

The Police Personality: *Solid as a Rock* or *Still Crazy After All These Years*

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Presentation Topics

- Quick review of law-enforcement websites enabling the *Still Crazy After All These Years* view
- Review the research supporting the *Solid as a Rock* view
- Present an update of Aamodt and Stalnaker (2001)
- Discussion of how to properly interpret the Aamodt and Stalnaker (2001) meta-analysis on police suicide rates
- Discussion of reasons why the *Still Crazy* views continue to survive in spite of research to the contrary

“Solid as a Rock” Personality Profile Looks pretty normal to me

Average Law Enforcement MMPI-2 Scores												
L	F	K	Hs	D	Hy	Pd	Mf	Pa	PT	Sc	Ma	Si
58.9	44.8	58.7	49.2	47.6	48.9	52.1	43.8	46.1	47.5	48.2	50.7	43.2

Source: Aamodt, M.G. (2004) *Research in Law Enforcement Selection*

“Solid as a Rock” Personality Profile Law Enforcement CPI Profile

- 57.4 Dominance
- 52.5 Capacity for status
- 54.4 Sociability
- 55.9 Social presence
- 56.2 Self-acceptance
- 54.4 Well-being
- 50.6 Responsibility
- 53.3 Socialization
- 54.8 Self Control
- 52.9 Tolerance
- 55.4 Good impression
- 55.2 Communality
- 57.3 Ach via conformance
- 55.9 Ach via independence
- 53.4 Intellectual efficiency
- 56.8 Psychological mindedness
- 50.6 Flexibility
- 46.7 Femininity

The “Still Crazy” folks – Police Suicide

- “Police officers have **3 times** the risk of suicide over other municipal workers.”
- “The **high rate** of suicide among law enforcement officers is policing’s **dirty little secret**. Not only do police officers have higher rates of alcoholism, divorce, and drug abuse, not only do they have life expectancies ten years less than the average person; they also kill themselves at higher rates than the average American.”
- “Police officers have **one of the highest suicide** rates in the nation, possibly the highest.”

The “Solid as a Rock” truth – Suicide Rates

- Aamodt and Stalnaker (2001) meta-analysis
 - 18.1 per 100,000 for law enforcement
 - 151% of national population
 - 83% of demographically controlled for norms
 - 12 per 100,000 for national population (1997)
 - 25.5 per 100,000 for White, males, aged 22-55 (1997)
 - 21.9 per 100,000 nationally mirroring law enforcement percentage for gender and race

Updated Suicide Numbers (2010)

All Ages			Ages 25-54				
	Male	Female	Total		Male	Female	Total
Hispanic	8.46	1.98	5.27	Hispanic	11.55	2.49	7.15
Black	9.10	1.84	5.30	Black	13.37	2.77	7.78
Asian	9.32	3.55	6.30	Asian	11.04	4.47	7.56
Native Am	26.06	9.02	17.35	Native Am	33.88	11.92	22.63
White	25.65	6.66	15.99	White	33.27	9.73	21.51
Total	19.95	5.15	12.43	Total	25.96	7.35	16.60

Source: 2010 Center for Disease Control

Computing an Updated Benchmark

- Gender & Race in Local Police (2003 – most recent available)

Race	Male	Female	Total
Hispanic	7.8%	1.3%	9.1%
Black	9.0%	2.7%	11.7%
Other	2.5%	0.3%	2.8%
White	69.4%	7.0%	76.4%
Total	88.7%	11.3%	100%

Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Local Police Departments, 2003, NCJ 210118 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2006), p. 7, Table 13

Updated comparison (2012 LE suicides)

- Badge of Life Data
 - 2012
 - 126 law enforcement suicides (much lower than the previous four years)
- Updated Data
 - 885,246 local, state, and federal sworn officers in 2008 (most recent available)
 - 14.23 per 100,000 for law enforcement
 - 12.43 per 100,000 for national population
 - 33.27 per 100,000 for White, males, aged 25-55
 - 26.35 per 100,000 nationally mirroring law enforcement percentage for gender and race (2003 data, most recent available)
- New comparison rates
 - 114% of national population
 - 54% of demographically controlled for law enforcement norms

Trends in Suicide Rates (U.S.)

Year	All Ages U.S.	Canada	Age 25-54	W.M. Age 25-54	Cop Demographic	Cop Rate ^a	# Cop suicides
2012						14.23	126
2011						16.61	147
2010	12.4		16.6	33.1		16.38	145
2009	12.0	11.5	16.2	32.1		16.15	143
2008	11.8	11.1	16.0	31.4	24.98	15.93	141
2007	11.5	11.0	15.6	30.1		13.89	129
2006	11.2	10.8	15.1	29.0			
2005	11.0	11.6	14.8	28.2			
2000	10.4	11.7	13.7	25.2			

^aThe suicide rates for law enforcement are based on the number of local, state, and federal sworn officers in 2008 – the most recent data available as of September, 2013

Updated Comparison (2008 LE suicides)

- Badge of Life Data
 - 2008
 - 141 law enforcement suicides
- Updated Data
 - 885,246 local, state, and federal sworn officers in 2008 (most recent available)
 - 15.93 per 100,000 for law enforcement
 - 11.80 per 100,000 for national population
 - 31.40 per 100,000 for White, males, aged 25-54
 - 24.98 per 100,000 nationally mirroring law enforcement percentage for gender and race (2003 data, most recent available)
- New Rate Comparison
 - 135% of national population
 - 64% of demographically controlled for law enforcement norms

