

SUICIDE BY COP

By

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SUICIDE BY COP

PRESENTATION CONTENT:

- *Suicide By Cop (Defined)*
- *Statistics*
- *Use of Force (Historical)*
- *Law Enforcement (Questions to Ask)*
- *Subject Indicators and Risk Factors*
- *Suicide (Traditional Methods)*
- *First Responder's Responsibility*
- *Profile of Suspect*
- *How Officers React and Symptoms*
- *Intervention*
- *Tables 1 – Calls*
- *Table 2 – On-Scene*
- *Table 3 – Behavior of Suicidal Individual*
- *Table 4 – An Example Scenario*

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First Coined by:

M.E. Wolfgang (1958)

Originally Termed:

“Victim-Perceptuated Homicide”

Term Became popular

In the 1980's

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Defined:

“A term used by law enforcement and mental health professionals to refer to an individual who wishes to die and uses the police to effect that goal.”

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Another Definition:

"Provoked shooting by police as a mechanism for suicide"

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Accepted Definition:

“Involves an incident where-by a suicidal person intentionally engages himself/herself in a position with law enforcement and deliberately provokes an officer to use lethal force as a defense mechanism against the suicidal person.”

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Phenomenon:

- 1. Not New*
- 2. Only recently have researchers begun focusing on it in 1999 (Blenins, 1999).*

The Trend:

The literature review indicates a growth in this area of research.

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Recorded Suicides
(Estimated in U.S. Annually):

31,000

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Percentage of Police Shooting:

30 to 50% of all police-related shooting involves in “Suicide By Cop.”

Constable Rick Parent, Municipal Police Department, Delta, British Columbia, Canada

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What the Suspect Seeks:

To provoke the law enforcement officer to use violence to end the suspect's own life.

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Use of Deadly Force:
(As Seen By Suspect)

*Intensifies and escalates violent situation.
Consequences of the interaction process.*

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Law Enforcement: (QUESTIONS TO ASK)

- 1. What are the circumstances of “Suicide By Cop” events?*
- 2. What are the behaviors of a person who is seeking “Suicide By Cop?”*
- 3. What type of training is needed by law enforcement personnel to better enable them to handle “Suicide By Cop” situations?*

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Dynamics of:

Officer confronts an individual, who has a “Death Wish” and intends to force the police into a situation where the only alternative is for them to kill suspect.”

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“Deadly Force”: (Historical Significance)

The 14th Amendment to the Constitution (Adopted in 1868) specified the “Due Process Law.”

Specifically: “Life, Liberty and Property.

”Title 42, US Code, Section 1983:

Enforced the provision of the 14th Amendment in the Federal Courts.

Specifically: Establishment of the Federal Constitutional Standard governing the “Use of Deadly Force” by Police.

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“Deadly Force”: (Historical Significance)

Not until well into the 20th Century – State police powers would not experience the impact of the 14th Amendment.

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State Law:

Acted and defined the protocol for defining the authoritative guidelines for police when using “Deadly Force.”

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Fleeing Felon Rule:

Adopted by most states and was used as a punishable means of death for felons who had committed serious crimes.

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The Use of “Deadly Force”

(Supreme Court Ruling – Crawford v. Edmonson):

“An officer may use deadly force to immediately defend him or herself and others nearby; however, the courts will only justify the officer’s action if evidence of imminent danger is present.”

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Indicators: (SUBJECT)

- 1. Sets a deadline of his or her own death.*
- 2. Talks about deceased person(s) – As if they were still alive with intent to join them soon.*
- 3. Arranges for the disposition of personal property.*
- 4. Uses a negotiating stance to engage in face-to-face confrontation with police.*

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Indicators: (SUBJECT) – Cont'd

- 5. States an intention to die.*
- 6. Uses biblical references to the Bible (In particular reference to the “Book of Revelation”).*
- 7. Possesses weapon.*

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Police Shooting (Key Factors):

