

Law Enforcement Stress and Marriage

The Effects of Job Stress on Law Enforcement Marriages and Methods of Combating the
Job Stress

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Abstract

The reality of how law enforcement stress affects individuals and marriages will be presented in light of its causes and dangers to officers, as well as how the stress affects officers' marriages. The marital problems stemming from law enforcement stress can progress from producing less spousal interaction and communication issues, to presenting opportunities for infidelity, and eventually result in divorce. Before countering the impact of job stress upon marriage, officers must first deal with the stress individually.

Marriages do not have to end as a result of job stress. By seeking family therapy and by relying on God, law enforcement marriages can be saved.

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Introduction

From atypical work shifts and high risk situations to the effects of post traumatic stress disorder, law enforcement takes a toll on both law enforcement officers and their marriages. The stress incorporated in law enforcement work often does not just stay at work. Eventually, the marriages of law enforcement officers can suffer (Borum & Philpot, 1993; Miller, 2007; Roberts & Levenson, 2001; Waters & Ussery, 2007). Going into law enforcement without knowing the danger of job stress is bound to lead to marital hardship. Although law enforcement stress does impact marriages, couples do not have to accept defeat. In order to combat the effects of law enforcement job stress on marriage, it is important to consider the reality of the stress, analyze its marital effects, diffuse the stressful impacts upon the officer, and finally deal with the actual effects it has upon marriage.

The Reality of Law Enforcement Job Stress

The law enforcement line of work is known to be much more stressful than the average job. From investigating homicides to taking the life of a criminal, officers have unique job stresses (Came, 1989). Law enforcement job stress is of particular concern because of the unique dangers that face law enforcers. In a recent study, 200 jobs were surveyed to compare the amount of stress various professions produce. Twenty-one factors were considered when rating the amount of stress that workers dealt with. A few of the factors that were considered include safety hazards, physical strain, job

competition, and the work environment. As seen in *Figure 1*, police officers ranked number five on the list of most stressful jobs in 2010 and firefighters ranked number one (Strieber, 2010). In discussing the reality of law enforcement job stress, one needs to understand some of the actual dangers stress poses to officers as well as the causes of the stress.

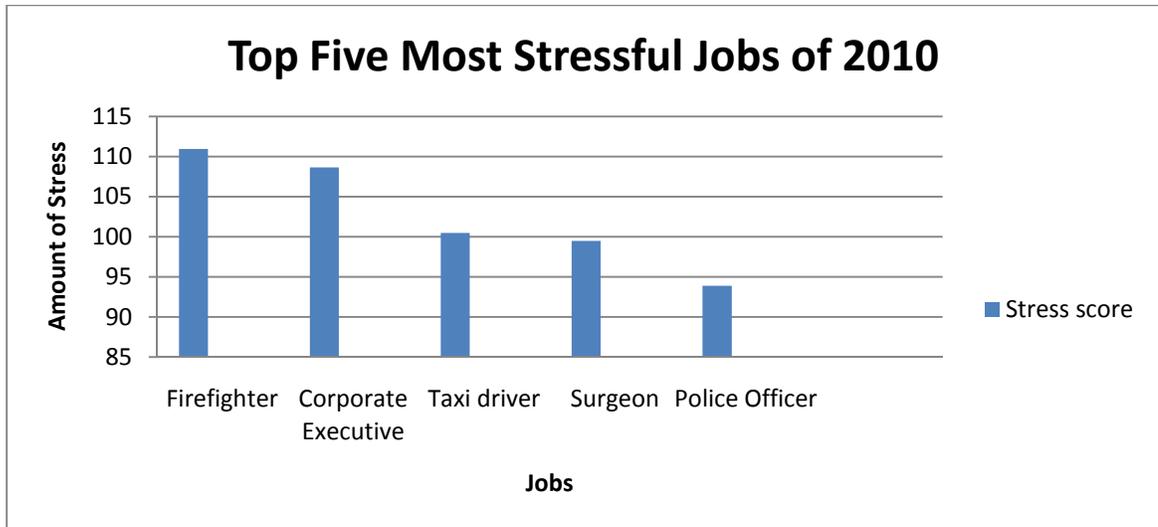


Figure 1. Top five most stressful jobs of 2010. This figure presents the levels of stress present in the most stressful jobs of 2010. Retrieved on February 19, 2011 from <http://www.careercast.com>

