How can my organization be more productive and cost-effective using existing manpower and equipment with minimal funding? This question is constantly on the minds of progressive law enforcement administrators. Historically, the prevailing tendency was simply to ask for additional funds to support added personnel or equipment. Administrators were not always forced to look within themselves to find solutions to field operational problems. However, State propositions and recent government financial problems have changed all of this. Law enforcement agencies are now required to continue a high level of service, maintain top productivity, and create programs to reduce crime statistics, while remaining within rollover or reduced budgets.

Crime within a community is a primary concern of all citizens, but especially to law enforcement personnel and city administrators. Aware of general crime statistics and crime clearance rates, the Oceanside, Calif., Police Department was not able to state with confidence whether our preventive efforts were productive. Although the crime clearance statistics change from month to month and year to year, the fluctuating base line...

The Uniformed Crime Investigator: A Unique Strategy to Protect and Serve

By LT. GENE N. BERRY
Commander
Operations Bureau
Police Department
Oceanside, Calif.

"Cooperation and coordination are main ingredients to the success of the program."

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William H. Webster, Director

The Attorney General has determined that the publication of FBI, statistical and other material is necessary in the performance of the public business required by law of the Department in order to use funds in the Appropriations Act for the fiscal year ending September 30, 1984. Issued by the Assistant Director of the Office of Management and Budget through June 30, 1985.
"The Uniformed Crime Investigator Program... can enhance public relations and bring the community and law enforcement agency into a shared light of total crime scene control and community responsiveness."

Resistance
Any change within an organization, especially a major field operational change, provokes some resistance and negativism among the rank and file, and this was true with the conceptualization of the Uniformed Crime Investigator Program. General investigative personnel feared the enhancement upon their investigative techniques and that their expertise would be challenged. Most of all, they feared that UCI field work would generate additional case workloads for them. These were legitimate concerns, but concerns which have not materialized, even though our program is still in its early stages of development. This is why it is important for close working relationships to be developed between division commanders and among division personnel to keep the intent of the program intact. Program personnel and others involved must be encouraged to establish a coordinated and cooperative working relationship if the specific program objectives and departmental goals are to be met.

Contrary to the beliefs of investigators, case loads have not increased substantially. Instead, significantly more physical evidence is collected and more extensive investigative investigations are conducted. Efforts by UCI officers have allowed a heavy workload for investigators and thus freed them for other duties. Also the work of UCI’s has enabled investigators to follow up immediately on leads which have been developed.

Program Monitoring
First-line supervisors need to be thoroughly familiar with the program and its objectives. They must also be made aware of the type and extent of training given to UCI’s and the limitations placed upon them by their equipment and experience. Those supervisors must establish liaison with other departmental units, especially the investigative personnel, and UCI officers themselves should be encouraged to institute “lines of communication” with other support groups.

The program has been monitored closely and suggestions and criticisms evaluated to increase the program’s effectiveness. Monthly meetings are used to identify operational field problems, reinforce program goals, and raise the efficiency of the unit and its individual officers.

Equipment
Full departmental support and suitable equipment go hand in hand for a successful and productive. A significant community program that will impact the reputation of the law enforcement agency must be properly prepared and equipped. Several other law enforcement agencies, county crime laboratory personnel, knowledgeable camera experts, and other individuals associated with private laboratories were solicited for equipment suggestions. The final result was that we were able to combine several well-informed opinions into a feasible equipment inventory. This, coupled with the training, would meet the objectives of the program.

Conclusion
The Uniformed Crime Investigator Program became operational in March 1983, and since that time, UCI officers are handling 125 to 150 incidents a month. While most of the UCI field work does not initially produce a suspect, thorough preliminary crime scene work has produced excellent results in connecting perpetrators to a series of crimes.

The major impact of the UCI program has been realized in the property crime section of the Investigative Division. A large amount of physical evidence has been collected, and arrest have been made as the result of these investigations. Additional side benefits of the program are the availability of UCI officers who have specialized training to act as instructors for other field officers, which has a positive effect on the quality of work produced. The program can also be viewed as an enhancement for career development.

Society’s expectations are high, whether it concerns what individuals expect of themselves or from others. Those expectations, combined with bureaucratic problems for the public sector, make our jobs difficult but not impossible. We must look within ourselves and organizations for new ideas. We have a commitment to our communities to provide the best service possible without asking for additional monies. If added financial help must be requested, then we must be constantly aware that the public will expect a fair and equitable use of resources.

