

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

ORGANISATIONAL AND OPERATIONAL POLICE STRESSORS AND THEIR ASSOCIATED SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC AND WORKPLACE FACTORS

Retneswari Masilamani^{1&2} and Awang Bulgiba^{3&4}¹Department of Social and Preventive Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University of Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia²Department of Population Medicine, MK Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, 43000, Kajang, Malaysia³Centre for Epidemiology and Evidence-Based Practice, Department of Social and Preventive Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University of Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia⁴Academy of Sciences Malaysia, Level 20, West Wing, MATRADE Tower, Jalan Sultan Haji Ahmad Shah, off Jalan Tuanku Abdul Halim, 50480 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Corresponding author: Retneswari Masilamani

Email: retnes@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Police work is a high-pressure profession where stressors are categorised into organisational and operational domains, significantly impacting officer well-being. This cross-sectional study aimed to identify the ranking of these stressors and their associated sociodemographic and workplace factors among police officers in Kuala Lumpur. Following a one stage cluster sampling, data were collected using the Organisational and Operational Police Stress Questionnaires. With a response rate of 94.3% analysed was carried out using Independent T-tests, ANOVA, and General Linear Model. Operational stressors (mean 2.79) were ranked slightly higher than organisational stressors (mean 2.73), with fatigue, not enough time to spend with friends and family (operational stressors), and bureaucratic red tape (organisational stressor) emerging as primary concerns. Multivariable analysis revealed that age and years of service were significantly associated with both stressor categories, while marital status and rank were predictors for organisational stressors. Salary commensurability remained a primary predictor ($p < 0.001$), with mean difference (MD) of 0.58, (95% CI: 0.40, 0.75) for organisational stressor and, ($p < 0.001$), with a mean difference (MD) of 0.72 (95% CI: 0.53, 0.90) for operational stressors. The practice of prayer served as a significant protective factor $p = 0.02$ with MD of -0.46, (95% CI: -0.85, -0.08) for organisational stressors and, ($p < 0.001$), MD of -0.88, (95% CI: -1.29, -0.47) for operational stressors. These findings suggest that the Royal Malaysia Police (RMP) welfare strategies should prioritize financial stability and spiritual support units to effectively mitigate the unique organisational and operational burdens identified.

Key words: Police stress, Organisational stressors, Operational stressors, General Linear Model, Police Stress Questionnaire, Occupational health, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

Historically, research into police stress during the 1960s and 1970s focused primarily on high-profile operational hazards such as tactical combat and crime chases. However, since the mid-1980s, the conceptualisation of police stress has shifted towards a dual framework: organisational and operational stressors. Despite this shift, global literature revealed significant inconsistencies, often due to a narrow focus on specific dangerous experiences while neglecting a broader spectrum of potential stressors¹⁻².

Despite early findings identifying stress levels between 40% and 60%, Malaysian police research remains constrained by small sample sizes and a reliance on unpublished data that lacks broad generalizability. Furthermore, while existing literature identifies isolated issues like salary or trauma, there is a critical lack of integrated analysis concerning how **organisational and operational stressors**—compounded by the institutional and structural challenges and unaddressed reforms highlighted in the Royal Commission Report (RCR)—interact with specific

sociodemographic and workplace factors to shape officer well-being.

A significant breakthrough occurred in 2006 when McCreary and Thompson addressed these limitations—particularly the often-overlooked work-family conflict—by developing the Police Stress Questionnaire (PSQ)³⁻⁴. This tool provides two distinct scales for organisational and operational stressors, accounting for the administrative and systemic issues that frequently outweigh the dangers of frontline duty. In Malaysia, while police stress is an acknowledged concern, there is a scarcity of research that utilises culturally validated, comprehensive tools to examine how localised workplace factors and personal beliefs—such as spiritual practices and rank-specific demands—interact with these stressor domains.

To address these gaps, this study utilises the Bahasa Malaysia-translated version of the PSQ⁵. The rationale for this research is to move beyond generalities and provide a data-driven picture of the Malaysian policing environment. The primary objectives are to describe the organisational and

operational stressors among Kuala Lumpur police officers, identify which domain exerts a greater burden, and determine the association between these stressors and sociodemographic and workplace factors through multivariable analysis.

