

**OPERATION
PREFRONTAL
CORTEX**

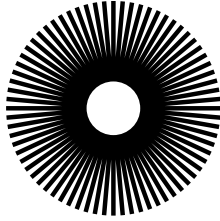
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MINDFUL
POLICE PROGRAM

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MINDFUL POLICE PROGRAM

**HOW MINDFULNESS BENEFITS THE WELLBEING OF
OFFICERS AND THE COMMUNITIES THEY SERVE.**



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POLICE VIOLENCE

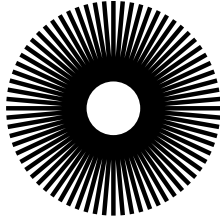
Police violence has become one of the most important issues in the world today. Every person reading this is well aware of the issue and how serious it is, there is no need to go into detail about it. What is needed is new thinking about the causes and effective solutions.

POLICE EXPOSURE TO STRESS

We can all picture the stress involved in being a police officer. Just thinking of the life threatening situations, the gruesome crime and accident scenes they must experience is unsettling. This is a police officer's day to day reality. As a group, police officers are disproportionately exposed to stressful situations, from high-speed car chases to domestic disputes and daily stressors, like long hours and inconsistent shifts and are the object of much public scrutiny and criticism. [4]. Researchers have linked policing careers to high rates of depression, PTSD, and substance abuse, along with physical ailments like sleeplessness, diabetes, and sudden cardiac death [11]. As many as 18 percent of police are suffering from PTSD according to nationwide estimations, with police women showing higher rates [12].

STRESS EFFECTS ON THE BRAIN & BEHAVIOR

Stress increases the size of the amygdala, making it more receptive to stress. The cortisol produced hard wires pathways between the hippocampus and the amygdala that create a brain that is in a constant flight or flight state.[13] Stress also affects the pre-frontal cortex. This brain region is the most evolved brain region that subserves our highest-order cognitive abilities, it is where planning complex cognitive behavior, personality expression, decision making, and moderating social behavior happen. However, it is also the brain region that is most sensitive to the detrimental effects of stress exposure. Even quite mild acute uncontrollable stress can cause a rapid and dramatic loss of prefrontal cognitive abilities, and more prolonged stress exposure causes architectural changes shrinking the prefrontal dendrites [5][13]. Some of the common effects of damage to the frontal lobe include, but are not limited to: Sudden changes in behavior, including aggression; impaired moral judgment; memory loss; reduced motor skills and spatial reasoning; declining intelligence; inability to understand/interpret social cues; dementia; impaired language skills; loss of empathic reasoning (ability to relate to the emotions of others) [6].



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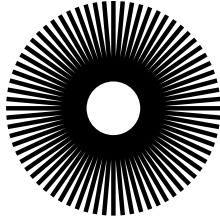
A study from the Federal University of São Paulo and the Federal University of Tocantins found that the prefrontal region is affected in police exposed to traumatic situations. Since this is an area involved in cognitive functions such impairment has direct implications on the performance of the profession [3]. A stressed-out police officer will be more likely to resort to intimidation or aggression when confronted with ambiguous situations, which can lead to inappropriate or even violent actions. Misreading a potentially volatile situation could mean putting oneself in danger—or shooting at an unarmed suspect or bystander [1]. Stress-induced lack of control over automatic defensive responses constitutes a problem endemic to high-risk professions, such as the police. Difficulties controlling automatic defensive responses may not only impair split-second decisions under threat, but also increase the risk for and persistence of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms. Over 30% of young, inexperienced police recruits developed stress-related symptoms after being exposed to a life-threatening situation [2].

MEDITATION & MINDFULNESS EFFECT ON THE BRAIN

Neuroscientists had once believed that this damage to the prefrontal cortex to be permanent. In recent years that has changed. Meditation has been found to change specific regions of the brain; adding volume to the hippocampus the region involved in memory, learning and emotions [9], shrinking the amygdala the region of the brain that plays a key role in the processing of emotion, adding thickness to the prefrontal cortex [7] and increases the connection between the prefrontal cortex and amygdala [8]. The brain functions with greater coherence, enhances concentration, quickens cognition, improves emotional control, helps reduce tension, lowers heart rate, lowers blood pressure, improves multi-tasking, reduces anxiety, and reduces stress. Other benefits include improvements in analytical thinking, memory, planning, creativity, learning ability, I.Q., and memory.

MINDFUL POLICING

The science is validating that mindfulness has the potential to increase fair and impartial policing. Oregon police officer Richard Goerling found “Mindfulness opens up the space in which we make decisions—we’re not so linearly focused or so stressed because we are under threat, we may still be under threat, but because I’m regulating my stress response and my emotions—anger, fear, and ego, which is a huge problem in our culture—I’m more aware of my options.” Officers who learned mindfulness skills reported “significant improvement in self-reported mindfulness, resilience, police and perceived stress, burnout, emotional intelligence,



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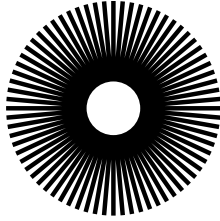
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difficulties with emotion regulation, mental health, physical health, anger, fatigue, sleep disturbance and less likely to inflict physical harm or have anger outbursts [1] [10]. Preliminary analysis of the latest study from Pacific University in Oregon (60 police officers in Portland area) shows a reduction in alcohol use by police officers, a reduction in self-reported aggression and a reduction in cortisol levels. A police mindfulness program such as the Mindful Badge Initiative <https://www.mindfulbadge.com/> addresses the issues with compassion and empathy. By equipping officers with practical tools to proactively combat stress and enhance well-being, a mindful police program will allow officers to serve more effectively as community guardians, resulting in cascading benefits throughout the communities these officers serve.

Thank you,

Julien Christian Lutz
Founder, Operation Prefrontal Cortex
www.Op-PFC.com



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