

The Chirone project in the Italian State Police: application of the EMDR group protocol in the prevention of job related stress with road and rail Police operators

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The Chirone project started in 2015 in the Italian State Police, with the support of the Sapienza University of Rome, ANIA Foundation and the Lorenzo Guarnieri Association. It targets road and rail policemen, and aims to train them for the interaction with victims of serious road and rail accidents, while carrying out their institutional tasks of death notification, body recognition and restitution of personal belongings.

These are activities that might entail an emotional overload, that can, by time, affect wellbeing.

The investigation on accidents with fatal results, moreover, exposes policemen to traumatic scenarios, to which even a long experience can't completely form habit (i.e. corpses of babies, grotesquely dappled bodies).

The Chirone project foresees specific trainings aimed at improving victims support and initiatives targeted at preventing the impact on wellbeing caused by facing very emotional demanding job events.

To this purpose, it has been designed a model that takes the cue from the Post Critical Event Seminar for Law Enforcement, born in the FBI and conducted in the United States by Roger M. Solomon. The model designed combines several techniques in a single half a day group work, divided into different phases. The first phase, the story telling, is similar to that of the first part of debriefing. The second phase is the EMDR group protocol. The third phase entails psycho-educational issues, and stimulate a group shared positive cognition.

In designing this model it was intended to strengthen, combining, the positive effects of the group event telling, the EMDR, the education and the positive redefinition. Historically, police operators are accustomed to suppressing emotions, as a result of the stigma reserved for those who show emotional reactions. So, avoidance has become the preferred strategy for managing high-impact events. In the long run operators can collect chains of unprocessed events that affect the sense of security, causing a chronic activation condition.

This model of intervention is aimed primarily at counteracting the avoidance, offering alternative paths of elaboration, and the rooting of positive convictions enhanced by the thrust of the group. The experiences so far made on serious road and rail accidents involved groups of 25/35 people. Sometimes groups were homogeneous because of their participation in the event. Other times the homogeneity was by common activities carried out, asking them to work on the worst accident investigation lived. In this second case it was possible to each policemen to work on what they considered the worst accident they had ever investigated on. During the first spontaneous narration the majority of COPs usually refers to their own thoughts, 20% also brings back emotions and bodily sensations, 10% report a post-traumatic growth and positive thoughts. 30% communicates to be accustomed to accidents, while 20% makes connections with previous traumatic events. In the end, 3% remembers details and feelings that did not remember before. Following the elaboration through the group EMDR protocol, the majority report a lowering SUD. In the education phase usually participation is very active and feedback for improvement of the emotional state are widespread for the largest number of policemen, even for the small percentage of subjects who reported an increased level of SUD after EMDR. Follow up on long term results are ongoing.