

Survival Stress in Law Enforcement

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Abstract

What is it that causes us to become startled when we experience an unexpected occurrence or a threat to our well-being? We have all experienced the feelings associated with this fear. The pounding heart, the rapid breathing, the dry mouth, sweating and trembling are just a few of the obvious effects. We accept the fact that these are unavoidable by-products, but do we truly understand what is happening and why? As police officers in today's society, we will find ourselves experiencing these feelings more often than most people.

Research and studies indicate that police officers exposed to those sudden, intense and sometimes life threatening situations, encountered during the line of duty, can cause uncontrollable changes to the body. These changes may affect physiological, sensory and cognitive processes that may prevent timely responses in very serious situations, thus causing tactical implications during critical decision making processes. Medical studies also indicate that prolonged or frequent occurrences of this stimulation (stress) could subject an officer to future mental and physical health issues, if not addressed.

This issue needs to concern more than just the officer. Police agencies, supervisors and trainers must realize the impact of Survival Stress has on officer survivability and make this issue a working part of their training.

This paper will address the issues and effects of Survival Stress on the body and provide options and safeguards such as; physical fitness, mind preparedness, training, and confidence issues that will help officers deal with negative stress and improve the ability to function more decisively in these situations.

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INTRODUCTION:

Stress is an element of everyday life and no one is immune from it! Since birth we have all been exposed to different stressors that create anxiety. As we grow older, stress seems to present itself in a variety of forms that occur more frequently, are more intense and last longer in duration. One of the major contributors of a person's "modern day" stress comes from their occupation. Technological advances, competitive workforces, hierarchical demands, performance standards and longer workdays have all contributed to our "stress rich" work environment. We have all come to accept that stress is an unavoidable by-product of today's society, however, are finding that levels of prolonged stress on our body is creating an unhealthy society. It is rare to hear of anyone dying of old age anymore. Mortality is high, with most of us falling short of life's expectancies. Crippling ailments, sicknesses and mental collapses are on the increase all of which being directly attributed to stress and how we deal with it.

Select occupations, such as the military, public safety and law enforcement take on different levels and types of stress that most occupations do not experience. These types of stress may include the fear of personal injury or death, close combat encounters, deadly force issues and the fear of the unknown. These stressful encounters cause uncontrollable anxiety and emotions referred to as survival stress, combat stress, and or sudden stress syndrome. Regardless of what it is called, it can be defined as, "the perception (real or imagined) of an imminent threat of serious personal injury or death, or the stress of being tasked with the responsibility to protect another from imminent serious injury or death, under conditions where response time is minimal" ("Physiology of Close Combat", 2002).

The issue here is not so much the event that causes the stress than it is the effects the stress has on our body. The body reacts naturally to stress, preparing itself for the threat. The body's preparation creates influences on the body's thinking, perception and skill performance

which can present a real serious issue especially when we are required to make split second decision making processes.

Police work can accurately be described by a quote made popular during the Vietnam War; “War is long stretches of boredom punctuated by moments of sheer terror.” (Artwohl & Christensen, 1997, p. 25). Days, weeks and even months can go by without even a hint of danger or high risk in any generated or dispatched call. However, we all know that the tables could turn at any given moment. The next radioed dispatch or street contact could present itself with a high-stress situation. A lack of concentration or a moment of complacency during these moments could prove deadly. These stressful moments are far and few between, but it is these moments we must train for to better prepare ourselves for our job and the threats that await us.

The effects of survival stress on the body is inevitable and can never be completely eliminated, however, with proper training and preparation, the effects can be minimized. If an officer trains him/herself properly, they can arm themselves with the necessary safeguards to minimize the effects of survival stress on performance.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE:

“Scientific research has demonstrated that stress causes autonomic responses which is the body’s physiological response to the stressor. In law enforcement, survival stress can have a diminishing and sometimes debilitating effect on task performance in life and death situations.” (Siddle, 1998, p. 2-1).

