

University of Nevada, Reno

Blue to Black: Empathy Erosion in Law Enforcement Officers

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in
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by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the impact of work experiences on empathy among people employed in the law enforcement profession. It is hard to imagine that what law enforcement officers (LEOs) go through would not affect how they relate to the public or handle themselves for career longevity. It is possible that the mere exposure both physically and mentally experienced by LEOs erodes the very empathy needed to navigate such a profession and is not only detrimental to the community they serve but to themselves.

Data were collected using a voluntary, anonymous survey which was distributed to LEOs across the United States over an eight-month period. The analysis probes whether empathy is diminished by what a LEO encounters while on-the-job. The results suggest that the regular day to day activities of a LEO do not noticeably reduce empathy as I first thought they would. Upon further review however, certain experiences like the physical stressors associated with police work do predict increased anger, and symptoms of depression and PTSD. Conversely, I found that the more the LEO feels supported by their family, friends, community, and department, the less they experience anger, depression, and PTSD. It should be noted that empathy actually increases if the LEO experiences an injury or illness that affects their job. This was unexpected and may be a starting point to be explored by further studies.

Studies involving LEOs are far from new and often follow a more common theme where a LEO feels “burnout.” Unfortunately, there have been few studies that attempt to capture the feeling of empathy in general and even less with its relation to the law enforcement profession. Although the original survey designed for this thesis was very

comprehensive, participation was lower than expected. Thus, the results only paint a partial picture of how experiences LEOs encounter on the job affect how they feel.

Further research should examine how LEOs' feelings and experiences might improve positive relations with the community and increase wellness for the LEOs that serve it.

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Introduction

This thesis explores the erosion of empathy and wellbeing among law enforcement officers (LEOs) as a function of the cumulation of stressors they encounter on and off the job. Loss of empathy and poor mental health among LEOs are serious social problems, both for the LEOs themselves and the public they serve. Law enforcement has come under severe criticism, especially since the videotaped murder of George Floyd and other controversial violent encounters between police and the public. It is now more important than ever to understand why some LEOs lose the capacity to empathize with the public and suffer a variety of mental health outcomes, as efforts to reform the system must be guided by sound empirical research.

Police officers can be seen everywhere in daily life, yet most people have a very limited understanding of what their work entails. Most of what people think they know is gleaned from misleading media coverage or unrealistic dramatic television shows. At any given time, one can find an article, media release or online report outlining a police-related incident, a news report displaying police conduct, or a documentary or crime series on TV. These media portrayals condition members of the community to expect police work to be exciting, fair, infallible, and wrapped up within an hour. This often leads to unrealistic expectations of the police that are not consistent with the reality of the job. Those who choose this profession are presented with a variety of challenges that are inadvertently overlooked by the public. Like a mountain, erosion of the Law Enforcement Officer (LEO) can occur over the course of time. Physical and mental hardships can wear away even the strongest of LEOs resulting in a disconnection from their families, friends and ultimately the community they serve.

A job in law enforcement is like no other and has unique job stressors. From the cumbersome uniform, the shift work, danger, and risks that exist daily to the bureaucracy often found in typical government entities, it can wear down even the strongest of people. Witnessing traumatic events, death or violence can cause even the most emotionally resilient to suffer ill-effects. “LEOs are routinely at risk for exposure to critical incidents, such as being injured, injuring others in the line of duty, or witnessing death or injuries to civilians and other officers, but they are also understudied relative to such groups as combat veterans and sexual assault victims” (Neylan et al. 2005, p. 374). Consistent exposure to traumatic events on an almost daily basis over the course of 25 plus years can create a level of stress that can lead to burnout, erode the mental health of the LEO, cause poor performance, residual resentment, and a waning capacity to connect to others with empathy.

To engage citizens daily, most LEOs start out wanting to help the people in their community. The LEO responds to calls, hoping to problem solve, remain understanding, open-minded and find the best resolution for most situations. However, over time, an erosion of empathy can cause the LEO to unknowingly burn a bridge between themselves and the community they serve. If the LEO can hold on to the ability to understand, recognize and put themselves in another person’s shoes, both they and the community will be better for it. Maintaining empathy and wellbeing is crucial in forming relationships and fosters the ability to display compassion. The experiences of the LEO may often lead to erosion or loss of empathy. Like LEOs, some social and health care professionals work with frequent exposure to emotionally demanding situations with people who display intense negative emotions. Altmann and Roth (2020) concluded that

those professionals who maintained a high level of empathy in such situations daily actually experienced a higher emotional workload. This finding could explain why LEOs create a mental distance between the community and themselves, because it helps them avoid burnout.

Although there are many definitions of empathy, one characteristic remains consistent and that is that empathy involves engagement with others. Whether it is perspective taking, avoiding judgment, absorbing, or understanding the feelings of others, empathy can only exist by taking an experience and internalizing it to see it from a place other than your own. Breithaupt (2019, p.7) explained empathy as how “we participate in the experiences of someone else. Likewise, we extend the depths of our feelings when we feel what someone else feels. We participate in many ways in the emotions, ideas, thoughts, and intentions of other people. It is by means of others that we see ourselves as if from the outside; we perceive our environment differently because we note how others feel about it.” When we apply this definition to an overextended LEO that is often handling excessive amounts of service calls, it means seeing the people involved in these calls as people, and not just another call. The LEO may want to avoid this because it may complicate their job to experience the depth of emotion and suffering of the people they serve. For the LEO, the idea and practice of empathy can often be at odds with or compete with objectivity that the LEO needs to function day to day.

Additional considerations for the LEO include keeping the job separate from home life. This is sound in theory but not always plausible and attempts to do so can often create the opposite of an empathetic response when community engagement is necessary. “Social species must be able to suppress their empathic response to another’s

pain when, for example, it is better for the observer to flee, keep a safe distance or confront a potential adversary” (DeWaal & Preston, 2017, p. 503). As natural protectors, LEOs are never truly “off duty” and rarely can let their guard down. Even while on an outing with their family they remain hypervigilant and unable to rest emotionally. Ultimately the LEO needs to protect their own psyche whether intentionally or subconsciously. By suppressing their empathy, a natural protective barrier is created for the LEO thereby relieving some sense of heartache and helplessness that would otherwise be inevitable with such frequent traumatic exposure. While this protective mechanism serves its purpose, it can also become detrimental over time.

Relating the Nature of Police Work Nature to Empathy and Mental Health

When considering the erosion of empathy within law enforcement it is important to understand the nature of police work. The following pages review a variety of components of policing that may impact LEO’s physical and mental wellbeing, including their capacity for empathy.

Governing

LEOs are governed by federal, state, and local laws. Rules often called general orders further dictate what the LEO can and cannot do. General orders are determined by each individual agency and include such things as how officers respond to a given call, general conduct, what equipment they use and what they wear while on duty. Along with such formal rules, there is an informal set of rules that often exist within a police department. This can be attributed to a longstanding culture, steeped in tradition carried from generation after generation along with a general disdain for change resulting in slow evolutionary progress. Herbert (1998) noted “that a rookie police officer sits in front of

the room during roll calls; this is not a rule that is formally inscribed in any police documents, but those who violate it are quite loudly punished through ridicule by senior officers.”

Oftentimes informal rules are practiced and supported as firmly, if not more firmly than the formal rules. New officers find themselves “growing thick skin” and suppressing personal feelings to work in an environment that is constantly charged with the emotions of others. Without proper guidance and mentorship from more senior LEOs, the junior LEOs may follow a path that is resistant to the progression and evolution of the profession. Simply stated, LEOs fail to change with the times and become apathetic, even resistant to any change. According to Kindy et al. (2020), good examples of this can be seen when new techniques involving physical control are introduced or abolished like use of chokeholds. Updated and ever-changing laws, legalization of activities that were once illegal become legal. A recent example of this was the 2016, Nevada Question 2 ballot, which resulted in the purchase, possession, and consumption of recreational marijuana for adults becoming legal in Nevada on January 1, 2017. LEOs are now needing to suppress years of training regarding enforcing this once illegal act and are expected to infallibly adapt.

In addition, another new policy was a recent requirement that LEOs wear body cameras that are to be actively recording on most or all of their calls. According to Adams & Mastracci (2019), this is just another thing LEOs may perceive to be a lack of support, on the part of their department. LEOs are expected to change the way they respond to calls to make it more “palatable” to the public in contrary to the way that they

have done business for often a large amount of time. This may leave the LEO feeling more powerless to control their environment, which is already so rigidly dictated to them.

The Uniform

LEOs are not only governed by strict rules of engagement, but also stringent dress codes. Few changes in fabric and materials have been made through the years that would cater to the resplendent police uniform's increased comfort. Written policies are put into place to assure that strict adherence to uniform standards is met. Policies are crafted with specificity that include how the uniform is worn, grooming standards that are to be maintained and which equipment is permissible. Below is an example of a local agency's policy: Reno Police Department General Order No: E20505 (2014) Order Title:

CODE OF APPEARANCE:

1-2: Employees are expected to practice good personal hygiene and grooming. All Department personnel, while on duty, must at all times be neat and clean; clothes will be clean and neatly pressed, hair neatly cut, cleanshaven, mustaches neatly trimmed, and clothed in conformity with the uniform of the day and rules and regulations

6: Uniforms will be neatly pressed, with leather, badge, and brass items shined. Buttons on uniform shirts will be buttoned with the exception of the collar button, unless a tie is worn which requires the collar button to be fastened.

7: Use of Body Armor Officers shall wear only agency approved body armor. Body armor shall be worn by officers while engaged in field activities unless exempt as follows:

- a. When a physician determines that an officer has a medical condition that would preclude wearing body armor;
- b. When the officer is involved in undercover or plain clothes work that his/her supervisor determines could be compromised by wearing body armor; or c. When the department determines that circumstances make it inappropriate to mandate wearing body armor.

A typical duty uniform consists of wool or polyester blend pants and collared shirt, ballistic vest, with an additional undershirt, leather-type boots, approved hat, belt containing duty weapon, extra rounds, handcuffs (often two pairs), radio, baton, pepper spray, taser, tourniquet, and flashlight. A federally mandated body camera is usually affixed to the front of the shirt secured accordingly by a magnet which is not designed nor expected to remain secure when an officer gets into a physical altercation. Likewise, if an officer walks too close to a larger metal object that may provide better adherence by the magnet.

The weight of a duty belt and ballistic vest can add an additional 20-40 pounds to be carried on the waist and hips of the LEO. The duty belt is secured and tightened onto the belt underneath and does not always have to be removed by male officers, as luckily the pants provide a front zipper used for urination. This is not the case for those occasions where the belt must be removed for the pants to be pulled down to use the bathroom. Conversely a female LEO does not have the same benefit. The belt must always be removed to access the uniform pants and therefore the simple difference of gender creates its own set of uniform issues. Although often in the field, the use of public restrooms is not always preferred, as it leaves the LEO in a vulnerable position, unable to respond quickly or fend off a subsequent attack or confrontation. The uniform further presents persistent challenges to things ordinary citizens may often take for granted, such as sitting in a vehicle, moving quickly and quietly and of course maintaining a comfortable body temperature.

The Weather

Along with adherence to strict dress codes and grooming standards, LEOs are exposed to adverse weather conditions. Weather can also cause the LEO to become physically drained in a short amount of time in regions that experience oppressive summer heat, as sweat rolls down their backs and heat is trapped inside the ballistic vest, sticking clothes and skin together. The LEO can experience the opposite when the cold, dark dead of winter provides a haven for frozen feet and hands. Sometimes not enough clothing in the world can keep a person warm when they are assigned to a perimeter, hoping that if that homicide suspect were to attempt to escape, their hands and feet would be warm enough to physically react in accordance with their training. Most days, what is worn by the uniformed LEO remains cumbersome yet essential, and just has to be endured. Considering these points, something as simple as a uniform can affect the demeanor of even the most experienced LEO. “Workplace conditions such as inclement weather, extreme heat/cold, chemical smell, noise, poor lighting, vibration, and dust have direct or indirect effects on employee job performance. These conditions decrease employee concentration towards tasks which lead to low employee performance such as low productivity, poor quality, physical and emotional stress” (Kahya, 2007, p. 516). The public expects the LEO to be available during the entire shift, without regard for restroom breaks when needed, breaks when they are hungry and much needed moments of adjustment between one call to the next just to be able to focus their mindset, update their paperwork and even catch their breath.

