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Final Paper

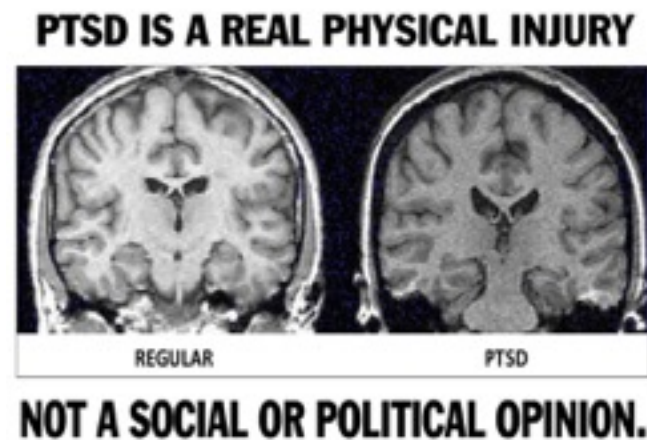
The growing problem of PTSD

This is a problem that has started many, many years ago and many men and women come back from wars and don't know how to fit in. So they stay in the military or join the police force so they feel normal. What many don't realize is that so many people already in the police force struggle with this from their stressful jobs. What is PTSD, what causes this high stress, does this change the way the police misuse their force and what are treatments or solutions? I feel this is a big problem that can be addressed so easily and we can all contribute in small ways. This country is taking such a terrible turn in the way they treat our policemen, which is causing additional stressors on already a stressful jobs.

What is PTSD? Post-traumatic stress disorder is a reaction to a stressor that evokes significant stress. For police officers, such stressors might include the death of a fellow agent or the shooting of a civilian (Gaines 197). I noticed that in many of the readings that we discussed that it was a very common occurrence and not all that uncommon in regular police officers. One that really stood out to me was "Blue Truth" by Cherokee McDonald, that came back from Vietnam and struggled to let that come into his police work. There's an instance where he's out driving to dinner with his wife and he see's something suspicious. He wants to turn around and investigate the situation and his wife gets angry because he is off duty. She says,"I want my husband to be a person all of the time and a cop only some of the time. I feel like I don't even know you when you're a cop." At this era in history, aggression used in police work was acceptable more then it is today, but still he gets reprimanded numerous times because he has problems controlling his anger. An officer suffering from PTSD will:

1. Re-experience the traumatic event through nightmare and flashbacks.
2. Become less and less involved in the outside world by withdrawing from others and refusing to participate in normal social interactions.

3. Experience “survival guilt,” which may lead to loss of sleep and memory impairment (Gaines 197). These are symptoms that I saw throughout the readings and when I started to read the experiences, it really made started to make sense why so many policemen have problems.



Each profession has its own set of stressors, but police are particularly vulnerable to occupational pressures and stress factors such as the following:

1. The constant fear of being a victim of violent crime
2. Exposure to violent crime and its victims
3. The need to comply with the law in nearly every job action
4. Negative media coverage

Police face a number of internal pressures as well, including limited opportunities for career advancement, excessive paperwork, and low wages and benefits (Gaines 196). Many people don't realize that policemen are human beings too. There was a chapter that had a police officer that struggled to be friends with people that weren't on the force. They went to a party and someone did something stupid and he almost freaked out on a teenager. At that point they realized it was hard to be friends with them, because many civilians don't understand why they act this way.

Professor John Violanti and his colleagues at the University of Buffalo have determined that police officers experience unusually high levels of cortisol, otherwise known as the “stress hormone,” which is associated with serious health problems such as diabetes and heart disease (Gaines 196).

Some people think that this is just an excuse for policemen to misuse their force. An example of this is the Michael Brown case in Ferguson. Many people I feel interpreted this as racism when in turn it could have been the high stress of the situation and fearing for his life. In general, the use of physical force by law enforcement personnel is very rare, occurring in only about 1.6 percent of the 43.5 million annual police-public encounters. Still, the Department of Justice estimates that law enforcement officers threaten to use force or use force in encounters with 700,000 Americans a year, and 14.8 percent of those incidents result in an injury. Of course, police officers are often justified in using force to protect themselves and other citizens (Gaines 197). PTSD is common reason for this problem and again Cherokee McDonald using some pretty excessive force on the suspects just because he can. That was a while ago and things are a little bit different now, but the root problem was PTSD.

Some solutions are that officers take matters into their own hands. The effects of stress can be seen most tragically in the high rate of suicide among law enforcement officers, three times higher than in the general population (Gaines 197). I couldn't believe that this was true, it makes me so sad that officers put so much responsibility on themselves, what's worse is that we as citizens are contributing to that burden. One story that stood out to me was about Kenny in chapter 6. He was a war veteran that didn't get help with his PTSD and commits suicide when he comes close to retirement. There's some conversations at the end that really explain how some of the cops feel, especially close to retirement. “Time spent with someone who hadn't

handled a quadruple homicide was like being with someone who lived in a bubble. I never took the job home with me, never discussed it with anyone but my fellow cops, but I liked being around others who'd lived on the edge." "It's worse for the war veterans who become cops," Dad said. "Years of maximum velocity to a dead stop. Some don't make it to retirement (Hill 74)." This makes me sad that this could be prevented and they aren't doing more to make sure that mentally policemen have lot professional help available to them. That is the best solution that's available for PTSD is to get professional help, before it consumes you or endangers others.

A movie I watched recently called American Sniper just showed how common PTSD is and how it can happen to almost anyone under stressful situations. He goes to Iraq as a sniper and comes home with PTSD, it about destroys him and his family. He has to go through a lot of therapy and volunteering helping other veterans to be able to overcome it. He becomes who he once was and makes things right with his family. What is so tragic is that he had finally overcome the PTSD and had been able to have a normal family life but is killed by a mentally unstable veteran he was trying to help at a shooting range. Most people can get professional help that's provided by employers and can overcome it with their help but for some people it doesn't cure it forever.

In addition to physical dangers, police work entails considerable mental pressure and stress. "Intervention is necessary to help officers deal with this difficult and stressful occupation," says Violanti. "Police officers need to learn how to relax, how to think differently about things they experience as a cop."(Gaines 196) I think we need to try find ways to make it easier on policeman if we can by cooperating and remember that they are people too. Policemen need to find ways to relax and vent with someone or their spouse from their stressful job. If they are having problems they need to be willing to get help from a professional to get through it. If

people are more aware of this problem I think that it will be not seen as a weakness but a strength to receive help to fix an actual physical problem.

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