

UNDERSTANDING THE LINK BETWEEN PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING AND PROFESSIONAL OUTPUT IN KENYA'S NATIONAL POLICE SERVICE

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Abstract

Workplace conditions can sometimes be quite challenging. The National Police Service in Kenya consists of police officers who are an agent of Law Reinforcement. Mental Health challenges in the service have been on an increasing trend in the recent past. This has been attributed to work overload, long working hours, strict supervision and poor living conditions. All these leads to unnecessary high levels of stress and anxiety among the police force. The paper explores the observable mental health challenges in the National Police Service in Kenya and how this has impacted on their service delivery. The study adopted a descriptive survey with a sample of 500 police offices in the various ranks. All statistical tests were conducted at 0.05 level of significance. It has been noted that at least 20% of the police force personnel have one mental health condition that needs to be addressed. The key findings show that over 80% of the respondents indicated that they have experienced stress related challenges while 70% of the officers felt that they were being overworked by being allocated long working hours. The paper further highlights on key policy recommendations that are needed to bring sanity to the National Police Service in Kenya and realize the perceived best practice in mental health in the workplace.

Keywords: mental health, stress, long working hours, workplace, employee performance.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION 1.1 Background Information

Currently, there is an increasing number of staff going through mental health challenges, with at least 15% of the adult working- age experiencing at least one mental condition (WHO and ILO Report, 2022). However, most organizations have no systems on how to support them. Equally, it has been reported that Police Officers in the United States are overly fatigued due to long working hours which is often associated with insufficient sleep (Bryan, 2006).

In Kenya, in the recent past there have been a number of reported cases of illegal killings of citizens the hands of the National Police Service, reported Gender Based Violence driven by a police officer, murder of family members and sometimes suicidal cases involving their staff. To some extent previous resear ches have attributed these occurrences as a result of poor mental health status among the police officers which exhibits itself in form of stress and due the possibility of long working hours. As a matter of fact, it has become a public outcry that needs to be resolved ones and for all. Stress is perceived to be a dynamic condition in which an individual is confronted with an opportunity, constraints, or demand in relation to

his or her desires and for which the outcome is often perceived to be both uncertain and significant to him or her (Robbins and Sanghi, 2006). In fact work stress has become a monster in the workplace, whereby it is gradually eating into organizations with adverse effects that are almost irreversible. Research has shown that work stress accompanied with long working hours greatly impacts on employee performance, in a way that it reduces an individual employee potential to deliver, accompanied with an increase in mental health challenges and unhealthy interpersonal relationships.

1.1 Statement of the problem

The problem is that the National Police Service has been blamed for the wrong things in the society. And that most of these problems have been committed by the staff in the police force towards the citizens that they are supposed to protect. This has however been attributed to the possibility of poor mental health conditions among their staff. For example, a number of cases have been reported of the officers killing one another. Most of this occurrence has been linked to work stress and long working hours. It is on this understanding the paper explores the conditions contributing to this scenario so as to provide some strategic policy recommendations aimed at establishing and maintaining an appropriate work life balance.

1.2 Specific Objectives

- (i) To determine the effect of stress on the performance of the National Police Service Officers in Kenya.
- (ii) To determine the influence of long working hours on the performance of the National Police Service Officers in Kenya.

1.3. Research Hypotheses

- (i) H1: Workplace stress has a significant effect on the performance of the National Police Service Officers in Kenya.
- (ii) H2: Long working hours has a significant effect on the performance of National Police Service in Kenya.

2.0 Literature Review

The paper reviewed literature based on the two themes covered in the study, that is stress related challenges and long working hours in the workplace. Job stress in an organization is believed to have a profound impact on the performance of employees (Vijayan, 2018).

Another study identified Administration Police Officers at Police Headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya, to be operating in a challenging environment, that significantly influenced their performance (Wasike and Maroko, 2024). This happens to be the practice in most Offices in the Police Service in Kenya.

Having a healthy and safe workplace is key to assisting the employees lead a fair life in which they give back to the organization. Hence, the need to have workplace where the staff are mentally healthy. According to Cooke et al (2024) the process of managing mental health to get rid of stress in the workplace should be a matter that needs more attention now than ever especially for managers. Understanding the intricacies of workplace mental health challenges in requires a thorough examination of the organizational practices and an organization's ability to access quality mental health resources (Pandya et al, 2022). Managers at all

levels are encouraged to demonstrate supportive supervision techniques in order to proactively identify the root causes of stress in the workplace. While on the other hand, some studies have shown that reducing the number of working hours in combination with adequate breaks, dya-offs and other rest periods is likely to lead to enhanced productivity.

