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Suicide by Cop: A Secondary Analysis using
Open-Source News Data

by

McKayla Nolan

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Criminal Justice

Department of Criminal Justice

College of Liberal Arts

Rochester Institute of Technology
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Working Paper #1: An Overview of “Suicide by Cop”

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Definition of SBC

Suicide by cop (SBC) has recently become a known phenomenon in the United States, Canada, Australia and parts on the United Kingdom as another way to complete suicide (Patton & Fremouw,2015). SBC refers to when an individual creates a scenario in which law enforcement agencies are called and have to use deadly force in order to protect themselves and the people around the individual who is attempting to take their life (Mohandie, Meloy, & Collins, 2009). The term suicide by cop was originally coined by a police officer and psychologist Karl Harris in 1983 and is the term that is most commonly used today (The untold motives behind suicide-by-cop, 2015). But before that was brought to the attention many researchers used either Victim precipitated homicide, law enforcement assisted suicide, and legal intervention deaths (Patton & Fremouw, 2016). Just like there are varying ways to refer to SBC, there are also varying definitions that researchers have used to classify SBC. Geberth (1993) suggested that “officers confront an individual who has a death wish and intends to force the police into a situation where the only alternative is for them to kill him. The motivation of people bent on self-destruction ranges from the clinical to bizarre” (Geberth, 1993: p. 105). Another example of varying definitions of SBC comes from Hutson et al. (1998) in which they describe SBC as “a term used by law enforcement officer to describe an incident in which a suicidal individual intentionally engages in life-threatening and criminal behavior with a lethal weapon or what appears to be lethal weapon toward law enforcement officers or civilians to specifically provoke officers to shoot the suicidal individual in self-defense or to protect civilians” (Hutson et al., 1998: p. 665). The combination of lethal and non-lethal use of force and the presence of weapons or not will be used in the definition for this project in order to have a wider range of understanding SBC and collecting news stories that mention the above qualifications of SBC.

History of SBC

Before SBC became a topic or a possibility of a shooting, SBC cases were considered officer involved shootings. Once researchers discovered the phenomenon of SBC cases were not just viewed as officer involved shootings, but also if there was a presence of SBC. One study found that 10-13 percent of officer involved shootings were actually SBC cases from three different sources, (Patton & Fremouw, 2016). Another study was conducted by Kennedy, Homan and Hupp in 1998 found that 14 to 46 percent of their sample of officer-involved shootings contained SBC cases. In the early developments of SBC and in some cases today, law enforcement officers that were involved in the shootings were questioned and even sued. Homant, Kennedy, & Hupp (2000) discussed a court case from 1998 in which a wife called police and told them that her husband was armed, would kill her for calling the police, and left a letter saying that he would kill officers. When the police encountered the husband they believed that he was armed based on his actions and they shot and killed him. It was determined later that the husband was unarmed because he had left his weapon in a vehicle. From that scenario bystanders reported that the officers were anxious and not the husband and hence the lawsuit occurred against the officers and city involved because they seemed unprepared and untrained to handle the scenario. Today there are still cases that go through court system. According to reporting from the Los Angeles Times, some police agencies in California have stopped responding to some SBC calls due to the fear of not only a potential lawsuit from coming to the department but also because of officer safety and the unknown facts of the situation (Chabri, 2019).

SBC Methods of sampling

This overview of SBC have come from a number of different studies that have used different

methodologies and definitions when researching SBC. Lord in 2000 when she researched SBC used the definition as “those individuals who, when confronted by law enforcement officers, either verbalized their desire to be killed by law enforcement officers and/or made gestures such as pointing weapons at officers or hostages, running at officers with weapons, or throwing weapons at officers”(Lord, 2000, p. 403). The definition also included successful SBC and attempts in which officers were able to bring the individual in alive. Lord took a more qualitative approach to her study by interviewing officers from 32 North Carolina law enforcement departments. Hutson et al in 1998 took a more quantitative approach and reviewed files of officer involved shootings from the Los Angeles Sheriff’s department from the years 1987-1997 and used the criteria of evidence of individuals suicidal intent, evidence that the individual specifically wanted officers to shoot them, possessed a lethal weapon or what appeared to be a lethal weapon and if there was evidence that the individual intentionally escalated the encounter a provoked the officers. In 2009 another group of researcher looked at SBC among officer involved shooting. Mohandie and colleagues examined frequency and other variables that pertained to SBC using a nonrandom sample of officer-involved shooting cases across North America. The researchers were looking to test the validity of previous findings and to identify historical, demographic, incident and behavioral characteristics (Mohandie, Meloy, & Collins, 2009). The researchers spent 11 months reviewing officer involved shooting files from more than 90 North American police departments in the United States and Canada to which they used a code book to separate the cases into different categories such as incident characteristics, subject data, outcome and evidence of SBC. In defining SBC, these authors used the criteria of when an individual engaged in actual or apparent risk to others with intent to precipitate the use of deadly force by law enforcement (Mohandie et al., 2009). A key note to keep in mind would be that

because there are multiple definitions that researchers can consider SBC to be there will be varying results and sample sizes among each of the studies that are mentioned.

Another team of researchers critically reviewed SBC research over the past 20 years. Patton and Fremouw in 2015 looked at research from 1994 to 2014 in which they aimed to focus on the individual's characteristics, situational variables and legal intervention outcomes of SBC in which they found 18 different studies to be used for their study. With SBC not having a set definition of what it is and what is in the criteria there are many areas for researchers to study which then produces different results and statistics about SBC. Jordan, Panza and Dempsey looked at cases in the Los Angeles Police Department's Mental evaluation unit that occurred between January 2010 and December 2015. The researchers looked over data that the unit collected and filtered the SBC cases out of the thousands of reports the unit responds to. The researchers then used the working definition of individuals have had to verbally express that they wish to be killed by police or assert themselves in an aggressive manner that would engage police (Jordan, Panza & Dempsey, 2020). Jordan, Panza & Dempsey then used a code book that contained 86 variables and divided the sample of 419 SBC cases into three categories including incident, subject and outcomes. Homan and Kennedy in 2000 compiled a database of SBC incidents and sorted the incidents into different groups based on various categories to then see how reliable and independent judge could assign incidents to the categories that the researchers created. Homant and Kennedy used incidents that were cited from another project that Homant was working on in 1999 in which the incidents were obtained from professional literature or newspaper data base that was then expanded on during this project from continuously searching of newspaper databases, cases supplied by prosecutors and searching of legal literature on police shooting cases from the appellate court (Homan & Kennedy, 2000).

There are varying ways the researchers have analyzed SBC as described above, from conducting interviews with departments like Lord did in 2000 for a more qualitative approach to researchers such as Homan and Kennedy, Jordan, Panza & Dempsey, and Mohandie, Meloy and Collins that took a more quantitative approach and used existing data from participating police agencies when conducting their research. The different methods that each of these researchers used in their studies geared them towards what they were able and how they were able to explore SBC. Whether the researchers looked at mental health in the individuals, the presences of weapons, or the amount of SBC cases that were included in officer involved shootings can influence the sample size as well as the results when analyzing SBC cases. This is important for readers and other researchers to keep in mind when conducting their own research projects because the different sampling methods and measure produces different results.

SBC Outcomes

SBC does not have one working definition that researchers use in order to have the same type of guidelines when conducting their studies. As mentioned above some studies only consider SBC when there is a lethal weapon involved, while others view SBC if there is any type of weapon involved or the presence of one. The research of Jordan, Panza and Dempsey in 2020 found that out of 419 SBC cases identified in the LAPD's Mental Evaluation Unit case files, 3 percent of subjects were injured, 1 percent killed and one officer was injured. In the same study they also found that 28% of their sample involved a mental illness call, 23% involved a suicide call, and only 4% were armed with an actual firearm which could reflect the low number of successful SBC as well as injuries. Just like all research that has been conducted there are varying results

depending on how the researchers collected information and what they considered to be criteria for their data collection. Mohandie et al. in 2009 had a sample of 707 officer involved shooting cases they collected from participating police agencies in the United States and Canada. From the results of their work the injury and fatality outcomes from SBC incidents were higher than Jordan, Panza and Dempsey. Mohandie in 2009 found that in 256 SBC cases, 51% (n=131) individuals completed SBC and were killed, 40% (n=101) were injured with a 97 percent chance overall of death or injury to individuals that precipitated SBC incidents. Mohandie et al. also looked at the outcomes of SBC on law enforcement officers and the community members surrounding the SBC incidents. Their findings showed that 9 or 4% of SBC incidents killed non law enforcement bystanders, 30 cases or 12% were injured with 217 (85%) of bystanders unharmed (Mohandie et al.,2009). Two officers in the sample were killed, 40 (16 %) were injured and 214 (87%) were unharmed during the incident giving an overall 32% chance of injury or death to law enforcement or bystanders during an SBC incident (Mohandie et al.,2009). In this study Mohandie used officer-involved shootings instead of mental health calls and worked backwards in order to collect the data. The key factor is research is to pay attention to how researchers define the variables and how they collect data, in cases of SBC because there is no set definition, studies can have varying qualifications that they use to deem what is considered SBC and how they will collect data.

SBC Demographics

Researchers have found that individuals that have attempted or successfully completed an SBC are typically white males that are between the ages of 16-35 with a mean average of 31 to 36

years (Patton & Fremouw, 2016). One study noted that when the perpetrator of SBC is not white, their research found that the second most frequent race/ethnicity are Black/ African American (Patton & Fremouw, 2016). Studies have also reported that there are a number of mental health issues that are common among SBC cases. One study that was conducted in Los Angeles found that 67 percent of their sample of Suicide by Cop individuals had a diagnosis of Schizophrenia, 16 percent had bi polar disorder and 14 percent had depression (Jordan, Panza, & Dempsey, 2020).

