



BUILDING A WORKFORCE WHICH HAS THE RESILIENCE TO DEAL WITH THE DEMANDS OF POLICING

Date: November 23, 2022

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KEY EVENTS

On November 23, 2022, Chief Constable (C.C.) Chris Rowley for Lancashire Constabulary presented *Building a Workforce Which Has the Resilience to Deal with the Demands of Policing*. The key points discussed were the conceptualization of resilience, the need for and benefit of resilience training for individuals in law enforcement, and strategies for building and maintaining resilience in organisations and individuals.

NATURE OF DISCUSSION

Presentation

C.C. Rowley conceptualised resilience in policing as the capacity and capability to deal with and process mental health challenges. He stated that it is not about eliminating risk and stress, but rather the ability to effectively process the adversity and stressors encountered in the line of duty. Through written testimonials from current staff, research in law enforcement, and recent findings in neuroscience, C.C. Rowley provided insight into the work-related and personal challenges faced in law enforcement, as well the means through which resilience can be fostered by individuals and organisations.

BACKGROUND

At the beginning of his presentation, C.C. Rowley outlined the concept of resilience, highlighting three features—it is not about eliminating risk and stress, the capacity and capability to deal with and process mental health challenges, and being able to deal effectively with adversity and stressors—as key to

understanding and building resilience, and proceeded to outline each in respect to law enforcement.

Beginning with the ability to deal effectively with adversity and stressors, C.C. Rowley stated that, first and foremost, it must be assessed whether individuals pursuing careers in law enforcement are aware of the challenges presented by the occupation. He stressed that the demands placed on staff—such as long and erratic hours, extreme highs and lows followed by long periods of normality, and sustained exposure to traumatic events—are not for everyone, and that this should be clearly articulated in the recruitment stage. He noted the need for assessment and recognition of individuals' mental and physical limits, stating that to build personal resilience, one should recognise that what works for one does not work for all; it is imperative not to expose individuals to what they are unprepared for. Given the frequent exposure to traumatic incidents in law enforcement, it is essential to have adequate measures in place to mitigate the effects on staff. These can take the form of role adjustments, quality training on pre- and post-incident skills, and the ability of leadership to monitor the wellbeing of their staff.

Regarding the capacity and capability to deal with and process mental health challenges, C.C. Rowley stressed the importance of training staff to process these challenges prior to joining law enforcement. For those currently in service, there should be an active focus on building mental health in the face of persistent stress and adversity. He outlined the success of current models such as the Trauma Risk Management (TRIM) process—a proactive, post-traumatic peer-group-delivered management strategy—and the new Demobilising and Diffusion training for frontline supervisors, in which the demobilising occurs at the time of an event and the diffusion the day after, allowing the individual to process any issues and access further support.

C.C. Rowley emphasised that the process of building resilience is not about eliminating risk and stress, as these are unavoidable. No matter the amount of planning, there will inevitably be unexpected and challenging occurrences that push individuals to their mental and physical limitations. This highlights the need for built-in resilience, fostered through programs such as the above, that allows individuals to develop the skills required to engage and process traumatic events in a productive and healthy manner.

The importance of building resilience in law enforcement was then discussed, citing a study of 17,000 police personnel across the UK which found that 95% of officers and 67% of operational police staff had been exposed to traumatic events,

almost all of which were work-related. Of those who experienced trauma, 20% reported symptoms within four weeks of the event that were consistent with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or Complex PTSD (CPTSD). He noted that, in addition to the moral perspective, there is a significant financial cost to organisations. For example, in 2014 UK police forces incurred 600,000 lost days to staff sick leave, which suggests a substantial cost to police forces, in addition to exacerbating the demands on officers who remain in the workplace.

C.C. Rowley then presented the written testimonials of three current staff, highlighting the cumulative effect of continued exposure to adversity and stress on mental and physical wellbeing, as well as the importance of work and personal support networks. The first testimony was courtesy of a female Response Officer, who discussed the challenges faced by women in policing, which range from casual sexualization to extreme derogatory language that challenge their ability to remain professional and maintain authority. He then presented the testimonial of a black male Response Officer, who discussed the frequent and severe verbal and racial abuse he experienced, and the difficulty maintaining a calm and professional demeanour in response. The third testimonial was of a Force Control Room operator, who discussed the difficulties of engaging major incidents as they are occurring, as well as the stress that carries into home life. The individual stated that anxiety and stress are the norm and that although resilience grows over time, one needs continued support from work and at home in order to maintain a healthy mindset. Lastly, C.C. Rowley presented the testimonial of a Crime Scene Investigator, outlining the high-stress tasks and odd hours associated with the position. The individual expressed the importance of a strong work ethic and self-motivation in the role, but also the difficulty in performing a challenging position in distressing situations. Common to all the staff's testimonials was the cumulative effect of continued exposure to adversity and stress on mental and physical wellbeing.

Next, C.C. Rowley presented a short video courtesy of Police Care UK, highlighting that when an individual experiences constant and high-level stress, it amounts to the neurobiological triggering of the stress response system, which remains continuous as the body never has an opportunity to *reset*. This can manifest in various social and physical symptoms, including withdrawal from peers and loved ones, body aches and stiffness, and inability to properly regulate emotional responses. C.C. Rowley presented research findings that showed strong empirical evidence in the success of certain techniques — Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), mindfulness, and breath control — to foster a focused attention at the time of a traumatic event, as well as assisting the

individual to process the incident at the physical and neurological level afterwards.

In conclusion, C.C. Rowley stressed the necessity of building resilience from the pre-hiring stage onwards, setting reasonable expectations in those starting in law enforcement and providing continued resilience training and support throughout their career. C.C. Rowley pointed to studies in Sweden and the UK that provided empirical evidence supporting the positive implications of resilience training for law enforcement staff, citing a reduction in PTSD symptoms, correction of negative sleep patterns, and greater ability to regulate emotional responses to trauma. Despite the benefits of resilience training, C.C. Rowley noted there is much still to be done in optimising responses to stress — for potential recruits and current staff. C.C. Rowley also stated that we can build a workforce which has the resilience to deal with the demands of policing, but this requires individuals embracing the concept and significant investment from organisations that facilitate an understanding of resilience and mandate a process to assist and support individuals.

KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION

- Resilience can be conceptualised as having the capacity and capability to deal with and process mental challenges. It is not about eliminating risk and stress, but being able to deal effectively with adversity and stressors.
- Individuals pursuing a career in law enforcement must be made aware of the conditions of employment beforehand, as the intense physical and psychological demands can cause harm to individuals underprepared to experience them. Furthermore, individuals must recognize their own physical and mental limitations with respect to the demands of law enforcement work.
- The intensity and frequency of traumatic events carry cumulative effects on the physical and mental health of individuals in law enforcement regardless of position. If left unnoticed and untreated, these can have deleterious results on the wellbeing of the individuals in both the work and home environment.
- Constant and high-level stress can manifest in various social and physical symptoms. Empirical evidence shows that Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, mindfulness, and breathwork can improve individuals' performance at the time of an event as well as assist in processing the event afterward.

- A workforce which has the resilience to deal with the demands of policing can be built, but this requires the embracing of the concept by individuals and significant investment from organisations — both in respect to how they facilitate an understanding of resilience and mandate a process to assist and support individuals.



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