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# Constructing a Mental Health Support System for Law Enforcement Officers: An Exploration of the 'Three Circles, Three Layers' and 'Four Dimensions, Four Wholes' Frameworks

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## Abstract

With the development of a law-based society, the psychological pressure on law enforcement personnel has increased, making the construction of an effective psychological health support system of great significance. This paper, focusing on police officers as representatives, mainly discusses the development of psychological health services for police forces in various countries and the practices and explorations in the construction of psychological health services and support systems for the Chinese police force. Based on practical work in Shanghai, China, this paper proposes the construction of a "three circles, three layers" psychological health work framework centered on police officers, with police-community cooperation and family-team connectivity. It also introduces an integrated "four dimensions, four wholes" psychological health work system and model that includes psychological selection, psychological education, psychological service, and crisis intervention, aiming to provide a reference for the construction of psychological health support systems for law enforcement personnel.

## Keywords

law enforcement mental health, psychological support systems, crisis intervention in policing, police psychological training

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Оригинальная статья

# Поддержание психологического здоровья сотрудников правоохранительных органов. Разработка программ «Три круга – три уровня», «Четыре измерения – четыре целостные структуры»

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## Аннотация

С развитием правового общества усилилось психологическое воздействие на сотрудников правоохранительных органов. В связи с этим большое значение приобретает создание эффективной системы поддержания психологического здоровья сотрудников правоохранительных органов. В данной статье, в фокусе внимания которой находятся сотрудники полиции, рассматривается развитие служб поддержания психологического здоровья сотрудников правоохранительных органов разных стран, а также практический опыт и исследования в области создания таких служб для полиции Китая. Авторы статьи, на основании результатов практической работы в Шанхае (Китай), предлагают создать программу поддержки психологического здоровья «Три круга - три уровня» (“three circles, three layers”), ориентированную на сотрудников полиции и предполагающую взаимодействие полиции и граждан, а также взаимодействие в формате «семья – коллектив». Кроме того, в работе представлена интегрированная модель по поддержанию психологического здоровья «Четыре измерения - четыре целостные структуры» (“four dimensions, four wholes”), включающая психологический отбор, психологическое образование, психологическую службу и кризисную интервенцию. Цель данной модели – дать рекомендации для разработки методик по поддержанию психологического здоровья сотрудников правоохранительных органов.

## Ключевые слова

психологическое здоровье сотрудников правоохранительных органов, модели психологической поддержки, кризисная интервенция в полиции, психологическая подготовка сотрудников полиции

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## Introduction

Law enforcement officers are subjected to a myriad of pressures stemming from their professional duties, work environment, and personal emotions. Given these challenges, the establishment of a comprehensive psychological support system is both crucial and imperative for their well-being.

**1. The increasing psychological burden on law enforcement personnel necessitates the development of an effective mental health support system – a requirement propelled by the evolving demands of social progress.**

**1.1. The Complexity of Public Security Conditions and the Increasing Difficulty of Law Enforcement Work.**

With societal advancement, the dynamics of public security and law enforcement have become increasingly intricate and unpredictable. This evolution poses significant challenges for law enforcement officers.

On the one hand, the rapid emergence of new crime forms such as cybercrime, financial fraud, and terrorism – characterized by their stealth and cross-border nature – complicates the investigative and enforcement efforts required. These crimes demand not only a robust legal framework but also a sophisticated understanding and innovative strategies from law enforcement agencies.

On the other hand, the increase in social conflicts and the heightened security demands of the public impose new requirements on the work of law enforcement officers. With rapid social development, the public's aspirations for a better life are growing, and so are their demands for safety. In addition to combating crime, law enforcement officers need to pay more attention to changes in social conflicts and the safety needs of the public, actively resolve these conflicts, and maintain social harmony and stability.

