



EAP's working with Police: Establishing a Solid Foundation

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Introduction:



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Who are we and how did we get here today?

Presentation objectives

- 1. Employee Assistance professionals will learn key characteristics of police organizations, police culture, and officer attitudes that can help or hinder the effectiveness of EA programs.
- 2. EAP providers will learn methods for improving outreach and utilization to police organizations, including the unique requirements for planning stress management and wellness programs.
- 3. Clinicians who may work with police personnel will learn techniques to work more effectively with these employees and their supervisors in the chain of command and in municipal or other organizations.

A poem that says it all:

I have been where you fear to be;
I have seen what you fear to see;
I have done what you fear to do;
all these things I've done for you.

I am the one you lean upon,
the one you cast scorn upon,
the one you bring your troubles to,
all these people I've been for you.

The one you ask to stand apart,
the one you feel should have no heart,
the one you call the officer in blue,
but I am human, just like you.

And through the years I've come to see,
that I am not what you ask of me,
so take this badge and take this gun,
will you take it? Will anyone?

And when you watch a person die,
and hear a battered baby cry.
Then you think that you can be,
all those things you ask of me.

--- Unknown author



What can we learn from our predecessors?

- The primate analogy to organizational culture:

Common LEO Culture

- “You know you’re a cop when you don’t know how not to be one; if you feel that way, you’re a cop. If you don’t, you’re not.”
- The building of domestic warriors:
 1. Police Organizations are based on an hierarchal systems (fear and reprimand based)
 2. Rigid control over emotional expression is considered appropriate reactions to stress (NOT GOOD)
 3. Use of force: A viable and necessary response to conflict/danger
 - Becomes incorporated into personality; Reinforces the need for control outside the job; creates us vs them mentality
 4. Conformity is a must mindset (for safety), starting at academy and reinforced throughout one’s career
 - “Identity Deconstruction” and “Identity Reconstruction”
 - A little bit about the training academy
 - We had years to appreciate balance and build out professional identity; the police not so much...

Its more complicated than that:

- Within law enforcement organizations often the cultural variables that are adopted are the very one's that are fundamental to performing duties...
 - Ethological meanings have fundamental value and a catch 22 predicament...
- Emotional Control is necessary in the face of a situation where the experience AND expression of emotions would compromise doing the job (short term)
- And here is the problem: in time, if not addressed, the “weight” of the collective negative experience leads to maladaptive attempts to minimize the impact of engaging the realities of being on the street.

- The often natural expression of emotion during these times is taught to be unacceptable, unproductive, and example of character flaw. Officers quickly learn to suppress emotional experience, which over time can lead to a stoic and cold outlook, even when outside the job.



- » What this means is that the Officer tends to learn to **defend** against the reality AND natural emotions experienced.
- » This also influences the Officer's ability to accept what he/she has experienced.

Consequences, there are:

- The “unforgettable”: trauma by a 1000 cuts
 - Examples
- The “cumulative”: The knockout blows
 - Examples

The Bias and Heuristics also apply to the police; after all it is a social psychology phenomena:

- Within a very short period of time, Police Officers begin to associate memories, almost exclusively, if not traumatic, to locations and areas in their beat, which is often THEIR community too.
 - Soon enough almost every corner has some form of association

Quick Perceptual Transitions

Repeated exposure to harsh realities shape personal defenses:

- Cynicism: An attitude of scornful or jaded negativity, especially a general distrust of the integrity or professed motives of others
- Civilians vs LEOs : Civilians believe people tell the truth until one discovers otherwise; Police LEARN that everybody is lying until they feel convinced otherwise.
- LEO's face mostly negative on the job experiences.
 - Leads to pessimism, cynicism, and suspiciousness of others

Cycle of Unresolved Stress

LEOs repeatedly face events causing intense and sudden:

- Stress
- Crisis
- Trauma
- Loss

These experiences left unprocessed/misunderstood can lead to a variety of self-destructive behaviors/responses:

- Chronic Anger
- Social Isolation/Depression
- Addictions (substance and non-substance-related)
- Complete integration of their LEO role
 - Difficulty/Inability to cope with emotional arousing situations
 - Further emotional avoidance/restriction
 - Family Relationship Conflicts/Turmoil
 - Exhaustion/Overwhelming/Feelings Burnout



A “COPS” model of conceptualization of the issues:

- Ethnographic and ecologically informed perspective within a developmental and evolutionary paradigm.

