

2-26-2021

Implementing a Personal Wellness Program for Law Enforcement

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Implementing a Personal Wellness Program for Law Enforcement

by

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February 2021

Submitted to Concordia University, St. Paul, Minnesota

College of Humanities and Social Sciences
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS CRIMINAL JUSTICE LEADERSHIP

Acknowledgements

I wanted to thank my beloved fiancée who has inspired me to pursue this lifelong goal, without her I would not have the motivation to achieve this mile mark. Thank you.

Dedications

Dedicating this paper to the men and women who go to work to protect their communities. Stay safe.

Abstract

Law enforcement is trained to handle any and every situation they may encounter when patrolling the streets. From civil cases, domestic, de-escalation, going hands-on with subjects, to having individuals at gunpoint. Law enforcement is in an occupation that can go from 0-100mph in a matter of seconds. With all the training that can make the outcomes more desirable, one aspect has been on the afterburner that is almost as important as other training. With the staggering statistic regarding law enforcement officers committing suicide, it would make sense that law enforcement should be given more training on coping abilities and even understanding what causes stress. Understanding that suicide does not come into one's mind out of the blue. It is through chronic stress when dealing with high stressful calls. They also have poor coping abilities that can lead to more problems in their personal lives by financial, relationships, and even drug/alcohol usage. Law enforcement are seen to be individuals with strong-willed personalities who show no fear. This paper will cover some stress causations, posttraumatic stress disorder, suicide history in law enforcement, even coping abilities that law enforcement can use to reduce the stress, and the results of implementing a personal wellness program in an agency.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In this world the sheepdogs, also known as law enforcement officers, are fighting multiple wars as we speak. These wars range from being criticized by the politics, the media, crime, drugs, and even within themselves. There are thousands of different statistics regarding law enforcement that have been tracked, except the rate of suicides committed by law enforcement. Law enforcement officers are trained to handle any situation they may encounter when on the streets they patrol—however, law enforcement officers are killed more by suicide than any other way in this profession—therefore there needs to be a better understanding of what occurs in one’s own body when facing an incident where we get these “tunnel vision” moments. Perceptual distortion is stated as “mostly used for the description of phenomena experienced during the periods of extreme stress and describes a lack of correspondence between the way a stimulus is commonly perceived and the way an individual perceives it under special conditions” (Novy, 2012, p. 60). This means that our main senses dwindle in a high-stress situation. The primary senses consist of sight, smell, hearing, touch, and taste.

When faced with a high-stress situation, and also utilizing poor coping strategies, can result in a major break down of the individual. Stress is almost inevitable in every profession. When speaking to a few current law enforcement officers, they mentioned, “the heaviest thing on the planet is a police officer’s badge.” Law enforcement upholds a strong commitment to do anything and everything to better the community they serve, which comes with a price including stress. Stress is seen as the new “open door” to even worse choices such as drug or alcohol abuse, unethical professional conduct, personal misconduct, and even suicide.

Law enforcement includes a group of proud men and women who will put their lives on the line for the community they serve. These men and women are trained for anything they may

encounter. Understanding what causes stress and knowing which hormones are involved can help one to understand how the body reacts when dealing with a stressful situation. According to the Mayo Clinic website, when facing a stressful situation, our body “releases a surge of hormones, including adrenaline and cortisol” (Mayo.org, para. 3). Both adrenaline and cortisol come from the adrenal gland. These hormones each have a function in the stress response: “adrenaline increases your heart rate, elevates your blood pressure and boosts energy supplies. Cortisol is the primary stress hormone” (Mayo.org, para. 4). Stress can result from any situation or encounter that law enforcement may face. Not managing or coping with this stress appropriately can have prolonged adverse effects on our bodies being able to control our emotions. Stress can increase the risk of high blood pressure, cardiac arrest, mental issues (anxiety, PTSD, depression), and even suicide. Stress can benefit us at times to help us get through certain situations but allowing the stress to evolve into something larger can result in catastrophic results.

Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. Law enforcement is viewed by some of the general public as a profession where walls are constructed to keep negative feelings in check, and positive feelings at a distance until they can be vetted and let in by the individual. This involves facing fear in their eyes and overcoming anything they may encounter. According to the IACP, law enforcement “they are more susceptible given the horrific events, trauma, and chronic stress endemic in their profession” (IACP, 2014. p. 13). An article written by Morales Sonza, states that 126 police officer suicides occurred in 2012. Then in 2019, there were 228 police officers that committed suicide. (Shannon, 2020). This drastic increase over only five years should be a big concern to every individual. The rate continues on the spectrum’s upward scale, yet it is not being discussed. With the steady increase, the number will continue to rise in the future unless current issues in policing are addressed.

Background

Implementing a personal wellness program would be beneficial for law enforcement officers and would positively affect the community. Implementing a personal wellness program is beneficial for the community because it will make interactions with the agency a more positive experience instead of fear, high stress, and unknown to what direction it may lead. The program would benefit the agency for multiple reasons including retaining officers within the department, increased commitment and dedication to the agency and community, as well as bettering their own lives, their families, and the community. This capstone is focusing on educating the officer on how to properly cope with stress when faced with adversity. There has been multiple case studies conducted regarding personal wellness for law enforcement; yet this is still a poorly discussed and addressed area. This area of study is needed to better the future generations of law enforcement. Implementing anything new into the criminal justice system takes time, especially regarding changes in personal wellness. There is a saying in law enforcement that “complacency kills;” however, law enforcement officers are the first to say that they do not like change. Implementing a new regulated policy in regards for stress management or physical awareness is paramount if the goal is to reduce the rate of officers who are killed on duty or take their own lives.

Understanding the human mind has interested scholars for the past few centuries, especially with autonomic reactions of the body when faced with a stressful situation. Almost every part of the human body is affected by stress. In these situations, one might lose dexterity in the hands, officers may lose eyesight and get tunnel vision, hearing is limited to the focus of the attention, heartbeat rises and much more occurs. There has to be an understanding in any research that stress management is different for everyone and individuals handle stress

differently. Stress influences someone's judgement to the point that a person could commit suicide if they are unable to manage, cope, and deal with their stress. In 2019, there were 228 police officers that committed suicide (Shannon, 2020). This is a ridiculously high number that should be a serious concern of all law enforcement departments. Implementing a personal wellness program can do so much for the overall well-being of the individual and potentially save lives.

Statement of the Problem

The problem with modern-day law enforcement is that many officers are not educated regarding personal wellness for stress management. Officers are engaging in negative coping mechanisms when they are stressed out. These negative coping mechanisms can come in many shapes and forms. One example of this includes eating fast food which will then cause physical issues such as cardiovascular diseases. Another example is resorting to alcohol or substance abuse to not feel stressed out, or even not communicating appropriately with a counselor or loved one. Anecdotally, there has been a negative outlook related to officers seeking help following a traumatic incident. The sayings "need thicker skin," "suck it up," or "you will be fine" are sayings of the past, which need to be corrected. As an example, a law enforcement officer who has just been involved in a traumatic incident might say that they are "fine," in reality, it is not normal for anybody to see a fatal car crash, a partner who just got shot, needing to engage in life saving measures yet to see the person not make it. None of these are normal encounters for an individual and will affect everyone; and affect everyone differently. Having the law enforcement agency ignore the mental health of the officers cannot continue anymore.

