



AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF SUICIDOLOGY
SUICIDE BY COP FACT SHEET

Suicide by Cop defined

Suicide-by-cop (SbC): A colloquial term used to describe a suicidal incident whereby the suicidal subject engages in a consciously, life-threatening behavior to the degree that it compels a police officer to respond with deadly force¹.

Some facts:

Often occurs because the individual has the intent to die, but does not want to kill him/herself.

There are two victims of SbC: the suicidal subject, and the firing officer. Officers involved in SbC often suffer from emotional difficulties, and sometimes Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), following the incident².

When facing an armed individual, officers often do not know if the individual's firearm is loaded or not, and must defend themselves in case it is³.

In order to determine whether a death is the result of SbC, certain criteria must be met⁴:

- The suicidal subject must demonstrate intent to die
- The suicidal subject must have a clear understanding of the finality of the act
- The suicidal subject must confront a law enforcement official to the degree that it compels that officer to act with deadly force
- The suicidal subject actually dies (otherwise it is an attempted suicide by cop)

Factors found to influence subject's intent to die of SbC include⁵:

- Disruption of a relationship
- Critical family issues
- Suicide ideation

¹ Stincelli, R. retrieved from: www.suicidebycop.com

² Caruso, K. 'Suicide by Cop' retrieved from: <http://www.suicide.org/suicide-by-cop.html>

³ Caruso, K. 'Suicide by Cop' retrieved from: <http://www.suicide.org/suicide-by-cop.html>

⁴ Stincelli, R. retrieved from: www.suicidebycop.com

⁵ Lord, V.B. (2012). Factors influencing subjects observed level of suicide by cop intent. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 39(12), 1633-1646.

- History of mental illness
- Substance abuse
- Past suicide attempts
- Involvement in a domestic dispute
- Refusal to surrender to law enforcement
- Acute crisis

Typology^{6 7}:

Direct Confrontation - 16%

The individual pre-plans an attack on police, or other law enforcement, in order to be killed by them. Subtypes:

- *Kamikaze attack* – subject attacks police station or group of officers using deadly force
- *Controlled attack* – subject confronts police with a real or threatened weapon
- *Manipulated confrontation* – subject orchestrates a situation to initiate police investigation
- *Dangerous confrontation* – subject creates a situation (such as committing a serious crime) to attract police

Disturbed Intervention – 20%

The subject acts in an irrational, emotionally disturbed manner that calls for police intervention, but there is no evidence that the subject actively tried to involve police. Subtypes:

- *Suicide intervention* – the subject is attempting suicide and threatens the police to stop them from trying to prevent the attempt or because SbC appears as a good alternative
- *Disturbed domestic* – a domestic dispute leads to police intervention which is meth by a hopeless individual who chooses death over arrest– 17%
- *Disturbed person* – an individual under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or who is mentally ill or is otherwise disturbed resists police intervention indicating a preference for death over submission. This person is not necessarily suicidal prior to incident.

Criminal Intervention

⁶ Homant, R.J. & Kennedy, D.B. (2000). Suicide by police: A proposed typology of law enforcement officer assisted suicide. *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies and Management*, 23(3), 339-355.

⁷ Mohandie, K., Meloy, J.R. & Collins, P.I. (2009). Suicide by cop among officer involved shooting cases. *Journal of Forensic Science*, 54(2), 456-462.

The subject commits a crime. When he/she realizes there is no way out, the subject decides to be killed rather than arrested. Subtypes:

- *Major crime* – the individual resists capture by police following the commission of a major crime – 35%
- *Minor crime* – the individual appears to resent police and resists their intervention following the commission of a minor crime (e.g. traffic violation) – 12%

Some statistics:

A study published in 2009, using data from 1998 to 2006, found that among 707 officer involved shootings, Suicide by Cop subjects⁸:

- Comprised 36% of cases (both attempted and completed suicide by cop) – 51% were killed
- 95% were male
- Mean age of 35 years
- 41% were Caucasian, 26% Hispanic and 16% African American
- 37% were single
- 29% had children – 18% of these were currently experiencing issues related to the child (such as child custody and child support issues)
- 54% were unemployed at the time of the incident
- 29% did not have housing at the time of the incident
- 62% had confirmed or probable mental health history
- 80% were armed – of these 60% possessed a firearm (86% loaded firearm, 7% unloaded, 4% inoperable) and 48% of those with a loaded firearm, fired the weapon; 26% possessed knives
- 19% feigned or simulated weapon possession – 46% did so by reaching or placing their hand in their waistband
- 87% of individuals made suicidal communications prior and/or during the incident
- 36% were under the influence of alcohol
- Of the 5% Suicide by Cop females⁹:
 - Mean age of 40 years
 - 50% Caucasian, 25% Hispanic
 - 42% single

⁸ Mohandie, K., Meloy, J.R. & Collins, P.I. (2009). Suicide by cop among officer involved shooting cases. *Journal of Forensic Science*, 54(2), 456-462.

⁹ Mohandie, K. & Meloy, J.R. (2011). Suicide by cop among female subjects in officer involved shooting cases. *Journal of Forensic Science*, 56(3), 664-668.

- 50% had children
- 100% armed with weapons
- 50% had a firearm (33% loaded) and 50% had a knife
- 100% had confirmed or probable mental health history – 67% suffered from depression or other mood disorders

Further information for research

Buhrmaster, S. (2009). Investigating suicide by cop incidents: what to remember and what to get. Found at: <http://www.policeone.com/investigations/articles/1802061-Investigating-Suicide-by-Cop-incidents-What-to-remember-what-to-get/>

Buhrmaster, S. (2006). Suicide by cop: 15 warning signs that you might be involved. Found at: <http://www.policeone.com/police-products/training/articles/84176-Suicide-By-Cop-15-warning-signs-that-you-might-be-involved/>

Lord, V. B. (2004). *Suicide By Cop: Inducing Officers to Shoot - Practical Direction for Recognition, Resolution and Recovery*. Looseleaf law Publications, Inc.

Vioanti, J. M. & Drylie, J. J. (2008). *Copicide: Concepts, cases and controversies of suicide by cop*. Springfield, IL: Thomas Books.

American Association of Suicidology

AAS is a membership organization for all those involved in suicide prevention and intervention, or touched by suicide. AAS is a leader in the advancement of scientific and programmatic efforts in suicide prevention through research, education and training, the development of standards and resources, and survivor support services. For membership information, please contact:

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If you or someone you know is suicidal, please contact a mental health professional or call 1-800-273-TALK (8255).