

Social Uprising in America Op-ed

Recent events have confirmed the beginning of a social uprising in America that most law enforcement agencies are ill prepared to handle. As CEO of an international police training corporation, I have conducted extensive research on high-risk policing. For a current project, I compiled data on the number of law enforcement officers shot this year throughout the United States by performing a meticulous search of news reports. The following numbers reflect the continuation of a disturbing trend in policing:

March: 24 officers shot in 21 separate incidents

April: 22 officers shot in 18 separate incidents

May: 24 officers shot in 22 separate incidents

June: 25 officers shot in 22 separate incidents

July: 37 officers shot in 17 separate incidents

The five-month total has now risen to 132 officers who were shot in 100 separate incidents, and it could actually be greater because some incidents may not have been reported or were missed in my search. Additionally, data on suspects who shot at, but did not hit officers, has also been excluded.

Law enforcement officers have a difficult and dangerous job regardless of their race. However, in July 2016, white officers were specifically targeted in retribution in Dallas, TX; Bristol, TN; Ballwin, MO; Milwaukee, WI; and Valdosta, GA, for acts perceived as unjust and racially motivated against people of color. Individuals, many of whom suffer from mental illness, are attacking officers in response to a constant barrage of mainstream and social media detailing negative portrayals of police actions. While recognizing that sometimes this portrayal is justified, the same level of coverage does not exist when officers are the targeted victims of violence. Divisiveness is on the rise in communities throughout the country because people do not understand the difficulties and lack of tangible resources facing police today.

There are three principle factors directly related to officer shootings: organizational, individual, and offender.

Organizational factors include inadequate officer recruitment/selection processes and officer preparation, along with an insufficient number of officers responding to calls for service. Money for additional officers and their subsequent training drives the organizational issue for most departments. This, combined with a reluctance to be innovative in officer training both while in the academy and in-service, does not adequately prepare officers for their multiple roles in society.

Police officers are asked to be psychologists/mental health experts, marriage counselors, mediators, teachers, friends, lawyers, firearms experts, tacticians, protection specialists and more. Job performance is scrutinized when results do not meet community expectations; however, police support is rarely provided with the same vigor as the criticism received. Few other professions, outside of the military, offer the possibility of death during the "routine" performance of daily duties. As such, officer performance must be almost flawless.

Individual factors affecting officer shootings include poor situational assessments and ineffective decision-making skills. While this also relates to selection and training, officers must still make

split-second decisions that carry life-and-death consequences. Of great importance is the recognition that some people are not suited for the job of a law enforcement officer. An effective recruitment/selection process must be able to identify poor decision-makers along with racist and bigoted individuals before they become officers. Another individual factor currently influencing decision-making is an officer's keen awareness of the potential for criminal indictments and civil lawsuits, which in many cases creates a reluctance to employ deadly force. This reluctance can be beneficial when deadly force is unwarranted, as no one should want to shoot another person, but hesitation can also be deadly for officers when such use of force is necessary in dealing with armed offenders.

Lastly and perhaps most important, are offender factors: principally the deadly consequences of untreated mental illness and the rise of racial tensions in society. Violent mentally ill individuals are dramatically increasing the number of officer shootings. This trend will continue at an alarming rate until adequate low-cost treatment facilities are made readily available for the mentally ill, and law enforcement agencies make effective first responder education and response a priority, particularly in the areas of mental illness and cultural diversity.

Safety is paramount for law enforcement officers. The mentality that accepts officer shootings as "part of the job" permeates law enforcement and society in general, thereby creating a false normalcy. Attitudes toward police, and policing itself, must radically change in order to protect the protectors of society while improving this vital community service.

A social uprising is occurring in America whether it is acknowledged as such or not. Law enforcement can only progress after achieving better interaction with the diverse communities they are entrusted to serve, while creating organizational conditions such as improved officer selection, training, staffing, and equipping in order to immediately impact this dangerous trend in policing.

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<http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/opinion/oped/bs-ed-shooting-police-20160821-story.html>