THE PSYCHOLOGY OF POLICE DEADLY FORCE ENCOUNTERS

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This program is dedicated to the past and recent victims of violence in our society and to the men and women in law enforcement, criminal justice, military service, mental health, and education who work to reduce the risk and lessen the suffering of their fellow citizens.
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I. FORCE: DEADLY & OTHERWISE
WHAT IS FORCE?
FORCE: DEFINITIONS

- DEMONSTRATION: DON’T TRY THIS AT HOME!
- Level of force used must be *objectively reasonable* to control a *deadly threat* situation.
- “Armed” vs. “unarmed” suspects.
- Purpose of *deadly* force: disable, wound, kill, or *stop*?
- *Necessary* force.
- *Excessive* force.
- *Deadly* force.
- *Justifiable homicide*.
- Officers are expected to react to the imminent and credible *threat* of violence; i.e. don’t respond after you’re already dead.
DEADLY FORCE

- Uniqueness of the gun.
- Mandatory requirement of a lethal weapon.
- Use of judgment and discretion in deadly force encounters.
- Split-second decision-making.
- Repercussions: administrative, legal, and psychological.

Deadly force encounters are only a fraction of UOF incidents, which are a fraction of police-citizen interactions.
MOST COMMON DEADLY FORCE SCENARIOS

1. Domestic disturbance.
2. Robbery in progress.
4. Traffic offense.
5. Personal dispute and/or accident.
DEADLY THREAT: FBI CRITERIA

1. Suspect possesses a weapon or is attempting to gain access to a weapon.

2. Suspect is armed and running to gain tactical advantage of cover.

3. Suspect with the capability of inflicting death or serious injury, with or without a weapon, is demonstrating the intention to do so.

4. Suspect is attempting to escape the vicinity of a violent confrontation in which he/she inflicted or attempted to inflict death or serious injury.
UOF/EF: RESEARCH FINDINGS

- Most EF instances occur in police-controlled settings.
- Almost all EF victims are young, lower-class males from any ethnicity.
- Most officers restrain their use of force even when legally and tactically justified to use it.
- Most officers do not consider their own use of force “excessive,” but:
  - About 20% of officers believe that a little “extra” force is sometimes justified.
DEADLY FORCE: RESEARCH FINDINGS

- Force of any kind is used in less than 1.5% of police-citizen contacts.
- Officer-involved shootings (OIS) are a fraction of the above.
- Average annual rate of deadly force by U.S. LEOs is approx. 360-400/year.
- Together, the justifiable homicide of felons by police and the murder of police by felons comprise 2% of all intentional killings in the U.S.
DEADLY FORCE AGAINST LEO’S: RESEARCH FINDINGS

- Average annual rate of assaults on police officers with a deadly weapon is approximately 11,000/year.
- Up to 80% of officers are assaulted in the LOD, some multiple times.
- Since 1976, an average of 79 police officers each year have been killed in the line of duty.
- However, the rate at which police officers are killed has been steadily falling.
- Approx. 85% of officers killed in the LOD never fired their service weapons.
FACTORS IN POLICE-CITIZEN OUTFLOW

- Contact is officer-initiated, rather than from 911 call for service.
- Subject is young, male, and/or non-white.
- Bystanders present, both citizens and other officers.
- Subject resists lawful request or command by officer.
FACTORS IN POLICE-CITIZEN OUTF

- Subject shows hostile demeanor or aggressive behavior toward officers.
- Subject possesses a weapon or object that can be used as a weapon.
- Encounter follows an automobile pursuit.
- Subject is intoxicated.
- Subject is mentally ill or cognitively impaired.
OFFICERS MOST LIKELY TO USE FORCE: DEMOGRAPHICS

- Male officers more likely to use force than female officers.
- Research on race and ethnicity has been inconsistent, probably reflecting regional differences.
- Officers with prior history of OISs or other use of force (cause or effect?).
- College-educated officers less likely to use force than those with lower education (knowledge or dispositional traits?).
THE “PROBLEM OFFICER”
THE “PROBLEM OFFICER”

- “Real” police work vs. “social work.”
- “Who are you to pass judgment on us? – we’re out there every day.”
- “You can’t be nice to these people.”
- “They’re all guilty of something.”
- COC = *Contempt of cop.*
- The *cult of the asshole.*
- “Just let us do our jobs.”

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"I'm right there in the room, and no one even acknowledges me."
In many patrol communities, the police force is predominantly white and the citizens are predominantly black.

In 1978, the rate at which blacks were killed by police was 8 times the rate for whites.

In 1998, the rate at which blacks were killed by police was 4 times the rate for whites.

Age interacts with race in accounting for which citizens are killed by police:

In 1998, young black males made up 1% of the U.S. population but 14% of citizens killed by police.

In 1998, young white males made up 7% of the population and 15% of those killed by police.
DEADLY FORCE AND RACE: RESEARCH FINDINGS

- White officers make up 87% of U.S. police forces and account for 82% of justifiable homicides by police.
- Black officers make up 11% of U.S. police forces and account for 17% of justifiable homicides by police.
- Because of racial demographics, any given suspect killed by police likely is likely to be killed by a white officer. However, the ratios differ:
  - White officers kill white suspects at an almost 3 times higher rate than black officers kill white suspects.
  - Black officers kill black suspects at about twice the rate that black officers kill white suspects.
Throughout the 1990s, white police officers made up about 87% of all police officers in the U.S. and 83% of those killed by felons.

Black officers made up 11% of police officers and 15% of those killed by felons.

