

CHAPTER-6

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) with its deployment in all corners of the country is tasked for internal security duties involving frequent and sudden movements of the personnel. The personnel live in the barracks hundreds of kilometers away devoid of normal comforts which an average citizen takes for granted. The unemployment levels in rural India are so high that young men are compelled to serve in the armed forces. The stress and strains of working in the stifling and disciplined environment is too much to bear for some. In extreme cases this leads to instances of suicide and fragging.

The problem of suicide in CRPF has become a cause of worry for the Force and the government. The loss of trained and disciplined manpower by acts of suicide raises doubts about the policies of the Force and government. The morale and motivation of the personnel also takes a dip. The families of the suicide victims are left devastated and keep groping for many unanswered questions regarding the suicide of their ward. The social stigma attached to suicide further aggravates their agony.

This study has attempted to delve into the trends, challenges and causes of suicides in CRPF and steps that can be taken to reduce the suicides. Survey research techniques were adopted as the methodology for the study. To collect primary data a questionnaire was prepared by the researcher after literature survey and consulting officers and personnel of CRPF. It was prepared both in both Hindi and English. The questionnaire consisted of (i) list

of causes and reasons of suicide as perceived by the respondents i.e. the CRPF personnel (ii) open ended question for issues not covered in the structured part of the questionnaire. Total 1000 questionnaires were sent all over the country to be administered to CRPF personnel through a modified stratified cum convenience non-probability method of sampling. Secondary data was collected from CRPF Headquarters pertaining to transfer, housing and welfare policies and court of inquiry (COI) reports.

Over an eleven year period, from 2003 to 2013, 372 personnel of the CRPF committed suicide. After every suicide a COI is conducted to find the circumstances and causes of the suicide. From the content analysis and gleaning data from all the 372 COIs, it is seen that suicides in absolute numbers have increased by 68% from 2003 to 2013 but given the expansion of the Force, suicide rate (number of suicides per lakh of population) was calculated for each year which gave a comparable picture. Both the increase in the strength of the Force and suicide rate was 24% from 2003 to 2013. Firearms were used to commit suicide in 48% of the cases with hanging accounting for 34% of the cases. 'Family and personal reasons' were found as causes in 53.5% of the cases with 6% due to 'mental illnesses' and 25% due to 'unknown reasons'.

The researcher interacted with seven family members of the suicide victims to find what they thought were the reasons for their ward committing suicide. The dominant reason for suicide that came out of these interactions was 'family or personal reasons'. The researcher also had discussions with fifteen CRPF officers of various ranks. All the officers felt that 'family and personal

reasons' and 'mental illnesses' were the main causes of personnel committing suicide.

Out of the 1000 questionnaires which were sent to CRPF personnel all over the country, the researcher received back 553 filled questionnaires. The structured data was fed into the computer using SPSS version 21. Output for the descriptive analysis showed that CRPF personnel perceived the reason 'due to personal and family reasons' as cause for suicide with a mean of 4.04 and median of 4 on a 5 point scale with 4 corresponding to 'agree' and 5 to 'strongly agree' as responses for the cause. Similarly 'not able to solve personal and family problems' as a cause scored 3.84 as mean and 4 as median; 'continuous mental tension and stress' scored a mean of 3.97 and median of 4 and 'due to mental illness' scored 3.35 as mean and 4 as median.

Factor analysis was also resorted to through iterations in SPSS and the researcher's insight. Twelve causes out of 19 were grouped into 3 factors which explained 56% of the variance. The left out 7 causes were not taken for further analysis as they explained very little variance on their own. The researcher named these 3 factors as a) Working Environment Reasons b) Reasons Affecting Personal Life and c) Medico-Psychological Reasons.

To conclude, the study finds that no single cause by itself can explain the reasons for suicide in CRPF. However it can be said that the major causes of suicide by CRPF personnel are 'reasons affecting his personal life', 'working environment reasons' and 'medico-psychological reasons'.

Very little can be done as a strategy to reduce the personal problems that the CRPF man and his family encounter. But the Force and the government can substantially contribute to the amelioration of his problems in the working environment and identification, prevention and cure for his medical problems.

Before suggesting any interventions to reduce or prevent suicide, it would be worthwhile to have an idea about stress coping mechanisms, suicide prevention challenges and strategies which some scholars have discussed.

