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Early Intervention Systems (EIS):
An Effective Tool in Predicting and Preventing Problematic
Police Behavior

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ABSTRACT

The use of Early Intervention Systems (EIS) is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because it is well known that citizen complaints are usually generated due to the behavior of a small percentage of police officers. Because police misconduct can be extremely damaging to a police organization, police departments all over the country are seeking new ways to identify problematic behavior in officers. The goal and objective of EIS is that when certain thresholds are met, strategies will be implemented that will correct the problematic behavior prior to it becoming a liability to the department or the officer. The purpose of this research is to assert that systems such as EIS are truly effective in predicting problematic police behavior before it escalates and becomes a liability to the individual officer and/or to the organization.

The researcher discovered that if an EIS is properly implemented, it can be very beneficial and can successfully predict and identify problematic police behavior. If the implementation is not done correctly, the program will be met with great speculation and resistance. Vital to successful implementation of EIS is obtaining the support and acceptance from front line supervisors. The reason for this is they are the first line of defense against problematic police behavior and the member of management that officers deal with the most. Just as important is the need to foster an atmosphere in which supervisors feel fully empowered to engage any and all resources necessary to assist officers whose behavior triggers the system.

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INTRODUCTION

The problem or issue to be examined considers whether or not systems such as (Early Intervention Systems) EIS are truly effective in predicting problematic police behavior before it escalates and becomes a liability. It is relevant to research the effectiveness of EIS in law enforcement because a major percentage of citizen complaints are usually generated due to the behavior of a small percentage of police officers. Police misconduct can be extremely damaging to a police organization. Police departments all over the country are seeking new ways to identify problematic behavior in officers. The goal and objective of EIS is that when certain thresholds are met, strategies will be implemented that will correct the problematic behavior prior to it becoming a liability to the department or the officer.

The purpose of this research is to examine the effectiveness of EIS and evaluate its success in departments that have already implemented such programs. The research question to be examined focuses on whether or not EIS can effectively predict problematic police behavior. Research will explore the most common pitfalls met by police departments during the implementation of EIS. It will also attempt to identify what best practices are being used by departments to make an EIS program successful. The intended method of inquiry includes: a review of articles, periodicals, and journals. The outcome of the research is that EIS can effectively predict problematic police behavior before it escalates to levels that result in serious damage to the police organization and to the individual officer. It is also clear that the additional requirements put in place by EIS on field supervisors provide a better level of police supervision on the field level.

The field of law enforcement will benefit from the research or be influenced by the conclusions because police misconduct can be extremely damaging to a police organization and to the individual officer. EIS has proven itself to be a valuable tool in predicting problematic police behavior, so it should be implemented in police agencies. It has also shown to provide an organization with the additional benefit of improving field supervision because of the reporting requirements placed on field supervisors. It has expanded the role and importance of the field supervisor and in many cases provided additional tools and options to assist them in developing and mentoring subordinate officers. All responsible police organizations should strongly consider implementing EIS.

POSITION

Historically, supervisors have been tasked with fulfilling a number of roles: community problem solvers, teachers, leaders, and role models. They are now also being tasked with taking an active role in predicting and preventing problematic behavior by the officers they are charged with supervising. This is done effectively more often than not by the use of an Early Intervention System EIS. As the role of supervisors evolved so did the philosophy and the focus changed from disciplining to helping the officer.

It is a well-known fact that officers who engage in problematic behavior are few in number, but the effects of their behavior can have an extremely negative and damaging effect on the individual officer and the organization. In order for supervisors to effectively intervene and help the officer exhibiting the problematic behavior, they must have a good understanding of enhanced supervision techniques and have at their

disposal a vast array of resources. These resources will assist them in identifying the underlying causes of the problematic behavior and assist the supervisor when intervening and addressing the problematic behavior while still in the early stages.

One of the most important elements in having a successful E.I.S. is to educate the supervisors. They must understand every aspect of the program in order to effectively participate in their role and must also have a complete understanding in order to answer the large number of questions that are certain to come their way from the line-level personnel. It is also important to have buy-in from line supervisors because they will be the ones who will eventually get line personnel to trust and accept the program and its effectiveness and good intentions.

Despite the fact that it is a necessary element of successful implementation of any process, the study uncovered that one of the biggest errors committed was not educating all personnel (especially patrol officers) about the workings of the system (Walker, Osnick, & Berke, 2006). The implementation of an EIS requires a revamping of the old ways of supervision and accountability. It requires a change in the specific responsibilities of supervisors who will need to pay closer attention to subordinates especially in areas that have not been closely monitored. An example of this is a closer monitoring of off-duty assignments and the use of sick leave. Additional examples include shootings and/or use of other weapons, and training (Rhyons & Brewster, 2002). It is advisable that supervisory personnel familiarize themselves with the structure and processes of the early intervention system to include the captured data, how it is to be used as well as what they will be responsible for within the process.