These autonomic responses to stress are our body’s natural reaction preparing itself for battle and ultimately keeping it alive. The responses are instinctive, so as hard as we may try to control or regulate them, we are fighting a futile battle.

The sympathetic nervous system (which will be referred to as the S.N.S. from here on out) is incorporated in the lower-rear portion of the brain and is responsible for controlling and or triggering these autonomic responses. When the S.N.S. is activated, numerous actions follow, preparing the system and body for the stress. The S.N.S. activation stimulates the adrenal glands, which in turn responds by dumping adrenaline, hormones and chemicals into the body. These chemicals are channeled to different areas of the body providing support to the primary function needed in the effort. The effects of this chemical release may include the heart to beat faster, respirations to increase, a rise in blood pressure, tensing of muscles, dilation of pupils and perspiration to increase. Other, not so obvious symptoms may include the slowing of digestion, chemically enhanced blood entering the body to assist in clotting and the release of sugars and fats into the blood stream to help fuel the fight.

These bodily reactions to stress are no different than those responses experienced by the fleeing gazelle or the chasing lion. In both examples, the body reacts by focusing all the body's energy and resources to chasing ahead or running away. It is this body's preparation we refer to as the "fight or flight syndrome." Though this response or "syndrome" may be effective for the fleeing gazelle on the plains of Africa, there are some definite limitations for an officer making crucial decisions in the concrete jungle.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Survival Stress and the effects it has on officer performance and decision making is not a new issue. In 1950, S.L.A. Marshall's "The Soldiers Load and the Mobility of a Nation" was one of the first studies to identify how combat performance deteriorates when soldiers were exposed to combat stress. Marshall's finding indicate that when "individuals are under stress, they are far less capable of doing anything other than blindly running away or charging toward

the threat.” (Physiology of Close Combat “2002”) Included in this philosophy was the belief that humans have only three survival systems: vision, cognitive processing and motor skill performance. Under stress, all three systems break down.

In more recent and landmark research, Bruce K. Siddle (a former police officer and founder of the Pressure Point and Control tactics system-P.P.C.T.) has demonstrated tireless efforts in his work in regards to stress, anxiety and its effects on the body. Siddle has shown that increased heart rates resulting in anxiety/stress which inhibits ones ability to perform certain motor skills. Optimum arousal for behavior decreases with increases in task difficulty and that high levels of stress appear to interfere with fine muscular control and decision making. These finding were obtained by Siddle through the monitoring of officer heart rates and reactions during intense interpersonal conflict simulations using paintball weapons.

Other works cited from Phil Duran and Dennis Nasci (Tactical Attitude), both prior police professionals and survival instructors, focus on the issue of mind preparedness. Mental preparation is the key to officer survivability. Nasci and Duran acknowledge that police work is inherently dangerous and as hard as the most tactically minded officer may be, complacency is difficult to fight. Unfortunate as it may be, death of officers sometimes occur in this career but it is necessary for us to learn from every death in hopes of preventing similar tragedies from occurring in the future.

All of the above studies and research have helped officers and agencies understand the complex responses of the body under stress and valuable “tools” to help counter the effects of Survival Stress.

RESULTS/ FINDINGS

EXPECTED EFFECTS OF SURVIVAL STRESS:

All of these effects caused by the S.N.S. activation are very important, and their function in relation to stress will be discussed in more detail. This paper will first highlight the effects of survival stress on the body and then provide options to reduce those effects.

Increased Heart Rate:

In a survival stress situation, one of the first most obvious symptoms we encounter is a rapid, pounding heart rate. What is it that causes this reaction and why?

The heart's main function for sustained life is to pump oxygen rich blood through the circulatory system to receiving muscles, tissues and organs. In survival stress situations, the chemicals released by the adrenal glands enter the blood stream. This chemically enhanced blood now needs to reach the parts of the body in need of this chemical quickly. The S.N.S. activates an increased heart rate, which, in turn, elevates the blood pressure. This blood is pumped at an accelerated rate through the body and is maintained as long as the threat or stress is present. When the threat is eliminated, the heart rate and blood pressure will return to normal and the adrenal glands will cease to release chemicals.

