

The Importance of Changing Attitude Towards Mental Health in Law Enforcement Agencies

Zorawar Sekhon

Abstract: *Mental health is an important component of effective law enforcement because it influences officer well-being, operational performance, and public safety. Police personnel regularly encounter occupational stressors, including exposure to traumatic incidents, high-pressure decision-making, irregular working hours, organizational constraints, public scrutiny, and inadequate institutional resources. These challenges may contribute to psychological distress, burnout, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and difficulties in maintaining healthy professional and personal relationships. Traditional institutional attitudes emphasizing emotional toughness and masculinity may further discourage officers from seeking psychological assistance. This review examines the major occupational and organizational factors affecting police mental health and discusses practical approaches to improving psychological well-being. Key interventions include institutional cultural change, confidential counselling, peer-support programmes, mental health training, improved communication, appropriate staffing, and better working conditions. The review emphasizes that reducing mental health stigma and strengthening organizational support are essential for promoting officer welfare, improving professional effectiveness, and maintaining public confidence in law enforcement agencies.*

Keywords: Police mental health; Occupational stress; Post- traumatic stress disorder; Mental health stigma; Police organizational culture; Psychological well-being; Peer support; Law enforcement

1. Introduction

In a democratic society, the police stand as a crucial institution between the state and its citizens. The core role of the police force is to maintain public order, enforce laws, prevent and investigate crime, and protect life and property. They act as the primary agency responsible for upholding civil safety within a society. Their presence is felt daily, whether in maintaining peace on busy streets, responding to emergencies, or investigating crimes. The incumbent performs tasks related to the enforcement of Federal State and local laws, maintaining law and order, protection of life and property and the preservation of the public peace and order, crime prevention and detection, Intelligence gathering, emergency assistance and public service and the control and direction of vehicular traffic [1, 2].

Policing is considered a stressful professional occupation requiring police officers to cope with danger, uncertainty and unpredictability. The stress causes could be operational and organizational. Operational stressors are related to policing specificities such as working in shifts, danger and risk of injury, critical incidents, traumatic events, citizen criticism of police officers' behaviour, perception of policing by society, fear of excessive use of force, aggressive interactions, work-family conflict, etc. On the other hand, organizational stressors are related with Police as an institution/organization, including stressors such as conflicts with supervisors/colleagues, lack of material/human resources, work overload, excessive administrative tasks, leadership problems, political interference etc., as well each police department/ command/ police station's specific way of functioning [3 - 9].

When this job stress becomes chronic and is left unaddressed, it strongly affects physical and mental health of the personnel, impairing their ability to perform their duties optimally. Burnouts happen when chronic stress is left unattended. It is defined as a "prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job, [expressed on] three dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism and inefficacy".

Repeated studies have found a direct correlation between high levels of exhaustion and depersonalization as a coping strategy and between burnout and mental/psychological problems such as anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. Furthermore, police officers' burnout can manifest as internal or external aggression, which has brought this issue of mental health under the scanner. External aggression happens when the police use excessive force as they begin to assess the situations as more threatening than what they really are. Internal aggression is when they can cause self-harm. Several studies have alerted for suicide among police officers due to the easy access to a gun, due to situations which elicit post-traumatic stress disorder, stressful conditions during policing, depression and burnout indicating that "police officers are more likely to die by suicide than in the line of duty [10-16]."

Law enforcement officers must remain in a highly alert and stress-free state of mind because their roles require split-second decision-making where errors can result in the loss of human life. Police officers encounter critical incidents are unpredictable, potentially uncontrollable, novel, and often involve time pressure. Under these circumstances, officers are occasionally required to make life-or-death decisions, often in a split-second, to preserve and protect the lives of both the public and themselves. Video footage of certain police-public encounters highlight deficits in officer performance, including errors in the decision to use lethal force. Such incidents can have tragic consequences, including serious injury or death and strained police-community relations. Occasionally, such incidents can also lead to the incarceration of police officers and legal liability for law enforcement agencies (LEAs) that have not adequately prepared their officers for critical incidents [17-19].