They should also be aware of the variety of resources which can be utilized to aid affected officers.

While research found examples of resistance to the implementation of EIS, it was found that in agencies who successfully implemented the system were pleased with the results (Lersch, Bazley, & Miezckowski, 2006). The EIS improved supervision and gave supervisors the tools to help officers achieve improved performance which in turn resulted in better service to the community and fewer complaints. This meant fewer headaches for supervisors, fewer investigations, and a lot less paperwork. It also resulted in an improved reputation for the organization which was now seen as engaging in proactive programs for the benefit of its employees and the citizens they serve.

It is very important to understand that line level supervisors will be the linchpin in any EIS because of the amount of time they spend observing and interacting with the line level officers. Also, due to the specific demands of their work, line level officers are often the first to reach established EIS thresholds, and line level supervisors will be tasked with monitoring these. Despite this being the case, an EIS was not meant to and should never have the appearance of replacing traditional supervision. An EIS should encourage the basics of good supervision such as communicating with subordinates and insuring that they are producing a quality product.

An EIS should supplement already existing good supervision with new procedures and tools. One example of this is the use of a data base which can produce reports of undesirable officer behavior. This will then require making important decisions about whether or not the observed and reported behavior will require

intervention. While it is likely that some supervisors will not feel completely comfortable accomplishing these tasks, it is pivotal to the success of EIS that they learn to become proficient in doing so.

Unfortunately, at least one study has shown, that even when supervisors take the initiative to perform their responsibilities as required by their EIS, they often times do not feel supported by their agency (Caldwell, 1996). They also reported, in substantial numbers, that their suggestions and recommendations for intervention were not taken seriously. This obviously often results in bad feelings toward the administration but also toward the system. While some felt that their recommendations were simply falling on deaf ears, others reported simply not having the required resources to respond to the needs of their officers. Others objected to the amount of paperwork that can be created by EIS. Their complaint was that they had to substantially reduce the amount of time they spend interacting with their officers because they were tied up on the tasks required of the program which often times required additional paper work and the compiling and entering of data (Lersch et al., 2006)

Another aspect of EIS that is concerning is the unintended negative perception that EIS punishes the productive. Some of the findings of this research were that officers flagged by EIS were considerably more likely to be younger, male, and have fewer years of police experience. The research highlighted just how important and appropriate it was to consider productivity as it related to the number of arrests along with the EIP criteria. One study discovered that the number of citizen complaints was tied directly to several different police work related activities. These included arrests traffics stops and field interviews (Lersch et al., 2006)

It was also discovered that the reliance on use of force reports to trigger EIS involvement was also problematic (Alpert & Walker, 2004). The reason for this was that officers working areas known for higher rates of crime were more apt to have to submit use of force reports than officers assigned to areas with lower crime rates. A way to remedy this is by using ratios instead of absolute numbers when determining what will trigger EIS. An example of absolute numbers would be 12 use of force reports in 12 months. A ratio would provide a comparison between the number of complaints or possible problematic behaviors and the activity level.

Alpert and Walker (2004) cited an example where two officers are tracked. One was shown to have filed five use of force reports while the second comparison officer filed almost five times that amount. Most of the EIS systems would clearly select the second officer as the one engaging in possibly precarious behavior. An extremely relevant bit of information that is not seen is the number of arrests made by each of the officers. It would be invaluable to include that the first officer submitted the low number of use of force reports but had an equally low number of citizen contacts and arrests. At the same time, the second officer who had submitted five times the number of use of force reports had an impressively high number of arrests. In this case the ratio of use of force reports to arrests for the first officer was 1.6. He submitted a use of force report for each 1.6 arrests he made. The second officer submitted 24 use of force reports while making 600= arrest. His ratio was 25, reflecting that he filed a use of force report only after every 25 arrests. In this example, it is obvious that it is the behavior of the first officer which should sound alarms. Using the standard utilized by a majority of agencies, officer one's behavior would not be cause for concern for concern. The

research did not point to any specific standard for triggering the EIS in the departments that used this type of system. It was agreed that the threshold for triggering the program should be considerably low, so that an alert would be generated way before an officer will exhibit troublesome behavior.

One of the surveys, which compared the early warning systems of 571 departments, indicated that 73% of departments surveyed used a three use of force reports over a calendar year period as a basis for inclusion into the early intervention program. First interventions typically called for nothing more than supervisory counseling or additional training. Miami Police has used the standard of five or more use of force reports and extended the reporting period to two years. In July 2000, they had reported that only four of their 1,100 officers had been included in the program due to triggering the threshold number of use of force reports (Alpert & Walker, 2004).