The four horsemen:

- Control:
- Outlets for frustration:
- Psychological Defenses:
- Sources of Support:

But first

- Organizational stress is often reported to be the most significant psychological stressor LEOs face
 - We need to have supervisors on board too:
 - Educate, consult, and discuss ways to advise and advocate for the confidential support services

Control

- The exercise of control is not as important as the belief we have it, and knowing when its ok to relinquish it...
- However, if we believe we have control over stressors that are beyond our control, we may self-blame; and for the Police Officer that means potentially questioning the self and personal adequacy.
- Control and being a Police Officer are inextricably linked and perceived loss of control can lead to perceived loss of self (i.e. perceived personal inadequacies and question personal competencies)
- So the question is: Is there accurate appraisal?
- Internal= resiliency (when a stressor IS controllable)
- External = resiliency (when a stressor IS NOT controllable)
 - Its about processing and adjusting the Officer's mindset

Control: am I a victim or am I a survivor

- Feelings of not being in control can lead to vulnerabilities, insecurities, and hyper focus on feelings of betrayal!
 - The Officer feels like a victim:
 - Fuels negative feelings:
 - Helplessness, powerlessness, anger
 - » Anxiety, depression, resentment, hate
 - Possessing sense of control over one's life and sense of self is central to emotional well-being (when things are controllable)
 - Its all about where you put your focus...
 - Focus on what you can control:
 - Fuels positive feelings: empowerment, self-worth, accomplishment

Outlets for frustration

- The rigors and experiences of Law Enforcement can be exhausting:
 - So can managing (or using resources in defending against) the natural emotions associated with police experience
 - Leads to little investment in non-police activities
 - Can appear to be disinterested and detached (relationship problems)
 - **MOST IMPORTANT:** may have little clue why non-police activities are met with such exhaustion...Its because of the little emotional reserves



Outlets for frustration

- Cathartic release of energy and the irony: finding outlets even when exhausted lead to greater energy and motivation to engage in other life activities.
 - If stressors are fresh: gets stress response out
- Distraction from stressor adds more quality to self-identity

Psychological defenses:

- Through selective reinforcement from intragenerational support of denial, repression, dissociative processes, projection, etc
- A fundamental error: less experienced clinicians may at times collude in denial and minimization unwittingly (or avoidance through his/her own fears/insecurities) by accepting the officer's minimization of trauma as being accurate

Psychological defenses continued:

- Remember that Officer's have built up complex psychological defenses to protect themselves from the psychological losses they have experienced over the years on the street.
 - Over time letting go of their defenses may let in too much... May be too much to handle, and they know it!
 - Which is why getting to them is so important before they come to you as a last resort
- This has meaningful implications in how the Officer may present in therapy as well as meaningful opportunity in exploring how they may present and impact the Officer's life.

Towards an acceptance perspective:

- Acceptance of loss and trauma dilutes the earlier need for denial and minimization
- This process is facilitated through education and cultural change

A discussion about social support

- Excellent benefit; yet diversity is the key, and can be most problematic for the seasoned police officer
- I.E.: police officer no longer feels “worthy” of his badge and doubt his abilities because he may have difficulty controlling intense emotions and cannot make sense of them; tendency to self-isolate (shame based).
- Who else can he turn to, if he has developed a social support network marked with only police officers?

So what do we do with this information?

- Must adjust out perspectives of LEOs and the possible unique challenges in getting them to our offices before the issues become so severe
- This can only be accomplished by fostering and establishing trust:
 - We need to be seen at the department
 - We need to allow the Officers to assess us as much as we are assessing them
 - Transparency is fundamental

Media influences into the police psyche

- What are the consequences of increased public haphazard scrutiny of police practices?

Behavioral and psychological consequences?

In addition

- These negative events further strengthen the Officer's feelings of betrayal, further bridging the general population and law enforcement relationships, adding more risk to experience of psychological distress.
- I have found utility in conceptualizing the law enforcement community as a marginalized group:
 - like any other diversity group that due to cultural identity they are stereotyped, stigmatized, and are particularly primed at noticing their subjugation

Trust and the therapeutic relationship:

- How do you feel about guns in your office?
- Accurate empathy: authentic appreciation for the cultural constraints and realities of the officer. DON'T SAY: "Well why don't you get another job or I don't understand why you cant ask to have Sunday's off for religious reasons." He needs to know he can trust you!
- Genuineness: no phony bonding; out of any patient, an officer will "sense" when one is simply acting the part in stead of truly appreciating the officer and his/her situation. Put in the work, know your clients.
- They also will be looking if you can call them out on their BS; there is therapeutic value here and failure to do so has the potential to dramatically compromise the therapeutic relationship. Don't put yourself in a position of needing to be rescued! These are professional rescuers and the transference here will define subsequent dynamics.
- Availability: Especially with the police, especially when them reaching out to MHPs may in and of it self represent the severity of the situation.
- Concreteness: Police officers are problem-solving focused; goal-oriented interventions that take a similar fashion, at least initially will both further solidify rapport as well as add a sense of comfort and challenge for the officer, bringing him/her back...

