


# Understanding Cop Culture



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[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2lCWUufgRFU&has\\_verified=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2lCWUufgRFU&has_verified=1)

## Driving Priorities for this Presentation

- **Mental health providers/organizations may lack the cultural competence to meet law enforcement personnel “where they are”**
- **Law enforcement profession is in crisis**
- **Law enforcement agencies are working to better support their personnel**
- **Increasing numbers of law enforcement personnel are/will be seeking mental health services**
- **Community – Law Enforcement relations are in turmoil**

# A Professional Community in Crisis





# Law Enforcement *Line of Duty* Deaths

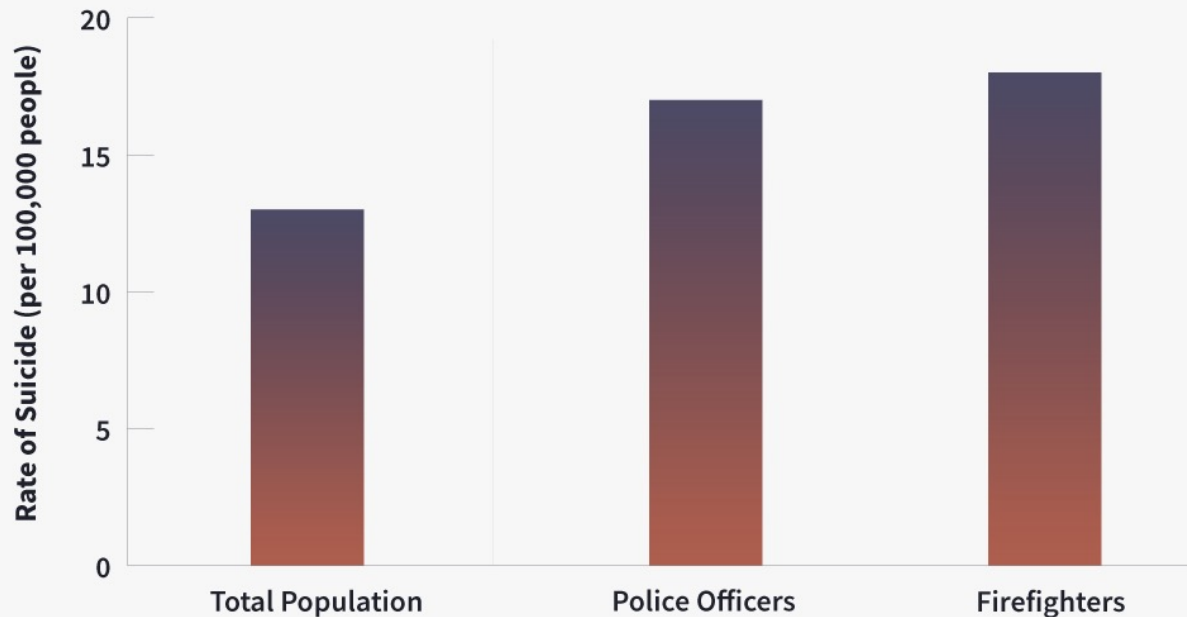
vs.

## Deaths by Suicide

Year	Line of Duty Deaths Source FBI	Deaths by Suicide Source Bluehelp.org
2016	118	149
2017	93	174
2018	106	179
2019	134	237
2020	126*	171
2021 thru 3/21	33*	33

**LEO/FR Suicide Rates = 18 per 100,000**  
**General Population Suicide Rates = 13 per 100,000**

### Suicide Rates Among Firefighters and Police Officers



Source: Heyman, Miriam; Dill, Jeff; Douglas, Robert. "The Ruderman White Paper on Mental Health and Suicide of First Responders," Ruderman Family Foundation, April 2018. Accessed March 26, 2019. [www.rudermanfoundation.org/white\\_papers/police-officers-and-firefighters-are-more-likely-to-die-by-suicide-than-in-line-of-duty/](http://www.rudermanfoundation.org/white_papers/police-officers-and-firefighters-are-more-likely-to-die-by-suicide-than-in-line-of-duty/)

Created by: Counseling@Northwestern, the Online Master of Arts in Counseling Program from The Family Institute at Northwestern University.



