

Exploring the Relationships between Secondary Traumatic Stress and Brief Resilience among Station-level Police Officers in Jaipur Range

Shayana TK*, Rufus D

Department of Criminology, Sardar Patel University of Police, Security and Criminal Justice, Jodhpur, Rajasthan. *Corresponding Author's Email: shayanatkyethadka@gmail.com

Abstract

Individuals who come into touch with victims of tragic events, whether the victims are alive or dead, experience varied degrees of Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) when attempting to assist or examine their suffering. The vast majority of persons affected by STS are first responders, such as police officers, medical staff, therapists, other social workers, fire fighters, and rescue personnel. Among these categories of first responders, police officers are the first and most experienced in responding to any form of crime victims. According to a substantial amount of criminal justice research, police personnel are susceptible to STS, especially while investigating horrific crimes and major catastrophes. Ethical Injury (EI) is another difficulty realised by the police officers when things go against their own moral values and professional ethics. In this context, an empirical study was conducted with 110 police practitioners who were chosen using multistage random sampling method in Jaipur police-range, Rajasthan. The major objectives of the study were i) To identify the relationship between STS and EI among police practitioners, ii) To understand the relationship between the STS level and Resilience level. The data collected through structured interview schedules were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Results revealed that, 2/3rd of the police practitioners suffered due to STS due to investigating violent crimes. A low positive correlation ($r=.271, p<.01$) between STS and EI was found. A moderate-level of negative correlation ($r=-.476, p<.01$) was found between the level of STS and Resilience level among police officers at 0.01 significant level.

Keywords: Ethical Injury (EI), Police professionals, Psychological Health, Resilience, Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS).

Introduction

Policing is a constantly changing and challenging profession. In addition to being constantly vigilant for public safety as a legal duty, the police force is also obligated to provide emergency support and assistance to victims of crime and accidents. Police officials are referred to as one of the frontlines or first responders in society (1). The versatile nature of works of police officers brings them to hold the title of 'first responders of the society'. The versatile nature of works of police personnel ranges from criminal investigation, maintaining law and order, protecting and assisting citizens to immediate crisis response etc. Long work hours, poor staffing levels, and rising crime rates are only a few of the particular issues and obstacles that their complicated work settings present and cause them to experience stress (2). Numerous studies have shown that occupational stress has a direct impact on the organization's employees and is

currently one of the most significant health issues facing the modern world (3-5). Employees who experience occupational stress suffer negative psychological and physiological consequences (5). Occupational stress is an umbrella term under which several other stressors, such as anxiety, depression, secondary traumatic stress, post-traumatic stress disorder, etc., can be categorized. Due to the low police-to-civilian ratio, the police profession, particularly in India, is experiencing a surge in workload, which in turn raises stress levels (2). The police profession's strong hierarchical structure may be a factor in the continuation of moral harm. Police officers may suffer moral harm if they are unable to protect and provide justice to victims of violence or if they are compelled to act or ignore unethical behaviour of others in the same profession that goes against their moral principles because of pressure from

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(Received 27th August 2025; Accepted 09th January 2026; Published 28th January 2026)

higher-ups or unspoken departmental policies. Additionally, this results in a breach of the profession's ethics. Emotional repercussions including guilt, humiliation, and a decline in faith in oneself or institutions can result from such ethical injuries (6). Hence, the term ethical injury can be stated as individuals' experiences of psychological distress or inner pain when their personal moral values, beliefs, or professional ethics are questioned, or when they are unable to follow deeply held moral beliefs or professional ethics and are forced to act against them." The nature of work of police officers includes both direct involvement and indirect involvement. The psychological impact among law-enforcement personnels after being affected by direct trauma such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) were discussed often but the impact due to indirect trauma is still unattended or explored timely. Most people think of STS as PTSD, and some researchers who are not from the field of psychology are even explaining STS as PTSD. Despite having many symptoms in common, PTSD and STS are two different psychiatric disorders. The major difference between the PTSD and STS is the type of trauma exposure. An individual can get affected by PTSD upon their direct victimization, while Secondary traumatic stress (STS) is a psychological distress that results from witnessing or enduring the pain of others, particularly when dealing with horrifying crimes and being exposed to traumatic events those victims of crimes—typically assaults, rapes, murders, and accidents—go through (7). Comprehending the conceptual distinctions is essential for precise diagnosis and suitable treatment strategy implementation. The impact of STS is not less than the impact of PTSD. Moral or ethical injury refers to the psychological distress experienced by police officers when they are forced to act in accordance with or ignore the unethical conduct of others in the course of their duties. However, occupational stress is a broader term that encompasses the stress resulting from all work-related stressors.

