

COGNITIVE APPRAISAL MECHANISM AND THEIR ROLE IN PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF POLICE PERSONNEL

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Abstract:

The occupational environment of law-enforcement personnel is characterized by frequent exposure to critical incidents, high operational demands, unpredictable situations, and heavy organizational stressors, all of which can adversely impact psychological well-being. The present study investigated how cognitive appraisal—the individual's evaluation of stressful events in terms of threat, challenge, control and personal significance—serves as a key predictor of psychological well-being among police officers. Officers who appraised stressful encounters as opportunities for challenge and growth, and who perceived greater control and coping capacity, reported higher levels of psychological well-being. Conversely, appraisals characterized by threat, harm/loss, or Lower well-being scores were significantly correlated with a lack of control. 400 police officers from Punjab made up the sample, which was assessed using the Cognitive Appraisal Scale (CAS) and the Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWBS). The current study's findings demonstrated a substantial and positive correlation between total psychological well-being and all of its dimensions, with the exception of the danger perception domain, and the work Importance and Challenge Perception of primary Cognitive Appraisal. Additionally, it was shown that there was a substantial positive correlation between overall psychological well-being and its aspects and coping and control perception of secondary cognitive appraisal. It has also been found that the most significant variables in the regression model for psychological well-being the threat perception, challenge perception, control perception and work importance; which collectively explained 29.6% of the variance in measures of psychological well-being. The findings support the transactional model of stress and coping, highlighting the fact that not just police officers' matters, but how they interpret it. Implications for police training, intervention and organizational policy are discussed, with recommendations emphasizing cognitive-appraisal-focused resilience programmes aimed at shifting appraisals toward challenges and resource orientation, and improving well-being outcomes in police populations.

Keywords: Psychological well-being, police personnel, Cognitive appraisal

INTRODUCTION:

Policing refers to 'the whole craft of governing a social order'. Policing is usually recognized to be one of the most demanding jobs. Because they are constantly exposed to horrific occurrences, police officers are under stress. Because they labor around the clock and are crucial to upholding peace and order in society, police officers endure a great deal of mental and physical strain. Stress causes police officers to lose their feeling of fulfillment, loyalty to the organization, and general well-being. Additionally, it is characterized by persistent negative feelings like anger, worry, and despair, which can lead to emotional tiredness or psychological burnout, cardiovascular disease, or in extreme cases, even death.

A person's overall health throughout all aspects of their life is referred to as their "well-being." Subjective wellbeing has been the focus of the majority of study in the field of mental health (Cox & Griffiths, 2010). An individual's subjective assessments and evaluations of his or her state of life can be considered subjective well-being. The idea itself is a combination of various ideas, including positive and life satisfaction, happiness, and negative affect (Jackman et al., 2020). Eudemonic or psychological well-being (PWB), which stresses reaching one's potential and discovering one's purpose in life, and hedonic or subjective well-being (SWB), which emphasizes happiness, positive affect, and enjoyment, are the two components of positive well-being. Although they are different, these two facets of wellbeing are connected. (Waterman et al., 2008). According to Burris et al. (2009), well-being can be understood as a broad concept that reflects a person's welfare, value, happiness, sense of purpose, meaning, and overall quality of life. "Lives going well because of feeling good and functioning effectively" is another definition of well-being at the mental health level."

The term cognitive appraisal was first used by Lazarus and Folkman in their Cognitive Appraisal Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Cognitive appraisal means the manner in which a person evaluates stressful or overwhelming events. This evaluation is based on the personal meaning and significance person assigns these traumatic events. There are two phases of this process: first refers to primary appraisal and other refers to secondary appraisal. First phase involves individual's assessment of whether the stressful event is significant and has any negative consequence associated with it. Second phase involves one's judgement of whether one has the capacity and sufficient resources to handle the potential threat. (Lazarus, R. S. 1999). According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), cognitive evaluation is the process by which a person assesses the significance of a potentially stressful occurrence for their own well-being. There is direct relationship

between cognitive appraisal and psychological well-being i.e., positive appraisal will lead to positive outcomes with respect to psychological well-being and vice versa.

A key idea in comprehending how people adjust to stressful situations is cognitive assessment because an individual's perception of stress and strain is based on how they assess a situation and their own coping mechanisms, cognitive appraisal processes are crucial for comprehending human adaptability to stressful conditions. Because policing is associated with a higher level of occupational stress, it is necessary to conduct research that not only examines potential sources of stress that may be problematic for police personnel, but also focuses on how these potentially stressful conditions are influenced by police personnel appraisals and how they may lead to strain and illness. It is not the person or the work environment alone that is responsible for stress and distress in organisational settings, but the functional juxtaposition of both. Analyzing cognitive appraisal processes—that is, how police officers assess their job activities and the coping mechanisms and control they have to deal with issues at work—becomes crucial. In order to learn more, the current study set out to investigate the psychosocial variables linked to police officers' psychological well-being on cognitive appraisal which can be further utilized in the development of psychotherapeutic treatment strategies for improving the psychological well-being.

