The Myths of Law Enforcement

- "You'll Always Be Part of the Law Enforcement Family"
- "We Take Care of Our Own"
- "Police Families Are Prepared to Lose Their Officer in the Line of Duty"
- "If Something Happens to Him (Her), You’ll be a Rich Widow"

Not to speak of the deceased denies their existence. *Speaking of the deceased, affirms their life and the fact that they were loved.*
Line-of-Duty Deaths: Survivor and Departmental Responses

Frances A. Stillman, Ed.D., Research Director, Concerns of Police Survivors

Introduction

Officer Brummett* was performing a routine traffic stop when a passing car struck and killed him. For the first 6 months after the incident, his widow refused to accept the fact that her husband had died. After 6 months, she accepted his death but felt emotionally numb and unable to grieve. She said she needed to be "strong" so she would not upset others.

More than 2 years after the accident, Mrs. Brummett remained distressed by her loss. Plagued by nightmares of her husband, she had trouble controlling her thoughts about his death and her consequent problems. She could not concentrate at work and began to drink heavily. She felt alienated from most of her friends and family.

To some, Mrs. Brummett's reaction to her husband's death may seem extreme. It is not. In fact, it is typical of the intense, long-lasting reactions experienced by the majority of adult police "survivors" - that is, the spouses, parents, siblings, friends, and coworkers of police officers killed in the course of their work. (While children also are the survivors, their reactions were not studied in the research on which this report is based.)

Reactions of police survivors are often so profound as to be diagnosed as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a psychological disorder associated with traumatic events that are generally outside the range of usual human experience. Common PTSD symptoms include recurring recollections of the traumatic event, feelings of detachment or estrangement from others, hyperalertness, sleep disturbances, guilt about surviving, and difficulty with concentrating.

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From the Director

The National Institute of Justice is proud of its efforts in "protecting the protectors" - reducing the risks police officers face on the job. The most dramatic example is the Institute's role in developing lightweight police body armor, which has been credited with saving the lives of more than 700 police officers nationwide.

But despite these and other efforts, far too many police officers still are killed in carrying out their sworn duty to protect citizens from criminal attack. Line-of-duty deaths, whether felonious or accidental, are a sad and frequent reminder of the danger inherent in police work. While the loss to the department and the community is serious, each police death leaves family, friends, and coworkers with the emotional trauma of a devastating loss.

There is a bond joining those in the "police family" that is formed by the shared experiences they have faced. A police death hits hard within that family, as others are reminded of their own vulnerability.

Many mistakenly believe that the spouses, children, and parents who survive police deaths are somehow more prepared for their losses than are other people. But knowing that the job can be dangerous does not prepare an individual for the actual experience of losing a loved one. Police survivors often endure prolonged psychological stress because they do not seek help. They are hurt by the misconception that, because they are part of the police community, they should somehow be stronger emotionally and better prepared for such a tragedy.

To learn more about the problems faced by survivors of police deaths, and how police departments can help, the National Institute of Justice sponsored this study by Concerns of Police Survivors. The findings presented in this Research in Brief clearly show the magnitude of distress survivors face.

Too often, when police survivors do seek help, it isn't available. As this Research in Brief indicates, police departments can do much more to help survivors cope with their loss. Many departments have no formal procedures for completing required paperwork and assisting family members with funeral plans and requests for benefits. Most departments do not consider the emotional and psychological needs of survivors to be a part of their responsibility.

When police departments establish systematic policies for dealing with a departmental death, they are better able to respond to the needs of survivors. Effective procedures allow a police department to respond in a prompt, organized manner and remain sensitive to the profound human emotions they must confront. The immediate and continuing response of police departments when an officer is killed has a definite impact on the well-being of survivors.

Departments with no formalized policies can learn from those that have developed clear and caring procedures for dealing with line-of-duty deaths. The information from this study can help departments begin to meet this great unfulfilled need.

James K. Stewart
Director, National Institute of Justice
Many people and police departments are unaware of the devastating impact of an officer's death on survivors. Many mistakenly believe that police survivors are somehow more prepared for their losses than civilian survivors.

In fact, surviving family members of public safety officers may be more at risk than other survivors after their loss. Relatives of slain police officers often endure psychological distress for long periods of time and do not seek help or discuss their problems because they feel embarrassed or wish to avoid seeming weak. They may refuse existing community services because they believe that only other members of the "police culture" can understand their problems.

A survivor's level of distress is affected by the police department's response to the tragedy. Elements of the department's response that should be considered include:

- The way survivors are notified of the death.
- The emotional support provided by the department.
- The information the department gives concerning insurance and benefits.

How these elements are handled has an influence on whether or not the survivor will develop a clinical psychological disorder such as PTSD.

However, most police departments lack formal policies for handling the aftermath when an officer is killed on duty. Some departments have provided policies concerning only felonious on-duty deaths, thus excluding accidental deaths. Others deal only with such tangible issues as notification procedures and funeral arrangements but neglect important intangibles such as counseling and emotional support.

To learn more about the impact of a law enforcement officer's death on adult survivors and on the steps a police department can take to help survivors, the National Institute of Justice sponsored a study on the psychological, emotional, financial, and practical problems faced by survivors of police deaths.