Conclusion

Law enforcement officers protect the public from “bad” people. When law enforcement is being heavily scrutinized by the public, the media and even politicians, stress can and will appear in their lives. Law enforcement are dealt with higher regulations when they can use of force, with the discretion taken away from the officer it can potentially result in law enforcement getting hurt or even killed in the line of duty. The central aspect that needs to be addressed is the effects of stress and suicide in this occupation. Law enforcement has the highest rate of suicide in any profession there is. Law enforcement has a problem of allowing stress to creep into their lives and potentially ruin their work and even their personal life. This paper is a review of the research related to how stress affects law enforcement officers, and how coping strategies and other tactics can potentially decrease the suicide rate in law enforcement.

Chapter 2: Stress Within Law Enforcement

The silent killer for law enforcement is stress. According to the article written by Richardson and Rothstein, “A situation where in job-related factors interact with the worker to change his or her psychological and or physiological condition such that the person is forced to deviate from normal function” (Richardson & Rothstein, 2008, p.70). When an individual starts to feel overwhelmed, the individual begins to deviate from ordinary thinking and not be able to critically think in high stress situations. There are multiple side effects when someone is in a stressful situation that could appear to help but may actually hinder an officer. “Law enforcement is considered to be one of the most dangerous, stressful, and health-threatening occupations” (Tanigoshi, 2008, p. 64). Assaults on officers are on the rise, the emotional harm that law enforcement has to endure on certain calls can be to overwhelming, and the backlash on their decisions while at work. All of these different aspects of the job are only increasing the stress the law enforcement officers are being exposed to. Law enforcement has encounters with the public that can potentially range from a person high on narcotics to a high-tension domestic call. Each call an officer responds to has an aspect of the unknown. Each individual manages and reacts to stress differently, therefore there needs to be something to help everyone. Some law enforcement officers can “shrug it off” while keeping a positive mindset about it. Another officer may not be able to do this and may jump to the bottle to “take the edge off.” Using alcohol is a negative coping ability that can have drastic negative side effects if untreated. Stress comes in many shapes and forms and affects everyone differently.

Being a leader in criminal justice means that one must look forward to bettering the officers in multiple ways. This can include training, requiring proper equipment, attending to an officer’s needs, and even being a person who will listen to an officer’s complaints. When an

administration micro-manages and is closed-minded for changes regarding the department, it tends to cause more stress for an officer while working (Crank, 2004). Having micro-manager leadership shows distrust for the officers. The best way for anyone to learn is from past mistakes. If they are not allowed to make any mistakes or get reprimanded from the errors, they will not professionally grow. Allowing the officers to grow from their mistakes will improve their critical thinking and develop an understanding of their own way of managing stress.

When law enforcement officers are put into a situation that is out of the norm, an officer's body instinctively goes into a "fight or flight" mode. This mode includes the body giving off a specific hormone called "cortisol." Cortisol is a major stress hormone that influences numerous physiological systems, including CNS (central nervous system) function, metabolism, cardiovascular function, the immune system, muscle tissue, and bones" (Armbuster, 2011, p. 105). Cortisol is emitted from the adrenal gland in the brain. When one has entered this mode, the senses dim down, leading to tunnel vision and only focusing on the target. Even while shooting that entire magazine, no ringing or pain in the ears occurs because the focus is fixed on the target and only the target. Engaging in the fight or flight mode has its benefits and also its downfalls.

The human body is programmed to "fight or flight" when put into a stressful situation that may jeopardize their life. The human brain produces adrenaline and cortisol to help the officer fight the situation or allow the officer to flee. The downfalls of this natural response can produce stress which can then cause CVD (cardiovascular disease), anxiety, digestive issues, and even more mental health issues. Every animal has this type of natural response when it is faced with a potential threat. Human beings have the downfall of having an advanced brain system to allow them to think critically about the situation after the fact. Humans have the tendency to

continue to think in retrospect, or depending on the situation they faced, they are exposed to trauma after the fact. Implementing a personal wellness program to help educate the officers to understand what their body is doing during the situation can attend to their needs to help alleviate the traumatic effects.

A quote from Artwohl and Christensen states, “there is no other job like a police officer’s, that requires someone to deliberately go out and actively search for dangerous situations where their life or someone else’s life may be threatened” (Artwohl & Christensen, 1997, p. 36). The fight or flight syndrome is an automatic response given off from the body through the sympathetic nervous system (SNS), “Improved sensory awareness increases an individual’s ability to successfully address a threat” (Kalisch et al., 2015). This automatic response has been programmed inside of every living organism on the planet. The positives regarding fight or flight are that it is supposed to get the officer out of their situation. Having the eyes fixed on the target and having the extra stress can help cope during and after the crisis. The negative aspect regarding fight or flight is that dexterity is minimized, making it more difficult for the person to use their hands in a stressful situation. If the officer has not been properly trained in stress situations the results could get someone hurt or even killed. An example of this states, “Police performance reveals that psychological and physiological stress responses during critical incidents shape the outcome of the incident, either for good or for bad” (Arnetz, et al., 2013; Arnetz, et al., 2009). Law enforcement is an occupation that trains more often to be better prepared for anything they may encounter while working the streets they serve, rather than how to cope with the aftermath.

When the officers are in a high-stress situation, they may experience a visual deficiency called “tunnel vision.” When someone is in the situation that causes stress, their eyes will be

directed towards the threat. (Olson, 1998). The incident may “slow down or speed up” depending on the person and their mental capacity. Having the eyes fixed on the target is supposed to help the officer deal with the threat. With the eyes fixed on the target it will make other aspects hard to do such as minor dexterity movements.

When the body is in this kind of situation, one can potentially lose dexterity. Our small motor functions, such as functional movements with fingers, can be harder to use. This is why in the law enforcement career, the experienced officers harp on the rookies to practice being perfect using the whole hand with larger muscles instead of relying on fingers with fine pinch gripping to load a gun.

Law enforcement officers are proud men and women who take pride in the work they do. When an officer arrests someone and then the court system lets the individual go free because there was not enough evidence, this results in the law enforcement officer becoming easily burnt out. This brings on a feeling of “what is the point” because even though the law enforcement officer was doing the job, the acknowledgment is thrown out the window. With work-related stress, it is hard for law enforcement to “turn off” the mentality of work when going home. “About 40 percent of officers polled admitted to acts of domestic violence in their families” (Mohandle, 1999, p. 359). With the higher rates of law enforcement committing domestic violence, it is paramount that the agency takes a proactive approach to seek out stress reducing programs. If the officer is using positive coping abilities then the drama of the work life has the opportunity to not get into their personal life.

In the career of a law enforcement officer, there are always stressors that will come daily. There are two distinctive types of stresses that can negatively affect the life of a law enforcement officer. The first one is an acute stress disorder, usually occurring after a traumatic incident

(Christopher, 2018, p. 104). Examples of a traumatic incident law enforcement officers may experience can be a fatal car crash, partner getting hurt on duty, or a high tension domestic related incident. Symptoms of acute stress can range from the usual stress symptoms to even an awareness issue of not knowing where they are and feeling hopeless. The second primary type of stress disorder is chronic stress disorder. This type of disease takes years of bottling up stressors, and then it takes control over the individual. Symptoms of chronic stress can present as stomach pain, fatigue, and getting sick more often. This can be explained as: “Consistent exposure to acute and chronic stress is a risk factor for adverse mental health in law enforcement officers, including anxiety, sleep problems, depression, and suicidal ideation” (Christopher, 2018, p. 104). Individuals who suffer from both of these types of stressors have a greater chance of being diagnosed with PTSD (Post traumatic stress disorder) if the stressors are untreated.

