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# Security organisations in stress study

"Security forces, in general, need to look towards being more agile in internal communication. The attitude to share ideas must be imbued and the ability to do so must be trained."

Mr Reuben Ng, University Scholars Programme and Psychology major

Global terrorism, geopolitical conflicts, cultural differences ... Add to these, stress from the domestic front such as problems arising from immigration and economic uncertainty. Security forces face such stress every day. But does more stress lead to better or poorer performance of such organisations? University Scholars Programme student Reuben Ng who is also a 4th-year Psychology major, embarked on a research project to find out the interaction of three variables - organisation stress, resilience and success - with particular focus on the Singapore Police Force (SPF). The research won Reuben the 2005-06 Seisoh Sukemune/Bruce Bain Early Career Research Award by the International Council of Psychologists. This is the first time the award went to an undergraduate. All recipients so far, have been academics or postgraduate students.



THE FORCE BEHIND: Mr Reuben Ng (above) won him the 2005-06 Seisoh Sukemune/Bruce Bain Early Career Research Award for his research on the impact of stress on security forces.

"Most studies have focused on investigating stress at the individual level, which at most, allows for interventions at the individual level. In order to recommend mediation

measures that will benefit the entire organisation, stress must be studied at the organisational level," said Reuben.

"It seems that certain amount of organisational stress is healthy for success. My research does not address the optimal amount of stress for success but it paves the way for more studies in this area," he said.

### **Communication and Commitment**

Researchers elsewhere have found five factors which are characteristic of a resilient organisation. Out of these five factors, two are relevant for success in the SPF. These are communication and openness; as well as management commitment. "My research does not in any way suggest that the SPF is lacking in these areas. But it does mean that if the SPF wants to build up its organisational resilience for greater success, it can consider focusing on building these two areas," said Reuben.

"Security forces, in general, need to look towards being more agile in internal communication," said Reuben. He calls this "communication agility". There should be an environment of openness within the organisation. "The attitude to share ideas must be imbued and the ability to do so must be trained," said Reuben.

According to his research, strong commitment from the management has a "wave" effect (as opposed to just a ripple) on the entire organisation. "It engulfs the employees from all levels and motivates them to display organisational citizenship behaviour. Employees will then take ownership of the organisation and willingly go many extra miles to ensure the organisation's success," he said.

Training is the best way to instill strong commitment. "The Police Academy has an excellent training programme. They can also consider programmes or fundamental training philosophies that emphasise communication attitude. Commitment is equally crucial and training can also focus on instilling a sense of belonging and shared values," said Reuben.

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