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Happiness, now on duty



BINDU GOPAL RAO

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IMAGE COURTESY: AI IMAGE

Bindu Gopal Rao

Who looks after the men and women who spend their days looking after everyone else? For Bangalore's policemen, the answer has often been, duty first, everything else later. Not anymore. Now, Project Khushi is asking them to press pause, not on the job, but on neglecting themselves. Launched by the Bengaluru City Police this week, the initiative is aimed at nudging personnel towards healthier lifestyles through structured physical and digital health interventions. And if its pilot is anything to go by, there is reason to pay attention.

Conducted in September 2025, the three-month pilot recorded measurable improvements among participants. Sixty-one per cent reported lower blood sugar levels, 70% corrected Vitamin B12 deficiency, while 59% lost between 0.5 kg and 6.1 kg, according to the police.

The gains were not confined to the weighing scale or blood reports. Participants also reported improvements in stress management, sleep, digestion, physical activity and overall energy levels.

That is precisely where the idea gets interesting. Project Khushi is not being pitched as a quick-fix health drive. City Police Commissioner Seemant Kumar Singh said the larger aim was for personnel to build long-term habits that would help them lead healthier lives.

The initiative, which began with the Electronic City Police Division, is now being expanded to cover more personnel.

Over the next three years, 600 participants will undergo the programme, with the first batch taking part in a 90-day physical and digital health and wellness programme from September 8 to December 6, 2026.

Health assessments, blood tests, BMI and waist-to-hip measurements, weight-management assessments and wellness surveys will track the journey.

But here's the bigger question - why did Bangalore's cops need a Project Khushi in the first place? Because, perhaps the most overlooked casualty of policing isn't always on the streets. Sometimes, it is the policeman himself.

A job that doesn't clock out

A police job does not come with the luxury of a neat 9-to-5 life. Long hours, night duty, meals at odd times and the constant possibility of the next situation turning unpredictable are woven into the job. And the body, eventually, keeps the score.

Dr Mahesh R Nadagouda, consultant internal medicine at Samprada Hospital, says poor sleep and prolonged stress can increase the chances of high blood pressure, diabetes, weight gain and heart "A police officer needs to stay alert and make the right decision at the right time," Nadagouda says. Poor sleep can make that harder.

The warning signs need not arrive with sirens blaring. They can creep in quietly with frequent headaches, acidity, stomach problems, body aches and persistent tiredness. Stress can also push some people towards smoking, drinking or unhealthy eating, creating another layer of health problems.

The real trouble? These problems rarely announce themselves overnight. They accumulate, sometimes over years.

IMAGE COURTESY: AI IMAGE/FOR REPRESENTATIONAL ONLY

When stress follows them home

The uniform may come off at the end of a shift. The stress does not necessarily do the same. Families, in fact, can become the first observers of a policeman's deteriorating wellbeing.

The wife of a police officer, requesting anonymity, says these changes can be accompanied by poor sleep, waking up tired or an inability to mentally switch off from work.

Then there are the physical clues: headaches, changes in weight, acidity, rising blood pressure, unusual breathlessness, palpitations and constant fatigue. Sometimes, the family notices what the officer himself has stopped noticing.

"If an officer is regularly coming home exhausted, skipping meals, sleeping poorly or becoming increasingly short-tempered, it's worth having a conversation," she says.

Nadagouda adds that burnout is not simply being tired because of the job. If such changes persist for weeks or months,

he says, they warrant attention and, when needed, professional help.

That matters because the consequences of an unhealthy work life do not necessarily stop at the station gate. Stress can spill into family life, while poor sleep and physical exhaustion can feed back into the next day's work. It is a cycle. And cycles are notoriously difficult to break without intervention.

The stress you don't even notice

Ask a traffic policeman about stress and you might expect a list of obvious triggers - traffic jams, noise, pollution, impatient motorists and emergencies.

But sometimes the body knows before the mind does. A traffic policeman who uses a smartwatch says his device has a relaxation alert that keeps beeping while he is at work, even when he does not consciously feel stressed.

"Stress may be happening somewhere below the surface. An ambulance stuck in traffic, for instance, can instantly raise

the pressure. So, can motorists ignoring instructions or bypassing directions," he says, on the condition of anonymity.

Fitness is only one piece of the puzzle

There is an obvious temptation when discussing police wellbeing to reduce the conversation to fitness. Policemen need to be physically fit, after all. But fitness alone cannot carry the entire burden.

Divya Mohindroo, counselling psychologist and founder of Embrace Imperfections, says sleep, nutrition, physical activity and mental-health support all have roles to play in occupational wellbeing.

"Irregular duties can disrupt the body's natural rhythms, affecting emotional wellbeing and attentiveness. Nutrition and physical activity matter for maintaining energy, while accessible mental-health support can be important for occupational functioning," she says.

And there is another dimension, family life. The negative effects of the job can flow into the home, making psychological sup-