Dangers to Law Enforcement Officers

Before looking at some of the causes of law enforcement stress, it is important to consider some of the ways work stress endangers law enforcement officers. Some of the more prevalent dangers posed to officers as a result of job stress include an inability to regulate emotion, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Emotional regulation. Emotional regulation is greatly impeded by having a high stress day at work. Emotional regulation problems occur when an individual has difficulty in controlling what emotions he or she displays. After a high stress day at work,

officers may be emotionally exhausted. The causes of the exhaustion can come from trying to live up to unrealistic demands and continuous frustrations at work (Roberts & Levenson, 2001). The demand on officers can feel too great when officers are asked to work long hours and deal with traumatizing crime scenes (Borum & Philpot, 1993; Waters & Ussery, 2007). Psychologists often use the term “burnout” to describe the emotional exhaustion that results from work stress (Nahrgang, Morgeson, & Hofmann, 2011). The reality of how emotional exhaustion can result from job stress was shown in a study that was focused on understanding the link between job demands, safety concerns, job resources and burnout. In the study, it was found that risky job demands resulted in safety concerns and increased burnout. If job resources were prevalent, it helped to decrease burnout (Nahrgang, Morgeson, & Hofmann). Frustrations and safety concerns at work come from a variety of sources. Officers may deal with armed suspects, arrogant administrators, unethical partners, and large amounts of paperwork (Waters & Ussery, 2006). Some of the most destructive unregulated emotions for marriages are negative emotions (Roberts & Levenson).

Negative emotions include feelings of anxiety, depression, and despair. For law enforcement officers’ marriages to work, they must learn how to regulate emotions (Roberts & Levenson, 2001). It is imperative that spouses stay on the lookout for issues with emotional regulation because in the end, the results can be disastrous. The main issue couples must look out for is high amounts of negative emotions and low amounts of positive emotions. Research has shown that couples become unsatisfied and may even divorce if their relationship is characterized by excessive amounts of negative emotions

and small amounts of positive emotions such as joy and love (Roberts & Levenson). Emotional regulation issues are a red flag for officers dealing with job stress.

Depression. Stress rooted in interpersonal conflicts is often one of the greatest producers of negative moods. Unfortunately, law enforcement has a great deal of interpersonal conflict (Roberts & Levenson, 2001). By 2020, depression is projected to become the world's second greatest cause of disease (Wang et al., 2010). Depression not only impacts officers' health, it also influences their job performance. Research has linked depression to an increased number of job absences, decreased work productivity, and early retirement (Lerner et al., 2010). In a study of 100 Buffalo, New York police officers, 16% of the officers were found to have depression (Violanti et al., 2006). Depression can be caused by numerous factors in life such as adverse events. Adverse events vary from the death of a loved one to the loss of a job. Surprisingly, everyday work stress for officers can be a greater predictor of depression than adverse life events. For an officer, everyday work stress may include the necessity of constant vigilance or the pressure to seek promotion (Wang et al.).

Post-traumatic stress disorder. Post-traumatic stress disorder is a problem that roughly 13% of police officers must face (Lieberman et al., 2006). PTSD can stem from high job stress and is basically a severe case of anxiety. PTSD can result in bad sleep patterns, irritability, and even a great increase in awareness. Typical signs include nightmares, flashbacks to traumatic events, and even a numbing of emotions. Victims may have issues remembering the actual traumatic event that caused the stress and it is common for those dealing with PTSD to avoid people and places that stimulate memories of the traumatic event. To effectively serve, officers cannot just avoid certain people or

places because officers must go where duty calls them. All in all, PTSD can cause serious issues for law enforcement officers (Haisch & Meyers, 2004).

Causes

Law enforcement job stress comes from a variety of sources. By identifying the sources of the stress, it is possible to deal with the impacts of stress on officers as well as the effects on their marriages. Some of the causes of the stress include autonomic arousal, viewing traumatizing images, being involved in risky situations, organizational stress, and shift work.

Autonomic arousal. Autonomic arousal is the condition in which stress and adverse emotions produce hormones that increase the heart rate, muscle tension, and respiration (Miltenberger, 2008). It doesn't have to take a traumatic event to spark an increase in autonomic arousal for law enforcement officers. Even routine stress can trigger arousal and make it difficult for one to solve problems and think clearly. The issues with problem solving and thinking clearly present dangers to the officer while he or she is at work. While out on patrol, it is crucial for officers think on their feet because officers never know exactly what type of situation they will face. Efficient problem solving not only ensures officers' safety, but it is also necessary for healthy marriages (Borum & Philpot, 1993).

Traumatizing images. Unlike the general public, officers are often called to disturbing crime scenes where they see numerous traumatizing images. Whether officers deal with a suicide, murder, assault, or even a rape; law enforcement officers see far more disturbing images than the average citizen (Waters & Ussery, 2007). Officers are often the first people to arrive on scene and those who are at the scene look to the officers for

stability and leadership in the midst of chaos. Officers must learn to control their emotions in order to efficiently carry out their duties (Waters & Ussery). Unfortunately, the repressing of emotions can lead to the future growth of disorders correlated with stress. The repressing of emotions doesn't just end at work; it can eventually impact the home (Waters & Ussery).

Risky situations. Law enforcement officers put themselves in a variety of risky situations. Even routine traffic stops can turn into a wrestle for one's life. Officers come in contact with particularly dangerous individuals. Some of the individuals dealt with by law enforcement may be on PCP or drunk (Waters & Ussery, 2007). Arresting individuals while they are under the influence of drugs or alcohol can be dangerous because it is difficult for officers to predict the actions of the arrestees. Since a seemingly docile individual may unexpectedly attack the officer, officers can never let themselves relax when in the line of duty. Although rare, officers can also become involved in gun fights. Facing a life and death situation is sure to produce stress (Waters & Ussery). It is no surprise that risky situations can produce stress, but one can't afford to overlook organizational stress and shift work.