Necessary Use of Force

In addition to these external stressors, LEOs often have to use physical force owing to the actions of others. Take the Reno Police Department excerpt from their Use of Force General order: “Where deadly force is not justified or authorized, Officers may use only that level of force that is Objectively Reasonable to bring an incident under control” (Reno Police Department General Order No: P-400-20, 2020). “Use of force is controlled in large part by a person who may choose to resist arrest for even a more frivolous crime like shoplifting or a traffic violation. Police are expected, on occasions, to subdue suspects physically, and this can involve serious injury or even death. The right to use force is necessary, but it entails the potential for officers to misuse this authority and engage in unnecessary or excessive force.” (Prenzler et al., 2013, p343-344).

Contrary to popular belief, an incident involving use force is something that a majority of LEOs would like to avoid. Not only is the propensity for injury to the citizen and LEO higher, but departments often require additional investigations, interviews and paperwork stemming from any injuries sustained by the LEO or the citizen.

As a result, observers, administration, and the community may assume that LEOs are heavy handed and without restraint. In reality, LEOs apply their advanced training and exercise restraint more often than not. Considering the amount of police contacts with the citizenry across the nation, the following information was gathered from the Bureau of Justice Statistic report in 2020 concerning interaction with the police: Whites (26%) were more likely than blacks (21%), Hispanics (19%), or persons of other races (20%) to experience police contact. There was no statistically significant difference in the percentage of whites (12%) and blacks (11%) who experienced police-initiated

contact and a higher percentage of blacks (4%) and Hispanics (3%) than whites (2%) or other races (2%) experienced threats or use of force. (Harrell, E., & Davis, E., 2020, p.1). It appears that the odds of being involved in a use of force incident, being injured, or being killed by LEOs are similarly low. Nonetheless, additional studies demonstrate that, "Over the life course, about 1 in every 1,000 black men can expect to be killed by police. Risk of being killed by police peaks between the ages of 20 y and 35 y for men and women and for all racial and ethnic groups. Black women and men and American Indian and Alaska Native women and men are significantly more likely than white women and men to be killed by police" (Edwards et al., 2019, p. 16794).

Nature of calls

In addition to the physical aspects of the job, which include long hours in highly stressful situations, with some departments working up to 12-hour shifts on their feet in extreme weather, wearing uncomfortable heavy gear, and having to use force, LEOs are sent to an infinite array of calls each shift. Calls may range in the amount of time spent on a scene as the type of call dictates. During shifts LEOs experience a variety of calls such as domestic disturbances, child abuse injuries, vehicle accidents involving serious bodily injury or death, and the all too common and gruesome suicide/homicide scenes If that wasn't enough, "Law enforcement has often become a backstop for much of society's ills, sometimes being stretched thin while dealing with domestic disputes or providing safety for schools (Asher & Horowitz, 2020, para. 13) Depending on the size of the agency, calls often seem unsurmountable and usually range proportionally with the population of an agency's jurisdiction.

Continued calls for service and interactions with community members can influence LEOs' demeanor and how they interact both on and off duty. In most cases, when a LEO must respond to a call for service, it is not to celebrate or witness a happy event. Rather, they are called in and forced to share one of the worst days of a person's life. Individuals become victims of crime when their car has just been stolen, someone has used physical violence against them, or maybe their house has been burglarized. People share their grief and frustration as they experience the death of a loved one, expecting empathy, solace, and comfort which the LEO may not have to give. The LEOs' training is engrained within them. Training dictates that they focus on obtaining and retaining facts to complete an accurate report, remain alert and aware of potential dangers no matter how secure the scene may appear, and ensure the safety of community members young and old without distractions such as emotions.

What citizens may not realize is this is just one call of many for the LEO, a brief stop in their busy day, not to be dwelled upon, but to be prioritized and managed. Sometimes, during a call, the emotions experienced by a citizen can weigh on the LEO. The LEO is expected to make everything okay, make them a priority, and solve the problem efficiently, while at the same time refrain from showing too much or too little emotion, evolving into whatever that citizen needs at that time. Unfortunately, according to the 2020 article by Asher and Horwitz, "Law enforcement has often become a backstop for much of society's ills, sometimes being stretched thin while dealing with domestic disputes or providing safety for schools." This kind of pressure leads to unrealistic expectations by the public towards the LEO.

The profession carries with it a constant pressure coupled with the all too real human emotion and the exposure to the extreme behaviors of others that can easily create a dark cloud comprised of overarching negativity from which the LEO cannot escape. The result is that the LEO has unknowingly shouldered and carries an outlook that is darker and less empathetic than that of a citizen. “The work of police.....presents them with a jaded image of life and contributes to a contempt for the public” (Crank, 2014, p.2). This despair can create internal resentment and eventually spill over from work to home and back again. “Most can agree that it is a great responsibility to be accountable for the society and an expectation to be available at all times makes the LEO try to maintain a positive approach towards each current call and it’s resolution and continue this into each future call as well” (Sen & Hooja, 2005, p. 94). Like the rest of the community they serve, LEOs are human and therefore this positive approach is not always tenable.

Understanding the daily experiences of the LEO is not typically in the forefront of a citizen’s mind as they call for help. Failing to recognize the humanity of the police officer is also a contributing factor to negative public interactions. A LEO may have just left a scene where they were posted for six hours, could have held an infant burned at the hands of their parents or responded to a complaint of a neighbor playing loud music prior to responding to another citizen who called, yet that citizen would never know. If the officer does not respond in a manner that causes the complaining citizen to believe their problem is the most important priority for that officer, the officer is considered unhelpful, lazy, or incompetent. Such interactions often result in more negative contacts and frustration for officers as well as citizens. “If citizens treat police officers with disdain or

aloofness, then police officers may be likely to be less respectful, less helpful, or more inclined to abuse their authority” (Gaines & Kappeler, 2011, p. 13). This contact would proliferate, leaving a bad taste in the mouth of the citizen, who would continue to have negative feeling towards this LEO and the next one with whom they came in contact.

A common but unknown attributed quote states that “Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.” When breaking down a majority of calls for service that a LEO responds to, it would appear the LEO is destined for just that. Constant negative contact with the community creates a sense of futility in the mind of the LEO from repeatedly responding to situations they can only change with negative outcomes. While on-scene, the LEO is expected to provide solutions to problems they did not create, deal with a repeat offender that does not choose to change, or quell incorrigibility of children that the LEO is expected to help raise or at least discipline. From the LEO’s perspective, the solutions put forth all too often are not adhered to with any consistency or at all, resulting in further visits from often the same officers within a single week or more.

LEOs are too often expected to be all things to all people when a community requires them to respond to and solve many of their problems related to relationships, parenting, and even general annoyances such as a barking dog or loud music. Additional responsibilities are placed upon that LEO when they respond to violent situations and are expected to utilize the exact amount of force needed to subdue a violent suspect without causing harm. They help the homeless person sleeping in a business entryway, while also ensuring business owner’s rights are not infringed upon. They prevent vehicle accidents

resulting in injury or death but are resented when pulling people over and giving them a ticket.

Exposure to trauma

Individuals without actual police-work experience might imagine that the most stressful part of the job is responding to dangerous situations and traumatic events that potentially pose the risk of death. However, there are other aspects of police work which are chronically stressful and arguably more distressing than the fear of imminent harm. If we are to speak about the possibility of death to most law enforcement officers, they may say something to the effect of “it is part of the job,” and accept it as inevitable. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020) agreed that officers do have some of the highest rates of injuries of all occupations. This may be due in part to the chance of facing physical injuries that occur during conflicts with criminals and other high-risk situations, but this specific group does not have the highest mortality rate.

In fact, the workplace mortality rate of LEOs is often lower than other occupations, or even the murder rate among residents in many American cities with large populations. This shows that death, although a possibility, is not as common as one might assume amongst LEOs. Injuries of a physical or mental nature are far more common. Injuries that leave the LEO in various states of diminished mental health may be far more common yet less studied and harder to treat than those of a physical nature.

Work-Life Balance

Once the LEO finishes their shift, they may find home does not feel any more secure than being on the job. Switching their mindset from work to home can prove difficult. They often must transition from experiences like the call of a grisly homicide,

violent child abuse or indescribable suicide to taking their family to dinner, watching their child's soccer game, or simply helping the kids with their homework. This transition from work life to home life without the reconciliation of what was experienced throughout the day may eventually be detrimental. "The LEO may attempt to relate to their family when the reality of the job is often indescribable and unrelatable to a non-LEO spouse. This can lead the LEO to practice psychological avoidance and disassociation of their experience" (Aaron, 2000, p. 439). Increased stress occurs with female LEOs as seen in the study by Violanti (2017) where "female officers experience unique stressors including concerns over their ability and skill to perform their duties compared to male officers, sexual harassment, discrimination, lack of support within the police agency, and increased work-family conflict."

The LEO may avoid processing difficult experiences, which eventually leads to distress, desolation, anger, and apathy both at work and at home. The ever-present pressure of the LEO to remain stoic, strong, and unwavering looms constantly as the brave face is donned as easily as the clean uniform, shiny shoes and polished brass. For many, this façade is not sustainable and leads to a breakdown of the LEO, both professionally and privately, and the effects can be far reaching. The hypervigilance created both inside the department and outside adds another layer of mistrust for the LEO and gives them a feeling of futility to find a place where they can feel safe. Current anti-police sentiment occurring nationwide is an additional contributing factor to an already strained profession.

Anti-Police Sentiment

“The anti-police sentiment in the last few years places the LEO in between knowing what they are doing is needed and important although often unpopular with many members of the community” (Kirschman, 2018, p. 2). This often leaves the LEO torn between the need to continue in an occupational class that has traditionally been seen as “a warrior’s calling” to feel the raging conflict of those who despise LEOs so much that they call for the death of those embedded in the profession.

Although not new, controversial incidents have occurred that tarnish the reputation of the LEO. In 1991 an intoxicated Rodney King led LAPD officers on a high-speed vehicle pursuit. Once the chase was ended, a bystander filmed several officers surrounding and striking King, who was unarmed, with their batons. The incident was covered by news stations, litigated, analyzed, deconstructed, and talked about for years to come. Community “reactions to the King beating were part of a struggle over perceptions of reality and what to do in response to those perceptions. In some cases, virtually everyone agrees that police use of force was justified; other cases are highly contested” (Martin, 2005, p. 308). Criticisms offered by citizens who are not fully informed have contributed to prevailing theories about how LEOs could have or should have responded to certain incidents. These theories fail to include additional variables that are critical in LEO decision making at times of crisis and danger including human emotion, training, experience, department rules and protocols. This has greatly contributed to the current anti-law enforcement sentiment which is palpable in the United States.

In 2020, George Floyd was being arrested for passing a counterfeit bill when a struggle between Floyd and the officers occurred. Ultimately Floyd was forced to the

ground on his chest while an officer kneeled on his back. Despite Floyd verbalizing an inability to breathe to the officers, the officer continued to kneel on his neck ultimately, contributing to his death. The bystander videos showed one side of the incident while scant body cam footage from the officers failed to show the other side or beginning of the encounter. This negligence often results in police and establishment mistrust within the community, compounded by contrasting that Floyd was black and the officer who kneeled on him was white. Considering racial differences, it is often assumed that racism must have been not only involved, but the true underlying catalyst for poor officer behavior. The implication of racism, whether perceived or actual, sparked protests and fervent violent displays in support of the Black Lives Matter movement. This movement and others like it have been shown to garner anti-police sentiment nationwide. “When reviewed, hashtags depicting strong anti-police sentiment such as #killercops, #policestate, and #fuckthepolice appear almost exclusively in #BlackLivesMatter” (Gallagher et al., 2018, pp. 13-14).

