

The Effects of Stress on Law Enforcement Officers

Grace Towler

Abstract

The Sanibel Police Department officers and dispatchers were surveyed using a ten-question anonymous survey to determine how the effects of stress affects them. The questions queried the participants on topics such as does the Operational and Organizational Stress affect their health, should a Periodic Physical Exam be mandated, should a yearly Physical fitness result in a pay raise, and if they were familiar with the City of Sanibel Wellness Program. The participants answers were charted and discussed in this paper. There will be four recommendations to the Chief of Police in hopes of strengthening our relationships within the department.

Introduction

Law enforcement officers encounter stress from all areas whether they are on duty or off duty. This career field demands you to be available to respond 24/7 even at a short notice whether it's a natural disaster, staff shortage, special details, events, mandatory training, or overtime; the list continues. So why do we choose to serve and protect in our communities? The answer although simple is very complex. Many believe it's a calling that this is what we are supposed to be doing serving and protecting. Why else would officers put their lives on the line day in and day out, sacrifice themselves for strangers, miss children's birthdays and holidays, sporting events and torture their bodies with shift work. There is a personal enjoyment and satisfaction that an officer receives knowing they make a difference in this chaotic world.

Officer's encounter with stress can be cumulative or traumatic both taking a toll on the officer. Cumulative stress builds up from the first day in the academy and continues to grow and fester unless you get a handle on it. Traumatic stress can happen at any time such as a car accident, injury from a use of force, or every law enforcement officer's nightmare, being shot or killed in the line of duty. Research has shown that stress not only affects the physical human body but also affects our mental state of mind. It is evident that there needs to be more research conducted on stress as it correlates to mental health. The stigma of mental health issues as they are associated with law enforcement officers, not only is a barrier, it's a wall that officers may find difficult to climb.

Law enforcement officers are seen being strong physically and mentally in the eyes of their community, spouses, and family but more importantly to their brothers and sisters that stand beside them. In order to identify the sources and effects of stress that officers encounter on a daily, stress itself, will have to be defined and examined. The objective of this research is to determine what the officer's incentives are to be healthy

and physically fit. The purpose of establishing or accessing a health and wellness plan for officers is to give them a fighting chance to have a healthy and happy career. When an officer utilizes these programs and benefits it not only benefits the officer and the department but also the community in which they serve.

Literature Review

Sources of Occupational Stress

Law enforcement is one of the most stressful careers in society and dealing with stress is an everyday issue. The medical definition of stress is defined as: In a medical or biological context stress is a physical, mental, or emotional factor that causes bodily or mental tension. Stresses can be external (from the environment, psychological, or social situations) or internal (illness, or from a medical procedure). Stress can initiate the "fight or flight" response, a complex reaction of neurologic and endocrinologic systems (Shiel, 2018). Therefore, job-related stress in the workplace plays a role in how the body reacts to daily life.

In the research that Irving conducted regarding Occupational Stress and the Law Enforcement Officer Significant Relationships, Irving states that "stressors influence the response of the officer to the incident while strain is the long-term effect from the stressors" (Irving, 2017). Occupational stress consists of job demands, control, supervisor and manager support, workload, environment, work schedules including overtime, shift changes (Irving, 2017). Within occupational stress there are several terms that need to be explained in relation to law enforcement. The term "Critical Incident" is any significant event in a person's life that has a stressful impact on their beliefs or values and overwhelms or upsets the individual (Kulbarsh, 2007). These abrupt and powerful events may be unordinary experiences that cause individuals to have unusual and unexpected types of coping behaviors. The critical incidents that law enforcement officers respond to and observe during their tour of duty may have a strong emotional impact on the community and the officers (Kulbarsh, 2007). The term "Post-traumatic stress disorder" is a mental health condition that can develop and be triggered after a person has experienced or been exposed to a terrifying event. People who suffer from PTSD may experience flashbacks, nightmares, depression, severe anxiety, and emotional illness as well as uncontrollable thoughts about an event (Irving, 2017).

The unexpected work pressure that officers deal with daily creates undo stress which in turn has a direct effect on the officer as previously defined in this study. Officers commonly have inconsistent work schedules, mandatory overtime, and court appearances. Law enforcement officers also experience stress and strain from the community and community leaders as well as political leaders because of the incidents that occur daily in their work environment. Officers are held accountable for incidents whether they are personally involved in the incident or not (Irving, 2017). The daily risk that law enforcement officers may lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), high blood pressure, insomnia, heart problems, and suicide (Irving, 2017).

The two different types of occupational stress discussed in this article by Irving include operational and organizational stress. These two types of occupational stress are relevant to how stress affects law enforcement officers.

The terms are defined and explained throughout Irving's article although Irving relates them to the topic of relationships (Irving, 2017). Examining two factors of occupational stress; organizational work-related stress levels and operational work stress levels help officers to understand their behaviors when interacting with family members, significant others and intimate partners (Irving, 2017).

Operational stress

Operational stress is defined as the aspects of the operations of the organization. (Irving, 2017). "Stressors associated with operational stress include issues experienced by officers which may include fatigue, back pain due to duty belt, the ability to handle traumatic events, shift work, eating habits, work load, communication with supervisors, communication with coworkers, public support dealing with the court system, adverse effects on health, adverse effects of personal relationships, and the administration" (Irving, 2017). Operational stress is faced daily by law enforcement officers as part of their job duties. "It includes the exposure to traumatic events; murder, assaults, shootings" (Violanti, 1999). "It also includes dealing with crime victims and perpetrators, and the criminal justice system; and police work's requirement of shift work are cited as operational stressors inherent in policing" (Violanti, 1999). Law enforcement officers consider the daily duties they perform more routine and less problematic than the actual stress they experience as a part of organizational situations and culture may prove problematic for officers (McCreary, 2006).

Organizational Stress

In Irving's article he quotes Stinchcomb from an article about stress by saying "organizational stress is that stress which involves organizational structure and characteristics including poor communication and efficiency in decision making, leadership and leadership styles, promotional interests, policies and procedures and work schedules" (Stinchcomb, 2004). "Much of the literature on police-related stress has focused on its intrapersonal nature, particularly in terms of the impact of such stressors as traumatic incidents and life-or-death decision-making" (Stinchcomb, 2004). When dealing with organizational stress traditional remedies have generally focused on one of two models: (1) clinical intervention through psychological counseling or (2) individual coping through training programs that teach stress-reducing techniques ranging from exercise to transcendental meditation. Yet neither of these causes nor their accompanying solutions address the chronic sources of organizationally induced stress that have the capacity for taking a far greater toll on the long-term health and well-being of police personnel. (Stinchcomb, 2004).

McCreary (2006) describes organizational stress as the rules and administrative practices of the police department which includes management and supervisors. They also specify that practices within the structure of the organization create stressors which include constant changes in policy and procedures, lack of resources to perform daily

duties, inadequate or outdated equipment, promotions, staff shortages, staff retention, and internal investigations. Policies and procedures within agencies along with inadequate rules and regulations within the department may create a stressful working environment for officers (McCreary, 2006). It is important that there is good quality of communication between the field or line officers and administrators must remain clear when discussing the causes of stress (Stinchcomb, 2004). Law enforcement officers experience stress which may result in emotional, physical and mental health concerns. (Irving, 2017)

Effects of Stress

In dealing with stress management one of the negative effects of occupational stress in the workplace is incivility. Incivility is defined by Merriam-Webster, as the quality or state of being uncivil or a rude or discourteous act. According Allison Abrams, Psychotherapist and Licensed Clinical Social Worker, in her article *How a Toxic Work Environment Affects Your Mental Health*, she discusses what is workplace incivility, why quality of sleep matters, and the effects of negative rumination. Not only is incivility in the workplace on the rise, but according to a recent study, it is compromising one of our most critical assets—our mental health (Abrams, 2018). The authors of the study, published in the *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, looked at the correlation between toxicity in the workplace and symptoms of insomnia, a common symptom of clinical depression. They wanted to know *how*, or via which mechanism, incivility in the workplace negatively affected employees' sleep quality, as there has been limited research into this factor (Abrams, 2018).