Organizational stress. Although the most obvious stress producers revolve around intrapersonal issues, organizational stress can also impact law enforcement officers. Psychologists may be forced to take the reactive stance when dealing with law enforcement stress, but it is also possible to be proactive. Since psychologists can't remove the actual presence of everyday work stressors in officers' lives, psychologists work with officers on dealing with the effects of the stress as well as the officers' responses to the stress (Stinchcomb, 2004). Life-threatening circumstances and traumatic

images will always be part of an officer's work, but there are ways of dealing with organizational stress. Organizational stress can include poor communication in decision making, promotional interests, and work schedule desires (Stinchcomb).

Organizational communication problems can stem from an organization becoming too centralized. Law enforcement departments must not remove the lower officers from partaking in the decision making process. In particular, communication lines between the field officers and administrators must remain clear when discussing the causes of stress (Stinchcomb, 2004).

When men and women first become law enforcement officers, working in the field may seem exciting and rewarding, but as the officers age, remaining in the field may not appear as desirable. Eventually, administration positions become attractive and promotional competition can cause stress (Stinchcomb, 2004). Like the officers' interest in promotion, officers may desire certain work schedules. Both married officers and single officers may vie for time off during holidays and on the weekends, but it is impossible to meet every officer's desires. Since organizational stress is often forgotten and not treated, organizational stress can become a silent killer (Stinchcomb).

Shift work. It is a well-known fact that law enforcement officers work unusual shifts (Waters & Ussery, 2007). Since law enforcement officers are assigned shifts based upon seniority, newer officers often have to work the less desirable shifts. One of the issues with law enforcement work shifts is that the shifts constantly change (Waters & Ussery). Law enforcement administration change shifts around so that the burden of working undesired hours is spread out among officers. Whether agencies change shifts weekly or every other week, there can still be serious health issues for officers (Waters &

Ussery). Just when officers start to get used to going to sleep at a certain time, they are forced to readjust to sleeping at a different time. Changing sleep patterns can add stress to officers' already stressful lives and the changes can have both psychological as well as physical effects on officers (Waters & Ussery). Now that the reality of law enforcement job stress has been identified, the effect of job stress on law enforcement marriages can be analyzed.

The Effects of Job Stress on Law Enforcement Marriages

There are mixed findings about whether law enforcement marriages have higher rates of divorce than other professions. While some researchers has found a 75% divorce rate among law enforcement officers, other researchers have found law enforcement divorce rates to be lower than the national average (McCoy & Aamodt, 2009). One study used the U.S. Census' marital statistics from the year 2000 to compare divorce rates among various occupations. Surprisingly, the study found that law enforcement officers had a 14.47% divorce rate while the average divorce rate among U.S. occupations was 16.96% (McCoy & Aamodt). Research findings are unclear, but even if officers' marriages do not have the highest divorce rates, the impact of law enforcement job stress can be seen nonetheless (Borum & Philpot, 1993). The stress affects marriages by producing less spousal interaction, issues with communication, opportunities for infidelity, and the possibility for divorce (Miller, 2007).

Hazards to Marital Interaction

The amount of time couples spend together is of great importance in considering marital satisfaction. Unfortunately, numerous distractions can rise and cut off the time that couples generally would spend with each other. It is vital for couples to spend time

together because increased amounts of marital interaction help to ensure healthy marriages and protect against divorce (Terling-Watt, 2001). To understand the issues revolving around law enforcement marital interaction, one needs to consider officers' hectic lifestyles, the subculture influences, and law enforcement's impact on marital communication.

Hectic lifestyle. Unlike the average job, law enforcement officers often work four twelve hour shifts in a row. To add to an officer's atypical shifts, night shifts are also a regular occurrence (Miller, 2007). Irregular work schedules can add to a law enforcement officers' already stressful job and make it difficult for officers to spend time with their spouses (Borum & Philpot, 1993). Families that value predictability as well as stability can suffer greatly at the hand of the hectic law enforcement lifestyle (Miller). The reality of how hectic schedules impact marriages can be seen in considering the effects of irregular shifts on medical professionals such as nurses. It was found that nurses, specifically those with children, have greater issues with marital stability if the nurses work either night shifts or rotating shifts (Presser, 2000). Like nurses, law enforcement officers need to be aware of the dangers that can result from a hectic lifestyle.

