

Police Families: Stresses, Syndromes, and Solutions

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Law enforcement families experience a variety of both common-place and unique stressors. This article discusses the main forms of police family stresses and crises and offers a range of practical solutions that family therapists can use to help these families cope and thrive. Especially with this kind of population, the emphasis is on both direct clinical services and a coaching-style, self-empowerment model that therapists can productively utilize in helping officers and their families to help themselves.

Pop quiz: Because of the stressful nature of the work they do, police officers' families are riven with strife, and their divorce rates stratospherically surpass that of the general population. Right?

Wrong—it's about the same. In fact, research suggests that if police families can survive for the first three years, they have no greater risk of breaking up than other families. Furthermore, second police marriages tend to be even more stable and to endure as well or better than first or second marriages in the general population (Bibbins, 1986; Terry, 1981).

Actually, considering the stresses and challenges of law enforcement work, it may seem surprising that the marriages and family lives of these professionals do not seem to differ dramatically from those of workers in other fields. However, there are a number of unique pressures and problems that affect law enforcement families. In fact, most of the non-mandated referrals I get from police agencies have to do with family and relationship problems (Miller, 1998, 2006).

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FAMILY STRESSES AMONG LAW ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL

Much of the stress in police families devolves on the spouse. Over three-fourths of police officer spouses report some degree of stress directly related to their mates' jobs (Alexander & Walker, 1994; Anderson et al., 1995; Bibbins, 1986; Blau, 1994; Borum & Philpot, 1993; DeAngelis, 1991; DeAngelo, 1994; Kirschman, 1997; Means, 1986; Miller, 1995, 1999, 2000; Reese, 1987; Toch, 2002). This section describes some typical problems encountered by family therapists who work with law enforcement professionals.

Schedule and Shift Changes

Frequently, the demands of the job and loyalties to the department compete with an officer's marriage for time and commitment, as many officers keep unconventional schedules and often work overtime shifts. Many departments rely on four-day, 12-hour shifts, and few police officers work the traditional 9-to-5. Where available, many officers put in considerable overtime, either for the extra money, or because putting in as much time as possible is consistent with the department's macho culture, or because of bona fide dedication to their work. Officers assigned to special units, such as undercover, hostage negotiation and SWAT teams are, by their very nature, potentially on call at a moment's notice (Greenstone, 2005; Miller, 2005d, 2006; Strentz, 2006).

Thus, families that cherish stability and predictability may find it hard to adjust when their loved one has to suddenly change weekend plans, stay late on a job and miss dinner, or be called in for mandatory overtime to make up for a municipal budget crisis. Even if not doing departmental work, many of these high-energy, go-getting officers have extra jobs or business ventures that keep them busy even when off-duty from their police role. Many of these officers justify their workaholism on the basis of the need to provide their families with a good lifestyle and, while the families may certainly appreciate this, they'd also like to actually *see* their hard-working family member at least once in a while.

Police psychologists, by the way, are not immune from this, either, and many seasoned practitioners warn their would-be protégés not to commit themselves to critical incident response or hostage negotiation teams if they can't be expected to drop what they're doing to respond to an emergency (Blau, 1994; Greenstone, 2005; McMains, 1988; McMains & Mullins, 1996).

The Law Enforcement Culture

Stereotypical "tough guy" macho values and attitudes—among both male and female cops—pervade the law enforcement culture (Miller, 1995, 1999, 2003, 2004, 2006). These include such characterological and behavioral traits

as control, dominance, authority, and lack of sentimentality. These are precisely the traits that naturally conflict with the more cooperative, emotionally expressive, and relationship-oriented attitudes generally considered important in marriage and family life.

Divided Loyalties: Job Commitment vs. Family Commitment

Another aspect of law enforcement culture is the formation of powerful bonds of solidarity among fellow officers and boundaries around this tribal inner circle that exclude nonmembers. The officer's spouse may feel left out, often leading to jealousy, as the officer seems to be far more involved with his departmental clanmates than with his marital soulmate and their family. A vicious cycle may develop as the spouse's palpable resentment further alienates the officer, who then spends even more time on the job or away from home, creating a higher risk for the development of extramarital affairs (see below).

Overprotectiveness

Many officers try to create a "protective bubble" (Reese, 1987) around their families to shield them from the unsavory and distressing aspects of their work, as well as to make the officer's home a separate haven from the pressures of the job. Thus, an officer may turn to his spouse for support during a particularly stressful time, then abruptly clam up and refuse to discuss anything about the job. The resulting emotional seesaw takes its toll on the spouse and on the marriage.

