

I5 The Forgotten Ones: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in First Responders

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Learning Overview: The goal of this presentation is to discuss: (1) various experiences of first responders from Emergency Medical Services (EMS), police, crime scene investigators, physicians, and others; (2) different agency and regional responses to PTSD and processing of PTSD and grief; and (3) symptoms experienced in these groups. How chronic exposure to trauma and vicarious trauma affect responders' mental health will also be identified.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by addressing a serious aspect of mental health and responder well being by discussing vicarious trauma, ways to recognize symptoms, and resources available for treatment. Understanding how PTSD is affecting first responders may also help address the need to research the forensic science community's potential risk. The forensic science community is not immune to the effects of PTSD and should also investigate how PTSD could be affecting the members of the forensic science community.

This presentation will discuss how PTSD can affect first responders in federal, state, and local agencies such as local fire departments, law enforcement, emergency medical services, and public health officials. In this presentation, current research studies and data will be presented to help identify how PTSD is affecting first responders who are continuously exposed to traumatic and stressful incidents over the course of their careers.

PTSD and acute stress reactions are not reserved for crime victims and war veterans. The American Psychiatric Association defined PTSD during the 1980s in the 3rd edition of *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*.¹ Researchers have extensively researched the effects of PTSD on military veterans returning from conflict whereby mental health professionals were then able to use standard criteria to properly diagnose patients who had PTSD. Since the 1980s, researchers are branching out from focusing on military veterans who have PTSD to researching the effects of PTSD on first responders.

The nation's first responders experience a wide variety of mental health symptoms that often go unrecognized. Recent research suggests that first responders such as firefighters, emergency medical technicians, paramedics, police officers, crime scene investigators, and allied health professionals are just as vulnerable to the effects PTSD. This presentation's focus will address the history of PTSD, recently published research, and new research areas to be studied in the future. For example, according to Stanley, the research data uncovered some shocking results of 1,027 retired and current firefighters that found that 46.8% had suicidal ideations.² First responders have been overlooked over the years without the opportunity to ask for help. This can be attributed to the culture and stigmatism of being considered weak if one asked for mental health help to overcome the traumatic stress encountered on the job. Many first responders have suffered in silence, and the only way first responders will be able to get help is through further research into how PTSD affects first responders and the public acknowledgment that PTSD is a real problem destroying first responder's lives.

Reference(s):

1. Crocq, M.A., and Crocq, L. (2000). From shell shock and war neurosis to posttraumatic stress disorder: A history of psychotraumatology. *Dialogues in clinical neuroscience*, 2(1), 47–55.
2. I.H. Stanley, M.A. Hom, C.R. Hagan, T.E. Joiner. Career prevalence and correlates of suicidal thoughts and behaviors among firefighters. *J Affect Disord*, 187 (2015), pp. 163-171, 10.1016/j.jad.2015.08.007.

PTSD, Vicarious Trauma, PTSD-C