

OCCUPATIONAL HAZARDS AND HEALTH CHALLENGES OF MEN OF THE NIGERIA POLICE FORCE (NPF)

Akankpo, Udom E.

Department of Sociology, University of Port Harcourt

<p>Corresponding Author Akankpo, Udom E.</p> <p>Department of Sociology, University of Port Harcourt</p> <p>Article History</p> <p>Received: 21 / 03 / 2025</p> <p>Accepted: 08 / 04 / 2025</p> <p>Published: 11 / 04 / 2025</p>	<p>Abstract: The police work is a dangerous work. Hazards and risks loom from various departments. These hazards include communicable diseases, and injuries. The work pressures cause high blood pressure and stress. The occupational and health challenges of police work stem from a combination of various risk factors depending on the nature of the duty/task. Each officer responds differently to operational work and personal factors. Police work is not homogenous in conditions and environment, neither are the officers in health responses. The study examine the risk associated with police duties in Rivers State, Nigeria. Study adopted the simple random sampling techniques. The instrument was a structured questionnaire administered to 370 officers. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics. Results indicated more police officers work in the department of operations, investigations and traffic, with challenging working conditions. Minimum work load is 12 hours of duty. Majority of the work force are in constant contact with members of the public. Officers fear communicable disease and health conditions associated with public interaction as major causes of occupational injuries and death. It is recommended that the police management incorporate the principles of health and safety into operational policies and guidance of the Police Force. Safety and health practices be enshrined in the police training programme and in refresher courses to ensure conversancy and compliance.</p> <p>Keywords: Health challenges Occupational hazards, Police.</p>
<p>How to Cite: Akankpo, U. E., (2025). OCCUPATIONAL HAZARDS AND HEALTH CHALLENGES OF MEN OF THE NIGERIA POLICE FORCE (NPF). <i>IRASS Journal of Applied Medical and Pharmaceutical Sciences</i>, 2(4), 1-5.</p>	

Introduction

In a six year period, Adenekan (2021) cited SB Morgan intelligence platform to prove that between January 7, 2015 and March 22, 2021, in 75 months, 497 police officers were killed in different attacks across Nigeria. The South-south region tops the chart with 163 incidents and 174 police deaths. North-central recorded 85 deaths in 88 attacks. South-west recorded 112 incidents, with 72 police deaths. While North-west and South-east accounted for 59 and 58 police deaths, and 64 and 82 incidents respectively. North –east recorded 45 attacks and 49 deaths. There were no reported killings of police officers in 2018-2020 and in 2015-2017. Each region faces different nature of problems arising from economic, political and social policies of government that raises tensions. The police in each state / region and scene are drafted to tend to the situation. Achim (2019) analyzed indicators on aspects of health and safety at work in the police operational environment. He noted that, aggression cases against police officers dropped by 13.5%, in the Republic of Moldova in 2017, with 223 cases of aggression involving 268 police officers. In 2008, 60 cases of aggression against 93 police officers, with a drastic decrease over 73% in the number of police officers attacked by citizens. This change was due the specific law for sanctioning the acts of violence against police officers established in 2016.

In an analysis of law enforcement officer deaths between 01st to 31st, 2022 in the United States of America, according to

Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) (2022), data indicated that, in January 2022 felonies deaths were consistent with the 10-year average of 4 felonies police officer deaths in the month of January. 14 officers died from medical conditions; 13 officers died in line of duty from illnesses related to COVID-19 and 1 officer died due to heart attack. In the United Kingdom, Police Care Research (2019) reported that amongst 10,987 UK serving police officers and staff, 81% had experienced one physical injury or mental health issue due to their police work. Many participants reported at least one physical or psychological injury/mental health issue whilst working for the police service. In all, psychological injuries or mental health were a factor in over half of the injuries reported in the study. Anxiety and depression, back/neck/shoulder injuries, fractures/dislocations/sprains or other soft tissue injuries to upper and lower limbs, and head injuries were the most commonly reported physical injuries.

Police officers are often recruited into the job as abled-bodied men/women. They usually operate under various dangerous conditions, with time resulting in occupational hazards and health challenges. Beside the physical hazards (violence, physical injuries, life-threatening incidents) faced by police officers, on duty officers are exposed to health challenges such as air pollution, smoke, and sound/noise from vehicles. Despite these, there is little government policy intervention to address the occupational health and safety of officers. With inadequate support, the challenges will

reduce efficiency, increase job dissatisfaction and increase compromise to the rule of law.

