

Law Enforcement and Dispatch Stress: A Comparison

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The intent of the research conducted is to answer a question within the emergency communications field that has yet to be answered: What types of stress exist? The intent is to broaden the knowledge base for future study. Attrition levels have historically been attributed to the stress of the position though little research has accompanied this summation. With better knowledge of what is causing stress, attrition levels may be reduced due to more appropriate stress management training or changes to job practices themselves. Currently much of the stress management training that is given to dispatchers has been developed for law enforcement officers and corroborating or refuting the validity of this can help significantly in the field of emergency dispatch. Additionally, the knowledge itself of whether or not officer and dispatcher stress is similar in nature will fill a void in research currently available.

Method

Definitions

This study will use specific terms to cover more broad ideas or subjects. The term officer within this study signifies any law enforcement officer who participated in either of the studies being used as comparison. The term dispatcher is used for any individual working in an emergency communications center. This includes any law enforcement or Public Safety Answering Point type of organization. The term dispatcher includes both 9-1-1 call-takers and dispatchers alike. The term PSAP is used as the abbreviation for any Public Safety Answering Point or any organization that answers 9-1-1 telephone lines within the United States. The term LEOSS is used as the abbreviation for the Law Enforcement Officer Stress Survey.

Studies Used

Both studies that were referenced within this comparative review were published in peer reviewed scientific journals.

McCreary, D., Thompson, M. (2006). Development of Two Reliable and Valid Measures of Stressors in Policing; The Operational and Organizational Police Stress Questionnaires. *International Journal of Stress Management* 13(4), 494-518

Van Hasselt, V., Sheehan, D., Malcolm, A., Sellers, A., Baker, M., Couwels, J. (2008) The Law Enforcement Officer Stress Survey (LEOSS) Evaluation of Psychometric Properties. *Behavior Modification* Vol 32(1): Sage Publications ISSB: 10.1177/0145445507308571

Participants

Officers

The officer research that was conducted was through both previous stress studies. Through these studies, three surveys that will be used for comparison were administered to officers between 2006 and 2008.

For Van Hasselt's LEOSS, 188 participants were recorded. These participants included 159 men and 27 women ranging in age from 22 years old to 57 years old. The average age of officers participating was 40 years of age.

For McCreary's study, 385 participants were recorded. These participants included 313 men and 70 women ranging in age from 22 years old to 57 years old. The average age of officers participating was 39 years of age.

Dispatchers

The dispatcher portion of the survey was conducted by the author in 2013. A pilot study of 3 communications centers was conducted in order to establish wording, survey layout and dissemination. Then, after corrections, 278 dispatchers/call-takers participated in the final survey. This final survey was solicited from APCO Open Forum through a single entry solicitation. These participants included 60 men, 210 women, and 8 unspecified. These individuals came from 72 different communications centers throughout the country. Of the 278 participants 233 designated themselves dispatchers primarily while 33 designated themselves as call-takers. 233 of the participants also noted that they were a member of a PSAP.

Years of Service

Years	Response	%
0 - 1 year	7	3%
Between 1 and 5 years	48	17%
Between 5 and 10 years	68	24%
Between 10 and 15 years	54	19%
15 years or more	101	36%
Total	278	100%

Organizational Responsibility

Answer	Response	%
PSAP	233	84%
Law	221	79%
Fire	152	54%
EMS/Medical	141	51%

Measures

The Participants complete the Operational Police Stress Survey, the Organizational Police Stress Survey, and the Law Enforcement Officer Stress Study (LEOSS) modified for dispatch directly. The modifications to the LEOSS were to make the statements appropriate to the actions that dispatchers and call-takers would experience as law enforcement personnel would act on the same terms. For instance: an officer, in their survey received, “You are called to a burglary in progress. The assailant may be armed.” The dispatcher, for the same question received, “You are dealing with a burglary in progress. The assailant may be armed.” The intent was to maintain the integrity of each question while making it appropriate for the dispatchers taking this survey.