Suspiciousness and Hypervigilance

On the job, law enforcement officers must maintain a keen sense of alertness, vigilance, and mental preparedness, which often includes an occupationally reinforced suspiciousness and general distrust of people's motives, statements, and actions (Blum, 2000; Duran, 1999; Garner, 2005). Carried over into the home, this back-to-the-wall, question-everything attitude often seems frankly paranoid. The occupational cynicism and distrust heightens the spouse's feeling of being a perennial suspect under investigation ("Don't you ever trust me?") and puts a general damper on feelings of intimacy, as the officer never seems to let down his guard.

In extreme cases, pent-up anger and frustration from the job may spill over into verbal abuse or physical violence at home (see below). The spouse may be reluctant to report the violence because of feared termination or censure of the officer by the department or because she concludes that "they'll all be on his side anyway."

Dual Law Enforcement Couples

Occasionally, both spouses work in law enforcement, sometimes in the same department (perhaps that's how they met). An advantage of this arrangement is that each partner is able to truly understand the problems, pressures, and perspectives of the other. Even where one spouse is a cop and the other is in a related public safety or emergency services field, such as a firefighter-paramedic or ER nurse, many of the stresses are similar. In such cases, the carryover of the us-versus-them mentality from the department to the marriage may have a positive effect on the relationship.

The disadvantage is the potential blurring of personal and professional roles, especially where one spouse holds a different rank in the same department. A related problem occurs where the officer's role as protector interferes with his or her objectivity in perceiving the spouse as a work partner. However, even the most obtuse commander will usually have sense enough not to pair spouses as partners or shiftmates. Finally, in the fishbowl atmosphere of most departments, a married couple's relationship may be subject to kidding and meddling—some good-natured, some not—by coworkers.

FAMILY THERAPY WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT COUPLES

To address many of the above issues, Borum and Philpot (1993) have described a number of effective marital therapy strategies that clinicians can use with police couples where at least one member is an active officer; these are presented here, along with my own comments and suggestions (Miller, 1998, 2006). Therapeutic goals basically involve: (1) strengthening the marital boundary around the couple, relative to the departmental boundary; (2) reducing divided loyalties, triangulation, and jealousies between the job and the marriage; and (3) increasing intimacy and bonding between the couple. A number of practical family therapy strategies can facilitate this.

To begin with, try to use the common us/them police mentality as a metaphor for the officer to begin to understand the need to create an equivalent us/them atmosphere for the marital dyad. The goal of this should be inclusion and solidarity, not paranoia and isolation.

Help the couple develop ways to create more time for each other. This may involve explicitly scheduling times for communication about non-job-related or generally non-problem matters. Assign "caring days" homework, including lists of nice things to do for each other. (If you don't like that syrupy terminology, call it something else, like "family solidarity day" or "family morale day." One of my officers came up with the term, "unit day," as in family-as-a-cohesive-unit, that he borrowed from his military experience.) If practical, have the couple plan a "secret vacation" together, a romantic holiday that they keep from everyone except a few select people.

Help the spouses gain insight into divided loyalties and triangulation, and teach them to deal effectively with one another, instead of

communicating with and through third parties. Encourage them to identify and appropriately express emotion to one another in a nonthreatening way. Teach them the kind of problem-solving, negotiation, and conflict-resolution skills that are standard issue in family therapists' clinical toolboxes. As important as it is to foster cohesion and solidarity, beware of families becoming isolative troglodytes, and encourage them to appropriately expand their social world beyond the department and their immediate families. It may also be useful to teach them to cognitively and emotionally compartmentalize in an adaptive way, so that they can turn on their "feeling channel" at home and turn it off at work, as needed. Many officers do this naturally.

Identify, emphasize, and mobilize strengths that have thus far kept the marriage together. Have the spouses describe their early dating days, what attracted them to each other, old love letters, shared good times, private jokes, "our song," and so on. Ironically, the same characteristics that originally attracted the lovers to one another often become polarized and are now a source of friction. For example, the very logical, emotionally stilted police officer may have originally been attracted to his wife because of her open affection and warmth, which made it a little easier and safer for him to access and express his own feelings. In fact, male police officers are frequently observed to pair up with females in a helping or people-related profession, like nursing, social work, teaching, sales, or human resources.