Mental health is just one factor to consider when handling individuals in SBC cases. Other factors that researchers considered and looked into with the individuals of SBC was their lives and relationships with the people. Lord (2000) looked at the relationships of the individuals in regards to their families and social life. Her research showed that 50 percent of individuals who died in SBC incidents had no close friends or family and 8 percent of the sample had no social support (Lord, 2000). Social interactions and connections are important for individuals. The saying that humans are born social creatures can be applied to this because, without interaction among peers, family and friends an individual will feel socially isolated and alone which in turn creates a higher risk for suicide (Lord, 2000). While social isolation is a risk for suicide in general, Lord did note in her research that social isolation is not a characteristic of SBC individuals, more social isolation is just a warning sign of suicidal individuals.

SBC Characteristics

Research has identified a number of characteristics that are common among civilians that have attempted or completed SBC. One characteristic that is almost universal is the presence of substance abuse among SBC individuals. Lord in 2000 found that 53 percent of individuals had

substance abuse to which 75 percent of individuals had used right before the incident.. One study that had a sample of 256 cases found that 36 % or 93 cases were under the influence of alcohol while 16% or 40 cases were under the influence of methamphetamine. Among those cases involving alcohol, 77% (71 cases) had a blood alcohol content (BAC) above 0.08 (Mohandie,et al., 2009). Hutson et al. in 1998 found that 65 percent of the 46 SBC cases in their sample indicated substance abuse. While substance abuse and mental health factors are the more commonly known factors linked to civilians who have attempted or committed SBC, another characteristic includes recent behavioral changes. Behavioral changes can range from relationship problems whether it be with family, friends or a significant other, to spiritual conflicts or issues. Other factors to consider would be if the civilian was recently divorced or separated as well as if they have had any prior history with law enforcement. Kennedy, Homant, & Hupp (1998) found that out of 240 case 18 percent had domestic violence history, 9.8 percent had drug history and 9.8 percent had DUI charges. A key note that the researchers mentioned was that more than half of their sample of 240 cases did not have a prior criminal history (Kennedy et al., 1998). In a study by Dewey, Allwood, Fava, Arias, Pinizzotto, & Scheslinger, (2013) they started with 85 officer involved shooting cases between 1979 and 2005 across 55 jurisdictions. From that they identified 58 cases that were consistent with SBC and then they conducted a factor analysis which resulted in three different event precipitation groups; mental illness, criminality and domestic problems. 24 cases from the original sample had evidence of criminal background as a contributing factor. They found that 100 percent of the 24 had a history of arrest, 83 percent were facing incarceration and 75 percent experienced a legal stressor (Dewey, Allwood, Fava, Arias, Pinizzotto, & Scheslinger,2013). This study found that SBC cases can be grouped into different motives such as mental illness, domestic problems and criminal

history that may cause an individual to end their life by SBC. Mohandie, Meloy and Collins in 2009 found that out of 256 cases, 82% (n=209) of the individuals had recent behavioral changes, 72 percent had relationship problems, 65 percent were struggling with spiritual conflicts and 42 percent were divorced or separated. The same study also noted that 38 percent of their sample were on parole or probation and 35 percent had violations on their parole or probation (Mohandie et al., 2009).

Apart from relationships, prior criminal backgrounds, substance abuse or mental health, another characteristic that researchers found in common with their studies is the level of communication with family or friends that the individual had prior to their attempt or completion of SBC. One study found that out of 160 cases 38 percent of the subjects verbally communicated about their intentions, and 53 percent of the individuals specifically mentioned SBC (Jordan, Panza & Dempsey, 2020). Mohandie, Meloy and Collins (2009) found that out of 256 cases, 87 percent (n=222) of the individuals had communicated suicidal intentions with the remaining 13 percent having no communication of their intentions. This study also looked at the amount of time between this communication and the SBC event. The same study found that out of the 141 cases involving suicidal communication within two months of the SBC incident, 27 percent of individuals expressed intent minutes before the event, 24 percent communicated their intent the same day, 22 percent indicated that it would happen the same week and 18 percent indicated in the same month (Mohandie et al., 2009). In the majority of SBC cases where suicidal intent is communicated, those expressions occur in close proximity to the event. An important note to take into consideration though that some studies have pointed out is that there are cases that there was no indication of the individual expressing SBC.

After a SBC incident, many question why their friend or family member wanted to end their life

and why they wanted to involve law enforcement in the process. One study looked at the motives that individuals had prior to their SBC. The results of this study found that there were varying reasons to complete or attempt SBC. This study found that an individual may have had manipulative motives in which their mindset focuses around sending a message to someone to put the blame on them for the subject wanting to kill themselves (The untold motives behind suicide-by-cop, 2015). Along with a manipulative motive, the study found that there was a grandiose or attention motive in which the subject wants to make headline news or make one last grand gesture and they usually have a narcissistic attitude and should be treated as highly dangerous. The other side of the attention motive is when an individual is unsure about life and death and they want to leave the decision up the officers in which they do not have intentions on killing themselves until law enforcement is involved. This type of motivation is called ambivalence about life and death and can be found in domestic violence situations (The Untold Motives behind Suicide-By-Cop, 2015). The study also noted that some of the individuals would leave notes for law enforcement stating to not blame themselves because the individual was too much of a coward to complete the act themselves.

SBC Scenario Characteristics

Studies that have been conducted on SBC have not just focused on the characteristics of the individual in SBC but also the presence of weapons and how the presence of weapons influenced how they approached law enforcement. In 2000, Homant and Kennedy looked at the different ways individuals conducted SBC. The results from this study showed that there were a number of different ways that an individual approached law enforcement. One way included a kamikaze attack where the subject used deadly force against a group of officers or the police station. Another type of attack that was discovered in this study was a controlled attack. In this type of

attack the subject instead of attacking the police, approaches the officers with a weapon and or threatens the officers with one and states to the officers that they need to kill them or they will escalate the situation. A few other approaches that were mentioned in this study included manipulated confrontation where a simple traffic law violation would engage officers in a pursuit of the individual. A dangerous confrontation is the opposite of a manipulated confrontation in which the individual commits a more serious crime or has a higher level of danger for cops or hostages. The final approach mentioned in this study is more related to the individual's mental health in which the individual was acting in an irrational or emotionally disturbed behavior (Homan and Kennedy, 2000).

Along with approaches, there have been studies that looked at if there was a presence of weapons in SBC cases. Individuals that have attempted or completed SBC are frequently found to have some type of weapon on them to have the officers treat the incident as a highly dangerous one for themselves and the community around them. One study of 46 SBC cases found the universal presence of a lethal weapon, or what appeared to be a lethal weapon. The study then broke down the different weapons and found that 47 percent involved firearms, 17 percent involved firearm replicas and in 36 percent of cases there were knives or blunt objects (Hutson et al., 1998).

Officers during a SBC scenario have a heightened level of awareness due to the danger that an individual with a weapon poses for not only the officers but the community around them.

Officers have to act in the best way they see fit in order to serve and protect the community from danger.

SBC has become a phenomenon in the United states, Canada, Australia and United kingdom (Patton & Fremouw,2015) which instead of just being combined with officer involved shootings, these can be examined by departments all over to have a better understanding of what they are

and how they differ from officer involved shootings.. The family, friends and the community are not the only ones impacted by SBC cases. In fact the officers that are involved in SBC cases are also impacted because they took a life of an individual and with the other stressors of the job, taking a life is just one more factor that plays into developing mental health issues. The next paper will be focused on officer mental health around the job and specifically how SBC impacts their mental health and what services are being provided for officers.

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Working Paper #2: Suicide by Cop and Police Officer Mental health

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Introduction

Suicide by cop (SBC) has become a phenomenon in the United State, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom (Patton & Fermouw, 2015). While most of the research is centered on individuals that attempt or complete SBC along with the community and family members that are affected, law enforcement officers that handle the SBC scenarios are also affected. Police officers work in a high stress environment every day while they are on the job and working in those types of environments can have emotional and psychological effects on police officers. Not only do officers work in high stress environments, police culture also plays a role in officer's psychological and emotional problems. Police culture has placed a heavy image on officers having mental health issues in the sense that they ignore the problem and pretend that there is nothing wrong. Instead supervisors and other officers protect the officer by saying that there is nothing wrong (Baker & Baker, 1996). Lack of reporting from officers that have developed mental health issues comes from the fear of being taken off the force or being placed on desk duty until they are seen fit enough to go back out on patrol. Police culture also looks at psychological disorders as a taboo because officers are taught to show no emotion when handling situations which in return then applies to their lives outside of the job to have this tough guy mentality (Violanti, et al., 2008). This paper will address how the job can negatively impact police officer mental health and, more specifically, how SBC incidents have also affected officer mental health.

Police Culture, Occupational Stressors, and Individual Stressors

Officers are put into stressful situations every time they report for duty in which they are faced with situational and occupational stressors that can play a role in their mental health. Violanti (1997) looked at officers in the job and outside of the job to see what types of stress that the

officers endure. Outside of the department and in their home life, officers are scrutinized by the public and they have to fill a role of having the tough mentality that society has placed on them just to have society place blame on the officers saying they are too aggressive (Violanti, 1997). This can be an example of occupation stress that officers have been exposed to. Occupational stress refers to influences and experiences that the job has on the officers that can cause them stress such as expectations that commanders and directors have of the officers and well as what society has. Occupation stress can also include events that happens on the job such as the prevailing risk of being injured etc. Individual stressor focus more on the officers themselves and their home lives outside of the job and how being an officer can guard them from being who they are. Individual stressors can include relationship problems, financial problems, mental health issues or health issues in general.

