Police Suicide: Acuity of Influence

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Abstract

1. **Stat:** Suicide claims approximately 30,000 lives each year in the United States.

2. **Fact:** The law enforcement profession is a dangerous profession.

3. **Intention of Research:** To explore the lived understanding of police officers regarding their acuity with respect to the subject of officer suicides.

4. **Aim:** To facilitate a deeper appreciation of the lived experiences of police officers.

5. **Format:** Qualitative Phenomenological Research (Affords a distinguishable degree of examination of the phenomenon).
Review of Information

1. Research Question:
What are the lived experiences concerning the incidence of suicide among law enforcement officer?

1. Data Collection:
   a. Series of interviews (Individual/Focus Group)
   b. 9 demographic questions
   c. 9 Interview questions

Population Sample Size

1. Includes:
   a. Municipal police agency
   b. Sworn Personnel
Demographics

Race and Ethnicity:
- 47% - White
- 33% - Hispanic/Latino
- 13% - African American
- 7% - Other

Education:
- 20% - High School
- 40% - AA
- 27% - BA
- 13% - Graduate

Age:
- 60% - 46-55
- 40% - 36-46

Length of Service:
- 47% - 25+
- 13% - 20+
- 33% - 15+
- 7% - 10+

Marital Status:
- 80% - Married
- 13% - Divorced
- 7% - Separated
Interview Questions

1. What type(s) of difficult situations have you or another police officer have you come across in your law enforcement career that would lead you to consider suicide as a choice?

2. In retrospect to your experience with your present law enforcement organization, what type of in-service educational program did you undertake concerning the topic of suicide?

3. Thinking back on the training you received with your present agency, what could have been done to improve and enhance the efficacy of the suicide education (if any)?

4. Considering your experience with the agency you are employed with, in what ways does your police organization demonstrate concern about your welfare and on the issue of suicide?

5. What efforts do your peers do to diminish the strains that depression often exert on fellow officers that may consider suicide as an option?

6. How do you view the police culture encumbering an officer’s from ability to look for help on the subject of suicide?

7. In retrospect to your experiences with your present law enforcement organization, what types of training programs have you had that would have addressed the issue of suicidal thoughts?

8. How do police supervisors and command staff speak to the issue of police officer suicide in your law enforcement organization?

9. How can police supervisors and command staff ward off the risk of suicide as an option for your fellow officers?
Importance of Research

1. What was anticipated:
   a. Should yield evidence that would benefit a police organization.
   b. Shed light on a police officers’ sense of acuity of care.
   c. Awareness of complex issue of police suicide.

2. Law Enforcement Culture:
   a. Dramatically influences an officer’s perception.
   b. Related to repeated exposure to trauma.
   c. Officer learns to maneuver themselves away from dialogue/exploration of feelings.
   d. Power invites persons in need of self-affirmation.
1. Officer’s predisposed to suicide affected by:
   a. Depression-type symptoms
   b. Alcohol abuse
   c. Substance abuse
   d. Diminished sense of peer support
   e. Ongoing increased/pervasive stress

2. Risk Factors:
   a. Police Officers are more susceptible to suicide than the general population.
Research Limitations

1. Research Availability:
   a. Available literature review on suicide is limited.

2. Reasons:
   a. Police Officer reluctance to speak about the issue
   b. Police organization failure to accept the fact that suicide exist
   c. Liability issues
   d. Misclassification of suicide
Methodology

1. Research design:
   a. Qualitative/Phenomenological Model
   b. Review of in-depth interpretation of lived experiences
   c. Ability to dispute familiar beliefs/themes/myths
   d. Appreciation of police officers perceptions/beliefs
   e. Better collection of information (Open-Ended Questions)
Results

1. Themes Identified Via:
   a. NVivo 10® software
   b. Transcript review of re-occurring themes
   c. Identifiable patterns examined
   d. Emerging themes collected until saturation/redundancy reached
   e. Exploration of perceptions and consequential effects

2. Resulted in 5 major themes focusing on:
   a. Suicide prevention
   b. Talking about suicide
   c. Training
   d. Identifying available outside resources
   e. Understanding the police culture further
Recommendations

Three Stage Phase:

1. Phase 1:
   a. Development of a plan (Planning Phase)
   b. Increase public awareness (Public Sponsorship)
   c. NYPD, Early Intervention Unit (EIU)
   d. Army's Teammate Care Initiative Program
   e. National P.O.L.I.C.E. Suicide Foundation Training Program
   f. New Jersey's Cops2Cops Program

2. Phase 2:
   a. Sponsor suicide prevention (Planning, Implementation and Evaluation)
   a. Follow-up care (Review effectiveness of Program)
   b. Cultural considerations (Uniqueness of Profession)
   c. Evaluating present practices (SOP, Rules, Orders)
Recommendations

Three Stage Phase: (Cont’d)

1. Phase 3:
   a. Integrate/Conduct a suicide prevention program.
   b. Address issue of alcohol/substance abuse.
   c. Address related mental health issues.
   d. Compulsory preemptive training program.
   e. Volunteer police officer peer counselors.
   f. Police Organization Providing Assistance (POPPA)
   g. Provide services to bereaved families of police officers. (Collateral support)
Dedication:

Good-bye, brother in blue all of us are thinking of you. You left this world way too soon, for reasons only known to you. If only one of us knew, we certainly would have reached out to you. Good-bye, brother in blue. Rest in peace

(Johnson, 2010)

Officer Thomas G. McEvoy
Coral Gables Police Officer
09/27/52 - 10/22/99

“Rest in Peace”