The rising incidents of suicides, fratricides, and excessive use of force in police operations among police personnel have highlighted the critical, systemic crisis in law enforcement mental health. The victims of this brute force also suffer and make communities lose confidence in the very agencies that

are meant to protect their wellbeing and personal safety and enforce law. Since police officers have a great deal of legal latitude in determining when to use force, and even fatal force, the perceived threat of police victimization in civilians' interactions with police may lead to unique mental health implications for communities most affected by police violence [20].

This paper is a literature review of existing research and articles. It studies the various professional challenges that can cause stress in police personnel and the solutions that can address these challenges more effectively.

2. Primary Causes of Mental Health Challenges Faced by Police Personnel

2.1 Constant exposure to danger and trauma:

Persistent exposure to critical incidents often results in serious psychological difficulties, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, sleep disturbances, and secondary traumatic stress. In the line of duty, police officers, as with many public safety personnel, often have to deal with traumatic incidents, and that can include extreme violence, accidents, and even the death or suffering of other people. Exposure to potentially traumatic experiences on a regular basis sets the stage for a series of mental health complications, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) [21].

According to a study in Canada, over 90% of Canadian public safety personnel, a group which includes the police, have witnessed violent or accidental deaths and have been assaulted during their careers, and nearly every second person tested positive for a mental health disorder. Such extremely high prevalence rates highlight the fact that police work is a profession that is inherently filled with trauma. Over a long period, the pressure of such incessant exposures may lead to professional burnout and increase the risk of depression and suicidal ideation among officers [22,23].

Trauma exposure according to the American Psychiatric Association, 2022 is exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence, which may occur through three interrelated pathways: direct, indirect, and cumulative exposure. Direct trauma exposure refers to personally experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event as it occurs, such as encountering life-threatening situations, mass casualties, or serious injury during the course of work while indirect or secondary trauma exposure refers to repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of traumatic events encountered through professional duties without direct personal involvement, including responding to critical incidents, managing trauma-affected individuals, or processing traumatic material. Occupational trauma exposure encompasses both of these forms of exposure arising specifically from the professional role, including exposure to life-threatening circumstances, fatalities, physical violence, and the psychological distress of others. Cumulative trauma exposure refers to the accumulation of multiple traumatic events or repeated exposures over the course of an individual's occupational career [24-27].

Police officers face a disproportionately high risk of exposure to traumatic incidents and life-threatening situations. In the 2025 'What Cops Want survey, Police1' in the US reported that 80% of officers said hostility had risen since 2020 and two-thirds said they were very or somewhat concerned about being assaulted on duty. According to the survey, police officers face an average of 178 critical incidents throughout their careers. Cumulative trauma from responding to graphic incidents- including domestic violence, child abuse, and homicide- builds over time. Often, officers don't get the chance to fully process an incident before they must move onto the next urgent call [28].

2.2 Decision making under pressure:

Police officers face split-second, life-or-death choices that trigger intense physical and mental strain. Making these high-stakes decisions under pressure causes extreme cognitive overload, emotional fatigue, and long-term psychological damage, profoundly impacting their overall mental health and well-being. During dynamic and stressful encounters, officers are required to make rapid decisions that rely on effective decision-making processes, experience, tacit knowledge, and intuition. These encounters can be potentially uncontrollable, novel, and often involve time pressure that can lead to dire consequences, including injury or death. This can add to the stress levels as the police personnel have to process information at the spur of the moment, formulate efficient and proper tactical decisions, prepare, initiate, and execute a response behavior knowing fully well that they would be accountable for their actions [29,30].

However, only recently have researchers demonstrated the impact of heightened SNS response on police performance. A study of 122 active-duty police officers created a realistic scenario that included lethal force to induce stress. The investigators found that the scenario caused elevated heart rates and visual changes including reporting tunnel vision. The average performance rating (which reflected a composite score from 3 measures: Deadly Force Judgment and Decision-Making, Tactical Social Interaction, and Crisis Intervention Team surveys) for the officers was 59%, with 27% of the participants committing at least one lethal force mistake, with more mistakes occurring when stress was higher [31].