**1.2. The Evolution of a Law-Based Society and Its Implications for Law Enforcement Personnel.**

As the rule of law society gradually evolves and develops, the expectations and demands placed upon law enforcement officers by the public have become increasingly stringent and exacting. Law enforcement officers are no longer merely executors of the law; they have become guardians of justice, fairness, and transparency. Every decision they make and every action they take has a direct and profound impact on the public's faith in the rule of law and their trust in the societal framework.

On the one hand, the continual evolution and sophistication of criminal methodologies have posed significant challenges to the investigative and enforcement efforts of law enforcement personnel. In today's landscape, an array of emerging forms of crime, such as cybercrime, financial fraud, and terrorist attacks, proliferate at an alarming rate. These criminal activities often exhibit a high degree of concealment and transnational characteristics, presenting new challenges that test the capabilities of law enforcement officers in combating crime effectively.

On the other hand, the increase in societal conflicts and the escalating demands for public safety have introduced new requirements for the work of law enforcement personnel. As society progresses rapidly, the public's aspirations for a better quality of life are increasingly elevated, and correspondingly, their demands for security are also rising. Beyond their primary role of combating crime, law enforcement officers must now pay greater attention to the shifts in social conflicts and the safety needs of the community. They are tasked with actively resolving these conflicts and upholding social harmony and stability, thereby ensuring a safe and secure environment for all.

**1.3. The Dual Role of Enforcement and Service: Increasing Psychological Challenges for Law Enforcement Personnel.**

As society continues to evolve and develop, the roles and responsibilities shouldered by law enforcement agencies are also undergoing a gradual transformation. These departments are tasked not only with combating crime but also with placing a significant emphasis on serving the public and maintaining social stability. This shift in functional responsibilities undoubtedly represents

a substantial psychological challenge for law enforcement personnel. The adaptation to these expanding duties requires a multifaceted approach that balances stringent law enforcement with compassionate community service, all while ensuring the overarching goal of societal harmony and security.

Firstly, law enforcement officers, when engaging in crime-fighting activities, typically adopt a tough and stringent demeanor towards suspects involved in criminal activities. However, under the additional role of serving the public, these officers are required to adopt a more gentle and patient approach in their interactions with the community. They must engage in meaningful communication with the public to understand their needs and concerns and assist them in resolving their issues. This transition in attitude necessitates significant psychological effort from law enforcement personnel. It demands that they continuously adjust their mindset and manage their emotions to effectively bridge the gap between being stern law enforcers and compassionate public servants. This dual role challenges them to balance authoritativeness with empathy, ensuring they fulfill their duties while fostering trust and cooperation within the community.

Furthermore, when executing their crime-fighting duties, law enforcement officers typically operate in a solitary and closed manner. They are required to make swift decisions and take immediate actions within a limited timeframe to uphold societal safety and stability. However, under the role of serving the public, these officers need to place a greater emphasis on interaction and collaboration with the community. They must adopt a more open and inclusive approach to accepting the opinions and suggestions of the public. This shift towards cooperative and interactive engagement demands law enforcement personnel to possess a higher level of psychological resilience and coping capabilities. It challenges them to balance the urgency of law enforcement with the thoughtful consideration of community input, fostering a more integrated and trustful relationship between the public and the police.

Finally, when executing their crime-fighting functions, law enforcement officers typically rely on their professional knowledge and experience to make decisions and judgments. However, in their role of serving the public, these officers must focus more on communication and interaction with the community. They need to understand the cognitive differences and specific needs of various groups in order to gain their understanding and support. This requires law enforcement personnel to not only possess the ability to adjust their own psychological state but also to have the capacity to employ psychological knowledge in their work and in their communications with the public. This dual necessity underscores the importance of empathy, active listening, and the ability to adapt communication strategies to diverse audiences, all of which are essential for building trust and fostering cooperative relationships between law enforcement and the community they serve.