Objective of the study

1. To evaluate the association between different variants of cognitive appraisal (primary and secondary) in relation with psychological well-being of police personnel.
2. To assess the contribution of various cognitive appraisal (primary and secondary) in predicting the variance in the psychological well-being of police personnel.

Hypotheses of the study

1. There would be a positive relationship between cognitive appraisal with psychological well-being of police personnel.
2. It is expected that Cognitive appraisal (primary and secondary) would predict the variance in the psychological well-being of police personnel.

METHOD

There were 400 police personnel in the current research (200 men and 200 women) NGO,s randomly selected from various districts of PoliceRanges of Punjab State. The age of the participants ranges from 25-40 years, while there is a minimum require of 5 years of experiencein police settings.

Participants

Measures

The Gomes (2008) Cognitive Appraisal Scale (CAS):

It is a 15 item scale consisting of two subscales for assessing primary and secondary cognitive appraisal. The internal consistency reliability for all the dimensions of this scale is satisfactory. Cronbach's alpha coefficientsfor work importance dimension is .91, for threat perception dimension is .79, for challenge perception dimension is .90, for coping potential dimension is .82 and for control perception is .75. (Gomes and Teixeira,2016).

Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWS; Ryff, 1995):

It is a 18 item scale consisting of six domains and for the responses, a four-point rating scale is employed, where "strongly disagree" is represented by 1 and "strongly agree" by 4. Cronbach's alpha values for the PWBS's six subdomains ranged from 0.72 to 0.81, demonstrating a sufficient degree of internal consistency.

Procedure

The present research aimed to find the association between Cognitive appraisal (primary and secondary) and police officers' mental health. The surveys that include the demographic details were administered to the participants and the data was collected. Further, any assistance regarding the understanding of the statements in the questionnaires was provided during the test administration.

Statistical analysis

After collecting the data, analysis was done using the software SPSS-22.0 and the required result tables were generated. Correlation and Regression analysis were conducted.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The current study's main goal was to assess the relationship between Cognitive appraisal (primary and secondary) and the psychological well-being of police personnel. For this purpose, psychological measures, viz., Cognitive appraisal (primary and secondary) and psychological well-being were used. The scores of all the variables under study were subject to statistical analyses. Data were entered and analyzed using SPSS software. For every variable, the scores' means and standard deviations were calculated. Stepwise and correlation multiple regression analyses were computed to find significant correlations and predictors of the variables under study. The mean scores and standard deviations (SD) forCognitive appraisal (primary and secondary) , and psychological well-being are presented in Table 1. The correlations of Cognitive appraisal (primary and secondary) and psychological wellbeing are presented in Table 2. Table 3 represents the stepwise multiple regression analyses for variables under study.

TABLE 1 Descriptive Statistics of cognitive appraisal and psychological well-being

	N	Mean	Median	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
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Work Importance	400	4.15	4.30	1.43	-0.15	-1.35
Threat Perception	400	3.28	3.30	1.15	0.05	-0.04
Challenge Perception	400	3.84	4.00	1.13	0.04	-0.45
Coping Potential	400	3.68	3.60	1.39	0.08	-0.89
Control Perception	400	3.62	3.60	1.46	0.04	-1.04
Autonomy	400	12.61	13.00	3.67	-0.31	-0.09
Environmental Mastery	400	12.15	12.00	3.90	-0.02	-0.34
Personal Growth	400	11.46	11.00	4.22	0.28	-0.62
Positive Relation with Other	400	10.75	11.00	3.74	0.32	-0.13
Purpose in Life	400	10.42	10.00	3.70	0.28	-0.20
Self-Acceptance	400	10.91	10.00	4.14	0.25	-0.68
Overall Psychological Well-Being	400	68.28	69.00	13.41	-0.03	0.08

Note. N=400

TABLE 2 Showing correlation analysis between cognitive appraisal and psychological well-being

