TRUST

Law enforcement wellness: Promoting the "good" during the "bad" and "ugly"

Konstantinos Papazoglou,*† Katy Kamkar,‡§ and Jeff Thompson¶

ABSTRACT

Wellness and resilience have been at the epicenter of attention amongst many law enforcement researchers, clinicians, and professionals in recent years. Both resilience and wellness aim to provide law enforcement officers with knowledge and effective tools that can be employed during both professional and personal challenges. The current manuscript presents wellness within a context of prevalent conditions and/or situations (i.e., what is called "Good" during the "Bad" and "Ugly") that law enforcement officers experience as part of their duties as well as in their personal lives. The authors aim to raise awareness of police wellness that needs to be viewed within the context of police work and not in a vacuum. Considering that, tangible actions and recommendations are also discussed.

Key Words   Resilience; moral injury; compassion fatigue; self-compassion.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last centuries many scholars have devoted their work to studying the meaning of well-being and have examined the factors that appear to contribute towards one's well-being. To this end, it is believed that happiness, optimism, hope, and self-determination are integral components that formulate the epitome of one's well-being; in turn, well-being refers to one's capacity to increasing flourishing (Seligman, 2011).

A myriad of research studies (see, e.g., Gershon et al., 2009; Kuhns et al., 2015; Ma et al., 2015; Seigfried-Spellar, 2018; Walter et al., 2019) have shown that police work encompasses a plethora of challenges, some of which can be traumatic. Specific challenges include the multiple stressors police officers experience in their workplace at personal, operational, and organizational levels (Gershon et al., 2009; Kuhns et al., 2015; Terpstra & Schaap, 2013; Seigfried-Spellar, 2018; Violanti et al., 2013).

Aside from these known historical challenges police officers are faced with, recent events, including civil unrest, strained police–community relations, police abuse of powers, and having to police during the global COVID-19 pandemic, have further contributed to mental health and overall well-being concerns for police personnel.

These historical and current issues and concerns are complex and warrant a detailed plan to address them that is realistic, includes input from key public stakeholders and,

importantly, provides a response that is sustainable. The authors appreciate the complex nature of this endeavour and will explore one specific aspect that can contribute to positive change in each of these areas: officer well-being. This paper reviews historical and current contributing factors that have led to diminished officer well-being. Then, two critical aspects of creating officer well-being are reviewed: occupational and personal. Finally, the paper concludes with recommendations for a path forward to increase the "good" (officer well-being) while persevering through the "bad" and "ugly."

Detriments to Officer Well-being: Historical

It is not surprising that exposure to multiple stressors and potentially traumatic incidents may hinder well-being among police officers. Chopko et al.'s (2015) work suggests that over the course of their career, an officer can be faced with 188 critical incidents on average. Patterson's research (2001) states that police officers face an average of three traumatic experiences for every six months of service. Further, and more generally, research has also established a connection in officers between exposure to traumatic incidents and higher levels of depression and anxiety (for a review, see Violanti et al., 2017).

It is not just the incidents that adversely impact officers' well-being. In fact, it is the very structure of their work. To this end, shift police work appears to be one of the factors that impede police well-being. In particular officers who work

afternoon and night shifts report more stressful events and exposure to higher physical and psychological risks than morning shift officers (Ma et al., 2015). Rotating shifts and the potential to disrupt sleep can also impact an officer's ability to handle incident-related stress (Baughman et al., 2014). Overall sleep deficiency remains an issue for police officers as well (Bond et al., 2013; Neylan et al., 2002; Pearsall, 2012).

The police agency itself is known to contribute to considerable stressors for police officers (Violanti et al., 2017; Violanti et al., 2016; Violanti et al., 2014), and some studies have shown the organization to be the most significant stressor (Collins & Gibbs, 2003). The significant role of occupational stressors on the psychological health of public safety personnel has recently been further confirmed. Carleton and colleagues (2020) found that, among public safety personnel, across different positive screenings for mental disorders, believing you need to prove yourself to the organization and believing if you are sick or injured your co-workers seem to look down on you were found to be the two organizational stressors with the highest odds ratios.

Morash and colleagues (2006) explain that organizational stress encompasses a variety of aspects such as lack of influence over work activities, racial and gender bias, harassment, lack of opportunity to advance, and lack of a support network.

