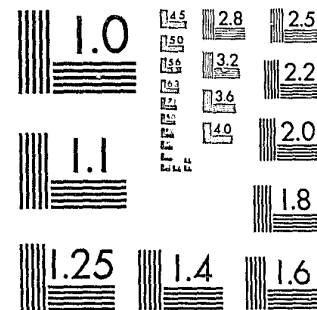


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ACQUISITIONS



The Cover: Confrontations with irrational, violent individuals are day-to-day occurrences which threaten the safety of police officers everywhere. (Staged training photo.) See article p. 1.

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Washington, DC 20535

William H. Webster, Director

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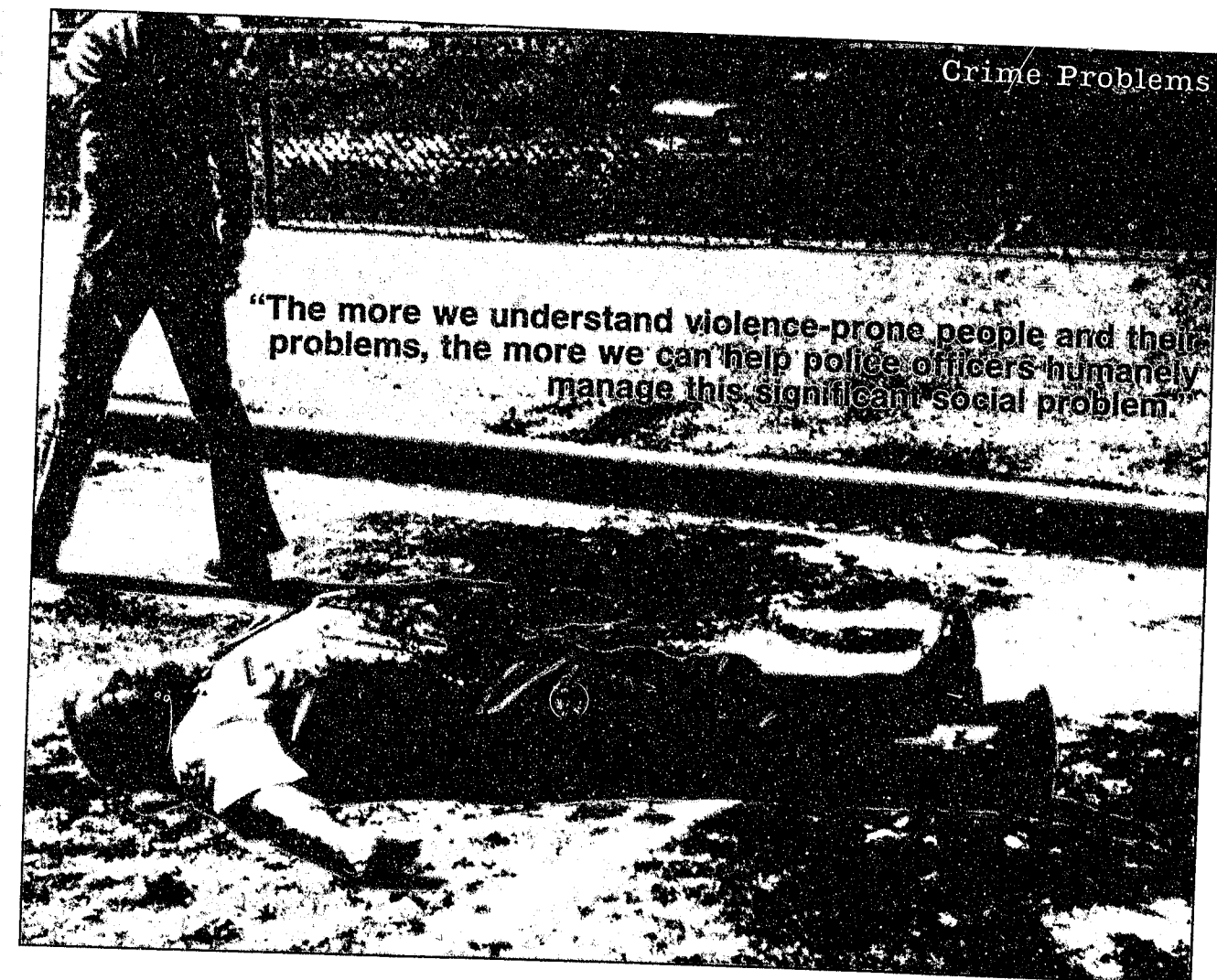
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## Police in a Violent Society

Misunderstandings or overactions by psychologists and others about the police and their actions can occur for many reasons. Biases, negative attitudes, and distorted views are often fueled by negative and slanted news and fictional portrayals of the police and their behavior. Yet, it is very easy to see how these misconceptions occur.

