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## Culture of Wellness Toward Resiliency

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Culture of Wellness Towards Resiliency

by

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This research is dedicated to my husband, children, and parents. Without their support, this work would not be possible.

## Abstract

Stress and burnout are increasingly prevalent amongst law enforcement officers and civilian staff due to job demands and job-related traumas. A culture of wellness planning is how administrations can build resiliency against stress and burnout. A wellness plan should emphasize organizational responsibility, officer responsibility, formal and informal leadership, and external collaborations. Agencies can also utilize the same cognitive behavioral therapies that supervised release agents find beneficial for clients. There are great similarities between the utilization of cognitive behavioral interventions, evidence-based models, and thought behavioral links between supervised release clients and law enforcement staff members. Often, cognitive behavioral therapies are used to help supervised release clients change their thought processes to change their criminal behaviors. For law enforcement officers and staff members, these same techniques can be used for those struggling with mental health particularly relating to stress or burnout accumulated on the job. If left untreated stress and burnout have a negative impact on how officers and civilian staff carry out their duties. This leads to ethical and moral failures. Agencies can foster staff to have a personal moral compass through external mental health resources, developing clear and concise ethics policies, having leaders who model strong ethical values, and changing the culture within the agency to be mental-health focused first. Searching methods for this literature review focused on law enforcement and civilian staff stress and trauma. An emphasis was placed on how law enforcement agencies could help staff build resiliency towards stress and burnout and what resources were beneficial.

Keywords: *Stress, burnout, resiliency, and law enforcement.*

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Stress and burnout on law enforcement officers and civilian staff are inevitable in today's climate. A recent shift of focus on officer wellness has begun to squash the historical notion that the only danger police officers face is criminals and crime. Organizations around the world have begun wellness programs for their officers and civilian staff to fight against stress, burnout, and mental health-related illnesses that occur because of on-the-job stressors.

There are several ways for an officer to experience stress in their career. Secondary traumatic stress and daily occupational stressors are reasons cited by many professionals as the root cause of burnout, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that lead to the end of an officer's career or life. Levin et al. (2021) claim that secondary traumatic stress, also known as compassion fatigue, describes a core set of responses to exposure to challenging and traumatic material. Risk factors for developing secondary traumatic stress, are dependent on the individual but can include the intensity of exposure, graphic nature of the material, cases involving children, identification by the professional with the victim, gender, personal history of trauma, prior symptoms, organizational factors, and lack of social supports (paras. 1-2).

Occupational stresses are present in most workplaces and for average citizens includes reports, deadlines, and unrealistic demands. The law enforcement professional has these same occupational stressors as well as added stress due to safety concerns, the potential for civil lawsuits for lack of use of proper procedures, a backlog of reports, inadequate resources/manpower, yearly training minimums to meet, and constant demands from citizens and calls for service.

The effects of long-term cumulated occupational and secondary traumatic stressors over time lead to higher burnout rates within officers. McCarty et al. (2019) claim “Expectations that officers rise to the heightened challenges they face in the status quo amidst great scrutiny cannot be met when they are emotionally, physically, or mentally unwell” (p. 280). Officers deal with high-stress situations daily. They are often never given a chance to examine the situation before they move on to the next stressful event.

In addition to physical traumatic events and violence that officers and civilian staff experience due to job duties there can be a silent accumulation of stress and burnout that can be just as deadly. If left untreated and unrecognized stress and burnout become risk factors for officers and civilian staff for the furtherance of mental health-related problems such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

“There isn’t a magical formula as to which risk and protective factors evolve into PTSD” (Conn, 2018, p. 5). Risk factors can contribute to an officer or staff member's failure to be resilient against stress, burnout, or other mental health issues. “Risk factors include lack of social support, history of traumatic events, the perception of threat to life during the incident, coping styles, and even genetic susceptibility” (Conn, 2018, p. 5). Protective factors can be set in motion by an individual as well as the support systems around them. “Some protective factors include the presence of social support, positive personalities, and overall satisfaction with life. It is the officer’s resilience, coupled with support, which will allow them to heal” (Conn, 2018, p. 5). Therefore, agencies can provide support systems in various ways to help officers and civilian staff heal from job traumas, stress and burnout. These support systems can be used as a prevention tool as well.



Overall satisfaction in life is listed as a protective factor against PTSD. Often, staff develop cynical viewpoints of their life due to the workload that they carry. This could be changed by changing the mindset of staff. Programs recently utilized by criminal justice agencies to help individuals on supervised release from incarceration are those that help the client understand the outcome of their thought behavior link. Supervised release clients have a clearly defined problem, their criminal behaviors that led to their incarceration. The thought behavior link has been incorporated into supervised release to help offenders be reintroduced into society while learning to change their thoughts to change their criminal behaviors. These same programs can benefit law enforcement officers and civilian staff that are encountering stress and burnout-related anxieties from job-related trauma/s by helping them change their mindset.

It could be argued that it is not the job of the agency to provide services. While others could argue, the agency has a duty to maintain a certain level of mental health that an officer had when they entered the workforce. The problem lies in the fact that law enforcement agencies have yet to identify the problem surrounding mental health and the potential downfall that PTSD could have on the health of their officers, staff, and agency. A recent uptick in PTSD-related retirements has proven what could happen when agencies are not protecting or preventing staff from job-related stress, burnout, and trauma.

Thought behavior programs are currently being used to allow offenders to live a life outside of incarceration, in hopes to rehabilitate fully amongst civilization. The desire to correlate the usage of the same programming for law enforcement agencies is to help define the problem surrounding how mental health will affect our law enforcement agencies in years to come. This will have a trickle effect on how civilians will receive police response as well as crime rates. More officers and civilian staff leaving the workforce at an early age means a higher

turnover rate and less experience in the workforce. This affects the agency, its employees, and the civilians that they serve. If there is enough support in the usage of thought behavior programs such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Risk Need Responsivity amongst supervised release populations, it too can be utilized by agencies to build resiliency against stress and burnout that officers and civilian staff encounter due to job-related trauma.

It could be argued that the resiliency of an individual has little to do with their ability to make ethical and moral decisions. However, Conn (2018) explained that if you examine a traumatic event such as a child being murdered, the amygdala, which is the emotional part of the brain will override the information-processing portion of the brain, the hippocampus. This interrupts an individual's ability to process the information and healing cannot occur. Because of this interruption, the brain mistakenly believes that the event is not over because it fails to store the memory properly. The brain will send intrusive images and nightmares as forms of reminders of the event because it is designed to keep warning you of perceived danger until it registers that the event is over, and the danger is gone (p. 3). These reminders of danger disrupt an individual's ability to process what is reality and affect normal brain functioning.

If normal brain functioning is affected, Conn (2018) argued that "an individual with less resiliency would take measures to avoid or mask the signals coming from the brain, hoping that they would simply stop if they're ignored" (p. 4). This leads to a varying degree of unethical and immoral behaviors that staff can succumb to. To ignore or mask these signals from the brain staff can use unhealthy coping mechanisms both on and off duty such as risk-taking, extra-marital affairs, and corruption to name only a few.

Resilience is neither a state nor a trait. It is a tool, that must be worked. Papazoglou et al. (2019) stated that "at the same time resilience does not imply that police officers simply rebound

to pre-stress levels of functioning” (p. 5). Tools that could help agencies build resilience in staff are agency training, external resources, and changing the culture of the agency.

These services promote a strong personal moral compass amongst staff members. “Having a personal moral compass means that our commitment to and participation in activities are guided by intentionality” (Conn, 2018, p. 141). In the hustle and bustle of the world today, it is possible to coast without paying to what our intentions are with an activity. A recruit, officer, or civilian staff likely commits to serving the community with the highest integrity. This motivation for a high moral compass can be lost when a staff member is experiencing personal or job-related stress or burnout.

