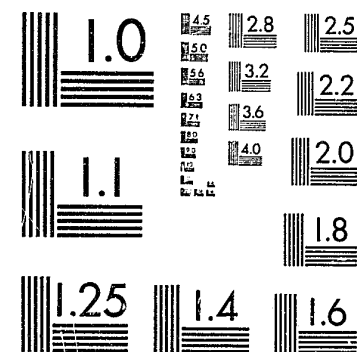


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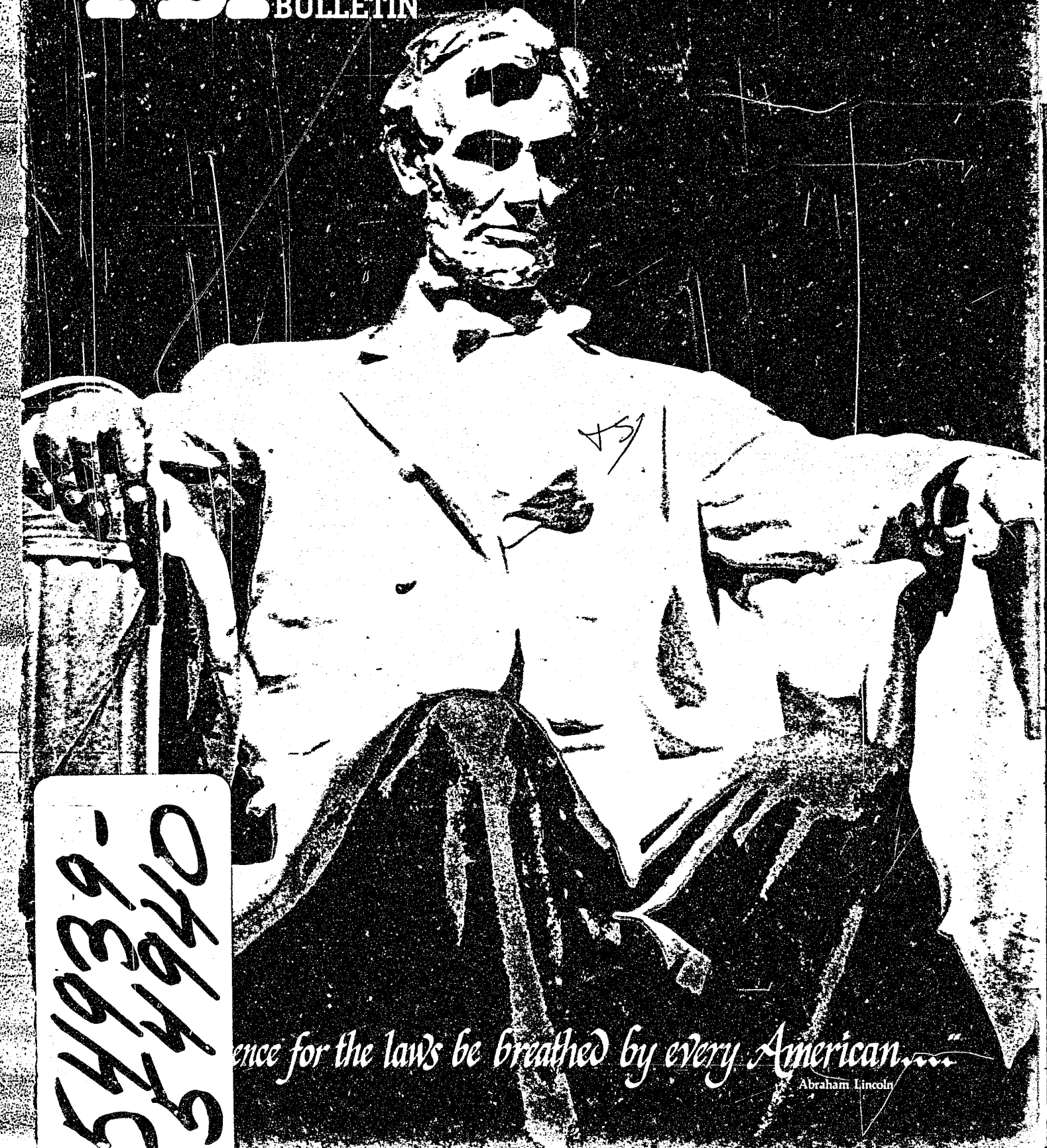
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FBI LAW ENFORCEMENT BULLETIN

FEBRUARY 1979



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...ence for the laws be breathed by every American...
Abraham Lincoln

FBI LAW ENFORCEMENT BULLETIN

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Lincoln Memorial photograph courtesy the National Archives. Quote from address before the Young Men's Lyceum of Springfield, Ill., Jan. 27, 1837.



