

# Police addiction, divorce and suicide A survey of law enforcement officers.

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# Introduction / Hypothesis

For our study we gathered data on addiction, divorces, and suicide rates within several police departments here in Utah. We conducted the study through a self-administered online survey that was given to the police departments of: Salem, Orem, Lone Peak, Saratoga Springs, and Pleasant Grove.

Our hypothesis for the study was that there would be a correlation of having problems with an addiction, suicide, or divorce and being in law enforcement. We believed that the connection to the factors (addiction, suicide, divorce) would be stress from the job.



# Literature Review

During literature review, we reviewed nine different published studies completed by various authors

- Current literature indicates higher rates of suicide and/or suicidal ideation among law enforcement officers than the general public (Volanti, 2004).
- Law enforcement officers suffer from higher rates of PTSD than the general public sometimes leading to substance abuse, usually alcoholism, however research is limited (Austin-Ketch, 2012).
- While studies have found law enforcement officers to have lower rates of divorce, there is possibility for higher stress in officer's personal relationships that has limited research (Matthews, 2011).



# Research Design / Survey

For our study, we distributed an anonymous qualtrics survey to the mentioned police departments. The survey consisted of 51 questions that asked about their demographics (age, gender), their law enforcement experience, and questions regarding addiction, personal relationships and divorce, and suicide.

Throughout the process of the study, we had one police department not be able to participate. This was the only problem we encountered, besides the restrictive time frame.

The data we will analyze from the survey is from 29 participants. To ensure we would have a decent sample size, we had constant communication with the respective departments.



# Addiction

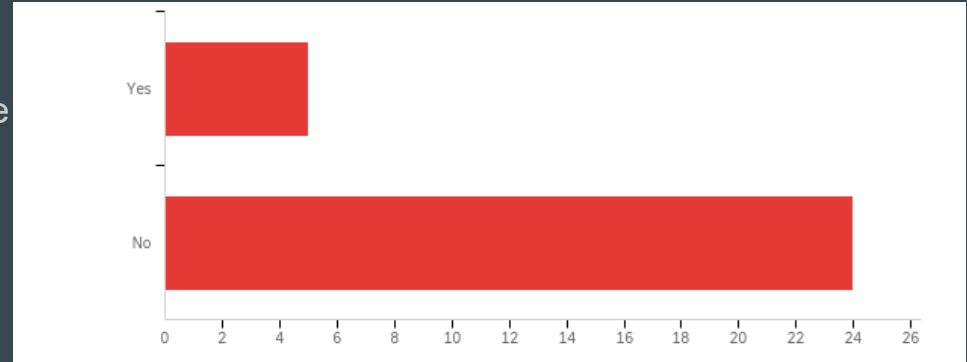
17% of officers surveyed reported developing some sort of addiction after joining law enforcement.

57% of those reporting developing an addiction had an addiction to alcohol. The remaining 43% reported pornography, prescription drug abuse, and other addictions.

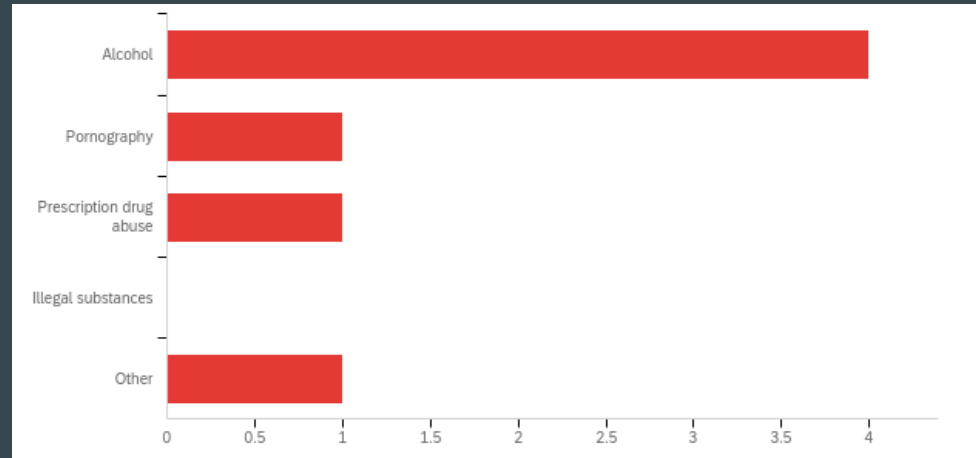
60% reported never seeing a professional for help with their addiction.

