Thriving in SURVIVING THE TRENCHES

Addressing Officer Stress and Wellness

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INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

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Do you believe that working in the criminal justice system has changed the way you view the world?

- Yes: 93%
- No: 6%
- Unsure: 1%

N=2,377
Cynicism: A pervasive distrust of human nature and motives

A professional mindset
- Officer safety

(Gilmartin, 2002)
Describe your level of stress at work

- Extremely: 10%
- Very: 28%
- Sometimes: 51%
- Rarely: 10%
- Never: 1%

N=2,187
RESEARCH ON PROBATION STRESS

Finn and Kuck, 2003
Lee, Joo & Johnson, 2009

1. High caseloads
2. Excessive paperwork
3. Meeting deadlines (many of them unexpected)
   • Lack of time to supervise caseloads properly
   • Being held personally accountable for offender misbehavior
   • Inadequate salary
   • Changing or conflicting polices and procedures
   • Lack of promotional opportunity
   • Frustration with judicial system – inconsistent demands
   • High expectations but inadequate time to meet them
   • Lack of recognition for good work
   • Inadequate support from agency
   • Lack of adequate community resources (i.e. treatment)
STRESS IN THE NEWS

A New Study: Work Stress Can Badly Effect Personal Health

8 Ways You Don't Realize Stress Is Ruining Your Health

Researchers are finding more reasons than ever to chill out.

By Larry Schwartz / AlterNet | August 29, 2015
Which is worse for a growing fetus?
Chronic maternal stress?
Pregnant mother consuming 1 glass of wine a day?

1. Stress

2. Wine

(N=69)
In 1936, Dr. Selye conducted studies on rats to identify the effects of hormones.

The rats consistently developed:
- Bleeding ulcers
- Loss of muscle tone
- Immune system failure

Defined stress as "the response of the body to any demand made on it"
Rats were exposed to extreme conditions to manufacture “stress”
- Forced to tread water until it starts to drown
- Blasted with loud noise
- Given toxic drugs
- Exposed to extreme temperatures
- Shocked with electric floors
- Placed in overcrowded cages and forced to fight for food and resources
STRESS IN THE GENERAL POPULATION
1998 NATIONAL HEALTH INTERVIEW SURVEY

N=28,753

(Keller, Litzelman, Wisk, et. al., 2012)
Reported "a lot" of stress

Perceived that stress affected health "a lot"

43% increased risk of premature death

(Keller, Litzelman, Wisk, et. al., 2012)
Reported "a lot" of stress

Perceived that stress affected health "hardly any or none"

Lowest risk of death across all groups

(Keller, Litzelman, Wisk, et. al., 2012)
REDEFINING STRESS

- Stress is what arises when something we care about is at stake
  - Includes thoughts, emotions, and physical reactions

- Stress and meaning are inextricably linked
  - We don’t stress over things we don’t care about
  - We can’t create a meaningful life without experiencing some stress

(Kelly McGonigal, 2015 pp. xxi & xxii)
TRAUMATIC STRESS

- Traumatic stress differs from organizational stress in a number of ways:
  1. The event is often sudden or unexpected
  2. Creates some level of distress
  3. Can overwhelm coping capacity
  4. Has the potential to alter the way one views the world

- What constitutes a traumatic event is in the eye of the beholder
PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OR OBSERVE AN EVENT THAT POSES A RISK TO SELF OR OTHERS

- Officer assaults
- Receiving threats
- Officer stalked by offender
- Officer attacked by animal in the field
- Observing violence/death/suicide
- Conducting searches/seizures
- Arrests (i.e. children witnessing their parents’ arrest)
- Near-misses
- Car accidents
- Being accused of criminal/unethical conduct
How many primary traumatic events have you experienced in your career?

- 4 or more: 29%
- 3: 17%
- 2: 19%
- 1: 19%
- None: 16%

N=2,256
Did you feel supported by your agency during or after your primary traumatic event?

- Yes: 31%
- No: 48%
- Unsure: 21%

N=631
Professionals begin to experience trauma symptoms themselves due to their secondary exposure to human suffering

- Hyper-vigilance
- Intrusive thoughts
- Feeling detached and numb
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Irritability or outbursts of anger
- Difficulty concentrating

(Figley, 1995)
“Those who work with offenders are called upon to bear witness to the crime.”