The police experience, firsthand, the violence that mental health professionals learn about through books

or other sources. The police view psychologists as people with their heads in clouds viewing the world from ivory towers, while the police work with their feet on the ground, dealing with divergent realities in their complex world. Yet, there are some similarities which must be recognized.

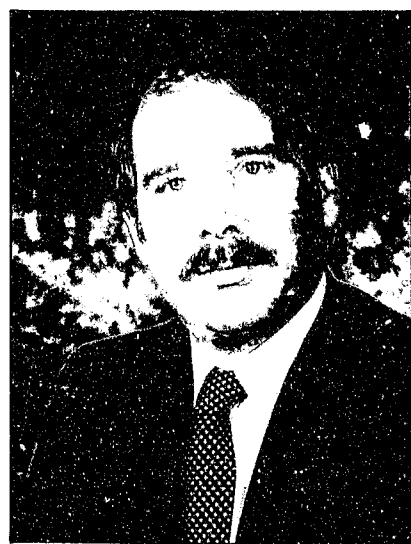
Psychologists and the police share a common "idealistic" view of society. Both strive to make society well by working with a small percentage of its ill or problem members. And

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January 1985 / 1



Dr. Stratton



Dr. Snibbe

while the methods used differ, the same basic motivation remains—a desire to help people.

Both professions are basically governed by similar ethical and social responsibilities. People, in their time of need, turn to each profession seeking help. According to respective "codes of ethics" and "social responsibilities," each provides aid and service to those in need. It is this "service ethic" that brings us to our third commonality—frustration, the frustration shared in trying to perform our respective jobs. Therefore, while we may appear, at times, as being on "opposite sides of the fence," we are actually *partners* in an ever-increasing effort to make society and the world a better place for all of us.

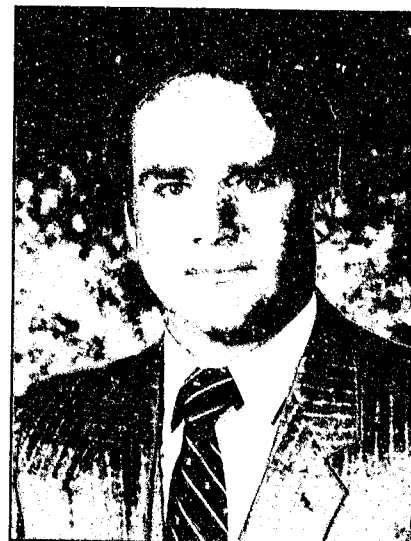
A common perception of the role of police in society is that of a three-ring circus complete with screaming sirens, unholstered guns, and violent action. Most often highlighted in the media and fictional accounts of police work and the news are the shocking, violent, and often tragic occurrences that police encounter daily. The dramatic focus is invariably on officer shootings, serious and notorious criminal cases, and other events that sell newspapers or raise audience ratings.

Many members of society expect the police to act in the way they are portrayed in the media. Although it is true that many situations require swift and dramatic action, the public believes basically that this is the sum and substance of police work. When such things as S.W.A.T. teams are considered, it is easy to see how views can be slanted by the media. For example, in the late 1970's, a popular dramatic T.V. series was entitled S.W.A.T., which presented a spe-

cial police unit routinely performing their duties. Yet, in almost every episode, numerous people were killed and/or injured by this unit. From this, the public believed that S.W.A.T. officers in their community would do the same things they have seen done on television.

The community reaction, although warranted by TV experience, is tragic, since actual statistics do not concur with what is portrayed on television. For example, from 1973 to 1982, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department deployed its Special Weapons Team 591 times. These incidents are often the most dangerous and difficult assignments given to law enforcement. Weapons were fired on only 11 occasions (a mere 1.8 percent of all deployments), 5 people (.08 percent) died, 3 people (.05 percent) were wounded, and 3 shootings resulted in no injuries. These figures reveal that modern S.W.A.T. teams belie the common media image and are actually dedicated peace officers with exceptional discipline.