80% reported telling another individual about their addiction.

80% reported viewing their addiction as a problem.



(Officers who developed an addiction after joining law enforcement)



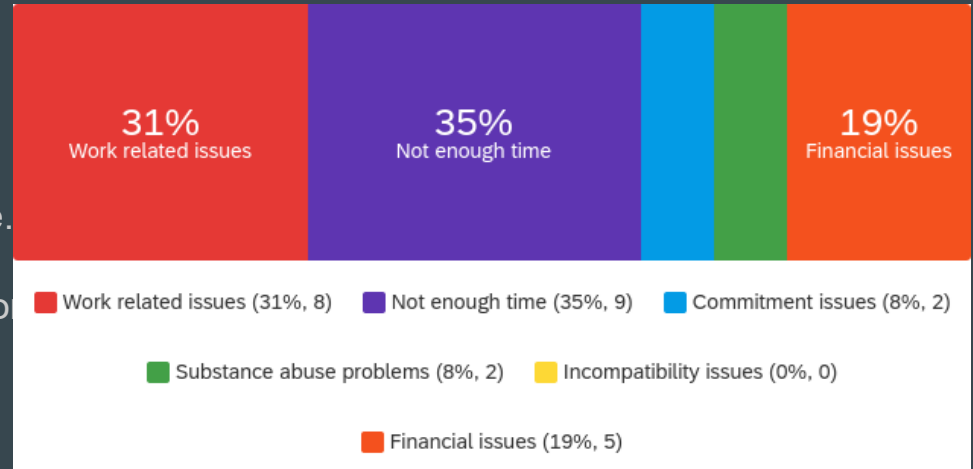
(Types of addiction)

# Divorce

26 of the 29 surveyed officers admitted to be in a relationship.

Half of the surveyed officers (15) admitted to experiencing problems in their relationship due to their career, and the other half (14) reported none.

96% of the surveyed officers had a peer or someone in their leadership who suffered a divorce. 84% reported that the person involved had their work performance negatively impacted.



(Common problems in relationships/marriages)



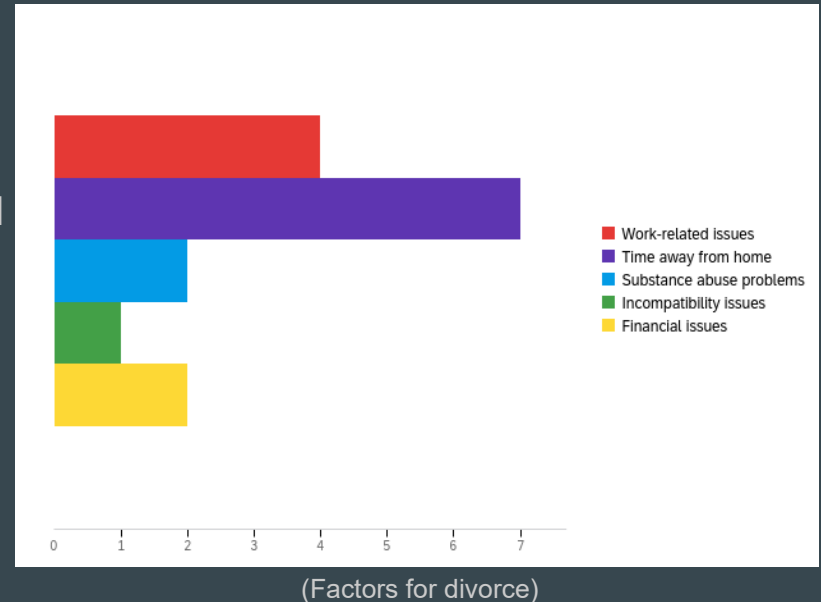
# Divorce Continued

When asked if they considered a divorce or separation from their spouse/partner, 3 answered “yes, with great thought”. 1 answered “yes, often”, 7 answered “rarely”, and four answered “never”.

53% admitted to experiencing a divorce/separation.

From the surveyed officers who claimed that their marital issues were related to work, one answered “not enough time/commitment issues”, two answered “stress related issues” and one answered “other”.

75% admitted that while dealing with their divorce, their work performance was “greatly” impacted negatively.



# Suicide

14.2% of officers in our survey sample experience suicidal thoughts.

25% of law enforcement officers sometimes feel like others would be better off without them.

32.1% of officers struggle dealing with situations they are exposed to during the job which leads to some sort of depressed mindset..