Police Culture

Police culture represents an aspect of occupational stress and can play a distinct role in the development of mental health issues among law enforcement officers. Police culture “offers a form of social regulations and authority; an informal guide and informal rules to situational circumstances of police work” (Hakik & Langlois, 2020, p. 118). Hakik and Langlois also point out that there are common features such as “suspicion, sense of mission, authoritarianism, cynicism, solidarity, and masculinity” (Hakik & Langlois, 2020, p.121). While police culture has been known to develop characteristics of support, teamwork, and empathy to create an accepting social environment, police culture has also been regarded as highly destructive (Hakik & Langlois, 2020). These features can be highly destructive because of an established masculine ethos in the workplace that require officers to portrayal of emotional and physical wellness (Hakik & Langlois, 2020, P. 121). With the forms of social regulations in police culture, the

officer's willingness to seek assistance with mental health lowers due to the aggressive and masculine persona that officers must take on and engage in after work and this can cause officers to be hesitant to ask for help because of the toxicity of the culture (Hakik & Langlois, 2020). The presence of police culture typically limits discussions of police officer mental health. Thus when an officer seeks outside help, a sense of distrust and suspicion forms in other officers due to the fact that it shows a sign of weakness on that officer and could have other officers second guessing them when faced with a call that needs backup (Soomro & Yanos, 2018). The mental toughness and the masculine persona that police culture requires officers to have, causes officers to not talk about their mental health struggles because of the perceived association with weakness. Stigma is also an underlying cause of officers not reporting mental health issues, stigma refers to negative stereotype and attitude leading to undesirable experiences or opinions when referring to mental health treatments (Velazquez & Hernandez, 2019, p.714). Within stigma there are different forms such as public, self, and organizational. Public stigma identifies how social predisposition makes a person aware of stereotypes and descriptions of people who use mental health services (Velazquez & Hernandez, 2019, p. 714). Self-stigma refers to when a person identifies as having characteristics that are associated with negative stereotypes. Organizational stigma occurs when the agency prioritizes officers wellness and provides supportive services (Velazquez & Hernandez, 2019,p, 714) Additionally, during training officers are exposed to the cultural expectations and any deviation from that will not be accepted and could potentially cost them their job (Soomro & Yanos, 2018). While police culture does provide a sense of community to other officers to have people that know the ins and outs of the job and psychological experiences that can come with the job, police culture is also toxic to officers due to the expectations that are given during training and in the department themselves.

Police culture can be considered not only an occupational stressor but also an individual stressor as well. Police culture expects officers to possess a tough guy mentality where they do not show emotion while working or do not speak of any struggles that they have during the job, thus making them hide who they truly are can be considered an individual stressor (Baker & Baker, 1996). This can be an example of occupational stress because the officers have to put on a facade that nothing bothers them and that they can't show emotion in order to ease the community members that witnessed anything as well as the family. Holding emotions in and not having an outlet to release them due to being afraid of reporting anything in fear of losing their job creates stress on the individual.

Occupational Stressors

In addition to general police culture, other occupational stressors could include the department or organization in which the officers work for, whether there is an increase in demand for a case to be solved and questions being raised as to why nothing has been done, to the simple fact that the department may deflect blame in order to protect the reputation of the organization and thus dictates how officers roles are filled. Common examples of higher ups deflecting blame and filling positions could be not having answers to an investigation in which the officers working the case are questioned or even demoted in order to protect the image of the department and replaced with other officers (Violanti, 1997). Another form of occupational stress comes from shift work. One study found that as age increases the amount of hours worked on the day shift increased which caused an increase in suicide ideation (Violanti, et al., 2008). Among women officers that were involved in the study, there was a 50 percent increase in the prevalence of suicidal ideation of those that had high amounts of hours in the day shift (Violanti, et al., 2008). Some reasons that the study provided for the differences in results from day and night shifts

include, for women the authors noted that they “ may tend to feel more uneasy and stressed in the daytime male dominated work environment due to more frequent peer and public interactions”(Violanti, et al., 2008, p. 765). The authors also noted that the day shift may increase concerns about childcare and other family obligations at home. For males the authors noted the reason for the difference in results from day to midnight shift “may be accounted for in part by a stronger need by males to be part of the social cohesiveness associated with male peers in the police organization” (Violanti, et al., 2008, p. 765). This study also found that of the officers that reported suicide ideation in regards to shift work, those individuals that worked the midnight shift were also likely to report having high suicidal ideation (Violanti, et al., 2008). Shift work does affect officer’s psychological well-being due to the lack of sleep that they have as well as the change in shifts when they change from day to night or night to day it also affects their schedules. A key note to keep in mind that the shift rotation and results vary depending on each department and what their rotation looks like.

Individual Stressors

Outside of work and in their home lives officers tend to become addicted to their role as an officer because of the excitement that comes with the job, they become listless and detached from anything that is not related to police work and when they are at home they have a hard time adjusting to being a family (Violanti,1997). Another example of individual stress can occur in the officer’s home life, whether the individual is married, in a relationship, has a family, or is single, the relationship status can be an individual stressor alone. Officers have to work over holidays and events that their families have missed. This can cause a strain or even make the officer feel isolated because they may not know everyone in the family or in their community as well as they would like. Another individual stressor includes not being able to debrief at home

with their families. Officers do not want to bring their work home with them to their families or spouses because they want to be able to move on from the day's events and have a fresh start with a new day. Officers that have families also do not want to bring home the stress and traumatic experiences to their families and they don't want to talk about it with them. Not being able to debrief or talk about their emotions at work as well as at home can cause an individual stressor for the officer because they have nobody to express their emotions to (Violanti, 1997). The changing environments and the contrasting change of personalities that the officers have to switch back and forth to each time they enter and leave the job not only causes stress on them but can affect their mental health and lead them to develop depression and suicidal ideation. The next section will cover how officer mental health is affected specifically by SBC cases.

Officer Mental health in regards to SBC Scenarios

Oftentimes officers are placed in SBC situations where the subject successfully completes their goal of having the officers kill them. Once the act is complete these officers are often left with the aftermath of the fact that they killed someone as well as the public questioning the need for deadly force in the situation (Lord, 2000). The fact alone that the officer killed someone creates stress on the officer but having the public question the officers decision can lead to the officer second guessing all of their decisions in other situations. One study noted that officers that are involved in successful SBC scenarios second guess their response to shoot in other scenarios because in SBC situations once the subject is dead, the officers are seen as the perpetrator and the subject the victim (Hultson et al., 1998). One study looked at the reactions from officers involved in SBC scenarios and found that officers do not like the feeling of losing control of the situation when a successful SBC happens. They found that officers do not like the feeling that they have failed that individual, and these feelings of guilt and hopelessness that comes with the

aftermath can lead to officers developing depression or anxiety when going back into the field after a SBC scenario (Miller, 2006). The same study then suggested that the psychological impact of a successful SBC has on a cop that could not prevent the subject from killing themselves could symbolically stand for the “officer’s unconscious fear that he may someday fail to prevent his own demons from wrestling away his will to live” (Miller,2006).

Mental health issues

A key note to take into consideration would be that because mental health issues are a taboo subject to talk about, the research that has been conducted contains smaller sample sizes because of lack of participation from officers and departments in regards to officer mental health as well as officer suicide. One common mental health diagnosis that officers have would include depression. Depression is an imbalance of emotions that an officer can experience in which the behavioral and social withdrawal are important (Katona et, al., 2015). Violanti and colleagues (2009) conducted a research project analyzing officer depression in a cross sectional study of 115 officers from a mid-sized urban police department that have 930 officers. The participating officers were given a self-questionnaire from 1999 to 2000, of the 115 officers, 105 responded to the questionnaire (Violanti et al., 2009). This study looked at depressive symptoms of the officers using a 20-item/4-point scale measure of depressive symptoms in which the officers reported how often the symptoms occurred in the past 7 days. Along with depression, suicidal ideation was also measured using a dichotomous response (yes/no) to the question: “Have you ever thought about suicide?”. The results from this study showed that there was a similar prevalence of lifetime suicide ideation among women (25%) officers and male (23.1%) officers whereas depression in female officers was two time higher (12.5%) than in male officers (6.2%) (Violanti et al., 2009). The study then looked at the relationship between depression and suicide

in officers and found that women officers' mean depression score was nearly three times higher for those with suicide ideation as those without suicidal ideation. Among male officers, the depression score was nearly twice as high for officers with suicide ideation as for those without it (Violanti et al., 2009). In the same study, Violanti and others also explored an interaction with marital status with depression and suicidal ideation in officers. They found that marriage among women officers served as a protector in which, there was a stronger relationship between depression and suicidal ideation among unmarried women officers compared to married woman officers (Violanti et al., 2009).

Depression is not the only mental health diagnosis that officers have received from working a high stress job. Another diagnosis includes Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). In 2004 John Violanti conducted a research study that looked at suicide ideation among police officers with a focus on the psychologically traumatic police work experiences that officers had that lead to a development of PTSD. The sample for this study came from a police agency in the northeastern U.S. that had 934 full time sworn police officers, and participants were randomly selected using a computer generated random number table (Violanti, 2004) in which 100 percent of the randomly selected officers responded to the study (n=115). To measure both suicide ideation and PTSD in officers Violanti used a 19-item scale for suicide ideation (SSI) in which each item was rated on a 3-point scale and the first five SSI items were measured, 0 being no active ideation to 5 indicating there was ideation and potential attempt (Violanti, 2004). For PTSD, Violanti asked officers to report any work events that they deemed as traumatic or disturbing such as homicide of another officer, self-involvement in a shooting incident, exposure to child abuse, etc. He then used an Impact of Event scale and had asked the officers to rate the items on a four point scale on how often incidents occurred in the past 7 days (Violanti, 2004).

