

# Law Enforcement Officer and Family Survey Report December 2007



**Law Enforcement Family Support Network Contact:**

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The 2007 Law Enforcement Family Support *Officer & Family Survey* was a multi-level collaboration that resulted in 1255 police and peace officer responses and 234 law enforcement family member responses. The survey asked for officer and family perspectives in five key areas: *general stressors, accidents and injuries, disaster preparedness, mental/emotional health and access to resources.*

This officer survey followed a law enforcement administrator's survey (Spring 2006) that was undertaken to identify Sheriff, State Patrol, and Local law enforcement leadership perspectives on similar topics. The administrator survey reports are available at [www.lawenforcementfamilysupport.org](http://www.lawenforcementfamilysupport.org)

The officer and family surveys were open for five months, during which MN LEFSN partnered with law enforcement agencies, departments, associations, and federations to invite participation.

According to the August 2007 Post Board website, there are 10,500 active sworn peace officers. The LEFS survey sample is 11.9%.

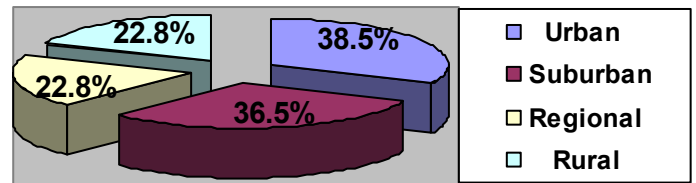
## Respondent Profiles

Officers who responded to the survey were from a cross section of rural, urban, and suburban departments in a variety of law enforcement settings.

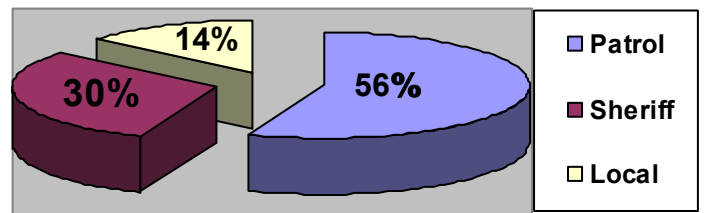
The responses represented a variety of department sizes with the following response profiles:

- 43.8% 500 or more officers
- 3.2% between 300-500,
- 1.7% between 200-300,
- 14.6% between 100-200,
- 16.6% between 50-100,

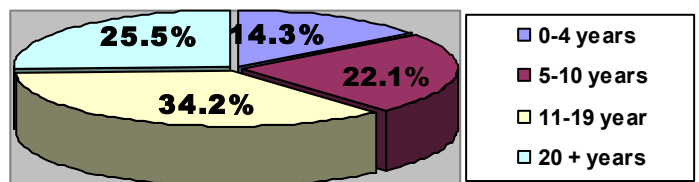
## Department Size Profile



## Law Enforcement Agencies



## Years of Service



The following key themes are consistent across all officer survey data, with some significant cross references to related questions in the family member survey data.

**General Stressors**

Out of 1226 responses, 83.8% of officers agreed, strongly agreed, or were certain that the stress they experience on the job has an impact on their family and family life. Similarly, out of 244 family members surveyed, 85.6% identified that the stress associated with being a family member of an officer has impacted their lives.

In response to a question about whether or not respondents had someone in their job or life that they could talk to about job-related stress, 91.4% of officers and 83.7% of family members stated they could talk with someone about their stress. Talking about stress generally results in a decrease in stress and is one tool for stress management. This 7.7% variation between officer and family member data might indicate that there is less opportunity for family members to talk with others about the stress related to their officers' jobs.

When asked to respond to whether or not officers and family members had the information and resources they need to identify law enforcement job-related stress, 58.1% of officers agreed, strongly agreed, or were certain that they had the information and resources they needed. Conversely, 66.8% of family members stated they did not have the information and resources related to identifying job-related stressors. This discrepancy would indicate the need for family members to receive information and/or education regarding law enforcement stress indicators.

When asked, a significant number of respondents, 37.4% of officers and 42.7% of family members, disagreed or were not sure that law enforcement related stress is addressed positively and proactively in their households/families.

**Conclusions**

Officers experience job-related stress that is unique to the profession of law enforcement. While both officers and their family members agree that law enforcement job-related stress has impacted their home and lives together, the information and support they need to address those stresses vary between officers and their families and across jurisdictions.