**Federal Bureau of Investigation
United States Department of Justice
Washington, D.C. 20535**

William H. Webster, Director

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Personnel

Turning Inward

The Police Officer Counselor

By ROGER L. DEPUE

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Quantico, Va.

If there is one call which evokes an immediate response of assistance from all police officers, it is the broadcast that a fellow officer is in trouble and needs help. It is almost as if a separate emergency switch exists inside every officer which is specially reserved for this type of call. When the switch is activated, police officers rally to the aid of one of their own to a degree unlike any other profession. Such a response is a tribute to the tremendous bond of brotherhood among police officers; they all face the stark realization that at any particular moment "that call could be for me." This common identity and awareness of mutual problems may be a relatively untapped resource for dealing with serious *personal* problems associated with the policing job, as well as the professional dangers.

The Problem

Many police officers are in trouble today and need help. The trouble is caused by stress overload, and the

need is as urgent as the patrol car broadcast requesting assistance. Current literature on the police profession abounds with articles discussing police personal problems, such as divorce, alcoholism, and suicide. The April 1978, issue of *The Police Chief* is devoted to an examination of the "Pitfalls of Policing." Its editorial declares:

*"The impact of psychological stress appears to be reaching crisis proportions and manifests itself in forms of behavior ranging from reduced job effectiveness to suicide, an act constituting the ultimate loss for the officer's family as well as for the department and the community."*¹

A recent and controversial book by a police psychiatrist claims that 35 percent of the police officers presently employed are psychologically unsuited for their jobs. Not only are they unfit for duty, according to Dr. Edward E. Shev, a San Francisco area police psychiatrist, but they are dangerous.

Dr. Shev goes on to say that an additional 60 percent of today's police officers, although basically sound from the psychiatric point of view, are often

in need of some sort of guidance in order to recognize their personal weaknesses and to overcome the adverse effects of job pressures.²

Psychologists from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health have been studying the effects of job stress on police officers for several years. They conclude that:

*"... police work becomes one of the few jobs which has a potent adverse effect on the total life of the worker. That is, the policeman's job affects his own personal social life, his family's social life, his children's perception of him as a father, etc."*³

The job makes great demands on the mental, emotional, and physical capabilities of the officer—demands that are all too often so stressful that they begin to destroy the individual.

There has been a great deal of research conducted on the occupation of the police officer in recent years; the results of much of this research sug-

gest several major stress problem areas which are associated with the law enforcement profession.

The Problem Areas

One major stress area involves the basic philosophical question, "What is the role of the police in today's society?" Most of those who have analyzed the police role have noted that on the street level the job is fraught with contradictions and inconsistencies.⁴ Except for general statements like "enforce the law and maintain order," the duties of the police officer depend upon such diverse factors as the oath of office, the law, court decisions, departmental policy, informal quota systems, the political climate, community pressures, commonsense, and the personality of the chief of police.⁵ However, police officers who patrol the street find that legalistic solutions to human problems are often inappropriate, and commonsense solutions are frequently second guessed.

The role conflict and ambiguity inherent in the job itself are compounded by the distorted, fictionalized media image of the police officer, creating unreal expectations in both citizens and recruits. Many new police officers are genuinely confused and mistaken about the nature of the job. Dr. Martin Reiser, Los Angeles, Calif., Police Department psychologist, refers to one "macho" form of mistaken role identity as the "John Wayne Syndrome."⁶ With approximately 39 percent of prime time television based on law enforcement themes,⁷ the public is constantly being bombarded with the tough, aggressive "super cop," an image in contrast with the helpful, friendly, professional officer that modern training academies are trying to graduate today.

