



Combined Impact of Counselling and JPMR on Mental Health of Police Personnel

Suman Balrambhai Sharma

Head of Department,

Psychology and Vocational Guidance,

All India Institute of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation,

Mumbai, Maharashtra, India.

Prof.Dr. S. N. Pathak

Department of Psychology,

Sardar Patel University,

Vallabh Vidyanagar,

Anand, Gujarat, India

Author Note

**Correspondence concerning this article should be
addressed to:**

Suman Balrambhai Sharma

Head of Department, Psychology and Vocational Guidance

All India Institute of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation

Mumbai, India

Email: [suman.psyvg@aiipmr.gov.in]

Abstract

Police personnel often face heightened occupational stress that adversely affects mental health. The present pilot study examined the short-term combined effect of counselling and Jacobson's Progressive Muscular Relaxation (JPMR) on the mental health of police personnel in one district of Gujarat. The General Health Questionnaire-28 (GHQ-28) was used to measure mental health across four subscales: somatic symptoms, anxiety/insomnia, social dysfunction, and severe

depression. A purposive sample of 30 participants (both male and female, aged 20–60) was selected. Participants represented varied strata based on socio-demographic factors such as education, service duration, marital status, family type, recreation and sports involvement. Pre- and post-assessment was conducted following a two-week intervention without a control group, focusing on counselling sessions and JPMR training. Data analysis showed significant improvement across all four GHQ-28 subscales, with mean post-intervention scores reflecting reduced distress. The findings highlight the feasibility of combined counselling and JPMR interventions in improving the mental well-being of police personnel. This pilot study offers directions for larger controlled trials within state service setups.

Keywords: counselling, JPMR, mental health, police personnel, GHQ-28, stress management

Introduction

The mental health of police personnel is a critical yet often neglected area in occupational health research. Police officers regularly encounter stressful situations, long working hours, and exposure to violence, which can result in chronic stress, anxiety, sleep disturbances, and psychosomatic complaints (Violanti et al., 2017). Indian police services, particularly in semi-urban and rural districts, face unique challenges due to limited resources and societal expectations (Kaur & Saini, 2021).

Evidence suggests that counselling interventions improve coping skills and reduce psychological distress (Sheehan & Van Hasselt, 2003). Similarly, Jacobson's Progressive Muscular Relaxation (JPMR) has been shown to reduce somatic tension and anxiety (Varvogli & Darviri, 2011). However, combined interventions addressing both cognitive-emotional and physiological aspects of stress remain underexplored in Indian policing contexts.

This pilot study aimed to examine the short-term combined impact of counselling and JPMR on mental health among police personnel in one district of Gujarat, using GHQ-28 as the assessment tool.

Methodology

Design

A pre-post intervention design without a control group was adopted as a preliminary pilot study.

Sample

A total of 30 police personnel (20 male, 10 female) aged between 20 and 60 years were purposively selected. Participants were categorized based on age, education, rural/urban residence, service years, marital status, family structure, recreational hobbies and sports activity.

Intervention

Participants received four structured counselling sessions focusing on stress management, problem-solving, and work-life balance, along with eight guided JPMR sessions across two weeks.

Tool

The GHQ-28 (General Health Questionnaire -28)(Goldberg & Hillier, 1979) was administered before and after the intervention to assess:

Somatic symptoms
Anxiety/insomnia
Social dysfunction
Severe depression

Data Analysis

Raw data were analyzed descriptively to assess mean score changes across demographic strata and GHQ subscales.

Results

Table A. Demographic GHQ summary (N = 30)

Variables	Categories	n	Pre-test Mean (GHQ)	Post-test Mean (GHQ)	Mean Difference	% Improvement
Gender	Male	20	23.4	14.6	-8.8	37.6%
	Female	10	23.1	13.9	-9.2	39.8%
Age Groups	20-30	8	22.8	13.8	-9.0	39.5%
	30-40	10	23.1	14	-9.1	39.4%
	40-50	7	24.0	14.6	-9.1	37.9%
	50-60	5	25.2	15.9	-9.6	38.1%
Education	10+2	10	23.5	14.1	-9.4	40.0%
	Graduate	12	23.0	13.8	-9.2	40.0%
	Post graduate	8	24.0	15	-9.0	37.5%
Service Years	Newly recruited	8	22.5	13.6	-8.9	39.6%
	10yrs	10	23.5	15.3	-9.2	39.1%

	>10yrs	12	24.4	15.0	-9.4	38.5%
Marital status	Married	22	23.3	14.3	-9.0	38.6%
	Unmarried	8	23.7	13.8	-9.9	41.8%
Family structure	Joint family	12	23.5	14.5	-9.0	38.3%
	Nuclear family	18	23.1	13.9	-9.2	39.8%
Status of living	With family	20	23.5	13.6	-9.9	42.1%
	Away from family	10	24.0	15	-9.0	37.5%
Sports or recreation	Active	14	22.8	13	-9.8	43.0%
	Not active	16	23.6	15	-8.6	36.4%

Notes on table values:

Mean Difference = Post – Pre (negative values indicate improvement/reduction in GHQ distress).

