

Best Practices for Family Support Programs

A Call to Action

Barbara Palomino deVelasco, Tracy Mallett, and Donna Schulz



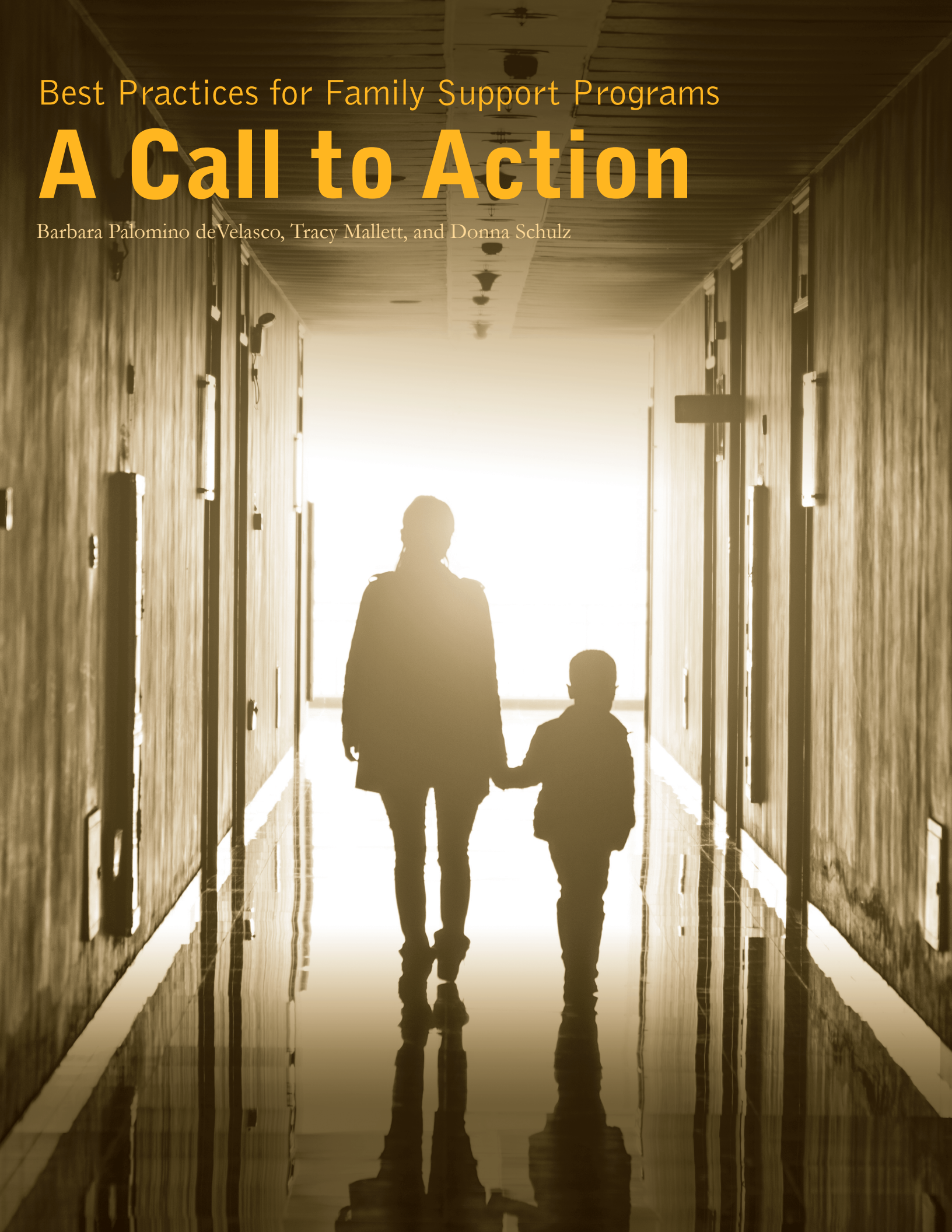
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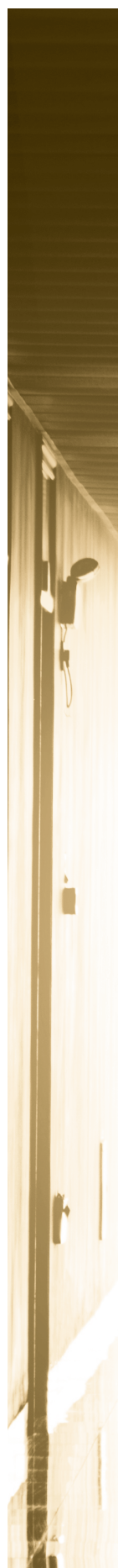


Background

This paper will review what experts are reporting what experts report are the imperative components for successful law enforcement family support programs and create a call to action to make recommendations for implementing an online support program for law enforcement families as well as a continually updated online directory and repository of available support services. The targeted population will be not only sworn officers but also their families, which includes spouses, children, parents, siblings, and any other makeup of the family unit of the officer. As Donna Schulz, Law Enforcement Coordinator for the U.S. Attorney's Office Middle District of Florida (retired), often says, "The Law Enforcement Family: We are America's finest! We want to make sure we *live* . . . live better, more positive and productive lives both on and off the job." Because job satisfaction has been consistently linked to individual coping skills and family support (Johnson 2012; McCarty and Skogan 2012), there is a need in the law enforcement officer (LEO) community to assist officers in remaining focused on saving lives—including their own—a focus that comes, in part, from their having a healthy support system at home.

The experience of the law enforcement family

It will likely come as no surprise to any LEO family member that being part of a law enforcement family will involve a great deal of stress not only on the officer but also on all other family members. While all family dynamics are stressful, law enforcement—simply given the nature of the job—means the officer will encounter stress regularly. Men and women often report that they pursue law enforcement careers because they want to make a difference in their communities despite knowing that they will not be as financially well compensated for their level of risk. During a Critical Incident for Law Enforcement seminar in Orlando, Florida, in 2016, when officers were asked to raise their hands in response to the prompt, "How many of you went into to law enforcement to help others?" all 35 participants raised their hands. An altruistic personality is a common trait in officers; many who enter law enforcement are motivated to do so to make a positive difference in the lives of others and truly believe in the motto "to protect and serve." Much of law enforcement work involves risking one's health, safety, and well-being to ensure that another person stays safe. "An altruistic police officer feels a sense of fulfillment when he or she risks their life to help others." (Hein 2014) This sense of fulfillment is part of what makes officers continue to be committed to do this challenging work day after day, year after year.



Stigma attached to seeking help

This altruistic personality, as well as fears of being judged for being weak or “not squared away,” can be powerful deterrents to seeking needed mental health assistance. During initial and ongoing training, officers may be warned through the grapevine that they will lose credibility regarding their effectiveness if they admit to needing help or that they are struggling with mental health issues. (Karaffa and Koch 2016) Officers also perceive a stigma—whether real or imagined—for those who avail themselves of mental or emotional treatment or support; they fear that if they seek psychological or psychiatric assistance they may be seen as weak, may be alienated from or by their peers, or may even be found unfit to carry a weapon. LEOs also report being concerned about breaches in confidentiality if they do seek mental health assistance. (Florida Regional Community Policing Institute 2014)

Breaking down this stigma is of utmost importance, given the necessity of mental fitness for LEOs and their families. Trauma is inherent in law enforcement positions, and officers and families must learn that taking affirmative steps to improve mental health takes moral and psychological courage; doing so is hardly a mark of weakness. It is imperative that we continue to promote—and decrease the stigma of—regular mental health checkups, as well as the continual seeking of assistance for acute problems. Following these steps will hopefully lead to enhanced mental fitness. (Palomino 2011).

