

# 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

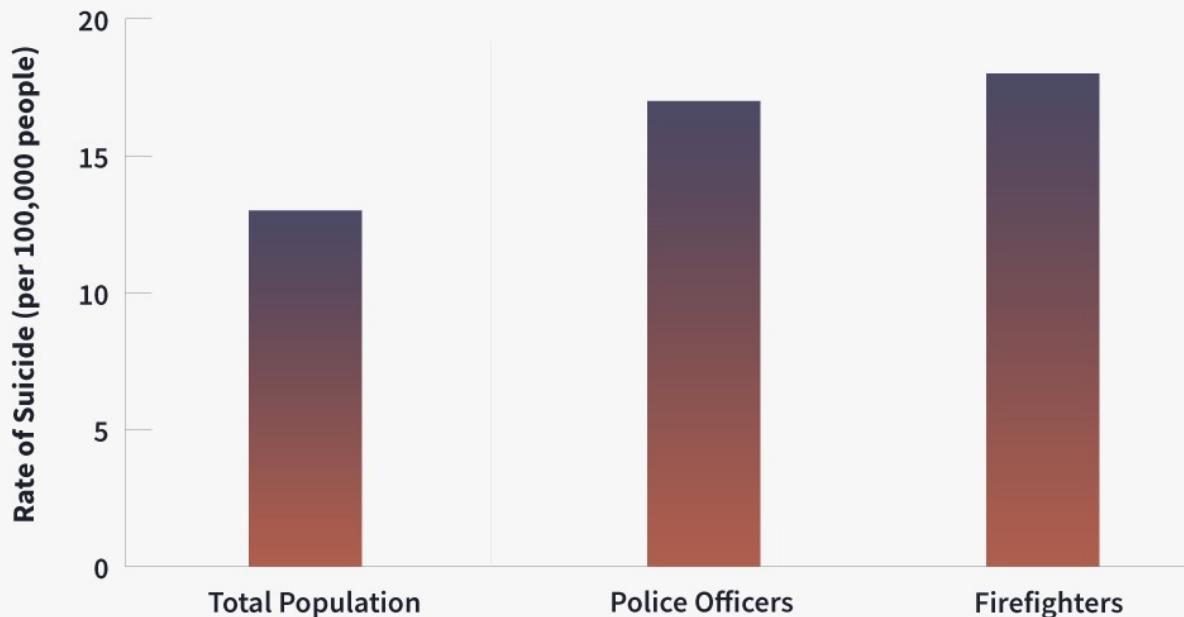
vs.

## 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.ruderemanfoundation.org/white\\_papers/police-officers-and-firefighters-are-more-likely-to-die-by-suicide-than-in-line-of-duty/](http://www.ruderemanfoundation.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**

