



by Francesco CACCETTA

INADEQUATE PREVENTION STRATEGY OVER POLICEMEN'S SUICIDE CASES IN EUROPE

UNARMA is an Union Association of the Carabinieri Corps, the Italian Military Police Department, dealing with Investigative and Security tasks, besides many other functions. With a great variety of duties, the Corps deploys approximately 100 thousand men and women of widely varying ages. Now, UNARMA Union's main role is to protect its members and propose any organizational solution that can improve their quality of life. Every year, in Italy, more than 50 suicides affect Police Officers, and half of these cases occur among the Carabinieri. This is very often due to the trouble of coping with occupational stress, given that specific and sometimes unavoidable psychological pressures weigh on a Police Officer's work, although such stressing condition could be limited by improving the human resource management and getting some antiquated organizational aspects renewed. Investigating the causes that lead to a Police Officer's suicide and provide any possible solution in order to reduce the number of these tragic events (indeed too many in Italy) is therefore a core task of the UNARMA Trade Association. Currently, both in Italy as in several other nations in Europe, the strategies that aim to reduce the number of suicides, within the context of the Police forces, are definitely inadequate. Suicide,



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in Italy, keeps on being the main cause of death for a Policeman, which makes it even more dangerous than crime or terrorism itself. All Italian Police Departments, civil or military, try to increase their own Psychological Assistance Service, thanks to the motivation of the Media and public opinion, and yet nearly every attempt at medical or psychological support has so far proved pointless, if not actually “a sheer failure”. No Policeman turns to the Assistance Centers within the Administrations for help in case of psychological distress, especially due to depression, which is the worst condition leading to suicide. The reason of this failure is quite simple to underline. When an Italian Cop reports about any kind of psychological disorder to his/her Headquarters, he gets immediately deemed “Unstable” and “Unfit” for Police activity, even if the problem may be mild and transient. The consequence is being suspended from service, because of precise provisions by each Administration, and in most cases



one is also expelled from the Corps, at the end of a painful and distressing series of psychiatric sessions. It is quite obvious, then, why nobody allows to make their awkward condition known in the office, nor their need for support, since no one wants to run the risk of being isolated or losing their job. And that is exactly why so many get into a loop that leads to despair and eventually suicide. So that many of them get to the point of committing suicide, not due to their depression, rather because of their inability to ask for help. The ideal solution, up to this point, is the one UNARMA adopted: a new Military Psychology Department has now been founded, with the task of studying the best Anti-suicide strategy. For this purpose, an Agreement was signed with the Italian Thin Blue Line Onlus (an external, private organization) which offers a free and highly confidential support service, specifically dedicated to the Police. The service provided by Italian Thin Blue Line Onlus is a creation of the famous Italian psychologist Marco



Gruppo di Intervento Speciale (GIS, in English "Special Intervention Group") is an elite special operations counter-terrorism tactical response unit inside the Italian Carabinieri military police, first formed in 1978. In 2004 the GIS evolved into a special forces unit.

Strano, who has been serving in the Police for 40 years, before turning to his new activity. In practice, it is a private telephone line, operational 24 h a day, which the Policeman can also contact anonymously, as well as a video chat system for psychological support interviews. Two years of experience with this particular type of approach has shown that in the vast majority of cases – a psychological support based on some preliminary telephone contacts, managed by a trained specialist, who deeply well knows the issues related to the job of a Policeman – can drastically reduce the risk of suicide and even get the Cop out of his critical condition, helping him/her to regain his/her inner balance. An effective Suicide Prevention campaign, among members of the Police Departments, must – as first – begin with a profound cultural shift within the Corps, which (also basing on the American experience) should start promoting new psychological support solutions, both confidential and external, thus avoiding hasty marginalization or even expulsion, in case of a slight and solvable discomfort.

BIOGRAPHY OF FRANCESCO CACCETTA



Francesco Caccetta is an Italian officer in the Carabinieri Corps (Captain, operational section Commander) and the Deputy Chairman of the Military Trade Union Association "UNARMA". He has had approximately 30 years of investigative experience in combating various forms of crime. Together with his institutional operational activity, Francesco Caccetta went through university studies of Sociology, Psychology and Criminology. He attended masters on some criminological issues and is a member of prestigious international criminology societies. He has a long experience in urban security and has written several books on this subject.