With this background in mind, let’s take a look at some of the specific stressors facing the law enforcement community, including the following:

- Addiction
- Cynicism
- Intense scrutiny in the media and community
- Post-traumatic stress and related symptoms
- Public and supervisory support
- Risk of suicide
- Sacrifices and coping mechanisms
- Sleep-related disorders and medical issues

- Social media impact
- Superhero mindset
- Tension in the home

Addiction

Forms of addiction for LEOs are not necessarily different from those seen in civilian families; however, the increased stressors of a career in law enforcement certainly suggest the potential for “self-medicating” in a variety of ways. Misuse of alcohol, prescription and nonprescription drug abuse, excessive internet use, and pornography addiction have all been reported by law enforcement agencies and individual officers as being methods used by officers to self-medicate their struggles with symptoms of stress secondary to their job-related trauma or to avoid the challenges of everyday life.

Alcohol and drug addiction

Alcohol is readily available, and in some family cultures it is expected that “the boys” will relax with a beer or that a couple will enjoy a romantic glass of wine together. Alcohol in moderation is not, in and of itself, a problem for most people. However, when an officer experiences isolation, helplessness, hopelessness, or other problematic emotions without an immediate and effective method of relief, overindulging may become an issue. We know that LEOs—not unlike other professionals—may fall into alcohol or substance abuse or addiction. Alcohol abuse rates for LEOs may be inflated by the media, but it is nonetheless a problem we cannot deny. For example, “choir practice,” or the informal gathering of officers for a drink and “decompression” after a shift, is one way to see the effects of alcohol on members of the law enforcement profession; rather than part of a social gathering, alcohol can be a way to self-medicate the pain of the job. Knowing the job stressors, it is incumbent on agencies to promote healthy lifestyles for their officers and offer substance abuse counseling as needed. In addition, it is vital that we assist the law enforcement family to recognize the symptoms of substance abuse, as addiction can be a co-morbid disorder along with depression, anxiety, and PTSD. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), 30 percent of first responders develop behavioral health conditions including depression and PTSD—compared to 20 percent of the general population—and substance use is one method of dealing with these effects. (SAMHSA 2018) Researchers have found high-risk alcohol and drug use rates among emergency response professionals reported to be as high as 40 percent, with direct linkages between occupationally related stress exposure, PTSD, and high-risk substance use. (Donnelly and Siebert 2009)



Abuse of prescription medication or alcohol can lead to illegal substance abuse. For example, officers injured on the job may be prescribed pain medication that has long-term negative effects. “Certainly, not every officer deals with stress and trauma by abusing chemicals, and not every officer who chooses to abuse chemicals does so to numb the effects of trauma. However, overwhelming evidence suggests that the two factors often are linked, particularly in the high-stress environment of police work.” (Cross and Ashley 2004) Again, likely because of the unwillingness of many officers to reach out for help, we often become aware of officer addiction only when an incident of LEO misbehavior appears in the news. For example, an officer decorated for heroism in Madison, Wisconsin, was arrested secondary to behaviors related to apparent heroin addiction. (Schrager 2015) Professionals conducting fitness for duty evaluations (FFDE) as a result of a disciplinary internal affairs referral may often hear similar stories, such as an officer being injured on the job or experiencing psychological trauma directly because of a critical incident involving law enforcement work. The officer may be using prescribed pain medications as a way to self-medicate the psychological pain of a critical incident.

A retired officer spoke at a conference in 2018 about the physical and psychological pain that he experienced, which he reported was caused specifically by a critical incident involving a child while he was a rookie officer and the subsequent cumulative effects of job-related stress. He reported that during his FFDE he admitted to using prescription medications to help him sleep and medications to help him control his anger. He was self-medicating as a way to stop the emotional pain. His testimony was powerful, candid, and heartfelt. Fortunately, he received professional mental health assistance and also had family support including his wife, who was able to recognize the symptoms of depression. He reported he was “lucky she didn’t leave him,” because he “wasn’t sure he could have stayed with what [he] put the family through.”

While it is unclear the degree to which workplace stressors are triggers to substance use and abuse, research has shown that education and self-care are predictive of lower levels of use. A 2018 study based on LEO self-report data found that officers who were more highly educated, as well as officers who engaged in regular physical exercise, were predicted to consume substances on fewer days each week (the amount of the substance consumed was not considered). (Copenhaver and Tewksbury 2018)

Internet addiction

Many of us rely on internet and technology to complete our day-to-day responsibilities. However, when used excessively, involvement with the internet can be problematic and even become addicting. While little research exists that specifically addresses law enforcement officers and internet addiction, we know that problematic internet use (PIU) is an escape for those who seek a release or break from everyday stressors. Isolation is often used by the officer—sometimes unknowingly—and internet use can be the conduit. Individuals who experience symptoms of anxiety and depression are more likely to engage in PIU. Corresponding symptoms include denial, agitation, feelings of guilt, and avoidance of responsibility (Winkler et al. 2013). Excessive use of the internet has been linked with insomnia, depression, anxiety, interpersonal sensitivity, and obsessive-compulsiveness (Carlisle et al. 2016). Sometimes, an officer may be tempted to release pent-up feelings via social media. This can cause some challenges for the family. Younger LEOs and those working with them must maintain particular awareness regarding the possibility that their social media may be used as a cry for help. Social media posts and comments on LEO accounts that seem hopeless or helpless should be danger signs of the officer possibly becoming depressed or even suicidal.

Cynicism

A general attitude of cynicism—which seems to be an almost inevitable learned coping trait of an officer—can lead to tension at home as well. “Cynicism results from prolonged exposure to the worst in people’s behavior—cops see a lot of that People lie to cops about everything: who they are, what they have been doing, what their name is, and so on. It only takes a few disappointments for an idealistic young officer to build a self-protective wall of cynicism against being made to look foolish or feel naïve.” (Kirschman 2006) This attitude can weigh on the partner and family of an officer and lead to disruptions in communication and intimacy.

Intense scrutiny in the media and community

It is easy to see the proliferation of the attention on LEOs in the media. Simply by turning on the television we can see many examples of law enforcement being shown in a negative light. We know that officers’ families are also affected; regardless of the event, when an officer’s actions become newsworthy, the lives of the officer in question and those of their family will be altered (Bejan et al. 2018).



Certainly, officers who do wrong should be held accountable, and just as in any other profession, consequences should be mandated. No profession is immune to its members committing wrongful actions, whether criminal, civil, or administrative. However, this reality does not seem to be understood when we observe the nightly news (as well as social media) full of reports such as the incident in Florida where a 19-year-old fast food server allegedly refused to serve a LEO simply because that person was a police officer. (Adams 2015) Conversely, when firefighters arrive to a scene, they are welcomed and appreciated; people are thankful for their help. For law enforcement, the situation is often very different. The media regularly reports of police brutality and officer misconduct, but rarely are officers commended for their good work in news stories and in social media. Community members often make judgements about officer actions without all the facts, the event context and agency operating procedures. We know that with the use of social media and smartphones, anyone can post law enforcement interactions online as “news,” but beyond the public perception and response, LEOs have concerns about every member of their family hearing about an incident before the officer can share the news personally.

It is easy to worry about the future of law enforcement with this type of intense scrutiny. We must recognize that children of law enforcement also face this level of potential prejudice and bias and will be exposed to negative news stories and commentary about law enforcement. In some communities, family members will not even be able to go out in public without being asked about controversial events that involve law enforcement. (Kirschman 2006) This can also include questions about violent incidents such as school shootings, where officers have been exposed to unimaginable tragedy. Children and other family members will perceive that they have to protect and defend their loved ones who are in law enforcement. Part of determining support needs involves offering practical assistance when this exposure to the “court of public opinion” and public curiosity affects the families in a negative manner. It is imperative that we provide the families with the tools for support and resources for successfully coping with the stressors of being in the media and the public’s spotlight as a law enforcement family member.

