Traumatic Stress in Police Officers
A Career-Length Assessment from Recruitment to Retirement

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TRAUMATIC STRESS IN POLICE OFFICERS

A Career-Length Assessment from Recruitment to Retirement

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PREFACE

If a comprehensive understanding of the nature and effectiveness of the police role in dealing with adverse trauma events is to be developed, it is necessary to empirically integrate such events into the police career path. At present, there is no comprehensive resource to address this issue. There is a growing recognition that stress risk can in some cases begin prior to police work and extend after retirement from police work. It thus becomes necessary to incorporate pre-employment and the retirement period into accounts of the psychological impact of policing. Similarly, the implications of the changing gender balance in police agencies needs to be accommodated. To date, these issues have not been explored systematically within a framework that embraces the whole career of police officers. Such an approach is essential if we are better able to understand the complex and changing interactions that affect the psychological well-being of police officers. This approach is based on the premises that:

• officers can experience both positive and negative outcomes as a result of confronting highly challenging events which may coexist
• these outcomes are influenced by different resilience and vulnerability mechanisms
• the organizational environment and practices, the family environment, and the societal environment introduce significant and independent influences on these outcomes
• changes in factors such as gender and ethnic composition contribute to issues that influence the nature of the organizational environment
• posttrauma outcomes are influenced by the interaction between individual, team and organizational levels of analysis
• positive and negative posttrauma outcomes are also influenced by factors that, over the course of officers’ careers, commence prior to their employment and persist beyond the point at which they retire or disengage from police work
We propose with this book to develop a viable resource to explore interactive issues of trauma over the entire police career course. The book will draw upon empirical research to provide an evidence-based approach to traumatic stress risk management. We will start with police officer pre-employment experiences and conclude with a discussion of the implications of disengagement or retirement from the police role.

The contents of the proposed text will include:

• Incorporation of police trauma into a life-career course perspective
• Changing context and nature of police work (e.g., sources of trauma and uncertainty, community relations)
• Recruitment, selection, and socialization in the context of critical incident and terrorist work (e.g., pre-employment experiences, organizational influences on capacity to confront uncertainty, developing resilience within an organizational context)
• Changing gender balance in policing
• Training and development in uncertain times
• Managing risk, resilience, vulnerability, and adversarial growth
• Organizational context (e.g., management systems, organizational culture)
• Family dynamics and issues
• Team: inter and intraorganizational
• Health and mental health
• Consequences of long-term exposure to hazards
• Disengagement and retirement

We feel that this book is unique in two ways. First, the majority of volumes on police psychological issues do not differentiate with regard to career stage. Second, very few books reflect complex patterns of interaction between vulnerability and resilience characteristics that occur at individual, team, group, and organizational levels, as well as involving interaction between these levels. This book will be one of the first to pull these various threads together and provide a comprehensive account of the impact of trauma throughout the police career. This work will provide a framework that police agencies can use to develop their officers and their organizations in ways that enhance their capability to confront an increasingly uncertain future. It will also be useful as a teaching tool for police officers, mental health professionals, and supportive organizations.
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The objective of this book is to demonstrate how adopting a career perspective can provide a more comprehensive conceptualization of traumatic stress processes as they apply to police officers and agencies and provide a framework that can be used to guide research and intervention agenda in ways that reflect the changes that can occur over the course of a police career that can span decades. The book examines the nature and effectiveness of the police role in dealing with adverse events as they unfold within a career perspective. It begins with pre-employment experiences and their implications for operational well-being and concludes with a discussion of the implications of a police career for disengagement or retirement from this role. It draws upon empirical research to provide an evidence-based approach to traumatic stress risk management and well-being in contemporary policing. Based on state-of-the-art research, the book provides a framework that police agencies can use to develop their officers and their organizations in ways that enhance their capability to confront an increasingly uncertain future in ways that maximize the interests of front-line policing. Areas of discussion include incorporation of police trauma into a life-career course perspective; changing context and nature of police work; recruitment, selection, and socialization in the context of critical incident and terrorist work; changing gender balance; training in uncertain times; managing risk and vulnerability; organizational context; family dynamics; inter and intraorganizational teams; health and mental health; consequences of long-term exposure to hazards; and disengagement and retirement. The text will be of significant interest to police organizations and agencies whose officers face a high risk of experiencing disaster and traumatic stress, law enforcement managerial and supervisory personnel, human resource and health and safety professionals, and mental health professionals and consultants. The text will also be relevant to those researching traumatic stress, disaster stress, and emergency management as well as other protective services.