# **Cops and Communities**

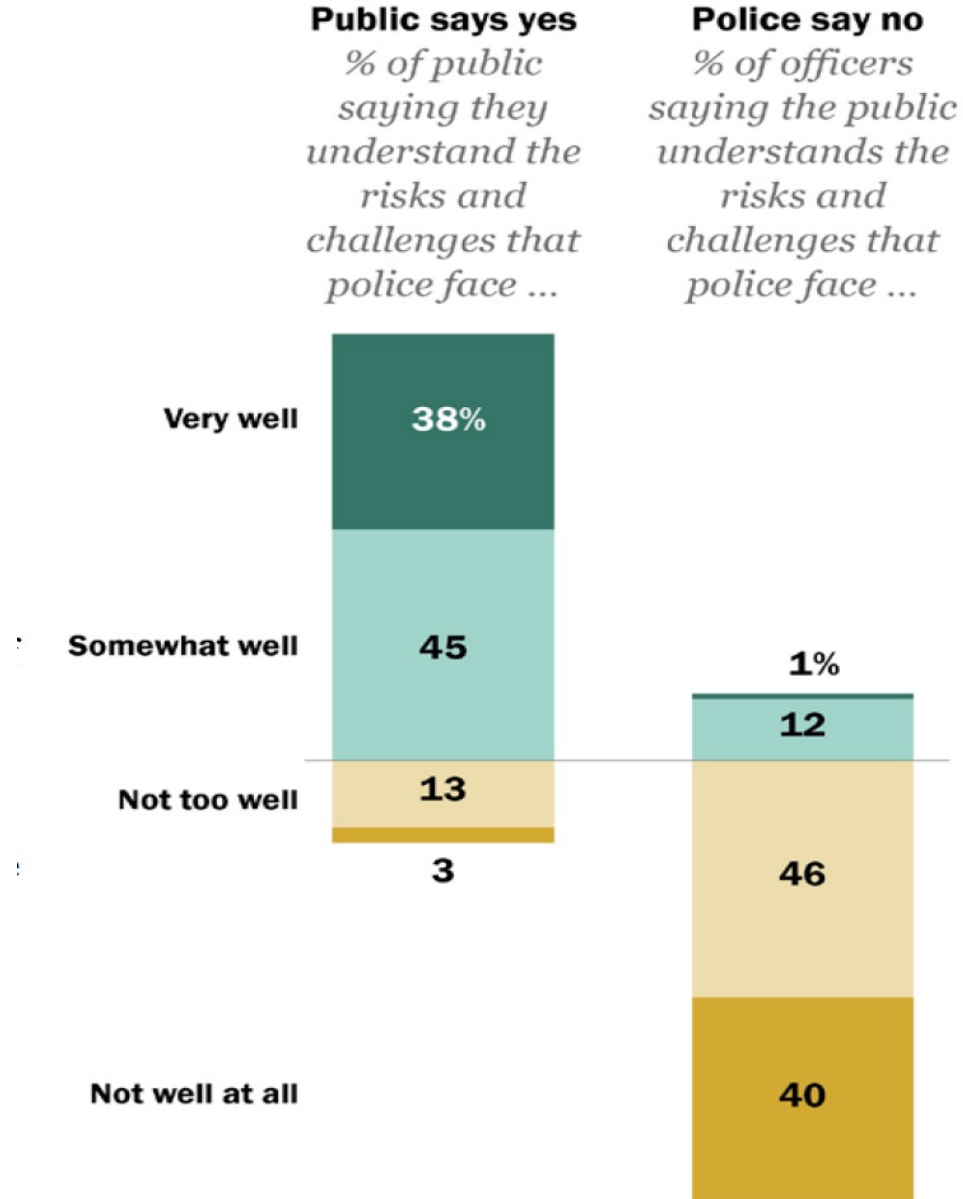
## ***A Crisis in Disconnection***

***“Come love me, go away!”***  
***We need you (desperately)***  
***And we fear you!***

***Us versus Them Polarization***

***Cops as Entertainment***

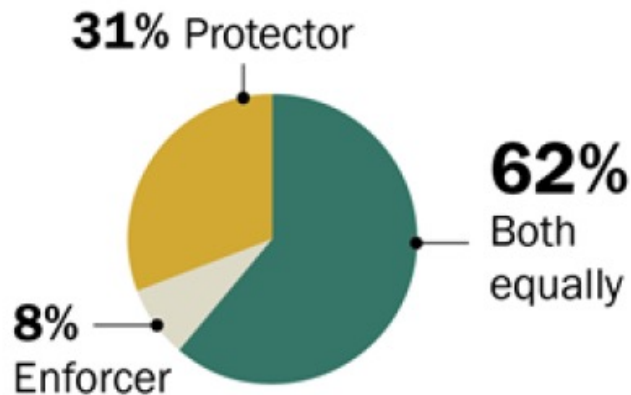
## Do Americans understand the challenges police face on the job?