Many individuals are led into law enforcement work because they possess positive characteristics (such as integrity, work ethic, and honesty) that make them committed to making change and doing good. Often, law enforcement officers report that being an officer is an identity, not just a job. The behavior of officers who choose to go against their official oath and code of ethics must be properly addressed—criminally or via disciplinary action—but ideally, these officers can be held accountable while they and their families still have access to support services.

Post-traumatic stress and related symptoms

Officers will likely be exposed to multiple critical incidents—sometimes several within the same day, week, or month. Officers are continually tasked with putting themselves physically and psychologically on the line for community members who normally only engage with law enforcement during the worst moments of their lives. (McCarty and Skogan 2012)

The resultant stress can be challenging to confront effectively. Continual stress can lead to cumulative stress, which in turn can lead to PTSD. Post-traumatic stress symptoms often result from exposure to life-threatening or traumatic situations and can present as dramatic mood changes, increased reactivity, risk-taking behaviors, more aggressive response to calls, intrusive thoughts, avoidance of people or everyday activities, changes in sleeping or eating patterns, or dissociation. Any of these symptoms can cause difficulties for officers and their family members; together, a set of these symptoms can prove paralyzing.

PTSD in law enforcement officers has also been referred to as cumulative career traumatic stress (CCTS). Regardless of whether a good or bad critical incident decision is made, it will likely have marked effects on the officer and by extension on his or her family. A line-of-duty death or death by an officer's own hand (i.e., suicide) can cause significant stress on other officers that can trickle into their family interactions. The stressors for those two events may look different, but we have to understand that either event can cause significant stress for the officer. Every individual has their own coping styles, prior psychological and emotional foundations, physical training, and the potential for prior life events that can trigger psychological responses as a result of being involved in a critical incident. As a result, it can be difficult to predict an individual officer's response (Paton, Burke, and Violanti 2009).

“LEOs are trained to be stoic and unflappable.” (Moore 2015) We know that this is an entirely unrealistic expectation. It is estimated that 35 percent of LEOs have been seriously injured by an alleged perpetrator and 23 percent of officers have “witnessed a badly beaten adult more than 50 times.” (Chopko, Palmieri, and Adams 2019) Officers deal with intense stressors including everything from a car accident with resulting injuries to a child's death at the hands of their parents. An officer can only “tamp it down” for so long. Chronic fatigue is likely to eventually result in other maladaptive symptoms, such as impaired thinking and judgement, impaired job performance, and impaired health (Moore 2015).



Public support

Mandated LEO overtime is an ongoing concern in agencies across the United States and is changing how families are able to meet their internal needs such as child care, home repairs, vacations, holidays, and elder care. This requirement for existing officers to serve overtime is likely a result of decreased numbers of actively serving officers, so the existing resources are stretched thin.

We have seen a decrease in law enforcement applicants and successful new hires from about 2005 to 2016. (Hyland 2018; Jackman 2018). “In Seattle, applications have declined by nearly 50 percent . . . Even the FBI had a sharp drop, from [an average of] 21,000 applications per year to 13,000 [in 2017].” (Jackman 2018) Some have cited the so-called Ferguson Effect (named after the 2014 police shooting in Ferguson, Missouri, which ignited tension between the community and police officers) as a key factor sparking ongoing distrust between LEOs and the communities they serve. This tension between law enforcement and the community is thought not only to decrease morale among existing officers but also to contribute to lowered motivation of people to consider a career in law enforcement (Hosko 2018; Jackman 2018). The increasing proliferation of social media, including the so-called “viral video effect” described by former FBI Director James Comey (Lichtblau 2016), has caused many in law enforcement (and many potential law enforcement recruits) to question their value in the eyes of the public. “Law enforcement within the United States is facing an apparent legitimacy crisis,” with the general public using (sometimes out of context) viral stories and videos to criticize the judgment calls of officers in the line of duty (Wolfe and Nix 2015). The increased scrutiny by civilians can arguably make it more likely that an officer could be held liable for making a “good-faith mistake,” which adds another stressor—and potential moral deflator—to the LEO’s responsibilities (Jackman 2018; APA 2015).

As a cumulative result of these and other factors, the stability and routine envisioned by the administration of a law enforcement agency can be at best contradictory: Work hours are dictated by criminal activity and calls for service; all days, including holidays, must be sufficiently staffed; days off, including vacation, are dictated by needs of the department.

Supervisory support

Officers generally take a lot of pride in their position, and rightfully so: LEOs are tasked with the responsibility of regularly putting their safety and their lives on the line to protect others. It can understandably be demoralizing, then, when officers feel a lack of support from their department’s administration. “Within their own organizations, police officers

face bureaucracy, internal politics, and a militarist style of management that can seem unsympathetic to the issues officers face.” (Johnson 2012) Families and administrators often have competing demands over the time and attention given by the individual law enforcement officer, and their priorities can readily be in conflict.

Such competing demands can be viewed as a natural by-product of life in law enforcement. Most families seek some stability and routine in their life: a standard work schedule similar to their friends and neighbors (9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday); shared parental duties; holidays and celebrations with family members; and good pay with benefits.

Frustration about family issues occurs on both sides of the equation. Non-officer romantic and domestic partners, especially early in a relationship, can be frustrated when the job interferes with family life, and this is magnified during those times when the officer spouse must choose job demands over family and their expectations.

Administration and experienced personnel in senior management positions can be frustrated when officers use benefits such as parental or family leave—even if guaranteed by policy, contract, or law. Many such long-tenured personnel are quick to criticize and deride such personnel, many of whom are younger and less tenured, as seeking entitlements and lacking loyalty or commitment to the job. This dynamic can lead to a disconnect and lack of understanding of the respective roles. The administrators are often viewed by officers as noncaring or as having forgotten what it is like to be out on the road.

According to Dr. James Sewell, retired Assistant Commissioner of the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, there are times when the administrator would like to contact the family or the officer following a critical incident but because of liability and legal issues the administrator is unable to do so. What officers and their families often do not recognize is that many of these administrators are deeply concerned about them. What the administrators do not share are the sleepless nights they may experience while wondering how the families are managing the stressors of being in a public position, at the mercy of the media—and how all of this compounds the disconnect between administration and the law enforcement officers and their families.

While the experiences discussed here are not all job descriptions related to a law enforcement career, they are some of the most highlighted areas that reportedly cause stress for officers and their families. However, there are so many law enforcement job requirements that can affect the officer and family that it would be impossible to list them all.



Risk of suicide

Studies of completed and attempted LEO suicides have been linked to stressors experienced on the job (Nanavaty 2015; Nisar, Rasheed, and Qiang 2018). Agencies and researchers are more focused on officer safety and wellness in the 21st century than they were before, including suicide prevention and awareness. One example is the IACP Law Enforcement Suicide Prevention and Awareness website funded in partnership with the COPS Office (<https://www.theiacp.org/resources/document/law-enforcement-suicide-prevention-and-awareness>). However, research remains to be done even though agencies have worked on the problem for years: in 2012, three law enforcement departments acknowledged that their officer suicides were directly attributable to job stress or trauma (Violanti 2008). In 2017, it is estimated that 102 police suicides occurred in the United States (O'Hara 2018). In June 2019, four New York City Police Department officers took their own lives with their service weapons (Southall 2019). While these statistics be considered controversial by some experts that the job is not directly related to suicide, *we all remain committed and in agreement to the idea that even one suicide is too many!* Schulz, who has dedicated her life to promoting healthier law enforcement families, shared her view that “the law enforcement job is like no other; the cumulative stress and the trauma of the job, the ‘people pain’ that others experience, and the effects on the family” can be crushing. She is certain, she says, that these challenges were what led her husband, Bruce, a special agent with the FBI, to commit suicide. Even though Schulz was a sergeant herself, she was unaware of the behavioral indicators of trouble and of what she could have done to help her husband through this difficult time and encourage him back into a healthy life. She often states that she would give anything to have known then what she has learned since his death. She strongly believes that all law enforcement families will benefit from understanding the stress and trauma of the job, signs of suicidal ideation, and what to do to help their loved ones to be healthy of mind and body.

