

LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

**STRESS INDUCED BURNOUT IN A SMALL
POLICE DEPARTMENT**

A RESEARCH PAPER

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR

MODULE III

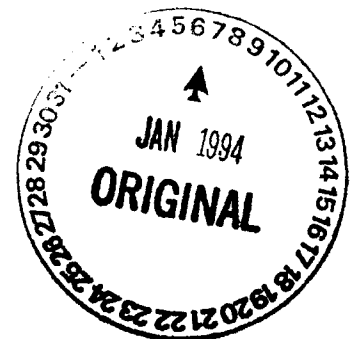
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INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade the journals in the area of law enforcement have shown a significant awareness of the issues of police stress and stress induced burnout. Despite the volumes of information available on stress, the phenomenon remains poorly defined. Hans Selye, a researcher and theorist who pioneered the physiological investigation of stress, defined stress as "The nonspecific response of the body to any demand placed upon it" (Selye, 1956).

The law enforcement officer of today must pass rigid physical and psychological testing to qualify for police work. Yet, as an occupational group, the health of police officers deteriorates rapidly. Police officers live an average of 12 years less than most people (Metekew, 1990). We are all aware of the associated risks of injury or death.

The inherent stress in the police occupation is based in part on the changing complexities of the job. It has been only within the recent past, however, that law enforcement organizations have begun to come to terms with the complexities of the police occupations. Historically, all that was needed by a police officer for job competency was the ability to shoot a gun and understand

The journal model for the research report is the American Sociological Review.

the Penal Code (Reeves, 1987).

Psychology of Stress

Not all stress can be considered harmful or bad. Some stress may even be considered "good" stress, such as stress associated with a promotion, marriage, and graduation. This stress usually is a short term, with no long term effect on the body. For the purpose of this study, we will focus on the bad or harmful stresses as these present the most challenges to police administrators.

General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) was formulated by Selye (1956) to describe the biological level as to how stress can incapacitate an individual at the biological level. The GAS encompasses three stages of psychological reactions to a wide variety of stressors--environmental agents or activities powerful enough in their impact to elicit a reaction from the body. These states are as follows:

- (1) The alarm stage, also known as an emergency reaction, is exemplified on the animal level by the so-called "fight or flight" syndrome.
- (2) The resistance stage - if stress continues, the body mobilizes its resources to deal with the specific stress.
- (3) The exhaustion stage - if stress continues over a prolonged period, the body is no longer capable of maintaining its levels of reaction.

Even before this extreme stage has been reached, excessive hormonal secretions may result in severe

physiological pathology of the type Selye calls "diseases of adaptation" (Selye, 1956).

Psychological pathology has been shown to be an important causal factor in coronary heart disease, gastrointestinal malfunction, dermatological problems, severe nervous conditions, neuroses and various other physical and mental disorders (Selye, 1956). In comparison with workers in other occupations, police officers seem to have unusually high rates of illness apparently related to stress (Reiser, 1983).

Stress has a cumulative effect upon the person. Job stress can affect one's health and home life. Before stress associated health problems appear, certain personality characteristics and behavior patterns may signal an officer's inability to deal with the stress of the job. The items in the following list were identified as possible, but not absolute, indicators of excessive stress (Police Supervision, 1985, p. 137):

- (1) Abrupt change in typical behavior patterns
- (2) Rapid mood changes
- (3) Overly suspicious
- (4) Excessive use of alcohol
- (5) Overly hostile
- (6) Extreme defensiveness
- (7) Frequent illnesses
- (8) Excessive nervous habits
- (9) Accident prone

- (10) Taking unnecessary chances
- (11) Obsessive about working
- (12) Sleep disturbance
- (13) Decrease in work performance
- (14) Depression
- (15) Use of excessive violence

Besides the inherent risks associated with police work, two external sources of stress for police officers stem from family and interdepartmental demands. Stress responses in families of police officers can include feelings of social isolation, lack of support and emotional intimacy, and subservience that feeds marital and family conflict (Reiser, 1978). Families additionally suffer as a result of the officer members' associated variety of additional factors, including: social rejection due to their occupational choice, disruptive work schedules, limited communication with spouses, tendency of masking feelings, and interpersonally relating with children in authoritarian rather than loving ways (Nordlicht, 1979). This relationship with the family most certainly contributes to the fact that police officers divorce at the rate of 15-20 percent above average (Motekeew, 1990).

The second strand to the external category of stress includes interorganizational practices. The factors in this category include, but are not limited to, shift assignments, ineffectiveness of the court, unfavorable court decisions, adverse government decisions, and the inefficiencies of some

of the referral agencies.

How to eliminate or reduce the stress in policing is therefore of vital concern not only to the individuals in police work, but to each and every citizen who depends upon their services. A first step in developing individual and institutional stress-reduction policies would entail measurement of the problems in target organizations.