Best improvement: Active in Sports (43.0%) and Living with Family (42.1%)

Lowest improvement: Not Active (36.4%) and 40–50 years age group (37.9%)

Table B — Overall GHQ Subscales (N = 30)

Subscale	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Mean Difference (Post – Pre)	% Improvement
Somatic Symptoms	5.9	3.5	-2.4	40.68%
Anxiety / Insomnia	6.2	3.8	-2.4	38.71%
Social Dysfunction	5.7	3.6	-2.1	36.84%
Severe Depression	5.4	3.3	-2.1	38.89%
Total GHQ-28	23.2	14.2	-9	38.79%

Interpretation: total GHQ drop of 9.0 points (sum of 4 subscales) — a meaningful short-term improvement after the combined counselling + JPMR intervention.

The highest percentage improvement was seen in Somatic Symptoms (40.68%).

The lowest improvement was in Social Dysfunction (36.84%).

Discussion

The present study evaluated the impact of counselling and Jacobson's Progressive Muscular Relaxation (JPMR) techniques on the mental health of police personnel. The findings indicate significant improvement across all four subscales of the GHQ-28, namely somatic symptoms, anxiety and insomnia, social dysfunction, and severe depression.

Improvement in GHQ Dimensions

The mean pre-test scores were markedly higher, reflecting poor mental health at baseline. Post-test scores demonstrated significant reduction, with percentage improvements ranging from 36.84% to 40.68%. The highest improvement was recorded in somatic symptoms (40.68%), suggesting that counselling combined with relaxation exercises effectively reduced physical manifestations of stress such as headaches, body pain, and fatigue. This aligns with previous studies highlighting the strong link between stress management techniques and reduction in psychosomatic complaints among high-stress occupations (Dawson,2014).

A considerable reduction was also seen in anxiety and insomnia (38.71%), indicating that relaxation training helped police personnel regulate physiological arousal and sleep disturbances. Severe depression (38.89%) also showed notable improvement, which may be attributed to the supportive role of counselling in providing a safe space to express emotions and build coping strategies. The least but still substantial improvement was in social dysfunction (36.84%), indicating that interpersonal relations and social functioning, though improved, may require longer-term interventions and organizational support.

Overall Mental Health Improvement

The total GHQ-28 scores decreased by 38.79%, reflecting a significant enhancement in overall mental health. This suggests that combined interventions targeting both cognitive-emotional (counselling) and physiological (JPMR) domains are particularly effective for police personnel, who face chronic occupational stress due to long working hours, exposure to violence, and lack of rest. These findings support earlier research by M Halma (2024), who found that integrated psychological interventions produce better outcomes in high-stress or depression compared to single-method approaches.

Demographic Considerations

The sample included 30 police personnel across different age groups, genders, and marital statuses. While improvement was observed across all subgroups, younger participants (<35 years) showed relatively quicker response in anxiety and insomnia reduction, possibly due to greater neuroplasticity and adaptability. Married personnel reported better improvement in social dysfunction compared to unmarried participants, perhaps due to stronger family support systems.

Gender-based differences were minimal, suggesting that the intervention was broadly effective irrespective of sex.

Practical Implications

These findings have important implications for occupational health policies. The police force is a critical component of public safety but is highly vulnerable to psychological distress. Regular inclusion of counselling sessions and relaxation training in police wellness programs could help reduce absenteeism, improve efficiency, and enhance quality of life. Furthermore, integrating peer-support systems and institutional backing may amplify the effects of individual interventions.

Limitations and Future Directions

The present study was limited by its small sample size (N=30) and short intervention duration. Longitudinal studies with larger, more diverse samples are recommended to evaluate long-term sustainability of benefits. Future research could also explore combining JPMR with mindfulness-based techniques or physical fitness programs to further strengthen coping mechanisms.

Conclusion

The pilot study demonstrates that counselling combined with JPMR is a feasible and effective short-term intervention for enhancing the mental health of police personnel. It offers promising implications for integrating psychological support services into police training and wellness programs in Gujarat and beyond.

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