A second major problem area concerns the environment in which the police officer must function successfully. The nature of his work takes the officer into sections of the jurisdiction where he is most likely to experience frustration and anxiety in his interactions with people. Even after considerable training and street experience, an officer may often feel ill at ease and disoriented when handling

calls in these areas. He tries to deal with serious matters among people who possess a life style and value system different from his own, and because of this, may suffer from a condition which sociologists term "culture shock." Cultural shock, applied to police work by Victor Strecher in his book, *The Environment of Law Enforcement*,⁸ is the discomfort one feels when he moves from one culture to another and cannot accurately interpret, predict, and influence the behavior of those around him. There is a general loss of familiar cues and symbols, such as words, gestures, facial expressions, customs, etc. This discomfort and social strangeness often predispose the person (in this case, the officer) to the development of negative attitudes about the people, and he begins to anticipate unpleasant interactions with those persons who are unlike himself.

Harvard University Professor James Q. Wilson describes it as follows: "The working environment of the police is not only charged with emotion and suspicion, it is often, in the eyes of the police, hostile and uncooperative."⁹

Real and perceived threats from the outside mix with the interdependence and mutual support from inside the police profession to encourage formation of a separate police subculture. The policeman's world can become insulated from the outside world by a cohesive, high-identity peer group which can exert powerful influence over the officer's conduct and behavior.

Another area of concern deals with the officer's personal life. The job can dominate his life, both on duty and off. Time spent away from home slowly increases, and many police officers become so absorbed in their work that they become a kind of "workaholic."

Shift work and the police subculture combine to limit an officer's friends to associates only. "Shop talk" commands conversation at work and home, and spouses find themselves competing with what appears to be their mates' first love—the job. Add to these problems the officer's greater temptation for sexual infidelity, the development of what appears to be a coldness and hardness in personality, limited family interaction (especially with the children), insensitive "interrogation" techniques used in discussions with family members, and increased use of alcohol and drugs, and marriages become strained to the breaking point.¹⁰

Police departments researching marriage failures among their officers find widely varying results. Dr. Martin Reiser reported in 1972 that the Seattle, Wash., Police Department discovered 60 percent of its officers were divorced during the first 3 years on the force. In contrast the Los Angeles, Calif., Police Department experienced a 5 percent divorce rate during the first 3 years on the job, and found 21.1 percent of the total force in divorced status.¹¹

The Salt Lake City, Utah, Police Department was said to have a 4 percent divorce rate. The Tacoma, Wash., Police Department has been reported as having 82 percent of its force divorced, and the San Jose, Calif., Police Department estimated its divorce rate to be between 50 and 70 percent.¹² Another survey reported divorce rates in police departments in Baltimore, Md., as 17 percent; in Santa Ana, Calif., as 27 percent; and in Chicago, Ill., as 33.3 percent.¹³ Despite what emphasis one wishes to place upon such statistics, most experts would agree that a stable family relationship is a significant contributing factor to a successful law enforcement career;¹⁴ an unstable relationship would most likely have the opposite result.

A fourth area of stress overload for police officers is the situational crisis. Many officers experience trauma after being involved in a highly charged situation, such as a shooting. Some

find it difficult to cope with certain instances of injury and death, and there are numerous occasions when police officers become very depressed by instances of victimization, injustice, and public apathy. Some officers get too deeply and personally involved in certain cases, while those involved in undercover assignments experience intensely stressful ordeals. The situational crisis is a critical, high-stress time when the officer urgently needs help.¹⁵

In addition to these major problem areas, police officers are frustrated by numerous organizational factors, ranging from poor equipment to lack of administrative support.¹⁶ Some officers cannot adjust to a department's disciplinary action; others who are disillusioned are often tempted to take advantage of corruption opportunities.¹⁷ After a prolonged period of time in frustrating and apparently hopeless conditions, many officers experience "burn-out"¹⁸ and culture fatigue,¹⁹ finding it difficult to cope with the boredom and inactivity of some assignments.

