Stress Reduction: A Proactive Prevention Program for Law Enforcement

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Under the Supervision of Dr. Susan Hilal
Acknowledgements

Obtaining my Master’s Degree has always been a personal and professional goal that I set for myself many years ago. Stress prevention was selected as my seminar topic because of the overwhelming affect that I have witnessed stress have on law enforcement officers.

I would like to thank my family, friends, and co-workers for their understanding and support over the past four years – especially to my fiancée, Katie, and to my parents, Tracy and William.

I would also like to thank my graduate advisor Dr. Cheryl Banachowski-Fuller, with a special thank you to Dr. Susan Hilal for her guidance, encouragement, and support during the writing of this seminar paper.

Finally, to all of the law enforcement officers thank you for your service and sacrifice. Our profession has aspects that can be controlled and aspects that cannot be controlled. Stress awareness and proactive prevention can be controlled, so seek out resources that work for you, your family, your friends, and your community! Stay safe out there!
Abstract

Stress Reduction: A Proactive Prevention Program for Law Enforcement

Eugene C. Woehrle

Under the Supervision of Dr. Susan Hilal

Statement of the Problem

Stress is an everyday fact of life for most law enforcement officers. The American Institute of Stress ranks policing among the top ten stress-producing jobs in the country (as cited in Schmalleger, 2009). Police officer stress can manifest itself in many ways that can potentially hurt officers, their loved ones, their department, and the public. Many stressors that law enforcement face are not acute, physical challenges that test the officers’ ability to survive life-threatening situations. These stressors instead may involve how the officer handles the psychological and social stressors in the work and home environment. Many times, law enforcement tends to view other people’s needs as more important than their own. However, both quantitative and qualitative overload in the work and home environment places the law enforcement officer under stress. These demands include the needs and obligations from work, family, departmental pressures, and line of duty deaths. Even though the sources and causes of stress are unique for each person, many law enforcement officers experience these common sources of stress.

Methods of Approach

The methodology consisted of a review of secondary research and statistics, including a review of various empirical and theoretical findings. The general strain theory, power and
control theory, and social learning theory are also examined for their correlation to the law enforcement profession and related stress, reinforcing the need for a proactive stress prevention program for law enforcement professionals. The police subculture creates a family-like environment; however, the subculture often does not address the proper techniques for proactively recognizing and addressing stress relating to individuals. Both the City of Madison Police Department (Madison, Wisconsin) and the New York State Department of Law Enforcement (New York, New York) are discussed as model agencies with stress reduction programs. This seminar research paper also discusses a proactive stress prevention program to be adopted and/or utilized within the law enforcement professional community, as well as recommends strategies and tools to evaluate the program’s effectiveness after adoption.

Results of the Study

Over the past decade, police administrations have started to recognize the seriousness and consequences involved regarding stress and their officers. Many administrations have implemented programs that are directed towards external changes or the development of programs to assist officers in the form of group or individual counseling (Gaines & Kappeler, 2008). Unfortunately, according to Gaines and Kappeler (2008), very limited proactive changes have occurred within police departments – instead a reactive approach to stress has been utilized. It is important for police departments to assist their officers in handling daily stressors and the body’s response to stress by providing proactive departmental programs, such as focused in-service trainings that would encourage implementation of relaxation methods that officers could utilize throughout their shift to help cope with these negative stressors.
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SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

Stress Reduction: A Proactive Prevention Program for Law Enforcement

Statement of the Problem

Stress is a natural element of police work. The American Institute of Stress ranks policing among the top ten stress-producing jobs in the country (as cited in Schmalleger, 2009). Police officer stress can manifest itself in many ways that can potentially hurt officers, their loved ones, their department, and the public. Examples include burnout, substance abuse, lower tolerance levels, health problems, poor judgment, deteriorating relationships with family and friends, high turnover, low productivity, use of excessive force, citizen complaints and increased rates of workers’ compensation claims (Schmalleger, 2009). According to Bennett and Hess (2007, p. 351), “stress is killing and incapacitating more police officers than bullets. Along with body armor, every man and woman entering this profession deserves a ‘stress vest’ that provides them with the knowledge, skills and on-going services to combat the deadly consequences of stress.”

Stress often means different things to different people. Stress is commonly thought of as anxiety, tension, strain or pressure and is the body’s internal response to a situation a person perceives as threatening (Bennett & Hess, 2007). Significant physiological, psychological, and behavioral consequences can also result from regular exposure to stress and strain, especially for officers without supportive family and friends or the coping skills necessary to deal with a stressful job.

Since stress is an adaptation response that alters and strains the body over time, the end result can lead to the general adaptation syndrome. This syndrome is a long-term, three stage
response pattern in which the body tries to accommodate stress by adapting to stressors. This process consists of the fight or flight stage (alarm reaction), the stage of resistance (which could be long term), and the stage of exhaustion (resulting in stress related diseases). It is important to reemphasize that stress is a physical reaction of the body and to remember that the body does not differentiate between pleasure and pain. This stress response is triggered and perceived as a physical threat by the mind which prepares the body for vigorous muscular activity to meet the threats and challenges presented whether the threat is real or imagined. Anytime the mechanisms of adaptation are called into play, stress manifests itself as a definable medical problem and can be characterized by fatigue, weakness, loss of appetite, and a general lack of interest (Copes, 2005). If stress is allowed to accumulate, the body could reach a breaking point as well. If an officer allows stress to accumulate and does nothing about his or her situation, then their bodily response will continue to be a hazard to the officer’s physical and mental health, and possibly compromise their police services. This continual stress can also progress into medical conditions as severe as a heart attack, stroke, or gastric ulcer, as well as a state of psychological or clinical depression.

In a review of police work, common work stressors can be found most often among the following experiences: conflict with departmental regulations, poor supervisor support, public disrespect, shift work, excessive paperwork, lack of recognition, poor fringe benefits, and accidents in public or in patrol vehicles (Copes, 2005). Officers also encounter situations and experiences that are less common than those mentioned above, such as children beaten and/or abused, domestic violence tasks, another officer hurt, death notifications, losing control of an altercation, and disrespect from the courts. Furthermore, Gerhshon, Barocas, Canton, Li, and Vlahov (2009) indicated that critical incidents,
workplace discrimination, lack of cooperation among coworkers, and job dissatisfaction were significantly correlated with perceived work stress among officers.

**Purpose of the Study**

Law enforcement officers face traumatic incidents daily. These events, which are typically sudden and unexpected, are outside the realm of normal experiences; therefore, even the most trained, experienced, and seasoned officers may encounter and face profound physical, emotional and psychological impacts (Bennett & Hess, 2007). However, trying to hurry through or completely ignore the emotional turmoil that follows a traumatic incident can have serious consequences.

Police administrations have recognized the seriousness and consequences involved regarding stress and their officers. Many administrations have implemented programs that are directed towards external changes or the development of programs to assist officers in the form of group or individual counseling (Gaines & Kappeler, 2008). Unfortunately, according to Gaines and Kappeler (2008), very limited proactive changes have occurred within police departments – instead a reactive approach to stress has been utilized. It is important for police departments to assist their officers in handling daily stressors and the body’s response to stress by providing proactive departmental programs, such as focused in-service trainings that would encourage implementation of relaxation methods that officers could utilize throughout their shift to help cope with these negative stressors.
Methodology

The method of approach for this seminar paper will consist of a review of secondary research and statistics, including a review of various empirical and theoretical findings. The general strain theory, power and control theory, and social learning theory will also be examined for their correlation to the law enforcement profession and related stress, reinforcing the need for a proactive stress prevention program for law enforcement professionals. The general strain theory will help with a broad understanding of the impact of stress on an individual over time and its effect. The power and control theory will look at various work relationships and home relationships, including the often contrasting characteristics that come with the position of a police officer. The social learning theory will assist with the explanation of learned negative behavior that can occur through the police subculture. The police subculture creates a family-like environment; however, the subculture often does not address the proper techniques for proactively recognizing and addressing stress relating to individuals. This seminar research paper will discuss a proactive stress prevention program to be adopted and/or utilized within the law enforcement professional community, as well as recommend strategies and tools to evaluate the program’s effectiveness after adoption.

Limitations

The limitations of this seminar research paper are that very few proactive stress prevention programs are currently utilized within the law enforcement profession that provide services to the officer, their family, and the department. Most departmental stress prevention programs are reactive and address critical stressors that officers encounter after
experiencing a traumatic event. These reactive programs do not address long-term relaxation training, officer assistance, or family assistance relating to coping techniques to deal with the stress or stressors on and off the job, and the use of psychophysiological approaches that engage both mind and body that can be used daily.
SECTION II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review section of this paper is divided into five sections: definition of stress, types of stress, sources of stress, impact of stress, and perceived stress.

Definition of Stress

The definition of stress varies between individuals, groups, and organizations; however, Hans Selye is credited as the pioneer to note the existence of human stress and clarify the nature of stress (American Institute of Stress, 2013). Selye (1946) defined stress as “the nonspecific response of the body to any demand made upon it to adapt whether that demand produces pleasure or pain.” Therefore, stress is the physiological reaction or response of the body; it is physical, not cognitive. The stimuli that trigger the stress response may be cognitive mental conditions (anxiety, depression, or frustration) and are termed “stressors” (Allen, 1983). In other words, a stressor is the cause and stress is the physiological effect or result.

Selye’s definition is important with the term nonspecific both in cause and in effect. The stress reaction can be triggered by anything that changes conditions for the body to which it must then adapt. This produces nonspecific effects and alters the activity of all organ systems in the body. Interestingly, both pleasure and pain are capable of evoking a stress response. Pain and pleasure elicit an adaptive response since both change the circumstances under which the body must operate (Allen, 1983).

According to the American Institute of Stress (2013), stress has generally been thought of “as being synonymous with distress and dictionaries have defined it as ‘physical, mental, or emotional strain or tension’ or ‘a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilize.’” Most
stress conditions are not physically derived, but are created by events (stressors) that seem to distort perceptions and affect the individual by how they are interpreted. Events that produce mental or cognitive arousal may in many cases be the direct stimuli that trigger the stress response. This implies a critical mind-body link that states the mind is placed in a position in which it must adapt, and is followed by a physical response of the body (Allen, 1983).

