

Study finds more active-duty police officers died of COVID-19 in 2020 than all other causes combined

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Of the 264 police officers who died in the line of duty in 2020 across the United States, more than half died of COVID-19, according to [new data compiled by the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund \(NLEOMF\)](#).

A professor at Case Western Reserve University is bringing some awareness to the disturbing trend.

Mark Singer, the Leonard W. Mayo Professor in Family and Child Welfare at the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences, also discussed some possible solutions during his recent lecture in Cleveland.

"COVID-19 is absolutely devastating police departments around the country," said Singer, also deputy director of the Begun Center for Violence Prevention Research and Education at the Mandel School. "I'm certain there are local departments that have been ravaged by this disease, as well as our hospitals' staff, firemen and EMS. We need to do everything we can to promote healthy, safe first responders."

The data does not include how many police officers were forced to miss work days because of COVID-19. However, the NLEOMF report noted that 145 police officers nationally died from complications related to the novel coronavirus. The organization verifies each reported death, according to its website.

COVID-19-related fatalities were the single highest cause of officer line-of-duty deaths in 2020.

"By far," Singer said. "It's not even close."

The data—which includes federal, state, military, tribal and local law enforcement officers—highlighted an increase in fatalities by 96% from the 135 officers killed during the same 12-month period in 2019.

Singer noted that, in typical years, the causes of death for police officers are varied, ranging from automobile crashes and heart attacks to gun violence and other physical violence. He said there are several key

factors why COVID-19 is the current leading cause of police officer deaths.

"For starters, there's no social distancing when you're a police officer," he said. "We know that this virus is the most contagious in tight quarters. Then you add in that these officers often work in enclosed environments."

Solutions

Singer suggested [police](#) officers should be moved to the front of the line for vaccinations. Increased personal protective equipment (PPE) would also help, he said.

"These first responders have to deal with this extra worry, in what's already a tension-filled job," said Singer, who was recognized for his role with the Partnership for a Safer Cleveland in 2018 at the grand opening of the Five Communities exhibit at the National Law Enforcement Museum in Washington, D.C.

He also touted the Safeguarding America's First Responders Act of 2020 as a success, which guarantees law enforcement officers and their survivors federal benefits if an officer is killed or disabled by COVID-19.

"I think it's important to recognize some of the unique dangers that [police officers](#) are facing," Singer said. "They want to come home from work from a dangerous job and be safe."

Provided by Case Western Reserve University

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