Although these movements seek to break down the profession and its members, they tend to have the opposite effect and strengthen the comradery of those within the profession into something more counterproductive to the movement. As previously mentioned, long standing traditions are slow to change and police culture becomes more cohesive, creating increased solidarity and brotherhood when under (perceived) attack. Like criminal law itself, the “Blue Code of Silence” is a normative injunction, unwritten but embedded in police subculture. At its best, the feelings of loyalty and brotherhood sustaining the “Code of Silence” may facilitate policing and protect police against genuine threats to safety and well-being (Kleinig, 2000 p.7). LEOs are known to create a

wall of silence or an “us vs. them” mentality and the anti-police sentiment strengthens that wall amongst the majority of LEOs on the streets.

Organizational & Professional Stressors

While the wall of silence gains strength amongst the rank and file as a means of self-preservation from the outside world and its impossible expectations, there is often mistrust and uncertainty inside the walls as well, for within the organization itself is yet another battleground. In a 2010 study, it was found that “organizational stressors may be the greatest source of stress in police officers. Various structural arrangements, policies and practices imply police agencies can be inhospitable workplaces, where officers must withstand a variety of daily hassles generated internally by the organization” (Shane, 2010 p.3). This additional layer of stress is often overshadowed by beliefs about what police work is like.

Each LEO must trust their teammates with their life, and they must put their own life in the hands of their teammates while trusting one another’s capabilities and judgment. The responsibility for not only oneself, one’s team and one’s community is a heavy burden for anyone to bear. Unfortunately, behind that wall of trust that a LEO feels for a team member, trust is not fully extended to all those in their respective departments. “Conflicting concepts, lack of support and the feeling of not being valued or trusted by department administrators often leads to dissonance. More stress has been recorded to occur within the walls of a police department than in the streets riddled with danger” (Alexander, 1999, p. 58). Distrust with the internal practices and actions of administrators creates a negative and suspicious workforce within departments. While LEOs contend with the dangers of daily policing, increasing negative public sentiment and depleting

reserves of energy, empathy, and patience, they are also impacted by the innerworkings of their departments. Administrators are removed from the daily operations conducted by LEOs and new ideas are often dismissed without a second thought, often with the response that things have always been done this way, i.e., tradition. Promotions occur by way of attrition and connections vs. skill, demonstrated conduct or abilities. Policing continues to be a male dominated profession with women facing increased scrutiny and fewer opportunities.

Police departments managed by generations of those comfortable with the practices of nepotism, cronyism, and discrimination in its many forms, prevent forward movement and change within a stagnant system. Maintaining the status quo hinders progressive policy changes and new thinking to support LEOs' wellbeing, training, and solution focused teaming with those on the ground and front lines. Lastly LEOs often feel defeated when "bad cops" are protected by administrators and strong labor unions. LEOs' morale is deeply impacted by what occurs behind the walls of their departments. While LEOs strive to ensure justice occurs within the community they can do little to ensure fairness and justice within their own department.

Understanding how this profession can result in stress, burnout and reduced empathy experienced by the LEO is important for not only the LEO but for the community. The plethora of factors described above all impact LEOs, resulting in mistrust, physical and emotional suffering and estrangement between the police, their family, and their community. In a society that relies on and expects protection and order, it is imperative that law enforcement and community define mutual expectations and actions required to achieve the desired outcomes that are beneficial to our society.

Police Work and LEO Mental Health

Police work puts LEOs at risk of mental health problems. The expression of personal feelings is severely limited within the police culture, which dictates that officers are expected to remain calm and in control and constantly guard their emotions as was discovered by Pogrebin & Poole (1991). This may cause the LEO to train to avoid physical injuries, yet quietly overlook their mental state as something that does not need acknowledgement. The risk to mental health is often seen in the form of what most LEOs refer to as burnout. “Burnout is a prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job and is defined by three dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism and inefficacy” (Maslach et al., 2001, p. 397). Although the LEO may make futile attempts to avoid burnout, its unchecked growth can result in the loss of positive association with why they joined this profession in the first place. “This stress is often experienced within a context of excessive anger, which decreases officer wellbeing and has the potential to negatively impact public wellbeing as well” (Bergman et al., 2016, p. 857).

In addition to burnout and loss of empathy, the stressful nature of police work has been linked to elevated symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, alcohol abuse, and anger, according to studies by Bergman et al. (2016), Fox et al. (2012), Ménard and Arter (2013), Price (2017), and Wagner et al. (2020). LEOs are expected to seamlessly switch between roles of enforcer, problem solver, parent, counselor, legal expert, and social worker. These negative situations and relations result in anger and frustration in the individual, who then seeks means to alleviate the strain. Adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies may be employed in attempts to reduce strain

(Ménard & Arter 2013, p.38), which often does not positively address the issue. No thought is given to LEOs as people, working undesirable shifts (nights, weekends, holidays), which leave them exhausted from lack of sleep, depressed because they are not able to spend time with family, and too emotionally drained to effectively manage any life work balance. “Cognitive, social and inflexible styles associated with the police role hinder efficacious coping with stressful interpersonal interactions and precipitate risk factors associated with the potential for suicide” (Paton et al., 2009, p.103).

Post-traumatic stress disorder or PTSD has been a common term associated with a severe emotional response to anything from a car accident to witnessing a life threatening or dangerous event. According to the DSM-5 (2013), PTSD is a trauma and stressor related disorder that requires exposure to a stressful or traumatic event. For some LEOs, depending on the area in which they work, trauma exposure occurs daily. It is important for the LEO to feel respected, to believe that what they do matters and to be surrounded by others that believe the same way. According to Frapsauce et al. (2022), exposure to trauma on the job in combination with feeling a lack of support, recognition, or meaning can lead to PTSD. One study found that 17% of LEOs met criteria for PTSD (Chopko & Schwartz, 2012, p. 87) owing to “exposure to traumatic incidents on the job.”

The stress of being a LEO such as having to maintain law and order can also increase the risk of depression for both work-related and personal reasons according to Agrawal & Singh (2020). Another study found that LEOs can experience depression and “after one year of police service, depression symptoms were partly independent from PTSD symptoms (Wang et al., 2010, section 4, para. 11). Additionally, LEOs can be angry and “stress is often experienced within a context of excessive anger, which

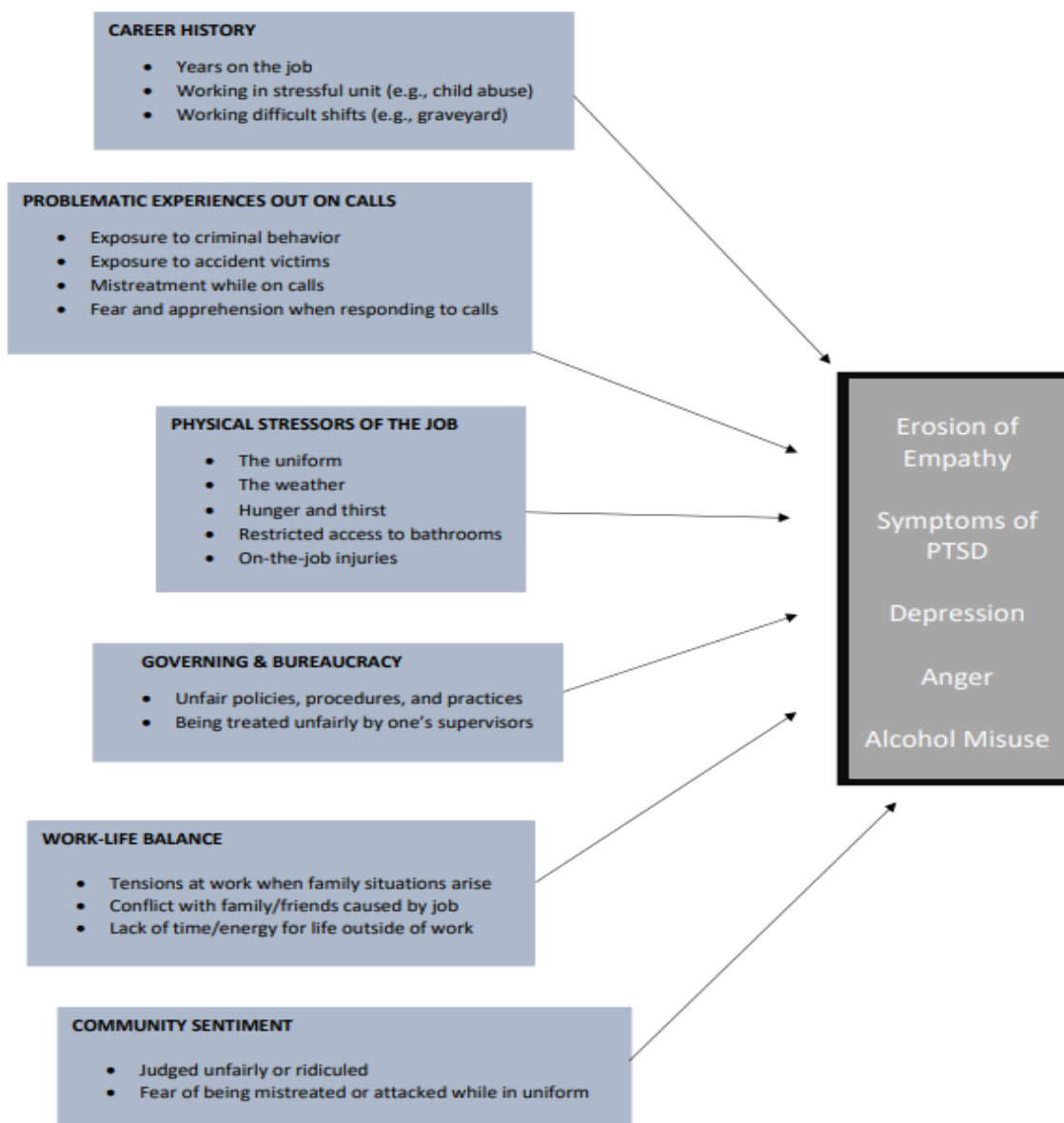
decreases officer wellbeing and has the potential to negatively impact public wellbeing as well. (Bergman et al., 2016, p.851). One situation that angers LEOs is when the public is non-compliant with police orders as seen in by Akerlof (2016). Enforcing the law is an interactive profession and “because the work of law enforcement officers is complex, many-sided, often unpredictable and accompanied by situations requiring constant emotional tension (Shamshicova et al., 2017, p. 189) causing emotions in the LEO which may make it harder to relate to the public they serve.

Lastly, alcohol misuse is a problem for many LEOs. Alcohol has often been seen used as a coping mechanism to deal with stress, and given the level of stress experienced by LEOs, it is no surprise that they are susceptible to alcohol use. Findings from a 2020 study examined use of alcohol as a possible coping mechanism to stress. The “findings suggest that there is reinforcement value associated with alcohol use, beyond symptom reduction, and may also suggest that positive reinforcement models of alcohol use should also be considered when conceptualizing consumption in the aftermath of a trauma” (Luciano et al., 2020, pp. 6-7).

The extent of calls for service and exposure to certain calls can expose the LEO to traumas that may in turn create an environment where additional coping mechanisms such as alcohol use may be sought. Using alcohol in this manner may suggest that alcohol abuse would be common amongst LEOs. In a study of 1,200 officers, Ballenger et al., (2011) found that 18.1% of males and 15.9% of females reported that alcohol use had bad effects on them, and 7.8% of them had symptoms that met the criteria for alcohol abuse or dependency.

Conceptual Model and Hypotheses

To understand factors that lead to the breakdown of empathy and other indicators of poor mental health, we have examined the most common experiences that may be encountered by LEOs. These experiences are grouped into six main categories: (1) Career history where particular attention is paid to the years one has worked as a LEO; (2) Problematic experiences which deals with exposure to difficult and upsetting calls; (3) Physical stressors on the job which focus on bodily needs that can interfere with a LEO's focus and demeanor; (4) Governing & Bureaucracy which includes unfairness in LEO organizations; (5) Work-life balance which addresses the pressures brought on by those at home and those at work, and lastly, (6) Community sentiment, which can ebb and flow in a LEO's career often by events far outside of their control.



