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Caitlin Kelly, Matthew Podlogar, Christopher Strunk and Thomas Joiner





THE DISTINCT SYMPTOMS OF SUICIDE BY COP

Caitlin Kelly, Matthew Podlogar, M.S., Christopher Strunk, M.S., and Thomas Joiner, Ph.D.
Department of Psychology



INTRODUCTION

- Researchers have defined Suicide by Cop (SbC) victims as individuals who deliberately threaten bystanders or explicitly state their intentions to die by necessitating deadly force from police officers (Lord 2010).
- Findings support that police are frequently involved due to lethal behavior on behalf of the subject—often, possession of a deadly weapon and endangerment of witnesses (Neitzel and Gill 2011).
- Prior research supports the following recurring themes: SbC is often initiated with a criminal act or violence toward other individuals (Lord 2010). Compared to subjects who chose alternative modes of suicide, SbC victims tend to be unique regarding their choice of weapon and threatening behavior toward law-enforcement (Lord 2010).
- Our study aims to expand on these distinctive factors and uncover a pattern of characteristics present in SbC victims. We intend to isolate the unique set of symptoms in this phenomenon as opposed to alternative methods of suicide.

METHODOLOGY

- The original data set (n = 1,110) was downloaded from fatalencounters.org on August 24, 2014. The records of deceased individuals were taken from a public database; thus, the Florida State University IRB waived the need for review.
- Subject lines in the database were included in analyses if they contained the contributor-provided flag of "mental illness" (n = 203), or any mention of the phrase, "suicide" or "suicidal" in the entry description or source reference (n = 96).
- Primary source documents/reports of all selected cases (n = 244) were reviewed and coded by CS. Cases were reduced to include only police/government reports (n = 76), and a standardized coding scheme for common themes such as "Subject Occupation" and "Life Stressors" was defined.
- CK used QSR NVivo v.11 to conduct two iterations of report analysis and thematic coding refinement according to principles within grounded theory.

RESULTS

Table 1
Frequencies and percentages of recurring symptoms in SbC cases

Distinctive Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (N = 76)
Gender		
Male	69	90%
Female	7	10%
Gender Unknown	0	0%
Race		
Caucasian	28	36%
African American	6	7%
Hispanic	6	7%
Asian	4	5%
Race Unknown	32	42%
Age		
Juvenile/Teenager	3	4%
20—29 Years	14	18%
30—39 Years	25	32%
40—49 Years	13	17%
50+ Years	4	5%
Age Unknown	17	22%
Occupation		
Unemployed	19	25%
Police/military	10	13%
Manual Labor	6	7%
Business/customer service	7	10%
Occupational Status Unknown	44	57%
Physical Health Problem History		
Chronic Pain/illness	8	11%
No Physical Health Record	68	89%
Mental Health Problem History		
Mood Disorders	23	30%
Psychotic Disorders	22	28%
Childhood History of Mental Disorders	15	19%
No Mental Health Record	16	21%
Geographic Location		
Nevada	51	67%

Oregon	4	5%
Idaho	5	6%
Maine	11	14%
California	3	3%
Other	2	2%
Geographic Location Unknown	0	0%
Physical Location		
Subject's Residence	37	48%
Relative/Friend's Residence	9	11%
Vehicle	6	7%
Parking Lot	8	10%
Road	7	9%
Other Location	9	11%
Physical Location Unknown	0	0%
Subject Intentions		
Suicide Note	8	11%
Verbalized SbC Intent	47	62%
Verbalized Intent to Harm	39	51%
Others		
Aggressive Quotes	25	33%
Hopeless Quotes	10	13%
Expressed Inability to Self-Harm	24	32%
Intentions Unknown	21	27%
Weapon Used		
Firearm	46	60%
Knife	18	23%
Random Weapon	10	13%
No Weapon/Unknown	2	2%

