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Preventing Police Misconduct Through Root Cause Continuous Assessment

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"Higher exposure to police stressors was associated with increased risk for health problems, low self-esteem, partner aggression and police aggression." [1]

"Findings suggest superiors should attend to the mental health, organizational stressors and life-events of their officers regularly and not only following critical incidents at work." [2]

"As applied to police behavior, angry aggression theory argues that the chronic stress of police work along with the inability to respond to the actual sources of that stress increase both the perception of threats and the aggressiveness of responses to perceived threats. In addition, social isolation of police officers increases their tendency to displace aggression onto visible and vulnerable targets in the immediate environment." [3]

INTRODUCTION

Law enforcement, union and community leadership throughout the country have long recognized that a small percentage of officers are responsible for a disproportionate share of complaints and misconduct. The actions of these individuals undermine community support and public trust, make policing more difficult and stressful, and tarnish the reputation of all sworn officers in the towns and cities they serve.

Current solutions proposed for police reform are not fundamentally different than those suggested decades ago, with an emphasis on *redressing negative actions* rather than *identifying and mitigating the stressors and behaviors* that precede those adverse actions.

Today, police officers are under a great deal of external, internal and environmental pressures that – if left unchecked – can build to a point that negatively impacts their ability to support the communities they serve and increase the risk of unintended negative outcomes. Police officers under unmitigated stress are at increased risk of being distracted or disgruntled at work, which can lead to accidents, poor decisions, and conditions that induce tragic, violent actions.

There is a better opportunity to use enhanced continuous assessment technologies to reduce distractions, support positive decision-making, and ultimately uncover concerning behaviors far enough in advance to resolve issues before they manifest into significant problems. These proven, best-in-class solutions protect the privacy and civil liberties of individuals in law enforcement through consent and anonymity, elimination of bias and favoritism, alignment with department policies and collective bargaining agreements, and incorporation of community sentiment to rebuild trust and effectiveness.

LAW ENFORCEMENT STRESS / OUTCOME MATRIX

Stressors[4,5]	Stress-Related Behaviors[6]	Decertification Actions[7]
- Inherent stresses in police work, including routine exposure to high-risk situations and human misery - Physical exhaustion from shift work, and long hours - Traumatic events and threats to physical and psychological health - Police department practices, policies, and politics - Financial pressures - Relationship issues, including divorce	- Isolation and withdrawal - Disengagement, active negativity, and/or lack of motivation - Nightmares and flashbacks - Poor hygiene or apathy about one's physical appearance - Loss of empathy or compassion - Substance misuse and abuse - Recurrent sadness or depression - Resistance to feedback or change	The most common offenses in a nationwide database of 30,000 former law enforcement officers whose certifications were revoked: - Drugs & Alcohol (22%) - Assaults & Violence (16%) - Other (14%) - Dishonesty (13%) - Theft (13%) - Misconduct with Prisoners (11%) - Sexual Misconduct (9%) - Official Misconduct (2%)

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Indications of stress are not often defined by a single act, behavior or event. Therefore, it is essential to create an ongoing and holistic assessment based on patterns of observable behaviors on and off the job. Concerning behaviors should be pre-defined by organizational leadership to provide notification when those behaviors occur and prevent the targeting of individuals and inappropriate searching for negative information and outcomes. Organizational leadership should define policies and behavioral thresholds specific to their organization, individual divisions, and assignments.

These behaviors can be integrated and authenticated from a variety of high-quality, publicly available commercial sources of data, including indications of financial stress from derogatory consumer credit or rapid acceleration in personal debt, criminal activity outside an officers immediate jurisdiction or geography, social media threats, as well as incident reporting and complaints. Enhanced continuous assessment also enables integration with current incident reporting tools, human resources or other internal data to ensure a complete picture is formed.

STRESSOR FEEDBACK LOOP

Unmanaged stressors lead to negative actions and community reaction.

Internal and External Stressors → Stress-Related Behaviors & Actions → Community Response & Reactions →

