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Evaluating the Predictors of Stress among Police Officers: A Current Psychosocial Analysis from Nigeria

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Abstract

Due to the nature of their job, police officers often experience unpredictable, emotionally disturbing, physically exhausting, and stressful working conditions in Nigeria. Socio-legal literature is replete with case studies, anecdotal evidence and research findings attesting to the high rates of stress and stress-related disorders associated with police work. A growing number of these studies provide convincing evidence that the overall well-being of police officers is significantly related to their performance at work. Existing studies have consistently demonstrated that there are two categories of stress in policing. The first category revealed that the nature of police works often exposed police officers to stressors such as exposures to danger, facing unpredictable situations and violent confrontations from the public. The second category of stress experienced by the police involved stress associated with the nature of police organisation, and the associated stressors often include workplace bullying, limited opportunities for promotion or career progressions, difficult rules, unfair regulations, and disagreeable job assignments. In this current study, I empirically assessed the occurrence and prevalence, as well as the effects of stress among police officers in Nigeria. This article also considers what current research could contribute to police practice, and the general implication for research and policymaking.

Keywords: police stress, stress and stressors, operational police stress, organisational police stress, Nigeria police, burnout syndrome, stress management

Introduction

Policing is one of the most stressful and physically demanding occupations in the world (Anshel, 2000; Anshel et al., 1997; Dempsey & Forst, 2019). The American Institute of Stress classified police work has highly stressful and that it is among the top ten stress-producing jobs (The American Institute of Stress, 2020). Police officers are more likely to report and be diagnosed with psychological problems and stress-related physical complaints than workers in other professions (Can et al., 2015; Dempsey & Forst, 2019; The American Institute of Stress, 2020). They are often exposed to situations and events at work that may be beyond the threshold of normal human experiences (Anderson et al., 2002; Anshel et al., 1997). This could range from critical incidents such as situations in which they face threats to their physical well-being, or that of a fellow police officer, or a victim within the community, and it can also include a dispatch to road traffic fatality. It is evident that when stress becomes chronic, it can lead to a plethora of other problems affecting officers at work and in other socio-personal aspect of their lives (Anderson et al., 2002; Anshel, 2000).

Research has shown that stressors occur at different and multiple stages across life, and that they can also present different levels of severity and chronicity (Keyes et al., 2011). Other studies have also confirmed that there are different sources of stress in the police (see Can et al., 2015; Cullen et al., 1985; Keyes et al., 2011), however, four specific classifications are identified as prominent among others – organisational stressors, operational stressors, external stressors and personal stressors (see Dempsey & Forst, 2019; Violanti & Aron, 1994). According to Dempsey and his colleague, *external stress* is produced by real physical threats and a heightened sense of imminent dangers which can include dangerous assignments in which there are physical confrontations, shoot-outs, and involvement in auto pursuits (Anderson et al., 2002; Collins & Gibbs, 2003). *Organisational stress* often results from the quasi-military structure of the police in which officers work at odd hours with little or no weekend or holidays, the strict regimental discipline placed on officers, lack of control over workload, workplace bullying and bias, and the general condition and atmosphere at work (Collins & Gibbs, 2003; Dempsey & Forst, 2019; Guile et al., 1998).

Personal stress is often caused by officer's socio-personal interactions with others within their organisation. Personal stressors also involve events or conditions that occur in an individual's

life that may have adverse effect on them or their family's wellbeing. *Operational stress* comes from the daily need to confront criminals, deal with derelicts, mentally disturbed offenders, drug addicts, and the constant awareness and need to engage in dangerous activity to protect the public. Also, police officers are consistently cautious about their actions and inactions in a bid to avoid legal liability (Chapin et al., 2008; Dempsey & Forst, 2019; Violanti & Aron, 1994).

