



## Physical Anthropology Section - 2013

### 122 Forensic Psychological Issues From Terrorism to Officer-Involved Shootings: U.S. Border Patrol Critical Incident Investigative Teams

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The goals of this presentation are to: (1) explore the forensic psychological factors associated with traumatic incident management, debriefing, substance abuse, self-assessment, and suicide prevention for the Border Patrol CIIT; (2) explore the culture of the Border Patrol; and, (3) fuel a foundation for additional research.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing professional dialogue that will result in best practices in this area.

The federal government maintains hundreds of ports of entry. The length of the United States – Canada and United States – Mexico borders makes them convenient targets for illegal border activity. The responsibility of the U.S. Border Patrol is to no surprise directed at preventing Homeland Security breaches due to dangerous people and potentially dangerous situations. For example, following the terrorist attacks of 9/11, U.S. Homeland Security, and specifically the Border Patrol, became increasingly sensitive to border protection policy. There was intense discussion and considerable disagreement regarding immigration from the border with Mexico that added to the pre-existing concerns about drug trafficking and other border crimes. Also fueling tensions were competing economic needs reflected in Mexico's job demands and the need for a cheap work force. For example, the hourly wage in Mexico in 2000 was less than two U.S. dollars. By contrast, the earnings for unskilled undocumented workers in the U.S. are almost three times higher. Monies returned to Mexico also impacts their economy.

The USA Patriot Act was a major piece of legislation aimed at addressing the need to protect Americans from perceived threats posed by terrorists. To address those concerns, the number of Border Patrol agents increased from 3,965 in September 1993 to 12,349 in September 2006. In the fiscal year 2009, there were about 20,000 Border Patrol agents. The Border Patrol mission obviously applies not only directly to terrorists but terrorist weapons. Among the objectives of the Border Patrol is the planned use of information, integration, and rapid response that is crafted to protect the borders of the United States. The Border Patrol objectives of managing risks, increasing community engagement, and strengthening an investment in people all have underlying forensic psychological elements. The work of Border Patrol agents is hazardous and involves a significant amount of stress. For example, four Mexican nationals were charged in the shooting death of a U.S. Border Patrol agent. This incident was believed to be connected to the controversial "Fast and Furious" gun-smuggling operation. Border Patrol agents are also subjected to accusations of corruption and abuse of migrants. The Border Patrol's border enforcement has the doctrine of "prevention through deterrence" which also had implications for this unit. For example, the border stations San Diego, El Centro, Nogales, and El Paso have seen the construction of fences, lighting, and an increase in agents. Yet, some remote areas (e.g., mountains and deserts) were less protected and resulted in more risky attempts by migrants. The U.S. Border Patrol has a unit referred to as the "Critical Incident Investigative Team" (CIIT). The CIIT has witnessed an increase in the number of migrant deaths due to dehydration, hypothermia, and being double-crossed by coyotes hired to smuggle them across the border.

In many respects, CIIT functions as an investigative nexus to address a wide range of incident issues that arise as Border Patrol agents carry out their enforcement duties. Yet, there are unique sources of tension (e.g., supervisor issues, suicidal behavior of Border Patrol agents, and Latino law enforcement cultural factors) in the U.S. Border Patrol. The first learning objective of this presentation explores the forensic psychological factors associated with traumatic incident management, debriefing, substance abuse, self-assessment, and suicide prevention for the Border Patrol CIIT. The second learning objective explores the culture of the Border Patrol. The third learning objective is designed to create a theoretical foundation for additional research. The community is expected to profit from a professional dialogue that will result in best practices in this area.

**Forensic Psychology, Border Patrol, Critical Incident**