Officers of other races were 2% of police officers and 2% of those killed.

Again, age interacts with race: From 1980-1998, young black males made up about 1% of the U.S. population but 21% of suspects who killed police officers.

Young white males were 8% of the population but 20% of suspects who killed police officers.

Young black males killed police officers at a rate almost 6 times that of young white males.
THE BAD NEWS: YOU’RE BOTH RIGHT

- If you are a young black male, you are proportionately more likely than any other demographic group to be killed by a police officer.

- If you are a police officer, you are proportionately more likely to be killed by a young black male than by any other demographic group.
SUSPECT SUBSTANCE USE AND USE OF FORCE

- Impaired judgment and impulse control.
- Disinhibition of aggressive behavior.
- Proxy factor for aggression: marker for impulsive, thrill-seeking, hedonic lifestyle.
- More than half of forcefully subdued suspects admit to having been intoxicated and resisting police by arguing, disobeying an order, or becoming combative (self-serving?).
Paradoxical police attitude toward mentally ill suspect:

- On the one hand, more lenient treatment is suspect is considered unable to control his/her actions.

- On the other hand, heightened sensitivity to danger due to perceived unpredictability and possibly negative stereotypes about the mentally ill.
RISK FACTORS FOR UOF WITH MENTALLY ILL CITIZENS

- Subject displays psychotic symptoms, especially persecutory delusions with command hallucinations.
- Subject has a co-existing substance abuse history and/or is presently intoxicated.
- Subject has antisocial, paranoid, or borderline personality disorder.
- Subject has history of treatment noncompliance for mental disorder.
- Subject has recently experienced stressful life event.
- Subject resists officers, becomes combative, and/or wields a weapon.
HOW DEADLY FORCE ENCOUNTERS EVOLVE

- Call for service or crime in progress.
- LEOs authorized to use coercive physical force.
- Citizens required to obey officers’ commands.
- **Contempt of cop.**
- **Vicious cycles** and **tipping points**.
- Less-lethal force = excessive force?
POTENTIALLY AVOIDABLE DEADLY FORCE ENCOUNTERS

- Deadly force used on subject who is already surrendering.
- Officer draws gun while handcuffing a subject.
- Adrenalin overload occurs following high-speed chase.
- **Split-second syndrome**: officers misperceive danger and overreact.
- **Contagious fire**: one officer fires, then other officers fire (is this rare?).
II. DEADLY FORCE PSYCHOLOGY
THE DEADLY FORCE MINDSET

- Gradual vs. explosive onset.
- Running toward danger, not away.
- Common alterations of perception, cognition, and/or behavior.
- Adaptations of natural defenses in emergency situations.
THE DEADLY FORCE MINDSET

- Perceptual Distortions.
  - Time perception: slow-motion.
  - Time perception: event compression.
  - Visual hyperfocus: “tunnel vision.”
  - Auditory exclusion: “tunnel hearing.”
  - Auditory attenuation: sounds (gunshots, shouting) muffled.
  - Auditory enhancement: sounds seem louder (less common).

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THE DEADLY FORCE MINDSET

- Cognitive and Emotional Distortions.
  - Dissociation: out-of-body perception.
  - Going on automatic.
  - Intrusive distracting thoughts.
  - Confusion and/or helplessness.
  - Memory impairment.
  - Memory distortion.
  - “Flashbulb memories.”

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THE STRESS RESPONSE: BRAIN

Anatomy of the Brain

Frontal lobe
Parietal lobe
Occipital lobe
Temporal lobe
Pons
Medulla oblongata
Cerebellum

Limbic System
Thalamus
Cingulate gyrus
Fornix
Amygdala
Hippocampus
Parahippocampal gyrus

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STRESS RESPONSE: HORMONES

Physical, psychological or environmental

Hypothalamus

CRH

Pituitary Gland

ACTH

Adrenal Glands (located above kidneys)

Cortisol

Stress & the HPA axis

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DEADLY FORCE CRITICAL INCIDENTS: PROCEDURES

- General or restricted call-out.
- Personnel respond to the scene.
- Officer speaks with attorney.
- Officer speaks with MH professional.
- On-scene investigation and walk-through.
- Internal investigation.
- Post-critical incident psychological evaluation.
DEADLY FORCE CRITICAL INCIDENTS: SHORT-TERM PSYCHOLOGICAL REACTIONS

- Usually 24-72 hours, but may be as long as a week.
- Hyperarousal: “adrenalin dump.”
- Impaired sleep.
- Obsessive rumination.
- Heightened safety concerns for self and family.
- Reduced communication.
- Clinical syndromes (rare).
- Responses of peers, friends, family, department.
DEADLY FORCE CRITICAL INCIDENTS: LONGER-TERM PSYCHOLOGICAL REACTIONS

- Impact phase.
- Recoil phase.
- Resolution phase.
- Posttraumatic phase.
REFERRAL FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES

- Mandatory vs. voluntary referral.
- Confidentiality vs. privilege.
- Documentation and reporting.
- Clarification of goals and agendas.
- Clarification of roles and responsibilities.
- Minimum depth & intensity of intervention.
- Relationship to fitness for duty.

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PSYCHOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT

- Administrative model for ethical leadership.
- Clear standards and practices.
- Effective selection and hiring criteria.
- Proper training and enculturation.
- Individualized coaching and counseling.
- Appropriate referral for psychological services.
- Proper use of psychological FFDEs.
- Fair discipline and termination policies.
- Development, maintenance, and exemplification of a ‘‘Culture of Honor.’’
WHAT’S FOR LUNCH?