Suicide Awareness Amongst First Responders
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ABSTRACT
Lack of awareness in first responders mental health and duty related trauma exposure is an increasing concern. Protecting the population’s health is a vital part of preserving national security and the continuity of critical national functions. However, public health and public safety workers experience a broad range of health and mental health consequences as a result of work-related exposures to natural or human-caused disasters (Benedek et al., 2017).

BACKGROUND
- Occupational hazards such as repeated exposure to observational disruptive events can result in psychological trauma.  
- Depressive and Anxiety Disorders can linger in unresolved response to daily occupational trauma requiring clinical attention.  
- “One in four responders met Post Traumatic Criteria and One in Three were at high risk for suicide”.  

LITERATURE REVIEW
- Over the span of 16 years, 25 firefighters died by suicide in a sample of 982 North Carolina firefighters. This is 3 times more than deaths in the line of duty (Jones, 2017, p.209)
- In a sample of 1027 firefighters in the S., 46.8% reported having suicide ideation during their career (Stanley, 2015, p.166), 15.5% reported having attempted suicide during their career at least once (Stanley, 2015, p.166).
- Studies show that first responder death by suicide has increased significantly and has now surpassed in the line of duty deaths (Heyman, Dill and Douglas, 2018).
- Suicide in first responders is a result of mental illness, including PTSD and depression, which stems from constant exposure to death and destruction (Heyman, Dill and Douglas, 2018 p. 18-19).
- On average, about one in three first responders (33.1%) experiences stigma regarding mental health and that about one in eleven first responders (9.3%) experience barriers to care. Barriers that stand between first responders and seeking mental health services include stigmatization, fear of their career being impacted negatively, confidentiality, scheduling and access to services (Haugen, 2017, p.223).
- Lack of awareness about suicide and associated mental health issues may contribute to stigmatizing attitudes and limit the support that suicidal individuals may otherwise receive potentially exacerbating their distress and level of risk (Heyman, Dill, & Douglas, 2017).
- The nature of the work of firefighters, including repeated exposure to painful and provocative experiences and erratic sleep schedules, can pose significant risk to firefighters' mental health (Stanley, Boffa, Hom, Kimbrel, & Joiner, 2016).

RESULTS/DISCUSSION
- First responders are at constant exposure to traumatic events that largely impact their mental health and overall well-being.
- Research indicates that First responders are at high risk of suicide, and more likely to die by suicide than in the line of duty (Jones, 2017, p.209).
- Barriers that stand between first responders and seeking mental health services include stigmatization, fear of their career being impacted negatively, confidentiality, scheduling and access to services (Haugen, 2017, p.223).

CONCLUSION
Heightened levels of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Major Depressive Disorder in first responders contribute to their high risk of suicidality. Lack of awareness on the matter and stigmatization are problematic and serve as barriers to first responders in seeking help. Ignoring the capacity of this issue and leaving mental illness untreated can result in suicide rates among this population to rise. Raising awareness amongst those within the first responder community and the broader society can help in the development of further research and policies tailored to this population’s needs.

REFERENCES
- [Image 1398x1527 to 2050x2180] Dr. A.J. Panos
- [Image 2488x2269 to 3280x2472]