When dealing with more mental health issues and minimal help resources, more law enforcement officers are losing hope and taking other paths with more permanent results, such as a physically or mentally harming lifestyle. Law enforcement is trained to handle every call they may encounter. The calls could be a civil matter regarding a child custody dispute, de-escalating an individual who may be suffering from excited delirium, or using deadly force when facing an individual who intends to harm the officer or someone else. Critical incidents can happen in a blink of an eye and can catch many officers off guard, which could have deadly consequences. Negatively dealing with post-stress can lead to more mental health issues, social life issues, personal life issues, work-related issues, and even to a greater chance of suicide. Leadership in criminal justice have a vital role in influencing and implementing positive change for the future generation of law enforcement and its community. Mental health is one of the aspects in law enforcement that has been forgotten drastically over the past few years. According to Lazarus,

"The relationship between the person and the environment that the person appraises as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 19).

As a criminal justice administrator, understanding the warning signs of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can save the individual's life or limit the liability of that officer for the agency. PTSD is described as "the development characteristic symptoms following a psychologically distressing event outside the range of human experience" (Kureczka, 1996, p. 11). Implementing an ethical principle or policy regarding stress management is critical for the officer, the department, and even the community would all benefit from this. The Minnesota P.O.S.T Board should mandate the officer's added training for a few various reasons in order to aid in preventing or managing PTSD. Humans should not see what law enforcement have to deal with on calls, yet still be expected to live a normal everyday life after the incident. Most adults handle stress differently and that is expected in every workplace. Some law enforcement officers are able to go to a traumatic scene and not be affected as bad as other law enforcement officers. Some of the other officers will reflect and remember everything, and it will feel like elephants are sitting on their chests. Law enforcement officers who are repeatedly exposed to traumatic incidents could face the possibility of stress. Understanding the warning signs of stress would be beneficial for the officer.

If a department starts with mandatory training regarding positive coping mechanisms, it could help the officers when exposed to a critical incident. Every individual shows various characteristics of stress. According to Lexipol, the most common ways stress could be seen as an early red flag for officers can be "isolation and withdrawal, being disengaged or unmotivated, physical exhaustion, nightmares and flashbacks, poor hygiene or apathy about one's physical

appearance, loss of empathy or compassion, relationship issues, including divorce, substance misuse, and abuse, recurrent sadness or depression, resistance to feedback, resistance to change, reduction in meaningful work product, reduced job satisfaction, and increase in citizen complaints” (Lexipol, 2019). Looking at the Lexipol’s information, it is clear that there are already numerous early warning signs of stress that officers may experience and show.

Implementing policies that can help officers cope with stress is positive for the officer and the department. “The actions taken by the department in the ensuing weeks and months will determine in large part whether he copes effectively with the stress induced by his critical incident or whether its effects become debilitating” (Kureczka, 1996, p. 11). The administration shall understand what could constitute what a critical incident is.

Critical incidents can vary greatly and can affect the person differently. Law enforcement can face experiences such as multiple fatalities at a car crash, witnessing an incident regarding a child, or being involved in a deadly force situation. As stated before, a critical incident can be separate for everyone. Being a criminal justice administrator, it is essential to implement a policy regarding a critical incident on the stress management for proper coping abilities. Examples of policy changes could be having mandatory time off for the officer-involved with the incident, speaking with a licensed therapist where everything is confidential, and seeking out other professional help regarding strategies.

Allowing the stress to linger on from work into the officer’s personal life can only lead to more personal related issues. Law enforcement and even correctional officers are in a position to encounter more traumatic incidents than the public. Allowing the traumatic incidents to build more stress and using poor coping mechanisms can open up a new door that could have even

more drastic results. Implementing a peer assistance program would be beneficial for multiple reasons.

Characteristics such as trust, confidentiality, and a fellow officer would be performing the assistance. Police Organization Providing Peer Assistance is described as “a volunteer police support network committed exclusively to providing a confidential, safe and supportive environment for police officers and retirees” (POPPA). Having the resource that allows open communication, focuses on trust, and confidentiality would allow the officers to seek out the help when exposed to a traumatic incident.

PTSD and Suicides for Law Enforcement

Law Enforcement officers are exposed to more traumatic events than most compared to the general public. After numerous incidents the stress can take its toll on the individual. Understanding stress can be different for everyone, and especially more difficult to understand and cope with when witnessing a traumatic event. For one officer, a stressful incident could be just “another day in the office.” For another, though, the officer could have not slept in days because they will have flashbacks from that scene when they try to sleep. According to the American Psychiatric Association, “Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a psychiatric disorder that may occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event” (American Psychiatric Association, 2020, para. 1). To be diagnosed with PTSD, there is a classification process by the DSM-5. Byrne stated, “Four main symptom clusters characterize post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) according to the DSM-5: intrusions, avoidance, negative cognitions and mood, and alterations in arousal reactivity” (Byrne et al., 2019, p. 266). Stress affects everyone differently; when someone has PTSD, there are common effects that happen

internally. These include mental health issues beginning to occur, higher probability of CVD, increased fatigue, and depression are all common effects of PTSD.

Keane states “We now know that trauma initiates a complex psychological and biological process, and not all individuals exposed to the same traumatic event will develop PTSD” (Keane et al., 2006, p. 161). When officers face a traumatic event, the natural hormones cortisol and adrenaline are released from the adrenal gland to help defuse the situation. When someone faces a traumatic event and is suffering from PTSD, their brains do not snap out of the fight or flight mode. An example of this:” increased amygdala responsivity in PTSD” (Hughes, et al., 2011, para. 6) The amygdala is the central portion of the brain in control of the fight or flight response and fear processing when the individual is in any situation. When someone is dealing with this disorder or has flashbacks regarding the traumatic event, the heart begins to pump blood more to the body to ensure that you win the fight or get away safely. “PTSD symptom severity was associated with an 18% increased risk of coronary heart disease (CHD)” (Friedman, 2017, p. 1). With the brain and other vital organs affected by PTSD, the individual may start to act differently. The individual may start to be more negative towards life, can be more irritable, and even choose to be by themselves.

One of the main signs of someone who may be experiencing PTSD is intrusive dreams or otherwise known as flashbacks. The amygdala is a crucial proponent of someone who may have PTSD, but another portion of the brain that is drastically affected by PTSD is the hippocampus. One study states, “Overactivation of this region along with the amygdala may contribute to intrusive thoughts frequently experienced by individuals with PTSD” (Patel et al., 2012, p. 2132). Individuals who are experiencing these types of abnormalities appear to be more fatigued, which is also evidenced in the research: “Research shows 40 percent of police officers have

symptoms of a sleep disorder, including sleep apnea and insomnia” (Pittman, 2012, p. 1). Having flashbacks hindering the officer’s sleep can result in the officer being more fatigued, having mood disorders, and becoming more isolated. The symptoms of someone who is suffering from these flashbacks include appearing to be fatigued during the day, memory loss is more apparent, they may have difficulty forming a thought or even continuing a relationship with loved ones or with friends. Less sleep and having the mentality of being down on themselves will then cause the officer to be more agitated towards himself and everyone around them. During the first phase it affects the officer internally; ultimately the internal damage will start to affect the officer externally through interactions with other people.

When individuals start to show signs of irritability after being exposed to a traumatic situation, they will do whatever it takes to not fall back into that situation. The officer will start to avoid anything and everything that could remind them of that situation. Location, sounds, smells, and even talking about it with loved ones can trigger the traumatic situation of the PTSD. The individual might succumb to solidarity because the officer will not want to burden the family and have it all on their shoulders. Isolating and not seeking out help can lead to a depressed mindset and outlook on life.