There have been significant results associated with these classifications in extant literature. For example, in a study conducted by Anderson et al. (2002) using samples of police officers from 12 municipal police departments in British Columbia, the results indicate that police officers experience both physical and psychosocial stress and that officers anticipate stress as they go about their duty. The research further established that police officers suffer anticipatory stress at the start of their shifts and that the highest level of stress is experienced prior to and during critical incidents. Other research on police stress and stressors have suggested that overexposure of officers to stress may lead to a greater likelihood of job dissatisfaction, sleep disorder, absenteeism, weak immune system, short and long-term illness, divorce, burnout, early retirement, PTSD, diminished awakening cortisol response pattern, poor performance, low morale and premature death (see Alexopoulos et al., 2014; Anderson et al., 2002; Anshel, 2000; Anshel et al., 1997; Barnes et al., 2007; Gerber et al., 2010; Ma et al., 2015; Renden et al., 2017; Violanti et al., 2017).

Similarly, in a 2007 study of 'the role of mindfulness in romantic relationship satisfaction and responses to relationship stress', Barnes and his colleagues asserted that individuals whose careers frequently exposed them to challenging and stressful situations often reports significant reduction in communication skills, and this outcome is also associated with divorce and break up in relationships (Barnes et al., 2007). In a study conducted to examine how specific shift system is associated with stress, sleep and health among 460 Swiss Police, Gerber et al. (2010) found that shift work is associated with increased social stress, work discontent and sleep complaints among Swiss Police. Gerber and his colleagues also found that stress was associated with increased sleep complaints and lower scores in perceived health (see also Cannizzaro et al., 2020).

Broadly speaking, increased work-related stress has also been linked with a few other health challenges such as high blood pressure and coronary heart disease. Violanti et al. (2017) utilising the Spielberger Police Stress Survey examined the association between the top five highly rated and bottom five least-rated work stressors among police officers. In their analysis, Violanti

and his colleagues found that there was a significant negative linear association between total stress index of the top five rated work stressors and slope of the awakening cortisol regression line. The result suggest that police events considered to be highly stressful by the officers may likely be associated with disturbances similar to awakening cortisol pattern. In their Danish study, Jensen et al. (2019) assessed the impact of organisational change at work on cardiovascular disease (CVD) and they found that there was an excess risk of CVD in the year following change in management and employee layoff. The study also confirmed that exposure to any organisational change has strong link to an increased risk of CVD (see also Bunker et al., 2003; de Rijk, 2020; Hanson et al., 2020).

Looking critically at current evidence, research has demonstrated that there is a huge psychological, economical and health cost of stress; and that there are multidimensional predictors of stress. Studies have also established that there are variegated outcomes of stress in individual's lives. In this current study, therefore, I empirically assessed the pattern, occurrence, and prevalence, as well as the global effects of stress among police officers in Nigeria. To do this; (i) I assessed the pattern, occurrence and prevalence stress among the police; (ii) I examined the psychosocial variables that predict organisational and operational police stress; and (iii) using relevant argument in literature, I also assessed whether there is a significant relationship between stress and a self-reported effect of stress in the police. While causality cannot be established in a study like this, it would be interesting, however, to assess whether one can establish a significant relationship between some of the independent variables and stress, and how stress would in turn interact with self-reported 'effect of stress' among the police.

Policing and Sources of Stress in Nigeria: Towards an Empirical Analysis

Work-related stress among police is a global issue, and police officers in Nigeria are no exception. Though police officers in Nigeria have considerable power to use force (see Akinlabi, 2019), they are often confronted with the arduous operational demand that may be detrimental to their psychological and physiological wellbeing (Idubor et al., 2015). They are routinely exposed to traumatic and disturbing situations such as intimate partner violence, abused of children, fatal motor vehicle accidents, ritualised killings and homicide (Idubor et al., 2015; John-Akinola et al., 2020; Lateef, 2019). Significantly adding to these operational stresses are the everyday challenges in their socio-personal lives and the public expectations of police effectiveness in solving crimes

in their community (Akinlabi, 2018). Officers are under strain to put their lives on the line to maintain law and orders in their communities. The fact that police officers are recruited with excellent physical and psychological health assessment but retire early on medical advice or die from job-related stress disorders demonstrates that the cost of stress is enormous.

