



# US DOJ REPORT TO CONGRESS ON OFFICER MENTAL HEALTH

In 2017, the Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act was passed in Congress signed into law in 2018

Officers are being asked to do more duties that are outside of their original scope of work – this has taken a toll on officers across the country; mentally and physically

A damaging narrative has emerged in which LEOs (state, fed or local) are not seen as protectors, but as oppressors

Officers' actions are continually questioned and viewed with suspicion

In this environment, where an already stressful job is made more stressful by public distrust and negative public opinion, the risks to officer wellness are exacerbated

# WHAT IS ADDICTION?

- Five components:
  - Engagement in the behavior til satiation
  - Preoccupation with the behavior to the exclusion of everything else
  - Satiation is temporary – must use frequently
  - Loss of control
  - Suffer negative consequences

*Brain function changes*



- These calls affect first responders
- Repeated exposure to traumatic events (overdose reversals, counseling, providing resources, referring to treatment, hearing distressing experiences, smells, etc) can be traumatizing and damaging
- The risk of exposure to drugs/communicable diseases may increase our anxiety levels
- You start to become emotionally numb to the reality of the situations

## THE EFFECTS ON FIRST RESPONDERS

# WHAT IS TRAUMA?

It's what we see *everyday*, it's just part of the job

A deeply distressing or disturbing event that overwhelms the ability to cope. May affect an individual's ability to experience a full range of feelings and emotions.

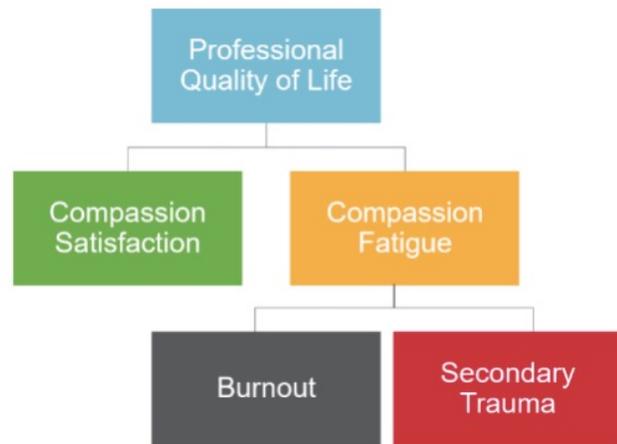
*Acute* – exposure to single stressful or dangerous event

*Chronic* – Repeated or prolonged exposure to a highly stressful event

\* *Complex* – Exposure to multiple traumatic events

\* *Secondary/vicarious trauma* – Exposure to trauma in helping professions by hearing about others' traumatic experiences

# STRESSORS THAT LEAD TO BURNOUT



- According to a study of secondary traumatic stress and burnout among first responders, the most prevalent reasons for burnout were:
  - Organizational stressors – A combination of supervisory practices and bureaucracy of agency, feeling undervalued by supervisors
  - Personal stressors – Work-life balance, financial concerns, taking care of elderly parents, special needs children, teenagers, etc.
  - External stressors – Negative attitudes by the public towards the work you do
  - Task stressors – Stressors intrinsic to emergency work; shift work, risk of violence, regular exposure to death, grief, injury, pain and loss

The Professional Quality of Life Scale is a self-test that asks questions to assess your levels of job satisfaction and fatigue, burnout and secondary trauma

- Hudnall and Stamm's Professional Quality of Life Scale (PROQOL).

Perez et al, 2010

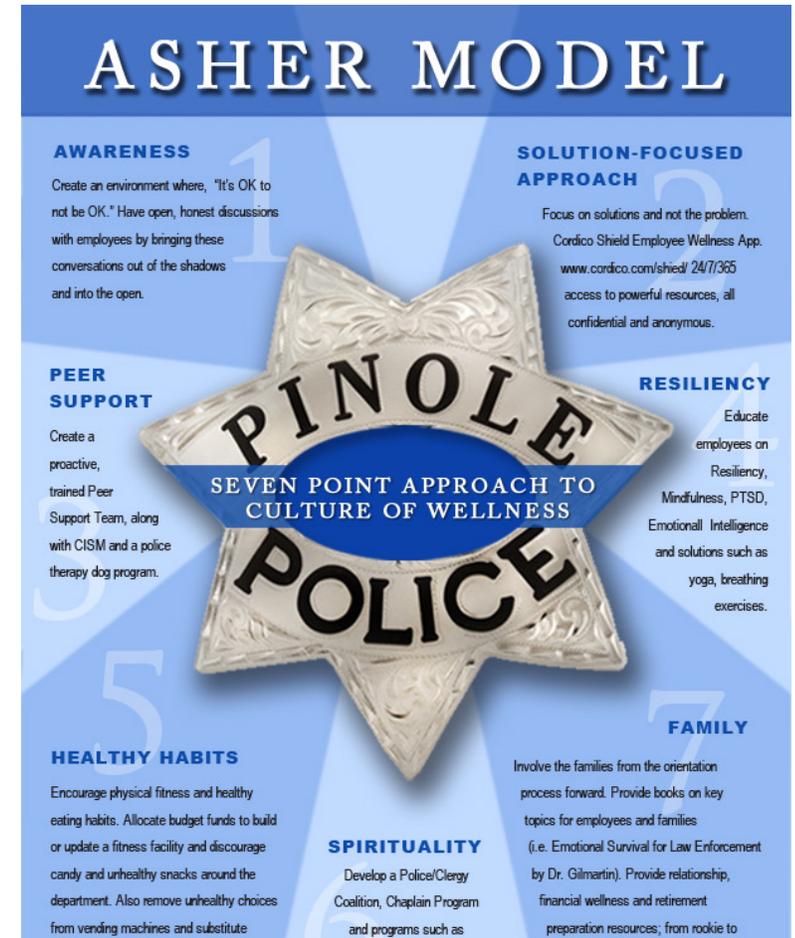
Centers for Victims of Torture,  
[www.proqol.org](http://www.proqol.org)



