

MIKE BUMCROT CONSULTING

REPORT OF INVESTIGATION

DATE: March 9, 2014

SUBJECT: Officer Involved Shooting Death of Chaz Isaiah Sherron which occurred on October 14, 2012 at 2246 Hours

CASE: Riverside Police Department File #P12149530, CPRC #12-027

LOCATION: 3750 Myers Street, Apt. #55, Riverside

On March 5, 2014, I was asked by Frank Hauptmann, Manager of the Community Police Review Commission, to review the circumstances surrounding the officer involved shooting death of Chaz Sherron by Riverside Police Department Patrol Officers Mike Gomez, David Lim, Rogelio Serrato and Chamroeun Ouk. I was also asked to provide my expert opinion in a written report on the manner in which the case was investigated by the Riverside Police Department. I reviewed several hundred pages of police reports, photographs, and other documents contained in the presentation by Riverside police detectives to the Riverside Police Review Commission; I also researched legal issues and the phenomenon known as "Suicide By Cop". I had earlier responded to the location to better understand the reports as well as canvass the apartment complex for witnesses.

It is my conclusion that Officers Gomez, Lim, Serrato and Ouk acted in lawful self defense and defense of others at the time each fired his weapon. It is also my conclusion that this was a classic case of "Suicide By Cop", as evidenced by the attached information. All four shooting officers provided a statement to detectives, which were considered as part of the analysis.



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FACTUAL ANALYSIS

In the evening hours of October 14, 2012, the Riverside Police Department was dispatched to a location in the city of Riverside regarding Chaz Sherron who was contemplating suicide. Officer Velazquez responded but found that the subject was gone prior to her arrival. A couple of hours later, Chaz Sherron again called the Riverside Police Department from the Myers Street apartment, his residence.

Sherron told the 911 operator that he had a gun and wanted to kill himself. The operator did an excellent job of trying to calm Sherron, all the while dispatching officers to the scene.

Several patrol officers arrived at the location as well as, at least, 3 sergeants. Sgt. Cash immediately took control of the situation and “stacked” officers on both sides of the partially open door of apartment #55, as well as designating which officers would be the “contact team”, who would be responsible for the use of less lethal weapons and who would respond with lethal force, if needed.

Officer Gomez was standing on the right side of the apartment doorway and told any occupants of the apartment that he was from the Riverside Police Department, was there to help, and asked everyone to come out. He received no response from several commands to exit the apartment. Suddenly, he saw Sherron at the doorway, holding a black semi-automatic handgun, and pointing it at the officers standing on the left side of the door and continued to point his handgun at officers. Fearing for the officers’ safety he fired 3 rounds at Sherron’s torso, causing him to fall to the ground.

Officer Lim was standing on the left side of the door and announced his presence at least 3 times. Sgt. Cash had arrived on the scene and designated Officer Lim as the “Point” on the left side. As he looked inside the partially opened door, he saw Sherron, walking towards him, holding a black semi-automatic handgun. He would later describe Sherron to detectives as having a “thousand yard stare”. Sherron raised the pistol towards Officer Lim and, fearing for his life, fired at Sherron. Lim said that he was “scared” and he saw Sherron fall, holding a long knife.



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Officer Serrato arrived with his partner, Officer Ouk and Sgt. Cash designated them to be the arrest team. As he stood on the left side of the door, Sherron walked out “out of nowhere”. Sherron had his arm extended as if he were holding a handgun, although he didn't see one. He heard several gunshots and his ears rang so badly, he thought he might have been shot in the head. Fearing that he was being shot at by Sherron, he fired at Sherron and his weapon jammed as he fell backwards. He cleared the weapon malfunction, got up, and assisted Officer Ouk in handcuffing Sherron.

Officer Ouk arrived with his partner, Officer Serrato, and was “stacked” on the left side of the door, when he heard a “pop”. He wasn't sure if it was a gunshot but Officers Lim, Serrato, and Velasquez began falling back towards him as if they had been shot. He saw Sherron walk out of the apartment, holding a knife. Fearing for all the officers' safety, he fired a shot at Sherron and his weapon jammed. He cleared the malfunction, as Sherron fell to the ground.

Recovered at the scene were a large knife that was found in Sherron's left hand and a black Airsoft handgun that was recovered in the grass, directly below Sherron's second floor apartment. It should be noted the Airsoft handgun was an exact replica of a Sig-Sauer pistol and had no orange or red safety markers.

Witnesses Cesar and Teresa Macias live on the ground floor of the apartment complex and watched through their bedroom window as several uniformed police officers approached apartment #55. They weren't surprised by the police presence because police had been to the same apartment 3 times in the last 3 weeks. They thought the apartment occupant had “mental problems”. They saw several officers outside Sherron's apartment and heard “Riverside Police Department, come out with your hands up. If you have weapons, throw them down.” They saw Sherron run out of the front door holding something in his hand. They heard gunshots and saw Sherron fall.

The radio log shows that the first call for service happened at 2246 hours. Just 9 minutes later, Sherron tells the 911 operator that he is bi-polar, is suffering from depression and just wants to die. At 2301, the operator hears officers in the background and Sherron hangs up the telephone. At 2305, radio traffic states that shots have been fired and the suspect is down.



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EXPERT QUALIFICATIONS

I was employed as a peace officer for the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department for 34 years. I worked as a jail deputy, 18 months as a patrol officer, and four years assigned to the Special Enforcement Bureau (SWAT team). My last 27 years on the department, I was assigned to the Detective Division, including over 22 years assigned to the Homicide Bureau. I investigated over 450 homicides and suspicious deaths and over 100 Officer Involved Shootings, including the murders of ten police officers.

In 1994, I assisted in writing the LASD Homicide Bureau Investigative Manual. I was also selected to be a member of the Joint LASD/LAPD Crime Lab Development Committee as well as the JET Committee to develop Homicide Bureau job standards and selection criteria. In 1995, I was selected as California's Deputy Sheriff of the Year by the California Organization of Police and Sheriffs (COPS) for the investigation, arrest, and conviction of a suspect in the murders of two local policemen.

For over 15 years, I have taught "High Profile Murder Investigations", "Homicide Scene Management", and Officer Involved Shooting Investigations" for the Robert Presley Institute of Criminal Investigation, police academies, advanced training classes, supervisor training, college classes, Homicide School, and in-service training. I am currently on staff with the Police Policy Studies Council where I teach and consult nationally on officer involved shooting, homicide, and suspicious death investigations. I am currently the investigator for the Riverside Police Review Commission. Although I retired from LASD in 2002, I was immediately signed to a contract to train newly assigned homicide detectives. In 2006, I was also assigned to the LASD Cold Case team where I have reviewed over one thousand unsolved murders and specifically work the unsolved DNA and latent print cases.



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INVESTIGATION AND REVIEW

The investigation into the Officer Involved Shooting Death of Chaz Isaiah Sherron was conducted by the Riverside Police Department and the Riverside County District Attorney's Office. I reviewed all the reports submitted to the Community Police Review Commission and researched deadly force legal issues. The District Attorney found there was no criminal liability.

LEGAL ANALYSIS

California law provides that the use of deadly force in self defense and defense of another if it reasonably appears to the person claiming the right to use such force that he actually and reasonably believed that he or another person was in imminent danger of great bodily injury or death. CALCRIM No. 3470.

The reasonableness of a particular use of force must be judged from the perspective of a reasonable officer on the scene, rather than with the 20/20 vision of hindsight. This analysis must also allow for the fact that officers are often forced to make split second judgments about the amount of force that is necessary in circumstances that are tense, uncertain, and rapidly evolving. *Graham v. Conner* (1989) 490 U.S. 386, 396-397.

CONCLUSION

The evidence examined shows that several Riverside Police Officers responded to a request for help by Chaz Sherron. Upon their arrival at the location, several of the patrol officers, all in official police uniforms, attempted to coax Sherron from his residence. Sherron had told the 911 operator that he was bi-polar, suffered from depression, and wanted to kill himself. Officer Gomez told Sherron that he (Gomez) was there to help him. It is quite apparent that Chaz Sherron was unwilling, or unable, to take the violent act to end his own life, and thus he created a deadly situation thereby relying on the police.



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I have worked on or reviewed over one thousand officer involved shootings and have studied the dilemma known as “Suicide By Cop”, or police assisted suicide. A 1998 report by the American College of Emergency Physicians examined all officer involved shootings involving the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department and found that suicide by cop incidents accounted for 11% of all deputy involved shootings and 13% of all deputy involved justifiable homicides. See Attached.

Suicide by cop occurs when people want to die but can’t kill themselves. So they put themselves in a position where a police officer is forced to shoot them.

In the above mentioned study of shootings involving the Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department, researchers found that in the 11% of suicide by cop officer involved shootings, 98% were male; 39% had a history of domestic violence (Sherron had reportedly beaten his mother just weeks before his death); many individuals had a prior history of suicide attempts (Sherron reportedly told the 911 operator that he had past suicide attempts); 17% used a toy or replica gun.

Rebecca Stincelli is a recognized expert in the field of Suicide By Cop. She writes that to qualify as a Suicide By Cop, the following criteria must be met:

- The suicidal subject must demonstrate the intent to die
- The suicidal subject must have a clear understanding of the finality of the act
- The suicidal subject must confront an officer to the degree that it compels the officer to act with deadly force
- The suicidal subject actually dies.

See Attached.

Also see attached Journal of Forensic Sciences Article on Suicide By Cop where researchers found over one third of officer involved shootings in North America are “Suicide By Cop”.

Rick Parent, a Canadian police-shooting expert and on staff with the Police Policy Studies Council, wrote an article for Police Magazine in October 2000, titled “When



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Police Shoot". He writes of several key factors being present in fatal police shootings. One is titled "mental disorder" and reads "mental disorders, or characteristics consistent with that of a deranged and irrational person, were displayed by roughly half of the individuals who were shot and killed by police. These findings are based upon the actions and behavior of the suspect during his/her encounter with the police. Also noteworthy is that, in roughly one third of these instances, the deceased had a recorded history of mental disorder.

