The Impact of Police Retirement: Transitional Considerations

The Family Therapist Role in Facilitating Constructive Change

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FILM

BADGE OF LIFE

POLICE RETIREMENT
PRESENTATION OVERVIEW

• Concepts of Retirement
• Phases of Retirement
• Effects of Police Retirement
• Decision to Retire
• Inherent Dangers of Police Work
• Stress & Health Management in Retirement
• PTSD
• Family Intervention
Concepts of Retirement
Retirement
(What Most Think Of)

- Old Age
- Withdrawal from Workforce
- Pensions
- Leisure Time

“You Mean Death with Benefits?”
(Movie: Righteous Kill……..Al Pacino)

Violanti, 1992
Police Officers (Primary Concerns):

- Meeting financial obligations past retirement

Violanti, 1992
QUESTION:

“Are police officers actually retired when they leave the force, or are they simply in transitions from one occupation to another?”

Violanti, 1992
Police Officers (Perception of Retirement):

- Not to retire; but,
- To obtain a pension and find another job

“True retirement is not economically feasible until at least the age of 55.”

Atchley, 1976
Retirement as an Event (Focuses on):

• *Actual point of separation*

Atchley, 1976
Retiring Police Officers (What Ends):

- *Strong sense of camaraderie*
- *Teamwork concept of survival*

Violanti, 1992
Love-Hate Relationship (With Job):

• Difficult to stay beyond retirement eligibility years, and even more difficult to leave.

Violanti, 1992
Retirement Rituals:

- **Retirement Party (Marks Separation)**
- **Includes:**
  - "Roast"-Type Humor
  - Retiree berated in a friendly way
  - Past exploits reviewed w/peers

*The humor is indicative that the retirement ceremony is not as happy an occasion as it appears."

Violanti, 1992
Symbolism of Organization:

- **PBA**
- **FOP**

Represents emotional support at time of separation (False sense of attachment with organization, guarantee central contact and affiliation with police acquaintances).

Violanti, 1992
Retirement
(Symbolism of Law Enforcement):

- **Plaques**
  (Badge, Rank, Years of Service)
- **Firearm Presented**
- **Hat**
- **Certificates/Awards**
- **Letter from Chief of Police**
Police Retirement Party (View of Retirement):

- Similar in structure to a “wake.”
- Gathering to “say goodbye.”

Violanti, 1992
Importance of Retirement Ritual:

- **Avoidance of Psychological Vagueness**
- **Offers clear definition of “being retired.”**

Violanti, 1992
Difficult Aspect of Retirement:

• *Turning in of:*
  - Badge/Shield
  - Firearms

*Violanti, 1992*
Badge/Firearm (Represent):

- **Symbolic essence of Police Role/Function**

Police retirement is filled with symbols which represent the job and its traditions

*Violanti, 1992*
Retirement
(Why So Much Hype?):

- **Primary Reason:**
  - Preparation to become a civilian
  - Loss of Police Power
  - Loss of Perceived Cohesiveness
  - No Longer Part of a Fraternity
Retired Officer
(What is Wanted Most):

- Family
- Close Knit Affiliation
Police Retirement (What it Represents):

- The ending of a process that spans a career.

Retirement marks the beginning of leaving the job and coming to terms with the fact that eventually all things must end.

Violanti, 1992
Retirement Process:
(Taught on the First Day of Hire):

- Retirement Criteria
- Years of Service Necessary
- Age of Retirement

Violanti, 1992
Retirement Role (Atcheley’s Process Theory):

- **Formulation of new role with society (“Real World”).**

Violanti, 1992
Retirement
(What Most Officers Cited):

- Missing the job
- Interactions with people

Violanti, 1992
Retirement (Interaction Among Police):

- Sharing of “old times” in social settings (Formal and Non-Formal)
- “War Stories”

Despite this, there is a genuine need to keep contacts alive and well. Time may modify interactions with "old friends", but not loyalty to police work.

Violanti, 1992
Phases of Retirement
Phases of Retirement (How Viewed):

- Retirement seen more of as a process than a single life event (developing over the life span of a retired officer).

