

Police Stress: Revealing the Need for Training

Approved *Cheryl Barachowski-Juleer* Date May 16, 2008  
Advisor

Police Stress: Revealing the Need for Training

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Carla J. DeLaMater

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## **Abstract**

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Carla J. DeLaMater

Under the Supervision of Dr. Cheryl Banochowski-Fuller

### Statement of the Problem

The types and consequences of stress and its destructive effects it has on the health and performance of police officers has been studied at great length. Police stress is often the result of a variety of duty-related, organizational, relationship or external factors impacting on officers (Deisinger, 2002).

Police stress is a problem confronting every officer and every department, not only in the United States, but globally. The costs of this stress range from monetary costs to lives lost. Worker's Compensation claims, stress related disabilities, and sick leave used for stress related illnesses annually cost millions of dollars (Bildstien, 2005; Courier-Mail, 2006; Europe Intelligence Wire, 2006; This Is London, 2007).

Compounded with the cost of officers "out sick", is the added cost of hiring and training new police officers. These costs include the hiring process, police academy, field training, and outfitting the new officer. The amount to hire a new police officer ranges from an average of \$50,000.00 to a staggering \$100,000.00 in San Francisco (Police-Stress.com; Chamberlain, 2000).

Most police stress programs are reactive. The most commonly known of these types of programs are Employee Assistance Programs and Critical Incident Stress Debriefings. Critical Incident Stress Debriefing programs are not effective in eliminating the long-term effects of police stress (McNally, 2004), and some studies have shown that these programs may actually do more harm than good (Rose, et al., 2001). Employee assistance programs (EAP) are often underused by police officers for a variety of reasons (National Institute of Justice Journal, 2006).

The problem of police stress is universal, yet programs to combat police stress are ineffective, unused, or in some cases, even harmful. The dilemma lies not in identifying police stress as a problem, but how to prevent and reduce police stress. The

answer should be obvious, and is the focus of this research. Just as police officers are trained to deal with unruly subjects, difficult circumstances, and high risk situations, so should they be trained to deal with the inevitable stress that comes with the profession.

#### Method of Approach

Data will be collected from secondary sources, using a review of empirical and theoretical research. This information will come from textbooks, accredited journals, and Internet sources including those set up by the United States Government. A sample of current training programs will be reviewed and strengths and weaknesses will be identified.

#### Assumption

The assumption is that training programs in police officer stress are not widely available, and those that are available are utilized inefficiently. It is further assumed that training police officers in the inevitable stress they will be face, will result in increased police officer well-being, thus increasing safety for officers and citizens, and ultimately the organization.

## Results of the Study

Currently used police stress training programs vary greatly in content. Research supports the proposition that proactive training efforts in recognizing and reducing the influences of police stress upon police officers do have some positive results.

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## **I. INTRODUCTION: Police Stress: Revealing the Need for Training**

Police officer stress is not a new topic. Books, articles, web pages, and presentations abound for anyone who wants to research the topic. Most research seems to be on the detrimental affects of police stress. Information on training programs to recognize and reduce those negative affects is much harder to locate.

The types and consequences of stress and its destructive effects it has on the health and performance of police officers has been studied at great length. Police stress is often the result of a variety of duty-related, organizational, relationship or external factors impacting on officers (Deisinger, 2002).

Police stress is a problem confronting every officer and every department, not only in the United States, but globally. The costs of this stress range from monetary costs to lives lost. In Australia, figures show 1 in 4 worker's compensation claims are stress related (Bildstien, 2005). It is estimated that officers retiring on stress-related long-term disabilities will cost \$50 million, annually, with

estimated annual long-term costs reaching hundreds of millions of dollars (Courier-Mail, 2006). North Ireland officials report a cost of \$47 million to taxpayers for a two year period (Europe Intelligence Wire, 2006). Great Britain reports that 1000 officers a day are off due to stress related illness (This Is London, 2007).

Compounded with the cost of officers "out sick", is the added cost of hiring and training new police officers. These costs include the hiring process, police academy, field training, and outfitting the new officer.

The monetary costs associated with police officer stress are astounding enough, but they do not factor in the human costs in higher than average divorce rates, alcoholism, domestic violence, and suicide (Arthur, 2005; Constant, 2006; Sheehan and VanHasselt, 2003).

Most police stress programs only deal with the police stress after it becomes a problem, or after an incident. The most commonly known of these types of programs are Employee Assistance Programs and Critical Incident Stress Debriefings. According to McNally (2004), Critical Incident Stress Debriefing programs

are not effective in eliminating the long-term effects of police stress. Studies have shown that these programs may actually do more harm than good, causing a higher rate of post-traumatic stress to those who participate, over those who do not (Kagee, 2002; Rose, et al., 2001). Employee assistance programs (EAP) are underused by police officers for a variety of reasons, including lack of confidentiality and they do not meet the distinctive needs of those in law enforcement (National Institute of Justice Journal, 2006).