-Judith Herman, 1992
WORKING WITH OFFENDERS

Exposed to disturbing aspects of human behavior

- Police reports
- Presentence Investigations
- Criminal history
- Assessment interviews
- Victim contacts
- Collateral accounts
- Living environments
In the course of your day, how often are you exposed to traumatic material?

- Always: 22%
- Frequently: 29%
- Often: 23%
- Occasionally: 18%
- Rarely: 8%

N = 2,038
OFFICERS EXPERIENCE TRAUMATIC STRESS AS A RESULT OF THEIR SECONDARY EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE, INJURY, AND DEATH

- Offender suicide
- Violent recidivism involving death
- Violent recidivism involving child victims
- Sexual recidivism
- Violent death of offender
- Line of duty violence, injury, or death of a co-worker
How many secondary traumatic events have you experienced in your career?

- 4 or more: 48%
- 3: 15%
- 2: 15%
- 1: 15%
- None: 7%

N=2,266
Did you feel supported by your agency during or after your secondary traumatic event?

- Yes: 21%
- No: 53%
- Unsure: 26%

N=632
Select which symptoms of secondary trauma have you experienced in the past 2 months?

- Loss of trust
- Loss of innocence
- Lower concentration
- Preoccupation with trauma
- Hyper-vigilance
- Sleep disturbances
- Chronic exhaustion
- Feeling detached/numb
- Avoidant behaviors
- Increased anger, disgust, sadness, and/or distress

(Salston & Figley, 2003)
Secondary Trauma Symptoms

1. **64%** Loss of trust
2. **56%** Sleep disturbances
3. **55%** Increased anger, disgust, sadness and/or distress
4. **53%** Lower concentration
5. **46%** Chronic exhaustion
6. **45%** Hyper-vigilance
7. **44%** Feeling detached/numb
8. **43%** Avoidant behaviors
9. **33%** Loss of innocence
10. **30%** Preoccupation w/ trauma

(N=1,039)
Exposure to the trauma of someone else can cause people to vicariously experience a change in their own world view:
- Beliefs about humanity
- Views of the world (safety)
- Chronic suspicion
- Cynicism
- Loss of empathy

(McCann & Pearlman, 1995)
HIKING IN THE CARIBBEAN

On the Cliff of Awakening

(Laura van Dernoot Lipsky, 2009)
Select which symptoms of vicarious trauma have you experienced in the past 2 months?

- Interpersonal relationship problems
- Distorted world view
- Question spirituality
- Less tolerant
- Loss of empathy
- Feeling desensitized
- Intrusive thoughts
- Intrusive imagery

(Steed & Downing, 1998)

- Increased cynicism
- Chronic suspicion of others
Vicarious Trauma Symptoms

1. (71%) Increased cynicism
2. (69%) Less tolerant
3. (66%) Chronic suspicion of others
4. (62%) Feeling desensitized
5. (58%) Distorted world view
6. (54%) Loss of empathy
7. (40%) Intrusive thoughts
8. (39%) Interpersonal problems
9. (31%) Intrusive imagery
10. (23%) Question spirituality

(N=1,038)
SOLUTIONS

Managing Traumatic Stress
“The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet.”

-Naomi Rachel Reme

“Removing the judgments and inhuman expectations are precursors to healing.”

-Laura va Dernoot Lipsky
Reactions to trauma exposure are adaptive and protective

Conscious awareness = conscious choice

Create a work culture that promotes healthy coping, awareness, and self-care practices
  - Addressing job impact is paramount to sustaining the highest quality of professionalism

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

- If it is predictable... it is preventable!
- Training and education can enhance “psychological inoculation”
  - Normalize the responses
  - May prevent belief they are the only one negatively impacted
  - Early recognition = early intervention
  - Promote healthy coping strategies
  - Best accomplished at the onset of careers

An Ounce of Prevention is Worth a Pound of Cure
- Benjamin Franklin -
STRESS MINDSET

- Stress mindsets are extremely powerful
  - Affects how you think
  - Affects how you feel
  - Affects biochemistry
  - Affects how you act

- Stress is harmful = stress avoidance
  - Signals escape and reduction strategies

- Stress is helpful = proactive with situations
  - Builds resources for dealing with stress

(McGonigal, 2015)
Participants in a research study were assessed:
- Stressful events in the past year
- How much time spent helping others

Participant mortality was tracked for 5 years.

Major life stress increased risk of death by 30%.

Stress did not predict mortality risk for participants who spent time caring for others.

