

POLICE CHIEF



ACTIVE THREATS & TARGETED VIOLENCE

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Resilience Training Intervention

Lessons Learned from Milwaukee and Madison

MOST LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS BEGIN THEIR CAREERS IN GOOD PHYSICAL CONDITION AND HEALTH. HOWEVER, JOB-RELATED STRESS DISORDERS CAN CAUSE MANY TO RETIRE EARLY OR DIE PREMATURELY.

Compared to the general population, police officers tend to have a worsened metabolic profile and a higher prevalence of cardiovascular disease and other risk factors. The demands of the law enforcement occupation place daily psychological and physiological stress on officers, consequently increasing their risk for illness and diseases associated with stress; thus, it is critical that officers develop the ability to recover from recurrent stressors. The ability to prepare for, recover from, and adapt in the face of stress, adversity, trauma, or challenge is defined as *resilience*. The law enforcement field needs strategies and techniques to enhance its members' ability to cope with stress—resilience training is one option to address coping with stress using self-regulation.

The effectiveness of a resilience training intervention is highly dependent on its timing. In a recent Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Police Department Academy class of 42 cadets ranging in ages from 21 to 53 years, greater job satisfaction three months after their graduation from the academy was statistically significant and associated with lower emotional stress and lower perceived stress. It appears from these early results implementation with recruits at the academy is likely the most effective time to deliver resilience training.

The Milwaukee and Madison, Wisconsin, Police Departments proposed to build comprehensive programs of stress reduction and resiliency through implementation of the HeartMath Resilience Advantage (RA). The RA is an evidence-based training program to improve officers' emotional well-being,

stress coping skills, and interpersonal skills. It teaches techniques to self-regulate the natural human emotions and physiological response to stress. Research demonstrates that the RA improves sleep, judgment, decision-making, and adaptive thinking, as well as the ability to maintain composure in challenging situations and environments and the ability to reestablish normal composure after stressful incidents.

MILWAUKEE AND MADISON STUDIES

Participants in the Milwaukee Police Department's program and study were recruits enrolled in the agencies' academies in 2015, 2017, and 2018. The study was supported by funding from the U.S. Department of Justice Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Office. The enrollment for the Milwaukee study was 146 recruits. Approximately 10 days after the initial two-hour RA class, the recruits attended (in small groups of 10 to 14) the first of four 50-minute telementor sessions. The sessions were led by two mental health experts from HeartMath, conducted via phone conferencing, and scheduled approximately two weeks apart. The goals of these mentor sessions included reinforcing course content, improving coherence by using supported practice, facilitating mentoring among group members, and providing a venue for recruits to discuss situations they may encounter (on and off the job) where they might apply and use the methods or tools imparted in the class. Further, these sessions modeled the benefits of check-ins regarding mental health—especially because they were facilitated

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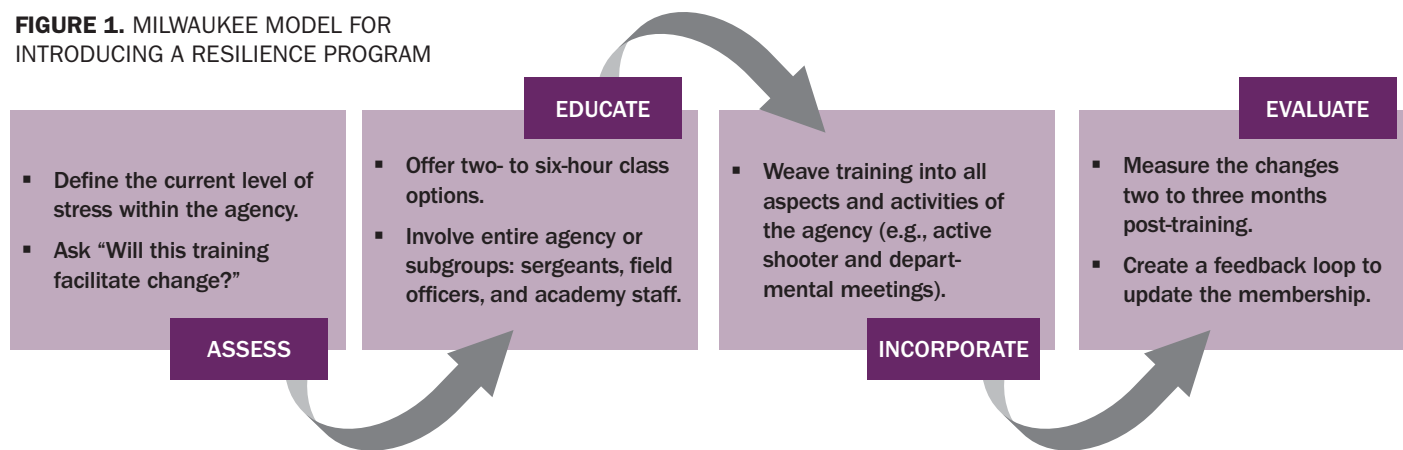
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by mental health professionals. The use of iPads captured recruits' heart rate variabilities during their practice using the Inner Balance application. All participants electronically completed self-reported measures of stress at three time points: baseline, academy graduation, and two to three months post-graduation.

