

REPORT ON FOP/NBC SURVEY OF POLICE OFFICER MENTAL AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

KEY FINDINGS

**90% report stigma as a barrier to seeking treatment*

**79% report experiencing critical stress at some point during their career*

**Over 90% report a belief that there is a lack of awareness by the public and the profession that critical stress is a problem in law enforcement*

**Peer support is viewed as the most helpful of treatments by 73% of respondents*

In the summer and fall of 2018, the Fraternal Order of Police partnered with NBC New York to conduct an important survey of our members with the aim of learning more about the critical stress that officers face on the job. We wanted to gauge the level of difficulties officers are facing, often struggling in silence, and we wanted to bring light to these issues not only to raise awareness, but to learn how we can best help our nation's heroes remain well and productive in their lives and careers. Our survey asked questions about the nature of problems generated by our profession, both in our lives and in the workplace. It included questions about mental health education and services offered to members, and inquired about which services help the most. The survey also helped to identify any roadblocks to use of these services.

Nearly 8000 active and retired sworn officers participated in the anonymous survey, and responses came from all over the United States, including 49 states and one US territory. We received responses fairly evenly from every region of the United States, which speaks to the importance of this topic for all members of our profession.



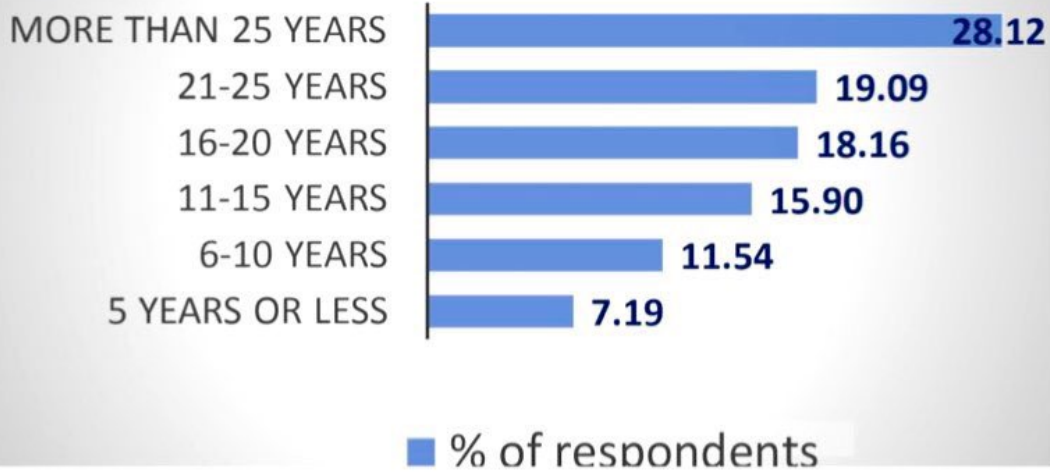
Location of Respondents



- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------|
| ■ Northeast | ■ Southeast |
| ■ Midwest | ■ Southwest |
| ■ Northwest +territories | ■ REFUSED |

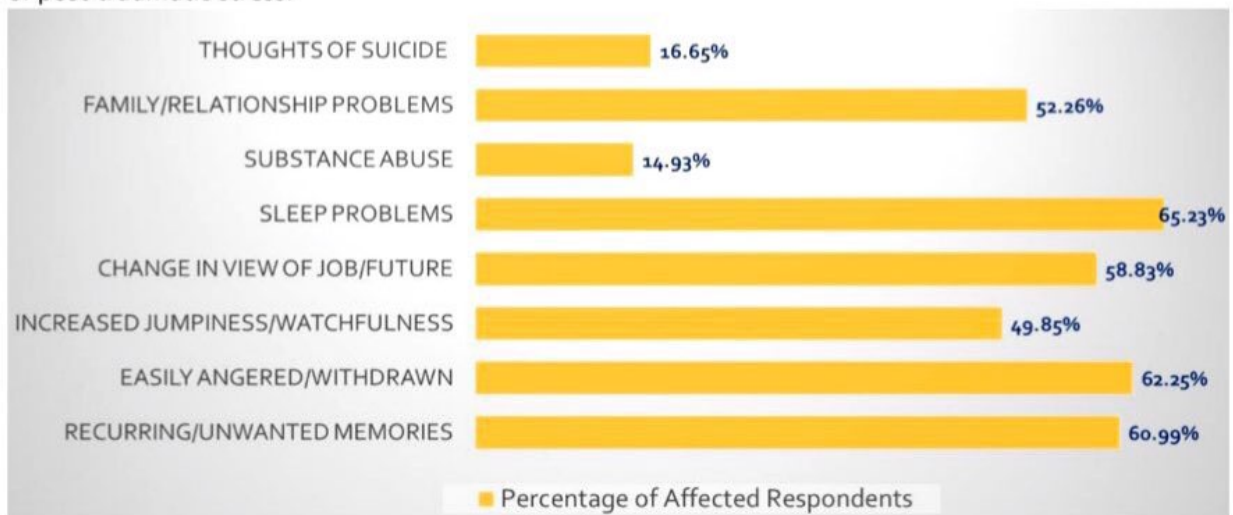
Among the respondents, those with the most time on the job participated at the highest rate, but responses were received from officers new and more tenured, and across the range in between.

