

The NYPD Experience: The Promise of Peer Support

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Today's Presentation

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Overview of the Study

- Who
 - US Department of Homeland Security
 - Center for Catastrophe Preparedness and Response (CCPR)
 - Center on Violence & Recovery (CVR)
 - Research Team
 - Linda G. Mills, JD, MSW, PhD (Principal Investigator)
 - Peggy Grauwiler, MSW, PhD
 - Briana Barocas, PhD
- What
 - The Public Safety Trauma Response (PSTR) Study examined two peer support programs (Early Intervention Unit and POPPA) currently available to New York City police officers

Overview of the Study

- Early Intervention Unit (EIU)
 - Internal to the NYPD
 - Staffed by trained uniformed police officers and civilians (EIU serves both uniform and civilian members of the NYPD)
 - EIU serves 1,907 officers and civilians annually
- Referrals are voluntary and non-voluntary (supervisor mandate)
- Services include
 - Individual peer support
 - Education and support groups (e.g., bereavement, relationship, critical incident)
 - Crisis-intervention and referral to community-based mental health professionals
 - Immediate escort to psychiatric emergency room
 - Trauma response

Overview of the Study

- POPPA: *Police Organization Providing Peer Assistance*
 - External to the NYPD and an independent not-for-profit organization
 - Staffed by volunteer uniformed members of the service and mental health professionals
 - POPPA serves 850 officers annually
- Referrals are voluntary (self-referrals only)
- Services Include
 - Peer Support Officers (PSO) staff 24-hour helpline
 - Crisis-intervention and referral to POPPA clinicians
 - Psychopharmacology assistance
 - Immediate escort to psychiatric emergency room
 - Peer support groups/Family support groups
 - Trauma Response Team
 - Retiree Program

Overview of the Study

- When
 - Data were collected from 2005 through 2007
- To Understand
 - Police attitudes and beliefs about help-seeking for work-related and other stress
 - Awareness and utilization of peer programs
 - How police officers manage day-to-day stress, exposure to critical incidents, and traumatic stress
- Purpose
 - Build knowledge on police peer programs (current literature is extremely limited)
 - Help identify key foundations for a model response to public safety stress and trauma

Scope

- Interviews with senior program personnel from EIU and POPPA (N = 4)
- 2,500 surveys distributed to New York Police Department officers regarding their awareness/utilization of existing peer support programs (N=184)
- Interviews with NYPD officers who have or have not used the peer programs (N=39)
- Interviews with EIU peer counselors (N=10)
- Focus groups with volunteer PSOs from POPPA (N=24)
- Interviews with members of the POPPA clinician panel/mental health providers (N=10)

Limitations of the Study

- Convenience sample, with low participation rates compared to size and scope of NYPD.

Little research has been done on police peer programs that includes police and provider perspectives; this study builds knowledge in an unexplored field.

Givens

- Police officers are exposed to multiple traumas across their careers (National Institutes of Health, 2007)
- Police stress places officers at a greater risk for post-adjustment reactions (e.g., depression) over the course of their career (Reyes & Elhai, 2004)
- Social support has been found to prevent negative long-term physical and psychological health consequences following a traumatic event (Boscarino, 1995; Joseph et al., 1993; Stephens & Long, 2000; Solomon & Mikulincer, 1990)
- Police peer support programs attempt to reduce the potential negative consequences of this high risk occupation (Chamberlin, 2000; Robinson & Murdoch, 2003)
- Police view the risk of becoming suicidal in response to police stress as prevalent across the ranks; this threat is the primary reason to seek help from mental health or other support programs (Grauwiler, Barocas & Mills, 2008)

Definitions

- Day-to-day work Stress

Typical stress associated with the difficult job of doing public safety work

- Critical Incidents

Examples: 9/11, London and Madrid bombings, school shootings, suicide, homicide

Definitions

- Traumatic Stress

An accumulation of stress in reaction to a critical incident, leading to a psychiatric diagnosis of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

- Police Work and Culture

True of policing agencies around the world, certain assumptions (both personal and job-related) affect working conditions and attitudes. Examples: To show feelings is a sign of weakness; we take care of others, not ourselves; men of steel.

