

A photograph of a fire truck, showing a large red hose extending from the side. The truck is blue and red. The background is a bright blue sky.

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First Responder Mental Health: The  
Importance of Training and  
Intervention



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## ❖ Significant Job-Related Stress

- High Exposure to Critical Incidents
- Shift work/Long shifts
- Inadequate equipment
- Exposure to hazardous chemicals
- Exposure to life threatening situations
- Work environment
- Lack of control over day to day schedules
- Need for rapid and precise decision making
- Threats to health and safety
- Boredom, alternating with the need for sudden alertness and mobilized energy.
- Responsibility for protecting the lives of others.
- Continual exposure to people in pain or distress.
- The need to control emotions even when provoked.
- The presence of a gun, even during off-duty hours.

# Background

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# Why Research Firefighters/First Responders?

- Firefighters face profound physical and psychological demands as part of their occupation.
- Minimal Research
  - Cardiac Problems/Heart Attacks and Cancer/Suicide
  - Focus on link between physical and mental health

16 Firefighter Life Safety Initiatives (2011), Firefighter Life Safety Initiative 13 (Psychological Support; Stress First Aid)

*“Firefighters and EMS professionals and their families must have the resources to deal with the various complications that their jobs can bring to their lives, especially issues regarding emotional and psychological stress.”* ([www.everybodygoeshome.com](http://www.everybodygoeshome.com))





# Why Research Law Enforcement Officers?

Police Officers face profound physical and psychological demands as part of their occupation.

Research is limited on special populations (i.e., SWAT)

- Cardiac Problems/Heart Attacks and Cancer/Suicide

➤ Number of LEO Suicides per year

- 125-150 Police suicides every year
- From 2008-2011
  - 577 Suicides
  - 224 Felonious Line of Duty Death





- Depression
- Alcohol abuse
- Sleep disturbances
- Anxiety disorders
- PTSD
- Suicide (lethal attempts)
- Cancer
- Cardiac-related issues
- Obesity
- Relationship Problems



# Overall increased risk

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# Statistics: Firefighters


General Population	Firefighters
3.5-5.6% PTSD	6.5-37% PTSD*
22% of engaged in binge drinking in the past 30 days	Approximately 50% of career and volunteer firefighters reported binge drinking in the past 30 days
62% of males reported consuming alcohol in the past 30 days	85% of career firefighters reported consuming alcohol in the past 30 days.



# Why Is Sleep Research Important?

- More than 50% of firefighters report some sleep disturbance
    - Most studies have not identified what type(s) of sleep disorders may be present among firefighters
  - A recent nationwide study found that 37.2% screened positive for a sleep disorder
    - Obstructive sleep apnea – 28.5%
    - Shift work disorder – 9.1%
    - Insomnia – 6%
  - Majority of on-duty fatalities among firefighters are due to heart attacks and motor vehicle crashes.
  - Sleep disorders can be independent risk factors for both heart attacks and motor vehicle accidents
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The National Fallen Firefighters Foundation reported that a fire department is **four times more likely** within a given year to experience a suicide than a line-of-duty death

- ❖ Within a seven-month period, Phoenix Arizona Fire Department lost four firefighters
- ❖ Within a span of 18 months, the Chicago Fire Department lost seven firefighters
- ❖ Houston Fire Department experienced three suicides within a two-year period.

Rates of suicide within the fire service have risen from 69 in 2013 to 112 in 2014 and in 2015, 117.

# Suicide in the Fire service

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**General Population: 2.9-8.7% attempt suicide at least once**



# Fire Service Suicide

(Stanely, Hom, Hagan, & Joiner, 2015)





## Alcohol Use:

“Police departments have historically been recognized as a **culture of drinking** not only in the USA, but in many countries”

General Population with an alcohol abuse disorder: ~ 7%

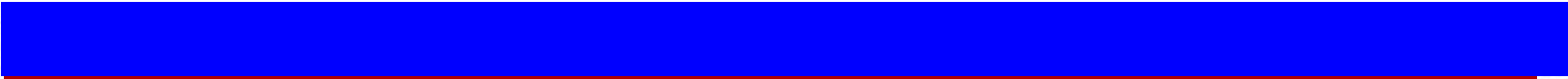
Law Enforcement officers with an alcohol abuse disorder: ~17-25%

## Relationship Problems:

- Average newly wed police officer divorces after 5 years
- Divorce rate in law enforcement: 70-80%
- Domestic Violence: 7-40%

# Statistics: Police Officers

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- *“The average American citizen does not witness in their lifetime what many police officers witness in one month.” –Violanti (1996)*

### **Post Traumatic Stress Disorder:**

- 7%-19% incident of current duty-related PTSD

### **Sleep Problems:**

- ~ 40% screened positive for a sleep disorder

### **Suicide:**


- 1934-1960: police suicide rates were half that of the general population
- 1980-present: police suicide rates are 2-3 times higher than the general population

# **Statistics: Police Officers**

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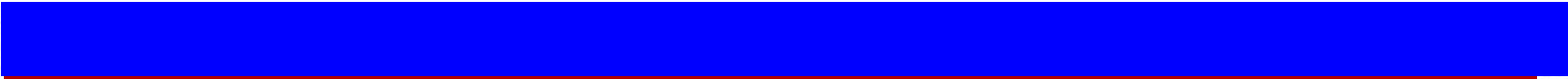
(Goldfarb, 1998; Maia et al., 2007; Mohandie & Hatcher, 1999; Slovenko, 1999; Rajarathnam et al., 2011; Robinson et al., 1997)



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- Unique Subculture
  - Tradition
  - Strong Values
  - Camaraderie
  - Us. Vs. Them Mentality
  - “If you are not sworn you are not born”