But when the spouse comes to look to her husband for additional emotional nurturance, perhaps related to some crisis, perhaps just expressing a heightened need for closeness, he becomes intimidated and freezes up, turning into a hyperrational computeroid to compensate for what he perceives to be his spouse's excessive emotionality. The therapist may have to provide reframing-type reality checks to focus the behavior of both husband and wife in a more productive, intimacy-enhancing, but nonthreatening direction. This can be effectively accomplished as long as it takes place in the context of the therapist's thorough understanding of the couple's dynamics, within a trusting therapeutic relationship, and on the basis of a solid grounding in couples and family therapy strategies (Carlson & Sperry, 1998; Figley, 1998; MacFarlane, 2001; Weeks & Treat, 1992)—not used as "therapy tricks" or cookbook-like, quick-fix devices, which may serve only to further disenchant the couple with the therapy process and with their hopes of realistically forging a more solid relationship.

SPECIFIC PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT FAMILIES

This section will describe some of the more specific types of law enforcement family stresses and the therapeutic and practical measures I have found useful in dealing with them (Miller, 2002, 2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2006). Hopefully, this insight and advice will add to the therapeutic toolbox of clinicians who

work with police officers and their loved ones, provide law enforcement supervisors and administrators with some practical guidelines for counseling the men and women under their command, and constitute a reality check for affected officers that, hey, your family's not the only one that's going through this, and just because the other cops don't talk about it, it doesn't mean that all of their family lives are perfect and yours sucks.

The "Cop Channel:" Overtime, Overwork, Overcommitment

Most police spouses recognize and appreciate that their officer is a dedicated cop and a hard worker. But often, the police role, police behavior, and police attitudes come to intrude upon family time and family relationships. Overzealousness may turn into compulsive overcommitment, as the officer seems to grab every overtime opportunity or special detail. Spouses complain that "he's on the Cop Channel—all cop, all the time." The officer typically justifies his workaholism by emphasizing the sacrifices he's making for his family's financial well-being, all the while ignoring their pleas that they would gladly pass up the extra cash for a little more time with him.

Worse, he begins to neglect household chores and tasks, either because there is simply no time left in the day to pay the bills, mow the lawn, fix the sink, and take the kids to music lessons, or because he feels entitled to crash and recuperate when he does come home and shouldn't have to be bothered with the petty details of homemaking when he's been out there for umpteen hours doing "real work." In either case, more and more daily responsibilities fall on the spouse, fueling further resentment.

Basically, I've observed that there are three main reasons some officers overcommit themselves. Two are related to the job itself, and the third has to do with life outside the department.

The first potential reason is *overidentification with the police role*. There are some guys (and a few gals) who really do feel they're supposed to take up permanent residence in the Cop Channel. Their enthusiasm for their work crowds out all other priorities because nothing consolidates their identity and gives them greater personal validation than being a law enforcement officer. Actually, this gung-ho attitude may at first be viewed as a positive quality, as the officer's hard work comes to be admired and he or she is rewarded by promotions, pay raises, and access to plum assignments.

But nobody has inexhaustible energy or motivation and, pushed to the limit, such an officer is a prime candidate for burnout and job stress, which in turn can lead to family discord, deteriorating job performance, depression, and, in rare cases, even suicidality (Miller, 2004, 2005c). The solution is *balance*: spouses should try to validate their officer's commitment to the job, but emphasize that "recharging the batteries" by taking some occasional time off can only enhance his law enforcement effectiveness. Ideally, police

administrators should reinforce this balance concept, but often they themselves are torn between allocating or even insisting upon the officer's well-deserved rest and not wanting to interrupt the services of one of the department's star producers. The mixed messages this sends can be frustrating to both the officer and his family.

The second reason for overcommitment, frequently related to the first, is *insecurity about their law officer status*. The high productivity of some officers may be driven by the need to constantly "prove themselves" to their coworkers and their department by taking on more and more work and bigger and bigger assignments. Again, in many cases, the departmental culture actually reinforces this: only a wuss or a slacker turns down a job. Here, the challenge is to help the officer develop a feeling of realistic confidence and accomplishment in the good job that he's doing, so he can chill out a little and not feel constantly compelled to demonstrate his worth as a cop.

In the third situation, the *police job is a respite from the family*. In other words, the officer spends as much time away from home as possible precisely because work is an escape from a distressing family life. Here, the task is to focus on healing the home front so that productive work is balanced by a supportive and fulfilling family life. In these cases, the family therapist can help them find the particular strategy that works for their particular situation.

Secrets, Suspicions, and Surveillance

It is bad enough that the officer is spending all his available free hours working his butt off with overtime, but when he does finally come home and his spouse asks him about his day, he clams up or just spits out one-word answers, leaving the spouse feeling even more excluded and rejected from her mate's world. And then, when they do steal a few hours away together, he persists in Cop Channel mode, remaining hypervigilant and suspicious of his surroundings, seeming to find it impossible to relax and just enjoy the outing.