The actions of Chaz Sherron reasonably created a fear of death or serious bodily injuries to all Riverside police officers present at the location, and their response with deadly force was justified. I also find that the investigation into the Officer Involved Shooting Death of Chaz Sherron was completed in a fair and impartial manner and met or exceeded POST standards of practice.



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Clinical and Forensic Indicators of "Suicide by Cop"*

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REFERENCE: Mohandie K, Meloy JR. Clinical and forensic indicators of "suicide by cop." *J Forensic Sci* 2000;45(2):384-389.

ABSTRACT: This paper reviews the literature pertaining to the phenomenon of "suicide by cop"—any incident in which a suicidal individual attempts to get law enforcement to kill him. This article defines the term "suicide by cop," discusses the various motivations of individuals who engage in this type of behavior, presents the risk factors and indicators for suicide and violence, and describes specific indicators for suicide by cop. Proper recognition of these events, prior and subsequent to their occurrence, has important implications for prevention, officer safety, equivocal death analysis and psychological autopsy, civil litigation, criminal justice proceedings, and community stability. This paper presents seven case studies which demonstrate the clinical and forensic indicators of this phenomenon.

KEYWORDS: forensic science, suicide by cop, victim-precipitated homicide, police-assisted suicide, suicide, homicide, police, violence risk, equivocal death analysis

In the United States the suicide rate for all ages in the general population has remained between 11 and 12 suicides per 100 000 population. More than 31 000 people take their own lives each year, and suicide is one of the leading causes of death (1). Attention has recently begun to focus upon incidents in which a suicidal individual engages in conspicuous and threatening behavior in an attempt to get law enforcement to kill him, a phenomenon known as "suicide by cop." Proper recognition and understanding of these events, prior and subsequent to their occurrence, has critical implications for prevention, officer safety, equivocal death analysis, and psychological autopsy, civil litigation, criminal justice proceedings, and community stability (2-4). This paper defines the phrase "suicide by cop," discusses the various motivations of individuals who engage in this type of behavior, presents an overview of the limited research as it relates to the prevalence and dynamics of this problem, presents the risk factors for suicide and violence, describes generic suicide and violence indicators, and discusses specific indicators for suicide by cop.

Definition

According to the Police Officer Standards and Training (5), "suicide by cop" is a term used by law enforcement and others to de-

scribe an incident in which an individual engages in behavior which poses an apparent risk of serious injury or death, with the intent to precipitate the use of deadly force by law enforcement personnel towards that individual.

There are a variety of terms which are used synonymously with the term suicide by cop, including "police-assisted suicide," "victim-precipitated homicide," and "hetero-suicide" (5,6). "Police-assisted suicide" is preferred by some because it clarifies that the incident involves police action in the death of another, and avoids confusing the event with "police suicide" which refers to the suicide of a law enforcement officer. The generic "victim-precipitated homicide" (VPH) describes those victims who somehow initiate or contribute to the sequence of events that results in their deaths (6,7). This term has been criticized because it is too general and applies to other unrelated situations, and it places the involved law enforcement personnel in the position of being labeled suspect(s) and the suicidal person being viewed as the "victim" (5). "Hetero-suicide," a subcategory of VPH in one classification system, has been coined to describe situations whereby one commits suicide by causing another person to perform the act, usually by entering into confrontations with opponents who are bigger, have more fighting experience, or are better armed than the potential VPH victim (6).

We adopt the term "suicide by cop" since it is a more commonly used and universally understood expression for these types of events, embraced by law enforcement, public and the media (5).

Motivations

All suicidal behavior is goal-directed behavior, with some goals appearing to be more instrumental and others more expressive (8). Instrumental goals might include avoidance of consequences such as incarceration or reconciliation of a failed love relationship, while expressive goals might include venting hopelessness or rage about the individual's life, or proving some emotional point. These categories help to focus investigations or review these events, but it is important to note that both motivations are usually present in any given situation, as suicide by cop is usually overdetermined. There are also three common "meta" or ultimate goals, at least one of which is present in every "suicide by cop" situation: suicide, homicide-suicide, or attention or "cry for help."

Instrumental Goals

In the instrumental category, individuals are: (1) attempting to escape or avoid the consequences of criminal or shameful actions; (2) using a forced confrontation with police to reconcile a failed relationship; (3) hoping to avoid the exclusion clauses of life insurance policies; (4) rationalizing that while it may be morally wrong to commit suicide, being killed resolves the spiritual problem of

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* The opinions included herein represent the authors' own views and do not reflect an official organizational opinion or communication.

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suicide; or (5) seeking what they believe to be a very effective and lethal means of accomplishing death.

The first type of situation is illustrated by an incident which took place in February 1996, in Honolulu, Hawaii. This event ended when the suspect was shot to death by police after he threatened to kill his hostage. The suspect had killed his girlfriend several days prior to returning to his former workplace and shooting a co-worker, and had made it known in conversations with witnesses that he "would not go back to jail" (personal communication, Captain K. Kaniho, Sept. 1996). In his wallet was a news account of his father's death at the hands of police prior to the suspect's birth. Homicide-suicide appeared to be his ultimate goal, interrupted by the escape of his prospective victims. He paraded his remaining hostage in front of police officers, taunting them, and was in the midst of a 60-second countdown to kill his hostage when he was killed by the officers.

The second type of incident is exemplified by an event that occurred in Southern California in August 1998. In this incident, a civilian police department employee was attempting to reconcile with his estranged wife and showed up at her house drunk, begging her to let him in to discuss their relationship. When she refused, he asked to use the bathroom and she then allowed him in the residence. An argument ensued with the husband refusing to leave. When the wife threatened to call the police, the husband said "I'll call them for you" and proceeded to call the local police and hang up on the dispatcher, resulting in a police response. The husband grabbed a replica pistol and opened the door, apparently waiting for the police to arrive. He was talked out of this suicide attempt by his son, and taken for psychological evaluation, admitting that he was "trying to get sympathy from my wife . . . make her take me back" (first author's field observation). It would appear that attention, rather than suicide, was the individual's ultimate goal in this circumstance.

In an example of the other types of instrumental motivation, a depressed and suicidal man in Los Angeles during the 1980s threatened to kill himself with a recently purchased handgun, and negotiations were begun to dissuade him from committing suicide. During the negotiation process, the man indicated that he was going to force the police to kill him, as he was worth "more to my children dead than alive" (personal communication, Lieutenant M. Albanese, Jan. 1999). He also stated that he was afraid of simply wounding himself and becoming more of a burden to the world. He had lost his job, recently separated from his wife, and had only minimal custody of his children. He also believed that if he killed himself, he would disqualify his life insurance policy, while if the police killed him, his children would receive the benefits. Furthermore, he believed that it was wrong within his spiritual belief system to commit suicide, but rationalized that if someone else did it, this would not bar him from the spiritual afterlife. After several hours of negotiations, the man surrendered without harming himself. In this example, suicide appeared to be the ultimate or meta-goal, with the instrumental sub-goals readily apparent.

Expressive Goals

In the expressive category, individuals are communicating: (1) hopelessness, depression, and desperation; (2) a statement about their ultimate identification as victims; (3) their need to save face by dying or being forcibly overwhelmed rather than surrendering; (4) their intense power needs; (5) rage and revenge; or (6) their need to draw attention to an important personal issue (9).

On November 23, 1998, in Orange County, CA, a father who was angry over the special schooling for his disabled son, was shot to death by a police sniper after taking several school officials hostage at gunpoint and claiming to have explosive devices (10). He had recently lost custody of his children and was embroiled in court battles with his estranged wife and the school district over the care of his disabled child. He told one of his hostages, "I came here today to get myself killed, because I don't have the guts to kill myself" (10). Throughout hours of negotiation, he ranted and raved about the inadequate education that the school district was providing for his 16-year-old deaf son. At the end of the ordeal, he paraded a hostage at gunpoint in front of police, who shot him. Later it was determined that while the gun was operative, the apparent explosive devices were fake. In this case, several expressive needs are apparent. This man was hopeless and desperate in his own perception of life circumstances, desired attention for an important personal issue, and saw himself as a victim, creating the circumstances to fulfill that role even in the manner of his death. He also sought to punish and intimidate those whom he perceived had caused him to suffer, and inflict revenge and rage against those in positions of authority by overpowering the school administrators with force, and by cajoling the police to kill him so that it would be their fault. As noted by statements attributed to this man, an instrumental goal was also present in this situation: setting up circumstances so that someone who was capable of completing his suicide would do so. The meta-goal here was suicide.

Also on November 23, 1998, a trespasser was shot to death by Los Angeles police officers who found him armed with a rifle upon their arrival (11). He shouted "just shoot me, just shoot me," then pointed his rifle at the police (11). The man had been evicted from the house, was still staying there, and was reported to have been "kind of down in the dumps." He had a history of sporadic employment, alcohol abuse, recently lost both parents to cancer, and one of his sons had just died. One year prior, he had threatened a neighbor's children with a rifle, stating "don't walk in front of my house or I'll blow you away." In this case, the suicide by cop behavior appeared to fulfill the expression of hopelessness and depression, as well as his acceptance of the victim role. Saving face by dying, rather than suffering further shame and defeat, may also have been a goal. Again, the instrumentality of avoiding consequences and utilizing an effective means of death is apparent. Ultimately, this situation may have been an attempted homicide-suicide.

In 1994, Los Angeles police responded to a domestic dispute with shots fired. When officers arrived, family members who had escaped the wrath of the gunman told the police that he was heavily armed, homicidal, and suicidal. Several years prior, he had been suspected and acquitted in a murder case. When the gunman became aware that police were at the location, he immediately fired over 50 rounds from an AK 47, shot and killed his horse, and shot his favorite vehicle. In the ensuing gunfight, he refused to stop shooting and was ultimately killed by police. Hopelessness and tremendous rage appeared to be the expressive goals, with homicide-suicide being the meta-goal.

