

# Psychological Consequences of Job Stress on the Nigeria Police Officers in Rivers State, Nigeria: Implications for Counselling

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**Abstract- Background-** Police work is inherently stressful, involving exposure to violence, high public scrutiny, shift work, and life-threatening situations. In Rivers State, Nigeria, these stressors are intensified by security challenges, resource constraints, and community expectations. Chronic job stress can undermine officers' mental health, job performance, and community relations.

**Objective-** The study investigated the psychological consequences of job stress on Nigeria police officers in Rivers State, determining the psychological consequences of job stress; general anxiety and job dissatisfaction as psychological consequences of job stress of the Nigeria Police force in Rivers State.

**Method -** The study is a descriptive survey design with a sample of 400 Nigeria Police officers dichotomized into male and female, low and high educational level, junior and senior officers, married, single and divorced selected through simple and systematic random sampling techniques. The study adopts a descriptive survey design and a sample size of 400 Nigeria Police officers. Demographic stratification by gender (male/female), education level (low/high), and rank (junior/senior), as well as marital status (married, single, divorced); simple random sampling and systematic random sampling used to select participants from six Local Government Areas, representing the three Area Commands. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire with a consistency coefficient of 0.83, while analysis was done using descriptive statistics and presented using frequency tables.

**Results:** Psychological consequences of job stress significantly affect law enforcement officers. No gender disparity overall: both male and female officers are affected. On anxiety: female officers experience higher general anxiety than male counterparts. Job

dissatisfaction: younger officers are particularly vulnerable due to excessive demands from supervisors.

**Conclusion:** The study confirms that job-related stress exerts significant psychological effects on Nigeria Police officers in Rivers State, with both men and women affected. While no overall gender disparity emerged, female officers showed higher levels of general anxiety. Younger, less experienced officers appear particularly vulnerable to job dissatisfaction driven by supervisory demands. These findings underscore the need for targeted, culturally sensitive counselling and supportive organizational practices—such as workload management, supervisor training, peer-support programmes, and accessible mental health services—to promote resilience, well-being, and effective policing.

**Unique Contribution-** Provides empirical evidence from Rivers State, Nigeria, capturing local stressors (e.g., security challenges, resource constraints, community relations) and their psychological impact, which may differ from findings in other regions or countries. While some studies report gender differences, the study shows no overall gender disparity in psychological impact but reveals that female officers experience higher general anxiety, yielding a nuanced, context-dependent understanding of gender and stress.

**Key Recommendations:** Implement stress inoculation training for police officers experiencing stress, with a focus on relaxation techniques to reduce stress. Establish a counselling unit across Area Commands (ideally at each division) to provide accessible support for officers to discuss emotional problems and maintain fitness for duty.

**Keywords:** Consequence, Counselling, Job, Police, Stress

## I. INTRODUCTION

Police work is inherently stressful, involving exposure to violence, high public scrutiny, shift work, and life-threatening situations (Berg, Hem, Law and Ekeberg in Ilevbare and Ogunjimi, 2014). A study by Balakrishnamurthy and Shankar (2009) on work related pressure experienced by non-gazetted officers, shown that abnormal state of pressure brings about poor execution towards inclining components, for example, individual and expert duties. The study indicated that demographic variables such as age and level of experience significantly affect the level of stress experienced by police officers. In Rivers State, Nigeria, these stressors are intensified by security challenges, resource constraints, and community expectations. Chronic job stress can undermine officers' mental health, job performance, and community relations. Understanding the psychological impact of policing in this region is critical for safeguarding officers' well-being, reducing errors, and improving public safety. Evidence-based counselling interventions tailored to local contexts can bolster resilience, coping strategies, and help-seeking behaviours. While global research links occupational stress to anxiety, depression, PTSD, burnout, and substance use among police, there is limited region-specific data for Rivers State. Cultural, organizational, and systemic factors may influence stress exposure and coping mechanisms. Harpol and Feemster (2002) suggest policing is dangerous and stressful, especially when handling dangerous offenders. A case is cited where an officer witnessed a colleague being brutalized, deceived, and murdered, leading to PTSD. While help is available today, many officers may be reluctant to seek or accept it due to fear or stigma. To protect officers, they are equipped with essential gear (weapons, protective vests) and supported by fellow officers to prevent risky incidents. Wakil (2015) observes that Nigerian officers operate in a high-pressure, turbulent environment, where they are responsible for maintaining order. This makes them vulnerable to job insecurity and the risk of making critical errors, underscoring the danger of being a police officer in Nigeria.

