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A Qualitative Investigation of Police Officers' Reports of Stress and PTSD While on the Job

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Abstract

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Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is most commonly known as PTSD. It is affecting people of all races, and genders. Very subtle literature has been done on pinpointing post traumatic stress disorder specifically in police officers, and a lot of police officers aren't even knowledgeable on the effects and symptoms of police officer PTSD. The major hypothesis is that when PTSD levels increase, on the job stress rates increase. Mixed methods will be used in conducting research for this topic.

Introduction

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In this mostly qualitative research proposal I gathered information on how different traumatic situations cops are put in has to deal with the levels of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, known as (PTSD). One question is whether levels of PTSD are through having to deal with the politics in police or just the strain of the job itself. Also, I was researching to see a) if the department in fact would have treatment, b) if there was treatment available, would the officers use it? And c) perhaps officers would avoid treatment due to their high ego? I have therefore conducted interviews with police officers in finding out if officers hide from their PTSD and what the department does to help them cope. My results suggest that officers definitely hide from the fact that they have or may have PTSD, because of the separation and trust issues with the department.

Theory

One theory is that police officers have such a high level of PTSD because the departments does not put in efforts to treat it. And the officers feel that if they go into seek help the department will make fun of them or even tell them that they don't need that treatment. As we can see this is not helping the problem of preventing PTSD it is only prolonging it.

Another theory is that police officers have other factors in attaining PTSD. According to www.policeone.com "Other stressful situations include, but are not limited to: long hours; handling people's attitudes; waiting for the next call and not knowing what the situation will be; and even politics within the department." Age can also have a factor in PTSD because younger police officers are not quite mentally stable to deal with these things that can't be taught in a police academy.

Hypothesis

Hypothesis

1. As PTSD increases, on the job stress rates increases
2. As PTSD decreases, on the job stress rates increases
3. As PTSD increases, on the job stress rates decreases
4. As PTSD decreases, on the job stress rates decreases
5. There is no relationship between PTSD and the on the job stress for police (the null hypothesis)

1. As PTSD increases, the higher the chance an officer attends counseling rate increases
2. As PTSD decreases, the higher the chance an officer attends counseling rates increases
3. As PTSD increases, the higher the chance an officer attends counseling decreases
4. As PTSD decreases, the higher the chance an officer attends counseling rates decreases
5. There is no relationship between PTSD and the chance an officer attends counseling (the null hypothesis)

For more information contact:

Data Collection and Methods

Sample

Conducting interviews was a very vigorous process. I made sure to let the personal that I was interviewing know that confidentiality was a key factor in this process. I interviewed the Chief of the Bernalillo Police Department, and three different officers from varying agencies. Officer A, is with the New Mexico State Police and has been an officer for a little over one year. This officer was interviewed on the phone for about 10 minutes.

Officer B is a medically retired LAPD detective. He was on the force for 13 years until he decided to medically retire. Officer B was interviewed on the phone and that lasted close to twenty-five minutes.

Officer C is an officer of the Bernalillo Police Department and he has been on the force for 9 years. His interview was conducted in person at a coffee shop in Bernalillo, New Mexico. This interview lasted about twenty-five minutes.

Officer D is a Deputy with the Santa Fe County Sheriffs Department and has been on the force for 9 years. He is a veteran of war and his interview was also conducted through the telephone. This interview took about 10 minutes. I asked for informed consent to conduct every interview, just for validity on my part. Even though police officers are a "public figure" in uniform and we don't need consent. I asked anyway to boost my validity in efforts for more reliable answers. All interviews were conducted with respect and integrity to this subject of PTSD. None of the interviews were recorded and or video taped.

Data Analysis and Findings

FIGURE 1: Themes Identified

QUESTIONS	RESPONSES CHIEF	RESPONSE OFFICER A	RESPONSE OFFICER B	RESPONSE OFFICER C	RESPONSE OFFICER D	THEMES
Would you say that you enjoy your job?	Somedays more than others, I love my career	Yes, I love it.	Yes, I loved it. Everything about it.	Yes I ultimately enjoy it	Yes	Enjoys job
What stress management policies does/ did the department have?	Counseling upon officer request	P.O.S.T TEAM- Will lend you help ever ever needed.	We really didn't have any specific for stress.	I don't think there is any	Give time off if requested.	If requested
Is there a counselor readily available at all hours of duty?	No, not 24/7	No, just P.O.S.T Team	No	Yes	Yes, chaplains	Only bigger agencies
What actions are taken to reduce stress in your department?	No actual stress reduce programs.	No real actions are taken other than P.O.S.T	Nothing was done	Nothing, in place for that	Time off if requested	No actions taken by department.
What is the worst part of your job?	As a police chief the worst part of my job is the constant worry that all officers under my supervision are safe and doing their jobs to the best of their ability.	Crimes against children	Politics in the department.	Dealing with major incidents	Paper work and politics in the department	All answers varied.
Did you ever encounter groupies?	haha, yes. A very long time ago	All the time	Yes, they were always there.	Yes	Yes	All answered yes
Do you know of any officers with PTSD?	Yes I do.	Yes, I do.	Yes, I thought I may have suffered as well.	Umm, not diagnosed by a doctor.	No, PTSD only occurs if you believe in it.	Varying answers. But most said yes
What was the most tragic incident you have ever been in?	Loosing an officer as a police chief.	Having a cousin of mine go on a killing rampage.	Walked into a ambush, and missed the suspect.	Tripple fatal car accident	My last shooting, it wasn't that tragic.	Death
Do you have nightmares of it?	I used to but haven't in a long time.	Yes	Yes	No, not that one but other calls yes	No	Some nightmares
Do you have trouble sleeping at night?	No	No, not really	I used to until I seeked help.	Yes	No	Varying answers
If treatments were available would you use them?	Yes	If I really had to.	N/A	No	No	No

Discussion

- Limitations of my data findings were being able to question and find time for all the ones I interviewed. A chief is a very busy man and he has a swamped schedule. Another limitation of data collection would be not being able to interview more police officers or every police officer that has ever served.

Conclusions

I found out a lot of great information about officer PTSD and stressors that they have encountered on the job. I realized that a police officers job is very rigorous not just physically but mentally, A lot of officers either have or know someone who has suffered from PTSD. I have conducted qualitative research from reliable resources, people who do this day in and day out. It was at times hard finding correlations between answers, due to all the different outlooks on police work

The null hypothesis is to take the opposite point of view than my theory took. My theory was that A, Police Officers suffer from high levels of PTSD due to the job stressors. And B, that if treatments were given to officers, they would use them. At this time I have to reject the null for A, but accept the null hypothesis for B

References

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Acknowledgements

- Stephanie Amedeo Marquez
- Bernalillo Police Department
- Santa Fe County Sheriffs Office
- New Mexico State Police
- Los Angeles Police Department
- Northern New Mexico College