On February 28, 1997, two heavily armed and vested gunmen engaged in one of the deadliest shootouts in modern United States history during a bank robbery gone awry. This shootout, which was broadcast on live television, ended with nine police officers and three citizens wounded, nearly 2000 rounds fired, one of the suspects committing suicide when his assault weapon became inoperative, and the second suspect being shot to death by Special Weapons and Tactics team members. These suspects were extremely violent during past crimes, possessed automatic weapons

and armor piercing ammunition, and trained extensively. A search warrant found the movies "Heat" and "Navy Seals," as well as books about close-quarters combat and police tactics in their safe house. While suspect number one took his own life, the second suspect continued to engage in gunfire with the police when it was clear that he could not escape. After he was incapacitated by the police gunfire and safety taken into custody, he told the arresting officers, "why don't you just put a bullet in my head" and, "why don't you just kill me, I'm not telling you a fucking thing" prior to dying (personal communication, Officer R. Massa, Jan. 1999). It is probable that these suspects decided that they would never be taken alive and would take as many law enforcement officers and others with them in the event they ever faced capture, dying in a blaze of antisocial glory. This fulfills the expressive goal of face saving, and especially speaks to the power needs of these individuals—"I am too powerful to be taken alive" and "I am so powerful that I died in a blaze of glory." While one may consider this to be speculation, it certainly is supported by the father of one of the deceased suspects who stated proudly "everything my son did, he did all the homework. . . any crime that you could put out there, he could show you a better way to do it. . . all the way up to bank robbery" (12). He added, "Larry told me that if it ever came down to him getting busted—going to jail for the rest of his life—he'd rather die" (12). Clearly, in this case there were also the instrumental goals of escape and avoidance of punishment present. The meta-goal in this situation was homicide-suicide.

Many mass murderers reflect a similar expressive dynamic. For example, Charles Whitman killed 16 people and wounded at least 31 others on August 1, 1966 in the Texas Tower incident (13). Heavily armed and purposeful, he left suicide notes and diary entries with the bodies of his mother and wife whom he killed before embarking on his murderous spree. These communications and behaviors made it clear that he did not intend to survive the incident, and that he wanted to die while engaged in the mass murder. Hempel, Meloy, and Richards (14) in a nonrandom study of 30 mass murderers over the past 50 years, found that death by suicide or at the hands of others is the usual outcome for the mass murderer. Hopelessness, a "warrior identity," rage, and intense power needs merge into a yearning for homicidal achievement, during which the perpetrator plans on being killed by police at some point. Cases such as these, with a meta-goal of homicide-suicide, represent the most lethal of suicide by cop scenarios because of this grandiose and overwhelming expressive need to achieve by killing and then dying at the hands of others. Table 1 lists a comparison of instrumental and expressive motives in suicide by cop situations. This table presents actual verbalizations, derived from the first author's experience in field response to hostage and barricade situations and psychological autopsy investigations, by individuals who have attempted or completed suicide by cop. These utterances are

strikingly similar to the concept of "psychological abstract" developed by Hempel et al. (14) to describe verbalizations immediately prior to, or during mass murder, which give insight into the perpetrator's intent and motivation.

Overview of Research

The research on suicide by cop is limited. In an early study which looked at 3282 homicides from 1956 through 1975 in Dade County, Florida, Wright and Davis (7) found the largest category of murders to be victim-participated homicide, a general category that includes situations where there was any participation by the victim in the incident, close enough to be considered an integral part of the act, thus a more inclusive category than "suicide by cop." These cases accounted for approximately 10% of all of the examined homicides between 1966 and 1975. They concluded that the difference between firearms and other weapons was most important in the victim-participated homicide category, with these homicides most frequently involving firearms (71%). They argued that in the heat of passion, the presence of a firearm can turn a fight into a killing, a fact that suicidal individuals in the 1990s seem well aware. They noted a 240% increase in violent situations involving firearms over other weapons, a finding of researchers examining this issue in other contexts (15,16).

Haruff, Llewellyn, Clark et al. (17) examined the related issue of firearm suicides during confrontations with police, what they termed "police associated deaths," in which an armed suspect being pursued, apprehended, or otherwise confronted by police suddenly turns the gun on himself. They examined 14 cases which qualified out of a total of 1203 suicides that occurred between 1984 and 1992 in Marion County, Indiana. This represented 1% of all suicides, and 2% of firearm suicides. They found that all of the subjects were male and 72% were in the 20- to 39-year-old range. Fifty-seven percent of the cases originated as a marital or relationship disturbance, and in 29% of the cases, the subject was wanted for a crime. All of the suicides were committed with handguns. Fifty percent of the cases where data were available (10 cases) tested positive for alcohol and/or drugs. While this study did not look specifically at the issue of suicide by cop, the presence of suicidal ideation among subjects during police intervention can be serious and lethal.

In a recent study conducted on all shooting cases handled by the LA County Sheriff's Department between 1987 and 1997 ($n = 437$), it was determined that 13% of all fatal officer-involved shootings and 11% of all officer-involved shootings, fatal and nonfatal, were suicide by cop situations (18). In addition, data for 1997 indicated that these cases accounted for 25% of all officer-involved shootings, and 27% of all officer-involved justifiable homicides, a significant increase over previous years. They found that 98% of the suspects were male, 70% had a criminal record, 65% had drug or alcohol problems, 63% had a known psychiatric history, 39% had a history of domestic violence, and 65% had verbally communicated their suicidal intent. In addition, 48% had guns, most of which were loaded and operative, while others had what appeared to be a lethal weapon (replica pistol, knives, or blunt objects) during the confrontation with police. In 39% of the cases domestic violence was the precipitating cause for police response, 20% of the cases involved despondence over a relationship breakup, while 9% of the cases involved a "three strikes" individual facing capture.

To provoke officers to shoot them, 50% pointed their firearm at officers, 26% lunged at officers with a knife, 15% fired their weapons at officers, 4% threw a knife at officers, and 4% contin-

TABLE 1—Instrumental versus expressive motivations in suicide by cop.

Instrumental	Expressive
"I'm not going back to jail"	"My life is hopeless"
"I wanted her to come back to me"	"I am the ultimate victim"
"God won't forgive me if I do it, but He will if you do"	"Soldiers never surrender"
"Make sure my kids get the insurance money"	"I am important enough to be killed by cops"
"I can't do it myself"	"I'll teach you a lesson"
	"This is worth dying for"

ued to assault civilians with a lethal weapon after being ordered to drop their weapon. Seventy-eight percent of the suspects verbally indicated that they wanted to commit suicide by cop: 58% asked officers to shoot them, 6.5% told someone else they would have officers shoot them, 6.5% told officers afterwards that suicide by cop was why they continued to point their weapon, 2.2% thanked officers for shooting them, 2.2% left a written note, and 2.2% called law enforcement officers prior to the event stating they wanted to commit suicide. Twenty-two percent indicated their suicidal intentions through demonstrative behavior: 15.2% continued to point their weapon after being told they would be shot, and 6.5% lunged at officers with a knife, knowing they would be shot. Seventy percent of the shootings took place within 30 min of the arrival of officers (18).

In another non-random study of suicide by cop cases, Kennedy et al. (2) reviewed an electronic library containing the full text from 22 newspapers, representing 18 metropolitan areas in the United States, to obtain a broad sample of accounts of police shootings in which potential cases of suicide by cop could be found. They analyzed a total of 240 articles from the years 1980 to 1995, and using two independent raters, catalogued the incidents into one of five categories: (1) probable suicide; (2) possible suicide; (3) uncertain; (4) suicide improbable; and (5) no suicidal evidence. They obtained 74% inter-rater agreement on categorization. They found probable or possible suicidal motivation in 16% of the 240 incidents. However, when they identified 80 cases with sufficient detail to classify, they found that 46% of these cases contained some evidence of possible or probable suicidal motivation. They then examined a new sample of 33 usable incidents taken from the *Detroit Free Press* files from 1992 to 1993 and determined that 47% of the cases with enough detail to classify had possible suicidal motivation. These data, while not rigorously collected and subject to reporting biases, indicate that anywhere from 16 to 46% of police shootings may be precipitated by suicidal motivation on behalf of the suspect.

Kennedy et al. (2) also found that demonstrative behavior on the part of the suspect was present in 89% of the cases. These behaviors included pointing or firing a gun at an officer, and reaching for a weapon. They also found that armed robbery was the most frequent reason for officer intervention; however, they noted a slight trend for suicidal incidents to involve the triad of general disturbance, domestic disturbance, and person with a weapon calls. They speculated that armed robbery often signifies a desperate crime in which many offenders, while much preferring to get away, would rather be killed than captured. Similar to the Hutson et al. (18) study, they found that 97% of the suspects were male. They concluded that these events require greater law enforcement attention due to the number of police shootings that involve these types of individuals and because of the impact that they can have upon community police relations. The weakness of this study is that news reports are an unreliable source of data. Data collection is not scientifically rigorous, tends to reflect local biases, and many events fail to be included.

A study reported by Parent (19) examined the frequency and degree of victim-precipitated acts that have constituted lethal threats to police officers in British Columbia municipal departments and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police between 1980 and 1997. He found that characteristics associated with victim-precipitated homicide appear to be a significant factor in 48% of the 58 cases that were analyzed. In these cases, the individuals' statements and actions clearly reflected their intent to commit suicide. He noted that in several cases the perpetrator of the lethal threat had a docu-

mented history of mental illness and/or suicidal behavior, and several had a high blood-alcohol level at the time of death. He concluded that in some instances, alcohol, substance abuse, and mental illness were added to the complex picture of suicidal tendencies. A significant weakness of this particular study is the failure to report methodology and statistics on these variables; however, the study does offer some insight into the possible international significance of this issue.