To sum up, the development of modern society demands that law enforcement officers continually adjust their attitudes and emotions, enhance their psychological resilience and coping capabilities, in order to better adapt to new requirements and provide higher quality services to the public. Law enforcement agencies need to establish effective psychological support systems to help officers better handle these psychological challenges. Such support systems are crucial for enabling them to perform their duties more effectively and maintain the stability and safety of society. This comprehensive approach not only aids in the personal well-being of the officers but also reinforces their capacity to act as both enforcers of the law and compassionate community servants, thus fostering a more harmonious and secure environment for all citizens.

## **2. The Practice and Development of Mental Health Support Systems for Police and Law Enforcement Personnel.**

### **2.1. Global Developments in Police Mental Health Services.**

As society progresses and the pressures of police work intensify, the issue of mental health within the police force has increasingly come to the forefront, becoming a significant factor that influences

both the efficiency of police work and the stability of the force. Consequently, countries around the world have been taking measures to enhance the mental health services and support systems for police officers. These initiatives are aimed at addressing the psychological needs of law enforcement personnel, recognizing that their well-being is crucial not only for their personal health but also for the effective functioning and operational success of the police services. This global trend underscores the importance of integrating psychological care into the framework of law enforcement to ensure that officers are supported in managing the unique challenges and stresses of their roles.

In the United States, police mental health services have received widespread attention and support. Police departments have established specialized psychological counseling institutions that provide officers with psychological assessments, counseling, and therapy services. In addition, U.S. police departments also emphasize training and awareness campaigns regarding mental health, aiming to enhance officers' understanding of mental health issues and their ability to cope with them. These measures have effectively alleviated the work-related stress experienced by police officers and have improved their psychological well-being.

In Europe, several countries are also actively promoting the development of mental health services for police officers. For instance, in the United Kingdom, police departments have established mental health support groups that provide psychological support and counseling services to officers. These groups serve as a crucial resource, offering interventions and ongoing support tailored to the unique stresses faced by law enforcement personnel. In Germany, police departments place a strong emphasis on the training and prevention of mental health issues among officers. This is achieved through organizing mental health seminars and providing psychological assessments. Such initiatives help officers to promptly identify and address psychological issues, fostering a proactive approach to mental health that prioritizes early intervention and ongoing mental wellness.

In Asia, the awareness and development of police mental health services are also on the rise. The Japanese police department, for example, has established mental health guidance centers that provide psychological assessments, counseling, and treatment services. There is also a significant push towards improving mental health awareness among officers through education and publicity.

In conclusion, the global trend towards enhancing mental health services within national police forces is a positive and necessary development. By strengthening these services, we can improve the mental well-being of police officers, reduce work-related stress, enhance operational efficiency, and contribute more effectively to social harmony and stability.

## **2.2. Practice and Exploration of Mental Health Services for Chinese Police Officers.**

As Chinese society rapidly develops and the public security environment continues to evolve, the work-related stress and psychological burdens borne by police officers are progressively increasing. In order to provide better care and support for the mental health of these officers, Chinese law enforcement agencies and relevant departments are actively involved in the practical implementation and exploration of mental health services. They are diligently working to establish a mental health service system for police officers that is well-suited to the specific conditions and circumstances of China.

One crucial approach is the establishment and refinement of a mental health service mechanism. The Chinese police force places a high priority on the mental health of its officers, strengthening the standardization and guidance of mental health services at the institutional level. In 2003, the Ministry of Public Security of China incorporated police mental health work as an essential part of the regularization and development of its forces in official documents. This led to the creation of the National Public Security Officers' Mental Health Service Center, and the establishment of a master's program focusing on police psychology at the People's Public Security University of China. Subsequently, provincial-level public security organs across the nation established their own local



mental health service centers, staffed with professional psychological counselors and personnel. These centers organize psychological assessments, conduct psychological education, and provide counseling services. Additionally, comprehensive mental health records are maintained, regular mental health screenings are conducted, and prompt identification and resolution of police officers' psychological issues are ensured. These measures aim to support the mental well-being of officers, facilitating their ability to cope with the demands of their roles effectively.