Each factor experienced by a LEO over the course of a day can be broadly assigned to any of these six categories. These categories describe the nature of the profession and what a LEO may encounter during their career, and how they may impact empathy and other psychological outcomes.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis one: The more problematic experiences the LEO reports while out on calls, the greater their erosion of empathy and other mental health problems will be

Hypothesis two: The more physical stressors the LEO experiences on the job, the greater their erosion of empathy and other mental health problems will be

Hypothesis three: The more unfair and unreasonable the LEO finds workplace policies and treatment to be, the greater their erosion of empathy and other mental health problems will be

Hypothesis four: The less work-life balance the LEO reports, the greater their erosion of empathy and other mental health problems will be

Hypothesis five: The longer the LEO has worked, especially in stressful assignments, the greater their erosion of empathy and other mental health problems will be.

Hypothesis six: The worse the LEO believes community sentiment towards the police is, the greater their erosion of empathy and other mental health problems will be.

Data and Methods

Recruitment

Approximately 30 agencies were contacted and requested to participate in a survey study designed for this thesis. Although several agreed, the number of completed surveys was relatively low. Due to the anonymity of the survey, it is not known how many officers from each agency completed the survey. I attempted to distribute a survey to as many current and former LEOs in the country, first by each state through their corresponding Police Officer Standards and Training agencies. This was to keep things easier to distribute as each state only has one which is responsible for all agencies in the

state regarding training and certifications. This became problematic when I was then referred to each individual agency, which in essence included every police agency in every state. I then reached out to approximately 25-30 US agencies, three social media groups and on occasion used word of mouth to recruit participants. Upon being referred to specific LEO personnel, the following agencies were sent the survey with a brief introduction and explanation. The following is a list of all the agencies I contacted for purposes of recruitment.

Anchorage, AK Atlanta, GA Baltimore, Billings, MT Birmingham, AL Carson Police Dept, NV Chicago, IL Columbus, OH Denver, CO DPS, MS DPS-NV Highway Patrol, NV <i>Facebook (social media platform): Bridge the Blue, History of Policing, 444 Assembly</i> Hawaii POST Jackson, MS	Maine-POST Maryland-POST Milwaukee, WI Montana POST Napa, CA NYPD, NY Oakland, CA Oakland, MI Portland, OR Provincetown, MA Reno Police, NV San Diego PD, CA San Francisco, CA Sparks Police, NV Washoe County Sheriff's Department, NV
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The survey was distributed, and results collected from December 7, 2021, until August 10, 2022. There were 401 surveys that were started, and of these, 265 provided complete data on the dependent variables. Thus, the analyses presented in this thesis are based on a sample of $N=265$.

Measures

The online survey included a mix of original measures and validated scales. Original measures were created when no measures of a given construct could be

identified in the literature. Unless a citation to a validated scale is mentioned, the reader may assume that the measures were created for this thesis.

Independent Variables

Career history

Career history is measured with questions regarding how many years as a LEO they have worked, including the number of years served, assignment choices (e.g., patrol, detectives, bikes), and years served in each respective assignment. Career history also includes promotion and obtaining rank.

Nature of calls

Multiple aspects of the nature of calls are measured. First, frequency of response to various types of crime scenes and accident scenes were measured. Next, how the LEO felt they were treated while on a call was measured. Then, feelings of fear and apprehension leading up to a call were measured and finally, perceived ability to resolve issues while out on calls was measured.

First, LEOs were asked if they have even responded to situations involving adult or child victims of various types of criminal acts, such as physical or sexual assault. If they checked a given type of victim, they were asked how often they responded to such calls, ranging from 1=rarely to 5=every day or almost every day. Examples of questions include, “In the line of duty, have you ever responded to situations involving adults or children who have been physically neglected?” and “In the line of duty have you ever responded to a situation involving an adult or child who has accidentally overdosed?” A similar series of questions gauged how often LEOs have responded to calls involving

adult or child victims of accidents, such as incidents with firearms, drowning, and accidental overdose.

How the LEO is treated on calls

Questions that measured this looked at how the LEO felt people behaved towards them on calls. For example, “People are appreciative of my efforts to help them” and “People think that someone other than the police should have responded to their call,” with response options ranging from 1=always to 5=never. Items reflecting negative treatment were later reverse coded so that a high value on the scale reflected poor treatment of LEOs on calls.

Feelings of fear and apprehension

These feelings were measured with a set of questions asking how the LEO felt while on their way to a call such as “When on my way to respond to a call, I feel... afraid that someone may get hurt” and “...angry that I have to deal with the situation.” There are 5 response options to these items ranging from 1=always to 5=never. Items were later reverse coded so that a high value reflected fear.

The LEO’s perceived ability to resolve issues was measured by asking how often they respond to the same address, as well as asking several questions about the extent to which a given situation is resolved vs. unresolved at the end of the call. For example, they were asked how often “...there is little you can do to help because the situation is hopeless?” and how often “...can you not get a situation off your mind after a call is over?” Responses include 5 options rating from 1=always to 5=never. Items reflecting ability to resolve calls were reverse coded so that a high value reflected resolving calls.

Physical stressors

Several types of physical stressors were measured, including stress caused by hunger, thirst, lack of access to bathroom facilities, exposure to extreme weather, and discomforts associated with wearing the uniform and carrying equipment. For example, LEOs were asked if they have "...ever gone more than 8 hours without an opportunity to eat a snack or food?" and "Do you feel you have a safe place to use the bathroom?" Responses options again range from 1=always to 5=never. Items were reverse-coded so a high value on the scale reflected more stressors.

On-the-job injuries

Information about on-the-job injuries was obtained by asking how the LEO feels about the possibility and experience with injuries suffered while at work. Example of one of these questions are, "How concerned were you about becoming injured as a result of your job when you were working as a LEO?" (1=not at all concerned to 5=extremely concerned) and "Have you ever been injured on duty as a LEO?" and if so, how often, and how serious was/were the injury/most serious injury.

Governing/bureaucracy

Data concerning issues related to governing and bureaucracy were measured by asking how the LEO felt about certain practices surrounding promotions, hiring and treatment. Examples of these questions are, "Your department is fair with their initial hiring practices" and "Your department demonstrates favoritism towards certain LEOs" with response options ranging from 1=strongly agree to 5=strongly disagree. Items were reverse coded for analysis so a high value on the scale reflected problems with governing and bureaucracy.

Work-life balance

Work-life balance information was obtained by asking how the LEO felt about taking time off or balancing the job and their home life. Examples of these questions include asking the LEO if they "...feel like you are "letting your team down" when you request time off?" And do they "have enough mental energy to engage fully in activities outside of work?" with response options ranging from 1=always to 5=never. Items that reflected lack of work-life balance were reverse-coded so a high value on the scale reflects lack of balance.

Community sentiment towards the police

The LEO's perceptions of community sentiment towards the police were measured by asking how LEOs feel that police officers are treated and judged by the public in general. Examples of these questions include if they felt that they were "assessed fairly when police incidents are brought to the attention of the public by the media" and felt they were "likely to be made fun of if seen at a place that serves, coffee, doughnuts or other establishments of this nature." Response options range from 1=always to 5=never.

Social support

Social support was measured with a two-item scale developed by Ross and Mirowsky (1989) that asks to what extent the following two statements are agreed or disagreed within a 5-point scale from Strongly disagree to Strongly agree. "I have someone I can really talk to" and I have someone I can turn to for support and understanding when things get rough."

Dependent Variables

Demographics

Several demographic characteristics were measured, including gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, age, education, relationship status, and parenthood status.

Empathy

Empathy was measured with a revised version of a scale developed by Carré et al. (2013). Eleven items that loaded .55 or above on their published factor analysis were retained that capture emotional contagion, cognitive empathy, and emotional disconnection.

Depression

Depression was measured with the ten-item CES-10 (Irwin et al., 1999), that asks respondents on how many days over the past week they have experiences such as “I felt like everything was an effort” with response options ranging from 1=rarely or none of the time (less than 1 day) to 4=all of the time (5-7 days).

PTSD

PTSD was being measured with the 17-item PTSD Checklist-Civilian Version (Weathers et al., 1991) that asks respondents how many days over the past month they have experiences such as “Suddenly acting or feeling as if a stressful experience were happening again (as if you are reliving it)?” Responses ranged from 1=not at all to 5=extremely.

Anger

Anger was measured with the 5-item DAR-5 scale (Forbes et al., 2014) that asks respondents to self-report their feelings of anger over a 4-week period. An example

being, “When I got angry, I stayed angry” and “I found myself getting angry at people and situations.” The responses ranged from 1-5 with “none or almost none of the time” and “all or almost all the time” respectively.

Alcohol misuse

The presence of possible alcohol misuse is measured by the 4-item CAGE screening tool (Ewing, 1998). Questions for this measurement include but are 4 simple questions with yes or no answers. These questions are “Have you ever...felt the need to cut down your drinking, felt annoyed by criticism of your drinking, had guilty feelings about drinking and taken a morning eye opener.”

Methods of Data Analysis

Scale reliability was estimated with Cronbach’s alpha and scales were deemed reliable at a level of .70 or above. When scale reliabilities fell below .70, an alternative method of assessing scale reliability was used that is appropriate when scale items are ordinal in nature, which is true of all scales in this thesis. This method uses polychoric correlations, following current conventional standards (Gadernann, Guhn, & Zumbo, 2012; Zumbo, Gadernann,& Zeisser, 2007). When a scale was deemed reliable using either Cronbach’s or polychoric correlations, the scale value was calculated by taking the average value of all items. Prior to taking the average, a count of number of valid items was estimated and anyone who answered fewer than half the items on the scale was treated as missing on that scale.

Bivariate correlations between scales were estimated to ensure that scales were coded correctly and to test the construct validity of the scales. Next, the dependent variables were predicted using Ordinary Least Square regression (OLS). For example,

loss of empathy was regressed on the measures of the nature of calls, physical stressors, perceptions of community sentiment towards the police, problems with governing/bureaucracy, and work-life balance, controlling for career history and demographics. Similarly, PTSD, anger, and alcohol abuse were regressed on the same set of independent variables.

However, the regressions for depression, anger, and PTSD violated the assumption of normality as well as contained multiple residual outliers. Therefore, robust regression was used because robust regression limits the influence of outliers on estimates and does not assume that residuals are normally distributed. R^2 estimates are not reported because R^2 estimates in robust regression are not meaningful when computed using pseudo values and, therefore, should not be used (Street et al., 1998). Lastly, Bonferroni corrections were used to adjust for family-wise type-I error rates, resulting in a .05 adjusted alpha-level of .0125 (.05/4) and a .01 adjusted alpha-level of .0025 (.01/4).

Results

Demographic characteristics of the sample

The demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1. Access to the survey was given to both currently employed and formerly employed or retired LEOS. Currently employed LEOs made up 207 (78.1%) of the respondents, and the remainder included 54 retirees (20.4%) and 4 “other” responses. General demographic information from respondents was collected and showed that 232 (87.5%) identified as White. Black, American Indian, Asian Pacific Islander of other comprised the remaining 9.5% and 3% declined to answer the question. There were 205 male respondents (77.1%), 56 female respondents (21.6%), and the remaining 1.5 % had missing values. The most

common education level reported by respondents was a bachelor's degree at 49.8% (N=132) followed by some college but no degree at 24.5%. Most LEOs reported that they are married or in a domestic partnership (76.6%) and 20% were never married or divorced. The age of the participants was 26 to 75 years of age ($M = 45.24$; $SD = 9.98$). Career history was collected and showed the years worked as a LEO ranged from 2 to 32 ($M = 17.75$; $SD = 8.03$).

Single-item measures of work history and working conditions

Table 2 presents measures of LEOs' work history and single-item measures of their working conditions. A majority of the LEOs that completed the survey fell into line staff (represented as Officer or Deputy), whereas 176 or 66.4% did not work in a supervisory position. The second most common was a first line supervisor such as a sergeant which comprised 21.9% of the sample. The remaining distribution of 11.7% was between lieutenant and Chief/Sheriff or equivalent which may be considered command staff. The distribution of years worked showed the minimum years worked as 2 and 32 as the maximum years worked, which brought the mean of years worked to 17.75. The years needed in most states before the LEO can retire is usually 25 to 30 years depending on the department. The mean shows that most LEOs that participated in this survey were at least halfway through their career or close to retirement.

