

Law Enforcement Wellness Programs: Recommendations for Implementing the Eight
Dimensions of Wellness

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Law Enforcement Wellness Programs: Recommendations for Implementing the Eight
Dimensions of Wellness

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Abstract

Purpose

There are over 800,000 law enforcement officers in the United States that are charged with serving and protecting our society (National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund, 2023). Unfortunately, many of those officers will face adverse health effects due to the profession before they retire. This study aims to provide recommendations for agencies to implement holistic wellness programs for law enforcement officers, to include the Eight Dimensions of Wellness, especially for smaller agencies.

Methods

The research will consist of reviewing and summarizing information gathered from peer-reviewed articles, scholarly journals, government websites, and other resources related to the main topics of holistic wellness and law enforcement.

Findings

Although law enforcement officers are subjected to countless traumatic events throughout their careers and often struggle with mental health conditions such as depression, PTSD, and anxiety at higher rates than the average American, not every police department offers a holistic wellness program. The study recommends incorporating the Eight Dimensions of Wellness into officer wellness programs as they can benefit an officer's overall wellness and, if modified, can be tailored to small police departments as well. Specific recommendations for each dimension are provided.

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Section I: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

The average American experiences 2-3 traumatic events during their lifetime, compared to a police officer who could experience more than 180 traumatic events throughout their career (Dockstader, 2019). The effects of constant exposure to traumatic events can have a negative impact on the overall health, especially the mental health of law enforcement officers. For example, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (2021), it is estimated that 35% of police officers suffer from PTSD, which is almost six times the national average in the United States. Police officers are also at an increased risk for suicide as compared to the general population and are more likely to die by suicide than in the line of duty (McAward, 2022).

Although there is not a substantial amount of research on the topic, the findings of one study suggest that poor mental health can affect small police agencies disproportionately. The study found that police departments that employ less than 50 officers have an annual suicide rate that is nearly four times that of the national rate (Violanti et al., 2012). Some researchers propose that this alarming fact is due to dynamics associated with community size, such as the lack of mental health resources within small communities, anonymity within the department and community, increased workload placed on officers due to being understaffed, and inadequate resources dedicated to train and support mental health within the department (McAward, 2022).

One way to support law enforcement is by adding holistic wellness to current officer wellness programs. Holistic wellness recognizes that an individual's overall

wellness is based on the interconnections of the various categories of wellness (Colorado College, 2022). This means that each category of wellness impacts one another. Therefore, when one wellness category is neglected, the others can also be negatively impacted. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2016), eight dimensions of wellness impact an individual's life, including emotional, spiritual, intellectual, physical, environmental, financial, occupational, and social. Implementing a holistic wellness program that includes the Eight Dimensions of Wellness is necessary in order to support our police officers fully.

Purpose of Study

The wellness of law enforcement officers is crucial, as the US Government illustrated in the passing of the Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act of 2017 (Spence et al., 2019). This act provides funding, resources, and support for law enforcement agencies to implement peer support programs, suicide prevention, training, family resources, and other promising practices related to officer wellness (Community Oriented Policing Services, n.d.). It was signed into law after it was recognized by the Department of Justice that law enforcement officers not only deserve to be supported in their mental health and well-being but that good mental and psychological health is crucial for police officers in order to effectively keep our communities safe and crime-free (Community Oriented Policing Services, n.d.). This study aims to provide recommendations for agencies to implement holistic wellness programs for law enforcement officers, to include the Eight Dimensions of Wellness, especially for smaller agencies.

Significance

Research has found that depression, PTSD, and anxiety can have a negative impact on all facets of daily life, including physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional health. Not only can poor mental health affect the personal lives of police officers, but it can have a profound effect on their productivity and how well they are able to serve their communities. In other words, healthy law enforcement officers are critical to maintaining healthy and safe communities. Traditional wellness programs typically focus on physical wellness, healthy eating, and, more recently, mental health, but other facets of one's life also affect wellness. For example, if an officer feels stress due to financial concerns, their physical, social, occupational, and emotional wellness could also suffer. As such, it is crucial that any wellness program incorporates all dimensions of health as it could save a career, marriage, and even a life.

Limitations

The limitation is that no original data was collected for this project. The information collected is limited to what is publicly available.

Section II: Literature Review

The following literature review will be divided into two main sections. The first section will focus on the health of law enforcement officers, including the negative impact that law enforcement has on the mental health, physical health, and health behaviors of law enforcement officers. The second section will explore the Eight Dimensions of Wellness that comprise a holistic wellness program.