The study was conducted by Concerns of Police Survivors (COPS), a non-profit organization that offers emotional and moral support to spouses, parents, children, siblings, other family members, and others who are affected by police line-of-duty deaths. The study examined the reactions of 126 survivors to their losses and the ways that 88 police departments responded to their problems.

This report discusses the study findings and provides recommendations that will assist police departments in developing workable, sensitive policies that help bereaved spouses and families.

**Methodology of the study**

Data for this project were gathered from two main sources:

- Surviving adult family members of police officers killed in the line of duty; and
- Police departments that had lost an officer feloniously or accidentally.

The sample of spouses and of police departments for this research was drawn primarily from the U.S. Department of Justice, Public Safety Officer Benefits Office data base. The Office, which provides financial benefits to eligible survivors, maintains records on officers killed in the line of duty whose departments file an application for the death benefit.

Most of the spouses included in the study were survivors of officers who died between November 1982 and February 1986 and whose applications for benefits had been received by the Office. Police departments surveyed were those that had submitted a claim for Federal death benefits through the Office between 1983 and 1985.

Participating survivors responded to a questionnaire; some also participated in personal interviews. Police departments responded to a mailed questionnaire. Responding departments, located throughout the Nation, ranged in size from less than 10 sworn officers to more than 5,000 and represented Federal, State, and local jurisdictions.

**Impact of the Loss on Survivors**

This study found that when police officers die in action, surviving spouses, parents, and siblings are not more prepared for the death just because they are part of a law enforcement family. Knowing that the job could be dangerous does not prepare an individual for the actual experience of having a loved one die.

According to the COPS' study, the following are common police survivors' reactions to their loss:

- Having difficulty concentrating and making decisions, feeling confused, having one's mind go blank.
- Feeling hostile.
- Feeling different from others, feeling alone, being uncomfortable in social situations.
- Fearing people, places, and things, and being anxious of one's ability to survive.
- Re-experiencing the traumatic incident through flashbacks, dreams, or thoughts.
- Feeling emotionally numb, having less interest in previously enjoyed activities, or being unable to return to prior employment.
- Having less ability to express positive and negative emotions.
- Feeling guilty about the way one acted toward the deceased or as if one could have prevented the death.

These reactions are individuated by specific symptoms. Table 1 presents the most prevalent and acute symptoms identified by survivors as occurring at levels that clinically indicate serious distress.

The study also found that 59 percent of the surviving spouses of police officers killed in the line of duty met the criteria for having PTSD. This psychological disorder is common among victims of physical assault, rape, and natural disasters, prisoners of war and persons taken hostage.

Factors that were found to intensify distress reactions among spouses include the way they are notified of the death and the length...
Duration of distress

It has commonly been assumed that survivor grief reactions are “acute, time-limited phenomena.” Survivors are often encouraged and even pressured to return to pretrauma behaviors and activities. For some, this is an impossibility. For others, it is possible only after an extended period of healing.

This study confirmed recent research that indicates that the grief response after an accidental traumatic loss may lead to long-term emotional distress.

Survivors were found to have clinical levels of psychopathology in a number of areas and evidence of PTSD even 2 years after the traumatic death occurred.

The assumption that time heals all wounds is not valid in the case of police survivors since people who hold this assumption may be deterred from providing the support and intervention that survivors need to recover emotionally and psychologically from a personal crisis and to return to a pretrauma level of functioning.

Felonious versus accidental death

Responding police departments reported a total of 298 line-of-duty deaths during the time period studied. Of these, 158 resulted from accidental causes and 140 from felonious causes.

Deaths due to homicide traditionally have been perceived by society as more serious and threatening events than deaths due to accidents. Thus, it was believed that surviving family members of an officer who died feloniously experienced a more severe reaction than survivors of one killed accidentally.

This study indicates this assumption is not valid for surviving spouses. Spouses of officers killed accidentally and spouses of homicide victims experience the same level of distress.

Significant differences were noted, however, between parents of officers killed accidentally and parents of officers killed feloniously. The latter were found to be more traumatized, hostile, and depressed after death.

Survivors reported that the type of death makes a difference in the response they receive from the police department, with homicides receiving more or preferential attention than accidents. The difference in police department response can add considerable pain to an already traumatized family - especially when the family expected a different type of treatment.

In addition, if the suspect accused of killing the officer is apprehended, the survivors may experience additional trauma as a result of the trial.

Benefits and compensation

Ninety-one percent of the police departments surveyed reported that they provide explanations of their health benefits to officers and 89 percent said they provided explanations of death benefits. However, the departments were not questioned about how the explanations were carried out and whether the officers actually understood or were aware of the importance of the information. Some departments indicated this instruction was accomplished in a brief description, or by handing officers a booklet to read. Very few departments fully explain all benefits, options, and compensation and their implications for the officer and family.

Survivors may be excluded from the police department's group medical coverage within days of the officer's death. In such cases, a letter informing survivors of this separation is sent in the mail, forcing the survivor - still in a state of shock - to find health coverage for the family. In such cases, departments seem to fail to differentiate between a planned termination from police service and an unexpected line-of-duty death.

