

CRISIS INTERVENTION TEAM TRAINING

BEXAR COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Suicide by Cop

INSTRUCTORS:

Objectives

- What is Suicide by Cop?
- Warning Signs
- Why Suicide By Cop?
- Characteristics of Initiators
- Indicators for a peaceful resolution
- Indicators to a deadly resolution
- Law Journal..."Suicide by Cop"
- Community relations and the Media.
- The Impact of "Suicide by Cop" on involved personnel.
- What is Suicide by Cop?

"Suicide by Cop" is a police colloquialism for a form of victim-precipitated homicide in which a suicidal individual engages in calculated , life threatening and criminal behavior in order to compel the police to use deadly force. In these killings, the initiator is a direct, positive precipitator of his or her own death. (Parent, 1998: 22,1998b: 4)

- Using Law Enforcement or Military action to stage an event.
- Requires planning and capacity to operate plan.
- Individual is resigned to completing the event, no "fail safe" mechanism.
- Unlikely to communicate plan to others.

Suicide By Cop

- An incident in which an individual bent on self-destruction, engages in life threatening and criminal behavior in order to force law enforcement officers to kill them
- Also called Victim Precipitated Homicide

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In this Video:

Shooting indicated suicide by cop by friends

SUICIDE BY COP OR VICTIM PRECIPITATED HOMICIDE?

- Richard B. Parent states that "victim precipitated homicide" is not necessarily "suicide by cop"
- They are similar in that threatening behavior did cause the use of deadly force by law enforcement in a defensive action
- One must usually do a psychological post mortem to determine if the decedent's actions resulted from a clear intent to commit suicide
- In many cases, the intent of the decedent remains unclear

"Suicide by Cop"

- While it isn't common, there are examples of mentally ill people who may act on a suicidal impulse by engaging or threatening police in a manner that is likely to produce a lethal response.

We Must

- Recognize that a mentally ill person in crisis may be overwhelmed by
 - Sensations
 - Thoughts
 - Frightening beliefs
 - hallucinations

Police Magazine (March 2000)

- "The essential difference between suspect encounter training, that officers traditionally receive, and how to approach the mentally ill is the need to be non-confrontational. Such a requirement to, in effect, switch gears is diametrically opposed to the way officers are routinely expected to control conflict."

CIT skills can help if you use them...

Cop Kills Wild man on bridge....

Warning signs to look for

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- The subject is barricaded and refuses to negotiate.
- The subject says that he has a life threatening illness.
- The subject has just killed someone, particularly a close relative, his mother, wife or child.
- The subject's demands of police do not include negotiations for escape or freedom.

Warning signs to look for

- The subject has undergone one or more traumatic life changes (death of a loved one, divorce, financial devastation, etc.)
- Prior to the encounter, the subject has given away all of his money or possessions.
- The subject has a record of assaults
- Subject says he will only surrender to the person in charge.

Warning signs to look for

- Subject indicates that he has thoughts about planning his death.
- Has expressed an interest in wanting to die in a "Macho" way.
- Has expressed interest in "going out in a big way".
- Subject expresses feelings of hopelessness or helplessness.

"Warning Signs"

- Verbal Statements At Scene
- Notes Left Behind or Family Discussion
- Non-compliance of police commands
 - Threats or Aggression for no reason
 - Attack with inferior weaponry
- Failure To Leave or To De-escalate

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- Manipulate The Situation Into A Confrontation - "Setting A Trap"
- Warning signs to look for
- Subject demands to be killed.
- Subject sets a deadline to be killed.
- **89** people complete suicide every day
- **32,439** people in 2004 in the US
- Over **1,000,000** suicides worldwide (reported)
- This data refers to completed suicides that are documented by medical examiners – it is estimated that 2-3 times as many actually complete suicide

(Surgeon General's Report on Suicide

- Quote

"Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem."

Phil Donahue

- **Why Suicide by Cop?**
- Victims want to ensure death. They single out police officers because not only are they equipped with firearms, but they also have extensive training to react to potentially life-threatening situations with accurate and deadly force (Lewan, 1998).

Individual dies in a macho way

- Why Suicide by Cop?
- By forcing the people to kill them, victims may avoid the stigma and social taboos associated with suicide (Geberth, 1993: 105).
- Characteristics of Initiators
- In the cases studied by Hutson et al, 98% of initiators were male. (Hutson et al, 1998:665).

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- Initiators put a lot of thought and preparation into their own deaths (Van Zandt, 1993; Power Phone Editor's Note, 1998)
- A 1998 study by Harris showed initiators were:
 - (a) under the influence of drugs and alcohol

(b) Between the ages of 21 and 35 years

(c) In possession of handguns or knives

Characteristics of Initiators

- Between 1991 and 1997, the percentage of shootings identified as Police-Assisted Suicide jumped to 25%
- May represent a bona fide increase in this form of death as a means of suicide **or** improved data collection
- A study of 54 cases in which people attempted Police-Assisted Suicide was completed in North Carolina between 1992 and 1997:
 - 94% were male
 - 63% were armed with guns, 24% had knives, 3 had other objects ; 3 had no weapon
 - More than 50% were under the influence of alcohol
 - 45% were experiencing family problems or the end of a relationship
 - Almost 40% talked about homicide and suicide with officers involved
 - In 46% of the cases, the incidents began as a domestic argument
 - Two-thirds appeared unplanned

(Lord, 1998)

Characteristics of Initiators

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- The literature shows that in nearly every case, the weapon used by the initiator was either not loaded or not working properly; or it was not even real. In a majority of cases, the subject used a toy gun, and thus had no real intention of hurting others – just themselves (Valencia - Stincelli, 1998:1)