The issue of suicide by cop, while not a new phenomenon, is a relatively new area for scientific study. While the preliminary data reviewed here indicate that it is a significant problem, and there is some indication that the problem is increasing, this may be a reflection of better reporting and documentation. At the same time, if there is an actual increase, the change may be a function of changes in the criminal justice system (three strikes laws and tougher sentencing) and problems in the mental health system. Clearly, more research is needed.

Generic Suicide and Violence Risk Factors

There are generic suicide and violence risk factors which are provided by mental health researchers. Monahan (20) reported that (a) the prevalence of violence is more than five times higher among people who meet criteria for a DSM-III Axis I diagnosis than those who are not diagnosable; (b) the prevalence of violence among people who meet criteria for a diagnosis of schizophrenia, major depression, or mania/bipolar disorder are remarkably similar; and (c) the prevalence of violence among persons who meet criteria for a diagnosis of alcoholism is 12 times that of persons who receive no diagnosis, and the prevalence of violence among persons who meet criteria for being diagnosed as abusing drugs is 16 times that of persons who receive no diagnosis. Meloy (21) has identified individual and situational factors that may suggest increased violence potential: individual factors include past crime or violence, aged 15 to 24, male gender, lower intelligence, and alcohol and psychostimulant use; while situational factors include violent family background, a peer system that provides pressure to be violent, lack of employment or unsatisfactory employment, victim availability (affects frequency, severity, and lethality), weapon availability, and availability of alcohol. Weapon availability in the home has been identified as a strong risk factor for suicide and homicide (15,16). Other factors include family history of mental illness and alcohol abuse, family history of violence and child abuse, and seizure disorders or brain dysfunction (22). The general trend in violence research is to categorize factors as either dispositional (static) or clinical-situational (dynamic) to assess a real threat. Overprediction is still the major problem, primarily due to low base rates in most samples of "violent" individuals and clinical fears of false negatives.

Studies conducted by Shneidman (23) indicate that in 90% of actual suicide cases, people had given verbal or behavioral clues within the week or so before they committed suicide. He notes, however, that most individuals who threaten suicide do not attempt or commit suicide, a finding that parallels those of other violence researchers; that is, most individuals who threaten violence do not carry out their threats or *pose* a threat (24). He distinguishes between the *prospective* view of violence threats which focuses on the reality of how very few people who make threats or generate behavioral clues suggestive of a problem actually carry out the threat or do something violent. However, it is his opinion that, in practice, common sense dictates the wisdom of adopting a conservative or *retrospective* view, taking seriously any talk or indicators of violence potential (23).

TABLE 2—*Verbal clues to suicide.*

1. Direct threats—"maybe I should kill myself," "maybe I should kill ____" (25).
2. Veiled threats—"my life is over," "thanks for everything, you've been a good friend," "I know where s/he lives!," "I can't go on without ____" (25).
3. Hopeless and helpless statements—"there's no way out," "I'll never have a family" (25).
4. Statement of worthlessness, self-hate, and intense guilt—"I don't deserve to live."
5. Complaints about depression, great emotional pain, physical pain, distress, crying spells, or sleeplessness (25).
6. Angry statements such as "If I can't have him or her, then no one can," "they'll be sorry."
7. Statements that suggest over identifying with someone who committed suicide or another act of violence—"I wish it were me," "I know why he killed all those people, they just can't keep treating people bad," "I tell you I think a lot of how gratifying it would be to hurt people and sometimes I dream about it."
8. Verbal wills—"will you take care of my pets?," "tell Joe how much I care" (25).
9. Bizarre thoughts—"these people are not who they say they are and they are stealing my thoughts and poisoning me," "the end of the world is coming and I have a special mission to complete before it happens." Evidence of delusions (fixed and false beliefs).
10. Obsessions—"I can't get her or what she might be doing with him off of my mind," "It's wrong what the boss did to me and I'm NOT going to let it go." Grievances, lawsuits, multiple complaints.

TABLE 3—*Behavioral clues to suicide.*

1. Any overt act of violence such as suicide attempt or gesture, or assault of another.
2. Recklessness, putting self in harm's way or being provocative, and "I don't care what happens to me attitude" displayed in behavior.
3. Giving away personal possessions, getting affairs in order (25).
4. Suicide or violence rituals: writing a note, diary entries, dressing up for the assault, rehearsal. Acquiring a method for suicide attempt. Precautions taken to avoid rescue (25).
5. Pathological attachment: repeatedly pursuing, reuniting, and failing with love interest. Following, stalking, surveilling of another as a response to loss (26).
6. Drinking, drug use, or failure to take prescribed medication or treatment.
7. Restlessness or agitation indicative of major depression.
8. Deteriorating personal appearance, evidence of lack of sleep, poor personal hygiene.
9. Inappropriate displays of emotion, tearfulness, angry outbursts related to depression.
10. Social withdrawal and isolation as a result of depression.

Generic Suicide Indicators

In practical terms, there are two categories of clues, verbal and behavioral, that are reflective of some of the documented risk factors for suicide and violence risk, which may be observed by a loved one, friend, co-worker, or supervisor. Verbal clues to suicide risk are presented in Table 2, while behavioral clues to suicide risk are presented in Table 3.

Suicide by Cop Indicators

Verbal and Behavioral Clues

There are also multiple categories of clues that are indicative of suicide by cop. These data points are derived from the literature and the authors' experience with these situations. While certain clues may be more indicative of elevated risk in a given situation, the cur-

TABLE 4—*Verbal clues to suicide-by-cop risk.*

1. Demands that authorities kill him/her (9).
2. Sets a deadline for authorities to kill him/her (3,9).
3. Threatening to kill or harm others (27).
4. Wants to "go out in a blaze of glory" and/or indicates he "won't be taken alive" (7,9).
5. Gives a verbal will (27).
6. Tells hostages and others s/he wants to die (3).
7. Looking for a "macho" way out (9).
8. Offers to surrender to person in charge (9).
9. Indicates elaborate plans for his/her own death (9).
10. Expresses feeling of hopelessness/helplessness (9).
11. Emphatic that "jail is not an option" (27).
12. Biblical references, specifically the Book of Revelations and resurrection (3).

TABLE 5—*Behavioral clues to suicide-by-cop risk.*

1. Demonstrative with weapon (2).
2. Points loaded or unloaded weapon or apparent weapon at police (2).
3. Clears a threshold in a barricade situation in order to fire weapon (27).
4. Shooting at the police (2).
5. Reaching for a weapon or apparent weapon with police present (2).
6. Attaches weapon to body (27).
7. Countdown to kill hostage or others with police present (27).
8. Assaulting or harming hostages or others with police present (27).
9. Forces confrontation with police (2,3).
10. Advances on police when told to stop (5).
11. Suspect calls the police him/herself to report crime in progress (28).
12. Continues hopeless acts of aggression even after incapacitation by gunfire (28).
13. Self-mutilation with police present (5).
14. Pointing weapon at self with police present (5).
15. Refuses to negotiate (9).
16. No escape demands (27).
17. No demands (9).
18. Getting intoxicated with "chemical courage" (27).

rent state of the research does not allow for any predictive equations to express probabilities or degrees of certainty. Therefore, each situation must be assessed by its own unique elements, taking into account these guidelines for identification. Verbal clues are presented in Table 4 and behavioral clues are presented in Table 5.

Suicide by Cop Risk Factors

From our review of the research and actual case experience, it is apparent that there are risk factors in the recent history or circumstances of the subject, and other key life events that are indicative of suicide by cop. Behavior of the subject in recent history, the presence of unusual circumstances, and certain key life events from the more distant past, may contribute to understanding the subject's motivation and intent. (See Table 6 for the historical and situational indicators of suicide by cop risk and Table 7 for key life events noted in suicide by cop cases.)

Type of Call for Police Service

From our review of the literature and experience, certain types of calls for police service appear to have an elevated risk for escalating into suicide by cop situations. The presence of these specific circumstances may increase the likelihood that a given situation is a suicide by cop situation. These types of calls are presented in Table 8.

TABLE 6—*Historical or situational indicators of suicide-by-cop risk.*

1. Has killed a significant person in their life (9).
2. Has killed a prized pet or destroyed valued possessions (27).
3. Has recently disposed of money/property (3,9).
4. Faces an arrest or criminal justice situation perceived as serious (27).
5. Faces a life situation perceived as embarrassing or shameful (27).
6. Has left a suicide note (23).
7. Clinical depression (27).
8. Terminal diagnosis (9).
9. Two or more traumatic losses (9).
10. Previous police contact around suicide or violence risk issues (27).

TABLE 7—*Key life events noted in suicide-by-cop cases.*

1. Poor socioeconomic background (9).
2. Criminal record that includes assaultive behavior (9).
3. Family member killed in shootout with police (27).
4. Seeking attention for an issue (27).
5. Past and/or unsuccessful treatment for clinical depression and other mental health issues involving self-destructive and violent impulses (27).
6. Previous psychiatric hospitalization for danger to self and/or others (27).
7. Identification with others who have committed suicide by cop (27).
8. Religious beliefs and rationalization that makes it wrong to commit suicide but okay if someone does it for them (27).

TABLE 8—*Police service calls associated with elevated suicide-by-cop risk.*

1. Domestic violence or domestic disturbance calls (18).
2. Armed robbery (2).
3. Person with a gun (2).
4. General disturbance (2).
5. Mentally disturbed citizen (27).
6. Suicidal citizen (27).
7. Barricaded suspect, hostage, or "jumper" situations (27).
8. "Three strikes" criminal facing apprehension (18).
9. Police pursuit of wanted criminal (17).
10. Shots fired (27).

Conclusions

Suicide by cop is an important contemporary criminal justice issue. Research indicates that it is apparent in many violent confrontations between citizens and police. There are multiple motivations for those who attempt or complete suicide by cop, and degrees of intent and lethality include "cry for help" or attention, suicide only, and homicide-suicide. Research and the authors' experience indicate that it is a frequently considered alternative among suspects encountered by law enforcement.