Rapid, continuous choice-making over a prolonged period drains mental energy, leading to fast mental burnout and decision fatigue. Studies show that if you've been making complex decisions all day, you could find yourself being less careful about other choices you have to make. Impulsivity can take a wide range of forms and have a wide range of consequences. It can also lead to mental exhaustion and brain fog, or a thought loop where if you keep ruminating about the decision hours later and questioning the call you made, leaving the decision maker exhausted and stressed [32].

It's a vicious circle. High stake decisions in any case are stressful. When an individual perceives a high-stakes situation, the brain activates its threat-response system. This triggers the release of cortisol and adrenaline, which shift resources away from the prefrontal cortex- the brain region responsible for evaluating trade-offs and thinking across time horizons. Activity in the amygdala increases, orienting

attention toward immediate threats. This is not a character flaw. Peer-reviewed research confirms that high stress hormones actively disrupt prefrontal cortex function while enhancing emotional reactivity. The result is a leader who feels decisive but is actually operating with degraded analytical capacity [33,34]

Chronic stress can also impair cognitive functions such as memory, attention, and decision-making, which are crucial during emergency responses [35]. Police work often requires accurately recalling details from crime scenes, witness statements, and procedural protocols. Chronic stress can disrupt short-term and long-term memory [36], making it difficult for officers to remember crucial information. This can lead to judgment, reporting, and testimony errors, potentially compromising investigations and legal proceedings and adding to their existing stress levels.

2.3 Lack of work life balance

An individual's capacity to retain happiness in both their personal and professional lives while also managing their time and efforts efficiently is known as 'work-life balance.' Studies have shown that employees who are unable to strike a healthy work-life balance will indeed be plagued by high levels of stress for the rest of their lives. Long-term stress was shown to have adverse effects on both physical and psychological health. Anxiety, melancholy, mood swings, substance abuse, injuries on the job, and interpersonal conflict are all risks that can arise as a result of burnout in the workplace.

According to the World Health Organization, working long hours poses an occupational health risk that kills hundreds of thousands of people each year. People working 55 or more hours each week face an estimated 35% higher risk of a stroke and a 17% higher risk of dying from heart disease, compared to people following the widely accepted standard of working 35 to 40 hours in a week, the WHO says in a study that was published in the journal - *Environment International*. Another study by the International Labour Organization indicated that "Between 2000 and 2016, the number of deaths from heart disease due to working long hours increased by 42%, and from stroke by 19% [37-40].

Lack of flexibility in work schedules and the absence of family-friendly policies significantly contribute to stress among police officers. Shift rotations, unpredictable schedules, and the difficulty in mentally disconnecting from work make managing personal and family responsibilities challenging, increasing emotional and physical strain. These challenges are even more pronounced for female officers, who often face gender discrimination and unequal expectations regarding their domestic and professional responsibilities. The presence of masculinity contest cultures (MCCs) within police forces further increases stress, reduces psychological well-being, and exacerbates PTSD symptoms, particularly affecting female officers [41-47].

2.4 Constant scrutiny and public distrust:

In recent years, thanks in no small part to smartphone videos, police forces across the world are subjected to relentless

scrutiny. In some cases, it is justified as the public demands greater accountability in the aftermath of incidents where the police are seen to be abusing their authority and applying excessive force. But the question on how does public criticism affect policing, often goes ignored.

A new study by Texas researchers says empathetic officers – police with more liberal approaches to their work – become less effective. A 2017 Pew Research study found that a majority of police officers believe the public doesn't understand the risks and safety concerns they face, and that their job performance is being affected by public criticism. The study found out that police officers experience anxiety and frustration when they feel the public's narrative of their job is different from their own. They feel that when an incident happens, the police officer never has a chance. It's automatically assumed that they did something wrong and that their narratives get lost in the debates we are having nationwide [48,49].

The murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis Police Officer Derek Chauvin in the summer of 2020 which sparked massive nationwide protests and brought policing under intense scrutiny is a good example. While these types of violent incidents are not new, they have increasingly received national attention over the past ten years, with social media accelerating the spread of news stories capturing the events, their aftermath, and the larger debates around racial bias in policing and police misconduct. In the absence of personal experiences with the police, most Americans do not have regular contact with law enforcement. As a result, the news media plays an important intermediary role in shaping public opinion of the police, affecting, for example, perceptions of legitimacy, police effectiveness, and public appetite for accountability [50-58].

Police officers feel that the media sensationalises news. According to a recent Pew Research Center survey conducted by the National Police Research Platform in the US Police work has always been hard. Today police say it is even harder. Majorities of police officers say that recent high-profile fatal encounters between black citizens and police officers have made their jobs riskier, aggravated tensions between police and blacks, and left many officers reluctant to fully carry out some of their duties. About as many (72%) say officers in their department are now less willing to stop and question suspicious persons. Overall, more than eight-in-ten (86%) say police work is harder today as a result of these high-profile incidents. About nine-in-ten officers (93%) say their colleagues worry more about their personal safety. It is no different in other countries with increasing polarization in society and social and mainstream media doing whatever it takes to outdo each other to attract viewers [59,60].

Constant media trials have made the police hierarchy prone to micromanagement. This is different from overseeing. Close oversight can be appropriate- in high-stakes environments, with genuinely new employees, or during genuine performance issues. What distinguishes micromanagement is its chronic, indiscriminate nature and its underlying message: I don't trust your judgment. This micromanagement leads to erosion of Autonomy and Self-Determination; core psychological needs identified in Self-Determination Theory.

When autonomy is chronically thwarted, intrinsic motivation collapses. Workers shift from "I want to do good work" to "I just need to satisfy my manager," a mode psychologically associated with lower creativity, higher stress, and eventual disengagement. Moreover, knowing that their work will be scrutinized in granular detail creates a hypervigilant state. Rather than focusing cognitive resources on the work itself, they spend energy managing how the work will be perceived. This dual-track processing is exhausting and affects stress levels [61,62].

2.5 Organisational, bureaucratic and political pressure

Organizational stress in the police force refers to the chronic pressure, strain, and frustration that originate from the internal structure, bureaucratic policies, leadership style, and operational culture of a law enforcement agency, rather than from external field dangers. Also known as "job context" stressors, may be a greater source of stress for police officers because officers may perceive them as oppressive, unnecessary and inescapable. These stressors arise from the stiff hierarchies and bureaucratic frameworks within the police. Within their own departments, officers may face unfairly high workloads, excessive paperwork, lack of resources, poor leadership support, perceived unfairness, staff shortages administrative burdens, internal politics, and conflicting duties and bureaucratic red tape which is sometimes invisible [63].

These stress inducers also include stress due to job-related violence involving rank and file police officers and other incidents of being "second-guessed" in field work, punishment for "minor" infractions, lack of reward or recognition for a job well done, fear of being "degunned"-having their department issued firearm and personal firearms administratively confiscated by the department for personal or stress-related problems, favouritism in shift assignments, perceived inequities in promotions, and a lack of transparency in departmental policies. etc. [64,65].

Organizational stress may lead to feelings of betrayal and cause a loss of trust in their department. Unity of command, centralized authority, rigid hierarchical structure, one way communication, impersonality, unquestioned compliance of orders and instructions are some of the significant features of police organization. Communication is strictly regulated through a formal chain of command in which the flow of information typically flows downward for orders and upward for reporting but bypassing intermediate ranks or communicating sideways without authorization is heavily restricted to maintain order and accountability. This creates stress as the junior ranks may feel isolated and fearful of authority. They might also feel that the senior leadership is out of touch with ground realities or doesn't appreciate the challenges as much [66-68].