METHODS

This cross-sectional study utilised single-stage cluster sampling to select two of four district headquarters in Kuala Lumpur randomly (covering 50% ensured metropolitan selection context reducing institutional selection bias), covering 16 departments and 11 stations (population = 3,033). Universal sampling during "roll call" minimised recruitment bias by voluntary participation, while anonymous and self-administered questionnaires reduced social desirability bias. The study recruited "regular" officers with minimum 6 months of service. Exclusion criteria included less than 6 months service, lack of police training, known psychiatric illness, or refusal to participate. Based on a 40% stress prevalence, 5% precision, and 95% confidence, the initial sample size was 341, adjusted to 410 for non-response. Ultimately, 579 officers consented, to participate, enhancing statistical power. With exclusion of 33 responses, due to missing data, the final sample size was 546.

The operational definition of stress was categorised based on the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale Score (DASS) Manual, where the scores were summed for the relevant items and converted into percentiles as normal (0-78), mild (78-87), moderate (87-95) and severe (95-100 for severe and extremely severe) on a nominal scale, prayer defined as yes or no on a nominal scale, exercise as yes and no on a nominal scale and salary commensurate with job categorised into yes and no on nominal scale.

The Police Stress Questionnaire (PSQ) was the primary instrument, comprising 20-item Organisational (PSQ-org) and Operational (PSQ-op) subscales⁵. Stress over the preceding six months was rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = "none" to 7 = "extreme"). Following author permission, scales were translated (forward/backward) by bilingual academics. The validated Bahasa Malaysia version (BM-PSQ) demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.96 for both subscales) compared to 0.92-0.93 in the original⁵. Data on sociodemographic, workplace variables, and

lifestyle factors (prayer/exercise) were also collected.

Ethical Considerations

Approval was granted by the University of Malaya Medical Centre Ethics Committee (MEC Ref: 830.10) and the Inspector General of Police. All participants provided written informed consent.

Statistical Analysis

Data were analysed using SPSS version 20.0, including data cleaning and normality testing. Descriptive statistics used mean $\pm$ standard deviation (SD) for continuous variables and frequencies/percentages for categorical data.

A paired-sample t-test compared PSQ-org and PSQ-op mean scores. Pearson's correlation examined continuous variable relationships. Independent t-tests and One-way ANOVA (with Bonferroni post-hoc tests) identified associations between stressors and categorical factors. Finally, a General Linear Model (GLM) was used for multivariable analysis to identify independent predictors and adjust for confounders. Significance was set at $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed). Parametric tests were utilized based on the Central Limit Theorem given a good sample size. Assumptions including homogeneity of variance (Levene's test) and multicollinearity (Tolerance > 0.2 ; VIF < 3.0) were verified. Missing data ($< 5\%$) were handled via listwise deletion. Multivariable analysis was performed using a General Linear Model (GLM), reporting unstandardized coefficients (B), 95% Confidence Intervals (CI), and model fit indicators (R^2 and F-statistic).

RESULTS

A total of 579 police officers participated in the study with a final valid response rate of 94.3%. A final sample of 546 was included for analysis after exclusion of 33 respondents with incomplete data (missing $> 20\%$ data). The mean age of the participants was 35.20 years (SD = 11.1). The cohort was predominantly male (87.4%) and of Malay ethnicity (83.2%). 39.7% of the officers earned a monthly salary of RM 2,500 or more, while 32.4% earned less than RM 1,500. The mean duration of service was 14.0 years (SD = 11.6). Notably, more than half of the officers (58.6%) perceived that their salaries were not commensurate with their job responsibilities (Table 1).

Table 1: Socio-demographic and workplace characteristics of police officers (n=546).