Violanti, 1992
Atchley’s Proces Theory (Phases of Retirement):

- Pre-Retirement Phase
- Honeymoon Phase
- Disenchantment Phase
- Reorientation Phase

Violanti, 1992
Pre-Retirement Phase
(What is Expected):

• Reaction to the notion and eligibility of retirement
• Seen as a positive event (i.e., Benefits)
• 15+ years of service
• The sense of “self” in question
• “Old Timer” – New Label

Violanti, 1992
Pre-Retirement Phase (Practical Considerations):

- Finding a new career
- Emphasis: Taking care of family
- New Role: No longer a “Cop”
- Relaxation notions – Unrealistic
  - i.e. Golfing, Fishing
- Finances – Considerations
  - i.e., Inflation/Medical/Insurance

Violanti, 1992
Honeymoon Phase

- The realities of retirement have not set in yet
- A sense of the “great reward” being here
- Relief from responsibilities of Police Work
- Short in duration

Violanti, 1992
NOTE:

"Police Officers tend to romanticized notions of retirement (not in the usual sense). Retirement is seen as a utopia, where there are no problems to be expected.

Violanti, 1992
Disenchantment Phase:

- **Re-Orientaion – Critical Time**
- **Reintegration of stability – “Reality Check”**
- **Disappointments**
- **Alcohol/Suicide Ideation**
- **Psychological/Physical consequences**
- **Support from Family/Friends needed**

Violanti, 1992
Reorientation Phase:

- Acceptance
- Adjustment to circumstances
- Pulling "oneself" together
- Realistic view of retirement
- Reality – Its over – No Longer a "Cop"

"A mans got to know his limitation"

Clint Eastwood
Violanti, 1992
FILM

POLICE OFFICER

WARNING: A LIFESTYLE CHANGE
Effects of Police Retirement
Police Retirement (Effects):

- Physical
- Psychological
- Social Status

Violanti, 1992
Pre-Retirement Predictors (Include):

- Low self esteem
- Poor planning
- Practical insecurity
- Bad health

Fritz, Kluge, Ossawa and Jones, 1989
Adaption to Retirement (Success/Failures):

- Childhood perceptions of self
- Social skills
- Sense of purpose
- Retirement phase of development (what stage one is in)

Mattilla, Joukamaa and Salokangs, 1988
Stress and Retirement (What Increases):

- Poor health
- Irrational beliefs about aging
- Stressful life events
- Poor occupational status

Increase in psychological distress and depression is evident here.

Jaakobonski, 1985
Alcoholism (Considerations):

- May become a dysfunctional means of coping with realities of retirement
- Increase awareness of faulty coping skills in place

There is a strong correlation between post retirement and the abuse of alcohol.

Kros, 1975; Violanti, 1986; Brody, 1981
Retirement (Dilemma for Officer):

• Age considerations – Out of synchronization with society
• Re-entry into job market

At a time when most careers are in their prime, the police officer may be retiring.

McNeil, Lecca and Wright, 1983
Re-Entry Into Job Market (Can Lead To):

- **Significant loss of direction**
- **Loss in prestige in former role of a “Cop” (Authority figure)**
- **Loss of self-esteem**
- **Familiar way of life is gone**
- **Security in question**
- **“Off Balance”**

Druss, 1965
Role Confusion:

- Immediately following early retirement
- Status change – From officer to civilian
- Confusion of civilian role

McNeal and Griffin, 1967
Police Role Defined (Historical Perspective):

- Military-like orientation/structure
- Conservative
- Traditional (Orientation)
- Guided by written guidelines/operations/directives
- Rank ("Chain-of-Command") driven
- Role is operationally defined
- "Black or White"

McNeal et al, 1967
Retiring Officer
(Loss of Structure):

- *Role occupancy is blurred*
- *The need to seek structure in life*

Violanti, 1992
Retirement Survival Skills
(What is Needed):

• Flexibility
• Developing long-range plans
• Acceptance that stress in post-retirement is a factor
• Independence from work as a means of achieving satisfaction
• Reliance on inner resources
• Social contact

Personality Typology (Retiree):

- **Reorganizer**
  - Substitutes new activity for old one

- **Holding-On**
  - Does not accept aging well or retirement
  - Wants to work indefinably

- **Rocking Chair**
  - Disengages from life

- **Dissatisfied**
  - Low level of anxiety/activity

*Walker, Kimmer, and Price, 1981*
Wellbeing Study of Retiree (Concluded):

- Officer with low self-esteem prior to retirement, consistent low esteem after retirement
- Officer who retire with a realistic plan of retirement – do better
- In-Tack social skills lead to a better life satisfaction level

Kea, 1988
NOTE:

Self-esteem appeared to be much more prevalent for the younger officers, but is considerably lower for older officers considering retirement.