The Uniformed Crime Investigator Program can bring positive feedback to the department. It can enhance public relations and bring the community and law enforcement agency into a shared light of total crime scene control and community responsiveness.

The Forgotten Victim
Stress and the Police Dispatcher
"... the immediate attention and decisive action required in law enforcement telecommunications is a source of critical stress for police dispatchers."

By JAMES D. SEWELL, PH. D.
Director
Office of Management and Planning Services
Florida Department of Highway and Motor Vehicle
Tallahassee, Fla.

and

OFFICER LINDA CREW
Police Department
Tallahassee, Fla.

Over the past several years, the law enforcement community, and to a degree, society in general have turned their attention to the serious phenomenon of police stress. Significant research has been undertaken to explain the problem, identify specific stressors confronting today's officers, and suggest proper methods of stress management.1

At the same time, however, little attention has been focused on the stress experienced by the law enforcement support system, i.e., dispatchers, complaint clerks, clerical personnel, crime scene and evidence technicians, and other nonsworn personnel who are so critical to the success of the law enforcement mission.
Dr. Sewell

Law Enforcement Bulletin

While the stressors experienced by these individuals may not be as life-threatening as those faced by sworn personnel on the street, emotional overload and physiological damage caused by this stress are just as real and as dangerous to all members of the profession.

Other occupations have taken significant steps to identify and address stress confronting their personnel. The experience of some can have implications for understanding that faced by certain segments of the police support system.

Stress in Air Traffic Control

The pressures brought on by the job of police dispatcher are not dissimilar to those experienced by the air traffic controller. David Martindale, for instance, describes a mock advertisement for the latter profession:

HELP WANTED: World's busiest airport seeks radar jocks for unusually stimulating, high-intensity environment. Must be able to direct at least 12 aircraft at one time and make instant decisions affecting the safety of thousands. No degree required, but prior experience as traffic cop, seeing-eye dog, or God's helper. Severe stress will jeopardize sanity and result in early retirement from job, but employer will absorb cost of medical and psychiatric care.

Martindale cites the research of Sidney Cobb of the University of Michigan and Robert Rose of Boston University, who compared the medical histories of 4,320 controllers and 6,498 pilots. Those researchers found that "not only was hypertension four times more common among controllers, it also developed at an earlier age and was especially prevalent at busy fields. In addition, twice as many controllers suffered from peptic ulcers." In parallel research, Richard Grayson, a former president of the American Academy of Stress Disorders, "...has examined many of the controllers in the Chicago area and found remarkably similar symptoms: insomnia, loss of appetite, anxiety, irritability, and sexual dysfunction. Railroad dispatchers and sonar operators on nuclear submarines undergo similar stress, but their symptoms are seldom as severe. According to Grayson, air-traffic controllers have the highest incidence of peptic ulcers of any profession, ulcers aggravated by overtime work, high-density traffic, and fear of midair collisions." 4

Other researchers have also explored the phenomenon of stress within the air traffic control (ATC) function. Hunt and Ross, for instance, found that simultaneous peak traffic, i.e., the number of aircraft controlled over a limited period of time, was the most significant source of stress and "most potent index of workload at the ATC environment." 5 Additionally, Crump's search unveiled what was described as the most obvious source of stress for the controllers and "further identified stress as originating from the duration of radio communication, number of planes expected, number of planes controlled, and pressures of time."

Stress in Law Enforcement Communications

The police dispatcher experiences occupational stress which parallels that of the air traffic controller. With significant time pressure, the dispatcher, too, is required to direct the activities of multiple field units, receive, assimilate, and dispatch information from a variety of sources and effectively communicate with officers and citizens. To analyze effectively the resulting stress and implement programs of recreation and management, it is first necessary to identify those unique stressors which affect the communications environment.

Second-class Citizenship

It is not unusual for communications personnel to perceive themselves as "second-class citizens" within their department. Field units receive administrative attention and priority in both personnel and budget, and even line officers are quick to criticize and slow to recognize the actions of these vital support personnel. The frustrations of this stressor are generated not only from field personnel but also from administrators and supervisors who are perceived to lack knowledge about the role and functions of a professional communications center.

Insufficient Training

In spite of efforts by professional organizations, such as the Associated Public Safety Communications Officers (APCO), training for communications operations is still primarily on the job. In too many departments, such training is conducted by senior personnel without benefit of a formalized training program, such as that fostered by a field officer training guide. Consequently, the operator lacks the training—and perceives the deficiency—which is necessary for the most efficient operation of the communications center and assures maximum safety of officers on the street.

