

# Coping Strategies and Job Stress in Policing: A Literature Review

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## Abstract

Police officers often experienced stress when executing their job. Police officers utilized certain coping strategies, such as cognitive coping, behavioral coping, social support group such as close friends and emotional coping to deal with job stress. There are many research discussed regarding the issue of coping strategies in policing while encountering with job stress. However, it lacks a clear classification of coping strategies approach. This study aimed to review previous articles that related to coping strategies utilized by police officers when encountering their job stress and to provide a broad summary regarding this issue. Based on the library research, the categories of coping strategies were developed in policing. Further, this study also highlighted external factors that might influence police officers preferences to employ certain ways of coping. The suggestions for future study research of coping strategies with job stress in policing also discussed.

**Keywords:** Coping, Stress, Policing, Systematic Review

## Introduction

Utilizing coping strategies effectively are significant in managing job stress. Coping strategies that are appropriate in various circumstances enable one to reduce job stress. Otherwise, inability to cope with job stress sufficiently would lead to emotional disturbances, mental disorders, unhealthy body and social isolation. Coping strategies according to Sipon et al., (2014), functions as survival skills in encountering various challenges in life as well. In brief

explanation, coping strategies is significant element in life functioning and individual development (Grant et al., 2003).

Coping strategies is derived from cognitive, biological and social development. Rapid changes in cognitive, biological and social development might affect coping strategies accordingly (Compas et al., 2001). The first pioneer discussed about coping strategies was Lazarus (1966). Lazarus argued that one analyzed the existence of appropriate coping strategies sources when dealing with circumstances that lead to job stress. According to Callan (1993), inability to fully utilized appropriate coping strategies in dealing with job stress lead to physical, psychological and psychosocial disturbances.

Police officers were reported possess high level of job stress as compared to other professional (Russell, 2014; Yun et. al., 2013). There was a wide range of sources of job stress in policing that derived from routine work in work environment (Lieberman, 2004) workloads (Sundaram & Kumaran, 2012) shifts (Idris, 2011) job stagnation (James & Hendry, 1991) political pressure, imbalance between work and family, negative image from society (Zernova, 2012) command from higher level (Van Hasselt et al., 2008) rigid organization and ineffective communication (Gershon et al, 2009) criticism and less support from upper level (Selokar, 2011) subordinate relationships (Sundaram & Kumaran, 2012). There is significant correlation between job stress as well as coping styles (Yu-ling, 2011). However, there is inconclusive remarks for information regarding which coping strategies appropriate for organizational and operational stress. Different sources of job stress required different approach in coping strategies. This is in line with Richter and co-workers' (2013) argued that coping strategies are utilized based on context.

Although, many scholars have studied coping strategies in dealing with job stress among police officer but, it lacks a clear classification of coping strategies approach. Therefore, this study aimed to review previous studies that related to coping strategies issues in policing by expanding various types of coping in policing systematically. Examples of ways of coping in policing are cognitive coping, behavioral coping and external source of coping such as social support. Coping strategies refers to different strategy utilized when encountering particular stressful conditions. According to Masten (2006), coping strategies requires wider context by taking into account the context of physiology, emotion, external behavior, attention, interpersonal and social environment. According to Holodynski dan Friedlmeier (2006), coping strategies is a social interaction and physical context in real life situations. Therefore, social and physical sections should be considered when discussing about coping strategies.

In this study, we focus on coping in policing. There are particular responses or coping strategies utilized when police officers dealing with stressful circumstances. These certain coping strategies might be differed based on the demands of the situations. A significant question arise once the behavior of police officers dealing with job stress directly affects towards life (Babatunde, 2013) resignation (Harr, 2005) performance (Gupta & Adhikari, 2008). Therefore, coping strategies revealed a direct association to apparent job stress (Kirkcaldy, Cooper & Brown, 1995).