Types of Stress

Stress can be helpful (eustress) or harmful (distress), depending on its frequency and intensity as well as how it is mediated. For every performance activity (running speed, target shooting accuracy, muscle development) and each individual, there is a given amount of stress that will produce optimal performance. However, if the stress increases past that optimal point, performance decreases and the individual will gradually shut down. Thus, some stress is essential and healthy, the optimal amount is ideal, and too much is damaging.

Eustress is positive stress that enables people to function and accomplish goals (Bennett & Hess, 2007). It allows law enforcement officers to react immediately in life-threatening situations, feeling the excitement, the energy, and the heightening of their senses. Distress, in contrast, is negative stress that can lead to numerous diseases, including depression (Bennett & Hess, 2007). Distress represents an agent of damage; eustress, represents a challenge, a stimulus for growth and positive development (Bennett & Hess, 2007). The critical difference is how the stressors are interpreted – either as a challenge or threat. If the continual stressors in life are considered threats, then harmful results occur that will break down the officer’s “system.” If these same life events are looked at as challenges, then they can encourage growth and survival.
Most people associate stress with distress; however, some stress is essential to optimal performance and serves as a positive, challenging function.

Stages of Stress

The stages of the general adaptation syndrome, a long-term physiological response pattern to adaptation, are linked with the processes and development of human stress. The general effects on most people when confronted with a stressor can also be conceptualized into three stages: alarm reaction, stage of resistance, and stage of exhaustion.

The first stage is *alarm reaction*, which can be described as a brief period of high arousal of the sympathetic nervous systems, and readying of the body for vigorous activity (Copes, 2005). For example, imagine an alarm going off at a military base. Hundreds of people and machines suddenly spring to life. In this stage, the body notes the environmental change and reacts by initiating its adaptive defenses. An environmental change could mean anything internal or external – a change in outside air temperature, or a change in chemical balance within the body, or tripping on a sidewalk and breaking your ankle. In this stage, the body’s first response is to interpret the environmental changes and react by initiating its adaptive defenses to the new set of circumstances (Allen, 1983). The autonomic nervous system activates an increase in heart rate and breathing, muscle tension, and a heightened sense of alertness. The autonomic nervous system is also trying to regulate and balance the body’s response to the stressor or threat during this stage. The sympathetic nervous system (which is part of the autonomic nervous system) is providing the body with an increase in adrenaline needed to fight or flee the situation (New York Division of Criminal Justice Services, 2000). At the same time, the parasympathetic nervous system (also part of the autonomic nervous system) is working against the sympathetic nervous
system in order to slow down the increased adrenaline to the body and allow the body to still function properly.

Some stressors (stressful events or pressures) last longer than the body can maintain at this high state of arousal. Therefore, Copes (2005) suggests that the officer might enter the *stage of resistance*, a stage of prolonged but moderate arousal. During this stage, the body and mind continues to adapt by actively trying to maintain its physiological integrity and resist the changes imposed on it (Allen, 1983). Therefore, the autonomic nervous system further prepares the body to address the perceived threat and situation (New York Division of Criminal Justice Services, 2000). This is the longest stage and may last for months, years, or even decades.

If the stress continues to be intense and long lasting, the officer’s body can enter the third phase, the *stage of exhaustion*. Copes (2005) describes this phase as a chemical change in the body, which causes some the body functions or organ systems to fail, producing a weakened immune system. For a brief period of time, this will not necessarily present a problem since the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems are working towards returning the body back to a normal state (New York Division of Criminal Justice Services, 2000); however, over a long period of time, severe stress might leave an officer vulnerable to a variety of illnesses and/or severe medical problems. When one or more organ systems fail or become exhausted under the stress of adaptation, the organism has a *disease of adaptation* (Allen, 1983). Diseases of adaptation, also referred to as stress-related diseases, are the end result of the general adaptation syndrome. At this point, stress manifests itself as a definable medical problem such as a heart attack, gastric ulcer, breakdown of the immune system, diabetes, severe depression, or stroke.

For some of us, these “fight or flight” options are easily and readily available. Yet, according to Copes (2005), a third option of “freeze” needs to be added to the accepted “fight or
flight” reaction notion. However, these options are not necessarily voluntary reactions by an individual. They are often involuntary reactions or automatic bodily responses and can produce visible performance (or lack of it) by others. For instance, off-duty officers who recognize fearful consequences from an upcoming assignment can report “sick” or use compensatory time. Furthermore, if working officers respond with a “flight” response, there may be victims or other consequences as a result of their decisions. Their body can produce indicators of a fight, flight, or freeze response, no matter where their mind goes.

**Acute Stress and Chronic Stress**

On a daily basis, the officer’s adrenaline levels are at a high level, and now other hormones have elevated his blood sugar as well. This is called acute stress, which is a severe, extremely intense distress that lasts a limited time, and then the individual typically returns to normal (Bennett & Hess, 2007). This type of stress can also be called traumatic stress. Acute stress is temporary and may result in peak performance; however, the adrenaline rushes through the body, the heart rate increases, blood pressure increases, brain activity increases, and breathing rates and metabolic rates increase – the body is preparing for a fight or flight situation.

In contrast to acute stress, when the body experiences chronic stress which is less intense, the continual stress will eventually become debilitating (Bennett & Hess, 2007). This type of stress is also called cumulative stress. Bennett and Hess (2007) explain that the law enforcement profession has a constant flow of stress that starts to impact the officer as well. These sources of stress are often continuous (from calls for service or daily routine activities) and not even noticed, and can lead to post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
Sources of Stress

Many stressors that law enforcement face are not acute, physical challenges that test the officers’ ability to survive life-threatening situations. These stressors instead may involve how the officer handles the psychological and social stressors in the work and home environment. Many times, law enforcement tends to view other people’s needs as more important than their own. However, both quantitative and qualitative overload in the work and home environment places the law enforcement officer under stress. These demands include the needs and obligations from work, family, departmental pressures, and line of duty deaths. Even though the sources and causes of stress are unique for each person, many law enforcement officers experience these common sources of stress.

Overload

Stress is an everyday fact of life for most law enforcement officers. However, stress experienced with excessive demands for periods that are too long or too high can cause health problems. An officer may be overloaded quantitatively by having to multi-task with work responsibilities, going to school, studying for exams, writing papers, completing work trainings, working overtime, participating in family life, and being part of the community. An officer may also be asked to assume additional work tasks and responsibilities when they already feel overwhelmed with too much work to do and an insufficient amount of time in which to get it all completed. In other words, no matter how hard the officer works, one will never get caught up. Is the officer taking on too much responsibility or just overwhelmed with too many pressures?

An officer might also be asked to complete a task or assignment that they perceive they are not prepared for, or lack the experience, ability, or adequate training to do the task well. This
qualitative overload can affect performance and make the officer also feel incompetent, anxious and frustrated. Continuous technology information and computer/phone usage is another source of qualitative overload that occurs 24/7 in law enforcement. Conley (2011) states that all this technology has had a major impact on stress that the officer can be affected negatively by the information overload that may demand new skills, speedier reaction times and creativity to multi-task safely in the law enforcement environment.

These powerful overload stressors can result in physiological, psychological and behavioral changes in the body. The stress response from this work related overload may be carried outside of the work environment creating more stress at home, at work, or in the community setting. Allen and Hyde (1981) found that overload can affect job performance and is associated with increased absenteeism, low morale, and a decrease in work motivation.

**Work Hours & Shift Work**

General work stressors are a derivative of the work hours, shift work, court hearings/subpoenas, conflict with departmental policies and procedures, poor supervisor support, excessive paperwork, lack of recognition, gender differences or perceptions, another officer hurt, and accidents in public or patrol vehicles that officers often encounter on a routine basis (Copes, 2005). Police officers, furthermore, often report that they experience emotional turmoil as a consequence of dealing with serious cases of child abuse (Schmalleger, 2009) and domestic violence (Copes, 2005). Additionally, Gerhshon et al. (2009) indicated that critical incidents, workplace discrimination, lack of cooperation among coworkers, and job dissatisfaction were significantly correlated with perceived work stress among officers.
The law enforcement profession is not a typical or “normal” job that works nine to five, Monday to Friday. Police officers work rotating schedules and shifts with the time frames varying from an eight-hour day to a twelve-hour day depending on departmental resources, needs, etc. This unusual work schedule and rotation often requires police officers to work holidays, weekends, during family events, and often involves mandatory or voluntary overtime (Miller, 2007). In fact, many people outside of the criminal justice system do not realize the strain that the work schedule places on officers and their families. As a result, many families find it difficult to continually be flexible with the instability and unpredictability of the law enforcement profession.

Many young police officers tend to work a great deal of hours to accommodate the organization and their personal career. These young men and women have high expectations for themselves. These officers want to get involved in many different aspects of the job and are ambitious to start new things, which can be overwhelming. Miller (2007), however, suggests that spouses would rather spend extra time with their significant others, rather than having them constantly working.

Dawson and Reid (1997) and Williamson and Feyer (2000), found that when looking at lengthy work hours, officers who are awake for 19 consecutive hours have the same impairment level as a person with a 0.05% blood alcohol content (BAC). This was further worsened when the officer was awake for 24 consecutive hours. The BAC simulation at that point went to 0.10%. In most states the legal limit to drive is below .08%. Officers involved in this test showed decreased hand eye coordination and cognitive performance (Dawson & Reid, 1997; Williamson & Feyer, 2000). Furthermore, officers that are in a sleep deprived condition had a 50 percent decreased reaction time when compared to an intoxicated person.
Police Subculture

The police subculture and the continual working atmosphere are both very dangerous to the well-being of a police officer and their family. According to Cavanagh (2004), over time the subculture diminishes the well-being of the police officer and everyone around them. Cavanagh (2004) identifies characteristics of the police subculture, which are detrimental to the officer and their family, such as the “John Wayne Syndrome” that promotes “tough, abusive, prejudice, hard drinking, hot tempered, humorless, authoritarian, unattached, bullheaded, fearless, chauvinistic, adventuresome, and emotionless” (p. 81). The authoritarian style of the police subculture may cause marital problems that often result in divorce. Miller (2007) suggests that the police subculture and aggressive behaviors exhibited by the officer create distance from their spouse or significant other and leads to increased marital and family problems.