The heart is the strongest muscle in the body and is the catalyst for survival. A well-tuned heart will perform optimally and provide the body efficiently.

The average officer in good condition will possess a resting heart rate between 60-80 beats per minute (BPM). When an officer is presented with a survival issue, that heart rate could escalate to a 200 beats or more in a matter of seconds. Of course, this response is dependant on the type of threat, the officer's perception to the threat, the element of surprise and an officer's

heredity. For a healthy heart this is not a health concern, however, for the unhealthy heart, a spike of this magnitude or an elevated heart rate maintained for an extended period of time could prove detrimental.

Auditory Exclusion:

The human body is equipped with five sensory systems that provide the brain with information. Under ordinary conditions all the senses perform equally well, however, under stress the brain will select the one sense that will provide the most relevant information at that particular moment. “In most situations the visual sense will be selected as the primary sense. As a result, the brain will stop processing information from the other senses, particularly the auditory sense.” (Siddle, 1998, p.2-3). This sensory exclusion is critical because it can limit an officer’s ability in stressful situations, to receive and process important audio information. Verbal responses and shouts of surrender by a victim may go unheard and, unfortunately, result in elevated uses of force. The auditory exclusion will also exist in the assailant, so it is crucial for officers to use loud, repetitive commands when use of force options are utilized. In understanding this process, it may take three or four commands before your assailant even begins to receive and process the requests. If minimal commands are given, officers will find assailants claiming no commands were given and that they would have complied if told to do something.

Visual Problems:

In most stressful situations, the vision becomes an officer’s primary source of information to the body, however, due to the S.N.S. activation, the visual systems may undergo some changes that may create devastating results. Our vision is a delicate sense that requires a stable environment to work efficiently. When that environment is exposed to vasoconstriction,

re-routing of blood and increased hormonal influences, it can be expected that the eyes and vision will undergo some changes that may result in some tactical implications.

“One of the effects that the vision may experience is a phenomenon known as tunnel vision. This occurs when the actual span of vision narrows as if you were looking through a tube. This issue significantly reduces the percent of visual stimulus needed in a stressful situation, thus creating the possibility of missing threat cues in an officer’s peripheral areas of vision.” (Siddle, 1998, p. 2-3). Unfortunately, this is a very common occurrence in police work. Officers tend to focus on a single threat so intently that they fail to see details and other possible threats around them. For example, an officer may be so focused on the driver during a traffic stop that he/she fails to see furtive movement of the other passengers. Ways to overcome these problems will be discussed later.

A second effect may be pupil dilation, which could cause the loss of near vision (within four feet), which has significant implications with weapons sight acquisition on targets at close range.

Thirdly, the inability to focus may occur as a result of the relaxed eye muscles that control the lenses which, in turn, control the focusing on an object, thus affecting accuracy skills.

Other Visual Deficiencies:

S.N.S. activation inhibits monocular vision, which forces an officer to become binocular. Binocular vision will inhibit accuracy on distance shooting, but may enhance accuracy at close range.

Loss of depth perception may occur, which will cause improper estimation of distances.

Loss of night vision occurs because the night vision receptors are located in the peripheral field of the eye which was lost with the S.N.S. activation.

INCREASED REACTION TIME:

An officer's reaction time is the actual time it takes the officer to perceive a threat and respond accordingly with a motor response. The quicker the response, the better chance for survival. The time it takes to respond depends on the officer's ability to process the steps in a decision making situation. All decision making circumstances are broke down into a four step process:

1. Perception
2. Analyzing and Evaluating
3. Formulating a Response
4. Initiating a Motor Response

Any skip or disruption in this sequence will result in an increase in reaction and possibly a "no reaction" or freezing. Research has shown that this step processing will deteriorate when the officer's heart rate exceeds 145 BPM.

