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Clinical and Forensic Indicators of "Suicide by Cop"*

ABSTRACT: This paper reviews the literature pertaining to the phenomenon of "suicide by cop"—any incident in which a suicidal individual attempts to get law enforcement to kill him. This article defines the term "suicide by cop," discusses the various motivations of individuals who engage in this type of behavior, presents the risk factors and indicators for suicide and violence, and describes specific indicators for suicide by cop. Proper recognition of these events, prior and subsequent to their occurrence, has important implications for prevention, officer safety, equivocal death analysis and psychological autopsy, civil litigation, criminal justice proceedings, and community stability. This paper presents seven case studies which demonstrate the clinical and forensic indicators of this phenomenon.

KEYWORDS: forensic science, suicide by cop, victim-precipitated homicide, police-assisted suicide, suicide, homicide, police, violence risk, equivocal death analysis

In the United States the suicide rate for all ages in the general population has remained between 11 and 12 suicides per 100 000 population. More than 31 000 people take their own lives each year, and suicide is one of the leading causes of death (1). Attention has recently begun to focus upon incidents in which a suicidal individual engages in conspicuous and threatening behavior in an attempt to get law enforcement to kill him, a phenomenon known as "suicide by cop." Proper recognition and understanding of these events, prior and subsequent to their occurrence, has critical implications for prevention, officer safety, equivocal death analysis, and psychological autopsy, civil litigation, criminal justice proceedings, and community stability (2–4). This paper defines the phrase "suicide by cop," discusses the various motivations of individuals who engage in this type of behavior, presents an overview of the limited research as it relates to the prevalence and dynamics of this problem, presents the risk factors for suicide and violence, describes generic suicide and violence indicators, and discusses specific indicators for suicide by cop.

Definition

According to the Police Officer Standards and Training (5), "suicide by cop" is a term used by law enforcement and others to de-

scribe an incident in which an individual engages in behavior which poses an apparent risk of serious injury or death, with the intent to precipitate the use of deadly force by law enforcement personnel towards that individual.

There are a variety of terms which are used synonymously with the term suicide by cop, including "police-assisted suicide," "victim-precipitated homicide," and "hetero-suicide" (5,6). "Police-assisted suicide" is preferred by some because it clarifies that the incident involves police action in the death of another, and avoids confusing the event with "police suicide" which refers to the suicide of a law enforcement officer. The generic "victim-precipitated homicide" (VPH) describes those victims who somehow initiate or contribute to the sequence of events that results in their deaths (6,7). This term has been criticized because it is too general and applies to other unrelated situations, and it places the involved law enforcement personnel in the position of being labeled suspect(s) and the suicidal person being viewed as the "victim" (5). "Hetero-suicide," a subcategory of VPH in one classification system, has been coined to describe situations whereby one commits suicide by causing another person to perform the act, usually by entering into confrontations with opponents who are bigger, have more fighting experience, or are better armed than the potential VPH victim (6).

We adopt the term "suicide by cop" since it is a more commonly used and universally understood expression for these types of events, embraced by law enforcement, public and the media (5).

Motivations

All suicidal behavior is goal-directed behavior, with some goals appearing to be more instrumental and others more expressive (8). Instrumental goals might include avoidance of consequences such as incarceration or reconciliation of a failed love relationship, while expressive goals might include venting hopelessness or rage about the individual's life, or proving some emotional point. These categories help to focus investigations or review these events, but it is important to note that both motivations are usually present in any given situation, as suicide by cop is usually overdetermined. There are also three common "meta" or ultimate goals, at least one of which is present in every "suicide by cop" situation: suicide, homicide-suicide, or attention or "cry for help."

Instrumental Goals

In the instrumental category, individuals are: (1) attempting to escape or avoid the consequences of criminal or shameful actions; (2) using a forced confrontation with police to reconcile a failed relationship; (3) hoping to avoid the exclusion clauses of life insurance policies; (4) rationalizing that while it may be morally wrong to commit suicide, being killed resolves the spiritual problem of

suicide; or (5) seeking what they believe to be a very effective and lethal means of accomplishing death.

