Characterising the resilient officer: the process of adjustment to the police profession

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A number of studies highlight the incidence of difficulty in adjusting to the role of police officer, with a focus primarily on predicting officer vulnerability. Other studies however, acknowledge the resilience shown by many police officers, and argue that most officers are able to effectively cope with the work and organisational demands of the profession. The aim of the current study is to examine the individual and organisational characteristics that interact to effect the adjustment of new officers to the profession of policing, thereby examining the predictors of both vulnerability and resilience. This paper presents current data from 115 (6 training groups) police recruits outlining responses to trauma exposure prior to academy entry. Further, changes in levels of stress and coping usage as officers move from training and into operational duties has been obtained from 53 (3 training groups) probationary constables. The results indicate a high level of prior trauma exposure prior to academy entry, and the implications of this for officers facing stressful and traumatic events on the job is discussed. The results also indicate a significant decrease in certain types of stress after the completion of training, and this is accompanied by a decrease in the use of certain coping strategies. Insights into how and why these decreases occurred are elucidated by qualitative data from semi-structured interviews.

Victims of violent crime: social-cognitive aspects of adaptation and recovery

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This poster discusses social-cognitive influences on recovery from criminal victimisation. It considers how the relationship between blame attributions (e.g., blame self or others), perceived control, likelihood of recurrence, and perceived avoidability of future victimization affect recovery. The implications for survivors' interactions with criminal justice procedures are discussed. In the process of working through the emotionally challenging memories associated with acts of criminal victimization, survivors attempt to make sense of their experience. An important aspect of this process relates to their attributions about the cause of their experience and the degree to which it might have been avoidable. How a person makes sense of these issues plays an important role in facilitating their sense of perceived control. This, in turn, influences the speed and quality of their recovery. This is not a straightforward task.

Because of a greater need to render them predictable and avoidable, negative events such as being the victim of an act of criminal violence, moreso than positive experiences, give rise to spontaneous attributions. The blame attributions one makes influence adaptation. Behavioural self-blame (e.g., my actions contributed to this experience) is linked to better adaptation than characterological (e.g., I deserved this) and other-blame (e.g., this is someone else's fault) attributions. This suggests that recovery and adaptation can be encouraged by focusing on recognizing how one's actions contributed to the experience and learning how things might be done differently. However, self-blame attributions need not automatically function in this way. This poster discusses how distinguishing between low- and high-control events, the temporal focus ('past' or 'present') of those victimised, the perceived likelihood of the person being victimised in the future, and counterfactual thinking (i.e., imaging a better outcome than actually occurred) assist understanding recovery. These processes must be identified if recommendations for effective adaptation are to be developed.