

Beyond call of duty: Mumbai police is battling a deadly disease caused by stress. Is there a cure?

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“One of the best in the world after Scotland Yard.”

That’s how the Bombay High Court described the city’s police force in 2020 while issuing a directive in a cybercrime case. The court’s pat on the back is indeed a ‘medal for distinguished service’ for a force that brought the dreaded Mumbai mafia to its knees, ending decades of extortion, kidnappings, murders, and bloody gang wars.

But now, the guardians of law and order in the maximum city are fatigued and worn out.

The storied force that busted notorious gangs is crumbling under the burden of long working hours and a hazardous lifestyle. The appalling conditions lead to serious healthcare challenges such as cardiac complications, hypertension, early onset of diabetes, etc.

Worse, recent news reports reveal a particularly worrying trend. Earlier this year, five on-duty police officers died of heart attack in a span of 42 days. According to Deepesh More, a crime reporter with the *Maharashtra Times*, Mumbai police recorded 821 deaths of its personnel between January 2018 and April 2023. This translates into one death every 57 hours.

Claiming 205 lives, heart diseases are the leading cause of mortality. Covid-19 follows closely with 120 victims, while 31 police officers died by suicide due to exhaustion and despair.

While a few senior police officials termed More’s report “sensational” and a wrong interpretation of the rate of prevalence, it nevertheless serves as a grim reminder of the severe risks posed by workload and stress. It also raises an important question that has been largely overlooked so far: How well is our police force looked after?

Number of deaths and cause of mortality in Mumbai police

Major causes of death	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023 (Till April)	Total death
Heart diseases	38	23	27	40	54	23	205
Covid-19	0	0	96	23	1	0	120
Liver / Kidney trouble / Jaundice / Pneumonia	12	27	24	20	16	6	105
Cancer	15	15	10	11	5	0	56
High blood pressure / Diabetes	7	5	11	12	7	4	46
Accidents	9	7	13	10	5	4	48
Suicide	6	3	4	8	7	3	31
Tuberculosis - TB	7	7	2	9	3	0	28
Others	35	57	43	27	17	3	182
Total	129	144	230	160	115	43	821

Source: Mumbai Police / Maharashtra Times

 ETPrime

Guards of India's richest city

Mumbai is India's most populous city. With an estimated GDP of INR9.83 lakh crore, the country's financial capital contributes 6.16% to the national output. Mumbai's prosperity is supported by its thriving business environment, which makes it critical for the police force to diligently ensure the safety of its 18 million inhabitants. Given the poor police-population ratio, that's a tall order.

According to the United Nations, the ideal ratio should be 222 police personnel for every 100,000 citizens. As per the Bureau of Police Research and Development's data, this ratio was 196.23 in India as of January 2022 based on the sanctioned strength. The sanctioned ratio for Maharashtra was at 186.36 police personnel per 100,000 citizens while the actual ratio, as per a report submitted to the parliament, was even lower at 136.45.

The Maharashtra State Police has a total strength of approximately 195,000 personnel including 15,000 women. The police-population ratio for Mumbai is unavailable. As per the official website of Mumbai police, the city has a modest contingent of 38,570 police personnel. This roughly translates into one cop per 47, 731 people.

Despite its limited geographical area, the island city has seen a surge in population. According to the National Crime Records Bureau's (NCRB) *Crime in India 2021* report, the city's crime rate has spiked as well, adding to the woes of an already burdened police force. Mumbai witnessed 78,882 cases registered under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) or Special and Local Laws (SLL), up from 58,676 in 2020.

More, who has been covering crime for nearly a decade, tells ET Prime that there has been a shift in the degree and nature of crimes in recent years. While petty street crimes have declined, white-collar crimes and cybercrimes have seen a significant surge.

“Consequently, the police officers tasked with handling these cases are facing an evident increase in mental stress,” he says.

A total of 1,565 cases of cybercrime were registered in the city between January and April 2023. These involved offenses such as online fraud, obscene e-mails/SMS/MMS/posts, fake social-media profiles, morphing e-mail/SMS, job frauds, investment frauds, matrimonial frauds, data thefts, sextortion, etc.