The first type of situation is illustrated by an incident which took place in February 1996, in Honolulu, Hawaii. This event ended when the suspect was shot to death by police after he threatened to kill his hostage. The suspect had killed his girlfriend several days prior to returning to his former workplace and shooting a co-worker, and had made it known in conversations with witnesses that he "would not go back to jail" (personal communication, Captain K. Kaniho, Sept. 1996). In his wallet was a news account of his father's death at the hands of police prior to the suspect's birth. Homicide-suicide appeared to be his ultimate goal, interrupted by the escape of his prospective victims. He paraded his remaining hostage in front of police officers, taunting them, and was in the midst of a 60-second countdown to kill his hostage when he was killed by the officers.

The second type of incident is exemplified by an event that occurred in Southern California in August 1998. In this incident, a civilian police department employee was attempting to reconcile with his estranged wife and showed up at her house drunk, begging her to let him in to discuss their relationship. When she refused, he asked to use the bathroom and she then allowed him in the residence. An argument ensued with the husband refusing to leave. When the wife threatened to call the police, the husband said "I'll call them for you" and proceeded to call the local police and hang up on the dispatcher, resulting in a police response. The husband grabbed a replica pistol and opened the door, apparently waiting for the police to arrive. He was talked out of this suicide attempt by his son, and taken for psychological evaluation, admitting that he was "trying to get sympathy from my wife . . . make her take me back" (first author's field observation). It would appear that attention, rather than suicide, was the individual's ultimate goal in this circumstance.

In an example of the other types of instrumental motivation, a depressed and suicidal man in Los Angeles during the 1980s threatened to kill himself with a recently purchased handgun, and negotiations were begun to dissuade him from committing suicide. During the negotiation process, the man indicated that he was going to force the police to kill him, as he was worth "more to my children dead than alive" (personal communication, Lieutenant M. Albanese, Jan. 1999). He also stated that he was afraid of simply wounding himself and becoming more of a burden to the world. He had lost his job, recently separated from his wife, and had only minimal custody of his children. He also believed that if he killed himself, he would disqualify his life insurance policy, while if the police killed him, his children would receive the benefits. Furthermore, he believed that it was wrong within his spiritual belief system to commit suicide, but rationalized that if someone else did it, this would not bar him from the spiritual afterlife. After several hours of negotiations, the man surrendered without harming himself. In this example, suicide appeared to be the ultimate or meta-goal, with the instrumental sub-goals readily apparent.

Expressive Goals

In the expressive category, individuals are communicating: (1) hopelessness, depression, and desperation; (2) a statement about their ultimate identification as victims; (3) their need to save face by dying or being forcibly overwhelmed rather than surrendering; (4) their intense power needs; (5) rage and revenge; or (6) their need to draw attention to an important personal issue (9).

On November 23, 1998, in Orange County, CA, a father who was angry over the special schooling for his disabled son, was shot to death by a police sniper after taking several school officials hostage at gunpoint and claiming to have explosive devices (10). He had recently lost custody of his children and was embroiled in court battles with his estranged wife and the school district over the care of his disabled child. He told one of his hostages, "I came here today to get myself killed, because I don't have the guts to kill myself" (10). Throughout hours of negotiation, he ranted and raved about the inadequate education that the school district was providing for his 16-year-old deaf son. At the end of the ordeal, he paraded a hostage at gunpoint in front of police, who shot him. Later it was determined that while the gun was operative, the apparent explosive devices were fake. In this case, several expressive needs are apparent. This man was hopeless and desperate in his own perception of life circumstances, desired attention for an important personal issue, and saw himself as a victim, creating the circumstances to fulfill that role even in the manner of his death. He also sought to punish and intimidate those whom he perceived had caused him to suffer, and inflict revenge and rage against those in positions of authority by overpowering the school administrators with force, and by cajoling the police to kill him so that it would be their fault. As noted by statements attributed to this man, an instrumental goal was also present in this situation: setting up circumstances so that someone who was capable of completing his suicide would do so. The meta-goal here was suicide.

Also on November 23, 1998, a trespasser was shot to death by Los Angeles police officers who found him armed with a rifle upon their arrival (11). He shouted "just shoot me, just shoot me," then pointed his rifle at the police (11). The man had been evicted from the house, was still staying there, and was reported to have been "kind of down in the dumps." He had a history of sporadic employment, alcohol abuse, recently lost both parents to cancer, and one of his sons had just died. One year prior, he had threatened a neighbor's children with a rifle, stating "don't walk in front of my house or I'll blow you away." In this case, the suicide by cop behavior appeared to fulfill the expression of hopelessness and depression, as well as his acceptance of the victim role. Saving face by dying, rather than suffering further shame and defeat, may also have been a goal. Again, the instrumentality of avoiding consequences and utilizing an effective means of death is apparent. Ultimately, this situation may have been an attempted homicide-suicide.