We have identified the verbal and behavioral clues, recent history and circumstances, key life events, and type of police service calls indicative of suicide by cop situations. However, there are currently no correlational, comparative, or predictive studies available to assist in determining the degree and intent that suicide by cop may be a factor in any given situation. Similarly, these indicators are not meant to be counted to arrive at a quantitative index of risk or a probability statement; rather, degree and intent must be defined by behavior and individual circumstances. One variable in a particular case may be more significant and therefore weighed more heavily than another. At present, these variables have not been subjected to any tests of validity or reliability, but do appear to have strong face validity.

Research efforts in the future should examine the relative significance of these indicators, and determine the weighting of factors

which are comparably more relevant to identify suicide-by-cop situations. Law enforcement organizations need to continue and expand their documentation related to this phenomenon. Prevention and intervention models are dependent upon such data collection, so that additional approaches to safely resolve these destructive situations may be further developed, implemented, and assessed for efficacy.

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Suicide By Cop: Victims from BOTH sides of the Badge

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Biographical

Rebecca Stincelli is a recognized expert in the area of Suicide By Cop. She began researching "suicide by cop" in 1986 while working with the deputies of the Sacramento County (CA) Sheriff's Department as a crisis interventionist and post trauma liaison for victims of violent crimes. During the next decade, Rebecca became a law enforcement instructor where she was given the opportunity to present the perspectives of both the loved ones of the decedent and the officers involved.

Rebecca is a national award recipient and published author of articles and training manuals on victim trauma and law enforcement contacts with victims of violent crimes. She is a former field advocate with the Sacramento County Sheriff's Department with over 20 years of front-line experience. She currently holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in Criminal Justice from the California State University in Sacramento (CA) and an Associate Degree in the Behavioral Sciences. She is a retired member of the adjunct faculty for the Los Rios Community College District and held membership in the American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress, a part of the National Center for Crisis Management.



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Suicide By Cop Defined

After a long battle with ridiculous euphemisms, I have come to define and classify suicide by cop as clearly and distinctly as that written below. I must have hit the mark since editors of Black's Law Dictionary contacted me requesting permission to use these definitions in their next updated edition. Of course I was honored to oblige.

Suicide-by-cop: A colloquial term used to describe a suicidal incident whereby the suicidal subject engages in a consciously, life-threatening behavior to the degree that it compels a police officer to respond with deadly force.

Police-assisted suicide: A term used by some researchers to describe a suicide whereby the suicidal subject completes the act with the assistance of a police officer.

Victim-precipitated homicide: A term which implies a shared responsibility between two (or more parties) whereby a suicidal subject provokes his or her own death by means of another.

Classification Criteria.

Although simplified, the criteria below may be used to qualify the suicide

- The suicidal subject must demonstrate the intent to die
- The suicidal subject must have a clear understanding of the finality of the act.
- The suicidal subject must confront a law enforcement official to the degree that it compels that officer to act with deadly force.
- The suicidal subject actually dies - otherwise it is an attempted suicide by cop.

The ongoing debate centers around the argument that suicidal subjects may not be in a "knowing" state of mind during the event to understand the outcome. Since most who choose this method of suicide are generally "under the influence," I can understand that. However, interviews I've conducted indicate that while these individuals are in a high emotional state, the majority consciously chose this method due to their belief that the officer will indeed act with deadly force.

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Suicide By Cop

Suicide by cop, also known as death by cop, is a phenomenon where a person who wants to commit suicide decides to create a scenario or situation which forces the police officer to use lethal force.

The general public is very aware that Police are trained to use force to stop a threat, and are even authorized to use deadly force if the situation warrants it.

People wanting to commit suicide by cop take advantage of this trained response to meet their own needs.

The police officer, in essence, becomes a tool for the suicide.

Clearly, this is a no win situation for the officer involved in the incident.

If the suspect has decided that they want to commit death by cop, and takes the necessary steps to force the hands of the officers, the officer will have very little choice. The officer must protect him/herself as well as nearby civilians, and discharging their firearm may be their only option.

Its uncertain why an individual would choose this method of suicide, although there are some theories.

One belief is that the individual is unwilling or unable to take the violent act to end their own life, and thus create a deadly situation thereby relying on the police.

Another possibility is that a person may want some kind of media attention or record of their demise. By carrying out a suicide by cop scenario in the public eye, they may feel they are getting some form of recognition prior to their death.

Police departments recognize this phenomenon as legitimate, and even incorporate it into their officer training.

It is important to note, however, that regardless of the scenario - whether the subject intends to use the police to die or not- that there should not be any real change in how the officers deal with the subject.

Of paramount importance is YOU! The officer`s safety! If your safety is compromised and you witness a violent act which may result in serious harm or death, whether it be you or a civilian, take action! If the situation dictates using lethal force, do what you have been trained to do. You have not failed, and you have done your job in good faith.

Will the entire ordeal be difficult? Absolutely. But this is another reality that as police officers, we may one day have to face.

Have a look at the video below...



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Study Finds Suicide by Cop in Over Third of Police Shootings



[Christine Bude Nyholm](#), Yahoo! Contributor Network

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Suicide by Cop, called SBC, is an engagement of a person who apparently wants to die at the hands of a policeman. Suicide by Cop is the attempt to force law enforcement to kill or injure a person. This

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practice poses a danger to perpetrators, police officers and to innocent onlookers.

The Journal of Forensic Sciences has examined the phenomenon of SCG in a sample of shootings that involved police officers.

According to a press release on Wiley-Blackwell, dated February 18, 2009, over a third of the shootings in North America that involve police are "Suicide by Cop."

A study led by Kris Mohandie, Ph.D., who is a noted forensic and police psychologist; showed

that 36 percent of police shootings are "Suicide by Cop." SBC cases result in the injury or death of the perpetrator in fifty percent of the cases.

Dr. Mohandie, who is experienced in the management and assessment of violent behavior, has appeared on several fact based news programs, such as MSNBC, CNN, Discovery Channel, History Channel and A&E. Famous cases that Dr. Mohandie has been involved in include being on the scene

in the O.J. Simpson barricade and in assisting the prosecution of Steven Spielberg's stalker in Los Angeles.

Researchers examined 707 cases that involved shootings that involved police officers between 1998 and 2006. The researchers reviewed evidence such as witness statements, police reports, subject's criminal histories, photographs and videotapes.

36 percent of all the police shootings in the study sample were determined to be "Suicide by Cop," a momentous amount. The high percentage of SBC in the sample studied shows how significant suicidal impulses are among people who become involved in shootings with the police.

According to the Medicinenet website, some people commit suicide by behaving in a manner that is threatening to police officers. The perpetrator may use a gun, which may or may not be real, to force the police to respond to a threat by shooting.

Suicide by Cop is not only hazardous to the perpetrator. Behavior that induces police to talk strong action, such as shooting, has the potential to cause injury to other people. Individuals who instigate "Suicide by Cop" are not only lethal to themselves, they pose a risk to onlookers or other people who happen to be in the vicinity. According to the study, the chance of harm to others was one in three.

The research indicates that "Suicide by Cop" is a common occurrence in shootings that involve police officers. The phenomenon must be a consideration when investigating police shootings, according to the study authors.

Resources:

Wiley-Blackwell: "Suicide by Cop" Phenomenon Occurring in Over a Third of American Shootings Involving Police. Press release dated February 18, 2009. EurekAlert.

Medicine Net: What are the risk factors and protective facotrs for suicide?

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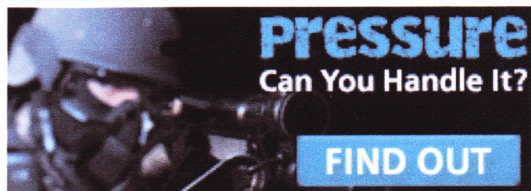
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They call it “suicide by cop”, or “police assisted suicide.” I prefer the former term because the “cop” is the instrument of suicide. He or she might as well be a bottle of sleeping pills, carbon monoxide or a gun in the hand of the suicide. “Police assisted suicide” to me suggests “doctor assisted suicide” which is an entirely different kind of suicide. The police do not “assist” in suicide by cop. They are merely the methodology the person employed.

Current estimates suggest that as many as of 10% of those killed by police officers intended that this was an inevitable or a likely outcome of actions they took.

There’s almost always police stress as a result of a suicide by cop. Except in those cases where the perpetrator of suicide by cop attempted to harm or actually did harm an officer or civilian, I would say that some degree of lingering post-incident stress is inevitable. At times this can even develop into chronic post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

There are different kinds of suicide.

Suicide by cop is too simple a phrase, too all inclusive. It’s as if there’s regular suicide, which is every other kind, and suicide by cop. From the cop’s point of view, unless he or she is the lethal method of choice, suicide is suicide, right?

Wrong. Suicide comes in many shapes and sizes. There are a variety of factors that lead to suicide, most frequently depression and sometimes rage as well. The method of any suicide is determined by both availability of a means, and the personality of the individual.

The former is obvious. If a gun isn't available, one won't be used. An available gun won't be used if the person can't stand the thought of blowing away part of his body, or doesn't want to leave a mess for others to find and clean up.

Some people seem to be "pill people", destined to take their lives by overdosing. Others seem to be carbon monoxide, or bag-over-the-head people. Alcoholics and nondrinkers alike often augment their lethal choices by drinking. Dramatic types jump off buildings and bridges after creating a spectacle. Those who make a rational decision to end their lives because of a terminal illness may show amazing consideration for those who find them. People who want to hide the cause of death for insurance or other reasons sometimes deliberately crash their cars, although airbags have had an effect on the lethality of some of the most dramatic single car accidents.

People who are very angry in addition to being depressed are more likely to involve others in their suicide. When a person ends his life in front of the news cameras, they want to send the message "I'll show you", to a lover who jilted them, a company that fired them, or a society that they believe never gave them a chance. Some people stage elaborate suicides solely for the benefit of the one person they set up to find them.