Various authors have come out with stress coping skills and mechanism and suicide prevention strategies. Maris (et al. 1992) define coping as 'behavior that facilitates adaptation to change and helps to maintain a continued level of previously adequate functioning.' The 'coping skills' are defined by Violanti (1996) as 'behavioral reactions to distress', and he identifies two primary categories of coping strategies: 'emotion and problem focused strategies'. Piennaar & Rothmann (2007) say that several studies have found that emotion-focused strategies were maladaptive, whereas problem-focused strategies were adaptive'.

Territo & Vetter (1981) suggest practical organizational and individual programs for coping with stress which calls for firm commitment from the individual and department.

Dash (et al. 1978) confirm this statement and agree that comprehensive programs of primary and secondary prevention attribute to relatively low suicide rate among the police.

Shneidman (1985) cautions: 'suicide prevention should optimally be practiced in consultation with a number of colleagues representing various disciplines.

Suicide can best be understood in terms of concepts from several points of view. According to Everstine (1998) the reduction of suicide rate 'will be by the efforts of mental health professionals in devising methods of primary prevention that will affect the general public, as noted by Edwin Shneidman in his definition of suicide: Perhaps the main task of suicidologists lies in the dissemination of information especially about the clues to suicide: in the schools, in the workplace, and by means of public media'.

Leenaars (1991) discusses suicide prevention under three rubrics:-

a) Primary Suicide Prevention

Refers to measures to prevent the development of significant suicide intent.

The broader social ills of a society are being corrected, such as child abuse, breakdown of families, reduction in alcohol and drug, poverty alleviation, keeping elderly company etc. Educating professionals like physicians, nurses, clergies, teachers, police etc. in recognizing depression, and establishment of suicide prevention centers.

b) Secondary Suicide Prevention

Addresses those measures undertaken to stop the suicidal process once it has begun from moving forward to a lethal culmination, and to reverse it so that the patient will be relieved of the pressure to commit suicide. In this instance Leenaars refers to treatment of depressed and suicidal patients for specialized treatment, and managing the recovery phases.

c) Tertiary Suicide Prevention

Refers to measures to reduce impairment and suicide probability in the minority of individuals who tend to remain suicidal over months and years. Leenaars refers to treatment of those patients who do not show any sign of

change over months and years and on the brink of suicide. Here, combinations of drugs and electroconvulsive therapy is applied, including modified narcosis and neurosurgical treatment.

Recommendations

Having analyzed the perception of CRPF personnel and the causes of suicides that have come out in the COIs and personal interviews with few families of suicide victims and discussions with CRPF officers has given the researcher a fair idea of what drives CRPF personnel to take the extreme step of ending his life.

Any suicide prevention policy in CRPF will have to be multi-pronged involving the senior officers, subordinate officers and other ranks. The CRPF top authorities must accept that there is a problem that needs serious attention and commitment at all levels for prevention of suicides. Due to fear of inquiries holding them responsible, the officers in the unit, a priori, try to establish that the cause of suicide was personal/family reasons. While this may be true in some cases, in many other cases other reasons may also be responsible in combination with personal/family reasons.

The policy makers need to focus on the following areas to prevent and reduce suicides in CRPF:

Structural Changes in CRPF

The CRPF HQ needs to delegate decision-making, simplify processes, reduce the periodic returns and reports and cut down on paper work. Though there have been attempts on these lines but they have been frequently changed and modified. The authorized strength of personnel in field units and

in static offices is way below the strength required for smooth conduct of normal work. The CRPF needs to fill the vacancies and should impress upon the government to increase authorizations at critical ranks. Moreover the high vacancy levels further burden the existing employees. These kind of structural imbalances have created unnecessary workload for the personnel.

Psychological Evaluation of Personnel

Every CRPF personnel is mandatorily required to undergo an annual medical examination (AME). Before starting any policy intervention, the number of potential suicide victims have to be identified. A rigorous psychological evaluation of all personnel with the help of experts must be made part of the AME. Once this is done the policy makers will be able to gauge the extent of suicidal propensity in a unit.

Introduction of Psychometric Tests in Recruitment

At present no psychometric tests are conducted while recruiting candidates for CRPF. The varied kind of tough duties, ranging from anti-terrorist, anti-Naxal, dealing with communal disturbances, law and order, elections etc., require exacting physical and mental strength in a CRPF man. Any recruit who does not have the aptitude and temperament not only becomes a liability to the Force but in due course of time he may become a victim of psychological disorders, mental illness and in extreme cases develop suicidal tendencies. Therefore introduction of psychometric tests by trained psychometricians in the recruitment process is a *sine qua non* for inducting the right kind of persons in CRPF who are *ab initio* not suicide prone.