In 1994, Los Angeles police responded to a domestic dispute with shots fired. When officers arrived, family members who had escaped the wrath of the gunman told the police that he was heavily armed, homicidal, and suicidal. Several years prior, he had been suspected and acquitted in a murder case. When the gunman became aware that police were at the location, he immediately fired over 50 rounds from an AK 47, shot and killed his horse, and shot his favorite vehicle. In the ensuing gunfight, he refused to stop shooting and was ultimately killed by police. Hopelessness and tremendous rage appeared to be the expressive goals, with homicide-suicide being the meta-goal.

On February 28, 1997, two heavily armed and vested gunmen engaged in one of the deadliest shootouts in modern United States history during a bank robbery gone awry. This shootout, which was broadcast on live television, ended with nine police officers and three citizens wounded, nearly 2000 rounds fired, one of the suspects committing suicide when his assault weapon became inoperative, and the second suspect being shot to death by Special Weapons and Tactics team members. These suspects were extremely violent during past crimes, possessed automatic weapons

and armor piercing ammunition, and trained extensively. A search warrant found the movies "Heat" and "Navy Seals," as well as books about close-quarters combat and police tactics in their safe house. While suspect number one took his own life, the second suspect continued to engage in gunfire with the police when it was clear that he could not escape. After he was incapacitated by the police gunfire and safely taken into custody, he told the arresting officers, "why don't you just put a bullet in my head" and, "why don't you just kill me, I'm not telling you a fucking thing" prior to dying (personal communication, Officer R. Massa, Jan. 1999). It is probable that these suspects decided that they would never be taken alive and would take as many law enforcement officers and others with them in the event they ever faced capture, dying in a blaze of antisocial glory. This fulfills the expressive goal of face saving, and especially speaks to the power needs of these individuals—"I am too powerful to be taken alive" and "I am so powerful that I died in a blaze of glory." While one may consider this to be speculation, it certainly is supported by the father of one of the deceased suspects who stated proudly "everything my son did, he did all the homework. . . any crime that you could put out there, he could show you a better way to do it. . . all the way up to bank robbery" (12). He added, "Larry told me that if it ever came down to him getting busted—going to jail for the rest of his life—he'd rather die" (12). Clearly, in this case there were also the instrumental goals of escape and avoidance of punishment present. The meta-goal in this situation was homicide-suicide.

Many mass murderers reflect a similar expressive dynamic. For example, Charles Whitman killed 16 people and wounded at least 31 others on August 1, 1966 in the Texas Tower incident (13). Heavily armed and purposeful, he left suicide notes and diary entries with the bodies of his mother and wife whom he killed before embarking on his murderous spree. These communications and behaviors made it clear that he did not intend to survive the incident, and that he wanted to die while engaged in the mass murder. Hempel, Meloy, and Richards (14) in a nonrandom study of 30 mass murderers over the past 50 years, found that death by suicide or at the hands of others is the usual outcome for the mass murderer. Hopelessness, a "warrior identity," rage, and intense power needs merge into a yearning for homicidal achievement, during which the perpetrator plans on being killed by police at some point. Cases such as these, with a meta-goal of homicide-suicide, represent the most lethal of suicide by cop scenarios because of this grandiose and overwhelming expressive need to achieve by killing and then dying at the hands of others. Table 1 lists a comparison of instrumental and expressive motives in suicide by cop situations. This table presents actual verbalizations, derived from the first author's experience in field response to hostage and barricade situations and psychological autopsy investigations, by individuals who have attempted or completed suicide by cop. These utterances are

strikingly similar to the concept of "psychological abstract" developed by Hempel et al. (14) to describe verbalizations immediately prior to, or during mass murder, which give insight into the perpetrator's intent and motivation.

Overview of Research

The research on suicide by cop is limited. In an early study which looked at 3282 homicides from 1956 through 1975 in Dade County, Florida, Wright and Davis (7) found the largest category of murders to be victim-participated homicide, a general category that includes situations where there was any participation by the victim in the incident, close enough to be considered an integral part of the act, thus a more inclusive category than "suicide by cop." These cases accounted for approximately 10% of all of the examined homicides between 1966 and 1975. They concluded that the difference between firearms and other weapons was most important in the victim-participated homicide category, with these homicides most frequently involving firearms (71%). They argued that in the heat of passion, the presence of a firearm can turn a fight into a killing, a fact that suicidal individuals in the 1990s seem well aware. They noted a 240% increase in violent situations involving firearms over other weapons, a finding of researchers examining this issue in other contexts (15,16).