The second approach involves enhancing mental health training and awareness campaigns. To improve police officers' awareness of mental health care and their self-regulation abilities, Chinese law enforcement actively conducts mental health training and promotional activities. By offering psychological courses, organizing specialized lectures, and conducting psychological training exercises, these initiatives help police officers gain knowledge about mental health and acquire skills for psychological adjustment. Additionally, awareness of mental health is further promoted through the creation of informational bulletin boards, distribution of educational materials, and the execution of online campaigns. These efforts aim to disseminate knowledge about mental health more broadly and increase police officers' awareness and appreciation of their own mental health issues, thereby fostering a more supportive environment for their psychological well-being.

The third approach is the exploration of new models for mental health services. In order to better meet the psychological health needs of police officers, Chinese law enforcement continuously explores new models of mental health services. For example, the establishment of a psychological crisis intervention mechanism allows for timely and professional intervention and treatment for officers experiencing significant psychological crises. Furthermore, the expansion of channels and methods for mental health services promotes the integration of these services with societal resources, providing professional mental health services to address the psychological issues of police officers. Additionally, the development of remote psychological counseling services, including internet-based online counseling and telephone consultations, offers convenient and efficient psychological support to officers. These innovative approaches are designed to enhance accessibility and effectiveness of mental health care for police officers, ensuring they receive the necessary support in a timely and flexible manner.

### **3. Exploration of Psychological Services Practices in Shanghai Public Security Organs: Building a Mental Health Support System with "Three Circles, Three Layers" and "Four Dimensions, Four Wholes".**

Over the past 20 years, China has made significant progress in the field of police mental health services, achieving nationwide coverage of psychological services for law enforcement officers. However, there are still several challenges and issues that need to be addressed. These include how public security organs can integrate various resources to provide more timely and effective mental health services to police officers, how to seamlessly integrate different aspects of mental health services, and how to shift the focus from reacting to psychological issues to preventing them.

In 2006, the Shanghai Police, leveraging the resources of the Shanghai Police College, established the Shanghai Police Mental Health Service Center (also known as the Shanghai Experimental Center for National Public Security Officers' Psychological Training and the Psychological Service Center of the General Education Department at Shanghai Police College). This initiative has gradually explored and established a comprehensive psychological support system. This system includes a "three circles, three layers" model that fosters collaboration between the police force, the community, and families, as well as a "four-dimensional, four fulls" model that encompasses psychological selection, education, services, and crisis intervention. This integrated approach aims to provide a multi-layered and thorough support network for the psychological well-being of police officers, enhancing their ability to effectively handle the stresses associated with their duties.

### **3.1. Establishing a "Three Circles, Three Layers" Psychological Health Framework Centered on Individual Police Officers, Emphasizing Police-Community Collaboration and Family-Team Connectivity.**

In this framework, the police officer stands at the core, around which the support for their psychological health is structured into three concentric circles of objectives and three operational layers.

#### **3.1.1. The Police Psychological Health Support System is Structured into Three Concentric Circles Centered Around the Objectives.**

The police psychological health service forms the first and core layer of the police psychological health support system. Given the considerable work-related stress and the complexity of their working environments, the services provided within this innermost circle are primarily focused on addressing the psychological health of police officers. This is achieved through a structured approach that includes regular psychological evaluations, counseling sessions, and psychological training programs – all designed to assist police officers in maintaining a robust and healthy mental state amidst the rigors of their duties.

The construction of a social support system constitutes the second circle of the police psychological health support system. The psychological well-being of police officers is not only linked to their personal circumstances but also deeply intertwined with their family and social interactions. The services offered in this middle circle mainly concentrate on the familial and social relationships of the officers. By establishing linkage mechanisms between the families and the police organization, and by providing family counseling and social skills training, these efforts aim to foster harmonious family and social environments for the officers. This, in turn, significantly contributes to the preservation and enhancement of their mental health.