The motivation for examining the stress and burnout that officers and civilian staff experience are two parts. First, staff wellness should be a priority for the agency. Lastly, strong moral compasses should be prioritized among staff, to protect against unethical behaviors. It is important to work with fellow officers who can be trusted to carry out their duties with the highest integrity.

The issue thus far with incorporating wellness-related programming are staff and leader buy-in to programming as well as securing funding for programming and resources. A strength is that there are various free resources that agencies can incorporate and refer to staff as well. Minimal changes need to be made to have a large impact to have a culture of wellness within an agency. Though that is a strength, the weakness is getting the agency on board with new programming, finding those resources and then implementing them. The blueprint for success in a culture of wellness for staff resilience begins with agency response. It incorporates the agency's mission statement, holding officers accountable for their wellness, enforcing mandatory mental

health and physical fitness checks, and values transformational leaders, peer support groups, and external support.

## **Background**

The issue of stress and burnout in law enforcement agencies is not new. Though the recent rise in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) early retirements has required agencies to reform their policies and practices to prevent further loss. The U.S. Department of Justice website states that “the Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act of 2017 was signed into law in January 2018, recognizing that law enforcement agencies need and deserve support in their ongoing efforts to protect the mental health and well-being of their employees” (para. 1). It is pertinent that organizations and their leaders prepare early and create a wellness plan that encompasses the length of an officer’s career to decrease the chances of stress and burnout and promote resilient officers.

## **Statement of the problem**

The accumulation of stress and burnout on law enforcement staff is prevalent. Job-related stress and trauma can lead to an inability for staff to carry out their daily duties and respond to the needs of civilians in the community. Ethical breaches in judgment by staff members can be brought on by the compounding effects of stress and burnout rates. Burnout on staff members is often accompanied by an imbalance between workload and support to carry out that work. This has a trickle effect on the quality of work that staff can give.

Moreover, if stress and burnout compound and are left untreated there may be further complications with a staff member’s mental health. If internal and external resources are not provided to staff, there is a risk of early retirement. The number of early retirements due to PTSD has increased at an alarming rate. If this trend continues the future of law enforcement will

suffer traumatically. This has increased the importance of agencies finding a way to help staff build resilience against the effects of stress and burnout.

The focus on mental health amongst staff is a newer topic within law enforcement. Few agencies have begun to pave the way with mental health initiatives. With no outline of a program to follow agencies must rely on the brief research and effective programming that has been created to outline their mental health policies and initiatives.

### **Conclusion**

Job-related stress, burnout, and trauma are not foreign concepts to those working in law enforcement. These stressors can cost an agency a loss of staff due to mental health-related early retirements, or a loss of ethical integrity within the agency. Building staff resiliency against further mental health requires work from both the agency and the individual. Law enforcement organizations can engrain a myriad of protective and preventative resources to change the culture of the organization and help staff self-initiate resiliency.

## **Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**

### **Blueprint for Success: Culture of Wellness Program**

Staff wellness is paramount to the overall well-being of any law enforcement agency. If this is a new priority for agencies starting a wellness program from the ground floor can be a daunting task. It will take involvement early in an officer's career to emphasize both agency and officer responsibility. To accomplish this goal a culture of wellness program should be formulated. The culture of wellness can focus on the agency's mission statement, holding staff and leaders accountable, mandatory mental and physical fitness checks, transformational leaders, peer support groups, and external support systems.

Resiliency against stress and burnout among officers is the overall goal of the wellness program. Resiliency can be defined as the ability to recover quickly from difficulties, or an individual's ability to practice mental toughness. A lack of resiliency can be described as a person being involuntarily bounced on a trampoline. Once the trampoline bounces the individual there is nothing that the individual can do but go with the movement and be sprung through the air. There are subsequent bounces that send the individual up again. This reaction is like a stressful event causing a mental reaction in an officer. But what if there were some sort of recharge they could reach for every time that they are bounced in the air? This is where an agency can step in for a staff member with early training, services, and support to teach them how to be resilient for the subsequent bounces of stressful events.

Organizations must place a value on personal responsibility for officer wellness, as well as taking responsibility for their policies, and procedures and appropriately providing resources to members within their organizations. The agency and its leaders set the tone for the culture of wellness among officers. To begin the culture of wellness program the first step for an

organization will be creating a mission statement that the agency acknowledges standing behind hiring and promoting staff who will take pride in their overall health and wellbeing. This creates officer and organizational responsibility for wellness to be a priority.

The buy-in of a culture of wellness among officers can be accomplished through a mission statement that is written for all who are affected by the agency's work. "The mission can provide organizational members and constituents a clear understanding of an agency's purpose, goals, and objectives. Moreover, a declaration of the agency's values and operating philosophy within the mission statement can provide a basis for ethical decision-making on the part of its members" (Stojkovic et al., 2015, p. 36). It is through the mission statement that new and existing members will begin to understand the agency's desire to employ well-rounded individuals. Staff will understand expectations to follow mandatory guidelines within the program, for both staff and agency benefit. This will begin the process of creating a culture of wellness within the organization.

Criticism amongst organizational members may still occur. Existing staff may not appreciate a new mission statement as bold as that or understand the value of a culture of wellness. Alternatively, a wellness program may lead some to question if it will create a budgetary concern likely believing that funds may be taken from other needed resources. It is the job of leaders within the organization to acknowledge these criticisms and assure that the goal of the wellness program is not to take away needed resources from the agency but add resources for staff benefit.

Leaders should preach the benefits that a wellness program will have for the overall health of the agency. Stress and burnout have an impact on an officer's long-term mental and physical health. Van Der Kolk (2014) argued that the process of wellness begins with the mind

and the body is the scorekeeper (p.192). If organizations do not begin to place value on officer health and wellness now it could lead to a larger list of individuals who retire early due to PTSD, or medical issues that leave an individual unable to work. This turnover rate will cripple the agency financially as well as lead to a loss of well-trained and respected officers and civilian staff.

Members within the organization, community, and city council should be aware that these early and traumatic losses of experienced and well-trained officers will also begin a wave of officers being promoted that are not yet equipped with years of training or experience to step into leadership roles. Lack of training and experience amongst administrative ranks will allow for problems within the agency that could bleed out into the communities that are being served by the organization.

In the making of a wellness-minded mission statement it is key that the organization does not risk officer privacy during the use and creation of this wellness plan. “Unions are key stakeholders and should be active participants in helping to create or support the expansion of mental health services for officers and employees” (Cople et al., 2019, p. 3). Mental health and officer wellness is a sensitive and confidential matter. It is the job of the police unions to make sure that officers’ rights are upheld. Alternatively, a violation of officer rights and privacy would be against the mission of the wellness program. It is imperative that police unions sit in on planning committees and subsequent meetings throughout the wellness program.

The second step of the wellness plan is to accurately provide checks and balances to an officer’s mental health, using psychiatric checkups. Crime scene investigators, do control checks on their equipment to ensure that it is properly functioning. Prior to the use of a smart tool measuring device to determine an approximate angle for trajectory, the user must ensure that it is



properly functioning and is reading accurately. If the tool isn't working properly or is missing components it is taken out of service. The most valuable tool in law enforcement is the people doing the work, therefore the same control checks should be applied.

In some states, before an officer begins their career in law enforcement, they are expected to pass a psychiatric review and only a select few agencies have a yearly check-in procedure after that. There is a lack of appropriate calibration to the officer's mental health if these psychiatric reviews are only given at the start of an officer's career. There are various ways in which an officer's mental health can be compromised throughout their career and affect their calibration of mental fitness to carry out their job duties.