Stress

Day in and day out, law enforcement officers respond to some of the worst moments of people's lives, including car accidents, domestic violence, murders, suicides, and violence against children. Although responding to one of these incidents may not cause serious harm to a police officer, the cumulative stress and trauma that is experienced over a career can seriously impact the mental health of a police officer. According to the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (2022), stress is the physical and emotional reaction to a challenging situation. These physical and emotional changes one feels when responding to an occasional stressful situation are normal and healthy. Still, chronic stress, like the kind law enforcement officers experience daily while performing their job, has been linked to mental illnesses, such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Anxiety

Anxiety is an emotional state that produces feelings of intense worry, fear, and apprehension. The psychological and biological processes caused by anxiety can be

helpful to a law enforcement officer as they can physically and mentally prepare one to handle a potentially dangerous situation (International Association of Chiefs of Police, n.d.). For example, anxiety can not only help an officer identify a dangerous situation but help them stay alert and kickstart their innate fight-or-flight response. Unfortunately, excessive and prolonged anxiety can be harmful as it can cause unexplained aches and pains, fatigue, difficulty concentrating, irritability, and sleep disturbances (National Institute of Mental Health, 2023).

High anxiety levels in law enforcement officers can be hazardous, not only for the officer but for the community as well. According to one study (Lees et al., 2019), police officer anxiety is negatively correlated to the under and overuse of legal force, confidence in job abilities, and overall performance. Law enforcement officers who experience high anxiety may also increase their chances of a lethal encounter. This research further suggests that law enforcement officers under increased anxiety tend to fire their weapons sooner and provide less time for suspects to respond to directions. Furthermore, shooting accuracy, self-defense performance, communication, and response time also suffered, as well as the overall effectiveness of the officers.

When referencing interventions for anxiety in law enforcement, this same research study has found that in-service mental health training decreased the prevalence of anxiety over 12 months. Still, the rates of anxiety increased after that (Lees et al., 2019). These findings suggest that law enforcement agencies should not only continue to use in-service mental health training but also indicates that these types of interventions should be conducted at least every year.

Depression

According to the National Institute of Mental Health (2023), depression, which affects approximately 8.4% of adults in the United States, is a common but serious mood disorder that affects how a person thinks, feels, and acts. Depression is associated with feelings of hopelessness, decreased energy, irritability, difficulty concentrating, physical aches or pains, and even thoughts of death or suicide. A 2018 study conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that 80% of adults with depression reported difficulty at work, at home, and with their social life (Brody et al., 2018).

Police officers face higher rates of depression compared to the general population due to occupational stressors, such as the physical and psychological dangers associated with policing, and organizational challenges, such as strict department policies and lack of support from the chain of command (Allison et al., 2019). One study found that 26.5% of police officers reported feelings of hopelessness, which is a strong indicator of depression. Researchers also found a significant association between depression and burnout, with some subjects expressing thoughts of suicide (Civilotti et al., 2022). Depression was found to be the most common mental health condition reported among law enforcement officers who committed suicide. In fact, 32% of officers who committed suicide were found to have depression (Homeland Security Today, 2022).

PTSD

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a psychiatric disorder that occurs after exposure to a traumatic event or series of events (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). For police officers, traumatic events can include being a victim of assault, officer-involved shootings, as well as working child abuse, suicide, and murder cases. It is estimated that police officers are exposed to three traumatic events every six months of service (NYU Langone Health, 2020). In fact, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (2021), up to 35% of police officers suffer from PTSD. Another study of over 1,300 police officers found that nearly half of the officers involved in the study had symptoms of PTSD (Clark, 2022). Common symptoms of PTSD include flashbacks, nightmares, anxiety, aggression, sleep disturbances, depression, and an increased risk of suicide (NYU Langone Health, 2020).

PTSD has also been found to have a negative effect on the brain functioning and decision-making abilities of police officers. Results of one study suggest that officers with higher levels of PTSD also have increased disruptions in their decision-making process due to a heightened reaction to threats and an inability to focus (Violanti, 2018). PTSD can also affect the prefrontal cortex, which helps regulate emotion and decision-making skills, and the hippocampus, which affects how the brain stores memories, which can lead to traumatic flashbacks (Maynard, 2020). Another study found that police officers with PTSD displayed lower cognitive performance compared to the control group, especially in executive functioning, verbal learning, memory, and information processing (Bisson Desrchers et al., 2021).

