

Crime Scene Investigation and Critical-Incident Trauma

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Abstract

It is hypothesized that crime scene investigators are affected by critical incident trauma exposure. Crime scene investigators in a sizable Midwestern state self-reported data, which was used to analyze individual and organizational attribution factors. In order to assess the level of stress associated with CSI work and the type of organizational support offered to the investigator, this research examines significant aspects of the employment of a crime scene investigator. The job's nature can result in high levels of professional and personal stress, with work-related stress frequently fueling personal stress, even when preliminary studies point to a high degree of job satisfaction. Future research topics and policy implications for decreasing officer stress are highlighted.

Introduction

The organizational difficulties and treatments targeted at reducing the pressures connected to critical incident trauma are a constant threat to the landscape of American law enforcement. These pressures, according to Sewell, might be either organizational or event-related. Event stressors are those that pertain to the actual crucial incident event (such as being exposed to traumatic stimuli, worrying about getting hurt, or failing to finish an investigation and solve the crime). Police bureaucracy is analyzed for overt and covert stressors that exacerbate the impact of major incident trauma through organizational stressors. The policing bureaucracy needs to expand its intervention tactics from a conventional, monolithic approach, regardless of the shape or content that these stressors take in any specific situation where law enforcement professionals are exposed to critical-incident trauma. Law enforcement personnel that encounter a crisis situation that results in either immediate or delayed stress experience critical-incident PTSD. According to this description, a large portion of what law enforcement officials deal with on a daily basis qualifies as critical event trauma. These accumulated trauma's effects are harmful and dangerous. Critical event stress, according to Heglund, is like "packing boulders in a bag."

Similar to how law enforcement professionals face "ruptures" to their work and life from the weight of exposure to accumulated stress, the backpack eventually ruptures from the weight of the pebbles. Unchecked critical incident trauma causes post-incident stress behaviors that put the lives of law enforcement personnel, the people they care about, and the people they have sworn to protect at peril. Death occurs in the most extreme examples of post-traumatic stress. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 447 of the 31,600 Americans who attempted suicide in 2004

were police officers. What's more, according to data from 2007 from the National Police Suicide Foundation, there are currently 547 law enforcement officer suicides yearly, or one every 17 hours. Even though these figures are concerning, caution must be used. Age, sex, ethnicity, proximity to human suffering, workplace culture, availability of firearms, and other factors frequently affect suicide rates. Additionally, they can be impacted by the study's time frame, the inclusion of retirees, inaccurate reporting of the causes of death, and other factors. As a result, it is challenging to compare law enforcement suicides to those of other people or professions. Researchers have reported conflicting findings on the level of law enforcement suicide in comparison to other professions and demographic groups, despite worries over the prevalence of suicide among law enforcement officers being expressed. This paper specifically examines the effects of critical-incident trauma on crime scene investigators due to their chronic exposure to acts of violent crime (i.e., multiple homicides, questionable deaths, rapes, and violent property crimes). Although the development of therapeutic intervention programs and coping strategies is important for all of law enforcement and their challenges with critical-incident trauma, this paper does not specifically focus on those challenges. We think that over time, crime scene investigators will experience frequent episodes of post-incident stress that will ultimately lead to a severe emotional separation from their social interactions with their loved ones, their peers, and the general public.

The costs of crime scene investigators and their supporting police organizations ignoring the psychological impacts of critical incident trauma are enormous, not the least of which is that they will be less effective in carrying out their law enforcement duties. The trauma process itself offers the clearest understanding of the emotional detachment that results from exposure to traumatic events. The involvement in the actual trauma, the subsequent shock, and the recurrent traumatization are the stages of critical incident trauma (or post-traumatic stress). Post-traumatic stress events will happen more frequently and in more varied ways if crime scene investigators are not encouraged or required to take part in thorough psychological or emotional interventions.