The National Study of Police Suicides (NSOPS) noted that “police suicides took a noticeable drop in 2012” and suggested that increased support programs and improved willingness to seek professional assistance were contributors to this decline (Clark and O'Hara 2013). Because officers typically are resistant to reaching out for help if they are struggling internally, loved ones and colleagues may be unaware that an officer is having a problem until a suicide attempt or death occurs. It is logical to conclude that the most effective suicide prevention is actually a holistic approach to prevention or mitigation of the development of mental health problems (Clark and O'Hara 2013).

The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) offers compassionate care to all those grieving the death of a loved one serving in the U.S. armed forces. Since 1994, TAPS has provided comfort and hope 24 hours a day, seven days a week through a national peer support network and connection to grief resources, all at no cost to surviving families and loved ones (<http://www.taps.org/survivors/>). While the Badge of Life (July 2015) addresses many issues similar to those tackled by TAPS (including officer suicides, which as we have seen numerous law enforcement departments are confronting), no general consensus has been reached regarding how a law enforcement suicide should be handled. This is a significant unresolved issue in law enforcement today. The suicide of an officer can tear apart the very fabric of the department and the law enforcement family.

Sacrifices and coping mechanisms

Often, the prospective romantic or domestic partner of a law enforcement officer may be unaware of the emotional, mental, and psychological sacrifices necessary to be successful in this challenging career. Raising awareness of these issues can be a crucial first step in supporting law enforcement families.

Support programs can assist partners in understanding the myriad aspects of an officer's mental mindset as well as the areas most often reported as causing stress for the officer and family. These include the following:

- Healthy paranoia: checking doors repeatedly, being overly cautious in public venues, teaching their children about danger (often explicitly)
- Overprotectiveness
- Gallows humor and cynicism
- Brotherhood (them vs. us)
- Controlling behavior
- Shift work: being absent for holidays, celebrations, medical appointments for loved ones; missing children's events; experiencing sleep deprivation
- Unpredictability: long hours, safety issues, change in schedules, change in sleep patterns, mandated overtime, change in roles (e.g., officer to detective)
- Inability to discuss events of cases; being a frequent witness to others' pain



- Public scrutiny and social media (an officer may not have time to reach out to their family before someone has already shared a newsworthy event)
- Social isolation, including from family / social media used as a plea for help
- Challenging law enforcement roles: role conflict from administrators, gender issues with partners, job identity, retirement, disability
- Law enforcement stress / trauma: depression, anxiety, PTSD, compassion fatigue, burnout, cumulative stress, suicide
- Internet addiction (as a way to isolate)

Sleep-related disorders and medical issues

Researchers have found that more than 40 percent of law enforcement officers develop disordered, disturbed, or disrupted sleep patterns resulting in sleep disorders (Rajaratnam et al. 2011). In addition to split shifts (a workday schedule split into two or more parts with over a hour between the shift periods), officers have required appearances such as court dates, training, and range qualifications scheduled during the 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. work day as opposed to being scheduled to work around the officers' shifts or overtime. Overnight work schedules can be isolating and prompt decreased time spent with family (Kirschman 2006).

It has been conclusively shown that persistent lack of sleep can compromise health. (Colten and Altevogt 2006) "While it's normal and arguably acceptable [in LE] to go days and even weeks without getting a full eight hours of uninterrupted sleep, the effects on your body are no less lethal." (Fass 2014) Sleep deprivation—especially when paired with the inherent stress of the job—can result in slowed reaction time, impaired cognition and concentration, and decreased alertness. Sleep deprivation has been linked to a higher incidence of cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, immune suppression, and obesity in the general population as well as LEOs. The most common sleep disorder among LEOs is sleep apnea, which is estimated to affect one-third of all officers (Kulbarsh 2014). Sleep apnea is a dangerous disorder, as it involves repeated cessation of breathing. Symptoms of sleep apnea include fatigue—even after a full night's sleep—and loud snoring.

Another commonly experienced sleep disruption among LEOs is shift work sleep disorder (SWSD), which is marked by the disruption of circadian rhythms due to inconsistent sleep patterns. In addition to sleeping and waking, circadian rhythms regulate autonomic functions such as secretion of adrenaline, body temperature, blood pressure, pulse, emotion, and

thought processes. Disruption of these functions can lead to difficulties with personal relationships, decreased job performance, and frequent illness. A common symptom set of SWSD is insomnia during daytime sleep opportunities and sleepiness during nighttime shifts (Kulbarsh 2014). More specific medical conditions are linked to SWSD, such as heart disease, ulcers, hypertension, and obesity. Conditions such as asthma, diabetes, epilepsy, and depression also can be worsened by SWSD (Kulbarsh 2014).

Law enforcement family members, like other first responders and medical staff, may also experience sleep disruption, as the spouse or partner and other loved ones have to work around the officer's sleep schedule. Children are asked to remain quiet during the day so the officer can get some rest, and teens or young adults may also experience hesitation at being left alone in the home at night, prompting anxiety for the officer while he or she is on shift. Learning ways to help the family cope with sleep issues is imperative for the law enforcement family. A guard dog, extra lighting around the home, alarm systems, or living in communities where surrounding neighbors can assist are representative ideas that may assist families find solutions to sleep disruption (Kirschman 2006).

Social media impact

The increasing proliferation of social media has had far-reaching implications for law enforcement. The influence ranges from updated procedures in major threat assessment policies to seeing loosely connected groups of community members polarized around an issue (Jaitner 2014). The latter situation can have a substantial and immediate impact on law enforcement families when their loved ones become involved in high-profile cases. Social media allows for—and often encourages—immediate feedback from the community at large, who very often have only a vague idea of the event and more than likely do not have knowledge of its specific circumstances or nuances.

The community may not have all the facts

Following the massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, in December 2012, some law enforcement officers' family members were threatened on social media and "doxxed" (publicly identified) by extremists who denied the tragedy had ever occurred.

Source: Usher et al. 2016.



Arguably, police brutality claims would not be nearly as prolific without social media outlets to magnify the message (Krey 2015). “The headlines make it feel as if the country is experiencing an unprecedented wave of police violence . . . we’re just seeing more mainstream media coverage, and for a variety of reasons.” (McLaughlin, 2015) With smartphones, apps, and millions of people nationally and internationally connected through social media, claims of police misconduct can be disseminated instantaneously. We are all familiar with examples of LEO stories on social media platforms that are not balanced with the literally thousands of standard interactions that occur between LEO and the community every day. In some cases, inflammatory social media posts have been shown to correlate with retaliatory violence (Bejan et al. 2018).