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	477	87.36
Female	69	12.64
Marital Status		
Married	383	70.15
^a Others	163	29.85
Ethnicity		
Malay	454	83.15
^b Non-Malay	92	16.85
Educational Status		
School educated	483	88.46
^c Diploma and above	63	11.54
Place of work		
^d DPH	207	37.91
Balai polis	339	62.09
Rank of Officer		
^e Junior officers	415	76.01
^f Sergeant	75	13.74
^g Inspectors and above	56	10.25
Department		
^h Management, resources & technology	227	41.57
ⁱ Crime-related	98	17.95
^j Security and public order	221	40.48
Salary in RM^k		
<1500	177	32.42
1500-2499	152	27.84
≥2500	217	39.74
Salary Commensurate with job		
No	317	58.06
Yes	229	41.94
Exercise		
Yes	361	66.12
No	185	33.88
Prayer		
Yes	515	94.32
No	31	5.68
Age	35.2±11.1*	
Years of Service	14.0±11.6*	

*Mean±SD= Mean ± Standard deviation, ^kRM-Ringgit Malaysia. ^aOthers - single/divorced/widowed. ^bNon-Malays - Chinese, Indian and all others. ^cDiploma and above - attained post graduate degrees from diploma, degree, Masters and Ph.D. ^dDPH- District Police headquarters. ^eJunior officers - Constable, Lance Corporal and corporal, ^fSergeant-Sergeant and Sergeant Major, ^gInspectors and above - sub-inspector, inspector and chief inspector, including Management posts - Assistant Superintendent of Police, Deputy Superintendent of Police, Superintendent of Police and Assistant Commissioner of Police Headquarters. ^hManagement, resources and technology - combined Management Department and Strategic Resources and Technology Department. ⁱCriminal related - combined Criminal Investigation, Narcotic Crime Investigation and Commercial Crime Investigation Departments. ^jSecurity and Public Order - Combined Internal Security and Public Order Department with Special branch. All numbers in cells have been rounded up to two decimal places.

Ranking of Organisational and operational stressors

The top three ranked organisational stressors in descending order were 'bureaucratic red tape', 'if you were sick or injured, your co-workers seem to look down on you' and 'dealing with co-worker' (all with same mean = 2.77±1.17) while the three lowest ranked stressors in ascending order were 'inconsistent leadership style' (Mean = 2.74±1.17), 'too much computer work' (Mean = 2.75±1.17) and 'excessive administrative duties' (Mean = 2.75± 1.17), The overall mean

organisational stressor was 2.73 out of 7 (SD = 1.20).

The 3-top ranked operational stressors were 'Fatigue' (mean = 3.46±1.74), 'Not enough time to spend with friends and family' (mean = 3.27±1.79) and 'Risk of being injured on the job' (mean = 3.24±1.79) while the 3 lowest ranked in ascending order were 'Eating healthy at work' (mean = 2.47±1.64, Limitations to your social life' (Mean = 2.49±1.65) and 'Traumatic events' (Mean = 2.59±1.77). The overall mean operational stressor was 2.79 out of 7 (SD = 1.27).

Table 2: Paired t-test for mean organisational and mean operational stressor scores

Variable	Mean Stressor Scores	Mean Difference	T-Test	P-Value	Paired Sample T-Test	
					95% Confidence Interval for Mean Difference	
					Lower Limit	Upper Limit
Operational stressor	2.79	0.06	2.24	0.02	0.01	0.12
Organisational stressor	2.73					

Mean organisational stressor and mean operational stressor scores

Table 2 shows a paired-sample t-test conducted to compare the mean scores of operational and organisational stressors among the participants. The analysis revealed a statistically significant difference between the two stress domains ($t(545) = 2.24$, $p = 0.025$). The mean stressor score for operational stressors was slightly higher (2.79) compared to organisational stressors (2.73), with a mean difference of 0.06 (95% CI: 0.01 to 0.12) as shown in Table 2. These results indicate that while both types of stressors impact officers, operational stressors are perceived as significantly more taxing within this cohort.

