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Police Auditor

Law Enforcement Wellness Data Review

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Introduction

In recent years, there has been a notable surge in the implementation of wellness policies, units, programs, and training within police departments nationwide. Departments recognized that prioritizing physical and mental health produces better employees that can more effectively address the diverse needs of the community they serve. Neglecting or failing to prioritize the wellbeing of employees may result in adverse outcomes such as suicide and negative interactions with the public that undermine the legitimacy of the police department.

Research findings indicate that police officers exhibit a higher rate of suicide compared to the general population, with increased exposure to risk factors such as traumatic incidents - potentially leading to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) – and organizational stressors like shift work and administrative burdens[1]. In 2018, the National Officer Safety Initiatives (NOSI) in collaboration with the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the Education Development Center, and the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention released an issue brief titled "Preventing Suicide Among Law Enforcement Officers." This brief identified numerous suicide risk factors with a focus on the law enforcement community. While the variables outlined in the current report do not directly measure these risk factors, they serve as proxies utilizing available data.

The Alameda Police Department instituted a peer support program comprising both sworn and professional staff members who have undergone specialized training to assist their peers and family members in the aftermath of stressful and traumatic incidents. Presently, five members of the Department are formally trained, with an additional five slated to undergo the same training. The Department also contracts with an outside organization to provide psychological support services to employees on an as needed basis. Additionally, the City of Alameda extends access to an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for its employees and their families. This comprehensive program offers support for a range of personal issues including emotional well-being, substance abuse, parenting challenges, financial management, and legal consultation.

To promote physical well-being among its sworn employees, the Department incentives those who successfully complete an annual fitness test with 10 additional hours of leave time. In 2023, the Department secured grant funding from the State of California to enhance officer wellness initiatives. The Department engaged the services of a specialized company focused on coronary health. This collaboration facilitated comprehensive health assessments encompassing blood tests, vascular imaging, cardiac biomarker analysis, and other relevant diagnostics. Over half of the employees in the Department elected to participate.

The purpose of this document is not to create an early warning system utilized by many police departments. Early warning systems are primarily geared towards identifying officers exhibiting problematic behavior with the aim of intervening before such behavior escalates. Instead, this document's purpose is to provide the Department with a list of employees (sworn and professional staff) that are highflyers in certain areas that might have an impact on their physical or mental wellbeing or in areas that may indicate an existing issue. The Department can then tailor its approach to engage with these employees and assess what services or interventions they may require.

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1   Violanti JM, Robinson CF, Shen R. (2013). Law enforcement suicide: A national analysis. International Journal of Emergency Mental Health, 15(4), 289-297. 3.

Peterson C, Stone DM, Marsh SM, et al. (2018). Suicide rates by major occupational group - 17 states, 2012 and 2015. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, 67(45), 1253-1260. doi: 10.15585/mmwr.mm6745a1

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Traumatic Events

Traumatic event exposure, as highlighted in the NOSI report, is identified as a significant risk factor for suicide. While any event has the potential to induce trauma, this analysis concentrates specifically on calls involving deceased individuals.

In 2023, Alameda Police officers responded to 133 individuals reported deceased, six suicides, and one murder victim's body. For the purpose of this analysis, the primary responding officer for each incident was identified and utilized, acknowledging that multiple officers may have responded to each scene.

- Two officers responded to 10 or more calls involving deceased individuals. One of these officers also responded to a suicide incident.

- One officer assumed the primary role in two suicide cases.

- Additionally, two officers viewed the body of the murder victim on Bay Farm Island. Both officers were also the primary on two other calls involving deceased individuals.

The chart below details this information.