In Nigeria, police officers are often confronted with various job stressors that are significantly different, both in quality and quantity, in comparison to their counterparts in the developed West. Also, while police officers in the developed West have pre and post exposure strategies in place to mitigate the effect of stress, officers in Nigeria receive little or no support in the management of stress at work and in their personal lives (Lateef, 2019). Like most developing countries, working in Nigeria can be incredibly challenging. The only dichotomy between Nigeria and other contexts is the way and manner in which Nigeria operates as a complex socio-political and ethnically divided society. Policing a socially and politically divided society like Nigeria presents an enormous stress for police officers in Nigeria (Adebayo et al., 2008). During their day-to-day activities, police officers are frequently exposed to violence from criminals, often engage in rescue operations of civilians from armed robbers and other gunmen, they deal directly with the hardest criminals and the worst of the society. Sometimes, they watched their colleagues killed or maimed in the course of their legitimate duties (Lateef, 2019).

Every year more police officers commit suicide than are murdered by criminals (Adediran, 2020; Chopko et al., 2014; Miller, 2005). However, the media often deploy most of their resources to report police corruption than the everyday challenges police officers confront in the line of duty. Due to public and media backlash, officers are also under tremendous pressure to perform their duties effectively. While doing this, they are also susceptible to losing their jobs for committing the slightest blunder. This is how risky and challenging it is to be a police officer in Nigeria. These occupational stressors can have significant effect on officers' mental health morbidity. Studies have shown that officers' poor mental health wellbeing can be harmful at a professional level, on organisational effectiveness and for public safety (John-Akinola et al., 2020; Purba & Demou, 2019; Wakil, 2015).

A number of studies conducted in Nigeria have confirmed a significant connection between police work and job-related stress (Adegoke, 2014; Idubor et al., 2015; John-Akinola et al., 2020; Lateef, 2019; Odedokun, 2015; Ogungbamila & Fajemirokun, 2016; Omolayo, 2012). For

example, in a recent study conducted in Edo State Nigeria, Idubor et al. (2015) investigates the effect of work related stress on the health status of 1000 police officers and found a significant relationship between stress and health status of the sampled police officers. Specifically, they found that officers who reported a significant high score on both organizational and operational stressors also reported poor health and low quality of life.

In a study conducted by Ogungbamila and Fajemirokun (2016), they investigated the extent to which gender and marital status moderated the relationship between job stress and occupational burnout and they found that job stress significantly predicted occupational burnout among the police in such a way that a heightened level of job stress also resulted to an increased level of occupational burnout. The study also confirmed that gender moderated the effects of job stress on occupational burnout. That is, female officers reported a higher level of occupational burnout that their male counterparts. Similarly, marital status moderated the relationship between job stress and occupational burnout. In other words, those who were married reported a higher level of occupational burnout than those who were unmarried.

Similarly, in a similar study conducted among 153 police officers in Ekiti State, Omolayo (2012) found effect for gender and rank. The study revealed that female police officers and those who are of low cadre (i.e., junior rank) are more likely to experience higher stress at work than others not in these categories. While gender is confirmed in many studies, there are other studies that reported that men are more susceptible to stress than their female counterparts (Morash et al., 2006; Violanti et al., 2016), some reported similar effects between male and female (Spielberger & Reheiser, 1994) and some supported Omolayo (2012)'s findings that females are more prone to work-related stress and other associated factors such as PTSD than males (Bowler et al., 2010).

In assessing the coping strategy for stress among the police, Wakil (2015) confirmed that police officers who experienced stress adopt unconventional coping strategies such as the use of alcohol, smoking and religiosity rather than seek professional help to cope with stress. A similar study examining the experiences of stress and coping mechanism among police officers in Ibadan confirmed that a high proportion of the sample (80 percent) reported experiences of stress. The study also revealed that only a few (37 percent) of the officers had good coping mechanism and that knowledge about workplace stressors is scant among the police (John-Akinola et al., 2020).

Method

Data

The data for this study were collected through a cross-sectional survey of 706 police officers in southwest geopolitical zone in Nigeria.