The long-standing controversy about the interface between politicians and public servants is often framed as the 'politics-administration dichotomy'. Various scholars suggest that the dichotomy – the separation of roles between politicians and public managers is both theoretically and empirically questionable with separation often breached in practice, whatever the normative claims. Political astuteness is viewed

as a key leadership capability in public servants especially at more senior levels in a range of situations, involving formal or informal politics. Deploying political skills involves working with stakeholders often with diverse and sometimes competing interests in order to achieve sufficient alignment and/or consent in order to achieve outcomes. A 2021 study in the UK - "Democratic Oversight and Political Direction of Chief Police Officers in England and Wales: Implications for Police Legitimacy" found that they experience the one-to-one nature of the relationship as provoking anxiety about job security, job progression and operational autonomy [69-73].

Another study, titled 'Status of Policing in India Report 2019: Police Adequacy and Working Conditions', conducted by the NGO Common Cause, and the Lokniti programme of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) also alluded to the political interference. The nexus between politics and policing erodes institutional autonomy and the fair application of the law. Police organizations are regularly exposed to informal and formal political pressures that influence operational choices, resource allocation, personnel assignments, and the pursuit or suppression of specific investigations which adds to the work stress and is also passed down the hierarchy [74,75].

2.6 Lack of Resources

Lack of resources can have a huge impact on the police force leading to a force that is underpaid, undermanned, and under equipped relative to the challenges it must face. Police agencies' inability to maintain adequate staffing levels has been linked to a range of adverse outcomes, including higher crime rates, slower response times, and increased misconduct, and low morale of the force. Reductions in sworn law enforcement personnel have been linked to increases in crime rates. Police visibility throughout a jurisdiction also contributes to crime control by shaping offenders' decision-making calculus. Thus, agencies facing staffing shortfalls may struggle to sustain an adequate presence across their jurisdictions, thereby hindering their ability to deter and control crime. Elevated crime, increased victimization, and heightened fear of crime may, in turn, reduce public satisfaction with the police ultimately undermine public support for law enforcement [76-80].

Staffing shortages are directly linked to slower response times. Rapid response times are also among the public's core expectations of the police and delayed or ineffective responses may undermine trust in law enforcement [81]. For these reasons, agencies often prioritize rapid response as a means of sustaining public support. Yet during periods of staffing shortages, meeting this expectation can become a significant challenge. Staffing shortages have also been linked to increased risks of police misconduct, as well as overworked personnel, diminished morale, and compromised officer well-being. As resignations rise within police agencies, remaining officers are often required to work excessive hours, mandatory overtime, and irregular shifts—factors that elevate stress levels. Research connects officer stress to higher risks of misconduct, making agencies more vulnerable to misconduct complaints and other adverse outcomes. In response to staffing shortages, some agencies lower hiring standards to replace departing officers more

quickly. This practice may introduce younger or less-qualified personnel into frontline or even supervisory roles further heightening the risk of misconduct. Research shows that younger and less-qualified officers are more likely to engage in problematic behaviours, with negative consequences for both the agency and the communities they serve [82-85].

Moreover, shortage of resources can have a direct impact on equipment upgradation. Every purchasing decision made by a law enforcement agency has real-world consequences. The equipment officers rely on during traffic stops, patrol operations, and enforcement details is not simply a line item in a budget. It becomes a daily tool that either supports or hinders performance. Speed enforcement systems, video platforms, and in-car technologies must function seamlessly in demanding environments. When procurement prioritizes usability, durability, and officer-focused design, agencies strengthen their operational impact and reinforce public trust [86]. Outfitting an officer from head to toe is no longer a matter of assembling independent pieces of gear. It is the construction of a complete safety system. Each component supports the next, forming a cohesive ensemble capable of withstanding rapid threats, extended shifts, and today's increasingly complex environments. The development of society and the evolving nature of criminal activity, including terrorism, cybercrime, and transnational crime, have led to ever-changing demands on police work and the need for intelligent police equipment. These changes have also influenced the requirements for police equipment technology. For instance, there is a growing necessity for effective equipment to prevent and combat terrorist attacks, as well as for technical support in network monitoring and criminal detection. Additionally, the application of technologies, such as drones, face recognition, and the Internet of Things, has become essential to enhance police monitoring and information acquisition capabilities. Lack of resources leads to poor upgradation in equipment which has a direct impact on police performance, safety and morale [86-88].