- 1. Commission of a serious criminal offense (i.e., Murder, Attempted Murder, Robbery, Aggravated Assault, etc.).*
- 2. Alcohol/Drugs.*
- 3. Mental Disorder/Irrational Behavior.*
- 4. Mistaken facts (General)*
- 5. Victim-Precipitated Homicide.*

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Suspect (WARNING SIGNS):

- 1. Demands that police kill them.*
- 2. Refusal to negotiate (For a Way Out).*
- 3. Recently experienced two or three traumatic events in their life.*
- 4. No wish list/demands.*

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Risk Factors:

- 1. Mental illness.*
- 2. Suicidal tendencies.*
- 3. Substance abuse (Alcohol/Drugs)*
- 4. Social isolation*
- 5. Unemployment.*
- 6. Firearm availability.*
- 7. Experienced recent major stressful event.*
- 8. At least one prior attempt (Suicide).*
- 9. Written note.*

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Deciding Factors:

- 1. 1987 – 1997 (437 Officer-Involved Shootings in Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department).*
- 2. 11% Confronted law enforcement with weapons.*
- 3. Provoking officers to use lethal force.*

DILEMMA:

“Officers have limited time to provide alternative forms of interventions in order to prevent the “Use-Of-Force.”

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Traditional Methods (SUICIDES):

- 1. Jumping from high structures.*
- 2. Crashing a speeding vehicle into a stationary object.*
- 3. Self-Inflicted wound.*
- 4. Hanging.*
- 5. Gunshot.*
- 6. Pills/Overdose.*

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Dependent Upon:

- 1. A decision by an individual to end their life.*
- 2. More acceptable means of ending one owns life.*

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“...not being in total control of the suicidal act makes it more acceptable for some individuals to seek an end to their life.”

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“Whatever the motive, the suspect will set out to precipitate a shooting by preying on an officer’s defense responsibilities to self and others.”

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First Responder's Responsibility (Law Enforcement Officer):

- 1. The first 15 to 45 minutes (Most Dangerous).*
- 2. A subjects level of anxiety can quickly be raised (Common error of responding officer).*
- 3. Ensure officer safety.*
- 4. Initial contact with subject should be a clam, distract and gain information).*
- 5. Avoid soliciting demands.*
- 6. Listen for cues (Ref: Emotional State)*

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First Responder's Responsibility (Law Enforcement Officer):

- 7. Avoid bargaining/Making concessions.*
- 8. Reassure (i.e., Police will not storm in)*
- 9. Do not offer subject anything.*
- 10. Avoid giving orders to subject.*
- 11. Minimize seriousness to subject's crime.*
- 12. Do not refers to person(s) (if applicable) as
"Hostages."*

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First Responder's Responsibility (Law Enforcement Officer):

- 13. Avoid tricks (Strive for Honesty).*
- 14. Never say "No" to a demand (This does not mean saying "Yes.").*
- 15. Do not make suggestions.*
- 16. Do not ask for outsiders/family to talk to subject.*
- 17. Never exchange yourself for a hostage.*

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First Responder's Responsibility (Law Enforcement Officer):

- 18. If you suspect that the subject is suicidal (Remain Cautious).*
- 19. Do not expose yourself (Making yourself vulnerable) while talking to subject.*

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Profile of Suspect:

96% Male.

58% Asked to be killed by officer.

58% Have a history of mental disorders.

50% Intoxicated at time.

42% History of Domestic Violence.

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“The bullets may bring peace to the person bent on dying, but the shooting victimizes the COP who has been manipulated into the role of executioner.”

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“The police are a good object for suicide consideration by a suspect. The police symbolically represent the social conscience, a surrogate parent. Sometimes suicidal suspects fell guilty about something real or imagines, they seek punishment.”