DETERIORATION OF MOTOR SKILLS:

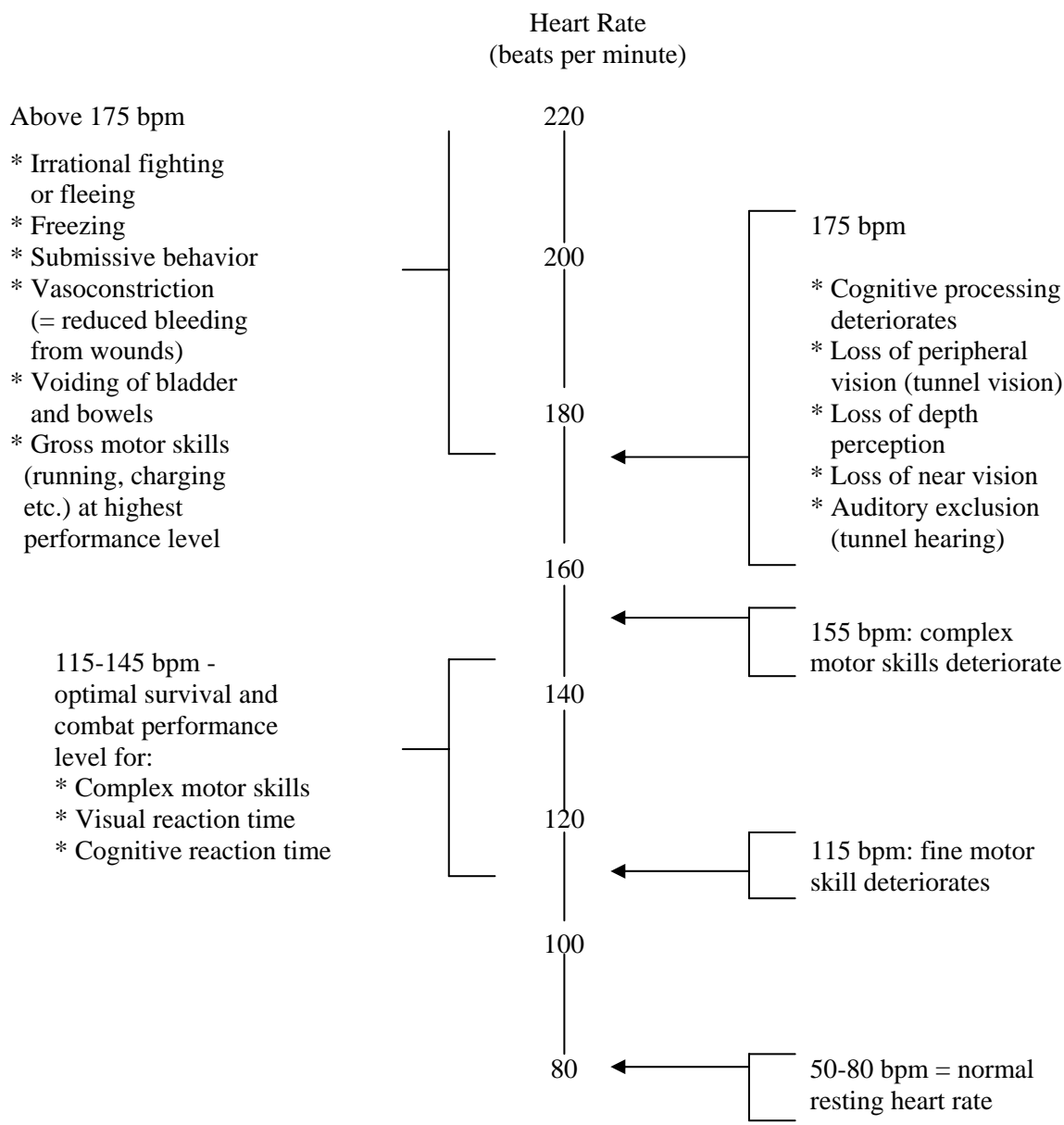
"Motor skills are classified into three categories; fine motor skills (they require hand and eye coordination and hand dexterity), complex motor skills (involve a series of muscle groups in a series of movements requiring hand/eye coordination, precision, tracking and timing) and gross motor skills (large muscle or major muscle groups)." (Siddle, 1998, p. 2-5).

