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Suicide and Law Enforcement: (Impact on Society and the Family)

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The Police Officer Tends to (At Home):

- 1. Shut Down Emotions Towards the Family.***
- 2. Detachment.***
- 3. Seeking Outside Relationships.***
- 4. Marital Troubles.***



Factors Associated with Skills in Policing:

- 1. Incidents outside the range of normal occurrences
(Adversely affects Officers).***

- 2. Critical Incidents:***
 - a) Shootings***
 - b) Witnessing death/mutilation***
 - c) Attending to disasters***
 - d) Dealing with abused/maltreated children***



Critical Incidents (Often Associated) :

- 1. Prolonged reaction classification to posttraumatic stress disorders (PTSD).***
- 2. Persistent re-experiencing of critical incident events.***
- 3. Avoidance of associated stimuli that remind Officer's of events.***



Top 10 Stresses of Policing :

- 1. Killing someone in the line of duty***
- 2. Fellow Officers killed***
- 3. Physical attack***
- 4. Battered child***
- 5. High speed chases***
- 6. Shift work***
- 7. Use of force***
- 8. Inadequate departmental support***
- 9. Incompatible partner***
- 10. Accident in patrol car***



Factors Affecting Critical Incidents:

- 1. The more sudden and unexpected the occurrence, the more likely it will adversely affect the Officer.*
- 2. Incident may have a negative psychological impact when it results in serious threat to Officer.*
- 3. The impact of trauma on Police Officers may depend strongly on the degree of disruption of personal and social values.*



Officers Involved in a Critical Incident:

***26% Experienced some form of PTSD , one month later
(Especially where death occurred).***



Other Reported Symptoms of PTSD by Officers after exposure to a Critical Incident:

- 1. Sleep disturbance*
- 2. Flashbacks*
- 3. Guilt feelings*
- 4. Wish that it didn't happen*
- 5. Depression*
- 6. Anger*
- 7. Lowered work interest*



Suicide Precursors:

- 1. Negative impact that trauma has on police image of being invulnerable to outside stressors.*
- 2. Training (From the day of the academy) emphasizes a "superhuman" emotional and survival ideation.*
- 3. Strong belief in indestructibility.*



Suicide Precursors (Results):

- 1. Officers learn to “shut-off” their feelings towards various situations at work.*
- 2. The ability to regain a sense of being uniquely protected from harm, diminishes if the officer becomes vulnerable to their feelings.*



Vulnerability to Traumatic Events Bring About:

- 1. Shame***
- 2. Fear***
- 3. A heightened sense of danger to oneself***
- 4. A general feeling that one's "armor" is shattered***



Fowlie & Avelin, 1985; Frye & Stockton, 1982, Foy, Sipprelle, Rueger & Carroll, 1984

Crime (Perception):

- 1. Officers routinely feel helpless and ineffective in dealing with crime.*



Officers in a State of Constriction (Perceived Two Alternatives):

- 1. Removal of intolerable conditions.*
- 2. Suicide.*



Maladaptive Police Coping Strategies:

- 1. Police Officers tend to use problem solving coping strategies less than non-police persons.***
- 2. Escape avoidance.***
- 3. Distancing.***



Escape Avoidance:

- 1. Avoidance of People.***
- 2. Use of alcohol or drugs.***



Distancing:

- 1. Emotional escape from situations.*
- 2. A psychological distancing from situations is involved.*
- 3. Leads to depersonalization.*



Police Environment (From the time of the Academy):

- 1. Use of distancing***
- 2. Self-control***
- 3. Accepting personal responsibility***
- 4. Escape-avoidance***



Perceived Appraisal Strategies of Police (What Gets Them in Trouble):

- 1. Unaware of peoples feelings/situation.***
- 2. Unaware of their own anxieties to situations exposed to.***
- 3. Judgment decisions made upon an inflexible/rigid plan-of-action.***



The Presence of Firearms:

- 1. Increases probability of suicide.***
- 2. Common method of suicide.***



CDC, 1985, Shaffer & Fisher, 1981

Police Firearms Represents:

- 1. Physical and psychological shield.*
- 2. It puts the Officer "one-up" on the rest of society.*



Violanti, Vena & Marshall, 1986

Use of Firearms in Suicides (Officers):

