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LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE OF TEXAS

POST SHOOTING TRAUMA AND THE NEED FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES  
ACROSS THE STATE OF TEXAS

A POLICY RESEARCH PROJECT  
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE PROFESSIONAL DESIGNATION  
GRADUATE, MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

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## ABSTRACT

THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF POST SHOOTING TRAUMA ON OFFICERS ARE OF MAJOR CONCERN TO MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS. DEPARTMENT PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES PLAY A VITAL ROLE IN THE TRANSFORMATION THAT OCCURS FOLLOWING A POLICE-RELATED SHOOTING. MANY DEPARTMENTS ACROSS THE STATE OF TEXAS DO NOT HAVE SUFFICIENT KNOWLEDGE OF THE EFFECTS OF POST SHOOTING TRAUMA OR THE BENEFITS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELING FOR OFFICERS INVOLVED IN SUCH SHOOTINGS. ALTHOUGH THERE IS LITTLE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH TO SUPPORT THIS STATEMENT, IT IS CONSISTENT WITH THE OPINION OF EXPERTS IN THE AREA OF POST SHOOTING TRAUMA. POST SHOOTING TRAUMA CAN BE DEFINED AS THE ADJUSTMENT MADE BY OFFICERS WHO HAVE KILLED OR INJURED ANOTHER PERSON. THERE ARE MANY FACTORS THAT CAN NEGATIVELY EFFECT OFFICERS, SUCH AS, FEAR OF WHAT IS GOING TO HAPPEN TO THEM AND THEIR CAREER, ISOLATION, SLEEPLESSNESS, AND INCREASED DRINKING. PROPER PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELING CAN MINIMIZE THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS ON OFFICERS, THEIR FAMILIES, AND COLLEAGUES. DEPARTMENT CHIEFS, COUNTY SHERIFFS, AND MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENTS THAT HAVE THIS INFORMATION CAN BETTER PROVIDE FOR THEIR EMPLOYEES WHO ARE PLACED IN A SITUATION WHERE THEY ARE REQUIRED TO USE DEADLY FORCE. WITH THIS INFORMATION, LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND DEPARTMENTS ACROSS THE STATE MAY BETTER BE ABLE TO MAKE AN INFORMED DECISION, REGARDING THE PROVISION OF IMPORTANT JOB-RELATED PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES.

## INTRODUCTION

FEW POLICE DEPARTMENTS ACROSS THE STATE OF TEXAS HAVE POLICIES REGARDING PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES FOR OFFICERS INVOLVED IN SHOOTINGS THAT HAVE RESULTED IN SERIOUS BODILY INJURY OR DEATH. MANY DEPARTMENTS AND THEIR OFFICERS HAVE INSUFFICIENT KNOWLEDGE REGARDING POST SHOOTING TRAUMA OR HOW TO DEAL WITH IT. I DO NOT KNOW OF ANY EMPIRICAL RESEARCH THAT SUPPORTS THIS STATEMENT, HOWEVER, IT IS CONSISTENT WITH THE OPINION OF EXPERTS IN THE FIELD OF POST SHOOTING TRAUMA (ADDITIONAL RESEARCH INTO THIS AREA IS GREATLY NEEDED).

THE PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH IS TO PROVIDE INFORMATION ABOUT THE EFFECTS OF POST SHOOTING TRAUMA ON POLICE OFFICERS INVOLVED IN SHOOTINGS AND THE NEED FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERVENTION SHORTLY AFTER THE EVENT. FOR EXAMPLE, "PUTTING OFFICERS ON DESK ASSIGNMENTS AFTER A SHOOTING MAY SUGGEST THAT THEY ARE BEING PUNISHED FOR WHAT THEY HAVE DONE" ( REIDE 1996). INSTEAD, CLEAR GUIDELINES CAN BE ESTABLISHED SO THAT ALL LEVELS OF SUPERVISION CAN DEAL WITH EACH SITUATION IN AN APPROPRIATE MANNER.

IT IS MY HOPE THAT LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND HEADS OF POLICE AGENCIES FROM ACROSS THE STATE GET A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF POST SHOOTING TRAUMA AND THE NEED FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELING FOR THEIR OFFICERS WHO HAVE SHOT OR INJURED ANOTHER PERSON. NOT ALL PERSONS INJURED OR KILLED BY A POLICE OFFICER ARE SUSPECTS OR CRIMINALS. SOME ARE STORE CLERKS, COMPLAINANTS, AND EVEN WORSE SOME ARE OTHER POLICE OFFICERS.