Job stress has been widely studied across various professions, including medical emergencies (Hammer et al., 1985), physicians (Roeske, 1981), teachers (Njoku & Amaefule, 2015; Vipene & Jackreece,

2015), and postgraduate students (Ibanga, 2014). While some factors predicting work stress have been identified in the literature, there is a lack of studies examining police-specific demographic and job variables (education, income, age, physical danger, work environment, role conflict, shift work, workload, and gender) within police departments. The current study focuses on the psychological consequences of job stress among the Nigeria Police Force in Rivers State.

## II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF STRESS

Because of its connotation and variety of usage, stress is always difficult to define. Some scholars portray stress as a state of the physical body which has been exposed to pressure or forces close to or beyond its tolerance; others see it as the agents which bring about these pressures or forces. However, stress is traditionally defined as a physiological and psychological response to internal or external stressors that challenge an individual's ability to cope (Selye, 1936). It involves a complex interplay between environmental stimuli and individual perception. Similarly, stressors are the stimuli or events that trigger the stress response. They can be:

- Acute or chronic (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)
- Physical, psychological, or social (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978)

**Appraisal Process:** The individual's perception and interpretation of the stressor determine the stress response. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) conceptualized stress as a transaction between the person and the environment, emphasizing primary and secondary appraisals:

- Primary appraisal assesses whether the event is threatening
- Secondary appraisal evaluates coping resources

From a physiological perspective, the stress response involves activation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis and the autonomic nervous system, leading to the release of stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline. This hormonal surge prepares the body for a 'fight or flight' reaction (Selye, 1936; McEwen, 2000). Psychologically, stress can evoke feelings of anxiety, depression, or frustration, while behaviourally, it may manifest as withdrawal,

overeating, or substance use (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

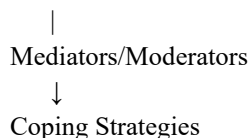
The conceptual framework of stress offers a systematic approach to understanding how stress is experienced, interpreted, and managed, integrating physiological, psychological, and behavioural responses. Stress involves various components: stressors are the external or internal stimuli that trigger a response, such as work pressure or personal challenges. The way an individual perceives or appraises these stressors—whether as threatening, challenging, or manageable—significantly influences their reaction.

Once perceived as stressful, the body activates physiological responses, including the sympathetic nervous system and the release of hormones like adrenaline and cortisol, preparing for a 'fight or flight' response. Psychologically, stress can evoke feelings of anxiety, frustration, or helplessness.

Several factors, known as mediators and moderators (e.g., social support, coping skills, personality traits), can influence the intensity and impact of the stress response, either buffering or aggravating its effects. Prolonged or intense stress may lead to negative health outcomes, such as mental health issues, cardiovascular problems, or immune suppression. How individuals cope varies; adaptive strategies like problem-solving and seeking support tend to reduce adverse effects, while maladaptive behaviours like substance abuse may worsen the situation. Stress is a tendency that relates to pathological human responses to psychological, social, occupational and/or environmental pressure.

### III. VISUAL REPRESENTATION

Stressors → Perception/Appraisal → Stress Response  
→ Outcomes



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Stress has broad psychological consequences, including anxiety, which is a pervasive contemporary issue, and can lead to disorders such as separation anxiety, phobias, depression, fatigue, burnout, and

aggression. Work-specific stress effects include job dissatisfaction, boredom, absenteeism, high turnover, industrial relation problems, and poor quality control. Previous research (Eremie, 1992; Markowitz et al., 1987) on first responders (e.g., firefighters) demonstrated emotional and health-related distress following disasters, highlighting demoralization, emotional distress, and perceived threat to physical health as key outcomes.

In firefighters exposed to a warehouse disaster, there was significantly higher demoralization, fear for health, and emotional distress compared to non-exposed peers, with toxic exposure linked to elevated psychological distress. A separate survey of 54 rescue workers from the Hyatt disaster found common reactions including depression, frustration, vulnerability, numbness, and nightmares. About 70% sought support from professionals or personal networks. The findings emphasize the need to address both physical and emotional reactions after disasters and to provide access to professional psychological support for affected workers.

Theoretical framing:

The study is anchored on the following theoretical framework.

A biopsychosocial model to capture biological responses (e.g., sleep disturbance, fatigue), psychological processes (e.g., appraisal, coping, self-efficacy), and social/organizational factors (e.g., leadership, peer support, community relations) were used. The Job Demand-Control(-Support) model and the Conservation of Resources theory were also used to illuminate how job demands, control, and social support affect stress and burnout. Similarly, Agnew's General Strain Theory: (Psychological Model) was also used which stated that negative stress emotions can contribute to criminal-violent behaviour; while GST is often linked to youth, it also applies to police stress, including domestic violence contexts. Kenwright (2008) notes that when stressed individuals cannot cope, negative emotions and actions are likely. Robert Agnew's General Strain Theory (GST) is particularly relevant to police stress, focusing on emotions (e.g., anger, negative feelings) and relationships. GST identifies three strain subcategories: (1) failure to achieve positively valued goals, (2) loss of positively valued stimuli, and (3) presentation of negatively valued stimuli. Strain

creates discomfort, which can lead to crime in some individuals, though not all exposed to strain will offend.