To find the causes of secondary trauma among police officers in a state level study the researchers gathered and examined data from 384 Hindu sub-inspectors in Tamil Nadu. Over two-thirds (67%) of the participants in their research reported having secondary trauma. The researchers found that the age, gender, years of experience, religion,

and education are not the significant predictors for the secondary traumatic stress (8). A theoretical study conducted on moral suffering in police service by researching a variety of literature, the researchers emphasised the significance of evaluating moral injuries or sufferings among police personnel. It was discovered that the complicated form of moral pain might result from the multifaceted character of police activity (9). In another study, to find out how moral injury and secondary traumatic stress are related, the researchers studied 109 healthcare professionals. They are among the frontline employees in the medical field. According to the study's available literature, moral damage and STS are quite prevalent. Therefore, the study's authors attempted to determine if STS and moral injury may be related (10).

Although there are many studies on secondary traumatic stress, the STS experienced by police officers particularly in India has not been explored much. Through this study, the researchers aim to understand the relationship between the level of STS experienced by Rajasthan police officials (PO) and the associated ethical injury experienced by them. They also try to find out whether the level of resilience and STS are complementary.

Need for the Study

Since efficient functioning depends heavily on mental health, it is critical to comprehend police personnel' mental health. As stated earlier, research on police victimization is very scarce, especially in the Indian context, with regard to secondary traumatic stress in police officers. The researches that are now accessible are somewhat outdated, and there are none that address the present situation. The goals of this study are to critically examine the effects of ethical injury and secondary traumatic stress on the mental health of police officers in Rajasthan Police, given the dearth of research evaluating the degree of STS and ethical injury and their relationship and impact on police officers' mental health. The study's findings will also support the necessity for more extensive research on Indian police to evaluate the standard of mental health and offer recommendations for new policies to be implemented in state police forces in order to enhance the mental well-being of officers. The present study has different objectives. The first objective is to understand the level of secondary traumatic stress and ethical injury

among police officers at the station level in the Jaipur range. The second objective of the study is to explore the relationship between secondary traumatic stress and ethical injury among the respondents. The third objective is to analyse the impact of respondents' resilience level on their mental health. The final objective is to discuss the importance of implementing various policies by law enforcement agencies to improve the mental health of police officers.

Hypothesis

- H_0 : There is no significant association between level of secondary traumatic stress and level of ethical injury among police officials in Jaipur Range.
- H_0 : There is no significant association between level of secondary traumatic stress and resilience level among police officials in Jaipur Range.

Methodology

This study is a part of doctoral research study at Rajasthan state level. Exploratory research design was used for this empirical study. The exploratory research design was chosen because, very limited

prior research on STS and no such research have attempted to understand the relationships between STS, Ethical injury, and resilience level especially among police officials in India. For this study, 100 samples were selected through multistage random sampling in Jaipur Police Range (Sikar, Jhunjhunu, Dausa and Alwar Districts) as depicted in Figure 1. Ten more officers showed their keen interest in responding to the study proving their recent involvement in dealing with victims of violent crimes. Thus, those 10 samples were included on the basis of 'voluntary response sampling'. Hence, sample size was 110. Samples of the study were limited to Police officers from Rajasthan state police service (only civil police officers), irrespective of the proportion of the gender. Respondents include the police staff between the ranks of constabulary and the investigation officers.

Inclusion Criteria: Samples who participated in the investigation of murder / grievous injury/ aggravated form of sexual offenses / grave accidents / suicide within one month from the data collection.