Definitions

- Peer Programs

Provide assistance/support/intervention to reduce the effects of day-to-day and/or traumatic stress

- Key elements of Peer Programs

- *Carefully selected and highly trained peers drawn from the workplace to support the process of recognition that a problem exists and what to do about it*

- *Mental health professionals provide short- and long-term treatment to help people recover from effects of stress*

Policing Today

- National Landscape

- Over 800,000 sworn police officers in the United States (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008)
- Police work is a high profile, professional, round the clock public service
- Expanding responsibilities precipitate sources of stress (Raymond, Hickman, Miller & Wong, 2005)
- Police training, work, and culture may inhibit help-seeking (Levenson & Dwyer, 2003)
- Police agencies have responded to officers' mental health needs by promoting peer programs and other mental health services (Finn & Tomz, 1997)
- Peer support shows promise in mitigating posttraumatic adjustment among police and potentially other first responders (Dowling, Moynihan, Genet, & Lewis, 2006)

Policing Today

- New York City
 - Over 8.1 million people are in an area of 321 square miles
 - New York City is the biggest and most densely populated urban center in the United States
- NYPD
 - 37,038 officers in the New York City Police Department
 - Overall staff of 52,000 (including civilians)
 - Annual budget of 3.8 billion dollars
 - Largest public safety agency in the US; one of the largest police departments in the world
 - 1,225 NYPD personnel are members of the National Guard or the Reserves; more than 952 have served or are currently serving in Iraq
 - Activities range from community relations to counterterrorism.

Policing Today

“...September 11th is in the back...it is always in the back of everyone’s mind; it’s just not going away...”

- Police Officer

Key Findings from the Study

- Motivation & Values
 - Police officers are ambitious, career-oriented, and have a strong professional identification; they believe in their ability to serve others
- Stress
 - Stress is endemic to police work and culture, and affects all aspects of the officers' lives

Key Findings from the Study

- **Stress-Management & Help-Seeking**
 - Help-seeking is perceived as a sign of weakness and potentially threatening to career advancement
 - Preference for informal sources of social support
 - Recognition that formal sources of support are needed
 - Confidentiality is critical to help-seeking
- **The Promise of Peer Support**
 - Significance of shared experience and purpose

Motivation & Values

- Values and Characteristics of Police Officers
 - Family and community oriented
 - Ambitious and career-minded
 - Strong professional identification
 - Confident in their capacity to help others
 - Self-reliant
 - Hard working
 - Value respect and appreciation

Motivation & Values

- Motivation for the Decision to Become a Police Officer
 - To help others, their communities, and their country
 - Belief in their own ability to solve problems and protect the citizenry, knowing the risks to one's life and civil liberties
 - Appeal of job security, benefits, and the opportunity for early retirement

Stress

- Police Work and Culture
 - Unpredictable hours
 - Lack of control over scheduling
 - Intermittent work pace
 - Financial pressures
 - Negative community attitudes toward police
 - Rumors/gossip can create mistrust in the workplace
 - Exposure to critical incidents

The effects of routine police stressors along with exposure to critical incidents predictably result in physiological, psychological, and/or behavioral problems in some officers (Reyes & Elhai, 2004).

Stress

Relationships

“...I mean, if you’ve seen something happen tragically to someone, you’re an eyewitness to an atrocity, to man’s inhumanity to man, how are you going to sit there and share that with your loved one at home?”

- Police Officer

Financial

“I mean, finances are a big thing, too. People come to us living from check to check. They got a couple kids, they got a house, they got a mortgage, and the money, we get lots and lots of money on this job [over time], but it’s hard, living in this environment it’s very expensive and New York is a very expensive city.”

- Peer Provider

Stress

Traumatic Stress

“Especially after 9/11. It was very bad. The nightmares, I had nightmares for a year, and my wife kept telling me, ‘Why don’t you go see a doctor, maybe it’s something that they could fix.’ You’re exposed to body parts and we worked the morgue for eight months...It was just the nightmares and it was hard.”