While survivors generally reported satisfaction with the treatment they received from police departments, they did report certain specific problems regarding compensation and benefits. Most survivors are not prepared for the delays that occur in processing benefit and compensation requests. Some survivors found that departments are uninformed about benefits.

Psychological counseling

Of the police departments surveyed, 58 percent have a psychological unit but only 31 percent offer access to a staff psychologist. Only 5.4 percent of the departments offer peer counseling and
police-family response services; 43 percent make counseling referrals; and 19 percent pay for outside counseling.

Survivors reported a lack of psychological counseling for family members. In addition, most believed that if such services were needed as a result of the death, the police department should pay for them.

Survivors also reported they felt abandoned by the police departments. The spouses wanted some type of formal and informal contact to continue. Most reported that contact ended soon after the funeral.

Police department policies

In addition to its impact on the family, the death of an officer can be a tremendous shock for members of the police department. For smaller departments that lack financial and personnel resources, the loss of an officer creates significant disruption. And, for police officers in departments of all sizes, the death of an officer can be a demoralizing reminder of their own vulnerability.

Yet 67 percent of departments surveyed lack formal policies concerning the death of an officer. Often no one is designated or prepared to deal with the legal and financial paperwork and to assist the surviving family members in planning for the funeral, with requesting benefits, or in preparing for the emotional and financial strain that may accompany the death.

In addition, most existing policies reflect an action-oriented, task-oriented, time-limited philosophy toward survivors. Most departments tend not to consider the emotional or psychological needs of survivors to be part of their responsibility.

Notification. Notification practices varied greatly among departments. Of the policy statements submitted to COPS (60 percent of the departments with formal policies submitted them), 50 percent deal with notification. Some dealt only with chain-of-command notification procedures, but most specified the need to notify the family quickly.

Most departments do not have designated officers or teams for notification. Often any available officer or a group of officers is asked to notify survivors.

Maintenance of records. Accurate records of next of kin are essential to notification procedures. Yet, 74 percent of the agencies surveyed do not have systematic procedures for maintaining such records. In 27 percent of the agencies, the records are maintained by the police department, but more frequently by the surviving family members. In 23 percent of the agencies, the records are maintained by both the police department and the surviving family members.

While almost 80 percent of the police agencies surveyed keep records on spouses, more than two-thirds lack records on parents of officers. Some 40 percent of the agencies maintain records within a week of the death; 30 percent of the agencies maintain them within a month; 25 percent of the agencies maintain them within a year; and 10 percent of the agencies maintain them within five years.

Information and emotional services provided. Of the departments surveyed, 53 percent provide information on will preparation; 44 percent offer instruction on stress management; 92 percent provide transportation to the hospital after the incident; 92 percent provide assistance with the media; 97 percent provide assistance with benefits; and 32 percent provide financial counseling.

Policy suggestions for police departments

The results of this study suggest that more than half of the surviving spouses of police officers killed in the line of duty may need support and assistance from the police department. Recovery from such trauma may be a very long, involved process quite different from the recovery process after a death due to a terminal illness or other anticipated event.

Police departments can help family members, as well as their own officers, to cope with the loss of an officer by establishing and implementing both general and specific policies on how to proceed in the event of a death. By designing clearer policies concerning notification procedures, psychological services, emotional support, and benefits and compensation for survivors, police departments will be better prepared to respond to survivors in an organized and humane fashion.

However, being organized is not enough. Survivors and police personnel need to be aware that the death of a loved one of a good friend, of a partner, or of a coworker, is a stressor of the highest magnitude. Avoiding discussion of the possible injury or death, or possible plans of action, and of prescribing policies protects no one from death. But it means that if death does occur, the crisis management skills needed to help survivors will not have been planned and thus will not be readily available.

Notes


Introduction

When a law enforcement officer dies in the line of duty, it is too late for the department to try to figure out how to handle the death. It's too late to decide how to notify the family; too late to consider how to debrief and counsel colleagues; too late to establish guidelines for assisting with the funeral arrangements.

The kind of support a spouse and family receive from a police agency following a line-of-duty death actually affects the length and intensity of the grieving process and how well the survivors are able to move on with their lives.

Additionally, when a line-of-duty death occurs, many departments are not prepared to deal with trauma and distress, either of the deceased officer's survivors—or among their own police force. Surviving spouses do not always receive the support from their "police family" that they have been taught to count on and need from the co-workers.

Over the past decade, line-of-duty deaths and the needs of survivors have been brought increasingly to public attention. Concerns of Police Survivors, National Police Week, and the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial have raised awareness. COPS addressed the issues affecting survivors and helps police agencies understand the need to help rebuild lives shattered by a line-of-duty death.

This document reports on a study sponsored by COPS to investigate factors associated with police spouse survival—how spouses respond to a line-of-duty death, and how police agencies are prepared to support them. It also provides recommendations to police agencies to develop workable, sensitive policies to help bereaved spouses and families.