- 1. 95% of the time.*
- 2. 90% away from work place.*



Alcohol Dependency (Contributed To):

- 1. 25% of all suicides a year in the United States.***
- 2. It is a factor in suicide.***
- 3. Its use is precipitated by stress.***
- 4. It is a maladaptive response by officers (it's use).***
- 5. 25% of officers have a serious related problem to alcohol abuse.***



Alcohol Dependency (Can Lead To):

- 1. High absenteeism.***
- 2. Intoxication on duty.***
- 3. Complaints by supervisors.***
- 4. Complaints by citizens of misconduct on-duty.***
- 5. Traffic accidents.***
- 6. Decrease in work performance.***



Police Role and Suicide Risk An Officers Frame of Thinking:

- 1. Tend to assimilate a mode of dichotomized "decision-making."***
- 2. The situation is either "right or wrong."***
- 3. There is no discretionary middle ground.***



"Constrictive" Cognitive Style (Dealing with Problems):

- 1. An officer's inability to cognitively process alternatives other than "Right" or "Wrong" or "Black" or White."*



Suicide (Multidimensional Phenomenon)

- 1. Includes interactions with:***
 - a) Other individuals.***
 - b) Formal and informal police organization.***
 - c) Relationships within the police structure.***
 - d) Society at large.***



Re-Socialization Process (The Rookie)

- 1. From citizen to police officer.***
- 2. Acquisition of police role.***
- 3. Acquisition process strong at initial police training (Academy).***



What the Rookie is Taught:

- 1. A sense of "superhuman" emotional strength is instilled.*
- 2. They are unique (Different from the average citizen).*
- 3. Beyond harm (The "brotherhood" will protect you).*
- 4. Self-defensive tactics.*
- 5. Street survival.*
- 6. Firearm use.*



Police Work (Creates):

- 1. Learned perceptual set of thinking (Altering drastically how one interacts with people and the environment).*
- 2. Physiologically adaption to the excitement and danger.*
- 3. Becomes psychologically depressed in calm or normal periods.*
- 4. Becomes listless and detached from anything unrelated to police work.*



Police Work (Creates): Cont'd

- 5. Difficulties adjusting to role as a spouse or father, and or friend outside police environment.***
- 6. Exist in a "pseudo-paranoia" state-of-mind.***



Informal Police Culture (Exerts):

- 1. Pressure on officer to conform.***
- 2. Assume a different an distinct role from public.***
- 3. Prescribes a theme of solidarity among officers.***
- 4. Deals with rejection from the greater society.***



Police Subculture (Places Officers in Dilemma):

- 1. Strict conformity to loyalty to organization.***
- 2. Sacrificing individuality.***
- 3. Conformity to:***
 - a) Police culture.***
 - b) Organization.***
 - c) Individual roles.***



Police Role (Results):

- 1. Affect their (Officer) ability to deal with distress (Inside and outside of police work).*
 - 2. Acquired cynical notion of reality.*
 - 3. Reality is seen as being only "black" and "white."*
 - 4. View of oneself as "problem solver."*
 - 5. Constrictive cognitive representation to an "all-or-nothing thinking".*
- 1. Dichotomous type thinking.*



Interpersonal Relationships:

1. *When at risk, suicidal ideation is increased and includes:*
 - a) *Estrangement from family.*
 - b) *Death of significant others.*
 - c) *Divorce or separation.*
 - d) *Inter-spouse aggression.*



Police Peer Relationships (Demand):

- 1. Loyalty and cohesiveness to organization.***
- 2. The organization comes first to any outside relationship.***



Societal Relationship (How Affected):

1. Become isolated from:

- a) Family***
- b) Friends***
- c) General society***

2. Society (Defined)

- a) Anyone who is not a police officer –
is the enemy.***



Suicidal Potential (Increased By):

- 1. Organizational stressors:***
 - a) Authoritarian structure.***
 - b) Lack of participation in decisions.***
 - c) Lack of administrative support.***
 - d) Punishment-centered philosophy.***
- 2. Inherent stressors:***
 - a) Danger***
 - b) Shift work***
 - c) Public apathy***
 - d) Boredom***



Suicidal Potential (Increased By): Cont'd.