The third circle pertains to the societal environment in which police officers operate. This societal context significantly influences the psychological health of police officers, affected by factors such as public expectations and media coverage. Services in this outer circle primarily focus on how the societal environment impacts the psychological health of police officers. By developing public relations for the police and strengthening communication and cooperation between the police force and various sectors of society, these initiatives aim to enhance public understanding and support for police officers. Ultimately, these efforts are instrumental in maintaining and promoting the psychological well-being of police officers by fostering a supportive societal atmosphere.

#### **3.1.2. The Police Psychological Health Support System is Structured Around Functions into Strategic, Professional, and Foundational Layers.**

The Shanghai Police have established a three-tier psychological health service system at three levels, specifically at the Shanghai Municipal Public Security Bureau, the various district public security bureaus throughout Shanghai, and the grassroots units and teams.

The strategic layer primarily denotes the establishment of the Shanghai Police Officer Psychological Health Service Center, which is orchestrated at the level of the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Public Security. This center is strategically positioned within the Shanghai Police College and operates by formulating comprehensive psychological health strategies, establishing a robust psychological health services system, developing educational programs in psychology, and providing guidance to various affiliated centers on their operational endeavors. These measures collectively ensure a thorough provision of psychological health support for the police officers in Shanghai. Presently, the center employs ten full-time psychology instructors and staff members, each of whom possesses either a specialized academic background in psychology or a certification as a National Second-Level Psychological Counselor, thereby underscoring their profound qualifications essential for addressing the intricate psychological needs of the police personnel.

The professional layer primarily involves the establishment of psychological health service sub-centers within various district public security bureaus. These sub-centers aim to integrate societal resources to provide more in-depth psychological consultations and therapy services, specifically tailored to address serious psychological issues that police officers might encounter, offering professional solutions. Typically, each psychological health service sub-center is staffed by one full-time mental health professional who is required to possess qualifications as a psychological counselor. Additionally, the district public security bureaus adopt flexible approaches, such as Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) and other methodologies, collaborating with professional psychological institutions and universities to provide specialized psychological services to police officers. This collaborative effort ensures that the psychological support is both comprehensive and accessible, tailored to meet the specific needs of the officers within their respective jurisdictions.

The foundational layer is established at the grassroots units and teams, where its primary functions are to identify psychological issues, provide psychological assessments, and offer basic counseling services. This layer plays a crucial role in assisting police officers in understanding their own psychological health status and, under the guidance of the professional layer, resolving common psychological problems. The main workforce in this layer consists of internal police staff who, after undergoing training and obtaining certain qualifications as psychological counselors, carry out these responsibilities on a part-time basis. This arrangement ensures that psychological support is deeply embedded within the daily operations of the police force, facilitating immediate and accessible care for officers in need of psychological assistance.

In summary, the "Three Circles, Three Layers" psychological health service framework centered on police officers not only focuses on the officers' own mental well-being but also takes into consideration the impact of their familial and social environments, as well as the broader societal context. This framework provides comprehensive and multi-level support for the psychological health of police officers. Such a structure not only helps in enhancing the mental health levels of the police but also contributes to improving their work efficiency and quality of life. Consequently, this enables them to serve the public more effectively.

**3.2. With the aim of delivering comprehensive mental health support, the "four dimensions and four wholes" system has been developed, encompassing psychological selection, psychological education, psychological service, and crisis intervention.**

The integrated and comprehensive psychological health work system, which encompasses psychological selection, psychological education, psychological services, and crisis intervention, is designed with the purpose of enhancing the mental resilience and coping capabilities of law enforcement personnel through the synergistic effects of these four dimensions. This system aims to thoroughly elevate the psychological readiness of the officers, enabling them to better adapt to the complex and ever-changing social environments and work scenarios they encounter.

#### **3.2.1. "Whole coverage" psychological selection.**

As the starting point of the entire police recruitment process, its importance is self-evident. Since 2007, the Ministry of Public Security of China has established a unified police recruitment psychological test, achieving "whole coverage" of psychological selection for police officers. This initiative has undoubtedly enhanced the overall psychological quality and combat effectiveness of the police force. Through scientific and standardized psychological tests, we are able to filter and identify law enforcement personnel who possess healthy psychological conditions, laying a solid foundation for subsequent training and real-world operations. Additionally, the psychological conditions of law enforcement personnel in special positions are regularly assessed and screened. For instance, the Shanghai police have in recent years routinely conducted psychological evaluations for armed officers, providing necessary psychological support and also serving as a reference for the management of the police force.