All of these are different kinds of suicide.

There are different kinds of suicide by cop, too.

One thing that all of these people have in common, and this is vital for every police officer involved in one to understand, is that the person who commits suicide by cop has by definition gone from being a victim to being a perpetrator. Obviously somebody who decides to stab or shoot a police officer in order to provoke a lethal response has committed a major criminal act. But threatening a police officer or a civilian for that matter with a weapon, whether it is loaded, unloaded or fake, is a crime too.

Somebody who simply commits suicide is a victim. Somebody who forces a police officer to kill him is a perpetrator. It is not only misleading, but can cause unnecessary guilt in officers forced to take a suicidal person's life, to call that person a "victim of suicide by cop" as if the officers had a choice in a "kill or risk being killed" situation. The decedent is a "perpetrator of suicide by cop."

Any police stress course in the police academy should have at least one or two classroom segments informing recruits about suicide by cop, and its after effects on the officer involved. I recommend if possible attending a full-day seminar on the subject, such as the ones offered by Chic Daniel or by Warrior Communications.

Unfortunately, most officers don't get this instruction and learn the hard way.

Knowing the tactical methods of dealing with someone who turns out to be a potential suicide by cop is of paramount importance, and I will only touch on that because I am not a law enforcement professional with expertise in that area. But understanding the psychology of people who may use suicide by cop as a means to end their own life is also very important. The more officers know about the mind of a suicidal subject, the better equipped they are to deal with these life or death confrontations.

Why people choose suicide by cop

Some suicidal people choose suicide by cop because it is the only method they seem capable of. These pathetic folks really harbor no anger towards the police. In fact, they may like the police and view them as providing one final service for them. My hunch is that these tend to be the elderly, and not to let any officer assume too much and get killed themselves, when an elderly man or woman points a gun at you and dares you to shoot them, they

probably aren't going to actually shoot you. For one thing, if you're alone, then who is going to finish the job on them? Most officers won't shoot, if only because it's hard to "blow away" someone who is not only so pathetic, but may remind you of your mom or dad. I'd advise you to very carefully take cover and keep them talking until back-up arrives. Of course, watch the trigger finger. If you can't convince them to put the gun down, try asking them to do you a favor and not point the gun at you. If they have a revolver, see if you can discern whether it's loaded. If you have to shoot, so be it. I will repeat this several times here: if you have to be the "cop" in "suicide by..." it isn't your fault. Most victims will leave you little if any choice.

Another type of person who chooses suicide by cop, who may not be particularly angry either, is someone who is legitimately mentally ill. There's a good chance someone like this has had numerous dealings with the police, and has, if anything, a love-hate relationship with them. They may hate you because you hospitalized them against their will when they went off their medication, but love you afterwards when they are restabilized.

In rural areas where hunting rifles are ubiquitous, mentally ill people often have easy access to, and familiarity with, these weapons. They aren't particularly easy to kill oneself with, not like a handgun at least, but are certainly a deadly threat when seriously aimed at you. As with the previous example, if you're alone, someone like this probably wouldn't shoot you, since then there wouldn't be anyone there to take him out. That's not to say they won't fire a few rounds in your direction. Take cover and keep him talking. Since it really isn't you personally they are angry at, sometimes it is surprisingly easy to convince suicidal people who initially seem bent on having you kill them, to at least point a weapon away from you just to make you feel more comfortable.

Still another type of person who may not be enraged, or even deeply depressed, but still commits suicide by cop, is the guy at the end of his rope. He's the fringe criminal who takes ever increasing chances, daring law enforcement to take him out, for example by committing outrageously risky, poorly planned, daylight armed robberies. They think along the lines of "if I can't make the big score, I might as well go down trying – and take a few cops with me along the way." Their crimes may seem suicidal, indeed, they often are. Tragically, innocent lives are sometimes lost as a result. There's little debate in law enforcement that in these cases, cops should shoot first and leave the talking for the locker room, critical incident stress debriefing (CISD), and the police stress shrink's office if necessary.

Even if you know, in your head, it wasn't your fault and you had absolutely no choice, you may find you are feeling irrationally guilty for taking the life of a criminal. Again, it is not your fault. Guilt in these cases is an entirely normal feeling. You didn't hire on to be the executioner of some pin-brained low-life robber. Sure, you know he may be better off dead, and without a doubt better him than you. But you may still feel guilty. In this age of Prozac for everything, irrational guilt feelings are still best resolved by good old fashioned talk therapy.

Some people attempt suicide by cop because they want to leave the ultimate decision up to someone else, and who better than a police officer. They may think thoughts like "I'm not sure I really want to die, so I'll pull a gun on a cop and leave it up to him or her whether I live or die." They may be ambivalent about dying and either consciously or unconsciously are hoping you can talk them out of it – even if they are holding a lethal weapon.

My hunch is that a significant number of suicides by cop fall into this category. It gives a new meaning to the expression "copping out" doesn't it? These people probably won't fire on you, but once again, you can never be sure.

If you ever face the business end of a gun or the blade of a knife in the hand of one of these folks, you'll earn your pay that day. Your job is to protect and serve the good people and bust the bad. But how do you categorize some pathetic suicidal mentally ill person who wants you to take his life and is a trigger pull or a lunge away

from taking yours? A good, if mentally ill or deeply depressed, citizen? Or a bad guy about to blow you away?

Suicides by cop aren't necessarily planned in advance. They can happen at the spur of the moment, especially if guns are available. A person who is depressed may be pushed "over the edge" by the break-up of a relationship, losing a job or some other setback in life. They may have no intention of killing themselves until for some reason the police are called to intervene. Then the thought may occur to them, either as a plan or a barely conceived notion, that they might engage the police in an armed confrontation without really thinking through the consequences until they find themselves a split second away from forcing the police to shoot them. If the person is intoxicated, he may not be fully cognizant of the fact that that every threatening word and gesture he makes can bring him that much closer to being killed.

One of the worst suicides by cop is fortunately quite rare. But it does happen. That's when cops, usually on suspension or recently retired, for reasons having to do with deep resentment, loss, rage, and what can be best described as a kind of temporary insanity, decide to set up colleagues on the job to take them out. There is a strong element of the "I'll show those bastards" attitude when this happens. No matter how much police stress counseling you get after being the instrument of death in an instance like this, no matter how much of your own anger at being put in a "your life or theirs" situation, you are probably going to be carrying guilt feelings for a long time. More frequently cops who commit suicide do so in ways to spare their colleagues, and do so with a degree of dignity. Cops to the end, they want their friends to think well of them in death.

Sometimes police officers are too well meaning, too eager to do what they in the moment perceive as the right thing for somebody they don't think fits the profile of a criminal. Television police dramas sometimes depict police officers doing exactly the wrong thing with armed suicidal people. How often have you seen the caring officer on television talk someone who is suicidal into handing over his knife or gun? It makes good drama, but in real life this is an exceedingly risky tactic because that person may turn on the officer to force him or her to take his life.

These are the most common cases. Many confrontations with suicidal people with weapons won't end in anyone's death because of your professionalism and the simple fact that you really don't want the person to die unless he or she absolutely has to in order to save innocent life. But some will, and some may die holding a toy gun that you will swear looked real, and no matter what you'll feel lousy.

It is normal to second guess your actions. It is normal to wonder if you could have said or done something different. But you need to understand that if a person is bent on suicide by cop, he will make it happen. Unless the police and all others can be absolutely protected from someone who decides to open fire, there is no scenario that can assure keeping this person alive. Some well meaning people have suggested that police use non-lethal weapons to subdue such people, but there are no such weapons that guarantee an individual with a firearm will be rendered unable to shoot an officer. So until officers can administer non-lethal force from the safety of armored personnel carriers, the police have little choice but to use lethal force. Otherwise, the use of non-lethal force can actually lead the person to try to shoot back at the police.

No matter how sure you were that had you waited another moment, you'd be the one in the morgue, the fact remains that except for the legal technicality, you didn't really kill a criminal. You were the instrument of death for the perpetrator of suicide by cop. Remember, it wasn't your fault.

One other point to consider is if the person has a knife instead of a gun. As you already know, you must be very wary of people with edged instruments. The basics are obvious to every law enforcement officer. (Never have them hand the knife to you. Always get at least twenty feet away and talk them into putting the knife down and getting away from it.)

As a therapist I can add that in a suicide by cop, a knife is more likely to be an instrument used against you than against the subject because aside from cutting one's wrist, usually done alone and by females, knives aren't commonly used for suicide in the western world. People may threaten to cut their own throat or stab themselves, but this isn't likely.

Police stress and suicide by cop

After an incident, however reassuring your colleagues and chief are, I strongly recommend you see a police stress counselor. A suicide by cop is always a critical incident and requires debriefing. Do this even if you feel you have it all together afterwards. Do it even if it doesn't seem like the macho thing to do. A killing like this can haunt an officer for a long time, and a lot of your own guilt can linger beneath the surface and cause you problems later on.

The culture of your department can make a big difference. Some police departments develop a macho culture where feelings aren't expressed because to do so would be viewed as a sign of weakness. Other departments, often those with a good mix of older, seasoned officers and younger, often unmarried "gung ho" officers, tend to foster more openness about feelings.

In the first kind of department someone may ask you "how 'ya doing" after such an incident as they are walking by you. They aren't really conveying the message that they want to truly hear the answer unless it's "no problem."

In the second department, if someone makes eye contact and asks "how are you feeling," the ball is in your court. I would suggest you try to answer them honestly. You may be surprised at the amount of real understanding and support you will get.

At home some officers try to "spare" their significant other from their job related troubles. They may come home distressed over incidents at work and gloss over them. This is not healthy for the officer and generally not good for the relationship. If you are involved in a suicide by cop you should talk to your significant other about how you feel.

Remember that you may find you are having disturbing thoughts, feelings and even vivid dreams about the incident starting shortly afterwards, or these may be delayed for a period of weeks or months and then emerge rapidly or gradually. You also may develop other symptoms of post-traumatic stress that are less obvious and you may be tempted to ignore them or attribute them to other causes.

