

# Social and psychological affects on a rookie police officer

[Government](#), [Military](#)



Is police work a stressful job? Is it stressful when you are making over one hundred thousand dollars a year, as are some officers? What is the home life like of a police officer? What are the occupational and social stresses that an officer must deal with? What dangers do officers deal with every time they put on their shield? What must they give up in life, when they decide they want to cross the "blue line"? Over the next ten pages or so, I am going to tackle these areas as well as many others, while I try to portray the stresses of being a police officer.

Some people may feel that even though police officers have probably the toughest job in the country, that they do not get stressed out, and it is not brought into their home life. However I personally feel, that if the job is too stressful, then the officer in question may not be able to do the job up to his or her potential. Now, if the officer is not able to fully do the job up to his or her potential, then we as citizens are not as safe and secure as we should be. Many officers have the stress of marriage and kids, poor work hours, and poor working conditions because of the areas that they work in.

They must deal with citizens who are not always up to code, when it comes to doing the right thing. Officers have to deal with being berated by people who do not necessarily view them as an authority figure. All of these extenuating circumstances can lead a person, in any occupation, to become stressed, but a police officer has to deal with this everyday. While doing the research for this paper, I was able to find a broad array of articles ranging from the divorce rates of police officers, to the suicide rate of police officers, which grew tremendously from the nineteen eighties through today.

I was able to find one particular article that discussed the stresses of being undercover. I was also fortunate enough, to have spoken with my cousin's fiancée, who is also an undercover officer (although I'll try not to divulge the specifics of his work). There were articles on how the danger of policing is increasing today to what it is like to actually be a law enforcement officer. There are people who feel that law enforcement officers are not embraced by the community, but have to admit that their task is difficult. Laurence miller said, " Police officers regularly deal with the most violent, impulsive, predatory members of society" ([www.aets.org/article87.html](http://www.aets.org/article87.html)) He also went on to discuss the stress level of their job, and how they are " more reluctant to talk to outsiders or to show weakness in front of their peers" ([www.aets.org/article87.html](http://www.aets.org/article87.html)). Law enforcement is a difficult field to get into. You have to make many sacrifices when you join the force. There are friends that you have to give up and holidays that you will miss. You will miss nights out with friends and possibly miss your kids birthday. A lot of people leave nice office jobs with no risk or pressure, where they work in a stress free environment.

They get thrown right into the fray, doing things they would have never imagined. They go out there and they protect us. They do the things we do not want to do. They keep our neighborhoods safe at night, they keep the drug dealers off the streets and they provide a sense of calming in our hearts when we see them out there doing their jobs. However, I do not think we have ever really taken a look at what goes on with them. I feel that there is a lot of stress that is put on them and I am going to prove to you, that being a police officer has a lot more stress than you could have imagined.

I stated that the job is so stressful on some officers that it breaks up their families. The national divorce rate is fifty percent. However, the divorce rate for police officers is sixty to seventy five percent (Police Stress And The Effects On Family, Sgt. Corey Haines pg. 6 <http://www.emich.edu/cerns/downloads/papers/PoliceStaff> ) Sgt. Haines tells us that in a “twenty to twenty five year career, it is not particularly unusual for an officer to go through six to eight marriages” (police stress and the effects on family, Sgt. Corey Haines pg. 6). Why is it that an officer’s marriage is torn apart when he is on the force?

It is because of the level of stress that is brought upon this individual, and not knowing how to handle it. If an officer was trained to handle their stress more effectively, I do not feel that we would see such a drastic rate of divorce. “By managing stress more effectively officer will have the tools necessary to be better equipped in their professional and personal live” (<http://www.emich.edu/cerns/downloads/papers/PoliceStaff> pg. 7). Sgt. Haines once again goes on to explain that officers feel that only other officers understand their careers and problem, and that leads them into isolation from their families.

He says that “Too many times officers choose to spend their off-duty time venting their frustrations with co-workers rather than spending quality time with their spouses (<http://www.emich.edu/cerns/downloads/papers/PoliceStaff> pg. 7). Obviously this leads to the stress not only being put onto the officer, but also onto their families. It eventually gives their family the feeling that they are being pushed away,

and left out of an important part of their spouse's life. We know that the stress of the job can lead to these high divorce rates.

The question I ask you is, how do we curve these trends in the other direction? Sgt. Haines feels that " officers and supervisors should be taught about the symptoms and effects of job stress. Proactive training helps ward off stress when officers encounter it. When an officer suffers from stress, reactive counseling and training should be available" (police stress and the effects on family, Sgt. Corey Haines pg. 8). Sgt. Haines has seen that when an officer has the proper training in dealing with stress, that they are able to tackle the problem efficiently.

