical review, the job stress factors are proposed to have significant influences on job stress among RMP personnel.

1. INTRODUCTION

Policing occupations has caught the attention of most scholars and policing occupations is broadly acknowledged as a demanding and challenging occupation that pose negative and damaging affects to the individual itself and the policing organizations in general. Policing occupations are regarded as the most stressful professions in the modern civilization mainly due to the nature of police work itself which oriented on crime preventions act along with maintaining law and order which exposed police officers to stressful and traumatic event that require different physical and mental capability to deal with firmly and effectively.

Police occupational work stress in particular comes with a cause. Various factors and sources along with stress symptoms associated with police job stress have been identified and documented by researchers throughout the years. As per understanding, stressor is defining as the circumstances that tend to cause stress. Stress could emerge in a variety of way. Over the years, many stressors have been proven to inflict stress and the most notable stressor

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are in the form of work overloads, role conflict, ineffective interpersonal relationships among employee, co-worker, line leaders, supervisors and managers (Anshel, 2000).

Police occupational work stress when become chronic, can result in a variety of physiological, psychological and behavioural problems. The prevalent and existing literature on stress among police officer shows and indicates that job stress can pose a host of consequences and threat in the sense of absenteeism, burnout, job dissatisfaction, early retirement, a weakened immune system with increased short- and long-term illness, long-term disability, poor work performance, and potentially, premature death (Burke, 1993; Brown & Campbell, 1990; Violanti & Aron, 1995).

In this paper, a conceptual framework for investigating the determinants of job stress among Royal Malaysia Police is proposed. The conceptual framework was developed based on practical discussion and empirical review on job stress factors such as workloads, working conditions, role conflict, role ambiguity and workplace relationships. Literature review section will offer interesting explanation for conceptualising any potential influences of the factors on job stress among Royal Malaysian Police (RMP).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Job Stress

The stress perspectives interpretation may differ upon individual. For instance, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined stress as a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding individual resources and endangering individual wellbeing. However, no mutual consent regarding stress definition because most of the researchers has their own interpretation of stress. For example some researchers use external stimuli, like a shocking accident or death, as to define stress as oppose to other researchers that used internal stimuli like anger, grief, and nervousness to define stress (Beehr, Johnson, & Nieva, 1995; Jex, 1998; Roberts et al.,1997).

Generally, stress occurs when individual's bodies and minds are trying to adapt to the constantly changing surroundings. Meanwhile, job stress was defined and described as the work situations outcome whereby the employee experienced the feeling of inconvenience and difficulties that arising from the differences between available resources and employee job demands (Beehr, Johnson, & Nieva, 1995).

Determinants of Job Stress

Relationship between Workloads and Job Stress

Workload is defined as the employee self-perception regarding the extra amount of work that needs to be done versus the amount of job they need to complete in a specific time period (Jex, 1998). According to Roberts et al., (1997),

work overload is defined as a situation whereby an individual's need to perform more work with limited time to complete the task and this situation is classified as psychological stressor.

Workload is always seen as a major contributor of employee job stress. Workloads issue is currently faced by police officers can be considered as inevitable. The increasing number of workloads and crimes are seen as the problem that may influences job stress among police officers. For instance, increment in Crime Rate Index is viewed as predominant factor that relates their workloads. Based on the statistic, The Malaysian Crime Rate Index for 2016 is decreasing at 3,191 cases (2.8%) from the total of 112,354, which have been reported in that same year compared to 115,545 cases in 2015. When the Index of crime increases, a lot of strategies need to be taken by RMP.

Past studies found that workload act as potential sources of stress and play a vital role in contributing to the stressful conditions among police officers. There are broad studies that have been conducted in relation to job stress, and workloads have been identified as a consistent work stressor (Diestel & Schmidt, 2009). Excessive workloads among police officers can influence bad attitude and behaviour such as bad-tempered at the office and at home, poor performance in the workplace, working late at night and low job satisfaction (Cooper et. al., 2013). These studies found and identified that the situations mentioned above as an important predictor of job stress among police (Burke, 1993; Jackson & Maslach, 1982). Based on above discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Proposition 1:   There is a significant and positive relationship between workload and job stress

Relationship between Working Conditions and Job Stress

Working conditions are associated with facilities, physical environment, dangerous physical working conditions, stress and noise level, safety, crowding, noise, air pollution, inadequacy of staff and resources and office politics in the workplace (Easton, Laar & Vardy, 2013). Core characteristics of Policing occupations are always subjected to dangerous physical working conditions. Dangerous physical working condition such as arresting violent criminals, informing relatives of sudden death, handling suicidal cases, fatal accidents, and dealing with drug addicts may lead to high level of job stress.