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Concerns of Police Survivors, Inc. (COPS) provides resources to assist in the rebuilding of the lives of surviving families of law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty as determined by Federal criteria. Furthermore, COPS provides training to law enforcement agencies on survivor victimization issues and educates the public of the need to support the law enforcement profession and its survivors.

Every year, COPS sponsors grief workshops in conjunction with National Police Week activities in Washington, DC. COPS also trains volunteers in active listening, peer support, identifying the signs for needing professional help, and has developed training programs to help law enforcement agencies prepare for line-of-duty death. Additionally, COPS has hands-on, peer support programs for parents, children and spouses of those who die in the line of duty.

Concerns of Police Survivors, Inc. takes the position that law enforcement agencies share a responsibility to provide liaison assistance to survivors of line-of-duty deaths. Agencies should tend to such matters as the clarification of survivor benefits and provide emotional and practical support throughout the ordeal.

Concerns of Police Survivors receives its major financial support through a grant from the Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Assistance, US Department of Justice. Other funding sources include police organizations, private foundations, private citizens, and corporations.

If you would like a copy of this complete study, or if you are interested in finding out more about COPS and its activities, please contact us at P.O. Box 3199, South Highway 5, Camdenton, MO 65020, call our office at 573-346-4911, or visit our website at http://www.nationalcops.org.

-Suzanne F. Sawyer
Executive Director
Concerns of Police Survivors

This was a project of Grant Number 98-MU-MU-0002 awarded by the Bureau of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The Assistant Attorney General, Office of Justice Programs, coordinates the activities of the following program offices and bureaus: Bureau of Justice Assistance, Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Institute of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and the Office for Victims of Crime. Points of view in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.
Of the 298 law enforcement agencies surveyed, approximately 50 percent of them credited COPS with influencing their awareness and policies regarding line-of-duty deaths.

**Background: COPS' Police Survivor Study I - 1987**

This study is a follow-up to one conducted ten years ago to learn more about the impact of a law enforcement officer's death on adult survivors and on the steps a police department can take to help survivors.

That 1987 study concluded that survivors of someone killed in the line-of-duty are not prepared for such deaths simply because their spouse worked in law enforcement. The study also found that most police departments did not have a policy concerning survivors. Most did not maintain adequate records of next-of-kin, or provide emotional and informational support during and after the crisis.

**COPS Police Survivor Study II - 1997**

The 1997 study wanted to know whether police survivor support and departmental policies regarding line-of-duty deaths changed over ten years.

It looked specifically at how line-of-duty deaths affected surviving spouses. Secondly, it considered how the psychological and physical effects on police spouse survivors compared with others who had not experienced a line-of-duty death.

The study was sponsored by Concerns of Police Survivors, a non-profit organization offering support to spouses, parents, children, siblings, other family members and others who are affected by police line-of-duty deaths. It was funded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance and conducted by John M. Violanti, Ph.D.

**Methodology for the Study**

Data for the 1997 study came from
- Surviving police spouses,
- Police departments who had lost an officer in the past ten years, and
- A control group of police spouses whose spouses had not died.

The sample of police survivors and police departments for the 1997 study were drawn from the U.S. Department of Justice Public Safety Officer Benefits database. The study surveyed 256 surviving police spouses to measure grief, coping strategies, self-esteem, and physical health. An additional 63 police spouses made up the control group.

Information on agency line-of-duty death policy was collected from 298 police agencies who had experienced officer deaths within the last ten years from accident, felony, illness or suicide.

When it made sense, the 1997 report compared new data to the results of the 1987 COPS study.

**Study Samples**

The average age of 1997 surviving spouses was 39.8 years. In the 1997 study, about 25 percent of spouses were over 46 years old, compared to 13 percent in the earlier study. Survivors in the 1997 study had a wider ethnic origin distribution and higher educational levels than those in the 1987 study.

In 1997, a greater percentage of survivors were male, probably as a result of the increase in women police officers. Similarly, there was a larger percentage of minority survivors in the 1997 sample.

In both studies, survivors had been married approximately the same average number of years at the time of death (11.9 years). However, a greater percentage of 1997 survivors were married for less than five years, and were married more than once.

**Impact of Line-of-Duty Deaths on Surviving Spouses**

As in the first study, 1997 data showed police spouse survivors experienced heightened symptoms of psychological distress after the death of an officer. Psychological effects reported by 1997 surviving spouses were not substantially different from those of survivors surveyed in 1987.

Survivors in the 1997 study reported lower total psychological symptom scores compared to those in 1987, but they revealed higher trauma symptoms, including greater symptoms of obsessive-compulsiveness, depression and paranoia.

**Grief Responses**

In the 1997 study, 32 percent of surviving spouses of police officers killed in the line of duty met the criteria for having Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, compared to 39 percent in 1987. This psychological disorder is common among victims of physical assault, rape and natural disasters, prisoners of war and persons taken hostage.

The 1997 survivors also demonstrated low self-esteem and negative attitudes toward themselves.