Retaliatory violence against LEOs is uncommon but also a worry for officers that is less of a concern for other professions. Some instances of violence include the following:

- November 2, 2016: Sgt. Anthony Beminio, 38, of the Des Moines (Iowa) Police Department and Officer Justin Martin, 24, of the Urbandale (Iowa) Police Department were shot while sitting in their patrol cars in separate instances on the same night by the same man (Fortin 2017).
- July 5, 2017: Officer Miosotis Familia was, according to the New York City police commissioner, “assassinated without warning, without provocation, in a direct attack on police officers assigned to safeguard the people of New York City.” (Mueller and Baker 2017).
- July 7, 2016: Five officers were killed and nine others wounded in Dallas while working at a protest of killings of Black men by police (Associated Press 2017).
- July 17, 2016: Baton Rouge (Louisiana) officers Montrell Jackson, 32, and Matthew Gerald, 41, were shot outside a convenience store by a man who had posted videos online calling for violence in response to police treatment of Black people (Associated Press, 2017).
- August 6, 2017: Ian James McCarthy, a Clinton (Missouri) police officer, was shot during a routine traffic stop (Cronkelton et al. 2017)

Conversely, law enforcement agencies can use social media to counter negative stories and connect with their communities to build trust and transparency. Individual officer social media activity should be carefully considered. Social media is a way for people to communicate, connect, and share life events. “Social media has allowed officers to integrate themselves into people’s daily lives and show them the human side of policing.” (Robinson and Smith 2018) However, any social media posting related to LEO work should be directed

by agency policy. Further, any posting on social media by LEO is open for view and interpretation, so all social media profiles and communication must be considered available for public consumption and judgment.

Because of this attention paid to social media accounts—from department administration as well as the public—officers who choose to “let off steam” through social media activity could cause themselves and their agency professional difficulty. For this reason, it is important that programs be available for officers and families that will allow them to have other sources for support—ones that are more confidential and more able to provide relevant resources and specific guidance on how to be cautious of social media communications. While social media is an excellent way to have “human connection,” officers and their family members should be cautious of what they post on social media as a form of protection for the law enforcement family (Palomino 2011).

Social media: A potential hazard as well as a benefit

A consideration for every person who is applying for a new job or promotion is their social media presence. It is important to realize that law enforcement agencies conduct social media searches during background investigations for recruiting and promotion purposes. Many employers, including law enforcement agencies, have social media policies for staff and consider social media use during annual reviews. Stakeholder groups and others can also conduct social media searches that expose unprofessional and offensive messages that reflect on the law enforcement community as a whole. Social media is a public platform and should not be used to voice work-life stressors.

Superhero mindset

Part of the officer mindset often includes an expectation of self-perfection. Officers expect themselves to demonstrate “superhuman emotional and survival strategies to deal with adversity.” (Violanti 2005) Obviously, no such “superman” expectation can be met by a mere mortal. Officers are human beings who give of themselves to accomplish extraordinary tasks, although they may not always be able to succeed. When an officer experiences a perceived failure, shattered illusions and despondency can result. This superhero stance can lead to unrealistic expectations and guilt not only at work but also and particularly with regard to their families (Violanti 2005). When officers see themselves as failures (whether real or imagined) during any event, they may become unwilling to seek mental health services.



Tension in the home

The experience of these stressors will impact not only the officer but also the officer's family. In a study regarding marital stressors in law enforcement families, it was found that substantial stressors in LE relationships involved financial concerns and WFC, or work-family conflict (Karaffa et al. 2015). Interviewed officers acknowledge that—as much as one might want to deny it—at some point in their law enforcement career, the impact of the stress has leaked into their family life. The officer may tend to “go silent” or withdraw from their family when off duty, perhaps feeling as though the family should be protected from the horrors of the job or believing that no one will understand. This dynamic can quickly lead to isolation between the officer and spouse, lack of intimacy, or increasingly pronounced interpersonal fractures within the family. For many years, the unspoken motto for law enforcement has been something along the lines of, “if you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen,” and many officers dealt independently with the many devastating events they confronted in their daily lives rather than seeking support from family or others. Even when the officer is physically present in the home, they may not be fully present emotionally and psychologically—which may result from purposely choosing to extricate themselves from the family interaction or from being unconscious of the disconnect.

Understandably, the family suffers when the officer emotionally or physically disengages; confusion, resentment, anger, or loneliness may be the result. Many times, family members can mistake the officer's lack of involvement or presence in the home as lack of caring, when in fact the officer may be coping to the best of their ability and trying to protect the family members by trying to avoid increasing their worry and concern. This WFC can quickly escalate and undermine the foundation of the family (Hall et al. 2010). Hopefully, increased awareness of the dangers of emotional isolation between the officer and the rest of the family will help to reverse the “going silent” phenomenon.

Benefits of support programs

If, indeed, the law enforcement family faces significant stressors, the question then becomes: What can we do to reduce the stress on all the individuals in a LEO family and enhance their quality of life on and off the job? The answer lies in the development of comprehensive programs focusing on family stress within our law enforcement organizations and a recognition that enhanced family relations results in better and more stable officers.

The benefits of having a law enforcement family program are numerous. Promoting and fostering healthy relationships in law enforcement families not only saves the lives of our officers but also positively impacts their performance in our communities. Critical incidents can also happen within the LEO's family life, and having a family support system also in place at the agency can play a key role in protecting and providing for that officer and their family. It is hoped that enhancing access to and use of available programs or making available electronic resources such as quality-content blogs or online support groups would help families understand not only the job of a law enforcement officer but also how the job can affect the family. If officers believe their families are aware of the challenges they face, going home to the family is much easier than if the family is unaware of or fails to understand the realities of law enforcement work. In times of critical incidents, social support networks offered not only to the officer but also to the family can create a feeling of unity rather than isolation. More important, though, is creating social support networks and family programs for any member of the family who can positively influence the law enforcement officer in their lives. In a research study involving self-report (focus group) data, it was suggested that key factors in promoting resilience in law enforcement officers included competency in the use of stress reduction coping skills strategies, the existence of supportive social ties such as family and friends, and perceived personal competence (Crowe et al. 2017). Organized support and programs can support the officer and their family in a number of areas, including the following:

- Asset management
- Breaking the stigma of seeking help
- Education about retirement
- Education on disability options
- Effective communications



- Family communications
- Family connections
- Mental health support

Assistance with asset management

When an officer retires they may be contacted by numerous financial agencies to see what they plan to do with their retirement funds. Family support programs may be able to offer some guidance regarding vetted agencies who are able to understand a retired LEO's priorities and goals and provide quality services in line with the individual officer's situation, taking into consideration post-retirement employment and income, savings and legacy goals, and quality-of-life issues.

Break the stigma of seeking help

Stigma is the leading reason law enforcement officers do not seek psychological assistance (Hackett and Violanti 2003). It is important to break the silence and continue removing the stigma of seeking mental health services not only for the officer but also for the family members who are also affected by the job—mental health services can include family and individual counseling, medication, and support groups. It is vital that we help our officers learn how to talk to family members rather than trying to protect loved ones from their daily stressors, including witnessing other people's pain, tragedy, and major critical incidents. For many years, law enforcement officers were told to “get over it,” meaning that what they witness and experience at work should not affect either their family and social functioning or their ongoing ability to do their jobs. The cumulative stress of suppressed feelings can develop into unhealthy habits such as overeating, anger management issues, substance abuse, gambling, and affairs, as well as illegal behavior such as domestic violence. Fortunately, the law enforcement community has made great strides in changing this “stay silent” mentality, but now, support programs need to help officers understand that being more open with loved ones—regardless of the trauma officers have witnessed—not only leads to a healthier partnership but also helps the family understand and support their loved one. Officers can learn how to be more open and communicate more effectively with their partners without sharing all the gory details but with enough content to provide understanding (e.g., “I witnessed a child's death today”). This promotes open and honest communication, which is key in every partnership, and does not leave the officer believing that the only ones who

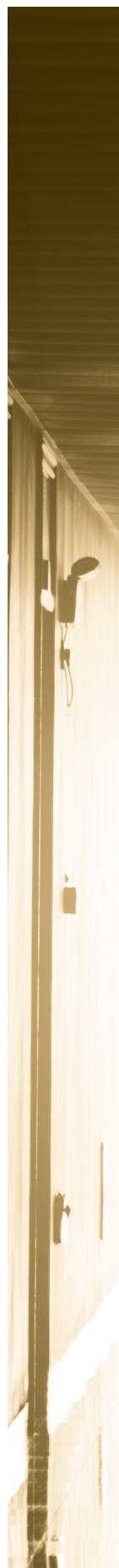
will understand are fellow officers. Often, what has prevailed has been an “us versus them” mentality: that only officers understand officers and that families need to be protected from the job. In protecting the family and not sharing about the job, the officer risks decreasing effective communication; rather than protecting their families, officers are alienating themselves from the family.