To check the accuracy of a staff member's calibration, similar to a tool, a wellness program can utilize a yearly checkup with a mental health professional. Some agencies refer to these as "a checkup from the neck up". It is a way for the agency to revisit the officer's mental health. On a personal level for that officer, it is a way to be forced to examine their own mental health needs and build a relationship with a mental health professional, who will be easily accessible if or when they decide they need further mental health resources than the yearly checkups.

The next portion of the culture of wellness is to do initial and subsequent yearly physical fitness checks. An organization should set the tone for an individual to maintain their physical fitness. A chart depicting an example of fair and not overly strenuous physical fitness standards set and created by the Black Hawk County Sheriff's Office in Waterloo, Iowa (n.d) is included in the appendices. By setting standards and testing them an agency is claiming that there is an importance on an individual's physical fitness in one's overall health.

With an emphasis on physical fitness for the overall creation of a culture of wellness, officers will be allowed to work out on duty not to exceed an hour a shift. Walden University (2022) claims that exercise can reduce stress, help with depression and anxiety, provide an individual with better sleep and boost brainpower (para. 1- 6). Though physical fitness is pertinent to the overall wellness of an individual it should not interfere with an officer's regular duties. This is something that the agency should have written in policy. It should be followed up with by shift supervisors to ensure there is not an abuse of this privilege.

An agency should focus on positivity surrounding officer wellness, versus reacting when it is too late. This can be done by creating a desire and responsibility for personal wellness at the start of the officer's career. The next step to the wellness plan will be that an officer should be expected to create a set of wellness goals to encompass their physical fitness, mental health, nutrition, sleep, and emotional health goals for their first year and be followed each subsequent year. Goals should be chosen at the discretion of the officer and will be in addition to the mandatory obligations outlined in this wellness program. These will be followed up by a peer support officer, whose role will be discussed later in the wellness plan.

Having the officer create these goals at the start of their career and each year after, promotes personal responsibility for their health. When implemented at the start of a staff member's career, buy-in will benefit. This will be a job requirement that staff is aware of when first employed. Incorporating a mandatory yearly goal sheet will enforce the agency's mission statement and desire for a culture of wellness in the agency. A sample wellness goal sheet created by the author is included in the appendices.

The wellness program should effectively promote buy-in from the members of the organization and decrease the negative stigma surrounding asking for help. If an officer is given

a psychiatric review upon the start of their career the organization should take responsibility to maintain the officer's mental health throughout their career by providing services and support in addition to the mandatory mental health checks. By giving the officer discretion on additional and optional services it provides for less of a chance for pushback due to the officer being in control. This will be done through collaborative efforts with mental health professionals, and chaplains of the community. As well as an insurance plan, to include access to emotional assistance programs. Copple et al. (2019) claim that "in some sites, a collaboration between mental health professionals and officers was key to creating contextually appropriate programs that address the needs of officers while remaining grounded in science and research" (p. 4).

A focus on positivity can be done by creating a culture of wellness. Organizational culture, as defined, by Stojkovic et al. (2015) is a set of assumptions and beliefs shared by members of an organization (p. 252). Papazoglou and Blumberg (2019) claim that "Eradicating organizational practices that promote toxicity such as the use of fear and intimidation to manage staff is necessary for prioritizing wellness. To promote a culture of wellness transformational leadership, employee engagement, and organizational justice is needed" (p. 172). A culture surrounding officer wellness will not be produced overnight. It begins with the organization; through mission statements and setting the tone for wellness to be a priority. It is then turned over to leaders within the agency and personal responsibility.

Stojkovic et al. (2015) describes a transformational leadership role as one that contains three concepts: mission and vision statement, goal setting, and cultivation of creativity and imagination to address organizational concepts and problems (p. 206). Officer and staff resiliency is built through transformational leaders. "It is through the connection of mission, charisma, and vision that the transformational leader optimizes influence amongst followers,

while mentoring followers to achieve their potential” (Papazoglou & Blumberg, 2019, p. 173). The training of and utilization of transformational leaders is the next step of the wellness plan. The training of formal supervisors should comprise of recognition of early warning signs of mental health issues in their staff, critical incident response training, as well as how to connect officers to resources. These leaders must walk the walk even if they were not a part of creating this program. They must model a culture of wellness and support it. “Quiet but consistent and persistent support from senior executive leadership or administration is critical, and they must be seen to be protective of the confidentiality of the program to maintain trust” (Copple et al., 2019, p. 3).

Toxicity fuels toxicity and this is especially true within law enforcement. There can be stress and burnout on an officer due to administrative job demands or the toxic culture of a department. Staff members may develop cynical personalities due to the administration's past failed actions, views of society, or due to low morale amongst the administration. Gilmartin (2002) claimed that law enforcement officers form their worldviews and predictions about life from the situations and events they see every day. Cynicism is a result of past failures by the administration, management, and civilians (p. 26-27). It is pertinent that leaders break the cycle of failed leadership for officers to place trust in them for the wellness program to work.

Allowing for social support within an agency is one way to combat added stress and burnout. Agencies can do this by having leaders who model that behavior. Conn (2018) states that “Social support during adversities has also been shown to have buffering effects on the physiological stress response. This, in turn, prevents physiological damage, enhancing your resilience. Having someone nearby during stressful events has also been shown to have physiological soothing effects” (p. 149). Leaders can provide this support themselves or allow

staff to build support systems for themselves. Leadership not involved in the making of this program should understand the value in staff members, both civilian and officers, creating social support systems. Barriers to creating a social support system are shift work, as well as taking administrative leave or stress leave following a traumatic incident. Leaders, both formal and informal, can keep lines of communication open during these trying times. They can ask the staff member if they wish to have other staff reach out to them. If social support systems are applauded by the administration before a traumatic event the chances are greater for staff to have support during trying times.

Van Der Kolk (2014) claims that one of the ways to reverse the damage that trauma has done is to talk about it (p. 31). Peer support groups can be utilized in a culture of wellness program. This can be done by training current staff to provide mentorship to new or existing staff. An officer must want to be a part of the culture of wellness, therefore being a member of the peer support team should be voluntary. Staff should be comprised of both formal and informal leaders. It will be important to involve those who do not hold a formal role yet as there may be officer hesitation to seek advice from an upline officer. It is also a great learning experience for those not in a supervisory position, to potentially bring with them if they are later promoted. These services and support should be made available to everyone as supervisors may need a peer they are acquainted with and feel they can trust.

The training for peer support teams should include dealing with officers in crisis as well as how to find appropriate resources for personal or family matters. Peer support will last as long as an individual wants it. Those participating as peer support mentors will train once a year annually. Though a mental health check is expected once a year within the agency, it is recommended that mentors to have additional checkups yearly. These individuals must take care

of their mental health. It will also promote buy-in, amongst other officers if they can share experiences of what they were able to gain from therapy or crisis intervention. As mentors, they will be held accountable to carry out their duties with the best interest of the officer in mind.

Copple et al. (2019) describe how Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department (IMPD) has created a mentoring program that begins in the academy and continues through the first year or two of service. They utilize 144 trained and experienced officers as mentors. The mentors offer early exposure to mental health services (p. 8). This is a way to start a culture of wellness amongst new officers. Copple et al. (2019) argue that IMPD's program normalizes and incorporates into department culture the importance of officer resiliency and mental health. It is a way for the department to protect its investment and demonstrate its commitment to the success and well-being of its officers (p. 8).

If the peer support team is not beneficial due to a lack of officer buy-in because of a strong stigma for receiving help the agency should seek out additional resources that are more confidential and detached from members within the agency. Copple et al. (2019) state that programs such as Cop2Cop, which is a hotline for officer peer support, have been developed. It is comprised of highly trained staff with experience in law enforcement, through a 24/7 free and confidential service (p. 27). The peer support system is still crucial for building a culture of wellness and this should not take its place, but it is an additional service to provide to officers who desire confidentiality outside the agency.