# HOW DO WE PREVENT BURNOUT?

Nationwide, officers overwhelmingly report that stress on the job has negatively affected their mental health

- LE suicides outnumber all combined LOD deaths – suicides still under-reported
- 90% of all LEOs report a stigma that creates a barrier to getting support for emotional or behavioral concerns
- Asher Model of Wellness: Pinole Police – 7 key components
  - Awareness
    - Create an environment where it is ok not to be ok
  - Solution-focused approach
    - Solutions, not the problem
  - Peer support
    - Have trained peers to provide support, reduce stigma by discussing common feelings/stressors – seek professional help
  - Healthy habits
    - Exercise, sleep and diet – Disconnect – mindfulness, hunting, singing, gardening, etc
  - Spirituality
    - Church or spirituality that supports you
  - Family
    - Invest in your family relationships, help them understand what you do and how it affects you
  - Resiliency



# RESOURCES

- COSSAP – Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant and Substance Abuse Program (Bureau of Justice Assistance program)
- CopShock – Surviving PTSD – Allen R. Kates
- Bulletproof Spirit, Emotional Survival Guidebook – Dan Willis (Required reading at FBI Academy)
- Emotional Survival for Law Enforcement – Kevin Gilmartin
- IAFF – International Association of Fire Fighters  
Behavioral Health Program
- SAMHSA – Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration  
DTAC (Disaster Technical Assistance Center)
- The Body Keeps the Score – Bessel Van der Kolk

# REFERENCES

1. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) webinar, First Response – Working on the Front Lines of the Opioid Crisis
2. Centers for Disease Control, and Prevention, Emergency Responders: Tips for Taking Care of Yourself [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
3. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. (2016). National Occupational Mortality Surveillance (NOMS): Resource and related links. <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/noms/link.html>
4. Bishopp, S. A., & Boots, D. P. (2014). General strain theory, exposure to violence, and suicide ideation among police officers: A gendered approach. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 42(6), 538–548. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2014.09.007>
5. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Disaster Technical Assistance Supplemental Research Bulletin, First Responders: Behavioral Health Concerns, Emergency Response and Trauma, 2018 [www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)
6. New York Times, 2020 [www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/15/upshot/drug-overdose-deaths.htm?referringSource=articleShare](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/15/upshot/drug-overdose-deaths.htm?referringSource=articleShare)
7. National Institutes of Health, Institute on Drug Abuse (NIH). [www.drugabuse.gov](http://www.drugabuse.gov)
8. Global Wellness Institute, [www.globalwellness](http://www.globalwellness)
9. Stamm, BH (2010). The Concise PQL Manual, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Pocatello, ID: ProQOL.org
10. Center for Victims of Torture, [www.cvt.org](http://www.cvt.org)
11. Perez, LM, Jones, J, Englert, DR, Sachau, D (2010) Secondary Traumatic Stress and Burnout among Law Enforcement Investigators Exposed to Disturbing Media Image. *J Police Crim Psych* (2010) 25:113–124
12. McCarty, WP, Aldirawi, H, Dewald, S, Palacios, M (2019) Burnout in Blue: An Analysis of the Extent and Primary Predictors of Burnout Among Law Enforcement Officers in the United States. *Police Quarterly*, 22 (3), 278–304
13. Building your resilience, American Psychological Association.org, 2020

# QUESTIONS, COMMENTS?

Amy Kevis, MS

302.690.8909

[akevis@gmail.com](mailto:akevis@gmail.com)