

MN Law Enforcement Family Support Network State Patrol Survey Report

In early 2006 the Minnesota Law Enforcement Family Support Network or MN LEFSN began working across law enforcement agencies to identify critical gaps in family support for the 9,700 active peace officers and over 300 active part-time peace officers in Minnesota. Family support in this case is defined as the identification of resources and information family members must have to effectively support peace and police officers in their day- to- day jobs. In an effort to obtain accurate and timely information and family support perspectives, LEFSN has held family and department focus groups and met with law enforcement partners across Minnesota. The L.E. administrator survey process began in May 2007, and was followed by a targeted officer and family survey in June 2007. We have begun the process of identifying department, organizational and family needs as they relate to the subject of family support. LEFSN has also actively sought support and buy-in for addressing these gaps through a cross-agency statewide law enforcement family support network.

Executive Summary

Among the Trooper Captains and Lieutenants who responded to the 2007 Trooper meeting survey, 83.6% had more than 20 years on the job. All of the respondents are in the ranks of Lieutenant, Captain, Major or Chief. The ideas they share come from valuable longitudinal perspectives.

In general, responding Trooper's strongly supported the idea that families play a critical role in contributing to officer preparedness. It is interesting to note that the Troopers organization intentionally addresses family needs in the training academy but by its own admission they 'drop the ball' after graduation. Despite acknowledging that there are multiple stressors for both officers and staff, nothing in the organization other than Employee Assistance Programs continues to intentionally address the ways this stress impacts the officers' families. Respondents to the survey strongly agreed that an officer's family life had an impact on an officer's job performance and that healthy family functioning contributes to officer preparedness. These department representatives, by their own admission, are clearly not addressing the reported education/training needs of families, nor are the full scope of recommended *outreach methods* for families widespread. At the same time, the family training/information topics that the respondents prioritized are among the *least available* to department families.

Conclusions

Results from the recent survey of Minnesota's top State Patrol representatives has helped identify perspectives and uncover needs related peace and police officer job performance and family support. The issue of supporting law enforcement families as it relates to police officer job performance is overwhelmingly supported by top law enforcement representatives within the State Patrol. Addressing the identified gaps from a holistic perspective will be important if we are to continue to provide Minnesota's citizens with the culture of excellence they have come to expect from our law enforcement agencies. Holistically approaching the preparation and support of law enforcement officers and including their families in the ongoing support process will maximize Minnesota's investment in its law enforcement personnel. Combining resources in a strategically designed, cross

Sue Dion, M.Ed.

Concordia University, Department of Criminal Justice
dion@csp.edu

agency family support network is one critical strategy identified to address these unmet priorities.

Although there are obvious limitations to this 'snapshot approach' from the MN State Patrol Captain's and Lieutenants survey, there are also a few safe assumptions.

Assumptions

1. More can be done to broaden the options available for supporting families within each district of the MN State Patrol.
2. Training/educational topics for families need to be expanded to meet the currently identified needs in Minnesota's districts.
3. Known barriers exist in the effort to connect with law enforcement families; the perspectives of families as well as senior administrators will be important to keep in mind when designing family outreach strategies.
4. Engaging family members must be a priority when moving this work forward.
5. Outreach and training must be designed to address troopers' understanding and knowledge of the importance and value of family engagement.
6. Funding sustainable family focused work is clearly a challenge within the State Patrol. It will be important to explore funding options until critical funding momentum is achieved.

For more information about the work of the Minnesota Law Enforcement Family Support Network contact; Sue Dion, MN LEFSN, Concordia University, Department of Criminal Justice, Saint Paul, MN 651.603.6155
dion@csp.edu

Full Survey Report

At the 2007 Minnesota Captain - Lieutenants Meeting held in Blaine, MN, State Patrol Trooper Administrators were asked to provide their perspective on issues related to family support. The surveys were made available during a scheduled meeting time, and time was set aside to allow the administrators to complete the surveys. A total of 61 surveys were returned, at a 100% return rate. To see a copy of the survey please contact, Sue Dion, dion@csp.edu

Biographical Information

In the Minnesota State Patrol there are 546 sworn and 290 civilian staff. The State Patrol is organized by Districts across the state of Minnesota. Our returns indicated that 29.5% of the respondents were from metro districts and 62.2% were from rural districts.