He wrote that " programs for individuals often help reduce organizational stress. When a department provides a psychologist and a chaplain, the officers see that someone at the top does understand their problems and is trying to help. " ((<http://www.emich.edu/cerns/downloads/papers/PoliceStaff> pg. 8) I know that stress can not be taken out of police work, but if it is recognized by the department and dealt with in a timely manner, then I feel that it can have a lasting affect on an officer's quality of life and career. It is also understood that the job is not creating all of the stress in an officer's life.

I understand that there are always going to be issues at home. Fighting with the wife, getting the kids through school and everything else that comes with being a husband and a father. The thing is, you have to be able to separate your social life, or the life you are used to, from your job. The second your tour starts you have to give one hundred percent of your attention to police

work. If you are not giving all of your attention to your job, you are endangering yourself and the lives of everyone you are being paid to protect.

Family stresses are not the only thing that a police officer has to deal with. While talking to my cousin's fiance yesterday, and discussing with him the topic of my paper, he really opened my eyes about some things. He actually told me that when you are a civilian, you kind of just take things for granted. It is like saying " ok I can go to the bar today and watch football" and you will not have to worry about who is there. However when you are on the force, you have to realize who your friends are. You can not hang around with people who have a negative influence on your life.

You constantly have to think to yourself, " What kind of impact will this have on me and my career". Some friends that you may have known since you grew up may not be able to be a part of your life anymore. These are sacrifices that you have to make for your career, and they can cause a great amount of stress on you. Cops are different from you and I. When we see cops, we see them for the most part as authority figures. We deal with them differently, as opposed to how we would deal with someone who did not have any authority. " Some people say cops are never off-duty.

Even when the officer is not working, there is a tendency to attack problems and take charge" ([www.heavybadge.com/10reasons.html](http://www.heavybadge.com/10reasons.html)). Why is it, that we automatically assume since someone is a cop, that they must help? Do we not think that, " hey maybe we are putting a lot of pressure on this guy? ' We do not realize that cops are isolated from us. " The wearing of a badge,

uniform and gun makes a law officer separate from society. This segregation leads to many psychological effects which research shows can create negative personality traits" (www. heavybadge. com/10reasons. tml). We go on to learn that just wearing the badge or a gun can cause an officer to act more aggressively toward people, and these are changes that can happen to anyone wearing a badge or uniform. However " many officers suggest there is a role, or mask which they put on along with their uniform" (www. heavybadge. com/10reasons. html).

What they are not telling us is, that sometimes their " role" leaks over into their personal lives and changes the course of their relationships. " Law enforcement officers work in a quasi-military, structured institution" (www. eavybadge. com/10reasons. html). Now what this particular passage is talking about is the fact that, in a military type environment, the " individual" is not of a great concern. In this instance the " individual" is the officer. In these types of environments it is the goal of the group that is paramount to success. If an officer is not performing up to standards and hinders the group performance, then they will be punished. They will " de-humanize you, to make you realize you are only a valued part of a machine" (www. heavybadge. com/10reasons. tml). How does that make an individual feel? Knowing that no matter what you do, you are not recognized as an individual, but only as a cog in a machine. The stress of performance can add up, knowing if you do not perform, there will be consequences. However it is not all the quasi-military style that can bring on the amounts of stress that officers deal with. What we need to realize is that " the at work world of

the officers is very negative” (www. heavybadge. com/10reasons. html. An officer is constantly seeing the bad part of society.

Granted you do see good things along the way. However it is the job of the police officer to find the bad, and deal with it. Is it always fun to work in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn and see these teenagers, who have their whole lives ahead of them, going down the wrong path? Is it not stressful to know that all these kids need is a little bit of education, and guidance in their lives. I feel it is more stressful on the officers in today’s world, when it seems like every time you read the newspaper, you see a random person getting hit with a stray bullet shot by a teen.