Past researchers have mentioned that working condition has caused a major stress among police officers (Easton, Laar & Vardy, 2013; Hunnur, Bagali & Sudarshan, 2014). The working conditions such as resources deficiency, noise, overcrowded space, small offices, and inadequacy of staff are in fact stressful. Different kinds of physical and psychosocial exposures in the work conditions have been found to be associated with work stress. In addition, heavy physical workload, ergonomic conditions and exposures to hazardous substances are associated with negative and harmful effect on employee emotion. A host of studies and

findings have proposed that if the working conditions are not in the good shape then it will increase job stress (Hunnur, Bagali & Sudarshan, 2014). Based on above discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Proposition 2:   There is a significant and positive relationship between working condition and job stress

Relationship between Role Conflict and Job Stress

Role conflict is defined as an incongruent or incompatible between employee jobs demands and expectations in the employee's role that includes expectations from supervisors, colleagues, and organizations which are incompatible and incongruent with employee role (Cooper & Khan, 2013). Employees will experience role conflict when they are given various tasks and the tasks that are given would be in conflict with each other. In other word, role conflict occurs when employee or individual are required to perform multiple roles in the organization (Gyamfi, 2014).

Most studies have indicated that role conflict result in a variety of stress related outcome such as job dissatisfaction and emotional exhaustion among police officers (Gyamfi, 2014; Gaunya, Oruta & Lidava, 2016). In addition, role conflict is also considered to be responsible for increasing the incidence of adverse events and negative emotions at work. According to Fisher, (2002), role conflict that is not properly cater result in unconventional and morally unacceptable behavior that causes feelings of anger, frustration, anxiety and fear which is the outcome of job stress. Based on above discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Proposition 3:   There is a significant and positive relationship between role conflict and job stress.

Relationship between Role Ambiguity and Job Stress

Role ambiguity is another job stressor that is commonly associated with police officers. Role ambiguity happens when employee does not have clear information on tasks and roles that need to be performed in their jobs (Wilkinson, 2006). For instance, these problems arise when roles for a particular position of police officers are unclear, uncertain and poorly-defined. A major concern identified is that most of the police officers do not have a clear picture regarding their task. This is because there is no enough information on the job description and expectation of their job.

According to Conley and Woosely (2000), role ambiguity is associated with various psychological symptoms in relations to police occupational work stress such as low job satisfaction, absenteeism, less job involvement, low expectancies, tension, anger, anxiety, absenteeism and withdrawal from work. In the context of police officers, role ambiguity is likely to occur because there are often discrepancies between the job descriptions and the realities of police jobs. For example, failure of supervisors to

communicate their expectation to their subordinates, failure in providing the detail information regarding job descriptions of a police officer and the frequent changing rules that are not effective and actively communicate. This may effect on police officers productivity, and may increase their job stress (Toch, 2002). Based on above discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Proposition 4:   There is a significant and positive relationship between role ambiguity and job stress.

Relationship between Workplace Relationship and Job Stress

Police job is more towards working in the group setting. In order to ensure the success of the group, the workplace relationships need to be established in a positive way. While many people may believe that dangerous encounters with violent criminals as most stressful to police officers, research reveals that officers perceive stressors intrinsic to the police organization are more stressful such as interpersonal relationships (Brown & Campbell, 1994). For instance, failure of communication between superior and officers, unfair practices of supervision and controversial performance rating, poor relationships and lack of support from supervisors are also identified as organizational police stressors that led to ineffective relationships or simply known as poor workplace relationships which can wear down communication, relationships and cooperation between colleagues (Gaunya, Oruta & Lidava, 2016; Violanti & Aron, 1995).