Feeling restless, irritable, having difficulty sleeping or being unusually tired when you wake up or during your usual waking time are common symptoms. You may have a heightened startle response. You also may get headaches and intestinal problems. It is often easier to write such things off as coincidental than to admit they are related to the incident. Sometimes the best person to ask how you are doing is the person closest to you.

If you even suspect you haven't resolved the incident, it is better to be safe than sorry and to see a therapist who is used to working with police officers.

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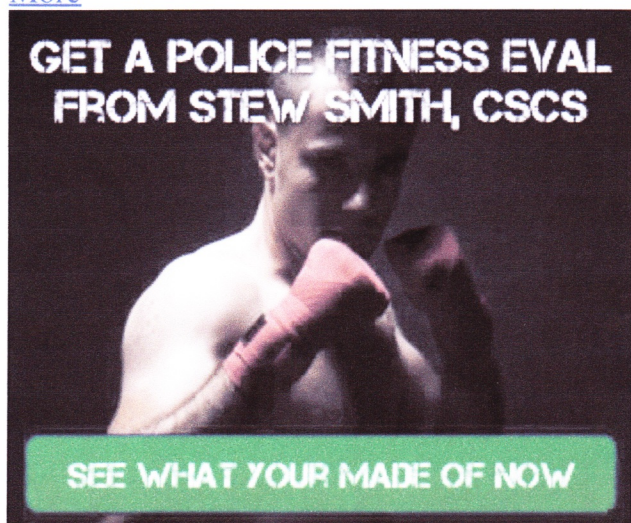
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Suicide by Cop

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Study objective: "Suicide by cop" is a term used by law enforcement officers to describe an incident in which a suicidal individual intentionally engages in life-threatening and criminal behavior with a lethal weapon or what appears to be a lethal weapon toward law enforcement officers or civilians to specifically provoke officers to shoot the suicidal individual in self-defense or to protect civilians. The objective of this study was to investigate the phenomenon that some individuals attempt or commit suicide by intentionally provoking law enforcement officers to shoot them.

Methods: We reviewed all files of officer-involved shootings investigated by the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department from 1987 to 1997. Cases met the following criteria: (1) evidence of the individual's suicidal intent, (2) evidence they specifically wanted officers to shoot them, (3) evidence they possessed a lethal weapon or what appeared to be a lethal weapon, and (4) evidence they intentionally escalated the encounter and provoked officers to shoot them.

Results: Suicide by cop accounted for 11% (n=46) of all officer-involved shootings and 13% of all officer-involved justifiable homicides. Ages of suicidal individuals ranged from 18 to 54 years; 98% were male. Forty-eight percent of weapons possessed by suicidal individuals were firearms, 17% replica firearms. The median time from arrival of officers at the scene to the time of the shooting was 15 minutes with 70% of shootings occurring within 30 minutes of arrival of officers. Thirty-nine percent of cases involved domestic violence. Fifty-four percent of suicidal individuals sustained fatal gunshot wounds. All deaths were classified by the coroner as homicides, as opposed to suicides.

Conclusion: Suicide by cop is an actual form of suicide. The most appropriate term for this phenomenon is law enforcement–forced-assisted suicide. Law enforcement agencies may be able to develop strategies for early recognition and handling of law enforcement–forced-assisted suicide (suicide by cop). Health care providers involved in the evaluation of potentially

suicidal individuals and in the resuscitation of officer-involved shootings should be aware of law enforcement–forced-assisted suicide as a form of suicide.

[Hutson HR, Anglin D, Yarbrough J, Hardaway K, Russell M, Strote J, Canter M, Blum B: *Suicide by cop*. *Ann Emerg Med* December 1998;32:665-669.]

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the United States, on average 1 person per day is killed by law enforcement officers.¹ Some individuals who are shot or killed by law enforcement officers during an officer-involved shooting are actually attempting or committing suicide.^{1,2} Initially, these suicidal individuals, in an attempt to achieve their suicidal goal, intentionally engage in life-threatening and criminal behavior with a lethal weapon or what appears to be a lethal weapon to gain the attention of law enforcement officers (ie, committing a robbery, a high-speed car chase, or committing a domestic assault). Once officers arrive to the scene, the suicidal individual purposely disobeys the commands by officers to lay down their weapon. These suicidal individuals then intentionally escalate the potential for a lethal encounter by threatening officers or members of the civilian population with a deadly weapon, commonly a firearm. This forces officers to use deadly force by shooting the suicidal individual in self-defense or to protect civilians.

The term used by law enforcement officers for this phenomenon is "suicide by cop."^{2,3} In many instances officers are unaware they have participated in a suicide by cop phenomenon until after the encounter has been resolved by deadly force or during the departmental investigation of the officer-involved shooting. Law enforcement officers are likely selected and forced to participate in a suicide by cop phenomenon because the suicidal individual is imminently intent on dying and it is common knowledge that officers are trained in the use of deadly force; they consistently carry firearms and will deploy deadly force with reasonable certainty when confronted by a life-threatening situation.² The purpose of this study is to investigate the phenomenon that some individuals attempt or commit suicide by provoking law enforcement officers to shoot them.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This was a retrospective review of files of all officer-involved shootings investigated by the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD) Homicide Bureau from January 1, 1987, through December 31, 1997. LASD, which is the largest

sheriff's department in the nation with approximately 12,000 law enforcement officers, investigates officer-involved shootings in areas of Los Angeles County populated by 47% (4.1 million) of the county's population (includes 35 municipalities and unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County).⁴ An officer-involved shooting was defined as a shooting in which an individual was shot by law enforcement officers resulting in a firearm injury or death to the individual.

Files were reviewed to determine whether they met the definition of a suicide by cop phenomenon. To be included in the study, all cases met the following criteria: (1) evidence of suicidal intent, (2) evidence the individuals specifically wanted officers to shoot them, (3) evidence they all possessed a lethal weapon or what appeared to be a lethal weapon, and (4) evidence they intentionally escalated the encounter and provoked officers to shoot them in self-defense or to protect civilians. Cases not meeting the 4 criteria were excluded. An attempted suicide by cop phenomenon is one in which the suicidal individual sustained a nonlethal firearm injury during the officer-involved shooting. The term suicide by cop was not mentioned in any of the LASD files reviewed.

Suicidal intent was determined by a written note stating a wish to die, recent verbal communication of a desire to die to friends or family and at times to officers, or exhibiting suicidal characteristics or behavior indicative of suicidal intent (ie, holding a firearm to one's head). Evidence that suicidal individuals specifically wanted officers to shoot them was determined by the individuals stating outright they wanted officers to shoot them, written or verbal communication to family or friends stating they wanted officers to shoot them, or not dropping their weapon when advised by officers to do so and then aiming their weapon at officers or civilians.

All files were independently reviewed and agreed on by the primary investigators that included: 2 emergency physicians, a forensic psychiatrist, and a homicide detective with 30 years' experience in law enforcement. Reviewers used a standard abstract form. All reviewers were coinvestigators and were trained in completing the forms. Missing data were coded as "unknown." All files and abstracted data were independently reviewed by 3 reviewers to ensure consistency of coding.

Files of officer-involved shootings were reviewed for demographics of the suicidal individual, past psychiatric illness or suicide attempts, history of alcohol or drug abuse, type of weapon used to threaten officers, whether firearms used to threaten officers were operative and loaded, whether less lethal uses of force were attempted before the officer-involved shooting (ie, Taser, chemical irritant spray [Mace], bean bag gun), the duration of incident from time of arrival

of the officers until the officer-involved shooting, and if the firearm injury was fatal. All deceased individuals were autopsied by the Los Angeles County Department of the Coroner and these reports were reviewed for mode of death and toxicologic findings. The sum of the percentages for evidence of suicidal intent is greater than 100% because some individuals demonstrated suicidal intent by more than 1 method. This study received institutional review board approval. Data were compiled and analysis performed with the Epi Info (version 5) software program.⁵

RESULTS

From January 1, 1987, through December 31, 1997, there were a total of 437 officer-involved shootings investigated by LASD; 237 (54.2%) individuals sustained nonfatal gunshot wounds and 200 (45.8%) had fatal gunshot wounds. Of the 437 officer-involved shootings, 46 (10.5%) met the case definition of suicide by cop. Twenty-five (54.3%) suicidal individuals sustained fatal gunshot wounds, and 21 (45.7%) sustained nonfatal gunshot wounds. All cases were separate incidents. A suicide by cop phenomenon accounted for 25 (12.5%) of the 200 officer-involved justifiable homicides. There was a mean of 4.2 cases of suicide by cop or attempted suicide by cop each year. The largest number of cases (n=13, 28.3%) occurred in 1997. Ages of suicidal individuals ranged from 18 to 54 years (median age 34 years; mean age 35 years). The race of suicidal individuals was white (n=24, 52.2%), Hispanic (n=17, 37.0%), and black (n=5, 10.9%). There were 45 (97.8%) males and 1 (2.2%) female involved in a suicide by cop or attempted suicide by cop phenomenon.

Evidence of suicidal intent for all suicide by cop individuals consisted of verbal communication to family or

friends in 30 (65.2%) cases, exhibiting suicidal characteristics or behavior in 20 (43.5%) cases, verbal communication to officers in 10 (21.7%) cases, and written communication in 2 (4.3%) cases. All cases demonstrated suicidal intent by 1 or more of the above listed methods. In all 46 suicide by cop cases, there was evidence that suicidal individuals specifically wanted law enforcement officers to shoot them (Table 1).

