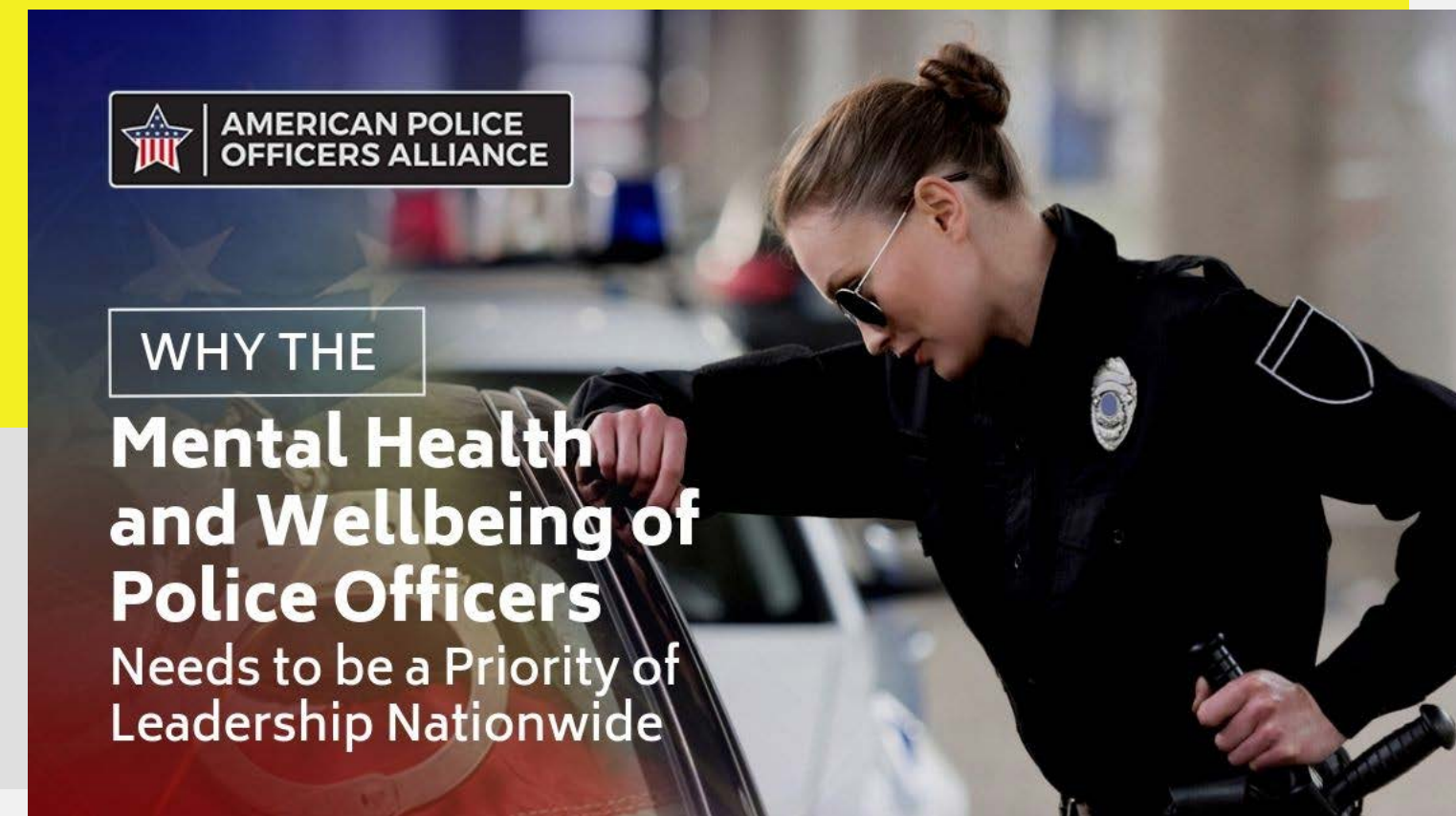


Prioritizing Mental Health for Police Officers

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Abstract

Police officers are a big contributor to communities all over America. Due to the recent spotlight that has been put on police officers and how they do their jobs, it would be beneficial to see if there is a way for police officers to be better at their jobs. The proposed study will examine the impact that mental health has on the performance of police officers on a daily basis. For this study, 50 police officers will be given a link to a survey that will ask them questions on emotional exhaustion, occupational stress, trauma levels, and job performance. This study is expected to find that higher levels of emotional exhaustion, occupational stress, and trauma levels correlate with a lower job performance. If this study finds that mental health significantly correlates with job performance, then it might lead to mental health being incorporated more into the lives of police officers.