INTERVIEWS WITH DR. GREG REIDE, HEAD OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICE FOR THE HOUSTON POLICE DEPARTMENT, OFFICER JIM CONALY, OFFICER SAFETY INSTRUCTOR AT THE HOUSTON POLICE ACADEMY, AND CURRENT LITERATURE, WILL BE THE SOURCES OF INFORMATION IN THE FOLLOWING PAGES. MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF BEING INVOLVED IN A FATAL SHOOTING OF AN ARMED SUSPECT WILL ALSO BE CITED IN THIS PAPER.

I INTEND FOR THIS RESEARCH TO BE USED AS A GUIDE FOR OTHER DEPARTMENTS IN TEXAS AND ELSEWHERE TO UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF ESTABLISHING PROPER PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES POLICIES. SEVERAL PARTICIPANTS MAY BE INVOLVED IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUCH A POLICY, INCLUDING THE CHIEF OF POLICE OR SHERIFF, POLICE OFFICERS, CITY COUNCIL OR OTHER LEGISLATIVE UNITS UNDER WHICH POLICE AGENCIES MUST OPERATE, THE COURTS, AND THE CHIEF'S OWN PEER GROUP (MORE 96-98).

#### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

SIXTY-THREE PERCENT OF OFFICERS INVOLVED IN SHOOTINGS SUFFER SOME SIGNIFICANT FORM OF POST SHOOTING TRAUMA. IF AN OFFICER WHO HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN A SHOOTING IS NOT AFFORDED COUNSELING AND IS LATER INVOLVED IN A SIMILAR SITUATION, 70 PERCENT WILL BE WOUNDED OR KILLED IN THE SECOND INCIDENT (BETTINGER 91). THIS MAY BE DUE, IN PART, TO THE PREVIOUS TRAUMATIC INCIDENT BEING UNRESOLVED. DR.REIDE THINKS THAT OFFICERS WHO HAVE DEALT PROPERLY WITH A SHOOTING REACT MUCH MORE ALERTLY DURING ADDITIONAL CONFRONTATIONS (REIDE 1996).

SEVERAL PERCEPTUAL DISTORTIONS MAY OCCUR DURING A SHOOTING INCIDENT. THE PERCEPTION OF TIME MAY BE GREATLY EXPANDED DURING A SHOOTING, PRODUCING SLOW MOTION MOVEMENTS BY THE ACTORS. REPORTS OF VISUAL DISTORTIONS ARE COMMON. TUNNEL VISION IS THE MOST COMMON VISUAL DISTORTION, WHEREIN THE OFFICER FOCUSES ON THE THREAT WHILE OTHER ACTIONS OR OBJECTS GO UNNOTICED. AUDITORY DISTORTIONS MAY ALSO OCCUR. MANY OFFICERS REPORT GUNSHOTS SOUNDING LIKE GRENADES, POP GUNS, OR EVEN PRODUCING NO SOUND AT ALL. EMOTIONAL NUMBING IS OFTEN THE FIRST REACTION FOLLOWING A SHOOTING. THERE MAY BE A DENIAL OF EMOTIONS. MANY OFFICERS IMMEDIATELY AFTER A SHOOTING MAY SAY THEY FEEL FINE, THEY ARE GLAD THAT THEY ARE ALIVE, AND HAVE NO OTHER ADVERSE EFFECTS. LATER, IN SOME CASES THE SAME DAY, THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF THE EXPERIENCE CAN HIT HARD.

IT HAS BEEN MY EXPERIENCE THAT PEERS OF THE OFFICER INVOLVED IN THE SHOOTING REACT IN MANY DIFFERENT WAYS. MOST ARE SYMPATHETIC, SOME JOKE ABOUT IT, WHILE SOME ARE JEALOUS OF THE SUPPOSED HERO STATUS THAT HAS BEEN HEAPED UPON YOU WHILE THEY CONTINUE PERFORMING THEIR MUNDANE, EVERYDAY TASKS. IT IS NEVER ACCEPTABLE TO REFER TO A COLLEAGUE INVOLVED IN A SHOOTING BY NICK NAMES SUCH AS BULLSEYE, DIRTY HARRY, TERMINATOR, OR ANY OTHER DEROGATORY TITLE. FROM MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE, THIS IS NOT HUMOROUS OR DESIRED. WHILE ALL OF THIS IS OCCURRING, THE INVOLVED OFFICER OR OFFICERS MAY EXPERIENCE FLASHBACKS, FEAR OF INSANITY OR LOSS OF EMOTIONAL CONTROL, GUILT OR SORROW, DEPRESSION, A HEIGHTENED SENSE OF DANGER, OR EVEN ANGER TOWARDS THE SUBJECT (REIDE 1996).