Even worse, he begins to become more controlling and overprotective of family routines and activities, demanding to know where spouse and kids are going, when they'll be back, and what they'll be doing. This is typically rationalized as a concern for the family's safety. After all, who knows better than a cop about all the nasty things that can happen out in the cold, cruel world? This maddening combination of secrecy, suspicion, and overcontrol strains the goodwill of even the most understanding and supportive families. Children, especially adolescents, may rebel against this regime, spurring increased surveillance and control, more rebellion, and frequent family fights, in a vicious cycle.

Paradoxically, the common thread that ties these problems together is the very need to maintain the home as a sanctuary and refuge from the

realities and pressures of the police job. One of the main reasons cops don't like to talk to their families about their work has to do with *protection* and *compartmentalization*: they don't want to expose their families to the grim realities of what they experience on a given day, and they don't want to sully their own home environment with talk or reminiscences about the job. Another reason relates to *saturation*: even if nothing dramatic has happened that day, after a shift spent patrolling their beat, ticketing obnoxious traffic violators, keeping an eye on potential felons, arresting petty crooks, and resolving mundane street squabbles, the last thing the officer wants to do upon returning home is rehash it.

For some officers, especially detectives and investigators, this overprotective controlling style is reinforced by the natural inclination of their own personalities (Miller, 2003, 2006). Neuropsychological research has shown that people's basic temperaments and cognitive styles influence many major decisions in their lives, such as who they marry and the kinds of jobs they choose (Gardner et al., 1959; Miller, 1990). Thus, the type of mind that feeds on data-gathering, likes to pick apart and analyze things, enjoys "putting two and two together," maintains a "healthy skepticism," questions everything, and is most in its element when ferreting out cold facts and hard data, will naturally gravitate toward a field like investigative police work (Henry, 2004; Sewell, 1993, 1994).

The problem is not being able to turn it off. Precisely because this "search mode" orientation is so much a part of the officer's personality, it naturally intrudes into recreational activities and personal relationships where it can be damaging. No spouse wants to feel like a perennial suspect, and it can become irritating and draining if the ostensibly off-duty officer treats every family gathering and social situation as if he were casing the joint for clues. In the worst cases, under extreme stress, this natural suspiciousness can decompensate into outright paranoia, and the family can feel like they're being stalked.

Spouses may have to compromise in terms of how much factual and emotional feedback they're likely to get and how relaxed their mate will be during family activities. If the officer is amenable to discussing the issue, the spouse might need the family therapist's guidance in pointing out that she doesn't expect him to stop being a cop, but that his excessive secrecy and overprotectiveness are corroding her ability to be the supportive spouse she wants to be. Sometimes, he may not be aware of the deleterious effects his attitudes and behavior are having on the family.

Alternatively, confronting the issue, however gently and respectfully, will prove frustratingly ineffective if the officer just rationalizes and justifies his behavior as "protecting my family." In such cases, the spouse may even be regarded as ungrateful for questioning his actions and his motives. If talking about it seems to get nowhere, encourage the spouse to teach by example. That is, see if she can make the home a separate safe haven from the rigors

of police work. As long as it's sincere and shows that she's "on his side," his defensiveness may relax somewhat and allow him to loosen up and enjoy family time.

COPS AND KIDS

Even if the spouse holds her tongue about the officer's shirking his family time, the kids are bound to talk about it. Children, especially older kids and adolescents, are often caught between feelings of loyalty and pride in their parent's work and anxieties about peer rejection because of common pejorative attitudes toward authority figures such as police officers.

In my experience, barring critical incidents and other extreme family stresses, there are two main areas where cop's kids have problems (Miller, 2002, 2006). One is getting enough time to spend with the parent and the other is the baggage that comes from being a cop's kid in the first place.

Police Officers and Kid Time

As for the time factor, sometimes the officer himself will raise the issue of insufficient time, and in many of these cases, the blame can be placed on crazy departmental schedules. But this excuse won't cut it where the officer chooses to max out on overtime or deliberately chooses time-consuming special projects. In such cases, it's not uncommon to hear officers complain that they just can't find time to be with their kids and family.

Well, of course they can't. No one who does any kind of demanding work ever *finds* time for outside activities—they *make* time. A little inventive schedule juggling on everyone's part might allow at least a little extra kid and family time. It really all depends on the officer's priorities.