Abrams summarizes the original study that suggested that when you can have a work life balance this can help you deal with workplace incivility. Relaxation can be described as a buffer between the two. Individuals especially law enforcement officers who can utilize relaxation techniques or methods such as yoga or meditation have a better quality of sleep than those who don't. There are other avenues of relaxation such as walking, listening to music, spending time with friends, and outdoor activities such as fishing or hiking. Training and prevention on the topic of workplace incivility should take a priority in helping the officer become prepared to deal with fellow co-worker's who think this type of behavior is accepted or wanted in the workplace (Abrams, 2018).

Sleep is a crucial factor on how our bodies perform daily. Studies have shown that poor quality of sleep have direct correlations to our physical and mental well-being. For example, insufficient sleep increases a person's risk of developing serious medical conditions, including obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease. Additionally, lack of sleep over time has been associated with a shortened lifespan (Abrams, 2018).

One factor that impacts sleep is described as the effects of negative rumination. A toxic workplace can increase depression, substance use, and several health issues. These adverse effects include decreased productivity, low morale, and officers leaving one department in hopes of a better work environment. But there is hope in that there are coping techniques that the officer can use to help reduce the effects of workplace incivility (Abrams, 2018).

Not only is quality of sleep a factor in workplace incivility but one of the indirect effects of workplace incivility is negative rumination. This is when you replay or

continually think about a negative act or event that you may have encountered sometime during your shift. If you focus on how you can change what was done or how it was done your mind continues to replay this event. This adversely affects your quality of sleep (Abrams, 2018).

In law enforcement this type of behavior can come from co-workers or the individuals you deal with daily. Workplace incivility otherwise known as deviant workplace behavior can include gossip, being rude or discourteous, interrupting people, berating a co-worker, using demeaning language, creating drama to name a few (Abrams, 2018).

Police officers report high rates of divorce, alcoholism, suicide, and other emotional and health problems. An article in the National Institute of Justice documents the causes and effects of job-related stress affecting law enforcement officers and their families. There are many consequences of job-related stress reported by police officers to include the following: cynicism and suspiciousness, emotional detachment, reduced efficiency, early retirement, job related stresses, excessive aggressiveness, alcoholism and other substance abuse problems, marital or other family problems (example, extramarital affairs, divorce, or domestic violence, post-traumatic stress disorder, heart attacks, ulcers, weight gain, and other health problems, and suicide). So why start or expand a stress reduction program? This article makes it clear that stress has to be dealt with and the need to reduce and prevent it should be a focus of all law enforcement agencies (Peter, 2000).

Research has shown that the effects of stress can impair how an officer performs their duties. When this happens the efficiency and effectiveness of the level of service given to the community is lacking in several ways. The officer becomes “hard”, calloused, or aggressive. Some officers choose early retirement or develop post-traumatic stress disorder. The officer’s job performance can be a negative impact on the department by tardiness, absenteeism, and low morale (Peter, 2000).

Unfortunately, these negative effects often spill over into their family life. As previously discussed, the effects of stress take their toll on the officer. Just imagine what it’s like to be the spouse or child of an officer. The emotional impact and the stressful home life not only can leave a negative impact while off duty but also while on duty. Some sources of stress that the officer’s spouse refers to include but not limited to shift work, shift rotations, fear that their loved one will be killed in the line of duty, presence of weapons in the home, always in a 24-hour role, family member’s perception that the officer is paranoid or overprotective to name a few (Peter, 2000).

Stress reductions training and methods may be an effective way for the recruit to recognize stress and to develop individual coping strategies. This training will benefit the recruit and their department. When the community and the law enforcement agencies have a good working relationship then everyone benefits. “The most common method for preventing stress is to train officers to recognize its signs and sources and to develop individual coping strategies. Training helps encourage officers and nonsworn personnel to use stress reduction techniques and services and dispels the stigma frequently attached to seeking assistance” (Peter, 2000).

The introduction of millennial generation law enforcement officers creates the potential for increased mental health needs within the field (McGill, 2018). The

millennial generation is characterized by those individuals born between 1982 and 2002. Some would define them as individuals who feel they are entitled to everything. This study completed by McGill illustrates that suicide is the single leading cause of death for United States law enforcement officers. A priority should be placed on more training time for new recruits while they are in the academy on the topics of mental health issues, suicide, and how to manage occupational stressors. "While previous generations have acknowledged and coped with these stressors with varying levels of success, research shows that the millennial generation has reported more mental health issues than any generation in history" (McGill, 2018).

Incentives to be mentally healthy and physically fit

The new guidelines supported by the American Heart Association and the American College of Cardiology voiced their support for the new guidelines for what is considered high blood pressure to be 130/80 MM. The new guidelines are to help individuals to get a better perspective on how high blood pressure can lead to heart attacks or strokes. This article focuses on the importance of diet, activity to lower blood pressure and Dementia by explaining the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diet and the effects it could have on high blood pressure. It provides examples of healthy nutrition and exercise strategies that can be used to combat Heart Disease in Law Enforcement (Carey, 2018).

What are the incentives to a law enforcement officer to be healthy both mentally and physically? When a department establishes and maintains a stress reduction program it requires economic resources that sometimes may not be available in the budget. One obstacle growing police department's face is the space to have workout equipment such as free weights, treadmills, or steppers for the staff. When departments overcome the financial restraints of implementing a wellness plan it can mean cost savings in the long run. "That is because stress affects the bottom line. Agencies can find it enormously costly when employee turnover increases as a result of stress-related early retirement or long-term disability" (Peter, 2000).

Health and Wellness Program

Agencies are using incentives such as bonuses, awards for perfect attendance, bonus hours to donate blood to the community, monthly allowance for gym membership, and even wellness times for the officer to work out during their shift. This should not be the reason the officer stays fit.

This profession is not only mentally challenging it is also physically challenging. It was determined that the research suggests that serving as a law enforcement officer is one of the most stressful careers to pursue in life. "Consequently, law enforcement officers experience higher rates of alcoholism and substance abuse, family problems, domestic violence, PTSD, suicide, heart attacks, ulcers, weight gain, and other health problems compared to the general population" (Toch, 2002). Why should law enforcement and government agencies spend time and money on a stress reduction program? There are many reasons to reduce the stress the officer encounters while performing their duties. We cannot forget the stress an officer encounters in their

personal life. Stress affects the quality of work that an officer performs while on duty. One of the most useful tools available to law enforcement officers is the Employee Assistance Program or EAP. “In order to understand the importance of EAP usage among law enforcement officers, it is necessary to understand the psychological costs associated with law enforcement work” (Donnelly, 2015).

Departments that have health and wellness programs including Employee Assistance Programs are better equipped to help officers recognize and deal with stress.

This research on the effects of stress on a law enforcement officer explained the negatives connotations stress has on the officer. The benefits of managing stress and using behavior modifications and relaxation techniques will help the officer endure a long successful career in law enforcement. Wellness programs give the officer the opportunity to take part in managing their health by monitoring their blood pressure, keep track of their cholesterol and keep their weight in check. Prevention and education awareness is beneficial when we are expecting officers to learn how to cope with stress and have a long and enjoyable career in law enforcement (Donnelly, 2015).

In an article by Christine Porath she states, “Leadership is crucial. In my research, the number-one attribute that garnered commitment and engagement from employees was respect from their leaders. In fact, no other leadership behavior had a bigger effect on employees across the outcomes measured. Being treated with respect was more important to employees than recognition and appreciation, communicating an inspiring vision, providing useful feedback, or even providing opportunities for learning, growth, and development” (Porath, 2016).