From past scholarly work, it has been shown that in most cases when the number of working hours increases, there is a possibility of a decline in an individual's performance, mostly associated with fatigueness therein. Indeed, when officers spend more hours at workplace is unhealthy (Igbokwe et al, 2020). Additionally, the nature and type of work one does will sometimes call for long working hours. It has been reported that long working hours may equally lead to increasing levels of stress which potentially impact on the Police Officers' performance (Wasike and Maroko, 2024). This becomes worse especially with the unpredictable nature of the nature of Police Officer's work.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

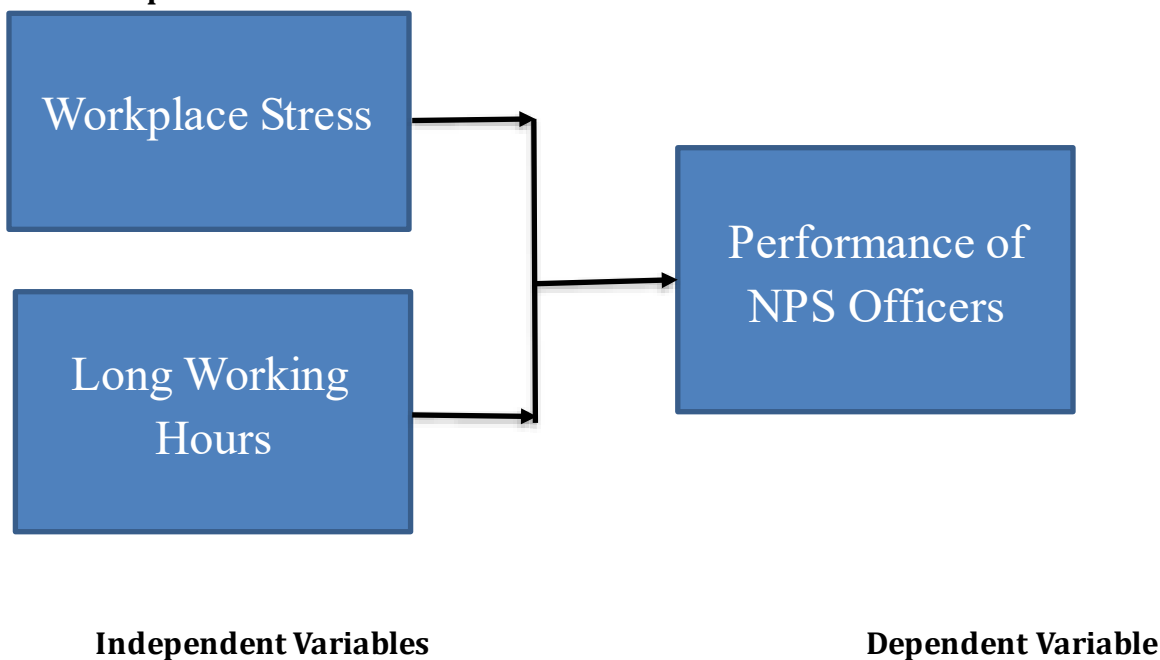


Figure 1.1: Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework (fig. 1.1) presents the perceived relationship between the work stress and long working hours with the Police Officer's performance.

3.0 Methodology 3.1 Population and Sample

The paper is based on a population of 5,000 police officers from five randomly selected counties in Kenya. 500 questionnaires were administered. A sample of 10% of this population was obtained through simple random sampling and formed the source of the information analyzed in this paper.

3.2 Reliability and Validity Tests

Both reliability and Validity tests were carried out to determine the appropriateness of the research tool adopted for the study.

3.0 Data Analysis 4.1 Response Rate

In total, the response rate was 90%. It was observed that some officers were not willing to voluntarily give the required information. This was however very minimal and therefore the outcome did not affect the overall results and findings.

4.2 Stress Levels

Over 80% of the respondents indicated that they have experienced stress related challenges in the workplace. Further analysis shows that slightly above 50% of this group have in the past resorted to taking the law to their hands and that they have actually thought of killing something in the course of discharging their duties. At least 20% of the respondents have been reported to the authority but continued to say that no action was taken against them for fear of the repercussions. It was also observed that over fifty percent of the stressed staff associated the stress levels with the poor standards of living conditions and a further 30% of this category linked their stress levels to the respective social status which has often resulted into poor and negative reputation.

On the part of managerial interventions, over 88% of the respondents thought that their supervisors and the entire management of the NPS seem not to care of what they undergo. Interestingly, 25% hinted that resources set aside for support services of staff with mental health challenges often get diverted by their bosses for personal interests. It also came out clearly that 50% of the rehab cases of their colleagues have been abandoned and no follow ups so far. Indeed, this further worsens the situation when the officers understand that the employer has little concern on their well-being. In this regard therefore, at least more than half of the NPS workforce end up developing anxieties which in turn affect their service delivery and further complicates the possibility of establishing a safe work environment and appropriate work life balance for all staff.