In marriage, couples deal with times of crisis, calm, and times that are hectic. With the periods of crisis and calm, there is hope for positive relational growth or relational drifting. Relational drifting occurs when a couple's intimacy suffers as a result of poor communication, lack of commitment, and independent decision making. During times of crisis, there are external attacks that no one can possibly know are coming. Couples can use the periods of crisis to learn how to work together and problem solve (Harvey, 1994). When couples seek family therapy for their marriage, therapists often

teach couples how to problem solve. Therapists understand that marital success is greatly dependent upon how well couples learn to work together (Borum & Philpot, 1993). During times of calm, there is a growth potential because couples do not need to use as much effort to keep their marriages unified. The opportunities to spend time together are more abundant when life isn't full of adversity. Unlike the periods of crisis, couples may not necessarily see the need to work together (Harvey). Marital unity can be affected when couples do not work together because the spouses become too focused on their own needs. The third period, usually a result of over-commitment, is the issue that law enforcement couples must often deal with. These periods, known as hectic times, are a complete danger to a marriage (Harvey).

A hectic period doesn't necessarily even mean that a couple is going through a particular hardship; hectic times are often just the result of having to deal with all of the cares of life (Harvey, 1994). Life can be seen as hectic when a couple is either too busy or if unseen distractions consistently change the couple's plans. The idea of life being hectic can be seen in how officers may have to change weekend plans with little notice and how those officers working undercover or on SWAT teams can be called in at any moment. Likewise, when a department has to deal with issues such as budget cuts, this burden may fall on the active field officers and result in the officers having to work unexpected overtime (Miller, 2007). The nature of law enforcement results in a hectic lifestyle.

Subculture. The law enforcement subculture can create stress that steals away from an officer's marital interaction. Law enforcement subcultures, such as the police subculture, are known for their macho atmosphere. The result of the subculture is that

officers feel as though they always have to prove themselves (Miller, 2007). To align with the macho atmosphere, officers of all genders are pressured to put in high amounts of overtime. Officers get the idea that only those who are lazy and weak turn down a job (Borum & Philpot, 1993). In the case of law enforcement officers, excessive personal achievement can be tempting. By taking on more and bigger responsibilities, officers gain a feeling of accomplishment and identification. Officers can rationalize their workaholic lifestyle by saying that they are working extra in order to give their families a better quality of life. The zeal that officers originally display may even be encouraged by the spouse, but eventually the zeal can turn into over-commitment (Borum & Philpot; Miller). To further the feelings of spousal resentment, law enforcement culture also creates an exclusive comradeship (Miller).

Law enforcement culture forms a bond of unity that often ostracizes officers' spouses (Miller, 2007). In some cases, a spouse may feel as though his or her relationship has been invaded by the law enforcement department. Intimacy truly starts to suffer when the department becomes a third-party in the relationship. Triangulation occurs because of the tight bond that is formed among officers (Borum & Philpot, 1993; Miller). Law enforcement officers learn to depend upon each other as they deal with stressful situations. At work, officers understand each other and what they have had to deal with. Since officers are understood at work, it can be tempting for the officers to spend more time with those who understand them and as the officer spends more time at work, the spouse's feelings of jealousy and resentment can grow (Borum & Philpot; Miller). The result can be a destructive cycle. Since the spouse of the officer becomes resentful, he or she may respond by alienating the other spouse. Because the spouse's reaction doesn't

encourage the officer to spend more time at home, the officer just spends more and more time with the force. In the end, infidelity can become a reality (Miller).

Communication. Law enforcement work stress greatly affects marital communication (Roberts & Levenson, 2001; Miller, 2007; Borum & Philpot, 1993; Waters & Ussery, 2007). Unfortunately, it has been found that emotional exhaustion is one of the most prominent aspects of job burnout among police officers (Burke, 1993). Considering the previously mentioned law enforcement stress, burnout and emotional exhaustion should be a concern for officers. Job stress can be a great hindrance to the likelihood of a successful marriage in considering how emotional exhaustion can make it much harder for a law enforcement officer to interact with his or her spouse (Roberts & Levenson). Job stress can increase the rate of the heart while at the same time decrease the bodily movements. The reaction is similar to the “freeze” response that comes from fear. When conversing with one’s spouse, the “freeze” response is thought to occur on days of high job stress (Roberts & Levenson). The officers’ unconscious reaction to stress can be detrimental to marital interaction because officers can have a hard time just talking to and relaxing around their wives (Roberts & Levenson). Thus, law enforcement job stress can eventually affect officer’s homes.

When law enforcement stress affects the home, the spouse is often the recipient. Studies concerned with the spouses of police officers have found that more than 75% of the spouses deal with stress that is a direct result of the officer’s police work (Miller, 2007). When work stress transfers to the marriage and creates a distressed marriage, poor communication is the outcome (Roberts & Levenson, 2001). The reason that communication is not easy in a distressed marriage is because the distress creates a large

gap between what the person speaking is trying to say and what the listener actually hears (Friesen & Friesen, 1989). When a person is under stress, he or she may mean to say something, but what actually comes out can be very different than what was said. In the same way, the listener must interpret the message. The message passes through the listeners filter and is interpreted. The filter is influenced by everything from exhaustion to stress (Friesen & Friesen). The reality of the previously mentioned situation can be seen when one considers that 90% of couples dealing with stress say that communication issues are a big concern (Friesen & Friesen).