The research found that those getting respect from their leaders reported much higher levels of health and well-being; derived greater enjoyment, satisfaction, and meaning from their jobs; and had better focus and a greater ability to prioritize. Those feeling respected were also much more likely to engage with work tasks and more likely to stay with their organizations (Porath, 2016).

Methods

The purpose of this research is to examine the effects of stress on law enforcement officers of the Sanibel Police Department. There were four topics discussed but not limited to: sources of stress, effects of stress, incentives to be healthy and physically fit, and utilizing the city health and wellness program. The data was collected through a ten-question anonymous survey of the Sanibel Police Department’s twenty-four fulltime, three part time sworn police officers, the departments four full time dispatchers, and three part time dispatchers. A total of 34 surveys were distributed to the staff. Information gathered in the survey included range of age, should a periodic physical exam be mandated after your hire date, and whether it should be mandatory to participate in physical fitness testing. Additional information gathered in the survey included whether officers and dispatchers would participate twice a year in a physical fitness test such as the Cooper Test if incentives were offered to them and if they could make changes to the City of Sanibel Health and Wellness Program. There was also an

opportunity to respond to Operational and or the Organizational stress of the department affect your health.

A possible strength of this study is increasing awareness of the incentives to be healthy and physically fit using the health and wellness program. One weakness of this study would be that officers not accurately completing the survey due to the department recently losing an officer to unknown health issues just prior to this study. A second weakness would be that the officers not accurately completing the survey to avoid being identified due to the size of the department although they were advised prior to the survey that the survey results are anonymous.

A copy of the survey instrument is included at the end of this report, listed as Appendix A.

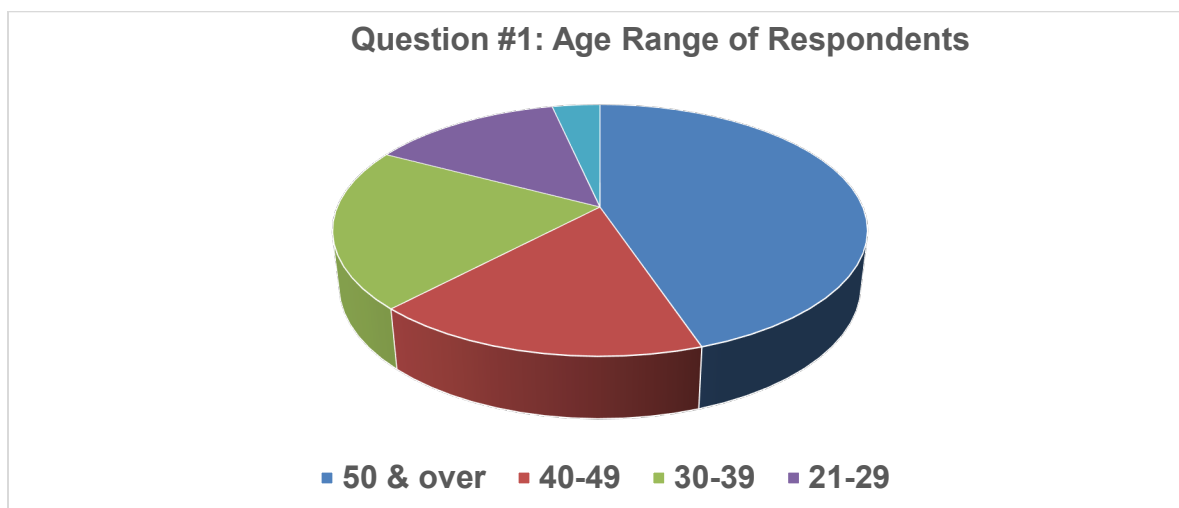
Results

A ten-question survey was distributed to thirty-four sworn and non-sworn individuals which included officers and dispatchers from the Sanibel Police Department. I informed the participants their responses would remain anonymous. I did this in hopes of receiving true and honest responses. I received twenty-nine responses out of the thirty-four surveys that were disseminated. This was a response rate of 85 %. Of those twenty-nine responses, some respondents chose to skip some of the questions in the survey.

The results of the survey will be displayed in charts with the color yellow meaning the answer yes and the color blue meaning the answer no with the exception of Question #1.

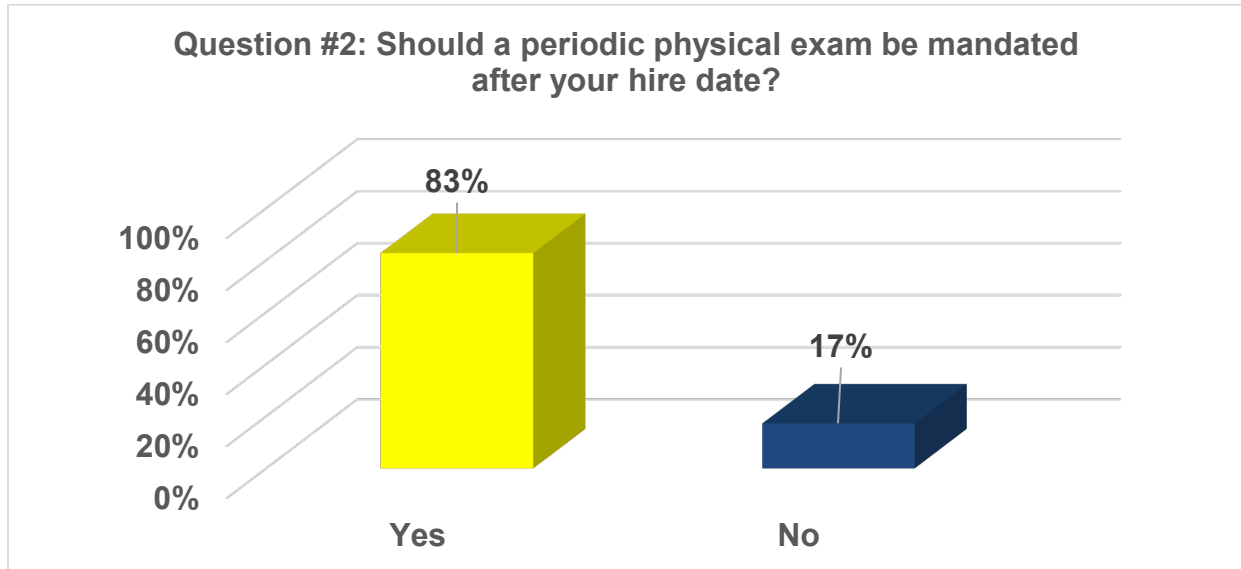
The first question asked participants to indicate their age range. The choices were 50 & over, 40-49, 30-39, and 21-29 years of age. There was one respondent who did not answer this question. Thirteen (46.4%) of respondents were in the age range of 50 & over, five (17.9%) of respondents were in the age range of 40-49, six (21.4%) were in the age range of 30-39, four (14.3%) were in the age range of 21-29.

TABLE 1: Question #1 What are the Age Ranges of the Respondents?



