Police Organization & Administration

CJ 3600

Professor James J. Drylie

Week 13
Stress and Police Personnel

- **Stress** is defined as anything that places and adjustive demand on the organism (Seyle).
- Stress is the body’s nonspecific response to any demand placed on it.
- Stress is either
  - **Positive** – eustress
  - **Negative** – distress
Biological stress

- **General Adaptation Syndrome** (Syle)
  - Three stages of *physiological* reaction to a wide variety of stressors.
    - Stressors are environmental agents or activities powerful enough to elicit a reaction from the body.
    - **Alarm**
    - **Resistance**
    - **Exhaustion**
- **Alarm**
  - Sometimes referred to as emergency reaction, or the so-called fight-or-flight syndrome.
    - The hormone ACTH is released which triggers the release of adrenaline.
      - Heart rate increases
      - Breathing quickens
      - Muscles tense
      - Digestion is inhibited

- **Resistance** – when stress continues the body’s resources mobilize to deal with the specific stressor.
  - **Adaptation** is optimal at this stage.
- **Exhaustion** – occurs when there is prolonged exposure to stress.
  - Hormonal defenses break down.
  - Further exposure leads to exhaustion, even death.
  - Syle identifies this stage as a link to certain diseases of adaptation:
    - Ulcers
    - High blood pressure
    - Coronary susceptibility
- All of this can create stress and result in psychological reactions.
  - Some can deal with it, others become overloaded.
Stress and Personality Type

- **Type A**
  - self-generated stress that is constant
  - Continuous pressure to accomplish
  - Hostile and demanding
  - Always in a hurry, sense of time urgency
  - Continuing impatience
  - Intense and ambitious
  - Compelled to challenge, not understand other Type A

- Qualities include
  - Constant state of being “on guard”
  - Hypermasculinity
- **Type B**
  - Less competitive and less rushed
  - More easygoing
  - More able to separate work from play
  - Relatively free of a sense of time urgency
  - Ambitions kept in perspective
  - Generally philosophical about life

- **Workaholic**
  - Similar to Type A
  - Addicted to work
  - Agitated and depressed when not working
  - May account for 5% of work force
Stress in policing

- Highly stressful occupation
  - Exposed to
    - Violence
    - Danger
    - Cruelty
    - Aggression
    - Decision-making under highly stressful conditions

- Police stressors
  - The single most potent stressor is killing someone in the line of duty.

Table 13.2, p. 536
Alcoholism

- Alcoholism in police officers manifests in a number of ways.
  - Higher than normal absentee rate before and after regular day off
  - Complaints of insubordination
  - Complaints by citizens
    - Verbal and physical abuse
  - Policing is conducive to alcoholism due to the acceptance of social drinking
  - The “character flaw” theory of alcoholism is an archaic way of thinking
    - Dismisses the alcoholic officer as unproductive
      - Views the problem, not the symptoms
Drug use

- It is estimated that 10% of the police work force may have a serious drug problem.
  - Unlike alcohol use, drug use is illegal
  - Does a drug using officer deserve an attempt at rehabilitation?
- Anabolic steroids – not a drug that is included in random drug screening
  - Estimated that more than 1 million Americans are regular steroid users.
  - Aggressive behavior is almost universal among users.

Table 13.4, p. 541
Police suicide

- A major difficulty in examining police suicide relates to the data.
  - Agencies are often reluctant to allow access to such data.
    - The police represent a highly cohesive subculture

- US suicide rate is 11.7 per 100,000
  - Police suicide rate in the NYPD was found to be 29 per 100,000

- Firearms were most commonly used.

- Alcohol abuse is common
  - Some studies found evidence of psychiatric or medical problems
Common factors

- Access to and familiarity with firearms
- Alcohol abuse
- Fear of separation from police subculture

Warning signs
- Recent loss
- Sadness
- Disappointment
- Grief
- Alienation
- Depression
- Loneliness
Suicide by cop

- Does not define suicide committed by a police officer.
- A colloquialism for a phenomenon that describes a suicidal person who resorts to the police as a mechanism for suicide.
  - Victim-scripted suicide (Drylie, 2006) objectively describes SbC
    - Voluntarily enters the script
    - Threat or perception
    - Communication of suicidal intent/ideation
Critical incident stress

- A crisis situation that causes individuals to respond with immediate or delayed stress-altered physical, mental, emotional, psychological, or social coping mechanisms.

- May include
  - Disasters
    - Accidental
    - Natural
    - Terrorist
Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

- Based on the critical incident and the individual response.
- Manifests predictable symptomatology and more individual response patterns.
- If adaptation or effective resistance is not possible the unresolved stress reaction may manifest itself physically and psychologically.

Table 13.5, p. 557
Stress and female officers

- Women account for approximately 14% of the workforce of agencies with 100+ officers.
- Females face the same stressors as their male counterparts.
- Tend to be excluded from predominately male assignments
  - SWAT
  - MC
- The *Glass Ceiling*
Other concerns

- **Domestic violence** – the level and extent of PO involved DV is unknown. Problematic in that the police are often the first line of defense in any community response to DV.

- Early Warning & Intervention in police DV begins with
  - Pre-employment screening
  - Postconditional offer of employment
  - Risk assessment
Employee assistance

- The costs associated with hiring, training, and retaining police personnel are significant.
- It is beneficial to maintain a healthy and productive work environment, one that does not tax the employer, the employee, and the community.
- EAP