The problem of police stress is universal, yet programs to combat police stress are ineffective, unused, or in some cases, even harmful. The dilemma lies not in identifying police stress as a problem, but how to prevent and reduce police stress. The answer should be obvious, and is the focus of this research. Just as police officers are trained to deal with unruly subjects, difficult circumstances, and high risk situations, so should they be trained to deal with the inevitable stress that comes with the profession.

Training in police stress and emotional well-being is not seen as a priority (Gilmartin, 2002). This is obvious by the claim of the University of

Illinois Police Training Institute that their academy level systematic stress prevention training is the only one of its kind in the country (University of Illinois, 2004). Police officers are faced with mental job stresses everyday, yet little focus is given to handling them. According to Dr. Kevin Gilmartin (2002), the development of skills necessary to survive the emotional facets of police work are given far less attention than developing the skills necessary to survive the physical assaults.

The purpose of this research is to study the training programs available to police officers in recognizing and reducing police officer stress, with the goal of producing an educational tool that can be used by law enforcement agencies and administrators. Ultimately, the information provided will offer a better comprehension of the need for training in police officer specific stress. It will suggest that stress recognition, reduction, and prevention training should be a priority for agencies and law enforcement training programs.

This paper will consider empirical and theoretical research on causes and costs associated with police officer stress. This information will

come from textbooks, accredited journals, and Internet sources including those set up by the United States Government. Samples of current police officer stress training programs will be presented, along with some of the strengths and weakness of these programs.

Sociological theories often associated with deviance, can also be applied. The Social Learning Theory can be easily adapted to the world of law enforcement and provides a view of why training early on in a police officer's career is crucial to his or her mental and physical well-being throughout that career. Data will be presented to support the argument that initial and ongoing training for officers and supervisors, will allow for earlier recognition, along with effective management and reduction of police officer stress. This early handling of police stress will have the ultimate result of decreasing organizational costs and increasing officer, citizen, and community safety.

This research will provide the reader with an understanding of the types, sources, and signs of police stress. The paper will give reasons why police officers are less likely to seek help with stress and why this creates a need for proactive training on the

part of the organization. This paper will offer examples of training programs available for officers and organizations. Recommendations will be made on the need for early and ongoing stress training, specific to police officers and the law enforcement community.

## **II. Literature Review: Prevalence of Police Stress, Currently Used Police Stress Programs**

### **A. Prevalence of Police Stress**

In order to discuss the effects of stress and the necessity of proactive approaches to dealing with stress, it is important to identify and define the topic. Stress is not something isolated to the world of law enforcement. Stress is found in every person, in every walk of life. Police stress is not always unique or obvious, as nearly every single stressor found in police work can be found in other occupations. One poll referenced by the University of Maryland Medical Center website (2007, 1) cited that "89% of respondents that they had experienced serious stress in their lives. What makes police stress different is that you find all the stressors in one job (Constant, 2006).

### **B. Definition, Signs and Symptoms, Sources and Costs of Police Stress**

What is stress? The Merriam-Webster online dictionary offers several definitions of stress, with two being relevant to this research. Stress is defined as:

"c: a physical, chemical, or emotional factor that causes bodily or mental tension and may be a factor in disease causation d: a state resulting from a stress; *especially* : one of bodily or mental tension resulting from factors that tend to alter an existent equilibrium <job-related *stress*>..."

Harpold (2002, 1) identified stress as "a nonspecific response of the body to any demand placed on it.". Goldfarb (n.d., 1) provides a metaphoric definition that is well known to many. He offers the following: "That feeling and desire along with the ensuing bodily effects, experienced by a person who has a strong and true longing to choke the living shit out of someone who desperately deserves it, but you can't".

Each of these definitions offers a slightly different insight into stress. These definitions also recognize an important commonality; Stress is an internal psychological and physiological response to something with an external origin.

Not all stress is bad (Davis, 2007). Stress consists of two types, negative stress is referred to as distress, while positive stress is eustress (O'Connor, 2006). What must be understood is that

both types evoke the same type of bodily response, and have the same types of long-term affects.

Signs of stress are as varied as the people who experience it. Stress can manifest itself in different ways; physically, mentally and emotionally, and behaviorally. The Mayo Clinic website (2007) provides several lists of signs and symptoms.

Physical manifestations of stress may include things such as periods of dizziness, headaches, weight changes, fatigue, nausea, tense muscles, general aches and pains, indigestion, difficulty sleeping, racing heart, tinnitus (ringing in the ears), stooped posture, sweaty palms, or trembling.

These physical signs and symptoms may expose more serious underlying problem. Stress has been associated with a multitude of physical ailments including hypertension, myocardial infarctions, diabetes, ulcers, and cancer (Ellison, 2004).