Haruff, Llewellyn, Clark et al. (17) examined the related issue of firearm suicides during confrontations with police, what they termed "police associated deaths," in which an armed suspect being pursued, apprehended, or otherwise confronted by police suddenly turns the gun on himself. They examined 14 cases which qualified out of a total of 1203 suicides that occurred between 1984 and 1992 in Marion County, Indiana. This represented 1% of all suicides, and 2% of firearm suicides. They found that all of the subjects were male and 72% were in the 20- to 39-year-old range. Fifty-seven percent of the cases originated as a marital or relationship disturbance, and in 29% of the cases, the subject was wanted for a crime. All of the suicides were committed with handguns. Fifty percent of the cases where data were available (10 cases) tested positive for alcohol and/or drugs. While this study did not look specifically at the issue of suicide by cop, the presence of suicidal ideation among subjects during police intervention can be serious and lethal.

In a recent study conducted on all shooting cases handled by the LA County Sheriff's Department between 1987 and 1997 ($n = 437$), it was determined that 13% of all fatal officer-involved shootings and 11% of all officer-involved shootings, fatal and nonfatal, were suicide by cop situations (18). In addition, data for 1997 indicated that these cases accounted for 25% of all officer-involved shootings, and 27% of all officer-involved justifiable homicides, a significant increase over previous years. They found that 98% of the suspects were male, 70% had a criminal record, 65% had drug or alcohol problems, 63% had a known psychiatric history, 39% had a history of domestic violence, and 65% had verbally communicated their suicidal intent. In addition, 48% had guns, most of which were loaded and operative, while others had what appeared to be a lethal weapon (replica pistol, knives, or blunt objects) during the confrontation with police. In 39% of the cases domestic violence was the precipitating cause for police response, 20% of the cases involved despondence over a relationship breakup, while 9% of the cases involved a "three strikes" individual facing capture.

To provoke officers to shoot them, 50% pointed their firearm at officers, 26% lunged at officers with a knife, 15% fired their weapons at officers, 4% threw a knife at officers, and 4% contin-

TABLE 1—*Instrumental versus expressive motivations in suicide by cop.*

Instrumental	Expressive
"I'm not going back to jail"	"My life is hopeless"
"I wanted her to come back to me"	"I am the ultimate victim"
"God won't forgive me if I do it, but He will if you do"	"Soldiers never surrender"
"Make sure my kids get the insurance money"	"I am important enough to be killed by cops"
"I can't do it myself"	"I'll teach you a lesson"
	"This is worth dying for"

ued to assault civilians with a lethal weapon after being ordered to drop their weapon. Seventy-eight percent of the suspects verbally indicated that they wanted to commit suicide by cop: 58% asked officers to shoot them, 6.5% told someone else they would have officers shoot them, 6.5% told officers afterwards that suicide by cop was why they continued to point their weapon, 2.2% thanked officers for shooting them, 2.2% left a written note, and 2.2% called law enforcement officers prior to the event stating they wanted to commit suicide. Twenty-two percent indicated their suicidal intentions through demonstrative behavior: 15.2% continued to point their weapon after being told they would be shot, and 6.5% lunged at officers with a knife, knowing they would be shot. Seventy percent of the shootings took place within 30 min of the arrival of officers (18).

In another non-random study of suicide by cop cases, Kennedy et al. (2) reviewed an electronic library containing the full text from 22 newspapers, representing 18 metropolitan areas in the United States, to obtain a broad sample of accounts of police shootings in which potential cases of suicide by cop could be found. They analyzed a total of 240 articles from the years 1980 to 1995, and using two independent raters, catalogued the incidents into one of five categories: (1) probable suicide; (2) possible suicide; (3) uncertain; (4) suicide improbable; and (5) no suicidal evidence. They obtained 74% inter-rater agreement on categorization. They found probable or possible suicidal motivation in 16% of the 240 incidents. However, when they identified 80 cases with sufficient detail to classify, they found that 46% of these cases contained some evidence of possible or probable suicidal motivation. They then examined a new sample of 33 usable incidents taken from the *Detroit Free Press* files from 1992 to 1993 and determined that 47% of the cases with enough detail to classify had possible suicidal motivation. These data, while not rigorously collected and subject to reporting biases, indicate that anywhere from 16 to 46% of police shootings may be precipitated by suicidal motivation on behalf of the suspect.