Mortality Rates

Not only do law enforcement officers face mental health issues, but they also face adverse health conditions, including early death, due to the law enforcement profession and lifestyle accompanying it, which includes poor sleeping habits, substance abuse, high rates of mental health disorders, and obesity. For example, between the ages of 55 and 60, police officers have a 55% chance of dying, whereas a white male of the same age has only a one percent chance. According to a 55-year mortality study, 50% of police officers died by age 65, 66% by age 70, and 80% died by age 75. Furthermore, police officers have a life span of almost 22 years less than the general population, and research has also found that officers die at higher rates for all causes of death compared to the general population in the same age ranges (Officer Safety and Wellness Group, 2017). Needless to say, the health outlook for law enforcement officers is bleak, and health issues such as obesity and sleep disturbances do not help the mortality rate.

Obesity

According to research, the workday of a police officer is 80-90% sedentary. This means officers generally sit for long periods, which is mixed with intermittent short bursts of extreme activity. The sedentary lifestyle of an officer, combined with shift work, poor eating habits, sleep disturbances, and stress, can lead to obesity (Williams & Ramsey, 2017). Obesity occurs when an individual is significantly overweight and has a body mass index of 30 or above. Those who struggle with obesity are at an increased

risk for high blood pressure, diabetes, stroke, heart disease, cancer, breathing problems, and mental illness (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022).

A 2017 study of 41 occupations found that police officers and firefighters have two of the highest rates of obesity (Williams & Ramsey, 2017). Furthermore, according to the Officer Safety and Wellness Group (2017), one source claims that 80% of police officers are overweight or obese, and another claims that 40% of police officers are clinically obese. Due to the physical nature of police work, including running, jumping, pushing, dragging, and the high probability of a physical altercation, police officers must be in good physical shape to protect themselves, each other, and the community.

Sleep disorders

Sleep disorders, which affect more than 50 million Americans, include insomnia, sleep apnea, restless leg syndrome, and circadian rhythm disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2020). Sleep disorders are twice as common among police officers compared to the general population. They are associated with poor performance and poor health outcomes such as depression, emotional exhaustion, anxiety, burnout, and depersonalization (Peterson et al., 2019). A lack of sleep is also associated with the inability to focus, fatigue, irritability, and chronic health problems such as heart disease and diabetes (American Psychiatric Association, 2020).

Research indicates that up to 40% of police officers have at least one sleep disorder, which can impact their performance. Researchers also found that officers who suffer from lack of sleep were more likely to make administrative mistakes, fall asleep while driving, violate safety protocols, and express uncontrolled anger towards

suspects. This study also found that almost half of the officers that participated admitted to falling asleep while driving on duty, and over 25% of those officers admitted that this happens one to two times per month (Pearsall, 2012). Lack of sleep can also negatively affect investigations. A 2023 study found that fatigued officers have difficulty focusing on their work, keeping themselves on task, and controlling their emotions. Furthermore, the study also found that fatigued officers reported that they received greater resistance from suspects and had difficulty establishing rapport with witnesses compared to when they are rested (Iowa State University, 2023)

Substance Use Disorder

Substance use disorder is a treatable mental health disorder that affects not only the brain but an individual's behavior as well, which leads to the inability to control the use of legal and illegal drugs or alcohol (National Institute of Mental Health, 2023). Substance use disorder occurs when the ability to function in daily activities without the substance becomes impaired. Cravings, personality changes, abnormal movements, and other behaviors are caused by changes made to the brain's structure by substance use. Studies have also found that substance use can change brain areas associated with judgment, learning, memory, decision-making, and control (American Psychiatric Association, 2020).

The rate of substance use disorder among the general population is 10% compared to that of law enforcement officers, which is anywhere from 20-30% (Help for our Heroes, 2023). A study in 2023 supported this finding by asserting that 25% of police officers in the survey reported hazardous drinking habits (Grupe, 2023).

Researchers claim that the training process, including time at the academy, introduces new recruits to unhealthy drinking habits and encourages hazardous drinking as a bonding tool (Clark, 2022; Lautieri, 2023). In fact, one study found that the top two reasons for drinking among law enforcement officers were to relieve stress and to celebrate. Unfortunately, substance abuse can not only exacerbate mental health conditions but also increase the likelihood of suicide if not addressed (Lautieri, 2023).

Suicide

Suicide is deliberately injuring oneself with the intent to die (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023). According to National Officer Safety Initiatives (2018), suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the United States. Suicide is a problem that continues to grow in the United States as rates have increased by 36% since 2000, and it is estimated to claim one life every 11 minutes (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2023), in 2021 alone, 12.3 million people seriously thought about taking their own life, 3.5 million made a plan to die, and 1.7 million attempted suicide.