All 46 suicidal individuals displayed a lethal weapon or what appeared to be a lethal weapon during their confrontation with law enforcement officers; weapons consisted of firearms in 22 (47.8%) cases, firearm replicas in 8 (17.4%), knives in 15 (32.6%), and blunt objects in 1 (2.2%). During the investigation of the officer-involved shooting, 21 (95.5%) firearms were operative, with 17 (77.3%) operative and loaded and 4 (18.2%) operative and unloaded. The 8 firearm replicas used by suicidal individuals to simulate a firearm were nonpowdered firearms (BB/pellet guns) in 3 cases, toy gun, pliers, a pager, metal pipe, and a hammer. Thirteen of the 22 firearms (59.1%) were semiautomatic or automatic weapons.

The locations of the officer-involved shootings for the suicide by cop scenarios varied, with 23 (50.0%) occurring at the suicidal individual's place of residence, 10 (21.7%) occurring at a residence other than their own, and 13 (28.3%) occurring at large in the community (ie, street, schoolyard, workplace). Twenty-six (56.5%) cases occurred out in the open (ie, in full public view).

Of the 46 suicide by cop cases, 30 (65.2%) involved threats with a lethal weapon or what appeared to be a lethal weapon toward law enforcement officers only, 2 (4.3%) involved threats with a lethal weapon toward civilians only, and 14 (30.4%) involved threats to both officers and civilians with a lethal weapon or what appeared to be a lethal weapon.

Table 1.

Evidence that suicidal individuals specifically wanted law enforcement officers to shoot them during the suicide by cop phenomenon.

Types of Evidence	Individuals No. (%)
Total cases	46 (100)
Asked officers to shoot/kill them	27 (58.7)
Continued to point firearm or apparent firearm at officers after being told they would be shot if they did not put down their weapon	7 (15.2)
Told family/friends they would have officers kill them	3 (6.5)
Lunged at officers with knife knowing they would be shot	3 (6.5)
Told officers they intentionally pointed a firearm at them knowing officers would shoot (survivors of suicide by cop phenomenon)	3 (6.5)
Thanked officers for shooting them	1 (2.2)
Written note stating they specifically wanted officers to kill them	1 (2.2)
Called law enforcement officers stating they wanted to commit suicide	1 (2.2)

Verbal dissuasion, consisting of demands to lay down their weapon, was used by officers in 44 (95.7%) cases of suicide by cop with no effect. In the other 2 (4.3%) cases, the lethal confrontation was so immediate that verbal dissuasion was not possible. In 11 (23.9%) cases officers initially used less lethal uses of force in an attempt to subdue and apprehend the armed suicidal individual. These less lethal uses of force included Arwen rifle (rubber bullets), bean bag gun, pepper spray, police dogs, Taser, tear gas, and in 1 case officers attempted to physically disarm the suicidal individual. In all 11 cases, less lethal uses of force were unsuccessful.

To provoke officers to shoot them, all suicidal individuals intentionally escalated the potential for a lethal encounter in the following ways: pointing a firearm or what appeared to be a firearm at officers in 23 (50%) cases, lunging at officers with a knife or cutting instrument in 12 (26.1%) cases, shooting at officers in 7 (15.2%) cases, throwing a knife at officers in 2 (4.3%) cases, or continuing to assault civilians with a lethal weapon after being ordered to drop the weapon in 2 (4.3%) cases. Because of life-threatening behavior toward officers or civilians, all 46 suicidal individuals were shot by officers. No officer fatalities occurred; however, 3 officers sustained gunshot wounds from suicidal individuals in separate incidents.

The time from arrival of officers at the scene to the time of the officer-involved shooting ranged from 1 minute (n=4)

to 6 hours 25 minutes (n=1), with a median time of 15 minutes. Sixteen (37.2%) shootings occurred within 5 minutes of arrival of officers at the scene, and 30 (69.8%) occurred within 30 minutes of arrival of officers at the scene. After the officer-involved shooting, 11 (23.9%) suicidal individuals were pronounced dead at the scene, 35 (76.1%) were transported to emergency departments for resuscitation. Fifteen (30.4%) individuals died during ED resuscitation or during the course of hospitalization. All 25 deaths from suicide by cop phenomena were classified by the coroner as homicides as opposed to suicides.

Other associated characteristics of individuals involved in suicide by cop phenomena are listed in Table 2. Etiologic factors precipitating the suicide by cop phenomena included: domestic violence in 18 (39.1%) cases, despondence over a relationship breakup in 9 (19.6%), imminent incarceration for third felony conviction ("3 strikes" law in California) in 4 (8.7%), loss of employment in 2 (4.3%), and unknown reasons in 13 (28.3%) cases.

DISCUSSION

This study shows that suicide by cop is an actual form of suicide and makes up a larger proportion of officer-involved shootings and officer-involved justifiable homicides than was previously recognized. The phenomenon of committing suicide through another person was characterized by Wolfgang⁶ as a victim-precipitated homicide. Wolfgang defined a victim-precipitated homicide as a "criminal homicide in which the victim is a direct positive precipitator in the crime. The role of the victim is characterized by his having been the first in the homicide drama to use physical force directed against his subsequent slayer."⁶ Wolfgang further stated that "these are cases in which the victim was the first to show and to use a deadly weapon to strike a blow in an altercation to commence the interplay or resort to physical violence."⁶ Although not all victim-precipitated homicides are suicides, all suicide by cop phenomena meet Wolfgang's definition of a victim-precipitated homicide.

Individuals who commit suicide by means of a suicide by cop phenomenon may not be included in the number of suicides or the number of suicide attempts that occur annually in the United States. This is exemplified in this study where all 25 deaths related to a suicide by cop phenomenon were classified as homicides by the coroner. The actual number of cases of suicide by cop in the area of Los Angeles County patrolled or investigated by LASD is likely higher. Some individuals attempting suicide by means of suicide by cop may have surrendered before an officer-involved shooting occurred and therefore would not have been included in this study.

Table 2.

Characteristics of suicidal individuals involved in a suicide by cop phenomenon (N=46).

Characteristics	Individuals No. (%)
Homeless/transient	
Yes	2 (4.3)
No	41 (89.1)
Unknown	3 (6.5)
Prior arrest/conviction	
Yes	32 (69.6)
No	8 (17.4)
Unknown	6 (13.0)
Alcohol/drug abuse	
Yes	30 (65.2)
No	9 (19.6)
Unknown	7 (15.2)
Domestic violence/domestic dispute	
Yes	18 (39.1)
No	16 (34.8)
Unknown	12 (26.1)
Psychiatric history	
Yes	29 (63.0)
No	3 (6.5)
Unknown	14 (30.4)

Although suicide by cop accounted for 2% of suicides in the region of Los Angeles County patrolled or investigated by LASD in 1997, suicide by cop phenomena accounted for 25% of all officer-involved shootings and 27% of all officer-involved justifiable homicides in 1997. Why suicide by cop was more frequent in 1997 than previous years is unknown. It could represent a trend toward an increase in this phenomenon as a means of suicide, or improved documentation by officers.

Suicide by cop is a rapidly evolving phenomenon—70% of cases occurred within 30 minutes following officers' arrival at the scene. This clearly offers minimal time for prevention or interventions, such as less lethal use of force methods or the involvement of law enforcement crisis negotiating teams.

Thirty-nine percent of suicide by cop phenomena involved domestic violence incidents. In 15 anecdotal cases by Wilson et al,⁷ 33% involved domestic violence. A stressed intimate relationship leading to separation, divorce, or family violence is known to be a significant risk factor for suicide.⁸ The threat of incarceration may also be associated with suicide. In fact, 10% of individuals in this study who committed suicide were facing the possibility of 25 years to life in prison ("third strike"). A substantial proportion of cases involved a history of alcohol or drug abuse, as well as past psychiatric histories or suicide attempts, all of which have been associated with suicide.⁷⁻⁹

Law enforcement officers are at high risk for occupational homicide.¹⁰ Every third day an officer is killed in the line of duty, in some instances with the officer's own firearm.¹⁰ Contrary to popular belief, officers are not trained to shoot to wound an individual. Those suicidal individuals who survived their suicide by cop phenomenon did so inadvertently because of a nonlethal firearm injury. Nearly half of suicidal individuals in this study survived their officer-involved shooting, which is similar to the overall survival rate of officer-involved shootings during the study period. In fact, the majority of individuals shot in officer-involved shootings nationwide do not succumb to their firearm injuries. Even if law enforcement officers recognize a situation as being a suicide by cop phenomenon, in this study 3 officers sustained nonfatal gunshot wounds and the majority of firearms used by suicidal individuals were operative and loaded. Therefore a life-threatening situation to officers continues to exist. The psychologic sequelae of an officer forced to shoot in a suicide by cop phenomenon may be profound.² Many officers second-guess their response to shoot in such incidents.² The officer is often regarded as the "perpetrator," while the suicidal individual is seen as the "victim".⁶

As with any retrospective study analyzing previously compiled information, inherent biases may exist. An

additional 15 officer-involved shootings had the potential to be suicide by cop phenomena but lacked documented evidence of suicidal intent or a specific desire for officers to shoot them.

Although the colloquial term for these suicide attempts and suicides is suicide by cop, the most appropriate term for these events is law enforcement–forced–assisted suicide, because law enforcement officers are "forced" to "assist" these suicidal individuals in attempting or committing suicide. Criteria for the determination of suicide should be expanded to include law enforcement–forced–assisted suicide. All officer-involved shootings should be examined to determine whether they are actually a law enforcement–forced–assisted suicide, and deaths related to this phenomenon should be recorded as suicide by coroners and medical examiners.

On the basis of this study, law enforcement agencies may be able to develop strategies for early recognition of law enforcement–forced–assisted suicide (suicide by cop). Health care providers involved in the evaluation of potentially suicidal individuals should be aware of law enforcement–forced–assisted suicide as a form of suicide. When individuals who have been shot in an officer-involved shooting are brought to the ED for medical care, both the officer and the patient should be questioned about the circumstances of the incident to determine whether the patient exhibited suicidal characteristics or behavior indicative of suicidal intent. More research should be undertaken to further assess officer-involved shootings involving law enforcement–forced–assisted suicide, in particular with individuals who survived this phenomenon.

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