



# Police Peer Support Team Newsletter



**Jack A. Digliani, PhD, EdD**  
Police Psychologist

[www.jackdigliani.com](http://www.jackdigliani.com)

## From the Desk of Dr. Jack: Positive side of critical incidents

For many years I and many others have been working to develop programs and protocols designed to prevent and treat the possible undesirable outcomes of exposure to a critical incident. Often times our efforts have focused on indentifying and treating these aspects of critical incident survivorship.

There is another side to critical incident survivorship, one that is seldom discussed. This side has to do with becoming “stronger and smarter” following a critical incident. Becoming stronger and smarter following a critical incident involves many variables including (1) finding something positive in the experience and (2) placing the event into psychological history (it is in chronological history as soon as the incident is over).

I was recently contacted by a British police officer that, although much rarer in England than in the United States, was involved in an incident several years ago wherein he was compelled to shoot a suspect that had taken a hostage. The suspect was killed. He knew he did was what necessary to protect the hostage but like many other officers, it took him some time to psychologically and emotionally process the event. He described his experience this way:

“...I am also aware how having come through both the incident and the aftermath, that I changed in a positive way too. I believe that dealing with the incident made me more resilient, able to cope better with problems and difficulties (based on a mind-set that goes something like “If I can deal with all of that, I can deal with anything that life throws at me”). The incident also reinforced my personal levels of professionalism (and my expectations of it in others). Over time these positives have, I believe, come to the fore, whilst the negative reactions have faded.” (May 19, 2015)

We should remind ourselves that positive outcomes can result from not-so-positive experiences. We do not have to focus on the undesirable or challenging responses which are sometimes generated out of unpleasant or unwanted experiences. We have an ability to examine the other side of such experiences. We have an ability to achieve a better mental balance. To the degree this can be accomplished, we can move forward, through any aftermath of any critical incident.

If you have tried your best to put troublesome aspects of a critical incident behind you but are still experiencing difficulties, remember that you don't have to go it alone. Seek support. Reach out. Talk it out. Sometimes all it takes is sharing your experience with others who care.

In this way, you too can become stronger and smarter...JAD



## Causes of Officer Stress and Fatigue

Enduring stress for a long period of time can lead to anxiety, depression or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD is a psychological condition marked by an inability to be intimate, inability to sleep, increased nightmares, increased feelings of guilt and reliving the event.

For law enforcement officers, stress can increase fatigue to the point that decision-making is impaired and officers cannot properly protect themselves or citizens.

### Factors That Can Cause Stress and Fatigue for Law Enforcement Officers

#### Work-related factors might include:

- Poor management.
- Inadequate or broken equipment.
- Excessive overtime.
- Frequent rotating shifts
- Regular changes in duties — for example, spending one day filling out paperwork and the next intervening in a violent domestic dispute.

#### Individual factors might include:

- Family problems.
- Financial problems.
- Health problems.
- Taking second jobs to make extra income

From: <http://www.nij.gov/topics/law-enforcement/officer-safety/stress-fatigue/Pages/causes.aspx>

## Ketamine - Special K

Research at Yale University continues to support the promise of ketamine as a treatment for depression. A recent article in an issue of *Science* journal said that administering small amounts of the drug regenerates synaptic connections, bringing patients almost immediate relief from depression's debilitating symptoms. Psychotherapy still is recommended for long-term recovery. In larger doses ketamine is used illegally as a "party drug" known in street lingo as "Special K." Ketamine was first used medically as an anesthetic.

## Happiness

"Happiness belongs to those who are sufficient unto themselves. For all external sources of happiness and pleasure are, by their very nature, highly uncertain, precarious, ephemeral, and subject to chance."

**Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860)**  
German philosopher

## Mental Illness and Violent Crime

About 6 percent of the population, or one in 17 Americans, suffer from a serious mental illness, according to the National Institute of Mental Health. Studies suggest that the mentally ill are involved in only about 4 percent of violent crimes. But when untreated, severe mental illness is associated with higher rate of violence.

## Impact of Sleep Deprivation on Police Performance

**Sleep deprivation is comparable to excessive drinking.** A sleep deprivation study found that not sleeping for 17 hours impaired a person's motor skills to an extent equivalent to having an alcohol toxicity of 0.05 percent. Not sleeping for 24 hours was equivalent to a toxicity level of 0.10 percent. This level of deprivation would impair speech, balance, coordination and mental judgment. (From: NIJ.gov)

**"Tough Cops Ask for Help"** (State of New Jersey Police Suicide Task Force Poster headline)