The Madison Police Department began delivering the RA to the pre-service academy recruits in September 2017, using state training funds available for academy training. Microgrant funding from the COPS Office supplemented these efforts and allowed the Madison Department to train and certify three additional HeartMath RA-certified organizational trainers, acquire 71 additional emWave2 training devices, and deliver RA programming content to commissioned officers. The emWave2 is a handheld device that employs an earlobe sensor to monitor changes in heart rate coherence while practicing the breathing techniques imparted in the RA class. (Physiological coherence or heart coherence is the ability of the heart's rhythm pattern to become more ordered.) In addition to providing training for recruits, Madison provided two classroom hours of introductory training material to all 375 commissioned officers during a mandatory in-service training session.

This session covered the value of resiliency training and introduced basic techniques using the emWave2 training aid, which gives users instant feedback on their performance during practice sessions. Similar to Milwaukee, Madison administered the Personal and Organizational Quality Assessment at two time points: pre-training and approximately eight weeks later.

FIGURE 1. MILWAUKEE MODEL FOR INTRODUCING A RESILIENCE PROGRAM



QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSES RESULTS

Positive changes were seen in the electronic survey results in Milwaukee and Madison. These included statistically significant improvement in stress levels, and for recruits, the improvement continued after two to three months on the job.

QUALITATIVE DATA RESULTS (FOCUS GROUPS)

Focus groups were used to collect data to complement the quantitative analyses.

According to the officers that participated, completion of the RA allowed them to develop new habits: (1) slowing down when making decisions; (2) using mindfulness, especially around difficult people or situations; (3) breathing during and after stressful situations to personally solve problems in stressful situations; and (4) employing positive imagery.

Some recruits shared that they were able to reduce the “noise in my head” with breathing techniques and by practicing self-awareness and mindfulness. They recognized the connection between cardiac disease, diet, exercise, and stress, as well as the importance of sleep and the effects of sleep on job performance.

One recruit shared about learning how to “take the uniform off when off duty” to help make a mental and physical transition from work to home, and participants noted use of the techniques taught before bed and when awakening during night.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTEGRATION OF A RESILIENCE TRAINING PROGRAM

The goals of the Milwaukee project included creation of a model for other agencies to follow (Figure 1). The first

step in the process is to define where the agency is at the onset by determining why the training is necessary and how it will help the agencies and officers. Agencies can use assessments, open discussion, interviews, or focus groups to further define where the agency is at baseline and support the need for the training. Continuous feedback is necessary, beginning with the assessment at baseline and culminating with evaluation post-training.

If the training is implemented within the academy, it is best to impart the training during the first few weeks so recruits can apply the tools while at the academy.

CONCLUSIONS

Lessons learned from the Milwaukee and Madison programs include the following recommendations.

1. Achieve long-term program success and sustainability is dependent on leadership buy-in.
2. Be prepared to reconcile program training schedules and requirements with competing staffing allocation priorities.
3. Consider using a train-the-trainer approach for programs requiring content certification to defray costs.
4. Encourage officers to practice the RA skills and collect data on these sessions for a more robust evaluation.
5. Provide training field training officers helps to reinforce health practices throughout the agency.

The policing profession continues to be increasingly stressful for those serving with growing demands and new challenges. The work done in Milwaukee and Madison depicts a path forward for incorporating this type of

training for police officers as they begin their careers. While the model developed here may seem simplistic, until this time, no structure was available to direct agencies—large or small—about how to introduce this training. It is the authors’ hope that imparting the results of these pilot studies encourages more agencies in their endeavors to empower their recruits and officers to improve resilience and, subsequently, officers’ health. ♡

THE BEAT: BUILDING PERSONAL RESILIENCE

The Madison, Wisconsin, Police Department’s Building Personal Resilience project was developed in coordination with the University of Iowa’s College of Nursing. Captain Mary Schauf (ret.) and Sandra Ramey joined *The Beat* in February 2020 to share Madison’s experience.

Listen at cops.usdoj.gov/hmtl/podcasts/the_beat/01-2020/Shauf-Ramey.mp3.

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