

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH CAPTAIN LORI A. LARAWAY,
COORDINATOR, OPERATIONAL STRESS CONTROL (OSC) PROGRAM, U.S. NAVY;
LIEUTENANT COMMANDER BONNIE R. CHAVEZ, BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PROGRAM MANAGER
FOR NAVY SUICIDE PREVENTION AND OSC POLICIES, U.S. NAVY VIA
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LIEUTENANT JENNIFER CRAGG (Office of the Secretary of Defense
for Public Affairs): Now, without further ado, I'd like to welcome you
all to the Department of Defense Bloggers Roundtable for Thursday,
December 10th, 2009. My name is Lieutenant Jennifer Cragg with the
Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, and I'll be
moderating the call today. A note to the bloggers on the line, clearly
state your name, blogger, the organization you're with prior to asking
your question or questions.

And then today our guests, as you both know, are U.S. Navy
Captain Lori Laraway. She's the coordinator of the Navy's Operational
Stress Control Program and also accompanying her is U.S. Navy
Lieutenant Commander Bonnie Chavez. She's the Navy's Behavioral Health
Program Manager working on Navy Suicide Prevention and OSC policies. Of
course, both of these ladies will be discussing operational stress
controls, so without further ado I'll turn it over to Captain Laraway.
Ma'am, the floor is yours, and we'll go ahead and proceed with questions
after your opening statement.

CAPT. LARAWAY: Thank you, Lieutenant. It's a pleasure to be
here to talk about the Navy's Operational Stress Control program. As
everyone is well aware, over the last few years the Department of Defense
has focused a lot on psychological health care, particularly in the
treatment of combat-related injuries. As part of that effort, the
Operational Stress Control program really focuses on prevention, building
psychological resilience to avoid stress-related injuries.

The program is really an extension of the tradition that the
Navy's had for over 200 years, that of leaders taking care of sailors and
their families. We've focused a lot in the last few years on physical
readiness and now we're realizing that we need to spend as much time and
effort on psychological fitness and resilience in order to help our

sailors and their families become strong and ready to carry out the missions at hand.

We want the Navy to be a place where sailors recognize the effects of stress and know how to deal with it, to prevent things from becoming crises or problems. In a recent 2009 behavioral health quick poll we found out that work-related stress has increased almost 16 percent, and these are self reports from sailors. The program really is aimed to help sailors and leaders thrive in the midst of these stressful situations. To that end, we've developed training tools, practical techniques based upon sound medical research, as well as lessons learned from the combat exposure and from our combat leaders.

We've worked with the Navy Center for Combat and Operational Stress Control to make sure that we have the latest information and then developed strategies to weave the best practices across all Navy training, education and policy. Our goal is to increase awareness of everyday and extraordinary stressors. We want our sailors to recognize when they or their shipmates need help, to realize that seeking assistance is a sign of strength, not weakness, and to take action to address these issues.

Our Navy needs physically strong but also psychologically fit sailors. Future naval operations will only continue to be more demanding on the sailor and our families. The ability to successfully navigate their stress will be a critical requirement for the sailor's toolbox for the future. Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, Ma'am. Let's go ahead and go with the first question. Leo, the floor is yours. Please go ahead.

Q Yes. Hi. Leo Shane from Stars and Stripes. I'm hoping you can explain to me how you evaluate whether or not your efforts are succeeding. I don't know what kind of metrics you're using to determine, you know, when we're talking about resiliency. Is it more folks reporting later on that they may need help? Is it fewer cases of folks who develop stressors or develop stress disorders? How do you determine whether or not what you're doing is successful?

CAPT. LARAWAY: Well, Leo, that's a very good question and it's one that we struggle with on a regular basis. It's kind of all of the above. Certainly, resilience isn't something that an x-ray will measure or that you can do a blood test to measure. It's about successfully experiencing stress and working through it, successfully learning and building sort of those life experiences that allow you to be more successful the next time you experience stress.

