

DO YOU FEEL A LOT OF STRESS AT THE BORDER TODAY?

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Abstract. *In my border inspection staffs stress research I tried to establish how the border inspection staff experienced stress and how to cope with stress in different ways. My research was set out to identify coping mechanisms at their disposal and the ones the staff has found effective in reducing stress at the border inspection work.*

The data consisted of the results obtained in previous studies, and relevant theories, as well as on the results of the survey carried out on border inspection staff. Also, I used my own experiences for the benefit of my findings. The survey was carried out for three different border crossing points in Finland, the land border at Vaalimaa, sea border with the South Harbour and in air traffic at Helsinki- Vantaa airport.

The results of this research consisted of comparisons questionnaire response to investigated background variables and how the respondents' answered about the intensity of the stress and their opinion what survey claims. For these facts, and individuals experiencing about the stress, was based on indicators that could allow cross-tabulation application towards to my research objectives.

My research queries can be reused and applied in a wide variety of workplace stress research. The potential effects of today's refugee flows for stress are well known.

How is this pressure experienced at the border? Does it cause stress reaction and how is it dealt with? These questions have not been answered here or elsewhere. One research in the United States in 2012 investigated the effects of the border guards' emotional abilities on their lives. In Finland the Border Guard participates as the End User in EU's BODEGA research project which through research aims to find more effectiveness for personnel's human factors together with developed border control infrastructure.

My research and these above-mentioned researches are aimed at developing preventive methods for border security staff to maintain stress and develop supervision of work. My research focused on experiencing and coping with stress in border inspection work and the results are applicable in the border inspection work even today.

Keywords: *Stress, resistance to pressure, burnout, coping, border inspection*

Introduction

Border inspection staff stress research examined how the border control personnel experience stress and ways to cope with it in different ways. The research surveyed the available and effective means to reduce stress in the border control work. Stress is usually understood as a worker having an overwhelming workload which is thought to have an effect on his performance. Stress can also have positive effects in order to improve performance.

According to research various shortcomings in the working environment and poor working conditions are the most common causes of stress. These stress-inducing factors are the ones the workers list most often because they are tangible, visible, and present in the daily work. The most significant causes of stress in the working environment are the volume of work, noise, cold, windy, heat, concourse, different lengths of shifts, workspace overcrowding, etc. The list could go on forever. Occupational health and safety organization jointly set up by the employer and the trade unions focuses on correcting these deficiencies. Management organizations carry out annual inspections and visitations on the workplace, giving suggestions on how to improve job satisfaction and support coping at work. This study does not focus on these deficiencies in the workplace but rather on how the individual employee experiences stress and the ways in which individuals' best cope with stress in their own opinion.

Research methods and issues, respondents

The research looked at previous studies and papers for the background part of the theory of social psychology and behavioral sciences, as well as related literature. The study focused on the theories of stress and pressure in the previous investigations and the factors influencing stress tolerance. These background theories were considered and compared to the practice by means of a survey research on how the border check personnel experience stress and how they cope with it.

At my research I saw the problem, how they cope the stress the best? How a border inspection personnel experience stress? How does the border inspection personnel experience stress? What are the ways the border inspection personnel use to deal with stress and to prevent stress? At the beginning of the query border inspection staff expressed their stress level. The poll was used to survey the coping mechanisms of the border check personnel and to find out how they use these means to manage stress. With the survey meter it was possible to work out the best ways to prevent stress.

Another key problem was the factors which cause deterioration or decreasing of stress tolerance? How well do individuals recognize these symptoms of lower stress tolerance in general terms?

These research problems were limited to the border inspection personnel because they carry out the same standards border tasks in the selected border crossing points. The survey was carried out for three different border crossing points in Finland, the land border at Vaalimaa, sea border with the South Harbor and in air traffic at Helsinki- Vantaa airport.

In my research I did not find significant results about age, sexual, background or station.

To answer these research questions a quantitative research approach and quantitative survey as research method were chosen.

