



Suicide in Capable Cultures.

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- Outline:
 - Review statistics.
 - Discuss Social Identity Theory.
 - Introduce 'capable' culture concept.
 - Address challenges.
 - Discuss potential remedies.



Quick stats about police mental health.



Average officer directly faces 188 critical incidents (violent trauma, child abuse) in a career. ¹



Rates of PTSD in officers – up to twice as prevalent than in general public. ¹



Suicide kills more officers the last 3 years than line of duty deaths (169 as of October 12th). ²



Stress shares near linear correlation with substance use.



Shortened life spans & increased injury reports in PTSD sufferers.



Stigma against/low participation (reported) in mental health in First Responders.



Only 3-5% of departments nationwide have outright suicide prevention programs.



Burnout has negative impacts on officers, families and community.

Social Identity Theory (SIT)

or:

"How did we get here?"

"People like me don't get mentally ill..."

- SIT states that clear, distinctive and sometimes necessary lines exist within and between subcultures.
- In first responders' cases, life & death ramifications are involved (bonding).
- Reintegration/adjustment troubles emerge within family, church, culture and social circles.
- Difficulty adapting to different social norms and rules of engagement.
- Traditional & Social Media compounding 'Us vs. Them' mentalities.

Rules of Engagement

- We think of the world dichotomously.
 - At first because we are told we have to – we learn law and procedure in the 'black & white'.
 - Then, because we need to cling to the separation for the survival of our world view.
 - Us vs. Them
 - Admin or Line
 - Crooks & Tweakers
- Each related to identity.
- These clearly drawn lines aid us in the necessary acculturation to the work asked of us.
 - What happens when the lines become drawn inside a rank? Inside an individual?



Comparison is the
thief of joy.

Theodore Roosevelt

“ quote fancy

Capable Culture

Trauma & Toughness

- If we accept someone is 'tough' we must in turn accept *that* toughness as an earned product of the ongoing trauma that is a real hazard of our jobs.
- Yet we continue to deny our own traumas.

Contrast & Compare

- We exist in a culture rife with comparison.
 - Who had it toughest?
 - How many shootings?
 - How'd they handle it?
- Our comparison of experience moves from shared memory to self-injurious contrast.

Who takes on the toll of this “chain reaction of mental anguish?”

Home Life

- Children, families and loved ones (but rarely the dog) often bear the lion’s share of our work-related frustrations.
 - These are not always ‘positive’ symptoms, in that they are active and outgoing. They can also be ‘negative’ in our quietude and brooding.
- Self-medication comes to be an acceptable pastime – until we judge that it isn’t.

Work Life

- At their most banal, signs of our burnout and frustration may look only like sullenness.
- At their most explosive, burnout looks like videos on CNN of officers striking someone repeatedly, even after they have very clearly yielded.
- At its most threatening to the individual’s psyche, burnout looks like meaninglessness.

Frustrated Fixers

It is no secret those in helping professions experience burnout. This has been the case for as long as we've been studying it.



What *is* unprecedented and contributing to new stress of the job – we are doing more, in greater varied responsibilities for longer hours and under greater global scrutiny.

Cops as social workers.

Firefighters as medics.

EMS workers as trauma specialists (mental & physical).

Emotions

- Psychologist Paul Ekman has done more study on the nature of emotional expression than anyone alive.
- He narrowed them down to the following 7 universal examples:

1. **Anger**
2. **Fear**
3. **Disgust**
4. **Happiness**
5. **Sadness**
6. **Surprise**
7. **Contempt**

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- **Which emotions brought you to your profession?**
 - To this conference?
 - **Which brings you back home to your loved ones?**



What emotions could possibly drive someone in the first responder world to consider suicide as the *only* means by which they can escape their pain?

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- What makes us so afraid of some emotions and so reliant on others?
 - How are *you* going to be a change agent in the culture of your organization?

Resources: Free to All

- http://rudermanfoundation.org/white_papers
- <http://badgeoflife.org>
- <http://bluehelp.org>
- <http://firestrong.org>
- <http://codegreencampaign.org>
- Text '**BADGE**' to 741-741 – Crisis Text Line
- 1 (800) 273-TALK (8255) - Suicide Prevention Lifeline
- 1 (800) 267-5463 – CopLine – All retired law enforcement



Questions / Contact

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