The future of crime fighting is being defined by much of the same technology that is revolutionizing business and other areas of life. Artificial intelligence (AI), automation, big data, extended reality, and all the most important trends we identify across other sectors are equally making their mark in policing. This requires greater investment of resources in the force [89]. Poor equipment directly degrades police morale and mental health by increasing daily frustration, amplifying job stress, and making officers feel unsafe and undervalued by their leadership. When the tools required to face dangerous situations fail, the psychological toll can be immediate and long-lasting [90].

2.7 Hypervigilance and social isolation:

Social isolation has been associated with a wide range of mental disorders including mood disorders, psychosis, and drug dependence. Officers often suffer from adrenal exhaustion and fatigue, a byproduct of daily hypervigilance, which can create dysregulation of cortisol – the stress hormone. This cortisol and adrenaline dysregulation causes officers to “come alive” during their shift and causes them to crash with fatigue and hormonal dumps at the end of their shift. Over time, this hormonal dysregulation can predispose

officers to many physical and mental ailments including high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, depression, anti-social and thrill-seeking behaviors, suicidal thoughts and other PTSD-like symptoms [91].

This can lead to maladaptive coping strategies like heavy alcohol consumption, and it can also strain personal relationships and other social relationships. Possibility thinking – looking out for the safety of themselves, their colleagues and the community members they serve – causes a biological response in hypervigilance. Hypervigilance is defined as the feeling of being constantly on guard for the purpose of detecting potential danger, even when the risk of danger is low. Cops maintain this state of heightened alertness the entire duration of their shift. The problem is, when they get off duty, that sympathetic autonomic response becomes a parasympathetic response where they're detached, they're isolated and they're disengaged. This state of hypervigilance, followed by the let-down after the shift, is what is referred to as the “biological rollercoaster. Hypervigilance has been associated with several negative cognitive and behavioural consequences, including attentional bias, memory impairment, and difficulty with emotional regulation. It also serves to maintain anxiety disorders and post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD), with anxiety increasing hypervigilance for threat, which leads to greater threat detection and thus more future anxiety and hypervigilance. Physiologically, excessive hypervigilance can lead to autonomic arousal as well as over reactivity in brain regions related to threat detection.

A common issue with law enforcement professionals is a singular identity rooted in the profession. Social isolation due to erratic working hours or exhaustion, allows officers to sit in their singular view of the world. In this state, explains they are constantly seeking affirmation. At the same time, officers can experience anger from violated expectations in circumstances out of their control – they themselves can do nothing to change the situation. When officers are isolated in this world of anger, they search for a solution, for someone to blame for their problems and their emotional reaction to those problems. This cycle only leads to greater problems as officers' anger increases over what they are unable to control [92 -96].

With the brains resources on constant alert, the results can be inappropriate or even aggressive reactions in everyday situations. This constant scanning and rescanning of their environment can make people with hypervigilance ignore their family and friends around them. Often, they will overreact to loud sounds and bangs, unexpected noises, smells, etc. They can get really agitated and irritated, especially when in a crowded or noisy area as there is too much to ‘analyse’ which makes them socially awkward [97].

2.8 Stigma and Barriers to Seeking Help

Traditional police culture enforces a rigid masculine image that equates emotional suppression and toughness with job competence. Police officers are often reluctant to seek help for their mental health. Police culture stigmatises mental health reducing someone “from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one”, whereby the person is viewed as having a failing, shortcoming or handicap. The stigma

associated with mental health results in police officers makes them fearful that seeking help for their mental health may be perceived as a sign of cowardice or weakness. This conflicts with a police culture focussed on machismo and masculinity, resilience, hardiness and psychological capital, all of which demands police officers are tough and brave and in control of their emotions. It is also seen as a handicap for future growth within the organisation. Police officers are likely to view accessing mental health services in a negative light, whereby they are more concerned with the potential damage that it may do to their career as opposed to the potential positive change in their mental health. Such a culture may thus encourage a 'tough it out' mentality, making it challenging for officers to cope with these experiences. Not seeking help may exacerbate an existing condition and research has shown that police officers who actively avoided seeking help for their mental health, later reported higher levels of declining mental health [98-101].