Another measure that was addressed was how the LEOs felt about their salary. Over half the LEOs surveyed (51.7%) felt that they were not paid enough. Only 8.8% thought they were paid more than enough, which left the remaining 39.5% feeling they were paid the "right amount." The remaining single-item measures addressed how the LEO felt about injuries. When asked "how often are (or were) you concerned about

being injured on the job,” the largest distribution fell in the slightly concerned (23.8%), somewhat concerned (26 %) or moderately concerned (30.6%) area. It is apparent that being injured is on a LEO’s mind, but just how much varied. This seems to be a valid concern as the following item looks at injuries and how many times the LEO has experienced them. Just below half of the LEOs (42.3%) have been injured 2-3 times, and 20.4% of LEOs have been injured 4-5 times. Only 9.4% of LEOs reported to have never been injured, 12.8% only injured once and 14.7 % were unfortunate enough to have been injured more than 5 times (*1% missing value). When injured, 39.2% of the LEOs reported that the injury only affected their job performance “a little” and 24.2% reported more of a “moderate amount,” whereas only 3.4% reported that it ended their career.

Scales

Scales that were determined to be reliable are presented in Table 3. For each scale, the sample size of respondents that provided valid data for the scale is presented along with the scale reliability. Then the question stem and response options are presented, followed by all the items that made up the scale. Minimum and maximum values as well as means and standard deviations for each item are presented, as well as the same values for the scale average.

The first scale is exposure to trauma on the job, which has a reliability of .91. The most frequently reported traumas include adult victims of physical assault and domestic violence, whereas the least common trauma was child victims of homicide. The scale average was 2.16, or a little over “a few times a year.” The exposure to accidental injury or death scale had a reliability of .84. It covered both adults and children that were involved in the accidental injury or death involving accidents, firearms, drowning or

suicide. The scale average was 1.37 which fell in between “rarely” and “a few times a year.”

The third scale addressed if LEOs felt that they were treated badly on calls. It had a reliability of .73 and the following questions were reversed coded, “people acted like they were glad to see me” and were “... appreciative of my efforts and treated with respect.” The remaining four questions involved cooperation on scene, suspects putting up resistance, arguing with LEOs and thought that someone other than the police should have responded. The scale average was 2.73, which fell just below “about half the time.” The fourth scale addressing physical stressors of the job included fatigue and how that fatigue affected the LEO’s mood, going more than 8 hours without eating and how that affected the LEO’S mood, and lastly, going 8 hours without drinking water or a beverage and how that affected their mood. It had a reliability of .80 and an average of 3.49, which was approximately midway between “about half the time” and “most of the time.”

In the original survey, equipment discomfort of wearing a ballistic vest, duty boots, duty belt, duty weapon and impact weapon was presented to the LEOs. The results of the corresponding scale had a reliability of .85 and an average of 2.61, which is just over the midpoint of “sometimes” and “about half the time.” LEOs feel discomfort or pain while wearing these items. Scale six briefly explored the weather the LEO works in, from hot to cold and the ability to wear the right clothing in accordance with extreme weather conditions. The reliability of this scale was .71 and the scale average was 3.0 which was “half the time.”

The next two scales addressed how the LEO felt about department practices and laws that governed the way they conduct business every day and if they felt their

department was supportive with training, when the LEOs judgment was call into question, or if they have serious life events, illness or injury. Scale seven had a reliability of .72 and average of 2.95 which was slightly below “neither agree nor disagree” towards “somewhat disagree.” Scale eight conversely showed an average of 3.35 which was a little above “neither agree nor disagree” but towards “somewhat agree” and had .84 reliability

The ninth scale addressed the negative community sentiment that the LEO feels is occurring and includes being assessed fairly when police incidents are brough forth, or when a suspect dies. If the LEO feels they have community and local leader support, if their profession is viewed as “less noble” and they feel they are misunderstood and judged unfairly or even bombarded by negative statements like, “I pay your salary” or they are called stupid or racist without merit. This scale’s reliability was .88 and showed an average of 3.37. This average landed close to the midpoint between “about half the time” and “most of the time.”

Scale ten addressed how the LEO feels in uniform in public and had an average of 3.02 and a reliability of .87. This outlined that the LEO felt they may be attacked, judged, their food/drink tainted, their patrol car damaged, or they purposely have to avoid certain food/beverage establishments because of a recent arrest just over, “half the time.” The eleventh scale addressed if the LEO felt like they could help people on scene of a call, were able to successfully resolve it, or felt like they kept returning to the same address repeatedly or even felt like the situation was hopeless. The reliability of this was .70 and average was 3.79 which fell just short of 4=most of the time.

Work-life conflict was shown in scale twelve and had a .82 reliability. These questions addressed if the LEO felt like they were supported by their department when they wanted to take or request time off, had an important issue occur at home or were forced to miss a special event due to an overtime event or inability to take time off. It also looked as if the LEO felt like their family supported them and they had enough time to engage in things that are important to them like hobbies and spiritual activities. The average was 2.5 directly in between “sometimes” and “about half the time.”

Social support was measured by a simple two-item scale developed by Ross and Mirowsky (1989) that asked to what extent the LEO agreed or disagreed with the following statements. “I have someone I can really talk to” and I have someone I can turn to for support and understanding when things get rough.” This scale has .93 reliability and the mean fell slightly above “somewhat agree.”

Five dependent variables were measured as scales, including erosion of empathy, depression, anger, PTSD, and problems with alcohol. Erosion of empathy was the original focus of this thesis and is found in scale thirteen. The items used to measure empathy were taken from a revised version of an empathy scale developed by Carré et al. (2013). This included some questions like, “I don’t become sad when I see other people crying” and “other people’s feelings don’t bother me.” The reliability of this scale was .74 and the 2.98 average fell in between “somewhat disagree” and slightly closer to “Neither agree nor disagree.” Although the reliability of the scale was sufficiently high, this may be a concept that is not yet fully understood and not easily translated into a survey format. LEOs may not have wanted to admit that the feelings of others are not as important to them as they probably should be. The LEOs surveyed may have answered

dishonestly or have a lack of understanding about their own feelings resulting in inaccurate results. To be able to further study this developing concept, additional screening tools for the measure of empathy need to be developed.

Depression was measured with the ten-item CES-10 (Irwin et al., 1999), that asked LEOs how often they felt like, “everything was an effort” and “so nervous nothing could calm me down.” The reliability of this scale was .91 and the mean falling just below “a little of the time” (1.93).

Anger was measured with the 5-item DAR-5 scale (Forbes et al., 2014) and had a .89 reliability. These items asked LEOs questions about, when they got angry, if stayed angry, and “If they found themselves getting angry at people and situations.” The average was surprisingly low at 1.93 which was just under “a little of the time.” PTSD (scale 17) and the items used to measure it were taken from the 17-item PTSD Checklist-Civilian Version (Weathers et al., 1991). It asked LEOs if they have experienced disturbing memories, thoughts, images, dreams, and stress. It further addressed if the LEO feels “cut off, emotionally numb, irritable jumpy or irritated.” The reliability for this scale was .94 and responses showed a 2.22 average, which was just above “a little bit.”

The final scale reflected questions regarding alcohol misuse as measured by the 4-item CAGE screening tool (Ewing, 1998). There were 4 questions with yes or no answers. The standard deviation from the results of these questions was 1.29. The percentages of the answers “Have you ever felt the need to cut down your drinking?” resulted in 55.6% of LEOs reporting “no.” “Have you ever felt annoyed by criticism of your drinking?” resulted in only 26.3% reporting “yes.” “Have you ever had guilty feelings about drinking?” resulted in only 30.7% reported that they have and “have you

ever taken a morning eye opener” resulted in 90.8% of LEOs reporting that they haven’t. These numbers are so low that I suspect LEOs underreported alcohol misuse. This is not surprising as stigma associated with alcohol use may be higher in a profession that responds to many alcohol-related crimes and issues.

Bivariate correlations among scales

Bivariate correlations between each pair of scales are shown in Table 4. The first five columns are the dependent variables, starting with erosion of empathy. This scale is only significantly correlated with one other scale – it is negatively correlated with frequency of resolving issues while out on calls, meaning that the more often the LEO could resolve an issue, the less they reported a loss of empathy.

In contrast, depression is significantly associated with most of the other scales. It is positively associated with anger, PTSD, and alcohol problems; in fact, the correlation between depression and PTSD showed to be the highest amongst the scales (.798***). It is also positively associated with things that the LEO often has no control over such as frequency of bad calls, physical stressors on the job, equipment discomfort and problems with the weather. I saw further positive correlation with unfair policies at work, negative public sentiment towards LEOs, and the ever-frequent struggle in their work-life balance. Depression was negatively associated with department support, frequency of resolving calls and social support. This outlines the probability of the LEO becoming depressed when they perceive they don’t have department or social support and when they feel they cannot resolve their calls for service.

Anger and PTSD have similar correlations with bad calls, physical stressors, the discomfort of the equipment and weather issues. This association appears to be

reoccurring throughout this research. Anger and PTSD continued to share positive association with feelings of unfair governing policies, public sentiment, feelings of being unsafe when in uniform and work-life conflict and of course anger has a positive correlation with PTSD itself. Anger and PTSD both share negative correlations with department support and social support. When the LEO's perceived support is not there from either area, the LEO can feel both angry and depressed. PTSD has a positive association with alcohol misuse, but a negative correlation with the ability to resolve calls. Conversely, alcohol misuse has no correlation with either support or ability to resolve calls.

Exposure to trauma has correlations with most other scales including a negative association with department support and the ability to resolve calls. The only scales that exposure to trauma did not have a significant association with were physical stressors, unfair policies, and social support.

The LEOs' exposures to accident scenes showed to have positive significant associations with bad calls, equipment discomfort, weather exposure, public sentiment, feeling unsafe in uniform and work and life conflict. It is negatively associated with the ability to resolve calls but not significantly related to any other scale.

Bad calls and physical stressors are associated with all other scales to include each other. Their negative correlations include social and department support and the ability to resolve calls. This association continues to trend and shows that when the LEO feels they lack support either departmentally or socially it negatively affects the LEO when dealing with their calls.

Equipment discomfort, which addressed things that are worn or carried in some way had the same two negative correlations one with the department support the other with the ability to resolve calls. It was related to all other columns with the exception of unfair policies and social support which had no correlation.

Weather and unfair policies shared many of the same correlations which is understandable as both are often out of the LEO's control. Unfair policies were also found to be related to ability to resolve calls, where weather and ability to resolve calls did not seem to be statistically associated.

Department support has a negative correlation with public sentiment, feeling unsafe in uniform and the LEO's work/life conflict. Negative public sentiment may then affect negatively the ability of the LEO to resolve calls and feel unsafe in uniform as seen with the negative association but also the second highest positive correlation seen in this table is feeling unsafe while in uniform and public sentiment. It shows that if the public has negative feelings about their local law enforcement, LEOs do not feel safe wearing their uniform.

Regression results

Table 5 presents the results of the robust regressions. Two pairs of scales had to be combined into one owing to problems with multicollinearity. Exposure to trauma and exposure to accidents were combined into one scale ($\alpha = .93$), and negative community sentiment and fear of being in public in one's uniform were combined into one scale ($\alpha = .91$)

A robust regression revealed that in the multivariate model, only one variable had an independent significant association with loss of empathy. Injury affecting the job ($b =$

-0.13, $se = 0.04$, $p < .0025$) was significantly associated with loss of empathy. This means that with every one-point increase in injury affecting the job, there is a .13 unit predicted decrease in loss of empathy. In other words, the more a LEO reports that injury affects their job, the less their empathy is eroded.