Univariable analysis for Organisational stressor and Sociodemographic and workplace factors

Univariable analysis (ANOVA and Independent T-tests) indicated that organisational stress levels were significantly influenced by several sociodemographic and workplace factors. Highly significant mean differences were found based on salary ($p < 0.001$), rank ($p < 0.001$), and department ($p < 0.01$). Married officers reported higher stress (2.89) than single or divorced counterparts (2.49, $p < 0.001$), while those with a diploma or higher education (3.22) felt more pressure than school-educated personnel (2.71, $p < 0.01$).

Workplace environment was a critical predictor; officers at District Police Headquarters (DPH) experienced higher stress (3.03) than those at local stations (2.61, $p < 0.001$). Perceptions of inadequate salary were strongly linked to

increased strain ($p < 0.001$), while regular exercise showed a protective effect (2.70 vs. 2.92, $p = 0.03$). Pearson's correlation revealed positive associations with age ($r = 0.11$, $p < 0.05$) and years of service ($r = 0.12$, $p < 0.01$). No significant mean differences were found for gender (Mean Diff: -0.18; 95% CI -0.46, 0.10), ethnicity (Mean Diff: 0.11; 95% CI -0.14, 0.35), or prayer (Mean Diff: -0.31; 95% CI -0.71, 0.10).

Univariable analysis for Operational stressor and Sociodemographic and workplace factors

Operational stress levels varied significantly by rank ($p < 0.001$), salary ($p < 0.01$), and department ($p < 0.01$). Marital status ($p = 0.03$) and higher education ($p = 0.01$) remained significant contributors to elevated stress. District Police Headquarters stationed officers (3.03) again reported higher pressure than those at local stations (2.72, $p = 0.01$), with non-commensurate salary being the most significant workplace factor ($p < 0.001$).

Exercise continued to significantly mediate lower operational stress ($p = 0.02$). Notably, officers who practiced regular prayer reported significantly lower stress scores (2.80) than those who did not (3.55, $p = 0.01$), highlighting spiritual wellness as a coping mechanism. Unlike organisational stress, years of service ($r = 0.05$, $p = 0.26$) and age ($r = 0.04$, $p = 0.42$) showed no significant association. There were no significant differences based on gender ($p = 0.13$) or ethnicity ($p = 0.34$).

Table 3: General linear model: Effects of sociodemographic and workplace factors on organisational police stressor

Police stressor				
Variable	Mean (95% Confidence Interval)	Mean Difference	P-Value	95% Confidence Interval
Categorical variables				
Gender				
Male	3.11 (2.86, 3.37)	-0.11	0.42	-0.37, 0.16
Female	3.22 (2.88, 3.57)			
Marital status				
Married	3.31 (3.23, 3.60)	0.28	0.02	0.04, 0.52

^a Others	3.03 (2.73, 3.15)			
Ethnicity				
Malay	3.23 (2.96, 3.50)	0.12	0.29	-0.11, 0.37
^b Non-Malay	3.11 (2.79, 3.42)			
Education				
School	3.09 (2.82, 3.35)	-0.16	0.37	-0.51, 0.19
^c Diploma and Above	3.25 (2.88, 3.62)			
Place of work				
^d DPH	3.24 (2.95, 3.53)	0.14	0.19	-0.07, 0.37
Police station	3.10 (2.80, 3.39)			
Rank				
^e Junior officers -	2.87 (2.58, 3.15)	-0.40	0.04	-0.78, -0.01
^f Sergeant	3.27 (3.18, 3.65)			
Junior officers -	2.87 (2.58, 3.15)	-0.51	0.04	-0.99, -0.03
^g Inspector and above	3.38 (3.28, 3.76)			
Sergeant -	3.27 (3.18, 3.65)	-0.11	1.00	-0.66, 0.44
Inspector and above	3.38 (3.28, 3.76)			
Department				
^h Management, resources & technology -	3.16 (2.85, 3.46)	0.09	1.00	-0.46, 0.25
ⁱ Crime-related	3.25 (2.92, 3.57)			
Management, resources & technology -	3.16 (2.85, 3.46)	0.05	1.00	-0.19, 0.29
^j Security and Public Order	3.11 (2.80, 3.41)			
Crime- related -	3.25 (2.92, 3.57)	0.14	1.00	-0.22, 0.50
Security and Public Order	3.11 (2.80, 3.41)			
Salary in RM^k				
<1500 -	3.01 (2.63, 3.38)	-0.17	0.62	-0.56, 0.15
1500-2499	3.18 (2.86, 3.50)			
<1500 -	3.01 (2.63, 3.38)	-0.31	0.41	-0.81, 0.19
≥2500	3.32 (3.02, 3.62)			
1500-2499-	3.18 (2.86, 3.50)	-0.14	1.00	-0.53, 0.25
≥2500	3.32 (3.02, 3.62)			
Salary commensurate with job				
No	3.46 (3.18, 3.74)	0.58	<0.001	0.40, 0.75
Yes	2.88 (2.59, 3.17)			
Exercise				