PTSD will affect anyone and everyone differently. However, when someone is being affected by PTSD they will show similar symptoms. The third phase is negative emotions and mood changes involving and affecting daily life activities. Law enforcement officers witness events that the general public can only imagine. Still, the officers are expected to act in a usual manner after the traumatic event. When the individual begins to show negative emotions, the person will lose interest in their hobbies, not engage with family or friends, and choose solidarity. Having negative feelings towards the world and toward themselves, may result in the

officer beginning to portray depressive features in this stage. According to the American Psychiatric Association, the fourth stage is regarding change in arousal activity (2020). The suddenness of mood swings, irritability, and hypervigilance are all signs of PTSD. Continuing to allow the PTSD to run rampant in the officer's life can have drastic results. Implementing a personal wellness program has the chance to reduce negative emotions after a traumatic event. If the negative emotions are not dealt with properly, there can be more significant risks for the officer.

A PTSD statistic found that, one third of police officers suffer from PTSD or post trauma stress responses that can seriously affect physical and mental health (Blum, 2000; Kates, 1999). Law enforcement has one of the most stressful occupations there is. Using negative coping mechanisms can have drastic results for the officer's life.

Body- Suicide.

Stress comes without a warning sign; it will creep in and slowly take everything away. When an officer has battled prolonged depression, they may feel that nothing will get better. No one will know why a person decides to take their own life. The only thing people will think back to is "what could I have done differently to prevent this" or "if only I had done something." Suicide cannot be pinpointed for one exact reason. Only the person who committed the act knows because they believed that was the only way to solve the situation. Occupational stress, substance and alcohol abuse, marital issues, and even mental health disturbances are all possible factors on why someone would commit suicide (Waters & Ussery, 2007).

From 2012 to the present times, the rate of law enforcement suicides has risen 45%. This drastic increase can have multiple reasons of why the number increased, these could include: better documentation to keep track of the suicides, personal stress, economics, global pandemics

and so forth. To break this statistic down even more, in 2012 there were 126 suicides by law enforcement; in 2019, there were 228. In just only seven years, the rate has almost doubled of law enforcement committing suicide in a year. “From 2006 to 2015, 1620 officers were killed in the line of duty, 489 of them feloniously” (Johnson, 2018, p. 1). “There were 106 police officers that lost their lives on duty last year, during 2018” (McCarthy, 2019, para.1). Being killed in the line of duty can occur at any call law enforcement may encounter. Statistic of officers who committed suicide have not been properly tracked compared to other aspects of law enforcement. The rate of law enforcement deaths has always been higher than most occupations. Statistics have shown law enforcement commit suicide three times more than any other way that might take their life on or off duty (Nagourney, 2007).

The post lingering mental ordeal is the issue, such as “During the 2018 calendar year, 167 law enforcement officers tragically took their own lives, and that number is projected to increase during 2019” (Addiction center, 2020, para 2). According to the Officer Down Memorial Page, there were 342 line of duty deaths in 2020 alone. Ranging from the virus Covid-19, gunfire, and even automobile crashes (ODMP.org). PTSD and poor stress coping abilities only enhances the reason of why law enforcement have a higher statistic of suicide compared to the general public. Law enforcement has the means and can access firearms easier than the general public. With the mental health of PTSD and the easily accessible firearm, law enforcement are the ones that need extra training on how to regulate their emotions.

With the Black Lives Matter movement, tensions are skyrocketing regarding police brutality. George Floyd, Eric Garner, and Philando Castile are all recent cases that the movement Black Lives Matter have declared racial injustice towards the officers for using excessive force.

The public has turned towards rioting in the streets to declare their frustration regarding police brutality. With the sudden hate towards law enforcement and having the stresses on the rise, law enforcement officers have been getting attacked because of their occupations. “Marking a 28% jump in felonious officer deaths of the same period in 2019” (Hutchinson, ABC News 2020). Stress can have prolonged adverse effects on our bodies, especially with not appropriately controlling our emotions. Stress can put more of a greater risk of high blood pressure, cardiac arrest, mental issues (anxiety, PTSD, and depression), and even suicide. Stress can be beneficial to help allow us to get through the stressful situation, or the stress can eat away at the officer if not treated accordingly. It is paramount to implement more treatment options regarding law enforcement officer’s mental and physical health.

The mental aspect of law enforcement is not to let your emotions get the best of you. If a law enforcement officer seeks help, they fear being seen as “weak” by their fellow law enforcement officers. Depression is a mental disease that can make someone feel hopeless and that sometimes life is not worth living. When dealing with someone showing red flags of being depressed, it could be that they seem tired all the time and can have up and down moods, irritability, poor eating habits, and even suicidal ideations.

“For every, suicide that is carried out, there are as many as 25 attempts” for law enforcement (IACP, 2014, p. 20). The numbers of attempted suicides shows that the occupation is becoming a more deadly occupation, not from external factors, but from internally. Knowing that the suicide rate is already higher than any other profession, and with the statistic that there are approximately twenty-five attempts for every result is a statistic that needs to be dealt with. According to IACP, “Mental health problems left unaddressed over a significant period may cause irreparable harm, including death” (IACP, 2014, p. 22). Allowing the individual to use

negative coping mechanisms will allow the stress to lead to serious health hazards. Allowing the stress to form into a more negative effect such as PTSD, depression, and even to suicidal ideation. When someone succumbs to PTSD their physical and even emotional health may dwindle. This could be triggered by being around loud noises, their vocabular skills may be slowed or appears they have a difficult time forming a sentence, and even their mental recognizance may be impaired due to mental health issues.

Law enforcement officers are individuals who are proud of the work they perform for the community. They are the ones who generally will be the last ones to ask for help when something is bothering them. There are probably hundreds of reasons why and those reasons will depend on the person that is being affected. From researching articles, there are some common reasons why law enforcement officers might not seek out help. The first reason is the fear of being seen as weak by coworkers. As stated before, law enforcement officers are seen as nothing gets under their skin no matter the situation. When an officer starts to show signs of any issues, they will be told to “suck it up” which might cause additional problems for the officer. Being told that comment after being exposed to a traumatic incident has the potential to cause more harm. Law enforcement officers do not want to show that anything is bothering them. Being closed minded and choosing to not seek out help will only cause more problems in the future. The second is due to not having any trust in the therapist. The officer will think, “How will this person know what I am going through when they have never gone through what I?” Having a closed-minded mentality regarding seeking the help of a third party is a hardship that is difficult to break. Having in-house counselors who are also cops would be an asset that would pay for itself immensely. Including a personal wellness program in the department has multiple benefits

such as reducing the time off of the cop, sick time, reducing the officer's liability for the agency, and even insurance of the department.

Suicide inside of the department

A review of articles from several peer-reviewed sources show that there may not be enough policies that could help the deceased's family or even counseling for the officers that might have been affected by the death of the officer. Losing a law enforcement officer in the line of duty is disheartening as it is. Losing an officer to suicide can be even harder for the agency to mourn. After informing the family, the leadership should inform the agency, offer the other officers time to mourn and give the opportunity for counseling if the other officers request it. Depending on the department's size, the financial options to assist in covering costs can vary from being very abundant to being very few.

Suicide is a conversation no one wants to have. Many causations could enhance why there may be more stress in the occupation than management, work-related, and personal issues. Law enforcement is dealing with the most heinous events you could think of being possible. Educating the law enforcement officer about a personal wellness program can have a positive effect for the agency and even for the officer in his own life.