When the S.N.S. is activated it will have a direct influence on these skills. When an officer's heart rate reaches 115 BPM, vasoconstriction and dexterity begin to deteriorate, thus inhibiting fine motor skills. These skills may include trigger squeeze and gun sight alignment. As the heart reaches 145 BPM, some of the complex muscle movements found in multiple step takedown techniques and shooting techniques begin to deteriorate. The gross motor skills are the only muscle movement that improves as the heart rate increases, due to the fact that they include

or incorporate major muscle groups. These techniques may include movements of simple punches or kicks.

This element of deterioration should be monitored constantly. Those officers on the front line or acting in the heat of battle should not be required to do fine motor skill activities.

The graph to follow will indicate the skills breakdown with heart rate increase.



Effects of hormonal induced heart rate increases ("Physiology of Close Combat", 2002).

VASOCONSTRICTIONS:

At S.N.S. activation, vasoconstriction occurs naturally shutting down blood flow to an officer's extremities and re-routing the blood to the areas of the body in greatest need. This vasoconstriction will cause symptoms or feelings of being cold, tingly sensations and the reduction of dexterity in the fingers and toes.

Another significant implication pertains to blood loss. During S.N.S. activation, officers have received wounds to the extremities that have bled very little and were able to continue on with the fight. After the threat was gone, vasoconstriction left the body causing those not so serious wounds to bleed profusely, resulting in the officer to bleed out and die. After a S.N.S. activation (and an injury has in fact occurred), remaining calm and performing basic first aid techniques is crucial. An officer must also realize that if severe bleeding is encountered during the S.N.S. activation, it is a good indication that the wound is that of arterial bleeding and immediate first aid is crucial.

ENDURANCE LIMITATIONS:

Physical fitness, a major component in an officer's long-term health, is also crucial in survival situations. Fitness is comprised of aerobic and anaerobic conditioning. Even an officer in the best of condition may experience physical limitations under stress. For an officer to fight at 100% of his ability, he will only be able to sustain a fight at this level for only 10-15 seconds. If control of a subject is not successful in this time, the body will look to the lactic acid system, which will provide the officer with approximately 45 seconds of intermediate strength and endurance, which is approximately 55% of the officer's maximum output. Once the lactic acid is depleted the aerobic system will activate and will burn for a long period of time, however, will only provide the officer with approximately 31% of the officer's maximum output.

These limitations become a real issue when officers' endurance levels deteriorates and officers feel the need to compensate by escalating to higher levels of force, which may include deadly force.

ADDITIONAL EFFECTS:

In addition the body reacts and responds by slowing down the digestive process. Digestion requires the presence of blood in the digestive organs, but during the S.N.S. activation, all the blood has been redirected to the muscles and brain. This is what causes someone to vomit during or shortly after a high stress situation.

The body's muscles automatically tense up preparing itself for the fight or flight. This in turn will activate perspiration to increase with the purpose of cooling the body. The body automatically works harder, which creates heat. A cooler body will perform more efficiently.

Chemicals are released into the body/blood which will assist in the clotting of blood in the event of an injury. Sugars and fats are also released into the blood to provide the necessary fuel for the fight.

And finally, brain activity increases so the extra sensory information occurring during a stressful situation can be processed more quickly.

VARIABLES TO PREVENT S.N.S. ACTIVATION:

As stated earlier, the activation of the Sympathetic Nervous System is an unavoidable occurrence, however, there are things that an officer can do to help minimize the physiological effects.