The concept of special weapons teams is valuable in Los Angeles County and a safety to the communities, law enforcement personnel, and the suspects. No officer or innocent person had been killed during 591 deployments. In the 54 hostage situations, only 1 victim was killed by the suspect after S.W.A.T. was deployed; all other victims were rescued by the efforts of this team and hostage negotiators. Less than 2 percent of all deployments involved shooting situations, and less than 1 percent of all deployments involved the death of a suspect. Only 3 people were injured, and these deployments resulted in the safe arrest of 937 dangerous felons. In other incidents, the S.W.A.T. de-



Lieutenant Bayless



Sheriff Sherman Block

ployments furnished sufficient time and safety to allow for nonviolent, tactical alternatives, such as hostage negotiations and psychological emergency teams.

When regular, routine police assignments in the field are considered, the statistics are even more startling. There are an estimated 400,000 police officers in the United States,<sup>1</sup> and if each one works approximately 250 days (a 5-day week for 50 weeks a year), they would be working 100 million days, or shifts, per year. If during an 8-hour shift, the police have an estimated 10 interactions with people each day, whether it be traffic stops, providing assistance, family disturbances, pursuits, dealing with the mentally ill, or those under the influence of drugs, there would be 1 billion people contacts per year. In those 1 billion contacts, approximately 300 people are killed by the police each year.<sup>2</sup>

We live in a violent society and we employ police and give them weapons to use deadly force for everyone's safety. It is shocking to realize that in 1980, handguns killed 8 people in Great Britain, 24 people in Switzerland, 8 people in Canada, 18 people in Sweden, 23 people in Israel, 4 people in Austria, and 11,522 people in the United States.<sup>3</sup> Our country has 480 times more people killed by handguns than any other country mentioned.<sup>4</sup> Those in law enforcement are attempting to do what they can to reduce the level of violence. Unfortunately, they can't do it alone. The public, schools, churches, courts, mental health experts, politicians, and the media share responsibility for what is happening in our society today.

The police officer who stands alone in the street facing the reality of

irrational violence is neither the cause nor the cure for societal ills. As governmental budgets continue to dwindle, more hospital beds are closed to the mentally ill, dangerous criminals are released earlier from jails and prisons because of overcrowding, and the use of dangerous drugs increases, the extent of criminal activity becomes unpredictable.

To the citizens of every community, the police represent the last line of defense when it comes to issues of potential violence. When someone is being assaulted, robbed, raped, or is otherwise the victim of a violent crime, there is only one place to turn—the police. And when the call for help is made, there is *no one else* to handle the policeman's job if he fails to perform his task. Consequently, the policeman has an obligation to "*confront*" and "*handle to conclusion*," no matter what form of crime or violence he may encounter.

The policeman's perception of danger in these situations and his ability to handle the situation according to the law, department policy, and training will obviously play a major role in the outcome of such incidents. These factors become the "tools of his trade."

#### Law Enforcement and Use of Force Policy

The policy on the use of force and firearms in the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, as in most law enforcement agencies, is very simple. *In essence*, the policy prohibits the use of deadly force except in cases where someone's life is in immediate danger. This means they do not shoot misdemeanants, or even fleeing felons, unless the "immediate threat to life" criterion is met.



**"The police officer who stands alone in the street facing the reality of irrational violence is neither the cause nor the cure for societal ills."**



Obviously, with such a stringent deadly force policy, law enforcement officers must be armed with a number of alternatives to deadly force in order to handle the number of confrontations they face almost daily.

Police officers are taught from their first day on the force that deadly force is used only as a last resort. Therefore, courses in conflict resolution and handling disturbance cases, including procedures for the mentally ill and PCP abusers, are regular elements of their training in the basic, as well as inservice, levels. Good training programs stress violence prevention and conflict resolution through a process referred to as *incremental escalation*. Incremental escalation means that when confronted with violence, the police do not immediately respond in kind. If possible, they defuse the situation through a graduated series of steps which begin with listening or talking to the violent person. If this step is unsuccessful, officers are trained to escalate their response with

appropriate weaponless defense tactics, baton techniques, and/or less than lethal weapons. If all other efforts fail, or if the incident escalates rapidly, officers must use deadly force to protect themselves and the public.

