MENTAL HEALTH OF LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS: CURRENT STRATEGIES AND ISSUES IN PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION

Presentation by: Sarah Henderson, B.A., Bryan Steinkopf, M.S., Casey Straud, M.S., Nichole Vincent, M.S., Alexandra Crouch, M.S., Karen Guszkowski, B.A., & Vincent Van Hasselt, Ph.D.
Contributing Authors: Vera A. Klinoff M.S., and Kori A. Hakala Psy. D.
Current Statistics on Police Officer Suicide
Presented by: Karen Guszkowski, B.A.

Contributing Authors: Sarah Henderson, B.A., Bryan Steinkopf, M.S., Vera Klinoff, M.S., & Vincent Van Hasselt, Ph.D.
GOALS

- Risk Factors for LEO Suicide
  - Substance Abuse
  - Marital Discord
  - Health Concerns
  - Anxiety
  - PTSD
  - Depression
  - Suicide
➢ Alcohol Abuse: 7.3% in protective service occupations
  ➢ Almost 25% of LEOs are alcohol dependent

Larson, Eyerman, Foster, & Gfroerer, 2007; FBI LE Bulletin, 2004, 73(10)
Drug Abuse:

- “on the rise” in law enforcement agencies
- Linked with increase suicidal ideation
Marital Discord

- Divorce
  - About 50% of all marriages end in divorce
  - LEO Divorce ~75%.
Domestic Violence

- 2003: Domestic Violence was 2-4 times more likely to occur in a police family.

- 40% of officers in studies said they used violence against a domestic partner within the last year.
Increased risk of:
- Coronary artery disease
- Type II Diabetes
- Stroke
- Hodgkin’s Lymphoma
- Cancer
- Brain Cancer

Kirschman, Kamena, & Fay, 2014 *Counseling Cops*.; Gu et al. 2011
Anxiety

- Fear = response to an imminent threat
- Anxiety = response to *anticipation* of future threat
  - Hypervigilance has negative affects on personal life
Things to look out for:

- Fatigue
- Difficulty thinking/following conversations
- Suddenly snapping/ “on-edge”
- Derealization/Depersonalization
- Intrusive thoughts

DSM 5 (2014)
From a single call or a culmination of events over time

- Exposure: Pain, death, human and animal cruelty

- Officers are murdered in every year because they are part of law enforcement.
POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

- Things to look out for:
  - Flashbacks
  - Heightened startle response
  - Avoidance behaviors
  - Hypervigilance
  - Self-destructive behavior

U.S. Dept. of Veteran Affairs: National Center for PTSD (2014); (www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/PTSD-overview/dsm5_criteria_ptsd.asp)
Depression

- Depressive symptoms 2x that of the general population
- “Emotionally Infallible”

Kirschman, Kamena, & Fay, 2014; Police Suicide Study, (2012)
ACCESS TO WEAPONS

➢ By the nature of the job, they have greater access to lethal means of suicide

➢ E.g. Service weapon, multiple firearms at home
125-150 Police suicides every year

Badge of Life (2013); American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (2015)
SUICIDE: LET’S TALK FIGURES

- Law Enforcement Suicides
  - From 2008-2011
  - 577 die by suicide
  - 224 murdered on the job

Kirschman, Kamena, & Fay, 2014; Counseling Cops
Rates of Law Enforcement Suicides

- 16.4-18.1/100,000

Police Chief Magazine (2015); Aamodt and Stalnaker, 2006
SUICIDE: PROTECTIVE FACTORS

- Full-time employment
- Health insurance
- Social support
- Psychological screening

Police Chief Magazine (2015); Aamodt and Stalnaker, 2006
WHY DO OFFICERS TAKE THEIR OWN LIVES?

- **Perceived Failure**
  - “If I just did ____ differently, they’d be alive.”
  - Belief that they can control all situations

- **Betrayal**
  - Administrative betrayal
  - Betrayal of one’s training

Kirschman, Kamena, and Fay, 2014
Why do officers take their own lives?

- Losing Face
  - Impending job loss
  - “All I know is how to be a police officer”

- Retirement
  - Identity issues
  - “You are either on top of the cliff with the police team or you are at the bottom of the cliff by yourself. There are no soft landings.”

Kirschman, Kamena, and Fay, 2014
Conclusion

- LEO suicide rates are too high!
- The occupation exposes LEOs to multiple risk factors
- What’s next:
  - LEO culture risk and protective factors
Police Culture Risk and Resiliency
Presented by: Sarah Henderson, B.A.
Contributing Authors: Bryan Steinkopf, B.S., & Vincent Van Hasselt, Ph.D.
Law Enforcement culture can be a protective or risk factor for suicide among officers.