As officers responding to a stimulus we are controlled and forced to respond in certain ways. Regardless of how well we are prepared, we are still behind the “eight ball” because we are reacting (which is a much slower process) to an action that is, for the most part, preplanned. We must remain alert and ready for an attack when it comes. Many officers involved in life and death encounters have stated that they initially felt surprised when attacked! This is a common reaction, but it can be costly! When faced with violence, our response must be instantaneous. Feelings of surprise can slow reaction response time even more so. If you are mentally prepared for an attack you will waste no time on your response, thus increasing your survival odds.

As officers we must stay versed and well trained in survival skills.

In an attack you will be reacting to the actions of your assailant. Survival skills should be second nature, so when a response is needed, it can be done instinctively and smoothly. Repetitions and real life training is the key to establishing this second nature. You are forming muscle memory which links physical movements with the thought process. The more practiced you are on skills, the better physically and mentally prepared you will be.

Confidence in techniques and personal ability will lower a working heart rate which will activate a positive mindset, thus enhancing all types of positive performance.

PERCEIVED LEVELS OF THREATS:

Stress is related to how we interpret and react to events. Events in themselves are not stressful; it is how we perceive them. People may react differently to the same situations, with

one person interpreting a situation as very stressful, while another person may not. Levels of experience and numbers of encounters with certain circumstances play an important role in our response. Perception levels can be changed by being confident in tactics, survival skills and shooting abilities.

COMMITMENT TO DEADLY FORCE:

If an officer hasn't already, he must take a serious look at the issue of having to take someone's life. That thought alone will cause great levels of stress throughout a career, but if an officer is not convinced or has questions as to what he /she would do in a deadly force situation, they are endangering themselves as well as the lives of others. With all things considered, faith, religion, and murder vs. killing, must be weighed, but in this career a total commitment to deadly force must be adopted when this situation presents itself.

MOTOR SKILL SELECTION:

Stress in itself is not a bad thing and, in fact, is necessary to raise the level of body arousal required to function better, stay alive and cope successfully with the stressor. The body will perform more optimally with a certain level of stress. "Too little stress will cause very little arousal which may result in a reaction done haphazardly and with errors. Too much arousal will cause a person to become distracted, panicked or overwhelmed." ("Stress and Combat Performance," 2002). It is with this in mind that an officer keep the body's stress arousal within a range that best enables him to accomplish the mission.'

The optimal range of stress will vary from task to task, but knowing how the body is effected by the S.N.S. activation, we must practice, incorporate and select techniques involving gross motor skills. These skills will be few in number, but will involve large muscle mass

movements that consist of a minimum of three movements or less to perform. The philosophy of keeping things simple should be paramount.

MAINTAINING THE REACTIONARY GAP:

The reactionary gap is the distance between the officer and the subject required to formulate a reaction to an action. The distance, or gap, will vary depending on the type of threat presented. Regardless of the situation, this gap must be maintained. The reactionary gap provides an officer with numerous tactical advantages, however, the most important is reducing the element of surprise. The reactionary gap will provide the time and distance needed to prepare a tactical response to an attack. Knowing that reaction is slower than action, we must allow our body this distance to provide a cushion for the decision making process.

BREATH CONTROL/MUSCLE RELAXATION:

One of the key elements to controlling your heart rate, staying relaxed and releasing stress can be accomplished through a simple technique of controlled breathing. When our bodies are under stress, we tend to breath more quickly, however, the breaths are more shallow. With this type of breathing, we are depriving our body of adequate oxygen at a time it is in greatest need of it. In times of stress, we need to make conscious efforts to breath in a more controlled state in attempt to re-establish control of our heart rate and provide the organs and brain with the needed oxygen to function.

In times of stress, try placing your tongue on the roof of your mouth behind your teeth. Inhale through your nose for a count of four seconds, hold that breath for four seconds and then relax your tongue and forcibly control the exhale for a four second count. Repeat this process for several cycles at which time you should actually feel yourself returning to normal.