We've done some baseline assessment analyses and some assessment metrics, looking at reported stress, looking at the effects on retention, looking at effects on productivity and will continue to monitor this over time. But to really look at what is resilience, I don't know that we're going to be able to come up with a black and white definition, but if in the future we see that sailors are healthier, they're sleeping better, they're more physically fit, there are less relationship issues, less

potential legal issues, sort of these lagging indicators that allow us to believe that the force is healthier and more fit, then I think that that's moving in the right direction, and certainly there's a lot of civilian research on resilience and they all take a look at these myriad of factors including social cohesion and unit morale type things that play a difference in determining resilience.

Q Okay, and just a follow on to that. You said that you are monitoring these things. I don't know if you have already seen some positive indicators or when you would expect to. You know, something this massive, I don't know if you're looking out three years, five years, whatever.

CAPT. LARAWAY: We'll certainly continue to do that. The Navy's formal operational stress control program is fairly new. We became a formal program in November of '08, so it's very early on as far as looking at definitive metrics, but there are things that we'll continue to monitor in the future that will give us better trends and we'll be able to adjust the training and education then, depending on the information that we find out.

Q Okay, great.

LT. CRAGG: Thanks, Leo. Let's go to Dale, and I know Dale and Deborah are together, so you guys can, if you want to, tag team right after one another. Please go ahead.

Q Okay, thank you. Captain Laraway, Dale Kissinger from Military Avenue. Is this for Navy and Marines or just a Navy program?

CAPT. LARAWAY: The Navy and Marine Corps have developed joint maritime doctrine for combat and operational stress control. We made a little bit of differentiation between the two services, not from a theoretical standpoint because clearly our doctrine is joint, but the culture in the Marines is heavily focused on combat and certainly the Navy is playing a higher role, seeing more sailors with actually boots on ground in the current conflict than we have any time in the recent past.

We're certainly addressing the needs of our IA sailors that have boots on ground. It's paramount, but sailors were very clear in telling us that a good portion of them, their day-to-day stressors isn't about being in the sand and it's not about IEDs. It's about the normal deployment schedule, the increased op tempo of our ships. Deployments aren't new to the Navy. It's what the Navy does, so there's a little bit different focus in that the Marines have a little more reliance on combat operational stress and we're focusing more on the broader picture for the Navy of operational stress because every sailor experiences operational stress, whether they're in combat or not.

Q I agree and as a quick follow-on, I've been a squadron commander, a group commander and a flight wing commander in the Air Force and this is a line-owned program that started in November of '08. How is the manpower for this program? Has it just been given to the commanders

to implement or is there some way that they're getting assistance to implement this kind of program in the Navy?

CAPT. LARAWAY: What we're building on is what's already been successful in the Navy, and that's our leadership continuum. The Navy has a strong educational pipeline and leadership continuum, so every sailor from sessions in boot camp all the way through flag rank receives formal leadership training, and we're embedding a lot of our ops control training into the leadership continuum so that it is ongoing education and training based on increased rank, increased responsibility, and it will be woven throughout all of Navy policy and training along those lines.

Q Is this part of PME, then?

CAPT. LARAWAY: I'm sorry.

LT. CMDR. CHAVEZ: Yes. Q It's part of PME?

CAPT. LARAWAY: Yes, that's correct.

Q Okay. Thank you.

Q Hi, this is Deborah Kissinger from militaryavenue.com. I know that you're talking about the stress of the military, the servicemen, and I'm coming from the spouse perspective on this. And seeing how you have the information and the flow of information, how does this information get down, like, to the spouses? Is it an ombudsman sort of --

CAPT. LARAWAY: Oh, that's a great question, Deb. As we're developing this formal training that's woven into the leadership continuum, each module also has a co-existing family module that goes along with it because our families change over time. Whether you're a family of a new recruit or you're a family of a more seasoned sailor, there's different responsibilities and different stressors that you encounter throughout your Navy career. We're certainly working with our fleet and family service centers. The operational stress control content is woven into all their programs.