What measures can be taken by mental health professionals to deal with this problem.
Blue Bloods

- Unique Subculture
- Tradition
- Strong Values

Us. Vs. Them Mentality

“If you are not sworn you are not born”

Camaraderie

POLICE FAMILY

- Generations of Law Enforcement Officers
- Bond/ Family

MACHO CULTURE

- Machismo Ideals
- Strength
- Toughness
- Rigidity and Authority
- Heterosexual View

FAMILY STRESS

- Stress on family members
  - Shift work
  - Danger
  - Stigma of Law Enforcement

White and Honig, 1994; Blumestein, Fidell, & Jones, 2011
- Spouse
  - Sleep Alone (shift work)
  - Single Parent
  - One Income

- Spouse
  - Domestic Violence
  - Divorce
  - Infidelity

➢ Children

➢ Limited time with parent

➢ See parent stressed ➔ Effects Children

Arredondo, Shumway, Kimball, Dersch., & Bryan, 2002
COPING STRATEGIES

- Emotional Suppression
- Hardened Emotionally
- Become Routine
- Dark Humor/ Sarcasm

Horan, Bochantin, & Booth-Butterfield, 2012
ALCOHOL USE AND ABUSE

- “They drink a lot, and they drink together”
  - John Violanti

- Peer Pressure
- Choir Practice

➢ High Levels of Stress
➢ Alcohol Use = Coping Mechanism
➢ Feel Invulnerable
- Stress just comes with the job....
- Supposed to be able to handle the stressors of the job
- Physical and Mental Toughness

➢ If an officer is having trouble coping with the stress of the job, it could pose as a harm for themselves and fellow officers

➢ Take chances on the job

➢ Line of Duty Death ➔ Suicide
MENTAL HEALTH

- Mental Health within Police Culture
  - Cultural Resistance
  - Fear of Repercussions
  - Lack of Resources
  - Identify and Respond to Mental Illness
REPERCUSSIONS

- Not fit for duty
- Stigmatized/ostracized by fellow officers
- Passed for promotions
- Forced Retirement
- Not just a job/career it is a lifestyle that is lost

➢ Will not happen over night

➢ Code of Silence

➢ Recognize signs of Behavioral Health Problems
Resources

- Employee Assistance Programs (EAP’s)
  - In-House
- Chaplaincy Programs
- Outside Mental Health Services
Conclusion

- Change will not happen over night

- Decrease Stigma: Acceptance that stress is inherent to the job and can overwhelm even the most resilient

- Access to Appropriate Resources

- What’s next:
  - Unique Stressors for Law Enforcement
Unique Stressors for Law Enforcement Officers

Presented by: Alexander Crouch, M.S.

Contributing Authors: Sarah Henderson, B.A., Bryan Steinkopf, M.S., & Vincent Van Hasselt, Ph.D.
Goal of this presentation

- Point out stressors
- Provide interventions
- Increase Awareness
Top three most stressful occupations

26% of medical retirement from policing is due to psychological ill health
POLICE STRESS

- Officers live 8-11 years shorter than average citizen
- Increased suicide risk

Morash et al., 2006
WORK ENVIRONMENT

- Possible danger
- Death of a partner
- Having to take a life
- Violent arrests
- Gruesome crime scenes

He, Zhao, & Archbold, 2002
WORK ENVIRONMENT

- Shift work
- Changing shifts
- Critical incidents

He, Zhao, & Archbold, 2002
SUPPORT

- Support and Trust of Co-workers
- Working alone
- Supervisors

Territo, and Vetter, 1981
Bureaucracy

- Large departments vs. small

- Staff shortages

- Managerial structure

- Lack of resources

(Morash, Haarr, & Kwak, 2006)
ORGANIZATIONAL

- Community conditions
- Views of the Criminal Justice System

Morash, Haarr, & Kwak, 2006
➢ Predictor of burnout

➢ Varies based on gender

➢ High divorce rate
Life Outside Territory, and Vetter, 1981

- Financial
- Health concerns
- Daily stressors
Job Satisfaction

- Perceived control

- Differs based on demographics
  - Age
  - Rank
  - Gender
  - Ethnicity

Territo, and Vetter, 1981
“The battle against crime is won-not in the court of law- but in the court of public opinion.”

