The prevalence and associated factors of depression in policing: A cross sectional study in Sri Lanka

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Background

Policing is regarded as a high-risk profession for developing mental health disturbances due to various critical incidents and potential traumatic events they encounter. Exploration of mental health issues in policing in Sri Lanka, which recently concluded a civil war expanded over three decades, is a timely, yet, neglected issue. Hence, the present study was conducted to determine the prevalence and associated factors of depression among police officers in Kandy police division, Sri Lanka.

Methods

A cross sectional study was conducted using a simple random sample of 750 police officers employed in the Kandy police division. A self administered questionnaire, including “Peradeniya Depression Scale”, was used to collect data. The prevalence of depression was calculated with 95% Confidence Intervals. Multivariable logistic regression was carried out using backward elimination method to quantify the association between depression and selected predictors identified at bivariate analysis at p < 0.1.

Results

The response rate was 94.5% (n = 709). The mean age of the sample was 39.6(SD 9.2) years. Majority were males (n = 591, 83.4%). The estimated prevalence of depression was 22.8% (95% CI 19.9%-26.1%). In multivariable analysis, satisfactory welfare facilities at work place was negatively associated with depression (adjusted OR = 0.5; 95%CI = 0.3–0.7). Satisfaction of the opportunity to serve the public (adjusted OR = 0.2; 95% CI = 0.1–0.6) and satisfaction related to social status gained in policing (adjusted OR = 0.5; 95% CI = 0.3–0.8) emerged as significant factors that lowered the likelihood of having depression.

Conclusions

The prevalence of depression among police officers was found to be higher in comparison to other study findings in Sri Lanka. Given the modifiable nature of the significant predictors, it is recommended to design a package of interventions and implement adaptive measures to rectify the problems related to depression among police officers.

Key message

- Addressing the magnitude and predictors of depression in policing in Sri Lanka against the backdrop of understanding the dynamics of police reforms in post-conflict era, is of utmost importance.