Multiple Calls

As in the case of the air traffic controller, "simultaneous peak traffic" on the radio is a particularly significant source of stress for police dispatchers. Heavy volume of radio traffic and incoming telephone calls occurring within a short period of time exposes extreme physical and psychological demands on the individual operator.

Required Decisions

In his research on ATC stress, Crump identified one source as the number of required decisions, particularly "when a controller's decision-making capacity is stretched to the maximum." Similarly, the immediate attention and decisive action required in law enforcement telecommunications is a source of critical stress for police dispatchers. The potential life-threatening nature of many calls and the sense of urgency connected with handling people's problems magnifies the pressures created by multiple calls and constraints of time.

Anticipation

Like police officers who must experience their peers handling existing or dangerous calls in another zone, the dispatcher responsible for communications must also endure the stress of anticipation and vicarious fear. As anticipation and concern build, the dispatcher feels as if he must reach through the microphone to confirm his safety.

Antiquated Systems

An out-of-date radio system, coupled with antiquated support systems,
such as an inadequate intrastate criminal information center, can cause the dispatcher as much stress as the crime on the street. The frustrations are caused by the limitations on such a system and the fear of potential danger to officers and citizens as a result can be significant.

Low Control

Occupational stress research has identified as highly stressful those situations where a person is in a low-level job in the office hierarchy and has little control over the working environment. Unlike sworn personnel who control the events and control over their responses to requests for police services, communications personnel are limited in the flexibility of their response to public and officer demands. In spite of the potential for "stark terror" associated with crisis situations, the routinization of communications work, coupled with boredom and lack of personal development in such situations, the routinization of communications work, coupled with boredom and lack of personal development in such situations, the routinization of communications work, coupled with boredom and lack of personal development in such situations. The frustrations of the job role and appropriate stress level during and after high-intensity periods.

Dealing with Dispatcher Stress

Successful efforts in preparing officers to deal with stress suggest a general response which could be effective for communications personnel and support personnel. Training in appropriate and regular exercise, of course, is critical to enable anyone to deal with the effects of occupational stress. Relaxation training, particularly when it can be used on the job, may be especially productive in allowing communications personnel to reduce their stress level during and after high-intensity periods.

Lack of Professional Development

To most people, the ability to grow professionally and personally mitigates many of the distressful aspects of a job. In police communications, however, the opportunities to grow are limited. Little in-service training and low educational opportunities are offered for communications personnel and the career path is limited to a few supervisory and senior officer positions. Although the advancement to a sworn position is often offered as an incentive, the actual number of such promotions, particularly in large departments, is probably small.

Inadequate Interpersonal Communications

In a field called "communications," it is surprising that the interpersonal communications between field officers and dispatchers is so limited. As is the case in many people-oriented professions, the efforts of communication skills are too often reserved for the public, and frustrations and conflicts between uniformed and support personnel are allowed to build without resolution.

Citizen Contact

The stress caused by dealing with citizens who themselves are under stress, is, of course, intense. The dispatcher must deal with persons exhibiting a wide variety of emotions—from hysterical fear to anger—to allow only a professional response and often without necessary training. The reactions are particularly complicated when citizens, unfamiliar with the system, provide inauspicious, incomplete, or inadequate information to communications personnel.

(1) Such a response can reduce some of the physiological and psychological impact of shift work. The routine assignment of dispatchers to a specific shift or group of officers can be useful in improving the familiarity of working personnel and reducing: "inexperienced in the working environment."

The dispatcher, like other support personnel, must perceive promotional alternative benefits within the agency. The days plans, such as those used for patrol officers, may be one alternative to meet the financial needs of these support personnel. Professional and personal development through departmen-sponsored education and increased insurance training offers another valuable incentive to reduce the effects of occupational stress. Additional, the expanded use of communications personnel in paraprofessional positions, including walk-in report writing, telephonic investigations, and other nonwork activities suggested by programs such as the Integrated Criminal Apprehension Program and Managing Criminal Investigations (1) offers further professional growth and can streamline burnout and turnover effectively.

In summary, stress within law enforcement affects not only sworn personnel but also their civilian support personnel. The first step in dealing with the problem is to identify the stressors. Once described and acknowledged, administrators can begin effective programs of management and control through aggressive and innovative actions.
END