Chapter 10
Employee Assistance Programs: Counseling and Psychological Services for Law Enforcement Officers

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ABSTRACT
The purpose of this chapter is to introduce and explore counseling and psychological services for law enforcement officers that extend beyond critical incident interventions. In particular, this chapter focuses on Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), including discussion of how such programs have become an essential tool in supporting and sustaining law enforcement officers, their families, the agencies they work for, and the communities they serve. This chapter discusses what an EAP is, the benefits of EAPs, and the return on investment that public safety agencies can expect when utilizing an EAP. Relevant topics such as confidentiality, internal vs. external EAPs, and the need for specialized EAPs for public safety agencies are addressed. Finally, the chapter also explores non-traditional services that can be offered through EAPs to assist public safety agencies in supporting and sustaining their personnel in meeting their mission of serving the public.

INTRODUCTION
The purpose of this chapter is to introduce and explore counseling and psychological services for police officers that go beyond critical incident interventions. In particular, this chapter examines employee assistance programs (EAPs), discussing how such programs have become an essential tool in supporting and sustaining law enforcement officers, their families, the agencies they work for, and the communities they serve. To gain a full understanding of EAPs and how they fit into the continuum of psychological services utilized by public safety agencies, there are a number of areas that must be reviewed including what constitutes an EAP, what are the benefits of an EAP, and what is a public safety agency’s return on investment when utilizing an EAP. Two more areas that are of the utmost importance to understand when considering EAPs for public safety agencies are confidentiality and the different types of programs that are available to an agency. In addition to selecting the optimal type of program, it is important to
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understand that law enforcement officers require specialized EAPs with clinicians who have an appropriate knowledge base and have been specifically trained in police and public safety psychology. Finally, a thorough discussion of EAPs also needs to address the possibility of non-traditional services that can be offered through such a program that further the program’s benefit to law enforcement officers and their families, as well as the agency. It is the author’s perspective that EAPs are an invaluable tool for public safety agencies to utilize in supporting and sustaining their personnel in meeting their mission of serving and protecting the public.

WHAT IS AN EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM?

EAPs are voluntary, work-based programs that offer an array of psychological services to employees. The services, which are also typically offered to the employee’s immediate family members, are free to the employee because they are paid for by the employer, often as part of an overall benefits package. EAPs typically offer confidential assessments, counseling, and referrals to address a broad range of issues that may be affecting an employee’s mental health, emotional well-being, and/or psychological stability. Some examples of such issues include stress, anger, grief and loss, family related problems, mental health disorders, and substance abuse. By addressing these issues, an EAP attempts to help the employee develop the capacity to solve problems, thereby enhancing the employee’s functioning and quality of life. Often times, EAPs will also provide consultation services to managers and supervisors, engage in the prevention of workplace violence, and assist with trauma responses. Ultimately, EAPs are uniquely designed to benefit both the employer and the employee by providing services to employees, their families, and the organization.

EAPs began in the United States in the 1940s and were originally conceived as occupational alcohol programs (Attridge et al., 2009). These programs, which were part alcohol treatment, part social work, were typically provided in-house, meaning they were internal to the organization, and were designed to reduce the number of industrial accidents that occurred related to alcohol consumption. Such programs came into existence for two reasons. First, there was a shortage of skilled male workers as a result of World War II, meaning more males with alcohol problems were inevitably being hired by businesses. Secondly, corporate physicians believed that spending money on rehabilitating workers with alcohol issues would be more cost effective than terminating them and then having to hire and train new workers that may also end up having problems related to alcohol (Attridge et al., 2009).

Beginning in the 1950s, these occupational alcohol programs began to expand their focus to include mental health related problems (Office of Personnel Management, 2016). Like alcohol related problems, corporations began to see that it was more cost effective to rehabilitate trained workers who developed mental health problems than it was to take a chance on hiring and training a new employee. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, these expanded occupational alcohol programs became even more widely utilized and accepted, solidifying their part in the workplace culture (Attridge et al., 2009).

Based on the need for and success of occupational alcohol programs, The Hughes Act, also known as the Comprehensive Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism Prevention, Treatment, and Rehabilitation Act of 1970, was signed into law by President Richard Nixon. The Hughes Act created the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) and mandated that all Federal employees have access to comprehensive alcohol prevention and treatment programs (Office of Personnel Management, 2016). The 1970s and 1980s continued to see growth in the utilization and acceptance of occupational alco-