4.3 Long Working Hours

On the aspect of long working hours, 70% of the officers felt that they were being overworked. At 30% of these respondents indicated that they had in the been assigned two shifts in a day. On further interrogation, the affected officers linked these abnormal work schedules to withdrawals from their family responsibilities. Another 50% of these officers associated this to the nonsupportive workplace culture that has often been due to negligence on the part of the management and relevant supervisors.

Almost 90 % of the respondents proposed for a single shift in a day with two or three day-offs per week, especially by taking into consideration of the nature of their work.

4.4 Discussion

The findings of this research tend to agree with past scholars (Wasike and Maroko, 2024 and Igbokwe et al, 2020) who have linked both for stress and long working hours to performance. Similar studies also confirm

that work related stress has a negative impact on employee performance which is exhibited through higher levels of absenteeism, burnout, frequent sick-offs and unnecessary aggressiveness (Cooke et al, 2024).

5.0 Recommendations and Conclusion

Given the extent to which mental health challenges have encroached into the National Police Service, the paper recommends and concludes as follows:

5.1 Recommendations on Stress Related Challenges

While exploring relevant interventions, we should be able to come up with what is perceived to be the best practice in creating and enhancing an appropriate mental health condition at the workplace. The NPS management team have a critical role in the whole process. As much as it is a manager's moral obligation to maintain conducive mental health conditions of the staff, it is an avenue to establishing a sustainable organization in a fairly competitive business environment. Management should endeavor to promote a positive mental health among all the workforce and in turn implement appropriate interventions to support staff who experience poor mental health (Kelloway et al., 2023). These interventions should aim at creating and enhancing a healthier and more productive workplace environment, which in turn could be reflected in the overall organizational productivity and service delivery.

The significance of the support given to staff experiencing stress related challenges in the workplace cannot go unnoticed. Based on this understanding the managers have a role to play in ensuring that adequate support is availed to the affected staff in order to mitigate and take control of the identified mental challenges. Thus, the NPS should address work related stress and attempt to foster a positive and supportive work environment in order to enhance the well-being of police officers in Kenya. Endeavor to create an environment where peers can be able to support their colleagues.

5.2. Recommendations for Challenges Related to Long Working Hours

Addressing anxiety symptoms arising out of long working hours requires managers to take respective initiatives to establish a conducive work life balance where the personal life issues can be taken care of as well as the work demands. The Police officers need to be empowered through adequate awareness and sensitization, in order to be able to detect the any unusual behavior on their staff.

On the other hand, there is need to give emphasis to work life balance programs that reflect on adequate flexibility. This will provide some freedom to the staff as to when and how to carry out their duties. To some extent the police supervisors and Heads of various stations should be flexible and not too rigid on the standard work schedules. But rather provide an opportunity for the staff to fit into any of the available schedules to their convenience. For example, there is need to regularize frequent breaks, vacations or day-offs from work for the staff to have time to address family issues. Let the staff an opportunity to tap on the benefits associated with these flexible work arrangement programs, especially when it best suits them and gives them a smile. Rather than forcefully taking a day or week-off when they least need it, so long as it pleases the management. For example, assign them manageable tasks that are fairly distributed throughout the week.

On the other hand, there is need to offer a supportive workplace culture. There is need for managers to proactively and systematically ensure that the prevailing work factors in the workplace contribute to the well-being of their staff rather than becoming a source of stress and burnout. It is high time the NPS initiated and implemented peer support programs. With the increased workload as a result of supporting the staff who have mental health challenges, the managers may be overwhelmed to the level of being frustrated and disappointed. It is time consuming and may call for a lot of physical and emotional effort. Incidentally, such an experience may negatively impact on their service delivery as managers.

As a matter of fact, the NPS should formulate friendly and supportive policies to enable the police officers stand on their own without feeling discriminated and isolated from the rest of the civil servants. There is need to come up with supportive policies that are geared towards provision of support services such as counseling, policies to address increased funding to handle and implement a conducive work life balance in addition to supporting rehabilitation services for their officers.

5.3 Conclusion

Based on the above findings and discussions, the paper concludes that the National Police Service should move with speed in coming up with strategic doable strategies and fair policies that focus on establishing and maintaining an appropriate worklife balance in the workplace. This will give the police officers humble time to address their immediate family demands from time to time. Yes, this is the only way to address the stress related challenges, which deteriorate with the fact that the Officers have hinted on working for long hours without a break. All in all the NPS has a responsibility of creating a conducive work environment coupled with open channels of communication that supports appropriate mental health conditions and prioritize work life balance that embraces flexibility and inclusivity for all their staff.

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