

# Police Resiliency: An Integration of Individual and Organization

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Police work produces conditions of both intense and chronic stress. During violent incidents, split second judgment is critical to avoid unnecessary harm to the public, to co-workers and to self. Officers know that these incidents may lead to litigation, second-guessing of officer decisions, and loss of personal property in court settlements, further increasing the stressful milieu. Police officers are also exposed to physical harm, shift work, long work hours, organizational stressors, victims of violence, police suicide and other tragic events.

These occupational challenges contribute to an increased physical and psychological stress load, marking police work as a precursor to pathological outcomes. However, there is little work that explores salutary influences which can help officers become more resistant to the impact of stress. The development of socially based resiliency may be one such technique.

Evidence suggests that resilience has a moderating influence on stress (Aldwin, Levenson, & Spiro, 1994; Armeli, Gunthert, & Cohen, 2001; Paton, Violanti, & Smith 2003). There are specific characteristics that make individuals or organizations more or less resilient to stress than others (Maddi, 2002; Maddi & Khosaba, 2005; Youseff & Luthans, 2005; Walsh, 2002; Luthar, Chicchetti & Becher, 2000). Taken together, these factors suggest that resilience is not so much a trait as it is a process of integration of available resources such as groups or organizations (Siebert, 2002).

The police organization plays an important role in the process of officer resilience (Siebert, 2002). Police officers respond to stressful incidents as members of agencies whose climate influences their thoughts and actions (Paton, Smith Ramsay, & Akande, 1999). The police organization can influence the individual and organizations can change the course of individual reaction from pathogenic decline to adaptation. Higgins (1994) and Sledge, Boydston and Rahe (1980) also suggest that coping style and social cohesion could act to cognitively integrate the stressful experience. The salutogenic effects of resilience and social integration suggests that the group can facilitate the active process of self-righting and growth.

Additionally, because police officers are called upon repeatedly to deal with increasingly complex and threatening incidents, it is also appropriate to expand the scope of resiliency within the context of the organization to include the development of one's capacity to deal with future events (Klein, Nicholls, & Thomalla, 2003). Each negative stressful event an officer encounters leads to an attempt to cope, which forces them to learn about their own capabilities and available organizational support networks.

In sum, an approach integrating individual and organization resiliency has far wider implications than simply focusing on the pathology of stress and trauma. Organizational and individual resiliency together can have a meaningful impact on the more

effective management of psychological harm. In the long term, reduced personal stress has the potential for positive health outcomes in this difficult occupation.

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