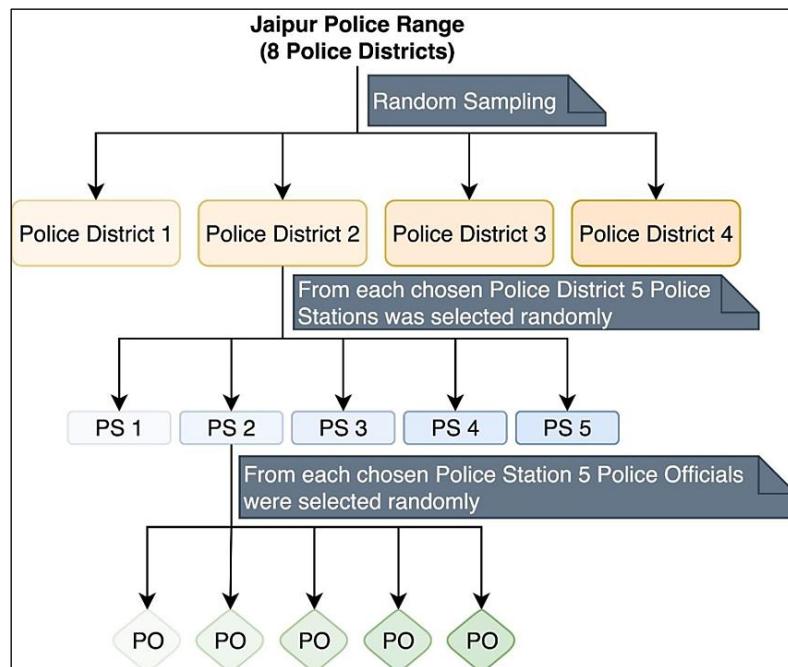


Figure 1: Pictorial Representation of Sampling

The rationale for this eligibility criterion is to obtain accurate data from the participants. This is because the earlier the data collection takes place; the more likely the participants are to accurately recall the experience.

Exclusion Criteria: Samples who met the inclusion criteria but were unwilling to participate in the survey were excluded irrespective of the official permission for data collection. To meet the objectives, a structured interview schedule with

both open and closed-ended questions was created. Personal interviews were done using the interview schedule created to collect primary data. The interview schedule was designed to minimize interviewer bias and avoid unnecessary leading, prompting, or evaluative responses, while also ensuring a clear understanding of the questions. Furthermore, the interviewer began data collection only after being thoroughly trained in trauma-informed interviewing techniques. Throughout the data collection process, the interview schedule was used only in the absence of any other senior officials, peers of equal rank, or subordinate officers.

Secondary sources were also employed to collect study-related data. This analysis was conducted using SPSS software, which included frequency analysis and correlation tests. The results are presented in the form of Figures and Tables.

Measures

The Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale (STSS) was used to assess secondary traumatic stress (STS). It is a 5-point Likert scale with 17 items (11). The items' reference time period is from last week. To meet the study aims, the scale was reframed for the Indian context. Cronbach's Alpha was used to assess the scale's dependability. The study's scale has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.865.

The researchers constructed a 19-item Ethical Injury measure based on expert opinion, using a 9-item 6-point Likert Moral Injury Event measure

(MIES) (12). The Cronbach's alpha was calculated to test the reliability of the study. The Cronbach's alpha for the scale is 0.870.

A 6 itemed Brief Resilience Scale were used by the researchers to identify the resilience level among police officers.

Ethical Consideration

Informed consent, confidentiality, privacy, minimizing potential for harm and anonymity of the participant and all other ethical requirements was maintained throughout for the proposed research (13).

Results

The results obtained through analysis of data by Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) are presented below.

Demographic Details

Age and Service Experience of the Respondents:

Age: A total of 110 samples were collected, and the participants ranged in age from 23 to 58. The analysis revealed the mean age of the participants was 43.09 years. The samples had been serving in the police for a minimum of 4 years and a maximum of 37 years. The average length of Service of the total samples was 21.31 years. Thus, it is understood that majority of the respondents of the study are from constabulary rank with an average service nearer to two decades and middle-aged professionals.