This MN LEFSN survey effort has been concentrated within the three largest departments in Minnesota, encompassing suburban and rural departments throughout the state. This same survey was previously given to Minnesota Chiefs of Police at their annual meeting in May 2007. Minnesota Sheriff's will be surveyed at an upcoming June 2007 meeting. A Saint Paul department specific survey is planned for late summer/fall 2007. Surveying Minneapolis department members is planned future work for MN LEFSN.

Sue Dion, M.Ed.
Concordia University, Department of Criminal Justice
dion@csp.edu

Officer Stressors

Eighty-eight percent (88%) of Trooper's surveyed strongly agree or are certain that an officer's family life had an impact on an officer's job performance the remaining 11.4 percent agreed. Ninety-four percent (94%) of respondents strongly agree and/or are certain that healthy family functioning contributes to officer preparedness and the remaining 6.5% agree.

Troopers were asked to rank stressors that impact officers' job performance. The number one spot was shared between family situations and routine job related stressors like shots fired, high speed driving and use of force situations. Critical incidents and the impact of shift work tied for a second place ranking. The cluster scoring of respondents indicates the significance of all four of these stressors for MN's Troopers. Additional stressors mentioned by respondents included relationships with co-workers & partners and other law enforcement personnel, county attorneys, judges and peers.

Addressing Family Support Issues

Among those surveyed, 32.7% disagreed that preparing families for their role in the law enforcement community is an important part of district training and overall support. Another 24.5% weren't sure of their district's commitment to family preparation. Forty percent (40.8%) agreed, strongly agreed or were certain that preparing families was an important part of the departments overall training and support.

Comments from respondents included

- We've only recently begun to do this and we still lack follow through
- The desire and compassion are there but we have no tools
- Lot's of talk about this but no action
- More should be done with ongoing support & family training throughout a State Patrol career

Five percent (5%) of departments indicate no barriers in their current outreach and connection to their department families. The remaining 95% indicated specific barriers in the following in order of frequency (respondents were asked to check all that apply)

- 67% say departments and families are geographically spread out
- 40.9% say family members don't get the information
- 36% say officers don't want their family members to participate
- 22.9% say confidentiality and trust are reasons families give for not participating
- 21.3% say family members don't have time
- 3.2% say small department everyone already knows each other

Additional comments regarding connecting with department families included

- hasn't been a focus
- supervisors generally do not associate with line officers and their families
- I know there are challenges but I don't believe that the organization has identified them or given this much thought
- officers try to keep their family life separate from their work life

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- and one respondent noted that he had seen a notable decline and pulling away from the state patrol family within the newer generation.

Family Outreach Strategies and Topics

When family outreach was addressed among the State Patrol districts a multitude of strategies were used. Fifty percent (50.8%) of responding departments rely on social functions/networks for family outreach, and 42.6% rely on informal family networks. Only 1.6 % of respondents have open training available through their districts and 1.6% use service projects as a vehicle for family outreach.

Additional comments regarding family outreach strategies include;

- even our social networks have stopped with our new administration
- our social activities are on a 'union' basis and not sanctioned by management
- less socializing than in years past
- partners & supervisors recognize the need for help and step forward to have the needed discussions with the employee
- even our Christmas party was canceled due to lack of interest

It is apparent from the survey responses that the State Trooper organization provides significant family education and outreach during their training academy for new recruits. Respondents indicated that following the training academy, family directed educational outreach is minimal. The most available post academy topics indicated were critical incident protocol for families (16.3%) and emotional survival in the law enforcement family (11.4%). Pandemic health emergencies (9.8%) & stress patterns in law enforcement families (9.8%) were followed by recognizing and preventing mental health issues in law enforcement families (6.5%).

The respondents were asked to rank in order of importance family training topics. Emotional survival in the law enforcement family, stress patterns in law enforcement families and recognizing and preventing mental health issues in the LE family were ranked 1, 2, and 3. Raising healthy children, critical incident protocol, suicide prevention were ranked 4, 5 and 6. Child development, pandemic health emergencies and disaster preparedness were indicated as the final priorities presented in the survey choices.