In contrast, four independent variables were significantly associated with depression. The robust regression revealed that bad calls ($b = 0.23$, $se = 0.09$, $p < .0125$), physical stress ($b = 0.36$, $se = 0.07$, $p < .0025$), work/life conflict ($b = 0.19$, $se = 0.08$, $p < .0125$), and social support ($b = -0.13$, $se = 0.03$, $p < .0025$) significantly predicted depression. Regarding bad calls, each one-point increase in the frequency of bad calls was associated with a .23 increase in depression. Similarly, each one-point increase in physical stress was associated with a .36 increase in depression. Lastly, each one-point increase in work/life conflict was associated with a .19 increase in depression. Social support, in contrast, was negatively associated with depression, meaning that for each one-point increase in social support, depression decreases, on average, by .13.

Turning now to the robust regression of anger, physical stress ($b = 0.35$, $se = 0.08$, $p < .0025$), and social support ($b = -0.10$, $se = 0.04$, $p < .0125$) were significantly associated with anger. This means that with every single point increase in physical stress, anger is expected to increase by .35, whereas for each one-point increase in social support, anger is expected to decrease by .10.

The final robust regression was PTSD. It revealed that physical stress ($b = 0.36$, $se = 0.08$, $p < .0025$), work/life conflict ($b = 0.27$, $se = 0.08$, $p < .0025$), and social support ($b = -0.11$, $se = 0.03$, $p < .0025$), significantly predicted PTSD. This means that with every single point increase in physical stress, PTSD increased by .36 whereas for

each one-point increase in work/life conflict, PTSD increased by .27. In contrast, for each one-point increase in social support, PTSD decreased by .11

To summarize, physical stress was positively associated with depression, anger, and PTSD, whereas social support was negatively associated with all three. Work-life conflict was also positively associated with depression and PTSD, but not with anger.

Discussion

This study is the first of its kind to systematically measure a wide range of stressors that LEOs encounter on the job, and how those stressors impact their wellbeing, including their ability to empathize with the public that they serve. It is timely because the police are under more pressure than ever given the focus on the police killing of people like George Floyd, the videotape of which was seen around the world, and the subsequent wave of social outrage against the police, in general. Understanding why LEOs cease to empathize with the public may lead to interventions that improve LEO wellbeing and job performance.

However, this study proved to have several limitations. The data were measured at one time, so it was not possible to trace the erosion of empathy over time. The sample of LEOs that completed the survey was non-random, so the results do not represent all LEOs. It is likely that some LEOs who completed the survey did not answer all the questions honestly because of social desirability bias. For example, they may not want to admit to feelings that are inconsistent with the image of LEO.

Law enforcement officers have long had a complicated relationship with the community they serve. Depending on history, location and accessibility, this relationship can often be supportive and accepted or abrasive and maligned. The profession itself is

often closed off to outsiders and those not in the profession are rarely able to understand the work, actions and other factors that can affect the way a LEO feels, acts, and responds to the needs of that community. I predicted that the actual on-the-job rigors and experiences would affect the empathy, depression, anger, and PTSD of that LEO who is affected by repeated interactions with community members who themselves are often terse, impatient, or apathetic.

To capture the loss of empathy and wellbeing of LEOs, I developed a survey that encompassed a variety of experiences that a LEO may experience over the course of their career. The survey was very thoughtful and comprehensive because I did not think of an experience or incident that would not have been covered by one of the many questions. The survey attempted to capture how different events and experiences can affect a LEO both positively and negatively. Given my interest in covering many aspects of what it is like to work as a LEO, the survey was quite long.

In the end, the final sample size was not as substantial as I would have hoped, despite my attempts to recruit from as many different agencies as possible, and to represent a variety of types of work experience. In retrospect, the small sample size may be driven by the length of the survey, given how many LEOs started it (409), but quit well before providing data on the dependent variables, resulting in a final sample size of just 265. Another disappointment was the lack of independent predictors of erosion of empathy. Unfortunately, erosion of empathy is something that is not often studied and has proven difficult for me to capture with survey data. Only one independent variable predicted erosion of empathy in the results (see Table 5). It shows that empathy may be higher when an officer has experienced an injury that affects their job. I can only surmise

that this may be in part due to an increased feeling of helplessness or reduced mobility and movement of the LEO. If they are injured, they may be better able to take the perspective of others who also are afflicted with physical or mental maladies. Lastly, it may be that if the LEO is debilitated in any way, the warrior concept of how they see themselves is stripped away to reveal a very human person. Further studies are needed to determine the deeper meaning of the association between these two variables.

Turning to depression, anger, and PTSD, the results were somewhat richer and interesting. It appeared that the items measuring depression, anger, and PTSD were concepts that the survey participants (LEOs) were more able to relate to and were more closely related to their experiences on and off the job. Results showed that the more social support that a LEO had, the less depression, anger, and PTSD they experience. Although this is probably not specific to law enforcement profession, the fact that there is an independent association between social support and three mental health outcomes shows that LEOs are not beyond help.

Among all the aspects of work experience measured in this study, physical stress placed upon the LEO was the strongest predictor of poor mental health. Few can argue that the modern LEO is not influenced by physical encounters both inside and outside of their bodies. Body fatigue seems inevitable when a LEO is getting in and out of a car many times during a shift or subduing a criminal. LEOs encounter calls that can require a comforting hand to a community member that experienced a death of a loved one or heightened alertness to a critical incident where lives are at stake and deadly force may be an eventual, elegiac outcome.

During their career, LEOs can accumulate experiences that someone not in law enforcement (or something similar) would experience in only limited amounts during their lifetime. A typical day in the life of a LEO could very well include more than three domestic disputes (with or without injuries), a traffic accident with exposure to severe and often gruesome injuries and a deceased person (often with the body undergoing various stages of death and decay). In contrast, a typical civilian may never or rarely view or experience a death of one or two loved ones or one or two traffic accidents with severe injuries in their lifetime. These traumatic experiences are cumulative and although LEOs may attempt to compartmentalize, suppress, and ignore the emotional impact of such experiences, the effects are insidious and far reaching.

This absorption of trauma is compounded by factors often overlooked in such studies, including a lack of department support, the inability of the LEO to resolve calls, bad weather, and physical and equipment discomforts brought on by the very uniform which is dictated by the needs of the profession. The uniform and body armor can often be way too hot in the summer and mobility dictates fewer layers of clothing, which makes it way too cold in the winter. The tools of the trade like the handgun, extra handgun magazines, pepper spray, impact weapon, taser, handcuffs and radio can easily add an additional 10-20 pounds on an already overburdened frame. The additional weight may be responsible for added physical strain of the LEO's body, making them more prone to injury, reducing their efficiency to perform their job. Outside of continued improvements in lighter and more efficient tools for the LEO to carry and wear, weather, physical and equipment discomforts are the most difficult factors to improve upon.

When looking at what can be done to limit the effects of factors that correlate with depression, anger, and PTSD, many possible solutions came to mind, and I would like to address them with several proposed solutions. Support is a fundamental need for a person to succeed. If an individual doesn't receive support, it may affect the way they see the world, react to things, and relate in a way that is expected. This support should also be available not only off the job, but also at work given that people typically spend 40 hours on the job. Often, we spend more time at work than with our family and friends, which leads to work/life conflict, another predictor of depression and PTSD among LEOS. A police department, like many work environments, is often seen by the LEO as their second home. The LEO confronts so many things in their course of work that can be seen as dangerous or unsafe, despite expecting to feel safe within the organization. One solution to this problem would be to create organizations that are accountable, fair, and transparent. Organizational policies must be consistently adhered to and applied equitably amongst staff. If the LEO feels safe within their department, they may be less likely to feel angry, experience PTSD or fall victim to depression.

The structure and values of a police department are also key to how feeling unsafe in uniform and public sentiment is associated with anger, PTSD, and depression, albeit only in the bivariate case. The department must relate with the community in much the same way it should with its LEOs. It must shake the silo mentality and integrate as much as it can with the people it serves. If a department is committed to transparency, impartiality and community relations, the LEO may be viewed in a more favorable light. This would increase comfortability levels within the community, resulting in a higher trust within the community that LEOs will keep them safe.

Turning once again to work-life balance, this is a common theme with many a career professional, but it may be an especially potent problem for LEOs given the extent of trauma they experience on the job. To alleviate it, agencies should provide paid time off and the opportunity to use it. For the LEO, reduced staffing levels, emergency events and policies that do not limit the hours an officer can work can lead to burnout and ultimately lack of a balanced work-life schedule. With this factor the department is only responsible for setting an environment that supports the balance, but LEOs must be motivated to do it. I have often seen new officers lured by the promise of additional pay, exciting assignments, and feeling part of a good cause. These motivations override their reason when deciding if they should go home to their family or stay at work. The result of working too many hours may leave the LEO tired and edgy when they finally have time to spend with their friends or family. These experiences may also affect the lack of support that a LEO feels from family members at home. The finding that support from family and friends was associated with reduced depression, anger, and PTSD indicates how that social support is critical. If the LEO is angry and depressed, especially if this is not their normal demeanor, loved ones may find it more difficult to be supportive. The cyclical nature of the work-life balance and social support in this study cannot be overlooked.

Lastly, the ability of the officer to resolve calls and having to repeatedly respond to “bad calls” is related to elevated anger, depression, and PTSD, at least in the bivariate case. These on-the-job experiences are solely externally controlled. The LEO may not be able to avoid a bad call during their career or even during their shift. They may have to respond to the same address repeatedly, feeling impotent to resolve whatever issue

brought them there in the first place. Although these factors are often out of the control of the actual LEO, steps can be taken to minimize the impact. Progressive departmental training that is timely and relevant can prepare the LEO on how to best handle a call for service. This departmental training should have an expanded scope to include LEO wellness and understanding the needs of the community and how best to satisfy these needs. If there are increased calls involving mentally unstable individuals in crisis, LEOs should have training and resources that would best deal with these incidents. If the LEO is not given the tools to handle certain cases, the community and local government should evaluate if certain calls even required LEO response. The LEO also needs to receive training and resources for their own resilience. This could include a quarterly meeting with a counselor, training that teaches supervisors and co-workers to watch for initial signs of anger, PTSD, or depression so they can be more swiftly mitigated.

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to determine if working as a LEO ultimately resulted in diminished feelings of empathy within the officer. Although the results pertaining to decreased empathy did not appear to be significant, the research yielded a correlation with being a LEO and a rise in feelings of anger, PTSD and depression.

This survey was conducted for several months to allow access to as many LEOs as possible. The LEOs who were given the survey were either currently working as a LEO, or were former LEOs, had varied assignments, exposures, tenures and family status. A combination of 18 variables were used to create basic scaling, bivariate and regression analysis resulting in a comprehensive view of the relationships between experiences of the LEO and how they feel.

This research concludes that the experiences of unresolved calls, physical discomfort from weather and equipment, lack of support from their department, community and family are greatly related to the LEO having increased signs and feelings of anger, PTSD, and depression.

That being said, the LEO is a necessary occupation in any society. The emotional welfare of the LEO is often minimized and overlooked. This causes a tenuous relationship with their community and oftentimes within their own family. Further research into this area should be conducted to gather additional data and critically examine work related and societal factors that have a lasting impact on the LEO's emotional wellbeing, which undoubtedly impact the professional and the communities they serve. A concerted effort to foster wellness for those choosing this profession undoubtedly will result in better service to LEOs and to society. Only through progressive change, attention and reasonable solutions will the positive relationships between LEOs and community members exist, but flourish.

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Tables

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics, *N*=265

Employment status

Currently employed	207	78.1%
Retired	54	20.4%
Other	4	1.5%

Gender

Male	205	77.1%
Female	56	21.6%
Missing	4	1.5%

Race/ethnicity

White	232	87.5%
Black or African American	4	1.5%
American Indian/Alaska Native	1	.4%
Asian/Asian-American	2	.8%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	3	1.1%
Other	15	5.7%
Missing	8	3%

Education

High school graduate	1	.4%
Some college but no degree	65	24.5%
Associates degree	37	14.0%
Bachelor's degree	132	49.8%
MA degree or higher	24	9.1%
Missing	6	2.3%

Relationship status

Never married	20	7.5%
Married/domestic partnership	203	76.6%
Widowed	1	.4%
Divorced	33	12.5%
Separated	2	.8%
Missing	6	2.3%

Age

Minimum:	26	years
Maximum:	75	years
Mean:	45.24	years
SD:	9.98	years

Sexual orientation

Heterosexual	241	90.9%
Gay or lesbian	12	4.5%
Bisexual	5	1.9%
Missing	7	2.6%

Table 2: Work History as a LEO and Single-Item Measures of Working Conditions
N=265

How many years have/did you work(ed) as a Law Enforcement Officer (LEO)?