The results from this study showed that officers with fewer years of police service (1-9) compared to officers with increased years (10-19) had less of a risk to develop PTSD and suicide ideation (Violanti, 2004). Violanti also found in this study that the “exposure to work events and PTSD symptomatology thus appeared to significantly increase alcohol use and suicide ideation among police officers” (Violanti, 2004, p. 281). In 2019 Violanti reviewed officer suicide studies that looked at suicide rates of officers and compared them to the general population. One study he found was a critical review of 41 studies of suicide completion rates among officers to which there were inconsistent results with both higher and lower rate of suicide among officers by Hem and others. Another study that was mentioned in Violanti study was conducted by Tiesman and others in 2010 that looked a New York City Police officers from 1977 to 1996 and found a lower overall suicide rate in officers than in the residents of NYC (Violanti, 2019). Soomro and Yanos in 2018 looked at trauma exposure within police and the general population, the results showed that officers experienced more trauma than the general public as well as officers had more perceptions of dangerous and unpredictability among people with mental illness than the general public (p.179). This simply means that officer experienced more traumatic situations than others in the community due to their job as well as their views of people that have mental illness are more negative than the general public in which officer view that those with mental illness are more unpredictable. Depression and PTSD are the more popular mental health diagnosis when law enforcement officers are the ones being diagnosed. High stress job environments and traumatic experiences while on the job affect how officers live their lives off the job. The next section will look discuss recommendations for addressing officer mental health.

Recommendations for Law Enforcement Mental Health

One clear recommendation that came from all of the studies that were used in this paper was the

subject of training on SBC cases as well as the need for mental health services in the departments. One study interviewed officers that were involved in SBC cases and learned that “officers are often unaware they have participated in a suicide by cop phenomenon until after the encounter has been resolved by deadly force or during the departmental investigation of the officer-involved shooting” (Hultson et al., 1998, p. 666). In order to help officers that have been involved in a SBC case one study recommended having officers go through traditional debriefing just like any other officer would involve in a shooting and or hostage situation (Miller,2006). The same study also mentioned that if multiple officers were involved in the same shooting that a critical incident stress debriefing should occur with the officers involved. During this critical debriefing the officers should go through each of their steps in the process and clarifying in each of their steps what was going through their minds while keeping the conversation focused on the positives of the situation in order to keep the positivity towards the officer’s future competence and success (Miller, 2006). Another study also noted that critical stress debriefing provides a peer support program instead of an external service but still runs into problems with officers not participating in the discussions (Velazquez & Hernandez 2019, p. 720). Interdepartmental collaborations among officers and mental health specialists would be one solution to preventing successful SBC scenarios from occurring in the future.

Another recommendation would be to increase mental health services that are provided to the officers in police departments. A study that was done in 2018 interviewed 110 law enforcement agencies across the United States to see how they promoted mental health services to their officers. The agencies that participated went through a few different interviews, the first being that the researchers looked to see suicide and mental health concerns within the agency and mental health and suicide prevention programs. From the interviews researchers split the

agencies into 4 categories that included offering minimal service, basic services, proactive services and integrated services. Of the agencies that participated in this study, 11 of the organizations were placed in the minimal services in which the department offered mental health services through an employment assistance program, these were typically found in smaller agencies with 50 sworn in officers. In the interview that was conducted with these agencies officers stated that suicide is discussed only when it has happened to another agency but there are no formal policies because it is not that big of an issue for them. These areas are typically small towns and officers stated that everyone knows everyone so if something was wrong they would rather handle their issues in informal procedures than formal ones (Ramchand et al., 2018).

The next category were 37 agencies were placed in the basic service category in which the agencies had some mental health services available and the agencies had some form of process for officers reporting to critical incidents (Ramchand et al., 2018). Of the participating agencies, some had proactive programs that either identified people at risk for suicide or mental health problems or helped them facilitate their care. These departments had psychological evaluations conducted prior to their employment to the agency and the officers were provided with six options. The six options that officers were given included, in house mental health care, embedded chaplains, special programs that helped with substance abuse, peer support programs, screenings for high risk individuals and having official wellness programs (Ramchand et al., 2018). The final categories that the participating department were placed in would be an integrative services. The departments that offered integrative services included services for suicide prevention and mental health promotion in day to day operations. A few of the departments included units specifically for officers, families, and veteran officers that were run by command staff. One of the agencies that was placed in this group noted that one of their

official policies that was adopted to promote health and wellness was called “restorative sleep policy” in which the officers had sleep rooms within the office that officers could take a nap on during their lunch break (Ramchad et al., 2018). Overall the study recommended that agencies raise awareness and promote self-care, identify officers that are high risk, and facilitate quality care as well as provide quality care (Ramchand et al., 2018).

Suicide by cop while is an important topic to research and spread awareness about is not the only one that needs more research and more awareness on. Officer mental health is another area of research that needs to be expanded on more and while the research that has been conducted has shed some light on how the job affects officers. One way to promote officer mental health and to prevent officers from taking their lives would be to take away the negative opinion on officer mental health and not seeing it as a taboo in the police culture. Having that taken away will allow officers to freely express their emotions instead of bottling them up as well as researchers would be able to have greater samples sizes because officers would be willing to participate. Another way to raise awareness about officer mental health would be to have a formalized plan for promoting officer mental health services by partnering with other agencies in order to have adequate services. By working with other agencies and together as a department to promote self-care and to talk when something is bothering them, officer’s mental health problems can be addressed in a positive way instead of ignoring their issues or turning to negative ways to deal with their stress.

Velazquez & Hernandez in 2019 also conducted research on officer mental health in which in their study part of it focused on interventions for officers and officer mental health to prevent officer suicides from occurring. One recommendation as noted above was critical stress debriefing, but there were a few other programs that were mentioned such as Smart assessment

on your mobile and a PTSD coach. The Smart assessment on your mobile (SAM) was developed to help screen for trauma related symptoms by having a PTSD checklist for the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, commonly referred to as the DSM-5 as well as SAM also includes the checklist for Depression Anxiety and Stress scale (Velazquez & Hernandez 2019, p.720). This is administered before a clinical interview to which the results indicated a significant correlation between the interviewer and SAM (Velazquez & Hernandez 2019). Having a program like SAM could help with pre hiring of officers when they are going through the mental health portion of their hiring process, as well as SAM can also be used after traumatic experiences in order to help administrators see how their officers are doing after such an event. The other program that Velazquez & Hernandez found from other researchers was called a PTSD coach. This was designed to be a self-run psychoeducational and self-management tool that deals with stress from PTSD (Velazquez & Hernandez, 2019). The goal of the program is to reduce stigma related to treatment and improve mental health literacy by providing the users with information about PTSD, professional care, an assessment checklist and ways to locate other service (Velazquez & Hernandez, 2019).

There are many different ways researchers go about studying not only SBC but officer mental health, whether that be through quantitative studies, qualitative studies or cross sectional studies, there are ways to finding answers to questions. The next paper will focus on what the method this project will be using which is known as open-source news media data to analyze SBC scenarios.

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Working Paper #3: Measuring Suicide by Cop with Open-Source Data

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Introduction

This research project will be using open sourced data to provide a sample of news cases to investigate their usefulness of determining details about suicide by cop (SBC). Open sourced data “comes in forms such as media articles, legal transcripts, and academic writings, and can be free or purchased by members of the public” (Parkin & Gruenewald, 2017, p. 2694). A factor to take into consideration would be that there is other terminology that open sourced data can be confused with. One example would be crowd sourced data which also uses an online production model that is distributed to networks of people that have previously been performed by others. Crowd sources are outsourced to a large group of people in the form of an open call by a company or institution (Barbier, Zafarni, Gao, Fung & Lui, 2012). Some examples of crowd sources include Firefox, Apache and Linux as well as Wikipedia, YouTube and Yahoo answers (Barbier, et.al, 2012). Crowd source differs from open source because the projects involve multiple users that collaborate to collect and organize data. As stated above this project will be using open sourced data specifically from Google alerts to collect news articles on suicide by cop. One study specifically used google alerts when conducting their research on Taser incidents involving police. Google alerts is a computer generated news site that collects news articles from several thousand new sources (Stinson, Reynolds, & Liederbach, 2012). In the midst of the search google will identify news events that have been reported on events after the occurrence has happened (Stinson, Reynolds, & Liederbach, 2012). In this specific project the reports are after the SBC has occurred whether it was a successful SBC or not. This search engine will search over 50,000 news sources and provide the researcher with multiple links to the same story in case one article does not contain sufficient information on the incident (Stinson, Reynolds, & Liederbach, 2012).

Media coverage has become a more widespread way of looking at police shootings such as officer involved shootings and SBC because of their easier accessibility to the public. Oftentimes when researchers are trying to use data from police records they have a harder time obtaining information as well as when they have the information the data can be modified or redacted to hide confidential information (Farrell & Monk-Turner, 2018). News articles provide more data than official reports, such as community reaction to police shootings or SBC incidents. News stories also include events leading up to the incident, characteristics of the individual and or officer as well as possibly any prior history that the subject has had that could lead them to initiating a SBC situation (Farrell & Monk-Turner, 2018).

Studies that have used Open Sourced Data

Farrell and Monk-Turner (2018) conducted a research study that utilized a content analysis of newspaper stories to examine the frequency, nature and context of police shootings in the Hampton Roads region in Virginia for a period of over 20 years (1991-2011). The study used articles that were published by “Pilot” over the 20 year span and used the terms, police shoot, police shot and police kill (Farrell & Monk-Turner, 2018). The researchers noted that the reason they only went with Pilot for their news source was due to the fact that the reporters fact checked with the police department before publishing their story in order to obtain the most accurate information (Farrell & Monk-Turner, 2018). From these articles the researchers found that the stories that were published by pilot “often provided additional information beyond that found in official data sources, including a sense of the community’s reaction and response to officer involved shootings, events leading up to the shooting, and officer characteristics, all of which allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of individual incidents” (Farrell & Monk-Turner, 2018, p. 449). From their results of pulling news articles the researchers found that 121

police shootings were identified by the Pilot from April 1990 to September 2010. From the variables that researchers used to sort the articles out, they found that 43 incidents had the officer publicly identified and 35 incidents had the officer's duty assignments (Farrell & Monk-Turner, 2018). A key note that will be addressed later in the paper are the different variables that each research study codes when using news media sources to report on police incidents whether it be shootings or SBC cases.