For example, how about junior getting up a half-hour earlier a few days a week to have breakfast with dad before he leaves for work (of course, junior has to go to bed a little earlier the night before). Or if dad and his daughter happen to have the same day off on a weekday, have him pick her up from school and go out for a Coke and a little father-daughter time before she starts her homework.

When larger blocks of time become available—a lucky weekend together, for example—the family should make the most of it, trying not to schedule too many chores and responsibilities in order to leave ample time for family fun. Even a day or afternoon at the beach or park can be refreshing if everyone makes a point of having a good time.

And even if the officer's family understands that dad can't physically be around while he's working, there's nothing to prevent him from calling the kids to say he misses them, leaving them little notes before he goes off to work, and bringing home a little present after his shift. Remember, parental

“presence” is more than a warm body; it’s a feeling the child gets when he or she knows a parent cares, even if that parent can’t always be there in person.

Being a “Cop’s Kid”

The other main category of problems involving children of police officers comes from that dubious status itself. Ministers have “preachers’ kids,” physicians have “docs’ kids,” psychologists and psychiatrists have “shrinks’ kids,” and police officers have “cops’ kids.” What all these offspring have in common is a parent whose profession is unusual, intimidating, authority-based, and frequently misunderstood.

One problem these children often have is the expectation that they’re supposed to be “extra good” because their parent represents some higher authority (religion, medicine, mental health, or the law). Peers may tease them and this may spur the kids to prove their bad-boy chops in any number of situationally antisocial or illegal ways, ranging from silly pranks to serious crimes. Then, when they’re caught, they expect their law enforcement parent to bail them out of trouble.

Sometimes, cops’ kids get ragged on because of some sensationalized media event. Reporters love stories about police scandals, police brutality, and “dirty cops,” and the officer’s child may be assailed by jeering questions like, “Hey, where’d you get that cool bike—did your dad buy it with his drug money?”

Older children and teen friends may have had their own run-ins with the law, and may take out their resentment on the cop’s kid in their group: “Hey, is your dad out there beating up some guy for running a red light?” In other cases, the classmates or their parents or friends may feel let down and disappointed by the perceived failure of law enforcement to adequately respond to a recent crisis: “Sure, your dad couldn’t stop our house from being robbed because he was too busy writing parking tickets for little old ladies.”

Sometimes, it’s jealousy. Despite its foibles, the law enforcement profession is still looked up to by most people, and if the child’s dad is a cop and his friend’s dad is something else, or unemployed, or not there at all, he may well project his sour grapes onto the officer and his kid. Worse, the officer’s own child may then recycle this resentment and project it back onto him: “Nobody likes me and it’s all your fault—why can’t you have a normal job like everybody else’s parents!”

When working with children of police officers or when the parents ask what they can do help their children deal with such peer pressure, family therapists can offer the following points of guidance and advice.

Remember that direct confrontation of schoolyard teasing is rarely an effective strategy because it just confirms the “gotcha reaction” and reinforces future baiting and harassment. What often works better is deflection. If the

child is hit with a “who’d-your-dad-shoot-today?” crack, teach him to use Socratic dialogue queries. For example, he can reply with something like, “What’s *your* dad do?” If the other kid answers this surprise question, the officer’s child can then say, “That’s interesting, what kind of stuff does a [lawyer, store manager, truck driver, contractor, small business owner, cook, nurse, etc.] do during the day? Ditto for the other kids.

This creates a forum for your child to educate his or her peers about what his police officer parent does for a living. Now it’s become a discussion, not a rank-out session. But remember—this only works if he actually knows what a police officer’s job is like, so discuss it with him and ensure that he has enough information to handle the debates. More importantly, if the officer is proud of what he or she does, then usually so is their child—even if he or she may never admit it to the parent. Try to keep grouching about the job out of family discussions and take the time to point out many of the positive things cops do to help people and the community. That way, when all else fails, your kid can respond to his harassers with a shrug and a confident reply: “Hey, say whatever you want, but I’m proud of what my dad/mom does. Deal with it.”

If the teasing continues unrelentingly, it may be time to take action through the school administration, although most kids, especially cop’s kids, won’t want to have their parents get involved because it makes them look like crybabies. In these cases, difficult parental judgment calls may have to be made. To this end, discourage the officer from using his or her police authority in an inappropriate way. If their kid gets in trouble trying to out-delinquent his friends, the officer can stick up for him as would any good *parent*, but don’t let the child—and the other children in his group—see that he’s got a free pass to do whatever he wants, just because his parent is a police officer. All this does is erode your child’s sense of responsibility and confirm the other kids’—and their parents’—impression of the officer’s child as either a wimp who needs mommy or daddy to bail him out or as a special species of entitled brat. In addition, it affirms the noxious stereotype of police officers as a corrupt bunch of insiders who “just take care of their own.” As much as possible, try to turn such disciplinary slips on the part of the cop’s kid into a lesson in responsibility.