Yes	3.13 (2.84, 3.41)	-0.08	0.38	-0.27, 0.10
No	3.21 (2.93, 3.50)			
Prayer				
Yes	2.94 (2.72, 3.15)	-0.46	0.02	-0.85, -0.08
No	3.40 (3.19, 3.82)			

Continuous variables

Variable	Beta coefficient	T stats	p-value	Confidence interval
Age	-0.05	-2.79	0.01	-0.08, -0.01
Years of service	0.04	2.23	0.03	0.01, 0.07

^aOthers - single/divorced/widowed. ^bNon-Malays - Chinese, Indian and all others. ^cDiploma and above - attained post graduate degrees from diploma, degree, Masters and Ph.D. ^dDPH- District Police. ^eJunior officers - Constable, Lance Corporal and Corporal, ^fSergeant- Sergeant and Sergeant Major, ^gInspectors and above - sub-inspector, inspector and chief inspector, including Management posts - Assistant Superintendent of Police, Deputy Superintendent of Police, Superintendent of Police and Assistant Commissioner of Police Headquarters. ^hManagement, resources and technology - combined Management Department and Strategic Resources and Technology Department. ⁱCriminal related - combined Criminal Investigation, Narcotic Crime Investigation and Commercial Crime Investigation Departments. ^jSecurity and Public Order - Combined Internal Security and Public Order Department with Special branch. ^kRM - Ringgit Malaysia. All numbers in cells have been rounded up to two decimal places.

The multivariable GLM for organisational stressors was significant ($F_{27,310} = 3.102$, $p < 0.001$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.144$), with 6 significant independent predictors (Table 3). Rank was a significant factor ($p < 0.01$), with post-hoc analysis showing that junior officers reported significantly lower stress than sergeants (Mean difference (MD) = -0.40; 95% CI: -0.78, -0.01) and those ranked inspector and above (MD = -0.51; 95% CI: -0.99, -0.03). Marital status was also significant ($p = 0.02$), with married officers experiencing higher stress than others (MD = 0.28; 95% CI: 0.04, 0.52).

Perceptions of salary commensurability showed the strongest association ($p < 0.001$; MD = 0.58), while prayer served as a significant mitigator ($p = 0.02$), with practitioners reporting lower mean stress (2.94) than non-practitioners (3.40; MD = -0.46). Additionally, age was negatively associated with stress (beta = -0.05, $p = 0.01$), whereas years of service showed a positive correlation (beta = 0.04, $p = 0.03$). A significant interaction was observed between rank and gender ($p = 0.02$), refer to Fig 1.