Additionally, if the investigators don't feel comfortable expressing their feelings, their family, friends, and coworkers might feel helpless in the face of their anguish. Effective organizational intervention is now more challenging. Since police bureaucracies tend to adhere to organizational cultures that are out of alignment with the sensitivities of crime scene investigation, this paper contends that crime scene investigators are more likely than law enforcement officers in general to experience cyclical re-traumatization due to their chronic exposure to critical-incident trauma and these factors. Accordingly, the National Institute of Justice has financed research on critical incident trauma in the hopes that it will help law enforcement and correctional institutions create and implement more extensive intervention plans. The Corrections and Law Enforcement Family Support (CLEFS) projects, which concentrate on the behavioral effects of stress (such as tardiness, absenteeism, labor-management issues, and acts of brutality) rather than treating individual officers who experience post-traumatic stress, serve as a model for this intervention initiative. Modern study now focuses on the components connected to post-traumatic stress as a result of the shift in programming focus from the individual to harmful behavior. Although there is a wealth of literature on the factors that lead to post-traumatic stress in the fields of psychology, public and community health, sociology, and criminal justice, for the sake of simplicity in this paper, factors of post-traumatic stress are divided into those at the individual and organizational levels of the police. Individual attribution is specifically attributed to physiology, gender, and negative affectivity, as well as views of self-determination and work control and problem-solving strategies that combine emotion and logic. The job substance and context, rank, and political skill are those aspects assigned to the police organization. Critical-incident trauma-induced post-traumatic stress

emphasizes the necessity of an efficient contemporary police organizational intervention.

Best practices analysis reveals that military trauma response was the forerunner of today's police intervention techniques. According to Sheehan et al., medical units were forced to use an intervention strategy based on (1) early involvement, (2) complete care, (3) peer support, and (4) specialized, tactical training to treat the symptoms of shell shock, fatigue, and trauma during World Wars I, II, and the Korean Conflict. When taken as a whole, these intervention strategies were built on the tenets of proximity, immediateness, and expectation. These ideas, especially expectation, or the idea that stress brought on by trauma is natural, if properly understood and put into practice, can improve perceptions of police organization loyalty and sympathy for crime scene investigators. Heglund adds that there may be an even larger benefit for police groups to promote a sense of loyalty if they are prepared to create outside intervention programs. She claims that by sharing their experiences with others who are also dealing with post-traumatic stress and avoiding the perception trap of feeling betrayed by their department, crime scene investigators could more quickly regain the feeling of lost control over their lives if first responders were allowed or required to attend external multiday retreats. At the micro level, particular program initiatives for the intervention of critical incident trauma require the attention of factors that govern both individual and organizational attributions, even though best practices of military-trauma intervention are well-served at the macro level of law enforcement. In accordance with the trauma theory developed by Rees and Smith, repeated exposure to trauma results in a cycle of alienation from society and either a fight or flight response. These fight-or-flight reactions are brought on by a combination of rational thought, sophisticated neurological system, and cultural upbringing.

Therefore, both adverse reactions to critical incident trauma will lead to cyclical alienation when applied to crime scene investigators. According to Rees and Smith, "One of the reasons that trauma victims sustain long-term negative effects [posttraumatic stress disorder] is that they have been unable to 'release' the body from its highly charged state when the original [critical-incident trauma] event happened, and as a result store the effects in the body through a process called 'somatization.'" Because there is no acceptable cultural outlet for either the original trauma or the stress it causes, crime scene investigators' exposure to trauma is biologically retained in their bodies for all time.

The end effect is a cycle of social and bureaucratic isolation. Anderson et al. looked examined police officers' heart rates in a study on the role and functions of physiology associated to post-traumatic stress disorder to ascertain whether and when the development of critical-incident trauma occurs. "Sustained heart rate of 22 beats per minute above rest during the shift" was their indicator of stress. Their research suggests that there is little variation in the heart rates of police officers at the start of each shift, just before a perceived critical incident trauma, and throughout the actual critical incident event. They read this outcome as proof that the police officers who participated in the study saw stress as a necessary part of the job.