Family Outreach Preferences

Respondents were asked detailed questions about the methods of family outreach followed by their beliefs regarding the most effective or BEST methods for reaching department families.

Currently 83.6% of responding departments provide outreach to families through the use of health insurance EAP plans. Fifty-nine percent (59%) provide support face to face when officers and families request services, and 11.4% provide telephone triage with dedicated staff in place to respond to calls. Six percent (6.5%) use scheduled training or courses for outreach purposes. Six percent (6.5%) hold department sponsored discussion groups and scheduled training or courses. None of the respondents provide online courses or tutorials.

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Best Approaches

Respondents were asked to indicate which family outreach approaches would be the most effective and to check all that apply. Fifty percent of respondents (50.0%) told us that a combination of all of the approaches listed would yield the best results.

Individual percentages were as follows:

- 55.7% Face to face when officers and families request services
- 49.0% Through the use of health insurance EAP plans
- 31% Scheduled training or courses
- 27.8% Department sponsored discussion groups
- 18.0% Through a centralized web based clearing house
- 8.1% Via online courses and tutorials

The Future

A total of forty seven percent (47.4%) of the responding Trooper administrators strongly agree (32.7%) or are certain (14.7%) that they supported the idea of a cross department family support network. An additional forty two percent (42.6%) agree with the concept. Only 9.8% of the respondents indicate a 'not sure' rating and none disagree with the idea.

When asked to predict their trooper's willingness to embrace the family support network concept 31% were not sure how their officers would respond, followed by 39.3% who felt that their officers would agree. Twenty-seven (27.8%) and 3.2% percent of administrators surveyed strongly agreed or were certain that their officers would embrace the concept.

When asked to predict their trooper's family's willingness to embrace the concept, 22.9% were not sure, followed by 45.9% who thought their families would agree. Another 32.6% were sure their officers families would either strongly agree (24.5%) or certain that they would agree (8.1%).

Priorities & Sustainability

Respondents were asked to prioritize the engagement key groups needed to move this work forward. They indicated that training/educating officers should be first priority followed by educational outreach to department administrators and family members.

When asked about the likelihood of using direct department level funding to support this work, a total of 18% of respondents indicated that they agree, (18%) strongly agree (3.2%) or were certain of direct funding support. Forty seven percent (47.5%) respondents were not sure with 65 % disagreeing.

Comments from the unsure respondents included;

- Supervisors associations and troopers associations might support this work
- We might be able to pay for in-services and facilitators

Respondents were asked to recommend additional ways to sustain a state wide, cross departmental family support network and to check all that apply. Private foundation and legislative mandates were the top two recommendations, followed by government infrastructure funding and county or regional funding sources.

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Discussion and Assumptions

It is obvious that the concept of supporting families as a way of contributing to officer preparedness has widespread support among Captains and Lieutenant's in the MN State Patrol. Ninety-three percent (93%) percent of responding administrators believe that a fully implemented state wide family support network could make a positive impact on officer preparedness in their organization. None disagreed with this statement and only 9.8% were unsure.

In general, responding Trooper's strongly supported the idea that families play a critical role in contributing to officer preparedness.

It is interesting to note that the Troopers organization intentionally addresses family needs in the training academy but by their own admission they 'drop the ball' after graduation. Despite acknowledging that there are multiple stressors for both officers and staff, nothing in the organization other than Employee Assistance Programs continues to intentionally address the ways this stress impacts the officers' families. Respondents to the survey strongly agreed that an officer's family life had an impact on an officer's job performance and that healthy family functioning contributes to officer preparedness. These department representatives, by their own admission, are clearly not addressing the reported education/training needs of families, nor are the full scope of recommended *outreach methods* for families widespread. At the same time the family training/information topics that the respondents prioritized are among the *least available* to department families.

Administrators agree that to move family engagement work forward in Minnesota we must prioritize the education of family members about their critical role in officer preparedness. Respondents' recommendations for exploring additional funding sources must be followed including looking to Troopers Associations and Supervisors Associations in addition to private foundations and government agencies to support a portion of this work.

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