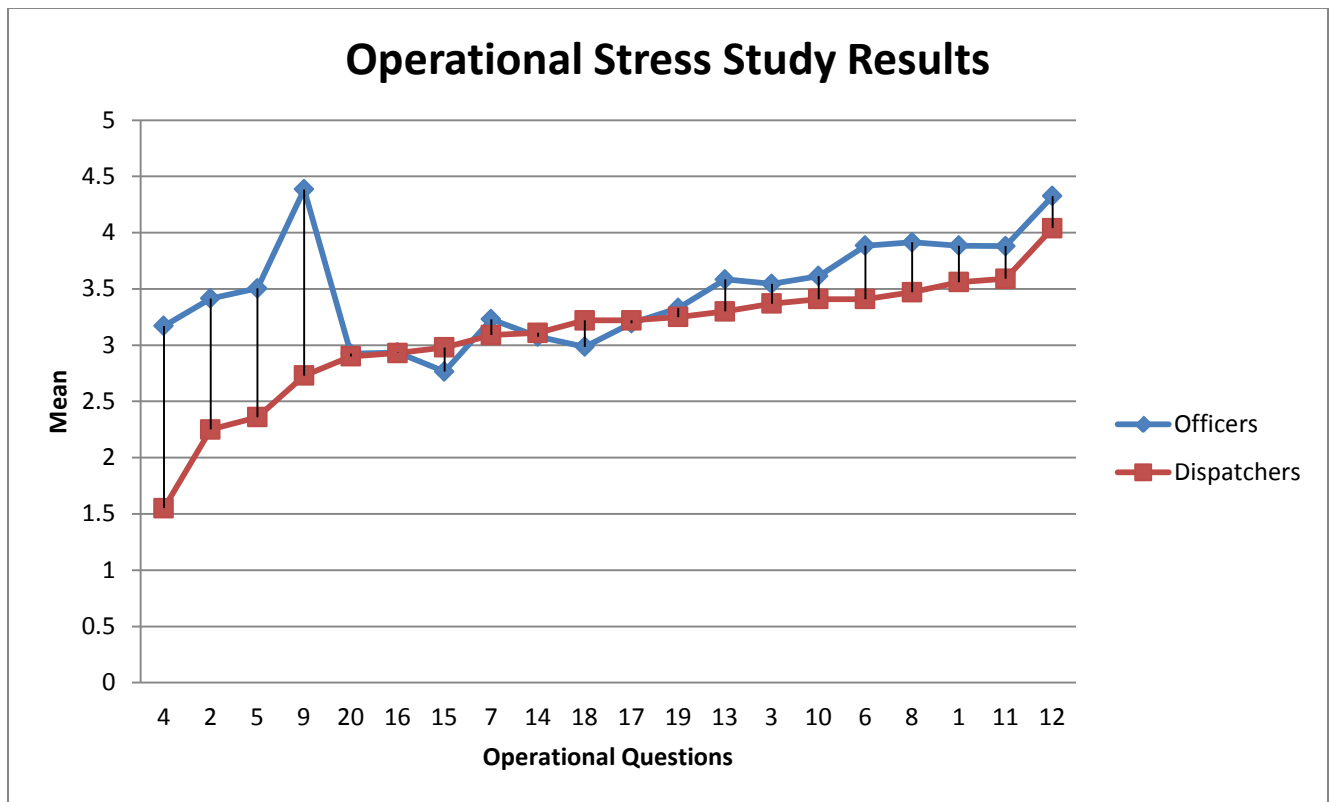
Demographic questions were asked about work experience, organizational responsibilities, age, and gender. Along with demographic questions, 64 individual questions were asked regarding different operational or organizational stressors. The results of the studies taken by dispatchers and call-takers are then compared with the results from the corresponding survey from officers.

Operational Police Stress Questionnaire

Scale is 1 (No Stress at All) to 5 (A Lot of Stress). 3 is considered Moderate Stress.