Kennedy et al. (2) also found that demonstrative behavior on the part of the suspect was present in 89% of the cases. These behaviors included pointing or firing a gun at an officer, and reaching for a weapon. They also found that armed robbery was the most frequent reason for officer intervention; however, they noted a slight trend for suicidal incidents to involve the triad of general disturbance, domestic disturbance, and person with a weapon calls. They speculated that armed robbery often signifies a desperate crime in which many offenders, while much preferring to get away, would rather be killed than captured. Similar to the Hutson et al. (18) study, they found that 97% of the suspects were male. They concluded that these events require greater law enforcement attention due to the number of police shootings that involve these types of individuals and because of the impact that they can have upon community police relations. The weakness of this study is that news reports are an unreliable source of data. Data collection is not scientifically rigorous, tends to reflect local biases, and many events fail to be included.

A study reported by Parent (19) examined the frequency and degree of victim-precipitated acts that have constituted lethal threats to police officers in British Columbia municipal departments and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police between 1980 and 1997. He found that characteristics associated with victim-precipitated homicide appear to be a significant factor in 48% of the 58 cases that were analyzed. In these cases, the individuals' statements and actions clearly reflected their intent to commit suicide. He noted that in several cases the perpetrator of the lethal threat had a docu-

mented history of mental illness and/or suicidal behavior, and several had a high blood-alcohol level at the time of death. He concluded that in some instances, alcohol, substance abuse, and mental illness were added to the complex picture of suicidal tendencies. A significant weakness of this particular study is the failure to report methodology and statistics on these variables; however, the study does offer some insight into the possible international significance of this issue.

The issue of suicide by cop, while not a new phenomenon, is a relatively new area for scientific study. While the preliminary data reviewed here indicate that it is a significant problem, and there is some indication that the problem is increasing, this may be a reflection of better reporting and documentation. At the same time, if there is an actual increase, the change may be a function of changes in the criminal justice system (three strikes laws and tougher sentencing) and problems in the mental health system. Clearly, more research is needed.

Generic Suicide and Violence Risk Factors

There are generic suicide and violence risk factors which are provided by mental health researchers. Monahan (20) reported that (*a*) the prevalence of violence is more than five times higher among people who meet criteria for a DSM-III Axis I diagnosis than those who are not diagnosable; (*b*) the prevalence of violence among people who meet criteria for a diagnosis of schizophrenia, major depression, or mania/bipolar disorder are remarkably similar; and (*c*) the prevalence of violence among persons who meet criteria for a diagnosis of alcoholism is 12 times that of persons who receive no diagnosis, and the prevalence of violence among persons who meet criteria for being diagnosed as abusing drugs is 16 times that of persons who receive no diagnosis. Meloy (21) has identified individual and situational factors that may suggest increased violence potential: individual factors include past crime or violence, aged 15 to 24, male gender, lower intelligence, and alcohol and psychostimulant use; while situational factors include violent family background, a peer system that provides pressure to be violent, lack of employment or unsatisfactory employment, victim availability (affects frequency, severity, and lethality), weapon availability, and availability of alcohol. Weapon availability in the home has been identified as a strong risk factor for suicide and homicide (15,16). Other factors include family history of mental illness and alcohol abuse, family history of violence and child abuse, and seizure disorders or brain dysfunction (22). The general trend in violence research is to categorize factors as either dispositional (static) or clinical-situational (dynamic) to assess a real threat. Overprediction is still the major problem, primarily due to low base rates in most samples of "violent" individuals and clinical fears of false negatives.

Studies conducted by Shneidman (23) indicate that in 90% of actual suicide cases, people had given verbal or behavioral clues within the week or so before they committed suicide. He notes, however, that most individuals who threaten suicide do not attempt or commit suicide, a finding that parallels those of other violence researchers; that is, most individuals who threaten violence do not carry out their threats or *pose* a threat (24). He distinguishes between the *prospective* view of violence threats which focuses on the reality of how very few people who make threats or generate behavioral clues suggestive of a problem actually carry out the threat or do something violent. However, it is his opinion that, in practice, common sense dictates the wisdom of adopting a conservative or *retrospective* view, taking seriously any talk or indicators of violence potential (23).