Statement of the Problem

Job stress is a major concern in organizational psychology, worsened by increasing and changing demands in the work environment, with negative effects on law enforcement personnel. Nigeria’s security situation, including terrorism, kidnapping, and other threats, drives police officers to use new electronic tools and work demanding schedules (night shifts, all-weather patrols, high-risk distress responses). Officers face extreme conditions at checkpoints, with exposure to armed criminals and disasters, contributing to heightened job stress and psychological strain. Given these persistent pressures and continuous duty, there is a need to understand the psychological consequences of job stress among the Nigeria Police Force in Rivers State.

IV.OBJECTIVES

1. To identify the psychological consequences of job stress among Nigeria Police Officers in Rivers State.
2. To examine general anxiety as a psychological consequence of job stress on Nigeria Police Force in Rivers State.
3. To determine general hostility as a psychological consequence of job stress on Nigeria Police Force in Rivers State.

V.RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the psychological consequences of job stress among Nigeria Police officers in Rivers State?

2. To what extent is general anxiety a psychological consequence of job stress on Nigeria police officers in Rivers State?
3. To what extent is general hostility a psychological consequence of job stress on Nigeria police officers in Rivers State?

VI.METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive survey design, which examines differences and relationships between key variables.

The population consisted of all the Nigeria police officers serving in Rivers State with a total population figure of 14,920, across the 23 Local Government Areas of Rivers State.

The study used a sample size of 400 Nigeria Police Officers, which is considered representative of active-duty police officers in Rivers State. The sample size was determined using Taro Yemen’s formula. Simple random sampling was employed to select the 400 officers, and a multi-stage approach involved systematic random sampling to determine the number of divisional police stations from 6 Local Government Areas, representing the 3 Area Commands. The coverage included 3 Area Commands and 6 Local Government Areas.

The study used a questionnaire developed by the researcher as the research instrument. Due to the large population and proximity, two assistant researchers were recruited to help administer the questionnaire to respondents.

VIIRESULTS

Research Question 1: What are the psychological consequences of job stress on the Nigeria police officers in Rivers State? In answering the research questions, mean score analysis was used. The results obtained were summarized and presented in table 1

Table 1: Summary of the Mean Score Analysis of the Psychological Consequences of Job Stress on the Nigeria Police Force in Rivers State.

S/N	Items	SA	A	SD	D	Total	Mean	Decision
A.	General Anxiety							
1	I tend to worry about my unmet needs	250	100	20	30	400	3.43	Accepted
2	I tend to worry about losing my life	210	160	15	15	400	3.41	Accepted
	Mean						3.42	Accepted
B.	General Hostility							
3	I work in a dangerous job	230	150	10	10	400	3.5	Accepted

4	In my job, a person stands a good chance of getting hurt	190	140	30	40	400	3.2	Accepted
	Mean						3.35	Accepted
C.	Job Dissatisfaction							
5	I am very happy with my work	200	180	5	15	400	3.41	Accepted
6	I am not very happy with my work	150	120	60	70	400	2.5	Accepted
	Mean						2.96	Rejected
D.	Inefficiency							
7	My knowledge of computer makes me efficient in my work	250	100	15	35	400	3.41	Accepted
8	My lack of knowledge of computer and other electronic gadgets make me inefficient in my work	300	80	10	10	400	3.68	Accepted
	Mean						3.55	Accepted
E.	Lack of co-ordination							
9	If too many things happen at one time, I tend to be confused	220	130	10	40	400	3.33	Accepted
10	When my supervisors attack me unnecessarily, I feel destabilized	150	130	80	40	400	2.98	Accepted
	Mean						3.16	Rejected
	Grand mean						3.29	Accepted

The results presented in Table 1 indicate that all ten items were accepted to some extent as psychological consequences of job stress among Nigeria Police Officers in Rivers State. The overall grand mean is 3.29, which exceeds the standard mean of 2.5, suggesting that most items were accepted as psychological consequences of job stress and were significantly endorsed. However, when each block of psychological consequences was compared with the overall grand mean, only the blocks for general

anxiety, general hostility, and inefficiency were accepted as general psychological consequences of job stress among the officers.