The framework for the study lies on Systems Theory of Ludwig Von Bertalanffy who viewed organizations as interconnected, with various parts working together for efficiency and better service delivery. The NPF operates within this system which includes the police management team, the government, the officers, the citizens and crime rates. Addressing issues of occupational hazards involves all the operating units. The objective of the study was to seek, what working conditions exposes officers more to danger. Secondly, examine the health challenges associated with officers of the command. And thirdly, assess the health condition officers face most.

Research Questions

- What working condition exposes the officers most to more danger?
- What are the health challenges associated with police duties in Rivers State command?
- What disease and health condition do officers fear most?

Literature Review

Police as an occupation serve members of the public more than other jobs. Police duties bring officers in constant and frequent contact with members of the public. By this, officers have suffered severe and contentious diseases. While investigating crimes, conducting searches, taking samples, or arresting suspects, police are exposed to infectious organisms. Also, during body search of a suspected drug user, through a puncture wound may be contaminated with a number of diseases such as: HIV, Hepatitis B, Tuberculosis (Mayhew, 2001). In a study on illness risk, Han et al. (2017) found that, with the exception of traumatic stress disorders, police officers had higher heart rhythms for every disease they examined. They also found that police personnel had the highest HRs in the research for angina pectoris, acute myocardial infarction, and cerebrovascular disorders. Of the three diseases, police officers had the greatest rates. In the group under study, female police officers had the greatest rates of cerebrovascular disorders and angina pectoris, and the second-highest rates of acute myocardial infarction. Others had multiple cardiovascular disease risk factors, including personal characteristics like alcohol use, smoking, high blood pressure, obesity, diabetes mellitus, or dyslipidemia. The impact of personal protective equipment (PPE) on participants and police-related tasks has been assessed in a number of experimental investigations. Regardless of the condition, Simpson and Sandrin (2021) found that PPE use is both beneficial and crucial in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Police are among those who have embraced the use of personal protective equipment (PPE), which has been shown to offer numerous health and safety advantages. It lowers the danger of contracting the virus. According to Simpson (2020), police officers can avoid direct contact with individuals by wearing gloves. Provide an extra barrier to skin contact and contaminated surfaces. Face masks usage is effective at inhibiting the spread of diseases through coughing, sneezing, and talking.

It is cumbersome on the part of the police management alone with regards to the financial cost and man hour loss experienced from their budget. This cost includes according to Larsen et al. (2016) replacing injured officers, organizing appropriate treatment, and conducting "back-to-back" testing. Hence, in recognition of the challenges, officers have a duty to

© Copyright IRASS Publisher. All Rights Reserved

achieve excellent stewards of health and safety management to promote occupational health, safety and welfare.

In a Canada study from 1961 to 2009, Dunn (2010) highlighted that, since 1961, 133 police officers were murdered in the line of duty, all but four of whom were men. Homicides against police officers occurred often during robbery investigations. Nine in ten police officers were shot to death, were not wearing a protective vest. Between 1961 and 2009, 92% of all officer-related killings were with a firearm. Police officers killed for other reasons, like traffic accidents, were excluded. According to Bano (2011), policing is one of the most stressful jobs. Officers must deal with dreaded elements while handling crimes. In a study of 65 police officers in Aligarh district (Uttar Pradesh), respondents cited political pressure (71.2%), lack of family time (68.2%), public non-cooperation and a negative public image (62.1%), and low pay (57.6%) as the main causes of stress, followed by a lack of government support (48.5%), work overload (48.1%), frequent transfers (48.5%), excessive job (36.5%), lack of organizational/departmental support (36.4%), and torture by senior officers (30.3%).

In a study of determinants of injury and death in Canadian police officers, Cohen and Garis (2018) noted that from 2006 to 2015 there is an increased risk among police officers for physical and psychological injuries as a result of the frequency and intensity of their interactions with the public. This is due to the physical nature of their duties, spending long periods of time in their vehicles or engaging in stressful activities, numerous involvement in dangerous or traumatic events, and of shift work. Risk associated with police duties has tremendous effects on the lives of police officers and their work ratio. In a study comparing symptoms of psychological distress between injured and uninjured workers, West et al. (2018) found greater emotional instability, depressive, and anxiety symptoms injured than uninjured workers and concluded that psychological consequences for workers who return to, or remain at, work following injury may reduce adaptation and increase vulnerability to secondary work disability. The police work at night. Some work schedules are 24 hours' duty, some 12 hours, others 8 hours. In each work shift, most officers are on night duty. According to a study by Petterson (1997), working at night disrupts the body's circadian cycle, which lowers biological capacity between the hours of two and four in the morning. Burnout, often known as "compassion fatigue," is a result of long shift work, demanding circumstances, and unreasonable expectations. Stak and Kelley (1994) identified three burnout symptom levels. First, fatigue on all levels—physical, mental, and emotional. Detachment and disillusionment come in second; diminished self-worth and personal utility come in third. These could have contributed to divorce or even suicide, or they could have caused resignation and deep sadness. Thorne et al. (2008) whose study was on Kathmandu Metropolitan City noted that excessive decibel of sound led to loss of hearing among traffic police officers. Other exposures are rain, sun, air pollution and emission from vehicles. This include those on various road work.