Time in Law Enforcement Service



In addition to learning about how long respondents had served in law enforcement, we learned that approximately 28% of respondents have an immediate family member serving in law enforcement. Also, just over one quarter of respondents had previously or were currently serving in the military.

We defined critical stress as “a strong emotional reaction that overwhelms usually effective coping abilities”; and **79% of participants reported that they had at some point suffered critical stress in the course of their duties as a law enforcement officer**. Further, 69% percent reported that stressful experiences as a police officer caused unresolved or lingering emotional issues. These unresolved emotional issues led to a range of effects in their lives, including sleep problems, relationship problems, and thoughts of suicide. Sixty-six percent of respondents believe that these behavioral issues are results of post-traumatic stress.



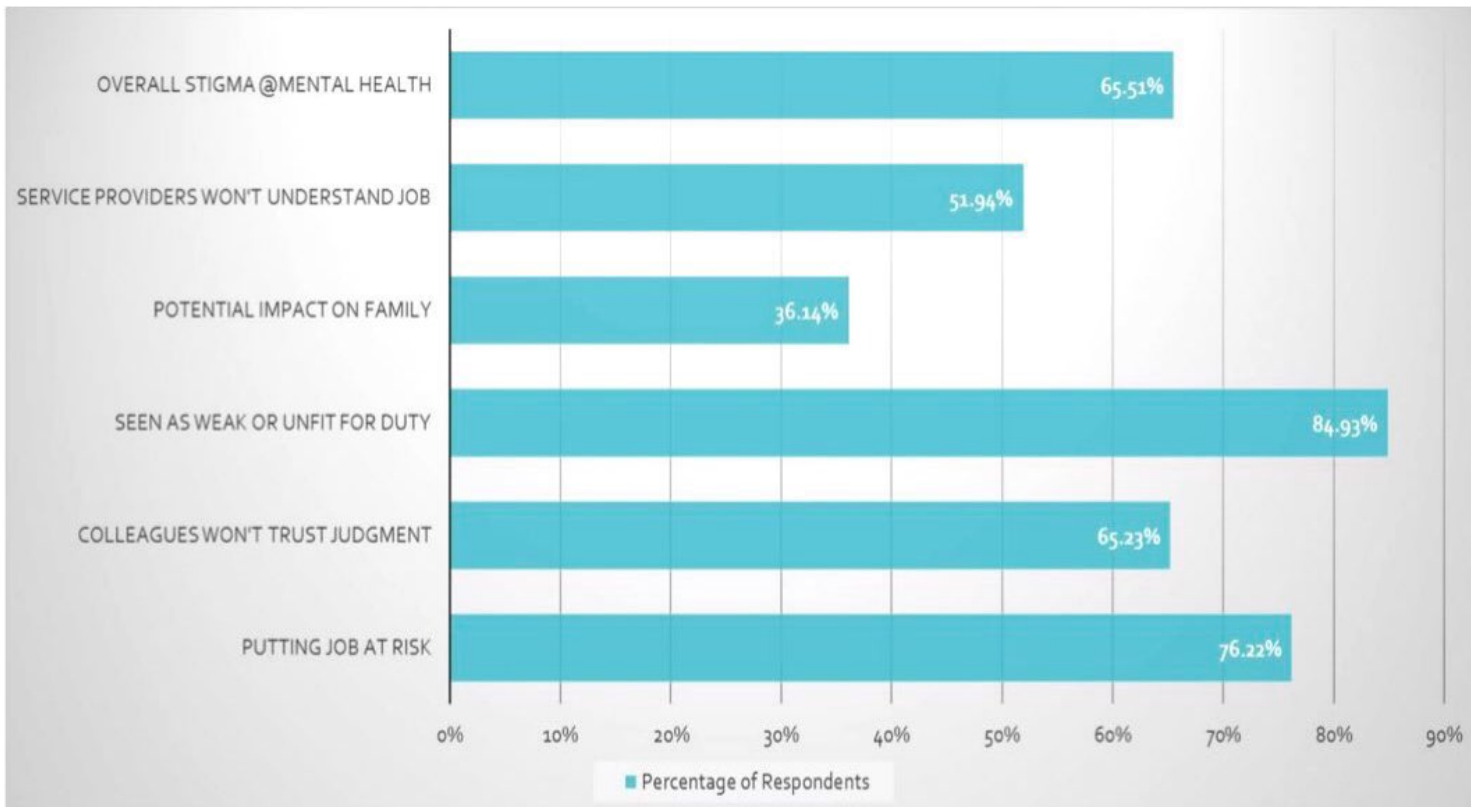
Despite the variety and rate of negative effects caused by critical stress, participants report having self-deployed various strategies for coping. We note that responses indicate higher rates of the use of positive coping mechanisms such as exercise and talking with peers and friends, than resorting to

