

Reducing Officer Injuries

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In order to begin to better understand the scope and frequency of injuries sustained by law enforcement officers, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), through a cooperative agreement with the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, conducted a multi-department assessment of line-of-duty injuries. Eighteen different agencies participated in this study and tracked all reported injuries over the course of 1 year. All available information pertinent to each injury was documented and entered into a database using a standardized reporting instrument built for this study. The IACP collected all data and partnered with George Mason University to perform an analysis of the data and develop strategies and resources for injury prevention.

During the year of data collection, a total of 1,295 injuries were reported. Reported injuries resulted in 5,938 days missed, with an average of 4.5 days missed per incident and an average rehabilitation period of 3.5 days. Based on a 10-hour work day, this total represents 59,380 hours of work time lost. Using a national average annual entry-level salary of \$40,000, the approximate total cost for hours lost from injuries in this study was \$1,211,352. Factoring in the added costs of overtime to cover assignments for injured officers, an estimated \$1,817,028 was also incurred by the participating agencies. When these two figures are combined, excluding the extra costs of medical care, the estimated total added costs exceed \$3,000,000.

In addition to hours lost and resulting monetary cost, injury data collection focused on an array of other information, including specific injury type, characteristics of the injured officer, involvement of a suspect in the injury incident, training received, officer fitness attributes, and body weight. Additional information on vehicular crashes and the use of body armor was also obtained during the data collection to further inform the research effort. Based on the analysis of the data, a number of important recommendations emerged:

- Agencies should closely track officer injuries of all types along with circumstantial data in order to identify possible patterns of incidences and to develop prevention strategies.
- Findings show that there are certain groups and types of officers who are more likely to experience injuries, including those who are in their first five years on the job and those who are overweight. Agencies should develop targeted injury-reduction efforts for these groups when possible.
- Data reveals that those officers who had prior contact with the police caused more severe injuries to officers than those without prior contact. These findings demonstrate that agencies should develop a greater awareness of officers in their jurisdictions.

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- Police encounters with suspects under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs resulted in more severe officer injuries. These findings suggest that the closer offenders are monitored after an arrest through police-probation/police strategic partnerships, the better the chance of neutralizing threats and reducing officer injuries.
- Officer training efforts in the areas of arrest procedure and tactics and use of force resulted in fewer injuries during officer encounters with suspects, and thus should be incorporated into academy and in-service training curricula.
- Officers sustaining injuries in vehicular crashes missed five fewer days and spent less time in rehabilitation when wearing seatbelts. Study findings also showed a connection between higher vehicle speed and a greater severity of injuries following a crash. As a result of these findings, it is recommended that agencies implement mandatory seatbelt policies and address speed and pursuit policies that promote the safety of the officer and the public.
- Officers who engaged in fitness training regimens were less likely to suffer an injury that was Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) reportable and more severe. Similarly, officers who were overweight were more likely to sustain serious injuries, miss more days at work, and require more rehabilitation. Those with a healthy weight as classified by the body

mass index missed 25 percent less time post-injury than officers classified as obese. Agencies should recognize the evidence of a strong connection between fitness and health and injury severity, and it is recommended that agencies implement mandatory fitness programs to curb injury and injury severity.

The final report provides a more in-depth review of the data collected during this study and highlights other findings pertinent to injury trends and officer safety considerations. It is intended to serve as a resource for agencies and encourage them to think more critically about departmental injuries and proactive prevention strategies.