- Negative images of officers depicted in the media
- Varying daily interactions
WORK OBLIGATIONS

- Membership in a specialized unit
  - e.g. S.W.A.T., Hostage Negotiations
  - On call 24 hours
- Off duty details
DEALING WITH STRESS

- Similarities across programs for dealing with Stress
  - efficient pre-employment screening
  - increased practical stress training for police personnel
  - training programs for spouses so they can better understand potential problems

Territo, and Vetter, 1981
1967- President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice stated, ‘psychological tests . . . to determine emotional stability should be conducted in all departments’

- Developed based on state guidelines and law
- Inconsistent across departments

Patterson, Chung, and Swan, 2014
Reducing Stress

- Employee assistance programs
- Change the employee’s response to stress
  - Stress management techniques
  - Recognize signs of stress
  - Improve coping skills
➢ Reduce environmental stressors

➢ Costly

➢ Require organizational change

➢ Example: increasing individual participation in decision making
Gain family and social support

- Can attend support groups
- Encourage to share experiences with others
Conclusion

- Stress takes a toll
  - Hypervigilance
  - Endorphins
    - Reduce sleep
  - Addicted to the adrenaline

- What’s next:
  - The mental health and physical toll from stressors
Mental and Physical Toll from Stressors

Presented by: Nichole Vincent, M.S.

Contributing Authors: Sarah Henderson, B.A., Bryan Steinkopf, M.S., & Vincent Van Hasselt, Ph.D.
MENTAL & PHYSICAL TOLL FROM STRESSORS GOALS:

- Common signs of behavioral issues as a result of stressors in police work
- Techniques on how law enforcement officers can reduce adverse health outcomes
- Current best when working with police personnel
Many of the dangers and psychological stresses LEOs face are NOT exclusive to what they encounter on the streets.

Higher risk than the general population for long-term physical and mental health effects.
MENTAL & PHYSICAL HEALTH DANGERS:

- Mental Health Dangers:
  - Suicide
  - Depression
  - Anxiety
  - PTSD

- Physical Health Dangers:
  - Obesity
  - Cardiovascular disease
  - Sleep disturbance
  - Cancer
Impact:

- Family
- Fellow LEOs
- Agency
Depression

- High absenteeism
- Concentration problems/forgetfulness
– Depression

- Friction with peers
- Decreased job efficiency

Nielsen, 2002
Depression

- Anger outbursts
- Excessive force
- Violence at home
#1 occupation with highest rates of obesity

Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) found that 80% percent, of law enforcement workers in the U.S. are overweight.
Nearly 50% will die from heart disease ≤ 5 years of retirement

25 times more likely than the general population to die from heart disease

Risk of having a heart attack doubles with each decade of law enforcement service

Violanti et al. 2012; Zimmerman, 2012
Midnight shift 72% more risk for injury than dayshift, and 66% more likely than those on afternoon shift

Insufficient sleep leads to:
- Decreased alertness
- Decreased concentration
- Increases risk for occupational injury
Officer are at an increased risk of developing:
- Hodgkin’s and Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma,
- Prostate cancer
- Colon
- Stomach
- Pancreas
- Liver
- Brain cancer

Wirth et al., 2013; Violanti et al., 2012
Possible Contributions:
- Irregular hours
- Alcohol use
- Obesity
- Reduced physical activity
- Exposure to:
  - Meth labs
  - Gun cleaning solvents
  - Air pollution

Boni, 2005; Wirth et al., 2013; Violanti et al., 2012
“FIT FOR DUTY?”

- Reduction in the health and fitness of LEOs
  - This lack of fitness:
    - On-duty injuries
    - Illnesses
    - Increasing exposure to liability
“FIT FOR DUTY?”

- Regular physical activity helps:
  - Prevent coronary heart disease
  - Weight control
  - Reduced risk for diabetes
GAP IN THE RESEARCH?

- Effective Coping Mechanisms

Schwarzer, Bowler, & Cone, 2014
WHAT CAN BE HELPFUL

- 4 main types of coping resources:
  - Cognitive
  - Social
  - Spiritual/Religious
  - Physical
COPING: COGNITIVE & SOCIAL RESOURCES

- Humor
  - Experience less stress/conflicts
  - Helps regain feeling of control

- Social Support
  - Talk through emotions

Coping: Physical & Spiritual Resources

- In house – wellness program
  - Specific to improve LEOs health habits

- Religion/spirituality assists LEOs in having lower levels of stress
  - Buffers the toxic nature of police work

Anshel and Kang, 2008; Charles, Trabis, & Smith, 2015
Good mental health and good physical health will enhance officer safety while serving the community.

What’s next:
  - The Impact of Critical Incidents
Impact of Critical Incidents
Presented by: Casey Straud, M.S.