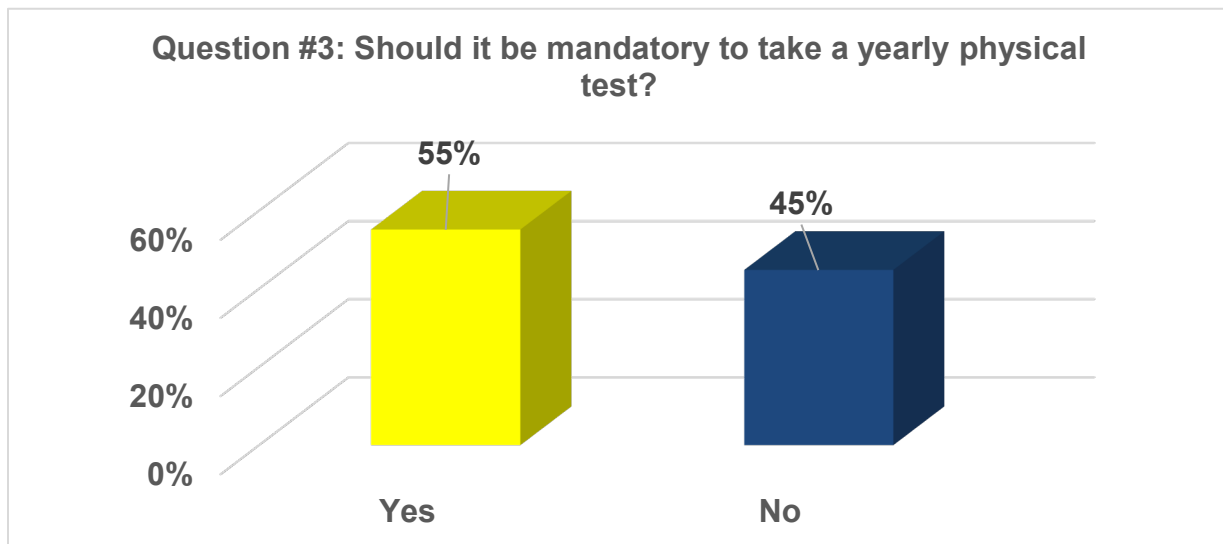
The second question asked participants should a periodic exam be mandated after your hire date? Twenty-four (83%) of participants responded yes while five (17%) responded answered no that a periodic exam should not be mandated after date of hire.

TABLE 2: Question #2 Should a periodic physical exam be mandated after your hire date?



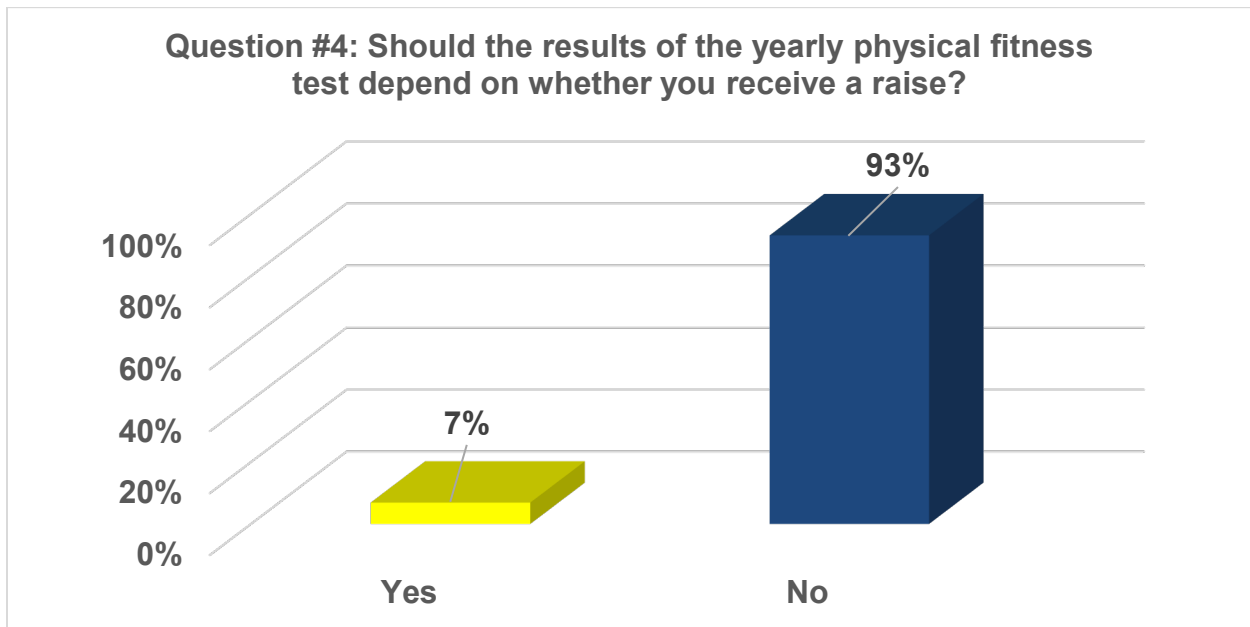
Question #3 asked if it should be mandatory to take a yearly physical fitness test. Sixteen (55%) participants said yes, they believe it should be mandatory to a take a yearly physical fitness test while thirteen (45%) participants said no they felt it was not necessary to complete a yearly physical fitness test.

TABLE 3: Question # 3 Should it be mandatory to take a yearly physical fitness test?



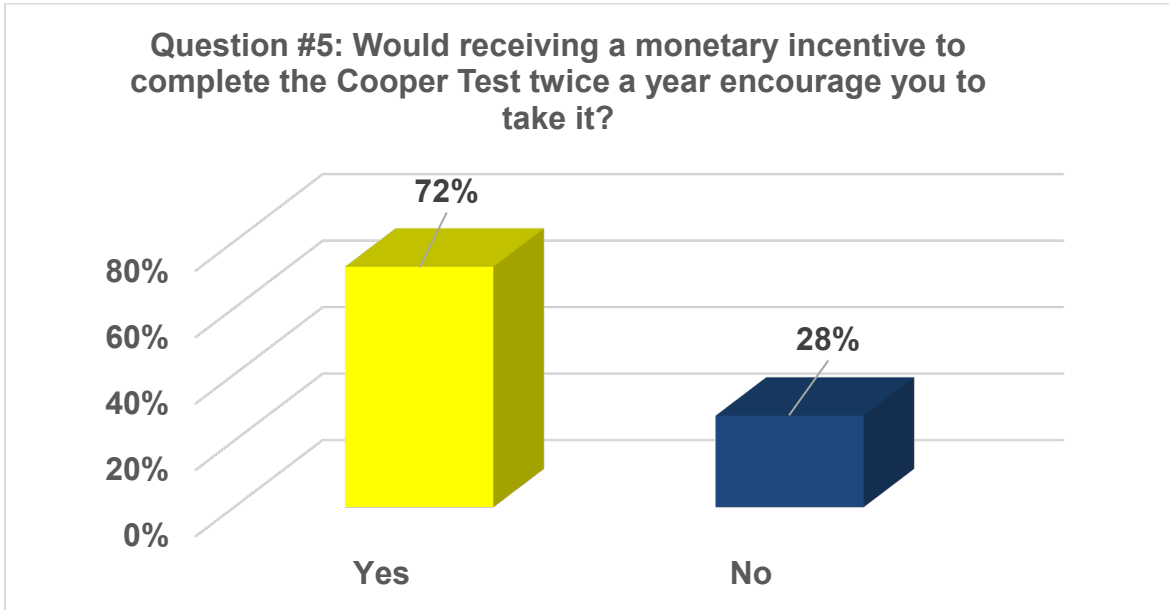
Question #4 asked if the yearly physical fitness test should depend on whether a raise is received. Twenty-seven (93%) of the participants said no the results of the PAT should not determine if the officers get a raise and two (7%) of the participants said yes, the results should depend on whether the officer gets a raise or not.

TABLE 4: Question #4 Should the results of the yearly physical fitness test depend on whether you receive a raise?