Relationship-oriented attitudes, such as learning to express emotions, are suppressed within law enforcement (Borum & Philpot, 1993). Emotional detachment is crucial for dealing with the various issues that officers are exposed to (Dick, 2000). Since officers often deal with stress, they are taught how to remain in control even while they are dealing with a situation such as a homicide. To deal with the situation, officers learn to detach emotionally. For male officers in particular, the problem occurs when the emotional detachment is brought home (Waters & Ussery, 2007). With female officers, communication is a way to connect emotionally. When a husband cuts off the emotional interaction, this crushes his wife. The extreme control that officers invoke upon their emotions severely impacts the quality of communication and emotional connection between a man and his wife (Borum & Philpot). One example of how law enforcement officers emotionally disconnect with their spouses is in how they tend to keep their work life somewhat secretive. The impact of law enforcement stress upon marriage doesn't just end with poor communication, communication problems can lead to greater marital issues such as infidelity and divorce (Gillan, 2008; Miller).

Infidelity

If a law enforcement marriage has problems with spousal interaction and communication, the unfortunate result can be infidelity (Gillan, 2008). Issues such as forming emotional bonds and spending large amounts of time with one's partner are points of concern. Unfortunately, once an officer breaks his or her spouse's trust, marital reconstruction can be difficult (Miller, 2007).

Emotional bonds. Like other stressful jobs that consist of long work shifts and a possible lack of family time, law enforcement officers can easily fall into the temptation of infidelity. The possible opportunities for officers to fall into infidelity are numerous. Working long night shifts with a partner of the opposite sex is an issue that officers may have to deal with and developing an emotional bond with someone at work is a definite risk (Gillan, 2008; Miller, 2007). If boundaries are not set, it is all too easy for officers to let themselves get into potentially compromising situations.

Officers may go through life and death circumstances with their opposite sex partners as well. Again, this stress results in a bond of trust between the two officers. Even though communication at home may be lacking, an officer must learn to depend upon communication with his or her partner (Gillan, 2008). If partners do not communicate effectively, they both could end up dead. Marital infidelity doesn't even have to include the act of sex; when officers sacrifice time with their spouses so that they can spend time with their partners of the opposite sex, the officers are being unfaithful to their spouses (Gillan). What can happen is that as the officers increase the amount of time they spend with their partner, it can result in a decrease in the amount of time they spend with their spouses.

Divorce

Couples are not the only people who should be concerned about divorce; law enforcement administrators have reason to worry as well. Divorced individuals can have psychological issues such as depression, distress, and poor self-images (Amato, 2000). As mentioned earlier, issues such as depression can lower work productivity (Lerner et al., 2010). If spousal interaction is minimal and if communication breaks down, divorce can become the unfortunate result. Divorce generally doesn't just happen; it is the result of a process. Over time, even seemingly solid marriages can crumble and fall beneath the pressures of law enforcement work (Gillan, 2008; Miller, 2007).

Spousal interaction pertaining to divorce. Couples that don't spend time together can drift and eventually dissolve. For any relationship to last, each person must spend time to make it work. As previously mentioned, when couples spend time together, it actually decreases the chances of divorce (Terling-Watt, 2001). An interesting point is that the time factor is more important for women than for men. For men, the main issue is that the marriage does not become isolated. Men in particular need a marriage that includes social interaction beyond what wives provide. Healthy marriages are marriages that include time for couples to spend with just each other and also to branch out in the community (Terling-Watt). In considering this, spouses must be empathetic in order to understand and adequately provide for their husband's or wife's needs.

Communication. Communication issues are always among the top causes for divorce (Perry, 2010). When considering the previously mentioned communication issues for law enforcement officers, certain problems should not be overlooked. The emotional exhaustion of officers compounds with the communication gap of the officers' possibly

distressed marriage and creates a communication nightmare (Roberts & Levenson, 2001; Frieson & Frieson, 1989). When one adds the emotional numbness and lack of time that law enforcement can cause, it is a wonder that more law enforcement marriages don't end in divorce (Miller, 2007).

Job stress is a reality for law enforcement officers. Law enforcement job stress affects officers' marriages by hindering spousal interaction, presenting opportunities for infidelity, and creating conditions for divorce. At first glance, one might wonder why an officer would get married, but fortunately, marriages do not have to end as a result of joining the force.

Neutralizing the Effects of Stress upon Officers

The marriages of those working in law enforcement can be saved using a two part attack. First, the effects of law enforcement job stress on officers must be considered. Next, the actual effects on the marriage can be thwarted. The reason for using the two part attack is because opportunities for intervention exist at both stages. Ultimately, the goal is for law enforcement marriages to become healthier and not result in divorce. There are numerous ways that individual officers can approach the task of dealing with stress. The approach taken here is from a psychological standpoint. Over the past decade, studies have been producing positive outcomes when stress has been attacked using behavior modification techniques (Granath, Ingvarsson, Lundberg, & von Thiele, 2006). Various forms of behavior modification can be beneficial in dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder, negative thoughts and even stress itself.