Another study that used news media as a data source was conducted by Parkin and Gruenewald in 2015. Their research examined if open sourced data had the potential to be used as a valid and reliable data source in testing theory and homicides. Their study took place in a single jurisdiction for one year to see if the open source data could recreate the population of homicides and variable responses collected in official supplementary homicide report (SHR) data in Seattle (Parkin and Gruenewald, 2015). A note to take into consideration would be that open sourced data comes from all sorts of media information such as printed newspapers, television, news magazines and online sources such as blogs (Parkin & Gruenewald, 2015). This study took data from the supplementary homicide report (SHR) from the Seattle Washington police department's website and other news media sources. This pool resulted in 22 victims that were reported in 2011 and were coded as victims of murder and non-negligent manslaughter (Parkin & Gruenewald, 2015). The primary newspapers in Seattle Washington are the Seattle Times and Seattle PI, to which the researchers reported their findings separately from LexisNexis Academic that they used as an open source resource. The results from this study showed that the major newspapers had at least one article that mentioned every victim, while the category with the lowest percentage of coverage was the Other Print News such as news magazines, or news blogs, which only reported 60 percent of the victims (Parkin & Gruenewald, 2015). According to the

authors, open sourced data “allowed for the entry of information into the data set that may not have been available when the official data were collected or even months later when law enforcement agencies had the opportunity to update the information” (Parkin & Gruenewald, 2015, p. 2710). Another finding that came from this research was that open sourced data can be used by other researchers to recode variables that were found in official government data, such as a circumstance variable, to have a better understanding of the characteristics or the victimization of the event (Parkin & Gruenewald, 2015).

Just like Parkin and Gruenewald (2015) and Farrell and Monk-Turner (2018), White and Ready (2009) also conducted research using news media sources to examine all of the media reports of Taser incidents in the United States from 2002 to 2006 by using LexisNexis and New York Times Archives. LexisNexis is a database of documents and publications and an associated search engine that allows a user to identify published information on any given topic of interest. The search engine allows the user to narrow and personalize their searches by entering keyword terms that they are looking for and that will generate a list of documents and publications centered on that topic. The researchers stated that they relied on news media data because the data that comes from news media sources are the only viable data with detailed information on fatal and non-fatal incidents involving Tasers (White & Ready, 2009) From their initial sample pool, they started with 691 cases and recorded 68 variables relating to content of the articles and the circumstances that the officers deployed the Tasers. (White & Ready, 2009). Approximately 30 percent of the articles were eliminated due to missing information. Duplicated cases were also eliminated. The researchers defined a duplicate article as any news report that contained the same information as another report describing the same incident in which a police officer used a Taser on a suspect (White & Ready, 2009) The results from this study showed that LexisNexis

articles accounted for 84 percent (n=586) of the cases and the remaining 15 percent (n=105) of the cases came from the New York Times. The researchers found that overall, 74 percent of the news reports described a specific incident in which the police used a Taser on a suspect (White & Ready, 2009). The authors excluded 26 percent of their original pool of articles because some lacked incident descriptions and were instead general news articles describing the manufacture, distribution, or police department adoption of Tasers. (White & Ready, 2009).

An important note to keep in mind from the research of White and Ready is the importance of the inclusion and the exclusion of data. This will be important in any research that is conducted but especially when using open sourced data generated by Google alerts or other search engines. This is critical to narrow a researcher's search down to specific articles that meet their criteria of research as well as to prevent overpopulation of one story or news source compared to others. White and Ready (2009) are not the only ones that had inclusion and exclusion criteria. The research that was conducted by Turriss and Lund (2016) when researching mortality at music festivals also used Google alerts to gather prospective news media reports on these incidents. The researchers used academic and nonacademic search terms to gather their data. The researchers then sorted the data. In order for the reports to count towards their data collection the articles had to meet certain criteria established by the researchers. These criteria included that the articles were published in the English language, the death or deaths occurred from 1999-2014, the reports described a fatality related to a music festival attendance, and the articles included demographic information (Turriss & Lund, 2016). They then noted that the articles that were excluded from the study included articles that were not related to attendance at a music festival, articles describing events that occurred in a night club setting, and articles that were only reported in private blogs or social media (Turriss & Lund, 2016).

The articles that were mentioned above searched back through previously published articles from different time periods and while these articles are helpful to set a contextual visualization of open sourced data, this project will be taking a more prospective approach with the use of a Google News Alerts design. “Google News alerts is fast becoming the preferred method of conducting news based content analysis” (Stinson et al., 2011, p. 7). Google alerts has been used for content analysis of news coverage on a wide range of topics that include Taser incidents and law suits, human trafficking, and other medical and public health topics. Stinson noted that Google alerts have clear advantages over other news databases due to more up to date stories that are recovered from its algorithm of over 50,000 news sources (Stinson et al., 2011). Every 15 minute Google alerts searches the news sources to locate not only known published stories but also stories that have not been picked up by news wire services. Another advantage with Google news stories and another reason why Google alerts will be the main source for data collection is because the engine provides multiple links to related news content in case one story does not contain enough information. As a result it is relatively easy to track down another news source that incorporates more information (Stinson et al., 2011). Lerner and others in 2017 conducted a vast majority of research projects, one specifically also used google alerts to find cases of reported individuals with dementia in the year 2015 to which “found deceased” was the main outcome measure for the cases. In this research they found that providing a picture of the individual helped in finding survivors (Lerner et al, 2017). Each of the research studies that have been mentioned above have used different ways in order to code their data, the next section will delve deeper into variables that the researchers used.

Coding Variables

When researchers are done collecting data from their respective news sources they then will compile their data and code each article based on what they have outlined for their project. Each study that has been discussed has used different variables to code their data to fit what they are looking for. Farrell and Monk-Turner in 2018 used numerous ways to code their data including data related to research methods, such as date of publication, incident background (e.g., address), and other relevant information (e.g., history of mental illness).

Having a wide range of variables to code allows for the researchers to delve into the articles and truly pull out all of the information that they need and can show the missing information that one report may lack but another includes.

In their study of homicide data, Parkin and Gruenewald (2015) used a much smaller coding strategy than the work of Farrell and Monk-Turner (2018). Parkin and Gruenewald coded variables for victim's race or age by stating if the information was available or not (Parkin & Gruenewald, 2015). Other variables that were coded included marital status, and weapon to which they also used the variable of whether or not the information was available. Not only are the number of variables that are being coded smaller than those of Farrell and Monk-Turner (2018), but the way that the researchers coded the data was different as well. Parkin and Gruenewald (2015) instead of coding the articles of what the age the person was, the race and other variables specifically, they took a more general route to which they just coded the data by whether or not the information was present in the articles and did not report the specific details. Their study was more of an exploratory study that sought to determine whether open-source news media data could provide a reasonable picture of homicide comparable to official SHR data. Another approach that can be taken when coding variables besides going to specific details for all of the variables or by having a general idea of whether the information was there or not, is

to have a mixtures of both ways. Some studies can code their data using specific details such as age, gender, race, etc. and code them specifically by those categories, and then once those are in groups the researchers can then have a more general approach of whether the information was available from those different groups.

White and Ready in 2009, used 68 different variables in their research, to which they coded based on the content of the articles and the circumstances under which police used the Taser. The researchers paid special attention to characteristics of the suspect, officer, and events that lead to the deployment (White & Ready, 2009). The researchers also only coded articles that focused on officer deployment of Taser, to which this specific requirement excluded articles that reported on research relating to officer deployment of Tasers and to business reports for Tasers. (White & Ready, 2009). The researchers also coded their variables by the source of the article, the type of story, if the Taser deployment resulted in a death, year of publication and region of country (White & Ready, 2009). With this study the officers looked at a more wide range of reports all over so they were able to incorporate more location codes unlike the other cases, such as White and Ready (2000), that occurred in a specific area. While each of the studies mentioned in this paper have separate coding variables, there are some common variables that are typically coded in some way or another in each study. The variables that are commonly found to be coded by different research studies include, age, race, gender and marital/ relationship status from the articles that were used in this paper. Other research may include or exclude variables depending on what the criteria they are using. The next section will discuss limitations of using open sourced data that these researchers ran into.

Limitations

With any body of research that is produced there are always going to be limitations that prevent the researchers from gaining all of the information that they truly desired or had originally planned on incorporating into their research. Lack of information is a common limitation from using open sourced news media data. Whether there is limited access to police records or whatever information source that researchers are using could provide vast differences between the variables and topics of interest that researchers have and what a journalist may highlight in an article or a news webpage.

Information that is published by police departments or other sources also may not always be up to date and could be lacking information that researchers would be specifically looking for.

White and Ready (2009) stated that one of their limitations included biases because of the high level of interest and controversy surrounding Taser use (White & Ready, 2009). When using news sourced data, there is more information that is provided that is mainly accurate with some degree of bias. Farrell & Monk-Turner noted that the bias could be from differences that exist from fatal injurious and non-injurious shootings that were reported in the Pilot news source compared to other news outlets (Farrell & Monk-Turner, 2018). White and Ready (2009) also note the potential for bias in their findings when they were researching Taser incidents. They noted that there were three types of potential bias, the first being about the “newsworthiness” of fatal versus non-fatal incidents. The researchers noted that non-fatal incidents were less likely to be reported by news outlets due to the lack of drama that is more commonly associated with fatal incidents (White & Ready, 2009). The second potential bias was how “the measures were operationalized and the quality of the information recorded from the media reports” (White & Ready, 2009, p. 873). The final bias that White and Ready pointed out was the difference between the media representation of the police use of a Taser and what was reported by the

officers. They also noted that other research has suggested that police are less effective in controlling the media message when the use of force is involved (White & Ready, 2009).

Parkin and Gruenewald noted some specific limitations on open sourced data in general, they found that when using open sourced data is the varying degree to which media reports certain crimes. The researchers noted that “jurisdictions with higher homicide rates will not report all victimizations in open-sources, nor is there any reason to believe that all victims and their characteristics have an equal chance of being reported” (Parkin & Gruenewald, 2015, p. 2712).