**Department Responses**

The study showed an increase in the percent of police departments providing specific services to survivors of line-of-duty deaths from 1987 to 1997. However, most departments respond "informally," rather than according to a formal policy. In the 1997 survey, only 39 percent of police agencies reported any type of general orders in place for handling line-of-duty deaths. This was a very slight improvement from 1987, when 33 percent reported formal officer death policies. Approximately 20 percent said their formal policy came about as a result of a line-of-duty death.

This lack of formal policy is significant. Without one, departments and survivors are unprepared to deal effectively with funeral, benefit explanations or emotional distress of the officer's death.

Department size plays a role in whether a formal policy exists. Almost three-fourths of large departments (1001-6274 officers) have policies, as compared to about half of medium departments (51-1000 officers) and just more than one-fourth of small departments (2-50 officers).

**Death notification and funeral arrangements**

In 1997, eighty percent of the departments handled death notification, in comparison to only 50 percent in 1987. This is particularly important, as other research has shown that death notification has a substantial and long-
lasting affect on survivors' ability to deal with their grief and move forward with their lives.

More than half of the police agencies (51 percent) send more than one officer to the survivor's residence, and 77 percent send the chief or a high ranking official. Only ten percent send one officer.

Sometimes, agencies send other individuals to notify survivors of a line-of-duty death. This may be clergy (54 percent), the officer's partner (13 percent) or a physician (4 percent). Almost a third of the departments reported contacting relatives and bringing them to the residence.

Only 13 percent of the police agencies actually train people for death notification.

Over the ten-year period, the number of departments providing assistance with funeral arrangements for officers has increased.

Follow-up

Almost three-fourths of agencies assign a family liaison officer following an officer's death, and almost as many support survivors during the death investigation and trial.

Only 39 percent of agencies report policies to maintain contact with survivors after the funeral. In those cases, the contact generally lasts from one to two years. Some departments maintain contact for as long as the survivors feel is necessary.

Department contact with survivors is handled formally -- by a high ranking official -- for about half the departments; 65 percent said they initiated informal contact by patrol officers. If the deceased officer was single, 90 percent of departments offer the same services to surviving parents.

Record Maintenance

Phone numbers and addresses of officers' spouses are maintained by only 89 percent of responding departments. Half keep similar records for parents, about a third keep records for adult children, and 38 percent keep records for minor children.

This is a higher percentage than reported keeping such records in 1987.

Agency Services for Survivors

Even though more departments reported handling death notification and more departments also reported handling funeral arrangements than in 1987, fewer departments provide an explanation of death benefits, assistance with the media or psychological referrals.

Psychological treatment for police survivors is important to help address many of the same problems affecting anyone who has suffered a loss. Many times, however, there are additional issues involving the suddenness and violence of the officer's death, which present an even more compelling reason to provide survivors with professional counseling. Extensive and graphic media coverage of the death, and the slow, unresponsive criminal justice system both take their toll on line-of-duty death survivors. Quite often, psychological closure is delayed for many years as legal issues concerning the death are argued in the courts and discussed in the media.

The following table shows the percentage of police agencies in 1997 that provided various services, compared to 1987.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>1987: % of police agencies providing this service</th>
<th>1997: % of police agencies providing this service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hospital expenses</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death notification</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funeral arrangements</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funeral expenses</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanation of death benefits</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escort to the hospital</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assist with media</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escort for funeral, burial</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistance with insurance</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial counseling</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to staff psychologist</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral to psychologist</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to police chaplain</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aftercare of survivors</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 compares death services provided by police agencies in 1987 and 1997.

Survivors and Their Response to the Department Support

For the most part, survivors reported satisfaction with death notification. Sixty-nine percent of survivors surveyed said they were notified with sensitivity and understanding. However, 11 percent said notification was cold and informal, and ten percent wished someone else would have told them.

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Support after the Death

In the period following the death of their officer spouses, survivors ranked who was most supportive for them, in the following order:

- Parents
- Non-police friends
- Children
- Police friends
- Co-workers
- In-laws

Surviving spouses were much less satisfied with the responses of the police departments and other offices in 1997 than reported in the 1987 study.

Table 2 compares responses of surviving spouses in 1997 and 1987 to response of various non-family groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>1987 Survivors (percent very satisfied)</th>
<th>1997 Survivors (percent very satisfied)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Police Department</td>
<td>53.7</td>
<td>35.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other offices</td>
<td>56.6</td>
<td>33.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death notification</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td>32.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funeral arrangements</td>
<td>66.9</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community response</td>
<td>70.3</td>
<td>33.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police Benevolent Groups</td>
<td>55.1</td>
<td>54.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trial proceedings</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final verdict</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media coverage</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Judging from results in both the 1987 and 1997 survivor studies, departments do not appear to be formally responding to survivors of line-of-duty deaths.

The difficulty is that without a formal policy, departments really have no guide on procedure. In the distressing time after the death of the officer, it is difficult for department leaders and officers to prepare an orderly, caring protocol for the death.

Emotional as well as tangible support through the entire process of grieving is essential. The police “family” must be available for the survivor during the ordeal and afterwards. In this study, only 53 percent of departments provided any type of aftercare for survivors.

7) Develop a standard for follow-up with survivors. One suggestion is that both high ranking and patrol officers schedule visits for survivors for at least two years after the officer’s death.