KEEPING FIT/EXERCISE:

Studies indicate that most police officers maintain a level of fitness much less than that of the general population. “We are fatter, weaker and possess less stamina than our assailants. Statistics also indicate that the longer we stay in this profession the worse our physical condition becomes.” (Hoffman & Collingwood, 1995, p. 8). The main reason for this is the lack of actual physical activity required to do the job. If an officer does not have the desire or motivation to maintain a fitness program off the job, an unfit, unhealthy body is inevitable. Officers may also choose to deal with stressors by over eating, smoking or abusing alcohol. These particular lifestyle choices are very easy to adopt and in the long run will have dramatic influences on both health and performance issues.

Physically fit officers can cope with dramatic increases in heart rates due to stress or physical exertion more efficiently. Heart rates stabilize and decrease faster which aids in the reacquisition of fine and complex motor skills.

Physical fitness also improves blood flow to the brain, bringing additional sugars and oxygen that are needed when thinking intensely. “As the brain works harder, toxic waste products will build up. These toxins can damage the brain in the long run if not flushed out. Exercising improves blood flow so even when you’re not exercising, waste is eliminated more efficiently.” (“Health and Nutrition,” 2002).

Besides feeling better and looking better, physically fit officers perform better due to their sense of self achievement and confident mental attitude.

MENTAL REHEARSAL:

“Mental rehearsal can be a valuable tool in preparing you for a life threatening encounter. Mental rehearsal has been around and practiced since the early 1940’s, however, studies linked to mental process and physical skills can be traced back to 1892.” (Duran & Nasci, 2000, p. 29).

Mental rehearsal is the process of mentally visualizing and rehearsing how something should be done prior to actually doing it. What this rehearsal does for the body is it connects thought processes with physical activity. Most of us are equipped with the physical tools, (ex. defensive tactics, shooting skills, etc) to get the job done but, if we cannot connect them to a mental rehearsal under stress, a life and death decision process may occur to slow, with hesitancy and with errors. The concept of mental rehearsal is to experience the situation before it actually occurs. By creating “real life” scenarios to different situations, you can walk yourself through the decision making process. The scenario can be played over and over adding or changing the situation causing changes in decision making processes. Mental rehearsal should be done with things you’ve never encountered or thought of before. Scenarios should incorporate situations that cannot be included in training sessions due to safety issues or practicality. Make the scenarios as true to life as possible!

Probably the most important issue in mental rehearsal is to “always visualize yourself winning or never being killed.” Part of this rehearsal is training yourself to never give up even in the event you do get shot, stabbed or hurt. By anticipating stressful situations you can prepare for them.

NUTRITION:

“A surprising amount of the stress that we may experience on a daily basis can be linked to the chemicals we consume by way of eating, drinking or inhaling.” (“Health and Nutrition,” 2002).

By maintaining an unhealthy diet we are stressing our bodies by depriving it of essential nutrients it requires to perform optimally. Whether it is over eating or not eating at all, the effects are ultimately the same. The heart, lungs and organs become stressed and due to the imbalance, can only perform at a reduced stamina. A diet which consists of caffeine, nicotine, high sugars and fats should be reduced or eliminated in attempt to minimize this chemically enhanced stress.

A well balanced diet will provide the body with the necessary nutrients to function effectively.

SCANNING:

The visual problems discussed earlier as a result of the S.N.S. activation are many and uncontrollable, however, a simple technique of scanning can overcome the effects of tunnel vision.

In a stressful situation an officer should practice looking side to side and up and down, doing this will increase the field of vision. This scanning process will provide more visual cues and or threats that may be overlooked during the tunnel vision occurrence. Whether it is identifying an armed subject in the shadows or a pedestrian/vehicle hazard in a high-speed chase, this is a simple technique with valuable results in law enforcement efforts.

