

# PSYCHIATRIC HEALTH

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Contemporary Issues in Criminal Justice - Section 403



# HISTORICAL ORIGINS

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Police psychology began in 1916 with Lewis Terman's use of the Stanford-Binet IQ test to screen San Jose recruits (Terman, 1917). Until the 1980s, the focus was purely exclusionary: identifying candidates with gross psychopathology to avoid hiring liabilities, rather than ensuring long-term officer wellness (Aumiller & Corey, 2007).



# EVOLUTION OF SCREENING

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By the 1950s, agencies realized IQ tests were insufficient. Shifting to personality inventories such as the MMPI to detect emotional instability. This era marked a shift from testing intelligence to assessing character; the goal remained screening out unfit applicants rather than the wellness of hired officers (Aumiller & Corey, 2007).

# MENTAL RISKS TO OFFICERS

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Many of the risks of a job in Law Enforcement can have an immense impact on a Law Enforcement Officer. Some of those risks include:

- Cases of Use of Force
- Fatalities and Officer-Involved Shootings
- Routine calls, such as mangled car accidents
- Chronic exposure to human suffering



# THE BARRIER

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Primary obstacles to wellness include the "code of silence." Union Pacific Special Agent Mike Marks suggests that it is critical for agencies to support, rather than discharge, officers after trauma. Without this cultural shift, personnel will avoid treatment to protect their careers, perpetuating the stigma (Marks, 2025).



# CUMULATIVE TRAUMA

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The documentary “Officer Involved” highlighted the brutal reality of cumulative trauma. Experts estimate that one-third of officers involved in deadly force incidents suffer undiagnosed PTSD. Without intervention, this trauma builds until officers reach a breaking point, potentially destroying their families or lives (Shaver, 2017).

# A SILENT EPIDEMIC

Line of Duty Deaths (2017)



Officer Suicides (2017)

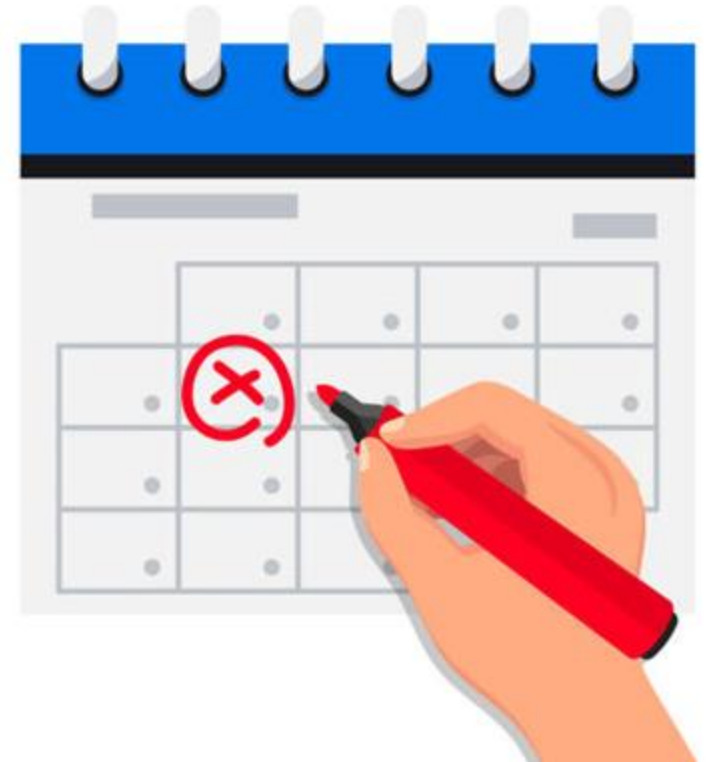


Statistics from the Ruderman Family Foundation reveal that officers are more likely to die by suicide than in the line of duty. This disparity highlights the failure of reactive mental health models.

# PROVEN SUCCESS

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Implementation in agencies like the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department demonstrated that mandatory wellness visits reduce formal disciplinary complaints. By normalizing mental health care, these communities shifted from a crisis-response culture to one of maintenance, showing that proactive models yield measurable operational success (Spence et al., 2019).