Family support programs can also help officers learn to disclose events that may change the way they parent their children as well as how to share details of the job responsibilities with children. The goal is to present the truth in age-appropriate language to a child. This can be done through training modules, blogs, web pages, and specialized curriculum for the officer, their children, or both. The training and materials are taught by experts who work with children and trauma. Teenage children also will want to understand why their parent may be unemotional or overprotective or exhibit other characteristics that may prompt alienation from the family. Teenage children benefit from knowing the truth from the parent, because they may receive information via social media or their schoolmates that is inaccurate or skewed.

Provide education about retirement

As we have discussed, it is expected that what affects the retired officer will also affect the family. At retirement, the family dynamic changes from the officer being away from the family often to suddenly being present all the time within the day-to-day routine. It may be reasonable to expect that the officer may offer some opinions on the family’s routines, which may prompt resentment in the other parent who has been making decisions singly for years. This historical unilateral decision-making occurred not because the officer did not want to be available or present for the family, but an LEO’s schedule is never predictable. It is an adjustment when the retired officer is home with the family full time. The officer looks forward to retirement yet is unprepared and has not planned for what they are realistically going to do for the rest of their life as well as what it will be like to lose the LEO persona. Unfortunately, relatively few agencies also have services to offer pre-retirement mental fitness programs.

Some preliminary research has indicated that officers have a higher rate of behavior problems toward the end of their careers (Harris 2011). The NSOPS noted that officers who died by suicide had an average of 16 years on the job (Clark and O’Hara 2013). Statistics also suggest that retired officers are at a higher risk of maladaptive behaviors (Violanti 2008). As mentioned previously, law enforcement officers take great pride serving the community, and upon retirement they may have difficulty adjusting to their experience of losing their professional identity. Interestingly, many retired law enforcement officers go into other law



enforcement–related roles such as bailiff, seek employment at another law enforcement agency, or volunteer with community organizations. Research indicates that the qualities of integrity, service orientation, self-identification with occupational stereotypes, and career embeddedness are correlated with law enforcement–related work after retirement (Hill 2013).

Many seasoned and retired law enforcement officers did not receive any assistance after a critical incident. In training sessions, they may be initially resistant to the message that mental fitness is part of overall wellness. However, as training moves forward they are not as resistant but at times become resentful because nothing was in place for them during those difficult times. Many law enforcement officers report that “when everything stopped” is when the result of all their emotional trauma emerged. Once the officers have free time as retirees, the images, sounds, smells, and all the human suffering they witnessed may become forefront in their minds.

During this time, support becomes crucial; however, this is often when the retired officer can become isolated. They may disengage from family, friends, and community. Previous interests may be abandoned. Support in the area of pre-retirement preparation of the officer—as well as the family—regarding the potential impacts of retirement can be extremely beneficial. Pre-retirement counseling could provide the family with information about resources to access if they face difficulty adjusting to the officer’s retirement. Often, older officers hold belief systems consistent with a different philosophical generation of policing, such as being expected to “tough it out” and get back to work. Because of the ongoing stigma about accepting mental health intervention or assistance, the officer preparing to retire may deny the need for pre-retirement therapeutic assistance. However, the changing perception of mental health and focus on overall holistic wellness helps to effectively promote training and treatment; “mental fitness” can be more acceptable as an option for retirees. Even if the officer is offered two individual sessions of psychoeducational information and one with the family, the benefits can outweigh the resistance and promote a more seamless and successful retirement for the law enforcement family.

Provide education on disability options and Internal Affairs investigations

Disability and internal affairs investigations are other important factors to understand in a law enforcement family. As mentioned previously, the role of being a law enforcement officer is often critical to their identity. While the younger generation of officers has a

greater willingness and ability to navigate the differences between their law enforcement career and personal roles, it is important to understand that not all law enforcement officers feel that they differentiate themselves from their role as LEO. As a result, if an officer is severely injured and ends up on disability or is placed on desk duty pending the results of an internal affairs investigation (even a nondisciplinary event that has to be investigated per policy), they will likely find it difficult to be on desk duty because the perceived “correct” role is to be in the community responding to calls for service. Disability and internal affairs investigations can lead to many different mental health issues including frustration, anxiety, despondency, helplessness, and depression. The long-term repercussions of disability or an internal affairs investigation can magnify negative issues for the officers and their family.

Providing support services to improve family awareness of mental health factors and symptoms of disability and what to expect during and after an investigation could be potentially helpful in preventing the officer’s long-term mental health challenges. However, if the officer does require permanent disability status or is terminated, it would also be helpful to ensure that they are adequately supported, as it can be argued this would be a potential risk factor for mental health challenges to the officer.

Teach effective communication

Being in a relationship with a law enforcement officer is different than being partnered to someone in other high-risk positions or those in other professions whose schedules are inconsistent. It seems logical that the law enforcement dynamic could potentially alter the nature of families and relationships. Because of the nature of law enforcement work, the family has to learn to accommodate many factors inherent in being part of a law enforcement family. Some of the factors were mentioned previously, including the officer’s mindset, shift work, unpredictability, shifting roles, media portrayal, and mental health disorders that may go undiagnosed and untreated. If an officer is having family difficulties that could affect their job, the loved ones may not know whom to contact or may fear that the officer would be professionally harmed if a call for assistance is made to help the family.

The role of a law enforcement officer is not a typical 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. job with weekends off. An officer’s involvement in misconduct or illegal activity would be newsworthy. The public’s subsequent judgment of the officer’s conduct would certainly also impact the family. Sadly, what we know is that an officer can have a perfect career—including commendations, awards, and recognition—and in one instant can destroy their professional life, causing severe emotional, psychological, and financial hardship to the



family as well. Support programs promoting healthy relationships and family cohesiveness for law enforcement families can potentially alleviate discord, divorce, or domestic violence in officer families. Family support programs may not be able to prevent hardship in all cases, but if one officer and their family can be saved, it should be enough to challenge ourselves to implement assistance for law enforcement families.

Family communication self-assessment

All relationships take work. Without regular maintenance, any relationship is at risk of withering away to nothing. This is especially true of marital partnerships. So when we consider a relationship in which one or more members is a law enforcement officer and consider all the stressors inherent in that job, it should become clear how vital ongoing work, nurturance, and meaningful, substantive communication are to the effective functioning of that relationship dynamic. Toward that end, we must encourage law enforcement families not only to reach out for professional help when needed but also to constantly assess the health of their own family relationships.

“A law enforcement officer is a part of a close fraternity just as a soldier is and the fear of separation is a powerful element in the suffering felt following a crisis. Supportive camaraderie is essential to prevent or mitigate PTSD and this is where those who can be supportive must be supportive. Simply reaching out to the officer and their family can be one of the most healing events an officer can experience” (Smith 2013). Officers and their loved ones need to be secure in the knowledge that they are not alone. Isolation should be identified as a common enemy and purposeful, consistent steps taken to defeat it.