3. Interventions that can make a marked difference

3.1 Departmental commitment to cultural change and destigmatisation of mental health:

Moving the needle on perceived help-seeking stigma is challenging in a culture that strongly values stoicism and views emotional difficulties as a sign of weakness. No meaningful change can happen regarding men's mental health without a sincere effort to reshape the cultural expectations of masculinity. The traditional cultural norms that dictate that men must be stoic, invulnerable, and entirely self-reliant need to be worked on because when mental illness is viewed as a contradiction to these "tenets of masculinity," it creates severe barriers to well-being [102,103].

Annual wellness visits with a primary care doctor are a standard practice in public service community healthcare, offering opportunities for screening, education and early intervention. These visits are crucial for promoting preventative healthcare and the early detection of disease. Recognizing that community members often present with both medical and psychological concerns, these visits should mandatorily include mental health checks resulting in more efficient and comprehensive treatment overall. This will go a long way in normalising mental health issues [104]. Leaders can set an example by using clear, non-punitive language that treats seeking mental health support the same as seeking care for a physical injury.

One study found that officers were more negatively impacted by the lack of follow-up after a critical incident than the trauma from the incident itself. To alleviate the impact of trauma on first responders, many departments have implemented critical incident stress debriefing (CISD). CISD sessions are facilitated, three- to four-hour small group discussions that occur between two and 10 days after a traumatic event. By sharing their experiences, they feel less pressure as there would be others going through or having gone through similar trauma or anxiety. Studies show social support boosts oxytocin and serotonin, improving mood. Strong relationships also lower cortisol, reducing stress and anxiety. A good support system helps develop coping skills,

leading to better emotional regulation and resilience. By talking it out, a person feels supported and understood [105,106].

3.2 Periodic counselling:

There should be free access to periodical Counseling which is confidential, voluntary, and provided by a professional experienced at working with law enforcement or public safety personnel. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is one component of programs that improve stress-related outcomes for police officers. CBT focuses on making changes to unhealthy thinking and behavioral patterns (e.g., recognizing cognitive distortions, using problem-solving skills, facing fears instead of avoiding them) to improve mental well-being. It promotes more balanced thinking to improve the ability to cope with stress [107-110].

3.3 Peer Support

In peer support programs, police assist their fellow officers with active listening, screening and assessment to identify needs, and appropriate referrals to services. The parity in a peer support relationship can alleviate the common police concern that seeking support from supervisors could negatively affect career advancement. Peer support groups can also solicit the services of retired police officers to ensure greater confidentiality, and to alleviate individual fear of an adverse reaction from the organisation. Peer-support programs provide police officers with an opportunity to share their experiences with other officers, which is important because fellow officers are perhaps best able to relate to their colleagues' experiences in the line of duty. Peer-support has been widely accepted as a confidential outlet for police officers to speak to other police officers free from judgment and the sharing of private information. Promoting the sense that police officers are not alone and encouraging the idea that there is no shame in seeking help both contribute significantly to bringing about changes in the current police culture [111-114].

There is a consensus that the main goals of peer support are: to provide an empathic, listening ear; to provide low-level psychological intervention; to identify peers who may be at risk to themselves or others; and to facilitate a conduit for professional help. It is generally agreed upon that the goals of peer support do not relate solely to helping individuals recover from a traumatic or highly stressful incident; rather, peer-support functions to help maintain and promote psychological and physical health, and well-being more broadly. Peer-support can be defined as the true reciprocity and exploration of hope between individuals. It is a relationship that is based on empathetic listening and being compassionate human beings [115,116].

3.4 Law Enforcement Training

Police departments should provide training and information, particularly to supervisors, on identifying possible warning signs associated with stress-related issues. Some departments employ training programs to educate officers and promote awareness of mental health issues and available services. The educational approach can also reduce stigma by dispelling

myths and providing context for developing mental health issues in law enforcement [117,118].