Stress theories of research

Stress and tolerance of the stress are very closely related to each other and, in many cases, these are described in almost the same way. Resilience keeps the person's mental and physical state at balance and thus stress does not catch one by surprise. Stress is an abnormal situation to which the body has to respond. Stress is caused by psychological and psychosocial loads as well as an excessive long term physical strain. Stress can be described as a disturbance in the internal balance when the individual has received too much psychological or physical stimulus. The amount of stimulus has caused deviation from the normal balance to an alarming state which causes symptoms in accordance with stress. The short-term stress reaction does not harm the body but it is useful in terms of daily operations. Becoming alert sharpens the senses and the brain as well as enhances physical performance capacity.(Soinila 2003, 213-215)

Physiological stress is a persistent dynamic state or process that is generated from the adjustment efforts to change the intensity of the environment varying from under-or overload.(Sinivuo 1990, 5) A person becomes stressed physiologically for a variety of reasons. Regular and normal way of life keeps physiological stress in balance. Regular sleeping habits, eating habits and meal-times and normal stimulus during the time awake maintain the physiological balance. An individual should be able to regulate hormonal stress through his own actions and through the experiences of the individual's own behavior control.

The employees will be able to identify a number of work-related psychological stress factors. The amount of information needed at work has increased and diversified. One has to perform the tasks more efficiently and with higher quality in the same time frame as in the past. These raised standards apply to a number of different professions today. Bullying and mobbing have been raised almost daily to the forefront if it happens or is suspected of some teams. Bullying-induced stress is one factor causing mental stress in the workplace. It would make a study on its own.

Psychoneurologyendocrine stress is a combination of physiological and psychological stress theories.(Sinivuo 1990, 7) In this model, the individual reacts on psychological level to physical stress factors. In this case a person is stressed both physiologically and psychologically. For example, an employee who hasn't slept well may have a tantrum over

something trivial and it is the co-workers who suffer. Stressed colleagues will get part of the cries. Fatigue is at physiological level and behavior is at the psychological level and it is the result of a physiological level. As well as co-workers it can be the customers feeling the consequences.

Coping-stress theory explains an individual's way of solving stress situations. The individual is trying to cope with stress in accordance with their own thinking. For instance a stressed individual can reduce their workload when nearing the limits of their tolerance and thus avoid exceeding the stress level they are able to withstand. This behaviour is goal and purpose-oriented. People aim at flexibly using their resources according to the requirements set by the situation.(Sinivuo 1989, 35-36)

In my research I dealt with the concept of aggression only as a mental level activity. Aggressive behavior is expressed as anger or hatred towards someone else. Border guards as well as the customers during border check may display psychologically aggressive behavior. Psychologically aggressive behavior increases the degree of stress in almost all individuals present.

Long-term stress can develop into burnout and this can happen so that the employee does not notice it. Medical investigation comes later, when employee feels very tired and worker is diagnosed to be depressed. (Soinila 2003, 224)

Experiencing and managing stress

Each individual feels stress in their own level compared to others. The stress response becomes problematic if this reaction is very intense, prolonged or frequently repeated in a short time span. In general people tend to regulate and balance their own reaction levels in everyday life. There are three explanations complementary to each other related to stress management that will be discussed next. In all of them the individuality of the human at psychological and physiological levels is included. (Ellonen ym. 1997, 215-216)

Usually stress tolerance is explained as a stance towards the requirements of the environment. The demands of adapting to the environment can be defined at the level of the individual also as a good survival and the ability to manage the situation. Some see many new opportunities and directions when faced with troubles. The others see difficulties in all possible situations and therefore do not dare enter new situations. (Ellonen ym. 1997, 215-216)

The second explanation describes the stress management optimization through relax and reset situations. Some people are naturally well prepared

to cope with the difficulties through relaxation and resetting of the past situation. (Ellonen ym. 1997, 215-216)