Understanding Aamodt & Stalnaker (2001) and Aamodt (2013)

- “This is the study some love and others love to hate”
- The interpretation depends on the question being asked
- Is suicide a problem for police departments?
 - Yes. Suicide rates are highest for White, men, aged 25-55 and given that the majority of police officers fit that demographic, suicide is a concern.
- Do police officers commit suicide because of problems on the job?
 - Yes, just as people in the general public commit suicide as a result of job-related problems
- Is there something unique about policing that increases the chances of committing suicide?
 - NO!
- Is the suicide rate for police actually higher but police departments hide the cause of death more than do other occupations?
 - Show me the data!

The “Still Crazy” folks – Suicide & Line of Duty Deaths

- “Nationally, **twice as many cops** – about 300 annually – commit suicide as are killed in the line of duty”
- “National studies show that about 140 police officers across the country killed themselves each year from 2008 to 2010 and that officers are **three times more likely** to kill themselves than to be killed by others.”

Suicides and Line of Duty Deaths

Year	Suicides Badge of Life ¹	Total Line of Duty Deaths			# Due to Homicide	
		FBI ²	NLEOMF ³	ODMP ⁴	FBI	ODMP
2012	126	92	120	120	47	64
2011	147	125	169	176	72	86
2010	145	128	161	176	56	78
2009	143	96	124	140	48	57
2008	141	109	142	153	41	60
2007	123	141	191	203	58	82
2006		114	156	161	48	71

¹Badge of Life

²Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted report (2012 data are preliminary)

³National Law Enforcement Officer Memorial Fund

⁴Officer Down Memorial Page

The “Still Crazy” folks – Police Divorce

- “Typically, the Police divorce rate is high. On average, the large departments are about **70-80%**”
- “They have a high divorce rate, about **second in the nation**. They are problem drinkers about twice as often as the general population”
- “Past studies have indicated that law enforcement officers have **one of the highest divorce rates** when compared with other groups of professionals”
- “Divorce rates among law enforcement personnel parallel those of other high-stress professions such as doctors and lawyers. Surveys of police officers continually reflect estimates of divorce rates as **high as 75%!**”
- “Nationally, the divorce rate among police officers is shown to be as **high as 70 percent** in a society that has a divorce rate of around 50 percent.”

The “Solid as a Rock” truth – Divorce Rates

- McCoy & Aamodt (2010)
 - 2000 Census Data
 - Law enforcement divorce/separation rate was 14.47%
 - Divorce/separation rate for all Census jobs was 16.35%
- Whitehouse (1965)
 - 1960 Census Data
 - Law enforcement divorce rate was 1.7%
 - Divorce rate for the male population was 2.1%
- Niederhoffer and Niederhoffer (1978)
 - Survey of 30 police departments
 - 2.5% were divorced
 - National average was 3.7%

The “Still Crazy” folks – Police Alcoholism

- “Alcohol use by police officers in the United States is theorized to be **double** that of the general population, with **20% of those abusing alcohol**.”
- Studies show police officers have **higher rates of alcoholism**, divorce, and drug abuse, than the average American. They also have life expectancies ten years less than the average person, mostly due to suicides.
- Alcohol abuse among police officers is a serious and widespread problem, with some studies estimating that it **afflicts one-quarter** of all police officers in the U.S.

The “Solid as a Rock” truth – Alcoholism

- This is a tough one
 - Need alcoholism rates for police
 - Need alcoholism rates for others
 - The rates need to share a common metric
- What do we know?
 - Men have higher alcohol abuse rates than women, both in policing and in the population in general
 - Using the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT)
 - Law Enforcement
 - U.S., one study, problem rates of 20.3% for men and 14.5 for women
 - Norway, one study, problem rates of 17.9% for men and 9.4% for women
 - Australia, one study, problem rates of 36.0% for men and 26.5% for women
 - Other Occupations
 - Norway: Ambulance drivers, 18.8% for men and 10.7% for women
 - Germany: Doctors, 28.0% for men and 7.1% for women
 - Norway: Surgeons, 29.7% for men, 18.0% for women
 - Norway: Non-surgeon doctors, 21.7% for men, 7.6% for women
 - England, 73% for inmates

Why do the “Still Crazy” beliefs continue?

- Availability heuristic
 - Police officers associate with other police officers
 - Police psychologists (there are no “accountant psychologists” or “welder psychologists”)
- Illusory correlation
 - Every suicide, divorce, or drunk cop “confirms” the belief
- Built in excuse for failure
 - Honey it’s not me, it’s the job. Did you know that police are 500 times more likely to get divorced than the rest of the world? And that’s when they are sober, which is almost never!
- Provides a special bond among officers
 - Only a cop can understand what we go through. It is so tough that our suicide, divorce, and alcoholism rates are the highest in the country.
- Financial motivation by some police psychologists
 - “However, a breath of fresh air can be found in Prof. Michael Aamodt at the University of Arkansas. He isn’t interested in perpetuating myths of how screwed up cops are and then making money fixing us. He’s interested in the truth.” (Jeff Shannon, 2010, policementalhealth.blogspot.com)

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