INFIDELITY AND BETRAYAL

To be blunt, if someone’s gonna cheat, they’re gonna cheat, and they hardly need some psychobabble explanation or any other excuse to do what they’ve already made up their mind to do. But in many cases, otherwise stable dyadic relationships begin to fray under the pressures of police work and the temptations of infidelity become harder and harder to resist (Miller, 2005a, 2006).

Infidelity: Facts and Stats

I'm often asked by police wives what percentage of officers cheat on their mates, and if this rate is higher than that for the general population. Another question is, "Why do they do it?" Which is really a way of asking, "What can *I* do to prevent *my* mate from doing it?" Unfortunately, I haven't come across any hard statistics on this subject, but my overall impression is that the rate of law enforcement infidelity is not much different from that of other working male populations whose jobs combine the features of: (1) long shifts with considerable time away from home; and (2) daily exposure to a multitude of different kinds of people. No doubt, this applies to long-distance truckers, night shift nurses, traveling salesmen, military personnel, and others.

The bottom line is that if someone steadfastly chooses to be faithful, no one job and no one temptation is automatically going to "make" them cheat. At the other end of the spectrum, if someone has no qualms about breaking their vows, the police profession offers ample opportunities for dalliances of convenience. The gray area arises in the case of all those officers in between: neither saints nor sinners, but only too human. In these cases, the usual risk factors for infidelity—family conflict, career disappointments, or low self-esteem—operate on the vulnerable officer, just as they would for anyone else.

Spouses also want to know how they can "tell" if their mate is having an affair—on or off the job. Unfortunately, there are no magic spells or talismans they can use to infallibly divine whether their mate is being true; they need to use their instincts and basic knowledge of their spouse to come to a conclusion that makes sense. Beyond that, if there's a specific reason to assume that the mate is cheating, then the issue must be dealt with. Otherwise, there's no reason for the spouse to walk around worrying that a law enforcement career will automatically turn their otherwise faithful partner into a philanderer.

An interesting line of questioning I sometimes get on this subject comes from police officers themselves who want advice about how to resist temptation on the job, or what to do if they've already stepped over the line and now want to come clean and fix everything up. Maybe it's been too many late evenings chatting up the night shift nurse at local medical center. Or a female suspect is all too willing to trade favors for a break on an arrest, and it's late, and I'm tired. Or it's another cop in the same or different department, and we seem to have so much in common. The trouble is, these guys never seem to think ahead to the time when the affair may be coming to an end, and that's when the real problems often start, especially if the ending isn't something that's mutually agreed upon.

All moralizing aside, a purely practical reason to resist sexual temptation on the job is the potential for severe career repercussions, and this involves the issue of professional boundaries. A seemingly harmless sexual dalliance

with a citizen while on duty can come back to haunt the officer in the form of a harassment complaint or even criminal sexual assault charges. It might lead to prosecutorial legal cases being thrown out because of contamination of evidence or testimony. That's definitely a nightmare the officer doesn't need.

Unfaithful: An Ounce of Prevention

So when faced with temptation, I ask officers to remind themselves that maintaining a certain degree of professional detachment and decorum is part of their "mental uniform." It doesn't mean being cold or aloof with citizens, just not becoming either inappropriately angry and hostile or overly charming and flirty with those citizens. Even if someone "throws herself" at the officer, either to curry favor or simply because she likes his tush, he should be prepared to courteously but firmly decline the offer. A simple "No, ma'am" stated in his official cop voice will usually be enough to discourage such advances, without seeming like a stinging rejection.

But a lot of sexual affairs don't start that way. Often the temptation comes from someone the officer already knows, either from his patrol area, a local hospital or business, or even his own department (Anderson, 2004). He may even have had a friendship with this person for years and now one or both of them are considering taking it to the next level. The officer and the night nurse may never have intended to one day find themselves horizontal when they first started sharing stories about their kids and commiserating over the pressures of late-shift work. However, such harmless little intimacies have a way of swelling into sinister longings, and then it's sometimes devilishly difficult to maintain the boundary between the personal and the professional.

In these cases, only the officer can decide if he wants this to happen. If not, he should be up front and let the other person know that escalating to the wild thing would only jeopardize an otherwise good friendship. If the would-be paramour is persistent, the officer may have to make himself scarce until she gets the message.

