SUFFERING IN SILENCE
Addressing Trauma in Non-Sworn Members of Public Safety Agencies
OBJECTIVES

1. Explain the current gap in support for non-sworn members of public safety agencies.
2. Discuss current research regarding PTSD and how non-sworn members are at risk.
3. Discuss recommendations for improving the response to trauma experienced by non-sworn members of public safety agencies.
PTSD FOR FIRST RESPONDERS VS DISPATCHERS AND OTHER NON-SWORN MEMBERS

There is no difference between the PTSD developed by non-sworn members in public safety.

Rates among dispatchers are between 18 and 24 percent (Lilly, 2016).

Often mislabeled as “secondary trauma” or “vicarious trauma.”

Examples of non-sworn members include:

- Communication personnel
- Crime scene personnel
- Crisis workers
- Victim advocates
COMMON TRAUMATIC CONTACTS

- HOMICIDE
- SUICIDE
- ANY DEATH OF A CHILD
- CALLS REGARDING FAMILY/FRIENDS
- ASSAULTS
- SEXUAL ASSAULT
LACK OF APPROPRIATE RESOURCES

On to the next call…

Not included in debriefs

Not covered by confidentiality

Arizona Law addresses Critical Incident Stress Management teams under 38-1111

- Designated Person under CISM includes: an emergency medical provider, firefighter or law enforcement officer.
RESEARCH INVOLVING NON-SWORN MEMBERS

• Almost exclusively surrounding communications personnel
• PTSD does not require being present during the traumatic incident
• Comparing peritraumatic distress scores between officers, civilians and communications found both civilians and communications personnel scored higher.
• Reactions higher for civilians/communications:
  • Helplessness
  • Sadness
  • Worry about those on scene
  • Anger that they could not do more
  • The unknown
• How does gender play a role in non-sworn PTSD?
  • Studies show that while females in general have higher rates of PTSD, female sworn members show no gender differences.
  • However compared to female sworn members, female non-sworn members have higher rates of PTSD
• What are some reasons for this difference?
  • Social Support
  • “Male” coping mechanisms among sworn members
Compassion Fatigue

- The negative impact from working in a trauma influenced environment
  - Compassion fatigue can greatly influence work performance
  - Examples have been seen on 9-1-1 calls when the communication personnel appear ambivalent or lack sympathy.
Vicarious Trauma

- Trauma from exposure to traumatized people
- Victims Advocates
- Crisis Response
RESEARCH INVOLVING NON-SWORN MEMBERS
ADDRESSING THE NEED AND GAP

- Changing the culture of public safety agencies for non-sworn members
- Developing resiliency programs for non-sworn members
- Creating resources specific to non-sworn members
- Develop and implement policies to include non-sworn members in post incident debriefs and follow-up
CULTURAL CHANGE

• Leadership promotes unity and discourages sworn vs non-sworn
• Recognize “boots on the ground” include both groups
• Acknowledge this change starts in the initial training process
BASIC ELEMENTS OF CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS DEBRIEF

- Preparation for critical incident
- Demobilization (rest or time out)
- Defusing-small group support
- Debrief-larger integrated event
- One on one support
- Continuing follow-up
BUILDING RESILIENCY

• Specific to units and job function.
• Focus on breaks, exercise, eating, and available resources.
• Public safety agencies are mandating exercise and/or counseling for sworn members to build resiliency. How does this translate to non-sworn? 
• Resiliency begins in initial training.
Resources that meet the right need

Peer support from individuals that can relate

Resources designed for public safety but not just non-sworn members.
• Develop policies that require “time outs” and at least minimal resources after specific critical incidents.
  • Given the option, most people in public safety will decline help.
  • Making policies mandatory allows members an “out.”
• Work with your CISM teams or resources to arrange debriefs to include everyone.
  • Remember debriefs allow process but are not a review of tactics and response.
  • Must be managed by a mental health professional outside of the agency.
• Address the lack of confidentiality around non-sworn members.
  • While statute does not protect non-sworn, policy can mitigate this issue.
QUESTIONS?

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