Table 1. Demographic and control variables

Demographics	(%)	Demographics	(%)
Gender		**Marital status**	
Male	56.8	Never married	13.6
Female	43.2	Married	83.1
		Separated/divorced	3.3
Age		**Ethnicity**	
18 – 30	41.6	Hausa	4.1
31 – 40	30.7	Igbo	13.3
41 – 50	15.0	Yoruba	66.0
51 – 60	12.6	Others	16.6
Rank		**During the past 12 months, how would you**	
Constable	54.4	**rate your health?**	
Corporal	26.3	Poor	14.3
Sergeant	14.7	Fair	31.0
Inspector	4.5	Good	15.2
		Very good	29.9
		Excellent	9.6
During the past 12 months, how would you rank		**During the past 12 months, how much effect**	
experiences of stress in your personal life?		**has stress had on your health?**	
No stress	6.1	None	6.1
Almost no stress	16.3	Hardly any	17.6
Relatively little stress	19.4	Some	28.8
Moderate amount of stress	23.8	A lot	47.6
A lot of stress	34.4		
During the past 12 months, have you taken any steps to		**If you were stress, what type of help would**	
control or reduce stress in your life?		**you seek?**	
No	94.1	Spiritual	38.8
Yes	5.9	Medical/psychological	29.2
		Combination of both	32.0

The sample for this study were predominantly police officers within the ranks of constable, corporal, sergeant, and inspector, and they were randomly selected from Zone 2 and Zone 11 of the Nigeria Police Zone Commands. The Zone 2 and Zone 11 include Lagos, Ogun, Osun, Ondo, and Oyo State, respectively. To draw sample for this study, 5 police commands in each of the five states were selected at random. 750 questionnaires were administered through convenience sampling. After four weeks of administering the questionnaires with support from two Research Assistants, the research team were able to retrieve 717 questionnaires, however, only 706 questionnaires were found useful and relevant for the current analysis. Accordingly, the socio-demographic characteristics of the research participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 2. Means and standard deviation of organisational police stress questionnaire

Variable items	Mean	SD
Dealing with co-workers	5.25	1.78
The feeling that different rules apply to different people (e.g. favouritism)	5.81	1.64
Feeling like you always have to prove yourself to the organization	5.99	1.26
Excessive administrative duties	5.76	1.38
Constant changes in policy / legislation	4.69	2.07
Staff shortages	5.87	1.70
Bureaucratic red tape	5.58	1.52
Too much computer work	5.47	1.39
Lack of training on new equipment	5.86	1.47
Perceived pressure to volunteer free time	5.64	1.55
Dealing with supervisors	5.15	1.78
Inconsistent leadership style	5.38	1.74
Lack of resources	5.93	1.89
Unequal sharing of work responsibilities	5.45	1.82
If you are sick or injured your co-workers seem to look down on you	2.63	1.38
Leaders over-emphasise the negatives (e.g. supervisor evaluations, public complaints)	4.74	1.56
Internal investigations	3.61	1.52
Dealing the court system	2.47	1.29
The need to be accountable for doing your job	4.90	1.64
Inadequate equipment	5.90	1.70

Note: Responses ranges from "No stress at all" (1) to "A lot of stress" (7)

Measures

A range of questionnaires were utilised to address the research questions in this study. These instruments and their relevance to this study are described below.

Police Stress Questionnaire: The Police Stress Questionnaire was developed by McCreary and Thompson (2006) to assess the relationship between stress and health status of police officers. McCleary and Thompson have argued that the more stress people experience, the poorer their physical and mental health.

Table 3. Means and standard deviation of operational police stress questionnaire

Variable items	Mean	SD
Shift work	5.20	1.77
Working alone at night	5.50	1.71
Over-time demands	5.90	1.47
Risk of being injured on the job	5.65	1.53
Work related activities on days off (e.g. court, community events)	3.59	1.95
Traumatic events (e.g. MVA, domestics, death, injury)	3.27	1.95
Managing your social life outside of work	4.62	1.57
Not enough time available to spend with friends and family	5.40	1.55
Paperwork	5.10	1.59
Eating healthy at work	5.54	1.58
Finding time to stay in good physical condition (e.g., regular exercise)	5.04	1.80
Fatigue (e.g. shift work, over-time)	5.38	1.72
Occupation-related health issues (e.g. back pain)	5.81	1.48
Lack of understanding from family and friends about your work	5.53	1.55
Making friends outside the job	4.60	2.12
Upholding a "higher image" in public	4.84	1.44
Negative comments from the public	5.91	1.46
Limitations to your social life (e.g. who your friends are, where you socialize)	5.29	1.58
Feeling like you are always on the job	5.03	1.56
Friends / family feel the effects of the stigma associated with your job	5.59	1.54