Over half of the responding officers have information related to coping with job-induced stress. In addition, they feel they have people on the job or in their families they can talk to about their job-related stress. On the other hand, more than half of the law enforcement family members who responded do not have needed information on law enforcement related stressors and do not have people in their lives they can talk to about their officers' stress.



*“We need our families to know how job stress affects our attitudes/relationships. Families need to know the demands of the JOB and how these demands impact how we raise our kids, or concerns and fears.”*



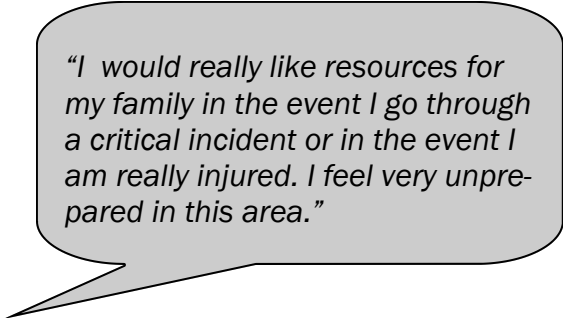
## Accidents and Injuries

In response to the question regarding whether or not respondents have a written family plan for responding to an accident or injury that involves the officer, only 13.7% of officers agreed, strongly agreed, or were certain they had one. Similarly, 11.4% of family members responded affirmatively. This would indicate an overwhelming need for families to develop and be ready to implement a Family Critical Incident Response Plan.

When asked about their desire to have training and/or information for family members related to the process for handling accidents or injuries that occur on the job, 77.4% of officers agreed, strongly agreed, or were certain. Eighty-nine percent (89.1%) of family members indicated strong support for having written information that identifies the departmental procedures if an officer is involved in an accident or injury.

In addition, 90.6% of family members indicated a desire for their department to provide training and information related to the process for handling accidents or injuries on the job. The data strongly indicate the need for this information and/or training.

One of the strongest indicators that emerged resulted from a question about the desire of respondents to have notification information on file in their department that would allow families to indicate their needs should an emergency arise involving their officer. A total of 93.7% of officers agreed, strongly agreed, or were certain (with a strong 35% certain) and 96.5% of family members agreed, with 34.5% certain. This is an important and relevant opportunity to pursue the creation of family support and education.



*"I would really like resources for my family in the event I go through a critical incident or in the event I am really injured. I feel very unprepared in this area."*

## Conclusion

Many law enforcement professionals are engaged in potentially threatening and violent situations on a regular basis. They and their family members recognize that the risk for injury, accident, and death is ever present. This recognition presents some unique stressors and the need for some specific tools and supports to assist families when a critical event occurs. Planning and preparation are important for families to be equipped to handle difficult decisions and responses should a critical event occur. The data indicate that some simple tools to prepare for and deal with personal and family crises are needed, are currently not present, and are welcomed by officers and their families. The data support the need for family emergency plans, protocols, and training on family emergency responses for both officers and families. This training and/or information should be considered a high priority, as it is stated in the data as a significant need and desire of officers and family members.

## Disaster Preparedness

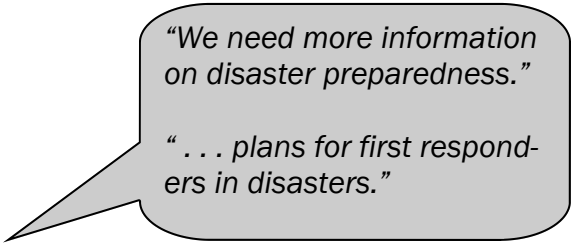
In response to a question regarding whether respondents had a family plan in place for disaster or pandemic flu emergency, 70.4% of officers disagreed and 13.9% were not sure.

Fifteen percent (15.2%) of family members stated they disagreed or were not sure that there was a family plan in place to respond to disaster or pandemic flu emergency. When asked about whether the responder knew his/her city or county protocol for first responders' families in a disaster or pandemic flu situation, 54.6% of officers did not know and 21% were not sure.

In a statement regarding respondents formally passing down disaster-related training and protocol to their respective families, 80.5% officers disagreed or were not sure. Seventy-four (74.2%) of family members disagree or are not sure that the disaster-related protocol has been passed down to them.

## Conclusion

Officers and families are aware of the potential threats that pose challenges in today's environment. Preparedness assists both officers and families for their respective responsibilities in the occurrence of a national, state, or community disaster. The data strongly indicate a need for greater officer and family preparedness. This would constitute a high priority in the effort to deliver relevant and effective family education, resources, and support.