Organizational

Dealing with the police organization is a major stressor that many police officers endure. Police departments typically have a heavy reliance on organizational efficiency and uniformity of operations, falling under the bureaucratic school of management style of leadership (Zhao, He, & Lovrich, 2002). Zhao et al. (2002) further explain that the stressors police officers face are often worse than other occupations because of the hierarchical structure and fixed division of labor, prolonged probationary periods, narrow span of control, and a strict chain of command. Although officers are expected to utilize discretion in their daily calls and tasks, they often have their decisions scrutinized by administrators the following day.

According to Zhao et al. (2002), the quasi-military manner of law enforcement can allow line officers to become alienated as well. This occurs because officers are very seldom allowed
to be involved in the decision making processes at their departments. The policies and procedures are decided by administrators, but they affect the day to day operations of the police department without the input from line officers who will need to work under those new policies and procedures. Similar to officers within a department, law enforcement executives and administrators also feel the same stressors only in slightly different ways. Executives and administrators feel a higher amount of occupational stress if they lack control over the hiring process or policies and procedures (Crank, Regoli, & Hewitt, 1993).


Personal conflict exists inside of the individual and typically entails failed expectations for themselves. Stojkovic et al. (2003) note that the officer must align their expectations with the organization and supervisors to fully understand the conflict and reduce the impact it may shed on their personal lives.

Group conflict occurs when individual members disagree on a common interest made by the organization. This form of conflict may cause the group to develop a police subculture that was previously discussed. The interest of this group may be inconsistent of the organization over very small details. A resolution must be achieved to further enhance the quality of the organizational goals and the personal lives of the police officer.

There are four roles within the intra-organizational conflict: vertical conflict, horizontal conflict, line-staff conflict, and role conflict. Vertical conflict refers to the rank and file of the organization. The ability to take orders is vital for organizational goals and well-being of the department. Horizontal conflict identifies problems that exist within those of the same rank or
position within the organization. Line-staff conflict occurs when staff members supplement their arguments based on the workload of the officer. Role conflict is perhaps the most common within criminal justice agencies. Failure to identify organizational goals develops isolation inside and outside of the organization. Placing blame on others, to include their spouse, creates distance that often drives police officers to alcoholism, depression, and divorce.

Inter-organizational conflict occurs when specialties within the organization disagree on the overall objective or arrangement utilized to reach goals. It is important to understand that the well-being of police officers do not pertain strictly to line personnel, but to administrators and supervisors as well. According to Stojkovic et al. (2003), there are many stressors that create problems for staff members within management positions. These stressors can easily filter back into the family life of the police officer just as easily as it could for a member on the patrol unit.

Family

After dealing with work related stressors, officers often return home and feel burdened by the stressors of their significant others and their families. Officers can also take these family stressors with them to work, adding to the already stressful law enforcement profession. Many police officers do not discuss work related matters with their significant others, which can create frustration for their significant other if they observe that there is clearly something weighing on their partner. Although it is important to separate work and home lifestyles, it is also important to have open communication with your significant other regarding stressors in your life.

Figley (1995) discusses secondary traumatic stress (STS) as a symptom that is possible in spouses of police officers. STS is similar to post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD); however, the spouse has not directly dealt with the incident, and has only heard or seen the damage that the
incident has caused to their significant other. A good example of this would be an officer involved shooting and the subsequent investigations that result from this incident. The officer is experiencing a lot of stress during this time (even during a justified use of force incident), while the spouse is trying to help their significant other recover. STS, however, often occurs over time from several stressful events rather than one traumatic event (Figley, 1995).

Figley (1995) states that it is important for significant others of police officers to be aware of STS, because the eventual build-up of stressors will disrupt the marital relationship and cause undue stress on the couple. Similarly to PTSD, STS should be addressed with education on the topic and possibly counseling to curtail the long-term effects. Because officers might not be aware of their spouse’s stress level or possible STS, additional marital or family problems can arise if these issues are not talked about and addressed.

**Gender Differences**

According to Dunham and Alpert (2010), research has shown that gender is another key factor in predicting the sources and coping strategies of stress among police officers. Female police officers are more likely to encounter higher levels of harassment, overt hostility, and other negative social interactions compared to their male co-workers within the police subculture (Dunham & Alpert, 2010). Through previous research, Dunham and Alpert (2010) state that female officers experience stress through sources such as negative attitudes towards male officers, training, exposure to tragic or horrendous events, group blame, and rumors.

Furthermore, several studies have identified work-family conflict as a significant predictor of psychological burnout among police officers. Dunham and Alpert (2010) argue that this work-family relationship particularly affects female officers due to their demands in a
domestic role (i.e. wife and mother), as compared to the domestic demands of the majority of their male co-workers. However, positive coping mechanisms are considered the most effective and appropriate approach to reduce psychological and physical stress for both males and females.

Line of Duty Death

According to the Officer Down Memorial Page (2013), gunfire deaths and automobile related deaths continue to be the two leading causes of officer deaths throughout the nation. Over the past decade, officer line of duty deaths have continued to haunt police officers around the nation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Line of Duty Deaths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
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<td>2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td><em>93</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Despite the gradual variations over the past decade, from January through November of 2013 there has actually been a decrease of 12 percent in overall deaths (during this timeframe) from 2012, with a total decrease of nine percent in automobile related deaths and a total decrease of 31 percent for officers killed by gunfire in the line of duty (Officer Down Memorial Page, 2013).

The 2013 line of duty deaths are categorized by cause below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>Line of Duty Deaths *</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aircraft Accident</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automobile Accident</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bomb</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drowned</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duty Related Illness</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fire</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gunfire</td>
<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gunfire (Accidental)</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heart Attack</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Motorcycle Accident</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>Stabbed</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Struck By Vehicle</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Training Accident</td>
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<td>Vehicle Pursuit</td>
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The deaths of these officers have caused many police organizations a great deal of stress and raise the question of whether departments are equipped to mitigate the stress that an officer killed in the line of duty creates. The idea that your life could be ended while you are at work is a major cause of stress for many police officers. Responding to routine calls is no longer routine because of the felonious assaults that many officers have suffered while responding to these so called “routine calls.” Law enforcement is innately dangerous and along with the increase of violence against the police comes an increase of stress among police officers.

Impact of Stress

Most stress that individuals encounter is caused by the mind’s interpretation and how it triggers the body’s adaptation response. This adaptation response is initiated on a daily basis, throughout our lives, whether one interprets the stressors as a challenge or a threat. Stress is not always damaging to the body and is not something that should be avoided absolutely. Stress can have a positive effect when it encourages people to achieve more in their lives and challenge themselves to produce at an optimal level. Furthermore, the stress response can be influenced by the body’s response to adaptation, the mind’s interpretation of stimuli, and finally the impact of the environment that determines the stressors and sociocultural guidelines interpretations.

Stress frequently demands a response, which can range from very minimal to very serious. Stress affects people in numerous ways: physiological, psychological, and behavioral. Stress can cause a physical strain on the body, relating to “heart problems, hypertension, cancer,
ulcers, diabetes, chronic headaches, anxiety-related disorders, asthma, excessive eating, decreased sex drive, fatigue, dizziness, muscle aches and tics, backaches and frequent urinating” (Bennett & Hess, 2007, p. 365). These medical conditions can be caused or prolonged by stress, and even increase in severity or become aggravated by stress.

The consequences of living in a complex, fast-paced society results in many stress-related diseases, with an estimated 85% of all illnesses resulting from stress (Bennett & Hess, 2007). Stress can lead to various health problems (Collins & Gibbs, 2003) and contribute to negative behavior issues such as alcohol use, aggression, and violence (Kohan & O’Connor, 2002). This complex society is often seen in an officer’s daily activities of unhealthy or rushed meals, working late or nights with long shifts, and long hours of sitting in a patrol car.

Some of the effects of stress can lead officers to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), alcoholism and substance abuse, domestic violence and divorce, depression, or even suicide. Unfortunately, some officers attempt to numb the effects of their traumatic experiences by using chemicals (such as alcohol or drugs). Overwhelming evidence suggests that in the high-stress environment of police work these stressors and the subsequent abuse of chemical substances often are linked (Bennett & Hess, 2007).

Law enforcement officers face traumatic incidents daily. These events, which are typically sudden and unexpected, are outside the realm of normal occurrences; therefore, officers may experience serious physical, emotional and psychological conflicts as they deal with these incidents. Bennett and Hess (2007) observe that the impact of these traumatic incidents can affect even the most trained, experienced and seasoned officers. However, trying to hurry through or completely ignore the emotional turmoil that follows a traumatic incident can have
serious consequences, with some officers turning to alcohol and drugs to help dull the pain and anguish.

In addition to physical symptoms, behavioral symptoms of stress can include “accident-proneness, anger, argumentativeness, blaming others, drug and/or alcohol abuse, excessive violence, irritability, inability to concentrate, lack of control, neurotic behavior, nail biting, obsession with work, rage, rapid behavior changes, uncontrollable urges to cry and withdrawal” (Bennett & Hess, 2007, p. 367). It should be noted that it is only when these symptoms appear in excess or several symptoms appear simultaneously that problems arise.

Interestingly, Roberts and Levenson (2001) found that job stress is far more toxic for marital interaction than physical exhaustion of an individual. Roberts and Levenson (2001) state that during a marriage, there is a minimum of a 50 percent chance that the marriage will end in divorce and further suggests that something as simple as stress can predict happiness or divorce between a married couple. There are, however, a number of practical implications to their findings. It is important for couples to recognize when their working spouses have experienced high levels of stress at work, so the couple can manage this stress constructively and not just avoid the stress completely. Additionally, it is also important for employers to be aware of the effects that job related stress could have on their employees and families.