Psychological Inputs during Training and Workshops

While there is an obvious emphasis on physical, weapons and tactics training, inputs on mental strengthening also need to be introduced in the training curriculum as the CRPF personnel are exposed to nerve wracking situations which test the psychological and mental mettle. The concept of 'Emotional Intelligence' is relevant here. Salovey and Mayer(1995) first introduced the term describing it as "a type of emotional information processing that includes accurate appraisal of emotions in oneself and others, appropriate expression of emotions, and adaptive regulation of emotion in such a way as to enhance living". Enhancing emotional intelligence of the personnel in these workshops can reap huge dividends in reducing stress and mental strengthening. A onetime training, however, would not have the desired result. Regular and refresher workshops to be conducted by trained experts providing psychological inputs can obviate cropping up of suicidal tendencies. These workshops should train master trainers belonging to the Force who in turn can further train other personnel. These workshops should also train personnel to recognize and identify any suicidal symptoms in their colleagues so that timely interventions can help such individuals to come out of the morass of suicidal thought.

Posting a Counselor/Psychotherapist in each unit.

The CRPF personnel are subject to stressful and traumatic situations almost on daily basis specially in conflict zones like J&K, Naxal affected states and North Eastern states. As of now no counseling help is available to personnel who are in need of help to overcome the stress or trauma they may have

experienced. The jawan in CRPF has no one to confide in, both in professional and personal matters. His colleagues and senior officers may be well meaning but they may not be able to provide him the required help which only a trained counselor or psychotherapist can do. Therefore it is essential that each CRPF battalion should have a regular counselor or psychotherapist. There have been number of instances when during an encounter with terrorists or Naxals precious CRPF lives have been lost and survivors badly injured. The post trauma stress management of CRPF personnel after these incidents is of vital importance to maintain their mental health. This stress management can be done only with the help of the counselor. This expert can also give professional advice on many personal issues which the personnel may be grappling with back at home and which may be a cause of great deal of stress to them affecting the quality of both their personal and professional lives. The expert can closely work with the unit doctor to identify personnel needing further psychiatric intervention and also counsel and motivate alcohol addicts to kick the habit.

Increasing Effective communication between ORs and Officers. ✓

Communications in armed forces and police is top-down .Instructions and orders are passed down by the superiors according to the chain of command. The culture of strict discipline and obeying of orders without questioning is internalized at all levels and any deviance or defiance, even for legitimate reasons, is treated as affront to the established norms of the Force. Such personnel are singled out as trouble makers and taken to task. Seeing this, a general trust deficit is created between the lower ranks and officers. This

leads to communication gaps and perception of seniors being insensitive to the issues and problems concerning the lower ranks. A toxic atmosphere is created in the unit and the perception that grievances will not be redressed, gains currency. Therefore it is incumbent on the senior officers in the unit specially the commandant that effective two way communication channels are established so that the lower ranks feel free to air their genuine grievances to the CO. Regular personal interactions by the CO with the lower ranks specially the jawans about their personal and professional problems will not only act as stress busters but will give the CO ample opportunity to win the confidence of the lower ranks and in clearing lot of confusion about leave and other organizational policies. Such regular interactions will also afford a chance to the CO to get to know and understand his men personally. Apart from assessment of the capacity of each man in his unit for effective task allocation in his unit, the CO can also identify stress and suicide prone men in the battalion. The senior officers also need to introspect regarding their misbehavior with the lower ranks. Any act of abusive behavior by a senior officer nullifies all good work done by him. He can no longer command faith and loyalty from his subordinates, so essential in a Force. In fact developing a sense of pride and loyalty to one's BN and the Force is a vital duty of the commandant of the unit. The *esprit de corps* and *camaraderie* in any Force fosters a positive and stress free environment in an uniformed and disciplined organization. This is a very well accepted and recognized factor in maintaining emotional and psychological health of any armed force. The CRPF also needs to develop this *esprit de corps* and *camaraderie* to prevent and reduce the incidence of suicides.