MOST SHOOTINGS HAPPEN VERY QUICKLY AND AT CLOSE RANGE, ACCORDING TO OFFICER JIM CONALY. TWO TO THREE SHOTS AT 4 TO 5 FEET AWAY FROM THE SUSPECT ARE TYPICAL (CONALY 1996). CONALY FEELS THAT SOME OFFICERS MAY BLAME THEMSELVES BECAUSE THEY MAY HAVE MADE SAFETY MISTAKES SUCH AS LOOSING COVER, GETTING TOO CLOSE TO A SUSPECT, OR LOOSING CONTROL OF THEMSELVES OR THE SITUATION (CONALY 1996). WHILE THIS MAY BE TRUE IT IS SUSPECTS WHO DECIDE THEIR FATE.

EACH SHOOTING CIRCUMSTANCES WILL BE DISTINCT. REIDE SAYS THE BEST WAY FOR PEERS AND SUPERVISORS TO DEAL WITH OFFICERS INVOLVED IN A SHOOTING IS TO SHOW CONCERN FOR THEM RATHER THAN ASK THEM WHAT HAPPENED, AND NEVER CONGRATULATE THEM. THE OFFICERS DO NOT FEEL THAT THEY HAS DONE ANYTHING FOR WHICH THEY SHOULD BE CONGRATULATED (REIDE 1996). MOST OFFICERS HAVE BEEN RAISED IN A CULTURE THAT TEACHES "THOU SHALL NOT KILL" WHICH IS IN CONFLICT WITH WHAT THEY HAVE DONE, KILLED ANOTHER PERSON. FOR THE hardcore MEMBERS OF PACIFIST RELIGIONS, THE ANSWER IS SIMPLE. NO HUMAN LIFE SHOULD EVER BE TAKEN. A POLICE OFFICER WHO SUBSCRIBES TO THIS BELIEF MAY BE WELL ADVISED TO TAKE ANOTHER PROFESSION (SCHULTZ 26).

THE TIME BETWEEN THE SHOOTING AND WHEN THE OFFICER RECEIVES COUNSELING CAN VARY. DR. REIDE BELIEVES 2 TO 3 DAYS IS A GOOD TIME FRAME. THIS GIVES OFFICERS TIME TO THINK ABOUT WHAT HAS HAPPENED SO THEY CAN BETTER RELATE THE INCIDENT TO THE PSYCHOLOGIST (REIDE 1996). THE OFFICER WILL PROBABLY BE REQUIRED TO GIVE FACTUAL INFORMATION TO INVESTIGATORS WHILE STILL AT THE SCENE. THEY MAY EVEN BE REQUIRED TO GIVE ADDITIONAL FACTUAL STATEMENTS OVER THE NEXT FEW DAYS, BUT THE EMOTIONAL TRAUMA EXPERIENCED CAN BE DELAYED UNTIL THE OFFICER HAS TIME TO REFLECT ON THE EVENT.

WITHOUT PROPER COUNSELING CERTAIN NEGATIVE BEHAVIORS MAY BEGIN TO APPEAR. SOME OFFICERS BEGIN TO FEEL ALIENATED FROM THE COMMUNITY (BONIFACIO 126) AND THIS FEELING MAY INCREASE AND BEGIN TO INCLUDE THE OFFICERS DISTANCING THEMSELVES FROM THEIR FRIENDS AND FAMILY. THEY MAY BEGIN TO INCREASE THEIR CONSUMPTION OF ALCOHOL TO THE POINT OF BECOMING AN ALCOHOLIC. OFFICERS BELONG TO A MALE DOMINATED PARAMILITARY SETTING WHERE HIGHER LEVELS OF ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION ARE ENCOURAGED (CHANDLER 125). THE NATIONAL COUNCIL ON ALCOHOLISM ESTIMATES THAT EACH PROBLEM DRINKER COSTS THE EMPLOYER AN AVERAGE OF \$3,000 PER YEAR IN SICK PAY, ACCIDENTS, AND LOST PRODUCTIVITY (PUBLIC PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT 155).