**Perceived Stress**

The general adaptation syndrome (and its stages) occurs whenever an officer perceives something as threatening to their survival, regardless if the threat is real or imaginary. It is important to remember that physical contact or damage is not required as the body automatically has a preparatory response. The notion of survival involves more than just physical survival, but
also economic survival, academic survival, social survival, and survival of self-esteem (Allen, 1983). If someone feels threatened, in any way, the body reacts as if its physical survival was threatened. The fight or flight reaction is triggered when the mind can take a simple event and interpret it as a threat, creating emotional arousal and biological responses. Again, the body does not know the difference between a real or imaginary threat and can convert these responses into a life-threatening condition of stress.

Gilmartin (2002) states in his book *Emotional Survival for Law Enforcement*, “if I see the world as potentially violent, I’ll be prepared for violence when it does take place” (pg. 33). Police officers must successfully graduate from a law enforcement academy before being placed on the street with a Field Training Officer (FTO). Although many training tactics are different from department to department, the same philosophy of survival remains constant. According to Gilmartin (2002), in order to be successful and survive through the day, officers ultimately develop hyper-vigilant behavior. This behavior is considered to be remarkably dangerous to the well-being of the police officer and their family. In many cases, the officer is at the edge of the squad car seat waiting for the “big call.”

Many people outside of the law enforcement occupation do not deal with hyper-vigilance or the risk of getting hurt on a moment’s notice. Therefore, they do not understand the complexity that this biological behavior brings. Rarely are officers at a relaxed mode that would require letting their guard down (Gilmartin, 2002). The officer maintaining a ready mode creates a biological effect that allows them to prepare to survive through heightened functions. Gilmartin (2002) identifies seven increased levels of biological influences: increased peripheral vision, improved hearing, faster reaction times, increased blood sugar, elevated heart rate,
increased blood pressure, and a general sense of energy to meet and overcome any threats that are challenging the body’s capacity to survive.

The biological effect creates a rollercoaster that is damaging to the officer. Gilmartin (2002) identifies not only the hyper-vigilant rollercoaster while on-duty, but the off-duty aspect as well. Because of the extreme level of anticipation, the officer will get emotionally drained when returning home from work. Often times, the officer will block out events around the house in order to unwind; however, this ultimately develops a lack of communication between the officer, spouse, and their children. Just as a lack of effective communication within an organization creates distance between line and staff officers; the lack of communication in the home of the officer may potentially cause the officer to develop negative behaviors of alcoholism, suicide, depression, and divorce.
Several different sociological theories can be used to determine why stress occurs within law enforcement personnel. The theoretical framework section of this paper is divided into three sections: general strain theory, power-control theory, and social learning theory. These theories relate and discuss the causes and impacts that stress can have on police officers and their families, and will be related to the subculture of policing and the effects of police stress.

**General Strain Theory**

One of the major criminological theories that deal with various aspects relating to people faced with extreme stress or traumatic experiences is the general strain theory. The strain theory relates to social structures that pressure individuals to commit crimes or other negative actions. When relating the strain theory to critical incidents, focus is drawn to Agnew’s (2006) definition that asserts the general strain theory is neither structural nor interpersonal; instead, it is emotional and based on the immediate social environment. Specifically, the individual’s failure to achieve positively valued goals, the loss of valued possessions, and a negative or aversive environment or treatment by another can cause someone to turn to crime (or disassociate themselves, leading to criminal activities such as substance abuse, etc.). Agnew (2006) further states that if these negative feelings and emotions are unsupported, individuals are more likely to be motivated by their negative thoughts. Furthermore, independent characteristics such as an individual’s temperament, intelligence, interpersonal skills, self-efficacy, association with others, and conventional social support all determine the recovery and response from these negative situations (Agnew, 2006).
Application of General Strain Theory

The general strain theory views the emotional responses of the police officer under extreme stress or traumatic experiences in their immediate social environment. This immediate social environment is the closed group of the police sub-culture. The strain theory is the only crime theory that focuses on the negative relationships with others – relationships that take an individual’s valued possessions, threaten the individual in an aversive manner, or prevent the individual from achieving his or her goals. The police sub-culture is one of the primary sources of stress for officers that “don’t fit in.” This stress can potentially cause an individual to turn to crime or utilize negative coping mechanisms in order to reduce or escape these strains, obtain revenge, or alleviate their negative emotions regarding a situation(s). Furthermore, individuals can be pressured by the police sub-culture to commit crimes through these negative relationships (such as bribery, obsessive or overbearing behavior, excessive use of force, or other violations of policy and law).

Power-Control Theory

John Hagan’s power-control theory starts with the assumption that what happens within the family structure is conditioned by what happens outside the family structure (Hagan, 1989). Hagan’s theory also looks at the affect that work relationships will have on family relations, along with the role that social class and structure will have on female juvenile delinquency. Power relates to a person’s work relationships where they are in a position of power and have the ability to do or act; whereas, control relates to the family dynamic where the person, usually male, has control or restraint over the family. Hagan (1989) believes that the social class structure of power within families comes from positions worked outside of the home.
environment. Additionally, Hagan (1989) implies that gender inequality within the home is often rooted in the idea of economic inequality. For example, Hagan (1989) explains that the primary “bread winner” in the family is normally the husband thereby making him more dominate and innately able to make decisions over his partner.

**Application of Power-Control Theory**

When applying the power-control theory to police stress, it is common knowledge that police officers employ a significant amount of power when they are at work. However, for many officers it is difficult to turn off that power when off-duty. This leads to officers becoming hyper-vigilant, where their body and mind are in a constant state of readiness (Gilmartin, 2002). When an officer enters this constant state of readiness, the power aspect of their job never subsides; therefore, the officer is never allowed to relax and spend quality time with their family. Gilmartin (2002) states that hyper-vigilance can cause the family and the officer to suffer significantly due to the officer’s inability to “turn off” their job, which leads to the officer becoming tired, detached, isolated, and apathetic.

Along with the hyper-vigilance behavior, another aspect of the power-control theory is the quasi-military function and traditional leadership styles of policing that have been shown to be ineffective. This leadership style has forced many officers to endure organizational stress, prompting departments to change their deployment and leadership styles. Part of this change is the move towards more community oriented policing and the need for a more productive style of leadership. However, many police departments are well known for their bureaucratic school of management with a heavy reliance on organizational efficiency and uniform operations. Furthermore, because of the top-down management style that officers often work under, the
ability to vent their frustrations are often limited and this stress is then taken home with them. Additionally, the officers who perceive limited power at work, due to this structure, may produce a power-control in the home environment. This power-control obviously can create a large amount of family stress and dysfunction.

Officers that hold a command position within their department often transfer the power that they possess while at work into their home lifestyle. These command officers will run their home with the same top-down management style which they utilize at work and control their family. This type of activity will often create hostility between the spouse and children and create more stress in everyone’s lives. Hagan (1989) further states that families with a “stay at home mother” will often suffer further because of the government type atmosphere that the husband is using to control the home. In this case, the husband would require dominance of the home and would expect that the family remain under his control (Hagan, 1989).

**Social Learning Theory**

Learning the police sub-culture by modeling behaviors from co-workers can bring a great deal of strain and stress to an officer at work and home. Bandura and Akers social learning theories will be explored in relationship to the individual and its effect on law enforcement through social control of the environment.

**Bandura’s Social Learning**

The social learning theory was first presented by Albert Bandura. The foundation of Bandura’s 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 (Gaines & Kappeler, 2008; 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, p. 1).

Bandura (1977) proposed that there are four distinct steps involved in the social learning or modeling process: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. Attention was Bandura’s word for the observation of the behavior of others. Bandura 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 form of retention. A behavior cannot be learned if retention does not occur. A person can watch someone perform a certain behavior; however, without recalling how the behavior is performed, the next step would never be achieved. The third step in Bandura’s social learning theory is reproduction. A person can watch and even remember how to do a certain behavior; nevertheless, it will not become a learned behavior until it is actually reproduced.

Finally, and perhaps the most important consideration in learning behavior, according to Bandura, is motivation. Motivation can be both positive and negative. Bandura argues that if there is no motivation to learn a behavior, that attention and retention may still occur, but there
will not be any reproduction. Bandura further proposed that those who have social control are more likely to be paid attention to and modeled (as cited in Franzoi, 2000).

**Akers’ Social Learning**

Another theory of social learning was offered by Ronald Akers. Burgess and Akers (1966) developed a theory called differential association-reinforcement theory of criminal behavior that integrated terms of learning into the theory. After Akers was finished working on the differential association-reinforcement theory with Burgess, he fully developed the social learning theory applying it to criminal, delinquent, and deviant behavior (Akers, 1994). The social learning theory does not compete with the differential association-reinforcement theory, although it was modeled after it. Instead, the social learning theory integrates the differential association processes along with differential reinforcement principles and adds behavioral and learning ideas to the theory (Akers, 1994). The social learning theory is divided into four main principles: differential association, definitions, differential reinforcement, and imitation.

*Differential Association*

Differential association is the process where an individual is exposed to favorable or unfavorable behaviors, which can ultimately influence further actions.

*Definitions*

Definitions refer to the individual behavior, as it relates to morals, rationalizations, ethics, attitudes, and beliefs. Definitions are further dividend into general and specific belief categories. General beliefs include things such as religion, moral, and other conventional values; whereas
specific beliefs orient the person to specific acts. This means that a person may believe that one law should absolutely be followed, while other laws can be broken because they do not see the crime as “wrong” by their own personal definition. This individual behavior is attached to the police sub-culture behavior and ultimately develops into a positive or negative performance while on or off duty.

*Differential Reinforcement*

Differential reinforcement refers to the balance between rewards and punishments that follow after displaying a certain behavior (which resembles Bandura’s variable of motivation). The reinforcement is dependent on an individual’s past behaviors and how the individual executes a thought process of whether or not taking a certain risk will generate rewards that are perceived to be beneficial.

*Imitation*

Imitation refers to a person simply engaging in similar behavior after they observed someone perform the behavior (which resembles Bandura’s variable of reproduction). This behavior is often affected by the resulting consequences relating to the person that they are imitating. If that person suffers no punishment or consequences, then the chances of imitation are greater.