Detriments to Officer Well-Being: Mental Health Conditions

The aforementioned described factors may not only impede police well-being but may also create a lethal combination of risk factors that potentially threaten officers' lives and increase susceptibility to mental health disorders, such as depression and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Gershon et al., 2009; Mumford et al., 2015; Carleton et al., 2020). Officers' coping strategies, in particular maladaptive coping, have also been found to increase the risk of psychological disorders. For instance, avoidant coping (e.g., alcohol use) was found to be detrimental and debilitating for officers' well-being in a group sample of police officers from Sweden (Arble et al., 2018). Analogous results were also found in a study conducted with police officers from India, whereby maladaptive coping strategies (e.g., self-blame, denial, substance use, behavioural disengagement) rendered officers more susceptible to health issues that were eventually detrimental to their well-being (Singh & Mishra, 2010). In their research work conducted with police officers from upstate New York, Violanti et al. (2013) found that police officers' life expectancy was significantly lower than that of the general US population. More specifically, the years of potential life lost was 21 times greater for police than for the general population. Potential risk factors contributing to such outcomes were shift work, stress, and exposure to hazardous work-related conditions.

Detriments to Officer Well-Being: Current Events

In addition to historical factors, such as traumatic incidents inherent to the nature of police work, the contributing factors of an agency on officers' well-being, and the increased risk of mental health disorders, current global events have only further increased the negative toll on officers' mental health. Thompson and Drew (2020) detail that this includes having to police during the global pandemic, the increasing rise in police officer suicide rates, and the growing anti-police rhetoric that has called for police agencies to be abolished and defunded. This all can contribute to various negative coping strategies and diminished officer well-being.

Work by Kamkar et al. (2019) and Papazoglou et al. (2020) explains that additional consequences can be the result of what is described as a "moral injury." Moral injury refers to one's moral and ethical beliefs and expectations being transgressed by an event, action, or inaction (Litz et al., 2009; Kamkar et al., 2019). Although moral injury is not a diagnosable mental health disorder, it still can have a significant and long-lasting detrimental impact on an officer. In fact, moral injury has been found to impact, for instance, psychological, emotional, and social functioning (e.g., Drescher et al., 2011). Internal psychological conflict or disequilibrium can worsen social functioning by leading to self-isolation and avoidance, as well as mental health conditions such as anxiety, suicide risk, and symptoms related to PTSD (e.g., Bryan et al., 2018; Papazoglou et al., 2020). Combining the historical toll policing is known to have on the well-being of police officers with current events stressors, the state of policing today can certainly be viewed as being in the midst of both the "bad" and the "ugly."

Despite this cause for alarm, which undoubtedly is warranted, instead of capitulating to these mounting unfavourable policing conditions, "good" can arise. This "good" includes both actions by police organizations and by the individual officers themselves. The next section details how officer well-being can be promoted and enhanced through organizational and personal actions.

Advancing Officer Well-Being: Organization

The role of an organization is integral to promoting officers' well-being. In their study of police officers from Germany, Wolter and colleagues (2019) explored the role of job demands—job resources framework to either hinder or promote well-being among police officers. Their study highlighted that whenever police culture places emphasis on shared values and the sense of belonging and fairness, well-being flourishes in the department. In addition, the term *job resources* refers to the availability of adequate social support from other colleagues and supervisors. Despite the stressors or other challenges experienced by an officer, it is suggested that the availability of adequate job resources (e.g., peer support, fairness, team cohesion) that promote the sense of hope and optimism in the department may not only empower an officer to overcome the hardships of police work but can also enhance well-being (Arble et al., 2018; Padhy at al., 2015). This finding is in accordance with Gershon et al.'s (2009) work, which found that it is not the police work stressors per se that create mental health problems but rather the perceived stress and whether or not officers are able to employ effective coping skills to overcome work-related hardships.

