

## Cumulative stress and police training techniques

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Throughout the course of history policing has undergone many transformations which have been directly influenced by the public's perceptions and expectations of the role of law enforcement in society. The public has, whether consciously or unconsciously, thrust upon the police the onus of being a universal solution for the remedies of any perceived injustice or problem, regardless of whether the matter falls under the purview of some other agency or entity. The willingness of the profession to accept the vast array of responsibilities identified by the public as a function of law enforcement, and continuing to perform such duties only reinforces the premise that society has significantly influenced and regulated the role of police in contemporary society. The technological advances of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, specifically the advancements in communication and transportation, as well as emerging urban populations not only had a significant impact on the role of law enforcement in society, but also a corresponding adjustment concerning the public's expectations and perceptions towards the police function. The more that the public placed certain functions under the purview of the police, the more the profession seemed to acknowledge those duties and integrate them into the occupation. The realities of the social service aspect of the profession can result in a sense of frustration within law enforcement. Yet an officer's perception and understanding of their role is in a large sense a reflection on how they are viewed by others in society, which in turn is formed by the depictions portrayed in the mass media. The officer himself/herself identifies with those representations and becomes frustrated by the realities of the preponderance of the social service aspects of the police profession, or he/she may simply repress his/her perception of these aspects. The general public identifies a police officer as a crime fighter; the individual officer tends to assume that identity, despite the realities of the occupation bound to community service type responsibilities. The individual officer is acting in "Bad Faith" by failing to recognize and acknowledge the realities of the profession, but rather willingly perpetuating the myth that crime fighting is their primary responsibility. The general public naively understands and projects the role of a police officer in contemporary society to be dominated by crime fighting functions. A police officer may in turn internalize those naïve perceptions and adopt the unrealistic identity promoted by the public and unfortunately, by police administrators as well. The image that society has of contemporary law enforcement is prefaced from portrayals enhanced in the mass media. It is from these beliefs about law enforcement that the public and potential recruits idealize the role of the police in contemporary society. The mass media, i.e. television and the movie industry, portray the police as invincible individuals constantly engaged in exciting and dangerous aspects of crime fighting. The administrations of the various municipal police departments, as well as training academy staff need to recognize and acknowledge the detrimental effects of cumulative stress on individual officers independent of concerns raised by the public and media. In order to facilitate such an ideological transition, recruits at police academies need to receive comparable instruction and emphasis in stress management education as they receive in physical fitness training. The conditioning of the emotional and mental psyche of a police officer is just as important to career longevity as is physical fitness training.

### Biography

Paul Sylvestre is completing the writing of his doctoral dissertation for a Ph.D. from Salve Regina University in Newport, Rhode Island. Prior to joining the faculty at Johnson & Wales University in Providence, Rhode Island he worked as an adjunct faculty member at Bay State College in Boston, Massachusetts and Bristol Community College in Fall River, Massachusetts. Paul retired from the Pawtucket Police Department after twenty-two years of service with the last nineteen working as a detective in the Pawtucket Police Narcotics Unit. He worked as an undercover officer for approximately two and a half years and was recognized as an expert witness in both state and federal courts.

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