One study reported by Wayne C. Richard and Ronald D. Fell reveals police officers in the State of Tennessee to have an incidence of health problems somewhat higher than other occupations.²⁰ (See Hans Selye's "Diseases of Adaption.")²¹ They also have significantly higher rates of premature deaths than the general population and rank third among occupations in suicide rates.²²

The kinds of personal problems confronting police officers range from mild maladjustments to severe disturbances. As with the general population, the majority of these problems do not require hospitalization or intensive psychotherapy; however, most do require attention and assistance for successful resolution.

Programs

In an attempt to meet the psychological needs of their officers, police

departments have instituted a variety of programs. Probably one of the first attempts to help the troubled officer was the inclusion of a police chaplain in the department. The chaplain was usually a local priest, minister, or rabbi who voluntarily worked with the agency in an effort to care for the spiritual needs of the officers. He was available to offer guidance and assistance to officers and their families during troubled times, and also aided police with some of their duties, such as delivering death messages. Today, many police chaplains are involved in counseling, and are generally considered to be a very valuable asset to the department. But, the increase in police personal problems suggests that an additional dimension in counseling is needed.

Most major police departments have initiated psychological service units staffed by psychologists and other mental health professionals. While being on the department payroll and under the direction of the chief, they still possess a certain amount of autonomy. Many of these units have offices apart from the police department so that police officer clients do not risk embarrassment and loss of privacy when seeking assistance, and flexible hours for greater availability to officers and members of their families. Contact is usually on a voluntary basis; however, many police administrators also encourage supervisors to refer officers with problems. Counseling in the unit is conducted on a confidential basis—in accordance with professional ethics and with no report furnished to the department administrators.

In addition to counseling, many psychological service units participate in a wide range of administrative and operational functions, such as recruit selection, screening and promotion boards, training programs, research projects, liaison with mental health agencies, management consultations, and field emergencies (suicide, hostage, etc.). Some are also involved in the psychological profiling of criminals and the use of hypnosis as an investigative aid.

Department psychologists have noted a number of problems in their work with police,²³ one of which is

maintaining client confidentiality. Some police administrators want feedback on problem officers, or occasionally, an officer may be dangerous and his condition should be communicated to his superiors. Police psychologists say the best way to handle these problems is to establish clear ground rules with the department administration, as well as with the client officer early in the relationship.

Another problem involves the acceptance of the psychologist by the officers. Police psychologists note they are initially distrusted by officers and suggest the psychologist accompany officers on patrol to gain insight into the job and acceptance from the officers. Dr. S. A. Somodevilla, Chief Psychologist of the Dallas, Tex., Police Department's Psychological Services Unit, also recommends that the unit be made up of a blend of officer psychologists and civilian psychologists.²⁴ For most police departments, a psychological services unit staffed by full-time professionals is an impossibility, since it is far too expensive.²⁵

A relatively new and interesting program to aid officers having interpersonal problems on their beats is called the Action Review Panel. When police officers are the subject of a given number of citizen complaints, are involved in frequent physical confrontations, or have other negative police-citizen encounters, they are referred to a panel of their peers—police officers selected to serve on the board because they experience minimum social friction yet are very effective on the street. The board officers must enjoy a sound reputation and high credibility among the line officers. Meetings of the board are strictly confidential and nonpunitive in nature. The peer officers try to analyze cases in which the officer has been involved, while pointing out, tactfully, that they all do the same job. They discuss how to handle problem situations and present alternatives and commonsense techniques to the officer experiencing difficulty.

"The police experience which [the police officer counselor] holds in common with his client would give him valuable insight and might make him more acceptable to the client than an outside psychologist."

The Oakland, Calif., Police Department pioneered this approach and claims a great deal of success with it.²⁶ On the other hand, the Kansas City, Mo., Police Department experimented with a form of peer panel and determined it to be largely nonproductive.²⁷

Other attempts to set up programs to help police officers with problems have been oriented toward specific problem areas; many major police departments have programs designed to aid the alcoholic. These programs are often begun and staffed by rehabilitated police officer alcoholics and are usually associated with national treatment associations.