TRAINING:

Shame on the department or police officer that feels they can survive in this career without training. The lack of or quality of training provided will only expedite failure, poor performance and increased officer safety issues.

Training is crucial for survival stress inoculation. Training must provide stress and tension, must reflect real life situations and must occur often to be effective. "Training must prepare law enforcement to instinctively and automatically respond to the wide spectrum of dangerous situations." (Simunition- Training for the Real World, 2002).

An officer must be motivated to train and dedicated enough to the career to seek training on their own if their department fails to provide it for them.

If you are a trainer, take pride and responsibility in that fact. Be committed to providing the most effective, realistic training possible. What better reward to know that you saved a life through some aspect of your tutelage.

WEARING OF BODY ARMOR:

The wearing of body armor provides no guarantee to an officer in deadly force encounters, however, it can help control stress levels and provide valuable elements to survivability.

The first issue is obvious, if you are wearing a vest and are shot; you stand a better chance of surviving and finishing the fight. The wearing of body armor also provides a sense of security and confidence. Knowing that you are somewhat protected going into a situation, your anxiety (stress) level may be lower, creating an ideal environment for decision making process.

DISCUSSION

With the onset of gangs, proliferation of drugs and overall dangers on the street, officers are in greater risk than ever before. Guns are appearing with more frequency, high stress calls are on the increase and violence is literally everywhere. It's a war out there, so the question is, are you ready! Are you prepared physically, mentally and emotionally.

After reading this paper, there should be no question that survival stress does exist and that it does present a very serious and legitimate issues as it pertains to safety, training and survivability in the law enforcement career. The effects and issues of survival stress are not recent break throughs, in fact, we have been aware of their existence for some time. As of late, we have come to realize the importance and impact survival stress can have on officers and their decision making processes.

“There is no other job like a police officers, that requires someone to deliberately go out and actively search for dangerous situations where their life or someone else's life may be threatened.” (Artwohl & Christensen, 1997, p. 36). This statement would imply that the career of law enforcement draws those individuals that are simply “nuts” or those driven by the adrenaline rush and challenges presented by the job. I would tend to believe more of the latter. We drive the streets enforcing the law but subconsciously looking for that adrenaline rich environment. Whether the events we encounter provide thrills or chills, we must realize they are producing “survival stress.” We know not when or where this stress may occur, but after reading this paper we now have a better understanding of how and why it happen

It is crucial for Police agencies to acknowledge the effects of Survival Stress and at least, educate police officers about its existence and the impact on decision making processes.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

As a trainer and supervisor, I have seen and experienced the power of survival stress. I have seen officers proficient in tactical movements, shooting skills and driving literally short circuit and break down under stress. I have come to the conclusion that the two most important elements in guarding against the effects of survival stress are physical conditioning and training.

Law Enforcement, as a profession, is both mentally and physically demanding. It is crucial to maintain elevated levels of health in both categories. One needs to exercise the mind just as one exercise their muscles.

Physical conditioning provides an officer with so many positive benefits. A healthy body performs better, recuperates faster and is generally a more efficient engine which instills confidence in itself.

Training incorporates a lot of different avenues and aspects of dealing with stress. We need to train hard, train often and train realistically. We must train and prepare for the unexpected, for it is the unexpected that will kill us.

A message to the trainer, your training is only limited by your own imagination. Take your training seriously and your students will follow! Incorporate training that constantly tests your students. Provide a positive learning environment that incorporates stress, fatigue, success, scenarios and mental imaging. You and your training are the core of officer survivability.

The following quote from an officer survival creed accurately sums up my feelings and this paper: "When faced with violent assault, my life depends upon my reaction without hesitation. There is no time to ponder because to ponder is to possibly perish. My response, if attacked, must not be fear but aggressiveness. I must block out all thoughts of my own peril, be

alert and confident in stopping my assailant. I must expect the unexpected and do the unexpected. Above all I won't give up and I will survive." (Duran & Nasci, 2000, jacket cover).

The bottom line... Be prepared!

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