Note: Responses ranges from "No stress at all" (1) to "A lot of stress" (7)

In fact, studies have shown that people with higher stress level tend to report lower overall health and well-being, and a more adverse health symptoms such as sleep disturbances, high blood pressure and are at a greater risk of coronary heart disease, hypertension, diabetes and auto-

immune disorders. The police stress questionnaire is in two levels – measuring both organisational and operational levels of stress. That is, **Operational Police Stress Questionnaire** (PSQ-Op) and **Organisational Police Stress Questionnaire** (PSQ-Org). Each of the two levels of instruments contained 20 items/questions and they are measure on a 7-point scale that ranges from 1 (No stress at all) to 7 (A lot of stress). For this current study, the reliability coefficient of the combined instrument yielded a Cronbach alpha $\alpha = 0.74; Mean = 5.12; SD = 0.49$ and individually, **Operational Police Stress Questionnaire** (PSQ-Op) has $\alpha = 0.83; Mean = 5.14; SD = 0.79$ and **Organisational Police Stress Questionnaire** (PSQ-Org) yielded $\alpha = 0.67; Mean = 5.10; SD = 0.60$ respectively. In both instruments, a high score indicates higher levels of stress.

Effect of Stress on General Wellbeing: The Effect of Stress on General Wellbeing in this study is a one-item variable that was tested using the question, "During the past 12 months, how much effect has stress had on your general wellbeing?" The question was developed by the researcher to assess the global effect of stress on the general wellbeing of the research participants. In this study, the variable is included in the analysis as a dependent variable and it is measured in terms of 'None' (1) to 'A lot' (4).

Demographic and Control Variables: Demographic variables for this study included: age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, and ranks. Other five questions/variables were added as control variables and they included: (1) During the past 12 months, how would you rate your health? (2) During the past 12 months, how would you rank experiences of stress in your personal life? (3) During the past 12 months, have you taken any steps to control or reduce stress in your life? (4) If you were stressed, what type of help would you seek?

Results

The central focus of this study is to assess the pattern, occurrence, and prevalence, as well as the global effects of stress among police officers in Nigeria. Table 2 and 3 present the mean scores, standard deviations, and the full wordings of the organisational and operational police stress questionnaires. Looking at the analyses in Table 2 and 3, it is evident that the measures of organisational and operational stresses are positively skewed. This indicates that the mean of each item in the two questionnaires are higher than the median score. That is, response on each item

indicates that there is a high occurrence and prevalence of organisational and operational stresses among the police.

Bivariate correlation

In Table 4, a Pearson product-moment correlation was conducted to assess the relationship between the variables in this study. A significant bivariate correlation was established for some of the variables and they were mostly in the expected directions. Specifically, operational police stress (r=.832, p < .01) has the highest bivariate correlation with organisational police stress. Though the high correlation coefficient should violate collinearity assumption, however, further analysis will be conducted using Variance Inflation Factors and Tolerance to establish if this assumption was violated. Other correlations were within the expected limits (see Table 4).

Table 4. Descriptive statistics and correlations

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(1) Operational police stress	1	.832**	.118**	.331**	-.096*	.023	-.003
(2) Organisational police stress		1	.106**	.345**	-.045	.007	.006
(3) Type of help			1	.070	-.022	-.003	.153**
(4) Stress reduction				1	-.077*	-.072*	.061
(5) Effect of stress on wellbeing					1	-.061	-.056
(6) Stress in personal life						1	-.043
(7) Death of a loved one							1
N = 706							

Note: Statistically significant at *p < .05; **p < .005; ***p < .001

Multiple regression

Table 5 and 6 presents the findings for three multiple regression analyses. Preliminary analysis confirmed that no assumptions were violated. Collinearity diagnostic using Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor were performed to avoid problems of multicollinearity. The collinearity diagnostic revealed that Tolerance values were above .10 and Variance Inflation Factors were below 10 for all the items in the analysis (see Field, 2018; Pallant, 2010; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). In Table 5, a multiple regression analyses were conducted to investigate the predictors of

organisational and operational police stress. The two dependent variables were tested separately using nine demographic control and independent variables (i.e., age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, ranks, health status, stress in personal life, stress reduction, and types of help). In Table 6, the effect of stress on general wellbeing was tested using eleven demographic control and independent variables (i.e., age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, ranks, health status, stress in personal life, stress reduction, types of help, operational police stress, and organisational police stress).

