

**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

The Emotional Intelligence of Undercover Officers

**A Leadership White Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Required for Graduation from the
Leadership Command College**

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February 2018**

ABSTRACT

This study examined the emotional intelligence of undercover officers and the abilities to recognize and understand one's own emotions and the emotions of others. This study explored personality traits along with perceived qualities for interpersonal relationships. Emotional intelligence predicts a level of insight; it involves the capacity to perceive emotions and thoughts and understand the information that emotions can provide. Emotional intelligence affects how we manage behaviors, handle social complexities, and make decisions. Professional organizations should identify the emotional intelligence of its officers pertaining to job-related performance measures. Emotional intelligence covers areas such as stress management and decision making. Undercover officers must be given careful attention and monitored to discover changes in personality traits which pertains to work situations. Periodic undercover evaluations can be utilized to gather intelligence that would otherwise go unknown. The objective is to perform undercover checkpoints to evaluate operations and effectively and safely monitor undercover officers' well-being.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|----------------------------|------|
| Abstract | |
| Introduction | 1 |
| Position | 2 |
| Counter Position | 6 |
| Recommendation | 10 |
| References | 14 |

INTRODUCTION

Emotions affect people in some form or fashion, but only a few individuals can accurately identify their emotions. Police departments are challenged with identifying criminal activity and individuals who are committing crimes and disturbing the peace. It is the police department's responsibility and duty to ensure the citizens are safe and protected. In order to combat crime, police agencies must implement techniques to acquire information to gain valuable information and evidence. By procuring reliable intelligence, departments are able to disrupt serious crime; therefore, they are able to deter potential threats. This is accomplished by assuming an undercover identity to employ the best possible investigative technique.

Undercover or plainclothes police divisions were first systemized in the early 1800s in France (Roth, 2001). Using undercover officers as part of law enforcement is a beneficial approach for obtaining much-needed intelligence to identify suspects and criminal activity. Becoming an undercover officer is dangerous work and can lead to devastating results. Undercover officers are police officers working in plain clothes units, and whether undercover officers are experienced or new to law enforcement, the undercovers must have their emotional intelligence under control. It is important that undercover officers have the ability to solve problems, make quick decisions, and be adaptive to situational changes (Yukl, 2010).

Like most police officers, undercover officers must be able to prevent and detect criminal activity in an ethical manner. However, deploying undercover officers can be hazardous due to various threats and the mental capacity of the undercover officers. Supervisors must monitor undercover officers periodically because without checks and

balances, undercover officer actions can lead to violence and have emotional impacts. Undercover officers must maintain various roles, either for a short or long period of time, which can lead to emotional concerns. To prevent or identify unwanted emotional needs, checkpoints should be implemented to assist in evaluating deployed undercover officers. This checkpoint system consists of comprising organizational provisions, accountability checks, and emotional designs to evaluate the officers' cognitive state. Many police departments do not have solid undercover policies that are aligned to facilitate the necessary demands for working undercover. There needs to be a well-penned documented policy to help officers going into undercover work, which can help with necessary training, protocol and procedures to keep officers safe and on-task.

POSITION

There should be psychological evaluations and checkpoints for identifying the emotional intelligence for undercover officers. For years, undercover officers used covert methods to hide their true identity in order to position themselves as a criminal (Ali, Garner, & Magadley, 2012). Being an undercover officer is a role played either for a short or extended period of time and whatever criminal activity someone might have engaged in is now their reality. To be the best, an undercover must portray the criminal and become the criminal. It is hard being a good guy posing as a bad guy. Oftentimes, undercover officers do not realize that while working in an undercover capacity, family members do not recognize them as the same person anymore. Being around bad elements becomes intoxicating, and undercover officers' negative behaviors are now valued and praised in the undercover role. Typically, the morals and ethics undercover officers once had appear secondary, and their values seem to go away. The things

they once loved, they end up losing because those things are less important to them. Undercover officers want to live a normal life but cannot because their normal is now abnormal, which causes the officer to revert to substance abuse, commit suicide, divorce their significant other, or participate in negative activities (Quinn, 2005).

Undercover officers should undergo a psychological evaluation on a yearly basis. Professional law enforcement researchers mentioned there needs to be additional psychological evaluations and mental health assistance to assist officers. According to Violanti, Fekedulegn, Hartley, Andrew, Charles, Mnatsakanova, & Burchfiel, (2005), Buffalo Police Department officers suffered from metabolic syndrome and research revealed this occurred in more than 25% of its officers. Professor Violanti and his research team further stated, officers commit suicide at a rate of 53% higher than the general population. Departments need to psychologically take care of undercover officers due to the specialty of their jobs. These undercover officers should receive psychological briefings prior to assignments and debriefings during and in the aftermath of operations.