Clearly, the current strength of the police force is insufficient for Mumbai considering its population and crime rate. And in their endless effort to keep the city safe, police personnel are ignoring the importance of basics of good health such as adequate sleep and food on time.

So, who will save the men and women who toil day in and day out to keep our lives safe? Do we even have the necessary facilities and mechanisms in place to take care of them?

Strength of Mumbai Police

Year	Sanctioned posts	Working posts	Vacancies	Shortfall in the staff
2021	51,255	41,396	9,859	-19%
2022	51,746	37,501	14,245	-28%
2023	51,272	38,570	12,702	-25%

Source: Praja Foundation, mumbai.police.gov.in



Caring for a better life

Maharashtra Police Kutumb Arogya Yojana (MPKAY) is a healthcare scheme launched by the Maharashtra government in 2005 for police personnel and their families. It provides cashless medical treatment in private hospitals across the state and covers 32 diseases including 27 emergencies and five critical illnesses.

The Office of the Director General of Police, Maharashtra, has formed contractual agreements with hospitals and third-party administrators to ensure that reimbursements are based on rates fixed under the Central Government Health Scheme (CGHS). A network of 170 hospitals, including 29 in Mumbai, is enlisted for this purpose.

Many officers have benefitted immensely from the scheme. Take James Dorai for instance, an employee in the IT sector who lost his father, Anthony Albert Dorai, on April 8. Aged 57, Anthony was serving at the Worli police station when he had to be hospitalised due to swelling of his kidneys.

James says throughout his month-long hospitalisation, his father received extensive treatment under MPKAY at Wockhardt Hospital. “We didn’t incur any expenses,” says James, acknowledging the unwavering support and assistance provided by the police department.

But then, there are some who are not convinced about the healthcare benefits. Constable Anil Shinde (name changed) is not confident of getting proper medical care from government hospitals due to their poor reputation.

“Even though the MPKAY scheme is in place, access to treatment in private hospitals is limited to specific severe illnesses (32 diseases). In other cases, individuals are required to pay for treatment at private hospitals. I had to spend for my mother’s Covid-19 treatment and my daughter’s hospitalisation,” he says.

Besides MPKAY, police personnel receive life insurance coverage through their salary accounts. In October 2020, HDFC Bank was chosen as the salary account provider for Mumbai police for a period of three years. The agreement includes a life insurance benefit of INR10 lakh and a cover of INR90 lakh in the event of unnatural death. The insurance coverage is offered along with the salary account.

Talking of salaries, the seventh pay commission shows that the compensation structure of Mumbai police personnel pales in comparison with average salaries in the private sector. Monthly salaries of constables range from INR21,700 to INR69,100 and they receive 38% of basic pay as dearness allowance along with 8%-15% as house rent allowance.

Besides salaries, employees are given allowances and state government-provided facilities such as affordable or discounted food at subsidiary canteens, gyms at 31 locations, hostels with 89 beds at Worli police headquarters, a guest house with 27 beds in Chembur for women officers, and 14 crèches located throughout the city for their children. Furthermore, in close proximity to Byculla,

there is the Nagpada Police Hospital which is specifically designed to meet the healthcare requirements of the force.

However, the quality of services has been an issue in certain cases. According to a senior police officer who wished not to be named, “Quality is often compromised in canteens as the tender is always awarded to the lowest bidder. Blame it on the belief that ‘the cheapest is the best’,” he says.

Despite their seemingly bare-bone nature, these facilities do help in mitigating the hardships faced by the police force. But given its growing responsibilities and disproportionately low staff strength versus the city’s bulging population, such benefits fail to make any meaningful and far-reaching impact on the police force.

"During the recruitment process for police services, only physical tests are conducted and there are no mental ability tests. As a result, it cannot be assumed that every individual will be equipped to handle mental stress in diverse and challenging situations."

