Research Paper

Influence of Perceived Social Support and Self-Compassion on the Psychological well-being of Law Enforcement Officers in Kerala

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between perceived social support, self-compassion, and psychological well-being of police officers in Kerala. The sample included 489 police officers from the rank of civil police officers to inspector of police. The self- compassion scale by Neff (2003), the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet, et al ,1988), and the psychological well-being scale by Mehrotra etal (2013) were used to measure self-compassion, perceived social support, and psychological well-being, respectively. The Pearson correlation method was used to determine the correlation between self-compassion, perceived social support, and psychological well-being. It was found that all variables were positively correlated.

Law enforcement officers often face high levels of stress, trauma, and emotional challenges in their profession. Perceived social support and self-compassion can act as protective factors against mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Maheux & Price, 2016). Understanding how these factors influence psychological well-being can lead to better support systems and interventions for officers. Commitment to a job is affected by an employee's perception of their psychological well-being at work and the skill of their social interactions at work, (Alkhawaldeh & Alkrimeen, 2020). There are two key aspects to psychological well-being. The first is how much happiness and pleasant sentiments are felt by individuals. Subjective well-being is a term that has been used to describe this component of psychological wellbeing (Diener, 2000). Normal usage of the term "Hedonic" well-being is to describe the feelings of happiness. It consists of two parts: a cognitive part (content with life) and an affective part (high positive affect and low negative affect). A person is said to feel happy when their levels of positive affect and life satisfaction are both high (Hood & Carruthers,

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2016). The more obscure term "Eudaimonic" wellbeing is used to describe the PWB's intentional component. The psychologist Carol Ryff has created a fairly precise model that categorizes psychological wellness into six main categories: self-acceptance, environmental mastery, positive relationships, personal growth, purpose in life, and autonomy. In the line of duty, police officers respond to a variety of serious occurrences and frequently put their lives in danger to uphold social welfare, peace, and order. However, during duty, police officers frequently encounter disappointment, failure, and pain. Police work can cause suffering in two ways: directly (when an officer is hurt while performing their duties) or indirectly (when cops help crime victims). Lack of self-compassion is frequently the root cause of the anguish and failure faced by police personnel. As a result, especially in situations where they feel inadequate or desperate, police officers may experience guilt, shame, or self-blame. Officers may develop cynicism and the belief that the world is unfair if they endure prolonged stress and suffering. That is, given their exposure to violent crimes and profound suffering, cops may lack self-compassion. That is to say, it is crucial for police officers to develop self-compassion as one of the methods for advancing their wellbeing, health, and professional performance (Papazoglou, et al.2019).

Research emphasizes that the factors that influence the decision to seek help in a police population, particularly in relation to accessing psychological services, identified five main themes that influence the decision to seek psychological services: systemic factors, access to information and education, quality and influence of relationships, individual characteristics, and organizational processes(Burns & Buchanan,2020).The impact of police officers' social support network on health and well-being has also been established in many studies (Schantz et al., 2020; Padhy, et al.,2022). Implementation of community policing leads to a change in the police department that may ultimately lead to stressors such as specific physiological responses, and lack of job involvement. However, their work social support system is significantly affected by the level of job involvement and coping with stress. A good work support system ensures better job involvement and coping with stress (Lord, 1996)

Apart from police community studies, establishing the relationship between perceived social support and psychological well-being were conducted among adults (Shin & Park, 2022). Social support and psychological well-being among young adults have been established in many studies (Winefield, et al.,1992; Stephen, 2023).

Positive outcomes, such as improved self-acceptance, positive relationships, and higher autonomy, were linked to a more positive impression of social support. Numerous research investigations involving teenagers consistently yield striking results. Positive outcomes, such as improved self-acceptance, positive relationships, and higher autonomy, were linked to a more positive impression of social support. Notably, Ngaru and Kagema's (2017) study found a strong correlation between students' psychological well-being and a variety of support types, including parental support, guidance and counselling, peer support, and religious support. This emphasizes how crucial it is to have a variety of supportive sources to promote favourable psychological outcomes. The study found that the frequency of Instagram use was a significant predictor of all three types of perceived social support: informational, companionship, and self-esteem.

In contemporary society, perceived social support is no longer confined to traditional sources such as friends, family, and peers; rather, individuals increasingly seek and perceive

support through social media platforms such as Instagram. Overall, the findings that Instagram users obtain specific types of social support depending on their activities on the platform, and these different types of support have varying effects on well-being (Hwnag, 2018)

Self-compassion is extending compassion to one's self in instances of perceived inadequacy, failure, or general suffering. Kristin Neff defined self-compassion as being composed of three main elements – self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness (Neff, 2003). Several research findings emphasize the relationship between self-compassion and psychological well-being. Self-compassion is associated with reduced anxiety, depression, and burnout, as well as increased well-being and physical health (Jarecki, et al., 2020). Self-compassion is positively and uniquely related to psychological well-being in older adults (Homan, 2016).

Objectives
- The focus of the present study is to determine the influence of perceived social support and self-compassion on the psychological well-being of police officers because the importance of well-being is felt in all aspects of a police officer's life.

Hypotheses of the Study
- There is a significant positive relationship between perceived social support and psychological well-being
- There is a significant positive relationship between self-compassion and psychological well-being.