Body- Training/ Coping Mechanisms.

Knowing how devastating stress can be if left unattended and knowing how often suicide occurs in a law enforcement officer's life, there are opportunities to lower the statistics. Taking a proactive approach to reducing stress law enforcement may face can potentially prolong their lives after retiring and can help to reduce the statistic that enforcement officers have a higher mortality rate from CVD, respiratory issues, mental health disorders, and die earlier compared to the general public. (Vena, et al., 1986). Law enforcement has approximately three times the

amount of suicide compared to the general public. (Vena, et al., 1986, p. 386). If the law enforcement officer continues to use poor coping abilities there can be life altering effects such as CVD issues, depression, cancer, and respiratory issues. There are numerous non-profit organizations for the ultimate goal to help reduce the stress, PTSD, and to reduce the statistic of suicide for law enforcement officers. Suicide Prevention Resource Center, Blue Help, NAMI, PERF, and National Police Suicide Foundation are all different programs to help officers suffering from suicidal ideations. There are many more confidential phone numbers someone can call so it can be discrete. That is one of the most significant issues where law enforcement officers do not want to seek help or go to administration due to the fear of being judged for seeking mental help.

Negative coping mechanisms can lead to very harmful results. Negative mechanisms may include drinking more often, poor nutritional habits, inconsistent sleep schedule, poor communication skills/solidarity, and even professional and personal issues. Personal wellness has to begin with educating the officer on the proper ways to handle stress. If stress can run wild in the officer, this will only open new damaging coping mechanisms. Drinking alcohol has been on the rise for anyone in public to abuse to just “take the edge off” after a shift. According to the article written by R . Kathryn McHugh and Roger Weiss “Psychiatric disorders, such as anxiety and mood disorders, commonly co-occur with alcohol use disorder (AUD)” (Mchugh & Weiss, 2014, para. 1). Alcohol can have severe life-altering effects. The officer can become depressed if they continue to drink excessively, relationships with family and friends could be negatively impacted, professional misconduct, and even suicide attempts if they do not control their drinking habits.

When a person consumes an excessive amount of alcohol, their body begins to slow

down because the drink is a depressant for the central nervous system. The alcohol will affect the mind, judgment, and even dexterity of the body. Alcoholic beverages consist of a high sugar intake rate, giving the person who is consuming a feel-good feeling. The book written by Robert Dudley stated, “Molecules of alcohol are then absorbed onto and also transit through the internal linings of the digestive and then the circulatory system before exerting their neurobiological influence” (Dudley, 2014, p. 89). Molecules of the alcohol are absorbed into the bloodstream and are then carried throughout the body affecting multiple areas inside of the body. Unfortunately, “The United States law enforcement occupation is speculated in the literature to have one of the highest abuse rates of alcoholic beverages, roughly twice that of the general population” (Lindsay, 2007, p. II). Law enforcement officers experience more trauma-related incidents than the public will ever experience. With the attitude towards seeking help to cope with the negative feelings, officers will more often drink an alcoholic beverage to calm the nerves.

Growing up, we are taught multiple times about proper nutrition, getting enough sleep, and maintaining physical activity. Bored eating, eating on the go, or eating to get rid of negative emotions are all negative habits that can happen to anyone. In the article regarding law enforcement eating habits, “Law enforcement personnel have been recognized as being prone to obesity” (MacKenzie-Shalders, et al., 2020, p1). Law enforcement has brief moments that will cause for physical exertion. Most of the time the officer will be inside of the vehicle for sometimes hours at a time. With the monotonous work hours and the unsure of when the officer will have the next meal, these are just a few examples of why fast food has been a major factor on the weight gain for law enforcement. Stress can make anyone’s life even harder than it should be, and negative eating habits is a cure for some. Some other hardships law enforcement has to endure consist of sleep difficulties, nutrition, exercise, support, and stressful situations.

The Centers for Disease defines anyone with over a 30.0 body mass index (BMI) or higher as obese. Law enforcement is in a position to have a difficult time sitting down and having a healthy nutritious meal. The career of law enforcement revolves around the calls officers may encounter at unknown times. Having an easy source of food at their disposal when on shift is one reason why law enforcement is consuming fast food more than healthy meals. “Recent research suggests that 40.5% of American police officers are obese, which is a prevalence rate above the national average of 35.5% for adult men” (Can & Handy, 2014, para. 2). By understanding the negative effects of not consuming healthy eating habits, the officer will start bettering their life not just professionally but also personally.

Proper nutrition is beneficial in many ways regarding one’s health. The officer with proper nutrition has a better chance at losing weight, lower blood cholesterol, reduce the possibility of having cardiovascular diseases, and reduced stress. Eating right and continuing to be physically fit is essential not only for our livelihood but also for duty. A personal wellness program can help educate the officer to understand all the physical aspects needed to maintain a healthy lifestyle. One statistic says, “Police officers in the United States face a 30 to 70 times higher risk of sudden cardiac death when they’re involved in stressful situations” (Kulbarsh, 2018, para. 9). In this lifestyle, law enforcement must do everything they can do to help reduce possible stress. When law enforcement is placed in a stressful situation, there are even techniques the officer can do to help at that moment, such as controlled breathing. Controlled breathing is one technique law enforcement have been trained on to continuously breathe in a certain manner in a certain rhythmic method. Law enforcement is trained to handle any situations they may encounter. Remaining calm and continuing to be physically fit has multiple benefits for professional reasons but can reduce cardiovascular diseases especially.

Lifting weights has multiple benefits ranging from internally and externally. People who engage in physical activity should attempt to do approximately thirty minutes in a day. The Public Health recommends that performing physical activity is essential to reduce cardiovascular issues, metabolic syndromes, and reduce mental health issues. Multiple studies have found performing a physical activity is a significant stress reducer for individuals.

Along with reducing stress, it has been shown that working out also helps people lose weight easier and faster. Engaging in physical activity and eating right will increase a person's metabolism rate. Having a higher metabolism rate will help burn more calories which will make a person lose more weight. Engaging in physical activity will then help the officer when they are on the streets. When faced with a situation that may call for any physical exertion, they can better protect themselves or others. Seeing the positive effects of engaging in physical activity will make the person more self-critical and not engage in the negative coping mechanisms mentioned earlier, but more so engage in different stress-reducing activities. Speaking to anyone regarding what is troubling someone has the benefits that can help alleviate stress drastically and aid in what direction to begin with managing stress.

Law enforcement is to be seen as individuals that are not discouraged by whatever is facing them. Some examples of this are witnessing a fatal car crash and having to engage in life-saving techniques that did not turn well, juvenile-related incidents, high-stress domestic assault cases, use of force, and much more. Every call law enforcement gets called to has the potential to be a traumatic incident. The term "thicker skin" or "man up" when someone faces these situations is what you do not do. Law enforcement has a negative trend when faced with a traumatic incident. The officers will generally keep it to themselves and do not seek out any help. Having support from your family, colleagues, and even therapists are a great tool that should be

incorporated into every officer's life. However, seeking out support therapists cannot work if the officer does not have trust in the therapist.

When an officer starts to show signs of unprofessional behavior, or their personal life is beginning to have negative behaviors, this can be a warning sign that the individual is stressed. The officer will not engage in any conduct that consists of going outside of his own house. Irritability, withdrawal from conversations, tiredness, and having a negative attitude towards everyday life are all symptoms of a person experiencing stress. Many officers think the option is to wait it out with the mentality of "it is just a phase" regarding when they choose the life of solitude when faced with stress.

