

The Hidden Costs of Security



CONTEXT AND PROBLEM

Engaging with violent material is a necessary aspect of contemporary counterterrorism work. From interviewing victims and family members of violence to analyzing primary documents, evaluating images and assessing risk via video content, the counterterrorism workforce is exposed to a broad constellation of violent material in their daily responsibilities.

ANSWERING THE QUESTIONS

- How are counter-terrorism practitioners affected by exposure to violent material?
- What types of programs might bolster resilience against the potentially harmful impacts from exposure?
- What are the implications for homeland security workforce development?

WHAT DID WE LEARN BY SURVEYING AND INTERVIEWING COUNTERTERRORISM PRACTITIONERS?

Regular exposure to violent material

In our survey of 266 current and former violence prevention practitioners and 181 government employees, **over 70%** reported regular exposure to 7 different types of violent material.

Higher levels of exposure to violent material can have negative impacts on mental health

Compared to similar professionals, employees exposed to violent material reported higher levels of **vicarious trauma**, and in some models, more serious symptoms of secondary traumatic stress and greater likelihood of reporting burnout. Moreover, those reporting higher levels of vicarious trauma, secondary traumatic stress, and burnout reported less job satisfaction, more counterproductive work behaviors, and worse job performance.

Value-laden work can bolster resilience

We spoke with interviewees about their experiences being directly and/or indirectly exposed to violent and traumatic materials during the course of their jobs, focusing on the impact of violence exposure on job satisfaction, worldview, and burnout. Interviewees detailed both the taxing daily consequences of reviewing violent material as well as their deep commitment to the mission of reducing terrorist violence and helping victims. Employees who felt their job tasks aligned with their personal values reported more resiliency to the effects of exposure to violent materials.

Systematic Literature Review

In our review of peer support programs in law enforcement settings, we found:

- The most frequently mentioned barrier to entry was fear of stigma for seeking mental health help.
- Of those studies that reported outcomes, all found that peer support has positive impacts, such as reducing anxiety and trauma, and increasing the likelihood of post-traumatic growth.

1,087

Articles screened

12

Articles for full-text review

LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR
RESEARCH TEAM



www.josephkyoung.com/projects/3352-hidden-costs-of-security-project