1. Shift work.
2. Working alone at night.
3. Over-time demands.
4. Risk of being injured on the job.
5. Work related activities on days off (e.g. court, community events, training)
6. Traumatic events (e.g. MVA, domestics, death, injury)
7. Managing your social life outside of work.
8. Not enough time to stay in good physical condition.
9. Paperwork.
10. Eating healthy at work.
11. Finding time to stay in good physical condition.
12. Fatigue (e.g. shift work, over-time)
13. Occupation-related health issues (e.g. carpal tunnel).
14. Lack of understanding from family and friends about your work.
15. Making friends outside the job.
16. Upholding a "higher image" in public.
17. Negative comments from the public.
18. Limitations to your social life (e.g. who your friends are, where you socialize).
19. Feeling like you are always on the job.
20. Friends / family feel the effects of the stigma associated with your job.

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Top 5 (Highest) Stressors

	Dispatchers	Officers
1	Fatigue	Paperwork
2	Finding time to stay in good physical shape	Fatigue
3	Shift work	Not enough time to stay in good physical shape
4	Not enough time to stay in good physical shape	Shift Work
5	Traumatic events	Traumatic Events

Bottom 5 (Lowest) Stressors

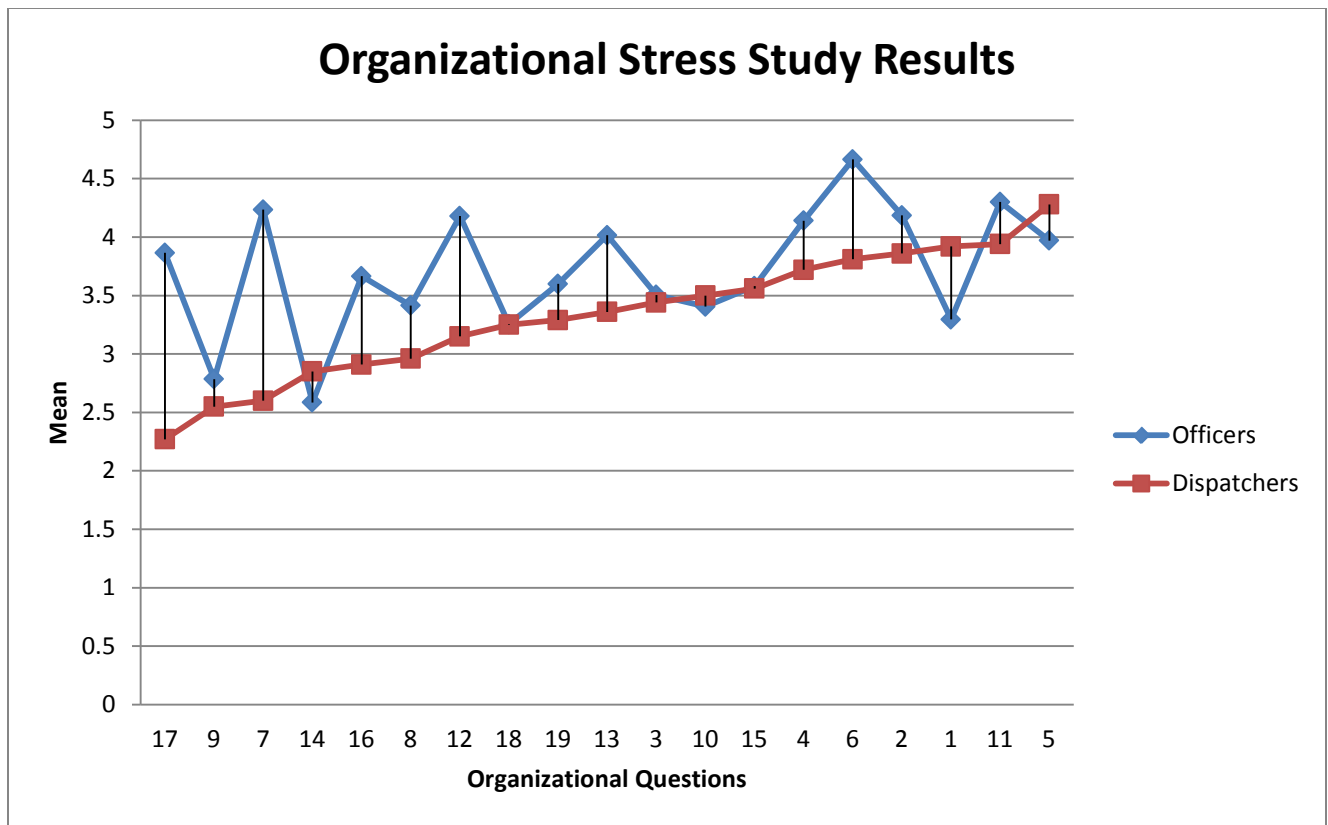
	Dispatchers	Officers
1	Risk of being injured on the job	Making friends outside the job
2	Working alone at night	Limitations to your social life
3	Work related activities on days off	Managing your social life outside of work
4	Paperwork	Feeling like you are always on the job
5	Friends/family feel the effects of the stigma associated with the job	Risk of being injured on the job