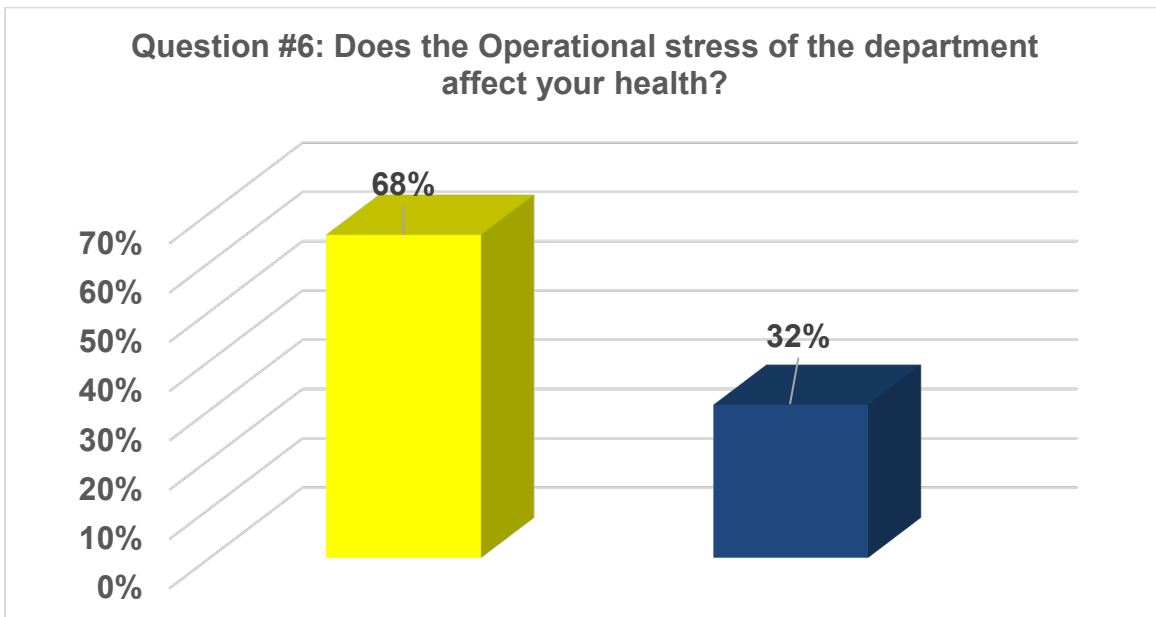
Question #5 asked would receiving a monetary incentive to complete the Cooper Test twice a year encourage you to take it? Twenty-one (72%) of the participants said yes, if they received a monetary incentive to complete the Cooper Test, they would be encouraged to take it, while eight (28%) stated, no they would not be encouraged to take the Cooper Test.

TABLE 5: Question #5 Would receiving a monetary incentive to complete the Cooper Test twice a year encourage you to take it?



Question #6 asked, Does the Operational Stress of the department affect your health. Nineteen (68%) said yes, the Operational stress from the department affects their health and nine (32%) said no and one participant skipped the question.

TABLE 6: Question #6 Does the Operational Stress of the department affect your health? If so, please indicate how.



The participants were asked if the Operational Stress of the department affects their health and if so, why? Some of the responses from the participants included the following:

- ▶ 1. there are numerous stressors related to police work, to name a few, shift work holidays without the family, completing paperwork on time and correctly, trying to eat healthy at work, risk of getting hurt on the job, lack of sleep- you toss and turn because you made an arrest and fear of losing your job. Mistakes will be made, but those are the moments when officers will learn. We have compassionate officers that use their discretion wisely and for good reason. This should not be looked at as bad police practice or frowned upon.
- ▶ 2. rotation between days and nights affecting sleep
- ▶ 3. fatigue
- ▶ 4. lack of resources, scheduling
- ▶ 5. the communication is lacking leaving officers to guess whether they are doing things right or wrong
- ▶ 6. worrying daily whether proper operational decisions have been made by an officer leads to lack of sleep and fatigue
- ▶ 7. 12-hour shifts and midnight shift can cause anxiety and stress and bad eating habits
- ▶ 8. the Operational stress of the department affects my health by causing me a lack of sleep, mood swings, and an increase in physical symptoms related to current health conditions involving stress in this current environment, too many responsibilities and being pulled in a number of directions which creates a lack of concentration and inability to complete tasks in a thorough matter. In return that causes additional stress, just to have more things added to an already full agenda.
- ▶ 9. stress doesn't directly affect my physical health, but it does get discouraging affecting the mental side. The discouraging part occurs because there is never a constant in the operations division, there always seems to be change, ALPHA SHIFT, Bravo shift then no Alpha or Bravo shift then back to Bravo. We will be working 12-hour Mondays then no, we are working 8-hour Mondays then wait we go back to 12-hour Mondays. Nobody ever seems to be on the same page and when that happens it seems that all the shifts are against each other which creates a toxic environment to work in for 12 hours
- ▶ 10. Operational stress affects my health in a negative way. Officers do things they should not do like miss assignments, miss court and act disrespectfully to the public. I have to see to it that they are held accountable or disciplined. That is a very stressful situation especially if it involves ending one's career.
- ▶ 11. because everybody does things differently and the communication is lacking leaving officers to guess whether they are doing things right or wrong
- ▶ 12. "top heavy" that leads to officers to deal with the brunt of the work, meanwhile some admin staff wonder around all day leading officers to wonder, what exactly do you

do all day. It's very tiresome to hear that road lieutenants "will take calls" but in reality, that does not happen. It would be nice to see admin on the road here and there. At the end of the day officers are underpaid, unappreciated and spread very thin. The tone and character shaming on paper when an officer is in the situation to be disciplined. There is no easy way to speak to speak and or write about another's shortcomings; but to tear apart an individual on paper is extremely disrespectful, and leads people to believe, untimely there is zero loyalty in the department.

▶ 13. yes, the operational stress does affect our health our health. Worrying daily whether proper operational decisions have been made by an officer leads to lack of sleep which in turn leads to fatigue. Research has shown chronic fatigue affects the mental health and physical health of an officer.

▶ 14. Shift shortages

▶ 15. in our department the morale has been at an all-time low since the passing of our friend Officer Neri. There is resentment, confusion, and pain from all squads in different levels. Being forced to attend grief management blindly and expecting folks to speak honestly about their true feeling without fear of reprisal was unrealistic. Discord among the squads

▶ 16. The daily operations of this department have created unwanted stress for officers. There is no consistency on how this department operates and lacks clear and concise directions from the leaders. The administrators have a duty to take care of their officers, but we feel like we are just numbers or a "body" to fill the spot and get the job done from them. The lack of consistency with the communication whether it's by word of mouth or even by email is terrible within the department. We as officers are told how to do something and then it's scrutinized by someone else because it was not done their way.