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

One of the big issues with PTSD is that it produces physiological arousal and part of physiological arousal is autonomic arousal. As mentioned earlier, autonomic arousal is characterized by an increase in heart rate, muscle tension, and increased respiration (Miltenberger, 2008). It is obvious to see why individuals dealing with PTSD can't sleep well, end up irritable, and become hypervigilant. When considering the results, one can surmise that having PTSD can make sustaining a solid marriage a difficult task (Haisch & Meyers, 2004). Fortunately, research has shown that relaxation training is very helpful in dealing with autonomic arousal. Three of the more popular types of relaxation training include behavioral relaxation training, diaphragmatic breathing, and progressive muscle relaxation (Miltenberger). Although three of the relaxation training methods have similar aspects, each is a little different. First, behavioral relaxation training will be considered in how it decreases muscle tension.

Behavioral relaxation training. Behavioral relaxation training is concerned with using postures of relaxation to decrease the tension in various muscles and other portions of the body. While sitting in a comfortable chair such as a recliner, the therapist may have the patient go through different postures of relaxation. The postures decrease tension throughout the body by relaxing various parts of the body such as the head and shoulders. It is important for patients to concentrate on breathing correctly, too. Like behavioral relaxation training, diaphragmatic breathing also helps with relaxation (Miltenberger, 2008).

Diaphragmatic breathing. Diaphragmatic breathing is a relaxation technique that involves deep and slow breaths. The breathing is to be done in consistent intervals. Considering how PTSD can result in physiological arousal, controlled and relaxed

breathing can really help in this regard. To fully maximize relaxation within diaphragmatic breathing, individuals must sit in a relaxed position and learn how to properly breathe using their diaphragm. Diaphragmatic breathing is most beneficial when the shoulders remain still and the diaphragm pushes out while inhaling. While remaining in a relaxing position, the individual should close his or her eyes and slowly inhale through their nose for about three to five seconds. To breathe out, the individual must slowly exhale for three to five seconds through the nose. The great part about diaphragmatic breathing is that it can be used in the field (Miltnerberger, 2008). If an officer is in a real stressful situation, he or she can concentrate on using diaphragmatic breathing to ease the autonomic arousal.

Progressive muscle relaxation. Progressive muscle relaxation is the process by which an individual tenses his or her muscles and then relaxes them. Progressive muscle relaxation consists of relaxing one major muscle group at a time. Like the other two types of relaxation, progressive muscle relaxation is best done while seated in a recliner. Relaxation is better acquired when the room is quiet and the individual closes his or her eyes when tensing and relaxing. By tensing each muscle group for about five seconds and then letting them relax for five or even ten seconds, the muscles will become less tense than before (Miltnerberger, 2008). Each of the relaxation training techniques can be very beneficial for dealing with physiological arousal. As mentioned earlier, it is important for officers to take care of physiological arousal because it makes it difficult for one to solve problems and think clearly (Roberts & Levenson, 2001).

Negative Thoughts

Cognitive therapy. Like autonomic arousal, negative thoughts resulting from stress can also impact an officer. When one consistently looks at oneself from a negative or depressive point of view, the individual can become depressed (Dozois et al., 2009). One of the best ways for an officer to address the issue of having negative thoughts is through cognitive therapy (Dozois et al.). Cognitive therapy is a part of cognitive behavior modification. The term cognitive behavior modification is used to describe the various procedures that people use to change their cognitive behaviors. Cognitive therapy in particular is used for removing unwanted cognitive behaviors (Miltnerberger, 2008).

An unwanted cognitive behavior for law enforcement officers may include having a pessimistic view on life or even having the cognitive distortion of personalization. An example of personalization for an officer could involve a situation where the officer wasn't responsible for some negative occurrence at work, but for some reason the officer still may feel like he or she is to blame. To change a patient's unwanted cognitive behavior, therapists seek to discover the patient's negative thoughts that are resulting in emotional responses such as depression and anxiety (Miltnerberger, 2008). Therapists will then try to restructure the patient's way of thinking by replacing the individual's irrational self-talk with a more accurate view. Instead of jumping to conclusions, over generalizing, or personalizing, the patient learns to see things more rationally (Miltnerberger).

Aaron Beck concluded that the themes and thought processes of individuals separate those who are depressed and those who are not depressed. The differences are seen in considering the causes and origin of individuals' depression. According to Beck's theory, depressed people are depressed because they originally had a negative self-

schema (Dozois et al., 2009). A negative self-schema is basically where individuals have a negative understanding of themselves. The schema is supposed to stay dormant until the individual experiences a really bad life circumstance. An officer losing a partner or being involved in a shooting could be just the life circumstance needed for the issue to surface. When the schema finally surfaces, the content as well as the thought process can become negative. Fortunately, research has shown that cognitive therapy can transform the way individuals perceive themselves. Because of this, it is considered by some to be the psychological treatment of choice for depression (Dozois et al.). Some tests have even shown that cognitive therapy has a lower rate of relapse than the medications used for depression. For officers dealing with depression and negative thoughts, cognitive therapy could be a great option (Dozois et al.).