Research Question 2: To what extent is general anxiety a psychological consequence of job stress on Nigeria police officers in Rivers State? In answering the research questions, mean score analysis was used. The results obtained were summarized and presented in table 2

Table 2: Summary of the Extent to which General Anxiety is a Psychological Consequence of Job Stress on Nigeria Police Officers in Rivers State.

S/N	General anxiety	HE		LE		Total	Mean	Decision
		SA	A	SD	D			
1	I tend to worry about my unmet needs	250	100	20	30	400	3.43	Accepted
	Mean	3.25		0.18				
2	I tend to worry about losing my life	210	160	15	15	400	3.41	Accepted
	Mean	3.3		0.11				
	Grand mean	3.28		0.15			3.42	Accepted
	Total mean difference	3.13						Accepted

The findings described for Table 2 indicate that both items assessing general anxiety as a psychological consequence of job stress among Nigeria Police Officers in Rivers State were accepted to a considerable extent. The overall grand mean is 3.42, which surpasses the standard mean of 2.5, suggesting that general anxiety is a significant psychological consequence of job stress and was strongly endorsed. Additionally, the total mean difference (3.13) exceeds the standard mean of 2.5, indicating that general

anxiety was generally accepted to a high degree as a consequence of psychological job stress among the officers.

Research Question 3: To what extent is general hostility a psychological consequence of job stress on Nigeria police force in Rivers State? In answering the research questions, mean score analysis was used. The results obtained were summarized and presented in table 3

Table 3: Summary of the extent to which General Hostility is a Psychological Consequence of Job Stress on Nigeria Police Force in Rivers State.

S/N	General Hostility	HE		LE		Total	Mean	Decision
		SA	A	SD	D			
1	I work in a dangerous job	230	150	10	10	400	3.5	Accepted
	Mean	3.43		0.08				
2	In my job, a person stands a good chance of getting hurt	190	140	30	40	400	3.2	Accepted
	Mean	2.95		0.25				
	Grand mean	3.19		0.17			3.35	Accepted
	Total mean difference	3.02						Accepted

The findings described in table 3 above show that the two items were accepted as the extent to which general hostility is a psychological consequence of job stress on Nigeria police force in Rivers State. Also, the grand mean which is 3.35 (greater than the standard mean of 2.5) indicated that general hostility is a psychological consequence of job stress on the Nigeria police force in Rivers State and were significantly accepted. Upon comparison, the total mean difference was found to be 3.02, which is greater than the standard mean of 2.5. This means that general hostility was generally accepted to a high extent as a consequence of psychological job stress of the police officers.

VIII.DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Table 1 shows that all ten items measuring psychological consequences of job stress were accepted to some extent by the officers. This suggests that job stress is associated with a broad range of psychological outcomes among Nigerian police officers in Rivers State, consistent with literature linking occupational stress to multiple mental health and functioning domains. The grand mean of 3.29 exceeds the standard benchmark of 2.5, indicating a moderate to strong collective perception of these psychological consequences. The significance of this mean implies that these items are not merely sporadic concerns but reflect a robust pattern of psychological impact attributed to job stress. When comparing individual blocks of psychological consequences to the overall grand mean, only three domains—general anxiety, general hostility, and inefficiency—reached the threshold to be considered general psychological consequences of job stress among the officers. This selective amplification suggests:

General anxiety: High prevalence aligns with literature that stressful policing contexts elevate worry,

vigilance, and anxious arousal, potentially affecting decision-making and interactions with the public.

General hostility: Elevated levels of hostility may reflect coping struggles, irritability, or aggressive dispositions under chronic stress, with potential implications for workplace climate and community relations.

Inefficiency: Perceived reductions in performance or productivity point to subjective assessments of diminished work capacity, which could impact policing effectiveness, mission achievement, and organizational outcomes. According to Mclean, Asnaani, Litz and Hofmann (2011) this result is in agreement with anxiety disorders, which is the most common class of mental disorders, affecting nearly 1 in 5 adults in the U.S.

On general anxiety

The results indicate a notable level of general anxiety as a psychological consequence of job stress among Rivers State police officers. The overall pattern, with a grand mean above the standard benchmark, suggests that anxiety is a common and salient experience in the context of police stress. The elevated mean (3.29 overall) points to moderate to strong endorsement of anxious symptoms or worry as part of the job stress response. This magnitude implies that anxiety is not a marginal issue but a prominent facet of officers' experiences under stress. Chronic exposure to high-stakes situations, threat perception, and organizational pressures can heighten vigilance, fear of harm, and rumination, contributing to sustained anxious arousal. Such mechanisms may impair cognitive functioning, decision-making, and interpersonal interactions on and off the job. Elevated anxiety can affect situational awareness, reaction times, and judgment, potentially compromising both officer safety and community interactions. It may also influence absenteeism,

turnover intentions, and overall job performance if unaddressed.

