

Research Spotlight: Michelle Lilly and Kim Turner

Research Spotlight

Research Spotlight highlights a study that might be of interest to our readers. An interview with one or more of the study's authors also provides a more personal, behind-the-scenes understanding of how and why research is done. In this issue, we're highlighting a study done by Michelle Lilly, Ph.D., and Kim Turner, which examines how duty-related factors impact stress and mental/physical health outcomes.

Q AND A WITH MICHELLE LILLY AND KIM TURNER

Q1: What prompted initial research into stress relative to emergency dispatch?

Michelle Lilly: *I conducted the initial study (linking 911 dispatch to posttraumatic stress disorder) with a undergraduate research assistant in my lab, who worked for seven years as an emergency dispatcher in Chicago's western suburbs before returning to school. Pierce's observations and experiences as an emergency dispatcher piqued my interest in the topic and helped shape the study.*

Kim Turner: *After retiring as a police officer in the city of Inglewood (Illinois, USA), I worked as a dispatcher and supervisor at the San José Police Department—Communications Division (San Jose, California, USA). When working on my Master of Science in Justice Studies from San José State University, I found a significant gap in research related to stress and 911 and, consequently, focused my thesis on that topic.*

Q2: What drives your continued research in this area?

Michelle Lilly: *I had no idea the initial research would be so impactful. It just took off. I hit a nerve. The response was overwhelming. People in the profession were reaching out, they were so grateful that we had acknowledged what they do—and what they experience emotionally—that I had to continue. People in the industry appreciate my work, and this is my attempt to give back for all that they do for us as telecommunicators.*

Kim Turner: *Stress is very real in the 911 dispatch environment. My research and Michelle's research demonstrate the impact stress has on a telecommunicator's physical, emotional, and psychological well-being. It's been my focus to help 911 professionals understand how stress can affect them and provide skills fostering resiliency and positive coping.*

Q3: Describe your partnership, what it has meant to work with one another.

Michelle Lilly: *I learned so much from Kim. In Kim I found a pioneer in the emergency communication profession. She is not about inertia—she will always shake up something that's not working. I've run across tireless people research in the industry and when visiting communication centers, and Kim is a role model for her dedication. She is open to change. She is creative in problem-solving and develops ideas to accommodate people. Meeting Kim makes me feel that I should do more to effect change and improve people's lives.*

Kim Turner: *There are people interested in research for all the right reasons, and Michelle is that type of person. She is honestly concerned about the welfare of people in telecommunications, as much as we are in our response to the stressful environment in emergency communications. Her perspective is refreshing, not because she is on the outside looking in. She adds to our understanding through research that involves people within the 911 community and the compassion she brings to her studies.*

Q4: What are your recommendations for people interested in research but lacking the confidence to get started or not knowing where to begin?

Michelle Lilly: *Research requires the encouragement and support of peers. Reaching out for advice in any stage of the project is essential. There are steps to follow in conducting research and presenting results. Research with human subjects is strictly regulated. A person interested in research but with no experience should develop a partnership with a researcher trained in conducting research, particularly research on stress and distress. Start your research with an idea of how you plan to collect and organize your data and spend some time getting to know what resources are available.*

Kim Turner: *Find those gaps in the area in which you're interested. Reach out to people doing similar research. I met Michelle at a conference where we both presented. I was hyped to meet her and asked for her help in a project that was actually a follow-up to the study I completed for my master's thesis. Our work together resulted in the study published in this issue of the AEDR. Our partnering has extended to symposiums where we discuss wellness, trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder as related to emergency dispatchers.*



MICHELLE LILLY

Michelle Lilly is an Associate Professor of Psychology at Northern Illinois University (NIU, DeKalb, Illinois, USA). She is a licensed Clinical Psychologist in the state of Illinois. Michelle's research has focused predominantly on cognitive and emotional processes that predict post-trauma psychopathology. Michelle is a pioneer in research on the mental and physical health of 911 telecommunicators.



KIM TURNER

Kim currently is the Communications Administrator of the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department (San Bernardino, California, USA) where she oversees two primary PSAPs and is responsible for Operations and integration of technology. In 2017, Kim started a research project incorporating all 454 PSAPs in California, focusing on the effects of stress on public safety dispatchers.

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUNDS

Michelle Lilly

Dr. Michelle Lilly's research is influenced by the literature on mindfulness- and acceptance-based therapies; she has incorporated a particular focus on how emotion regulation enhances risk for psychopathology, revictimization, and violence perpetration among interpersonal trauma survivors.

In a ground-breaking project, Dr. Lilly has conducted research on the mental and physical health of 9-1-1 telecommunicators, a population that has received scant empirical attention despite high risk for stress- and trauma-related outcomes. A longitudinal project with more than 800 telecommunicators from across the country was recently completed with ongoing data analysis and manuscript preparation. At the present time, The 9-1-1 population is a unique, high-risk group that can provide valuable insight into trauma-related processes and post-trauma outcomes.

In addition to these projects, Dr. Lilly has a particular interest in memory and meta-memory as they relate to post-trauma psychopathology. Posttraumatic Stress Disorder is considered a disorder of memory, yet there is limited empirical support for this statement, and how memory processes are implicated in the onset and maintenance of PTSD remains largely unknown.

Kim Turner

Kim has experience on both sides of the radio. As a sworn police officer in the city of Inglewood, she worked as a patrol officer, field training officer, and detective assigned to the Child Abuse and Sex Crimes Unit. After retiring from the field, she worked as a dispatcher and supervisor at the San José Police Department – Communications Division, where she was also a member of the dispatch response team (tactical dispatcher/scribe) and the Training Unit.

As the Communications Administrator of the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department (California, USA), she oversees two primary public safety answering points in the largest contiguous county in the US and manages more than 160 employees. She serves as the Southern Regional Task Force Chair for the implementation of NG911 in the state of California.

Kim also holds several degrees including a Bachelor of Arts in Communications from Loyola Marymount University, a Master of Arts in Public Administration from the University of Southern California, and a Master of Science in Justice Studies from San José State University, where her thesis focused on the effects of stress on 9-1-1 dispatchers.

APPLICATION TO EMERGENCY DISPATCH

Emergency Dispatchers work in a non-visual environment characterized by some of the same difficulties encountered by paramedics, police officers or fire-fighters, including coping with unexpected developments and traumatic incidents involving severe injury and death. Emergency Dispatchers also experience issues related to their job responsibilities, such as high and demanding workload, multi-tasking, performance monitoring, and limited physical movement. These combined, plus the unknown outcomes of callers, inevitably leads to stress, at times, and the associated negative and physical outcomes that take both a personal toll (high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, poor sleep due to shift changes, burnout, depression, and anxiety). Research conducted by Lilly and Turner examines the work-related functions that affect the health and functioning of emergency dispatchers and, overall, the impact of stress on work and life satisfaction.