A culture of wellness is a group effort. It will take collaboration amongst many individuals. As stated, it starts with the agency stating goals. It takes personal responsibility from an officer's standpoint and additional resources will need to be brought in. Copple et al. (2019) describes how Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department (CMPD) has created a similar wellness

program comprised of a close collaboration between chaplains, peer support, staff psychologists and department leadership that has proven effective in providing holistic support to officers (p. 8). Community members need to understand the benefits of a wellness program for officers.

A healthy workforce of officers is better suited to serve the community. Alternatively, officers who pursue more community policing within their communities may have an easier time dealing with the stresses, and cynicism that has been brought on by the job. Papazoglou and Blumberg (2019) argue that officers participating in community policing have greater job satisfaction and less cynicism as well as tend to be more resilient, more able to rebound from adversity, more motivated, and enhanced work/life balance (p. 224). Utilizing community policing for officer wellness has benefits for officers, their communities, and the organization as officers are more well-rounded to serve the public.

Creating a culture of wellness can also be done by offering group workouts, such as yoga. Van Der Kolk (2014) states that healthy individual's inhalations and exhalations produce steady, rhythmical fluctuations in heart rate; good heart rate variability is a measure of basic well-being. A lack of coherence between breathing and heart rate makes people vulnerable to a variety of physical illnesses, such as heart disease and cancer, in addition to mental problems such as depression and PTSD. Practicing yoga could increase an individual's ability to become self-aware of their emotions, trauma, and experience, allow them to better communicate their experiences, and help them self-regulate their emotions (p. 269). Copple et al. (2019) stated that Bend Police Department (BPD), in the city of Bend, Oregon, has developed a wellness program to include yoga and mindfulness. They have both strong leadership support for their wellness program, as well as strong buy-in amongst officers for the program. The BPD reports that the program is positively correlated to reductions in on-the-job injuries and improvements in job

performance and attitude (p. 7). This is a great example of how one small step toward the culture of wellness can pay off for the agency.

Implementing a complex change such as this should be followed up with. Agencies will not know if the program is effective unless they ask their members. There should be follow-up meetings to see how the program is effective and to include opinions from throughout the collaboration. All staff, officers, peer support members, mental health professionals, and any external services that are being provided should be included in the follow-up.

An agency and both formal and informal leaders within it can provide staff with proper support systems to fall back on so they can spring back up on the trampoline and have less chance of succumbing to stress and burnout. Agencies can promote officers' responsibility for their wellness by allowing them to create their own wellness goals each year of their employment and holding them accountable to them. They can stress that officer wellness is equally important to them through a mission and vision statement. An agency can diminish toxicity and cynicism by promoting buy-in amongst officers to a culture of wellness that is created through transformational leaders and peer support that is comprised of fair treatment and involves police unions.

#### Thought Behavior Link

Agencies can utilize thought-behavioral interventions to help staff build resiliency. Every individual brings with them different experiences and potential past traumas that change their thought patterns and therefore account for their behavior. The thought-behavior link, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), and evidence-based models are best suited for helping an individual understand how their thoughts affect their actions. These methods are often used for individuals under supervised release from incarceration. These same methods can be utilized to change the



thought patterns of law enforcement officers and civilian staff members who are experiencing job-related stress and burnout.

One such treatment method to change the thought behavior process of individuals during supervised release is the use of CBT. Fenn and Byrne (2013) state that “CBT explores the links between thoughts, emotions, and behavior” (para. 1). This can help an offender change their negative thoughts to change their behaviors. “CBT ultimately aims to teach patients to be their own therapist, by helping them to understand their current ways of thinking and behaving, and by equipping them with the tools to change their maladaptive cognitive and behavioral patterns” (Fenn & Byrne, 2013, para. 8). For staff worried about stigma, CBT can be used to teach staff to be their own therapist.

An emphasis is placed on the thought-behavior link to get offenders to understand how their thoughts become behaviors. Fenn and Byrne (2013) claim that:

A key to the cognitive concept in CBT is guided discovery. This is a therapeutic stance which involves trying to understand the patient’s view of things and help them expand their thinking to become aware of their underlying assumptions and discover alternative perspectives and solutions for themselves (para. 13).

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy can be utilized for law enforcement and civilian staff who experience stress and burnout due to job-related trauma. Often anxieties and withdrawal from people, places, or certain situations bring about avoidance in law enforcement or civilian staff who deal with daily traumas or with civilians who entice stressors. This is often common with individuals who experience PTSD due to a traumatic work-related experience. “There is a large psychoeducation component, where you will learn about trauma, how it’s reinforced by

avoidance, and how other ways of thinking and behaving either contribute to or take away from healthy functioning” (Conn, 2018, p. 177).

Bourgon and Bonta (2014) claim that “The Risk, Need and Responsivity (RNR) model is one of the most widely researched and validated models of offender rehabilitation” (para. 38). The risk portion of the RNR model states that the intensity of treatment should be matched to the risk level of the offender, with the greatest amount of treatment services being given to the higher-risk offender. The need principle dictates that treatment goals should be criminogenic needs that are functionally related to criminal behavior. The responsivity principle directed service providers to use cognitive-behavioral techniques to bring about change while being attentive to individual factors such as personality, gender, and motivation (Bourgon & Bonta, 2014, para. 1).

When discussing an offender under supervised release the supervising release agent is the individual responsible for guiding the offender through this journey of understanding what their risks are and applying appropriate goals, which comprises the needs portion of RNR, for their rehabilitation based on their criminogenic behaviors. Responsivity then shall focus on the supervising release agent working with an offender to understand how the offender can change their thinking patterns to avoid the same risks that placed them in supervised release, to begin with.

An example of the RNR model will explore a fictional character named Twyla. Twyla is a single mom of two children, who holds various odd jobs to support herself and her children. Twyla is a high school graduate who has no secondary education. She has no substance abuse issues, and no family other than a sister who has disowned her because Twyla has borrowed money several times and never repaid it. She has committed several thefts throughout her adult

life and has recently committed aggravated robbery, with the implication of a firearm at a gas station convenience store. A friend of Twyla's, who often gives her rides to and from odd jobs, convinced her that it was a quick and easy way to make money.

If a supervising agent were reviewing Twyla's case, they would state that Twyla's risk factors include lack of secondary education, lack of family besides minor dependents, negative companions, a pro-criminal attitude, and an anti-social personality pattern which can be described as a lack of ability to control oneself. Therefore, based on Twyla's risk factors she would be at an elevated risk of reoffending while on supervised release. The needs portion of the RNR model would state that based on Twyla's risks a supervising agent would need to focus on the direct risks that correlate to Twyla's crimes and incorporate appropriate goals based on that. An example of this would be eliminating negative companions. As she has a pro-criminal attitude it would behoove a supervising agent to explore why that might be. This is likely where helping Twyla recognize her thought patterns comes into action with the responsivity portion of RNR.

As Twyla has two children to care for and odd jobs are not enough to support her family Twyla has gained this sense of entitlement or a victim mentality surrounding her thefts. Behavior chains are one way that supervising release agents can help Twyla to pay attention to her thinking, recognize risk, and use new thinking to create a better outcome for herself. She likely feels she has no other way to support herself and her children than to commit these crimes.