3. Inherent stressors:

- a) Sense of uselessness***
- b) Dealing with misery and death***
- c) Shootings***
- d) Witnessing death/mutilation***
- e) Disasters and abuse/maltreatment of children***



Suicidal (May Be Seen by Officers as):

- 1. Attempt to restore:***
 - a) Feelings of strength.***
 - b) Courage.***
 - c) Mastery over the environment.***
 - d) Regaining a sense of one's own coping abilities.***
 - e) Rejection of vulnerability.***



Suicide Prevention Program (Problem):

Strong sense of denial among police personnel that suicides are a serious problem.





Suicide Risk Factors

1. Essentially 5 key characteristics/signs:

a) Age, race and sex

Males 50 years or older (Higher risk)

b) Psychiatric symptoms

Person(s) with clinical depression

c) Stress

Recent stress (i.e., Daily life events, traumas, etc.)

d) Prior suicidal thoughts/attempts

Higher for persons with previous suicide attempts

e) Available resources

Person(s) with little means of social support and who isolate themselves.

Ranked Factors in Police Suicide (Response by NYPD Officers):

- 1. Depression***
- 2. Relationship conflicts or losses***
- 3. Access to firearms***
- 4. Drug/alcohol abuse***
- 5. Financial difficulties***
- 6. Involvement in corruption investigations***
- 7. Difficulty with police organizations***



Suicide Prevention Efforts (Focus On):

- 1. Identifying factors (that can be changes):***
 - a) Knowledge***
 - b) Identification of risk factors***
 - c) Attitudes towards seeking help***



Suicide (Does Not Happen):

It is the endpoint of a long and painful path of unendurable psychological pain.



Intervention (Should Include):

- 1. Peer support***
- 2. Supervision intervention***
- 3. Administration intervention***



Prevention in Workplace (Begins With):

- 1. A focus on systemic level assessment of risks.*
- 2. Development of policies and procedures to mitigate potential problems.*
- 3. Building on a person's work and life competencies.*
- 4. Enhancing the Officers sense of resilience.*



Police Suicide Prevention Steps (Recommended):

- 1. Psychological assessment***
 - a) Before and throughout career***
- 2. Tracking high risk officers***
 - a) Criteria to identify and track high-risk Officers, i.e., Officers with marital difficulties, substance abuse, work problems, and other life problems.***



Police Suicide Prevention Steps (Recommended): Cont'd.

- b) To be reviewed every 6 months.*
- c) Other factors: Personality and coping styles of the Police Officer, depression, substance abuse, personality disorders, anxiety or financial problems, physical illness, problems at work, and past history of suicide attempts.*

3. Access to firearms (Reducing access)

- a) 95% of police suicides were by firearms*





Police Suicide Prevention Steps (Recommended): Cont'd

4. Family Involvement

- a) Seminars, workshops to families of Officers so that they could understand nature of work as well as counseling services made available.***

5. Training

- a) Help Officers recognize and avoid psychological factors leading to suicide (Should begin at academy – Inoculation against future psychological crisis and suicidal ideation)***



Police Suicide Prevention Steps (Recommended): Cont'd.

6. Stress Awareness & Coping Skills

- a) A well rounded education program that includes identification of stress, the value and techniques of physical exercise, proper nutrition, good interpersonal communications and coping skills development.*

7. Intervention

- a) Effective intervention can save an Officer's life, as well as safeguard an agencies resultant effects of suicide.*

Police Suicide Prevention Steps (Recommended): Cont'd.

8. Crisis intervention

- a) A 24-Hour private phone service would provide such accessibility.***

9. Peer support

- a) It is easier for troubled Officers to talk to other Police Officers.***





Police Suicide Prevention Steps (Recommended): Cont'd.

10. Professional intervention

- a) The establishment of a professional network of health care workers who are familiar with police problems.***

11. Retirement counseling

- a) A different transition for Police Officers in general.***

Peer Support:

Considered a “safe-place” for Officers seeking help makes considerable sense in prevention.



Family Intervention:

1. *Spouses and families are the best line of defense in thwarting suicide (They should be able to pick-up on the different clues that a "at-risk" Officer presents.*
2. *Appropriately educated socially integrated family members can recognize a potential suicide crisis in the making.*