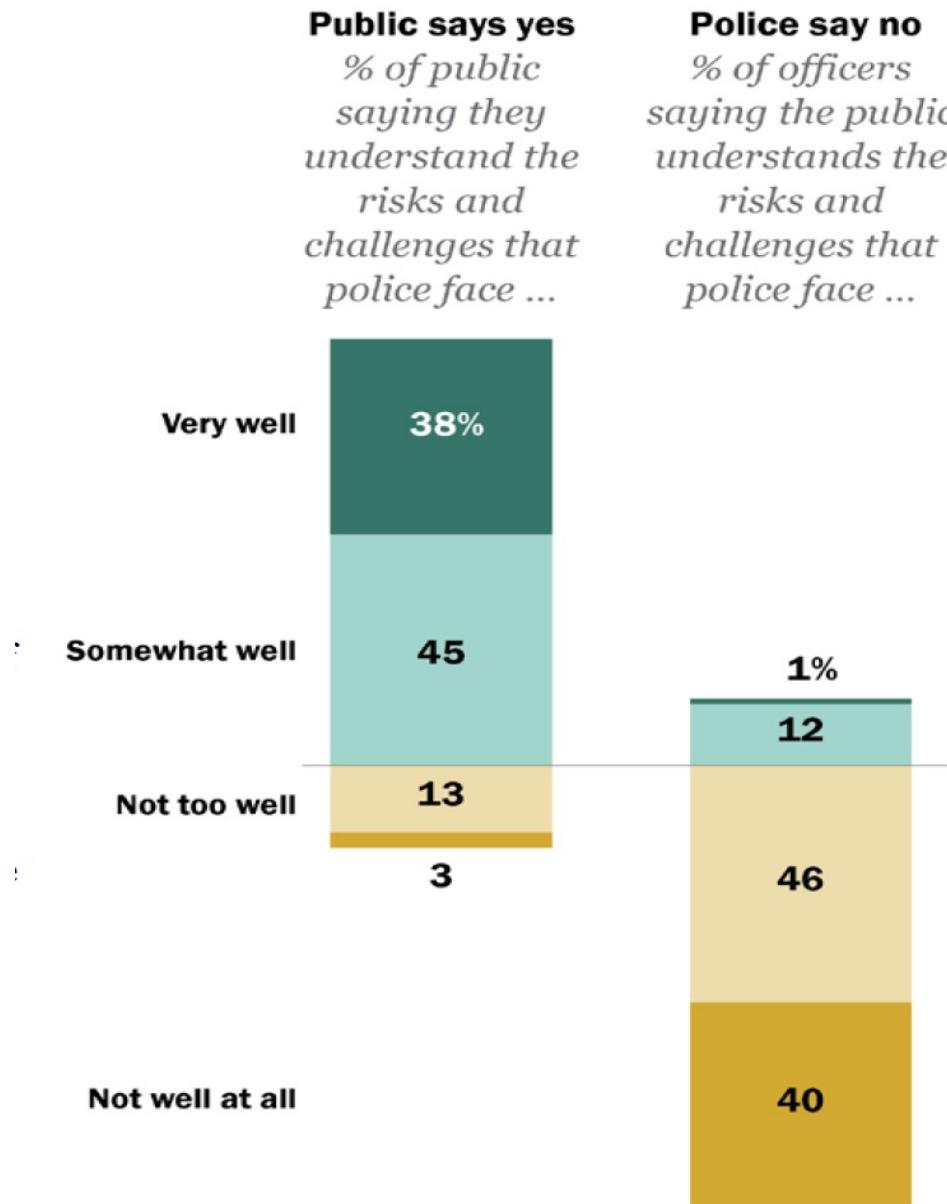
## *A Crisis in Disconnection*

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

***Us versus Them Polarization***

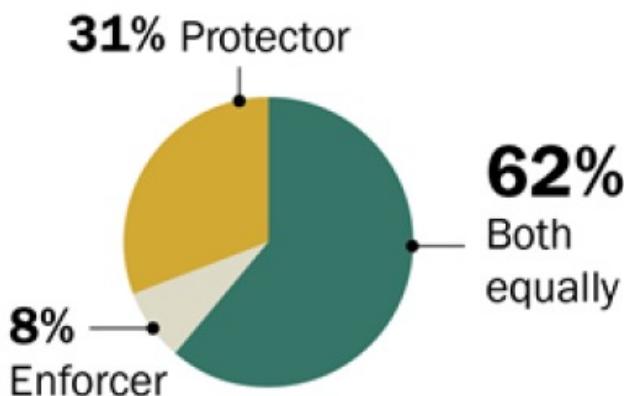
***Cops as Entertainment***

## 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 ...

Proud **58%**

Frustrated **51**

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**

# Cop Stress – Cop Culture

# Operational Stress

# Organizational Stress



# Traumatic Stress

# Code 9 Officer Needs Assistance

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uj6InQp\\_NIE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uj6InQp_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
- **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*

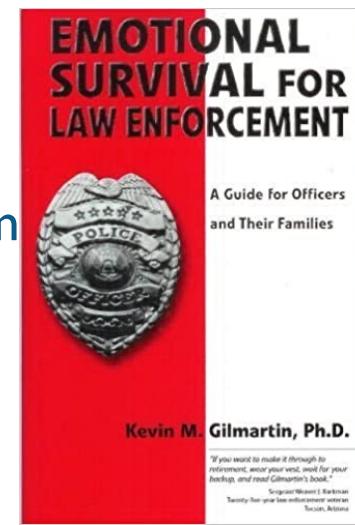
- **Primary trauma-** LODT, LODD, OIS/PSTLE (Adler-Tapia, 2012)
- **Secondary trauma or vicarious trauma-** witnessing and responding to trauma of others
  - \* *Systematic desensitization or habituation does not occur*
  - \* *Increased risk for compassion fatigue*
- **Betrayal Trauma-** stigma and 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

- I. **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**
- I. **Work stress- cop culture-** intertwined with and exacerbating presenting issues



# Cops as Clients

- I. **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
- I. **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

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