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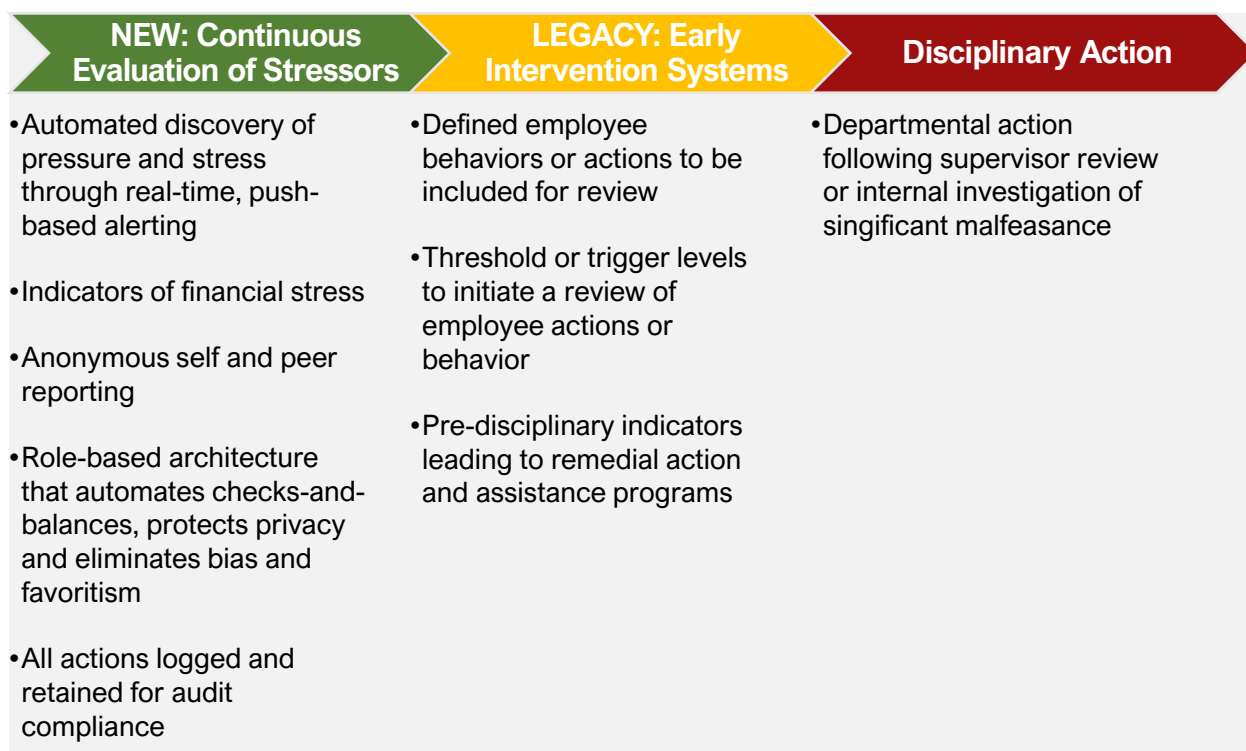**info@clearforce.com**
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LIMITATIONS OF CURRENT APPROACHES

Law enforcement agencies have used Early Intervention Systems (EIS) to identify off-track behavior in officers since the early 1970s.[8] They are also a standard part of federal consent decrees for departments judged to have systemic issues with civil rights violations.

However, the effectiveness of these systems depends heavily on the data metrics selected by each department. Minneapolis adopted its own EIS in 2009, but a 2013 review by the Department of Justice found the system "has gaps and is not used uniformly."[9]

A *New York Times* review of the Minneapolis Police Department's EIS found, "It is not clear whether an improved early warning system would have flagged Mr. Chauvin, who also had been involved in at least three shootings in his career, or the other officers involved in Mr. Floyd's death. Departments choose from a number of benchmarks, and from a range of responses when they are exceeded.[10]

EIS systems play an important role in reform, but EIS systems alone are limited because they focus on individual event outcomes, rather than the stressors or behaviors that precede the expression of non-compliant behavior or crime:

NEW: Continuous Evaluation of Stressors	LEGACY: Early Intervention Systems	Disciplinary Action
•Automated discovery of pressure and stress through real-time, push-based alerting	•Defined employee behaviors or actions to be included for review	•Departmental action following supervisor review or internal investigation of singificant malfeasance
•Indicators of financial stress	•Threshold or trigger levels to initiate a review of employee actions or behavior	
•Anonymous self and peer reporting		
•Role-based architecture that automates checks-and-balances, protects privacy and eliminates bias and favoritism	•Pre-disciplinary indicators leading to remedial action and assistance programs	
•All actions logged and retained for audit compliance		

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EIS systems also lack the necessary redress capability that enables officers to dispute inaccurate or incomplete information in a timely and consistent manner. Bad data leads to "false positives," which reduce accuracy and erode confidence in the system. In turn, personnel issues are not addressed in a timely manner, underlying stress is left unrecognized, and resources are not appropriately deployed as needed to enact positive change.

OTHER ISSUES OF CONCERN

Mental Health

On average, police officers witness 188 'critical incidents' during their careers.[11] This exposure to horrific accidents can lead to multiple mental health issues that often go untreated. For example, the rates for PTSD and depression among police officers is five times higher than that of the civilian population.

Despite the prevalence of mental health issues amongst law enforcement, there is a stigma related to treatment and support. Many officers view asking for help as a sign of weakness and think that if they acknowledge their mental health problems, then something is "wrong" with them. Additionally, many fear that talking about personal struggles will result in stigma from other officers, career setbacks, and the shame of having their weapons removed.

Suicide

Police officers are at a higher risk of suicide than any other profession. In fact, suicide is so prevalent in the profession that the number of police officers who died by suicide – which increased 132% between 2018 and 2019 – is more than triple that of officers who were fatally injured in the line of duty. Researchers are attributing these statistics to the unique combination of easy access to deadly weapons, intense stress, and human devastation that police are exposed to on a daily basis.