Violanti, 1992
Categories of Retirees:

- Voluntary – Early Age
- Voluntary – Normal Age
- Health Retirement
- Mandatory Retirement

Crowley, 1984
Finance and health are important considerations in the decision to retire or not.
Rank Consideration (Of Retiree):

- *Plays a part in adaption to retirement*
- *Retiring from a higher rank has much more consequences for retiree than street cop does.*

*Dillard, 1982*
Adjustment to Retirement (What is Needed):

- **Self-direction**
- **Intellectual flexibility**
- **Sociability**

Atchley, 1976
Retirement (Feeling of Loss):

- Few can retire and not feel a sense of loss
- Acceptance of loss – Crucial to retiree’s well-being
- Adjustment away from police work is necessary
- Emotional energy should be re-invested in new life

Worden, 1982
Denying feelings of loss is a common defensive mechanism for the police officer (i.e., “I’m glad it’s over” or “It wasn’t important to me anyway”) that can lead to long-term psychological dysfunction.

Violanti, 1992
Retirement (Adjustment to Loss):

- Takes time
- Necessitates setting new goals/direction
- Accepting loss signals the end of grief

*The adjustment to the loss is crucial to a healthy post retirement*

Worden, 1982
Refusing to Accept Loss (Can Lead To):

- Anxiety
- Withdrawal
- Depression
- Alcoholism
- Drug Abuse
- Suicide Ideation

Sheppard, 1990
Family (Of Retiree):

- Must also adapt
- Support integral during transitional period for retiree

Dressler, 1973
Relationship (Of Retiree to Family):

- Reduction in retiree’s family status
- Distressing to retiree

Menachery, 1987
Marital Satisfaction (By Retiree):

- Seen as no longer contributing to family
- Lifestyle changes
- Marital quality is altered

The family as a unit experiences the effects of retirement as well

Lee and Shehan, 1989; Griffin and McNeail, 1967
Returning to Work (For The Retiree):

- Economic needs become strained
- Role reversal/role conflict
- Emotional disruption of family
- Decrease in self-esteem (Retiree)
- Family disruption
- Increase in family tension

Kaufman, 1982
The police occupation has long been cited as a job where the need for control dominates. Not being in control can lead to feelings of invulnerability.

Violanti, 1992
Women
(Who Retiree):

• No evidence of feelings of vulnerability – Post retirement
• Not negatively affected as much as men
• Stress in family minimal

Kaufman, 1982
Retiree (Unmarried):

- Self-esteem and levels of importance tied to job
- Adjustment to post-retirement is difficult

Keith, 1985
Retiree (Disabled):

- Difficulty in family adjustment
- May not be able to find or sustain work
- Dependent on family daily living
- The family is thrown “off balance” (Retiree’s disability)

Keith, 1985
Practical Family Matters (For Retiree):

- Returning to work (Lower salary)
- Diminished status
- Children in college
- Mortgage
- Medical
- Life insurance cost

Keith, 1985
Stress and Physical Illness (Factors Related):

- Correlation between stressful change and illness
- Control over retirement (Mandatory or Voluntary)
- Timing of it’s occurrence
- Stage/Phase of retirement

“Timing is everything”

Eisdorfer and Wilkie, 1977
Early Retirement (Problem With):

- Out of synchronization with the rest of society

Shanas, 1970
Retirement (During Recessional Period):

- *May cause more stress than in normal economic times*
- *Increase pressures*
- *Resistance to retirement*
- *Increased mortality rate (2 to 5 years)*

_Brenner, 1971_
Post Retirement (Decrease Activity):

• Leads to:
  – Diminished interactions
  – Death comes sooner
  – Decline in health

Retiree’s who left at a normal age did not show an increase risk in mortality

Cameron and Perdinger, 1983
Retiree’s (Over 60 Years of Age):

- Higher risk of cardiac failure
- 2x times more prevalent than the general population

Siscovick, Strogatz, Weiss, Rennect, 1990
Mortality Rate (For Retiree):

- High risk to certain diseases
- Heart Disease
- Diabetes
- Suicide (3x time higher – 45-54 yrs)
- Cancer of the colon/liver
- Average Death: 64.3 years-of-age (General Pop. 76 years-of-age)
- 12 years sooner than general pop.

Violanti, Vena, Marshall, 1986
Suicidal Ideation (Risk Factors):

- Highest during time just prior to retirement considerations
- Psychological issues likely to occur (Once decision to retire made)

Violanti’s, et al, 1986
NOTE:

Police officers who accept the inevitability of retirement and prepare for it will fare out better than others who don’t.

