

Stress Symptoms and Substance Use Among Police Officials in the Central Region of Limpopo Province, South Africa

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KEYWORDS Stress; substance use; police officials; South Africa

ABSTRACT The aim of the study was to investigate police work as a source of stress; the symptoms of stress; the mechanisms used by police officials to cope with high levels of stress and the effects of this stress in their personal and interpersonal spheres, with the aim of outlining any issue/s that may come to the fore that needs to be addressed in proactive programs by the South African Police Service. Simple random sampling was used to select participants for this study. Two hundred and forty eight (86.7%) were male and thirty eight (13.3%) were females. They came from the 19 police stations and 4 satellite police stations in the Central Region in Limpopo Province. Their ages ranged from 19 years to 59 years. A questionnaire was used to determine their demographic variables, symptoms of stress, sources of stress, their coping strategies and the extent to which they engaged in substance use/abuse. A t-test analysis showed that policemen have higher levels of stress than policewomen. A Linear Regression Analysis showed that the number of years of service contributes significantly to the level of stress ($F = 0.44, t = 2.33, p < 0.05$). Frequency tables reflected that the greatest source of stress for police members came from the work sphere. 16.1% of police officials worried a lot often or very often. 18.1% experienced headaches often or very often. Within the personal sphere, 13.9% suffered from depression and 13.5% were burdened with unresolved issues of the past. Within the interpersonal sphere, 12.2% felt that others used them as a doormat. 37.4% admitted to smoking. 11.4% used either dagga (marijuana), glue or cocaine and 54.8% admitted to drinking alcohol. To cope with stress, 27.9% maintained a sense of humour often or very often. There is a need for proactive programs in the Police Service as a sizeable number of police members are stressed and coping ineffectively.