*"We need more information on disaster preparedness."*

*"... plans for first responders in disasters."*

## Mental/Emotional Health

When asked to respond to the following statement, "I know the emotional stressors specific to law enforcement families," 85.6% of officers agreed, strongly agreed, or were certain. Similarly, law enforcement family members were asked to respond to a statement about their awareness of unique stress patterns specific to law enforcement families, and 68.7% stated they agreed, strongly agreed, or were certain.

In response to a statement about knowing emotional survival skills specific to law enforcement families, 70.9% of officers stated they agreed, strongly agreed, or were certain. When asked to respond to the same statement, 56% of family members stated that they disagreed or were not sure that they understood essential emotional survival skills specific to law enforcement families.

The data seems to indicate a high level of officer awareness regarding the impact of job-related stressors on their attitudes and emotions within the family. Only 3% stated they disagreed or were not sure. Eighty-seven percent (87.6%) recognized that their career has had an impact on the quality of their home life, and 63% of officers responding stated that they agreed, strongly agreed or were certain that they had implemented strategies designed to address the impact of a law enforcement career on spouses and children.

*"Be clear that gender, race and sexuality have unique issues which need to be addressed."*

Out of the 199 family member responses, 50.8% of respondents disagreed or were not sure they could identify unique mental health issues and concerns related to spouses/partners/family members/children of law enforcement officers. In addition, 54.6% of family members disagreed or were not sure that they felt educated on suicide awareness and prevention and did not understand how it applied to law enforcement professionals and their families.

Fifty five percent (55.8%) of family members disagreed or were not sure they could identify unique issues that impact children's health and well-being in a law enforcement family, and 61.4% disagreed or were not sure that they had the resources they need to talk to their children about issues specific to growing up in a law enforcement family. However, 80.3% of family member respondents stated that they agreed, strongly agreed, or were certain that they were confident in their ability to identify spouse/child abuse in their family and 86.4% agreed, strongly agreed, or were certain in their ability to identify chemical/substance abuse patterns in their family.

*"I believe it would help police officers from diverse cultures have a resource to help our families understand American Law Enforcement."*

## Conclusion

The data indicate that there is a greater awareness of the issues and impact of job-related emotional stressors among law enforcement officers than there is among their family members. Officers and families alike recognize that the officers' career choice has an impact on their home and family, and the data indicate that law enforcement officers may have more knowledge about emotional survival skills and be better equipped to deal with them. Law enforcement family members were less likely to be able to identify mental health issues, did not feel educated on suicide awareness and prevention, and over half were not confident that they could identify the unique issues that impact children's health and well-being in a law enforcement family. Lastly, a majority of family member respondents identified a lack of resources to talk to their children about issues specific to growing up in a law enforcement family.

*I want my family to know "...that police deal with a wide range of people which does include individuals with values and behavior that are so radically different from me or my family that makes it difficult for family/friends to believe people like this exist and impossible for them to relate with. I think if they had more of an understanding of the violent subculture they would understand officer's decisions and reaction on the street better."*

An overwhelming majority, however, stated they were confident in their ability to identify spouse/child abuse in their family and were able to identify chemical/substance abuse patterns in their family. While it is possible that many officers have increased their knowledge about the stressors that impact family life and the emotional survival skills to address them, the data indicates that the same is not true for their family members.

## Accessing Resources

In responding to the statement about an officer's family being interested in accessing family specific resources, the most common response from officers was "not sure" (51.9%), followed by agree at 24%. Overall, officer responses to that question were 37% agree, strongly agree, or certain. Conversely, only 12.7% of family members responded as being not sure, and 85.7% responded as agree, strongly agree, or certain (23.3% were certain).

When asked about interest in learning more about any of the topics related to sustaining healthy and connected law enforcement families, 76.9% of officers agreed, strongly agreed, or were certain, and 85.7% of family members indicated their positive interest.

Sixty-four percent (64.2%) of officers and 71.8% of family members agreed, strongly agreed, or were certain that, information and resources related to law enforcement family specific topics are currently non-existent or limited.

Thirty-five percent (35.2%) of officers disagreed or were not sure that they were equipped to address the law enforcement family topics identified in the survey.