Some strategies for effective self-assessment include the following:

- **Accountability.** Relational trust is also built by seeing that one’s partner follows through on promises and commitments. To help one another be successful in keeping commitments, each partner should provide gentle and loving accountability to the other with regard to such issues as promises made to the family or children, efforts to maintain physical or emotional health, consistently acting in ways that are in the family’s best interest, and the like.
- **Avoiding isolation.** A common complaint among LEOs is that they feel alone within their family, as though no one can understand them. Similarly, officers’ loved ones often claim that they feel like single parents because of the officers’ physical or psychological absence (or both) from the home. Recognizing this, partners need to make a consistent effort to self-correct any isolating behaviors.

- **Honesty.** It is difficult if not impossible to attain and maintain trust without a commitment to honesty. Both members of the partnership should commit to being honest, no matter what—even if the honest response is to acknowledge something difficult that will lead to an uncomfortable conversation. It almost impossible to get one’s emotional and relational needs met if one is unwilling or unable to communicate specifically what needs exist. While many officers desire to protect their loved ones with the graphic details of what they endured, learning how to “share with filters” will likely allow the officer to receive needed support and allow the loved ones to feel more connected to the officer.
- **Practicing “time out” effectively.** A “time out” is a temporary removal of oneself from an escalating or nonproductive conflict situation. The goal of the time-out is avoidance of nonproductive conflict and a prevention of conflict escalation to the point where mistakes (such as emotional, verbal, or physical abuse; breaking things; or harsh words said in anger) can be avoided. It is important that both parties recognize that a time-out is temporary and not to be used as an avoidance tactic. The person initiating the time-out should be the one responsible for re-initiating the conversation at a time when both parties are calmer and able to discuss the issue rationally and productively. Both parties should agree on how long the time-out will be to ensure that one party does not feel like they are the ones responsible for taking care of others who may feel negated by the officer.
- **Regular check-ins.** Both the officer and the spouse should commit to checking in with one another daily (or more often). These check-ins can include reports on issues paramount in one another’s mind, any conflict or resentment that might be lingering, any concern about the children, job-related stressors that may be carried home, or any other issue that one either is experiencing which that may be distracting or troublesome. The goal of the check-in process is to enhance openness and intimacy by encouraging the couple to lean on each other for emotional and psychological support.

Reinforce family connections

Families are a key resource to any successful early warning and intervention program. Programs and information are important for family members for them to understand how they can support their significant other as a LEO, spouse, parent, and community member. The scope of family programs is to help the family understand what it is like to be a law enforcement family and be proactive rather than reactive to all the challenges that may arise. Hypervigilance is a factor that frequently plagues a law enforcement family. “It’s a paradox that the same work habits that make a good cop can be hazardous to being a good mate



and parent.” (Kirschman 2006) The officer wants to ensure that what they witness on the job does not become part of the family life. As a result, the officer may want to protect their family by actions that they consider “being safe” but may be perceived by the family as controlling or unreasonable. This may occur, for example, when the officer does not want family members out at a certain time of night without the officer or wants a child to have a car alarm system that can be tracked or apps on their phones identifying the locations of the loved ones; all of these attitudes can lead to family members feeling “smothered” by the officer. The officer may view these actions as a means of protection and the family as a reflex of paranoia, potentially causing family discord.

As we have noted, there are numerous challenges that can arise as part of being a law enforcement family. Programs and information are important for family members in order for them to understand how they can support their significant other as a successful and satisfied LEO. The more information and support that can be provided to the family, the more stable a law enforcement family they are likely to become.

Provide mental health support

There are excellent mental health support programs already in place for military families. A simple online search of “military stress and families” will yield volumes of resources available to help military families. However, a similar search for programs for law enforcement families results in far fewer options. Fortunately, much emphasis and attention has been placed on the need for peer support, critical incident, law enforcement chaplaincy programs, and other programming to provide support for the families of officers. Law enforcement officials, psychologists, and trainers have used some of the valuable resources in implementing some military-inspired programs and applying some of their principles to law enforcement families. We have seen a psychological shift where law enforcement is becoming more open and is embracing “mental fitness” rather than mental health issues in the line of duty. The next step is developing programs specifically designed to meet the unique needs of law enforcement families so that families have easier access to professional and peer support programs.

Call to Action—Need for Central Repository

A review of the literature and interviews with a small number of those who offer law enforcement support services produced examples of numerous resources produced by law enforcement organizations, support websites, and multiple other resources that are readily available to law enforcement families. Unfortunately, there is no central repository where all the resources are gathered. Often agencies are referred to national resources, but officers and their families have often not previously been aware of their existence. Moreover, there are agencies that have implemented some form of family assistance, but the individuals who would benefit most from the services may not be aware of them. Numerous agencies have reported implementing programs, but an ongoing challenge exists regarding the development and maintenance of a program that can be distributed to all LEOs and the families who support them. The authors of *Rank and File: Reflections on Emerging Issues in Law Enforcement* noted that “the community [and] law enforcement administrators and supervisors, as well as the rank and file themselves, need to develop strategies that reinforce peer-to-peer support.” (Robinson and Smith 2018) The current proposal would support this suggestion by creating a method by which officers and their families could learn together and support one another according to each individual family’s need rather than having difficulty locating access to resources and support.

Our review of family programs began in 2016 and was prompted by a perceived need to address the interpersonal and intrapersonal challenges related to the stressors of LEO responsibilities and to recognize that law enforcement families have struggles inherent to their loved one’s job. While we know that nationwide many efforts exist to foster healthier families, many are not recognized and are not in a central place for resources and tools to be used. Many agencies have local family support seminars (during the LEO’s time at the academy or after) and also may host picnics, events, symposia, and other outreach events; however, there is a lack of readily available online family education and support programming. Under the current proposal, both the family members and the officer would have access to the program, as they can use it asynchronously online. A recommendation made by the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) via the publication *Officers’ Physical and Mental Health and Safety: Officer Safety and Wellness Group Meeting Summary* (COPS Office 2018) was that “agencies must make it easy for officers to get help—make the information readily accessible. Officers should not have to work hard to figure out how to access assistance.”



Per that recommendation, our call to action is that we create a central location where family support programs already in place will be described and detailed. From there, law enforcement agencies and families can collaboratively learn from one another and implement ways to make this information accessible to any law enforcement officer and family. Our goals are to raise awareness of the need to protect the support systems for law enforcement officers and offer meaningful support to LEO families. We are hopeful that this call to action has been able to facilitate the creation of an online curriculum and repository, which will be asynchronous, feature user-friendly language, provide guidance for law enforcement families, and offer easy-to-understand exercises to enhance family communication.

It is vital to offer support to families according to the best practices used in the United States. Through a multipronged approach of incorporating orientations or trainings at the police academy, optional family programs offered by the agency, support groups for law enforcement families, public forums for families, and numerous resources easily accessible to families, the standard of family support can be raised. Our purpose is not to reinvent the wheel but rather to offer a challenge regarding how we can be doing a better job in training law enforcement families in ways to promote a healthy coexistence in living with an officer. From countless reports of law enforcement officers and their families, we know that there is a need for further research and programming to help families overcome the challenges with which they are faced.