more unhealthy mechanisms such as use of substances. However, also noteworthy is that responses indicate that officers are more likely to do nothing, to suffer in silence, or resort to the use of alcohol or drugs than they are to seek professional mental health help.

Although 82% of participants are aware that behavioral health services are offered by their employer, more than half of participants report that they have never received training on their department's behavioral health services. **Barely 20% of respondents had previously utilized their employer's professional Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and of those respondents who had utilized this specific agency-provided service, more than half (59%) reported that they did not find the service helpful.** This lack of positive effect indicates one roadblock to use of services. However, respondents also point to a lack of awareness on the part of both the public and the profession that critical stress is a significant effect of work in law enforcement. For example, only a third had received any behavioral health awareness education during their careers. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of respondents believe there is inadequate *recognition* that behavioral health support services for police officers are important or necessary. The same percentage report that there are inadequate behavioral health *services* available to officers.

More than half of respondents reported awareness of other services available to them, including crisis hotlines, substance abuse counseling, and online support services; however, less than a third of respondents found these services helpful. For approximately the past two decades, Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) has become more widely offered by police departments after the occurrence of a critical incident. Slightly over a third of respondents had at some point in their career participated in a Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) defusing or debriefing, with a slightly more positive effect, in that just over half (54%) of those who had participated in this type of service found it helpful.

Among the most significant results of the survey are reports of the importance of peer support counseling to our members. **While fewer respondents, approximately a third, had ever utilized a peer support service, three out of four of those that did found it helpful.** This result speaks to the most significant finding of this survey. **A staggering 90% of respondents believe that there is a stigma in law enforcement that creates a barrier to seeking help for emotional or behavioral health issues.** The perceived sources of this stigma are varied, but include concerns about putting employment at risk, concerns that the officer will be seen as weak or unfit for duty, and concerns that service providers won't understand the nature of the job.



In addition to the weight placed on stigma as a barrier to seeking help for emotional issues, we note that approximately one third (35%) of respondents had privately sought professional counseling outside of their employer, and in two-thirds of these cases, the officer found services helpful. Given that professional counseling provided by employers is rated much less helpful by participants than is private counseling, and taken with the concerns about stigma, these results indicate a lack of positive outcomes with, and possible mistrust of agency-provided services.

The Officer Wellness Committee recognizes that the Fraternal Order of Police has a unique opportunity as advocates for the emotional and behavioral health of the members of our profession. Based on survey data which indicates that members find peer support counseling most helpful in guiding them to process and cope with critical stress brought about by the job, **we have begun development of a nationwide peer support program, Call On Peers**, using our 348,000 plus members as a base. Because our members are concerned about confidentiality, we plan to create a network that will allow a member to talk with a trained peer counselor in the next town or across the country. As all FOP members know that our organization is one of proven member benefits, they know that the FOP can be trusted to be on their side in ensuring that they receive assistance when it's needed.

Finally, survey results indicate that continued efforts to raise awareness is key, and the Officer Wellness Committee is committed to this effort. Nearly all respondents (96%) feel that the public is unaware of the effect that critical stress has on police officers. Over 90% of respondents report a belief that greater awareness about behavioral health and post-traumatic stress in law enforcement will lead to improved services to address these issues. Our partnership with NBC on this project has begun to raise awareness as news of our survey has aired in several cities around the country. The Officer Wellness Committee is actively



engaged in several other initiatives which we hope will bring greater awareness to these issues through training offered nationwide.

For further information on the study, contact Sherri Martin, National Officer Wellness Committee Chair at sherrimartin@fop.net. The Officer Wellness Committee wishes to thank NBC New York (Stulberger, Ushery, Manney) for partnering with us on this important project.