- Police Officer

Stress Management & Help-Seeking

Police Perspectives

Police work and culture are viewed as obstacles to help-seeking on the job.

The need for ongoing **outreach** and psycho-education amongst the ranks is viewed as critical to combating stigma in help-seeking.

Location of services, **privacy**, and **confidentiality** are critical to **access** and **utilization** of any assistance and support services.

Recognition of the need to seek assistance was often followed by a concern about confidentiality. Some officers stated they were comfortable seeking services from within the department while others preferred to seek services outside the department.

Officers were divided on their perception of **attitudes and beliefs** about help-seeking after September 11, 2001. Most agreed that immediately after 9/11 there was more openness, others expressed concerns that more negative attitudes have returned.

Stress Management & Help-Seeking

The Answer Guy

“The first thing out of their mouth might be, ‘My brother is still in this pile. I’m not leaving.’ But part of the whole rationale is, again, I’m the answer guy, I’m the go-to guy, I don’t need the help, I give the help.”

- Mental Health Provider

“Because we’re in a position where we do the helping, we don’t ask for help. We’re out in the street and we’re told and we’re trained that you are in charge out there. Something goes wrong, you take control, don’t let anybody else take control over you.”

- Police Officer

Stress Management & Help-Seeking

Don't Ask, Don't Tell - Silence

“You better be careful. You don't want to hurt your career. You don't want to have somebody question whether you can do what you can do. That's why I did it on my own [got help]. I kept my mouth shut.”

- Police Officer

Stress is a Sign of Weakness - Stigma

“...I've always heard officers speak of needing help but afraid to get it because of the stigma, because of the possibility that they'll be labeled, and at the same time they're always in constant fear that if they can't keep their act together no one would want them as a partner...It's a shame that that's the way it is but it's not necessarily viewed as a strength to seek help. It should be, but it isn't.

- POPPA Clinician

Stress Management & Help-Seeking

Recognition - Help Should be Readily Available

“... Have the programs available for us because I’m sure, if not twice, at least once, you’ll need it. You turn on the news, there is still talk of terrorist attacks happening. They say that they’re not finished with us. You have the train bombing in Madrid, and you have all these attacks in Israel, London, so you never know. You never know when some day someone might be too stressed out, but if the program is not there or any program is not there for us to turn to, there’s no telling what may happen.”

- Police Officer

Stress Management & Help-Seeking

Changing Police Work and Culture

“...But I’ve seen over the past few years, especially with this police commissioner, pushing the POPPA program, the Early Intervention Unit. Making it somewhat confidential where nobody’s going to know, basically nobody does know. But years ago we never had that...”

- Police Officer

The Promise of Peer Support

“I think more people have gotten help because [9/11] was very traumatic. To see people jumping, not one, but hundreds of them just jumping. We’re all human. It affected all of us. But I think more people went for help... .. because there was so much that we were exposed to, and we don’t have the option of retreating. We have to go towards the problem.”

- Police Officer

“[The restaurant at Ground Zero] would be packed with firemen and cops, and everybody would be in a small little group. ... Talking. Laughing, talking. [Interviewer: And that was helpful?] Yeah, because after that day we were like, we were all right; we talked about it all the time.”

- Police Officer

The Promise of Peer Support

- Awareness (Survey Findings)
 - Over 90% of survey respondents were aware of EIU and POPPA
 - Most respondents (72%) heard about the programs at a training presentation
- Utilization: Peer Programs (Survey Findings)
 - 23% of respondents utilized either EIU or POPPA
 - 11% used EIU (50% voluntary, 50% mandatory)
 - 15% used POPPA

The Promise of Peer Support

- EIU (Officers' Presenting Problems)
 - Relationship/family – 42.1%
 - Bereavement – 26.3%
 - Job stress – 26.3%
 - Alcohol – 21.1%
 - Work related traumatic event – 21.1%
 - Other Crisis – 15.8%

The Promise of Peer Support

- POPPA (Officers' Presenting Problems)
 - Relationship/family – 55.6%
 - Work related traumatic event – 25.9%
 - Job stress – 22.2%
 - Alcohol -22.2%
 - Bereavement – 14.8%
 - Other Crisis – 14.8%

The Promise of Peer Support

Shared Experience

“...you are trained from the beginning that your partner is your life. There are two things that are basically your life: your weapon, if you’re a police officer, and your partner. ...it creates a very strong psychological bond...I think it’s natural that if you’re in trouble a peer is the one you’re going to go to.”