	DOA Call	Suicide	Murder Victim
Ofc 1	11	1	0
Ofc 2	10	0	0
Ofc 3	1	2	0
Ofc 4	6	0	0
Ofc 5	2	0	1
Ofc 6	2	0	1

Abusive Language

In 2023, there were 127,885 pieces of evidence uploaded to Evidence.com, the platform utilized for storing body worn camera footage and associated photographs as part of employees' daily duties. Given the sheer volume of material, it is impractical for supervisors to manually review every piece of footage. Instead, supervisors are typically assigned a specific number of videos from each employee to review on a monthly basis. To help determine which videos might warrant further review, the APD contracted with Truleo, a provider of automated body camera review and analysis for law enforcement. Truleo's software is designed to detect significant events such as instances of use of force, pursuits, frisking, and non-compliance incidents. Moreover, it screens for both professional and unprofessional language used by officers, thereby enabling supervisors to promptly review pertinent footage.

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For the purposes of this report, we focus on the "risky speaker" flag within the software. This flag serves to highlight instances where someone other than the employee uses profanity, makes insults, or issues threats. Such language may be directed either towards the employee themselves or towards other individuals present at the scene. Repeated exposure to this form of language could influence an employee's perception of and interaction with members of the community. Additionally, employees with a high number of flagged videos may need additional de-escalation training. This type of assessment can only be made after identifying those with the most flagged videos.

In 2023, Truleo software conducted an analysis of 47,801 videos. Among those, 2,000 videos (4%) were flagged for risky speaker behavior. The analysis encompassed footage from 79 employees, including both sworn and professional staff. Fifteen employees had no videos with the risky speaker flag. Among the remaining 64 employees, only one individual had slightly more than 10% of their interactions feature risky speaker flag. This employee was associated with a total of 397 videos, out of which 40 were flagged for risky speaker behavior. The employee with the highest count of videos featuring the flag had 2,762 videos, with 100 of them flagged, resulting in a flag percentage of 3.62. This individual also had the highest number of videos analyzed overall.

Overtime

While working significant overtime hours may not directly cause suicide, it can serve as an indicator of underlying financial or relationship challenges, both of which are recognized as suicide risk factors. The below chart presents the sworn and professional staff members who worked the highest number of overtime hours. In 2023, sworn members were mandated to work between 15-25 hours of overtime per month. It is important to note that excessive overtime can contribute to burnout, adversely affecting an employee's health and job performance. Thus, monitoring and addressing overtime patterns is crucial for safeguarding employee well-being and organizational effectiveness.

	# of Hours
Sworn 1 (since retired)	1,003
Sworn 2	889
Sworn 3	793
Sworn 4	779
Professional 1	545
Professional 2	436
Professional 3	416

Sick Time

For most full-time employees, sick leave accrual averages approximately 96 hours per year, with some variability based on the terms outlined in each respective union's contract. Both sworn and professional staff contracts stipulate that sick leave may be utilized solely in cases of genuine sickness affecting either the employee or a family member. This analysis centers on instances where sick leave usage surpasses the standard 96-hour annual accrual, recognizing that many employees may have accumulated a surplus beyond this threshold.

The emphasis on sick leave stems from its potential indicator of a need to access resources, whether for assisting with the care of a sick family member or accessing substance abuse services. Additionally, attention was directed towards individuals exhibiting a pattern of sick leave usage on specific days, such as the day preceding or following a regular day off. The purpose of this review was not to accuse the individuals identified of misconduct. Rather, its aim was to ensure they receive any additional assistance or support they may require from the Department.

In 2023, a total of 34 APD employees exceeded 96 hours of sick time usage. Among them, 20 were sworn staff members, while 14 were professional staff. Using the highest staffing level for the year (70 sworn, 34 professional), this translates to 29% of sworn employees and 41% of professional staff utilizing more than 96 hours of sick time per year.

The majority of these employees typically took multiple sick days off at once. However, there were individuals identified who frequently used sick time on the day following their scheduled days off, during holiday periods, or who often had to depart from work early. Notably, one sworn employee and one professional staff member appeared on both lists for top overtime worked and top sick leave usage.

