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# The Perceived Benefits of Counseling Provided to First Responders through the Officer Craig Tiger Act

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## Introduction

The type of emergency situations first responders respond to can cause high levels of stress and trauma which can lead to a decline in behavioral, mental and physical health. In 2018, Arizona passed the Officer Craig Tiger Act, requiring State departments and agencies to provide sworn firefighters and police officers with 36 licensed counseling visits following a traumatic event. As this statute is scheduled to sunset January 2023, the benefits of the counseling need to be determined. This project looks at the perceived benefits of this legislation through the perspective of the first responders.

## Methods

This is a cross-sectional study using an online self-reported survey. Participants included 65 firefighters and police officers in Arizona who have utilized counseling services through the Officer Craig Tiger Act. The survey consisted of a questionnaire to gather demographic, customer satisfaction, and a qualitative comment section. Three standardized assessments were included, the Quality of Life Scale (QOLS), the PTSD Checklist for DSM-5 (PCL-5), and the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). The study procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board of A. T. Still University.

## Acknowledgments

Jyothi Gupta, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA  
Kerry Ramella, Ph.D., LPC

Characteristic	Participants n=65 (%)
<b>Sex</b>	
Male	56 (86.2)
Female	9 (13.8)
<b>Job</b>	
Firefighter	58 (89.2)
Police Officer	9 (13.8)
<b>Years as First Responder</b>	
0-10 years	17 (26.2)
11-19 years	30 (46.1)
20+ years	18 (27.7)
<b>Actively in Counseling</b>	
Yes	54 (83.1)
No	11 (16.9)
<b>Number of Counseling Sessions attended</b>	
0-5.5 sessions	18 (27.7%)
6-11.5 sessions	20 (30.8%)
12-36 sessions	27 (41.5%)

### Increased access to counseling services

- Many comments used the word "easy" to describe the process of finding a counselor.
- Participants also shared how they would have never sought out counseling if it wasn't for the Officer Craig Tiger Act.
- "I never would have asked for help in the past and i now know i needed it".

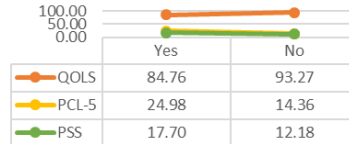
### Increased ability to cope

- "...learning how to cope with many things and feel emotions and recognize physical feelings in my body".
- "Having lessened the anxiety".
- "Total change in innate feeling of sadness and burnout".
- "EMDR changed my life".

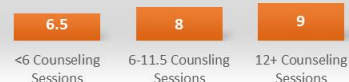
### Limitations of the Officer Craig Tiger Act

- Some reported being unable to use the full 36 sessions unless they used a psychiatrist or psychologist.
- Concerns about anonymity while using counseling.

## Comparison of Mean Scores on Assessments by Actively Using Counseling Benefits



## Mean Number of Selected Items Counseling Assisted With by Number of Counseling Sessions



## Conclusion

This study demonstrates the benefits of the Officer Craig Tiger Act through the perspective of the first responder. Participants reported high counselor satisfaction and that counseling was helpful. Only one participant who reported taking time off or having an alternative work assignment found it to be unbeneficial. Stress and anxiety management were the top things counseling assisted with. The most frequently selected coping skill used was exercise. Participants reported their quality of life to be better than before they received counseling. First responders who indicated they were not currently receiving counseling scored higher on the QOLS and lower on the PCL-5 and the PSS. These results demonstrate that counseling is effective at reducing PTSD symptoms and stress and is effective at increasing quality of life. The three qualitative themes identified were, increased access to counseling services, increased ability to cope, and limitation of the Officer Craig Tiger Act.

## Implications for OT Practice

Occupational Therapists need to understand the culture of first responders before working with this population. First responders greatly rely on exercise as a coping skill. In the event of an injury, OTs can assist first responders with adapting an exercise routine or teach alternative coping skills. Additionally, OT can be used in conjunction with counseling to assist first responders with return to work following a mental health crisis.

References: See handout for references