Methodology

The design adopted in this study is survey method. Four Area Commands of Port Harcourt, Mini-Okoro, Oyigbo and Choba was the study cluster. Simple random sampling technique was applied to select two divisions from each of the four (4) clusters.

Study population involves Senior Police Officers (SPOs), Inspectorate cadre (Inspectors) and Rank and File (sergeants, corporals and constables) made up of 14,230 police officers. 370 police officers were drawn for the study. Questionnaires as major instrument were distributed to respondents. Questionnaire consisted of four (4) sections and 27 items, issued to willing and available officers as respondents in their respective offices. Data

were grouped into various categories, analyzed using simple percentages.

Results

Research Question One: What working conditions exposes officers most to more danger?

Table 1: Conditions that Exposes Officers to Danger.

Working Condition of Officers

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Physical Danger	115	31.1	31.1	31.1
	Long Working Hours	142	38.4	38.4	69.5
	Irregular Routine	43	11.6	11.6	81.1
	Stress/Fatigue	70	18.9	18.9	100.0
	Total	370	100.0	100.0	

Source: Author's fieldwork, 2025.

On the working conditions of officers, table 1 shows that 142 (38.4%) respondents have long working hours, 115 (31.1%) are

exposed to physical danger, while 70 (18.9%) are exposed to stress / fatigue, and only 43 (11.6%) are of irregular routine duties.

Research Question Two: What are the health challenges associated with police duties in Rivers State command?

Table 2: Health Challenges Associated with Police Duties in the Command

Work Injuries are Attributed to police duties

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Routine Duties	38	10.3	10.3	10.3
	Training	35	9.5	9.5	19.7
	Workplace Stress	84	22.7	22.7	42.4
	Lack of Appropriate PPE	149	40.3	40.3	82.7
	Accident	64	17.3	17.3	100.0
	Total	370	100.0	100.0	

Source: Author's field survey, 2025

Table 2 is on the factors that mostly caused injuries to police officers in the command, which indicate the following. The respondents indicated that lack of appropriate PPE which stands at 149 (40.3%) is the major factor to work injuries. This is followed

by workplace stress, indicated by 84 (22.7%), and accident with 64 (17.3%). Next is routine duties which attracted 38 (10.3%) respondents. The least of the factors is training with 35 (9.5%) indication.

Research Question Three: What disease and health condition do officers feared most?

Table 3: Disease and Health Condition Officers Feared Most

Disease/Health Condition Officers Feared Most to Contact					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	HIV&AIDS	13	3.5	3.5	3.5
	Hepatitis B	13	3.5	3.5	7.0
	COVID 19	160	43.2	43.2	50.3
	Hypertension	32	8.6	8.6	58.9

Stress	120	32.4	32.4	91.4
Depression	32	8.6	8.6	100.0
Total	370	100.0	100.0	

Source: Author's fieldwork, 2025.

Table 3 deals with the disease and health condition that officers feared most in their line of duty. Based on the analysis, COVID 19 with 160 (43.2%) respondents is the most feared disease amongst the study group. Stress as a health condition with 120 (32.4%) is the second most feared. Others are hypertension and depression with equal respondents of 32 (8.6%), followed by HIV & AIDS and Hepatitis B also with both 13 (3.5%) respondents.

Discussion

On the working conditions of officers, 142 (38.4%) respondents have long working hours, and 115 (31.1%) are exposed to physical danger. On work load, the study group members work between moderate (12 hours) 62.4% to high (24 hours), 23.2% of work is on daily basis. Most (57.6%) are in constant contact with members of the public, whereby prone to contact communicable diseases. This study supports Achim's (2014) findings that police officers endure harm from ongoing danger, traumatic experiences, threats from inmates, task demands, court appearances, departmental injuries, and working in remote locations. In the same vein, Larsen et al. (2016) observed that the following tasks were being carried out at the time of injury: office work, training activities, operational policing jobs, or other/not allocated. On factors that mostly caused injury to police officers in the command, respondents indicated that lack of appropriate PPE which stands at 149 (40.3%) is the major factor to work injuries. This is followed by workplace stress, indicated by 84 (22.7%), and accident with 64 (17.3%). Routine duties attracted 38 (10.3%) respondents. On the disease and health condition that officers feared most in their line of duty. Analysis proved that, COVID 19 with 160 (43.2%) is the most feared disease amongst the study group, followed by stress as a health condition with 120 (32.4%). Other health conditions are hypertension and depression with 32 (8.6%) respectively, followed by HIV & AIDS and Hepatitis B also with 13 (3.5%).

