STRESS AND THE POLICE OFFICER

Second Edition

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By

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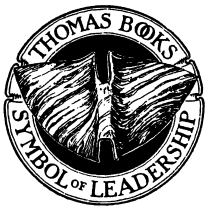

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To
Robert J. Louden
and
Stephen R. Band
Two of the finest cops I've ever known.

PREFACE

The scientific–and popular–literature on stress and stress management has increased exponentially since the first edition of *Stress and the Police Officer* (1983). Stress has settled in as a fad. Some of the work has been of highest quality; alas, some has not. There have been and continue to be exaggerated claims of extraordinarily high levels of stress and stress-related problems, accompanied by "instant fixes." In this edition, I have tried to evaluate these claims for their scientific merit. I acknowledge, however, that scientific knowledge is ever-changing. For this reason, I have included an appendix for those readers who are not scientifically trained, to help them begin to evaluate the claims of various authors.

Policing also has changed in these years. We cannot yet know the full impact of the incidents of September 11, 2001, on police work. However, there have been changes in the demographics of many departments, with more women and ethnic minority group members coming into the field.

I am distressed by my perception that the research on police stress has not kept pace with the research on occupational stress in general. Much remains to be done. I have tried to point out some of the areas where assertions do not match evidence.

In the first edition of this book, I included some specific strategies for stress management. As there are now some excellent resources that are generally available (and listed in Appendix B), I have minimized this kind of content.

I have worked with law enforcement officers for over 30 years, and have learned much from them. Certainly, my life has been changed by these interactions.

Good policing is not impossible. In my years of association with officers, I have seen many who do their jobs with skill and understanding.

In addition, the reactions that have been associated with stressors are not inevitable. Many officers retire in good physical and emotional health and look back on their careers with pleasure.

Yet the reactions associated with stressors are common enough and potentially deleterious enough to personal and organizational well-being that they deserve consideration. I have tried to highlight some of the common stress reactions and the solutions that are most widely accepted.

In a situation where stressors have led to maladaptive behavior on the part of individuals or organizations, change is called for. Change is not easy nor can anyone think that one change, however major, will bring everlasting happiness. Change must be constant, as social conditions in the world around us vary. If one can accept this inevitability and see it as a challenge rather than a threat, life will be easier.

Hans Selye has said that the worst of all modern stressors is purposelessness. Despite the setbacks, every officer can remember times when he or she made a difference in people's lives, giving them the aid they needed to cope with a chaotic world.

At their best, the police represent a force for the order necessary for society to function. It is not an easy job, but it is one that is worth doing well. This is the challenge that I hope will sustain officers and help them to be, as Niederhoffer (1967) put it, "tolerant observers of the human comedy," and perhaps even dedicated and successful agents for change.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book is dedicated to Bob Louden and Steve Band. I have known both of them and followed their careers for more than 25 years. Their dedication, professionalism, and knowledge have been an inspiration to me. Everyone should have friends and colleagues like Bob and Steve.

Throughout this book, I speak of the importance of social support. I also mention the value of giving thanks and praise where it is due. I would now like to practice what I preach and thank some of those people whose support and contributions made my work possible.

First, I want to thank those police officers (and former officers) who contributed to my knowledge of stress in policing and showed me that it is possible to do this difficult job well. These have included Frank Schafer, David Harman, Roger Terry, Lenny DePoe, John Genz, James D. Sewell, Gene Chiosi, Paul Cell, Herbert Lloyd, and John Cross. I also must extend my gratitude to many members of the Montclair Township and Montclair State University Police Departments, as well as other agencies and individuals who have shared their knowledge with me.

I spent the month of June, 2001, as a Visiting Faculty Fellow with the Behavioral Sciences Unit at the FBI Academy in Quantico, Virginia. It was there that I did much of the research for this volume. Members of that unit were unfailingly kind and helpful. Special thanks to Sandra Coupe, Samuel Feemster, Anna Grymes, Joseph Harpold, Faye Koerner, Harry Kern, John Lanata, Cynthia Laskiewicz, Sharon Smith, and Nancy Ward. Also John Wills.

In the spring semester of 2002 (in the aftermath of September 11, 2001), I was privileged to teach stress management to officers from the New York City Police at John Jay College in New York City. These students provided a wealth of insights and personal experiences; they

also gave me an opportunity to fine-tune some of the concepts and strategies I have presented. Special thanks to Pat O'Hara who made that experience possible.

Librarians are the unsung heros of any academic book. At the FBI Academy Library, Jean Caddy, Jane Garrison, and Pat Singstock proved invaluable. Many of the references to the popular literature I have used came from the Hasbrouck Heights, New Jersey, Public Library. I'm sure I tried the patience of Michele Maiullo and members of her staff: Mimi Hui, Carolyn Lee Kravatsky, Judy Mascis, and Josephine Zangl, but they were unfailingly patient and cheerful as they logged me on to the computer almost daily and answered my many questions.

Members of my civilian support network have included Saundra Collins, Joseph J. Hurrell, Jr., Rita Schafer, Roland Siiter, Lisa Staszak, Nick Humez, Cynthia Radnitz, JoAnn Jandoli, and Verna Louden. I always have been able to call on them for professional and personal support. Diane Delaney, who also is a special friend, kindly read and commented on the section on nutrition.

I must acknowledge here my debt to two academic mentors, now deceased. Barbara Dohrenwend was a superb researcher and pioneer in the stress field. She also was a person of great integrity, courage, and an extraordinary commitment to ethics, even if she had to take unpopular positions. Her untimely death was a tremendous loss to all of us who knew and worked with her. She is the model to which I aspire.

My second acknowledgement in the academic realm is to the late Robert Buckhout. Bob was one of the first (modern) researchers to work in the field of the eyewitness. His work was seminal, encouraging others to do research in the area.