### **Methodology**

The library search was carried out on library databases and several journals such as Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategy and Management, Stress Medicine, Psychological Bulletin by using the key words "police" and "stress" and "coping". Accordingly, the search

was restricted to coping with stress as general. The articles findings filtered articles accordingly; the search included a variety of settings in policing. In term of the design, chapters of the book, theses student, review article and empirical studies were included in this review. All studies published in English were selected in this review. The previous articles covered year from 1988 to 2014, resulted 200 journal articles, but only 165 research articles were selected since they fulfilled the criteria required.

## Results

<i>Classification Of Coping Strategies</i>	<i>Number of articles</i>	<i>Descriptions</i>
<b>Cognitive coping</b>		
1. Active Coping / Positive Reappraisal Coping / Problem-Focused	59	Thinking positively the problems can be solved and confront the problems.
<b>Behavior coping</b>		
2. Healthy Methods / Adaptive Coping	13	Exercise, physical fitness and counseling.
3. Unhealthy Method / Maladaptive Coping	16	Drinking alcohol, smoking, excessive eating, excessive drinking or gambling behavior.
4. Escape /Avoidance Coping / Passive Coping Strategies / Negative Distraction/ Denial/Blame	29	Avoid stressful situation by doing unnecessarily and less important job.
<b>Emotion coping</b>		
5. Emotion-Focused/Emotional Coping/Mindfulness/Emotional Awareness	16	Manage the intensity of the negative and distressing emotions that derived from stressful situation.
<b>External coping</b>		
6. Social Support	32	Social interaction from others such as advice and reassurance.

### Active Coping

There are 59 studies showed that police officers prefer to utilize active coping strategies. Police officers frequently utilize active coping strategies for handling job stress (Evans et., 1993; Biggam, Power & Macdonald, 1997). Active coping strategy was closely associated to job satisfaction (Burke, 1998) professional efficacy (Wiese et al., 2003) lower levels of burnout and cynicism (Anderson, 2000) high level of personal accomplishment (Wiese, Rothmann & Storm, 2003) significantly reduced distress (Violanti, 1992). However, active coping strategies did not help from exhaustion among police officers. Some studies showed contradictory results such as the use of active coping strategies did not result in lower levels of distress as

theoretically predicted (Patterson, 1999; Patterson, 2003). According to Thoits (1991), the appraisals of the individual are significant in evaluating the nature of stressful circumstances. Besides that, it is important to appraise the problem can be solved and there is no existence of threat before encountering with active coping strategies (Larsson, Kempe & Starrin, 1988).

### **Behavioral Coping Responses**

#### **Healthy Methods / Adaptive Coping**

There are 13 studies indicated that police officers tended to use healthy method or adaptive coping strategies when encountering with job stress. Exercise can be considered as an effective mean to mitigate job stress among police officers (Alexander & Walker, 1994). Relaxing leisure can be applied to cope with job stress (Iwasaki et al., 2005). However, according to Gerber et al., (2010), there is no significant connection between exercise and job stress; but, the increase number of physical fitness practice by police officers would be able to reduce job stress in general. Bezerra, Minayo and Constantino (2013) considered physical exercise as the most successful approach to alleviate the consequences of job stress.

#### **Unhealthy Method / Maladaptive Coping**

There are 16 studies indicated that police officers tended to use maladaptive coping strategies when encountering with job stress. According to Gershon et al., (2002), the most significant jeopardy factors connected with job stress were maladaptive coping behaviors. Maladaptive coping usually refers to the drinking alcohol, excessive smoking and eating to alleviate job stress (Alexander & Walker, 1994). Leino et al., (2011) stated that maladaptive coping strategies were utilized when there were an intolerable feelings or circumstances derived from job stress. While, Marksa and Howellb (2016) argued that police officers took drugs as harm reduction in performing their job. Violanti (1993) argued that police officers who are in high level of job stress tended to employ maladaptive coping.