On health challenges associated with police duties in the Command, the study revealed that, lack of PPE is one of the major challenges faced by the police in the discharge of their duties. On disease and health condition, COVID-19 has been identified by officers as the most dreaded disease that may challenge their health most in recent time. According to study by Simpson and Sandrin (2021), a large portion of police employment is inevitable interaction with the public, and these situations inherently increase the risk of infection for officers just by virtue of their presence. This is also consistent with Mayhew's (2001) research, which found that police officers may come into contact with infectious organisms whether they are investigating crimes, performing searches, collecting samples, or apprehending suspects.

Recommendations

- An average number of hours must be established for service and duty for officers.

- Management needs to incorporate the principles of health and safety into operational policies and guidance of the Police Force.
- Safety and health practices be enshrined in the police training programme /manual and in refresher courses to ensure conversancy and compliance.
- Police Hospitals need to maintain an emergency medical team dedicated to treatment of injuries and medical conditions resulting from hazards/operational duties.
- There is need for compulsory annual medical screening of officers for early detection of medical conditions.

Conclusion

The occupational and health challenges of police work stem from a combination of various risks factors depending on the nature of the duty performed. Each officer responds differently to operational work and personal factors. Police work is not homogenous in conditions and environment, neither are the officers in health responses. The variant in risk of police duty is in the nature of work, either in low or high risk department. Therefore, responses from management need be in line with the variations.

References

1. Achim, A.C. (2019). New aspects of health and safety at work in the police operational environment. *International journal of academic research in economics and management sciences*, 8(2), 1-11.
2. Adenekan, S. (2021). 497 Nigerian policemen killed in six years. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/452004-497-nigerian-policemen>
3. Bano, B. (2011). Job stress among Police personnel. *International Conference on Economics and Finance Research*, IPEDR. (4).
4. Cohen, I. & Garis, L. (2018). Determinants of Injury and Death in Canadian Police Officers. *Centre for Public Safety and Criminal Justice Research*. University of the Fraser Valley.
5. Dunn, S. (2010). Police officers murdered in the line of duty, 1961 to 2019. *Component of Statistics Canada Catalogue*, 85-002-x, 30 (3).
6. FIB's Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted Data Collection. 02/01/2022.
7. Han, M, Park, S, Park, J.H., Hwang, S. & Kim, I. (2017). Do police officers and firefighters have a higher risk of disease than other public officers? A 13-year nationwide cohort study in South Korea. *BMJ open* – 2017- 019987.

8. Larsen, B., Aisbett, B., & Silk, A. (2016). The injury profile of an Australian Specialist Policing Unit. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 13 (370), 1-9.
9. Mayhew, C. (2001). Occupational health and safety risks faced by police officers. Australian Institute of Criminology. National safety council. Risk perception: Theories strategies, and next steps. Campbell Institute.
10. Patterson, M. (1997). Shift your approach to handle those varied work schedules. *Police*, 21(12), a. 36-7.
11. Police Care Research (2016). Supporting the service Police injury on duty. Research Results
12. Simpson, R. & Sandrine, R. (2021). The use of personal protective equipment (PPE) by police during a public health crisis: An experimental test of public perception. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, Springer.
13. Simpson, R. (2020a). Officer appearance and perceptions of police: Accoutrements as signals of intent. *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*, 14(1), 243-257.
14. Stack, S. & Kelley, T. (1994). Police suicide: An analysis. *American Journal of Police*, 13(4), 73-90.
15. Thorne, P. R., Ameratunga, S., Stewart, J., Reid, N., Williams, W., Purdy, S. C., Dodd, G. &
16. Wallaart, J. (2008). Epidemiology of noise-induced hearing loss in New Zealand. *New Zealand Medical Association Journal*, 121(1280), 33-44.
17. West, C., Fekedulegn, D., Andrew, M., Burchfiel, C.M., Harlow, S., Bingham, R., McCullagh,
18. M., Park, S.K., & Violanti, J.(2017). On-duty non-fatal injury that leads to work absences among police officers and level of perceived stress. *Journal of Occupational & Environmental Medicine*, 11(20).