SOME CITIES MAY MAKE A SETTLEMENT WITH THE SUSPECT OR THEIR FAMILY TO KEEP THE CASE FROM GOING TO LITIGATION, THUS SAVING THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS. HOWEVER, THIS CAN BE PERCEIVED BY OFFICERS AS BEING AN ADMISSION THAT THEY WERE WRONG FOR WHAT THEY DID. "...ALTHOUGH YOU ARE CLEAN, A SETTLEMENT OFFERED TO A BAD GUY MAKES IT LOOK TO THE PUBLIC AS THOUGH YOU HAVE DONE SOMETHING WRONG..." (MCARDLE 71).

SOME DEPARTMENTS HAVE POST-SHOOTING SUPPORT TEAMS. THESE TEAMS TYPICALLY ARE COMPOSED OF OFFICERS IN NEUTRAL POSITIONS WHO ARE TRUSTED AND WELL LIKED. THE OFFICERS SHOULD BE ASKED IF THEY WANT TO TALK TO THE TEAM, BUT SHOULD NOT BE REQUIRED TO DO THIS. THE PURPOSE OF THE MEETING SHOULD BE

TO SUPPORT OFFICERS IN TALKING ABOUT THEIR FEELINGS OF THE SITUATION. THESE TEAMS TYPICALLY SUPPORT THE STAFF OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES, BUT DO NOT REPLACE THEM. A POLICY CAN BE CUSTOM FITTED TO EACH AGENCY REGARDING EXTRA SERVICES SUCH AS A POST-SHOOTING RESPONSE TEAM, BUT IT SHOULD ALWAYS INCLUDE ACCESS TO AN EXPERIENCED PSYCHOLOGIST.

#### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

WITHOUT AVAILABLE PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELING FOR OFFICERS INVOLVED IN SHOOTINGS OFFICERS MAY GO THROUGH ALL THREE PHASES OF THE GENERAL ADAPTATION SYNDROME (GAS) AS DESCRIBED BY HAS SELYE. ALARM, RESISTANCE, AND EXHAUSTION (MORE AND WAGNER 201). THE ALARM STAGE CAN BE CHARACTERIZED AS THE INCIDENT OF THE SHOOTING, THE RESISTANCE STAGE IS THAT OF EMOTIONAL DENIAL AFTER THE EVENT, AND THE EXHAUSTION STAGE IS MENTAL DETERIORATION, SUCH AS ALCOHOLISM, ABSENTEEISM, OR LEAVING THE JOB. IT IS BELIEVED WITH PROPER COUNSELING THE AVERSIVE AFFECTS OF THIS SYNDROME CAN BE REDUCED.

DR. DAVID BISSETT, STAFF PSYCHOLOGIST WITH THE HOUSTON POLICE DEPARTMENT'S PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES DIVISION BELIEVES THAT THE MOST IMPORTANT THING THAT CAN BE DONE FOR AN OFFICER WHO IS INVOLVED IN A SHOOTING IS TO LISTEN WITHOUT JUDGEMENT (BISSETT 1996). THE ONLY PROPER WAY TO ACCOMPLISH THIS IS TO PROVIDE PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELING FOR THE OFFICER. MOST POLICE OFFICERS HAVE LITTLE OR NO TRAINING IN PEER COUNSELING (CONALY 1996). IF THEY DO HAVE ANY, CHANCES ARE IT IS NOT IN THE AREA OF POST SHOOTING TRAUMA. IT IS DIFFICULT FOR POLICE OFFICERS, REGARDLESS OF RANK, TO LISTEN CAREFULLY TO THE OFFICERS WITHOUT PASSING JUDGEMENT ON THEM OR THE PERSON THAT HAS BEEN SHOT. OFFICERS MAY WITHDRAWAL INTO AN EMOTIONAL ISOLATION IF THEY THINK THAT NO ONE WILL UNDERSTAND WHAT THEY ARE GOING THROUGH. FOR THESE REASONS IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT EVERY AGENCY ACROSS THE STATE ADOPT A POLICY MANDATING PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES BE AVAILABLE FOR OFFICER INVOLVED IN A SHOOTING.



