

# Mental and Emotional Wellbeing of Officers:

According to a study of police suicides from 2008 through 2012, the number of officers who took their own lives was twice the number of officers killed by felons.[1] During each of these four years over 125 law enforcement officers died at their own hand. Statistics on this topic since that time have not been accurately maintained.

Officers have survived attacks and violent encounters because they kept a clear mind and used it to its most creative potential. The typical officer has only seconds to react – but it is in these few seconds that lack of clarity can be deadly – walking up on a car with a mind distracted by anxiety, job dissatisfaction, concerns over a divorce or financial worries is courting disaster.

An officer's mental wellbeing is just as important as their ballistic vest. Symptoms of anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and denial due to the stigma that accompanies an officer's persona of being a "warrior" and "protector" are factors



affecting their mental welfare. Due to the nature of law enforcement duties and responsibilities, there is a toll that may ensue.[2] This may result in fatigue due to long or erratic hours, concerns

about finances due to inherently low pay in the field, insomnia resulting from intrusive/upsetting memories or thoughts, failed relationships, drug/alcohol abuse, physical symptoms from stress and poor eating habits.

Law enforcement officer's mental wellness program components should:[3]

1. educate officers in stress management, stress inoculation, posttraumatic stress, posttraumatic stress disorder, traumatization, alcohol and substance abuse, the warning signs of depression, and officer suicide prevention;
2. engage more pre-emptive, early-warning, and periodic officer support interventions;

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3. initiate incident-specific protocols to support officers and their families when officers are involved in critical incidents;
4. create properly trained and clinically supervised peer support teams;
5. provide easy and confidential access to psychological support services, including a strong EAP program which encourages officers to seek assistance when dealing with difficult situations;
6. enhance the agency organizational and cultural climate, so that officers are encouraged to ask for help when experiencing psychological or emotional difficulties instead of keeping and acting out a deadly secret.

There is an “ethos” among police officers, where coming forward to seek help is viewed as a sign of weakness and officers are looked down upon for it. Between 15% and

18% of law enforcement officers in the U.S. suffer from PTSD.[4] Many law enforcement officers are veterans and many of those have seen combat. These officers show up the first day on the job carrying stress from what they have previously been involved in. Stress accumulates as a result of dealing with many highly stressful and often emotional situations. Stress doesn’t kill police officers, but rather trauma kills officers.[5] The cumulative nature of stress when not effectively addressed, can lead to mental and emotional trauma.

Safe Call Now is a nonprofit organization that provides 24-hour assistance to public safety employees experiencing crises. This free, confidential service is available nationwide to all public safety personnel – law enforcement officers, first responders, firefighters, corrections officers, professional support staff, and their families. [6]

## What’s Important Now?

Being physically and mentally prepared for work each day is critical for each officer to return home safely after each shift.

[1] The Badge of Life, “A Study of Police Suicide 2008-2012,”

[2] The Badge of Life, Andy O’Hara, Founder, California Highway Patrol (Ret)

[3] Police Primary and Secondary Danger: The make it Safe Police Officer Initiative, by Dr. Jack Digliani,

[4] Code 9 Officer Needs Assistance, Dr. John Violanti ( NYS Trooper Retired)

[5] Code 9 Officer Needs Assistance, Ron Clark (Conn State Police, Sgt. Retired)

[6] Safe Call Now [www.safecallnow.org](http://www.safecallnow.org)

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