TABLE 2—*Verbal clues to suicide.*

1. Direct threats—"maybe I should kill myself," "maybe I should kill ___" (25).
2. Veiled threats—"my life is over," "thanks for everything, you've been a good friend," "I know where s/he lives!," "I can't go on without ___" (25).
3. Hopeless and helpless statements—"there's no way out," "I'll never have a family" (25).
4. Statement of worthlessness, self-hate, and intense guilt—"I don't deserve to live."
5. Complaints about depression, great emotional pain, physical pain, distress, crying spells, or sleeplessness (25).
6. Angry statements such as "If I can't have him or her, then no one can," "they'll be sorry."
7. Statements that suggest over identifying with someone who committed suicide or another act of violence—"I wish it were me," "I know why he killed all those people, they just can't keep treating people bad," "I tell you I think a lot of how gratifying it would be to hurt people and sometimes I dream about it."
8. Verbal wills—"will you take care of my pets?," "tell Joe how much I care" (25).
9. Bizarre thoughts—"these people are not who they say they are and they are stealing my thoughts and poisoning me," "the end of the world is coming and I have a special mission to complete before it happens." Evidence of delusions (fixed and false beliefs).
10. Obsessions—"I can't get her or what she might be doing with him off of my mind," "It's wrong what the boss did to me and I'm NOT going to let it go." Grievances, lawsuits, multiple complaints.

TABLE 3—*Behavioral clues to suicide.*

1. Any overt act of violence such as suicide attempt or gesture, or assault of another.
2. Recklessness, putting self in harm's way or being provocative, and "I don't care what happens to me attitude" displayed in behavior.
3. Giving away personal possessions, getting affairs in order (25).
4. Suicide or violence rituals: writing a note, diary entries, dressing up for the assault, rehearsal. Acquiring a method for suicide attempt. Precautions taken to avoid rescue (25).
5. Pathological attachment: repeatedly pursuing, reuniting, and failing with love interest. Following, stalking, surveilling of another as a response to loss (26).
6. Drinking, drug use, or failure to take prescribed medication or treatment.
7. Restlessness or agitation indicative of major depression.
8. Deteriorating personal appearance, evidence of lack of sleep, poor personal hygiene.
9. Inappropriate displays of emotion, tearfulness, angry outbursts related to depression.
10. Social withdrawal and isolation as a result of depression.

Generic Suicide Indicators

In practical terms, there are two categories of clues, verbal and behavioral, that are reflective of some of the documented risk factors for suicide and violence risk, which may be observed by a loved one, friend, co-worker, or supervisor. Verbal clues to suicide risk are presented in Table 2, while behavioral clues to suicide risk are presented in Table 3.

Suicide by Cop Indicators

Verbal and Behavioral Clues

There are also multiple categories of clues that are indicative of suicide by cop. These data points are derived from the literature and the authors' experience with these situations. While certain clues may be more indicative of elevated risk in a given situation, the cur-

TABLE 4—*Verbal clues to suicide-by-cop risk.*

1. Demands that authorities kill him/her (9).
2. Sets a deadline for authorities to kill him/her (3,9).
3. Threatening to kill or harm others (27).
4. Wants to "go out in a blaze of glory" and/or indicates he "won't be taken alive" (7,9).
5. Gives a verbal will (27).
6. Tells hostages and others s/he wants to die (3).
7. Looking for a "macho" way out (9).
8. Offers to surrender to person in charge (9).
9. Indicates elaborate plans for his/her own death (9).
10. Expresses feeling of hopelessness/helplessness (9).
11. Emphatic that "jail is not an option" (27).
12. Biblical references, specifically the Book of Revelations and resurrection (3).