# Culture

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- Stress just comes with the job.
  - Supposed to be able to handle the stressors of the job.
  - Physical and Mental Toughness
    - Cultural Resistance
      - Fear of Repercussions
      - Lack of Resources
      - Identify and Respond to Mental Illness

# Culture

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# Behavioral Health Training

Collaboration between Nova Southeastern University Center for Psychology Studies and Broward Sheriff's Office

- 45 minute presentation
- 5 topics: 1) Stress, 2) Depression, 3) Suicide, 4) Substance Use, and 5), Sleep
- Provide information on the mental health issues
  - Prevalence, characteristics, risk factors, symptoms
- Increase ability of each firefighter to recognize symptoms in themselves and in their peers
- Reduce stigma of seeking help
- Work within fire rescue culture
- Encourage peer support and referrals
- Provide internal/external resources

## Interventions

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# Peer Support Programs

- ❖ Peers are first responders who were trained to identify various mental health symptoms and challenges → early-warning detection system
- ❖ Help first responders proactively address personal and occupational problems.
- ❖ Peers can also aid during critical incidents as well as prevent the accumulation of frustration, anger, and helplessness that could lead to **substance abuse, depression, violence, and suicide.**
- ❖ Example Programs
  - ❖ Houston Fire Department
  - ❖ Cop-2-Cop

## Interventions

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## ➤ Increased Resources

- Employee Assistance Programs
- Peer Support Programs
- Religious Resources
- Clinicians trained in first responder culture
- Education

# Future Directions

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# **CRISIS INTERVENTION TEAM (CIT)**

The Impact of CIT Training both Law  
Enforcement and the Community

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- Prior to the introduction of CIT
    - Little training – increased use-of-force
    - In cases of deadly force, mentally ill are disproportionately represented
    - Higher arrest rates for mentally ill individuals
    - Higher proportion of mentally ill inmates

# Before the Crisis Intervention Team

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(Ditton, 1999; Engel & Silver, 2001; Kesic, Thomas, & Ogloff, 2010; Teplin & Pruett, 1992)

- Mental health-based specialized responses
  - E.g. Mobile Crisis Units
- Police-based specialized mental health responses
  - E.g. non-sworn social workers
- Police-based specialized police responses
  - E.g. Crisis Intervention Team (CIT)

# Law Enforcement Response

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(Borum, Deane, Steadman, & Morrissey, 1998; Deane, Steadman, Borum, Veysey, & Morrissey, 1999; Hails & Borum, 2003)



- Memphis, TN – 1988
- Training Components
  - Identification of signs/symptoms of mental illness
  - Pharmacological Interventions and side effects
  - Crisis intervention and de-escalation (Active Listening Skills)
  - Role plays
  - Knowledge of community resources

# Crisis Intervention Team (CIT)

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(DuPont & Cochran, 2000; DuPont, Cochran, & Pilsbury, 2007; Vickers, 2000)

- Uniform patrol officers
- Minimum of 40 hours of specialized training
  - Mental Health Related Topics
  - Crisis Resolution Skills
  - De-escalation Techniques
  - Community Based Resources
- Training Format
  - Didactics/lectures
  - Role plays
  - Exposure to mental health facilities

# The Memphis Model

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(DuPont, Cochran, & Pilsbury, 2007)



- Clinical issues related to mental illness
- Medications and side effects
- Alcohol and drug assessments
- Co-occurring disorders
- Developmental Disabilities
- Family/Consumer perspective
- Suicide prevention and practicum aspects
- Rights/Civil Commitment
- Mental Health Diversity
- Equipment Orientation
- Policies and Procedures
- Personality Disorders
- Posttraumatic Stress Disorders
- Legal Aspects of Officer Liability
- Community Resources

# CIT Training Topics

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(DuPont, Cochran, & Pilsbury, 2007)

- Techniques used by law enforcement in order to defuse the crisis situation.
- Tips for effective de-escalation
  - Appropriate non-verbal communication
  - Active listening skills
    - Tone
    - Reflection
    - Emotional Labeling
    - Clarification
    - Summarization

# CIT: De-escalation techniques

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- Overrepresentation of individuals with mental illness in jails and prison settings.
  - Estimated between 13 – 56%
- Suicide is current leading cause of death in the jail setting.
- Correctional officers have one of the highest rates of nonfatal job injuries.

# Correctional Officers and CIT

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(Noonan, 2010; Vickers, 2000)


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- Following CIT training, corrections officers reported:
    - A high degree of comfort when dealing with mentally ill inmates
    - Increased self-efficacy in identifying maladaptive behaviors resulting from mental illness
    - Increased confidence in defusing or de-escalating crisis situations.

# CIT Training and Correctional Officers

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(Cattabriga et al., 2007)




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- Officers rate their response to mentally ill as **higher** than those with other response types
  - Increases officers' understanding of mental illness and etiology, while **reducing** stigma
  - Post-CIT officers reported **increased** self-efficacy

# Law Enforcement Response to CIT

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(Borum et al., 1998; Compton, Esterberg, McGee, Kotwicki, & Oliva, 2006; Demir, Broussard, Goulding, & Compton, 2009; Hanafi, Bahora, & Chien, 2008)


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- CIT trained officers referred more individuals to treatment facilities than non-CIT officers.
  - CIT trained officers are more readily able to identify individuals with mental illness, regardless of dispatch code
  - Use of force was used more conservatively with CIT trained officers

# CIT Efficacy

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(Ritter et al., 2011; Skeem & Bibeau, 2008; Teller, Munetz, Gil, & Ritter, 2006; Watson, 2010)



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- Increase training opportunities for various police departments across the country
  - Include stress management into CIT training courses

## **Future Directions**

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**QUESTIONS?**

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