This is an important note to factor into research depending on where someone is conducting their research. The fact that not all incidents will be reported the same, that some may take precedent over others depending on jurisdiction size and local crime rates, is an important limitation and consideration. Farrell and Monk-Turner noted that non-fatal incidents may be more news worthy when there are some other variable of interest that drives the story. While Feldman, Gruskin, Coull, & Krieger (2017) noted that rural area law enforcement-related deaths may not be reported as much due to less local news coverage. Another limitation that was mentioned about using open sourced data was that the information that researchers are looking up and using are not uniformly available across all temporal and geographic locations (Parkin & Gruenewald, 2015). In their specific study that they conducted their news media came from specific news channels, community blogs and papers from one area of Seattle. Their final limitation that they noted about using open sourced data is that collecting and coding open sourced data is time consuming to which they gave an example that a coding process for 20 homicide victims in their study would be a minimum of 5 hours per victim (Parkin & Gruenewald, 2015). White and Ready took a more narrow approach to their implications and focused on the implications of police departments with Tasers and for research.

In all of the studies mentioned in this paper and in truly every research paper is the recommendation for further research to be completed on the whatever topic they are studying. An example that came from Farrell and Monk-Turner (2018) would be for future research to expand data collection to include more recent shooting incidents and to collaborate with police jurisdictions to compare data (Farrell & Monk-Turner, 2018). Another example for future research came from Parkin and Gruenewald (2015) which they recommended that future research should focus on larger jurisdictions where official data for homicides are available to examiners offices, or the prosecutor's office to assess the validity and reliability of open sources. Another example also included research on when the appropriate time to access open sourced data to find the most complete picture of the topic that is being researched and how can the data be archived and shared so that researchers can support their findings and allow other researchers to follow up on these stories (Parkin & Gruenewald, 2015). The world is constantly changing and developing new ways of collecting data and reporting data. Further research is always suggested from research studies so that the readers know that there may already be up to date information from what they published that should be considered when they are trying to create a research project.

Conclusion

While open sourced data does come with limitations such as bias, lack of information or time consuming practices, there have been many positive attributions that researchers have given open sourced data a positive outlook when using in a research project. Those attributions can include while some may lack information, open sourced data sometimes provides more data than those of official records and can be used to characteristics and behaviors of suspects and incidents that may not have been found in official data (Parkin & Gruenewald, 2015). And while open sourced

data can be time consuming, the level of details that come from spending extra time to code can produce results that may have been skipped over by other researchers that were using a different method to study whatever topic was being researched. This study will be using open sourced data to provide a sample of news cases to investigate their usefulness of determining details about SBC that would otherwise not be included in official reports from police departments.

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Working Paper #4: Suicide by Cop Data Analysis with Open-Source News Data

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Suicide By Cop Introduction

Suicide by cop (SBC) has recently become a known phenomenon in the United States, Canada, Australia and parts on the United Kingdom as another way to complete suicide (Patton & Fremouw,2015). SBC refers to when an individual creates a scenario in which law enforcement agencies are called and have to use deadly force in order to protect themselves and the people around the individual who is attempting to take their life (Mohandie, Meloy, & Collins, 2009). A key point to keep in mind is that there are varying definitions to SBC, some definitions will just consider a SBC scenario to include lethal measures as well as if the individual completed a successful SBC incident. The definition that will be used in this paper will include lethal and non lethal measures in order to have a wider range of understanding SBC cases. Definitions of SBC are not the only aspect of SBC that have a variety of qualifications, the name for suicide by cop also varies depending on what the researcher has decided to use. Before SBC was brought to the attention many researchers used either Victim precipitated homicide, law enforcement assisted suicide, and legal intervention deaths (Patton & Fremouw, 2016). SBC has become a known Phenomenon in which there are varying definitions and terms that refer to this scenario. Like any research topic there are many ways that research on SBC can be conducted. Lord took a more qualitative approach to her study by interviewing officers from 32 North Carolina law enforcement departments. Hutson et al in 1998 took a more quantitative approach and reviewed files of officer involved shootings from the Los Angeles Sheriff's department from the years 1987-1997 and used the criteria of evidence of individuals suicidal intent, evidence that the individual specifically wanted officers to shoot them, possessed a lethal weapon or what appeared to be a lethal weapon and if there was evidence that the individual intentionally escalated the encounter a provoked the officers. Mohandie and colleagues examined frequency

and other variables that pertained to SBC using a nonrandom sample of officer-involved shooting cases across North America.

Throughout the different research styles and studies that have been completed by researchers, each of these research studies have produced characteristics of the incident as well as characteristics of individuals that are attempting or completing SBC. Some characteristics that studies have found in regards to characteristics of the individuals attempting SBC include, relationship issues, prior criminal backgrounds, substance abuse or mental health, another characteristic that researchers found in common with their studies is the level of communication with family or friends that the individual had prior to their attempt or completion of SBC. In regards to characteristics of an SBC scenario one study found that there were different ways in which a scenario can occur. One method of engaging a SBC scenario included a kamikaze attack where the subject used deadly force against a group of officers or the police station. Another type of attack that was discovered in this study was a controlled attack. In this type of attack the subject instead of attacking the police, approaches the officers with a weapon and or threatens the officers with one and states to the officers that they need to kill them or they will escalate the situation. A few other approaches that were mentioned in this study included manipulated confrontation where a simple traffic law violation would engage officers in a pursuit of the individual. A dangerous confrontation is the opposite of a manipulated confrontation in which the individual commits a more serious crime or has a higher level of danger for cops or hostages. The final approach mentioned in this study is more related to the individual's mental health in which the individual was acting in an irrational or emotionally disturbed behavior (Homan and Kennedy, 2000).

Open sourced Data Introduction

This research project will be using open sourced data to provide a sample of news cases to investigate their usefulness of determining details about suicide by cop (SBC). Open sourced data “comes in forms such as media articles, legal transcripts, and academic writings, and can be free or purchased by members of the public” (Parkin & Gruenewald, 2017, p. 2694). Just like the different terminology that is used with SBC cases, open sourced data also varies in terminology, but these varying terminologies are different in ways of what is being collected and from where. One example would be crowd sourced data which also uses an online production model that is distributed to networks of people that have previously been performed by others. Crowd sources are outsourced to a large group of people in the form of an open call by a company or institution (Barbier, Zafarni, Gao, Fung & Lui, 2012). Some examples of crowd sources include Firefox, Apache and Linux as well as Wikipedia, YouTube and Yahoo answers (Barbier, et.al, 2012). Open source data which is what is being used in this project comes from newspapers and other search engines such as Google alerts. News articles provide more data than official reports, such as community reaction to police shootings or SBC incidents. News stories also include events leading up to the incident, characteristics of the individual and or officer as well as possibly any prior history that the subject has had that could lead them to initiating a SBC situation (Farrell & Monk-Turner, 2018).

The open sourced data that will be used in this study will be news articles that are collected from Google Alerts. Google Alerts is a computer generated news site that collects news articles from several thousand new sources (Stinson, Reyns, & Liederbach, 2012). In the midst of the search google will identify news events that have been reported on events after the occurrence has happened (Stinson, Reyns, & Liederbach, 2012). search engine will search over 50,000 news sources and provide the researcher with multiple links to the same story in case one article does

not contain sufficient information on the incident (Stinson, Reynolds, & Liederbach, 2012). This type of data collection will be the main source for this project to investigate the usefulness of determining details about suicide by cop.

Methods

As mentioned above this study used Google alerts to collect news stories pertaining to Suicide by Cop. The search term that was used to collect the articles was "Suicide By Cop". Each day Google alerts would send an email with links to articles that included the term "Suicide by Cop". The articles were collected from Google alerts starting from October 14th, 2020 until November 30th, 2020. Once the email was sent, the articles that were deemed to fit the qualifications for this project were then collected into an Excel spreadsheet to be coded later. When reading through the articles the qualifications that the articles had to have in order to be considered for this study included evidence that the incident was a suicide by cop, whether the police believed it to be based on the incident characteristics or if there was a report of a possible SBC from relatives, the person themselves, or a report from a community member or dispatch. The articles that were not included in the data either mentioned Suicide by cop through research studies or legislation or were not reporting on incidents that involved police.

Once the articles that met the criteria to be included in the study were gathered, they were then coded based on 26 different variables. Each of the 26 variables were then placed into different groups, a total of 4 groups were produced. The first group of variables included those that involved information on "incident background". The variables that were placed in this category included date or incident, state, and responding agency. The second category looked at "suspect variables". The variables that were included in this section included age, gender, race, and mental health history. The third category looked at "incident characteristics" in which the

variables that were included were, police perception of a weapon, presence of an actual weapon, weapon type, presence of drug or alcohol and how the call was initiated. The final category group variables together that related to the “incident outcome”. These variables included suspect fatality, suspect shot, suspect injured and charges filed. The majority of the variables were coded with a “yes”, “no” or “n/a” (not available) format, the variables that were not coded like that included date of news alert, date of incident, state, responding agency, injured from shooting, weapon type, suspect age, suspect gender, specific charges and interactions initiated. A note to factor in when considering a large number of variables is that having a wide range of variables to code allows for the researchers to delve into the articles and truly pull out all of the information that they need and can show the missing information that one report may lack but another includes.

This study will be using a 2 part analysis, the first part will look to see what percent of the new story links that are sent from google alerts accurately represent SBC? What percent of stories are filtered out as irrelevant? And, what is the nature of those false positives. Those answers will be addressed in the first part of the analysis. The second part of the analysis will address how frequent information is provided from the articles.

