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I14 Violence Factors and Characteristics of Police Ambush Killers

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the manner in which law enforcement characterizes police deaths and the concept of police ambush killings. The characteristics of those who carried out police ambush killings will be reviewed and assessed for violence. The potential risk factors for violence will be reviewed. Recommendations regarding psychoeducation to health care providers, particularly forensic psychiatrists, will be explored.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by educating attendees about the clinical characteristics of those who have successfully conducted police ambush attacks from 2014 to the present.

On average, 47 felonious police deaths occur annually in the United States. Of these, ten occur annually in the context of police ambush shootings.¹ Police ambush shootings are defined as predatory and sudden attacks on police officers with the intent to kill or injure. The topic of police ambush shootings has garnered increasing significance in the media and society at large, particularly due to recent police killings in Dallas, TX, Baton Rouge, LA, and San Diego, CA.² Data from 2010 reveals that alleged offenders in the felonious killings of officers share certain characteristics, including being predominately male, having prior arrests, and being under the influence of controlled substances or alcohol at the time of the incident.¹ Although there is information available on offenders in felonious police deaths, there is little literature analyzing characteristics of offenders in ambush police killings.

Reviewed here are police ambush killings from 2014 to present (16 cases).¹ Using publicly available sources such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) websites dedicated to police deaths and media, including newspapers and social media, this presentation will review the assailants in those 23 ambush killings. The goal is to determine if there are any clinical similarities between the perpetrators and consider their risk factors and predispositions for engaging in such acts of violence toward law enforcement. Police ambush killings, while rare, have shown a significant increase in the United States and worldwide. It is poorly understood and infrequently reported in the forensic literature. This study seeks to alert the forensic community about this method of killing police officers as well as to review characteristics of the perpetrators and identify similarities and differences among them. By determining commonalities between these assailants, this presentation will educate health care professionals on these characteristics as well as on the increased incidence of ambush killings in the United States.

Reference(s):

1. <https://ucr.fbi.gov/leoka/leoka-2010/officers-feloniously-killed>.
2. <http://www.cnn.com/2015/08/03/us/police-officers-killed-nationwide/>.

Police Ambush Killings, Violence, Mental Illness