Police administrators, leaders, and those of authority who supervise undercover officers, should authorize, review, and provide oversight to prevent ethical mistakes and wasted cost. The evaluation process should include operational supervision, psychological reviews, and exit strategies. Conducting precaution, psychological briefings and periodic checkpoints for undercover officers are infrequent. Agencies, such as The Northwest Louisiana Internet Crimes against Children (ICAC) Task Force comprised of 20 law enforcement agents, did not offer psychological screening before joining the Internet Crimes against Children (ICAC) Task Force or receive mandate

regular counseling for its officers. Undercover officers love the challenges and excitement of the job, but the fulfillment does not always translate to positive emotions (Salovey, Mayer, Caruso, & Yoo, 2008).

Undercover officers can be considered emotionally disturbed people. According to Mazzula (2000), officers need positive coping mechanisms to wind down, such as attending family functions instead of drinking alcohol. Undercover officers are in need of good resources to create positive coping mechanisms, such as speaking with professional mental-health guidance personnel. Officers who work in an undercover capacity add unwanted stress on themselves; therefore, certain feelings can manifest to overprotect dangerous situations that might have occurred. Officers that work in an undercover capacity have trust issues, mental imagery, sleep disorders, and might suffer from PTSD (Kim, Cundiff, & Choi, 2014). Seeking forms of assistance is imperative, because other undercover officers and police personnel are too engaged in the same situations and fail to recognize red flags of their counterparts.

The executive director of the International Association of Undercover Officers (IAUO), Charlie Fuller, mentioned he wished he had known the ramifications of working undercover before he volunteered as a plainclothes undercover officer (Fuller, 1998). Mr. Fuller, the son of an FBI agent, stated, he recognized how the job dramatically changed him throughout the years. Working as an undercover takes mastery lying skills and the art of manipulation. He stated undercover officers' must play mind games, and the double life destroyed his marriage and made him question his identity.

Mental and psychological issues are revealed when officers are involved in dangerous situations, such as shootouts, being reprimanded, suspended, placed in jail,

or fired. Undercover officers do not have the opportunity to transition like uniformed officers. The lack of transition causes mental and psychological issues because uniformed officers have noticeable authority by showing their badge and uniform. When undercover officers become too involved in the underworld and go to the dark side, they lie to their supervisors, drink obsessively, condone marijuana usage, and compromise their ethical and moral beliefs (Punch, 2013). Ultimately, these individuals jeopardize their core beliefs. Therefore, it is important to implement forms of psychological evaluations and checkpoints to monitor undercover emotional intelligence.

The decision making of leaders cause additional stressors that produce negative effects, such as insecurity in job satisfaction and isolation of all departmental association (Fernández-Berrocal, Extremera, Lopes, & Ruiz-Aranda, 2014). According to Shane (2010), organizational stressors faced by law enforcement include a wide gap in “social distance” which causes “internal communication” problems even in life-threatening situations (para. 4). Additionally, larger organizations reveal officers believe and perceive they have no valid contribution and regarded the organization as “self-serving” and indifferent about the officer’s well-being (Shane, 2010, para. 4). Wester, Arndt, Sedivy, & Arndt (2010) studied approximately 178 male law enforcement officers. The study revealed a direct connection between males and the stigma associated with seeking mental health services. The research supported the assumed stigma of officers who sought psychological evaluations and checkpoints posed a risk of being scrutinized by others within the organization. The research disclosed officer’s benefits from receiving assistance, and there is not a stigma for seeking help (Wester et al., 2010).

Adams and Buck (2010) studied the social stressors of law enforcement officers in relation to the law enforcement officer's peers and citizens. The study mentioned the job performance of 196 officer participants from 12 police departments, which revealed officers' ability to control and display appropriate emotions based on the current situations. The officers were afforded the opportunity to answer a variety of questionnaires and the results suggested law enforcement agencies and supervisors were stressed but encouraged to be mindful of the potential help to reduce overall organizational trauma (Adams & Buck, 2010).