Mental and emotional indications of stress are anxiety, restlessness, confusion, irritability, depression, sadness, anger, mood swings, constant worry, difficulty making decisions, forgetfulness, inability to concentrate, guilt, resentment, and job dissatisfaction (Mayo Clinic, 2007). Being anxious or

sad may be an inconvenience, but an inability to concentrate could be life-threatening for an officer on the street.

Perhaps more noticeable to outsiders are behavioral signs of stress. Officers may have decreased productivity or blame others for their problems. A normally stable officer may have bouts of crying or angry outbursts. An outgoing person may become withdrawn or have significant changes in relationships. There may be a noticeable change in eating habits. Friends or co-workers may see an increase in tobacco or alcohol use.

Just as stress is primarily manifested in three areas of a police officer, so are there three primary sources of police officer stress (Albert, 1990; O'Toole, Vitello, and Palmer, 2003). The most often stated source of police stress is organizational (Brown & Campbell, 1994; Finn, 1997; Malloy & Mays, 1984; O'Toole, Vitello, & Palmer, 2003; Toch, 2002). Sources of organizational stress range from a lack of two-way communication between administrators and officers to the feeling of being micro-managed (Albert, 1990; Toch, 2002). Organizational stressors are also the reason why most police officers leave

their departments and the profession, in general (O'Toole, Vitello, & Palmer, 2003).

Situational stressors are those experienced by police officers as a part of the job. These are the stressors that are often cited by outsiders as being the primary source of police officer stress. These are the call-related stressors; responding to domestics, high-speed chases, child abuse calls, and even situations not necessarily viewed as stressful, such as routine & traffic stops (Constant, 2006; Malloy & Mays, 1984; Toch, 2002).

The final cause of police officer stress is from non-job related sources. These are the personal situations the invoke stress in the police officer. While personal sources of stress are not job related, they do affect the police officer's job. Administrators need to stop distinguishing between personal and job stress (Constant, 2006).

Costs of police officer stress are both short and long term. Short-term costs are those associated with occasional use of sick leave and the resulting overtime. One approximation is that 60 percent of all employee absences are stress-related, causing an employee to miss an average of 16 days of work each

year, with a cost to employers of \$8,000.00 (Drukteinis, 2006). It has been estimated that 60-90 percent of all health problems are stress related (Collie, 2004). Job stress costs American business hundreds of billions of dollars each year (Clark, 2005). The resulting cost is between \$50 and \$100 billion annually (Clark, 2005; Deisinger, 2002). This cost is for all American businesses, however law enforcement administrators should view this as a shining example of how stress affects their budgets.

Police stress is not just a problem in the United States. In Australia, figures show 1 in 4 worker's compensation claims are stress related (Bildstien, 2005). It is estimated that officers retiring on stress-related long-term disabilities will cost \$50 million, annually, with estimated annual long-term costs reaching hundreds of millions of dollars (Courier-Mail, 2006). North Ireland officials report a cost of \$47 million to taxpayers for a two year period (Europe Intelligence Wire, 2006). Great Britain reports that 1000 officers a day are off due to stress related illness (This Is London, 2007). Dowling (2005) reported that while most worker's compensation claims on declining, stress-related

claims have jumped 21 percent within two years, with each claim costing taxpayers an average of \$44,000.00.

Long-term costs are those more related to the insurance costs, long-term costs from health issues resulting from stress related ailments and stress-related retirements. According to Stress Less (2007), a website devoted to stress information, employees with high stress levels will have 46% higher health care costs. These employees are also twice as likely to cost the employers 250% more in health care expenses. Long-term expenditures also involve hiring new officers to replace those lost. Collie (2004) proposes that forty percent of employee turnover is stress-related. According to the website, Police-Stress.com, the amount to hire a new police officer is approximately \$50,000.00. In San Francisco, the cost to put a new officer on the street reaches a staggering \$100,000.00 (Chamberlain, 2000).

Not all costs are monetary. Organizations and administrations need to be aware of both the monetary and the human costs of police officer stress. Monetary costs are more apparent; however administrators need to also be concerned with the less obvious costs. Stress is often a precursor to many

physical and mental ailments. These can have a negative impact on the department, as well as the officer (Finn, 1997).

Police officers who suffer from negative stress can be a detriment to the department. Performance of mentally or physically unhealthy officers may suffer, creating public relations problems or an increase in civil suits (Finn, 1997). The role of stress as an underlying cause of numerous health problems is widely publicized. Stress is also responsible for other conditions, which should be of concern to police administrators. Alcoholism, divorce, domestic violence, and police suicide all result from stress (Constant, 2006; Moriarty & Field, 1990; O'Toole, Vitello, & Palmer, 2003; Waters & Ussery, 2007).

Alcohol abuse is a serious problem for 25% of all police officers (Moriarty & Field, 1990). Ellison (2004) argues the figure is not this high, but asserts that any level of alcoholism is significant when it involves a group whose occupation is to maintain law and order and protect the public.