Table 5. Predicting organisational and operational stress

Variable	Organisational police stress		Operational police stress	
	β	t	β	t
Age	.055	1.334	-.003	-.062
Gender	-.095*	-2.294	.059	1.428
Ethnicity	-.017	-.458	.047	1.248
Marital tatus	-.015	-.397	.029	.775
Ranks	-.058	-1.477	.022	.555
Health status	-.153***	-1.408	-.129***	-1.763
Stress in personal life	.170***	2.484	.161***	1.890
Stress reduction	-.007	-.174	-.004	-.097
Types of help	-.085*	-2.060	-.083*	-1.756
R	.37***		.12***	
R2	.13***		.05***	
F	2.112***		2.048***	

Note: Statistically significant at $*p < .05$; $**p < .005$; $***p < .001$

In Table 5, the analysis indicated that nine variables in the model jointly accounted for 13% [$F_{(9, 697)} = 2.112$; $p < .001$] total variance in organisational police stress, and four variables were statistically significant as follows: stress in personal life ($β = 0.170$; $p < .001$), health status ($β = -0.153$; $p < .001$), gender ($β = -0.095$; $p < .05$), and types of help ($β = -0.085$; $p < .05$). The result shows that policemen who reported stress in their personal life, had health related challenges and

sought unorthodox or alternative treatment for stress are more likely to experience organisational police stress.

Likewise, nine variables in the analysis jointly accounted for 5% [F (9, 697) = 2.048; p < .001] total variance in operational police stress. Individually, three variables predicted operational police stress as follows: stress in personal life (β = 0.161; p < .001), health status (β = -0.129; p < .001), and types of help (β = -0.083; p < .05). The result shows that police officers who reported stress in their personal life, had health related challenges and sought alternative or unorthodox help for stress are more likely to experience operational police stress. Interestingly, this shows that there is a similar response patterns among police officers in Nigeria when they are assessed on organisational and operational police stress.

Table 6. Predicting Effect of Stress on General Wellbeing

Variable	β	t	R	R²	F
Age	-.068**	-2.980	.84***	.705***	150.704***
Gender	.044*	1.951			
Ethnicity	.029	1.392			
Marital tatus	-.035	-1.698			
Ranks	.016	.742			
Health status	-.018	-.853			
Stress in personal life	.799***	35.225			
Stress reduction	.005	.253			
Types of help	.089**	3.949			
Operational police stress	.005	.217			
Organisational police stress	.044*	2.099			

Note: Statistically significant at *p < .05; **p < .005; ***p < .001

In Table 6, the result indicated that the eleven variables in this analysis jointly accounted for 70% [F (11, 695) = 150.704; p < .001] total variance in the effect of stress on general wellbeing. Individually, five variables predicted effects of stress on general wellbeing as follows: stress in personal life (β = 0.799; p < .001), types of help (β = 0.089; p < .005), age (β = -0.068; p < .005),

gender ($\beta = 0.044$; $p < .05$), and organisational police stress ($\beta = -0.044$; $p < .05$). The result indicates that being female and young, having experiences of stress in personal life, seeking an orthodox help for stress, and reporting organisational police stress may likely heightened the effect of stress on the general wellbeing of the police officers.

Discussion

This current study advances prior research and understanding on stress and stressors in the police. The study empirically assessed the occurrence and prevalence, as well as the effects of stress among police officers. This article also considers what current research could contribute to police practice, and the general implication for research and policymaking in Nigeria. As Newman and Beehr (1979) suggested, one of the first steps in handling job stress is to identify the factors which may likely predict or be related to stress. The current study confirmed this assertion. Using McCleary and Thompson's police stress questionnaires, this study demonstrated that there are existing factors that are related to the two categories of stress in the police. The first category being the nature of police work and how it often exposes police officers to stress, and the second category being the nature of police organisation.