8) Provide media support for survivors who choose to deal with the media. Perhaps assign a public relations officer to be present during media contact.

9) Because physical health among co-worker survivors tends to worsen following the death of an officer, departments should make physicians available for immediate physical examination and follow-up after care of other officers after the death of a colleague.

10) Survivors in the 1997 study reported less satisfaction with department support than in the 1985 study. Departments should make an effort (perhaps with a survey of survivors in their agency) to find out why this may have occurred. Could it be because survivors now talk with other survivors about support offered by their agencies?

NOTES


In 1997 C.O.P.S. revisited the 1985 research to see if agencies have improved their services to survivors and coworkers. Major finds:

For Survivors:

- In 1985, 59% showed symptoms of PTSD; 32% met criteria for PTSD in 1997.
- Survivors paying out of pocket for funerals in 1985 was 66%; survivors paying out of pocket for funerals in 1997 was 70%.
- Trauma and grief symptoms remained elevated for five years — evidence of PTSD. Found in both studies.
- Survivors in the 1997 study were much less satisfied than the 1985 study survivors with the responses of police departments and other police officers.

For Departments:

- 67% had no general orders in 1985; 61% of the agencies surveyed in 1997 had no general orders, on a 6% decrease.
  - Size of department influenced whether an agency had general orders for line-of-duty deaths.
- Record maintenance surveyed in 1997 only:
  - 89% kept phone numbers and addresses of spouses
  - 49% kept records for parents
- 50% of the agencies surveyed stated that COPS had an influence on their awareness and policies regarding line-of-duty deaths.
- Incidents of officer deaths led 25% of the agencies to initiate psychological services for officers. **Why not 100%**
Posttraumatic Growth in Survivors of Law Enforcement Officers Killed in the Line of Duty

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Survey Conducted with the Membership of
Concerns of Police Survivors, Inc.

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Historically, psychological interventions for people who have experienced a traumatic event such as natural disaster, bereavement, acts of terrorism, or sexual/physical abuse have been focused on alleviating distress, suffering and remediation of any psychological problems brought on by or exacerbated by the trauma. Research on victims and survivors of trauma has focused on posttraumatic stress and other symptoms of distress such as depression and anxiety. Previous studies have looked at the effects of trauma on war veterans, sexual assault victims, disaster victims, those suffering from acute or chronic illness, law enforcement personnel, and survivors of law enforcement personnel killed in the line of duty.

In a move away from the deficit model of traumatization, current literature suggests that many people who experience a traumatic event grow psychologically, emotionally, and/or spiritually from the ordeal of surviving the trauma. Tedeschi, Park and Calhoun (1998) call the positive experiences after trauma Posttraumatic Growth (PTG). Researchers point to the opportunities inherent in trauma to build new and improved life structures resulting in positive changes in self-perception, interpersonal relationships and life philosophies. Because much of the focus of research has been on the deficit model of posttraumatic experiences, little is known about the processes of posttraumatic growth. While it is important to understand how people are negatively affected by traumatic experiences, it is equally important to understand the growth experiences of those who have positive experiences related to surviving the trauma. Interventions and services more closely tailored to the needs of the traumatized person can be developed if we have a deeper understanding of both negative and positive responses to trauma.
This study investigated the perception of personal growth among the survivors of law enforcement officers of line-of-duty death and the relationship of personal growth to spirituality, sense of coherence, posttraumatic stress symptoms, social support (C.O.P.S. activities), mental health experiences, and demographic variables such as relationship to the deceased officer, age, sex, nature of the officer's death, ethnicity, time since the officer's death and reactions to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Members of the national organization, Concerns of Police Survivors (C.O.P.S.), were invited to participate in the study. With the permission of the C.O.P.S. Board of Directors, survivors on the C.O.P.S. mailing list were sent a questionnaire and an informed consent to participate in the study.

Research questions included in this study:

1. How do demographic variables (age, sex, relationship, length of time since loss, etc.) correlate with posttraumatic growth?
2. What support services (i.e., C.O.P.S.-sponsored activities) have been utilized by survivors and how does such social support correlate with posttraumatic growth?
3. How do spirituality involvement, beliefs and sense of coherence correlate with posttraumatic growth?
4. What is the relationship between self-reported posttraumatic stress symptoms and posttraumatic growth?

Assessment Instruments

Demographic Information Form — included age, sex, relationship to officer, participation in COPS activities, nature of officer's death, race, mental health services utilized, and one item assessing stress due to events of September 11, 2001.

Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) — A 21-item questionnaire asking subjects about changes occurring in their lives as a result of a crisis or trauma. Scores on individual items range from "0=I did not experience this change as a result of my crisis" to "5=I experienced this change to a very great degree as a result of my crisis". Total scores range from 0 to 105, with the larger the number, the greater perception of personal growth.

Orientation to Life Scale (SOC; Sense of Coherence) — a 13-item questionnaire measuring sense of coherence (comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness). Scores on individual items range from 1 to 7; several items are reverse scored, and the total scores range from 13 to 91. Higher scores indicate a stronger sense of coherence.

