

Introduction

My name is John Pettit and I am a tertiary qualified Forensic Security Consultant, having over 31 years of security industry experience. I have prepared the following practice notes that I hope all Legal Practitioners will find helpful when acting for security guards who have suffered psychological injury.

A duty to prevent psychological harm

Employers have a duty of care to provide a safe working environment for employees. This duty not only encompasses protecting against physical harm, but psychological injury as well.

Due to the very nature of security work, the stressors that cause emotional distress cannot in most cases be altogether eliminated. Nevertheless, employers still hold a duty to their employees to reduce the risk of psychological injury, so far as reasonably practical.

As security (private policing) is not so dissimilar to traditional policing, the security industry would be well advised to follow the same strategies that police departments across Australasia have adopted to fulfil their duty of care to protect their employee's psychological safety and wellbeing.

Due to security (private policing) taking over an increasing number of traditional roles currently undertaken by police and corrections, we can expect to see a corresponding increase of psychological injuries arising in the security industry in the future.

How big could this problem become for the security industry. Current research suggests that 16% of firefighter and as high as 26% of police suffer from PTSD. This compares with 1% to 3% for the general population. The truth is that the size of the problem will never be truly known as unlike certain physical injuries (death, amputation, head & eye injuries, burns, skin de-gloving, etc.) psychological injury is not reportable under the model Work Health and Safety Act. This is despite the fact that the effects of psychological harm can linger far longer than many reportable physical injuries.

Stress – Cumulative, Acute & Delayed

It is generally accepted that there are three types of stress reaction: Cumulative, Acute and Delayed.

According to Adams and Stanwick (2002)¹:

Cumulative stress results from a build-up of stressors that may be work or non-work-related. Each of the stressors, in and of themselves, may not necessarily overwhelm the individual's ability to cope. However, the combined effect of many stressful events can overwhelm the individual's coping mechanisms. Acute stress, on the other hand,

¹ Adams, K. & Sandwick, J. (2002). Managing the risk of psychological harm for operational police. Australian Centre for Police Research.

is often more noticeable as it results from an identifiable event, often called a critical incident. A critical incident on its own can overwhelm an individual's normal coping ability. The third type of stress Mitchell and Bray refer to is delayed stress. This type of stress is also related to a specific critical incident. However, the reactions to the trauma of the incident do not occur immediately but are delayed, possibly due to suppression of emotions.

In general, cumulative stress reactions do not show up for months or years after the experience of the stressors and can be a result of a combination of acute (critical incident), delayed (from a prior traumatic event), and chronic stressors. This type of stress can cause permanent psychological or physical damage because the stress builds up slowly over time and consequently often goes unnoticed until the individual becomes sick or exhibits significant and observable behavioral changes.

The second type of stress defined above was acute stress, often brought about by a critical incident. Examples of these types of critical incidents include:

- *Life-threatening incidents;*
- *Highly dangerous incidents, e.g., prolonged high-speed pursuits, vehicle ramming, grievous assaults against police;*
- *Macabre incidents, e.g., multiple casualties, gruesome mutilations, prolonged involvement at disaster scenes;*
- *Unsuccessful rescues, e.g., injured at disaster scenes, hostages at sieges, individuals who threaten and commit suicide;*
- *Death of colleague, e.g., killed on duty, died at work, committed suicide;*
- *Death or serious injury of members of the public as a result of police action or while in police custody, or taskings involving people intimately known to the attending police;*
- *Multiple difficult taskings, e.g., a series of less traumatic event in a short space of time, or prolonged exposure over time to unpleasant duties; and*
- *Any situation generating excessive reactions, e.g., where a member is visibly affected and/or remains distressed for several days.*

The final type of stress defined above was delayed stress. Delayed stress can be more difficult to deal with, as with the passage of time it may be hard to identify the cause of the stress. In addition, the length of time for which an individual has harboured unresolved issues means that professional counselling may be required to resolved the problem. As the effects of delayed stress can take years to manifest themselves, delayed stress may be evident in retired police officers.

Suggested Strategies to Manage Risks Associated with Psychological Duty of Care within the Security Industry

The following are some suggested strategies adapted from research conducted by the Australasian Centre for Policing Research into managing psychological injury for operational police that the security industry could or should adopt to help discharge their duty of care to reduce the risk of psychological injury to security staff, so far as reasonably practical.

Recruitment & Selection

Strategy 1: Providing information to job applicants to ensure accurate awareness of all aspects of security work, including the potential exposure to traumatic situations.

Strategy 2: Establishing best practice for screening and selecting job applicants to increase the likelihood of recruiting employees who are best suited to security work, including in terms of their ability to handle chronic and acute stress.

Strategy 3: Rejecting applicants who have a pre-existing or predisposition to psychological injury.

Training

Strategy 4: Providing stress management training and marketing of psychological and welfare services to new recruits and long term employees.

Strategy 5: Providing training to managers and supervisors in the identification and management of the signs of stress or trauma reactions in their staff.

High-Risk Taskings

Strategy 6: Ensuring that the selection of security staff expected to undertake high-risk taskings are of the highest standard through processes such as detailed job analyses that determine the precise skills, abilities, knowledge, experience and temperament required for working in high-risk taskings.

Strategy 7: Establishing best practice guidelines regarding tenure for high-risk tasking (i.e. Crowd Control, Cash-In-Transit, etc.) in order to minimize the risk of psychological harm and associated risk of litigation.

Strategy 8: Promoting best practice standards with regards to the monitoring and reintegration of staff working in high-risk taskings into low risk taskings in order to reduce psychological stress for staff.

Strategy 9: Rotation of duties to less stress tasks to ensure employees have respite from stressful duties.

Support Services

Strategy 10: Providing support programs (i.e. counselling, EAP's) to ensure that best use of resources and to maximize their usefulness in minimizing stress reactions in staff exposed to trauma.

Strategy 11 Establishing best practice in the delivery of welfare services to ensure all security staff receive appropriate support and to demonstrate that the organization has fulfilled its duty of care.

For further questions regarding security issues, feel free to contact John Pettit direct on 0418 720 187.

John Pettit has over 31 years of security industry experience having worked as a security officer/crowd controller and employed security officers and crowd controllers for a period of 27 years. John holds formal tertiary qualifications in Security, Criminology and Occupational Health and Safety.

John is also Board Certified in Security Management by ASIS International, having earned the internationally coveted Certificated Protection Professional (CPP), Professional Certified Investigator (PCI) and Physical Security Professional (PSP) designations.

John has also been involved in the development of three international security standards.

John holds the following vocational and tertiary qualifications:

- Master of Occupational Health & Safety with a *'Specialisation in Occupational Safety'*
- Master of Criminology
- Bachelor of Science (Security)
- Diploma of Security and Risk Management
- Diploma of Government Investigation
- Certificate IV in Training and Assessment
- Certificate III in Micro Business Operations
- Certificate III in Security (Guarding)
- Certificate II in Security Operations

To download a full copy of John's CV follow the link below:

<http://security-advisor.com.au/doc/Professional CV - JPettit 2016.pdf>