Our ombudsmen obviously have received the training, as well, and we're trying to get resources out in a variety of different ways so that every sailor and every family member is aware of the signs and symptoms and things to look for so that they can intervene very early on. We have a dedicated strategic communications plan and marketing plan, where we're working to get readily useable materials out in a variety of different mediums.

Q And on that material, what does a resilient family look like? What are the indicators of a family unit that may be experiencing an impact of stress as unique from what every single individual is going to show, and that's a little bit different with maybe operational stress control and that's been integrated right from the start because a family

unit is essential to navigating the challenges that an individual and a group goes through.

CAPT. LARAWAY: Right.

Q There was always the old saying about "You recruit the family and you keep the service member," so I can see the importance of that.

CAPT. LARAWAY: Yes, certainly you can't separate one from the other because if you have a sailor who is deployed and is trying to focus on the mission but he's aware of stresses in the family, that can be very, very serious and it all affects mission readiness and so we need to look at the whole picture.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, Dale, and thank you, Deborah. We'll come back around to both of you. Let's get back over to Leo. Leo, do you have any follow-on questions? Q Yes, I do. Captain, you mentioned indirectly the issue of stigma in getting some of these folks to not be ashamed of needing to seek help. Do we have any evidence that those efforts are working? This has been a major push not just by the Navy but the Secretary of Defense and all up and down the Defense Department, but are we seeing any evidence that it's working, that folks are starting to get away from, I guess, some of the macho mentality?

CAPT. LARAWAY: Well, again, it's one of those things that's kind of hard to measure. Stigma and perceptions, how people think about a certain topic or a certain subject, you don't change those overnight. You look at any of the major changes but not just the military, but just our culture in general has worked through, whether that's women in the workforce, you know, whatever the case may be. How you think and perceive oftentimes takes a generation to really start to change some of the thoughts and perceptions.

We're focusing very heavily on educating our leaders and providing tools and resources for them to help set the tone or set the command climate that allows sailors and family members to feel more comfortable. You know, many times the family, the spouse may have identified that there is a stress or something going on but doesn't speak up for fear of harming the person's career.

We're trying to really change that whole thought process and getting people to recognize that if you address problems early, when they tend to be much smaller and much more likely to find a successful solution, that that's really helping someone's career in the long run versus waiting till things get out of hand and it's a crisis or it's a legal problem and then you certainly can have significant career implications. If we can address things early, we tend to be much more successful in solving them.

Q And is that sort of the format that you're seeing there? It's more an issue of, I guess, ignorance or fear and not so much the macho, well, you know, I can push myself further. You know, is it a matter of just educating folks that, hey, you know, this is not just what

you might be going through but if you see someone going through this, you're not helping them by ignoring the situation.

CAPT. LARAWAY: We're taking things from a slightly different framework. When you look at world class athletes, nobody thinks twice if they use every resource to be competitive, whether that's a sports psychologist, a trainer, a coach. That is being wise. That's being a good athlete, to use every possible tool to be successful and, similarly, our sailors are asked to be world class and their families as well.

It doesn't make sense to say well, do it by pulling your own boot straps. What makes sense is right from the get-go, from day one at boot camp, these are the resources and support mechanisms to reach that level of performance even in the face of challenges and adversities. And obviously it's going to take time to change the way we think about things. We've measured some of those attitudes as a baseline in a behavioral poll done recently, in May, and we'll continue to measure those to see how effective it's going to be as we move along with this effort.

Q And just one more quick follow-up.

That May baseline that you've put together, is that the first time the Navy has had something that comprehensive on this?

CAPT. LARAWAY: There have been a number of different studies over the years, sort of measuring stress indicators, but this is the first that I'm aware of that's really looked at some of the attitudes.

Q Okay, I'm thinking, you know, three or five years down the line, is this going to be the baseline study that we're using to try and develop more empirical (data) judge of whether or not things are working?

CAPT. LARAWAY: That's part of our overall assessment and analysis plan with this, which is essential because as we move forward it's important to know not just those lagging indicators but also is the training achieving what it's intended to? Are the communication efforts reaching the people they're intended to? So even the process as we move along is important to measure and evolve.

Q Okay, great. Thanks.

LT. CRAGG: Thanks, Leo. Dale? Deborah?

Q A quick follow-on to that May 2009 baseline measurement. Earlier you had said there had been a 16 percent increase in stress levels as measured in a poll or survey. Is that from that 2009?

CAPT. LARAWAY: Yes, a good portion of the questions in the 2009 behavioral health poll -- again, a lot of them were new questions looking at the attitudes, as Commander Chavez just indicated, but there was a portion of those that we were able to -- the same questions that were done previously in Navy quality of life studies, so we were able to take a look at some of the measures of work-related stress as compared to the

2005 DOD health-related behavioral surveys, so we did have some comparison on some areas, but we broke a lot of new ground with really looking at some of the questions that looked to attitudes as the commander mentioned.

Q Okay, so that was the 2005 to 2009 comparison? That's where you got the 16 percent increase?

CAPT. LARAWAY: Correct. Correct. Q Is there an on-line resource that you can tell somebody, that, you know, in the blog I could have a link to it so if somebody saw it and wanted to look at it, they could go there?

CAPT. LARAWAY: I believe that the easiest way to get the information is to use the Naval Center for Combat and Operational Stress Control's link which is www.nccosc.navy.mil.

Q Okay, that was NCCOSC.Navy.mil?

CAPT. LARAWAY: Correct.

Q Okay, thank you.

Q Okay, I think my final question, because I'm listening to this, and it's great! This is operational and here I am, I'm the spouse, so my thoughts are at home, and I've always been supporting my spouse --- (inaudible)--- in his career and I love the accolades that he got. I love the interaction that was there and I know that, for us, stress, you know, maybe at a minimum -- well, maybe not at a minimum, but it helped with that. But what I was thinking was here you're talking about the world class sailor as a world class athlete and how you throw everything at them to make them the best, to make them fit for it.

Thinking of the place where the person resides, the home front, as such, I was wondering if the Navy, as such, is helping the couples, the sailor and his spouse to find time as a couple, you know, like through chapel sponsorship or community support, I'm thinking the Chamber of Commerces (sic) in the area, to give local recognition as that athlete who gets the support and the backup. Is there any -- would that help at all? Is that anything in what you're looking at?

LT. CMDR. CHAVEZ: There's a variety of support mechanisms through our Family Service Centers for families, but what you mentioned is a good idea, and I think that we will incorporate that in, in terms of providing that community recognition, because your resilience building is a lot about a community social support network, and so we'll take that on board.

Q Yeah, and even, like, cleaning up around the bases. It was always a joke, you could almost tell when you're coming up to an installation or a base, as such, because if you could somehow get the Chamber of Commerces (sic) into zoning or something, you know, for the businesses that are right there, it's that initial contact. It's just

like a stress-related experience. And we talk about the combat area. That is my final question. Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Did anyone have a comment after that? I just wanted to make sure. Leo, do you want to go ahead? MR. SHANE: Yeah, I do have one last question, and I hope this doesn't come out too inelegant, but Captain, you said in your opening statement or it might have been in response to one of the questions here, that a lot of the stressors we're seeing aren't new to the Navy. Obviously, there are the wars overseas. There is increased operational tempo, but the Navy's had a deployment mentality, so are you getting from folks why stress is up now, why we're seeing, in particular this year, there are these new stressors?

CAPT. LARAWAY: Well, I think that certainly, again, deployments, sea/shore rotations, et cetera, that's not new to the Navy, but what has changed is the nature of what we're doing on an ongoing day-to-day basis. Op tempo is up. You used to be able to do your sea rotation and then you knew when you finished that you'd come home and have a shore rotation and that would be somewhat protected. Well, now our shore rotations often involve IA deployments, they involve shorter dwell times before the ship gets ready to go out again.