Cherry (2021) states that "One's locus of control refers to their ability to feel that they have control over the events that influence their life" (para. 2). Likely, Twyla's locus of control is reliant on external control only. She has no means other than herself to support her children, and she can't get to and from these odd jobs unless she has a ride from these companions that

often solicit her for help in these criminal behaviors. A sample of a behavior chain, created by the author is included in the appendices. It displays how Twyla can be guided in pro-social and non-criminal activities by paying attention to her thinking, recognizing the risks that are present in her thinking and behavior patterns, and using new thinking to change her outcome. It also displays how Twyla can change her locus of control from an external victim mentality to an internal one in which she can understand she is responsible for outcomes in her life.

These methods could be used by law enforcement officers and support staff to help recognize their locus of control over events that influence their life. The RNR model use for Twyla was used to recognize how her thoughts created a chain reaction toward bad behavior. For law enforcement and support staff RNR models can be used for recognizing what they do have control over in their life. It will help them and their support systems to recognize what a staff member's needs are to appropriately direct resources. For example, perhaps a risk for an officer is responding to calls that involve children. An officer can use a negative thought behavior loop and reach for an unhealthy method to cope with that call such as alcohol, impulse buying or extra marital affairs. Or they and other support systems could recognize this type of a call as a risk factor. They could apply a resource for that need, such as a session with a therapist, or peer to peer counselor. This gives the staff member ability to respond and cope in a healthier way.

If such models are proven to change the thinking patterns of offenders and reduce recidivism then perhaps, law enforcement agencies can explore the same therapy and interventions for officers and civilian staff who are at risk of or are suffering from job-related stress, burnout, and even PTSD. As stated, every individual brings with them different experiences and past traumas that change their thought patterns and therefore account for their behavior. This is true for law enforcement officers and civilian staff as well. They may be

dealing with stress, burnout, or traumas from both past experiences and those gained from the job. “Some police psychologists and scholars have argued that first responders may encounter, not surprisingly, hundreds of potentially traumatic events during their careers” (Papazoglou, 2017, para. 3).

Compounding stress, burnout and trauma can manifest into larger issues for law enforcement officers. If left untreated that could inevitably lead to PTSD, anxiety surrounding a particular situation, substance abuse, and family and relationship issues. In response to traumatic and stressful events, many officers develop harmful and unhealthy coping mechanisms. This is in part due to officers’ failure to recognize the problem, but also due to mental health stigma, and lack of mental health resources. Agencies that claim to be wellness-focused and aimed at creating and maintaining emotionally well-rounded officers should aim efforts at finding resources for officers that are easily accessible and provided at no cost to the officer. Various grants can be available to an agency to fund these types of resources.

Agencies have an obligation to train officers through state licensing requirements. Often, these trainings are consistent with the use of force refreshers, legal and legislative updates, and basic first responder training. Less often do agencies train or emphasize staff wellness. Part of building resiliency should involve a wellness strategy that helps officers identify and prevent job-related burnout and stress and any mental health-related issues that can manifest from them if left untreated. This can be done with some of the same programs that are being used today for individuals who are being supervised in the probation and parole systems. Agencies can incorporate this training into scheduled training. They can introduce the programs and then offer resources on where to find CBT training.

Agencies wishing to utilize some of the same evidence-based methods that a supervising release agent would utilize for an individual on probation or parole would essentially trade themselves out for the supervising release agent and trade the individual in a life of crime out for a staff member. In most cases, these evidence-based practices will not be utilized on officers who are living a life of crime but helping staff change their thought patterns can be beneficial for a wellness-focused agency.

An agency then can also utilize Risk, Need, and Responsivity to help staff build resilience against stress and burnout. They can identify risks in officers in varying ways. Either an officer can approach the wellness unit stating they may need resources to combat mental health issues that are arising, a risk could be identified by a supervisor of the officer, or an incident could occur to flag the officer as being someone who could benefit from evidence-based practices. As a leader within the agency, it would be imperative then to have a meeting with supervisors to identify when an individual would be at risk and streamline a process to connect the officer with resources.

A plan should be set into place then to discuss what risk warrants what needs for the individual. Perhaps an individual works within the crime scene unit, and as a regular duty, they respond to death investigations. To then identify this individual processing the scene of any death as a risk consistent with needing evidence-based intervention to follow up is unlikely. It is however very likely that the same individual would be at risk when they process a gruesome scene of a death of a juvenile homicide victim, based on the circumstances that are presented in the case.

Needs would be addressed as what type of resources the individual needs based on what the goal for them is. Responsivity then is dependent on the circumstances of the risk factor for

the individual (stress, burnout, substance abuse, absenteeism, certain calls) related to an event. The agency could force mandated evidence-based interventions, cognitive behavioral therapy, or thought behavior chain guidance on an officer.

A way that agencies can incorporate the thought-behavior link is by using behavior chains as seen with Twyla's example. Perhaps an officer feels immense stress and burnout placed on them by job demands, lack of resources, and lack of staffing. Though there are many ways an agency can overcome those stressors placed on officers, there are also ways that a staff member can help themselves to overcome the negative thinking associated with these stressors.

As an individual officer cannot change lack of funding and lack of staff it is likely that an officer can be forced to work themselves to the point of stress and burnout. They will likely begin to feel like a victim, become disgruntled about calls for service, and their performance and service to the community will suffer. These thoughts and feelings of defeat and unappreciation by the agency will go back to that external locus of control. They truly cannot control the situation that is presented to them. Officers can control their thoughts and feelings about the situation though. Twyla's example of a pro-social behavior chain meant she would have to work incredibly hard to support herself and her children. A law enforcement officer under stress and burnout due to lack of staffing and lack of resources behavioral chain will likely look very similar. It is a way for an officer to change their mindset back to being service-oriented to the community.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is an additional tool that can help staff combat stress, anxiety, and burnout. Anxieties can accumulate for a staff member who has a perceived threat of danger or harm during their job duties. Van Der Kolk (2014) stated:

CBT was first developed to treat phobias, such as fear of spiders, airplanes, or heights, and to help patients compare their irrational fears with harmless realities. The idea behind CBT is that when patients are repeatedly exposed to the stimulus without bad things actually happening, they gradually will become less upset and that the bad memories will become associated with corrective information about being safe (p. 222-223).

The stressors for law enforcement are likely rational in comparison to the fear of spiders as described. However, perhaps a phobia revolves around a traumatic incident, talking about it and reliving it might place emphasis on the fact that the incident is over and the officer or staff member can begin to move on from that trauma.

Beyond stress and burnout placed on a staff member from job duties is the risk of developing PTSD which could likely be accumulated from on-the-job trauma. Witmer (2021) claims that stress management techniques and healthy coping mechanisms can help individuals immediately respond to trauma. CBT and Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) can effectively treat PTSD and co-occurring mental health problems (para. 8).

Papazoglou (2017) stated that scientific research has extensively explored factors that play a salient role in leading first responders to PTSD or preventing them from the onset of it. Risk factors for PTSD are distinguished into two categories objective and subjective factors. Objective factors consist of tension surrounding an incident, and fatalities and subjective factors consist of perceived life threats and peritraumatic distress (p. 4). Recognizing risk factors can aid an agency's identification of how an individual could be at risk for PTSD. Papazoglou (2017) claims that prior psychopathologies such as depressive symptoms, poor communication among peers, and poor emotional coping strategies may be pre and posttraumatic risk factors for PTSD.



In that mental health problems prior to traumatic incident exposure as well as lack of social support are factors that may increase the risk of PTSD (p.4). This places emphasis on the support an agency has in a staff members resilience. Papazoglou (2017) states that current clinical research and practices have developed evidence-based treatments shown to be effective in helping first responders ameliorate PTSD and perform duties effectively. Literature shows that CBT entails multiple evidence-based techniques that lead those suffering from PTSD toward symptom improvement and trauma recovery (p. 6).

