



Center for Healthy Minds Teams Up with Madison Police Department to Foster Officer Well-Being

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The Center for Healthy Minds and the Madison Police Department (MPD) are launching a pilot study to better understand the impact of mindfulness-based practices on police officers' physical and mental well-being.

The collaboration, which has been almost a year in the making, will begin in the fall and will focus on whether mindfulness-based practices can help improve officers' abilities to manage the daily and occupational stressors from their jobs. The program will also examine officers' ability to strengthen their attention – an indicator suspected to influence emotion regulation.

“Within their first year on the job, nine out of 10 police officers experience an acute traumatic event, and that number grows to nearly 97 percent by their third year,” says [Dan Grupe](#), an assistant scientist at CHM who is leading the study. “In addition to navigating these stressful, on-the-job situations, officers also experience chronic stressors at the organizational level.”

Through the research, he and other scientists want to learn whether well-being practices such as mindfulness meditation can buffer officers against daily stress – in addition to acute, traumatic stressors – that contribute to physical and mental health challenges in the profession.

Police officers are at elevated risk for depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), sleep disruptions, cardiovascular disease and alcohol abuse, other studies show.

“We need to take care of ourselves to take care of others – it happens from an individual officer level all the way through the organization and into community.”

Kristen Roman

“We know from previous research that certain mindfulness practices have resulted in positive physical and mental health outcomes,” says [Richard Davidson](#), William James & Vilas Professor of Psychology and Psychiatry at UW–Madison and CHM Founder. “I believe we have a moral obligation to expand this work in key areas where people could benefit the most from these practices, including professions that are more at risk.”

For leaders at the Madison Police Department, who routinely collaborate with UW–Madison to develop new approaches to improve training, the study is another step in an ongoing effort to consider police officers’ health more holistically and to proactively explore ways to continue to support officer health and wellness.

“We have to be our best selves,” says Kristen Roman, Captain of Community Outreach at MPD, who is leading the pilot study on behalf of the department. “We need to take care of ourselves to take care of others – it happens from an individual officer level all the way through the organization and into community.”

MPD has experimented informally with brief mindfulness trainings in the past few years, most recently with the Center; however, these sessions did not draw on scientific approaches until now.

The partnership has grown at a critical time, amid recent events and national conversations about policing practices and tensions with the communities they serve. Such reflection and public dialogue is critically important, Roman says.

“As police officers, we’re vulnerable. We’re human. We need to take steps toward accepting and working within that, while providing officers the best means available to maintain equilibrium and peace in the face of stress and

unrest.”

The pilot study is made possible by an award from the UW Institute for Clinical and Translational Research.

– *Marianne Spoon*

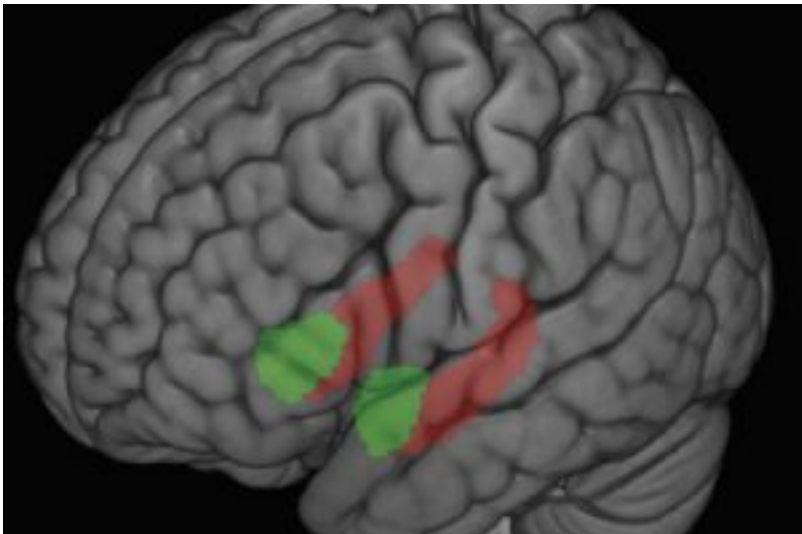
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