### 3.2.2. "Whole career" psychological education.

Psychological education is a crucial element in enhancing the psychological quality and the efficacy of psychological health support for law enforcement personnel. To meet the varied needs of different police types and positions at different stages of their careers, a comprehensive matrix of police psychological education courses has been established. These courses are designed to help police officers develop correct psychological concepts, enhance self-awareness and emotional management skills, improve their ability to handle psychological stress in law enforcement scenarios, and increase their capacity to deal with setbacks and stress throughout their careers. The content of these courses primarily includes self-awareness, stress training, interpersonal communication training, and psychological adjustment skills training. From the perspective of career development, the curriculum is divided into two main stages: pre-employment and post-employment. Pre-employment focuses on preparing for the psychological aspects of the profession, with courses such as "Psychological Health and Career Planning for Students in Police Colleges" and "Psychological Preparation for Police Careers." Post-employment education focuses on work adaptation and professional development, including courses like "Young Police Officers' Psychological Stress Adjustment," "Stress Management for Leadership," and "Training for Grassroots Psychological Health Workers." These courses emphasize practical application, serving both the development of police careers and the needs of frontline law enforcement work. In addition to systematic classroom teaching, these educational contents are also delivered through flexible formats such as special lectures, on-site physical and mental relaxation training, online micro-courses, and new media outreach.

### 3.2.3. "Whole day" psychological services.

Traditional psychological services often face constraints related to time, location, and resources. However, for law enforcement personnel, our goal is to offer around-the-clock support, enabling officers to access more humane, personalized, and timely professional help and services whenever and wherever needed. On one hand, we have established a comprehensive service channel that includes face-to-face counseling, online consultations, telephone consultations, and AI-driven interactive consultations. There is a complete system for appointment scheduling, assessments, and referrals. Additionally, an online consultation platform and a 24-hour telephone hotline have been launched to ensure that police officers can proactively access services at any time of the day. On the other hand, the psychological health service center sets up periodic psychological assessments and proactively intervenes based on the results of these assessments. This allows for the provision of individual psychological services or group psychological training tailored to the needs of the police.

### 3.2.4. "Whole process" crisis intervention.

When law enforcement officers face severe psychological crises, timely crisis intervention can effectively prevent the further deterioration of psychological issues and protect the mental health of the officers. The efficacy of crisis intervention is influenced by several factors: the level of trust between the work team and the law enforcement officer, the accurate expression of the officer's crisis situation, the emotional support perceived by the officer in crisis, strategies that align with the true state of law enforcement, and regular follow-ups and assessments. On one hand, we have devised a crisis intervention work plan that, relying on the three-tier psychological health framework, moves the psychological warning system forward. This enables the early identification of potential psychological crises and the rapid activation of intervention mechanisms. Furthermore, the conclusion of crisis intervention does not signify the cessation of support for the law enforcement officer. Rather, it should be seen as a continuous process that transitions from managing the acute phase of the psychological crisis to entering the realm of psychological services, with regular follow-ups and assessments to ensure the officer's mental health continues to receive ongoing attention and care. Through this approach, crisis intervention not only addresses the immediate crisis but also promotes the long-term psychological

health development of the law enforcement officers. On the other hand, we place significant emphasis on psychological support for critical tasks, actively preventing and managing psychological crises at the frontline. For instance, during the annual China International Import Expo psychological health workers went to the frontline to provide police officers with psychological counseling and relaxation training, enhancing their psychological resilience.

### Conclusion

In future endeavors, we attempt to promote and apply this model, providing comprehensive and professional psychological health support to a broader range of law enforcement personnel.

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