- Police Officer

Peer/Mental Health Provider Perspectives

Peers and peer programs were critical to engaging police officers in treatment. A shared professional experience is instrumental to police utilization of services.

The Promise of Peer Support

Shared Experience

“...We know what it’s like to have to juggle the job, the family, the illnesses, the upset and try to keep it all going in various respects. Again, it just makes us that much stronger, that much of a better resource for people.”

- Peer Provider

Hope for the Future

Resilience

“I think that they’re also more resilient than the average person would be, because when they get better, they really get better quickly, and they’re very motivated to get better, to get back on the job and to get back to full duty and to get their guns back.”

- POPPA Clinician

Hope for the Future

“Oh you don’t do that. You don’t go to the job. You don’t tell them anything. They’re going to take your firearms, it will ruin your career, it will ruin your chance of promotion...But I’ve also heard the opposite: that the job’s been very helpful, that things would have gotten a lot worse if they hadn’t gone through the job.”

- Police Officer

“I’ve used the POPPA service, and the preference for that was that, at least from my understanding, it was outside the police department. You always take a chance; you don’t know. Like, I’m taking a chance being here [in this interview]. But the goal to me to reduce my stress was that important that I needed to speak to someone because I was probably at the end of my rope in that certain instance, and I don’t mean like suicide or anything like that, but I just didn’t know anywhere else to turn...”

- Police Officer

Hope for the Future

Help-seeking makes the difference...

“I used to keep things inside, and that’s when I started keeping a lot of stress inside, but when I felt comfortable enough to start talking more with my peers or even when I went for counseling because at one point I thought never, no; they think that you’re crazy if you go for counseling, which a lot of cops feel that way and that’s why they’re reluctant to go because you feel that if I go they’re going to label me as crazy. And it’s not like that. I have learned since 9/11 to express myself a little more. It’s like I’m carefree now...I speak my piece, and that’s it whether you like it or not, it’s me. So talking is very important.”

- Police Officer

Implications

- By all accounts, NYPD has taken a leadership role in developing a police preparedness strategy that includes prevention and intervention programs. Police officers are given the option to seek services from Early Intervention Unit and POPPA
- NYPD leads the way in recognizing peer support as critical to fostering resiliency amongst police officers
- NYPD leadership recognize the stress of police work, the need for peer and mental health support, and the importance of recovery. Seeking help is viewed as a strength and is encouraged.

Implications

- Confidentiality, privacy, and location are key to encouraging officers to get help early and may offset effects of day-to-day and traumatic stress.
- Continuing outreach efforts to help educate officers about normal reactions to police stress is key. Using internal and external peer programs to accomplish those outreach efforts can help address police stress.
- Beginning in the Academy, outreach and education are paramount for the duration of an officer's career, regardless of rank.

Implications

- Police officers - smart, resourceful, and multi-talented - have the greatest chance for ending stigma with fellow officers regarding help-seeking.
- Police officers can and should play a significant role, formally or informally, in raising awareness of police stress and promoting the importance of help-seeking.
- The nation's police departments can learn from the NYPD's example on developing peer support programs and related strategies for combating predictable yet treatable symptoms in police officers.
- Key elements of an effective peer support approach include a menu of options for officers, including an internal and external program that facilitates choice and utilization.

Next Steps: Research & Practice

- In what specific ways do peer programs assist in promoting psychological health and well-being?
- How might peer support programs foster resiliency among the ranks?
- What essential components should a peer model embody when being implemented in small, medium or large police agencies?

Get the help you need...
It can make the difference!

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