At the forefront of stress and burnout officers should be given tools such as these to combat risk factors that will lead them to PTSD before it is too late. A step further from CBT and a backup plan for resources is EMDR. Van Der Kolk (2014) claims:

There is no question that traumatized people have irrational thoughts. “The other guys weren’t afraid they’re the real men” it is best to allow those thoughts to remain as cognitive flashbacks – you don’t argue with them any more than you would argue with someone who keeps having visual flashbacks of a terrible accident. A better way to treat these thoughts is with EMDR (p. 248).

If the goal for an agency is to breed resiliency amongst officers who are prone to work-induced stress and burnout, a way to combat that would be to identify and implement risk factors and needs in the form of resources for officers at the first thought that they may be prone to mental health issues. Papazoglou (2017) claims that elevated organizational and operational stress among first responders may trigger or deteriorate PTSD symptoms. Conversely, low levels of operational and organizational stress and a strong sense of confidence in their cognitive processing of a traumatic incident as challenging (vs. threatening) were found to be protective factors against the onset of PTSD among first responders (p.4).

These protective factors may not always be welcome by staff, due to the stigma attached to asking for help. Leaders of a department or a leader of a department's wellness unit could implement online CBT resources, free to use and accessible for everyone. Online therapy for law enforcement can be utilized for both personal and work-related stress or trauma.

One such online program that agencies can offer to officers, free of charge is Learn to Live, their website [learntolive.com](http://learntolive.com) (2022), states that they offer customized online programs based on the proven principles of CBT. The programs are confidential, accessible anywhere, and based on years of research showing online CBT programs to be as effective as face-to-face therapy. The site further claims to be able to help individuals identify thoughts and behavior patterns that perpetuate whatever an individual may be struggling with. Learn to Live claims to offer programs for social anxiety, depression, stress/ anxiety and worry, insomnia, and substance use.

By both increasing officer awareness of job-related stress and burnout, and providing resources to effectively reduce it, agencies provide better services to community members. If officers have a wellness-focused mindset and are provided with services that are free and accessible to combat and decrease stress and burnout, agencies are likely to see a decrease in officer absenteeism and an increase in officer productivity. This increase in productivity will likely lead to an increase in officer-initiated community policing activities. Officers who have a wellness-focused mindset, versus a toxic and cynical mindset are less likely to accumulate citizen complaints.

Law enforcement officers at risk of or already suffering from job-related stress and burnout can benefit from agencies implementing programs to help breed resiliency. Such programs come in a varying range of cognitive-behavioral therapy, and evidence-based practices

and can mirror those that are used for offenders during supervised release. It is agencies prerogative to maintain officers through a culture of wellness mindset amongst their workforces.

#### Ethical Downfall of Stress and Burnout

Stress and burnout accumulated by law enforcement officers and civilian staff are not unheard of in today's climate. It is, however, uncommon for administrations to recognize that this stress and burnout have a high likelihood for staff to succumb to direct and indirect unethical byproducts of that stress. When officers experience an emotional toll that seems to be unrecognized by the agency, they feel neglected. Negative byproducts of stress and burnout can be corruption, financial issues, lying, and a culture of mistrust amongst the agencies. To help ease these issues agencies can prioritize mental health and break down the barriers of the code of silence. When agencies can maintain mentally resilient staff, they will have an entire force who carry out their duties with integrity and ethical decision making for the civilians they serve.

For a law enforcement officer stress and burnout can accumulate over time due to job related stress, mandatory overtime hours, shift work, and poor management. Additional individual factors could include family problems, financial problems, and health problems. The trauma that civilian staff endure, is often overlooked because they do not respond physically to the traumatic scenes that officers do.

Hearing parents wailing as they have discovered their child is not breathing can haunt 911 call takers long after the call. People tend to fill gaps to complete a story. If you can only hear the wails, you will picture their faces filled with agony. Sometimes the images you imagine are worse than reality and no less damaging than if you had seen it personally (Conn, 2018, p. 57).

Stress and burnout have a negative impact on how staff carry out their duties. Coghlan (2020) argued that “Burnout stems from long-term occupational demands and organizational stress such as shift work, mandatory overtime, and punitive policies. Burnout can be associated with cynicism, demoralization, and reduced resiliency” (p. 9). Demoralization could mean a reduced desire to fully care for citizens’ concerns which could lead to ethical misjudgment.

A different kind of stress called compassion fatigue or secondary stress could lead to indirect unethical decision-making. Officers may make indirect unethical decisions based on these compassion fatigue scenarios by not properly recognizing the situation for what it is, and not treating the individual in an ethical manner, due to their burnout.

Coghlan (2020) argued that compassion fatigue stems from operational stress such as exposure to traumatic material and what psychologists refer to as secondary traumatic stress. For example, consider a hypothetical officer who routinely performs high numbers of calls-for-service and critical response. Over time, this officer responds to numerous calls for opioid overdoses in which multiple NarCan saves occur and the officer bears witness multiple times to both opioid fatalities and saves. This officer potentially becomes indifferent and apathetic to such calls and to the person in need. This individual loses their ability to see the citizen as a person in need (p. 9).

According to the National Institute of Justice (2012), “Law enforcement officers usually do not speak up about how stress affects their lives. Most departments have an unspoken code of silence about the stress and strain that comes with police work. For most officers, the work ethic and culture of law enforcement appear to accept fatigue as part of the job” (para. 7). One reason for that is the culture within the agency. Additionally, officers do not want to speak up because it

is accepted by the agency, and they don't want to be the ones to speak out against it in fear of loss of employment or the stigma attached to it.

Blumberg et al. (2020) state that "Some of the moral risks that cause officers to experience emotional and spiritual distress are exacerbated by their acts of misconduct" (para. 3). Agencies should be concerned that officers who experience work-related anxiety may be more prone to engage in unethical behavior. On a micro-level individual officers will lie, steal, and attempt to cover up their unethical behavior to keep their job. On a macro-level within the agency officers will turn to each other to help each other which leads to a culture of unethical behavior such as corruption.

#### Part one: External Resources and Resiliency

A major step of an agency's plan should be to provide external mental health resources that are free of charge and confidential. If agencies can provide officers with external and confidential resources, they are maintaining ethical boundaries while still providing resources to their officers. This is a way for officers to ask for assistance without the stigma being attached, and to ensure that the agency will not keep them from doing their job while they get the proper treatment they need. This sets the tone for the agency that mental health will not be an excuse for unethical behavior while on the job, but staff are given the help that they need.

The code of silence could affect a single staff member or officer from speaking up about their needs. Dawson (2019) claims that officers don't want to admit if they are dealing with stress reactions such as alcoholism, divorce, and thoughts of suicide because they see it as a personal weakness that could damage their careers (para. 12). As part of the agency's plan to help officers overcome fearing stigma associated with asking for help and admitting when they have a problem, agencies can offer outside resources. Dawson (2019), states that to overcome resistance

to programming for an officer the agency must focus on it during initial recruiting and hold health and wellness programs off-site away from the departments because of the belief that if you show any indication that you are under stress it could impact your career (paras. 13-14).

Ethical issues such as violations of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) occur when the agency is involved in or has knowledge of direct patient care information. An agency that attempts to hire internal mental health professionals such as doctors or psychiatrists may fail to fully protect the privacy of staff members and their health data may be breached. When agencies knowingly employ officers who are suffering from mental health issues that are a symptom of their severe stress or burnout it could put them at risk of being obligated to relay information for officer credibility in court.

A case that could challenge an officer's credibility is *Brady v. Maryland*, 1963. This was a case that "Decided that a defendant's due process rights were violated when a prosecutor intentionally withheld exculpatory and material evidence from the defendant" (Sergent, 2019, para. 2). The problem lies in the fact that "there is no bright line to define when evidence affects an officer's credibility; it is unclear where this requirement starts and stops" (Sergent, 2019, para. 10). A law enforcement agency must define parameters for when instances of untruthfulness or failures on an officer's part constitute them as non-credible. Officer mental health may be an ethical dilemma for the agency.