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Triggering Event

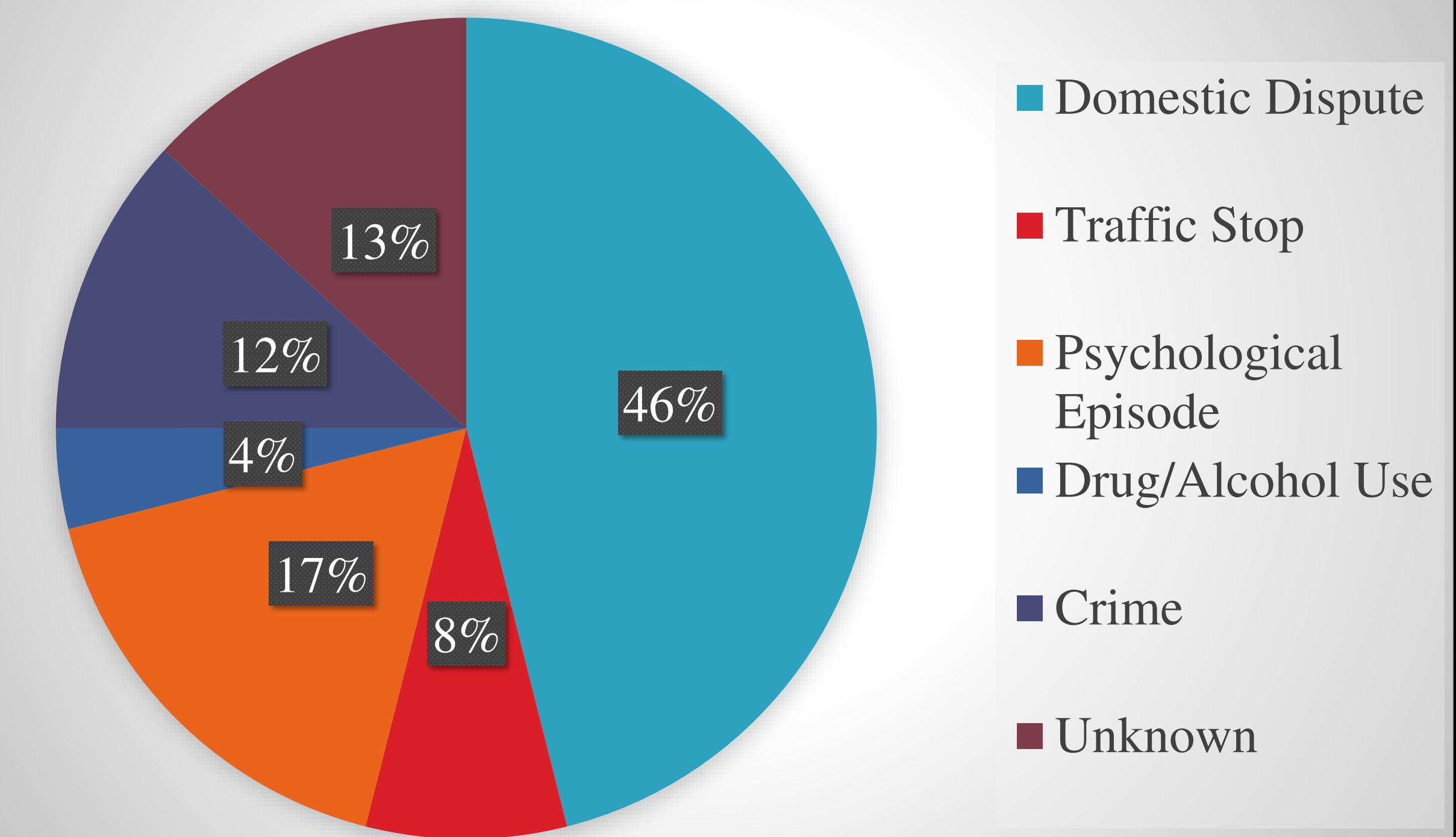


Figure 1. Frequency of SbC cases with each type of triggering event.

DISCUSSION

- Results suggest that SbC subjects tend to verbalize their intentions to die by suicide via law enforcement (62%). This is consistent with Vivian Lord's definition of SbC (2000).
- The high percentage of Caucasian males in their thirties is concordant with prior demographic findings (Lord 2000).
- Analyses support prior findings of dangerous behavior used to provoke deadly force from law enforcement (Neitzel and Gill 2011). Subjects tend to display overtly threatening behavior toward others involved in the event (97%); 51% provided quotes such as, "I am going to die tonight and I will take you with me."
- 33% of subjects provided aggressive statements (e.g. "You better [expletive] shoot me or I am going to stab you") as opposed to 13% of hopeless quotes (e.g. "I give up"). This could suggest that SbC subjects cannot carry out self-inflicted suicide—a concept admitted by 32% of subjects. In this context, aggression toward bystanders may be closer to suicidal behavior than homicidal behavior.
- Prior research suggests schizophrenia and bipolar disorder tend to be the most common mental disorders among SbC cases (Lord 2000). Our results suggest mood disorders, including depression, anxiety, and bipolar disorder, tend to be slightly more common (30%).
- Previous research found crime to be a common triggering event (Neitzel and Gill 2011). Our results indicate domestic fights between spouses or relatives tend to be more common (46%).
- Limitations in this study include unknown data in reports due to redaction and a high percentage (67%) of cases from Nevada that may not be representative of the population. Future research could include a larger sample size in order to increase generalizability and availability of commonly redacted information.

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