	Mean	SD	WOF	THP	CHP	COP	CNTP
Autonomy	12.605	3.666	.202**	-.168**	.157**	.168**	.168**
Environmental Mastery	12.148	3.896	.155**	-.280**	.190**	.170**	.181**
Personal Growth	11.455	4.218	.235**	-.224**	.243**	.197**	.198**
Positive Relation with Others	10.745	3.744	.124*	-.166**	.213**	.142**	.184**
Purpose in Life	10.418	3.702	.089	-.187**	.041	.105*	.088
Self-Acceptance	10.905	4.141	.189**	-.244**	.257**	.280**	.210**
Total PWB	68.275	13.406	.292**	-.372**	.325**	.313**	.301**

Notes. *p<0.05**= p<0.01**

TABLE 3 Summary of stepwise multiple regression analysis

Dependent Variables	Predictors	R	R Square	R Square Change	β (Standardized Coefficients)	F Change	%age
Overall Psychological Well-Being	Threat Perception	0.372	0.138	0.138	-0.372	63.759**	13.8%
	Challenge Perception	0.484	0.234	0.096	0.310	49.755**	9.6%
	Control Perception	0.534	0.286	0.052	0.237	28.579**	5.2%
	Work Importance	0.543	0.295	0.010	0.109	6.594*	1.0%

Notes. *p<0.05**= p<0.01**

Total psychological well-being was found to be positively and significantly correlated with work importance ($r = 0.292^{**}$), challenge perception ($r = 0.325^{**}$), coping potential ($r = 0.313^{**}$), and control perception ($r = 0.301^{**}$), according to the study's results (Table 2). Additionally, every aspect of psychological well-being, including self-acceptance, healthy relationships with others, environmental mastery, autonomy, and personal development except purpose in life were found to be positively correlated with both primary and secondary appraisal dimensions. Previous research supports the present findings, i.e., Cowell et al., (2011) found that primary cognitive appraisals influence officer's well-being and reported that if an individual evaluate traumatic event in a constructive way it will lead to lesser negative outcomes whereas if individual interpret it negatively it will lead to lower well-being. Gomes et al., 2016 revealed that threatening Cognitive evaluation processes are linked to increased absenteeism, low work satisfaction, and poor psychological well-being. However, the threat perception ($r = -0.372^{**}$) a category of primary appraisal was found to be negatively correlated with total psychological well-being and all its dimensions in a significant manner. Wallis et al. (2023) give his analysis on the threat appraisals and link it to the negative well-being (greater disturbing feeling), and Krok (2023) explored threat appraisal and negatively related it to health/well-being and mediated it through coping/resilience paths. Research by Li et al. (2021), found that challenge appraisals are able to lessen the adverse effects of job demands and at the same time bear a positive correlation with adaptive outcomes and wellbeing. Further, Zsido et al. (2022) pointed out that coping was a protective factor that predicted improved well-being during hardship. A review by Shum (2025) establishes cognitive reappraisal as a robustly positively correlated factor to psychological well-being in all studies.

Further, stepwise multiple regression analysis uncovered an important inter-relationship amidst police officers' mental wellness and multiple predictor variables, which were work's significance, perceptions of threat, difficulty, ability to cope, and control. Threat perception had a significant negative influence on overall psychological well-being ($\beta = -0.372$, $p < .01$), accounting for 13.8% of the variation. Conversely, job importance ($\beta = 0.109$, $p < .05$), control perception ($\beta = 0.237$, $p < .01$), and challenge perception ($\beta = 0.310$, $p < .01$) were identified as significant positive predictors, together

accounting for 29.6% of the total variance in well-being. The results clearly show that police personnel with higher perceptions of control, coping, and challenge, as well as those who value their work more, experience better psychological well-being. Conversely, heightened threat perception tends to lower their overall well-being. Anders et al. (2024), who found that perceived threat and organizational constraints significantly, undermine mental health outcomes in law enforcement personnel. Moreover, Baldwin et al. (2022) found that high-threat situations cause more stress and which further harms decision-making. When officers feel more control—through training, experience, and challenge-focused thinking—they handle stress better and perform more effectively.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study show that cognitive evaluation is a major predictor of police officers' psychological well-being. Police work is inherently stressful, and the way individuals interpret and evaluate job-related demands strongly influences their emotional and psychological functioning. When officers employ positive or adaptive appraisals—such as viewing challenges as manageable, meaningful, or opportunities for growth—they likely to express more psychological well-being. Negative or threat-based evaluations, on the other hand, are linked to higher levels of stress and worse levels of wellbeing. Overall, the findings emphasize how crucial it is to improve cognitive appraisal processes as a means of promoting mental health in law enforcement contexts. Training programs that enhance coping skills, resilience, and adaptive thinking may therefore contribute to improved psychological well-being among police personnel. Supporting officers in reframing stressors and developing healthier appraisal styles can serve as an effective strategy for fostering a more resilient and mentally healthy police force.

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