Horne (1985) studied burnout levels in a small (Arlington, Texas) law enforcement agency. She found low levels of burnout, as compared to an available national sample of public services providers. An attempt to identify specific stressors associated with burnout were not successful.

The purpose of the present investigation was to conduct a measurement of burnout levels in the local police establishment for comparison with Horne's results in a force of similar size, and through that comparison, to relate local burnout levels to national norms.

METHODS

The goal of this study is to attempt to further understand and assess stress and stress-induced burnout in the local police department. Subjects were all available police officers of the Kingsville Police Department with the exception of three who declined voluntary participation in this study. Patrol supervisors, corporals and sergeants were included in this study since they spend a good portion of their time on the street providing police services to the public. All subjects were adults over 21 years of age.

The Maslach Burnout Inventory (Appendix A), purchased from Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc., was used to measure burnout on the basis of variables of Emotional Exhaustion, Personal Accomplishment, and Depersonalization of the recipients of public service occupations. The Maslach Burnout Inventory consists of 22 items in the three subscales listed. Each item is answered on the one dimension of frequency of occurrence of specific positive and negative job-related feelings. Reliability coefficients of the subscales were the following: .90 for Emotional Exhaustion; .79 for depersonalization; and .71 for Personal Accomplishment. The standard error of measurement for each subscale is 3.80 for Emotional Exhaustion; 3.16 for Depersonalization; and 3.73 for Personal Accomplishment. The test-retest reliability coefficients for the subscales

were the following: .82 for Emotional Exhaustion; .60 for Depersonalization; .80 for Personal Accomplishment (Jackson & Maslach, 1979, 1982).

Convergent validity was demonstrated in several ways. First, an individual's scores were correlated with behavioral ratings made independently by a person who knew the individual well, such as a spouse or co-worker. Secondly, Maslach Burnout Inventory scores were correlated with the presence of certain job characteristics that were expected to contribute to experience burnout. Third, Maslach Burnout Inventory scores were correlated with measures of various outcomes that had been hypothesized to be related to burnout. All three sets of correlations provided substantial evidence for the validity of the Maslach Burnout Inventory.

With the department's approval (Appendix B), the Maslach Burnout Inventory was administered to volunteering officers during their daily shift briefings. The questionnaires were explained and handed out at the beginning of each shift. No questionnaires were taken from the briefings room. Officers were not allowed to confer or discuss the questionnaires among themselves. Questionnaires were given a code number so officers could be assured of anonymity. Scores for each of the subscales were determined by use of the scoring key provided with the test booklet. Results were averaged for comparison with the antecedent study.

These survey procedures posed no risk to participants. Responses were recorded in such manner that the human subjects cannot be identified, either directly or through identifiers linked to subjects. Responses, if they became known outside the research, would not place any subject at risk, and the research does not deal with sensitive aspects of subjects' behavior. As such, this research plan is exempt from Institutional Review by Para 46.101b(3) of the Code of Federal Regulations. (45 CFR 48, July 31, 1989)

RESULTS

Data of interest were subscale scores of 29 Kingsville police officers (Patrol Division) on the Maslach Burnout Inventory. The results were as follows:

- (1) On the Emotional Exhaustion Scale (EEF), the local sample scored a mean of $\bar{M} = 10.90$, $SD = 9.385$. This result is slightly lower than the reported mean of the comparison (Arlington) sample, $\bar{M} = 11.125$. This reflects a slightly lower rate of emotional exhaustion in the local force.
- (2) With regard to Depersonalization, the sample scored a mean of $\bar{M} = 10.93$, $SD = 5.048$. This is slightly lower than the reported mean of the comparison (Arlington) sample, $\bar{M} = 13.35$. This reflects a lower rate of depersonalization in this local force.
- (3) When comparing the Personal Accomplishment (PA) to that of the comparison sample subscale, the local sample scored a mean of $\bar{M} = 38.41$, $SD = 6.912$. This is lower than the reported mean of the comparison sample, $\bar{M} = 39.11$. This result reflects a slightly lower rate of Personal Accomplishment within the local force.

For the reason that the report of comparison the study was fragmented into categories of stresses, with no overall

means and variances reported, the above means of the antecedent study were reconstituted from available data. This fragmentation precluded any statistical test to determine whether obtained differences are significant. However, examination reveals a very close similarity of the two samples.

