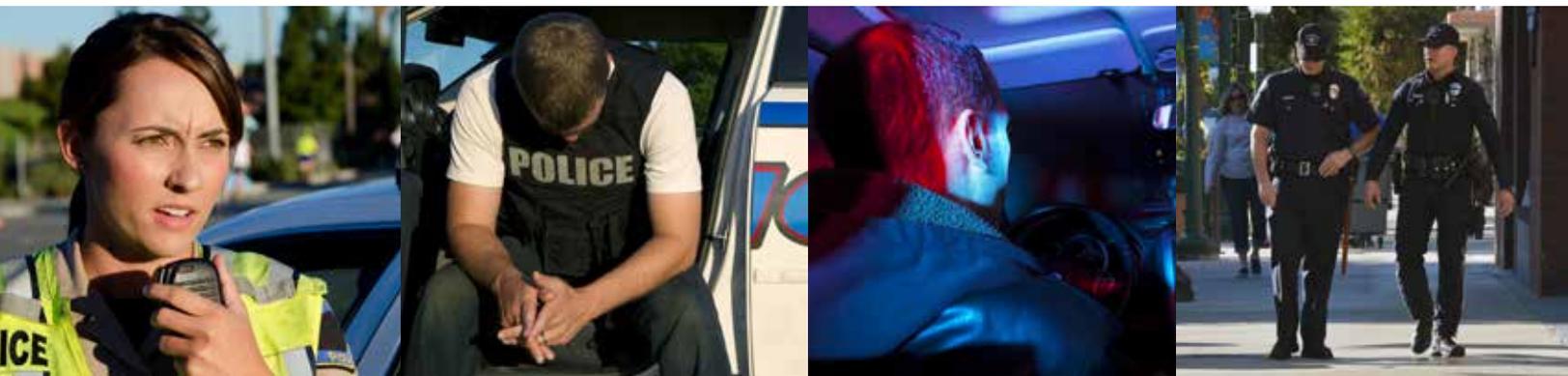


# NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE OFFICER HEALTH AND WELLNESS



## BACKGROUND

- Stress is an occupational hazard for law enforcement officers of all ranks in the US. Beyond the physical and emotional toll that stress can have on officers, it also can impact their overall effectiveness and efficiency and lead to other negative outcomes such as substance abuse, divorce, and suicide.
- Officer suicide is a serious problem in law enforcement. Current research suggests that nearly as many law enforcement officers die by their own hands as those killed in the line of duty. Additionally, the number of officer suicides have increased relative to the number of officers deliberately killed by others.
- Recognizing the need to ameliorate the impact of stress on these outcomes, including officer suicide, NIJ has taken a comprehensive approach to better understand and address this issue.
- In 1996, NIJ funded research to address the negative consequences (including suicide) that job-related stress exerted on law enforcement officers. The focus of the research under this program, that was subsequently extended and addressed the impact of stress on correctional officers, included:
  - Prevention and treatment programs that included, but were not limited to: counseling for officers and family members, marital and adolescent support groups, stress education for police recruits, and technical assistance and training.
  - Comprehensive impact evaluations of the effectiveness of existing law enforcement and/or correctional officer prevention and treatment programs.
  - Police organizational interventions designed to demonstrate how law enforcement policymakers, unions, and rank-and-file officers worked together to change agency policies, practices, organizational culture to address the impact of stress on law enforcement and correctional personnel.
- By 2005, NIJ expanded this body of research to examine the effectiveness of comprehensive police fatigue management programs and the impact of shift work schedules on police officer health and quality of life. This line of research was influenced by the need to examine the extent to which officers could further be subjected to stress and other health-related problems due to fatigue and rotating work schedules. Critical elements identified for examination included, but were not limited to:
  - Analyses of the impact of long work hours, shift schedules, and overtime on officer stress and fatigue.
  - Health-based programs designed to combat and prevent fatigue and stress experienced by patrol officers.
  - Education programs adopted to reduce officer fatigue and stress to cope with shift schedules.

- Quality of life indicators such as job satisfaction and family unit stability.
- Health indicators of stress and fatigue as a result of alternative shift schedules and agency shift policies.
- Ongoing efforts by NIJ to examine suicide prevention and intervention strategies for law enforcement and correctional officers include:
  - NIJ funding to the Rand Corporation to examine strategies that law enforcement agencies in the United States and abroad are using to prevent officer suicide. This work builds on previous research on suicide prevention in the military and among veterans; investigates best practices used in other countries; seeks to provide guidance to policy makers and practitioners on how to improve and adopt effective suicide reduction programs; and will identify what law enforcement agencies are doing and also what is missing and will address five key questions:
    - Do law enforcement agencies have institutional programs and practices that relate directly to preventing suicide among their employees, and what are the components of these programs?
    - For agencies with existing programs, how long have current suicide prevention programs and practices been in place, and what was the rationale for their adoption?
    - What resources are required to implement current suicide prevention programs and practices, and how frequently are these programs and practices used?
- How widely do law enforcement agencies' suicide prevention programs and practices vary, and is such variation associated with characteristics of agencies, type of personnel, or the populations they serve?
- How do current approaches align with research-based components of comprehensive, organizational approaches to suicide prevention, and where gaps exist, what challenges may be associated with adopting evidence-based practices?
  - NIJ's 5-year *Strategic Safety, Health and Wellness Research Plan* includes research to reduce officer suicide by:
    - Assessing the prevalence of contributing factors to trauma-related disorders in criminal justice professions.
    - Studying the impact of an officer's exposure to traumatic events and vicarious trauma on their mental health.
    - Examining the link between post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and officer suicide.
    - Identifying specific risk factors associated with suicide among in officers.
- NIJ's Fiscal Year (FY2019) *Research and Evaluation in Safety, Health, and Wellness in the Criminal Justice System* solicitation that aims to:
  - Establish the physiological and behavioral makers of stress in law enforcement and corrections officers.
  - Examine the influence of chronic stress on the mental health of law enforcement and corrections officers.

