

# Effective Coping Strategies For Police Officers

Ashrafuz Zaman

## Introduction

The purpose of this study determined what effective coping strategies police officers can use to alleviate stress from their occupation and create mental resilience through adaptive coping strategies. To understand adaptive coping strategies an individual must understand maladaptive coping strategies due to the latter causing avoidance habits that reduce mental resilience. This study conducted research on mind-fullness training where identification of the problems that affect mental clarity are exposed so an officer can understand how to combat them (Au, Wong, Leung & Chiu, 2018). Identifying the problems allows officers to replace negative behaviors with positive behaviors to improve mental clarity. Thus, this study conducted research on the effectiveness of adaptive coping strategies and if the overlaps between them improved mental resilience.

## Background

A career in policing requires mental aptitude when dealing with confrontation because exposure to violence and high risk situations can be the norm when dealing with the needs of the public (Papazoglou & Andersen, 2014). If high risk situations and exposure to violence are commonplace, then the risk of negative coping strategies may be used to alleviate and medicate the mind of the police officer (Arble, Lumley, Pole, Blessman, & Arnetz, 2017). However, avoidance of the underlying issues only perpetuates the deterioration of mental resilience and can affect the job performance of the police officer (Andersen, Papazoglou, Arnetz & Collins, 2015). Thus, relationships with family, friends and coworkers may suffer due to the lack of care the police officer is avoiding (Holton, Adam, & Chaney, 2016). Furthermore, the department and society will suffer if the police officer does not maintain the order of their mind when dealing with high stress situations. The primary focus of this study determined the effectiveness of existing coping strategies that police officers utilized when dealing with traumatic situations.

## Methods

This study used academic articles from the Justice Institute of British Columbia (JIBC) and Google Scholar. Excluded articles included non-English articles written before the year 2005 and articles that required a payment per view. Inclusion criteria such as full text, scholarly and academic journals were used to find articles. A broad search displayed 220 hits on JIBC library database and 19200 hits on Google Scholar. Refined search techniques resulted in hits as low as six in JIBC’s library database and 4500 in Google Scholar. Most articles were chosen from the JIBC library database due to the lower number of hits compared to Google Scholar which allowed the researcher to narrow their search. Keywords used included: coping methods, cognitive impairment, stress management, well-being, active coping, adaptive coping, occupational stress, resilience training, mental preparedness, psychological well-being, emotional preparedness, mindfulness, post-traumatic stress disorder and Canada. Keywords were paired with the words police officers. International articles were included because information of what is working in a police service in one country can benefit others.

## Results/Findings

Five themes were uncovered from the journal articles presented in this study: Deterioration of health, creation of mental resilience, education on how to combat stress through training, performance of duties and stigmatization of seeking help. Maladaptive coping strategies became a common trend among the themes because it affected the mental clarity of the individual. Arble et al. (2017) explained the use of maladaptive coping strategies reduced mental resilience. Training on mental resilience lacked among police departments' training curriculum (Papazoglou & Andersen, 2014). Due to the lack of education on mental resilience, police officers displayed increased use of maladaptive coping strategies which decreased their job performance. In fact, Andersen, Papazoglou, Arnetz, et al. (2015) explained reduced job performance, increased absenteeism, increased sick days can lead to early retirement which would reduce a police departments' efficiency. While seeking ways to increase adaptive coping strategies are beneficial for police officers, Papazoglou & Andersen (2018) explains stigmatization causes fear in police officers to seek help because they believe they will be judged by their peers.

## Discussion

Maladaptive coping strategies affected most of the themes in this study. On the other hand, the use of adaptive coping strategies improved mental resiliency that allowed increased self-efficacy and the actions needed for increased stress management (Holton et al., 2016). Au et al. (2018) adds building mental resilience from adaptive coping strategies allows police officers to reduce emotional stress from their occupation which reduces their anxiety, depression, fatigue and guilt. Maladaptive coping strategies involve the use of substances such as drugs and alcohol which can lead to psychological distress causing anxiety. Whereas adaptive coping strategies include mediation, exercise and communication between family and friends (Holton et al., 2016). Thus, police officers who utilize adaptive coping strategies displayed a strong mental resilience when dealing with traumatic situations that cause stress.

## Conclusions or Recommendations

Allowing police officers to achieve greater mental resilience and the reduction of maladaptive coping strategies requires the use of adaptive coping strategies. However, programs to increase mental resilience must be created but stigmatization of seeking help must be addressed. Police departments must display organizational commitment through pro social behaviors that reduce stigmatization on seeking help (Papazoglou & Andersen, 2014).

Programs can include training on the identification of the level of stress a traumatic situation can cause (Arble et al., 2017). Furthermore, training on mental resilience and mind-fullness which is described as heightened situational awareness, needs to become commonplace in police training, thus reducing maladaptive coping strategies (Andersen, Papazoglou, Nyman, Koskelainen, & Gustafsberg, 2015). Replacing maladaptive coping with adaptive coping strategies can be done by educating officers on the dangers and process on how maladaptive coping begins. Thus, the implementation of training should be conducted during cadet training when the police officers begins their career (Papazoglou & Andersen, 2014).

## References

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