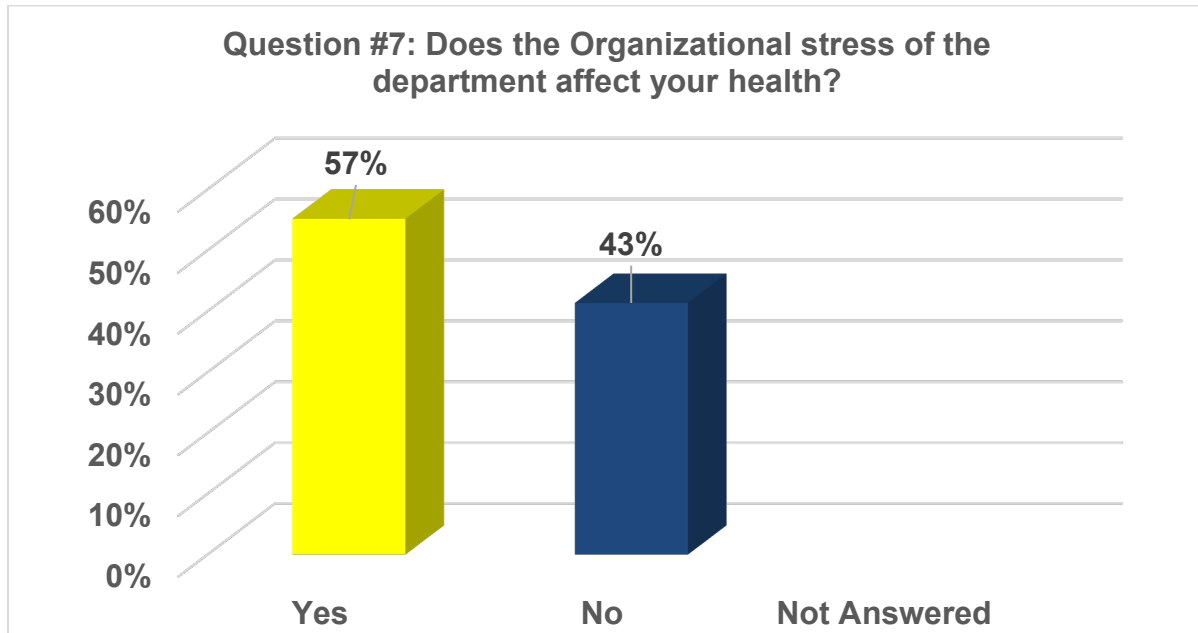
▶ 17. No Comment

▶ 18. Not learning how to deal with the stress has affected my health by causing me to have several major health issues.

▶ 19. No answer other than yes.

Question #7 asked Does the organizational stress of the department affect your health. Sixteen (57%) said yes, the Organizational Stress from the department affects their health and twelve (43%) said no, and one participant skipped the question.

TABLE 7: Question #7 Does the Organizational Stress of the department affect your health? If so, please indicate how.



Some of the responses from the participants included the following:

- ▶ 1. Organizational stress affects my health in a negative way. I am trying to convince our city council that we need a need for new police building or least an addition. There are competing interests in the city like a new senior center. Also, some officers think that the city has an endless pot of money when that just not the case. There is a definitive budget and the city will not deficit spend.
- ▶ 2. officers worry more about losing their job than doing their job causing officers to have poor morale
- ▶ 3. the organizational stress comes from mainly a lack of communication. I think this happens in a majority of organizations but being from a small department it seems to be magnified.
- ▶ 4. No Comment
- ▶ 5. the Organizational pressure by fear one could be subject to disciplinary action if their performance is lacking or mistakes are made creates a high stress level when any critical incidents arise.
- ▶ 6. a lack of morale, lack of confidence from command staff in officer's decision making, how fast the rumor mill goes without knowing the facts. All these things affect sleep, relationships, and outside life.
- ▶ 7. Organizational stress of the department does affect our health, the lack of leadership weighs heavy on officers at times. The department is unorganized as a

whole. There is a lack of presence, lack of direction. Lack of transparency and a lack of listening skills. All which equates to a negative work environment. An environment where officers spend literally ½ of their day.

▶8. stress doesn't directly affect my physical health, but it does det discouraging effecting the mental side. The discouraging part occurs because for the most part it doesn't feel the organizational side has the Officer best interest more like they are always trying to cover any type of liability that could fall back on them. The leadership throughout both organizational and operational is weak at best. The only way to help the situation and help the stress a clear-cut leader that understands how to lead steps forward and establishes consistency and comradery.

▶9.not knowing who you can trust and IF you should ever trust your upper management? It feels like there is a separation from the upper management to the ranks as though they feel they are better than those they supervise. It has caused hard feelings towards the supervisors.

▶10. organizational stressors include a high rate of turn over for a small department coupled with the apparent inability to hire qualified officers. For example, we struggle to hire qualified officers making it increasingly difficult to take time off and this is a significant problem on night shift. In addition, there is a lack of training that has resulted from understaffing within the department. Training requests are continually being denied in order to remain minimally staffed for patrol. There appears to be at times a lack of autonomy as an organization which leads to inconsistencies and confusion among officers.

▶11. when 95% of internal investigation is complaints within the department, this type of practice creates the feeling of being watched and not trusted.

▶12. Fatigue

▶13. lack of leadership, close to no communication.

▶14. Yes, I have suffered stress that has caused me to become fatigued, dehydrated, and other medical issues.

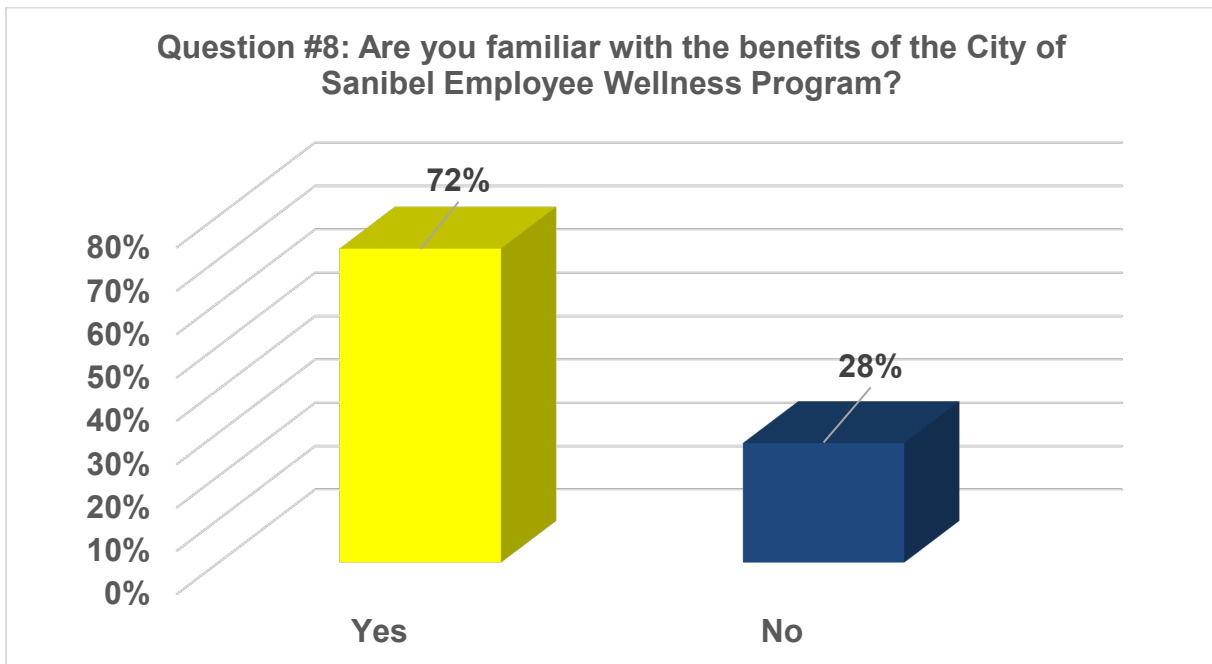
▶15. Yes

▶16. the organizational stress caused by the department is disheartening. We all know we have a job to do but it is unacceptable when you have command staff and officers cut corners. The department has two sides, A & B, where things are ran differently by their respective Lieutenants. Not one person is the same but with a sense of clear and concise directions they can achieve the same goals. Our department is top heavy from Corporals and up and has too many chiefs and not enough Indians. Individuals, who have a rank higher than officer should be able to perform their job at a degree higher than others, not just sit in their office and watch the hour hand move till they are good to go home for the day. If they are unable to perform their duties, they should step down and give someone a chance at their job because they failed doing it. This department is terrible with passing on information to one another by word of mouth and even by email. The chain of command is a joke and only used when it is deemed appropriate otherwise you have anyone and everyone breaking the chain of command and running upstairs to complain because they feel that will make things better. Making others look bad so they

will look good is how they live and work. In all my years in law enforcement and interactions with other agencies I have never been discouraged so much by observing how this department is organized and operates. Shame on those who are responsible to make this department move forward but fail to do so and create unwanted stress. Shame on those who say they care about the officers but have their own personal agenda first in mind and care about the name of the department rather than who makes up that department.

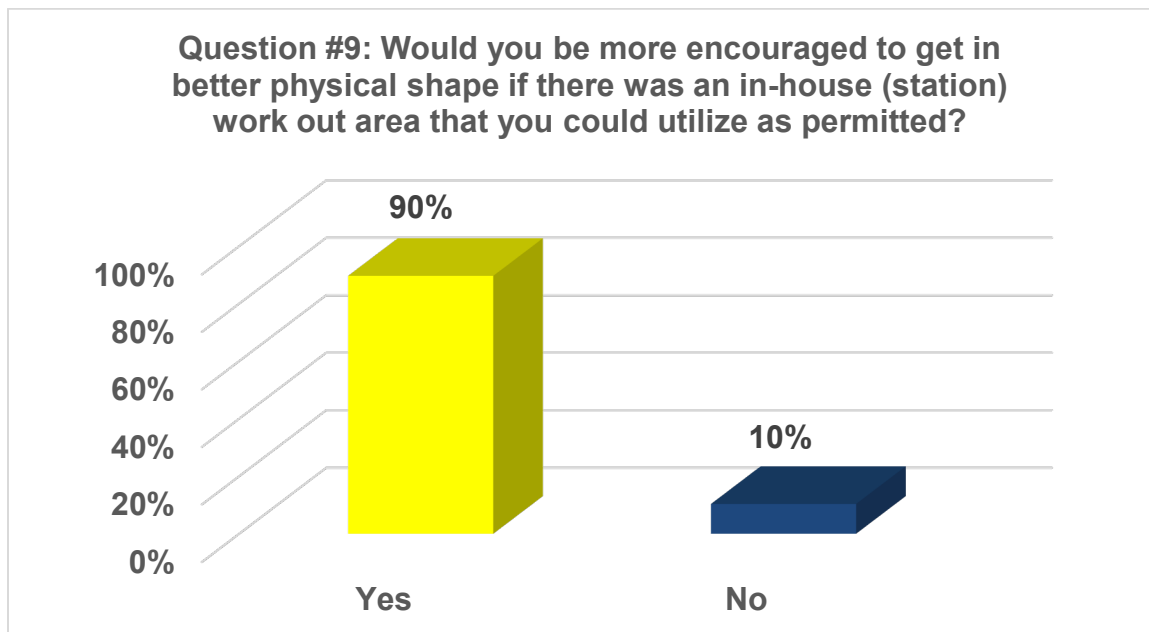
Question #8 asked about the familiarity of the benefits provided to employees. Twenty-one (72%) and eight (28%) stated they were familiar with the benefits of the City of Sanibel Wellness Program.

TABLE 8: Are you familiar with the benefits of the City of Sanibel Employee Wellness Program available to you outlined under Employee Benefits?



Question #9 asked about using an in-house work out area if one was provided. Twenty-six (90%) of the participants said yes, they would be more encouraged to get in better physical shape if there was an in-house (station) work out area that they could utilize as permitted. Three (10%) of the participants said no to this question. Some of the participants felt it necessary to give their opinion even though this was a yes or no question.

TABLE 9: Question #9 Would you be more encouraged to get in better physical shape if there was an in-house (station) work out area that you could utilize as permitted?



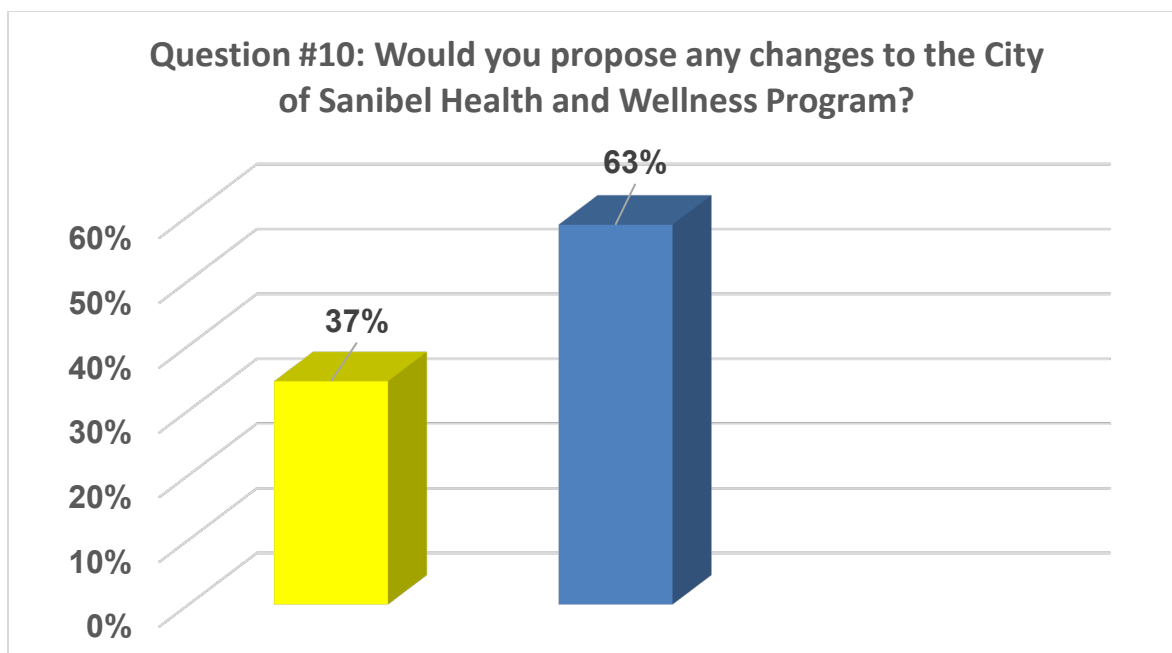
In order to make their responses be known I have decided to include them so they can be acknowledged for their importance to the survey.

- ▶ 1. One participant feels the City of Sanibel should pay for gym membership, hire a meal planner or dietician to help officer's learn about healthy options. Increase vacation and downtime, and access to an exercise room at the police department.
- ▶ 2. Another participant stated that officers cannot take part in the Wellness program while on duty due to staffing. There are unrealistic regulations set in place as well, it's nearly impossible to take off this uniform, secure a weapon, work out and redress in the allotted time. Being able to train on duty should be a priority because we work 12-hour days not including drive time, thus having the ability to train on duty will increase organizational morale, fitness levels, appearance, and perception of being able to do our jobs.
- ▶ 3. the need for a more readily accessible gym available to officers and the amount of time to work out.

►4. One proposal was to challenge the different squads to a friendly competition (weight loss, Nutrition, and physical fitness).

Question #10 asked would you propose any changes to the City's Health and Wellness Program. Ten (37%) of the participants said yes, they would propose changes while seventeen (63%) said, no, they would not make changes.

Table 10: Question #10 Would you propose any changes to the City of Sanibel Health and Wellness Program? If yes, please explain.



► 1. Yes, the City should pay for a gym membership, hire a meal planner or dietician to help officers learn about healthy eating options, Increase vacation and downtime, access to an exercise room at the police department.

►2. As for City Wellness Program, officers cannot take part in the program while on duty due to staffing. There are also unrealistic regulations set in place as well, it's nearly impossible to take off this uniform, secure a weapon, work out and redress in the allotted time.

►3. I would add a more personal touch to the program. Not do everything online as though we are a number. Challenge the agency and the city hall to a friendly competition. Challenge the different squads to friendly competition (weight loss, nutrition, and physical fitness).

►4. We should have a weight room that includes dumbbells, cardio equipment, pull up bar, we need our own gym at the station.