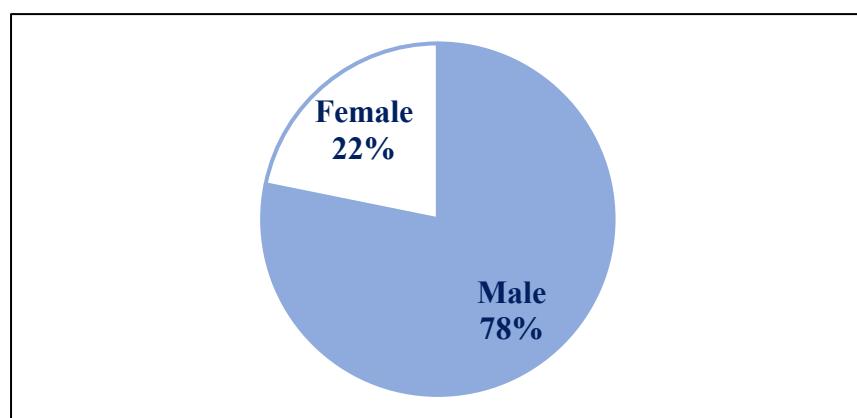


Figure 2: The Percentage of Gender Distribution among Participants

Figure 2 depicts the percentage of gender distribution among participants. Approximately 4/5th of the participants are male police officers and only 22% are of female police officers. This huge difference has been observed mainly because of high difference in male and female ratio in the police department of Rajasthan Police. As per

recent data by Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D) on data on police organizations only 11% of the total strength of civil police officers in Rajasthan have female police officers' strength (Rank ranges from Constable to Inspector) (14). This may be the reason for the low proportion of female participants in the study.

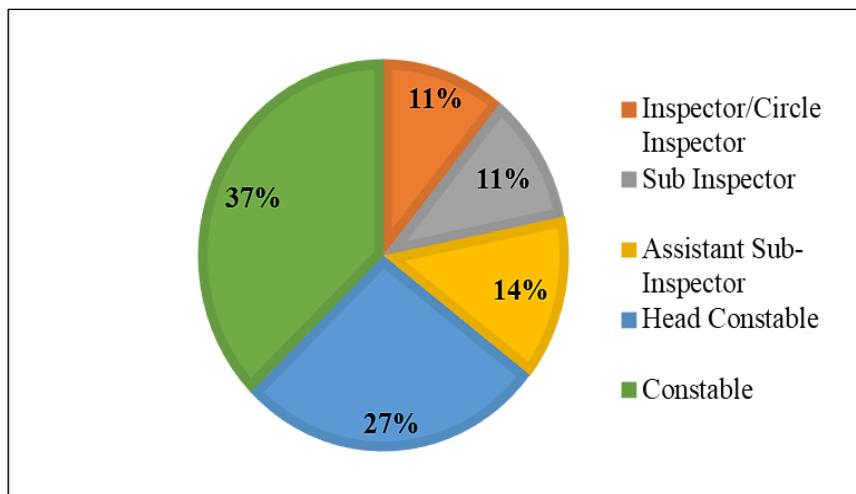


Figure 3: Present Rank of the Participants

Figure 3 illustrates the present rank of the participants of the study. According to Figure 3, 37% of the participants are of constables followed by 27% head-constables, 14% of Assistant sub-inspectors and 11% of Inspectors and Sub-inspectors each. The participants with constabulary rank are more because in the Rajasthan Police constable Strength is relatively high compared to the other higher ranks (14).

Frequency Analysis

The Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) is divided into 3 levels. Ignorable/Low level (≤ 26), Moderate level (27-38) followed by High/Considerable level (> 38). Similar way Ethical Injury Level is divided into 3 levels. Low/Ignorable (≤ 27), Moderate level (28-51) and High and Considerable (> 51). The threshold levels such as, low, moderate, and high levels were determined on the basis of empirical data collected and analysed during pilot study.

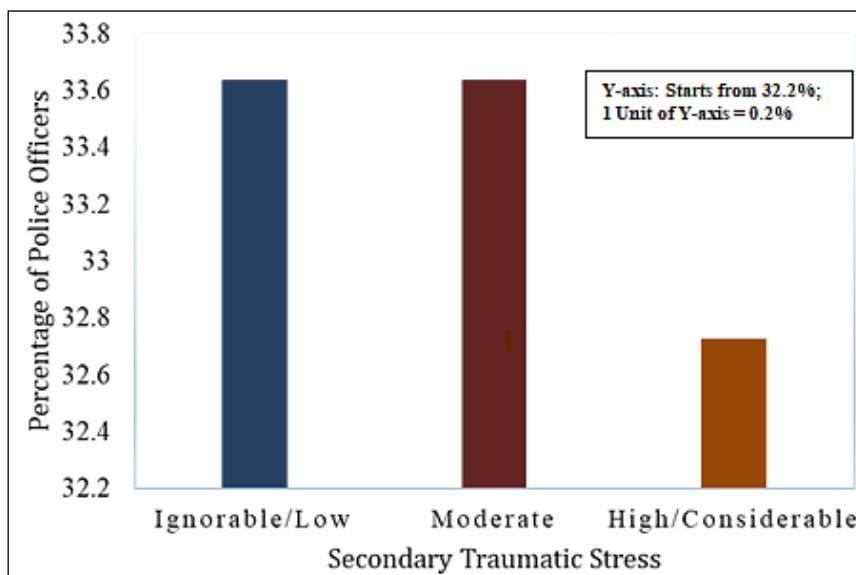


Figure 4: Level of Secondary Traumatic Stress

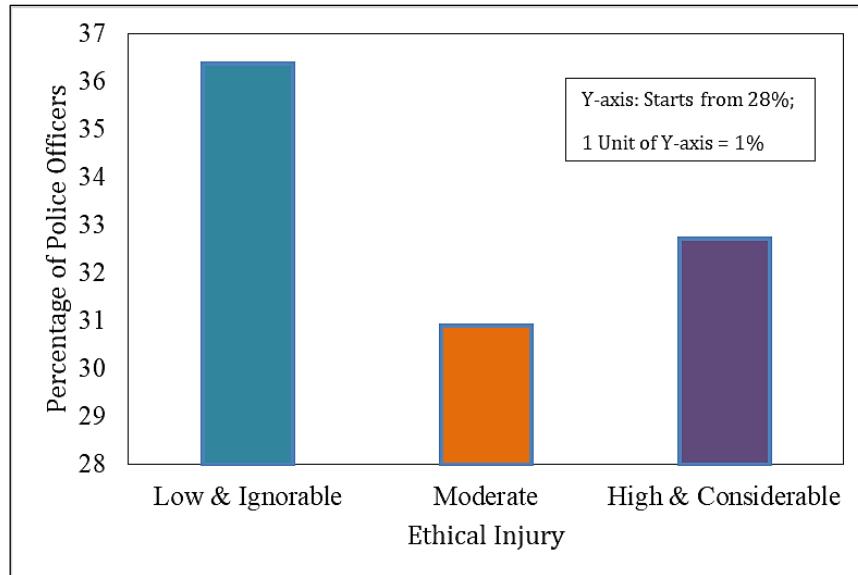


Figure 5: Level of Ethical Injury

Based on Figure 4, approximately 2/3rd of the police officers is observed with moderate to high level of secondary traumatic stress. This replicates the results of previous studies (8, 15). According to Figure 5 more than 60% of the police officials are having moderate to high level of ethical injury. This gives the similar results to other studies related to moral injury (9, 16, 17). Particularly in the case of police officers, the participants' experiences were described as follows: "When we joined the service, we believed that policing was a powerful job that

we could provide justice to victims, serve the public directly, and be free from any interference." Exposure to morally damaging experiences can cause people to hold certain beliefs. However, the reality is different, and we are under pressure from some sources to behave contrary to our moral principles and professional ethics. Guilt, shame, frustration, and other negative emotions are brought on by increased exposure to morally repugnant situations.