Of the 18,000 law enforcement agencies across the U.S., only ~5% currently have suicide prevention training programs.[12]

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THE WAY FORWARD

The Department of Justice and state and local police departments can do more to support police officers and the communities they serve by leveraging technology to support the early and ongoing discovery of personal pressure and stress. This is the logical extension of an officer's body camera – of which senators are already calling for increased use – as it captures the pre-defined concerning behaviors that occur between community engagement and interaction.

By identifying hidden stress – often an indicator of underlying mental/emotional problems – leadership can reach out to at-risk officers, connect them with the appropriate resources, and course-correct behavior through additional required training, mentoring, and hands-on engagement before negative events occur. Enhanced continuous assessment solutions streamline the personnel and risk management process; ensure cases are reviewed quickly, efficiently, and fairly; and allow for easier record-keeping and auditing. They also increase intradepartmental collaboration and prevent conflict/miscommunication, wrongful termination, and related lawsuits and liability.

In addition, enhanced continuous assessment solutions reduce modern barriers to incident reporting. Police officers, like most employees, are less likely to report incidents via 1-800 hotlines because they don't trust the anonymity and often unsure if certain behavior should be reported. By comparison, self- and peer-reporting that occurs on mobile applications and internet browsers can increase incident capture, predefine concerning behaviors that should be reported, and ensure anonymity.

The United States' criminal justice system cannot realize the early and ongoing discovery of non-compliant and illegal behavior negatively impacting communities today unless it continuously looks for it. Furthermore, as a nation, we cannot achieve an effective assessment program in partnership with law enforcement without the uncompromised protection of officers' personal privacy, legal compliance and civil liberties.

Establishing benchmarks of concerning behavior, in conjunction to incident reports and complaints, and comparing out of norm officer behavioral patterns based on peer groups will quickly spot problems that can be addressed. Going forward, there is also an opportunity to encourage or mandate the development and reporting of national, state and local behavioral data benchmarks correlated by population, demographics and crime statistics, further enabling early intervention.

Commercially viable technology solutions addressing these issues are available today and represent an essential component in rebuilding the trust and relationships between law enforcement officers and the communities they serve.

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Established in 2015, ClearForce, Inc. is a risk management technology company headquartered in Vienna, Virginia. We deliver innovation to the global risk management market. Our mission is to eliminate risk by informing organizations of the early signs of individual stress, misconduct and criminal activity and enable proactive and policy complaint action to mitigate risk.

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[1]ClearForce: Understanding insider risk - https://clearforce.com/resources/insider-risk/

[2]Police Stressors, Negative Outcomes Associated with Them and Coping Mechanisms That May Reduce These Associations S. Hakan Can*, Helen M. Hendy First Published September 1, 2014 https://doi.org/10.1350/pojo.2014.87.3.676

[3]Confrontations with aggression and mental health problems in police officers: The role of organizational stressors, life-events and previous mental health problems. Journal ArticleDatabase: APA PsycArticles van der Velden, Peter G. Kleber, Rolf J. Grievink, Linda Yzermans, Joris C.

[4]Angry Aggression Among Police Officers, Sean P. Griffin, Thomas J. Bernard, First Published March 1, 2003 Other https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1098611102250365?casa_token=x0L1lXZgEG0AAAAA:J_SQZTF83rvFPH NIAS9Tbr041mocMHAdVkPv5wd7rAdzF4Az-l2o9MjVUN7KrQ-eDujgDTVaiTP7Bg

[5]Police stressors and health: A state-of-the-art review - https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6400077/

[6]Lexipol: How self-care can reduce police officer stress - https://www.lexipol.com/resources/blog/how-self-care-can-reduce-police-officer-stress/

[7]USA Today: Database of police misconduct - https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/news/investigations/2019/04/24/usa-today-revealing-misconduct-records-police-cops/3223984002/

[8]National Police Foundation: Best Practices in Early Intervention System Implementation and Use in Law Enforcement Agencies - https://www.policefoundation.org/publication/best-practices-in-early-intervention-system-implementation-and-use-in-law-enforcement-agencies/

[9]Diagnostic Analysis of Minneapolis Police Department, MN - http://www.minneapolismn.gov/www/groups/public/@mpd/documents/webcontent/wcms1p-136807.pdf

[10]New York Times: Thousands of Complaints Do Little to Change Police Ways - https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/30/us/derek-chauvin-george-floyd.html

[11]Preventing suicide among law enforcement officers: An issue brief - https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/_NOSI_Issue_Brief_FINAL.pdf

[12]Addiction Center: New Study Shows Police at Highest Risk for Suicide of Any Profession - https://www.addictioncenter.com/news/2019/09/police-at-highest-risk-for-suicide-than-any-profession/

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