

A study on a correlation among traumatic event experiences, self-esteem, and stress responses in life safety police officer

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Abstract.

Purpose: This research is a descriptive research aimed at identifying traumatic event experiences, self-esteem, and stress responses of police officer in the life safety department and to find out their correlation. Method: Data were collected from 194 male police officers who worked in the life safety departments of 10 police stations in “D” city. The collected data was analyzed Pearson’s correlation coefficient. Result: There was not correlated between trauma event experiences and self-esteem. However, the relationship between trauma event experiences and stress response showed a significant positive correlation. Stress response showed a significant negative correlation with self-esteem. Conclusion: Various psychological programs and educational interventions will be required to improve self-esteem and reduce stress responses.

Keywords: Police officer, Traumatic event experience, Self-esteem, Stress response

1. Introduction

Police officers who work in the life safety field need to arrive at the scene first when they receive a report, and are exposed to traumatic cases 24 hours due to their unexpected and unpredictable nature of work with a greater risk of trauma compared to police officers working in other departments. According to a recent three-year statistics of police officers, violent crime is on the rise every year with 25,334 cases in 2015, 25,765 in 2016, and 27,274 cases in 2017[1]. In particular, various traumatic experiences experienced at work can lead to stress reactions for police officers. According to a prior research, various traumatic experiences experienced by police officers is more likely than other series to result in various physical and psychological pain such as insomnia, depression, anger, and physical illnesses[2]. This continued negative stress response can result in increased aggression, disorders of impulse control, anxiety, and sleep disorders, which can contribute to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder(PTSD)[3]. However, not all police officers experience negative stress reactions. Police officers who have experienced trauma will not respond to various stresses, but will actively challenge themselves with responsibility for their work. In other words, they perceive

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themselves as a valuable and positive being, which is called self-esteem[4]. Self-esteem simply buffers traumatic event experiences and stress responses, as well as internal dimensions that overcome an individual's negative reactions, making them less susceptible to negative cases against stigma or vulnerability[5].

Therefore, identifying the diverse experiences of trauma experienced by police officers, the stress responses resulting from it, and the relationship between self-esteem with positive factors may be an important basis for early intervention of the police officer's physical and psychological treatments.

In this research, I would like to identify the relationship between traumatic event experiences, self-esteem, and stress responses among male police officers who work in the life safety department, which is a high-risk group with high job stress among various police departments.

2. Purpose of the research

This research identifies the relationship between police officers' traumatic event experiences, self-esteem, stress responses, and the specific purposes are as follows.

First, the identification of the subject's traumatic event experiences, self-esteem, and stress responses.

Second, the identification of traumatic event experiences, self-esteem, and stress responses according to the general characteristics of the subjects.

Third, the identification of the correlation between the subject's traumatic event experiences, self-esteem, and stress responses.

3. Method

3.1 Research design

This research is a descriptive research aimed at identifying traumatic case experiences, self-esteem, and stress responses of police officers in the life safety department and to find out their correlation.

3.2 Participants

The subjects of this research were expressed randomly to full-time male police officers who worked in the life safety departments of 10 police stations in "D" city. The number of subjects G*power 3.1.2 (2009) is based on the significance level $\alpha=.05$, effect size $d=.15$, power $1-\beta=.95$, calculated with 3 independent variables and a minimum quantity of samples of 160. In this research, a total of 200 copies were distributed considering the rate of elimination. Among them, a final of 194 questionnaires were analyzed, excluding 6, which had not been collected, had many non-responses, or had unsatisfactory responses.

3.3 Research Tools

3.3.1 Traumatic event experiences

Shin[6] adapted and Kim [3] used a modified 5-point Likert scale tool for the list of direct and indirect traumatic event experiences for Thomas-Riddle's [7] List of Work Cases. This tool consists of a total of 23 questions, 9 questions on the degree of impact of direct traumatic event experiences and 14 questions on the degree of impact of indirect traumatic case experiences.

3.3.2 Self-esteem

Rosenberg’s [4] Self-Esteem Scale was adapted by Jeon [8] and Won [9] used a modified 5-point Likert scale tool. This tool consists of a total of 10 questions.

3.3.3 Stress response

In this research, shortened stress response measures developed by Ko et al [10] and modified by Choi et al [11] were used. The measure evaluates stress responses experienced over a week, consisting of 3 areas of 9 sub-region body dimension questions, 9 depression-level questions, and 5 anger-level questions, totaling 22 questions.

3.4 Ethical aspects and Data Collection

The research was conducted after obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of KyungPook National University (KNU 2014-0027) for the protection of the research subjects and the justification for the research progress. The data collected for this research were collected from May 31st to June 15th of 2014. The researcher visited the police station in person to explain the purpose of the research and instructions on answering the questionnaire, and distributed the questionnaire to police officers who agreed to participate in the research.

4. Result

In terms of the correlation between the subjects’ traumatic event experiences, self-esteem, and stress response, traumatic event experiences and stress response had a significant static correlation ($r=.43$, $p<.001$), and self-esteem and stress response had a notable unqualified correlation ($r=-.39$, $p<.001$) Table 1.

Table.1 Correlations among Variables (N=194)

Variables	Traumatic event experiences $r(p)$	Self-esteem $r(p)$	Stress responses $r(p)$
Traumatic event experiences	1.00		
Self-esteem	.04(.605)	1.00	
Stress responses	.43(<.001)	-.39(<.001)	1.00

5. Conclusion

In the correlation with traumatic event experiences, self-esteem, and stress response, traumatic event experiences showed significant positive correlation with stress response, and self-esteem was not statistically significant. Police officers are exposed to a variety of direct and indirect trauma event experiences that could pose a fatal threat to the well-being of citizens, both physically and mentally, under the nature of maintaining citizens’ life-protection order. These trauma event experiences do not simply act as an experience of cases, but they disrupt the human physical and psychological equilibrium and trigger physical and mental pain [12].

Therefore, police officers who experience various trauma event experiences are considered physically and mentally vulnerable and will be more sensitive to anxiety, depression, and somatization responses. Self-esteem, meanwhile, has shown a statistically significant misfit correlation with stress response. These results will limit the ability of self-esteem to better respond to stress responses and to perform when faced with hardships. According to a prior research, the lower the self-esteem, there is more negative self-evaluation, and people are more prone to fall into depression through others' criticism [13]. It was also said that lower the self-esteem, the more aggressive the subject, and the more aggressive the subject, there are acts to restore the lower self-esteem [14]. It is said that lower the self-esteem, the more prone the subject is to act impulsively when they experience anger [15]. In addition, a decrease in self-esteem will result in physical and mental disorders caused by the failure of impulse control. Therefore, self-esteem will require a variety of self-esteem training programs for high-risk workers based on the results of this research that show a poor correlation with stress response.

In summary, police officers in the life-safety department exposed to various incidents and accidents, showed a positive correlation between trauma case experiences and stress response, and stress response and self-esteem showed negative correlation. However, self-esteem and trauma case experiences were not statistically significant. Based on this research, it is believed that a variety of psychological early mediation will be required for police officers in the life-safety department. Therefore, it is believed that attention and effort will be needed at the national level so that the health of police officers can be positively exercised in the security and order of the country and citizens.

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