

Forensically oriented police officer PTSD preparation for school shootings

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Columbine and Sandy Hook School shootings are painful reminders of the need for police department response systems to include a psychological component. Psychological issues related to Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) must be systematically integrated into policies and decisions affecting risk and threat assessments related to school shooting response preparation. Not everyone exposed to school shootings go on to develop PTSD. Nonetheless, teachers, school personnel and police officers that experience acts of violence on campuses are disproportionately more vulnerable to rates of PTSD. These acts have long-term mental health consequences for victims and police officers on international basis. For example, in 2011 in Norway there was a bomb attack on government buildings resulting in eight deaths. This incident was a precursor to the same perpetrator shooting 69 youth attending a summer holiday camp. Research has demonstrated that the development of PTSD unfolds in response to pre-existing vulnerabilities, absence of resiliency factors, as well as ethnoracial transactional influences. As the main cog in the wheel of preparedness, police officers must be sensitized to the need for working collaboratively with other intervention disciplines in assessing for PTSD. Academy courses, practicums, field training experiences, wellness programs, and other continuing education efforts must include a culturally-responsive review of PTSD. The objective is to build an international PTSD school shooting response capability for all police personnel. This presentation explores the practical issues in preparing police officers to assume a role in PTSD-related issues associated with school shootings.

Biography

Ronn Johnson is licensed and board certified Clinical Psychologist with extensive experience in academic and clinical settings. He is a Diplomate of the American Board of Professional Psychology. He has served as a staff psychologist in community mental health clinics, hospitals, schools and university counselling centers. The University of Iowa, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, University of Central Oklahoma, and San Diego State University are among the sites of his previous academic appointments. His forensic, scholarship, and teaching interests include: ethical-legal issues, police psychology, women death penalty, and contra terrorism.

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