Results

From October 14th, 2020 until November 30th, 2020, a total of 80 news articles were generated and sent, of those articles 23 met the criteria to be included in the study thus making these articles 28.75% of the data collected accurately represent Suicide by Cop incidents. The remaining 71.25% of the articles collected did not accurately represent suicide by cop incidents. Of the 71.25% of articles that did not meet the criteria to be included in this study reported on statistics of cases that involved SBC incidents as well as legislation justifications for police

shootings or the articles mentioned suicide by cop but did not provide any details of the incident that was being reported on. For example one article that was not included in the study reported on “police use of deadly force is not about racism” this article mentioned SBC by using statistics and not talking about an actual SBC incident. The second part of the analysis will go over how frequent information was provided among the news stories that were collected.

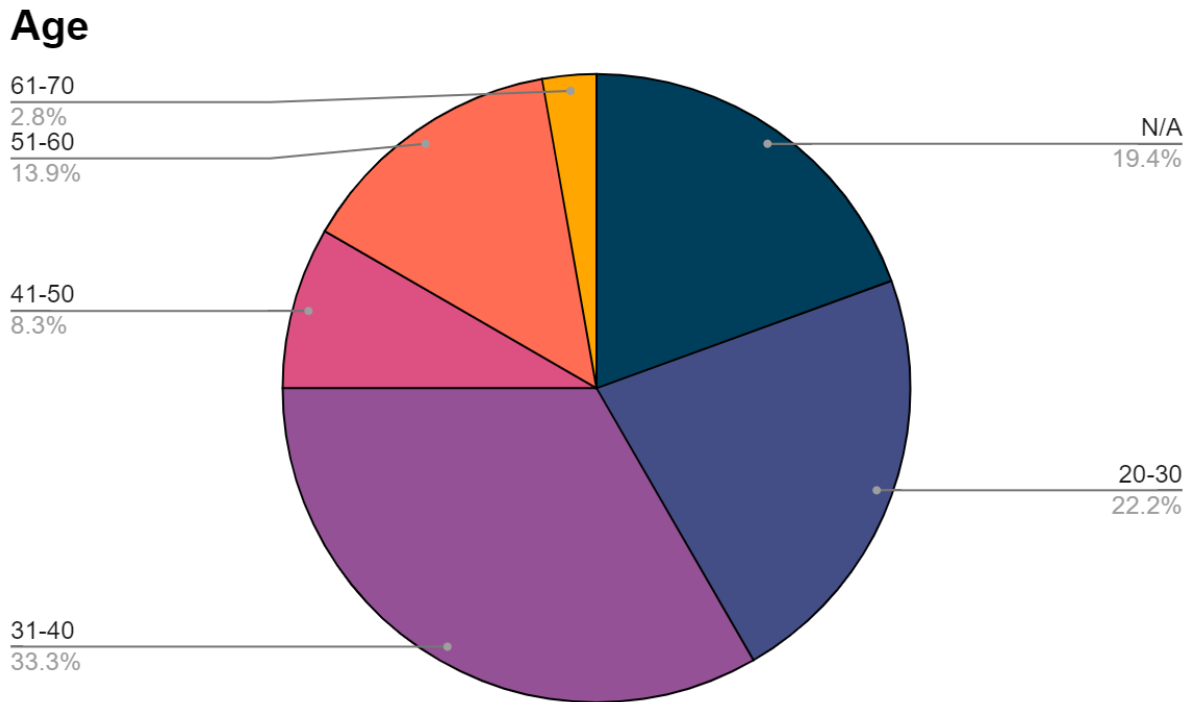
The second part of this analysis contains 36 articles that were coded using the variables mentioned earlier. The second part of analysis includes articles that were collected from September 15th, but because of emails being lost, 13 of the articles were not counted in the first part of the analysis but are able to count for the second part.

The first group of variables that belonged to the “Incident Background” group results showed that SBC incidents occurred all around the United States from the cases that were used in this study with 8 of the cases occurring in California. The table below represent the percentage of what agency responding to the SBC call. For most of the cases, local town police departments responded to the SBC incident, and in some cases both the sheriffs and the local police department worked together on the case.

Agency	Count	%
Sheriff	16	44.44%
Police Department	20	55.55%

The next set of results and tables looks at the individuals who have attempted or completed an SBC incident. As previous research from Patton and Fremouw in 2016, has stated that those who typically attempt or complete an SBC situation are male in their Early to mid-30’s. The results

from this study as shown below with the charts for age and gender back up Patton and Fermium's finding. The first pi chart looks at the results from the age variable for this study and found that 33 % of the individuals were in their 30's when they were involved in SBC cases. One case did report that an individual was in their 60's during the incident which stood out due to previous research suggesting that these incidents occur at a younger age.



The next table breaks down the Gender differences from this study and as previously mentioned, this study does support that males were the ones were more likely to be involved in an SBC scenario than females.

Gender	Raw #	%
Male	34	94.44%
Female	1	2.78%
N/A	1	2.78%

Another variable that was used in this study was to see which race was more likely to be involved in an SBC incident. The results from this variable could not be determined due to all 36 of the cases not reporting on the individual's race. Age and gender were not the only variables that were grouped in the suspect variables. The graph below represents the results from this study on whether or not the individuals name was mentioned in the article and that 77% of the sample did mention the individuals name.

Suspects Name	Raw #	%
No	8	22.22%
Yes	28	77.78%

The final graph and variable that was grouped in the Suspect variables included whether or not the individual had a history of mental health. This graph also reported on if the officers were aware of any mental health histories with the subject and if the articles reported on that.

Variable	Yes	%	No	%	N/A	%
History of Mental Health	6	16.67	-	-	30	83.33
Officers Aware of Mental Health	3	8.33	2	5.56	31	86.11

The results from this table shows that the majority of the articles did not mention any type of mental health history with the individual as well as only 3 of the articles reported that officers were aware of the individuals mental health when handling the SBC incident. The next group of variables that will be discussed comes from incident characteristics.

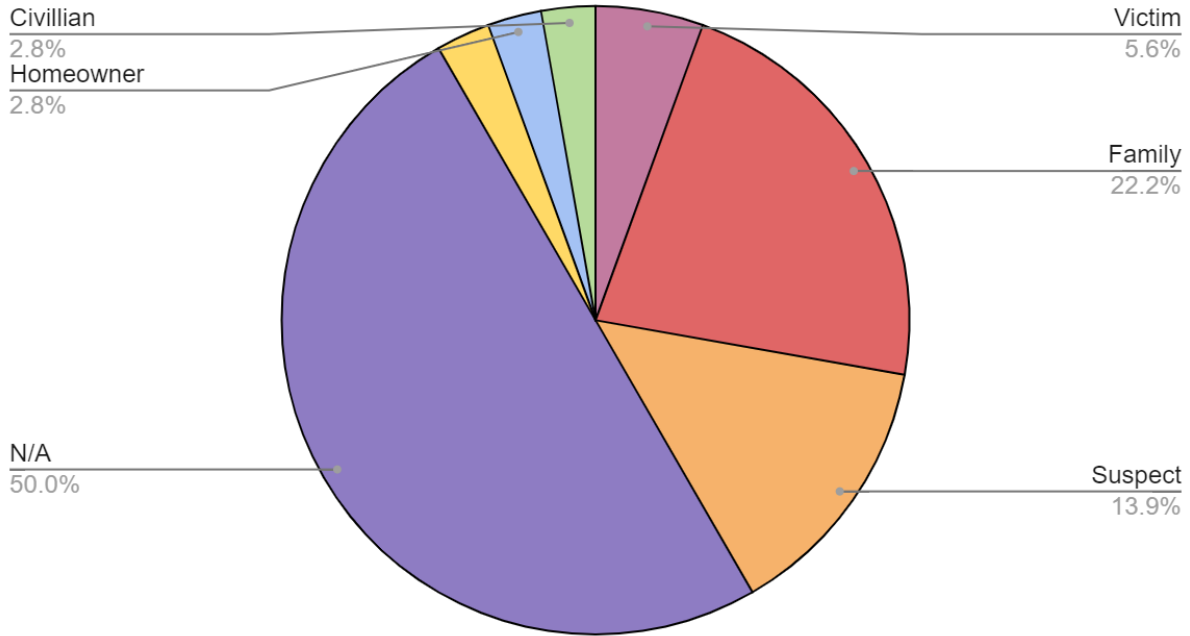
The table below shows the results of the variables that were included in the incident characteristics group. Of these variables the results from drugs or Alcohol variable stood out because 75 % of the cases that were used in this study did not mention if the individual had a history of drugs or alcohol use as well as if they were used at the time of the incident.

SBC Incident Characteristics						
Variables	Yes	Yes%	No	No%	N/A	N/A%
Police Fire	19	52.78%	7	19.44%	10	27.78%
Perception of Weapon	32	88.89%	-	-	4	11.11%
Actual Weapon	27	75%	4	11.1%	5	13.89%
Drugs or Alcohol	8	22.22%	1	2.78%	27	75%

The next variable that was included in this group looked at if the articles reported how the call

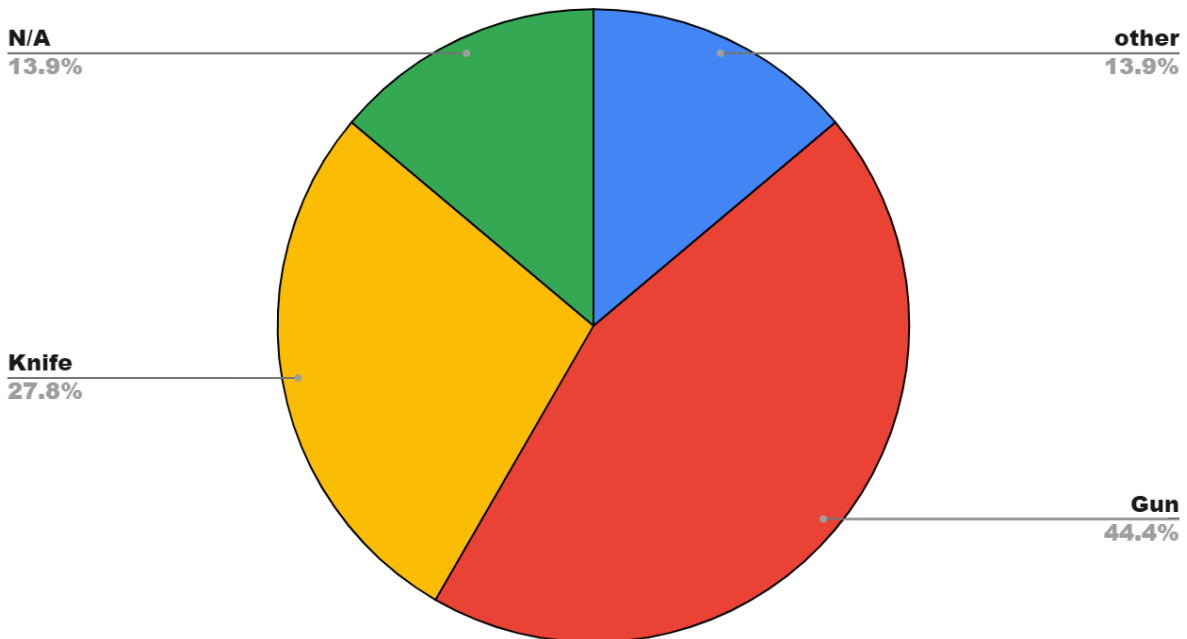
for an SBC incident was initiated.