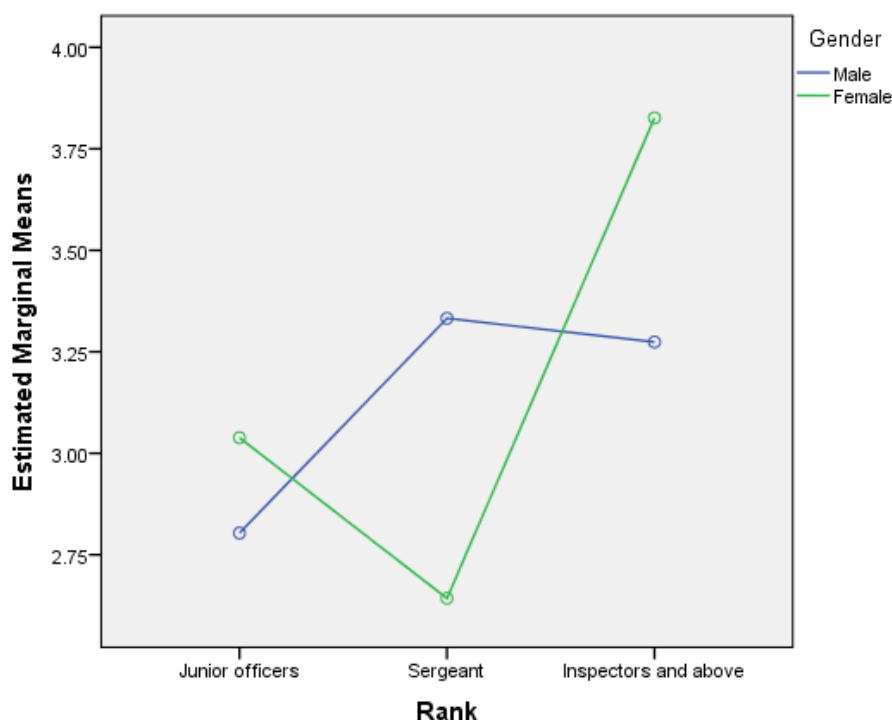


Figure 1: Profile plot of rank and gender interaction on organisational police stressor.

Junior officers - Constable, Lance Corporal and Corporal. **Sergeant**- Sergeant and Sergeant Major. **Inspectors and above** - Sub-inspector, Inspector and Chief Inspector, including Management posts - Assistant Superintendent of Police, Deputy Superintendent of Police, Superintendent of Police and Assistant Commissioner of Police Headquarters.

The interaction plot in Figure 1 shows that for males, the stress level considerably increased for sergeants compared to junior officers. The inspector and above rank officers for males showed a minimal reduction in the stress levels

compared to sergeants. For females, the sergeants showed a rapid decline in their stress compared to the junior officers while, the inspectors and above rank showed a sharp increase in their stress levels.

Table 4: General linear model: Effects of sociodemographic and workplace factors on operational stressor

Variable	Mean (95% Confidence Interval)	Mean Difference	P-Value	95% Confidence Interval
Categorical variables				
Gender				
Male	3.28 (3.02, 3.55)	-0.20	0.18	-0.48, 0.09
Female	3.48 (3.11, 3.84)			
Marital Status				
Married	3.48 (3.17, 3.79)	0.20	0.13	-0.06, 0.46
^a Others	3.28 (2.96, 3.60)			
Ethnicity				
Malay	3.48 (3.19, 3.77)	0.20	0.12	-0.05, 0.06
^b Non-Malay	3.28 (2.94, 3.62)			
Education				
School	3.28 (3.00, 3.57)	-0.20	0.31	-0.56, 0.18
^c Diploma and above	3.48 (3.08, 3.87)			
Place of work				
^d DPH	3.42 (3.11, 3.73)	0.08	0.54	-0.16, 0.31
Police station	3.34 (3.03, 3.66)			
Rank				
^e Junior officers -	3.18 (2.88, 3.48)	-0.23	0.56	-0.64, 0.19
^f Sergeant	3.41 (3.00, 3.81)			
Junior officers -	3.18 (2.88, 3.48)	-0.38	0.24	-0.89, 0.14
^g Inspector and above	3.56 (3.15, 3.96)			
Sergeant -	3.41 (3.00, 3.81)	-0.15	1.00	-0.74, 0.44
Inspector and above	3.56 (3.15, 3.96)			
Department				
^h Management, resources & technology -	3.32 (3.00, 3.64)	-0.16	0.99	-0.55, 0.23
ⁱ Crime - related	3.48 (3.14, 3.82)			
Management, resources & technology -	3.32 (3.00, 3.64)	-0.02	1.00	-0.27, 0.23
^j Security and public order	3.34 (3.01, 3.67)			
Crime-related-	3.48 (3.14, 3.82)	-0.14	1.00	-0.24, 0.52
Security and public order	3.34 (3.01, 3.67)			
Salary in RM^k				
<1500 -	3.28	-0.08	1.00	-0.42, 0.28

	(2.89, 3.68)			
1500-2499	3.36			
	(3.02, 3.69)			
<1500 -	3.28	-0.22	0.97	-0.75, 0.31
	(2.89, 3.68)			
≥2500	3.50			
	(3.18, 3.83)			
1500-2499-	3.36	-0.14	1.00	-0.56, 0.26
	(3.02, 3.69)			
≥2500	3.50			
	(3.18, 3.83)			
Salary commensurate with job				
No	3.74	0.72	<0.001	0.53, 0.90
	(3.44, 4.03)			
Yes	3.02			
	(2.72, 3.33)			
Exercise				
Yes	3.35	-0.06	0.51	-0.26, 0.13
	(3.04, 3.65)			
No	3.41			
	(3.11, 3.72)			
Prayer				
Yes	2.94	-0.88	<0.001	-1.29, -0.47
	(2.71, 3.17)			
No	3.82			
	(3.38, 4.26)			
Continuous variables				
Variable	Beta coefficient	T stats	p-value	Confidence interval
Age	-0.05	-2.42	0.02	-0.08, -0.01
Years of service	0.04	2.08	0.04	0.00, 0.07

^aOthers - single/divorced/widowed. . ^bNon-Malays - Chinese, Indian and all others. ^cDiploma and above - attained post graduate degrees from diploma, degree, Masters and Ph.D. ^dDPH- District Police. ^eJunior officers - Constable, Lance Corporal and Corporal, ^fSergeant- Sergeant and Sergeant Major, ^gInspectors and above - sub-inspector, inspector and chief inspector, including Management posts - Assistant Superintendent of Police, Deputy Superintendent of Police, Superintendent of Police and Assistant Commissioner of Police Headquarters. ^hManagement, resources and technology - combined Management Department and Strategic Resources and Technology Department. ⁱCriminal related - combined Criminal Investigation, Narcotic Crime Investigation and Commercial Crime Investigation Departments. ^jSecurity and Public Order - Combined Internal Security and Public Order Department with Special branch. ^kRM - Ringgit Malaysia. All numbers in cells have been rounded up to two decimal places.

The operational stressors model showed significant fit ($F(27,310) = 3.108$, $p < 0.001$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.144$), with four statistically significant predictors (Table 4). Salary commensurability remained a primary predictor ($p < 0.001$), with a mean difference (MD) of 0.72 (95% CI: 0.53, 0.90) between those dissatisfied and satisfied with their pay. Prayer demonstrated a highly significant protective effect ($p < 0.001$; MD = -0.88; 95% CI: -1.29, -0.47). Similar to organisational findings, age was inversely related to operational stress (beta = -0.05, $p = 0.02$), while years of service was a positive predictor (beta = 0.04, $p = 0.04$). The main effects of gender ($p = 0.18$), marital status ($p = 0.13$), place of work ($p = 0.54$), ethnicity ($p = 0.12$), salary ($p = 0.60$), education ($p = 0.31$), rank ($p = 0.13$), department ($p = 0.61$) and exercise ($p = 0.51$), were not statistically significant with operational police stressor. The interaction between gender and rank did not reach significance ($p = 0.09$).

DISCUSSION

Organisational and operational stressor levels

The moderate stressor rankings observed may stem from a "macho" culture of denial or social desirability bias, where officers provide neutral "on the fence" responses to appear resilient to superiors.⁶⁻⁸ Alternatively, these results could reflect genuine adaptive coping strategies developed over the officers' careers.⁹⁻¹⁰ This study reported slightly higher mean operational stressors than organisational ones, contrasting with findings in Canada and Nigeria.^{8,11} In Malaysia, pressing operational issues like the risk of injury, inadequate recovery time, and family-time constraints remain dominant. Conversely, higher organisational stress in the US and Nigeria may reflect more robust institutional supports that shift the focus toward administrative frustrations.^{10,12}

Ranking of stressors

Top organisational stressors included 'bureaucratic red tape,' 'peer stigma regarding sick leave,' and 'dealing with co-workers.'

different from Canadian and Nigerian studies^{8,11,13} Bureaucracy suggests systemic inefficiencies and digital burdens, while sick-leave stigma reflects a culture that equates health-seeking with weakness. 'Fatigue' and 'insufficient time with family' remain universal operational concerns as reported by a study in Kerala and Ontario, worsened by multicultural celebrations that clash with shift schedules.¹³⁻¹⁶ Unlike Western studies where shift work is a primary irritant, Malaysian officers ranked it lower, suggesting better adaptation to non-traditional schedules or stronger internal social supports.^{8,13,17,18}

Associated factors and multivariable analysis

After GLM adjustment, age and years of service remained significantly associated with both stressor categories. While maturity appears to enhance resilience, organisational stress tends to surface as officers gain longer exposure to the regimental hierarchy.^{14,19-20} Married officers reported higher organisational stress, likely due to "dual responsibility" conflicts.²¹⁻²² Rank was a critical mediator; Inspectors and Sergeants reported the highest stress, reflecting their role as the "backbone" of investigation teams in Narcotics and Criminal Investigation.²³

Salary commensurability and wellness

Salary commensurability emerged as a primary predictor of stress in both categories. Salary dissatisfaction acts as a potent stressor because it creates a "utility gap" where the high physical and psychological risks of policing are not balanced by financial security.²⁴⁻²⁵ In the Malaysian context, this is particularly acute; when pay does not cover rising living costs, officers may face external financial strain that diminishes their mental capacity for high-stakes decision-making. For welfare policy, this implies that psychological interventions alone are insufficient. Policymakers must prioritize financial welfare—such as competitive allowances or cost-of-living adjustments—as a fundamental component of occupational health to prevent burnout and maintain institutional integrity. Regarding wellness, exercise showed a protective effect univariably, mirroring findings among Swiss officers.²⁶ Notably, the practice of prayer remained highly significant in the GLM for both stressor categories. Spiritual practice serves as a robust internal resource in Malaysia, with prayer significantly moderating occupational pressure, similar to coping mechanisms documented in South Africa.²⁷

Strengths and limitations of the study

This study establishes a critical baseline for Malaysian police stress research. However, its cross-sectional design precludes causal inferences, and self-reported data may involve social desirability or recall bias. Findings from metropolitan Kuala Lumpur may not generalize to rural contingents. Methodologically, minor overlap in PSQ items (e.g., "shift work" and

"fatigue") may have influenced score distributions.

Recommendations

Stress mitigation requires institutional and individual strategies. The Royal Malaysia Police (RMP) should leverage the Religious and Counselling Division (BAKA) to expand psychosocial support, focusing on the following: Targeted Interventions - prioritize high-stress units (Crime) and middle-management (Inspectors/Sergeants) through peer counselling, Inclusive Wellness - expand spiritual and counselling services to non-Muslim officers and utilize Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP) to reduce help-seeking stigma and, Organisational Support- enhance workplace socialisation via sports and improved facilities to buffer operational fatigue. Future research should incorporate coping strategies and personality traits to provide a holistic view of resilience.

CONCLUSION

Operational stressors (mean=2.79) were perceived as slightly more taxing than organisational stressors (mean=2.73). Primary organisational burdens included red tape, sick-stigma, and interpersonal friction, while operational strain was driven by fatigue, work-life imbalance, and physical risk. GLM analysis confirmed that salary dissatisfaction, lack of prayer, age, and years of service was significantly associated with both stressor categories. Furthermore, rank (Inspector/Sergeant) and being married showed significant association with higher organisational stress. These findings underscore the necessity of a welfare-oriented RMP mission to protect officer mental health.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare no potential conflict of interest.

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