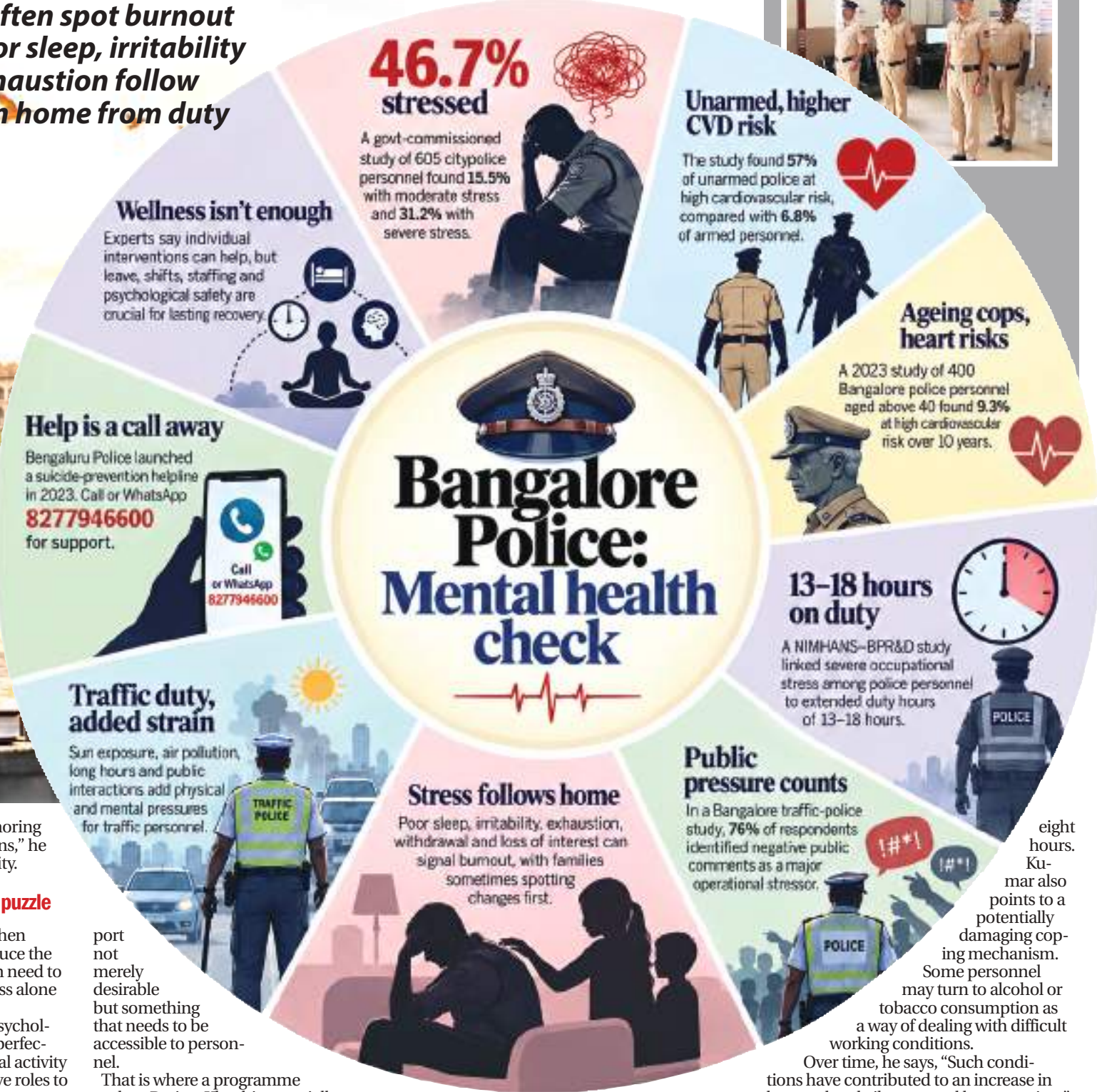
port not merely desirable but something that needs to be accessible to personnel.

That is where a programme such as Project Khushi potentially moves beyond a conventional fitness campaign. Its first batch is set to undergo a three-month physical and digital health and wellness programme, with health assessments, blood tests, BMI, waist-to-hip ratio, weight-management assessments and wellness surveys used to track progress.

The idea is to measure the journey rather than simply issue instructions.

HAPPINESS, NOW ON DUTY

Families often spot burnout first, as poor sleep, irritability and exhaustion follow policemen home from duty



No overnight miracle required

There is no magic switch for a healthier lifestyle. Nor can policemen simply be handed a checklist and told to fix everything by Monday.

Nadagouda says being told to sleep eight hours every day or exercise every morning may sound sensible. "But it may also be impossible when duties and emergencies are unpredictable," he says.

The better approach, he says, is to focus on realistic and sustainable changes rather than perfection.

That could mean being more physically active, making healthier food choices when possible, drinking enough water and getting quality sleep whenever the duty schedule permits.

"Regular health checks are another important piece. Monitoring blood pressure, blood sugar, cholesterol, weight and other basic health indicators can identify problems early; sometimes before symptoms appear," he adds.

And that is perhaps where Project Khushi's approach becomes particularly relevant. Its programme combines health assessments with a 90-day journey, ending in a comprehensive assessment and report documenting participants' progress from Day 1 to Day 90.

The numbers from its 2025 pilot offer an early glimpse of what structured intervention can achieve: 61 per cent of participants recorded lower blood sugar levels, 70 per cent corrected Vitamin B12 deficiency and 59 per cent lost between 0.5 kg and 6.1 kg in weight.

Participants also reported improvements in stress management, sleep, digestion, physical activity and overall energy levels. The challenge now is turning those improvements into habits that survive beyond the programme.

Khushi cannot stop at the individual

There is, however, a larger catch. Individual wellness can only go so far if the conditions producing stress remain unchanged.

Mohindroo puts it bluntly. "Wellness initiatives cannot by themselves compensate for unhealthy working conditions. Deep-breathing exercises, mindfulness and stress-management techniques can be taught, but if the underlying conditions do not improve, change at the broader level will remain limited," she says.

That distinction matters. Project Khushi can tell a policeman to take better care of himself. But it cannot, by itself, make an unpredictable duty schedule predictable. It can encourage healthier choices. It cannot erase the pressures that make those choices difficult.

So perhaps the real test of Khushi is not what happens during its 90 days. It is what happens afterwards.