Although law enforcement suicides are believed to be high, the exact number is unknown and estimated to be underreported due to a lack of official tracking programs and stigma related to suicide. According to the organization Blue H.E.L.P (2023), an organization that tracks officer suicides using internet searches and voluntary reports made by families, there were approximately 156 law enforcement officer suicides in 2018, 197 in 2019, 147 in 2020, 143 in 2021, and 160 in 2022, but they claim that the number of officer suicides could be much higher. Even with underreporting as a

concern, a recent study found that law enforcement officers are 54% more likely to die by suicide compared to the civilian population (Violanti & Steege, 2021). In January 2022, the Federal Bureau of Investigation launched a program to track law enforcement suicides officially. The data collected from his program called the Law Enforcement Suicide Data Collection Act, will not only help to understand the factors that lead to law enforcement suicide but also assist in developing programs and resources to prevent future suicides (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2022).

Stigma

With the overwhelming evidence pointing to the fact that law enforcement officers are at a higher risk for adverse health conditions due to the job's high stress, the question remains, why don't officers seek help? According to the American Psychiatric Association (2023), more than half of people with mental health illnesses do not seek medical assistance for their disorders due to stigma. Stigmatization is defined as "an attribute that is deeply discrediting within a particular social interaction." When stigma is attached to an individual, they often feel shame for not meeting societal standards and fear being discredited, which causes them to conceal the attribute. (Bell & Eski, 2015). Stigma comes in various forms, including public, self, and institutional. Public stigma includes the negative or discriminatory attitudes that others have about mental illness, self-stigma consists of the negative attitudes and internalized shame that people have about their own mental illness, and institutional stigma is where the policies of organizations, including workplaces, intentionally or unintentionally limit opportunities for those with mental illness (American Psychiatric Association, 2023).

A national study conducted on law enforcement found that over 90% of officers viewed stigma as “negatively influencing” help-seeking behavior. Even when services were viewed as effective, the study found that stigma levels remained high and detracted from accessing or continuing services (Drew & Martin, 2021). A 2019 study of almost 5,000 first responders also found similar results, with police officers acknowledging the overall declining mental health in the field but also feeling that they would be ostracized if they sought help (Lily, 2023).

Mental health stigma exists at high levels among law enforcement officers and is a significant barrier to law enforcement officers seeking help. According to the Department of Justice Report on Best Practices to Address Law Enforcement Officer Wellness (2023), “A workplace culture must be created in which personnel is encouraged and supported by leadership in their efforts to practice self-care and seek professional services without shame, embarrassment, or humiliation when experiencing mental health challenges as these practices are foundational to advancing psychological health and well-being.”

According to the Department of Justice (2023), in order to eliminate stigma for help-seeking behaviors, agencies should address local or state laws or policies that reinforce or instills fear for seeking mental health services, offer guided fitness, meditation, mindfulness, or yoga classes during work shifts, and provide access to mobile technology to assist officers and their families in connecting to resources, increase officers’ exposure to peer support team and services, protect the privacy and confidentiality of officers seeking peer support or other mental health services, and allow officers to seek and utilize peer support during work hours. According to the

International Association of Chiefs of Police (2018), a survey completed in 2018 found that 90% of officers who used peer support found it was helpful to very helpful, 80% said that they would seek peer support again, and 90% stated they would recommend peer support to another officer. Furthermore, over 50% stated that seeking help from their peers helped them perform better at work or improved their personal life. Research has also found that those who used peer support and mentoring services experienced improved hopefulness, enhanced social functioning, and greater satisfaction with life (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2018).

The Eight Dimensions of Wellness

Traditionally wellness in the law enforcement field has primarily focused on physical fitness and mental health. Still, other aspects of health are essential and can impact an officer's ability to serve the community effectively. According to the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2016), eight wellness dimensions impact an individual's overall health. The eight dimensions include social, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, physical, environmental, financial, and occupational wellness. These dimensions are interconnected and build upon one another to improve quality of life. If the eight dimensions of wellness are out of balance, they can, over time, adversely affect one another and overall health.

Social wellness includes developing a sense of connection and belonging. It also involves enjoying healthy relationships, building a solid support system, and making connections in the community (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2016). Positive social connections help navigate society and even

ensure people live longer lives. Strong social ties can reduce stress and the risk of heart-related diseases. In contrast, isolation and loneliness are linked to poor health, mental illnesses, depression, and an increased risk of early death (National Institutes of Health, 2017). Neglecting social wellness could negatively impact emotional wellness and physical wellness due to depression, which in turn could affect their job performance (occupational), lead to isolation caused by depression (social), could impact employment and finances if they lose their job due to poor job performance (occupational and financial), their ability to secure a safe place to live due to unemployment (environmental), and could finally lead to a lack of fulfillment and purpose (spiritual). As such, stress in one of the eight dimensions of wellness can impact multiple facets of wellness.