According to Violanti & Aron, (1993) the authors examined police suicide and potential causes. The authors conducted a study of a midsized police department with 930 employees. The study identified 105 police officer participants of the 930 employees, employed at the police department. Violanti et al. (2005) revealed a positive correlation of depression and suicidal tendencies. The study went on to explain male officers were twice as likely to be depressed, and female officers suffered suicidal inclinations three times as more than their male counterpoints. Marriage played a major preventative factor. If an officer was married, he or she was less likely to commit suicide.

COUNTER POSITION

Law enforcement is an honorable profession; therefore, police leaders do not want to be labeled and officially recognized that potential emotional problems even exist. Community leaders believe that undercover officers just want special treatment (Farmer, Beehr, & Love, 2003). The issue most police management mention in reference to undercover work is that the undercover officers volunteered; therefore, it is

their responsibility to seek help. Although working in an undercover capacity could be dangerous and detrimental, officers put their safety and life in jeopardy. Even though injury and death is a possibility, management and administrators are resistant to recognize the importance of psychological briefings and periodic checkpoints because of staffing needs, cost, and the lack of professional assistance for undercover officers. Effective staffing is essential to maximizing organizational effectiveness. Staffing is essential for operating in an undercover capacity. There must be enough personnel to facilitate the operation to ensure safety and effectiveness. Depending on the operation cost, salaried officers must work effectively to control high threat situations and detain people if necessary. Cost per officer depends on the agency and the officer pay grade. Some departments pay officers per shift differentials and the depending on the hazards of the job.

Additionally, police management is of the opinion that there are little certified professional resources to adequately facilitate and address undercover emotional intelligence concerns. The beliefs of management should not dictate how officers are treated and the help they should receive. Leaders feel as though officers should know their emotional state of mind; therefore, psychological evaluations and checkpoints are not needed. The police administrators' reasons for not assisting undercover officers with psychological evaluations and checkpoints should not affect the way in which they treat others. In law enforcement, there should not be any form of discrimination because the law enforcement community expected to uphold the law and treat everyone fairly and aid with issues that might have occurred due to job related circumstances. It is

important for police agencies and their administrators to interfere when appropriate and ensure proper assistance is granted to those in need.

Leaders are of the belief that lack of emotional intelligence is hard to understand, and a counter point is law enforcement profession does not hold mental health professionals in high regard (van den Berk-Clark & Wolf, 2017). When officers agree to work in an undercover capacity, they acknowledge and agree to the hazards of the job. Law enforcement officers, collectively, do not have resources to turn to when they need mental health services (Rapp et al., 2005). Stress could place demands on undercover officers that pose psychological, physical and emotional pressures (Epstein, 2012). When officers are placed in stressful situations, there is a cumulative effect that consists from genetics, hormones, poor diets, lack of exercise, or even drug usage. Typically, indicators for emotional intelligence go unnoticed until something occurs or the officers recognize their own feelings and thought processes change. Often, emotional intelligence is misunderstood, which causes bad choices and counter-productivity (Epstein, 2012). Community leaders and those of authority should support psychological evaluations and checkpoints to ensure their officers have a greater correlation for successful careers.

To recognize the effectiveness of undercover officers, the implementation of evaluations and checkpoints are great indicators. While evaluating the undercover officer, the five components of emotional intelligence will reveal self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Epstein, 2012). Undercover officers who work for larger departments should be afforded the opportunity to seek appropriate evaluations when working in an undercover capacity by checking in with a point of

contact, such as mental health professionals, counselors, experienced officers, and when available, attend job related training. Distrust is believed and viewed as being a direct reflection of an evaluation with results that will indicate the officer is unfit for duty. Additionally, distrust exists when officers believe results will be forwarded to the chief and other administrators, which will lead to termination.

The majority of officers, including undercover officers, believe Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services is for the general employees employed at a department and only deal with employee problems such as marriage counseling, organizational stress, or financial stressors. Leaders feel as though the EAP provides enough assistance, but in fact, the program does not have providers trained in trauma to understand the chronic exposure to trauma and violence in the law enforcement field (Megreya, 2015). Although difficult, law enforcement officers frequently internalize their emotions and do not seek assistance, as seeking assistance can be viewed as a sign of weakness. Due to the lack of perceived mental health support systems, there is a higher rate of suicide.