DR. GREG REIDE BELIEVES THAT THE HOUSTON POLICE DEPARTMENT'S POLICY OF REQUIRING AT LEAST ONE VISIT TO PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES AFTER A SHOOTING IS A GOOD ONE. "AFTER ONE VISIT SOME OFFICERS ADJUST FINE AND CAN GO ON THEIR WAY" (REIDE 1996). THE DOOR SHOULD REMAIN OPEN FOR THOSE OFFICERS WHO DO HAVE TROUBLE READJUSTING. "SOME OFFICERS LIKE TO BRING THEIR FAMILIES BACK FOR A VISIT BECAUSE THEIR FAMILIES HAVE ALSO BEEN AFFECTED BY THE SHOOTING AND THE OFFICERS DO NOT WANT THE INCIDENT TO CHANGE AN OTHERWISE STABLE RELATIONSHIP" (REIDE 1996).

ADDITIONALLY, THE HOUSTON POLICE DEPARTMENT'S POLICY GIVES THE OFFICER UP TO THREE DAYS OF ADMINISTRATIVE LEAVE OFF AFTER THEY HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN A SHOOTING. "THIS POLICY IS SO THE OFFICER CAN TAKE HIS SON FISHING, WIFE SHOPPING OR WHATEVER. THAT WAY THE OFFICER CAN RESUME HIS NORMAL PERSONAL LIFE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AFTER THE INCIDENT" (REIDE 1996).

THE DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN WOUNDING OR KILLING A PERSON, AS IT RELATES TO THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT ON THE OFFICER, MAY NOT BE THAT GREAT. IT SEEMS TO BE THE SAME ENCOUNTER, SIMPLY DISTINGUISHED BY A TURN OF FORTUNE THAT DETERMINES WHETHER A FIRED BULLET IS A "HIT" OR A "MISS". A HIT WILL BE FOLLOWED BY ONE QUESTION "DID IT KILL"? A MISS LEADS TO DEBATES AS TO WHY IT WAS A MISS INSTEAD OF A HIT (FIELD 154). APART FROM GIVING STATEMENTS TO HOMICIDE DIVISION, INTERNAL AFFAIRS DIVISION, AND THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE, THE OFFICER SHOULD NOT BE REQUIRED TO ENGAGE IN SUCH A DEBATE. TYPICALLY PSYCHOLOGIST TRAINED IN POST SHOOTING TRAUMA ARE THE ONES WHO INFORM OFFICERS OF THE IMPORTANCE NOT TO EXPAND ON THE INCIDENT TO PEERS, FRIENDS, OR ACQUAINTANCES. DR. REIDE THINKS OFFICERS SHOULD HAVE THREE STORIES IN THEIR MENTAL LIBRARY. FIRST, COMPLETE DETAILS OF THE EVENT FOR A SELECT FEW CLOSE FAMILY MEMBERS AND FRIENDS. SECONDLY, A VERY GENERIC VERSION FOR THRILL SEEKERS AT WORK, AND LASTLY, NO STORY AT ALL, SIMPLY REFUSE TO TELL ABOUT THE EVENT WITH ACQUAINTANCES (REIDE 1996).

THE POLICE ROLE IN OUR SOCIETY IS A COMPLEX ONE, INVOLVING THREE DIFFERENT GOALS: ENFORCING THE LAW, MAINTAINING ORDER, AND PROVIDING A WIDE RANGE OF SERVICES. PEOPLE GENERALLY RESPECT AND ADMIRE LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS, HOWEVER, OFFICERS TEND TO OVER ESTIMATE PUBLIC HOSTILITY TOWARDS THEM (ELLISON 51). AS SOON AS POSSIBLE OFFICERS SHOULD BE ABLE TO RETURN TO THEIR REGULAR DUTIES FOR SEVERAL REASONS. OFFICERS NEED TO KNOW THAT THEY CAN STILL FUNCTION AT THEIR DUTIES AND IT IS HEALTHY FOR THEM TO FEEL THE SUPPORT THAT COMMUNITIES GIVE THEM DAILY. IT ALSO ALLOWS OFFICERS TO REALIZE THAT THEIR INCIDENT WAS THE EXCEPTION AND NOT THE RULE, AND THAT MOST PEOPLE LIKE THEM AND DO NOT WANT TO KILL OR HURT THEM. IF OFFICERS PATROLLED ALONE BEFORE THE SHOOTING THEY SHOULD REMAIN ALONE, AND THE SAME IS TRUE IF THEY HAVE A PARTNER, THEY SHOULD REMAIN TOGETHER. THIS WAY NOBODY FEELS PUNISHED AND EVERYONE INVOLVED FEELS THAT THEY ARE BEING SUPPORTED (REIDE 1996).