These could be your kids, and you never really know what is going on when you are on the job. It is extremely stressful when you have to deal with kids, going down the wrong path constantly. Officer Dan Goldfarb gave a speech to union delegates and defined stress as “ that feeling and desire along with the ensuing bodily effects, experienced by a person who has a strong and true longing to choke the living shit out of someone who desperately deserves it, but you can not” (www. heavybadge. com/efstress. html. ) What officer Goldfarb is trying to portray in his speech is that an officer has to show a tremendous amount of restraint. He says “ police work by its nature calls for an incredible amount of restraint” (www. heavybadge. com/efstress. html. ) The demand on officers to show greater restraint has grown over the years, and with that so has the stress level on the job. “ Between nineteen thirty four and nineteen sixty, police suicide rates were half that of the general population. Between nineteen eighty to the present, suicide rates in



some departments have doubled. " (www. heavybadge. com/efstress. html. Why has the suicide rate jumped to this rather high figure? Well according to officer Goldfarb, it is because " you can not choke them anymore" (www. heavybadge. com/efstress. html. ) What he is portraying is that street justice is all but gone. Everyone has video cameras and the media just loves to put officers down. " Politicians continue to pander to the public with new laws and restrictions for police officers that further tie their hands" (www. heavybadge. com/efstress. html. ) Why is it that politicians are always so eager to get involved in police matters?

Well for one it has to do with public appeal. If a politician is not doing anything good, and he needs to save face, what is the best way to do it? Get on top of law enforcement. There are some people who do not like law enforcement. It is like always having a way out. No matter how bad you are at your job, you can always go the route of law enforcement. However there are some politicians who use law enforcement to further their own agenda. I am not going to mention names but in my opinion the reverend Al Sharpton tends to do this a lot. Let me ask you this, do we ever really hear from good old Al?

Nope, Only when there has been an altercation involving African Americans and usually the police, does Al come out of the wood works to spew his hatred of the New York Police Department to national television. If it was not for the police officers doing their jobs, then poor Mr. Sharpton would never have a reason to come out. Politicians are not the last people to stress out the police. Leah Cook, a student at San Jose State University wrote " in the

media, it seemed that police officers were seldom praised, but rather criticized or harassed for overstepping civil rights boundaries". [www.focusanthro.org/essays/cook--03-04.html](http://www.focusanthro.org/essays/cook--03-04.html))

She was telling us how news reports (once again the media) are quick to accuse police officers for brutality. However the " police departments have set policies and procedures to ensure officer safety, even if it means physically restraining an unruly citizen. " ([www.focusanthro.org/essays/cook--03-04.html](http://www.focusanthro.org/essays/cook--03-04.html)). What we need to understand is that with varying degrees of conduct, it should be understood that law enforcement will receive mixed reviews. one day officers are being publicized as heroes, like the praise they received after September eleventh, while on the next, they are portrayed as racist, brutal, and authoritarian" ([www.focusanthro.org/essays/cook--03-04.html](http://www.focusanthro.org/essays/cook--03-04.html)). I feel that it adds a tremendous amount of stress when you are doing a job that does not have constant public support. It adds to their stress level because there is a " negative and disrespectful image of law enforcement officers in our society" ([www.focusanthro.org/essays/cook--03-04.html](http://www.focusanthro.org/essays/cook--03-04.html)). I just do not understand why we have such a low level of respect for our police officers.

Maybe it is because of the money that Nassau and Suffolk police make. Although we can not really make that argument for the New York Police Department, because as we all know they are grossly underpaid for the job that they do. A lot of times the stress of a police officer is brought upon them at the Police Academy. Leah states that " while in the academy, training officers constantly remind the recruits that they are personally liable for their

actions once they are out on the field” (www. focusanthro. org/essays/cook--03-04. html) . They are told stories of how cops are sued, became alcoholics, druggies, wife beaters and even worse committed suicide” (www. focusanthro. org/essays/cook--03-04. html). The trainers are basically not selling the job well, and sending new officers out there with low morale. I think it is a good thing that the trainers are telling new recruits how it really is. However if it is going to hinder the morale of your newest officers, then maybe there is a better way to get the message across. I do not know if I would feel comfortable in a new situation, with all that is being thrown at me, to be told of these other officers.

I would personally find it extremely stressful to know that this could happen to me. It is like they are adding the first layer of stress, when there is just going to be tons more thrown at them, the second they hit the streets. Knowing what we now know, I feel I was successfully able to articulate the stresses of police work. It can be hard for some officers to be out on the street dealing with criminals every night. It is tough on your marriage, when you are working shifts that make it hard to see your family. It is stressful when your marriage falls apart.

Some officers will slip into that state of alcoholism, some will become druggies. We will always have that threat of an officer committing suicide. However for the officers that are out there, who love their jobs, I think that stress is more than manageable. We have to know that we can go home at night, and speak with our spouse. Do not shut them out of your lives. Be open about the way you are feeling, and speak when you feel things are

getting to be too much. Someone will always be there for you. We just need you to open the door.