Poor relationships with supervisors, managers or co-workers are common problem that is associated with workplace relationships. For example, communication failure between supervisors and employees, unfair supervision practices, controversial employee performance evaluation, lack of support from supervisors to subordinate are identified as main contributors to work stressors among police officers (Morash et al., 2008; Violanti & Aron, 1995). In addition, conflicts between co-workers, supervisors and managers are seen as a predominant factor that results in stress among police personnel. Workplace relationships are identified and acknowledge as a notable police job stressor (Gaunya, Oruta & Lidava, 2016). Furthermore, interpersonal conflict at a workplace was also related to dominant health outcomes such as distress stomach, headache, fever, backache and other cardiovascular problems (Lazuras et al., 2009). Based on above discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Proposition 5:   There is a significant and negative relationship between workplace relationship and job stress.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Conceptual framework for investigating the determinants of job stress was developed based on Theory of Cognitive Appraisal (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In their research,

they had proposed three phases of cognitive appraisal such primary appraisal, secondary appraisal and reappraisal Primary appraisal referred to the cognitive perceptual process whereby an individual perceives something as stressful, neutral or positive. Secondary appraisal involves evaluating what might be done about a stressful situation and the individual deciding whether they have the coping resources to deal with the stressor. The third phase which is reappraisal involves an altered perception about how stressful the situation is based on new information from the environment. High stress level will lead to harmful well-being especially when an individual or employee lacking in coping resources, coping strategies or ineffective strategies used to cope with stress (Lazarus et al., 1984).

In relations to this study, the vast majority of police officers perceive that the inability to cope with excessive workloads or job demands as stressful situations that affected their physical and mental health as well as their personal well-being. An unpleasant working conditions which comes in the form of inadequacy of resources (e.g.: inadequate staff, crowding, noise, air pollution, safety) are perceives or viewed as a notable job stressor that tend to inflict job stress. Most of the police officers encounters highlighted the incompatible and incongruence of role as a stressful event. The inadequacy of information in relation to their job descriptions and other information related to their task are also viewed as a stress factor that may affected their well-being.

Furthermore, the relationships between the members of the group and supervisors/superiors are viewed as the most important aspect in policing occupations. Most of the officers feel that the defect in these relationships will inflict serious damage in terms of physiological, psychological and behavioral reactions for example absenteeism, lower productivity and job dissatisfaction which are the outcome of job stress. Based on this perception, the study has applied the primary appraisal phase proposed by this theory to develop the study theoretical framework.

The theoretical framework of this study consist of job stress factor namely workloads, working conditions, role conflict, role ambiguity and workplace relationships as an independent variables whereas job stress as dependent variables. All these factors are perceives as the negative factor that tend to cause job stress especially in the context of policing. Thus, based on Theory of Cognitive Appraisal and related literature above, conceptual framework for examining the influences of entrepreneurial initiatives on business performance of rural entrepreneurs was developed as shown in figure 1 below. The relationship between job stress factors as independent variable with police occupational job stress as dependent variables was proposed.
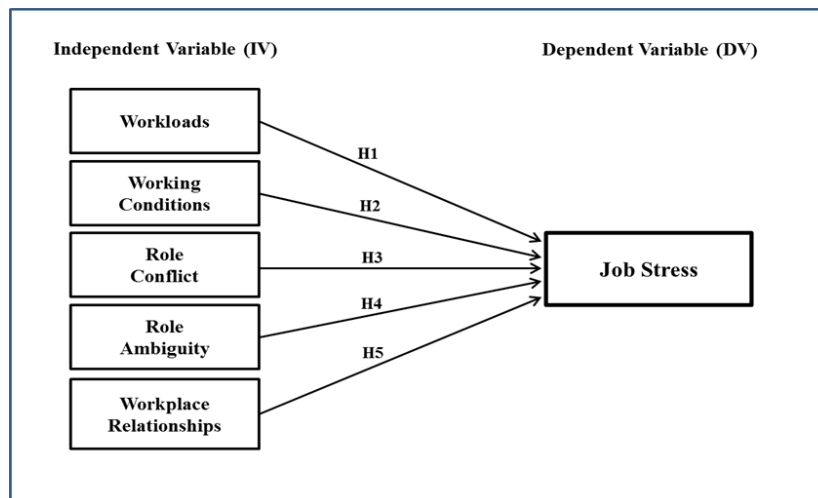

Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework

CONCLUSION

This paper provides the explanation regarding relationship between job stress factor namely workloads, working conditions, role ambiguity and workplace relationships with job stress among RMP. The relationship between dependent and independent variables has been properly framed and the contributing factors towards police officers job stress stressor and the job stress are precisely explored and discussed. In sum, these factors were proposed to have significant influences on job stress among RMP

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