*Application of Social Learning Theory*

Social learning theories can 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 techniques of behavior modeling that is widely used in training programs. This idea is very relevant to the world of law enforcement, as very few people have more control than academy instructors and field training officers (FTOs). Police academy training consists of some theory and book work, but the officers are taught skills through the use of demonstration and repetition. Instructors demonstrate various techniques and the recruits model what they have been shown. Furthermore, after the academy, these newly trained officers enter a field training program to work and learn from qualified and experienced officers (Gilmartin, 2002). As new officers, they see how the veteran officers show no emotion on critical incidents and appear unaffected by various situations. These new officers observe the behaviors exhibited and accept this as the proper response.

Police officers often 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 the law enforcement profession adopts a subculture response in an effort to cope. This police subculture 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). Unfortunately, the officer is influenced by the response of the subculture and uses coping techniques that may not have been taught appropriately; therefore, unconventional coping techniques, used by the police subcultures that have been witnessed, are imitated.
SECTION IV: STRESS PREVENTION PROGRAMS

Over the past decade, police administrations have started to recognize the seriousness and consequences involved regarding stress and their officers. Many implemented programs have been directed towards external changes or the development of programs to assist officers in the form of group or individual counseling (Gaines & Kappeler, 2008). Unfortunately, according to Gaines and Kappeler (2008), very limited proactive changes have occurred within police departments – instead a reactive approach to stress has been utilized. It is important for police departments to assist their officers in coping with stress and provide proactive departmental programs to help address negative stressors as well.

**Reactive Programs**

Law enforcement departments need to provide ways to reduce employee stress. In law enforcement, stress can occur from the environment (inclement weather, floods, or traffic incidents), from psychosocial stressors (manager, fellow officer, family expectations, or domestic incident) and physical stressors (heat/cold, hunger, fatigue, or disease). According to Bennett and Hess (2007), law enforcement departments would more than reap the long-term benefits of employee productivity and higher morale by implementing stress management programs.

Police subcultures and occupational related stressors provide the most significant distinguishing characteristics between the law enforcement workplace and other types of occupational environments (Ortmeier & Meese, 2010). An officer’s welfare may depend on the availability and response of other officers regarding the presence or actual danger involved –
leading to a reinforcement of group solidarity. This mutual support, group solidarity, and loyalty are critical to survival within the police subculture. Officers can be rewarded or punished for conforming or not conforming to the beliefs, attitudes, and informal rules established within the subculture as well. A police subculture, along with its group solidarity and loyalty, also develops stress within the workplace environment (Ortmeier & Meese, 2010) and must be acknowledged by managers and supervisors.

Many law enforcement agencies have implemented various stress-reduction programs such as physical activities, athletic club memberships, and free time or flex time. Other programs within a department may also include critical incident stress debriefing, peer support groups, and organizational consultant programs (e.g. employee assistance programs) (Bennett & Hess, 2007).

**Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD)**

Critical incident stress debriefing (CISD) is another effective way to prevent or reduce stress as well. In CISD, officers who experience a critical incident (such as a mass disaster, a crash with multiple deaths or a particularly heinous murder) are brought together as a group for a psychological debriefing soon after the event (Bennett & Hess, 2007). A trained mental health professional, supervisor, or peer-support member leads the group as they discuss their emotions and reactions. This process allows officers to vent and to realize they are not going “crazy,” but are responding normally to a very abnormal situation. CISD should take place within 24 to 72 hours after a critical incident, because often times within 24 hours is usually too soon for full emotional impact to have occurred (Bennett & Hess, 2007).
Research on Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) has shown very positive outcomes. Mitchell (n.d.) emphasizes that it is imperative that the Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) team be properly trained and adheres to the internationally accepted standards of CISM practice. The following research studies look at stress levels after utilizing CISD:

Bohl (1991) evaluated police officers experiencing a critical incident. One group received a CISD and was assessed within a 24 hour window. These officers were compared to a group of officers not receiving CISD. The study found that those police officers with the CISD program were found to be less depressed, less angry, and had fewer stress symptoms three months from the critical incident than the police officers who did not receive the CISD program.

Robinson and Mitchell (1993) looked at a sample of emergency, welfare, and hospital employees who worked on traumatic events. In this group, 96 percent of the emergency personnel and 77 percent of the welfare and hospital employees reported a reduction in stress symptoms directly attributed to attending a CISD program after the traumatic event.

Jenkins (1996) reports that after a mass shooting (in which 23 people were killed and 32 people were wounded), emergency medical personnel were offered CISD within 24 hours. Recovery from the trauma appeared to be most strongly associated with participation in the CISD process. Furthermore, anxiety, depression, and traumatic stress symptoms were found to be significantly lower in repeated measures for those who participated in the CISD program.

Alexander and Klein (2001) conducted a study of 160 ambulance personnel of a Scottish regional ambulance service (consisting of paramedics and technicians – no administrative staff was queried), with 110 people returning the completed questionnaire booklets. Approximately 82 percent of the ambulance personnel had experienced a particularly disturbing incident within
the past six months. Over one-third of the personnel claimed that better training (38 percent) and better pre-incident briefing (36 percent) would have helped them cope with their previous critical incidents. Furthermore, 69 percent of personnel reported that they have never had enough time to recover and cope emotionally prior to their next critical incident.

Boscarino, Adams and Figley (2005) evaluated groups of people working in New York City at the time of the World Trade Center attacks on September 11, 2001. They compared the employees that were offered crisis intervention services by their employers to other workers whose employers did not offer any form of organized crisis intervention services. Assessments were conducted at one year and again at two years after the traumatic events of September 11, 2001. Research findings indicated that people who received group CISM services demonstrated lower levels of alcohol dependency, PTSD symptoms, anxiety, and depression compared to people who received no CISM services.

**Madison Police Department Peer Support Program**

Peer-support programs are a particularly effective type of stress-reduction program and can be helpful in many different ways. Veteran officers may advise new officers on available financial benefits and can shepherd them through the complex paperwork and procedures. They are able to make referrals for local services for everything from a funeral home to a counselor. Support groups may also hold regular meetings during which problems and issues can be discussed, since officers are often more willing to confide in their colleagues because they share the same set of stresses (Bennett & Hess, 2007).

Police officers within the City of Madison Police Department (MPD) often times put themselves in dangerous situations on a daily basis, acting as necessary and accordingly within
their law enforcement responsibilities, using deadly force if required. When faced with these deadly force decisions and actions, police officers can often be affected emotionally and physically from these critical incidents. Usually, these critical incidents are often very sudden and unexpected. A critical incident is usually an incident which has personal significance for an individual. It is often an event which causes someone to stop and think, and question the situation. It may cause uncertainty in aspects of beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors. Furthermore, critical incidents have usually, in some way, had a significant impact on the personal and professional learning and lifestyle of the individual. These critical incidents can be a traumatic event or perceived life-threatening event that will include physical and psychological stresses and pressure which often will overwhelm an individual (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2013).

Because of the severity of these critical incident situations, and the stigma of the police sub-culture, it is important for police departments to have support groups in place (outside of the professional support). The City of Madison Police Department enacted the MPD Peer Support Team in March, 2006. The first formal evaluation (since the MPD Peer Support Team’s enactment in 2006) is being completed in 2013 and 2014 to properly assess its overall effectiveness, peer support officer training, and critical incident responses.

The purpose of the MPD Peer Support Team Program is to have a small group of personnel of any rank who will be trained to provide information and referral to officers seeking assistance, whether it is related to a critical incident, day-to-day work stress, or personal life stress. The primary purpose of an MPD Peer Support Officer is to be available as a resource for officers seeking assistance with personal and work related stresses. The secondary purpose is to
assist the Critical Incident Facilitator (CIF) with coordination of debriefings for officers and follow-up with officers involved in a critical incident as requested.

MPD Peer Support Officers are expected to convey trust and anonymity and assure confidentiality (as outlined in MPD Policy 5-400) to officers seeking assistance, to be available for contact and willing to provide support on a voluntary basis, to maintain contact with the CIF regarding program activities, to complete all necessary paperwork for the purpose of documenting program utilization, to attend training mandated by the program, and to understand that there is a minimum commitment of three years as a MPD Peer Support Officer.

Currently, the roles of a MPD Peer Support Officer are (1) to act as a peer support person for employees and their families seeking information on Employee Assistance Program (EAP) resources for issues such as work or personal stress, emotional stress, addictions, financial stress, relationship difficulties, and family concerns, (2) not to provide therapy or counseling but will act as a referral person to available resources, (3) to attend group critical incident debriefings, if necessary, to provide information that the professional mental health individual may not be able to address, and (4) to make follow up contacts with affected officers at intervals to be determined and coordinated by the CIF (MPD, 2006).

Currently, a MPD Peer Support Officer will be asked to respond to an incident the following ways: (1) initiated by a supervisor or fellow officer who brings the incident and/or concerns about the affected officer to the attention of the CIF or a MPD Peer Support Team member, (2) the affected officer contacts CIF or a MPD Peer Support Officer directly, (3) the MPD Peer Support Officer is aware of an incident as it is occurring or soon after it has occurred and initiates a contact with the involved officers (MPD, 2006).
A selection process of peer support officers has not been conducted since the enactment of the MPD Peer Support Team in March 2006. The current MPD Peer Support Officers were selected based on the nomination of officers by peers (and confirmed interest in being part of the program). Each nominated officer was then required to complete a written questionnaire to assist the advisory committee in the screening process (MPD, 2006). The Advisory Committee then selected the MPD Peer Support Officers based on the information provided on the nomination form, responses to the screening questionnaire, and the need for representation of various ranks and work groups. The current MPD Peer Support Team consists of nine police officers, five detectives, one investigator, two sergeants, one lieutenant, one captain, and the City of Madison EAP/CISM Program Coordinator (MPD, 2006).

**Employee Assistance Programs (EAP)**

Most law enforcement agencies promote and offer various Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs). For example, in the City of Madison, it is policy that all levels and locations are required to maintain and promote an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) that will help employees and their family members and significant others deal with personal, behavioral, or medical problems.

The Employee Assistance Program utilizes a full-time Coordinator and an internal network of employees, designated as Peer Support Officers who are nominated and receive special training. The program also contracts with an external EAP Provider giving employees or family members the option of being served internally or externally.
An employee or family member wishing to utilize the EAP has the following options:

1. **Contact the City of Madison EAP Coordinator** – The City EAP Coordinator provides direct services to city employees and their families. In addition, the City EAP Coordinator is responsible for joint oversight of the MPD Peer Support Program.