Minimum:	2 years
Maximum:	32 years
Mean:	17.75 years
SD:	8.03 years

Other Single-item Measures of Work Experience

Rank of current or most recent position

Officer/deputy	176	66.4%
Sergeant	58	21.9%
Lieutenant	10	3.8%
Captain or commander	9	3.4%
Sheriff, Chief, Deputy Chief, Asst. Sheriff, equivalent	12	4.5%

Do you think you are/were paid more than enough, just the right amount, or not Enough money for your job as a LEO?

More than enough	23	8.8%
Just the right amount	103	39.5%
Not enough	135	51.7%

How often are (or were) you concerned about being injured on the job?

Not at all concerned	21	7.9%
Slightly concerned	63	23.8%
Somewhat concerned	69	26.0%
Moderately concerned	81	30.6%
Extremely concerned	30	11.3%
Missing	1	.4%

How many times have you been injured on duty as a LEO?

Never	25	9.4%
Once	34	12.8%
2-3 times	112	42.3%
4-5 times	54	20.4%
More than 5	39	14.7%
Missing	1	.4%

How much has your injury (or injuries) affected your job performance?

NA/never injured	25	9.4%
Not at all	34	12.8%
A little	104	39.2%
A moderate amount	64	24.2%
It/they affected it a lot	27	10.2%
It/they ended my career	9	3.4%
Missing	2	.8

How often do or did you get called to the same address while on duty?

Less than once a month	43	16.2%
About once a month	39	14.7%
Several times a month	96	36.2%
Several times a week	70	26.4%
Every day or almost every day	7	2.6%
Missing	10	3.8%

Table 3: Scales, scale item and scale**Independent Variables****Exposure to trauma on the job, N=265, $\alpha=.91$**

In the line of duty, have you ever responded to situations involving adults or children who have been victims of the following criminal acts?

By adults, we mean people aged 18 and above.

By children, we mean anyone younger than 18 including infants, children, and adolescents.

0=never 1=rarely 2=a few times a year 3=about once a month 4=about once a week 5=every day or almost every day

Items	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Adult victims of physical neglect	0	5	2.09	1.40
Child victims of physical neglect	0	5	2.35	1.24
Adult victims of physical assault	0	5	4.13	1.22
Child victims of physical assault	0	5	2.68	1.36
Adult victims of sexual assault by a partner or relative	0	5	2.09	1.13
Child victims of sexual assault by a parent or relative	0	5	1.76	1.25
Adult victims of sexual assault by a stranger	0	5	1.71	1.00
Child victims of sexual assault by a stranger	0	5	.83	.95
Adult victims of homicide	0	5	1.96	1.04
Child victims of homicide	0	4	.77	.84
Adult victims of suicide	0	5	2.46	.98
Child victims of suicide	0	4	.84	.86
Adult victims of domestic violence	0	5	4.10	1.35
Child victims of domestic violence	0	5	2.48	1.55
Scale average	0	4.07	2.16	.79

Exposure to accidental injury or death on the job, N=265, $\alpha=.84$

In the line of duty, have you ever responded to situations involving adults or children who have been victims of life-threatening accidental injury or death?

By adults, we mean people aged 18 and above.

By children, we mean anyone younger than 18 including infants, children, and adolescents.

0=never 1=rarely 2=a few times a year 3=about once a month 4=about once a week 5=every day or almost every day

Items	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Automobile accident (adult)	0	5	3.41	1.40
Automobile accident (child)	0	5	2.22	1.58
Incident with firearm, shooting someone else (adult)	0	5	2.34	1.21
Incident with firearm, shooting someone else (child)	0	4	.86	1.03
Incident with a firearm, shooting oneself (adult)	0	5	1.91	.96
Incident with a firearm, shooting oneself (child)	0	3	.45	.66
Drowning or near drowning (adult)	0	3	.49	.69
Drowning or near drowning (child)	0	2	.35	.57
Accidental overdose (adult)	0	5	2.38	1.22
Accidental overdose (child)	0	4	.83	.93
Accidental suicide (adult)	0	4	.89	.99
Accidental suicide (child)	0	3	.28	.57
Scale average	0	3.17	1.37	.62

Treated badly when out on calls, N=262, $\alpha=.73$

These statements describe how people act/acted when you respond/used to respond to a call as a LEO. Please read each statement and indicate how frequently the acts are/were in accordance with statement.

When responding to a call, how often...

1=never 2=sometimes 3=about half the time 4=most of the time 5=always

Items	Min	Max	Mean	SD
...do/did people act or acted like they are or were glad to see me? (reverse-coded)	2	5	3.31	.84
...does/did the victim of a crime does/did not cooperate with the investigation?	1	4	2.51	.65
...are/were people appreciative of my efforts to help them? (reverse-coded)	1	5	2.90	.87
...do/did the suspect of a crime put or puts up a lot of resistance?	1	5	2.76	.83
...do/did people argue or argued with me when I am or was trying to help them?	1	5	2.75	.88
...are/were you treated with respect by the people you are/were trying to help? (reverse-coded)	1	5	2.94	.87
...do/did people think/thought that someone other than the police should have responded to their call?	1	4	1.95	.68
Scale average	1.71	4	2.73	.50

Physical stressors on the job, N=265, $\alpha=.80$

This series of questions asks about things like hunger, thirst, or fatigue you may or may not experience/have experienced during your work shift as a LEO. How often...

1=never 2=sometimes 3=about half the time 4=most of the time 5=always

Items	Min	Max	Mean	SD
...are/were you fatigued during your shift?	1	5	2.91	1.06
...does/did fatigue affect your mood?	1	5	2.73	1.05
...do/did you ever go more than 8 hours without an opportunity to eat a snack or food?	1	5	2.48	.98
...does/did hunger affect your mood?	1	5	2.84	1.21
...do/did you go more than 8 hours without water or a beverage?	1	5	1.80	.77
...does/did thirst affect your mood?	1	5	2.34	1.16
Scale average	1	4.83	3.49	.74

Equipment discomfort, N=265, α =.85

This series of questions asks about your equipment you may wear during your work shift. How often do you experience any discomfort or pain from wearing your...

1=never 2=sometimes 3=about half the time 4=most of the time 5=always

Items	Min	Max	Mean	SD
...ballistic vest?	1	5	3.05	1.24
...duty boots?	1	5	2.15	1.04
...duty belt?	1	5	3.41	1.23
...duty weapon?	1	5	2.36	1.25
...impact weapon?	1	5	2.08	1.14
Scale average	1	5	2.61	.94

Weather conditions, N=264, α =.71

This series of questions asks about exposure to weather conditions while on the job. How often...

1=never 2=sometimes 3=about half the time 4=most of the time 5=always

Items	Min	Max	Mean	SD
...do/did you have to work in extremely hot or cold weather?	1	5	2.98	1.05
...are/were you forced to be outside in bad weather (e.g., rain, snow, hot sun) while on duty?	1	5	2.94	1.15
...do/did you have to wear light clothing (e.g., thin gloves or a lightweight jacket) in cold weather <u>so</u> you can move quickly on the job?	1	5	3.07	1.23
Scale average	1	5	3.00	.91

Unfair government policies and practices, N=265, α =.72

These next series of questions deal with the feelings regarding the laws and practices governing the department where you work/worked as a LEO. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

1=Strongly disagree 2=Somewhat disagree 3=Neither agree nor disagree 4=Somewhat agree 5=Strongly agree

Items	Min	Max	Mean	SD
The policies at your department are or were reasonable (reverse-coded)	1	5	2.36	1.10
The local laws that you are or were governed by are or were reasonable (reverse-coded)	1	5	2.51	1.14
Your department is or was fair with their initial hiring practices (reverse-coded)	1	5	2.35	1.22
Your department is or was unfair with their promotion practices	1	5	3.26	1.21
Your department is or was fair with their special assignment practices (reverse-coded)	1	5	3.16	1.23
Your department demonstrates or demonstrated favoritism towards certain LEOs	1	5	4.07	.99
Scale average	1	4.67	2.95	.74

Department is/was supportive of LEOS, $N=265$, $\alpha=.84$

These next series of questions deal with the feelings regarding treatment given within your department. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

1=Strongly disagree 2=Somewhat disagree 3=Neither agree nor disagree 4=Somewhat agree 5=Strongly agree

Items	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Your department provides or provided enough training for you to do your job.	1	5	3.29	1.08
Your department supports or supported you (or a fellow LEO) if you (or their) judgment is called into question.	1	5	3.00	1.02
You (or a fellow LEO) receive support from your department if you (or they) have a serious injury.	1	5	3.42	1.16
You (or a fellow LEO) receive support from your department if you (or they) have a serious illness.	1	5	3.53	1.08
You (or a fellow LEO) receive support from your department if you (or they) have a serious life event.	1	5	3.53	1.15
Scale average	1	5	3.35	.86

Negative community sentiment towards LEOS, $N=263$, $\alpha=.88$

Here are more statements related to how you feel that LEOS are seen by the general public.

How often do you feel that LEOs are...

1=never 2=sometimes 3=about half the time 4=most of the time 5=always

Items	Min	Max	Mean	SD
...assessed fairly when police incidents are brought to the attention of the public by the media? (RC)	1	5	4.20	.82
...supported by the local community? (RC)	2	5	3.11	.93
...supported by local leaders like city government, church leaders, and so on? (RC)	1	5	3.63	.97
...misunderstood by the public?	2	5	3.81	.88
...viewed as less noble than other professions?	1	5	3.20	1.04
...judged unfairly when a suspect dies during a police encounter?	1	5	3.73	1.00
...bombarded by sentiments regarding defunding their profession or comments like "I pay your salary"	1	5	3.24	1.03
...likely to be made fun of if seen at a place that serves, coffee, doughnuts, or other establishments	1	5	2.89	1.19
...called racist or are told they are "only stopping me because I am Black, Hispanic etc...)	1	5	3.12	1.07
...told that they are stupid and don't know what they're doing	1	5	2.75	1.02
RC=reverse coded				
Scale average	1.90	5	3.37	.69

Feel unsafe in public in uniform, N=264, $\alpha=.87$

These next set of questions relate to how safe you feel in public when on the job in uniform. How often while in a public setting do/did you...

1=never 2=sometimes 3=about half the time 4=most of the time 5=always

Items	Min	Max	Mean	SD
...feel/felt like I may be attacked just because I am a LEO?	1	5	2.94	1.15
...feel/felt like I am being unfairly judged because I am in uniform?	1	5	3.07	1.14
...feel/felt like someone may taint my food/drink when in an eating establishment while in uniform?	1	5	2.95	1.23
...fear/feared someone will damage my police vehicle just because of its police markings?	1	5	2.68	1.12
...avoid/avoided a certain food/beverage establishment due to a recent arrest?	1	5	3.46	1.33
Scale average	1	5	3.02	.97

Resolve calls, N=261, Polychoric $\alpha=.70$

These questions ask you how about your experiences being able to resolve issues when you are out on a call vs. having to leave situations unresolved.

When responding to a call, how often...

1=never 2=sometimes 3=about half the time 4=most of the time 5=always

Items	Min	Max	Mean	SD
...are or were you able to help people when you arrived on scene for a typical call?	2	5	3.76	.62
...is or was there little you can or could do to help because the situation is or was hopeless? (RC)	2	5	3.91	.49
...are or were you able to resolve the situation when out on a call for service?	2	5	3.70	.65
...do or did you return to the same address and face the same situation without ever resolving it? (RC)	1	5	3.81	.59
Scale average	2.25	4.75	3.79	.39

Work-life conflict, $N=265$, $\alpha=.82$

These next set of questions deal with how you balance (or balanced) your work as a LEO with your home life.

How often do/did you...