Spiritual Involvement and Beliefs Scale (SIBS) — a 22-item questionnaire measuring subjects involvement and beliefs about spirituality. Item scores range from "1=strongly disagree" to "7=strongly agree". Total scores range from 21 to 147.

Posttraumatic Stress Checklist — a 17-item checklist measuring subjective distress symptoms. Item scores range from "1=not at all" to "5=extremely". Total scores range from 17 to 85.
Methodology

A total of 9,228 questionnaires were mailed to survivors of law enforcement officer line-of-duty deaths. Survivors who had experienced the death of their law enforcement officer during 2001 were not included in the mailing to avoid the possibility of intruding upon their grief. A total of 1,204 questionnaires were returned for a return rate of 13%. While the return rate is rather low, the demographics of participants were comparable to the demographics of the entire mailing list, suggesting that the sample of returned questionnaires is representative of the members of C.O.P.S. There were 1,087 questionnaires analyzed, after removing incomplete or otherwise unusable surveys.

Demographic Information

Table 1 presents the number and percentages of the demographic variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>N=1,081*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>22.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>833</td>
<td>76.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>N=1,074*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>926</td>
<td>85.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic American</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship to Deceased Officer</td>
<td>N=1,085*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>36.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibling</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coworker</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of Officer's Death</td>
<td>N=1,046*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felonious Assault</td>
<td>590</td>
<td>54.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accident</td>
<td>432</td>
<td>39.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly Fire</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Totals less than 1,087 indicate missing data on that item.
The average length of time passed since the officer’s death was 9.7 years. For the 337 spouses who reported length of marriage, the average was 12.2 years, with a range of less than 1 year to 40 years. The average age of participants in this study was 48.7 years, with a range from 19 years to 86 years.

Results – Research Questions

1. How do demographic variables (age, sex, relationship, length of time since loss, etc.) correlate with posttraumatic growth?

The results from this study suggest that posttraumatic growth occurs more often in the spouses of law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty than for other surviving family members. It may be that spouses, who have a day-to-day relationship with the loved one, experience a more profound change in their daily lives when the loss occurs. Tedeschi, Park & Calhoun (1998) suggest that posttraumatic growth is dependent upon a shake-up in a person’s life. The struggle to survive, to live without the loved one, can provide the impetus for growth to occur.

Studies have shown contradictory results in sex differences in posttraumatic growth. Lehman et al., (1993), Park, Cohen & Murch (1996), and Tedeschi & Calhoun (1996) all report that women indicate more growth than men, while Polatinsky & Esprey (2000) and Collins et al. (1990) report no differences between the sexes in posttraumatic growth. The results of this study indicate strong, significant, statistical differences between women and men, with women reporting more growth than men. While there are obviously individual differences in how people react to trauma, this study provides support for the idea that women are more likely than men to experience growth after trauma. It is interesting to note that Tedeschi & Calhoun (1996) postulate that growth is directly related to distress whereby medium levels of stress appear to stimulate the most growth. Studies on sex differences in stress reactions following trauma also report that women experience more distress than do men. Therefore, it may be that women, who experiences higher levels of distress after trauma, will necessarily experience more growth than men.

Results of this study show no relationship between posttraumatic growth and race, age, and time since death.

2. What support services (i.e., C.O.P.S.-sponsored activities) have been utilized by survivors and how does such social support correlate with posttraumatic growth?

Social support is considered by most researchers to be a vital component of posttraumatic growth and resiliency in the face of trauma. Those who experience or perceive themselves as having adequate support from friends and family tend to report more positive experiences following trauma, less severe distress symptoms, shorter duration of distress, and use approach-coping mechanisms (Grummon, Rigby, Orr & Procidian, 1994; Holahan, Moos, Holahan, & Brennan, 1995; Moos & Schaefer, 1993). In addition to family and friendship resources, researchers report that trauma survivors who participate in community support groups and organizations engage in more active coping strategies (Lauer, Mulhern, Bohne, & Camitta, 1985; Leserman, Perkins, & Evans, 1992). The results of this study suggest support for the social support hypothesis.
There is a positive correlation between participation in C.O.P.S. sponsored activities and higher levels of posttraumatic growth. As the number of activities participated in increases, so does reported posttraumatic growth. The C.O.P.S. sponsored activities are akin to the community support discussed by Leserman, Perkins & Evans (1992).

Table 2 presents the numbers and percentages of C.O.P.S. sponsored activities participated in by survivors of law enforcement officer line-of-duty death.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Police Week Seminars</td>
<td>631</td>
<td>58.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.O.P.S. Kids Activities-Police Week</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Counseling-C.O.P.S. Kids</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.O.P.S. Kids Summer Camp</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outward Bound-Young Adults</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siblings Retreat</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents Retreat</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Children Retreat</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter/National Teambuilding</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits Awareness</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parole Letter Writing Campaign</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Grief Literature</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payments/Japanese/American Friends</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requests for Counseling Resources</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistance for Nat'l Police Week Travel</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation Awards-Hands on programs</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trauma of Law Enforcement Training</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These results strongly suggest that the programming offered by Concerns of Police Survivors has a direct and positive impact on the survivors of law enforcement officer line of duty death.