Transfer and Personnel Policy

The CRPF by the very nature of its mandate and duties is deployed in all corners of the country. A constable gets recruited around the age of 18 to 20 in the Force. He is barely out of school and is suddenly exposed to an alien environment, rigorous training and overbearing trainers. Just after one year of training he is deployed in the toughest Naxal areas. The CRPF's mandate is to perform internal security duties all over the country. With situation in several states still fragile on the internal security front, the CRPF man is deployed continuously from one conflict theatre to another. The prime age between 18 to 30 years of the CRPF constable is spent away from his home. This is the age range when he marries, has children but has to be posted in tough operational areas as a matter of policy. Compared to postings in the tough operational field units, very few postings are available in peace and static units. The ratio between hard and soft postings in CRPF would be roughly 80:20. Almost all CRPF personnel aspire to be posted in or near their home towns after spending eight years in operational areas but the skewed ratio of operational postings to peace postings makes this task very challenging for the CRPF authorities. The transfer policy is a very emotive issue with the lower ranks and creates great amount of stress. A well thought out transfer policy incorporating all the concerns of the lower ranks should be rolled out. Personnel should be timely rotated between very hard areas, hard areas and soft areas. Areas like Kashmir where CRPF personnel have to live amongst hostile population and face both militants and stone-pelting mobs can be very unnerving and traumatic. As shown in table - 4.6 in Chapter 4, out

of the total suicides in CRPF between 2003 and 2013 around 21% were committed by personnel posted in Kashmir. Given the limited number of peace postings in CRPF, the government must make an effective and liberal deputation policy and the CRPF personnel must be encouraged to opt for deputation to state police forces and other organizations. The option for taking voluntary retirement after 15 years instead of 20 years of service at present should also be considered by the government.

Toll free Helpline

Establishing a helpline with trained counselors manning the helpline centers will give immediate lifeline to the emotionally beleaguered CRPF personnel. The helpline will encourage the personnel to talk freely with experts which they would be reluctant to do with their seniors. Their pent up feelings and suppressed emotions can be outpoured on this helpline. The content of the conversations in the helpline will give rich information and feedback about CRPF's policies and their implementation.

Housing Policy

At present the CRPF is able to provide government accommodation to only about 12% of its employees against the authorized 25%. The government needs to enhance budgetary support to CRPF so that it can achieve the authorization level of 25%. In fact the authorization itself needs to be enhanced. The conditions of barracks, toilets and kitchens need to be improved specially in the buildings provided by the state government. In fact the design of barracks should be changed in such a way that it affords some private space to the lower ranks. The provision of quality family

accommodation, barracks, toilets etc. raises the self-esteem of the lower ranks which can boost their sagging morale and reduce stress.

Welfare Policy

The government should consider declaring all CRPF, other CAPFs' and police personnel killed in action as martyrs, as is done for armed forces. As of now even in a joint operation involving army, CRPF and police the army man killed in action is declared a martyr but the CRPF and policeman killed in action is declared simply as 'killed in action'. This policy is discriminatory and a cause of much heartburn amongst the CRPF personnel. Similarly the less allowances vis-à-vis the army in the same area is also a cause of great concern for the CRPF personnel. This anomaly needs to be set right by the government. The Welfare Policy of CRPF needs to include steps to increase the number and amount given as scholarships to the wards of CRPF and impress upon the government to increase quotas for their wards in professional courses. The CRPF at the present runs 3 public schools for its employees' children. Some more public schools should be set up for providing affordable and quality education to CRPF wards. This will greatly reduce the stress and worry the CRPF personnel have about proper education for their wards.

Provisions for Rest, Recuperation, Sports and Hobbies.

Stress management workshops should be regularly conducted so that CRPF personnel are able to learn techniques and ways to manage their stress. Yoga, which has proven helpful to many as a de-stressing and life style

changing system, should be made part of the morning exercises for CRPF personnel. Given the arduous nature of duties performed by the CRPF personnel, proper provisions for timely rest and recuperation should be made. Likewise great emphasis should be placed on sports and hobbies which go a long way in reducing and managing stress.

Timely Disposal of Pending Personal Matters with State

Government Authorities.

Majority of the CRPF lower rank personnel are from villages or small towns. Some of them have property and other disputes in their villages or towns. Due to their prolonged absence from their villages they are not able to devote adequate time and attention to resolve these disputes. They try to sort out these disputes whenever they go on leave but the prevalent red tape, behavior of government officials and corruption frustrate their attempts. After leave going back to duty without resolving these pending disputes becomes a great source of stress for the personnel. Moreover they keep getting updates on their mobile phone from their family members about the new nuisances the other party creates. Their stress is compounded by their feeling of helplessness. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) needs to strongly advise and impress upon the state governments to put in place effective mechanisms and systems for time bound disposal of these pending disputes. The state governments need to sensitize their functionaries about the important role the CRPF plays in the internal security grid of the country and the adverse effect on their morale if their genuine and legal disputes are not settled in time. The

CRPF officers on their part need to be more proactive in identifying personnel who have such pending disputes and actively liaise and pursue with the state government officials for proper disposal of these issues.