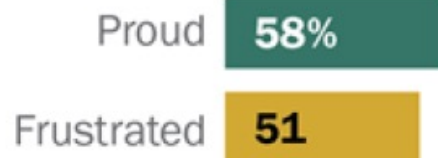


# The Dual Nature of Police Work: For Officers, Emotions and Experiences are Often in Conflict

They see themselves as protectors/enforcers ...



Police work nearly always/  
often makes them feel ...



They worry about their safety  
at least some of the time

84

They think the public doesn't  
understand risks they face

86

In the past month they have been \_\_\_\_  
by a community member while on duty

Thanked for  
their service

79

Verbally abused

67

# Organizational Stress

# Traumatic Stress



## Code 9 Officer Needs Assistance

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uj6lnQp\\_NIE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uj6lnQp_NIE)

# Cop Operational Stress

*Policing- possibly the most dangerous career in modern society*

- **Isolation**- cops frequently work alone
- **Unpredictable danger**- guard must *always* be up
- **Cops run *into the fight***, back-up other FRs
- **Work ethic/attitude is about *safety and survival*** in the context of *risks other people don't take*
- **Engaging with “*people at their worst*”**
- **Unpredictable/rotating shift work**- 24/7 operations
- **Low pay**- over time and “secondary” are essential
- **Understaffed**
- **High workload**
- **Multi-tasking**
- **Community expectation: *see and prevent***, not just respond
- **Protector – Enforcer Duality**, often contradictory “hats”
- **Rapid decision making by *heuristics***

# Cop Organizational Stress

*Cultural context: rigid ideals vs. lived experience*

- **Politicization of agency-** command staff report to politicians
  - politicians
- **Workplace culture-** insular group attitudes and behaviors
  - Prove your adequacy
  - Invulnerability- pretend to be OK when you're not
- **Co-worker work ethic and interactions**
  - “Gallows” humor
  - Bonding through “harassing”- giving each other crap
- **Administrative and supervisory practices**
  - Favoritism vs. meritocracy
- **Evaluation practices**
- **Recognition practices**
- **Internal affairs/OIS investigations**
- **Public image- officer's and agency's**
- **Media boundaries**



# Cop Stress: The Consequences

- **Systemic Distrust**- in others and organization
- **Delayed Officer Response/Situational Reluctance**
- **Vigilance**- heightened levels of awareness/alertness necessary for officer survival
  - Chronic exposure to critical incidents blocks return to “baseline” levels of tension- leads to chronic anxiety
  - Habituated anticipation of trauma- a.k.a., *first stage of trauma* (1996, Van Der Kolk, et al)
- **Hypervigilance**- “*Jacked Up*” panic like state in which sensory inputs are narrowed and decision making processes break down (lower brain dominates).
  - Reflects acute stress, fear and anxiety
  - Hypervigilance can become **chronic and habituated**
- **A “New Normal”**- an officer’s baseline for stress resets at increasingly higher levels

# Traumatic Stress and PTSD

*Trauma incurred may be more than the identified critical incident*

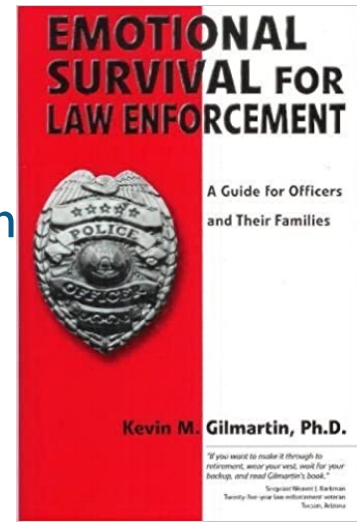
- **Primary trauma-** LODT, LODD, OIS/PSTLE (Adler-Tapia, 2012)
- **Secondary trauma or vicarious trauma-** witnessing and responding to trauma of others
  - \* *Systematic desensitization or habituation does not occur*
  - \* *Increased risk for compassion fatigue*
- **Betrayal Trauma-** stigma and shame experienced for needing help, loss of inclusion in “police family”
- **Institutional trauma-** Politicization of agency/command staff; *shaming abandonment*
- **Trauma after the trauma-** criminal charges, peer/command staff 2<sup>nd</sup> guessing, forensic/IA investigations, media/public demonization
- **Traumatic context-** Cop culture expectations, e.g. emotional suppression, surrounding traumatic event can delay PTSD symptom onset

# Moral Injury

- **Moral Injury-** damage to a person resulting from a *normal response* to an extreme contradiction or violation of deeply held moral expectations- the ***betrayal of what's right***- loss of identity and core self:
  - “Now that I have *done/seen/allowed* this, how do I *belong/trust/go on?*” “*Who am I now?*” “*With whom do I belong?*”
- Moral injury is **NOT** a disorder but rather a **psychic wound** that raises risks for MH disorders and increases the risk for suicide- **a psychic “sepsis”**
- Healing from moral injury is a process of ***rebuilding one's self and one's place amongst others, rooted in forgiveness-*** of self and society.