As early as 1974, only a select few studies conducted related to researching law enforcement peer support (Mental health and peer, 2012). The major obstacle was and still is finding qualified peers in which to confide. Due to stressful situations and lack of knowledge, few leaders and officers experienced the pressures undercover officers face of a daily basis. The stressors undercover officers face consists of chronic exposure to trauma, violence, horrific events, and unthinkable criminal activity (Mental health and peer, 2012). Departmental stress, such as policy changes, shift schedules, organizational lack of support, favoritism, and discipline are other stressors that

undercover officers undertake. When stress is absorbed and assistance is not provided, there is a tendency for law enforcement officers to turn to alcohol or other substances to help cope with their chronic exposure to trauma and organizational pressures (Wester et al., 2010).

RECOMMENDATION

After a thorough review of available research studies, it was revealed there are only a few analytical research studies on the subject matter of peer support within law enforcement. Results and findings may be incorrect because of deficiencies in the evidence in previous research studies because law enforcement officers may not have answered truthfully for a variety of reasons including concerns about confidentiality. Due to the nature of the profession, undercover officers do not feel completely protected even when there are protective confidentiality measures (Fine et al., 2003). There are few peer support programs or no set standard for psychological evaluations and checkpoints to monitor undercover emotional intelligence. Additionally, the lack of professional mental health programs infrastructures proves a need to provide proper training to assist law enforcement officers.

All law enforcement officers can benefit from law enforcement peer support programs, which includes law enforcement supervisors, organizational leaders as well as all mental health professionals currently working with law enforcement officers. The importance of the study will benefit the current gap and provide practical importance for all law enforcement entities to establish psychological evaluations, checkpoints, and mental health programs. Officers are more receptive to seek treatment when offered more treatment options (Becker, Nakamura, Young, & Chorpita, 2009). However, if

psychologists suspect the health of an officer is being damaged through their work, they have a responsibility to communicate their findings to the officer's employer. Therapy options such as cognitive behavioral therapy and exposure therapy found 10% of officers were diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and 48% of the officers met at least the first criteria for PTSD (Becker, Meyer, Price, Graham, Arsena, Armstrong, & Ramon, 2009).

It is recommended that organizational assessments be utilized to identify the impact of officers. An assessment will be beneficial, such as the 360 assessment, which identifies individual or leader emotional quotient (EQ) strengths and development areas and provides working model to learn the competencies of emotional intelligence for developing emotionally competent leaders. Assessments are necessary tools that identify strengths and weaknesses prior to placing officers in situations that potentially would lead to misbehaviors. Organizational support is recommended to identify and recognize the emotional intelligence of undercover officers. By identifying the factors that comprise of emotional intelligence, officers can identify the five components of emotional intelligence: Self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Epstein, 2012).

Emotional intelligence is positively correlated with improving one's life satisfaction, self-esteem, social dynamics, and relationships with others (Lopes, Salovey, & Straus, 2003). The best result is to strategize a tactical wellness plan for undercover survival. Institutions, such as The Law Enforcement Survival Institute (LESI), helps in sustaining life circumstances and careers within law enforcement

professionals (Kydonieus, 2016). LESI serves to assist with training and providing necessary information and sources for healthy living in the law enforcement community.

The International Association of Undercover Officers provides reality based training opportunities designed and dedicated for increasing and improving the professionalism and training for undercover officers. Charlie Fuller and his associates provide reality based training, and the godfather of undercover, teaches the art of working undercover, by providing a personal journey of techniques and survival approaches used by successful law enforcement professionals who work undercover (Fuller, 1998). This intense training provides a range of instructors from across the country who share their strategies and tips on how to prepare and handle themselves psychologically.

Another recommendation, which assists with psychological evaluations and checkpoints, is an organization called Safe Call Now. This organization is a crisis referral service for all public safety employees, emergency services personnel, and their family members nationwide (About Safe Call, n.d.). The organization provides a confidential, comprehensive service which assists and guides officers 24 hours, 7 days a week. Safe Call Now provides education, healthy alternatives and resources to save lives. This is the type of program that organizations should implement and mandate for officers, especially undercover officers.

Leaders that take on the above recommendations, will positively show commitment to their officers by implementing regulations that identify necessary risk. This commitment of acknowledgement recognizes the importance to attend mandatory psychological appointments, undercover trainings, and assessment courses.

Additionally, the officer must be committed to the recommendations by attending all appointments, training, and courses. Management often place blame on the undercover by stating actions were not approved or give the typical indication that the officer engaged in an intimate relationship with the suspect. It is recommended that well trained and experienced supervisors are placed in leadership positions to identify problems and implement controls and systems to uncover potential emotional problems and criminal activity.

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