The pivot of effective therapy

- All effective therapy requires therapeutic alliance:
 - Often the police patient can be labeled as “rigid” by clinicians
 - This only serves as a barrier and impacts therapeutic direction and therapist counter transference
 - Rather! Greater utility to recognize the officer as an individual who has learned to respond with subconscious and unique defenses
 - Yet expressing loss and sadness impedes survival and SOP: how does an officer get through such a reality?

Additional necessary techniques

- Show up at roll call/line up
- Give formal presentations with the department
- Go on ride alongs
- Other ideas/thoughts (what do you do to communicate trust and safety with law enforcement organizations)?



Working with Police in EAPs

Understanding the Culture and Establishing Credibility
Paul Fitzgerald, Psy.D., and Douglas Craig, Psy.D.
Adler University, Chicago, IL
Northern Illinois EAPA – August 14, 2015

History of Police EAP Programs

- Large departments have had peer assistance and internal models
- Smaller municipalities have had external EAP's sometimes through municipal consortia
- Hybrid model using internal EAP coordinator with external providers

Challenges in Delivering EAP

- Attitude of toughness means seeking help may seem a weakness
- Authority is hierarchical so informal referrals seldom lead to utilization of program
- Great concern about confidentiality – most departments have informal communication patterns and a “grapevine”
- Power issues – “bringing gun to session” question

Police EAP Needs

- Stress management
- Relationship and family issues
- Performance issues
- Substance use concerns

Traditional Views of Personality Factors among Police Personnel

- Black-and-white thinking (dichotomous)
- Authority is taken for granted, though not always accepted as valid (similar to military)
- External locus of control (Officer Accountability issues)
- Procedure is important
- View of people as good, bad, or clueless
- Must be cohesive (regardless of whether in proper or improper ways)

The reality of working with police

- They are employees, breadwinners, parents, spouses, co-workers like any other EAP clients
- They have similar stresses and concerns as any other employee: Work-life balance, organizational frustrations, workplace atmosphere, supervisor problems...
- They have a range of personal history and issues that can interact with their job stress

Reality, Cont'd.

- High stress levels, “Yucky calls,” adversarial relationships, and danger/threat are part of the work world
- Suicide is a known fact in the profession. EAP needs to be aware of the need for a good assessment.
- Substance use (primarily alcohol and smoking) is part of coping strategy for many police personnel.



Positives - The Helping Mentality

- Selfless giving and protecting others is a genuine value
- Interest in kids and their welfare is also genuine, not only for juvenile officers (Like to see a kid steered back to the right side)
- Respect for experience and skill is an important part of culture
- Prioritizing risk means not spending undue time worrying about the “small stuff”



Generalization

- In mental health field, dichotomous thinking and overgeneralization are seen as cognitive errors and we help people un-learn them
- In police work, these can be *survival skills*
- However, they come at a cost – classifying people by first impression, not being open to complexity of people's emotions or motivations, *and* the possibility of making a mistake with fatal consequences



Talking Tough

- “Helping” by setting people straight (Steering those who are at a crossroads to the right path)
- Gang and drug prevention and “Scared straight” efforts fit this mindset closely
- “Bad cop” role
- Trying to sow doubt about the attractions of the delinquent life

Ways to develop relationships with EAP

- Avoid “Shrink” or “therapy” characterizations
- Assistance for all life events can help
 - Work-life – child care, elder care, financial
 - Family and parenting help
- Wellness activities
 - Smoking cessation
 - Stress management
 - Fitness and wellness

Police Social Services

- EAP that develops a good relationship with them can build legitimacy with the dept. as a whole – Sometimes EAP can double as the PSS unit or vice versa
- Association of Police Social Workers has been active for 30+ years (LCSWs and LCPCs)
- Police Social Service workers operate out of police station or nearby space, work side by side with officers and gain trust and credibility

Developing Relationships

- Have municipality or department invite EAP to
 - Ride along on patrol
 - Attend roll call
 - Make appearances for community events along with police
- Colleague roles
 - EAP assist with neighbor disputes
 - CISM

Human Cost of Traumatic Stress

“Annually, America loses about 150 law enforcement officers in various line of duty deaths. In Stuart Gellman's book, *COPS, The Men and Women Behind the Badge*, (a study of a selected group of Tucson, Az. officers), Gellman says for each officer killed in the line of duty, three others commit suicide, dozens develop heart disease and peptic ulcers, and three out of every four are divorced.”

(Keith Bettinger, 2001. Retrieved from <http://www.tearsofacop.com/police/articles/aftercare.html>).

Critical Incidents and Police

- Walk a fine line – why is EAP there?
- Avoiding the counselor is usually too easy
- Peer assistance (Northern IL CISM Team)
<http://www.ni-cism.org/index.asp>
- Psycho-educational material can be well-received (Mitchell Model material)
- Destigmatizing the need to talk about difficult situations