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to determine the relationship between the levels of emotional exhaustion, occupational stress, and trauma and job performance for police officers. After the death of George Floyd, a large portion of the United States citizens were met at a crossroads between supporting the police and being angry at the police, as many believe that police officers are not able to do their jobs effectively. One of the many possible reasons that mistakes made by police officers, is that their mental health is not being prioritized enough. This study is to test to see if these attributes of a person's mental health is a predictor for job performance. The hypothesis is that higher levels of emotional exhaustion, occupational stress, and trauma will correlate to lower levels of job performance.

According to a study done by Jetelina, out of 54 officers, 12% reported a lifetime mental health diagnosis, 26% had positive screening results for current mental illness symptoms and out of these officers 17% sought mental health care services in the past 12 months (2020). Jetelina also found that the barriers for seeking help for these symptoms included: inability to identify when they are experiencing a mental illness, concerns about confidentiality, belief that psychologists cannot relate to their occupation, and stigma that officers who seek mental health services are not fit for duty (2020). Establishing that the majority of officers who had symptoms of mental illness do not seek out support from mental health professionals, it is important to look into why mental health would be so important to their jobs. In a study done by Purba and Demou they found one issue that comes with a lot of work is a significant amount of pressure to get things done as found in a systematic review done on police officers and their mental wellbeing, where emotional exhaustion was most strongly demonstrated by the demand inherent in the work of the police officer due to a significant relationship between high "demand" and emotional exhaustion in the female and male officers included in the study. In a longitudinal study done in 2010 by Van der Velden on police officers after experiencing a fireworks disaster, they wanted to see how many officers would have any lasting issues after the event. In this study they found that 30.5% of officers experienced moderate to severe symptoms of PTSD

In a dissertation done on the relationship between stress and police officers, Chikwem found that job performance related directly to the personal view on motivation, duty, and danger and those factors affect the officer's psychological stability. As mentioned in regards to the findings of the dissertation, psychological stability is necessary when working in a high-risk job such as being a police officer, as they are responsible for their own lives as well as the lives of many others on a day to day basis. In an article done by McElvain and Kposoway, on officer-involved shootings, it mentions that some people might believe that even though police officers have the option to use to coercive force when necessary, it is often unnecessary to use it and use of force is uncommon amongst the many calls officers handle on a day to day basis. As this article mentioned, many people may believe that being a police officer is not as stressful as other jobs because the high risk situations seem few and far between. However, there is always the fear that there will be an instance that day for the officer to use force and after it occurs, police officers are not seeking the help they need. This lack of support can greatly change their job performance after these events. Job performance will negatively correlate with emotional exhaustion, occupational stress, and trauma.

<https://americanpoliceofficersalliance.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/American-Police-Officers-Alliance-Mental-Health-and-Wellbeing-of-Police-Officers-Featured-Image-mh.jpg>

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Methods

Participants

This study will be done on active-duty female and male police officers, ranging in ages 21 to 70, regarding how they would estimate their levels of emotional exhaustion, occupational stress, and trauma to be as well as their job performance during the times of higher levels of exhaustion, stress, and trauma. The participants will be randomly selected by having a group of 20 police officers from 5 stations volunteer, then picking 10 by using a random number generator for the volunteers from each station.

Materials and Procedure

Each participant will be asked to repeat the survey anonymously (recording only station numbers) and electronically every month during the year, with questions asking about their job.

Predicted Results

This study will use a simple correlational to test the hypothesis. The goal is to see how emotional exhaustion, occupational stress, and trauma is correlated with job performance, and the correlation will be seen through running a regression analysis. It is expected that there will be a significant negative correlation between levels of emotional exhaustion, occupational stress, and trauma with job performance as well as the job performance with each aspect of mental health. The results of this proposed could also turn out to not have significant negative correlation, in which case the prediction would still be a negative correlation, just not a significant one.

Discussion

The predicted results for this experiment is that job performance would negatively correlate with emotional exhaustion, stress, and trauma. These results would contribute to the growing information that is being gathered on officers and how to help better the system that is currently in place in America. There is not currently enough emphasis on the mental health of officers, so adding research to support the use of mental health resources in police stations could change the stigma that is around mental health issues for police officers and many public service workers in general. The hope with this research and the expected results is that more stations will find value in having their officers prioritize their mental health with monthly check ins and required therapy visits after traumatic events on the job, in order to prevent any of the negative effects from emotional exhaustion, occupational stress, and trauma.