According to the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2016), emotional wellness is the ability to express feelings, manage stress, adjust to emotional challenges, cope with trauma, and enjoy life. Managing stress is essential to balancing emotional wellness, as chronic stress can impact overall health and is associated with an increased risk of heart disease, weight gain, high blood pressure, anxiety, and depression (National Institutes of Health, 2017). Managing stress, adapting to difficult situations, and overcoming daily challenges builds resilience, which is an essential skill for effective law enforcement officers. Those with strong emotional wellness can typically recover from trauma and setbacks quickly. In contrast, those who struggle with balancing their emotional wellness can also have issues with maintaining critical interpersonal relationships (social) and responsibilities at work

(occupational), which can, in turn, impact elements of their financial, environmental, and spiritual wellness.

Intellectual wellness involves stimulating our minds, engaging curiosity, keeping our brains active, broadening perspectives, and expanding our intellect (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2016). According to the Washington State University Health Sciences Department (n.d.), continuing to learn and expand our minds is encouraged in intellectual wellness as it helps people become well-rounded, diverse, and creative thinkers. It is also believed that those who focus on their intellectual wellness have better concentration, critical thinking skills, and improved memory (Hartford Healthcare, 2022). Those who struggle to balance their intellectual wellness can struggle with creating and maintaining relationships with diverse populations (social), which could then impact their career opportunities and advancement (occupational), which could lead to issues with finding fulfillment and purpose (spiritual).

Physical wellness includes nutrition, exercise, and healthy behaviors to achieve optimal physical and mental health (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2016). Physical wellness consists of various behaviors, including eating healthy, being active, ceasing bad habits, managing weight, preventing illness and injury, practicing healthy habits, and getting adequate sleep. According to the National Institutes of Health (2017), being inactive for long periods can lead to diseases such as cancer, diabetes, heart disease, and depression. Still, only about 20% of Americans meet the department's weekly recommendations for 75-150 minutes of physical activity. Eating healthy and managing weight can also help prevent diabetes, heart disease, and

obesity. Neglecting physical wellness could also impact the ability to complete responsibilities at work (occupational), maintain relationships if you are unable to participate in social activities (social), create stress due to not being able to maintain critical interpersonal relationships (emotional), impact finances if you are constantly being seen for preventative medical conditions (financial), which could then impact your ability to find adequate shelter (environmental), and finally your sense of meaning and purpose could be impacted by any or all of these things (spiritual).

Environmental wellness is the ability to be and feel safe within one's environment. This can include being aware of dangerous chemicals and toxins in and around one's home, staying safe in warm and cold weather, limiting hostile environments, securing and maintaining safe and suitable shelter, and protecting the environment (National Institutes of Health, 2017). Environmental wellness also includes engaging in supportive and nurturing home and work environments (University of New Hampshire, 2023). Those who struggle to balance their environmental wellness, especially those who are exposed to chaotic environments at both work and home, can struggle with managing their emotions (emotional) and their mental and physical health due to the anxiety of being exposed to constant chaos (physical), managing relationships with family and co-workers (social), which could then impact their employment status or mobility (occupational), ability to be financially stable (financial), and overall purpose in life (spiritual).

According to the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2016), financial wellness is the ability to afford basic necessities and knowledge of financial processes and resources. Financial wellness also includes debt-

to-income ratio, savings, and satisfaction with current financial state and future earnings. The mental and emotional toll financial issues place on an individual can cause health issues such as high blood pressure, anxiety, and depression (Better Help, 2023). If financial wellness is out of balance, constant worry about finances could cause anxiety (physical/emotional) that could not only interfere with the quality of their relationships inside and outside of work (social) but also cause physical health problems, which could then impact career (occupational), ability to provide adequate shelter (environmental), and their sense of self (spiritual).

Occupational wellness is not only ensuring that one is satisfied with their career but also includes finding a balance between work and leisure time (Washington State University Health Sciences Department, n.d.). Since most people spend at least 1/3 of their life at work, finding meaning in what one does and ensuring that a career supports one's goals and lifestyle is also essential for occupational wellness (Better Help, 2023). The inability to take time off work and choose to balance occupational wellness could alienate friends and support systems (social), cause stress and burnout (emotional), leave less time to adequately stimulate your mind (intellectual), and negatively impact your nutrition or sleep (physical).