SUPERVISORS HAVE AN IMPORTANT JOB TO DO AFTER AN OFFICER-INVOLVED SHOOTING. RESEARCH FINDINGS BY BERELSON AND STEINER MAKE CLEAR, THE FRIENDLIER AND MORE HELPFUL THE BOSS, THE MORE LIKELY THE EMPLOYEE IS TO FEEL THAT THE ORGANIZATIONS' REQUIREMENTS ARE REASONABLE, HAVE LESS ABSENTEEISM, AND HIGHER MORALE (MUNRO 107). SUPERVISORS IN RURAL AREAS SHOULD BE AWARE THAT WHEN OFFICERS SHOOT SOMEONE IT IS IMPORTANT TO LET THE OFFICER LEAVE THE SHOOTING SCENE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. THERE ARE TIMES WHEN OFFICERS MUST SHOOT A SUSPECT, THEN IMMEDIATELY CHANGE ROLES AND BECOME THE CAREGIVER UNTIL MEDICAL HELP ARRIVES. DUE TO THE LACK OF MAN POWER OFFICERS MAY EVEN BE AN INVESTIGATOR AT THEIR OWN SCENE, OR THE OFFICER MAY HEAR DYING DECLARATIONS FROM THE SUSPECT. ALL OF THESE CREATE ADDITIONAL DISTURBING MEMORIES FOR THE OFFICER (REIDE 1996). THEREFORE, IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT THE SUPERVISOR REMOVE THE OFFICER AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AFTER THE SHOOTING. POLICIES GOVERNING THESE EVENTS CAN HELP ENSURE THAT, OFFICERS INVOLVED IN A SHOOTING RECEIVE ADEQUATE ASSISTANCE, HAVE RESOURCES IN PLACE, AND SUPERVISORS FOLLOW ESTABLISHED GUIDELINES.

## DISCUSSION OF RELEVANT ISSUES

ONE-THIRD OF THE POLICE OFFICERS INVOLVED IN SHOOTINGS HAD MINIMAL OR NO PROBLEMS AFTER EXPERIENCING A SHOOTING INCIDENT, ONE-THIRD HAD A MODERATE RANGE OF PROBLEMS, AND ONE-THIRD SUFFERED SERIOUS PROBLEMS (van ESSEN 16). DIFFICULTY IS GENERALLY RELATED TO FACTORS SUCH AS PERSONALITY, CURRENT LIFE SITUATION, PERSONAL HISTORY, AVAILABLE SUPPORT SYSTEM, AND THE PARTICULAR ASPECTS OF THE INCIDENT ( REIDE 1996). IN MOST CASES ADJUSTMENT IS EASIER FOR OFFICERS THAT SHOOT AND KILL A ROBBERY SUSPECT THAT HAS SHOT AT THEM FIRST, THAN IT IS FOR THOSE WHO SHOOT AND KILL AN INNOCENT PERSON THEY THOUGHT WAS A THREAT. OFFICERS IN BOTH CIRCUMSTANCES NEED ASSISTANCE FROM DEPARTMENT PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES, BUT THE OFFICER THAT HAS JUSTIFIABLY SHOT AN INNOCENT PERSON MAY REQUIRE MORE COUNSELING THAN THE OFFICER THAT HAS SHOT AND KILLED A ROBBERY SUSPECT. ONLY A WELL CONCEIVED POLICY THAT IS IN PLACE CAN ENSURE THAT PROPER ASSISTANCE, BASED ON THE CIRCUMSTANCES AND MAKE UP OF THE OFFICER, IS AVAILABLE.

THREE MAJOR CATEGORIES OF STRESS REDUCTION EXIST. THE FIRST IS TO ELIMINATE THE STRESSOR; SOMETHING THAT MAY NOT BE POSSIBLE OR PRACTICAL IN POLICING. THE NEXT WAY TO REDUCE STRESS IS TO CHANGE THE INDIVIDUAL SO THEY ARE BETTER ABLE TO HANDLE THE STRESS. LASTLY, IS TO PROVIDE ASSISTANCE TO INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE STRESSED (KROES 98-99). DEPARTMENT POLICIES REGARDING POST-SHOOTING TRAUMA CAN ADDRESS THE LAST TWO CATEGORIES OF STRESS REDUCTION. COUNSELING CAN ASSIST IN PROVIDING THE INDIVIDUAL WITH CRUCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL HELP, THUS, CHANGING THEIR OUTLOOK ABOUT A SHOOTING INCIDENT.