There are times when deadly force is not only appropriate but demanded by the circumstances. The cold reality of our violence-ridden society is that there is an ever-increasing number of these life and death scenarios unfolding in urban centers. Therein lies the divergence between *intervention theory* and its direct application by the policeman on the street.

Fortunately, all potentially violent street confrontations do not result in deadly consequences. In fact, while the number of potentially violent confrontations between the police and criminals has increased over the years, the number of officer-involved shootings in the Los Angeles County

Sheriff's Department decreased nearly 31 percent since 1978. The decrease in officer-involved shootings is due, in part, to law enforcement's training in the incremental escalation of force and the development of a number of less lethal devices.

The era of less lethal devices began about 1978 when our department and others in major metropolitan areas began to experience a tremendous rise in the incidence of PCP abuse. With this increase came the realization that traditional police methods of restraint were totally ineffective against PCP users. Both officers and suspects were being injured at an alarming rate because, short of deadly force, the only effective arrest technique was the "swarm" technique, which entailed six or more officers "swarming" a suspect and physically overpowering him. However, this method could not be used if the suspect was armed with a knife, club, or similar weapon. As a consequence of these factors and the growing inclination of officers to employ deadly force against these suspects, the sheriff's

*The Capture Net*



department and other law enforcement agencies began an exhaustive effort to develop devices that are effective but less lethal.

#### **Nonlethal Devices**

There are five criteria that must be met to ensure viability of a new device:

- 1) It must be reliable and accurate in all environments and weather conditions.
- 2) Performance must be trouble-free with low maintenance.
- 3) Officers must have trust and confidence in its use.
- 4) The device must be easy to use so that training and proficiency is easily maintained.
- 5) It must provide a means of instantaneous deescalation of life-threatening situations

Over the last 6 years, our department has been vigorously searching for alternatives to lethal force. In the area of existing devices, one of the first things looked at was the tranquilizer dart. While there was a problem with accuracy, the primary risk was

the unknown side effects that could be triggered when the tranquilizer mixed with a number of other drugs that may be in the person's system. Therefore, the idea of using a tranquilizer dart was discarded.

The feasibility of using a high-pressure stream of water to subdue suspects was also examined. Both 2-inch and 4-inch hose lines were used to try to knock down or disarm a suspect. Neither line proved to be effective. Also, there were several logistical problems in getting a hose line into all the possible places a person could be.