After the Fall: Damage Control and Reconciliation

But what if it's already happened? The million-dollar question is whether or not the officer should tell his mate, and my answer surprises many officers: "It depends." That is, while honesty is almost always the best policy, it's not invariably so. Remember, we're dealing strictly with the practical here, and I will never presume to trump someone's religious or moral convictions.

But if the officer has truly resolved in his own conscience to forgo all others and work on his relationship, I tell him that the decision to tell or not to tell then depends on a few important "if's." *If* you truly believe the affair

was a mistake, and *if* you are as close to 100 percent certain as anyone can ever be that you will never again let this kind of thing happen, and *if* there is no credible way your mate could ever find out about it unless you told her, and *if* it would cause immeasurable pain to your mate should she learn of it, then you may be justified in keeping the episode to yourself—*not* just to let your own sorry ass off the hook, but to spare your spouse unnecessary agony and preserve an otherwise good relationship for both of you.

But before you take this route, ask yourself how you would feel if the situation were reversed, and realize that if your mate does discover the infidelity and your subsequent concealment, it will probably ruin any chance of trust between you ever again. Remember, the function of this “don’t ask—don’t tell” policy is to spare your mate unnecessary pain and preserve the relationship that you’ve recommitted yourself to in your own heart. But, again, if you have moral or religious beliefs that impel you in the direction of the truth at all costs, or if you truly believe that the highest form of respect for someone is to grant them honesty and allow them to deal with that truth, however unpalatable, then you must follow your conscience and, if this comes from a sincere place in your soul, then bless you for accepting the full consequences of your actions and your mate for seeing past the betrayal and accepting the sincerity of your recommitment.

In many cases however, this will all be moot because the mate will, in all likelihood, have already discovered the affair, or at least strongly suspect it, and now she confronts the officer and wants answers and a pound of flesh. Even if the sincere confession has come from the officer first, absolution will rarely come at so cheap a price as an apology and the promise not to do it anymore. In addition, both the offending officer and the spouse often ask me: what’s a sure sign of proof that the strayer has truly changed his ways and what is an appropriate period of time to wait before resuming normal relationships?

The answer here is another resounding, “It depends.” Once again, I tell the officer that only if you yourself have truly resolved in your own heart that such infidelities are a thing of the past, can you expect your mate to believe it and to try to work her way back to trusting you. But be prepared for a probationary period, during which you may have to be extra-considerate of your mate’s coldness, moodiness, and other hurt reactions as she struggles toward feeling secure with you again. At the same time, your probation shouldn’t be endless, and by six months or so post-penance, if your spouse is still strongly ambivalent about accepting you back into her heart and you’ve both done everything you reasonably can to make it work, then it may be time to make a decision. Professional help may be useful, but don’t rely on a counselor to fix what the two of you (or one of you) isn’t willing to work on. In all honesty, not every story has a happy ending, but if the changes are sincere, then many couples do manage to move past the affair and rebuild their lives together.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN POLICE FAMILIES

At one time, this was law enforcement's dirty little secret, although it's not much of a secret anymore. The issue of domestic violence among police families often overlaps with the discussion of administrative discipline (Miller, 2004, 2006) insofar as the officer's department will eventually become involved, however unwillingly, when the problem is persistent.

Police Officer Domestic Violence: Facts and Stats

It is not known whether police officers have a higher or lower rate of domestic violence than the general public, primarily because potentially higher rates of abuse might be offset by lower levels of reporting by fellow officers. The repercussions of an arrest and conviction on a domestic battery charge are far greater for a police officer than for the average citizen, because it can mean surrender of his weapon and loss of his law enforcement career.

Thus, until recently, many departments have maintained a conspiracy of silence around such occurrences, often persuading the complaining spouse that the loss of her husband's job would be potentially devastating to the family, and urging the couple to settle things "off the record." In other cases, especially where the call is to the home of a senior officer, patrol partner, or member of an elite unit, there may be the palpable, if unstated, threat of ostracism, lack of backup, or general opprobrium for cops who rat out other cops, similar to what occurs with other abuse-of-authority cases (Gallo, 2005; Kruger & Valltos, 2002; Lott, 1999; Miller, 2004, 2006; Sanders, 1997).

However, like other unlawful behavior on the part of officers that is actively or passively abetted, undeterred domestic violence undermines the credibility and effectiveness of the department with both its own personnel and the general public, and sets the agency up for civil and criminal actions relating to negligence and malfeasance (Kruger & Valltos, 2002). And again, like other disciplinary protocols, a program of domestic violence response within police agencies need not be brutal or unfair; indeed, the more equitable and just it is perceived to be, the greater the likelihood it will be implemented and used as needed. Accordingly, the following is an outline of a protocol that addresses the key elements in police officer domestic violence intervention (Gallo, 2005; Kruger & Valltos, 2002; Lott, 1999; Sanders, 1997).