3. How do spirituality involvement, beliefs and sense of coherence correlate with posttraumatic growth?

It has been suggested in the posttraumatic growth literature that persons experiencing the most growth would also show a stronger sense of coherence. There was no support for this hypothesis in the analysis of the data from this study. In fact, parents of law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty and other relationships (i.e., in-laws) both had a statistically significant stronger sense of coherence than did spouses, who reported the highest levels of posttraumatic growth. This result is surprising in light of the theorized connection between posttraumatic growth and one's sense of comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness.
There is evidence for a moderately low relationship between spiritual involvement and beliefs and posttraumatic growth. Tedeschi & Calhoun (1996) theorize that spirituality is definitely an aspect of posttraumatic growth and include spirituality as a subscale of their growth instrument. It is surprising that the relationship is of such low magnitude in this study.

4. What is the relationship between self-reported posttraumatic stress symptoms and posttraumatic growth?

The results of this study indicate that there is no correlation at all (.000) between self-reported posttraumatic stress symptoms and posttraumatic growth. This finding is very surprising given the theoretical supposition that a certain amount of stress is necessary for growth to occur. In other words, if there is no "push", there will be no movement toward change and growth. However, these results may be an artifact of the wording of the instrument. The respondents were asked about experienced stressful symptoms within the month prior to answering the survey questionnaire. If the participants had been asked to retrospectively report their levels of posttraumatic stress immediately following the death of the law enforcement officer, results may have been more in line with previous research and theory. This is a limitation of this current study.

Additional Results

It appears that children of law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty reported the least amount of spiritual involvement than any other relationship group. There is no data available on the exact timing of the death for the children and for some the death may have occurred during childhood, others during adulthood. However, all respondents were at least 18 years of age at the time of the study.

Parents of law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty had higher scores on the spirituality measure than children, siblings and coworkers. Spouses had higher scores than children and siblings, and other relationship (in-laws) had higher scores than children. Again, females scored higher than men on the spirituality measure.

Spouses had higher scores on the posttraumatic stress symptom checklist than siblings and other relationships (in-laws, etc.) This result is in line with results from other studies that suggest that, as mentioned earlier, posttraumatic growth is related to levels of stress. Females, again, score higher on this measure than do males. There is strong support in the literature for the notion that women are more open with their feelings, both positive and negative and therefore, the openness may influence scores.

The strongest relationship between measured variables was between sense of coherence and posttraumatic stress symptoms. This result is in line with the theory that persons who experience life as meaningful, comprehensible and manageable will be less likely to experience adverse stress reactions after trauma. What is surprising is the lack of relationship between sense of coherence and posttraumatic growth.
Survivors who received some type of mental health service after the loss of their law enforcement officer (individual, family or group therapy) showed higher levels of posttraumatic growth than did survivors who received no mental health services. While the relationship between mental health services received and posttraumatic growth was moderately low, it was statistically significant.

There was a moderately strong relationship between high levels of distress due to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and sense of coherence and posttraumatic stress symptoms. The relationship between responses to the terrorists attacks and sense of coherence was negative, indicating that those with higher sense of coherence experienced less distress due to the attacks. The relationship between posttraumatic stress symptoms and distress due to the terrorist attacks was positive, indicating that those with higher levels of distress about September 11 also reported higher levels of posttraumatic stress symptoms. These findings are in line with the literature in that persons who experience life as comprehensible, manageable and meaningful will be less likely to report high distress levels both in response to a specific event, or in general.

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

The data generated in this study provides much needed information about the positive aspects of response to trauma. Specifically, social support appears to be an important component of individual growth. The finding that C.O.P.S. sponsored activities were strongly and positively related to higher levels of posttraumatic growth indicates that the programming of this organization is fulfilling an urgent need of survivors of law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty.

Recommendations for strengthening the programming offered to survivors include the continued provision of services for relationship groups other than spouses. Spouses of law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty show a significantly higher level of growth than other relationship groups. It is interesting to note that anecdotally, spouses report a great deal of attention following the law enforcement officer’s death. Spouses are the center of attention at funerals and memorials, and are most often the recipients of benefits. Siblings, parents, adult children and co-workers may feel left out and ignored. Additionally, spouses have the opportunity to move into new relationships. Spouses can remarry; parents, siblings and children cannot fully "replace" the lost loved one. Different relationship groups may have very different responses to the loss of their law enforcement officers and thus may need interventions and programming designed to address those needs. The C.O.P.S. organization currently provides programming for adult children, siblings, parents, kids and spouses. In line with the results discussed above, expanding these programs to reach more individuals may have a profound positive effect on the individuals who experience such a devastating loss and may not receive an appropriate amount of sympathy and concern.

Mental health and social/community support services offered to survivors of traumatic loss possibly should include a focus on potential positive gains in addition to remediation of distressful responses and symptomology.
Mental health practitioners have become increasingly aware of the importance of addressing the spiritual needs of those in distress. The results of this study underline the importance of including and acknowledging these spiritual issues.

References