Spiritual wellness is having a sense of meaning, peace, harmony, balance, and purpose in the world. Those who are spiritually well tend to have a distinct set of personal beliefs, a sense of self, values, and a defined path and purpose in life (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2016). This type of wellness is the most difficult to achieve as it requires balance, purpose, and stability in other dimensions of wellness and a clarified sense of self (University of Pittsburgh, n.d.).

If one struggles with spiritual wellness, it could immensely affect their overall health. Focusing on achieving wellness, in general, is difficult if one does not have a well-defined sense of self, fulfillment, and purpose in life. Lack of spiritual wellness and meaning in life could lead to difficulties with bouncing back from life's setbacks (emotional), making meaningful connections with others (social), managing money for the future (financial), and seeking a meaningful and fulfilling career (occupational).

Conclusion

Creating balance in all parts of our lives is essential for overall wellness. Balance in terms of the Eight Dimensions of Wellness does not necessarily mean that they are all given the same amount of attention or consideration. Balance is a uniquely individualized process, and people will not balance these dimensions in the same way. Personal needs, culture, resources, and circumstances all impact how one will balance the Eight Dimensions of Wellness. As life constantly changes, one must evaluate their own wellness based on these changes and re-balance them as necessary (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2016).

As policing is recognized as one of the most stressful occupations in the world, it is essential for agencies to not only acknowledge the need for law enforcement wellness programs but to implement holistic programs that focus on multiple dimensions of wellness (Murray, 2020). Focusing on implementing the Eight Dimensions of Wellness into law enforcement wellness programs empowers officers to take control of their wellness in all aspects of their lives, and a healthy police department leads to a safer community for all.

Section III: Recommendations

Law enforcement wellness programs should support the health and wellness of officers while mitigating the many negative effects of policing. In the same way that departments assess and invest in officer safety programs, the same consideration needs to be given to assessing and implementing effective wellness practices. Wellness teams should always be searching for new and innovative ways to support their employees. Wellness programs have been associated with positive mental and physical health outcomes, including an increase in healthier eating habits, increased physical activity among participants, and reduced police officer stress (Police Executive Research Forum, 2021). Promoting wellness and creating a culture of work-life balance enhance psychological health and overall well-being. It also contributes to higher recruiting and retention rates and a more resilient workforce (Department of Justice, 2023). The following are recommendations for the implementation of a holistic wellness program, which includes the Eight Dimensions of Wellness, with emphasis being placed on small-department implementation.

General Implementation: The following recommendations will help develop a holistic wellness program applicable to the unique workforce of a police agency.

Recommendation 1: Implement a holistic wellness program that includes the Eight Dimensions of Wellness, which include physical, intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual, occupational, financial, and environmental wellness.

Recommendation 2: Tailor a wellness program to the employees.

Small Agency Implementation: Creating and sharing the costs of a wellness program with another small agency or department within the area could be a cost-effective and time-saving benefit.

Recommendation 3: Engage leaders within the department and partner with police collective bargaining units to advance, foster, and destigmatize well-being while promoting holistic wellness programs and activities.

According to both the Promising Strategies for Strengthening Police Department Wellness Programs (2021) and the Report on Best Practices to Advance Officer Wellness (2023), implementing wellness programs should focus on the health of the whole person. It should include a minimum of physical, mental, emotional, financial, and spiritual wellness. Research also indicates that wellness programs are most effective when they are tailored to the department and the needs of its officers. This can be done by utilizing input from all department employees utilizing anonymous questionnaires or surveys to determine the needs and wants of the department (Police Executive Research Forum, 2021). Also, according to the 2019 Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act's report to Congress, officers are more likely to see the value of and are more willing to "buy in" to new practices when police associations or organizations endorse programming.

Physical Wellness: This recommendation will help create a culture of physical wellness and encourage others to participate in healthier behaviors.

Recommendation 4: Offer fitness, yoga, and other group fitness classes or seminars on a rotating schedule and available to all shifts. If available, trained officers can lead classes, as officer-led fitness classes can provide physical health and emotional benefits and create a sense of camaraderie among officers.

Small Agency Implementation: Partner with a local agency, train department personnel, contact community volunteers, or use online videos to provide these services. These classes can be offered in line-up, annual training, or shift meetings if a large class option is not viable due to agency size, shift conflicts, or budget restraints.