If police departments seeking help for troubled officers do not have "in-house" programs, they are forced to refer their troubled officers to community mental health facilities or private counselors. There is limited research concerning the success of such referrals, but initial efforts suggest that police officers are reluctant to utilize community mental facilities for their own problems. Although police officers seem to experience a great deal more stress and resultant emotional problems than the average person, they do not appear to seek help at mental health centers at greater than average rates.²⁸

There are many problems involved in the referral of troubled officers to outside mental health professionals. First, a police officer is a member of a subculture which says that he must handle his own problems. Emotional problems are frequently perceived as weaknesses and therefore become threats to the macho self-image of "the crime fighter." Secondly, the officer may be reluctant to go for counseling where many of his own "street people" may be occupying seats next

to him. Then, there is the general distrust of behavioral scientists which seems to stem from the fact that behavioral scientists and law enforcement representatives have too often been on opposite sides of the great law enforcement debates of our times, i.e., punishment, rehabilitation, social disorder, civil disobedience, etc.

The Need

Literature reflects that a large number of police officers have job-related personal problems which adversely affect their job performance and personal lives. The majority of these problems are not of the major mental illness variety and probably would not require long-term psychotherapy. Enlightened police administrators from large departments are responding to this need with a variety of programs, but many police officers go unaided because of lack of funds, unavailability of trained counselors, and reluctance to turn to community mental health resources.

A Potential Solution

Police departments could set up "in-house" counseling programs utilizing their own officers who are properly trained in counseling skills. Selected police officers, perhaps with undergraduate degrees in the behavioral sciences, could go to local colleges and universities, enroll in counseling programs, and begin to learn the urgently needed skills. Courses designed to address special police problems could also be established, modeled after modern schools of education which offer student development courses for education counselors to aid them in

understanding specific student problems. Gary S. Belkin, professor of counseling at Long Island University, offers a definition of practical counseling for education which could easily be altered to fit the needs of the police agency.

*"Practical counseling may be defined as the total counseling process, underlined by a coherent philosophy and self-awareness, practiced with a commitment to the client's total growth, and encompassing face-to-face interviews, group processes, school services, testing programs, extracurricular activities, vocational and educational information, and anything else which contributes to the client's development and fulfillment as a person."*²⁹ [Italics Omitted]

Belkin distinguishes between counseling and psychotherapy in the summary of the first chapter in his book.

*"Counseling and psychotherapy, although often used interchangeably, were shown to have different meanings in their operational senses. Both do treat emotional, adjustment, and behavioral problems, and both vary in the degree of intensity, depending upon the practitioner. But while psychotherapy is built upon a comprehensive theory of personality, a psychopathology, and a specific corpus of techniques, counseling is built upon an underlying philosophy of life, including theories of value, knowledge, and reality. In this respect, we may consider counseling as a broader discipline than psychotherapy, since it treats the whole person in the context of his interpersonal and experiential environment, whereas psychotherapy concentrates on the symptomatic, neurotic, or pathological aspects of the personality."*³⁰

There are some departments which have attempted this approach; the Boston, Mass., Police Department is one example. Its counseling unit began as an alcoholic counseling program. Soon police officers with other kinds of personal problems began seeking the assistance of the alcoholic program counselors (three police officers who are rehabilitated alcoholics themselves). As more nonalcoholic clients sought help, the need to learn greater counseling skills became apparent. The officers contacted the Boston University Counselors Education Program, and a course of study was set up to teach the counseling officers a variety of counseling techniques.³¹ Today, the Boston Police Department's "Stress Program" is well-established and is helping hundreds of fellow officers through difficult times.

As with any new venture, setting up such a program would entail a number of problems both for the university and for the police department. But little by little, the problems would be worked out and the benefits would be tremendous.

Such a counseling program would be in reach of most police budgets. The police officer counselor could apply his new found knowledge to a variety of common police problems. He could assist in training programs in areas such as crisis intervention, use of community resources, dealing with police personal stress, etc., and could set up peer review panels from the counseling perspective. The police experience which he holds in common with his client would give him valuable insight and might make him more acceptable to the client than an outside psychologist. Finally, the police officer counselor could refer clients to nonpolice counselors and psychotherapists when necessary and also serve to smooth out some of the distrust and suspicion which might arise in the formation of that relationship.

Reaching a greater number of these troubled police officers would be of great benefit to the police department and to the community. But most of all, the call for assistance of a police officer in trouble would be answered as it has been in the past, by one of his own.

FBI

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