Eighty-one percent (81.9%) of officers identified agreement, strong agreement, or certainty in being comfortable with their family accessing resources that are tailored to law enforcement families. Family members



seemed to affirm the officers' responses, as 79.8% disagreed that their officer would object to them accessing resources.

When asked to identify the ways that families would likely participate or access family outreach and education, the most common response from officers was:

- ◆ by a combination of all the above listed approaches (61.9%).
- ◆ by invitation through department training or courses (10.9%)
- ◆ on-line tutorials, blogs, bulletin boards, and chat rooms (7.9%).
- ◆ through insurance EAP plans (6.5%)
- ◆ face-to-face with department representatives when we request it (6.5%).

The other officer responses were scattered across the remaining categories and are statistically less significant.

Similarly, when asked to identify the ways that families would likely participate or access family outreach and education, families responded:

- ◆ by a combination of all the above listed approaches" (54.5%)
- ◆ by invitation through department sponsored training or courses (12.6%)
- ◆ on-line tutorials, blogs, bulletin boards, and chat rooms (11.5%)
- ◆ through EAP plans (7.3%)
- ◆ face to face with department representatives when we request it (5.2%)
- ◆ through a centralized web-based clearing house (4.2%)
- ◆ in department sponsored discussion groups (3.7%)

The remaining responses were statistically insignificant.

## Conclusion

The data indicate that there is definite need and support for providing family education and resources, from both officers' and their families' perspectives. While over half of the officers responding indicated that they were not sure that their families would be interested in such a tool, the family members themselves indicated an overwhelming interest (87.7%). In addition, both officers and family members identified an interest in learning more about topics related to sustaining healthy and connected law enforcement families. Over 35% of the officers responding to the survey indicated they may not be equipped to address the law enforcement issues identified in the survey with their families, yet a majority of the respondents in both categories agreed that information and currently existing resources for law enforcement families were either limited or non-existent.

Overall, officers are comfortable with their families accessing education, resources and support, if available, and their family members report little resistance from their officer if they choose to access these services.

Respondents would like the desired family education, resources, and support to be delivered through a variety of vehicles. The most popular single responses after a combination of all the approaches was "by invitation through department sponsored training or courses," followed by "on-line tutorials, blogs, bulletin boards, and chat rooms."

*"Hold family gatherings and talk to kids about critical incidents and how to handle them."*

*"... how the stressors of the job impact the whole family... positive family support to help develop and maintain a health officer, family and marriage."*

## Report Recommendations

### Recommendation #1

Provide information and education to family members on law enforcement related stress and how to deal with it. Create opportunities for family members to talk about law enforcement related stress and how it affects their families.

### Recommendation #2

Provide essential family education, information, protocols, and tools to address the potential injury, accident, or death of an officer.

### Recommendation #3

Provide essential training and tools to assure that families know how to respond and are prepared for a disaster or pandemic emergency.

### Recommendation #4

Provide training for family members (parents, spouses, partners and children) related to the family and individual stressors in a law enforcement career and the emotional survival skills need to address those stressors.

### Recommendation #5

Develop and implement a Minnesota Law Enforcement Family Support Network that can deliver education, resources, and support in a variety of ways to families of law enforcement officers, based on the key issues identified in this survey.

We are especially grateful for the numerous individuals who volunteered to assist MN LEFSN with the process of this survey. This was a significant undertaking! The following individuals went above and beyond the call of duty and should all be acknowledged and congratulated. Heartfelt thanks goes to:

**Myra Harris**, Fridley PD, **Jessica Schlieman**, Saint Cloud PD, **Mike Walsh**, Rochester PD, **Peggy Hepp**, Mental Health Professional, **Anna Schwartz**, T.E.A.M., **John Sanchelli**, T.E.A.M., **Pat Kane**, St. Paul PD, **Steve Wickelgren**, Minneapolis PD, **Jeff Beahen**, Elk River PD, **Lee Folstead**, , Brooklyn Park, PD, **Mark Pettit**, Ramsey County Sherriff's Office, **Richard Peterson**, Minnesota Department of Commerce and **Bill Gillespie**, and the **Delegates** from the Minnesota Peace and Police Officers Association.

A special thanks to the MN State Patrol's **Gary Schloesser** and **Mike Asleson** for supporting their patrol officers' participation. By supporting this data collection process they have provided an invaluable contribution and will help all of us to better understand law enforcement family needs.

A final thank you to the over 1200 peace and police officers and over 200 families who provided their time and perspectives.