



Rising Stress in India's Defence Forces

For Prelims: [Central Reserve Police Force](#), [National Tele Mental Health Programme](#), [Kiran Helpline](#)

For Mains: Stress and morale issues in armed forces, Mental health concerns and stigma

[Source: TH](#)

Why in News?

A [Central Reserve Police Force \(CRPF\)](#) soldier in Manipur killed two colleagues before taking his own life, highlighting rising stress among **India's security forces**.

- Increasing suicides and resignations across defense personnel emphasize the urgent need for better mental health support and grievance redressal.

What are the Causes of Stress Among Defence Personnel?

▪ Operational Stressors:

- Prolonged Deployment in **Counter-Insurgency/Counter-Terrorism (CI/CT) Operations** and continuous exposure to high-risk environments (extreme weather, difficult terrain, and lack of basic amenities in remote postings), contributes significantly to stress.
 - A study by **United Service Institution of India (USI)**, highlights that **over 50% of Indian Army personnel are under severe stress** and officers experience higher cumulative stress compared to Junior Commissioned Officers (JCOs) and Other Ranks (ORs).
- **Frequent and Long Separations from Family** during combat operations and field posting limits interaction with loved ones affects mental well-being.
- **Unpredictable work hours, irregular shifts**, and high operational pressure demand constant vigilance and quick decision-making under stress, increasing strain on officers.
 - For non-officers, **short-term employment (as seen in [Agnipath Scheme](#))** and uncertain career prospects add to job-related anxieties.
- **Casualties and Combat Trauma**, witnessing injuries or deaths of fellow soldiers leads to psychological distress.

▪ Non-Operational Stressors:

- **Leadership and Administrative Issues** like perceived unfair promotions, lack of recognition, and leadership gaps.
 - **Conflicts with Seniors and Subordinates** including cases of humiliation, lack of dignity, and interpersonal tensions.
- **Frequent Transfers and Short Command Tenures** causing instability in career progression and family life.
- **Pay and Status Concerns** like downgradation in rank equivalence and financial dissatisfaction.

- **Leave Denial and Excessive Workload** due to delayed or rejected leave applications despite emergencies.
- **Restrictions on Personal Freedom** due to limited use of mobile phones and strict discipline rules.
- **Inadequate Infrastructure and Support** such as poor quality of rations, lack of recreational facilities, and inefficient administrative support.
 - Additionally, the harassment of military personnel's families back home further exacerbates their stress.
- **Mental Health Stigma** leading to reluctance in seeking psychological help due to fear of being seen as weak.
 - Additionally, **using alcohol as a coping mechanism for stress**, leads to long-term health and social issues.

How Does Stress Impact Defence Personnel?

- **Increased Suicides and Fratricides** as stress leads to extreme actions, endangering both the individual and colleagues.
 - **From 2020 to 2024**, as many as 55,555 CAPF personnel either resigned or took voluntary retirement, and **730 personnel died by suicide**.
- **Decline in Mental and Physical Health** with rising cases of [hypertension](#), [anxiety](#), [depression](#), and other stress-related illnesses.
- **Lower Morale and Motivation** reducing operational effectiveness and commitment to duty.
- **Compromised Combat Readiness** as stress affects decision-making, alertness, and overall performance in critical situations.
- **Higher Attrition Rates** with more personnel opting for voluntary retirement, resignations, or early exits.
- **Family and Social Struggles** as work-related stress strains relationships, leading to domestic conflicts and emotional distress.
- **Reduced Trust in Leadership** causing dissatisfaction with management decisions, policies, and organizational support.

India's Initiatives for Mental Well-being in the Army

- **Advisory & Guidelines:** In August 2023, the Indian Army issued an advisory deploying officers, religious teachers, and trained personnel to address stress and mental health issues.
- **Training and Counselling Programs:** Officers are trained at the **Defence Institute of Psychological Research (DIPR)**.
 - **Religious teachers** (Pandits, Maulvis, Granthis, Pastors) posted in every unit for support.
 - Unit **Psychological Counsellor Courses** for Junior and Non-Commissioned Officers (12-week duration).
- **Counseling Support:** Civilian counselors deployed at major military stations and helplines established across all Command Headquarters.
- **Psychiatry Centres:** Set up under the Directorate General of Medical Service at major military stations.
- **Holistic Approaches:** Includes **yoga, meditation, sports, recreation**, improved amenities, and a buddy system for soldiers.

Way Forward

- **Conduct Periodic Stress Assessments:** Expand ongoing studies like the DIPR initiative to assess and address evolving stress factors.
- **Leverage Technology for Mental Health Support:** AI-based chatbots, telemedicine services (under [National Tele Mental Health Programme](#) and [Kiran Helpline](#)), and mobile apps can provide real-time mental health assistance.
- **Family Support Programs:** Counseling, financial planning workshops, and well-being programs

for families of personnel can reduce domestic stress.

- Facilitate the **lateral entry** of retiring soldiers into paramilitary forces, police, and **Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs)** to ensure stable post-service employment and expand the reach of the **Self-Employment Scheme for Ex-Servicemen** and widows of the servicemen.
- **Better Grievance Redressal:** Establish a **time-bound** mechanism similar to the [Right to Information Act 2005](#) for addressing soldiers' concerns efficiently.

Drishti Mains Question:

How do rising stress levels among India's defence personnel impact national security and operational effectiveness? Suggest measures to address these concerns.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question

Mains

Q. Why suicide among young women is increasing in Indian society? **(2023)**

Q. What does the following quotation mean to you?

"We can never obtain peace in the outer world until and unless we obtain peace within ourselves." – Dalai Lama. **(2021)**

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