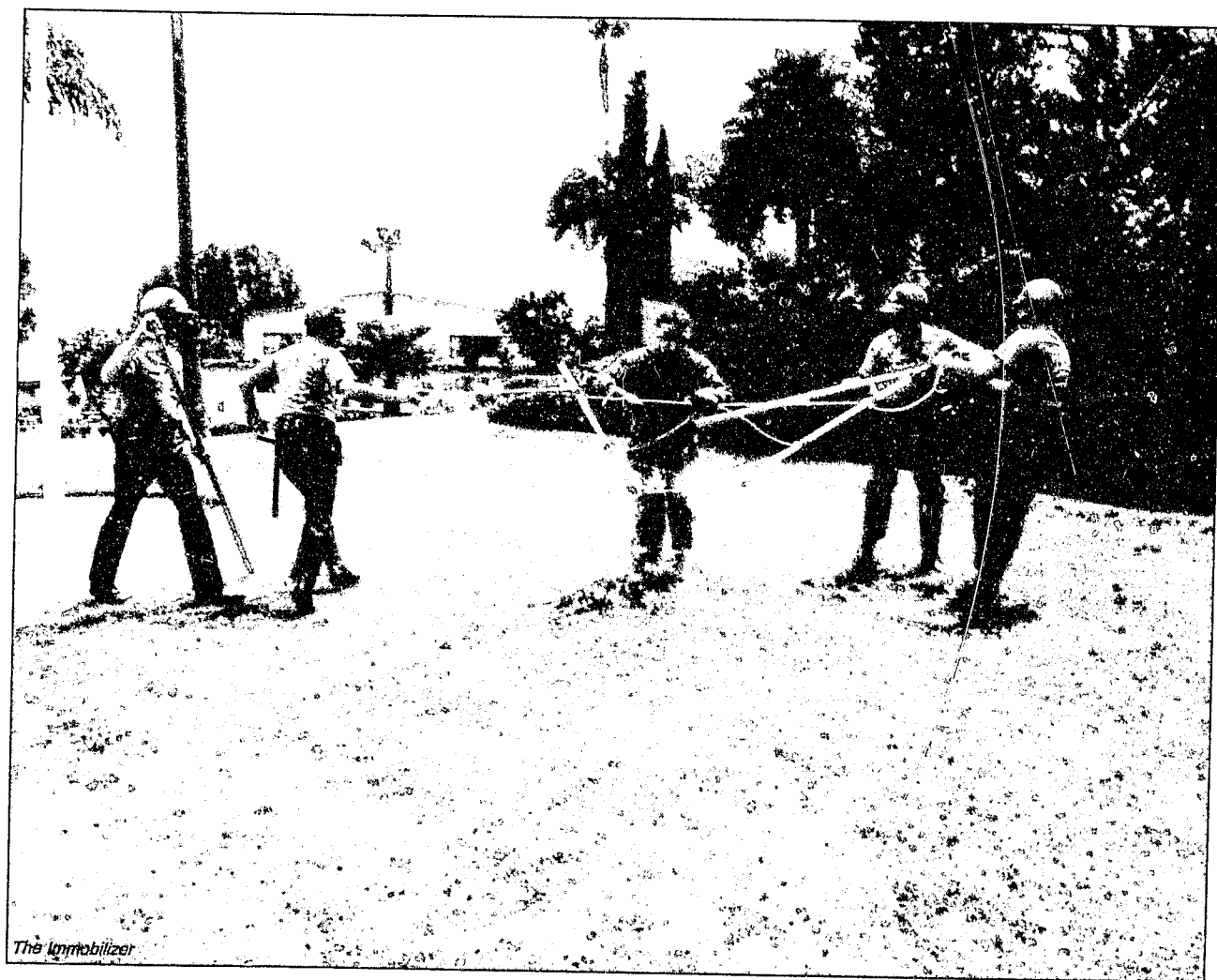
Another item tested was the aluminum ladder which is currently carried in the field supervisor's vehicle. The ladder was to be used by two officers to pin the suspect against a wall or car. Unfortunately, the ladders were in 4-foot sections so that they could easily fit into radio cars. This length was too short to afford officers a safe

distance from the suspect, and attempts to link more than one section of the ladder together proved unworkable.

Experiments were also conducted with the bola, an entanglement device used in South America, which has two heavy balls tied to the ends of a thong and is thrown at the feet of the target to disable it. The major problem with this device is that it requires an extraordinary amount of practice to maintain proficiency. Consequently, it also was rejected.

A jail mattress, which is sometimes used by jail deputies for protection when subduing violent inmates, was also tested. The mattress, however, was too bulky, even when handles were attached, and the suspect could easily outmaneuver the deputies if the mattress was used in places that were not confined.

The department also has experimented with shooting a suspect with a tear gas blast dispersion cartridge. This device dispenses a cloud of powdered tear gas from a special gun.



This alternative also had its drawbacks. First, the tear gas seems to disable only police officers and not drug-crazed or mentally ill offenders. Second, hospital emergency room personnel would suffer the effects of tear gas when they treated tear-gassed patients.

In the area of new developments to meet the less lethal need, several other items were examined. One development was called "the extended body noose." This item was composed of an 8-foot pole with a padded noose and drawstring at one end. It was designed to be slipped over a person's head and shoulders and drawn tight. This device could be easily side-stepped and proved to be ineffective.

In the area of weaponry, two modifications of traditional weapons appeared to have promise. The first was a device referred to as the "sting ray." This was an M16 rifle with a barrel modification which allowed it to fire a donut-shaped gas cloud. In theory, the cloud of air was to deliver more than sufficient force to knock the suspect to the ground. It was a good idea, but was never perfected.

Another device considered was rubber bullets. The intent of this weapon is to deliver a stunning and temporarily disabling blow to the adversary without doing permanent harm. Accuracy and the potential for a lethal blow remain the major concerns.