2. **Contact the City’s external EAP Provider** – The external EAP Provider is a private EAP firm with which the City contracts for employees and families who wish to be assisted by a service outside of the City’s program (City of Madison Police Department [MPD], 2006).

3. **Contact an MPD Peer Support Officer (PSO)** – Peer Support Officers have received specific training to be a resource for those seeking assistance with personal and work-related stress. It should be noted that Peer Support Officers are not afforded the same legal privilege regarding confidentiality that the City EAP Coordinator and external EAP Providers receive. There is no guarantee that a court, whether civil or criminal, will not under some circumstances be able to order either the individual seeking assistance through the Peer Support Program, or a Peer Support Officer to whom the individual spoke, to disclose any conversations which may have taken place, unless the Peer Support Officer has a confidentiality privilege under Chapter 905 of the Wis. Stats. (Clergy, etc.).

*Employee Assistance Program Referral Options*

Alcoholism, drug dependency and personal/emotional problems may become progressively more serious and uncontrollable, and this process often culminates in a person becoming involved in a crisis situation resulting in a disciplinary action, dismissal, criminal prosecution, hospitalization, or even death. The Department recognizes that this process may be interrupted and reversed with effective intervention and treatment.
Often persons affected will be unaware or deny the extent of the problem, and they will not be motivated to seek help. It is an employee’s best interest that positive or aggressive steps are taken to intervene before the situation deteriorates to the crisis point and that coworkers and supervisors intervene prior to that time whenever possible.

There are three types of referrals to the EAP:

1. **Self-Referral**: Employees with personal problems are encouraged to seek help on their own initiative before health or job performance is affected. They can discuss their problems with the City EAP Coordinator, a facilitator of their choice (including the department Peer Support Officers) or the external EAP provider. The EAP will assist the employee in contacting his/her health care provider or in contacting appropriate community resources to provide service for that type of problem. The EAP will also follow up with employees to make certain they gain access to needed services.

2. **Supervisory**: Whenever an employee with an established record of acceptable work evidences a pattern of inconsistent or deteriorating job performance that fails to respond to supervisory input (e.g., verbal instructions, written job instructions, discussion of job performance), the supervisor should encourage the employee to contact the City EAP Coordinator, one of the Peer Support Officers, or the External EAP provider.

3. **Co-Worker**: When an employee believes that a co-worker is experiencing one of these problems, but is not seeking treatment or is denying the problem, the employee should attempt to intervene by expressing concern in a caring manner and by making an informal referral to the EAP, the Peer Support Program, or other treatment sources. The employee may also contact the City’s EAP Coordinator who will discuss available options (MPD, 2006).
Refer to Appendix A for the complete list of program and confidentiality guidelines for the City of Madison Police Department’s Employee Assistance Program.

Lastly, an aspect missing from many departments’ employee assistance programs is the proper orientation and preparation of family and friends for a newly hired officer’s transition into the police subculture. “By providing knowledge and insight, departments can hope to help families and friends of new officers come to (1) understand the potential pitfalls of policing, (2) acquire insight into the potential attitudinal and behavioral changes in the new officer, (3) be alert to personality and behavioral changes that may require action, and (4) be familiar with resources available for intervention before the situation deteriorates too far and family relationships are irreparably damaged” (Bennett & Hess, 2007, p. 378).

Cop 2 Cop Program

The Cop 2 Cop program was developed in 1998 after an increase of police suicides that the State of New Jersey felt were related to stress. As of the published date of the article (2007) the Cop 2 Cop program is the first of its kind in the nation to assist police officers, and other first responders, with stress and other potential harmful mental health issues. In order for the program to start, the New Jersey Department of Public Health contacted the University of Medicine and Dentistry New Jersey to provide crisis intervention services to law enforcement. The program that they developed was eventually called Cop 2 Cop because of the hotline only being answered by mental health workers who were or are police officers. The research that was done prior to the implementation of the program led the researchers to believe that having “non-cops” answering the phone would result in fewer officers calling the line.
The Cop 2 Cop hotline acts much like a hotline that the general public may use for mental health problems except it specifically identifies with the issues that many law enforcement officers are facing. This is done using a seven step process that Waters and Ussery (2007) describe as being much like a crisis intervention model that was developed by Roberts in 1996. These seven steps are:

1. Plan and conduct a crisis assessment;
2. Establish rapport and a therapeutic relationship;
3. Identify the caller’s major problems including the precipitating events;
4. Deal with feelings. Be an active listener and validate the caller’s emotions;
5. Generate and explore alternative coping strategies and skills;
6. Develop and formulate an appropriate action plan; and
7. Establish a follow-up plan and agreement.

Many of these seven steps may be done together such as one and two, but the majority are done independently without the caller having knowledge that the call taker is gathering this information. During this phase, the call takers are also determining if the officer has any suicidal or homicidal ideation and if any are presented the caller takers are trained in the proper methods to deal with the officers in these situations. Once all of the seven steps are established and the call taker feels that the officer is no longer an immediate threat to themselves or others, a plan will be set up and the hotline will usually call back in ten days to check on the progress of the officer. If the call taker feels that the officer is no longer a threat to anyone, then the calls will end unless the officer asks for them continue (Waters & Ussery, 2007).

The New Jersey hotline states that the Cop 2 Cop program has become an essential program to the safety of its officers from stress related issues. The hotline believes that they
have prevented nearly 150 suicides and an unknown number of homicides (State of New Jersey, 2011). They further state that it is nearly impossible to delineate the total number of “saves” that they have had because many officers do not want to admit that they were going to commit suicide before calling the hotline. Overall, the hotline has saved at least 150 lives; therefore, New Jersey considers it to be a success.

**Proactive Programs**

People can learn to deal with stressors (factors triggering stress) by developing strategies for reducing stress and learning to cope with the stressors that cannot be eliminated. By manipulating conscious thoughts, one can learn to control negative feelings or emotions and put the stressors into perspective. Stress in its more severe stages can be overwhelming, and the seriousness of the stress needs to be taken into account when determining how to most effectively reduce the stressful situation to a manageable level.

Stress management involves more than simply reducing the total quantity of stress in one’s life; it also means being able to change the quality of stress in one’s life. To manage stress effectively, one must realize that the individual is responsible for their own emotional and physical well-being. Each individual’s perception of an event is under their control. Learning to use and control thought processes (and change the way one thinks from negative to positive) is an effective method of managing stress. Other relaxation techniques that can be used to reduce tensions and help one effectively manage or control stress can be classified as mind to muscle techniques (yoga, meditation, imagery, and autogenic training) or muscle to mind techniques (progressive relaxation, massage, and biofeedback).
There are many proactive ways to deal with stress. A simple method is: (1) identify the problem and share it with someone you trust or respect; (2) take a deep breath, count to 10, and release slowly – that helps put everything in perspective; (3) try to be positive and optimistic – laugh at yourself and try to maintain a sense of humor; (4) become a better time manager and prioritize – break down large time-consuming projects into small sections and reward oneself after each task is completed; and, (5) develop a healthy lifestyle through exercise and diet that will enhance your resistance to stress.

Law enforcement often uses humor to reduce stress, even if it can be somewhat cynical. Schmalleger (2009), for example, compares law enforcement to health-care professionals noting their abilities to joke while caring for patients that are seriously injured or dying. At times, police officers use humor similarly to defuse their reactions to dark or threatening situations as well. Another way of coping is by keeping an emotional distance from stressful events, although this distance is not always easy to sustain (Schmalleger, 2009).

Other positive coping techniques for stress reduction as cited by Schmalleger (2009) are programs utilizing exercise, meditation, abdominal breathing, biofeedback, self-hypnosis, guided imaging, induced relaxation, subliminal conditioning, music, prayer, and good diet. Additionally, Bennett and Hess (2007) state that stress levels can be reduced through physical exercise, relaxation techniques, good nutrition, taking time for oneself, making friends, learning to say no, staying within the law, changing one’s mental attitude, keeping things in perspective and seeking help when it is needed. Several devices to measure stress levels are becoming more readily available in the form of hand-held heart rate monitors and blood pressure devices as well (Schmalleger, 2009).
A new approach to managing stress among police officers shows that the amount of stress that officers experience is directly related to their reactions to various stressful situations. Furthermore, if an officer can learn to filter out and distinguish between threatening and non-threatening situations, fewer job-related stresses will be experienced (Schmalleger, 2009). Adapting and utilizing a proactive preventative approach to reducing stress for officers should be part of in-service training, the home environment, field work, and during crisis/critical incidents.

**Law Enforcement Family Support**

The New York State Department of Law Enforcement Services Family Support Program is used in several New York State police departments. The Law Enforcement Family Support program which was developed by the New York State Department of Law Enforcement Services (NYSDCJ) was created in order to assist in reducing the devastating effects of stress. The statement of purpose for the program is “to enable law enforcement officers to effectively perform their duties through the identification and management of the negative aspects of stress” (NYSDCJ, 2000, p. 1). The NYSDCJ (2000) felt that the negative effects of stress on officers’ physical and mental health were plenty, but also noted that reduction in stress can also help reduce alcoholism, divorce, and suicide among police officers.

The NYSDCJ developed a unique program that incorporated the officer and their family in the stress reduction and management training. The program that was developed was a two-tier system with the first being used for new officers while in recruit type training and the second being used for more seasoned officers during in-service training. The program also addresses the specific training level of each group, with the recruit training being more focused on the lack of “on the job” experience, while the in-service training looks at the experience officers have and
how the “on the job” experiences have changed their coping and management skills. The NYSDCJ (2000) felt that the training was very important for new officers to undergo because of the bombardment of stressors that they face when initially starting their law enforcement career. The first several years of being a police officer involve constant learning and change along with excitement that you are finally doing the work for which you have trained. The new officers are faced with the challenges of seeing the backside of humanity and are often required to see blood and death as a normal course of work (NYSDCJ, 2000).