Divorce may not seem like a departmental issue, but officers going through divorce are often distracted, thus affecting their job performance

(Toch, 2002). Police officers have the second highest divorce rate in the nation, with nearly 60-75% of all police marriages end in divorce (Constant, 2006; Goldfarb, n.d.).

Stress may also be attributed to domestic violence within police families (Sheehan & VanHasselt, 2003). Police officers are as likely as members of the general population to engage in domestic violence, and there are some studies that propose the incidents of police officer perpetrated domestic violence may actually be higher than that experienced by the general population (National Criminal Justice Reference Service, 1999). One study found that officers who experience high levels of work stress were three times as likely to engage in domestic violence (Gershon, 2000; Harpold, 2002).

Police stress is also related to the most extreme level of domestic violence, homicide. Former Tacoma, Washington police chief David Brame had sought out help for stress prior to doing the unthinkable. Brame shot his wife, in front of their two children, before turning the gun on himself (CNN, 2003).

The Tacoma incident illustrates another cost of police stress; police suicide. Police officers have

one of the highest rates of suicide of any population (Constant, 2006). Statistics from the FBI report that on average, there are 26,000-27,000 suicides annually, or approximately 12 suicides per 100,000 Americans. Police officer suicides average 14-28 for every 100,000 (Arthur, 2005). Other research purports that police officers commit suicide three times as often as the general population (Baker & Baker, 1996). Ellison (2004) cites officers are more likely to die by their own hand, than the hand of a perpetrator.

Brame's circumstances are common to many police suicides. The typical officer who commits suicide is a 35-36 year old white male, separated or getting a divorce, and who has recently suffered a loss (Arthur, 2005; Turvey, 1995). This underscores the fact that the most common factor in police suicides is relationship troubles (Constant, 2006; Goldfarb, n.d.).

### **C. Overview of Current Police Stress Programs**

The most common programs to deal with police officer stress are reactive. The most common are Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) and Critical Incident Stress Debriefings (CISDs).

Employee assistance programs are often administered through outside agencies, generally by practitioners who are ill-equipped to handle the realm of law enforcement officer stress. There are also some Employee Assistance Programs that are managed within departments, using a peer counseling approach (Capps, 1984). While these programs are available to police officers, officers are often hesitant to utilize them (Amaranto, et al., 2003). Resistance to Employee Assistance Programs comes from many sources. Officers fear being viewed as weak by their administrators and fellow officers, losing their job or suffering other negative job actions, if they seek mental help (Deisinger, 2002; Waters & Ussery, 2007). Lack of confidentiality and not meeting the distinctive needs of those in law enforcement have also been given as explanations for not using these programs (National Institute of Justice Journal, 2006). Waters and Ussery (2007) also proffer that seeking help conflicts with the police image. There is the attitude that if an officer can not manage a personal life and work without difficulties, he or she should not be in police work (Webb & Smith, 1980).

Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) is another reactive approach to police stress. These are usually one session events allowing the police officer to discuss a particular event and his or her feelings about that event. One positive aspect of these sessions is they are usually peer mentored. Each session involving law enforcement has at least one law enforcement professional, assisted by at least one mental health professional (Malcom, et al., 2005). Hammond and Brooks (2001) argue that CISDs have been used successfully by emergency responders over the past two decades.

Critical incident stress debriefings are based on a model created by Jeffery T. Mitchell. A typical debriefing session involves seven distinct steps, with each step having a unique purpose toward achieving the goal of allowing the participant to reach the pre-incident level of functioning (Malcom, et al., 2005).

The first step of the process introduces the participants to the process, rules of confidentiality, and expectations. The Fact phase allows participants to identify themselves and their role in the incident. Third, participants are asked to share their initial thoughts after the incident. The next stage has

police officers express their feelings, emotions, and reactions. The signs and symptoms associated with stress are then discussed, with the goal of normalizing those experienced by those involved. The sixth phase offers strategies to deal with the stress. Finally, officers and participants are urged to discuss any other issues or ask questions, with the primary focus of returning the person to their pre-incident duty.

Research on CISDs gives conflicting results, with some saying the session is beneficial (Malcom, et al., 2005) and others arguing just the opposite (Kagee, 2002; Rose, et al., 2001). One research study found that officers involved in a critical incident stress debriefing after a plane crash experienced greater long-term stress reactions than those who did not participate (Carlier, et al., 1998). It is acknowledged there is little research on CISDs specific to law enforcement personnel, with most being subjective and anecdotal (Hammond & Brooks, 2001; Malcom, et al., 2005).