Other devices have been and

continue to be tested by law enforcement around the Nation. However, there are currently only three devices that have satisfactorily passed testing by our department. Each of these have been deployed throughout 20 stations and in jail facilities. Additionally, they have been deployed and used by dozens of law enforcement agencies across the Nation.

The capture net is a 10-foot by 14-foot nylon mesh net encircled by drawstrings. It envelopes the suspect much like a tobacco pouch when the drawstrings are pulled after the net is thrown. A relatively harmless dry chemical fire extinguisher is sprayed at the subject to distract him just before the net is thrown, and when manpower is available, two men, each

**"To the citizens of every community, the police represent the last line of defense when it comes to issues of potential violence."**

armed with 6-foot aluminum poles, attempt to keep the subject contained in a given area, so that the net may be successfully thrown on the subject.

Next is the immobilizer. This device is composed of a pair of 6-foot nylon poles that have a strong chain interlaced between them. Two officers are used to handle the poles, while another is used to deploy the fire extinguisher as a distractor. As the fire extinguisher is fired, the officers rush the subject, placing the poles behind the person's feet. The officers continue running past the subject, thereby trapping and immobilizing the person in the chain mesh.

The third less lethal weapon deployed widely by law enforcement is the taser. This is a handgun-type device that fires two dart-like electrodes into the subject. The darts are connected to the taser gun by tiny wires. When the trigger of the gun is pulled, a pulsating current of 50,000 volts and 3.5 amperes is delivered to the body, thereby causing temporary immobilization.

Although these devices are effective and used by law enforcement, we certainly do not believe we have all the answers and continue to search for additional devices and procedures that will enhance our effectiveness in controlling potentially violent persons.

#### Summary

In today's society, because of various social, cultural, and legal factors, the police are called upon to cope with a large number of disturbed, violent, and substance-abusing individuals. Because of recent legal trends enforcing civil rights for all citizens, including the alcoholic populations, the disabled, drug-influenced individuals, and the mentally ill,

numerous disturbed individuals have been released into the streets and have flooded into major metropolitan areas. What appears to be happening is that large numbers of distressed individuals are now in the streets, both victimizing and becoming victims of violent society.

Economic pressures have also contributed significantly to the increase of violence in our streets. Jails and prisons are overcrowded, calling for early release of dangerous criminals and probation in the community rather than incarceration. There are fewer beds in psychiatric hospitals today and their cost is significantly higher than it was in the past. This again puts large numbers of distressed individuals on the street and police officers end up intervening when these people become overly psychotic, violent, or suicidal. This cost-cutting has had a substantial impact on the amount of violence in our society.<sup>5</sup>

There have also been cutbacks in emergency psychiatric teams, community mental health centers, and staff for these facilities. Again, the consequences on the police are significant. Police officers are asked to provide basic mental health services for a large number of disturbed individuals in our community. They have become reluctant managers of many of society's rejects.

Another significant issue associated with the increase of violence in our society is the epidemic use of various mind-altering or hallucinogenic drugs. The epidemic increase in the use of PCP has increased the number of explosively violent and basically unmanageable situations that the police are asked to manage. Individuals on PCP are very unpredictable and they

often can become violent, extraordinarily strong, confused, and disoriented. The police have considerable difficulty in controlling these individuals when attempting to restrain them humanely.

Meaningful training programs for police officers need to be developed so that they can manage disturbed and addicted individuals more adequately in the field. There also needs to be continued development of new nonlethal weapons to help cope with the disturbed, aggressive, or violent individuals who are currently being released into our communities.

The police will always be involved with violent individuals, whether they be psychotic, influenced by drugs, or involved in criminal activity. The more we understand violence-prone people and their problems, the more we can help police officers humanely manage this significant social problem.

**FBI**

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> N. Katzenbach, *Challenge of Crime in a Free Society*, Report by the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice, U.S. Department of Justice, 1967.

<sup>2</sup> K. Matulia, *A Balance of Forces*, International Association of Chiefs of Police, 1982.

<sup>3</sup> 1983 Handgun Facts, Handgun Control, Inc., Washington, DC.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> A. Lehman and L. Linn, "Crimes Against Discharged Mental Patients in Board and Care Homes," *American Journal of Psychiatry*, vol. 141, 1984, pp. 271-274.

**END**