Each level of training that is offered to the officers either in the recruit or in-service setting is done so in ten hour blocks. The ten hour block involves role playing scenarios in order to create stress for the participants and audience, classroom lecture on stress reduction and management, and a presentation by employee assistance program personnel on the services that they can provide to the officer and their family. During these ten hour blocks, the program also incorporates lunches so that the instructors can talk with the participants about the current and past stressors that they have faced while “on the job.” It is hoped that due to the training being about stress, and scenarios being presented, that the participants will talk about stress that they have had in the past and how they dealt with it. This program gives the instructors “hands on” time to give more personal attention to participants that may have poor coping skills or have further questions about stress management.

Program Structure

The ten hour program is structured into three separate sections that each talk about different subjects related to stress and managing it. Each section of the program is facilitated by certified police officers who have undergone proper train-the-trainer program so that they are
fully trained in the topic of stress management for police officers. The first (morning) session is given in a three hour block and starts with a short introduction of the day and involves a pre-test on the concepts of stress. This test is done in order to give the presenters a better perspective as to the level of stress awareness that the group has and what areas may need a greater emphasis. After the pre-test, a selection of role playing scenarios is used with the officers or recruits participating, while their family or significant other observes. The following scenarios are used for the role playing portion of this block:

- Officers responding to a domestic incident
- Officers respond to an accident scene involving the death of a child
- Officer receives orders from a superior which go against all common sense and could place several people in danger.
- Officer is brought up on unfounded charges by a civilian of physical assault
- Officer is on a tour of duty that is short handed and calls occur one after another
- Officer arrests an individual for DWI who is loud, abusive, and obnoxious, and the spouse in the vehicle has the same attributes.

The objective of this part of the training is to have everyone involved be under some sort of stress. Whether you are directly involved in these incidents, or are just observing, the level of stress you have will rise. The NYSDCJ (2000) also suggests that during this segment, blood pressures of participants and also family members are taken. These numbers will be shared with the class using anonymity towards the end of this section in order to show how role playing can do to create stress. This morning section also allows family members to see the types of calls that are handled during a “routine” patrol shift for their loved one. At the end of this session, the group will be debriefed and the second session, or afternoon, will take place.
The afternoon session will start with a discussion about the role playing scenarios and how everyone felt about the stress they underwent. The afternoon session will have two primary talking points: overview of stress and stress reduction strategies. During the overview of stress, the instructors will talk about the definition of stress, effects of stress (psychological, emotional, and behavioral influences), and causes of stress (causes of burnout and occupational influences). Stress reduction strategies that are discussed include environments such as problem solving and time management, physical such as breathing and nutrition, and mental such as relaxation and auto suggestion techniques.

The final session is given in the evening and deals with employee assistance programs (EAP) that are available. During this section, the issue of confidentiality is discussed at length due to many officers not trusting others with their personal information or feelings. During this session, the EAP professionals give information as to the programs that they offer along with other community sources that can be used. At the end of this section, all the instructors are present to answer questions and a post-test is taken by each of the participants.

The above was an overview of the recruit program which was used for all recruits that are in the academy. The program will be changed minimally for in-service training in the following ways. The role playing scenarios will be changed to incorporate more “real life” scenarios that the officers may have undergone in the recent past. The afternoon and evening sessions will also be adapted in order to talk about the current problems that some of the officers may be having with stress, or their families.

In order for the researchers to determine the effectiveness of the program, several pilot trainings were conducted. These trainings were held just like the normal training above was done with one distinct difference. At the end of each of the three (morning, afternoon and
evening) sessions, the researchers allowed each of the participants to individually discuss their thoughts of the training. This was done a total of three times and after each of the pilots, the researchers would refine the training to meet the current trends that the participants brought up. Further mentioned by the researchers was the need to continually change the training as the law enforcement environment changed. This will be done using the pretest and posttest responses from the groups that undergo the training. Should the training be deemed ineffective at any time by a group, the researchers will look to see if the training needs to be updated. The researchers’ state that with the posttest responses they received, the program is working at educating officers and their families and reducing overall stress.

Cutting Edge Technology

Today’s society is extremely reliant on technology; however, mental health professionals increasingly agree that “daily sprints, accompanied by a soundtrack of endless beeps, chirps and vibrations emitting from various devices, set off our stress systems, keeping us in a persistent and physiologically damaging state of fight-or-flight” (Enayati, 2013). Dr. Leslie Sherlin, a neuroscientist and chief science officer of Neurotopia (a company that provides brain training to athletes) feels that people today are living at such a fast pace that if they continue to keep this pace they will eventually burn out and have an increased risk of a weakened immune system leading to an increased risk of disease (Enayati, 2013).

Some of the most compelling training to help prepare people to better handle stress is going on right now with professional athletes and United States soldiers. For these two distinct groups, performance under high stress is a must (although for very different reasons). But the technologies being used to train them could benefit the rest of us as well.
Professional Athletes

Dr. Michael Gervais, a sports psychologist, works with Sherlin to train elite athletes to perform optimally during high-stress competition ranging from athletes in the NFL, NBA, NHL, as well as Olympians, golfers, and many others. Gervais believes that the key to high performance is a disciplined mind. Gervais and his colleagues use older Eastern disciplines like mindfulness, presence, meditation, deep breathing, and neurofeedback.

As part of the athletes training, Gervais and his colleagues hook up the athletes to electrodes and perform a baseline qEEG: a quantitative electroencephalogram. The results are then used to create an individualized brain map that helps assess and quantify mental aspects of performance like focus, decision speed, reaction time and stress regulation (Enayati, 2013).

After the brain is mapped, the psychologists conduct half-hour neurofeedback sessions to teach athletes how to reach optimal brain wave patterns. In a typical session, the athlete will sit before a large screen as sensors monitoring electrical activity in his or her brain are placed on the scalp (Enayati, 2013). The athletes focus on attaining desirable brain wave patterns that, in turn, influence what occurs on the screen (like controlling a video game with only your thoughts).

Although this technology was initially established as a technique to measure brain activity in NASA pilots during flight simulation exercises, neurofeedback has shown promising initial results. This training is intended to teach the athletes how to respond quickly to stressor stimuli, how to focus during stressful situations, how to recover from errors, and finally how to shut down and silence their minds when it’s all over (Enayati, 2013). This training is intended to teach the athletes how to respond quickly to stressor stimuli, how to focus during stressful situations, how to recover from errors, and finally how to shut down and silence their minds when it’s all over (Enayati, 2013).
These sports psychologists have collected an exclusive brain bank of assessments over years of working with elite athletes. They use the brain bank to recognize optimal brainwave patterns connected with the highest levels of performance. According to Sherlin, it takes roughly 15 to 20 neurofeedback sessions for elite athletes to learn some of these techniques (probably about 30 for an “average” person).

The kind of training that the athletes working with Gervais and Sherlin obtain is not available to the general population right now. However, in September, 2013, Sherlin’s company, Neurotopia, began beta-testing a dry sensor, mobile headphone, and tablet system that could eventually be made available to the general public (Enayati, 2013).

United States Military

In a partnership between the United States military, Hollywood, and the University of Southern California’s Institute for Creative Technologies, Dr. Albert Rizzo and his colleagues have developed cutting-edge gaming and virtual reality technologies to serve the clinical needs of United States soldiers (Enayati, 2013). Rizzo is a psychologist and research professor at the University of Southern California Keck School of Medicine, and serves as the associate director for medical virtual reality at the University of Southern California’s Institute for Creative Technologies.

The first project, Stress Resilience in Virtual Environments (STRIVE), helps train United States military personnel using virtual-reality combat scenarios. These combat scenarios help prepare the military personnel to develop better resilience and coping skills before they are exposed to the real stresses of combat (Enayati, 2013).
A second project, Virtual Iraq and Virtual Afghanistan, helps military personnel that are returning from combat work through their trauma by putting on a helmet geared with video goggles, earphones and a scent machine, and revisiting the scene in a virtual reality setting, complete with sound and smell. The projects of STRIVE, Virtual Iraq, and Virtual Afghanistan are based on exposure therapy, which has been effective in the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder (Enayati, 2013).

Rizzo reports that PTSD causes the individual to avoid anything that reminds them of the trauma; therefore, when the avoidance begins to generalize to everyday things, the individual is unable to deal with the stress (Enayati, 2013). “It’s a snowball cascade effect. The things that evoke the fear and anxiety are no longer directly tied to the original trauma but generalized to the outside world” (Enayati, 2013).

Rizzo’s goal is to replicate the stressful environment in a controlled environment (such as a doctor’s office), to help the patients confront and challenge the trauma – giving them the tools to manage their emotional response with what occurred (Enayati, 2013). This technology requires specialists and a clinical setting, but another advancement (called SimCoach) does not. SimCoach is a “virtual human” designed for interactive use on the Internet. Currently, SimCoach is targeted toward active-duty military personnel, veterans and their families; however, it may also have an increased usefulness for everyday stress and anxiety as well.

SimCoach operators can select one of several avatars to talk to when they are feeling stressed out. John Hart, program manager at the Institute for Creative Technologies, sees the virtual human coaches serving as an online companion for anyone who may be too introverted to seek help. If an individual may not want to reach out to a clinician or may feel stigma about seeing a therapist, the virtual human coaches help reduce their stress (Enayati, 2013). Hart
specifically states that SimCoach is not meant to replace human interaction or make a diagnosis (Enayati, 2013).

SimCoach does help individuals suffering from stress and anxiety symptoms initiate the conversation about what they may be going through. It may also provide users with more information about what they may be experiencing, suggesting local facilities where they can go for care and perhaps even walk them through breathing exercises or stress reduction techniques (Enayati, 2013). Hart summarized the SimCoach programs by saying, “Here we are, sitting on a mountain of valuable information about what to do when you’re stressed or feeling depressed. You can see how SimCoach can help people access the right information when they need it” (Enayati, 2013).
SECTION VI: SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Stress can be helpful (eustress) or harmful (distress), depending on its intensity and frequency as well as how it is mediated. Stress often arises from change and uncertainty, lack of control, and pressure. Stress can affect people in numerous ways: physical, emotional and psychological, and behavioral. Stress is related to many different health problems, including burnout, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and other family issues. To avoid burnout, officers need to keep their work interesting, receive recognition, and take time to rest and relax. Support groups, including an officer’s individual family, are particularly effective types of stress-reduction as well.