Choosing the life of solidarity can have drastic effects on the individual and even on the family. When a family member notices a slight change in mentality and wants to go straight to bed after work, it is critical to seek help. Prolonged periods of being on the lower end of the roller coaster can have dire consequences. In the book *Emotional Survival for Law Enforcement*, by Kevin M. Gilmartin, (2002), mentions the hypervigilance biological rollercoaster disengagement from personal life. If it revolves around work, the person appears to be excited, but when it does not involve work, the individual seems isolated or depressed (Gilmartin, 2002, p.47). Allowing this type of mentality can lead to many other harmful aspects: marriage issues, personal relationships diminish, and the feeling of being depleted.

Sleep deprivation is a common aspect in law enforcement profession. Law enforcement officers have to deal with odd hour shifts that workdays and nights, getting called into work on their days off, and even forced overtime after working a twelve-hour shift. Going to court on your days off can lead to more stress and less of a time to allow the officer to recover from the set of days they worked. Symptoms of sleep deprivation can affect cognitive decisions, such as

not paying attention to what you do or your surroundings. Poor sleeping habits can also hurt the nutritional aspect and can ruin one's metabolism. If one's metabolism is in disarray, weight gain, other mental health-related issues, and even cardiovascular issues can arise. Sleep deprivation symptoms can be because of cognitive problems such as not paying attention to what you do or your surroundings. Sleep deprivation symptoms can be irritability, carelessness with their actions, seeming distracted, high blood pressure rises, and weight gain.

Law enforcement officers work long, strenuous hours that sometimes will have forced overtime added onto the long shift. The average adult is recommended to get approximately 7-9 hours of sleep every night, or they will face fatigue or other symptoms. An article by Vila states, "Long and erratic work hours and insufficient sleep may result in fatigue that could impair the performance and decision-making ability of police officers, potentially threatening their health and safety and that of the public they serve and protect" (Vila, 2006, p. 1). The schedule of law enforcement appears will be a forever battle. Certain communities require having law enforcement on 24/7 all year long. Adjusting the officer's personal life around the work life can be done. Having longer stretches of days and nights can potentially make the sleep aspect easier to handle when the officers are not bouncing from days to nights monthly.

Law enforcement is given all the training to help the public, no matter the issue they may encounter. One example of the practice can consist of the countless hours of muscle memory of defensive tactics, the fundamentals of arrests, and proper shooting techniques. All these techniques are supposed to enhance the officer's skill set physically to get the job done. Statistics show that it is not physical encounters that kill the officer, rather it is mental health issues that are the number one killer for law enforcement. With all the multiple ways someone can cope

negatively, there are even more positive ways to manage and maintain a more positive personal wellness.

Mindfulness-based resilience training is being taught more often to use critical thinking abilities to better everyone's situation. It is not fixing the problem that the law enforcement officers are facing. It is to help the law enforcement officer to be able to have proper coping techniques and reduce burnout. Burnout is when law enforcement is exhausted and having a numb feeling to the profession or just going through the motions. Having this type of mentality can make one even more irritable or even depressed.

Deborah Moore mentioned there are emotional, behavioral, and cognitive approaches to cope with the stressful situations. Emotional coping strategies "involve our efforts to manage our reactions to the stressor, rather than trying to change those reactions" (Moore, 2013, p. 96). Instead of thinking negatively about the stressor keeping an open mind can reduce the stress before and even after dealing with the event. Behavioral Coping strategies "involve modifying our actions or taking whatever external steps are needed to resolve the difficulty" (Moore, 2013, p. 97). The behavioral strategy is a proactive approach to understand what is causing the issue, so the officer is then able to fix the problem. The third and final coping technique mentioned by Moore was Cognitive, stating, "Modifying your thinking and how you process information about the stressful situation." (Moore, 2013, p. 97). The coping technique is beneficial for the officer when faced with a stressful situation because it enhances their communication skills. All of these three strategies mentioned by Moore are simple tools that an officer can use for any scenario regarding stress. The ultimate goal is to take a proactive approach to reduce stress and these three are tactics they can use when at work or even in their personal lives.

There are thousands of different ways to enhance your proper coping mechanisms. Every person is going to have different opinions. Attending to your own needs and knowing what works and what does not work is critical in reaching your goals. Each one will have various stressors but will also have different coping mechanisms. Eating healthy, being physically fit, getting the appropriate amount of sleep, limiting alcohol/ substance use to a minimum, even proper open communication with your partner or anyone can drastically change your life for the better. Having hobbies is beneficial in many ways because it gets your mind away from your work life. Associating with people who are not in law enforcement is also beneficial. It separates the personal life with the professional life.

Legal Implications

The public sees law enforcement officer as having minimal training in dealing with mental health-related calls, resulting in excessive force. To change that mindset that the public believes, we have to dive into the law enforcement officers themselves. Implementing a personal wellness program can have multiple benefits regarding officers' safety while working, but even bettering their public interactions. Law enforcement officers can be exposed to a wide array of training concerning de-escalation, civil process training, emergency vehicle handling, and even medical related training. Implementing a new wellness program would be beneficial and should be added into the agency's protocols.

The Minnesota Legislature is composed of multiple elected officials from around the state who are dedicated to upholding the law and are the ones who can implement new policies/regulations. According to Minnesota statute 181.9731, law enforcement and other entities can seek out counseling for work-related traumatic incidents (MNrevisor). It may seem that law enforcement officers are not only fighting a war against drugs, but multiple other actions

are going on that no one else is talking about. These include a war against media, politics, the communities, and even the conflict within themselves. In a recent article, “In 2019, there were 228 police officers who committed suicide” (Shannon, 2020, para. 1). The public does not hear about this statistic in the news because most of the media is portraying law enforcement in a negative manner. This is a problem because then law enforcement officers continuously feel like the whole world is against them working a demanding job and then hearing about how bad a job they are doing on every media platform. This leads to increased mental health issues and, sadly, suicide if these individuals cannot find the help or support they need to better the state of mind. Bettering the mental health of the individual is the first step to improving the lives of the individual.

What are the legal issues in having a mandatory personal wellness-related program? The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was put into legislation in 1990. According to the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, “Title One of the ADA is a federal civil rights law that prohibits employers from discriminating against individuals of the basis of disability” (EEOC.gov, 1990, para. 7). Having a mandatory personal wellness program can potentially violate the ADA unless the program tends to the needs of individuals with disabilities. Individuals who are in law enforcement have to deal with the most mentally stressful situations people can imagine. Having the mental stress and also having the physical exertion required at certain times, it is very important that law enforcement continue to better their personal wellness for the physical aspect. Working out reduces stress to the point that you can live a healthier lifestyle. There are multiple health benefits such as reducing anxiety, decreasing your blood pressure, decreasing your cholesterol, and even other diseases that are less likely to occur if you can incorporate regular physical activity into your daily routine. Similar to the American

disabilities act, the Rehab Act of 1973 states “prohibits discrimination based on disability in programs conducted by federal agencies, in programs receiving federal financial assistance, in federal employment and the employment practices of federal contractors” (Kearn.org).

Implementing a personal wellness program has the potential to save lives for the officer. There are a few government laws that are required to be met before implementing the personal wellness program.