The government has an obligation to disclose favorable evidence under *Brady* that covers not only material exculpatory evidence but also information that could impeach government witnesses. The agency should make sure that the prosecutor is aware of any information about the officer, that would be favorable to the defense (Amato & Jones, n.d, p. 5).

If mental health programming is a focus for the agency, they may benefit from having a separate entity work with the officer. This ensures that the officer is protected and will not have their mental health conditions, status, or impairments disclosed to prosecuting attorneys.

An ethical dilemma that arises for agencies is the obligation to provide mentally well officers for the agency, the officers, and the community. They must find the balance between fully supporting their employee's mental health needs and having a force that is fit to protect the rights of all citizens. Turning a blind eye and simply providing the resources is not the only objective. There needs to be a conscious effort in the administration that resources are being utilized for at-risk officers at the first sign of issues. Ethical accountability will be held to the administration, individual leaders, and the individual officer. Everyone needs to accept their role. The administration will find, provide, and execute external resources. Leaders will suggest or if circumstances are present will assign individual officers to mandatory resources. It is the individual officer's job to abide by the resources assigned and the job of the force of officers to promote expectations that one's stress and burnout do not give them a pass to make unethical decisions on or off the job.

The next part of the agency's plan should be to promote resilience. Papazoglou, et al. (2020) claim that "Resilience occurs when a person establishes a certain comfort with ambiguous situations. To do so, it is necessary to acknowledge the scope of control and what is beyond influence. Adaptation and mental flexibility, when surrounded by chaotic, unpredictable environments, is expressed in resilience" (p. 7). Agencies can breed resilience to deter stress and burnout by incorporating a culture of wellness through training, services, and leaders who are willing to listen to what officers are going through.

This resiliency training begins on the first day that officers start. If trainers and leaders allow new officers to make their own decisions and correct them when it is wrong, they are allowing that individual to learn how to carry out their duties ethically. “To a large degree, police misconduct is responsible for eroding public trust. Such behavior is highlighted in frequent media reports of excessive and unnecessary force as well as in the now routine cases of overturned convictions based on unethical investigative techniques” (Papazoglou et al., 2020, p 50). If we can predict that unethical behavior could occur due to stress and burnout, we can prevent it with agency culture amongst officers and leaders with the help of resources from the very first day of an officer's career.

Providing resources sets a culture of wellness amongst the agency that will produce healthy officers that can make ethical decisions. Papazoglou, K., et al. (2020) state that “Fundamentally, a healthy workforce benefits the communities in which police officers serve” (p. 4). Therefore, promoting good health and wellness training and initiatives promotes a better workforce for the community.

#### Part two: Change the Culture

A personal code of silence can lead to cynical officers. Gilmartin (2002) states that the accumulation of stress over an officer's career can take a toll, on worldview, and outlook from positive to negative, from idealistic to cynical, and from physically active to fit and sedentary. This correlates to an officer's minor dissatisfaction with the organization, becoming all-consuming anger, hostility, and open hatred toward the management hierarchy (p. 5). When officers are left feeling neglected after enduring emotional scars, they become cynical about the work that they are doing in the community.



On an agency-wide spectrum, the code of silence contributes to noble cause corruption. Pollock (2022) states that “Noble cause corruption occurs when a utilitarian concept occurs that states that the end of crime fighting justifies the means that might otherwise be illegal, unethical, and or against rules or regulations” (p. 106). If officers see that their struggles are not being monitored and feel neglected by the agency there is a lack of a culture of integrity in duty assignment. They are more apt to feel that if these means of noble cause corruption get them a result, and no one is monitoring them, they should partake in this type of corruption.

Burnout can play into the culture of noble cause corruption within the agency. Michael Quinn, a retired Minneapolis Police Department (MPD) officer wrote (*The police code of silence: Walking with the devil*) in 2005. In the book, he describes the code of silence among officers by saying that

Every day is a new challenge and ethical police conduct is often an uphill battle. Even the best cops have days when they want to give up and do whatever it takes to put a child molester, baby murderer, or lowlife in prison. When you sit inches away from these scum and they brag about the truly horrific things they have done to an innocent, it's easy to abide by the Code- if that's what it takes. When evidence isn't perfect, you just use a little creative report writing and this guy will never harm another person again. Illegal searches, physical abuse, or even perjury, you know you will be in the company of many good cops who have done the same. But are they really good cops? (p. 5-6).

What Quinn is referring to is an act of utilitarianism being committed by officers. They want the win because they are tired of seeing bad being done to innocent victims, they may have stacked cases and be burnt out. Without evidence, they will create it to get what is best for

society. Pollock (2022) describes act utilitarianism as “The type of utilitarianism that determines the goodness of a particular act by measuring the utility of (good) for all, but only for that specific act and without regard for future actions” (p. 31). What these officers believe is good for society is a name behind bars.

An agency can change the culture by breaking the code of silence about what officers are going through. This includes having a plan in place to overcome officer stress and burnout and a plan to overcome the code of silence within the agency. This is a two-prong plan that will focus on prevention for new recruits as well as intervention strategies for current officers. Pollock (2022) argues that “Successfully changing a problematic police culture may involve reconceptualizing the mission, developing measurements of what matters most, improving recruiting, changing training to emphasize human rights at least as much as crime fighting, and changing the incentive and reward structure to encourage service-oriented policing as much as crime control” (p. 168).

Prevention efforts put forth by agencies include those where the agency understands that minimizing officers’ stress and burnout will also deter officers from unethical behavior. Prevention efforts will include methods for current officers as well as recruits. Blumberg et al. (2020) claim that with new recruits there should be a shift in the narrative to “Show the realities of the profession and provide clear expectations to potential applicants” (para. 45). Agencies must consider recruits in this plan to overcome unethical behavior.

Agencies can benefit by understanding what Blumberg et al. (2020) claim are the eight mechanisms through which moral disengagement occurs. They all occur when training does the following underemphasizes a service orientation in favor of instilling a warrior mentality, suggests that the end justifies the means, perpetuates a strong us versus them mentality,

reinforces a code of silence among officers and promotes views that victims are responsible for their own misfortune (para. 42). If agencies can focus on not training this way, officers will be more apt to be mentally engaged to make ethical decisions.

A major part of the agency's plan should be to have leaders who are present, have integrity and walk the walk when ethical dilemmas occur. An agency can end this culture of silence by being involved with their officers on a personal level as well as truly overseeing the work that they are doing. One way to do this is to formulate an ethics policy that is clear and concise, have officers train on it yearly and then have leaders who follow it themselves and hold officers accountable to it. A clear and well written ethics policy followed up by training and expectations amongst the agency would promote ethical behaviors as well as the understanding that the administration is paying attention to officer behaviors.

Supervision will be where this policy fails or thrives. Once the policy has been implemented and training has been given to all officers, it is the job of supervision to carry out the policy and oversee it. Buck (2020) claims that "Supervisors and all other agency leaders play a crucial role in the overall success or failure of the agency ethics policy. Supervision and upper-level leadership must constantly be alert and aware of any type of violation of the code, and, once violations occur, must address it in a swift and appropriate fashion" (para. 14). Therefore, leaders must understand the policy, and its verbiage and be able and willing to carry out reprimands when it is needed.