Again, you've got all this day-to-day ongoing stressors, moves, relationship issues, illness in the family, the current economic crisis, it all builds up over time and it has a cumulative effect. And so whether you have a specific incident or kind of trauma-related stressor, you've got these ongoing day-to-day issues that I think, over time, you know, people tend to get wore down and we're really trying to focus on how to build that resilience, how to give people time to recover.

Looking at work/life balance is a huge priority in the Navy. How do you optimize that while you still manage all the increased missions and the increased needs? And there's no easy answers to these questions because they're not all clear-cut and many of them have numerous tenets that weave in and out that all affect the big picture.

Q Okay, great.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, we have about eight minutes left to the round table and I want to make sure I check with -- I know, Deborah, you said that you were finished with your questions. Dale, did you have any last thoughts or questions?

Q Well, no. I think it's a great program. Is there any plan to share it with the rest of the services or a DOD-type program?

LT. CMDR. CHAVEZ: We coordinate with the other services on a regular basis and a variety of mechanisms, including, for example, the suicide prevention and risk reduction committee where there's an annual conference and monthly meetings to share best practices, and there's other forums as well.

CAPT. LARAWAY: We also work very closely with the Defense Center of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury,

which is, again, a DOD/VA level, managed through Health Affairs, so there's a lot of collaboration on those fronts. All the services work together and participated in the Defense Center's resiliency conference that was just held down in Norfolk recently. So a lot of the tenets of Operational Stress Control are being shared throughout -- we're all struggling with these issues. Each of the services has a little bit different culture, a specific way that they need to implement, but the concepts and the backbone for stress control is something that we all need to look at.

LT. CMDR. CHAVEZ: And we all recognize that you can't wait till the middle of a crisis to start building resilience. The foundation that needs to be put in place has to start right from the start.

Q Absolutely. Has the Navy seen an increase in suicides over the last couple years?

LT. CMDR. CHAVEZ: Yes, we have seen an increase this year and that is a concern and, at the same time, it's not about numbers, it's about people, so each and every case matters.

Q Absolutely. Well, thank you. I appreciate it. It sounds like a great program, and that was my last question, too. Thanks, Jennifer.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, Dale. Leo, I just want to make sure before I turn it over to Captain Laraway.

Q Nope, I think I'm all right.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. With that, Ma'am, I'd like to turn it back over to you if you'd like to close with any final thoughts.

CAPT. LARAWAY: Well, I certainly thank you for the opportunity to talk about our Operational Stress Control program and our suicide prevention efforts. Secretary Gates has said that our military members deserve the best. We believe that the Operational Stress Control program is helping to deliver on that promise by giving our sailors and their families the tools they need to reach their full potential for fulfilling and healthy lives.

Leaders are the key. Just as a coach would never let a world class athlete go into competition unprepared, the leadership must ensure that our sailors and their families have every available resource to excel, both in their personal and their professional lives. I thank you much for your time and your attention and appreciate the opportunity.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, Ma'am, and just to note everyone who is listening, you've been actually listening to U.S. Navy Captain Lori Laraway. She's Coordinator of Navy Operational Stress Control Program and U.S. Navy Lieutenant Commander Bonnie Chavez, Navy's Behavioral Health Program Manager working on Navy Suicide Prevention and OSC policies. You can download the audio file as well as download the transcript, the official transcript, from this round table if you visit

www.dod.live.mail, you'll find that as well as a story, as well. And I just want to - before you leave, Ma'am, can you cite that web site one more time. I believe it was www.ncosc.navy.mil where people can find more information?

CAPT. LARAWAY: That's correct. The Navy Center for Combat and Operational Stress Control, www.nccosc.navy.mil. And for specifics and the executive summary for the Behavioral Health Quick Poll, nprstsurveys.com.

LT. CRAGG: We'll also have a link to those two sites off the blog, as well, just so if people want more information. With that, thank you both, Captain Laraway and Lieutenant Commander Chavez, and for the bloggers today. This ends today's conversation.

Q Great. Thanks a lot.

CAPT. LARAWAY: Thank you.

Q Thank you.

END.