Organizational Police Stress Questionnaire

Scale is 1 (No Stress at All) to 5 (A Lot of Stress). 3 is considered Moderate Stress.

1. Dealing with co-workers.
2. The feeling that different rules apply to different people (e.g. favoritism)
3. Feeling like you always have to prove yourself to the organization.
4. Excessive administrative duties.
5. Constant changes in policy / legislation.
6. Staff shortages.
7. Bureaucratic red tape.
8. Too much computer work.
9. Lack of training on new equipment.
10. Perceived pressure to volunteer free time.
11. Dealing with supervisors.
12. Inconsistent leadership styles.
13. Lack of resources.
14. Unequal sharing of work responsibilities.
15. If you are sick or injured your co-workers seem to look down on you.
16. Leaders over-emphasize the negatives (e.g. supervisor evaluations, public complaints).
17. Internal investigations.
18. Dealing the court system.
19. The need to be accountable for doing your job.
20. Inadequate equipment.

McCreary, D., Thompson, M. (2006). Development of Two Reliable and Valid Measures of Stressors in Policing; The Operational and Organizational Police Stress Questionnaires. *International Journal of Stress Management* 13(4), 494-518



Top 5 (Highest) Stressors

	Dispatchers	Officers
1	Staff shortages	Bureaucratic red tape
2	Inconsistent leadership styles	Inconsistent leadership styles
3	Dealing with co-workers	Too much computer work
4	The feeling that different rules apply to different people.	The feeling that different rules apply to different people
5	Bureaucratic red tape	Lack of Resources

Bottom 5 (Lowest) Stressors

	Dispatchers	Officers
17	Dealing with the court system	If you are sick or injured your co-workers seem to look down on you.
9	Perceived pressure to volunteer free time	Perceived pressure to volunteer free time
7	Too much computer work	The need to be accountable for doing your job
14	If you are sick or injured your co-workers seem to look down on you.	Dealing with co-workers
16	Internal Investigations	Dealing with supervisors

Law Enforcement Officer Stress Survey (LEOSS) – Original

Broken into two scales: Likelihood and Difficulty

Scale is 1 (very unlikely or simple) to 7 (very likely or difficult). 4 is considered neutral.

1. You are called to a burglary in progress. The assailant may be armed.
2. You are called to respond to a silent alarm from a bank.
3. You are executing an arrest warrant for a violent criminal and are unsure of his/her location.
4. You are executing an arrest warrant when the suspect barricades himself/herself.
5. You respond to a major motor vehicle accident with multiple injuries and possible fatalities.
6. You are engaged in a promotional process.
7. You have been brought up on civil rights violations which are untrue.
8. You have plans with your family but work demands interfere and you are unable to go.
9. You are responsible to notify the parents of a child killed by a hit and run driver.
10. You are called to contain a public rally that is becoming agitated.
11. You are recruited to investigate a fellow officer.
12. You find that your subordinates did not complete the assignment you gave.
13. You must rely on employees that you feel are not trustworthy or incompetent.
14. You are trying to solve a high profile case while the public pressures for immediate results.
15. You have spent hours putting data into your computer, only to be down and data is lost.
16. You find that work is taking up more time, leaving you with little left for family and recreation.
17. You are unable to work on a project because your supervisor keeps changing the direction.
18. You are on your way to a high emergency call when the radio has interference.
19. Changing shifts has interfered with your sleep patterns.
20. You frequently argue with your spouse but are unable to resolve anything.
21. You are making progress on a case when pulled off for political reasons.
22. You are on a high pursuit chase in icy conditions.
23. You are investigating an officer's death in which suicide is suspected.
24. You have been injured and your back-up is late responding.
25. You respond to a shooting in progress between two gangs.