In today’s society, experiencing high levels of workplace stress may be inescapable; however, with this in mind, it is important to devote resources to finding new ways of dealing with stress more effectively. A critical step to reducing the impact of job stress and exhaustion on interpersonal relationships involves raising the awareness of the emotional impact of the job so that officers are more prepared for the competing demands between work and family (Roberts & Levenson, 2001). Unfortunately, Van Maanen (2002), states that without profound modifications in the defined tasks and values of police work is it doubtful that any significant changes to the amount of stressors in police work will be attainable.

Recommendations

Law enforcement departments can do a lot to reduce employee stress. It is vital that managers and supervisors pay attention to the conditions (stressors) that created the stress, and not just the individual. The source of stress, especially in law enforcement, can be an incident, a
citizen, a manager or supervisor, a fellow officer or other sources (Bennett & Hess, 2007). The implementation of a stress management and prevention program can lead to long-term cost-savings, high productivity and morale, and enhance community relations; but, it will also require law enforcement agencies to increase personnel and resources to have a successful program (Bennett & Hess, 2007). This increase could be as small as dedicating one person and “pilot” funding, or as large as an entire work group/training staff dedicated to the reduction of stress within their agency.

The people who are often of the most assistance to managing stress in law enforcement are fellow officers, immediate supervisors, unit commanders, peer counselors, chaplains, mental health professionals, the officer’s family, and, in some cases, the media and citizens (Bennett & Hess, 2007). Family members of police officers often report feelings of stress that are directly related to the officers’ daily work. As a result, and discussed previously in this paper, some departments have developed innovative programs to help reduce family stress. Peer-support programs for spouses and life partners, as well as for the children of officers are also being implemented in departments nationwide (Bennett & Hess, 2007).

Training and Education

Implementation of any stress management or prevention program is a step in the right direction for starting the battle of stress reduction for law enforcement officers. When law enforcement agencies implement these programs it is vital that they be mandatory (such as including the program into in-service training). If the stress prevention program is optional, this allows the police sub-culture to “convince” officers that might otherwise be interested not to attend. Furthermore, depending on the training environment and syllabus, having an incentive
for officers to bring their significant others could also be very beneficial for the work and family life.

The importance of stress management and prevention should be provided to officers (and their families) on a yearly basis. Health programs and stress management seminars are tremendous resources to help law enforcement officers prevent destructive stress (or at least reduce it). Stress-reduction techniques should be a part of every in-service police training program (Thibault et al., 2004). Thibault et al. (2004) also state that all personnel, including dispatchers, should attend these programs. A notable benefit from attending these types of seminars is a better understanding of the nature of stress and ways to prevent, cope with, or reduce its effects (Bennett & Hess, 2007). Officers need to have the proper training and experience to handle and control stress-producing situations, because the more skills and abilities that an officer has, the less stress he or she will likely experience (Thibault et al., 2004). Police departments can help reduce the potential for stress by clarifying the role that police play and providing training to develop methods for new officers to adapt to their new role within the community. Until an officer’s expectations line-up with the reality of policing in the twenty-first century, stress will continue to plague the law enforcement profession (Gaines & Kappeler, 2008).

Typically, officers must complete 24 hours of continual education and training over a calendar year. This allows law enforcement agencies to incorporate 8 to 10 hours into their yearly training routine. Although this amount of time might seem like a large portion of the 24 hours, when compared to the seriousness of the impacts that stress causes, it is a minimal amount of time. Furthermore, very few departments offer emotional or mental health well-being training to their officers. This type of training is essential and allows officers to be more effective when
under stress because they understand the effects and how to cope with their own thoughts and emotions. Officers that are both mentally and physically in shape are a benefit to their department, their community, and their family.

Relaxation and Self-Awareness

Despite anyone’s best efforts to prevent stress, it happens; but, it is how we interpret and manage this stress that affects our personal well-being. Cognitive relaxation techniques, such as guided imagery, autogenics, and meditation, have powerful effects on reducing stress (Olpin & Hesson, 2013). When someone is able to relax their mind, their body relaxes as well. Physical techniques, such as massage, progressive relaxation, breathing, and yoga, alter the body’s physiology and can diminish stress as well (Olpin & Hesson, 2013).

Relaxation is the process of effectively moving the mind/body from a stress response to a relaxation response (Olpin & Hesson, 2013). A relaxed state can decrease muscle tension, heart rate, blood pressure, and breathing. Relaxation, however, is not the same as watching television, reading a good book, watching a sunset, daydreaming, or sleeping or napping. Relaxation produces many health benefits, and as someone learns to relax they become more aware of their muscle tension and other physical sensations caused by the stress response. Once someone knows how the stress response feels (both mentally and physically), they can make conscious efforts to reduce this stress response.

As an individual becomes more experienced with relaxation methods they will be able to practice their nearly anywhere at any time, however, some helpful suggestions while learning how to relax might prove useful (Olpin & Hesson, 2013):

- not every relaxation technique works the same for everyone
- try each technique/method several times
- give yourself a minimum of 10 to 20 minutes each day to practice a relaxation activity
- seclude yourself where you will not be interrupted
- minimize background noise
- don’t be in a hurry to end the relaxation exercise
- approach each exercise without expectations
- keep an open mind
- don’t judge a relaxation technique based only on what happens while preforming it

It is important for officers to be aware of their own individualized stress responses, as everyone reacts differently to the effects of stress. Although relaxation focuses on an uninterrupted timeframe to relax the mind and body, this is usually not available as an option while riding in a patrol squad. Some other techniques that can assist officers during their shift include positive self-talk (whether silently or out loud), deep breathing techniques, the practice of tightening and relaxing muscles, and even carrying a stress ball in your squad bag can help officers decrease and combat the stress response while on-duty. But, if officers are not taught these techniques, their benefits, and provided the opportunities to “take a minute” after a big call, then very few officers will receive any benefit.

Organizational Acceptance

Implementing a stress management and prevention program will not be as easy as cutting and pasting a program from a book. The program must be realistically formatted to fit the agency’s needs; must be suited to the needs of the law enforcement environment (which is full of
unique stressors and scheduling related issues that create the need for a customized approach; must be one that is challenging, rewarding, effective for all employees; and, must be financially feasible.

Senior leadership and management within the agency must commit themselves to full participation in any stress prevention program. Law enforcement agency leaders must believe in the importance of the program for employees to embrace the concept (Shell, 2005). Participation by management shows employees that the program has been deemed important enough where employees at every level are expected to participate. It demonstrates a level of care and concern about officers and may help to reduce some of the inherent suspicion that is so frequently present in law enforcement and help to overcome some of the resistance that can come from the police sub-culture (Shell, 2005). Additionally, senior leadership and management support is the key to opening all the doors and to eventually altering the very culture of the organization (Overman, 2009). Management has the ability to work with or influence human resource personnel, union leaders, training academy staff, certification personnel, and other professionals that can lead to occupational significance for wellness (Shell, 2005).

One of the most important contributions that administrators could make for the continued support of a stress management and prevention program is by providing on-duty training time for the program. Providing paid time (e.g. department in-service, briefing time, time at the end of a shift) can significantly impact the effectiveness of stress prevention programs.

**Conclusion**

Stress does not need to be the end of an officer’s career simply because they were not aware of the various programs available to help them manage their stress. Law enforcement
agencies can take steps to prepare officers and teach them how to prevent stress from reaching an incapacitating level. These training programs must be implemented as a part of the recruit academy, ongoing in-service training, educational seminars, and need to include family members at one or more stages. The overall factor that must be considered is that the training must be specific to the stressors faced by law enforcement. Law enforcement officers face stressors that few other people encounter; and, they may experience these stressors on a daily basis. Law enforcement agencies that fail to prepare their officers for dealing with stress assaults are equivalent to not training their officers to fight off a physical assault.

Law enforcement agencies need to be at the forefront of developing and implementing stress reduction programs for their officers. Unfortunately, changing the attitude toward police stress will not come without some effort from officers, families, administrators, organizations, and educators. These changes will also incur a cost to implement; however, who can truly place a price on the lives of officers and the safety of the community. Citizens have come to expect officers to remain calm in the face of danger and to be unaffected by the violent and vicious behaviors of others at all times, performing their duties in the utmost professional manner. The idea that any person can be unaffected by the world around them isn’t reasonable. Officers are only human and although they react differently in the face of danger it does not make them any different than the average person – they are only doing what they have taken an oath to do, serve and protect. It is vital that law enforcement agencies take the time to train their officers in the proper stress reduction techniques so that officers are prepared for what they will encounter during their career, and hopefully help reduce long-term stress expenses and struggles.
SECTION VI: REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

_Employee Assistance Program General Guidelines_

1. It will be the option of the employee to accept or reject referral for diagnosis or professional treatment. The department encourages employees to seek help on their own initiative.

2. The fact that an employee accepts, rejects, or fails to respond to treatment for alcoholism, drug dependency or personal behavioral/medical problems will not diminish the employee’s responsibility to meet required job performance standards.

3. Implementation of this policy will not require, nor result in, any special regulations, privileges or exemptions from administrative practices applicable to job performance requirements, nor, shall there be an inconsistency with labor agreements.

4. Management and supervisory personnel will follow procedures which assure employees that job security or promotional opportunities will not be jeopardized by a request and/or referral for diagnosis and treatment (MPD, 2006).

_Confidentiality Guidelines_

All contacts with the City of Madison EAP Coordinator, Peer Support Officers, and external EAP Provider shall remain strictly confidential unless:

1. Prior written consent is obtained from the employee using the City EAP Coordinator, or the external EAP Provider, that specifies exactly what information may be disclosed, to whom, and for what purpose.

2. An unexplained, unusual, or suspicious death.

3. A case of suspected child neglect or abuse.
4. A threat to one’s own life or safety, or that of another.

5. A report of committing, having committed, or threat to commit a crime.

6. A threat to public health or safety.

7. A report or information required to be reported by police per S.S. 968.075 (WI Domestic Abuse Law) (MPD, 2006).