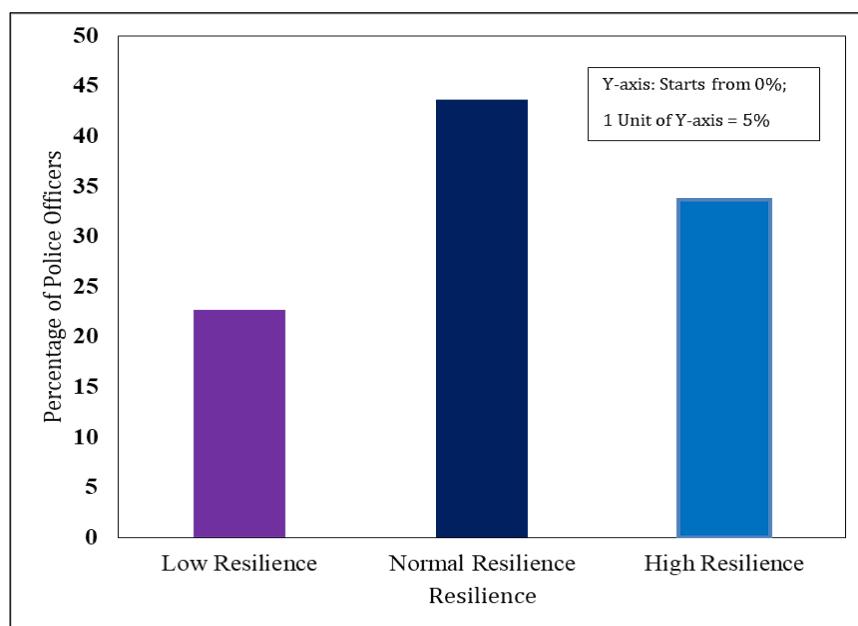


Figure 6: Resilience Level (Primary Data (N=110))

Figure 6 shows the level of resilience observed among police officials. More than 2/5th of the participants (43.63%) is observed with normal resilience followed by 33.63% of participants are having high resilience level. Only 22.72% of participants are observed to have low resilience level. Having resilience level more or less helps the police officers to cope up with any sort of psychological issues. Social support and familial support play a vital role in increasing resilience level among police officers (18).

Results of Hypothesis Testing

Null Hypothesis: H_0 : There is no significant association between level of secondary traumatic stress and level of ethical injury among police officials in Jaipur Range.

Table 1 illustrates that there is mild level of association ($r=.271, p<0.01$) between the level of secondary traumatic stress and level of ethical injury at 0.01 level. This suggests that there is modest tendency for increasing the level of secondary traumatic stress associated with the increasing the level of ethical injury. Hence, the null hypothesis can be rejected.

Table 1: Spearman's Rho Correlation for Level of Secondary Traumatic Stress and Level of Ethical Injury

Spearman's rho	Level of Secondary Traumatic Stress	Correlations	
		Level of Secondary Traumatic Stress	Level of Ethical Injury
	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.271**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.004
	N	110	110
	Level of Ethical Injury	Correlation Coefficient	.271**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.
	N	110	110

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The substantial link between STS and ethical injury replicates the findings of a study on the correlation between STS and moral injury (10). Compassion fatigue and moral harm have a direct influence on police compassion satisfaction (19). As a result, the findings of the current study suggest that secondary traumatic stress and moral damage may

have a detrimental impact on officers' perceptions of their value in their professional roles.

Null Hypothesis: H_0 : There is no significant association between level of secondary traumatic stress and resilience level among police officials in Jaipur Range.

Table 2: Spearman's Rho Correlation for Level of STS and Level of Resilience

Spearman's rho	Level of Secondary Traumatic Stress	Correlations	
		Level of Secondary Traumatic Stress	Level of Brief Resilience
	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.476**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	110	110
	Level of Brief Resilience	Correlation Coefficient	.476**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	110	110

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

According to Table 2 there is moderate level of negative correlation ($r=-.476, p<0.01$) between the level of STS and Resilience level among police officers at 0.01 significant level. Hence, it can be assumed that as the level of secondary traumatic stress increases the resilience level get decreases. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected. This replicates the results of similar study (20).

Hypervigilance, sleeplessness, using negative coping strategies etc. are the adding factors to observe reduced resilience level. Sound sleep and positive coping strategies will enhance the psychological wellbeing of the police officers

which will directly contribute to reduce the level of secondary traumatic stress.

Discussion

The study findings show the presence of moderate to high level of STS among the 2/3rd of the police professionals participated in the study. Similarly, more than 60% of the police participants observed with moderate to high level of Ethical Injury. Apart from this, the greatest thing that found by the researchers through the present study is approximately 4/5th of the police participants is having normal to high level of resilience level. On

the other hand, it is also to note near about 20% of the officers do have poor resilience capability. This leads readers to the conclusion that, police officers develop resilience within themselves with the assistance of society and family, allowing them to cope with STS and other psychological issues (18). The results revealed a significant correlation between STS and Ethical Injury. This is in conformity with the previous study which shows the exposure to ethical Injury can predict the future possibility of secondary traumatic stress among police personnel (21). It also shows a moderate level of negative correlation between the variables STS and Resilience level. Hence, it can be concluded that as the resilience level increases, the level of secondary traumatic stress decreases (20). As discussed above, the proper sleep, social support, positive coping strategies etc., helps in increasing the resilience level. The police personnel are not able to avoid or halt the situations linked to ethical harms because of the inner worry of losing job, associated concerns, and hierarchical pressure (22). The open-ended responses revealed that some police officers experienced ethical injuries in order to avoid incurring the wrath of other officials, particularly their superiors. Secondary traumatic stress and ethical injury can together cause police officers to have poor mental health, which is equal to the impact of PTSD, and it leads them to use drug addiction as a negative coping method which needs to be addressed immediately (23).

