

# Police and mentally ill: brutality and treatment for it



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America is a model country to the whole world. The communities that make it up have at one stage in life experienced challenges from a mentally ill person. They do not hesitate to call out for help. The first option they seek is the police, and they are never let down. This is a common occurrence in the daily lives of many Americans. The eventual interaction between the police and the mentally ill is a scene one would never wish to recollect. Some of the police officers are poorly trained and occasionally get frightened by the mentally ill people. They end up using excessive force on this people. This should not be the case as mentally ill are people always dire need of psychiatric attention. (Christian, 2012).

The lack of efficient health centers for the mentally ill is the main cause of these problems. There is little attention offered to these groups of people. They are highly despised in society. The mentally may end up seeking self help, in turn messing up. Their actions are deemed dangerous to the society. The only solution is to do away with them. Their families fail to understand the verdict behind their actions of involving the police in such cases which would have been solved amicably if mental health professionals were sought. We cannot blame the families on a larger extent as institutions to support the mentally ill do not exist. It has been a culture for quite some time now that the police are the only remedy. (Peter, 2005)

The information accorded to the police regarding the state of the mentally ill person is very crucial to the way they react to that case. Failure to give the correct details of the situation on the ground may elicit a wrong picture. The most saddening thing is that the training provided to these police officers is so poor that their services are always rendered damaging and ineffective.

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Instances do occur where parents report of a mentally ill person being on the verge of committing suicide, maybe in possession of a gun. This will call for police to be on high alert and armed to the latter. Response to a tragedy is also important. There may be a better solution to the situation, and it may never occur as an emergency all the same.

Many cases have been reported of harsh treatment of police on mentally ill people. The case involving Ricardo Clos, 1999, where he was reportedly shot at, 38 times, by the deputies of the sheriff for Los Angeles, elicited a lot of criticism from the public. His wife called the police in light of Ricardo attempting suicide by cutting himself in the neck. The police had no other option but to open fire immediately Ricardo proved dangerous by throwing a knife at them (missed hitting them). Another case occurred in April 1999 when a man, who stabbed himself severally, was shot down by police after giving a cold shoulder to their call to surrender. Gidone Busch, a more recent case involving the police and mentally ill, died after being shot more than twelve times by police in California. (Christian, 2012). These incidences have greatly dented the image of the police force in America. The various communities involved have never failed to air their grievances.

There are other incidents where the police are provoked beyond their control, to shoot at these mentally ill people. These are mainly the suicidal cases, hence being referred to as the 'suicide by cop'. The Colorado killings of 2009 fit this situation. A crazy incident occurred where a young man, under the depression of breaking up with his girlfriend, ran to the police with a knife in his hand shouting "shoot me, shoot me". He was shot dead in July, that year, since the police had no other option. The same police department <https://assignbuster.com/police-and-mentally-ill-brutality-and-treatment-for-it/>

caused the death of another disturbed father in March 2009 by shooting him to death. Many similar cases have been evident across many divides in the United States of America. These cases call for scrutiny of the major causes behind the shootings by the police. They may never be to blame for such cases as there life may also be put at risk. (Christian, 2012)

Organizations such as Amnesty International have come in handy to help in assessing this fatal shooting incidences and providing solace to families that may feel aggrieved by the police. Amnesty International wrote to the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), demanding explanation for the shooting of Mitchell Laverne in June 1999. The latter was mentally ill and homeless. She was shot when she tried to project at the police with a screw driver. The police engaged her, aimlessly, interfering with her privacy. Amnesty International viewed the shooting as being inappropriate and an act of injustice. The case is still under investigation, hoping justice will prevail.

Another group, the NYPD has been very effective for many years in providing guidelines to families on how to deal with the mentally challenged individuals. This also includes guidelines to police officers, especially in the Emergency Service Unit. The earlier mentioned case of Gidone Busch however challenged these guidelines as the case was not handled properly. The major undoing of these policies and guidelines is the right application and timing while using them.

Society is bigger than any single individual or group of people. Radical changes to the way the mentally disturbed people cases are handled have to be embraced immediately. Community- based services will provide a more

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comforting solution to these individuals. These include counseling, education programmes for those who take care of these individuals, and outpatient clinics. These changes may however take effect in the long term and we need immediate response to these challenges.

The short term measures include giving personal attention to the mentally ill people while at the same time providing adequate training and skills to police officers. They need to understand that the mentally ill are human, and need fair treatment as the other people. If the community-based approach will call for more patience and the only option thus being the police, they need to get the best training on handling the mentally ill. (Wayne, 2005).

There is reason to smile. Amnesty International, through research, recommended the " Memphis Plan", a program deemed as the most appropriate in handling these cases. It advocates for mental health experts to give special training to respective in line with handling crisis situations and any violence de-escalation. It calls for dispatching of mentally challenged people to mental health centers handling crisis rather than police centers. It has so far been adopted by many police centers such as Portland (Oregon), Waterloo (Iowa) and the Houston police Department in Texas. This is meant to weed out the violence reported cases in the media, social sites, and generally in society. The fast adoption by other police centers is a major breakthrough towards a better society. (Coffey, 2012)

Several police departments in the US have taken a personal initiative of working on efficient mechanisms to combat this problem. A good example is

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in Portland, where most cases of fatal shooting of the mentally ill have been reported. There are task forces that have been developed to tackle the mental health issues. It is an important step towards a better society. It is a course of action worth appreciating. However, change has to come from within and at a larger front. Standards of training offered to police needs to be changed, and internationally accepted humanitarian concerns have to be factored out. The officers have to be friends of society and not seen as great enemies or forces of destruction. They should protect the public but not at the expense of human rights of other individuals. Nations all over the world need to embrace the change advocated for in standards required for police training. This will provide the police officers with adequate training in mental health management. There is need for a universally accepted training manual for this sector. (Dick, 2010).

Lessons offered to the police officers on how officers how to handle encounters with mentally challenged individuals should always include familiarization with the most common mental health issues, training involving non-lethal restraint cases as well as use of verbal negotiations with people involved in crisis. It also calls for the development of an action plan which includes emergency personnel namely the paramedics, firefighters as well as police officers. (Wayne, 2005).

Society has to respect the efforts embraced by the government towards creating a peaceful society. The police have to respect the rights of individuals at all costs, and never should they apply their powers in a forceful and harmful way. There should be a fast response towards adoption of the recommendations put forward.

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