1=never 2=sometimes 3=about half the time 4=most of the time 5=always

Items	Min	Max	Mean	SD
...feel/felt supported by your department when you want or need to take time off? (RC)	1	5	2.30	1.02
...feel/felt like you are "letting your team down" when you request time off?	1	5	3.02	1.37
...have/had to work overtime due to an event beyond your control?	1	5	2.77	1.10
...have/had an important issue occur at home while you were at work?	1	5	2.17	.71
...miss/missed special events because you cannot take time off from work?	1	5	2.59	.99
...have/had enough time to engage in activities or hobbies outside of work? (RC)	1	5	2.83	1.01
...have/had enough time to engage in religious or spiritual activities? (RC)	1	5	3.04	1.22
...have/had enough mental energy to engage fully in activities outside of work? (RC)	1	5	2.99	1.04
...your family supports/supported you in your role as a LEO? (RC)	1	4	1.88	.89
...your family supports/supported you in your role as a LEO? (RC)	1	5	1.47	.73
Scale average	1.17	4.50	2.50	.63

Social support, $N=263$, $\alpha=.93$

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

1=Strongly disagree 2=Somewhat disagree 3=Neither agree nor disagree 4=Somewhat agree 5=Strongly agree

Items	Min	Max	Mean	SD
I have someone I can really talk to.	1	5	4.03	1.29
I have someone I can turn to for support and understanding when things get rough.	1	5	4.16	1.16
Scale average	1	5	4.10	1.18

Table 3 (cont.): Scales, scale item and scale reliabilities-Dependent Variables**Erosion of Empathy, $N=265$, $\alpha=.74$**

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

1=Strongly disagree 2=Somewhat disagree 3=Neither agree nor disagree 4=Somewhat agree 5=Strongly agree

Items	Min	Max	Mean	SD
My friends' emotions don't affect me much.	1	5	2.73	1.03
After being with a friend who is sad about something, I usually feel sad (reverse-coded).	1	5	2.89	1.00
I don't become sad when I see other people crying.	1	5	2.85	1.11
I can understand my friend's happiness when she/he does well at something (reverse-coded).	1	5	1.77	1.00
My friends' unhappiness doesn't make me feel anything.	1	5	2.08	.95
I get caught up in other people's feelings easily (reverse-coded).	1	5	3.60	1.14
Other peoples' feelings don't bother me at all.	1	5	2.46	1.03
When someone is feeling 'down' I can usually understand how they feel (reverse-coded).	1	5	2.19	.80
I have trouble figuring out when my friends are happy.	1	5	1.94	.90
I often get swept up in my friends' feelings (reverse-coded).	1	5	3.74	.94
I am not usually aware of my friends' feelings.	1	5	2.18	.98
Scale average	1.33	4.42	2.68	.52

Depression, $N=265$, $\alpha=.91$

The following questions ask about how you have been feeling during the past 30 days. For each question, please circle the number that best describes how often you had this feeling. During the past 30 days, about how often did you feel ...

1=none of the time 2=a little of the time 3=some of the time 4=most of the time 5=all of the time

Items	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Tired out for no good reason?	1	5	2.90	1.21
Nervous?	1	5	2.10	.99
So nervous that nothing could calm you down	1	5	1.41	.73
Hopeless?	1	5	1.60	.89
Restless or fidgety?	1	5	2.17	1.08
So restless that you could not sit still?	1	5	1.81	.97
Depressed?	1	5	2.02	1.02
So depressed that nothing could cheer you up?	1	5	1.57	.88
That everything was an effort?	1	5	2.17	1.10
Worthless?	1	5	1.56	.88
Scale average	1	4.5	1.93	.73

Anger, $N=265$, $\alpha=.89$

The following questions ask about how much you have felt angry during the past 4 weeks. For each question, please click the number that best describes how often you had these feelings. During the past 4 weeks, about how often did the following feeling occur?

1=none of the time 2=a little of the time 3=some of the time 4=most of the time 5=all of the time

Items	Min	Max	Mean	SD
You found yourself getting angry at people or situations?	1	5	2.51	.94
When you got angry, you got <u>really mad</u> ?	1	5	2.00	.99
When you got angry, you stayed angry?	1	5	1.82	.97
When you got angry at someone, you wanted to hit them?	1	5	1.54	.95
Your anger prevented you from getting along with people as well as you'd like to?	1	5	1.77	.96
Scale average	1	5	1.93	.80

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), $N=265$, $\alpha=.94$

Here is a list of problems and complaints that people sometimes have in response to stressful life experiences. Please read each one carefully and indicate how much you have been bothered by that problem in the last month.

1=none at all 2=a little bit 3=moderately 4=quite a bit 5=extremely

Items	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Repeated, disturbing memories, thoughts, or images of a stressful experience from the past?	1	5	2.40	1.11
Repeated, disturbing dreams of a stressful experience from the past?	1	5	2.01	1.09
Suddenly acting or feeling as if a stressful experience were happening again (as if you reliving it)?	1	5	1.85	1.03
Feeling very upset when something reminded you of a stressful experience from the past?	1	5	2.15	1.08
Having physical reactions) when something reminded you of a stressful experience from the past?	1	5	2.03	1.09
Avoid thinking about or talking about a stressful experience from the past to avoid having <i>feelings</i> related to it?	1	5	2.19	1.14
Avoid <i>activities</i> or <i>situations</i> because they <i>remind</i> you of a stressful experience from the past?	1	5	1.91	1.13
Trouble remembering important parts of a stressful experience from the past?	1	5	1.81	1.07
Loss of <i>interest</i> in things that you used to enjoy?	1	5	2.12	1.24
Feeling distant or <i>cut off</i> from other people?	1	5	2.38	1.28
Feeling <i>emotionally numb</i> or being unable to have loving feelings for those close to you?	1	5	2.10	1.21
Feeling as if your future will somehow be cut short?	1	5	2.08	1.12
Trouble falling or staying asleep?	1	5	2.80	1.39
Feeling <i>irritable</i> of having <i>angry outbursts</i> ?	1	5	2.18	1.00
Having <i>difficulty</i> concentrating?	1	5	2.28	1.07
Being "super alert" or watchful on guard?	1	5	2.73	1.23
Feeling <i>jumpy</i> or easily startled?	1	5	1.86	.99
Feeling intense irritation at loud noises like the TV or loud music, etc.?	1	5	2.12	1.19
Feel a strong dislike for being in crowded situations?	1	5	3.25	1.27
Scale average	1	4.89	2.22	.81

Alcohol Misuse

The following four questions ask how you feel about your personal alcohol use.

Have you ever felt the need to cut down on your drinking?

No	145	55.6%
Yes	116	44.4%
Missing	4	

Have you ever felt annoyed by criticism of your drinking?

No	193	73.7%
Yes	69	26.3%
Missing	3	

Have you ever had guilty feelings about drinking?

No	181	69.3%
Yes	80	30.7%
Missing	4	

Have you ever taken a morning eye opener?

No	327	90.8%
Yes	24	9.2%
Missing	4	

Count of 'Yes' responses Min=0 Max=4 M=1.10 SD=1.29

Table 4: Bivariate Correlation between Scales

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	
1	1.00																		
2	-0.10	1.00																	
3	0.045	.589***	1.00																
4	-0.019	.798***	.603***	1.00															
5	-0.111	.145*	0.082	.143*	1.00														
6	0.07	0.028	0.028	0.08	0.014	1.00													
7	0.119	0.056	0.061	0.115	-0.017	.774***	1.00												
8	0.111	.451***	.331***	.442***	0.003	.168**	.184**	1.00											
9	-0.036	.586***	.395***	.615***	0.042	0.067	0.12	.447***	1.00										
10	-0.001	.345***	.271***	.359***	0.043	.226***	.179**	.303***	.440***	1.00									
11	-0.079	.183***	.126*	.266***	0.073	.304***	.281***	.306***	.316***	.280***	1.00								
12	0.063	.250***	.241***	.262***	-0.063	0.058	0.055	.262***	.296***	0.12	0.071	1.00							
13	0.01	-.334***	-.325***	-.343***	-0.05	-.122*	-0.086	-.311***	-.331***	-.234***	-.181***	-.478***	1.00						
14	0.04	.341***	.312***	.443***	-0.04	.223***	.235***	.506***	.485***	.287***	.359***	.356***	-.297***	1.00					
15	0.032	.378***	.209***	.482***	0.043	.268***	.218***	.424***	.535***	.335***	.478***	.233***	-.244***	.672***	1.00				
16	-.126*	-.202***	-0.117	-.200***	-0.091	-.144*	-.149*	-.328***	-.201***	-.134*	-0.032	-.199***	.220***	-.215***	-.235***	1.00			
17	0.085	.503***	.386***	.566***	0.019	.151*	.150*	.432***	.527***	.317***	.356***	.315***	-.358***	.449***	.441***	-.149*	1.00		
18	-0.089	-.313***	-.233***	-.258***	0.030	0.007	-0.021	-.126*	-.152*	-0.052	-0.046	-0.107	.179*	-0.07	-0.089	0.082	-.219***	1.00	

* $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .01$ *** $p \leq .001$ (two-tailed tests)

- | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Loss of empathy | 10. Equip discomfort |
| 2. Depression | 11. Weather |
| 3. Anger | 12. Unfair policies |
| 4. PTSD | 13. Dept. support |
| 5. Alcohol problems | 14. Public sentiment |
| 6. Trauma exposure | 15. Unsafe in uniform |
| 7. Accident exposure | 16. Resolve calls |
| 8. Bad calls | 17. Work/life conflict |
| 9. Physical stressors | 18. Social support |

Table 5. Robust regression results on loss of empathy, depression, anger, and PTSD

	Loss of Empathy		Depression		Anger		PTSD	
	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>
Intercept	2.46**	0.67	1.15	0.69	0.61	0.80	-0.13	0.76
Demographics								
Male	0.13	0.10	0.06	0.10	0.23	0.11	0.11	0.11
Employed	0.06	0.10	0.05	0.11	-0.24	0.12	0.10	0.12
White	-0.03	0.12	0.03	0.12	0.16	0.14	0.18	0.13
Education	0.003	0.04	-0.03	0.04	-0.01	0.04	0.00	0.04
In relationship	0.13	0.13	-0.28	0.13	0.09	0.15	-0.14	0.14
Identifies as Heterosexual	0.07	0.14	-0.02	0.15	-0.10	0.17	-0.25	0.16
Work								0.01
Years as LEO	0.003	0.01	0.004	0.01	-0.001	0.01	0.01	
Rank	-0.02	0.04	0.00	0.04	0.02	0.05	0.02	0.04
Experienced trauma	0.08	0.07	-0.06	0.07	-0.07	0.08	-0.05	0.07
Bad calls	0.06	0.09	0.23*	0.09	0.16	0.10	0.17	0.10
Physical stress	-0.11	0.07	0.36**	0.07	0.35**	0.08	0.36**	0.08
Equipment Stress	0.03	0.04	0.30	0.04	-0.01	0.05	0.06	0.05
Working in bad weather	-0.09	0.05	-0.09	0.05	-0.01	0.06	-0.06	0.05
Unfair bureaucracy	0.03	0.06	-0.01	0.06	0.07	0.07	-0.05	0.06
Department support	.004	0.05	-0.07	0.05	-0.09	0.06	-0.06	0.05
Public/Community support	0.04	0.07	0.03	0.07	0.05	0.08	0.19	0.08
Ability to resolve calls	-0.02	0.10	0.02	0.10	0.05	0.11	0.10	0.11
Disparity between work/pay	0.05	0.06	-0.05	0.06	-0.04	0.07	0.04	0.06
On the job injury	0.02	0.04	-0.07	0.04	-0.06	0.04	-0.07	0.04
Injury that affects job	-0.13**	0.04	0.08	0.04	0.06	0.04	0.08	0.04
Repeated calls/same place	-0.05	0.04	-0.01	0.04	0.02	0.04	-0.01	0.04
Outside of work								
Work/life conflict	0.14	0.07	0.19*	0.08	0.09	0.09	0.27**	0.08
Social support	-0.03	0.03	-0.13**	0.03	-0.10*	0.04	-0.11**	0.03

Note: * $p < .0125$ (critical $t = 2.5188$), ** $p < .0025$ (critical $t = 3.0589$)