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“Suicide By Cop”

Is a Psychological Assault on an Officer

Dr. Harvey Schlossberg, NYPD – Police Psychologist - 1987

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SUICIDE NOTE (Left By Shot Suspect)

*“Officer, I’m sorry to get you involved.
I just needed to die. Please let my
family know I had to do this. This
was all my doing. You had no way
to knowing.”*

Written By: 19-year-old Moshe “Moe” Purgament

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“The police represent the “Good” of society and the suicidal person may use them as a means to “cleanse” themselves from wrongdoing.”

Constable Rick Parent, Municipal Police Department, Delta, British Columbia, Canada

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How Officers React:

- 1. Intense anger.*
- 2. Guilt.*
- 3. Sense of Failure.*
- 4. Feel Used.*
- 5. Should have recognized intent of offender.*
- 6. A need to comfort/ apologize to family.*
- 7. Diminished self-confidence.*

*Dr. Audrey Honig, Chief Psychologist, Los Angeles Sherriff Department
Dr. Jocelyn Roland, Assistant Director of Los Angeles Sherriff Department – EAP Services*

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How Officers React:

- 8. Fear of being portrayed as “Trigger Happy” (By Media).*
- 8. IA Investigations.*
- 9. Second guessing of self*

Dr. Audrey Honig, Chief Psychologist, Los Angeles Sherriff Department
Dr. Jocelyn Roland, Assistant Director of Los Angeles Sherriff Department – EAP Services

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Symptoms Experienced By Officer:

- 1. Resentment.*
- 2. Disbelief.*
- 3. Preoccupation with incident.*
- 4. Nightmares.*
- 5. Anxiety.*
- 6. Hypervigilance.*
- 7. Social avoidance.*

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Symptoms Experienced By Officer:

- 8. Changes in eating/sleeping patterns*
- 9. Hypersensitivity.*
- 10. Depression.*
- 11. Ambivalence.*
- 12. Perceived loss of control.*
- 13. Memory difficulties.*
- 14. Alcohol/Drug usage.*

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“The anger and guilt fosters a sense of failure when the officer believes that he/she could have done more to prevent the situation from escalating and being “set-up” as “Executioner.”

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Officers involved Should Receive
(INTERVENTION):

- 1. Critical Incident Debriefing (CID).*
- 2. Discuss their feelings (Controlled, Non-Judgmental and Supportive Setting).*

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Intervention Results In:

- 1. Reduce intensity/Duration of an acute reaction.*
- 2. Prevent the occurrence of long-term traumatic syndromes.*
- 3. Support from Family/Friends.*
- 4. Peer support.*
- 5. Pre/Post Stress Education to CID.*

Dr. John H. Chamberlin, Los Angeles Sherriff Department

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“Approximately 15% of officers who were directly involved in a fatal shooting incident involving a “Suicide By Cop,” left the law enforcement profession.”

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1

Called 9-1-1

Yes
72.7 %

No
27.3 %

2

Nature of
9-1-1 Calls

Family Disturbance
37.5 %

Man Firing Gun
25.0%

Rescue Request
12.5%

**General Request for
Police**
25%

3

Nature of Non
9-1-1 Call

**Officer Confronted for
Assistance/Gun Pulled**
33.3%

**Officer Initiated traffic
Stop**
33.3%

**Officer
Informed/Person with
Gun Threatening
Others**
33.3%

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Arrival Time and Use of Force

- 0-2 Min — 36.4%
- 3-5 Min -9.1%
- 6-12 Min - 18.2%
- 3 Hours -9.1%
- Unk -27.3%