3.5 Improve communication to build public trust:

Communication is essential to building trust, mutual respect, and understanding. Sharing information with the public can increase understanding of laws, safety measures, police procedures, and their rights as citizens. Effective communication can help reduce stereotypes, increase police understanding of local needs and concerns, support joint-problem solving, and contribute to more effective community-oriented policing. When community members feel heard and respected, they are more likely to trust, engage and cooperate with the police. Open communication channels allow community members to provide feedback on police performance, thereby fostering a sense of transparency and accountability [119,120].

While the police service has a duty to safeguard the confidentiality and integrity of the information it holds and the rights of individuals to privacy, this duty must be balanced against the need to be open and transparent. They must ensure that all information is accurate and verified and should correct errors proactively to maintain trust and integrity. In the current situation where, social media can amplify misinformation, the police should tackle misinformation and disinformation proactively. They should be trained to be discerning with disclosure obligations prior to release, ensuring nothing is shared that could compromise ongoing investigations, legal proceedings, operational integrity or the rights of individuals. The police should deliver consistent and coordinated messaging that avoids giving mixed messages to the public. The force should be trained to maintain impartiality, using neutral, unbiased language when describing people, events and situations and ensure that communications are free from victim-blaming language. Special emphasis should be laid on being inclusive, using language and channels that are accessible to people with different protected characteristics and different cultural, linguistic or technological backgrounds. There should be specific training to cover trauma-informed communications [121-123]. Improved public trust can go a long way in ensuring that the police work with less stress.

3.6 Compatible remuneration, staffing and equipment upgradation:

There should be strict policies regarding working hours and shift balance to allow police men to be well rested. Two recent research studies revealed that just 17 to 19 hours of sustained wakefulness—the kind of sleep loss routinely experienced by officers in many departments impaired participants' performance as much as having a 0.05% blood alcohol content (BAC). Extending wakefulness to 24 hours produced impairment equivalent to a 0.10% BAC. Both of the studies tested hand-eye coordination, and the more recent study also tested cognitive performance, motor speed, task accuracy, and alertness (Dawson & Reid, 1997; Williamson & Feyer, 2000). Reaction time on some of the tests in the more extensive study was 50% worse in the sleep deprived condition than in the alcohol condition (Williamson & Feyer, 2000). As a matter of public safety, it seems appropriate to ask whether fatigue-

impaired officers should tackle the tough job of policing, particularly because they may at times be as impaired as the drunken drivers they arrest. Police executives and managers can minimize officer fatigue by developing appropriate shift scheduling and work-hour policies which would require adequate staffing [124-126]. Adequate staffing is directly connected with remuneration to attract the best talent.

Governments should ensure adequate resources so that the law enforcement agencies are equipped to handle the pressures and risks in their line of duty. Upgrading police equipment has a direct, measurable impact on officer morale, influencing everything from mental health and physical comfort to operational confidence. When law enforcement agencies invest in modern gear, it signals to front-line personnel that leadership values their safety and professional efficacy. Academic research indicates a strong correlation between access to modern equipment and lower levels of reported anxiety and depression among officers. Working with outdated or failing gear creates friction, chronic stress, daily frustration and operational burnout [127-129].

4. Conclusion

The law enforcement agencies represent a fundamentally important social institution that advances the community interest in public safety, justice, equality, and the rule of law. Thus, prioritizing the mental health of the police force is vital because officers face unique, high-stress environments and cumulative trauma. Research shows unaddressed psychological strain leads to impaired decision-making, higher rates of depression or PTSD, and increased risks of officer suicide, directly impacting both officer safety and community well-being. Studies and national data frequently indicate that more law enforcement officers die by suicide than in the line of duty, making early intervention a life-saving necessity. These statistics have highlighted the issue of mental health and well-being of the law enforcement agencies making it a significant concern globally. It is important for governments to recognise the issue and take necessary steps to help. For this, it is important for the police force to shed its traditional culture of masculinity which equates professionalism with emotional stoicism, physical dominance, and the suppression of vulnerability and recognize that mental health is just as critical as physical fitness in their line of duty and take proactive steps to prioritise mental health.

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