According to the Bend Police Department, since the implementation of a yoga program for their officers, there has been a 40% decrease in work-related injuries, a 77% decrease in time loss days, and an improvement in officers' sleep, diet, stress, and anxiety levels. Furthermore, the flexibility of officers who participated in the yoga sessions improved 2-3 inches in their quadriceps, hips, spine, hamstrings, lower back, and shoulders (Copple et al., 2019). Research also suggests that the benefits of using yoga as a wellness tool in law enforcement include a significant reduction of stress, tension, fatigue, and anger and a positive effect on overall mood (Jeter et al., 2013).

Research has found that working out in a group can lower stress by 26% and improve mental health by 12.6%, physical health by 24.8%, and emotional health by 26% (Yorks, 2017). A study completed by the Society of Behavior Medicine (2012) found that working out with others, especially as a group, enhanced performance, even doubling the amount of time spent working out compared to those who worked out alone. Furthermore, researchers at Kansas State University found that those who

worked out with someone they looked up to and perceived as stronger increased their workout time and intensity by 200% (Steinhilber, 2017). Peer-led exercise programs have also been found to encourage physical activity, enhance empowerment, and promote social connections. In fact, peer lead exercise programs have been found to be as effective as professionally-led programs and have an even greater impact on attendance (Bouchard, 2021).

Emotional Wellness: These recommendations will help to promote emotional and mental well-being while eliminating the stigma surrounding mental health illnesses and normalizing help-seeking behaviors.

Recommendation 5: Provide education on emotional wellness topics such as mindfulness, emotional intelligence, trauma, anxiety, depression, suicide prevention, resilience, and meditation and encourage wellness activities such as relaxation techniques, self-care practices, stress management techniques, etc.

Small Agency Implementation: Partner with other local agencies, train department personnel, contact community volunteers, or use online videos

Recommendation 6: Increase officer interactions with peer support team members to normalize communication, contact, and reach outs.

Small Agency Implementation: Small agencies may find it beneficial to partner with several smaller agencies to provide peer support teams for their employees.

to provide this education. These topics can be offered in line-up or shift meetings in small but frequent doses if agency size, shift conflicts, or budget restraints are barriers to large-group education.

According to the 2019 Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act's report to Congress, preventative information on wellness topics, including stress, trauma, depression, suicide, and resilience, can help officers self-identify the need for help, understand what help is available, and limit stigma as everyone is given the same exposure to the information. Not only does the report recommend that prevention interventions, wellness information, peer support resources, and skills to increase resilience be taught while at the academy, but that follow-up sessions should occur regularly to reinforce knowledge and skills while normalizing help-seeking behaviors within the department (Spence et al., 2019).

The power of peer support is also evident in a 2018 survey of police that found 90% of police that used peer support found the services to be helpful to very helpful, 80% reported that they would seek peer support services again, and almost 90% stated that they would recommend peer support services to another officer. In fact, three out of four officers reported that they would rather seek peer support than any other kind of services available. Furthermore, officers who use peer support services report positive impacts such as improved hopefulness, greater satisfaction with life, improved social connections, increased treatment engagement, and an enhanced quality of life (Martin, 2018).

Intellectual & Occupational Wellness: These recommendations will keep officers engaged and satisfied at the department while gaining useful skills.

Recommendation 7: Offer department-sponsored educational or personal development opportunities for employees.

Small Agency Implementation: Partner with local organizations for education or personal development.

Recommendation 8: Encourage officers to apply for specialized positions in accordance with their knowledge, skills, and interests.

Small agency implementation: Seek grants and additional funding to create specialized positions and train officers within the agency in those positions.

In general, offering professional development opportunities keeps employees engaged and retained in an organization. According to the Harvard Business Review, disengaged and bored employees are 2x more likely to leave a job than engaged employees. The same study found that 80% of subjects agreed that learning new skills would keep them engaged at their company. Furthermore, a 2018 Workplace Learning Report by LinkedIn found that 94% of employees stated that they would stay with a company longer if it invested in their professional development (Keswin, 2022).

Social Wellness: These recommendations will encourage officers to build connections in the department, increase connections in the community, and strengthen connections with their families, all of which create more resilient officers.

Recommendation 9: Create an officer mentoring program to guide and support new officers upon hire and throughout their first year on the job to build community and connection.

Small Agency Implementation: Small agencies may find it beneficial to research, visit, and model their program after another successful small agency. Small agencies should also partner with several smaller agencies to provide mentors for their employees.

Recommendation 10: Engage officers and family/support persons in department activities upon hire and throughout their careers.

According to the 2019 Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act's report to Congress, research suggests that training programs should focus on building a sense of community among police officers as workplace connectedness has been found to be a vital protective factor against depression. The same report also states that the quality of peer relationships among officers is correlated with self-reports of stress. The authors cite peer relationships as crucial to resiliency and also report that strong mentoring relationships can function as a type of mental health check-in while preserving anonymity (Spence et al., 2019).