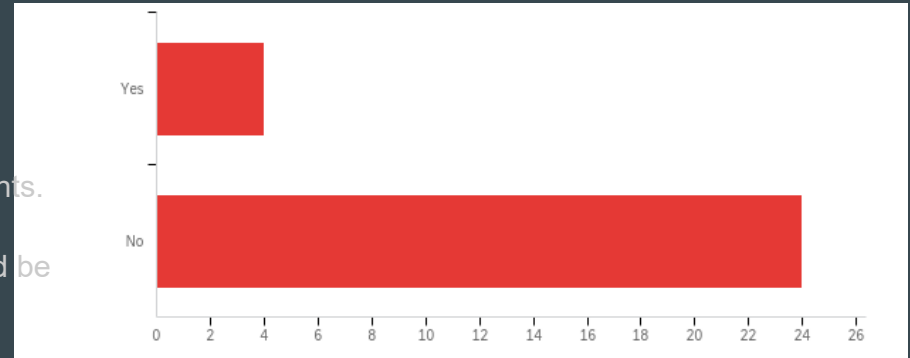
24.3% of officers feel depressed from hate being shown to law enforcement while 39% don't feel any depression from their jobs.

30.7% reported experiencing overwhelming and unwanted stress from their jobs.

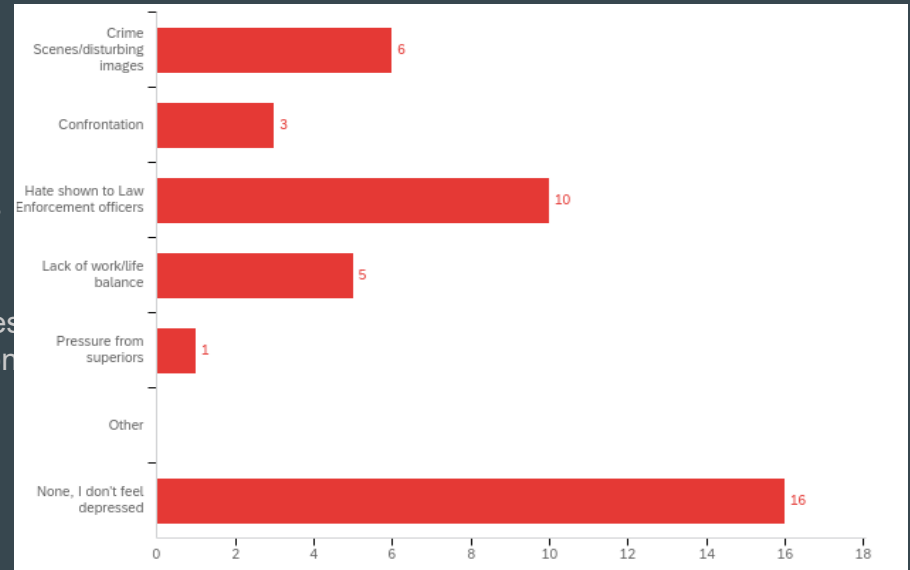
38.4% of officers see a therapist to help them through the stresses of working law enforcement while 62.5% said they can deal with it on their own.

26.9% of the surveyed officers feel like they suffer from PTSD.

38.4% know of a fellow officer who has committed suicide.



(Officers who experience suicidal thoughts)



(Job factors that cause depression)



# Conclusion

- According to our data, there appears to not be a strong correlation between law enforcement and developing an addiction. 17% of the surveyed officers admitted to developing an addiction of sorts, with alcohol being the common one. There is not enough data to make a correlation between the two.
- Regarding the relationship aspect, 54% of the surveyed officers had/have experience problems in their romantic relationships. The common problems were categorized to work related issues (31%), not enough time (35%) and financial issues (19%). 53% of the surveyed officers experienced a divorce or separation from their significant other. 96% of the surveyed officers had a peer or someone in their leadership who suffered a divorce. It can be concluded that there is a trend of marital issues for these police officers, 1 in every 2 officers suffers a separation or divorce due to “work related issues, time away from home, and stress related issues”.
- From our research, a small percentage (14%) suffered from suicidal thoughts. 24% feel depressed due to negative attitudes shown toward them on the job. 38% of the sample knew another officer who had committed suicide.



# References

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- Matthews, R. (2011). *Effects of Job Stress on Law Enforcement Marriages and Methods of Combating the Job Stress.* (Eds.) Liberty University
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