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

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- 1. Stress & the Police Family**
- 2. Shattered Illusions of Invulnerability**
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# ***Stress & The Police Family:***



## ***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*



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# ***Shattered Illusions of Invulnerability:***



## ***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.***



# ***Coping with Stress and Trauma:***



## ***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):***

*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***
- 4. Avoidance of People***
- 5. Use of alcohol or drugs***



## ***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***



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# ***Suicide and Firearms:***



## *The Presence of Firearms:*

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



## ***Police Firearms Represents:***

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



*Violant, Vena & Marshall, 1986*

## *Use of Firearms in Suicides (Officers):*

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





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# *Alcohol and Suicide:*



## ***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***

***Ascard, 1990; Murphy, 1992; Kroles, 1986***



## ***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***



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# *The Police Role & 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.*



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# *Psychosocial Model of Police Suicide*



## ***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.*
- 5. Becomes listless and detached from anything unrelated to police work.*
- 6. Difficulties adjusting to role as a spouse or father, and or friend outside police environment.*
- 5. Exist in a "pseudo-paranoia" state-of-mind.*

## ***Police Work (Other Influences):***

- 1. Formal police organization demands:***
  - a) Individual adherence to role.***
  - b) Judicial system***
  - c) Legislative (Laws)***
  - d) Media.***
  - e) Special interest group (i.e., MADD, PULSE, etc.)***



## ***Formal Police Organization (Exerts):***

- 1. Role prescriptions.***
- 2. Places officers on the defensive.***
- 3. Prescribes specific roles.***
- 4. Dictates how one must fulfill their role as an officer.***
- 5. Reinforces a "false Personalization" role to society.***



## ***False Personalization:***

*Creates behavior that forces officers to act out roles which were contrary to their true identities and feelings.*



## ***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.***



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# *Impact of Police Role*



## ***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.*
- 6. Dichotomous type thinking.*





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# *Police Role & Relationships*



## ***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.*



## ***Depersonalization (As a Factor):***

- 1. Lack of human emotion and or connection.*
- 2. Non-Expression of emotions.*
- 3. Emotional barriers erected.*
- 4. Emotional detachment from others (In general).*
- 5. Compassion is subdued.*



## ***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***



## ***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.***



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# ***Police Suicide Prevention***





## ***Suicide Prevention Program (Problem):***

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



## ***Classification of Police Suicides (often):***

***Misclassified as either an:***

- a) Accident***
- b) Undetermined cause of death.***



## ***Suicide Risk Factors***

- 1. Although inconclusive, there are some associated risk.*
- 2. There are no "hardcore" profiles of the "suicidal" Police Officer.*





## ***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):***

- 1. 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.***

## ***Research:***

- 1. The necessity to conduct research into the potential causes and precipitants of suicide on a departmental level still needs to continue.*





## ***Peer Support:***

- 1. 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.*



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