Contributing Authors: Sarah Henderson, B.A., Bryan Steinkopf, B.S., & Vincent Van Hasselt, Ph.D
GOALS

- Common types of critical incidents
- What is the impact of exposure to a critical incident?
- Interventions and protective factors
The duties and expectations of a police officer can be highly stressful and include exposure to a number of difficult situations.

“The average American citizen does not witness in their lifetime what many police officers witness in one month.” – Violanti (1996)
For a moment consider how one, brief moment can have a long-term impact on an individual’s entire life.
What is a critical incident exactly?

Any event that has a stressful impact sufficient enough to overwhelm the usually effective coping skills of an individual.
How does it differ from a traumatic event?
Prevalence rates:

- 87% of all emergency service workers at least once in their careers.
Prevalence rates:
- Research indicates that 7.6% of the participants exposed to a critical incident go on to develop full PTSD
- Another 6.8% developed subthreshold partial PTSD following a critical incident

Martin et al., 2009
Common types of critical incidents:

- Officer involved shootings
- Response to a motor vehicle accidents
- Officer assaulted
- Colleague or partner death
Common critical incidents:

- Response to a terrorist attacks or natural disaster
- Near shooting situation
- Death of a civilian or child
A majority of officers exposed to a critical incident do not go onto develop PTSD or even demonstrated subthreshold symptoms.

So who is at risk?
Discrepancies among research findings regarding risk factors:

- Pretraumatic life experience
- Post traumatic response
- Peritraumatic response
Research on pretraumatic life experience is mixed:

- Novelty of an event is sometimes a risk factor
- Chronic exposure is sometimes a risk factor

Martin et al., 2009; Perrin et al., 2007
- The posttraumatic response risk factors
  - Engagement in avoidant coping strategies
  - Lack of Support

Haisch and Meyers, 2004
Peritraumatic response is consistent in the literature:

- The way an individual responds to the trauma in the moment, the peritraumatic response, is very predictive of development of PTSD.
Protective factors for developing PTSD symptoms

- One study looked at academy cadets prior to becoming a police officer.
Protective Factors:

- Strong social support from colleagues
- High self esteem

Yuan et al., 2011
Protective Factors:

- Prior training and intervention on critical incidents
- Strong belief in a benevolent world
What interventions are available?

- Attend a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing within 72 hours of the incident
- What should officers do if symptoms continue?
Police officers are a relatively under studied trauma population with a great need for further analysis.

What's next:
- Behavioral Health Training
Goals of the presentation

Why this intervention?

What was covered?

How it was presented?

Future directions
Options for prevention and intervention

- Organization reconstruction
- Removal of stressors
- Culture shift
- Improve the training of mental health care providers for law enforcement
- Audit existing psychological care providers
- Provide family training
- Peer behavioral health training
Why A Preventative Approach

- Cost-efficient
- Easily generalized
Comorbidity of stress and severe mental illness in police and law enforcement.

Sheehan and Van Hasselt, 2003
PEERS AND CULTURE

- Police officers are often closer with one another than they are with their own spouses.

- Peer training
PEER RESPONSIBILITY

- Officer safety
- Psychological safety
Increase knowledge and awareness of stress and risk factors for psychiatric casualties that could occur
Topics

- Stress
- Depression
- Suicide
- Posttraumatic Stress Disorder
- Self-medication – Alcohol, performance enhancing drugs
- Sleep
- Community resources
FOR EACH TOPIC

- General review
- Myths
- Warning signs
- Negative outcomes
- Possible interventions
- Police terminology
- Presenter passion
- Media/Videos
- Humor
- Interaction
Presenters

- Passionate
- Knowledge of police culture
- Thankful for what they do
- Stand in contrast of their negative stereotypes of mental health personnel
- Informal research
- Non-defensive
- Flexible
- Use their coping mechanisms to relate
- Lightens the mood
- Willingness to be irreverent
Media

- Pop-culture
- TV Shows
- Memes
True or False?

Drinking beer regularly gives you a beer belly.

FALSE
HISTORY OF OUR APPROACH

- Fire Fighters
- Police Dispatchers
- Positive Feedback
FEEDBACK FROM COPS

- Florida Association of Hostage Negotiators Conference, 2014
- Positive Feedback
POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES

- Reduced occurrence of psychiatric casualties
- Reduced stigma towards mental health field
- Increase possibility of seeking out services
- Culture shift
- No Impact
CULTURE SHIFT

- Make it easier to discuss between one another
- Remove the stigma
Specific presentations for each topic

Academy

Annual

Check-up
QUESTIONS?