The American Disabilities Act (ADA) and the rehab act are all guidelines that are needed to be followed closely if a personal wellness program would be added to the agency. The Rehab act is against discrimination regarding federal agencies or having any involvement with national income. The ADA is against discrimination against employees and even in public encounters regarding the job. The law enforcement officer is a part of the ADA because law enforcement is a local government and works for the state. According to ADA.gov, law enforcement falls into title number II because of the state and local governments category (ADA.gov)

Having both of these state and federal laws in place, the Health Insurance Portability Accountability Act (HIPPA) ensures that everyone’s health is confidential unless they want to allow a separate entity to know the health check. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, HIPPA is an act that was implemented in 1996. HIPPA is “a federal law that required the creation of national standards to protect sensitive patient health information from being disclosed without the patients’ consent of knowledge” (CDC.gov, para. 1). A personal wellness program can be very beneficial if it follows the ADA laws, the rehab act, and HIPPA. The unique wellness program would need to be open to all, adaptable for all disabilities, and confidential.

Understanding the essentials regarding different types of laws and regulations in place involving a personal wellness program, the law enforcement agency can then build a wellness program that will suit the needs of the law enforcement officers. If the incentives are too good, the following legal issue is that they can be seen as coercive, meaning “The incentive should not be so high as to become coercive and render participation in the program involuntary” (EEOC.org, 2016, para. 4). If the agency initiates a personal wellness program and one of the incentives is that the health insurance will be lowered if the officer works out a certain number of times a month. Depending on the amount that is lowered on the insurance it could be coercive. If the amount makes someone think they have to join then it is seen as coercive which is a violation of the equal employment opportunity commission act that was passed in May 2016 (EEOC.org, 2016).

Implementing any personal wellness programs can be very beneficial to the officer. The most significant areas needed to be enforced is that it does not hinder on someone’s civil rights. The other main aspect is that the program is easily accessible by everyone. The website EEOC.org listed three various aspects that an employer should take so that no person’s civil rights were placed in jeopardy.

The first asset was that the employer, “may not require any employee to participate,” (EEOC.org, 2016, para. 9). This states that the department is not forcing anyone to participate and that is solely on the employees who voluntarily engage. The employees must know that it is a voluntarily program and they could potentially not gain the incentive when they would engage in the personal wellness program. Essentially, this ensures that the employee’s participation is voluntarily. Requiring someone to participate would be a violation.

The second aspect is that the employer “may not deny any employee who does not participate in a wellness program access to health coverage” (EEOC.org, 2016, para. 9). This states that there are not penalties for a person who chooses to not participate. The incentives cannot be coercive enough to make anyone think they have to engage in the program without their consent.

The third and final aspect from the EEOC was that the employer “may not take any other adverse action or retaliate against, interfere, coerce, intimidate, or threaten any employee who chooses not to participate in the program” (EEOC.org, 2016, para. 9). Having known all of these various laws and regulations, it is clear that the most logical approach to building a healthier lifestyle is a motivational approach by the leader and leading by example. A wellness program’s ultimate goal is to reduce disease and promote a healthier lifestyle for the officers. When officers live a healthier lifestyle, those officers can be retained and can function at a higher level. Having the ability to speak to a peer regarding personal issues can be a big asset for the officer.

One way that is normal for law enforcement agencies is to have the opportunity to work with the employee assistance programs (EAP). According to the article written by David Estep and Rhonda Allen, “An EAP is a program that provides a variety of services of a psychological and health-conscious nature for all employees of an agency or organization” (Estep & Allen, 2017, p. 12). Understanding you have these sources to seek out to reduce stress is a powerful tool. Having an EAP qualified officer on every crew could be very beneficial to reduce any buildup of stress. Peers can be a valuable source for officers to relieve stress, but during the moments of a stressful incident chaplains can be a valuable source for the officer.

Including a chaplain for the department can be a valuable source for the officer. Chaplains serve in multiple ways that can help alleviate stress for the officer. “Chaplains

improve the overall functioning of law enforcement through involvement in correctional facilities, community-police relations, line- of duty death notifications and burial service facilitation, crisis intervention, and officer and department well-being” (Braswell, et al., 2016, para. 3). Chaplains help alleviate an enormous amount of stress for the officer and even their family. Chaplains are more often associated with the community in a positive way compared to law enforcement. Having the familiar face of the chaplain be associated with the law enforcement agency it will build trust of the community to the agency. Having chaplains’ officers are more able to engage in community policing. Chaplains are a big asset for the agency regarding the officer’s well-being to reduce stress. Having a trusted official being able to assist through their personal turmoil. Chaplains will assist with death notifications with the family. The chaplain will assist the family for funeral arraignments and to give the proper guidance for mourning the loss. Chaplains can be implemented into a personal wellness program to reduce the PTSD the officer may have.

Individuals who play football take an ImPACT test regarding possible concussions. The test can show a change in someone’s reaction time and processing to determine from baseline to after the incident to determine if the brain has been affected by a traumatic brain injury or concussion (Gaudet, et al., 2017). By having the recipient take a before and after the test, you can then compare and get any distinct mental change there can be, and then compare it to see if there has been any noted mental processing change of the officer. If there is any noticeable change the person can get the proper treatment to hinder any further damage to the individual. Incorporating a similar test to law enforcement can give a better understanding of what to look for regarding someone who may be suffering from a traumatic incident, then will be able to stop it from progressively get any worse.

Van Hasselt developed a Law Enforcement Officer Stress Survey (LEOSS) (Estep & Allen, 2017). The LEOSS is a situational exam based upon seeing how the officers react to different situations that they may encounter daily while working. “The LEOSS has internal consistency, test-retest reliability, and reliable validity” (Vassett, 2008, p. 133). The test can be a useful tool to aid in understanding who is starting to have a change in mindset due to dealing with multiple stressful encounters. Officers unable to manage their stress, tend to make more mistakes regarding their decision-making and judgment when they are in a stressful situation (Blum, 2000). Officers who are not able to work under pressure they are more prone to make mistakes which can cause more harm than good.

According to the article written by Monaco, “Policing is an essential occupation to preserve the rule of law, and those who serve in law enforcement deserve proper protection from the mental strain associated with this task...[it] is a matter of psychological survival” (Monaco, 2020, para. 17). Implementing a personal wellness program can potentially save lives. Law enforcement has one of the highest suicide rates of any profession. What is not counted is the number of attempts: “For every single suicide that is carried out, there are as many as 25 attempts:” for law enforcement regarding suicide (IACP, 2014, p. 20). When a person is a leader in law enforcement, he or she must understand those under their command. When a leader knows the needs of the staff, they have a better understanding of how to help people properly.

The importance of including a personal wellness program is not only for the needs of the individual. It also tends to the needs of the community, as well. Law enforcement are given all of the training for to handle any call they may encounter. Ranging from use of force, de-escalation, vehicle pursuits, defensive tactics, and even proper medical aid. One area that has been forgotten has been the self-care for officers, including managing stress and remaining vigilant in physical

standards. Main goal for any personal wellness program is to educate all staff. Giving the opportunity for the staff the resources that can potentially better their lives. The officers who are voluntarily partaking in the program would learn about stress management, talking about counseling, knowing what good and the negative coping techniques is. Leaders must always look to better those they lead, as well as bettering themselves. This leads to a better department in the future. Being able to develop and then implement a personal wellness program is one of the most important aspect a law enforcement agency can do during these times.

In an article written by Ellen Chism, “Police officers felt a need for police departments to implement policies regarding physical fitness standards” (2016, p. 4). Law enforcement officers are the ones who know what is best for them, and they know what must be done regarding their well-being. Including the personal wellness program provide more opportunities for the officer and their family to better deal with stress from the occupation. Having the officer in a more positive mood the interactions with the community will be more of a positive aspect. Civilians remember random acts of kindness officers will perform but civilians will never forget an officer who treated them with disrespect. Being able to uplift the officer to respect themselves and even the community you can then start building the relationship for the community.