SUMMARY

Because only 142 police officers were included among the 2,897 public service workers sampled in the research of Jackson and Maslach (1982, 1979), direct comparison of present results could not be made. However, relating these data to normative information provided by Horne (1985) suggests the following:

- (1) With regard to Emotional Exhaustion (EEF), the local sample scored a mean of $\bar{M} = 10.90$, $SD = 9.385$. The Arlington sample mean of $\bar{M} = 11.125$ was reported to be at the 17th percentile of a national sample. This reflects a low level of Emotional Exhaustion in the local force in comparison to national norms.
- (2) On the Depersonalization (DP) subscale, the local sample scored a mean of $\bar{M} = 10.93$, $SD = 5.048$. The Arlington sample mean of $\bar{M} = 13.35$ reportedly falls in the high range of clientele depersonalization. Members of the local force are classed as moderate in this respect.
- (3) When comparing the Personal Accomplishment subscale (PA), the local sample scored a mean $\bar{M} = 38.41$, $SD = 6.912$. The Horne sample mean of 39.11 falls at the 60th percentile on the national norms. This means that slightly more than 40 percent

of human service professionals feel a sense of personal accomplishment more frequently than do members of the local force.

Overall, these data reflect general agreement with results of the antecedent study of another small police force in Texas. The levels of stress-related burnout in the local force is quite low in comparison with national norms. These findings support Horne's contention that stress-related burnout in small department is not as great a problem as it is in large cities. However, this does not mean that the manager of a small police department can just ignore stress-related burnout.

An individual's coping responses are often spontaneous; that is, people do whatever comes naturally to them and what has worked in the past for them to relieve stress. Sometimes these efforts are not enough. Because people so obviously have difficulty managing stress themselves, health psychologists have increasingly turned their attentions to developing techniques of stress management that can be taught (Taylor, 1991).

Regardless of the size of the agency, police executives should employ stress management programs for those officers who need aid in developing their coping skills. Such programs will teach officers to identify sources of stress in their lives, to develop coping skills to deal with those stressors, and to practice employing stress management skills and monitoring their effectiveness in avoiding stress-induced burnout.

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APPENDICES

Christina Maslach • Susan E. Jackson

Human Services Survey

The purpose of this survey is to discover how various persons in the human services or helping professions view their jobs and the people with whom they work closely. Because persons in a wide variety of occupations will answer this survey, it uses the term *recipients* to refer to the people for whom you provide your service, care, treatment, or instruction. When answering this survey please think of these people as recipients of the service you provide, even though you may use another term in your work.

On the following page there are 22 statements of job-related feelings. Please read each statement carefully and decide if you ever feel this way *about your job*. If you have *never* had this feeling, write a "0" (zero) before the statement. If you have had this feeling, indicate *how often* you feel it by writing the number (from 1 to 6) that best describes how frequently you feel that way. An example is shown below.

Example:

HOW OFTEN:	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Never	A few times a year or less	Once a month or less	A few times a month	Once a week	A few times a week	Every day

HOW OFTEN

0 - 6

Statement:

_____ I feel depressed at work.

If you *never* feel depressed at work, you would write the number "0" (zero) under the heading "HOW OFTEN." If you *rarely* feel depressed at work (a few times a year or less), you would write the number "1." If your feelings of depression are fairly frequent (a few times a week, but not daily) you would write a "5."



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Human Services Survey

HOW OFTEN:	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Never	A few times a year or less	Once a month or less	A few times a month	Once a week	A few times a week	Every day

HOW OFTEN

0 - 6

Statements:

1. _____ I feel emotionally drained from my work.
2. _____ I feel used up at the end of the workday.
3. _____ I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job.
4. _____ I can easily understand how my recipients feel about things.
5. _____ I feel I treat some recipients as if they were impersonal objects.
6. _____ Working with people all day is really a strain for me.
7. _____ I deal very effectively with the problems of my recipients.
8. _____ I feel burned out from my work.
9. _____ I feel I'm positively influencing other people's lives through my work.
10. _____ I've become more callous toward people since I took this job.
11. _____ I worry that this job is hardening me emotionally.
12. _____ I feel very energetic.
13. _____ I feel frustrated by my job.
14. _____ I feel I'm working too hard on my job.
15. _____ I don't really care what happens to some recipients.
16. _____ Working with people directly puts too much stress on me.
17. _____ I can easily create a relaxed atmosphere with my recipients.
18. _____ I feel exhilarated after working closely with my recipients.
19. _____ I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job.
20. _____ I feel like I'm at the end of my rope.
21. _____ In my work, I deal with emotional problems very calmly.
22. _____ I feel recipients blame me for some of their problems.

(Administrative use only)

cat.

cat.


cat.

EE: _____ DP: _____ PA: _____

KINGSVILLE POLICE DEPARTMENT

MEMORANDUM

TO : ALL PERSONNEL

FROM : Felipe Garza, Chief of Police 

DATE : February 09, 1993

SUBJECT : Human Services Survey

During the next several weeks Sgt. Arthur Roger will be conducting a Human Services Survey in the department. Selected officers will be asked to participate by filling out a questionnaire. This survey instrument will be administered during shift briefings and on city time. Anonymity will be assured as no officer will be asked to place any identifying markers on these instruments. Each officer who is asked to participate in the survey is encouraged to do so and to respond to the questions asked as honestly as possible.

At the completions of this survey all results will be discussed with the participants.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me or Sgt. Rogers.