METHOD

Participants
The sample comprised 489 police officers of various ranks, from civil police officer to inspector of police. Out of the sample, there are 61 females and 428 males. The average age of participants was 43.25 years, and they were working in various districts in Kerala. The sample includes Civil Police officers (n = 179, 36.6%), Senior Civil Police officers (n = 129, 26.4%), Sub Inspectors (n=143,29.2%) and Inspector of Police officers(n=38, 7.8%).Only a few are with education of SSLC (n=59, 12.1%), Senior secondary (n=90,18.4%), graduate level(n=272,55.6%) and post graduate level(n=68,13.9%.)About 87.5% (n = 428) were married, 4.7% (n = 23) were single or unmarried and 1.02%(n=5) were separated. The data collection process began with an in-person meeting with each participant to brief them on the study and its implications. An investigator informed the participants about their right to withdraw from the study at any time and asked them to sign a written informed consent form. The investigators distributed the psychological well-being questionnaire, self-compassion scale, and multidimensional scale of perceived social support and orally gave necessary instructions after obtaining written informed consent from each participant. Participation was entirely voluntary.

Measures
Psychological Well-being scale (Mehrotra, Tripathi, & Banu, 2013).
The scale consists of 20 items divided into four areas: self-acceptance, sense of mastery and competence, positive relations, and sense of engagement and growth. It is a 6- point rating scale with response options: strongly agree, agree somewhat, agree

slightly, disagree slightly, disagree somewhat, and, strongly disagree. The internal consistency reliability of the scale is 0.83.

Self- compassion scale

Neff (2003) defines self-compassion as the ability to hold one's feelings of suffering with a sense of warmth, connection, and concern. The six facets of self-compassion are Self-Kindness, Self-Judgment, Common Humanity, Isolation, Mindfulness, and Over-Identification. Subscale scores are computed by calculating the mean of subscale item responses. This test is the shorter version scale consisting of two items each for each facets of self-compassion with five response options (Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often and Always) given to the participants. Cronbach's alphas ranged from 0.68 to 0.78: Self-Kindness ($\alpha = 0.74$), Self-Judgment ($\alpha = 0.78$), Common Humanity ($\alpha = 0.72$), Isolation ($\alpha = 0.68$), Mindfulness ($\alpha = 0.70$), Overidentification ($\alpha = 0.72$)

Multidimensional scale of perceived social support

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) was developed by Zimet et al., (1988). It consists of 12 items, and each item of the scale is rated on a 7- point Likert scale (1, very strongly disagree to 7, very strongly agree). The scale evaluates the adequacy of perceived social support from three different sources: family, friends, and significant others. The items 3, 4, 8, and 11 measure support from family; 6, 7, 9, and 12 measure support from friends; and 1, 2, 5, and 10 measure support from significant others. The sum of 4 items under each subscale gives the subscale score, while the sum of all subscale scores gives the overall scale score. Total scores range from 12 to 84. High scores indicate high perceived social support. The internal consistencies of the total scale and the sub-scales are high, ranging from 0.79 to 0.98 in various samples (Zimet et al., 1988)

Personal data sheet

A sociodemographic response sheet was created and used to collect information about qualification, designation, age and marital status.

RESULTS

Table 1 Inter-correlation among the Variables in the Study

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3
Psychological wellbeing (1)	90.24	15.02	(.85)		
Self-compassion (2)	43.01	6.46	.493**	(.69)	
Perceived social support (3)	64.76	14.29	.463**	.409**	(.93)

Note. Cronbach alpha (α) is presented in parenthesis
$^*p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$

The summary of the correlation analysis presented in table 1 indicates that psychological well-being is positively related to self-compassion ($r = .493$, $p < .01$) and perceived social support ($r = .463$, $p < .01$).

DISCUSSION

The results indicate the importance of self-compassion and perceived social support in influencing the psychological well-being of law enforcement officers. Self-compassion and compassionate love significantly impact the mental health of first responders, reducing depersonalization and psychological distress. Self-compassion correlates with lower post-traumatic stress, emotional exhaustion, and higher resilience and life satisfaction.

Compassionate love predicts greater personal accomplishment and compassion satisfaction, particularly in emotional support first responders (McDonald, et al., 2020). There are studies which emphasize the impact of intervention approach incorporating PsyCap, self-compassion, social support, relationship satisfaction, and physical activity to enhance the health and well-being of first responders, providing a valuable foundation for future interventions (Lowery & Cassidy, 2022).

Self-compassion has been associated with enhanced well-being markers such as happiness, life satisfaction, and physical health, as well as lower levels of anxiety, sadness, and burnout. The results of one study conducted among physicians emphasize the value of self-compassion, highlighting how it can be a useful tool for building resilience to deal with the difficulties that come with practicing medicine (Jarecki et al., 2020).

Fostering a supportive environment within law enforcement agencies and promoting social support networks can significantly contribute to the overall mental health and well-being of officers, ultimately improving their performance and job satisfaction while reducing the risk of burnout and related mental health issues (Nisbet.et al, 2023). Different studies support the results of this study (Schantz et al., 2020; Drew & Martin, 2023; Aw, et al., 2023; Stephen, 2023).

Another study found that lack of social support is a barrier for law enforcement officers seeking mental health services (Richards, et al., 2021). Studies also mention the online support system is also beneficial (Jehangir, 2022). In summary, diverse types of social support from various relationships have a profound impact on the psychological well-being Understanding and addressing these different forms of support are crucial in promoting the mental and emotional health of the law enforcement officers.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of this study, it can be concluded that self-compassion and psychological well-being are positively related. Perceived social support is also positively related to psychological well-being. It can be ensured that training in self -compassion and rendering better social support from different sphere enhances the well-being of law enforcement officers.

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