Police stress training programs are rarely specific to the field of law enforcement and primarily deal with an overview of stress and general stress

management techniques. Law enforcement academies rarely address the stress in police work (Harpold, 2002). A 2002 survey of state and local law enforcement academies revealed that the average length of an academy was 720 hours, with only 6 hours being set aside for stress prevention and management training. This is the same number of hours officers were trained in community policing and officer civil/criminal liability. Statistics show officers are more likely to die by their own hand than that of another (University Of Illinois, 2004; Ellison, 2004), yet they received ten times the instruction in firearms, averaging 60 hours of firearm training (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2002). The survey also showed that the only area of training receiving fewer hours than stress management was that of hate and bias crimes. This only merited four hours of instruction. Recruits are often told the job will take a toll, however they are rarely given instruction on how to minimize those negative effects (Gilmartin, 2002).

Stress is a problem for police officers globally. This problem costs organizations and taxpayers millions of dollars, along with the cost of ruined or lost lives. The most often used police

stress programs are reactive. These wait until police stress is already a problem; on the most basic level, a problem for the officer and on a greater scale, a problem for the organization and the community.

The purpose of this research is to examine law enforcement stress training programs, advocating those which teach officers to recognize stressors and proper resolution techniques to prevent stress from reaching a problematic level. Argument will also be made on why organizations should consider it a priority to teach officers in stress prevention and alleviation, as a part of their required continuing education, in much the same way as officers are required to train in firearms, defensive tactics, and emergency vehicle operation.

### **III. Theoretical Framework-Social Learning Theory**

Sociological theories offer a theoretical explanation when analyzing the deviance of stress in conjunction with law enforcement. Dealing with stress, or more aptly not dealing with it, may not be considered deviant, however it is also not universally regarded as accepted behavior. It is not uncommon to hear the term "police subculture." While the existence of an actual subculture is the a topic of research, in many ways, those in law enforcement form as much of a sub-group as those involved in groups engaging in socially recognized deviant behavior. It is for this reason that "deviance" theories can be applied.

Social Learning theory lends itself very well in explaining police behavior. The theory was first presented by Albert Bandura. The basis of his theory was that there is more to behavior than simple reaction, and a person's behavior is a resulting combination of the environment, behavior of others, and the person's thought process (Learning Theories, 2008). Bandura developed the theory of observational learning, or modeling. Bandura based his theory on the concept that,

learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do. Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action (as cited in Kearsley, 2007, 1).

Bandura proposed there are four distinct steps involved in the social learning or modeling process; Attention, Retention, Reproduction, and Motivation (1977). Attention was Bandura's word for the observation of behavior of others. He stated that prior to learning how to do something, you have to pay attention to the behavior as it is performed by others.

Once a behavior is observed, there must be some retention of it. A behavior can not be learned if there is no retention of it. A person can watch someone perform a certain behavior, however without recalling how the behavior is performed, the next step will never be achieved. The third step in Bandura's social learning theory is that of reproduction. A

person can watch and even remember how to do it, however it will not become learned until there is an actual reproduction of it. Finally, perhaps the most important consideration in learning a behavior is motivation. Motivation can be positive or negative. If there is no motivation to learn a behavior, there may be attention and retention, but there will not be reproduction. Bandura further proposed that those who have social control are more likely to be paid attention to and modeled (Bandura, as cited in Franzoi, 2000). This idea is very relevant to the world of law enforcement training. Very few people have more control over a new officer than the academy instructors and Field Training Officers.

A second theory of social learning was offered by Ronald Akers. Akers' theory also proposed there are four variables which affect learned behavior. Akers and Jensen (2006) provide an overview of the theory and its concepts. The first of these variables is Differential Association. This variable deals specifically with who the person associates with, in this case, other police officers. It is by this association the new officer is exposed to all the other variables needed for social learning (Cullen and

Agnew, 2003). After association, a new officer is exposed to Definitions. According to Akers, definitions are personally held attitudes and beliefs, which encourage or deter the officer from engaging in certain behaviors. Often, the belief or attitude is not so strongly held as to compel a specific action (Cullen and Agnew, 2003). Differential Reinforcement is the third variable in Akers' theory, which resembles the motivation of Bandura. The decision to engage in a behavior is weighed according to the balance of rewards and punishments. If rewards exceed punishment, the chance a behavior will occur is greater. Finally, Akers' theory includes Imitation. This is simply the engagement in a behavior after it being observed in others. This corresponds to Bandura's variable of reproduction.

It should be easy to see how the Social Learning Theories can easily be adapted to the world of law enforcement training and behavior. In fact, Kearsley (2007) offers the insight that Bandura's theory is the foundation for the technique of behavior modeling which is widely used in training programs. When considered in a broad perspective, new recruits learn how to be police entirely using these Social Learning

Theories. While academy training consists of some theory and book work, the skills to be a police officer are taught by demonstration and repetition. Instructors demonstrate techniques and recruits model what they have been shown. Bandura's theory can easily be adapted to academy training.