Very special thanks go to (very much alive) Fred Tanis, my surrogate brother. Finally, thanks to Donald Pitches, who has been a shining presence in my life and the shelter of a mighty rock within a–sometimes–weary land. Donald has helped me keep my life and the world in perspective. We laugh together a lot–and occasionally cry a bit. Donald twinkles with a spirit's light.

CONTENTS

STRESS AND THE POLICE OFFICER

Chapter 1

THE NATURE OF STRESS

INTRODUCTION

Everyone acknowledges that life today can be stressful; in this, researchers (see Lehrer & Richardson, 1993), the popular media, and the average person agree. So, too, everyone agrees that stress can be harmful; we find research linking stress with a wide variety of physical and emotional ills (Sapolsky, 1994; Lehrer & Richardson, 1993; Holmes & Masuda, 1974). It also has been implicated in a multiplicity of organizational problems (Murphy et al., 1995; Ayers, 1990).

Despite more than 50 years of research and more than 25 years of intense interest in the popular media, there is a striking paucity of agreement about the specific nature of stress, its effects on physical and emotional well-being, the severity or length of time necessary for a stressful event, or combination of stressful events, to lead to damage. Nor is there agreement on the characteristics of individual biology or personality that may mediate the effects of potentially stressful events. Controversy also surrounds the part played by work situations, family and peer support, cultural expectations, and the like. Many interventions to reduce the impact of events thought to be stressful have been proposed, but none has received unequivocal support (Lehrer & Richardson, 1993). There even is controversy over the meaning of the term itself.

Because stress is a complex phenomenon, it requires complex research methodology for its study. Debate over appropriate approaches rages in the professional literature (Brown & Campbell, 1994; Lehrer & Richardson, 1993; Coyne & Lazarus, 1979; Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend, 1974). Much of the more elegant

research has been done in laboratories, under artificial conditions and with limited time spans, and may have little applicability to real-life situations.

Any statements about stress and its effects, then, must be made with some caution. Given the current state of knowledge, no absolute, categorical statements are appropriate. This is especially crucial to remember in light of the numerous strategies found with great regularity in newspapers and magazines, and in expensive "seminars" that *guarantee* instant solutions for reducing both the stress of everyday life and that which comes from great trauma.[1] This does not mean, however, that it is impossible to make a beginning. As in most areas of knowledge, the emphasis is on making educated guesses and on improving percentages.

There is another reason for undertaking programs aimed at reducing the potential negative effects of stress before all the returns are in. Virtually all the techniques that have been recommended work to improve the quality of life in other areas as well. At least, if they are not effective, they are benign. Thus, appropriate recognition for good work on the job is thought both to increase efficiency and to decrease the problems typically associated with stress. Exercise and weight control programs improve general physical condition, strengthen the heart and lungs, decrease the risk of bone loss, and enhance feelings of well-being, while making it easier for the individual to deal with the physiological strain put on the body by stressful event.

In stress management, as in almost every other area of human functioning, there is no foolproof formula for success. As we will see, individuals differ markedly in the events they define as stressful, in the ways they react to pressure, and in the specific techniques for dealing with stressful events that will be most successful (Sapolsky, 1994; Lehrer & Woolfolk, 1993). Despite this, it is possible to offer some suggestions that work for many people. It is up to each individual and organization to decide how to use this information.

This chapter will present an overview of the research on the nature of stress. Then I will summarize the most prevalent theories about the

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1. We have seen this in the aftermath of the tragedy of September 11, 2001. Virtually every newspaper and periodical I have read had a list of ways to reduce the impact of those events. Some of them are accurate, as far as they go, but they do not give sufficient guidance to be practical. Further, they can be dangerous. They can lead a person who tries to follow the suggestions and does not get instant relief to blame him or herself: "I must be doing something wrong."

nature of those events (called "pressures" or "stressors") that are believed to be involved in the stress process.

DEFINITION

A first area of disagreement in stress research is over how the term "stress" should be used (Brown & Campbell, 1994; Lehrer & Richardson, 1993; Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend, 1974; van Dijkhuizen, 1980).[2] Some researchers use it to mean the event or situation outside the person, such as a catastrophic event or accident, extremes of temperature, crowding, physical isolation, loud noise, shift work, a death in the family, or a reprimand from a superior. Others use it for the inner state of the individual, a state that can seldom be measured directly, but can be inferred from behavior, such as clenched teeth or expressions of distress, or from some other measurable state, such as the level of certain chemicals in the blood.[3] Anxiety, anger, joy, frustration, and sadness fit into this category. Indeed, Cofer and Appley (1964, p. 441) point out rather irritably that "it [stress] has all but preempted a field previously shared by a number of other concepts," including frustration, conflict and anxiety. They and others seem to feel that such a broad scope so dilutes the meaning of the term as to make it almost meaningless, and certainly makes it difficult to study with any scientific rigor. Especially, it makes comparisons across studies difficult if not impossible.

A third common use of the term "stress" refers to an observable response to an external or internal stimulus or situation, both physiological responses, such as sweating palms, pounding heart, increased adrenaline flow, and more behavioral ones such as yelling and cursing or other aggressive responses, crying, the regression that involves behaving in more child-like ways, and the like. On a longer-term basis, measures are taken of physical conditions such as absenteeism, heart attacks, ulcers or a variety of other ailments, or emotional and interpersonal problems such as depression, anxiety, divorce, domestic abuse, early retirement, or number of incidents of command discipline.

2. As the reader may notice, this debate has been ongoing for a number of years.
3. The ability to measure biological states which are believed to be correlated with external events has increased dramatically in recent years. For a very readable review of the effects of external events on levels of hormones in humans and animals, see Sapolsky (1994).