In their work with Australian police officers, Birch et al. (2017) conducted in-depth interviews and found that occupational justice can empower well-being in police. The authors defined occupational justice as officers' active participation and inclusion in work-related matters and decisions. It is argued that occupational justice instils positive working relationships, closeness, and familiarity with other police colleagues. In addition, Birch et al. (2017) found that altruism plays a vital role in promoting well-being in police since it helps officers to realize that contributing to

communities by helping civilians and, especially, those who need support is vital in ensuring the quality of the services in the communities they serve. In addition, altruism is one of the human strengths that helps a person make meaning and find purpose in police work. The vital role of officers' commitment to the organization, as well as their discretionary effort to dedicate additional time, effort, and power to their work have been shown to be factors that promote police well-being (Hesketh et al., 2016). It is possible that engagement in an organization's processes and activities increases officers' sense of self-control as well as their perception of control over their work-related conditions.

Psychoeducation and related activities pertaining to well-being and physical health have also been found to promote a healthy lifestyle focused on well-being. In their research study with police officers from Italy, Acquadro Maran et al. (2018) developed a program in which officers were invited to participate in practical exercises that included tai chi, autogenic training, yoga, and meditation. Findings showed that officers were able to reduce significantly their perceived distress levels and improve well-being by participating in the activities. In addition, researchers concluded that officers who participated in their study were able to employ a number of practical exercises that helped them adopt adaptive coping strategies, creating a virtuous cycle of positive feelings as they reflected upon and introspected about their emotional experiences while they practiced the exercises. Wild et al. (2020) do caution that psychoeducation alone has limited results and should thus be combined with the promotion of activities to increase officer well-being.

The connection between mind and body is further enhanced through focus not solely on physical sensations but on monitoring emotional sensations as well. Analogous conclusions were drawn by Trombka et al. (2018), who recruited officers from Brazil and had them attend a mindfulness-based program. Their results showed that officers who attended mindfulness sessions were better able to reduce distress and improve perceived quality of life.

Advancing Officer Well-Being: The Individual

It is clear that it is the responsibility of each police organization to continually look after the well-being of its workforce. However, it is important to emphasize the proactive and voluntary role the officers must play in their own well-being. Being active agents in enhancing their own well-being contributes to countering a learned helplessness. Seligman describes learned helplessness as a mental state wherein a person is unwilling or unable to avoid negative situations and further feels like they have no control over it. Seligman adds that this learned helplessness further contributes to an unwillingness to act, weakened self-esteem, and diminished mental and physical health.

Thus, as much as a police agency can provide and promote officer well-being initiatives, the officer must not only take part but want to take part. This of course helps counter the development of learned helplessness, with the officer being, as described by Hanson & Hanson (2018), the "hammer" and not the "nail." In resiliency terms, this is further described as possessing agency—acting on and addressing what can be controlled. When a police agency promotes officer well-being, it can motivate the officer to follow through and act, demonstrating

the symbiotic relationship between the individual and the agency in promoting officer well-being. Developing and enhancing personal resilience involves a variety of terms and practices. Three of them, mindfulness, self-compassion, and psychological flexibility, are discussed below.

Mindfulness and self-compassion have been found to be positively associated with well-being (Neff, 2012) and negatively associated with psychopathology (MacBeth & Gumley, 2012). Self-compassion includes being mindful of one's negative emotions and thoughts, practicing self-kindness, and recognizing that pain and suffering are part of the human experience (Neff, 2003). Both mindfulness and self-compassion have been found to be negatively associated with PTSD and with functional disability (Dahm et al., 2015). Thus, prevention, education and interventions around mindfulness and self-compassion might offer further support towards the prevention of mental health problems and the promotion of well-being among police officers.

Psychological flexibility is another modifiable factor found to be negatively associated with disability and positively associated with quality of life (Bond et al., 2013). It is defined as being in contact with the present moment and being aware of one's thoughts and feelings within the present moment to be able to take a broader view of the situation (Hayes et al., 2006).

After accounting for PTSD symptom severity, mindfulness, self-compassion, and psychological flexibility comprised a single factor that predicted disability and quality of life among war veterans (Meyer et al., 2018). Thus, interventions aimed at building resiliency through self-compassion, mindfulness, and psychological flexibility can help achieve better therapy outcomes, better prognosis for recovery, and improved functioning and quality of life.

Making the "Good" Better

Fortunately, comprehensive work already exists in agencies and organizations across the world demonstrating that rigorous research and data collection are informing and guiding practices to enhance officer wellness. This section details some of the existing work and is not intended to be an exhaustive list.