Suggestions

- a) Researchers often refer to secondary traumatic stress as post-traumatic stress disorder. But they are two distinct circumstances. Each must be comprehended in its own manner. Only then can it be addressed properly.
- b) Empirical research on secondary traumatic stress among law enforcement professionals is limited, particularly in India. It is a big contributor to the lack of understanding regarding the severity of this ailment. As a result, additional national-level empirical research focused on police personnel is required.
- c) Coping techniques should be developed by police scientists, criminologists, victimologists, and psychologists to counteract negative police officer coping strategies. Police officers and

workers should be made aware of the situation and trained accordingly.

- d) Encourage police personnel afflicted by STS to share their successful coping solutions.
- e) Conduct physical and psychological well-being exams for police officers at least twice a year in all districts of the country. If psychological issues, such as secondary traumatic stress, are discovered, a well-defined treatment plan should be devised, implemented, and healed.

Implications

The present study sheds light on a specific psychological trauma faced by police officers, namely secondary traumatic stress. The findings of the study highlight the importance of implementing appropriate psychological training during the police training period to deal with STS. It also highlights the need for periodic mental and physical health screening among police officials and the mandatory provision of counselling support from time to time. The study emphasizes the promotion of mental health and well-being initiatives within the police organization.

Conclusion

The present study explores the level of secondary traumatic stress and level of resilience present among the station-level police officers of Jaipur Range of State of Rajasthan. This study also tries to find out the relationship between the level of STS and ethical injury level. The findings of the study revealed that the ethical injury is a significant predictor for STS or vice-versa. It also revealed that the resilience is a significant protective factor against STS. As previously noted, police officers play an important role in society; thus, their mental health condition should be examined on a regular basis to ensure proper mental health. Several changes to law enforcement policy were required to achieve this goal.

The current study focuses on a specific group of police officers, i.e., only civil police station level police officers ranging from constable to inspector. Future studies can be conducted among different categories of front-line personnel including traffic police, higher-ranking officers, fire-fighters, women police, scientists from forensic science laboratories. Future studies can be improved by standardizing the instruments according to the specific category of front-line personnel. Along with psychological variables such as ethical injury

and self-resilience, emotional intelligence and personality traits can also be included in the forthcoming studies.

Abbreviations

BPRD: Bureau of Police Research and Development, EI: Ethical Injury, MIES: Moral Injury Event Scale, PO: Police Official, PS: Police Station, PTSD: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, STS: Secondary Traumatic Stress, STSS: Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale.

Acknowledgement

The authors are very grateful to the Vice Chancellor of Sardar Patel Police, Security and Criminal Justice University, Jodhpur and the Director General of Police, Rajasthan for granting permission for data collection. The authors are also grateful to the UGC for providing JRF grant to the first author for research work.

Author Contributions

Shayana TK: conceptualisation, resources, data collection, methodology, data analysis, writing original draft, Rufus D: conceptualisation, data analysis, editing, supervision, final proofing.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no other conflict of interests related to this work.

Declaration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Assistance

The authors declare that no AI assisted technologies and Generative AI used throughout the writing process.

Ethics Approval

Research proposal was approved by the departmental research committee and research advisory committee of the institution. No separate ethical review board was available in the institution during the study period. Written informed consent was obtained from the human participants. No animals were involved in the research. The ethical guidelines involving human subjects provided by the American Psychological Association were strictly followed.

Funding

The first author has received junior research fellowship from University Grant Commission for her research work.

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How to Cite: Shayana TK, Rufus D. Exploring the Relationships between Secondary Traumatic Stress and Brief Resilience among Station-Level Police Officers in Jaipur Range. *Int Res J Multidiscip Scope.* 2026; 7(1): 1021-1030. DOI: 10.47857/irjms.2026.v07i01.07849