Implementing new policies is a tricky situation for any administration. There are numerous law enforcement agencies that have adapted to proactively dealing with stress by implementing physical fitness, relationship building, and even counseling. There is approximately “750,340 sworn law enforcement officers” in the United States in 2012 (Banks, et al., 2016, p. 2). With all of the law enforcement officers, more agencies across the United States are starting to implement a personal wellness program. The following agencies have implemented a personal wellness program: Bend Police Department, Dallas Police Department,

Milwaukee Police Department, San Antonio Police Department, and many more has all implemented a personal wellness for the officers and even the officer's families.

Bend Police Department (BPD) consists of implementing an on-duty physical wellness program. "BPD has seen a 40 percent decrease in on-the-job injuries" (Copple, et al., 2019, p. 13). Having officers become more physically fit enhances their ability to protect themselves from harm. Taking initiative into their physical fitness the statistics shows that personal wellness has been beneficial for their job. Bend Police Department has a family support program, chaplains, and even an onsite psychologist dedicated for the officer and the officer's families' (Copple, et al., 2019).

Dallas Police Department (DPD) started their personal wellness program after the attack on the officer back in July 2016. DPD has stress management, financial management, and physical wellness programs. Results have shown a reduction in alcohol abuse, reduced stress and anxiety, decreased mental health issues, and overall positivity focused on changing the mentality of the law enforcement officers. DPD focused on attending to shaping the mentality of the officers to seek out help when they are feeling the effects of stress (Copple, et al., 2019).

Milwaukee Police Department (MPD) has created a wellness program that consisted of three distinct parts. The first part is an early intervention program, the second chaplain program, and the third an internal peer support group. MPD trained select few individuals who are specifically trained for early intervention regarding officers who may be affected by stress after being exposed to a traumatic incident. The chaplain program is to assist the officer after a traumatic incident to help them cope in a positive manner. MPD also incorporated a peer support group consisted of individuals who would sit down with part of the agency that is at a high risk

of trauma. All three of these different aspects are for bettering the officer in hopes to reduce stress from the environment (Copple, et al., 2019).

Lastly is the San Antonio Police Department (SAPD), which enacted a program for the ultimate goal for stress management. SAPD has in-house psychologists who are trained to handle officers who were exposed to traumatic incidents. SAPD incorporated a performance and recovery optimization program for the ultimate goal to “manage and reduce stress through healthy coping mechanisms, achieve resiliency” (Copple, et al., 2019, p. 77). SAPD focuses on changing the mentality and attitude of the officer there are multiple other aspects that are taught to the officers.

Conclusion

The world is forever changing, especially in the criminal justice setting. There are new laws, new ordinances, mental health issues, and even new generation of people. With the new world comes many different challenges for everyone. Law enforcement officers are supposed to act as warriors during certain moments while working. Law enforcement are also seen to be known as guardians, helping people whenever it is needed. With the high risk of specific calls being daily in some law enforcement officers' lives, it is understood by law enforcement officers' mental health is in trouble. Implementing a personal wellness program in the agency has the potential to reduce stress but also can save someone's life. Departments all around the country are implementing some type of personal wellness to help alleviate stress from their officers. The problem is that law enforcement officers are not receiving the proper training on how to cope with stress.

Knowing where the causation of the problem is the first step in how it can be fixed. Understanding how harmful it can be to let stress in an addiction to what it can do to law

enforcement if left untreated. Leaders in criminal justice have to come together and initiate more policies concerning mental health issues. Being able to see the red flags that their officers can show. The 228 law enforcement officers who committed suicide are statistics that everyone wants to see being lowered.

Law enforcement officers are given all the resources on how to handle the call appropriately they may encounter. It is not normal to see some of the traumatic situations law enforcement officers are experiencing in today's world. The post lingering stress that affects their personal life has been forgotten to be implemented into the training for these officers. Agencies that want to better the lives of their officers should take a proactive approach into implementing a personal wellness program. Educating the officer on how to positively cope with stress can potentially save the life of the officer.

A problem such as this will not be fixed overnight. It will take years to have all departments ensure that the mental health aspect of training and even recognize are being upheld by law enforcement officers and the office's administration. Stress is just the beginning that can potentially ruin anyone's life. Understanding what stress can look like and knowing the red flags it can show, suicide can be potentially reduced by incorporating new and improved coping techniques for personal care. Stress can transform and become PTSD which could add another statistic number for suicide for the officer. Law enforcement are given all the tools and knowledge on how to be an officer but are not given the tools to live an appropriate life after the occupation.

Chapter 3: Implications, Recommendations, and Conclusions

The general public is unaware about the stress law enforcement have to live with when they are exposed to some of the worst traumatic incidents imaginable. Dealing with the stress during the incident can take its toll on the officer. “critical incident stress affects up to 87% of all emergency service workers” (Kureczka, 1996. p. 11). Poor coping abilities after the incident can have life altering affects for the officer. Law enforcement has the highest rate of suicide compared to any other occupation. Educating the officer on how to better cope with the stress that comes with the job. PTSD has multiple effects that can have the person act differently than normal. The officer may subject themselves to solitude in fear of appearing weak Infront of other cops or chose to not inform their loved one and bottle it up.

Understanding that law enforcement will forever have the stressors that come with the job is inevitable. Taking a proactive approach to attempt to educate the officer in using positive coping abilities instead. Implementing a personal wellness program does not guarantee certain results likewise not implementing a personal wellness program.

Stress affects everyone differently and will make or break the officer. The one aspect that is certain is the attempt to reduce stress in the officer. The law enforcement agency has to be driven by leaders who want to make a positive change in the criminal justice setting. The leadership

Practical Applications

A personal wellness program has the potential to positively affect the lives of law enforcement. Applying any program would be beneficial for multiple reasons. Law enforcement has the tendency to have the mentality of “we have always done it this way” when it concerns any type of change. Applying any change in law enforcement takes time and perseverance.

Having the criminal justice leadership lead by example in a positive manner can change the system. If the leadership would engage in the program they can potentially get more participation from the rest of the agency. Attempt to take a proactive approach to reduce stress by incorporate a program to reduce stress in a positive manner.

Recommendations for Further Research

Understanding the needs of the officers regarding mental health is essential if the ultimate goal is to better the lives of the men and women who patrol the streets. Recommendations for further research would consist of understanding law enforcement officers that commit suicide. “few studies have thoroughly examined law enforcement suicide” (Violanti, et al., 2019, p. 2). The statistics of suicide involving law enforcement have not been kept track compared to other statistics. Understanding the correlation between stress and law enforcement suicide, would be beneficial for future generations for law enforcement.

Conclusion

Law enforcement are trained to handle any situation they may experience. Law enforcement is a job that in a split of a second can go from a usual traffic stop to the possibility of using deadly force. With the roller coaster of emotions that may occur during the incident and after it makes sense why law enforcement one of the most stressful occupations. Along with the high stress of the occupation, law enforcement is taking the stress home which will then cause more personal trauma. Stress can lead to CVD, mental health issues, respiratory issues, to depression, and even suicide. Law enforcement are given the tools to handle the job but are not given the appropriate tools to live their life positively after the incident. Incorporating a personal wellness program has all of the benefits dedicated to better the life of the officer.

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