Policies and Procedures

As with all law enforcement departmental programs, success stands or falls with the level of commitment and buy-in by the upper administration. Police leaders need to demonstrate by both their words and deeds that unwarranted

violence by police officers will not be tolerated in any venue. Many agencies endorse a “zero tolerance” policy with regard to violent behavior, but as with most such behavioral concepts, “zero” is not necessarily always an absolute quantity. Accordingly, departmental policy should spell out as clearly as possible what specific types of behaviors will not be tolerated. Two standards that most departments adhere to are “conduct unbecoming” and “failure to conform to law.” Most departments also require officers to make a report of any kind of police call to their own residence, whether or not arrests were made.

As with most departmental policies and procedures, domestic violence protocols will have little real bite if they are not enthusiastically endorsed by the agency’s leadership. Police leaders should have a good understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence and the magnitude of the problem, both within their own department and in their communities. A commitment to addressing the problem forthrightly includes the creation of a culture of disapproval among department leaders and the allocation of time and resources for adequate training and dealing with incidents.

Training

The key to any credible and permanent strategy for preventing domestic violence is adequate and appropriate training. Training for police officers should cover a comprehensive range of topics, including response, tactics, officer safety, and verbal crisis intervention and conflict resolution skills. In particular, special training must be provided for officers on how to handle domestic violence calls involving other officers.

Problem Recognition

Astute police supervisors may be able to detect signs of impending or ongoing domestic violence in officers within their own department. The legitimate response to “What happens at home is my business” is, “No, it’s not, because (a) if it escalates to an arrestable offense, we lose a good officer; (b) there are liability issues for the department of letting a potentially violent situation go unaddressed; and (c) any kind of family stress that affects our personnel concerns us.”

Many of the signals that a domestic violence problem may be brewing or ongoing in a officer’s family are generic stress-related symptoms, while others are more specific and may include increased isolativeness of the officer; signs of sleeplessness or alcohol abuse; emotional lability or Jekyll & Hyde personality; increased incidence of excessive force on the job; talking about the spouse in a particularly derogatory way; blaming the spouse for all the

officer's problems; or signs of physical injury that are attributed to "accidents," but may represent wounds received in physical altercations with the spouse.

Investigation and Response to Incidents

A comprehensive approach to responding to domestic violence incidents is the key to an effective law enforcement program. Kruger and Valltos (2002) recommend that the Internal Affairs department immediately conduct an initial preliminary inquiry to determine the need for a formal internal investigation. The latter would follow the agency's established protocol for criminal misconduct cases, including suspension of the officer's police powers and reclamation of their weapon and police vehicle. Officers should be placed on off-duty status, pending administrative investigation and referral for a psychological fitness-for-duty evaluation (Miller, 2004, 2006; Rostow & Davis, 2004).

If the officer is found psychologically fit for duty, administrators might transfer the officer from off-duty to modified-duty status, such as noncontact status assignments (the dreaded "desk job"), until the investigation is complete. If the officer has sustained a criminal conviction related to the domestic battery charge, he will usually be terminated from the department. If lesser or suspended charges ensue, the department retains the right to keep the officer or let him go. If he stays, the officer will be expected to comply with any departmental follow-up measures, as well as with any court orders, that arise from the case.

Not to be neglected is the role of counseling and family therapy but, as noted elsewhere (Miller, 2006), this resource should be an option not a requirement or punishment or, worse, a way of deflecting legitimate legal consequences for the officer's actions. For the most part, when people are "forced" to go to any kind of psychotherapy, including family therapy, true progress is rarely made. Nevertheless, I have seen many cases where a skilled individual or family therapist can turn the tide of deterioration in a police officer's family and also be instrumental in salvaging a career.

CONCLUSIONS

Domestic violence usually represents the extreme end-point of an accumulation of family stresses, or it may simply be due to the personality and psychopathology of the perpetrator. However, even family crises that fall far short of violence can wrench the police family apart if not appropriately addressed. Even when family dissolution is not a threat, just living in "walking misery" at home can make performance on the job all the more problematic. Most cops cherish their families as havens away from the pressures of the job. Police psychologists and specially trained family therapists should work with

departmental administrators to devise ways of strengthening police families for the good of the officer, his or her spouse and kids, the law enforcement agency, and the community as a whole.

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