# PEER SUPPORT PROGRAMS

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Mandatory screenings should be supplemented by peer support. Research by Rodriguez et al. (2024) suggests that peer programs effectively reduce stigma. Trained officers act as a "bridge," identifying early warning signs in colleagues that clinicians might miss during annual visits.

# LOCAL WELLNESS INITIATIVES

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West Central Wisconsin law enforcement is boosting officer wellness. The Eau Claire Police Department uses K9 Murphy, Menomonie Police has a Behavioral Health Officer, and the Dunn County Sheriff's Office offers strong peer support. These immediate, accessible resources are crucial for officer well-being.



# FINANCIAL & LIABILITY BENEFITS

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Annual screenings cost \$200–\$500 per officer (First Responders Wellness Center, n.d.). In contrast, replacing one burnt-out officer costs over \$100,000 (Orrick, 2002). Preventing a single resignation or early retirement pays for the entire department's screening program for years, securing our critical investment in human capital.

# COMMUNITY RELATIONS

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Wellness impacts decision-making. Chief Dobson notes that force must be legally "reasonable," yet high-stress decisions are complex. Regular screenings ensure officers possess the emotional stability to make safe, split-second judgments under pressure, meeting the community's expectation of professionalism.



# CONFIDENTIALITY PROTECTIONS

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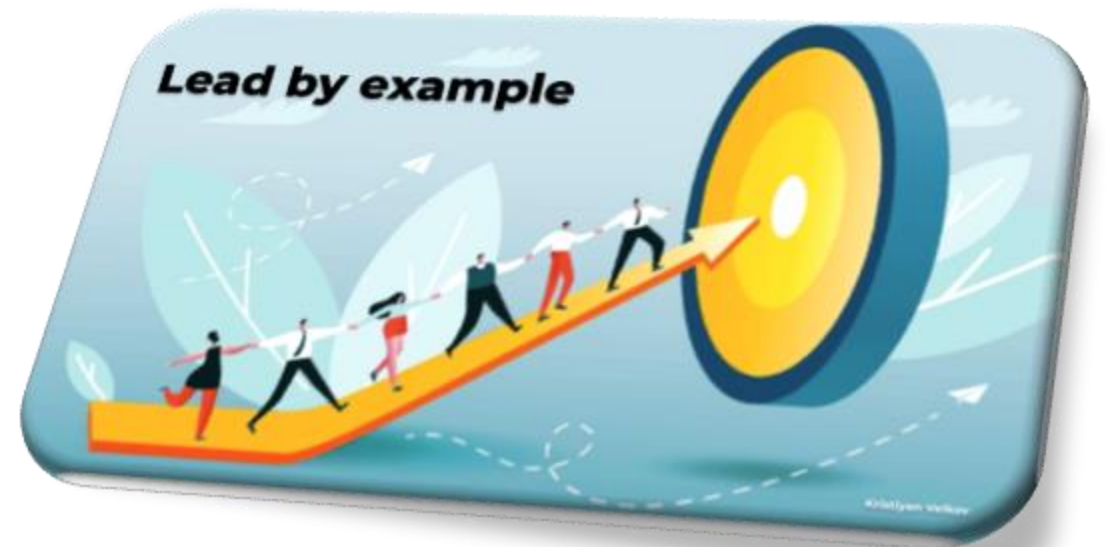


For these solutions to be effective, strict confidentiality is non-negotiable. The IACP emphasizes that results must not be shared with command staff unless there is an imminent threat. If officers believe their private disclosures will be used in performance reviews, they will not participate (IACP, 2014).

# LEADERSHIP'S ROLE IN CULTURE

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Policy alone cannot change culture; leadership must. The IACP (2018) emphasizes that when command staff actively participate in screenings, it "gives permission" for rank-and-file officers to prioritize their health. Leaders must model vulnerability to effectively dismantle the stigma and encourage widespread participation.



# THE FUTURE

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The risks of a Law Enforcement profession are clear, and mandatory screenings provide a necessary solution. But looking forward, policies to implement these ideals do more than reduce liability; they transform agency health and communication. This ensures that, rather than breaking officers, we empower them throughout their careers.

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