Van Hasselt, V., Sheehan, D., Malcolm, A., Sellers, A., Baker, M., Couwels, J. (2008) The Law Enforcement Officer Stress Survey (LEOSS) Evaluation of Psychometric Properties. *Behavior Modification*, 32(1), 133-151

The Law Enforcement Officer Stress Survey-Dispatch (LEOSSD)

Broken into two answer considerations: 1st is as a Call-Taker, 2nd is as a Dispatcher

Scale is 1 (vary unlikely or simple) to 5 (very likely or difficult). 3 is considered neutral.

1. You are dealing with a burglary in progress. The assailant may be armed.
2. You are dealing with a silent alarm from a bank.
3. Officers are executing an arrest warrant for a violent criminal and are unsure of his/her location.
4. Officers are executing an arrest warrant when the suspect barricades himself/herself.
5. You are dealing with a major motor vehicle accident with multiple injuries and possible fatalities.
6. You are engaged in a promotional process.
7. You have been brought up on civil rights violations which are untrue.
8. You have plans with your family but work demands interfere and you are unable to go.
9. A parent calls up about the status of their child whom had been killed in a hit and run accident.
10. Officers are called to contain a public rally that is becoming agitated.
11. You are questioned in a coworker investigation.
12. You find your coworker has not completed their portion of an assignment given.
13. You must rely on employees that you feel are not trustworthy or incompetent.
14. You are trying to assist in solving a high profile or in depth call while the officer pressures for immediate results.
15. You have spent hours inputting data in your computer, only to have it go down and all data is lost.
16. You find that work is taking up more time, leaving you with little left for family and recreation.
17. You are unable to work on a project because your supervisor keeps changing the direction.
18. You have officers on their way to an emergency call when the radio has interference.
19. Changing shifts has interfered with your sleep patterns.
20. You frequently argue with your spouse but are unable to resolve anything.
21. You are making progress on a case when officers no longer need the information or decide to go in another direction.
22. You have officers in a high pursuit chase in icy conditions
23. You are assisting officers who are investigating an officer's death in which suicide is suspected.
24. You have an officer who is injured and his back-up is late responding.
25. You have officers responding to a shooting in progress between two gangs.

Law Enforcement Officer Stress Study Results

Top 5 (Highest) Stressors

	Dispatchers	Officers
1	You have an officer who is injured and his back-up is late responding.	You find that work is taking up more time, leaving you with little left for family and recreation.
2	You have officers responding to a shooting in progress between two gangs.	You have plans with your family but work demands interfere and you are unable to go.
3	Officers are executing an arrest warrant for a violent criminal and are unsure of his/her location.	You have been brought up on civil rights violations which are untrue.
4	You must rely on employees that you feel are not trustworthy or incompetent.	You have spent hours putting data into your computer, only to be down and data is lost.
5	You have plans with your family but work demands interfere and you are unable to go.	You must rely on employees that you feel are not trustworthy or incompetent.

Bottom 5 (Lowest) Stressors

	Dispatchers	Officers
1	You frequently argue with your spouse but are unable to resolve anything.	You are investigating an officer's death in which suicide is suspected.
2	You are dealing with a silent alarm from a bank.	You are making progress on a case when pulled off for political reasons.
3	You are making progress on a case when officers no longer need the information or decide to go in another direction.	You are on a high pursuit chase in icy conditions.
4	Officers are called to contain a public rally that is becoming agitated.	You have officers on their way to an emergency call when the radio has interference.
5	You are engaged in a promotional process.	You have officers responding to a shooting in progress between two gangs.