Agencies can promote ethical accountability by developing a stewardship model. In a TedTalk by Rick Warren, he discusses being a steward by saying "I am here for only a short time – it's not my world- it is part of my job to protect it while I am here. We are simply here to oversee (be a steward) in life until we die. Leadership is stewardship, you don't own it, you are a

steward of it” (2006). A leader is here for a short time, it is their job to protect what they oversee while they have it. That means leaders don’t own the agency, the officers, the civilians, or the policies of the agency. Leaders are here for a short time with the job to protect the agency's integrity by making ethical decisions for the community it serves and then passing them on to the next individuals. Agencies can build ethical accountability amongst its force by changing the culture of the agency to carry out the oath that they took when they first started and protect and serve civilians and this starts with leaders, both formal and informal, who act as stewards.

An agency must promote integrity among its officers. This can be done with a culture that surrounds it. Papazoglou et al, (2019) state that

Integrity is a personality trait that is strongly associated with ethical decision-making. Integrity involves honesty, trustworthiness, fidelity in keeping one’s word and obligations, and incorruptibility or an unwillingness to violate principles regardless of the temptations, costs, and preferences of others. On the opposite side of this is expediency which involves the idea that principles can and should be tailored to fit the context, that it is important to advantage of profitable opportunities and foolish to fail to do so, and that deviations from principles can usually be justified (p. 51).

An officer has an obligation to protect all citizen's rights. This does not include using false information to put the desired individual away. Changing the culture holds each officer accountable to the ethics policy and to uphold the oath they promised to protect as an officer.

Changing a culture of an agency to uphold the constitution and protect and serve each and every citizen is not an easy task. There will be a small percentage of officers who are unwilling to go along with a better culture and who are using corrupt policing for their private

gain. To fully promote ethical accountability and ensure ethical expectations of all the true forms of corruption have to come to end. To do this sting operations or internal investigations may need to occur to eliminate those officers from the force. The agency should plan to do this externally, to ensure fair and consistent investigation. To begin a culture of wellness that leads to a culture of ethics you need a force of officers who is willing to do so, and corruption has no place in ethical decision-making.

When an agency begins to focus on having healthy staff, they invest in staff who can make sound ethical decisions and create a culture of integrity in the agency. This is done by developing external mental health resources, developing clear and concise ethics policies, having leaders who walk the walk when it comes to ethical dilemmas, and changing the culture within the agency to be officer mental health focused first. This allows for the best service to the citizens of their community with integrity, ethical decision making, and a stewardship model of service.

### **Conclusion**

Stress and burnout are not an uncommon dilemma amongst law enforcement officers and civilian staff. It is often brought on by unrealistic work demands, and traumatic incidents. If left untreated it can compound into further mental health issues and even PTSD as well as leave staff unable to carry out their duties and care for citizens in an ethical manner. To combat this staff, leaders and agencies can work together to create a culture of wellness. A culture of wellness can include both mandatory and non-invasive voluntary resources for staff. A culture of wellness towards resiliency for staff is a complex job, that requires both staff and agency cooperation as well as access to external resources. By placing an emphasis on staff wellness, agencies set a clear expectation that it is both the staff and the agency's responsibility to maintain healthy and

well staff to meet the demands of citizens and calls for service. Creating a wellness program requires the protection of staff privacy, and physical fitness standards, providing external resources to decrease stigma, teaching staff to overcome trauma and negative thoughts with the use of thought behavior links, and the support of both formal and informal leaders.

### **Chapter 3: Implications, Recommendations, and Conclusions**

Stress and burnout on staff are predictable in a law enforcement officer or staff member's career. If left untreated they can have a compound effect on the staff's ability to effectively carry out their duties and ethically care for civilians. Agencies can create a culture of wellness program around helping staff build resiliency towards stress and burnout brought on by on-the-job demands and trauma. Creating a wellness program is no small task and requires the protection of staff privacy, and physical fitness standards, providing external resources to decrease stigma, teaching staff to overcome trauma and negative thoughts with the use of thought behavior links, and the support of both formal and informal leaders.

#### **Practical Applications**

It is no secret that law enforcement officers and civilian staff are subject to traumatic events that can subject them to mental health-related issues. To retain a staff that were deemed mentally equipped for the job upon starting agencies should find themselves responsible for providing resources that help staff prevent a breakdown of their capabilities of upholding ethical and sound judgment. Wellness programs should be the first step towards upholding the proper functioning of staff. Agencies should begin with a wellness-focused mission statement. "This provides a basis for ethical decision-making on the part of its members" (Stojkovic et al., 2015, p. 36).

The same models used to change the thinking pattern of offenders can be used to help law enforcement officers and staff members change their thought patterns towards anxiety and burnout. Utilizing the Risk, Need, and Responsivity (RNR) model allows individual officers and peer support members to identify needs within an officer based on a recent traumatic event or as prevention before an incident.

Noble cause corruption can occur when officers fear they must do whatever it takes to put an offender away, even if it means a violation of an individual's rights. "When you sit inches away from these scum and they brag about the truly horrific things they have done to the innocent, it's easy to abide by the code- if that's what it takes" (Quinn, 2005, p. 5-6). Prevention of burnout and a mission statement that stresses an officer's ability to uphold high morals will break down this code of silence.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The need for mental health policy and resources for officers amongst agencies is on the rise. Further research, policy, and initiatives must continue. A small number of agencies have begun the process of formulating wellness programs for staff and agency benefit. To narrow down how specific needs can be met of law enforcement staff and civilian staff, more research could be done concerning on-the-job stress and burnout. Current research aims at discovering what stressors are placed on staff. Minimal studies delve into what resources have proven effective for staff as prevention tools.

### **Conclusion**

Resilience is neither a state nor a trait. Instead, it is a tool that must be worked. For staff encountering stress and burnout resilience may be a hard concept to continue to work towards without the proper tools. A myriad of professional and personal issues may arise by succumbing to the struggles of stress and burnout. Agencies can provide both mandatory as well as voluntary resources to help combat issues that surface from job trauma as well as prevent it. Preventative tools that could help agencies and officers are training, peer-to-peer support, changing the culture of the agency, and developing an overall wellness plan. "It is the officer's resilience, coupled with support, which will allow them to heal" (Conn, 2018, p. 5).



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## Appendices

Sample of physical fitness expectations.

Black Hawk County Sheriff's Office. (n.d). *Physical Fitness Standards Chart*. Retrieved

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<b>MALES</b>					
Test Age	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69
Sit & Reach	16.5	15.5	14.3	13.3	12.5
1 Minute Sit Up	38	35	29	24	19
1 Minute Push Up	29	24	18	13	10
1.5 Mile Run	12:51	13:36	14:29	15:29	16:43

<b>FEMALES</b>					
Test Age	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69
Sit & Reach	19.3	18.3	17.3	16.8	15.5
1 Minute Sit Up	32	25	20	14	6
1 Minute Push Up	15	11	9	*12	*5
1.5 Mile Run	15:26	15:57	16:58	17:54	18:44


\* Females in excess of 49 years of age may do push ups on their knees.  
Normative data for these age groups have not been established.

Wellness Goal sheet example.

Created by the author.

## Wellness Goal

What are your yearly wellness goals? How can you take responsibility for your wellness in addition to mandatory obligations? To comprise of wellness at home and on the job.



→ **Mental health goal**

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Peer support group  
Yearly check-in with a mental health professional or more frequently

→ **Physical fitness goal**

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How will you maintain or better your fitness?  
How many hours of on duty workouts will you strive for in a week?

→ **Emotional health**

---

Will you read a book, attend church, get a massage, practice self care?  
How can you detach yourself from unnecessary toxicity within the agency?

→ **Nutrition goals**

---

What can you do to improve your current water intake, servings of fruits and veggies, cooking at home, meal prep.

→ **Sleep goals**


---

What is keeping you from optimal sleep conditions?

→ **Maintenance and check in**

---

How will you maintain these goals?  
Who will be your chosen leader (formal or informal) to check in with you on your goals.



RNR sample.

created by the author.