Looking the occurrence and prevalence of stress in the police, the means and the standard deviation of the operational and organisational police stress questionnaires showed that stress is prevalent among the police. The analyses also showed that the individual items in the questionnaires were positively skewed. That is, the mean of each item in the two questionnaires are higher than the median score. This indicates that there are high occurrences and prevalence of organisational and operational stresses among the police. It makes sense, therefore, to argue that the police experiences both organisational and operational stress in Nigeria. Studies have shown that the police in Nigeria is faced with both organisational and operational challenges such as inadequate equipment, poor conditions of service, nepotism, corruption, insufficient education and training, and a poor public image (Akinlabi & Murphy, 2018; Alemika, 1988; Idubor et al., 2015)

In the regression analyses, the results indicated that the current health status, stress in individual officer's life, and the types of help being sought have significant effect on both organisational and operational police stress. The result confirmed that those who reported poor

health status also reported high level of both organisational and operational police stress. Since this is an existing self-reported poor health condition, it is difficult to establish whether stress was responsible for the poor health status. Nevertheless, the result established a negative relationship between the two variables, indicating that self-reported poor health status can have a significant effect on self-reported stress in the police. The result also demonstrated that gender is a significant predictor of organisational police stress but not for operational police stress.

In this study, female police officers reported a relatively low organisational police stress than their male counterparts. Though, gender in this case corroborates previous studies, it however, contradicts previous studies that reported similar or a higher stress level in female officers than their male colleagues (see Idubor et al., 2015; Ogungbamila & Fajemirokun, 2016; Omolayo, 2012; Verma et al., 2011; Wakil, 2015). While it is difficult to provide a simplistic explanation for this contradiction, it is important to point out that Nigeria is a complex society in which men are expected to be the breadwinner and the sole provider for both nuclear and extended families. The sociocultural expectations coupled with the challenges at work may likely be responsible for the higher stress level in policemen.

Overall, the current analysis confirms the divergent views in gender and stress research. For example, some studies indicated men are more susceptible to stress than their female counterparts (Morash et al., 2006; Violanti et al., 2016), some reported similar effects between male and female (Spielberger & Reheiser, 1994) and some supported Omolayo (2012)'s findings that females are more prone to work-related stress and other associated factors such as PTSD than males (Bowler et al., 2010). This study also established that police officers who sought unorthodox or alternative treatment for stress are more likely to experience both organisational and operational police stress. Invariably, this indicates that those who sought medical and psychological support will likely experience less stress or have better coping strategies.

The second part of the regression analyses assessed the effect of stress on the general wellbeing of police officers in Nigeria. In this analysis, age, gender, stress in the personal life of the police officers, types of help sought, and organisational police stress have significant effect on the general wellbeing of police officers. Specifically, the result revealed that younger policewomen, who had experienced stress in their personal lives, who had sought orthodox help for stress, as well as reported organisational police stress may likely report that stress has a lot of

effect on their general wellbeing than their male counterparts. Among the variables and constructs in this analysis, 'stress in personal life' stands out with the highest beta value. This finding supports existing studies by confirming that prolonged personal experiences of stress could have a strong negative effect on general wellbeing (see Denovan & Macaskill, 2017; Wersebe et al., 2018). Similarly, studies have shown that prolonged stress is associated with poor health and adverse health outcomes (Fawzy & Hamed, 2017), and that when challenges of personal stress exceed person's ability to cope effectively, it may likely have adverse effect on general wellbeing (Denovan & Macaskill, 2017; Fawzy & Hamed, 2017; Räsänen et al., 2016). It is important to note that, though some of these studies are not primarily focused on policing, they are however, relevant for comparative purposes.

Conclusion

This study provided an empirical understanding of the occurrence and prevalence of stress in the police as well as the effects of stress among police officers. The findings in this study, particularly, confirmed that the nature of police work and the stifling environment in which they work have significant effect on how police do their job. It also offered new insights on how stress associated with working for (and in) the police may impair their general wellbeing. To enhance the effectiveness of the police, police agencies must establish intervention programs that is aim at reducing stress and promoting coping strategies among the police. Such program should be designed to deal with and to address organisational and operational stressors. Also, it is important that specific stress management programmes be implemented for police officers in Nigeria. Nigeria Police Force should initiate and adopt training programs that would help 'supervisors' to identify signs of stress and to implement a stress reduction strategies and policies within and outside the police.

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