Stress

Cognitive behavioral therapy. Dealing with the stress itself is just as important if not more important than dealing with the results of stress. Of the various treatments for dealing with stress, psychologists deem cognitive behavioral therapy to be one of the most efficient. Cognitive behavioral therapy is considered to be a better solution to stress than both organizational intervention programs and the previously mentioned relaxation techniques. When combined with muscle relaxation techniques such as Yoga, cognitive behavioral therapy has shown to be even more effective than on its own. (Granath, Ingvarsson, Lundberg, & von Thiele, 2006).

Decreasing organizational stress. Many therapies are designed to deal just with intrapersonal stress. As previously mentioned, there is no way to totally remove the actual intrapersonal stressors of law enforcement. Fortunately for officers, there are ways

of preventing organizational stress at its root. Prevention of organizational stress mainly rests on the administration. Administrators must consciously put forth effort to improve organizational communication, teamwork, and decentralize the authority within management (Stinchcomb, 2004). The added communication and teamwork will give officers a better idea of what is expected of them and can help decrease unneeded organizational stress. By decentralizing the management, officers feel as if they are a vital part of the law enforcement work group (Stinchcomb). To increase communication and teamwork, administrators can use positive reinforcement. By adding administrative ride-alongs, administrators can actively see what is going on with the officers who are out on the streets. The administrators should use the added face time to improve and increase communication as well as find better ways to increase teamwork. Also, adding meetings to discuss department decisions can help with decentralization (Miltenberger, 2008). In the end, organizational stress will be reduced.

Law enforcement job stress does not have to simply be ignored. Law enforcement officers can meet stress head on. As discussed previously, research has shown that stress and stress related issues can be managed through behavior modification. Various forms of behavior modification can be beneficial in dealing with posttraumatic stress disorder, negative thoughts and even stress itself. Although law enforcement officers may be hesitant to consider behavior modification techniques, research has shown that behavior modification works (Miltenberger, 2008).

Combating the Influence of Stress upon Law Enforcement Marriages

Just helping law enforcement officers individually cope with stress and its side effects won't keep marriages together. Since job stress can overflow into the actual

marriage itself, it is important for couples to learn to work together to deal with some of the previously mentioned issues for law enforcement officers. To combat the actual effects of job stress on law enforcement marriages, couples should seek family therapy and rely on God.

Family Therapy

Family therapy can be very useful in revitalizing one's marriage. Therapists have learned numerous techniques to help couples deal with the unique job stresses of law enforcement. Together, couples can minimize their possibilities for divorce by dealing with the issues of intimacy, law enforcement subculture influences, and communication (Borum & Philpot, 1993).

Intimacy. Intimacy is a key for successful marriages. While at therapy, therapists may make the couple remember the couple's early days of dating and discover what originally attracted the individuals to each other (Borum & Philpot, 1993). To help with intimacy, couples are shown how to enhance their connectedness. To enhance connectedness, couples are taught to focus on the strengths of their marriage. Therapists may also assign homework to the couple that includes a list of activities that the individuals should do for each other in order to show that they care (Borum & Philpot).

Subculture influences. The law enforcement subculture and officers' hectic schedules influence many aspects of officers' lives. It was shown earlier that spousal interaction can suffer greatly as a result of the law enforcement subculture influences. To help with the lack of time that law enforcement officers and their spouses spend together, couples may be asked to set aside time for weekly dates and trips on the weekends (Borum & Philpot, 1993). In order to successfully disrupt the influence of the subculture,

it is imperative that couples first focus on their marital stability before they start to branch out and become involved in the social world (Miller, 2007).

Officers must also learn to compartmentalize their feelings. At work officers may be asked to suppress their feelings, but at home, they must be able to share their feelings with their spouses. Once the relationship has some stability, it is then important that officers and their spouses become involved in social activities outside of the department (Miller, 2007).

Communication. While in family therapy, couples are often given the task of creating more time for communication. The key is that within the time set aside, couples are not allowed to talk about their jobs or anything that might cause problems. The time that is set aside for communication just gives couples time to relate to each other in a non-threatening manner (Borum & Philpot, 1993; Miller, 2007). When working with the couples, therapists also teach the couples how to solve problems and resolve conflicts together. The main priority is that the couples learn to work together. To communicate effectively, therapists place importance on active and non-defensive listening. Active listening is where the listener responds to statements made by the one speaking in order to show that he or she is listening. Active listening helps the listener better understand what the speaker is saying and also lets the speaker know that he or she is being understood. Non-defensive listening is where the speaker is allowed to speak his or her mind without any defensive interruptions from the listener (Borum & Philpot). The aim is for the partners to become empathetic. Couples must come to realize that for the relationships to work, neither spouse can seek to win arguments. In the end, couples will

come to the point in which they are much more comfortable revealing their emotions (Borum & Philpot).