This paper has been years in the making and was prompted by the realization that law enforcement faces challenges—both intrinsic to the job and externally—that place the officer at risk physically and psychologically. Law enforcement continues to develop initiatives as it responds to critical incidents, and officers and administrators learn from these experiences. It is our goal that the attributes of commitment, dedication, and sacrifice that both the officer and the family make in ensuring that our communities are protected will be acknowledged and validated. Especially now, when officer morale has been impacted by violence and negativity toward law enforcement (Bejan et al. 2018), it is important to educate and empower our LEO families to be as strong as they possibly can be. This education and support do not have to be expensive or put additional hardships and time constraints on officers. Families can self-evaluate and seek professional services and colleague support and access resources as they choose, on an individualized basis. Providing the online resources and information needed to ensure that our law enforcement officers and their families can live positive, productive, and strong lives—both on and off the job—will hopefully have a substantial positive impact on LEO families.

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About the Authors

Dr. Barbara Palomino de Velasco is a licensed psychologist serving a forensic, police, and clinical population. She started her career at the Department of Corrections, Probation, and Parole Services (DOC/P&P), Miami, Florida, as a probation officer. She also was an electronic monitoring and sex offender officer and an administrator supervising treatment programs.

Presently, she responds to critical incidents internationally, providing training in the areas of law enforcement suicide prevention, critical incident peer support, and best practices for law enforcement families. In 2018, she became a Diplomate in Police Psychology. Most recently, she has been honored to be a member of the Badge of Life Organization as one of their team volunteers.

Currently, she is the Program Coordinator, MS/PhD in Forensic Psychology at Walden University. Her research focuses on the efficacy of creating educational programs for law enforcement families as well as treatment protocols for law enforcement and military personnel. Recently, she started conducting webinars on resiliency and peer support to first responders and their families through Crisis Systems Management LLC.

Dr. Tracy Mallett is the Clinical Director of Florida Family Options, Inc. She is a Licensed Psychologist (PY7881) and a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (MT2077). She is a Clinical Member of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, a member of the American Psychological Association, and a member of the Florida Association for Marriage and Family Therapy. She has been working with children and families for more than 20 years. Dr. Mallett holds a Doctor of Psychology degree in Clinical Psychology from Spalding University's APA-accredited School of Professional Psychology in Louisville, Kentucky. In addition, she holds a Master of Arts in Psychology from Spalding University and a Master of Arts in Journalism with an emphasis in Public Relations from Marshall University in Huntington, West Virginia.

Dr. Mallett works closely with couples and families to assist them in creating and maintaining healthy communication and conflict resolution. As a collaborative divorce professional, she serves as a child specialist, neutral facilitator, and coparenting coach to divorcing couples and coparents nationwide. As a communication specialist and crisis manager, Dr. Mallett provides coaching and counseling services for blended families in every stage of their journey. As a former Florida State Supreme Court Certified Family Mediator and certified instructor in Safe Crisis Management., Dr. Mallett assisted divorcing couples in making their own decisions and agreements for the structure of their changing families.



Donna Schulz retired as Law Enforcement Coordination Manager (LECM) for the U.S. Attorney's Office, Middle District of Florida (MDFL) in January 2012. In her capacity as LECM, Ms. Schulz advised the U.S. Attorney and the U.S. Department of Justice on law enforcement– and community-related issues; worked to improve cooperation and coordination among local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies; served on federal policy and focus groups; coordinated major initiatives such as Project Safe Neighborhoods, Anti-Gang Initiatives, Weed & Seed, Drug Education for Youth (DEFY), Human Trafficking, Offender Re-entry, and a plethora of other federal initiatives; provided technical assistance and training opportunities for more than 300 Law Enforcement Coordinating Committee (LECC) members in 35 counties; built bridges between law enforcement and the community; offered outreach; and worked with Florida law enforcement leadership in developing a statewide community policing training strategy. Ms. Schulz assured the sharing of information among local, state, and federal task force members; served on the Tampa Bay Regional Domestic Security Task Force (RDSTF); and developed antiterrorism training for law enforcement in partnership with the RDSTF training team. She is a certified law enforcement instructor and presents regionally and nationally on special programs and matters involving law enforcement and the community.

Ms. Schulz entered the law enforcement profession in 1979 and advanced to police sergeant with the Tallahassee (Florida) Police Department. She has experience in Uniform Patrol, Vice & Narcotics, Hit & Run Investigation, and Crime Prevention. She subsequently continued her work in public service as a police officer in Woodward, Oklahoma, and an Oklahoma state investigator. Relocating to Washington, D.C., Ms. Schulz became the Deputy Director of Coalition and State Services for the National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC) and then accepted a federal position with the U.S. Department of Justice, working with law enforcement and community initiatives across the nation. She has served as an adjunct instructor to the U.S. Department of Justice, National Advocacy Center, FBI National Academy, Florida Regional Community Policing Institute at St. Petersburg College (RCPI), and numerous colleges.

Ms. Schulz earned her Bachelors and Masters degrees from Florida State University. She is a certified Police Instructor and Crime Prevention Practitioner. Ms. Schulz has worked tirelessly to raise everyone's suicide awareness, and she has courageously shared stories of her own tragedy with any audience that would listen. Ms. Schulz has formed partnerships with state and local agencies in the state of Florida and collaborated with the Florida Regional Community Policing Institute to help create a suicide prevention curriculum, toolkit and on-line assistance for any agency that wants to be proactive in this area.

Ms. Schulz plans to continue advocating for awareness on law enforcement wellness and suicide prevention across the country by presenting and instructing on this topic for the Florida RCPI.

About the COPS Office

The **Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office)** is the component of the U.S. Department of Justice responsible for advancing the practice of community policing by the nation's state, local, territorial, and tribal law enforcement agencies through information and grant resources.

Community policing begins with a commitment to building trust and mutual respect between police and communities. It supports public safety by encouraging all stakeholders to work together to address our nation's crime challenges. When police and communities collaborate, they more effectively address underlying issues, change negative behavioral patterns, and allocate resources.

Rather than simply responding to crime, community policing focuses on preventing it through strategic problem-solving approaches based on collaboration. The COPS Office awards grants to hire community policing officers and support the development and testing of innovative policing strategies. COPS Office funding also provides training and technical assistance to community members and local government leaders, as well as all levels of law enforcement.

Since 1994, the COPS Office has invested more than \$14 billion to add community policing officers to the nation's streets, enhance crime fighting technology, support crime prevention initiatives, and provide training and technical assistance to help advance community policing. Other achievements include the following:

- To date, the COPS Office has funded the hiring of approximately 130,000 additional officers by more than 13,000 of the nation's 18,000 law enforcement agencies in both small and large jurisdictions.
- Nearly 700,000 law enforcement personnel, community members, and government leaders have been trained through COPS Office-funded training organizations.
- Almost 500 agencies have received customized advice and peer-led technical assistance through the COPS Office Collaborative Reform Initiative Technical Assistance Center.
- To date, the COPS Office has distributed more than eight million topic-specific publications, training curricula, white papers, and resource CDs and flash drives.
- The COPS Office also sponsors conferences, round tables, and other forums focused on issues critical to law enforcement.

COPS Office information resources, covering a wide range of community policing topics such as school and campus safety, violent crime, and officer safety and wellness, can be downloaded via the COPS Office's home page, <https://cops.usdoj.gov/>.





This comprehensive project focused on strengthening programs that help families support officers in mental or emotional crises or considering suicide. The suite of six publications includes four reports documenting innovative interventions currently being used around the country, one protocol for agencies on how to address an officer suicide, and a resources abstract. This publication, *Best Practices for Family Programs: A Call to Action*, highlights agencies that are presently using law enforcement family programs as part of their training, reviews what experts are reporting as the imperative components for successful law enforcement programs, and creates a call to action to make recommendations for modeling or implementing more programs for law enforcement families.



COPS
Community Oriented Policing Services
U.S. Department of Justice

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Office of Community Oriented Policing Services
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