ALL ORGANIZATIONS HAVE MISSIONS AND GOALS THAT SERVE AS THE REASON FOR FUNCTIONING (MORE AND UNSINGER 123). DEPARTMENTS SHOULD INCLUDE IN THEIR MISSION STATEMENTS EXACT WORDING THAT ADDRESSES THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELFARE OF THEIR EMPLOYEES WHO HAVE SHOT AND INJURED OR KILLED ANOTHER PERSON. THIS CAN

REDUCE REACTIVE LEADERSHIP OR CRISIS MANAGEMENT WHICH CONTINUES TO BE ONE OF THE MAJOR PROBLEMS OF POLICE AGENCIES (GAINES AND RICKS 257).

ONE NATIONAL STUDY SHOWED THAT POLICE OFFICERS KILLED AN AVERAGE OF ONE PERSON PER DAY FROM 1970 THROUGH 1979. WITH A HALF A MILLION POLICE OFFICERS, STATISTICS SHOW THAT ONLY 1 OFFICER IN 60 HAVE KILLED SOMEONE DURING THE LAST 15 YEARS. THIS SHOWS THAT THE VAST MAJORITY OF OFFICERS ARE NEVER INVOLVED IN A SHOOTING (MORE AND WAGNER 192-193). IT IS MY BELIEF THIS IS THE REASON THAT MANY AGENCIES DO NOT HAVE ANY TYPE OF A POLICY TO HANDLE THESE EVENTS. THEY SIMPLY HAVE NEVER HAD TO DEAL WITH A POLICE RELATED SHOOTING BEFORE. THIS IS WHY IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT THEY HAVE A POLICY AND THEIR OFFICERS BE EDUCATED ON THE POLICY. IF A SHOOTING OCCURS IN AN AREA THAT HAS NEVER EXPERIENCED ONE THERE WILL BE GUIDELINES ALREADY IN PLACE TO DEAL WITH THE EVENT. LACK OF KNOWLEDGE REGARDING POST SHOOTING TRAUMA AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES CAN BE A PROBLEM IN THE LARGEST OF DEPARTMENTS. OFFICERS IN THE HOUSTON POLICE DEPARTMENT ARE LARGELY UNAWARE OF THE EXACT POLICY THAT GOVERNS INJURY OR DEATH OF ANOTHER PERSON (REIDE 1996). MOST HOUSTON OFFICERS THINK THAT PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES ARE REQUIRED ONLY AFTER THEY HAVE SHOT A SUSPECT. THE FACT IS, PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELING IS REQUIRED IF AN OFFICER INJURES ANOTHER PERSON BY ANY MEANS OR IF AN OFFICER IS INJURED ON THE JOB. AGENCIES DO NOT HAVE TO EMPLOY STAFF PSYCHOLOGISTS. THEY CAN DEVELOP A CONTRACT WITH A LARGER AGENCY THAT EMPLOY PSYCHOLOGISTS, OR CONSOLIDATE THIS SERVICE WITH OTHER SMALL AGENCIES IN THEIR AREA. DR. GREG REIDE HAS COUNSELED OFFICERS FROM AS FAR AWAY AS WEST TEXAS. HE BELIEVES THAT GOOD PSYCHOLOGICAL HELP IS THE SAME AS GOOD MEDICAL HELP, ..." YOU MAY HAVE TO TRAVEL TO GET IT, BUT IT IS AVAILABLE..." (RIEDE 1996).

PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES CAN BE AN EXPENSIVE ADDITION FOR POLICE AGENCIES; SESSIONS CAN RUN INTO THE HUNDREDS OF DOLLARS. HOWEVER, OTHER OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE. MOST INSURANCE POLICIES WILL COVER PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSISTANCE. WORKERS COMPENSATION MAY ALSO COVER SOME OR ALL OF THE COSTS. ALL OF THESE