Violanti, 1992
The Decision to Retire
Retirement Decision: (Significance):

• *A career development process and turning point in changes in attitude*

Violanti, 1992
Developmental Theory (Of Retirement):

- Marks the passage of a series of life and career stages of changes
- Mid-life transitional period (40 – 45 years-of-age)
- Major transitional role
- Early adulthood to middle-age adulthood

Fragan and Ayers, 1982
Questions Asked (By Retiree):

- What do I want to do with the rest of my life?
- Who am I?
- Where am I going?
- What changes do I need to make?
- What will I leave behind (legacy)?
Police Officer
(Two Types):

• **Active**
  - Higher than normal job satisfaction

• **Inactive**
  - Waiting group
  - Lost interest in their job
  - Waiting for retirement

*Transitional patterns are different in police work than in other occupations.*

Fagan and Ayers, 1982
Middle-Age Police Officers (Retiree):

• *Retirement identity crisis*
• *Cynical attitude*
• *Complains often*
• *Dislikes their work*
• *Fells trapped*

Halloran, 1985
NOTE:

The key to successful retirement is diversity in interest and social interaction outside of police work

Violanti, 1992
Retirement: Doucet Study (Reasons):

- 21% Ready for change
- 11% Tired of police work
- 30% Disabilities
- 16% Job opportunities
- 5% Started their own business
- 2% Pressures from administration
- 1% Forced to leave
- 14% No Specific reason

Doucet Study, 1975
Mid-Career Retirement (Dilemma):

- Reported difficulty with work
- Difficulty with decision to retire

“Did you ever have the feeling that you wanted to go, but still had the feeling that you wanted to stay”

Doucet Study, 1975
“Wait-and-See” Attitude (Towards Retirement):

- Officers who don’t decide to retire, experience personal issues that if things do not change at work they are prone to become:
  - Bitter
  - Cynical
  - Disenchanted with mid-career if still a patrol officer

Violanti, 1992
Harpaz’s Typology (Perspective of Retiree):

• **Category 1**
  - Work central to their lives
  - Oriented internally
  - Intrinsic rewards of work valued (i.e., autonomy, job variety, etc.)
  - Delays retirement
  - Job still interesting
  - Being needed is important
  - Promotion important

Violanti, 1992
Harpaz’s Typology (Perspective of Retiree):

- **Category 2**
  - Work is central
  - Oriented toward extrinsic values
  - Financially motivated – “Money Matters”
  - Decision to retire is easy for them
  - Pension plan important
  - Tendency to retire early
  - Pension without having to work - Appealing
  - Usually a patrol officer

Violanti, 1992
Harpaz’s Typology (Perspective of Retiree):

- **Category 3**
  - Work not central to their lives
  - Low importance to intrinsic values
  - Will retire as soon as they can
  - Do not value much of anything
  - Money and work not a motivating factor
  - Loyalty to organization minimal

Violanti, 1992
Turning Point
(On The Decision to Retire):

- Age
- Removal of barriers
- Blocked promotions or special assignment availability
  (80% do not get promoted)
- Stagnation in police work
  (98% routine, 2% Terror)
- Traumatic incidents
- Attitudes towards retirement

Violanti, 1992
Police officers tend to psychologically “deaden” after approximately 12 to 15 years of service on the job.

Stagnation is synonymous with “burnout”.

Violanti, 1992
Inherent Dangers of Police Work
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COCAINE COWBOYS
NOTE:

Although by nature, police work is routine, it has its moments of sheer terror and fear.

Violanti, 1992
What a Police Officer Witnesses (In The Course of Their Career):

- Accidents (Minor and Fatalities)
- Child abuse
- Life/Death situations
- Riots/disasters (Natural/Man-Made)
- Shootings
- Death of fellow officers
- Nightmares/Flashbacks
- PTSD

Solomon, 1986
Violence Experienced (By Officer):

- Violence towards others
  - Rape
  - Violent accidents
  - Murder

- Violence used against another
  - Shootings
  - Physical altercations

- Violence against the officer
  - Shot at/Physically Attacked

Anderson and Bauer, 1987
NOTE:

The most disturbing incident for a police officer to witness or experience is to shoot or kill another human being.

Percentage of officer that leave police work after a shooting or witnessing a violent event – 35%

Violanti, 1992
FILM

MIAMI IN THE 80’s
Stress and Health Management in Retirement
NOTE:

“Every human being experiences stress...complete freedom from stress is death”

Hans Selye, 1975
Stress
(Defined):

• “The body’s reaction to some event in the environment...that arouses an individual’s senses.”