TABLE 5—*Behavioral clues to suicide-by-cop risk.*

1. Demonstrative with weapon (2).
2. Points loaded or unloaded weapon or apparent weapon at police (2).
3. Clears a threshold in a barricade situation in order to fire weapon (27).
4. Shooting at the police (2).
5. Reaching for a weapon or apparent weapon with police present (2).
6. Attaches weapon to body (27).
7. Countdown to kill hostage or others with police present (27).
8. Assaulting or harming hostages or others with police present (27).
9. Forces confrontation with police (2,3).
10. Advances on police when told to stop (5).
11. Suspect calls the police him/herself to report crime in progress (28).
12. Continues hopeless acts of aggression even after incapacitation by gunfire (28).
13. Self-mutilation with police present (5).
14. Pointing weapon at self with police present (5).
15. Refuses to negotiate (9).
16. No escape demands (27).
17. No demands (9).
18. Getting intoxicated with "chemical courage" (27).

rent state of the research does not allow for any predictive equations to express probabilities or degrees of certainty. Therefore, each situation must be assessed by its own unique elements, taking into account these guidelines for identification. Verbal clues are presented in Table 4 and behavioral clues are presented in Table 5.

Suicide by Cop Risk Factors

From our review of the research and actual case experience, it is apparent that there are risk factors in the recent history or circumstances of the subject, and other key life events that are indicative of suicide by cop. Behavior of the subject in recent history, the presence of unusual circumstances, and certain key life events from the more distant past, may contribute to understanding the subject's motivation and intent. (See Table 6 for the historical and situational indicators of suicide by cop risk and Table 7 for key life events noted in suicide by cop cases.)

Type of Call for Police Service

From our review of the literature and experience, certain types of calls for police service appear to have an elevated risk for escalating into suicide by cop situations. The presence of these specific circumstances may increase the likelihood that a given situation is a suicide by cop situation. These types of calls are presented in Table 8.

TABLE 6—*Historical or situational indicators of suicide-by-cop risk.*

1. Has killed a significant person in their life (9).
2. Has killed a prized pet or destroyed valued possessions (27).
3. Has recently disposed of money/property (3,9).
4. Faces an arrest or criminal justice situation perceived as serious (27).
5. Faces a life situation perceived as embarrasing or shameful (27).
6. Has left a suicide note (23).
7. Clinical depression (27).
8. Terminal diagnosis (9).
9. Two or more traumatic losses (9).
10. Previous police contact around suicide or violence risk issues (27).

TABLE 7—*Key life events noted in suicide-by-cop cases.*

1. Poor socioeconomic background (9).
2. Criminal record that includes assaultive behavior (9).
3. Family member killed in shootout with police (27).
4. Seeking attention for an issue (27).
5. Past and/or unsuccessful treatment for clinical depression and other mental health issues involving self-destructive and violent impulses (27).
6. Previous psychiatric hospitalization for danger to self and/or others (27).
7. Identification with others who have committed suicide by cop (27).
8. Religious beliefs and rationalization that makes it wrong to commit suicide but okay if someone does it for them (27).

TABLE 8—*Police service calls associated with elevated suicide-by-cop risk.*

1. Domestic violence or domestic disturbance calls (18).
2. Armed robbery (2).
3. Person with a gun (2).
4. General disturbance (2).
5. Mentally disturbed citizen (27).
6. Suicidal citizen (27).
7. Barricaded suspect, hostage, or "jumper" situations (27).
8. "Three strikes" criminal facing apprehension (18).
9. Police pursuit of wanted criminal (17).
10. Shots fired (27).

Conclusions

Suicide by cop is an important contemporary criminal justice issue. Research indicates that it is apparent in many violent confrontations between citizens and police. There are multiple motivations for those who attempt or complete suicide by cop, and degrees of intent and lethality include "cry for help" or attention, suicide only, and homicide-suicide. Research and the authors' experience indicate that it is a frequently considered alternative among suspects encountered by law enforcement.

We have identified the verbal and behavioral clues, recent history and circumstances, key life events, and type of police service calls indicative of suicide by cop situations. However, there are currently no correlational, comparative, or predictive studies available to assist in determining the degree and intent that suicide by cop may be a factor in any given situation. Similarly, these indicators are not meant to be counted to arrive at a quantitative index of risk or a probability statement; rather, degree and intent must be defined by behavior and individual circumstances. One variable in a particular case may be more significant and therefore weighed more heavily than another. At present, these variables have not been subjected to any tests of validity or reliability, but do appear to have strong face validity.

Research efforts in the future should examine the relative significance of these indicators, and determine the weighting of factors which are comparably more relevant to identify suicide-by-cop situations. Law enforcement organizations need to continue and expand their documentation related to this phenomenon. Prevention and intervention models are dependent upon such data collection, so that additional approaches to safely resolve these destructive situations may be further developed, implemented, and assessed for efficacy.

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