After the academy, newly trained officers go through a field training program, where new officers learn how to be competent from older officers (Gilmartin, 2002). As new officers, they see how the veterans show no emotion on critical incidents and appear unaffected by situations. New officers observe this behavior and accept this as the proper response.

Officers who do show emotion or show weakness are often viewed negatively by colleagues and new officers learn this is not acceptable (Deisinger, 2002). This harsh view by others could be considered a negative motivation or punishment, further reinforcing to the new officer the behavior of not showing emotion or acknowledging stress. From their predecessors, officers learn how to handle the streets, but they fail to learn how to handle their lives (Gilmartin, 2002).

Police officers become more reliant on each other for support, both professionally and socially, reaching a point where the only strong relationships held by many officers are those with other officers. Cochran and Bromley (2003) propose that those in the law enforcement field adopt a sub-cultural response in an effort to cope. This police sub-culture begins with the bonding started in the academy and continues to develop as officers learn from their peers and training officers, further intensifying as officers advance in their careers (Chappell and Piquero, 2004; Gilmartin, 2002). It takes little effort to see how Akers' theory of social learning can be applied to this period in an officer's training and career.

#### **IV. Literature Review: Police Stress Training Programs**

Police stress has been recognized as a problem for decades (Waters and Ussery, 2007). The result of this realization was the advent of police stress programs. Some larger departments, such as San Francisco, have created special bureaus to assist officers with stress problems (Chamberlin, 2000). The Los Angeles Police Department also implemented a peer support program, to complement the full-time psychological staff (Capps, 1984). These programs and approaches still fall short in that they focus on resolving an issue once it develops, rather than doing something to prevent it in the first place.

Harpold (2002) points out there is little being done to inoculate new officers from the negative effects of stress. The horizon is not completely bleak. There are training programs in use with the goal of preparing new officers for the stresses that will undoubtedly be faced. Some of these focus on the effects of stress, teaching new officers how to keep stress from reaching problematic levels. There are also training programs which strive to make police officers aware of the unique nature of career related

stress, before it becomes a problem. In essence, these latter programs aim to inoculate the new officer, as Harpold recommends.

**A. New York State Stress Training Program**

The State of New York recognized the need for training in police stress and received a grant to create a two-tiered training program (New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services, 2000). The training program was unique in that not only did it offer training at both the recruit and in-service levels for officers, it included the spouses and families. The stated goal of the program was "To enable law enforcement officer to effectively perform their duties through the identification and management of the negative aspects of stress" (New York State, 2000, 4).

The program was divided into two ten-hour sessions. The first session was taught during the recruit academy, while the other was offered during in-service training. The training included spouses, as they are forced to deal with the same negative effects of stress. As was discussed in previous sections, the end result of police stress on families

is all too often disruption, at best. The case of David Brame illustrates the worst possible outcome, homicide and suicide (CNN, 2003).

The New York State program is broken into three sessions. The morning session consists of short pre-test on stress, followed by three hours of role playing scenarios. The scenarios are based on real-life situations that may cause officers stress. The scenarios are played out by instructors and support staff, with participation by the officers. Spouses and family members watch, offering them some insight into the stresses encountered by their loved one. Instructors debrief everyone, after the scenarios are completed.

The second session is a four hour block focusing on stress. Instructors review the morning session and then offer information on stress: what it is, what it does and what causes it (New York State, 2000). During this session, officers are also given strategies for stress reduction. These strategies involve things officers can do in their environment, physical alternatives, as well as mental avenues.

The final part of the training is a three hour evening session. This session is presented by

professionals in the Employee Assistance division. It focuses on support that is available, and the importance of confidentiality.

The training is concluded by offering a short post-test. There is also some final discussion on stress concepts. A summation of the training is given and attendees can ask questions or voice concerns.

### **B. Emotional Survival for Law Enforcement**

Dr. Kevin Gilmartin (2002) developed the Emotional Survival for Law Enforcement program to focus on the emotional and physical toll police work takes on those in the field. Dr. Gilmartin is especially qualified to speak on topics of stress and police work. After receiving his PhD in clinical psychology, Dr. Gilmartin was hired as a deputy by the Pima County, AZ Sheriff's Department, where he served for 21 years.

The Emotional Survival program is unique in that it addresses not only the psychological, but also the physical sources of stress experienced by law enforcement officers. It also examines how the subtle day to day stressors can reach problematic proportions.

The program first provides an overview of an officer's emotional journey, from academy to retirement. It points out how officers go from a positive level to a negative level throughout their career. The Emotional Survival program (Gilmartin, 2002) outlines how officers learn from older officers and predictably go from an enthusiastic rookie officer to a cynical veteran. He then questions why more is not being done to prevent the destructive effects of stress on police officers.

