



A CBT-based stress management module for police officers: A pre-post intervention study

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ABSTRACT

Despite the high-stress nature of policing roles in Malaysia, there is a lack of structured, evidence-based stress management interventions with measurable outcomes for police personnel. This study presents the outcomes of a stress management module conducted at the Kuching District Police Headquarters (IPD) to address occupational stress among Malaysian police personnel. Given the high-stress nature of policing roles, the intervention focused on equipping officers with mindfulness practices and time management techniques to foster psychological resilience, emotional regulation, and enhanced professional effectiveness. The program was designed to incorporate pre- and post-assessment tools to evaluate changes in stress awareness, stress coping strategies, and individual productivity. A total of 39 police officers initially participated in the program, of whom 36 completed the full intervention. Findings indicated measurable improvements in participants' ability to recognise personal stressors, apply mindfulness-based stress reduction techniques, and utilise structured time management to handle workload demands. These results underscore the value of incorporating structured wellness training into the professional development of police personnel in Malaysia and highlight the potential for broader institutional integration across district-level law enforcement units.

Keywords: police officers, stress management, mindfulness, time management, module

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1 INTRODUCTION

Occupational stress among law enforcement officers has become a growing concern in Malaysia. Police personnel operate in a dynamic, frequently high-risk, high-stress environment where their duties involve law enforcement, community engagement, emergency response, and often unpredictable confrontations (Jacobs & Keegan, 2022). These factors collectively contribute to elevated levels of psychological stress, which may lead to burnout, absenteeism, impaired judgment, and reduced performance if left unaddressed (Wahid et al., 2023). District-level police headquarters, such as the Kuching IPD, serve as central operational nodes. High caseloads, workforce shortages, and community demand further strain staff, frequently burdening them. In this context, the implementation of structured interventions is essential not only for individual mental health but also for the broader functionality and credibility of policing institutions. The stress management module introduced was developed in response to these systemic pressures. It aimed to provide a practical, research-informed platform for officers to acquire strategies for managing occupational stress effectively, specifically through mindfulness and time-management techniques.

According to Sik and Pat (2024), police officers in Malaysia routinely face complex working conditions, including shift work, long hours, exposure to traumatic incidents, and hierarchical command structures. These stressors are further intensified by public scrutiny, evolving legal mandates, and limited institutional resources. As a result, stress-related symptoms such as anxiety, irritability, fatigue, and decreased motivation are frequently observed among personnel. Although wellness initiatives and informal coping strategies are sometimes available in policing contexts, their effectiveness remains questionable. Brief wellness talks or ad-hoc workshops are often generic, failing to account for the unique psychological demands of policing. Many lack structured follow-up or reinforcement, reducing long-term impact (Hoeve et al., 2021). Without measurable outcomes, it is challenging to justify institutional investment or scaling of these approaches.

The Kuching District Police Headquarters has experienced similar challenges, with internal observations indicating growing concern over officer well-being. Despite the availability of informal coping mechanisms and occasional wellness briefings, these measures often lack the consistency, depth, and theoretical grounding required to effect lasting change. Thus, the decision to develop and implement a structured consultation module was based on the need for a more sustainable, skill-oriented approach to managing stress within the organisation. The rationale for introducing this stress management module lies in its potential to address an institutional gap in mental wellness training for police personnel. According to Cox et al. (2022), police officers are frequently exposed to high levels of occupational stress arising from both organisational and operational demands, which are often associated with negative emotional responses such as anxiety, frustration, and depression. The module aimed to balance this by providing officers with validated psychological tools applicable to their specific work environments. Mindfulness, defined as the ability to remain present and fully engaged without judgment, has been shown to improve stress management, cognitive flexibility, and emotional balance in high-demand professions (Krick et al., 2023). Similarly, practical time management skills have been positively correlated with reduced stress, increased job satisfaction, and improved task performance across occupational