Use of Force

In 2023, officers responded to 67,772 calls for service. Throughout the year, instances of low-level force (control holds, takedowns, etc) were recorded in 67 instances, accounting for 0.1% of the total call volume. Notably, only three incidents involved intermediate-level force (punches, knee strikes, taser deployments, etc), representing an occurrence rate of 0.004%. Officers undergo training both in the academy and throughout their careers to discern when the use of force is allowed, how much force is appropriate, and the proper way to employ such force.

In 2023, three officers were involved in more than five incidents requiring the use of force, although none of these incidents involved intermediate-level force. Notably, all their uses of force were deemed compliant with Department policy. While using more force than others may raise questions about these officers' de-escalation techniques, it important to consider factors such as the officers' volume of interactions with the public or the nature of their assigned shifts, which could contribute to a higher likelihood of such encounters.

Upon a review of the reports and body worn camera footage associated with these incidents, the Police Auditor concluded that the officers effectively employed de-escalation techniques when appropriate and utilized the minimum necessary force to achieve compliances from the subjects involved. Officers were polite and courteous throughout their interactions, even while using force. Additional findings from this review will be presented in a separate memo as they do not specifically relate to officer wellness.

Complaints

In 2023, the APD initiated investigations for 19 misconduct cases. Notably, 14 of the 19 cases were internally generated by members of the Department. Misconduct cases are typically opened in response to suspected violations of departmental policy and can encompass multiple allegations and involve multiple employees.

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Among the employees under investigation, two officers received three complaints each, while five officers received two complaints each throughout the year. No professional staff member was investigated in more than one misconduct case. The chart below provides a breakdown of the number of complaints received by the top officers in 2023, along with the number of closed cases and the number of closed cases containing at least one sustained allegation (indicating that the violation did occur).

	# of Complaints	# of Closed Cases	# of Closed Cases with a Sustained Finding
Ofc 1	3	2	2
Ofc 2	3	1	1
Ofc 3	2	2	2
Ofc 4	2	2	1
Ofc 5	2	0	0
Ofc 6	2	0	0
Ofc 7 (no longer with the Dept)	2	2	2

Policy violations can range in severity from minor infractions such as repeated use of profanity to serious violations such as instances of bias-based policing. While it is acknowledged that no individual, including officers, can be perfect at all times, repeated violations raise legitimate concerns.

Repeated policy violations may indicate the need for a more thorough examination of the employee's actions. This assessment could involve evaluating whether the employee requires additional training to reinforce proper conduct or if there are underlying personal issues that may be impacting their on-duty behavior. Providing support and assistance to employees experiencing difficulties, whether related to job performance or personal matters, is crucial to maintaining an effective and legitimate police department.

APD Recommendations

The names of all employees in this report were provided to the Department's command staff. The Department takes the wellness of its employees seriously and identified the following as things they will commit to or explore to improve the health of the members of the APD.

• Quarterly Training: The Department will arrange for the psychological support services company it contracts with to conduct training sessions for officers, scheduled for Spring of 2024.

• Wellness Coordinator Training: In April 2024, the lieutenant overseeing the wellness program will attend a weeklong training session tailored for wellness coordinators. This training will offer insights into the role of a wellness coordinator, strategies for developing a comprehensive wellness program, and an in-depth exploration of various wellness approaches.

• Employee Assistance Program (EAP) Promotion: An employee who has utilized the services provided by the EAP has volunteered to share their experience and advocate for the benefits of utilizing these free services.

- Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs): The Department is in the process of procuring AEDs for each patrol vehicle, enhancing emergency response capabilities.

- Enhanced Wellness Checks: The Department will prioritize conducting more wellness checks on employees, particularly focusing on those flagged in this report for additional support and assistance.

- Establishment of a Quiet Room: Efforts will be made to identify a suitable space within the Police Administration Building that can be designated as a quiet room, providing officers with a dedicated area to decompress and alleviate stress.

The Police Auditor will follow up on these items in late Spring 2024 to determine what has been completed and what additional steps need to be taken.