#### On General Hostility

The results show that both items measuring general hostility as a psychological consequence of job stress among Nigeria Police Officers in Rivers State were accepted to a notable extent. This suggests that job stress is associated with appreciable perceptions of general hostility in their work, aligning with literature linking occupational stress to diminished job satisfaction. This result is in support of Roberts, et al (2012) investigations on job stress and dyadic synchrony in police marriages which asserted that High levels of hostile expressions (e.g., criticism) and low levels of affection expressions (e.g., shared humor) are particularly strong predictors of marital distress and divorce. Highly “emotionally neutral” interactions also can be problematic, signaling “a devitalized, essentially affectless marriage” on a similar, although slower path toward divorce. A potential threat to maintaining a positive, emotionally rewarding marital climate is job stress. Engaging in meaningful, coordinated emotional interactions requires effort, and stress depletes cognitive, emotional, and regulatory resources needed for such effort.

A study conducted by Haines (2015) on International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) showed a correlation between education background and disciplinary action with police officers in Florida, in examining disciplinary cases across the state from 1997 to 2002, the IACP found that 75% of all disciplinary actions involved officers who had a high school education, compared to only 11% involving officers with a four-year degree college degree. The message seemed clear. Officers with more education were less likely to be involved in situations that resulted in disciplinary action. A 2010 study by Michigan State University revealed similar results. College educated police officers may be less likely to use force when dealing with public. The commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agency (ALEA), a national oversight and advisory agency agreed that more officers need to be college-educated. The commission has recommended that police departments require full-time sworn positions to have a minimum of a bachelor’s degree because of the positive impact that it can have on job performance. In

a 2012 issue of its magazine, (ALEA) update, the commission discussed educational requirements for officers stating:

Officers must be able to understand and apply the law, to dissect complex social problems and integrate the knowledge of human needs and development with the psychology of persons whose attitudes toward the law may be different from their own (n.p).

This finding is in agreement with earlier study by Hoboubi, Choobineh, Ghanavati, Keshavarzi and Hosseini (2016) which ascertained that occupational stress accounts for 50–60% of all lost working days. Work-related stress is considered to be harmful when physical and emotional responses occur when there is a mismatch between job requirements and the workers' capabilities, resources or needs.

#### IX.CONCLUSION

Job stress is associated with a broad range of psychological outcomes, with most items in the measure showing notable endorsement. This suggests that psychological consequences are a robust and meaningful facet of the stress experience in this population, warranting attention in policy and practice. General anxiety emerges as a prominent and high-endorsed consequence of job stress. The evidence indicates that anxiety is a prevalent and salient response to occupational stress among these officers, with potential implications for decision-making, performance, and well-being. Targeted mental health support and stress-management interventions are warranted to mitigate its impact. Job dissatisfaction is meaningfully linked to job stress, with the observed endorsement indicating that stress contributes to negative attitudes toward work. This has implications for morale, retention, and performance, highlighting the need for stress-reduction strategies, job resources, and organizational supports to improve satisfaction and engagement.

The findings collectively suggest that job stress among Rivers State police officers is associated with significant psychological distress, notably in terms of general anxiety and perceived job dissatisfaction. Addressing both individual coping (e.g., counselling, resilience training) and organizational factors (e.g., workload management, supervisory support, recognition) is essential to enhance officer well-being and performance.

## X.RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Interventions should prioritize addressing anxiety and job dissatisfaction among officers, for example through stress management training, access to counselling, peer-support programmes, and organizational changes that reduce unnecessary stressors (e.g., workload balance, clear communication, and supportive supervision).
2. Strategies to mitigate perceived inefficiency could include workload assessments, skills refresher trainings, and performance-support resources to bolster confidence and effectiveness on the job.
3. Regular monitoring of mental health indicators and the establishment of a confidential reporting mechanism can help identify evolving patterns and tailor interventions.

### Ethical clearance

Ethical consent was sought and obtained from the participants used in this study. They were made to understand that the exercise was purely for academic purposes, and their participation was voluntary.

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### Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

### Authors' contributions.

John U. M. Ibanga conceived the study, planned, designed the study, collated the data, and managed the analysis and interpretation, while Hilda John wrote the initial manuscript. All authors have critically reviewed

and approved the final draft and are responsible for the content and similarity index of the manuscript.

### Availability of data and materials.

The datasets on which conclusions were made for this study are available on reasonable request.

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