The Fraternal Order of Police, along with NBC News, distributed a survey and collected responses from more than 8,000 officers. This type of data can strategically guide specific outreach and initiatives to address issues officers are experiencing (in contrast to generic outreach). Two important findings from their survey include trying to combat stigma associated with help-seeking and increasing the use of peer support.

The United Kingdom-based Oscar Kilo program engages in similar data collection using a yearly survey of police personnel on wellness (Durham University, 2020). The findings are used to create specific programs to assist officers in areas where they have asked for assistance ("Fatigue to be tackled," 2020). For example, they created a series of webinars addressing sleep concerns, collaborating with experts to provide information and tips ("Better sleep webinars," 2020).

With respect to identifying the literature on resilience and how practices can be developed specifically for policing, Tabibnia's work (Tabibnia & Radecki, 2018; Tabibnia, 2020) conveniently outlines numerous practices that fall within

three categories: upregulating the positive, downregulating the negative, and transcending the self. This work has already helped guide the creation of resilience programs that have been used by police personnel and other first responders across the world (Thompson & Drew, 2020; Thompson, 2020). Other resilience programs have embraced collaboration with researchers aimed at measuring their programs (Andersen et al., 2015; Balmer et al., 2013; Fikretoglu, 2019; Ramey et al., 2017). Notably, this includes a partnership between the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the Bureau of Justice Assistance, and the University of Pennsylvania with the Valor Program that is being distributed across the United States.

Finally, New Zealand Police, in partnership with Synergy Health, created a comprehensive digital platform, the Wellness Hub. Based on the continual collection of anonymous data, the content they provide is specifically curated. This includes podcasts, workout programs, mindfulness exercises, and blogs written by staff.

CONCLUSION

Police agencies have to acknowledge the burden and toll policing takes on its workforce. This acknowledgement of the daily "bad" and ugly" that is involved in policing, both in public interactions and those caused by the agencies themselves, requires action on their part in order to support their staff on a continual basis to demonstrate they legitimately want to increase the "good." This does not relieve the officers of their personal duties, however.

In order for the "good" to prevail, each individual must also be an active participant in developing and enhancing their personal resilience and overall mental health. In order for this to effective, both agency and individual practices must be not only evidence-based but practically designed. Practices grounded in science that have been created specifically for police officers are showing promising results and rigorous research needs to continue to test its efficacy, scalability, and sustainability. For the "good" to continue as the "bad" and "ugly" certainly will, this work and collaborations too must push forward.

Moreover, it appears more proactive to view wellness from a collective, multi-faceted perspective that incorporates various components, including a person's cognitive, emotional, social, physical, and spiritual well-being. In keeping with this approach, it appears vital that an officer strives to incorporate all those strategies to maintain wellness in life. Nevertheless, the role of the organization and leadership in police agencies is crucial in building an organizational system and culture that encompass wellness and mental health promotion. Of course, compared with decades ago, law enforcement has made progress towards wellness. Currently, most police agencies have wellness units and wellness coordinators, and most law enforcement professionals openly discuss issues of police wellness in professional meetings and academic conferences. As research progresses, with new findings and continuous conversations, we will have the opportunity to build on extant knowledge as a way to help officers maintain wellness and support not just for the officers but also their families.

In addition, while the establishment of wellness units, wellness programs, and related infrastructure is crucial, it is equally vital that wellness units be organized in a way that maintains open channels of communication with healthcare providers and police executives. These channels of communication will allow wellness to evolve over time, prioritizing police officers' needs and developing a philosophy of openness and trust amongst different stakeholders that aims to support officer wellness. To conclude, we are hopeful that further knowledge (both evidence- and practice-based) will allow police agencies to implement sophisticated, evidence-based wellness programs that are flexible enough to be customizable to each officer's needs.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST DISCLOSURES
The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS
*ProWellness Inc., Toronto, ON, Canada; †The POWER Project, San Diego, CA, USA; ‡Center for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), Toronto, ON, Canada; §University of Toronto, Department of Psychiatry, Toronto, ON, Canada; ¶Department of Psychiatry, Columbia University, New York, NY, USA.

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