

Collaboration helps police address job stress

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Mangled bodies, gunfire, high-speed chases and injured children are just a few events witnessed by police officers and soldiers serving in dangerous hot spots around the world. These traumas take a high toll on the police officers and soldiers, who suppress human emotions to get the job done and can be reluctant to share their experiences in an effort to spare others from their ordeals, according to a September *Police Quarterly* article (published by SAGE).

"Training Police Leadership to Recognize and Address Operational Stress," written by U.S. Army Lt. Col. (retired) Mark Chapin; Mark Singer, Case Western Reserve University Professor of Social Work and Michael Walker, Executive Director of Partnership for a Safer Cleveland, focuses on how this collaboration—one of the first in the United States between military combat stress experts and a local police force—has worked to reduce job stress.

"Police officers face job stress in the line of duty 24 hours a day. Even the toughest officer can eventually feel it. We want to change the operational climate of silence about problems and the stigma toward seeking help," said Lt. Col. Chapin, one of the trainers.

The city's program, funded by a grant from the Cleveland Foundation, has trained more than 80 commanders and supervisors who oversee the Cleveland Police Department's nearly 1,600 officers.

"Police work is highly stressful and one of the few occupations where an individual continually faces the inherent danger of physical violence and

the potential of sudden death," said Singer, who helped design the program. He has spent 15 years working with police, riding along with them regularly as they patrol Cleveland's neighborhoods.

Supervisors and patrol officers have tri-fold laminated cards providing the warning signs of operational stress. The commanders' and supervisors' cards outline symptoms of stress. The line officers' cards list physical and emotional symptoms of stress, provide information about recovery from operational fatigue and suggest ways of protecting both the officers and their partners.

"The early identification of operational stress increases the likelihood of positive outcomes in police-citizen interactions," said Michael Walker, executive director of the Partnership for a Safer Cleveland, who helped design and implement the training program.

Source: SAGE Publications

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