Keep Calm and Carry On: an International Comparison of Stress in Law Enforcement

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How I came up with this study...

- Fall 2012 studied abroad in Cambridge!!
- Learn about the culture of my “new home” in a meaningful way.
- Combine my interests in psychology, sociology and criminal justice!
Obtain a better understanding of police officers’ experience of stress through a cross-cultural comparison of the literature on policing in the U.S. and the U.K.

Inform policy recommendations related to stress response and preventative strategies for law enforcement.
Research Considerations

How is stress measured?
- Surveys (Self-Report)
- Effects of Stress: Physiological, Psychological, Behavioral Measurements

Can we use U.K. research to draw conclusions about LEOs in the U.S.?

McCreary & Thompson, 2006
Difficult to compare because U.S. and U.K. use different measurements of stress.

Effects of stress measurements:
The table below summarizes the different physiological, psychological, and behavioral effects of stress in the U.S. and U.K. compared to each country’s civilian population.

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<tr>
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<th>United States</th>
<th>United Kingdom</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physiological</td>
<td>Higher mortality rates, coronary disease risk factors</td>
<td>Higher heart disease risk factors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psychological</td>
<td>PTSD, Depression, Anxiety Disorders, Burnout.</td>
<td>PTSD, anxiety symptoms, insomnia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Behavioral</td>
<td>Deviancy, alcoholism, aggression, &amp; violence</td>
<td>Increased consumption of alcohol and cigarettes.</td>
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<td>US SURVEY RESEARCH</td>
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<td>When directly measuring the perceived stress of LEOs did not find a difference in stress between LEO and civilians.</td>
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<td>Wright et al., 2011</td>
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<td>Franke et al., 2002.</td>
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<td>On the other hand, U.K. research did find that LEOs reported more stress than their civilian counterparts.</td>
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<td>Juniper, White &amp; Bellamy, 2010; Johnson, Cooper, Cartwright, et al., 2005</td>
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U.S. research may not use an accurate measure of stress for LEOs.

When comparing the effects of stress of LEOs in these two countries and their self-reports of stress, U.S. officers appear more likely to engage in negative behavioral effects as a result of stress, whereas the U.K. officers are more likely to report their feelings of stress.
Types of Stressors for LEOs:
- Organizational
- Occupational
- Subcultural

Organizational stressors had greater impact on stress than occupational stressors for LEOs. (Gershon et al., 2009; Morash, Haarr & Kwak, 2006).

Why?

Subcultural stressors exacerbate occupational & organizational stressors (Woody, 2005; Emsley, 1996; Easton, 2012).
In the U.S. Gershon and Colleagues (2009) measured which coping strategies LEOs utilized

- Cognitive/Problem Focused
- Avoidance
- Negative Behaviors

In the U.K. Alexander and Walker (1994) asked LEOs how they coped with stress and found 3 significant categories:

- Problem focused
- Active-rational
- Avoidance
*Negative Behavior does not have any UK data and Active-Rational does not have US data.*
Role of Culture in the LEO Stress

Police Subculture
- Police Personality
- Overall Police Subculture?

Politics of Policing
- Organization
- Training

Historical Reactions
- WWI and WWII
- 9/11
LEOs do experience greater stress than civilians. LEO stress stems from organizational stressors. Attributable to different coping strategies used. Differences in LEO stress may result from diff. in culture or methods.
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<td>Training curricula that promotes empowerment and confidence of officers over militarism. Emphasize learning over teaching.</td>
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<td>Change the structure and organization of police agencies to promote internal and community collaboration, as well as giving LEOs more resources.</td>
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<td>In the U.S., policing agencies should add programs that help LEOs learn more positive coping strategies and help them deal with the ramifications of their negative coping behaviors.</td>
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**Future Research Considerations**

- Promotion of research methodology that encourages researchers to look at cultural influences before application to their data.

- Quantitative comparison of coping strategies between the U.S. and the U.K.

- Research U.K. LEO behavioral effects of stress
References