The third explanation is based on the individual's good survival and situation management skills. The appropriate management of the requirements of the task is selecting the appropriate action. If the situation cannot be changed it has to be accepted as it is at the moment. The individuals are genetically and characteristically different. Individuals grow up and develop individually. (Ellonen ym. 1997, 215-216)

Maintaining physical condition is the most essential of the stress management techniques. All the stress management techniques can be based on a good individual physical condition. If the individual's physical condition is at a low level, his unique opportunities for the acquisition of social skills and social support network will become more difficult. (Ellonen ym. 1997, 216)

Learning stress management must relate to everyday life. The purpose of stress management is to learn to use stress management techniques as applied to each individual's own life and to get him to take advantage of these techniques on a regular basis and to take measures to control his workload. (Ellonen ym. 1997, 216)

Conclusions and suggestions

With the research survey and the various statements I wanted to map opinions and awareness of the importance of good physical condition in coping at work. Based on the results the border inspection staff is aware of the importance of good physical condition at psychological as well as physical level.

In the survey the respondents had to choose up to three of the best stress coping mechanisms they use. The response options were sleeping, recreational activities, reading, reflection, bathing-sauna, chatting, smoking, coffee break, sports activities, music, fishing, hunting, functional exercise, or other means, which they were asked to specify. In addition the means used were classified into the following main categories: resting, relaxation and doing.

Based on the results the most frequently used methods were physical exercise, sleeping and the recreational activities. The proportion of these specified stress management mechanisms of all the answers was more than 10% which clearly indicates the availability of these instruments compared to the other means. The discuss is also used often to cope with stress. Discussions can also be debriefing-discussions to deal with unpleasant situations. What is positive about the research results is that smoking is not common stress-coping mechanism.

When looking at the main categories the most widely used means of coping with stress were the ones classified under categories of doing and sleeping.

My research from the year 2006 is still timely. Work-related stress and its management is an ongoing process and its development and maintaining the balance belongs to everyone. The most efficiently stress management can be handled by the worker himself and the leaders must enable it.

Table 1. Stress coping (Pursiainen 2006, 62)

RESTING			Total	Vaalimaa /	South Harbour	Helsinki-Vantaa
1	sleeping	15,8 %	21	9	3	9
2	recreational activities	13,5 %	18	7	3	8
RELAXATION						
3	reading	3,0 %	4	0	1	3
4	reflection	3,0 %	4	1	1	2
5	bathing - sauna	4,5 %	6	4	0	2
6	chatting	9,8 %	13	4	3	6
7	smoking	0,8 %	1	1	0	0
8	coffee break	1,5 %	2	1	0	1
DOING						
9	sports activities	25,6 %	34	12	6	16
10	music	6,0 %	8	1	4	3
11	fishing	0,8 %	1	0	0	1
12	hunting	3,8 %	5	5	0	0
13	functional exercise	6,0 %	8	3	2	3
14	other means, what?	6,0 %	8	1	4	3
			133	49	27	57

It would be a good idea to lecture on stress and stress management at the border inspection staff training events. Maintaining the capacity for work is an integral part in coping at work. The theme of the training could be stress management and developing stress tolerance, as the development of stress tolerance and management of stress are almost the same thing as coping at work. It would be essential to get the staff thinking about how important stress management and maintenance are in daily life. There are no shortcuts in stress management but there are many different ways in which it can be developed. Education can be used to highlight high-quality exercise and physical performance. They play a key role in the development

and maintenance of stress resistance. We have to remember not to overload our bodies too much physically.

Future technology at border crossing points sets new challenges to border check. 'BODEGA', a 3-year project coordinated by the VTT Technical Research Centre will examine how to enhance the use of technology and personnel at border crossing points. Increased technology changes the border check personnel's work and adds a new kind of strain. Studying these factors related to the more efficient use of personnel is one of the objectives of the project. BODEGA also wants to promote well-being so the efficiency of the staff and increasing the technology would be implemented without any side effects.

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