Dr. Gilmartin (2002, 8) illustrates how street survival training has increased in the past decades, leading to fewer officers being killed by others. Conversely, he argues that while more training in street survival leads to fewer suspect perpetrated deaths, police suicide has dramatically increased. Dr. Gilmartin questions why more is not being done by administrators and legislators to bring about the same level of training for officer's emotional survival as their physical survival. The program also looks at ways organizations can reduce the destructiveness of police stress. He focuses on ways departments can turn negative circumstance into opportunities for better management of police stress situations. The

Emotional Survival program educates participants in how and why police officers begin the change from the idealistic rookie to the disgruntled veteran.

The concept of Hypervigilance is a large component of the Emotional Survival program. Dr. Gilmartin identifies hypervigilance and the psycho-physiological affects this has on the officer. Dr. Gilmartin refers to this as a roller coaster, both from a physical and emotional perspective.

Hypervigilance is a biological state officers are in while they are on duty. Officers are always on the alert for something, looking for things which are out of the ordinary. The body responds by increasing energy, blood pressure, alertness, and pulse, to name just a few (Gilmartin, 2002, 38). Often, officers perceive this change in bodily response as pleasant and exhilarating.

Unfortunately, as everyone is fully aware, for every action there must be a reaction. As officers experience this heightened level of bodily response, eventually they must also experience the reduction of these levels. Much the same as the increased levels are perceived as pleasant, the drop results in an unpleasant feeling. During this seminar, Dr.

Gilmartin compares this feeling to that of depression. He contends that officers begin to associate the pleasant feelings with work and the unpleasant ones with home. Officers begin spending more time at work, rather than at home, thus perpetuating the cycle of social isolation that many officers suffer.

Dr. Gilmartin (2002) provides seven symptoms of his Hypervigilance rollercoaster. These symptoms are, 1) Desire for social isolation at home; 2) Unwillingness to engage in conversations or activities that are not police related; 3) Reduced interaction with non-police friends and acquaintances; 4) Procrastination in decision making not related to work; 5) Infidelity; 6) Noninvolvement in children's needs and activities; and 7) The "I usta" syndrome- loss of interest in hobbies or recreational activities.

The Emotional Survival for Law Enforcement program details how officers who succumb to the pitfalls of the hypervigilance rollercoaster end up identifying themselves as victims (Gilmartin, 2002). Officers who do not learn to traverse the course of emotional survival often lose their sense of personal identity. No longer do they identify as a husband,

wife, coach, etc. Officer simply identify themselves by saying, "I am a cop" (Gilmartin, 2002, 76).

Dr. Gilmartin concludes the Emotional Survival program by outlining ways officers, new and veteran, can regain control. He offers suggestions for combating both the physical and psychological responses to the Hypervigilance rollercoaster.

Dr. Gilmartin's program is different than the training offered by New York State. Both programs offer advantages to officers, by taking a proactive stance on police stress. Family participation is important to both programs, as well. The New York program is a required part of all police academies, taught by academy instructors. Dr. Gilmartin's Emotional Survival seminar is a stand alone program. Dr. Gilmartin and his associates travel the country and even internationally presenting the program to police departments, academies, members of law enforcement organizations and family members.

New York State's training program exposes officers and families to typical stressors which might be encountered on the job, and offers appropriate responses and strategies in dealing with these stressors. Dr. Gilmartin's program looks at police

stress from a different perspective. It does examine job stressors, but it also considers the stress created from simply having the job, regardless of what is actually encountered. He provides a unique view into how the body's physical responses can result in negative psychological effects.

Considering the importance of material covered in Dr. Gilmartin's program, departments should know the program can be expensive. Hosting the program at a local department has a price tag of \$4,600.00 (Kravitz, 2005). This should be considered money well spent, as the cost up front may save more money, as well as officer's well-being, later (Finn, 1997; This Is London, 2007).

Responses from Dr. Gilmartin's program provide subjective information on the positive outcomes. Officers who have attended his training suggest that training of this nature is "better late than never" and "it should be a required part of police academies and promotional processes" (Gilmartin, 2002, xvi).

## **V. Recommendations**

Police stress is not something new. Numerous studies have been undertaken over the past several decades, examining the causes and results of police stress. This paper has looked at sources of stress, signs and symptoms often associated with stress, and some of the costs.

The costs of police stress continue to rise, stretching the budgets of departments. Taxpayers are also faced with the increasing costs, as stressed officers file for disability more frequently than in the past. Officers are also leaving organizations for stress-related reasons, forcing administrators to spend more of their budgets on overtime and hiring processes. These increased costs eventually get passed on to the communities.

Stress also takes a human toll. Police officers suffer a greater risk of health issues due to a consistent exposure to stress. It is hard to argue that law enforcement is the most stressful occupation, as every occupation has its stressors (Malloy and Mays, 1984). What makes law enforcement unique is not that it has the highest level of stress, it is that officers are exposed to more types of stress on a more

frequent basis. Dr. Gilmartin (2002) illuminates the stress resulting from the state of hypervigilance. Harpold (2002) reminds us that officers face the stress of dealing with the worst in people's behaviors on a daily basis.