(Poulin, Brown, Dillard, & Smith, 2013)
Oxytocin is a neuro-hormone released under stress that binds to receptors in the brain
- Calms the SNS and brings the body back to homeostasis
- Decreases amygdala activation (dampens fear and increases courage and bravery)
- Stimulates neurogenesis in the hippocampus

Oxytocin binds to receptors in the heart
- Provides cardio-protection
- Helps heart cells heal and regenerate after stress-induced damage
- Reduces inflammation

(Campbell, 2010; Leuner, Caponiti, Gould, 2012)
Increased concentrations of oxytocin under stress prompt affiliative behaviors (social connection)
  ◦ Motivates the desire for human contact
  ◦ Strengthens social bonds
  ◦ Increases trust
  ◦ Fosters helping behavior and altruism
  ◦ Enhances empathy – reading and understanding other people
  ◦ Heightens intuition

Social connection, in turn, increases oxytocin production
  ◦ Both provider and recipient benefit

Campbell, 2010; Taylor, 2006
1. Stop trying to manage it!
   • Trying to manage stress can inadvertently increase stress
   • Using complex coping strategies to lower stress may require more energy and draws away from precious resources

(Crum et. al., 2013; McGonigal, 2015)
2. Acknowledge stress and trauma when it happens
   • Don’t deny it, don’t ignore it, and don’t try to fix it
   • Take notice of the sensations in your mind and body
   • Utilizes mindfulness

(Crum et. al., 2013; McGonigal, 2015)
3. Remember that stress is a response when something you care about is at stake
   - Draws connection back to meaning and purpose

(Crum et. al., 2013; McGonigal, 2015)
4. Make use of the additional energy stress provides:

- More courageous
- Reduces fear
- Sharper focus
- Enhances perception
- Better intuition
- Aids self-control
- Increases motivation
- Strengthens drive & perseverance
- Reignites passion(s)
- More open to emotion & connection
- Improves performance under pressure

(Crum et. al., 2013; McGonigal, 2015)
CONNECTING WITH THE EARTH

- Grounding to the Earth stabilizes bioelectrical and biochemical systems in the human body
  - Reduces inflammation
  - Decreases pain
  - Improves sleep
  - Promotes a shift from sympathetic to parasympathetic tone
  - Thins blood

(Chevalier, Sinatra, Oschman, Sokal & Sokal, 2012)
The earth resonates at a frequency of 7.83 hertz.

The frequency of the earth is almost identical to the alpha rhythms in the human brain.

(Dickerson, Ingrid)
Mindfulness is a method of mental training that increased awareness

- Disconnecting from autopilot
- Attention and focus on present moment experiences
- Observing physical and emotional reactions with non-judgmental curiosity

Being present can interrupt the negative consequences of trauma exposure

- When we are numb, it is more difficult to understand or see when we are doing harm
Mindfulness involves perceiving experiences without judgment.

It is often not the mood or feeling state that is problematic, but our *judgment* or reactions to them.

Decreasing reaction to emotions and letting go of expectations calms down the amygdala.
Studies have shown mindfulness
  ◦ Positively effects brain patterns
  ◦ Calms down over-active amygdala
  ◦ Improves physical effects of stress
  ◦ Increases immunity
  ◦ Prevents depression
MOOD AND BRAIN ACTIVITY

- Negative emotions are associated with heightened activity in the right prefrontal cortex
  - Anger
  - Anxiety
  - Depression
  - Withdrawal
  - Disconnection

(Davidson, 2004)
When people are in a positive mood, the left prefrontal cortex lights up with activity:
- Happiness
- Enthusiasm
- Feeling energized
- Connection
- Empathy

People with greater left-sided activity tend to have enhanced immune function.

(Davidson, 2004)
Researchers examined the effect of mindfulness training on brain activity.

After 8 weeks of mindfulness training, brain activity shifted to the left.

Subjects reported feeling happier, less anxious, more energized, and engaged.

Increased concentrations of disease-fighting antibodies

(Davidson, 2004; Davidson et. al., 2003)
HAPPINESS AND LIFE SATISFACTION

- Studies have demonstrated significant improvements in optimism and life satisfaction by engaging in one of these activities every day for 3 weeks:
  - Write down 3 things for which you are grateful
  - Meditate for 3 minutes
  - Describe in a journal a meaningful experience of the day
  - Perform a random act of kindness

- Research suggests the brain can rewire, creating alternate pathways as new habits develop

(Achor, 2010)
HONOR YOUR SERVICE

You may never know the number of lives you have impacted through your work, but know this...

You make our world a better place!
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