►5. needs to be law enforcement training

- ▶ 6. yes, no answer
- ▶ 7. yes, no answer
- ▶ 8. yes, no answer
- ▶ 9. yes, no answer
- ▶ 10. yes, no answer

Discussion

I was extremely satisfied for the response level that I received from the survey. Out of thirty-four surveys distributed among the participants I received twenty-nine (85%) of the surveys. The answers were anonymous and truthful. The participants were able to answer freely and honestly.

When the officer is mentally healthy and physically fit everyone wins. So often we see a law enforcement officer in a uniform that we are concerned about. The concern could be that the uniform doesn't fit properly maybe because he or she is not as physically fit as they should be. Or the reason they catch our eye could be because they are not as mentally healthy as they should be.

Due to the overabundance of stress in our modern lives, we usually think of stress as a negative experience, but from a biological point of view, stress can be a neutral, negative, or positive experience (Shiel 2004).

In the article by (Shiel 2004), he describes the medical process of how stress is released in the body as the Catecholamine hormones, such as adrenaline or noradrenaline, facilitate immediate physical reactions associated with a preparation for violent muscular action. These include the following: Acceleration of heart and lung action, paling or flushing, or alternating between both, inhibition of stomach and upper-intestinal action to the point where digestion slows down or stops, the general effect on the sphincters of the body, constriction of blood vessels in many parts of the body, liberation of nutrients (particularly fat and glucose) for muscular action, dilation of blood vessels for muscles, inhibition of the lacrimal gland (responsible for tear production) and salivation, dilation of pupil (mydriasis), relaxation of bladder, inhibition of erection, auditory exclusion (loss of hearing), tunnel vision (loss of peripheral vision), disinhibition of spinal reflexes, and Shaking (Shiel 2004).

In Irving's article he quotes Stinchcomb from an article about stress by saying "organizational stress is that stress which involves organizational structure and characteristics including poor communication and efficiency in decision making, leadership and leadership styles, promotional interests, policies and procedures and work schedules" (Stinchcomb, 2004).

This project has opened my eyes on the importance of dealing with the Operational and Organizational stress that we encounter daily during our twelve (12) shifts. Having to deal with undue stress is affecting the mental and physical health of the officers. Never have we seen the violence in communities with the mass shootings, school shootings, officers being slain, and violent crimes occurring daily. Research has shown that Suicide is the number one cause of deaths for officers. This is a totally

preventable. Mental health issues need to be discussed and addressed issue and the numbers are outstanding. Have we become so involved in our daily lives due to stress that we overlook the needs of our brothers and sisters? If so, then shame on us. Having a work life balance should be a priority in everyone's life especially mine. To quote an expert on stress, "Stress is not what happens to you, but how you react to it" (Selye 1974, 1977).

Recommendations

In reviewing the comments from the participants, it appears that stress plays a very important role in our daily lives including our work lives. In completing my research, there are several challenges as a department that we need to overcome. I made the following recommendations to the Chief of Police. Recommendation #1 acknowledge that a communication barrier exists within the department and address it. Recommendation #2 revitalize the Leadership Committee. This committee will be the voice of the officers and dispatchers. Their concerns will be addressed during the monthly meetings. Recommendation #3 one way to help eliminate future medical issues is to transition to a load bearing vest for the officers. Recommendation #4 one way to deal with and release daily stress is to effectively use the city Wellness Program and benefits available to the employees. Having a in house (station) workout area for the department will address the issues of stress. This will allow the officers to use the Wellness time effectively. Also includes challenging the police department against other departments to a weight loss competition, step challenge, or a monthly water challenge. The ongoing issue about physical fitness being readily accessible for the officers has been also addressed by giving them a set monthly amount for them to join a gym or wellness center.

Lieutenant Grace Towler has been in law enforcement for over 15 years, 12 of those years have been with the Sanibel Police Department. In 2004, she began her career with the Fort Myers Police Department. In 2007, she went to work at the Sanibel Police Department where she has worked as a road patrol officer, beach patrol officer, crime scene investigator, property and evidence manager. In 2012 she was promoted to the rank of Sergeant and served in Investigations and Community Services. In 2017, she was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant and is currently a Patrol Operations Lieutenant for Bravo Squad. Grace has a Master's Degree in Criminal Justice from Florida Gulf Coast University.

References

- Abrams, A. (2018, May 23). *How a toxic work environment affects your mental health*. Retrieved March 25, 2019, from Verywell mind.com:
<https://www.verywellmind.com/how-a-toxic-work-environment-may-affect-your-mental-health>
- Carey, M.G. (2018, October). The importance of managing blood pressure. *Police Chief*, 85(10),16-18.
- Donnelly, E. V. (2015). Law enforcement officers and employee assistance programs. *Policing*, 38(2), 206-220. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/PIJPSM-11-2014-0116>
- Irving, A. V. (2017). *Occupational stress and law enforcement officer signifant relationships* . Retrieved February 13, 2019, from ProQuest Dissertations &Theses Global:
<https://search.proquest.com/docview/1944383299?accountid+4840>
- Kulbarsh, P. (2007). *Critical incident stress*. Retrieved from
<http://www.officer.com/article/10249385/critical-incident-stress>
- McCreary, D.R., & Thompson, M.M. (2006). Development of two reliable and valid measures of stressors in policing: The operational and organizational police stress questionnaires. *International Journal of Stress Management*, 13, 494-518.
- McGill, J.M. (2018). *Millennial generation law enforcement academy recruits and their perception of mental health*. (Doctoral Dissertation), Nova Southeatern University. Retrieved February 14, 2019, from ProQuest n
<https://search.proquest.com/docview/2070598051?accountid=4840>
- Peter, F. (2000, January). On-the-job-stress in policing - Reducing it, preventing it. *National Institute of Justice Journal*, NCJ Number 180079, 18-24.
- Porath, C. (2016, December). The hidden toll of workplace incivity. *McKinsey Quarterly*, 1-4.
- Shiel, W. (2019, August 15). *MedicineNet*. Retrieved from Medicinenet.com:
<https://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=6882>
- Stinchcomb, J. (2004) Searching for stress in all the wrong places: Combating chronic organizational stressors in policing, *Police Practice and Research*, 5(3), 259-277, DOI: 10.1080/156142604200227594
- Toch, H. (2002). Stress in policing. *US Department of Justice, Washington, Dc*.

Violanti, J. M., & Paton, D., (1999). *Police trauma: Psychological aftermath of civilian combat*. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.

Appendix A

SANIBEL POLICE DEPARTMENT The Effects of Stress on Law Enforcement Officers ANONYMOUS SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. What age range are you in?
 - a. 21-29
 - b. 30-39
 - c. 40-49
 - d. 50 & over
2. Should a periodic physical exam be mandated after your hire date?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
3. Should it be mandatory to take a yearly physical fitness test?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
4. Should the results of the yearly physical fitness test depend on whether you receive a raise?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
5. Would receiving a monetary incentive to complete the Cooper Test twice a year encourage you to take it?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
6. Does the Operational stress of the department affect your health? If so please indicate how.
 - a. Yes, please explain (please type your explanation on a separate sheet of paper)
 - b. No

7. Does the Organizational stress of the department affect your health? If so, please indicate how.
 - a. Yes, please explain (please type your explanation on a separate sheet of paper)
 - b. No

8. Are you familiar with the benefits of the City of Sanibel Employee Wellness Program available to you outlined under Employee Benefits?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

9. Would you be more encouraged to get in better physical shape if there was an in-house (station) work out area that you could utilize as permitted?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

10. Would you propose any changes to the City of Sanibel Health and Wellness Program? If yes, please explain.
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

Thank you for your participation and the results of this survey will remain anonymous.

Lieutenant Grace Towler
Bravo Squad Operations