#### **Denial/Blame/Escape/Avoidance coping**

There are several terms refer to avoidance coping strategies such as denial, blame, escape, avoidance, and escapist coping strategies. The results indicated that there were 29 studies on avoidance coping strategies. Avoidance coping strategies were positively linked to work-family conflict and psychosomatic symptoms (Burke, 1998) associated with psychological stress (Kaur, Chodagiri, & Reddi, 2013) significantly increased distress and ineffective coping approach in policing (Violanti, 1992) and increase level of chronic fatigue (Stepka & Basinska, 2014; Anderson, 2000) exhaustion and negative feelings of professional value (Mitchell & Hastings, 2001) cynicism (Wiese et al., 2003). However, avoidance coping strategies might influence the strength of the body (Anshel, Umscheid & Brinthaup, 2013). Some studies also showed that avoidant coping strategies as a compounding factor when encountering with job stress among police officers (Williams, Ciarrochi & Deane, 2010). The source of job stress derived from interpersonal issues is the strongest predictor of avoidance coping (Morash et al., 2006).

#### **Emotion-Focused Coping Strategies/Emotional coping responses/ Mindfulness/ Emotional Awareness**

This study showed that there are 16 studies discussed on emotional based coping strategies in policing. Emotion-focused coping strategies generated distress (Patterson, 1999; Patterson,

2003) lower exhaustion (Wiese et al., 2003) and related to both psychological wellbeing and personal efficiency (Williams, Ciarrochi, & Deane, 2010) among police officers.

### **Social support**

This study showed that there are 32 research discussed on social support in policing. There are several studies showed that social support coping strategies was utilized when police officers were under stress. Social support was resulted in higher levels of distress (Patterson, 1999) associated with individual psychological strain (Kaufmann & Beehr, 1989; Patterson, 2003). A shocking result indicated that there is a direct impact on both mental and physical health affected from social support (Kirkcaldy & Furnham, 1995). However, police officers make limited use of social support (Evans et., 1993) and possibly social disturbance could hinder social support connection (Jenkins, 1997). Therefore, police officers are comfortable to obtain social support from coworkers and close friends only (Page & Jacobs, 2011). Besides, social support networks are effective according to ranks in policing, geographical areas of the workplace and societal culture. For example, superintendents used social coping methods least frequently (Brown, Cooper & Kirkcaldy, 1996). The importance of social support group also relevant in districts area as compared with other places (Berg et al., 2005). Societal culture that valued social support obtains the most benefit in relationships with others (Morash et al., 2006).

### **Conclusions**

The first conclusion is that the categories of coping strategies varied in policing such as cognitive, emotional, behavior and social support. The researcher also tries to classify the types of coping strategies based on these four categories. For example, cognitive coping strategies consist of two parts which are active and communal coping. Besides, the researcher combined different terms given to similar coping strategies into one category such as active coping, positive reappraisal coping and problem-focused-coping strategies. For behavior coping strategies, adaptive coping was combined with healthy methods and maladaptive coping was pooled with unhealthy methods.

There are a number of significant conclusions from this review. First, cognitive coping strategies that are based on problem-focused-coping were the most utilized coping strategies among police officers. Previous studies also generated same results which police officers frequently utilize active coping strategies for handling job stress (Evans et., 1993; Biggam, Power & Macdonald, 1997). Second, coping strategies are context-dependent and depend on the main issues of problems or circumstances. For example, the effectiveness of active coping strategies is more important after evaluating the severity of constraints in the circumstances (Jenkins, 1997). While, Kevin et al., (2016) explained that critical decision making based on the available context by using problem-focused strategies in a wide range of stressful events. Besides, emotional focused coping strategies are appropriate when dealing with interpersonal issues. Third conclusion is coping strategies that are utilized appear to depend partly on higher or lower rankings in policing, district or rural area and collectivistic or individualistic society. For example, upper level seldom used social coping strategies (Brown, Cooper & Kirkcaldy, 1996). Social support coping strategies are much more universal in collectivistic society such as South Korea than individualistic society such as United States (Morash et al., 2006). An interesting conclusion is certain coping strategies used in proper ways provided backfire towards police officers for example, exhaustion and cynicism.

Suggestion for future research is to identify factors of preference in utilizing coping strategies such as societal culture, demographics and geographical areas. In term of methodology, researcher prefer to use quantitative method, therefore, for future research qualitative method should be focused on qualitative approach to understand the nature of job stress among police officers.

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