Mentoring programs differ from traditional peer support or field training programs as an experienced officer is assigned to a new officer for the duration of the two-year program and is tasked with developing resiliency skills in new officers while providing support, guidance, and encouragement rather than formal training or short-term support. According to research, mentor programs are associated with high levels of performance. For example, one study found that mentees are promoted five times more, and mentors are promoted six times more than those who did not participate in a mentor program. Research has also found that retention rates are also positively affected by mentor programs. In fact, retention rates in the study, which are similar to retention rates in law enforcement, were found to be 69% for mentors and 72% for mentees (Community Policing Dispatch, 2023).

Strong and supportive family relationships have been found to be a protective factor for law enforcement officers. Research shows that families of police officers who are educated about police work and feel supported by the department have stronger and more resilient relationships (Kirschman, n.d.). Other research completed by the United States military has found that there is a positive relationship between family wellness and retention rates. This research found that when military families feel they are cared for and “mission ready,” there is an increase in officer performance and willingness to continue to serve in the military (Zemlok, 2022).

Financial Wellness: These recommendations will ensure that officers are financially informed and educated about financial resources and support, which reduces stress and leads to mentally and physically healthier officers.

Recommendation 11: Provide officers and their families with financial wellness resources, workshops, and seminars, including topics such as money management, investing, saving goals, debt issues, budgeting, and retirement plans.

Small Agency Implementation: Contact the finance department, local financial advisors, colleges, or a company that handles retirement packages to provide financial wellness seminars and resources.

Financial wellness is a stressor that many Americans worry about daily. In fact, a 2019 study found that almost 60% of employees stress more about their financial situation than any other issue. Furthermore, 35% of those that were stressed about their financial wellness said it impacted their ability to do their job (De Beer, 2020). A 2020 study of 427 Illinois police officers found that police officers may be even more prone to financial stress than other professions. The study found that 72% of officers who participated reported that financial issues were one of the top stressors in their lives (Frankel, 2021). According to Lincoln Financial Group, 77% of employees who used financial wellness resources reported a positive impact on their lives, and 69% reported that they feel less stressed about their finances (Businesswire, 2023). Furthermore, a study conducted by the Bank of America found that employers who offer financial wellness programs and resources saw a 50% increase in productivity, a 41% increase in morale, and a 43% decrease in employee stress (Dailypay, 2023).

Environmental & Spiritual Wellness: These recommendations will ensure that officers have a safe space to go within the department with wellness resources that encourages officers to reflect on their purpose and foster a sense of fulfillment.

Recommendation 12: Offer meditation and mindfulness education in annual training and encourage officers to participate in meditation and mindfulness sessions daily.

Small agency implementation: Use apps like Headspace and Smiling Mind to facilitate meditation and mindfulness sessions, as they are fairly inexpensive or free to use. Additionally, officers can use the app at any time while they are employed with the department, so if it is not feasible to do mindfulness sessions during shift change due to staffing issues, officers can still participate in sessions on their own.

Recommendation 13: Provide a “recharge room” for officers to decompress, meditate, self-regulate emotions, access wellness resources, and recharge after difficult calls.

Small agency implementation: Local mental health agencies can support your agency on what resources to provide to officers and how. Accepting donations from community organizations can help build the space.

Research suggests that mindfulness meditation can reduce stress, anxiety, and depression while improving emotion regulation (Ranalli, 2022). Some research has also found that practicing mindfulness can improve secondary outcomes such as sleep disturbances, somatic complaints, happiness, positive affect, and productivity (Hoeve et al., 2021). At the Bend Police Department, voluntary mindfulness sessions are offered daily at the end of the shift. Mindfulness sessions are facilitated on the app Headspace and led by the Sergeant on duty, which helps to increase participation and buy-in with

the officers. It is estimated that 75% of Bend officers participate in voluntary mindfulness sessions at the end of their shift (Cople et al., 2019).

According to the 2019 Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act's report to Congress, there is evidence to suggest that building resilience and self-regulation skills can improve officer judgment and decision-making skills while reducing the number of errors that occur while on duty. Having a safe, quiet, and comfortable space for officers to self-regulate and access needed wellness resources is essential. A "recharge room" incorporates natural and calming elements with wellness resources to reduce stress and decompress after a difficult call. Research conducted by Mount Sinai Hospital has found that just 15 minutes in a "recharge room" can reduce stress by 60%, improve mood, decrease blood pressure and heart rate, and increase alertness (Imhoff & Whitney, 2022).

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