Selye, 1975
Stress
(Includes):

- Perception of the event
  (Key mediating factor)
- Either (Positive or Negative)
- Affects (Both):
  - Nervous system
  - Endocrine system

Dressler, 1973
NOTE:

“Perception is reality”
Stress
(Three Major Phases):

• **Immediate**
  – Occurs in 2-3 seconds
  – (Usually after the stressful occurrence)

• **Intermediate**
  – Occurs approximately 20-30 seconds
  – (After the stressful event)

• **Long Term**
  – May last as long as 10 weeks (After occurrence)
  – Can cause imbalances in body
  – Precipitates physical disease

Violanti, 1992
Retirement (Viewed by Retiree):

- **Stressful life event**
- **Demand for change**

*Holms and Rahe, 1967*
NOTE:

“Police officers may leave the job, but they can never retire”

Violanti, 1992
PTSD
(Retiree’s Response):

- Intense emotional response
- Fear of what lies ahead
- Helplessness
- Significant distress
- Impairment at work, home, social functioning

Kirschman, 1997
PTSD
(Clusters of Symptoms):

- **Re-experiencing the event**
- **Exhibit avoidance**
- **Numbing of behavior**
- **Persistent signs of increased physical arousal**

_Kirschman, 1997_
PTSD
(Signs of Re-Experiencing Event):

• Recurrent, intrusive recollection of event
• Recurrent disturbing dreams
• Flashbacks (As if happening again)
• Intense psychological distress (To sounds and smell, etc.)
• Intense nervous system activity (Adrenalin rush)

Kirschman, 1997
PTSD
(Numbing/Avoidant Behaviors):

- Efforts to avoid thoughts
- Avoiding people, places and things
- Inability to recall an important aspect of trauma
- Diminished interest in activities
- Feeling detached/Estranged
- Inability to express feelings
- Sense of foreshortened future

Kirschman, 1997
PTSD
(Signs of Increased Arousal):

- Difficulty falling asleep
- Irritability/Outburst of anger
- Difficulty concentrating
- Hypervigilance
- Startled response to loud noises

Kirschman, 1997
NOTE:

“It’s difficult to predict who will develop PTSD. Research is contradictory and at time inconclusive. Anyone, can become overwhelmed in a catastrophic event. Personality traits, genetic disposition, age, are all factors.”

Dr. Bessel van der Kolk
WHAT IS KNOWN:

“...if people live in a supportive environment, if they can talk about what happened...they stand a good chance of recovery.”

Dr. Bessel van der Kolk
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POLICE TRAFFIC STOP
Family Intervention
Family Intervention (Therapeutic Goal/Intervention):

- Setting realistic goals for family
- Discussing in advance domestic responsibilities
- Planning for the future (Balancing present transitional factors for retiree’s with family goals)
- Therapy as an option
- Supportive groups for retiree’s and their spouse

Kirschman, 1997
NOTE:

“The basics of a successful relationship are the same regardless of what either spouse does for a living.”

Kirschman, 1997
(Therapeutic Goal/Intervention):

• Making adjustments to each other's lives (In transition)
• Diversification of interest
• “Time Out” to do things completely unrelated to police work
• Develop support systems outside of immediate family

Kirschman, 1997
NOTE:

“Just because one may love their spouse, that doesn’t mean that they automatically understand their spouse, or that one always knows how best to support the retiree.”

Kirschman, 1997
Family Intervention - Cont’d
(Therapeutic Goal/Intervention):

- **Cops (Retiree’s) are by training, critical and analytical**
  
  *(Use that to your advantage as a therapist - Cognitive Re-Structuring)*

- **Facilitate an atmosphere that is both supportive and respectful of the retiree and their family**

- **Utilize the coping skills (resolution techniques) that a retiree brings to therapy**

  *Kirschman, 1997*
NOTE:

“Sometimes family members are just too invested in each other to be helpful, no matter how much both of them would like to be otherwise.”

Kirschman, 1997
Family Intervention - Cont’d
(Therapeutic Goal/Intervention):

• Evaluate the propensity for higher-than-average incidence of domestic violence

Kirschman, 1997
A FINAL THOUGHT:

“I was causally walking down an open mall, and I couldn’t help but notice a police officer leaning against his patrol vehicle. I walked past the young officer who was standing in a relaxed posture, with one foot on the bumper of the car. As I got closer, I could see how edgy and apprehensive he really was, how his eyes constantly scanned the crowd. I felt like a spy. He was trying so hard to look cool and brave. No one was suppose to see his fear or concern: not the crowd, not his fellow officers, not even himself. Was I in danger, was there a threat that I didn’t see, that he saw? Was it my imagination? I was able to talk to someone close and quickly was able to diffuse any fears. I wondered about the officer, and hoped that he at least had someone to confide in too. I hoped he at least felt secured as well, and I remembered, that I forgot to say Thank You for looking after me; knowing that while he was on watch, I was safe.”

Anonymous Client
Thank you!