Discussion

There is relatively little research that truly tackles this issue, despite the fact that it is frequently speculated that CSI work is challenging and that CSIs feel high levels of stress in their jobs. This early study aims to start filling this gap. In order to learn more about CSI investigators' jobs and the effects they have on their mental health, we conducted an anonymous survey of them in a sizable Midwestern state. CSIs did face stress at work, but we also discovered that they had a high level of job satisfaction. The majority of answering CSIs expressed that they valued their employment, were very satisfied with them, and that they would accept them again in a heartbeat. notwithstanding these encouraging results. These results were not a surprise given how difficult it is to constantly be around hurting people.

CSI personnel are frequently called in to examine, investigate, and handle the crime scene even though they may not have had direct exposure to the criminal action. As a result, even though they might not be dealing with the victims or perpetrators or the emotions brought on by the event, they might still feel stressed. It is crucial that agencies be able to recognize and treat stress in an officer because some research suggests that PTSD symptoms may be present in about 85% of first responders. Programs that offer guidance and support help ease this load. Resiliency training initiatives have also been proposed as a means of assisting cops in recovering from traumatic events. We understand how to manage the pressure an officer, whether a CSI or not, experiences on the job. It's crucial to establish procedures for police to discuss stressful situations. It's likely more crucial to motivate cops to carry it out. It is possible to train supervisors and fellow police to recognize the symptoms of stress overload in an officer, including how to pay closer attention to the officer's self-destructive behavior. When an officer is having trouble, their fellow colleagues can encourage them to get assistance. In an effort to help officers better grasp the available support networks, steps can also be taken to help them reexamine their relationships with family and friends. Departments may be able to lessen some of the negative feelings that result from traumatic situations by encouraging officers to concentrate on traits like resilience, internal locus of control, and optimism for a better future. Feelings of being overworked and a sense that their efforts were undervalued by their company were among the high levels of stress that our respondents experienced. A simple "thank you" for a job well done and an understanding of the stressful nature of the job can often go a long way to alleviating emotions of being underappreciated and lonely, even though some of the answers to these problems may be more difficult to implement than others. Organizations can also help CSIs feel more valued by simply asking for their advice when creating new rules and procedures or initiatives that are related to their line of work, as well as by publicly praising their dedication by giving out letters of recommendation and bestowing citations. These latter suggestions may appear straightforward at first, and in a sense, they are. Our main point is that. Reaching out and expressing gratitude to someone for a job well done may go against the individualistic and macho police mentality, but it may help to lessen the undervalued aspect of being a CSI officer. Responding to crime sites is a necessary part of their job because CSI officers may not work a regular shift and instead increased stress at work. Anxiety related to being overworked can be handled by carefully employing extra people. Whenever funds are available, allowing the CSIs to take the necessary time encouraging healthy coping methods (such as access to training facilities and wellness or health initiatives), and utilizing a fair case assignment system Assignment and approval of CSI cases for vacation time, and the early detection of stress The direct superior of CSI. Companies must provide sufficient training. For managers to be aware of the symptoms of stress and being adaptable when managing CS and avoiding burnout! workload. Despite the research that came before, the reader must keep in mind that this was a pilot study carried out in a single Midwest jurisdiction. Although we made an effort to survey every CSI in the chosen state, we only received around half of the responses. It is obvious that more has to be done to properly assess the trauma connected to crime scene investigative work. It would be advantageous if others tried to reproduce our results elsewhere using their discoveries. Both larger sample numbers and more thorough interviews would be beneficial. It would be interesting to sample several officer vocations. For instance, it has been proposed that distinct sorts of stress are experienced by investigators who devote their time to focusing on child pornography. There hasn't been much study done yet on the stress brought on by these kinds of studies.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.