Reliance on God

Family therapy has shown signs of success, but therapists alone can't always save law enforcement officers' marriages. For a marriage to stand up against the stresses imposed upon it, marriages don't just have to rely on human solutions; husbands and wives can learn to rely on and seek God. When a couple takes a vow of marriage, the couple makes a commitment before God and becomes one. God's original plan for marriage was for couples not to divorce (Matthew 19:4-9, New American Standard Bible). For marriages to remain unified according to God's original plan, each spouse should seek God personally and the couple should seek God together.

Personal relationships with God. For a marriage to rely on God, it is essential that both spouses have a growing relationship with God. If one of the individuals doesn't have a relationship with Christ, it is like the effort made between two unequally yoked oxen (II Corinthians 6:14). Couples can have a difficult time working together when their whole purpose for living is totally different. An unequally yoked marriage may result in one of the spouses placing too much of a burden upon the other spouse. A husband or wife may end up looking to his or her mate to fill a God-sized void, but man cannot fill what God was meant to fill. By first having a relationship with God, spouses can also better understand how to love their mates (Clinton & Sibcy, 2006).

A husband is supposed to love his wife as Christ loved the church. Christ died for the church and husbands must sacrifice nothing less than their lives in order to be the husbands that they are meant to be (Ephesians 5:25). Humans are naturally selfish, but it

takes sacrifice for marriage to work. For a stressed-out officer, the sacrifice needed of him may be that he should come home and make the decision to engage in conversation with his wife. For a wife at home, she must live by biblical truths as well. When dealing with her stressed-out husband, she must apply the principle of forgiveness (Colossians 3:13). The officer's wife must learn to forgive her husband as Christ forgave her. Spouses must learn to forgive each other in order for their relationship to move forward and ultimately, forgiveness comes down to a decision. Spouses can forgive their husbands or wives even in the midst of negative emotions (DiBlasio, 2010). The impact of Christ-like forgiveness was analyzed in a decision-based therapeutic study which used a thirteen step process. The process started by teaching the spouses to understand forgiveness from a biblical standpoint and eventually worked towards the goal of having the spouses give and receive forgiveness. Like family therapy, the focus was to have each spouse grow in empathy (DiBlasio). To see if the therapy had actually helped the couple, follow up was conducted four years after the therapy. In the follow-up, the couple mentioned how Christ-like forgiveness had helped them with more than just short-term issues; the forgiveness positively affected the long-term intimacy of their relationship (DiBlasio). Like forgiveness, secure attachment is an important aspect of relying on God (Clinton & Sibcy, 2006).

Successful relationships can occur when each member has a secure attachment style with the other member (Clinton & Sibcy, 2006). When an individual prays to God, the relationship that is established with God can create a safe haven within the individual's life. The safe haven gives the individual a solid platform that he or she can work from. A safe haven and solid platform are beneficial in developing a secure

attachment style. Having a secure God attachment is important in establishing secure attachments with one's spouse, too (Clinton & Sibcy). Just knowing that God loves unconditionally can be a great source of security. Research has shown that there is a positive correlation between couples being religious and having both stable and satisfying marriages (Harris & Schvaneveldt, 2008).

Seeking God together. Couples shouldn't just seek God personally; they should also seek God together. It was mentioned previously that officers can triangulate their marriage. Instead of the marriage just including two people, the officer's department can somehow become a third member of the relationship (Borum & Philpot, 1993; Miller, 2007). Not all relationships made of three members are harmful. In fact, God's plan was for marriage to be between a man, woman, and God (Clinton & Sibcy, 2006).

One of the most important ways that couples can seek God together is through prayer. Research over the last decade has started to realize the power of prayer. One of the most impactful aspects of prayer is in how it helps couples deal with marital conflict (Butler, Gardner, & Stout, 2002). If couples pray together in the midst of marital distress, there tends to be a softening of the relationship. What is especially important for law enforcement officers is that praying together can lower emotional reactions to conflict. A lowering of negativity and enmity can occur from praying together as well. To further help with reconciliation, praying together also helps develop better marital communication, encourages commitment, and builds intimacy (Butler, Gardner, & Stout).

Conclusion

Job stress is a reality for law enforcement officers. From intrapersonal stress to organizational stress, officers experience large quantities of stress (Borum & Philpot,

1993; Miller, 2007; Roberts & Levenson, 2001; Stinchcomb, 2004; Waters & Ussery, 2007). Although job stress is often carried home by officers, marriage dissolution does not have to be the end result. With a proper knowledge base and some extra work, officers can learn to manage their stress and have successful marriages. To minimize the effects that job stress has on marriage, it is important to consider the reality of law enforcement job stress, analyze its marital effects, diffuse the stressful impacts upon the officer, and finally deal with the actual effects it has upon marriage. To be a law enforcement officer, one does not have to divorce his or her spouse and marry the force.

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