OPTIONS WILL HAVE TO BE EXPLORED AS AGENCIES DEVELOP THEIR SPECIFIC POLICIES. AGENCIES SHOULD SOLICIT INPUT FROM THEIR LOCAL GOVERNMENT, OFFICERS, AND MEDICAL COMMUNITY REGARDING THE ISSUE OF FUNDING. LOCAL GOVERNMENTS CAN BE A VALUABLE ASSET TO LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES THAT ARE ATTEMPTING TO DEVELOP A NEW PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICE POLICY. MOST MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL OR COMMISSIONERS COURT HAVE AN INTEREST IN THE LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY THAT PROTECTS THEIR COMMUNITY AND ARE WILLING TO ADOPT MEASURES THAT THEY FEEL WILL ASSIST THE OFFICERS OF THE DEPARTMENT. SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS SUCH AS POLICE UNIONS, AND LAW ENFORCEMENT BOOSTER CLUBS CAN ALSO BE OF ASSISTANCE. EACH AGENCY HEAD WILL KNOW THE POLITICAL BARRIERS THEY FACE TO IN ORDER TO SUCCESSFULLY DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT A PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICE POLICY.

THE FIRST STEP FOR A DEPARTMENT TO TAKE IN DEVELOPING A POLICY IS TO LOOK AT OTHER SUCCESSFUL AGENCIES THAT ALREADY HAVE A SYSTEM IN PLACE. THEY SHOULD PAY CAREFUL ATTENTION TO DEPARTMENTS THAT ARE SIMILAR IN SIZE, GOVERNMENT MAKE UP, AND HAVE COMPARABLE RESOURCES. OTHER AVAILABLE INFORMATION RESOURCES ARE THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT OF THE F.B.I. AND THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY WHO USE PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES OF OTHER DEPARTMENTS FROM ACROSS THE STATE.

THE NEXT STEP WILL BE FOR THE AGENCY TO COMPILE ALL OF THEIR DATA REGARDING POST SHOOTING TRAUMA AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES THEN PUT IT IN THE FORM OF A POLICY. THE DEPARTMENT HEAD SHOULD KEEP HIS LOCAL GOVERNMENT INFORMED OF DEVELOPMENTS.

IF A POLICY IS DEVELOPED THE NEXT STEP WILL BE TO DETERMINE HOW THE SERVICE WILL BE PAID FOR. ONCE THAT ISSUE IS DECIDED, EVERY PERSON OF THE DEPARTMENT SHOULD BE EDUCATED ON THE NEW POLICY. THE FINAL STEP IS FOR THE DEPARTMENT HEAD TO MAKE THE POLICY OFFICIAL.

PERIODIC REVIEWS OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICE POLICY SHOULD BE REQUIRED. EVERY MEMBER OF THE DEPARTMENT SHOULD BE FAMILIAR WITH THIS POLICY. THIS INCLUDES DISPATCHERS, CLERKS, SECRETARIES AND TRAINING STAFF. THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE SHOULD HAVE A COPY OF THE POLICY AS WELL AS ANY OTHER AGENCY THAT MAY BECOME INVOLVED IN THE INVESTIGATION OF A POLICE RELATED SHOOTING.

#### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

PROVIDING LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS WITH VALUABLE INFORMATION REGARDING THE EFFECTS OF POST SHOOTING TRAUMA ON OFFICERS IS AN EXTREMELY IMPORTANT FUNCTION. MANY AGENCIES AND OFFICERS ARE NOT FULLY FAMILIAR WITH POST SHOOTING TRAUMA. EDUCATING OFFICERS MAY BE THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR IN DEVELOPING A POLICY TO DEAL WITH IT.

NOT ONLY SHOULD AGENCIES AND OFFICERS FROM ACROSS THE STATE BE AWARE OF THE EFFECTS OF POST SHOOTING TRAUMA BUT OF EQUAL IMPORTANCE IS THE DEVELOPMENT OF A POLICY TO PROVIDE PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES TO OFFICERS INVOLVED IN SHOOTINGS.

THIS RESEARCH IS RELEVANT BECAUSE MANY OFFICERS ACROSS THE STATE ARE INVOLVED IN SHOOTINGS. SOME OF THEM NEVER RECEIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELING THAT IS SO BADLY NEEDED. AGENCIES, OFFICERS, AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS CAN EXAMINE THE FACTS SURROUNDING POST SHOOTING TRAUMA AND THE BENEFITS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELING.

I BELIEVE THE INFORMATION AND RESEARCH CLEARLY DEMONSTRATES THE NECESSITY FOR EVERY DEPARTMENT ACROSS THE STATE OF TEXAS TO DEVELOP A POLICY DEALING WITH THE NEED FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICE FOR OFFICERS INVOLVED IN A SHOOTING.

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