Standoff Situation

Yes — 27.3%
No — 81.8%

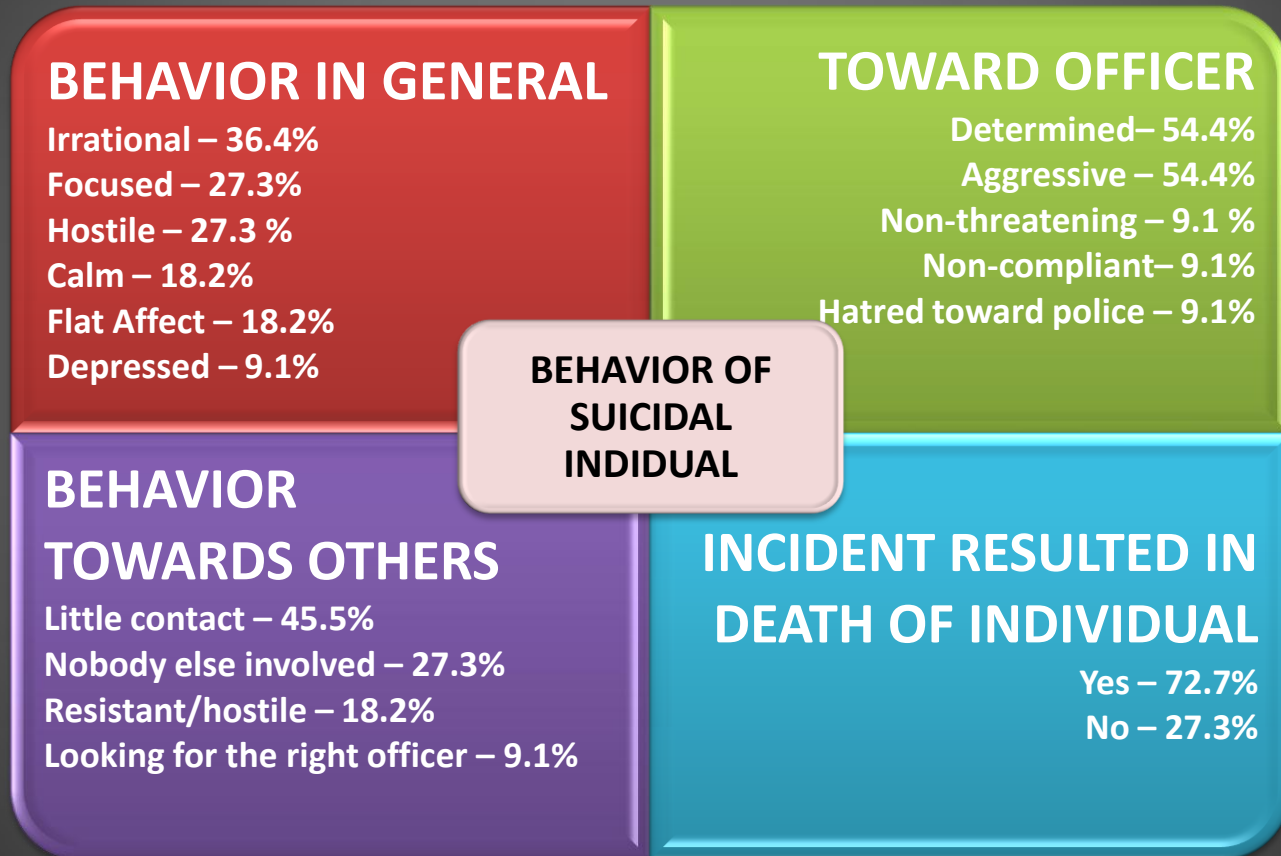
Perimeter Established

Yes — 27.3%
No — 81.8%

Evidence of Suicidal Ideation

Suicide Note 27.3%
Verbal — 18.2
Inform By Others 27.3%
None — 27.3

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An Example Scenario

“While driving through the city park at midnight in your police cruiser, you and your partner hear yelling coming from the wooded area. You both get out to investigate and about 40 feet away you see a female on the ground with a male astride her. They are struggling. Although it is rather dark, he has what appears to be a hunting knife in his hand. You would:

- 1. Not draw your weapon.***
- 2. Draw your weapon.***
- 3. draw and aim your weapon at suspect.***
- 4. You shoot the suspect.***

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An Example Scenario

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ANALYSIS OF DATA:

1. Not draw your weapon.
2. Draw your weapon – **95%**
3. draw and aim your weapon at suspect – **90%**
4. You shoot the suspect – **33%**

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THANK YOU

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