COUNTER POSITION

Critics of established EIP's point to the large number of tasks that police supervisors are already responsible for completing and claim that there is simply not enough time to accomplish the additional tasks required by these proactive programs. The job of the first line police supervisor has always been known to be one of the most demanding jobs within any law enforcement organization. This is or should be a factor considered by any officer aspiring to a supervisory position. As the law enforcement profession has evolved, so has the role of supervisors, and it is undeniable that the focus has changed from disciplining to helping the officer (Alpert & Walker, 2004). EIS require additional time and effort, but they are a very valuable tool in preventing problematic behavior that, if left unaddressed, will eventually have an extremely

negative and damaging effect on the individual officer and the organization ("Spot," 2001).

Critics also point to the fact that even when supervisors take the initiative to perform their responsibilities as required by their EIS, they often times feel that their agency does not support their efforts. They also claim that their suggestions and recommendations for intervention are not taken seriously. This obviously often results in bad feelings toward the administration but also and more importantly toward the system. While some felt that their recommendations were simply falling on deaf ears, others reported simply not having the required resources to respond to the needs of their officers (Walker, Osnick, Milligan, & Berke, 2006).

Having an unresponsive and uncaring administration that does not support its personnel and is apathetic to their needs is not a byproduct or in any way connected to the efficiency or effectiveness of an EIS. No program, regardless of how well it is structured, will be successful in any organization where there is a culture of apathy. Rothlein (n.d.) reported that many police organizations throughout the country have adopted EIS. The programs are fully supported and accepted from line level personnel to the upper administration, and the results have been phenomenal. Officers who have triggered the system have been identified at such an early stage that successful intervention steps have been taken and damage to the organization and to the individual officer has been prevented.

Critics also allege that EIS is designed in such a way that it will inevitably have the effect of punishing the productive. They point to the fact that officers flagged by EIS were considerably more likely to be younger, male, and have fewer years of police

experience (Lersch et al., 2006). This can be easily addressed by insuring that the triggering of EIS considers productivity as it relates to the number of arrests along with other EIP criteria. Research highlighted just how important and appropriate it was to consider productivity as it related to number of arrests along with the EIS criteria. The reliance on use of force reports to trigger EIS involvement was also problematic. The reason for this was that officers assigned to high crime areas were considerably more likely to file use of force reports as compared to officers working in areas with fewer calls for service (Lersch et al., 2006). It is very important to remember that a simple way to remedy this is by using ratios instead of absolute numbers when determining what will trigger EIP.

RECOMMENDATION

Systems such as EIS are truly effective in predicting problematic police behavior before it escalates and becomes a liability to the individual officer and/or to the organization. All responsible police organizations should strongly consider implementing EIS. It is not necessary that an organization be experiencing turmoil of some sort and be looking for a system to remedy problems. Any police organization interested in establishing or maintaining a culture of accountability would serve itself well with an EIS. Fortunately, there are a variety of software program options available to police organizations wishing to implement an EIS. One of the most popular software packages in the early intervention program market is IAPro. As with most similar products, the pricing depends largely on the number of employees to be monitored. IAPro advertises a package capable of servicing 750 to 100 employees at software package cost of $25,000. Training and installation are billed separately at a rate of

$1,200 per day ("Product pricing," 2007). Other available options include IA Trak, BlueOrder, and Sergeant Software (Dees, 2003).

As the law enforcement profession evolves, so must the culture within it. First line supervisors are tasked with more and more each day. They are no longer simply expected to discipline the officers under their charge. They are now expected to help them when their behavior gives them reason for concern. The argument that EIS is simply too time consuming to be a worthwhile effort is weak at best. It would be completely irresponsible for a law enforcement agency to not be willing to put forth the time and effort, however great it may be, to insure that all officers within the organization are given every opportunity to succeed. Alpert and Walker (2004) stated, "EI Systems have the potential to alter the organizational culture by introducing a high standard of professionalism and establishing a date-driven tool for management to enforce those standards" (p. 22).

Those who complain are not upset that EIS is being implemented and followed but that the upper administration is uncaring and is not making an effort to provide necessary resources. They are not criticizing EIS but rather their respective administrations. That complaint, in and of itself, should not be taken into consideration when determining the effectiveness of an EIS.   EIS is not designed to cure all the ills of a police organization. It is an accountability tool that, when properly implemented, benefits both the organization and its members.

As to the claim that EIS punishes the productive, one must simply understand that the use of ratios instead of absolute numbers easily addresses this concern. No organization ever wants to punish its most productive members. A simple

understanding of proper data gathering and insuring that EIS is not designed to be triggered using absolute numbers will go a long way toward insuring that an agency's most productive members are not discouraged from maintaining their high productivity.

EIS is extremely important to the law enforcement profession because it is a well-known fact that a small percentage of officers are responsible for a large percentage of citizen complaints. Police misconduct can be extremely damaging to a police organization. Police departments all over the country are seeking new ways to identify problematic behavior in officers. The goal and objective of EIS is to implement strategies when certain thresholds are met that will correct the officer's problematic behavior prior to it becoming a liability to the department or the officer.

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