

Examining Underlying Causes of Concern about Police Action

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Without question, we are witnessing instances where police action ends in tragedy. The recent North Charleston, South Carolina, shooting of a black male by a white male police officer is the current news item.

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The jury in the murder trial of [Michael Slager](#), a white former North Charleston police officer who fatally shot an unarmed black man, [Walter Scott](#), informed a judge Friday it was unable to reach a unanimous decision.

One juror is refusing to consider a conviction, according to the jury foreman.

After deliberating for more than two days, the jury of 11 whites and one African American cannot seem to agree on any of its three options: convicting Slager of murder, convicting him of voluntary manslaughter, or acquitting him.

<http://www.latimes.com/nation/nationnow/la-na-walter-scott-trial-20161202-story.html>

I speak not of justification for actions taken or not, nor do I weigh in on the appropriateness of action taken as the facts certainly are not within my grasp. However, I do want to speak to underlying issues that no media, public agency, special interest group or TV discussion mentions, which is certainly at the heart of many incidents. I speak of this not in judgment, nor as an excuse, but with a warning that ignoring the underlying issues permits them to exist without future help.

For many years, I have witnessed friends and colleagues from policing and other public safety occupations, fall victim to all manner of emotional, psychological and physiological harm to their health, including death. These friends and colleagues wore the uniform of police, sheriffs, EMTs, corrections, game wardens and other first responders as they carried out their varied duties. Each response to a call took them into potential danger, harm, and witness to all manner of cruel and inhuman behavior.

Over the years the level of accumulated stress and trauma left tell-tale scars. That accumulation is harmful, as evidenced by high divorce rates, the onset of health issues, suicide, and substance abuse problems, to name some. They alone did not suffer, for so too did their peers, family, and friends. We all have our examples and stories that are personal or related to someone we know. Certainly, not everyone has similar outcomes, but those that do are way too many.

I spent many months writing a book that I hope will address the causes, symptoms, results and importantly, what can be done to reduce the impact of accumulated stress, adversity and trauma (ASAT). It is a related story, one that can help the individual, the supervisor, peer coach, family and others to understand and weigh in before harm occurs. It is a weekly disclosure that person "A" had observable underlying mental health issues, resulted in silence. That does not lead to sustainable help and return to normal life balance. It is for working men and women, their supervisors and the organization, family, friends or others to pursue help.

For no matter, the source, the overhaul of current procedures and deferment of recognition lies directly within the organizations and personnel who work there. Elected and appointed officials, employees, Unions and Associations are representing them are late in stepping up in many instances to address these silent killers of police and first responders by the accumulation of stress, adversity, and trauma (ASAT).

The time to address the needs of these dedicated individuals is at present. ASAT has existed far too long. The vast majority of citizens will not and could not do the job that the dedicated public safety and first responders encounter with every shift. It is critical that proper tools to manage excessive stress, like the equipment and training provided for physical security, is made available. Far too many illustrations are coming to light where I believe that the proverbial "ounce of prevention," taken early enough, would have prevented many of the current examples.

Across the United States, for police and other professionals, the elevated issues of stress and trauma, are manifesting in poor outcomes. Some people experience one incident of trauma in their lives, our police, and public safety personnel may well experience many during a career. Just think about it! The following has been reported to police and are alarming statistics.

- ♣ In 2012 there were 126 recorded police suicides. The average age of officers were 42, and most were male with an average of 16 years on the job.
- ♣ Firearms were used in 91.5% and 83% there were indicators of personal problems before the suicide. It is the 83 percent that is so troubling.
- ♣ Across the United States the divorce rate is approximately 50%. For police officers, it ranges between 60-75%.
- ♣ Sadly, at the end of their career, roughly 25 percent will still be married to the same spouse.

Yes, other occupations, groups, and individuals also suffer from the effects of stress, adversity, and trauma; it does not select any particular person. I am not excusing behavior that is wrong, but understanding its impetus is also important. The cases now present in the public awareness and within systems of justice that will step in, further serve to illustrate the internal issues, of head and heart, that are all too real and which manifest them wrongly in some instances. We should not continue to stand by and not

take immediate steps to find solutions. The military finally acknowledged that PTSD is all too real with some of its members; we also need to do so for the civilian corps of first responders.

Why would we not believe the same issues emerge within civilian responders to all manner of harm, injury, danger, inhumanity and witness to dangerous human behavior – will accumulate unhealthy residue?