— A senior police officer

Long hours of commute is another problem. Due to high rentals in Mumbai, most police personnel stay outside the city, and travelling in crowded suburban trains in addition to the long working hours exacerbates fatigue and stress. “Some opt to stay back and work consecutive shifts in order to avoid the burdensome and time-consuming travel,” says another police officer.

Indeed, the excessive workload and long hours crippling one of the world’s best police forces have to be addressed. But the need of the hour is a sharper focus on improving the health and lifestyle of police personnel as it will have an immediate impact.

Prevention is better than cure

A total of 120 policemen have succumbed to Covid-19 infection. According to a senior police official, while the number of police personnel who lost their lives to the virus is significant, it was partly attributed to negligence within the force. “Even during the lockdowns, the police had to have direct contact with citizens, which contributed to the spread of the infection. Measures such as wearing masks and using sanitizers were overlooked in some cases,” says a police officer.

Although several health facilities are provided to the police, most are primarily focused on post-hospital care. Unfortunately, there is a lack of sufficient preventive measures in place to protect officers from falling sick. The department occasionally organises health camps but participation is very low.

During a recent free screening programme organised by Tata Memorial Hospital and Tata Trusts under MPKAY, several cases of cancer and pre-cancerous conditions came to light.

Swapnil Lale, director of health services, Government of Maharashtra, tells ET Prime that given the sharp rise in chronic diseases among the general public in the state, the government is

implementing a hub-and-spoke healthcare model. This essentially covers screening and detection of heart or other chronic complications at primary-level clinics, which would then move patients who need further treatment to large hospitals or hubs equipped with full-scale treatment infrastructure.

The AI-powered ST-elevation myocardial infarction (STEMI) programme for the diagnosis of heart disease, Lale says, is being implemented as part of the National Health Mission and hopefully can help in early detection and treatment. “Since diagnostic centres are available everywhere, detection of serious cases has seen a significant rise. We are also proposing to set up more catheterization laboratories to cater to heart surgeries,” he adds.

Meanwhile, the increasing number of suicide among policemen brings the issue of poor mental health to the fore. Experts say it is crucial to acknowledge and address the twin burden of physical and mental stress amid personal and professional challenges.

Neglecting one’s mental health can leave them susceptible to conditions such as depression. In May 2018, an IPS officer who had been battling cancer for an extended period shot himself to death with his service revolver in Mumbai’s Malabar Hills.

“During the recruitment process for police services, only physical tests are conducted and there are no mental ability tests. As a result, it cannot be assumed that every individual will be equipped to handle mental stress in diverse and challenging situations. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the attrition rate at the constable and sub-inspector levels remains below 1%”, says another senior police officer, requesting anonymity.

So, is there a permanent cure for the life-threatening disease that the Mumbai police is suffering from?

The treatment protocol

In a report titled the *State of Policing and Law & Order in Mumbai* in October 2022, the governance think tank Praja Foundation pointed out a significant correlation between the city’s population, strength of the police force, and crime rate.

According to Milind Mhaske, CEO, Praja Foundation, working conditions greatly impact employee well-being. Mumbai Police implemented an eight-hour-shift policy in May 2022 under police commissioner Sanjay Pandey, but it is often ignored.

Police officers handle non-cognisable offenses or minor matters such as lost identity cards or mobile phones which could be dealt with online these days. They are also responsible for providing security to VIPs and have election duties, which rob the police force of the valuable time and resources that could be otherwise devoted to solving serious crimes. Authorities should take necessary measures to free the force of such responsibilities.

In advanced countries such as the US, there are dedicated teams to handle serious crimes which operate independently alongside the regular police.

To create a supportive environment for the police department, it's crucial to take small but progressive steps. This would allow police officers to efficiently perform their duties and address citizens' concerns without unnecessary pressure.

Link: [mumbai police: Beyond call of duty: Mumbai police is battling a deadly disease caused by stress. Is there a cure? - The Economic Times \(indiatimes.com\)](https://www.economictimes.com/news/india/mumbai-police-beyond-call-of-duty-mumbai-police-is-battling-a-deadly-disease-caused-by-stress-is-there-a-cure?story=1)