Interactions Initiated



The results from this pi chart shows that 50 percent of the articles did not mention how the call was initiated. Of those articles that mentioned how the call was initiated, family members whether they were relatives or spouses of the individual were the ones that were most likely to call. The final graph for this section will look at the types of weapons that were found during the SBC incident and were reported.

Count of Weapon Type



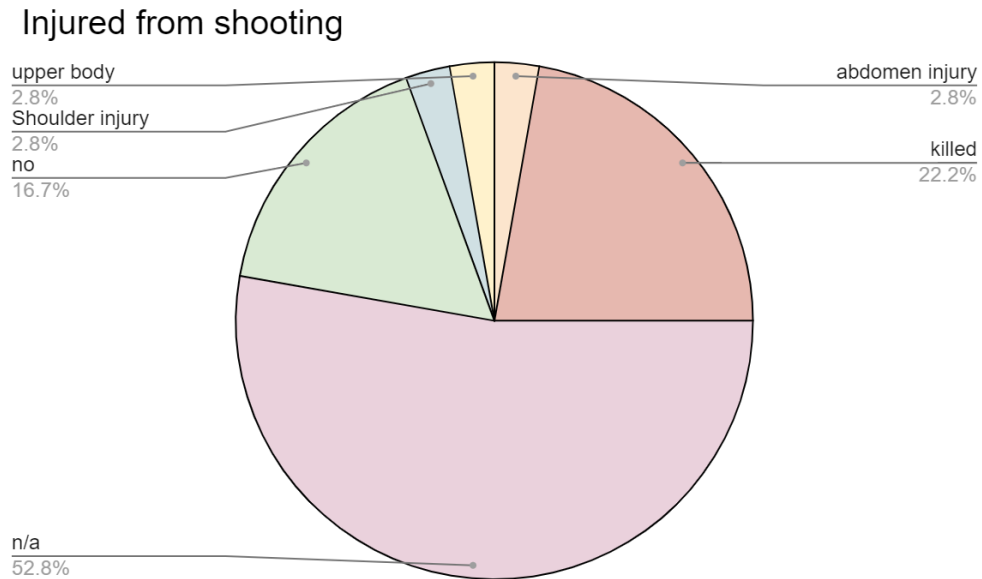
This pie chart shows the different types of weapons that were mentioned in the articles that the suspected either had or used during the SBC incident. The majority of the articles reported that Guns were involved in the incident with knives being the 2nd most common weapon used. When looking at “other category” that was to represent articles that mentioned there was a presence of a weapon but the weapon turned out to either be a fake gun, airsoft rifle or a cellphone made to look like a gun.

The Final list of variables that were coded for this project look at the outcomes of SBC incidents. The first table below shows the results from the variables that were coded according the outcome of the incident. A few results from the variables in this category stand out, suspect fatality on had 8 cases where the individual died, while 28 of the cases were able to avoid the individual dying.

Outcomes Of SBC Incidents						
Variable	Yes	Yes %	No	No %	N/A	N/A %
Suspect Fatality	8	22.22 %	28	77.78%	-	-
Other Fatality	-	-	36	100	-	-
Suspect Injury	17	47.22	11	30.56	8	22.22%
Other Injuries	2	5.56%	29	80.56%	5	13.89%
Suspect Shot	18	50%	7	19.44%	11	30.56%
Charges Filed	18	50%	6	16.67%	12	33.33%

Another variable that stood out from this group was whether there were charges filed. 18 of the articles reported that there were charges filed against the individuals after the SBC incident.

Some of those charges included, attempted first-degree murder, attempted arson of an occupied structure, disorderly conduct with a weapon, endangerment and child abuse, alcohol intoxication, first-degree disorderly conduct, third degree assault, and resisting law enforcement. With any SBC incident there is always a possibility for an injury to occur and in 17 cases for this study the suspect was injured. The chart below shows a breakdown of the different injuries that the individuals had after their SBC incident.



The results show that a little over half of the cases used in this study did not report on the type of injuries that the individuals had from the incident. The next result showed that of those that were injured, 22 percent of the sample were killed while the remainder of the individuals suffered upper body injuries such as shoulders or abdomen.

Strength's, Limitations, and Future Research

Strengths

This study used opened sourced data to analyze and code articles that reported on SBC incidents, some strengths to take into consideration when using this type of method to studying SBC or any topic in general is that open sourced data can provide more information on the individuals involved in incidents than police records. Some of the information can be the different types of mental health issues that the individual has as well as if the individual lived alone or had a family. Another strength from using open sourced data is that it is typically more up to date than police records in regards to follow up on the individual if they were injured as well as the results of the charges. When looking for a general overview of a topic to present on, using open sourced

data is another strength for this type of research. Using this type of data allows for a general overview of what SBC incidents are like in regards to characteristics of the incident and the individual. Using open sourced data also allows for a greater opportunity to develop further research questions that will be aimed at more specific segments of SBC cases.

Another Strength from using open sourced data to which made studying SBC cases easier than other methods was that, there was no need to contact or rely on police department records and have to take into consideration no responses or cooperation from the department themselves. This allowed easier access to data due to the articles already being published and open to the public without having anything redacted out that would normally have been if looking at public police records. Like any research study there is, an important aspect to have when conducting a research project is for others to confirm and build off each other's findings. Using open sourced data allows for researchers to build off others work and propose new questions to look into to have a better understanding. An example of this could be taken from this study in regards to age and gender from this study, comparing and backing up the research from Patton and Fremouw's work in 2016.

Limitations

While the strengths to this study make it seem like using opened sourced data to be the easiest to use when conducting an overview of SBC or general topics, there are limitations to this method just like any research study that could prevent further research and results to be conducted. One limitation from using open sourced data for this study was time. This study only occurred over a few months to which dramatically reduced the amount of cases that could have been added to this study compared to how many could have potentially made the qualifications if this was over a year or two span. Along with just gathering the articles and having a limited time span, coding

the articles also takes time and is found to be a limitation in open sourced data research studies. This is considered a limitation due to the fact that each article has to be analyzed closes and coded and if one person is going through all of the articles, a considerable amount of time will be used in order to code those, which in turn can have researchers thinking of choosing a different method to study SBC or whatever research they are studying.

Time is not the only limitation to this study, lack of information also came into effect when coding variables from the articles or using opened sourced data. The limited access to police records or whatever information source that is being used could provide vast differences between the variables and the topics of interests that researchers have and what is being reported on by the journalists in the articles or news pages. An example of this came into effect when looking at the individual's race for this study as well as mental health was prodominelty left out of the news reports. The results from this study showed that race was not mentioned at all in any of the articles used, which consequently makes it so that the variable for race cannot be determined because there were no results for it. Another limitation when using open sourced data when using information from news sources is the degree of bias that comes with reporting as well as the information and news sources may not always be available across geographic locations and results in that case not being included in the study.

When using opened sourced data, a note to keep in mind is to save all of the articles in a PDF format, that way the researcher is able to view the article anytime. Another limitation to using opened sourced data is that some of the article links do not work after a certain amount of time and unless the research has the article saved in a PDF, they are not able to views the articles.

Future research

Just like any research study that is published there is always ways to improve on the research as

well as new questions to pose about the topic. In regards to this study a few research questions that could be used in the future when looking closer at SBC incidents can touch on mental health of the individuals involved in an SBC incident and if the officers know about the mental health how could that information change the outcome of the SBC incident. Another question comes to mind when posing for future research would be if there is a relationship between the presence of a weapon and the likelihood that the suspect is shot by the police? As mentioned before, race was not reported in any of the articles that were used in this study, so a potential questions for future research would include what race is more likely to be involved in an SBC incident. The final question that could be posed for future research out of this study would be how drugs and alcohol influence SBC scenarios? And if officers were aware if the individual was on drugs or alcohol, would that change the outcome of the incident?

Future research is important to not only establish a larger sample of cases, but to also determine and see if the percentage of cases that google alerts provides on SBC cases increases. As well as more demographic information could have the potential to be included in other news articles which could potentially lead to some of the questions above being answered.

Conclusion

Using open sourced data to research and provide a general overview of SBC incidents proved to be successful in this research study. Not only was this study able to back up some of the findings such as age and gender that were found in Patton and Fremouw's study in 2016, but this study was also able to provide new information in a unique way that allowed for a general picture to be painted on SBC incidents. Suicide by cop (SBC) has recently become a known phenomenon in the United States, Canada, Australia and parts on the United Kingdom as another way to

complete suicide (Patton & Fremouw,2015). Future research would benefit this study to answer the questions mentioned above as well as to dig deeper into this phenomenon to truly learn SBC incidents.

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