



I3 Mental Health and Stress Relating to Crime Scene Investigators (CSIs): A Lack of Training, Support, and Resources for CSIs

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Learning Overview: The main goal of this presentation is to compare self-perceived stress between civilian CSIs and sworn officers, the impact on their mental health, as well as the available stress management tools. After attending this presentation, attendees will have a better understanding regarding the inconsistencies about reporting and recognition of occupational stress experienced by civilian CSIs and their sworn law enforcement counterparts. Significant differences apparently exist in the training, screening, coping strategies, and stress management between the two groups. There are also different standards in place to contend with exposure to traumatic events and related stress exposure and availability of resources for stress management for these professionals.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community and the agencies employing CSIs by demonstrating the need for more awareness of the occupational stress regarding this group, more open mental health discussions, and research to address these concerns. This is especially relevant for civilian CSIs, where stress and mental health support is nearly non-existent.

The plan of this study was to use a 28-question anonymous survey that collected responses about the stress perceived and experienced on the job; the training and education regarding stress management and coping skills; and the awareness of resources, policies, and support once stress or trauma is experienced. Participants within this study included CSIs ($N=12$) and sworn law enforcement officers ($N=46$) whose duties included responding to scenes of death, violence, dangerous, or emotionally sensitive scenes.

The results indicated that both groups were statistically similar in reporting that their agencies or employers offer programs of peer support, assistance, or critical incident stress management, with 100% of respondents having acknowledged that the services existed. Another area of the study evaluated the perceived stress experienced by both groups during the course of their duties. The results demonstrated there was a two-fold difference in reporting stress for the CSIs compared to the sworn officers. The self-reported scaled responses were also statistically analyzed and showed twice as many CSIs having experienced vicarious stress as compared to sworn officers. The topic of training and education in stress management within the first year of hire demonstrated 75% of CSIs did not feel they received adequate training compared to 30% of sworn officers. The perception of similar resources for assistance once stress was encountered showed 75% of CSIs thought they did not receive assistance, compared to sworn officers (28%).

In conclusion, the survey responses from this study suggest CSIs feel they are experiencing stress and trauma at similar levels as sworn officers and that sworn officers appear to have been given more training and education to cope with the stress encountered.

Crime Scene Investigation, Mental Health, Stress