# Cop Psychology

- Kevin Gilmartin, Ph.D., *Emotional Survival for Law Enforcement*
  - **Hypervigilance Biological Roller Coaster** ®
  - **Magic Chair** ®
- Coping with **chronic** exposure to trauma necessitates continuous “superhuman emotional strength”
  - **Compartmentalization**- blocking emotions and memories out
  - **Containment**- emotional suppression
  - **Stoicism**- *cultural expectation*- suffering while appearing “fine”
  - **Depersonalization**- experiencing event but feeling like it’s happening to someone else
  - **Derealization**- experiencing event but feeling like the event isn’t real
  - **Dissociation**- bodily disconnection to detach from reality (of experience)
- Chronic use of these coping strategies can result in **delayed on set of PTSD**





# The Cop Journey



A journey from idealism to cynicism,  
from enthusiastic optimism to pessimism,  
from easy going to angry rigidity.



# The Cop Journey

1. Cops spend more time in the culture of the “family” of officers than in the culture of their family- *relational styles are split between two very different worlds*
  - Functional social-emotional overlap is *minimal*
  - Decreased intimate connections and support systems
  - Overvaluation of self-reliance and isolation
  - “All or nothing” cognitive style
  - Shame and stigma associated with needing help/help seeking
2. Metrics for success??? *When every scenario involves somebody’s failure...*
  - Survival/harm mitigation- for self and others
  - Trust and Respect among peers- *the “family”*
  - Job fulfillment- making a difference(?)
  - Awards/recognitions- *conflicted?!*
  - Job performance evaluations

# Cops as Clients

1. **Presenting issues will probably not be work related** unless work generated referral
  - a. Marital/family/relationship issues
  - b. Anger management
  - c. Depression and anxiety
  - d. Physical health concerns/substance misuse
  - e. PTSD/Moral Injury
2. **Individual developmental histories (ACES)** at least as frequent as overall population
  1. **Work stress- *cop culture***- intertwined with and exacerbating presenting issues

# Cops as Clients

## 1. **Immediate priority:** stabilization and symptom reduction

- *Because they need to get back to work **immediately!!***
- Immediate relief increases likelihood of buy-in for future sessions

## 1. **Trust and Safety Building-** “Do I belong here?” *Commonality of “mindset”*

## 3. **Dominant coping strategies** involving escape and avoidance

- Social isolation- *hard to feel normal among non-cops*
- Discarded interests/outlets, “I usta \_\_\_\_\_” (Gilmartin 2018)
- Alcohol and substance abuse

# Cops as Clients

## “High Risk” Presenting Themes

### 1. Eroding identity- *am I making a difference?*

- Diminished sense of purpose and fulfillment
- Increasing isolation
- Reduced pride in professional and personal roles

### 1. Failure and Shame- *what's wrong with me?!*

- Self-perception as weak and inadequate for being effected by stress/trauma in work
- Self-blame for effects of trauma experiences

### 2. Cultural Disenfranchisement- *from police family*

- OIS/use of force investigations
- Professional/personal invalidation- I/my service doesn't matter
- Loss of trust across relationships

# Cops as Clients

## Envisioning the Treatment Process

- History taking takes back seat to immediate need for relief
- Relational and self-regulation **skills development**- cops are all about training
- Trauma informed, body focused interventions, EMDR, ART, Somatic Sensory
- “Communalize” stress and trauma experiences through sharing of stories in empathic, open communities, e.g. nurturing partners, peer support networks



# Cops as Clients

**Complicated referrals**- who initiated the referral?

- Post traumatic forensic involvement
  - Criminal investigations and/or civil litigation
  - Officer involved shooting
  - Workers compensation
- Command staff initiated referral and expectations
  - Fitness for duty assessment?
  - Who are we working for? (challenged boundaries)
- Vulnerability of therapists notes to subpoena

# The Deeper Dive pg. I

**RIDE ALONGS:** minimum 2-3

- **LEA Trainings**, e.g. Crisis Intervention Team (CIT), Force Science Institute

## ***Surviving Cop Culture: Bibliography***

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