Officers contend with a continual onslaught of stress. They do so with little information on the causes of stress and insufficient training in proper stress management techniques. This lack of training results in officers using maladaptive strategies to cope. These strategies range include alcohol and drug use, family violence, uncontrolled work place anger, and suicide. This does not have to be the outcome of a career in law enforcement. Officers should not reach a point where they simply exist, yet do not really live a life outside police work.

#### **A. Police Specific Stress Training in Recruit Programs**

One of the most important steps which should be taken is to make new officers aware of the stressors they will face. Organizational sources of stress were cited as one of the primary sources for officers leaving law enforcement, yet this is not something often told to new officers. As the survey of local

and state academies revealed, police recruit programs allot very little time to the topic of stress and stress management (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2002).

The need for training in law enforcement stress has not gone unnoticed by those in elected positions. In 1994, the United States Congress recognized this need and passed legislation that adequate training programs must be implemented at state and local levels (Amaranto, et al., 2003). Unfortunately, this Act did not specify the types of training, so academies and organizations were left to decide what constituted "adequate" training. The continued rise in police suicides is one blatant example that current trainings have not reached the level of adequate.

The Central Florida Police Stress Unit proposes that new officers receive 40 hours of police stress training in the police academy (PSU Training Institute, 2007). It is unrealistic to believe that academies would increase training in police stress from six hours to 40 hours, however the two programs reviewed in previous sections range from eight hours for the Emotional Survival program to the 10 hour session in the New York academies.

This is not a drastic increase in time spent on stress training, but it is a much needed directional shift. These two programs provide training in stress specific to law enforcement. They also offer stress management techniques focused on the law enforcement officer. Equally important is that these training programs work to dispel the long-held notion that police officers do not experience stress. They also strive to change the attitude that officers should not seek assistance when they experience that stress.

#### **B. Mandatory Ongoing Training**

The two police stress training programs reviewed hold an advantage to others which might be available. They can be presented to new recruits and veteran officers, with little alteration. Bandura's social learning theory proposed that retention and reproduction were necessary for learning. Similar information given at multiple times, over an extended period of time, is much like seeing a behavior performed. The more times an officer sees, or in this case, hears information, the greater the chance of retention.

If officers start their career learning a behavior, and continue hearing that same information throughout their career, eventually the attitudes toward police stress and seeking help when warranted will shift. Applying Akers' social learning theory, these new officers learn a definition of police stress. Throughout their career, these new officers eventually become the veterans that new recruits associate with, ultimately resulting in a change in the perceived differential reinforcement. No longer will acknowledging stress and seeking assistance be considered weak or viewed negatively.

This change is not one that will come immediately or easily. It will not come at all if new recruits and veteran officers are not given adequate and on-going training in the stress faced by law enforcement professionals.

Programs such as Dr. Gilmartin's Emotional Survival for Law Enforcement may seem out of reach for some agencies with budgetary constraints. Departments and educational facilities should look at ways to share the costs of these programs. Several small departments can join together, possibly even joining with a law enforcement training center, to sponsor one

of these programs. One agency may not be able to afford the fee for such a program, but when several join together, the resulting cost is minimal for each individual agency.

Law enforcement academies need not reinvent the wheel of police stress training. Academies that do not currently offer law enforcement specific stress training can look to those programs, such as the one established by the State of New York, and adapt it to meet the needs of the agency. The outline for the New York program is available through the National Criminal Justice Research Service (NCJRS).

## **V. Summary and Conclusion**

Stress does not have to be a debilitating result of a career in law enforcement. Departments and educational organizations can take steps to prepare officers. Utilizing training programs to teach officers on police stress can prevent stress from reaching that incapacitating level. These same training programs can also be used throughout an officer's career as a reminder.

Officers begin their career with enthusiasm, ready to handle whatever is encountered. Training officers on the effects of these encounters will keep them enthusiastic and mentally prepared to do the job.

There are programs available to teach officers about law enforcement specific stress. These programs exist as part of established academy curriculum and as stand alone trainings. The factor that must be considered is that the training be specific to the stresses faced by law enforcement. Police officers face stresses that few others encounter, and they do so almost daily. Failing to prepare them for these stress assaults is tantamount to not training them to fight off a physical assault.

It is an unfortunate fact that officers are more likely to take their own life than be killed by a perpetrator. Officers are given academy training in firearms, defensive tactics, and emergency driving, all aimed at keeping them safe when responding to and handling a call. An officer's mental safety needs to receive the same consideration.

Changing the attitude toward police stress will not come without effort. This effort must come from officers, families, administrators, organizations, and educators. The changes will also not come without at least some cost. There is an old adage that says "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Taking the time to train officers in the prevention of police stress, will go a long way to reducing the need for an expensive cure.

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