Cop Shooting... Douglas, Georgia

An individual points a weapon to a police officer

- **Potential indicators to a peaceful resolution by the subject**

- Less interactive tension
- Lowered voice
- Less anger
- Less profanity
- Diminished aggressive body language
- Increased non-aggressive body language
- Diminished threats of violence
- Less hopelessness and helplessness
- Greater willing to listen to the officer's suggestions

- **Potential indicators to a deadly resolution by the subject**

- Hyper-vigilance (Scanning)

This involves a subject visually scanning his surroundings, typically from shoulder to shoulder, and illustrating indications that the surroundings are being perceived as “negative.” The subject shows no indication that the presence of first responders is considered at all comforting or helpful

- **Potential indicators to a deadly resolution by the subject**

- Change in rate of breathing
- This is usually detectable (visually, audibly, or both) as the last act before death, writes Perrou. “However, the breathing pattern is not always pronounced; sometimes it is so subtle that it can be seen only by the observer specifically looking for such behavior”.

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Potential indicators to a deadly resolution by the subject

- Counting Down or up
- This involves a counting cadence, often illustrated by a rocking motion, that helps the suicidal subject take himself to “the point of release and fall.”

Potential indicators to a deadly resolution by the subject

- These indicators allow you to monitor the subject's state of mind and his or her immediate level of willingness to take the situation to a violent end.

Psycho path with a knife

Law Journal

- Campbell V. City of Leavenworth, No 83,833, 13 P.3d 917 (Kan. App.2000), which ruled that an officer acted reasonably in shooting and killing a man who, having stated that he would kill officers if he was not killed himself, charged at the officers with a metal object held in a threatening position.

2007 (8) AELE Mo.L.J. 101 Civil Liability Law Section - August, 2007

Law Journal

- Martinez v. County of Los Angeles, 47 Cal. App. 4th 334, 54 Cal. Rptr.2d 772 (1996), finding that sheriff's deputies acted reasonably in shooting and killing a man intoxicated with PCP and armed with a knife who slowly advanced towards them and announced his intentions of killing them if they did not shoot him.

2007 (8) AELE Mo.L.J. 101 Civil Liability Law Section - August, 2007

Law Journal

- Woods v. City of Lakeland, Fl. #98-3171, 203 F. 3d 1288 (11th Cir 2000), in which the courts concluded that a police officer acted reasonably in shooting and killing a man, armed with a

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knife, who had threatened suicide and had already injured himself. The officer could reasonably have believed that the man, who refused several orders to drop the knife, was coming towards the officers, and might injure or kill one of them.

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Law Journal

The Investigation

In *Suicide By Cop: Inducing Officers to Shoot*, Dr Perrou along with former Santa Rosa, California City Attorney Brien Ferrel Write, "Recognizing that SBC situations are lethal traps designed to place officers in a no-option situation, it is important to capture all aspects of the subject's psychological 'being and 'existence' at the time of the shooting, and collect evidence of their psycho-social mind set in the days and possibly weeks leading up to the encounter.

The Investigation

- Suicide
- Mental Health and Medical Record
- Crime/Scene Investigation
- Civil
- Employment History
- Alcohol/ Controlled Substances
- Misc.

80 year old woman taken down by officer... Open Discussion after video

Community relations and the Media.

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Open Discussion:

Did the Officer do a Good Job?

Public Inquiries and Litigation

1. Why did the incident occur?
2. Background of the police officers involved
3. Psychological profile of the decedent
4. The information known by police personnel at the scene, at the time of death
5. Experts who can assist in explaining how and why the event occurred

The impact of "Suicide by Cop"

"I experienced so many emotions, but the most prevalent was anger. I was angry with the woman forcing me into this situation. I was angry with the resident who knew she was armed,... and still told me nothing." (Valencia – Stincelli, 1998:1)

Police-Assisted Suicide

- Police officers reacting to the aftermath of Police-Assisted Suicide display symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder adversely affecting ability to perform duties
- Hyper vigilance, fear, anger, sleeplessness, and depression are among the many symptoms reported
- In many instances, the timing, speed at which the encounter escalated and officer's perception of immediate danger to self or others left him or her with no choice but to use deadly force
- Yet, second guessing on the part of the officer is common
- The reactions officers experience after a suicide by cop incident
- Anger to depression

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- Resentment
- Preoccupation with the incident
- Nightmares
- Anxiety to hypersensitivity
- Diminished self confidence
- Changing eating and sleeping patterns
- Feeling loss of control
- Memory difficulties
- The reactions officers experience after a suicide by cop incident: Trauma
- A traumatic event is an occurrence of such intensity that it over whelms a person's normal ability to cope. It is often sudden, shocking and involves death, serious injury, and emotions of intense fear, helplessness, or horror. It may destroy or impair one's sense that life is predictable.
- **Suicide by Cop**

Deputy Raphael Williams #4114

BCSO Mental Health Unit

An experience on a close call he experienced.

Cop vs. Gunman

The officer in this video indicates how he felt during the incident of suicide by cop

- Operational Safety Issues
- We must maintain our safety at all times
- Maintain a position of safety – COVER
- Always request back-up, never go it alone
- Develop an initial intervention plan

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- Once back-up units arrive they must maintain constant vigilance silently
- Confine and isolate the situation
- **Always** Remember to
- Be an active listener
- Use your authority in a positive manner
- Remember to
- Keep the subject's hands in view
- Remove influences that upset the subject
- Do not violate personal space
- Maneuver the person into a "safe area"
- Avoid one-on-one physical contact
- Maintain control

Brief Bibliography

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Videos

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Pictures

- Shutterstock.com
- Deputy Ross Garza #1772
- www.surgeongeneral.gov

Notes: