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# Best practice hostage negotiator stress debriefings à a step toward PTSD symptom reduction

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Michael R. Salter

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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Walden University  
2019

Abstract

Best Practice Hostage Negotiator Stress Debriefings – A Step Toward PTSD Symptom  
Reduction

by

Michael R. Salter

MPA, Walden University, 2007

BA, Moravian College, 1996

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Criminal Justice

Walden University

November 2019

## Abstract

After a hostage negotiation incident, it is common practice for either no debriefing to occur or a formal, administration-attended debriefing to discuss issues and possible emotional as well as, psychological stressors with the hostage negotiation team members. However, many times negotiators are reluctant to be honest in front of administrators or supervisors about their weaknesses as they feel this will lead to termination or loss of service weapon. Little is known about what effect, if any, best practice hostage negotiation after incident debriefings would have given regarding possible psychological distresses on the negotiators as well as effects on team bonding. The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate whether and how after incident hostage negotiation debriefing strategies lower PTSD symptoms among hostage negotiators. The theoretical framework for this study was Kelley's followership theory. The sample was 12 negotiators from a local county negotiation team and a local city negotiation team. The research questions focused on hostage negotiator preference for debriefing strategies, honesty in debriefings in relation to stressors, opinions of the meeting's effects on dealing with trauma, and effects on team bond building. The results were that peer run, peer driven debriefing strategies are most wanted and most effective for hostage negotiators. The positive social change implications are numerous, including a more effective, more mentally fit, and closer bonded hostage negotiation team capable of saving more lives who in turn will have a healthier family life, which will resonate into the community.

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## Dedication

I would like to dedicate my work to those individuals who have supported me throughout my career and academic journey. Thank you to my wife and daughters for allowing me to pursue this personal journey and for supporting me throughout the process. Thank you to Dr. Scott Hoke for his friendship, mentoring, and guidance throughout my career and educational journey. I would also like to thank Dr. Joshua Ozymy, Professor Tony Smith, and Dr. Darius Cooper for their never ending support, guidance, and knowledge in my academic growth experience. I would like to also dedicate this work to my brother and sister hostage negotiators. Lastly, for my daughters, you can achieve anything you aspire to as long as you work hard.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction Overview**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify best practice hostage negotiator stress debriefings and ultimately use the study's findings for post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptom reduction. As illustrated in the literature review, there is little to no previous research on hostage negotiator stress reduction debriefings. Most of the previous research involved personality traits of a good negotiator or the statistical ramifications of law enforcement officers affected by PTSD but certainly little specifically referencing hostage negotiators. The importance of this study lies in the area that hostage negotiators need a best practice debriefing method to allow them to have lower stress, lower PTSD symptom prevalence, and less chance of becoming suicidal.

The results of this study can have great positive social change implications. The lower levels of stress and PTSD symptoms ramifications can have a profound and resonating effect on the negotiator, their families, and the community at large. The study results are positive as anticipated, then other areas of law enforcement can adopt the best practice debriefing strategies. This study was necessary and timely in an era of PTSD symptoms and law enforcement suicides.

### **Problem Statement**

Hostage negotiators are exposed to a multitude of stressful experiences when participating in a hostage situation resolution (Cambria, DeFilippo, Loudon, & McGowan, 2002). During a hostage negotiation incident, there are multiple variables and situations that a hostage negotiator addresses. The hostage negotiator uses verbal

techniques to attempt to deescalate the emotions of the hostage taker (McMains & Mullins, 2010). Throughout the negotiation process, the hostage negotiator allows the hostage taker to verbally work through the immediate and long term problems of the hostage taker through the negotiator (McMains & Mullins, 2010). Due to possible violent situations performed by the hostage taker, abrupt and volatile changes can occur, so a main focus of the negotiator is to slow down the situation and help the hostage taker be more rationale in their decision-making process (McMains & Mullins, 2010). Throughout the hostage situation, the negotiator informs the hostage taker of the results of their actions and proposed actions, both positive and negative, again to guide the hostage taker towards a positive result (McMains & Mullins, 2010). The hostage taking incident can either end in a positive or negative conclusion. The incident's stress, violence, and possible negative conclusion have short term and long term psychological effects on the negotiator. Hostage negotiators work under extremely stressful situations, and Grubb (2012) proposed that one gap worth researching is the strategies that hostage negotiators utilize to cope with the highly stressful situations. This identification of key underlying issues that form a hostage negotiator, such as coping strategies for stress, are necessary to investigate due to the great implications on hostage situation survivors and all else that is involved (Grubb, 2012). As Grubb (2010) explained, previous literature has addressed the importance of selecting hostage negotiators with the correct personalities and previous training; however, it has not addressed the area of skill development, such as coping mechanisms used by the hostage negotiators . Finding best practice debriefing techniques is extremely vital as hostage scenarios are by definition stressful; however, some are

extremely stressful, such as situations involving prisons and situations involving hostages or barricades in schools (Daniels, et.al., 2010). In this study, I aimed to address possible solutions for the hostage negotiator to effectively deal with this stress.

### **Nature of the Study**

The nature of this study was qualitative. Qualitative research is used to provide deep and personal information that can infer data that describe the deep emotions of the interviewee (Patton, 2015). This depth gave me a personalized view of the emotions and experience based professional views to give credibility to the data (see Patton, 2015). The emotion-based data also provided me with experience-based believability (see Patton, 2015). In-depth interviewing was completed via personal interviews. Personal interviews were used to obtain personal and uninhibited views of the study participants (see Patton, 2015). The interviews were conducted using the standardized open-ended interview approach where the same questions were asked in the same order to all participants, with follow ups and probes used efficiently, to gain a full and honest perspective from the interviewee (see Patton, 2015). The pragmatic interviewing inquiry method was used by asking efficacious and focused professional questions in order to achieve the acquisition of the data (see Patton, 2015). Utilization Focused sampling was used as a limited number of cases, 15, were explored in depth to determine possible best practices in debriefing and PTSD symptom reduction (see Patton, 2015). Hostage negotiations are a very effective means to peacefully end a hostage situation; however, there is no one correct way to positively negotiate a scenario, just as there is no one way to effectively debrief for all negotiators (Grubb, 2010). This looking at multiple levels of experience in

negotiators is based on the fact that there is no one way to effectively debrief for everyone. Although there are no general rules for establishing an appropriate sampling size, the sampling number of 15 produced adequate opinions, new data, and a saturation level of new information (see Patton, 2015). The small sample size enabled me to have ample opportunity to gain in-depth information and highly valuable data that were used to address the research problem (see Patton, 2015). The small sample size has also been historically validated by providing large amounts of useful data in past studies (Patton, 2015). The sample number was enough to obtain multiple views and reach a saturation point where no additional data are obtained (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012). A qualitative research methodology was used to provide in-depth and honest answers to directly address the research question. Qualitative research methodology drove the research to establish a solid basis for the rationale of how and why the research matters as in this case lowering hostage negotiator stress and PTSD symptomology has broad reaching and resonating effects that encompass the community (see Patton, 2015). This qualitative research helps to find new data and unanticipated, positive, and far reaching consequences in my research area (see Patton, 2015). These unanticipated, positive, and far reaching consequences can establish resonating positive social change implications.

### **Research Questions**

Research Question (RQ)1: How do hostage negotiators perceive that after incident hostage negotiation debriefing strategies lower their Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms?

RQ2: Which after incident hostage negotiation debriefing strategies do hostage negotiators perceive as most effective at lowering their Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms?

Prior researchers have shown little to no evidence or discussion regarding the efficaciousness of debriefing strategies in relation to hostage negotiator stress reduction and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder symptom avoidance. The past literature has primarily addressed the personality needs of new negotiators in relation to them developing into effective negotiators.

As evidenced in the previous literature, hostage negotiators are not superheroes, and humans necessitate a method to speak about the stress they experienced during a hostage negotiation incident (Cambria et al., 2002). The debriefing process is necessary to relieve trauma and work through stressors (Norton & Petz, 2012). The followership theory was the base for this study, as it develops the concept and addresses the idea that giving the negotiators the opportunity to choose debriefing strategies enables the hostage negotiator to obtain the best outcome for themselves and their mental health (see Frisina, 2005).

The research questions have specific positive social change implications necessary to give hostage negotiators and other law enforcement, for that matter, to have a better chance at long term mental health. Finding best practice debriefing techniques

through the honest opinions of the participant hostage negotiators can enable policy makers to develop the best possible debriefing techniques. These techniques, specifically derived from the research question answers, can develop best practice debriefing techniques to allow hostage negotiators the ability to lower stress and not develop PTSD symptoms in the long term. These long term Post Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms can develop into suicidal ideations (Violanti, 2004). This debriefing skill set can be outwardly applied to other law enforcement agencies debriefing standard operating procedures, which can also affect additional positive social change outcomes. Again, the less-stressed negotiator or other law enforcement officers will have lower incidents of suicide and PTSD, be able to do a better job at their employment if less stressed, which can save additional civilian lives, and have a better less stressed family life. The less stressed family behavior can then resonate into the community and thus demonstrate the large possible outward flow of positive social change that is achievable with my study.

### **Research Objectives**

The research objectives were specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely. My study objective was to determine best practice debriefing techniques for hostage negotiators to use post incident. The best practice techniques can enable the hostage negotiator to appropriately deal with hostage negotiation incident stressors in order to eliminate long term stressors and possible PTSD symptoms.

The long term objectives were measurable as hostage negotiator stress levels, both short term and long term, were investigated to determine the appropriateness and accuracy of the best practice debriefing techniques. Debriefing strategies are an effective

means to lower stress and PTSD as seen in a recent study involving United Kingdom prison employees (Ruck, Bowes, & Tehrani, 2013). A recent study involving employees of the United Kingdom prison service established that debriefing had a large and positive effect on reducing long term PTSD symptoms and stress symptoms (Ruck, et.al., 2013).

The objectives are attainable and realistic as the hostage negotiators who have discussed this study are amicable toward it and believe it is a positive step toward their long term mental health that they would like to participate in. When short term trauma effects are not dealt with, then long term issues can develop. These long term problems can greatly affect law enforcement ability to effectively perform their job duties (Basinka, Wiciak, & Daderman, 2014). Effective debriefing strategies show promise that if done correctly can greatly lower long term psychological issues (Basinka et al., 2014; Noblet, 2009).

The objectives are timely as in recent years the public have been informed through the press of the effects of PTSD on military and law enforcement personnel. Hostage negotiators are involved in negotiations that frequently involve violent acts, and if this experienced trauma is not appropriately dealt with, social relation problems can occur with the negotiator (Westlund, 2015). The results of my study can resonate with hostage negotiators, law enforcement in general, their families, and community for years into the future.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the background and possibility of whether and how after-incident hostage negotiation debriefing strategies lower PTSD symptoms among hostage negotiators.

For the discussion and background understanding of PTSD to be complete, the *American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders* 5<sup>th</sup> ed. must be referenced in detail. The following criteria for PTSD are applicable to individuals over the age of 6: An individual can be afflicted with the disorder if they experience the “exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence” by themselves going through the act, seeing the act, finding out someone close to them such as a relative or friend had the violent or accidental act happen to them, or experiencing the violent act vicariously through others, such as through first responders, which in this research project would be hostage negotiators (see DSM-V , 2013, p. 143). The afflicted individual experiences flashbacks involving the incident, dreams involving the incident, memories that are negative about the incident, “intense or prolonged psychological distress” in regards to a reaction involving a remembered stressor involving the past event, or “physiological reactions internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event(s) (DSM-V, 2013, p. 144). Also present in the afflicted individual is the dodging of bad “memories, thoughts, or feelings” in regards to the upsetting event as well as evading direct behaviors that remind of the event (DSM-V, 2013, p. 144). Other experienced occurrences are changing the memories of the event to an even more negative scenario as well as experiencing a more negative mood involving the remembering of the event, such as

avoiding certain activities and embarrassment (DSM-V, 2013). Also experienced is the inability to focus, poor attitude, and being emotionally edgy when remembering the traumatic event (DSM-V, 2013). In order to be diagnosed with this disorder, the individual must experience these symptoms for more than 30 days, which “causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning” and is not related to the use of a substance such as drugs or alcohol (DSM-V, 2013, p. 146).

A second condition worth exploring in relation to post incident stress is acute stress disorder. Per the *American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders* 5<sup>th</sup> ed. information, the background indicators and symptoms are remarkably similar to PTSD other than it is suffered from 72 hours to 30 days (DSM-V, 2013). The main difference between the two afflictions is the length of the disorder and the timing of the disorder ([www.bridgestorecovery.com](http://www.bridgestorecovery.com), 2019).

I focused on PTSD as it is a long term disorder lasting over 30 days. Although acute stress disorder is a serious disorder, I focused on the long term affliction (see [brainline.org](http://brainline.org), 2019; DSM-V, 2013;). The following information is a further rationale for the PTSD focus: PTSD has the propensity to lead to suicidal tendencies (Violanti, 2004). Acute stress disorder does not statically lead to the development of PTSD (Bryant, 2017). In response to trauma, the National Institute of Mental Health (2019) found that many people develop a number of mental health conditions in the short term until they learn other coping mechanisms. Because there are so many possible mental health short term responses to trauma, I would like to focus on this necessary topic at a later date. Again,

this is the rationale for the focused PTSD research direction, which I hope results in large scale positive social change implications.

The gap in the literature is twofold. From the literature review, it is evident that there is both a lack of current studies or minimal studies on this topic, and a repeatedly stressed gap of research needed to be addressed is in the peer support area of after incident hostage negotiation debriefings. Upon numerous extensive searches of the literature, I found no studies addressing the concept of the efficaciousness of debriefing strategies in relation to reducing hostage negotiator stress. The literature searches were conducted through multiple attempts and using multiple combinations of search terms. The gap is further reinforced by stating that hostage negotiators operate in a stressful environment, whereas debriefings are necessary to work through stressors that were experienced in the hostage negotiation (Norton & Petz, 2012).

A fundamental understanding by negotiators is that they are regular people, not superheroes, and, therefore, they need an avenue to release and relieve stressors as not to develop long term PTSD issues (Cambria et al., 2002). Norton and Petz (2012) provided background information related to hostage negotiators and noted that negotiators face many areas of stress during a hostage negotiation incident. Norton and Petz also provided information related to after incident stress debriefings and that these debriefings are an important step to work through stressors and accompanying peer support, which are effective in helping to reduce trauma.

These stressors experienced by hostage negotiators and law enforcement, if not dealt with appropriately, can lead to long term stress and possible suicide (Violanti,

2004). These listed sources reinforce the importance of after hostage incident debriefings; however, an in depth look at the efficaciousness of debriefings on stress and PTSD symptom reduction on hostage negotiators has not been undertaken. Hostage negotiators provide a key role in law enforcement and in corrections as their actions have a direct effect on the outcomes of hostage and crisis situations (Grubb, 2012). This key role in hostage negotiation thus keeps individuals safe in a hostage situation and demonstrates how important this study is as it is imperative for society's safety to keep hostage negotiators in a positive mental health state. The results of this study can be passed on to general law enforcement as a more appropriate and efficacious tool for proper mental health care. To address this gap, a qualitative research approach was used.

The problem of hostage negotiators not necessarily having the appropriate stress relieving debriefing scenario is an important sociological problem. The problem of hostage negotiator stress reduction is a relatively new issue as hostage negotiation techniques, particularly FBI developed and New York Police Department (NYPD) developed techniques, are a relatively recent undertaking (Vecchi et al., 2004). Current hostage negotiation practices and tactics were originally introduced in the early 1970s (Vecchi et al., 2004). The hostage negotiation strategy was developed in 1973 by the NYPD due to a direct response of the Attica prison riot and the homicides of the 1972 Olympic athletes (Vecchi et al., 2004).

Hostage negotiators are regular people who go through extreme amounts of stress, and they need a stress lowering avenue to lower their chances of PTSD development (Cambria et al., 2002). Many researchers have estimated that there is a large number of

first responders that are affected by PTSD symptoms, which should be of concern to employers (Ruck et al., 2013).

The gap in the literature was investigated with the following ideas in mind: These ideas are grounded firmly in the past literature. Even though these concepts do not address the gap in the literature, the concepts are instrumental in grounding through past evidence the importance of undertaking my current study. McNally and Solomon (1999) provided views in relation to the importance of formal supervisor run post incident stress debriefings in dealing with hostage negotiator stress is worth reiterating. Norton and Petz (2012) provided background information related to the fact that hostage negotiators face many areas of stress during a hostage negotiation incident. Norton and Petz also provided information related to after incident stress debriefings, that these debriefings are an important step to work through stressors, and that accompanying peer support is very effective in helping to reduce trauma is also worth repeating. Cambria et al. (2002) gave views addressing the concept that hostage negotiators received stress from many areas, such as hostage takers, supervisors, and coworkers. Cambria et al. also provided views that demonstrate that hostage negotiators are not supermen and superwomen and therefore need an avenue to reduce trauma after an incident. Violanti (2004), a repeated writer on similar topics, addressed that trauma in law enforcement officers can lead to PTSD and suicide. Frisina (2005) described the followership theory where a good follower will not act unnecessarily as a sheep for the supervisor but will think critically for themselves to achieve an optimal end for themselves and the organization. Ruck et al. (2013) found that correctional employees who received post incident stress debriefings

after traumatic incidents were less likely to experience PTSD symptoms. With these important and evidence-based concepts in mind, it is imperative that a qualitative study with my parameters is undertaken to directly and honestly answer my research questions.

The nature of this study as previously stated was qualitative. Qualitative research was used as it provides data that are in depth and illustrate the true underlying feelings of the interview participants (see Patton, 2015). This depth gave the study a personalized view of the true opinions and beliefs of the research participants (see Patton, 2015). Utilization focused sampling was used as a limited number of cases, 15, were explored in depth to determine possible best practices in debriefing and PTSD symptom reduction (see Patton, 2015). The sample number was adequate to find the realistic opinions and ideas of the participants to enable the study data to allow positive social change implications to be achieved. The sample number should be enough to obtain multiple views and reach a saturation point where no additional data are obtained (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

The participants were selected from a pool of FBI trained hostage negotiators. The FBI offers 1-week long basic trainings to ensure that hostage negotiators receive the proper techniques and mind set development in order to be effective hostage negotiators. These individuals were selected from a local county team and a local city hostage negotiation team. The city team was selected as they get more call outs and thus have more experience to draw on. There are two local city hostage negotiation teams that are being looked at as possible participants as they get a fair amount of hostage negotiation call outs as compared to other agencies. I went through the appropriate Walden

University protocol to request participants and established all necessary steps were taken to appropriately complete my study.

The participants were both experienced and inexperienced, meaning some had gone through debriefings and others had not to obtain a broad range of perspectives. There are many hostage negotiators, especially on smaller hostage negotiation teams, who are FBI trained but who have never been on a call out for an active hostage negotiation and thus have not been through a debriefing process. These individuals have an important opinion in regards to my study as trainings of scenarios are very realistic, can be traumatic, and usually require an after incident debriefing to assure proper protocol was taken and that everyone involved is alright with what had occurred. The qualitative research method, interview method, and sampling size all align in respect to little or no prior research on this topic has been done, so that this new research provides new and unique data to assist in working towards achieving positive social change.

### **Theoretical Base**

The theoretical base for this study was Kelley's followership theory. The followership theory is based on an employee, hostage negotiator, following the direction of a leader (Frisina, 2005). The followership theory is based on the idea that followers, employees, should also think independently for themselves and make the best decisions for their own wellbeing (Frisina, 2005). The theory also concludes with the idea that good morals and values are necessary to be a successful follower and negotiator (Frisina, 2005). Also vital to the basis of the study is that followers who are following the theory contribute to the best interest of the team by not being sheep and by being accountable for

themselves and contributing to the best end possible for the team (Frisina, 2005). Hostage negotiators are not superheroes and thus need an avenue to speak about the stress they experienced during a hostage negotiation incident (Cambria et al., 2002). The stressors are numerous from the hostage taker to the stresses of dealing with obtuse supervisors (Cambria et al., 2002).

It is imperative that stress reduction techniques and debriefing methods for hostage negotiators be looked at in this study. The rationale is seen throughout this study and has many facets. The first theme involved in hostage negotiator stress reduction is the profound issue of multidirectional stress and outsiders presuming that acknowledgment of stress portrays weakness on the behalf of the hostage negotiator. Hostage negotiators experience a wide variety of stressors when participating in a hostage situation resolution (Cambria et al., 2002). The hostage negotiator is both a symbol of law enforcement but also a negotiator trying to help the person, which can sometimes be conflicting roles (Cambria et al., 2002). Cambria et al. found that interview information from experienced hostage negotiators revealed that stress comes from more than one direction onto a negotiator, from the hostage taker and also from fellow officers who may ridicule the negotiator as being weak (Cambria et al., 2002). These same researchers demonstrated that there is a very large number of first responders who are affected by PTSD symptoms, which should be of concern to employers (Ruck et al., 2013). These large numbers of hostage negotiators and other first responders demonstrate how important this problem is to address lowering stress, lowering the incidence of PTSD symptoms, and possibly

thwarting suicidal tendencies due to unaddressed stress and trauma from a hostage taking incident.

The second theme involving hostage negotiator stress reduction is unresolved PTSD precursors. This stress and anxiety can build up on a hostage negotiator. High stress and anxiety built up into PTSD can take a definite mental health toll on a law enforcement officer, including hostage negotiators, leading to prematurely leaving the criminal justice field (Stephens & Miller, 1998). If the stress and anxiety remain unresolved, it can morph into PTSD, alcohol abuse, or suicidal ideations (Volanti, 2004).

A third theme, peer support and self coping mechanisms, shows promise in prior studies of prisoners of war, but Solomon et al. (1999) indicated the continued research could help determine the effectiveness of such antistress-related mechanisms. Similarly, a study involving police with military backgrounds determined that coping strategies, such as debriefing techniques, were necessary to lower burn out rates of the officers involved in traumatic events (Ivie & Garland, 2010). In the current format, these issues would be attempted to be resolved during a critical incident stress debriefing. The evidence of the importance of debriefing demonstrates how vital my study is to find the preferred and best practice debriefing technique. These best practice debriefing technique strategies can be used by hostage negotiators and then possibly other law enforcement adaptation to develop lower stress, lower PTSD symptoms, and lower rates of suicidal issues.

The debriefing process is necessary to relieve trauma and work through stressors (Norton & Petz, 2012). The followership theory is the basis for this study concept on exploring the concept on giving the negotiators the opportunity to choose debriefing

strategies to obtain the best outcome for themselves and their mental health (see Frisina, 2005). The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore whether and how after incident hostage negotiation debriefing strategies lower Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms among hostage negotiators.

The followership theory is the basis for the rationale of why negotiators would benefit from identifying the most efficacious debriefing method for hostage negotiators in post critical incident stress debriefings, which can result in better short term and long term mental health and a more closely bonded hostage negotiation team. The better short term and long term mental health attributes can provide for a more mentally healthy hostage negotiator. The more mentally healthy hostage negotiator can have a general more positive effect on his or her family, where in turn, the family can then have a more positive effect on the community than a stressed family member would. This demonstrates the efficaciousness of the positive social change implications.

### **Operational Definitions**

The following terms are necessary to permit the reader to fully grasp the context of the research.

*Debriefing:* An after incident meeting between hostage negotiators, administration, and possibly mental health professionals to review operational issues and/or to lower impacts of trauma from the incident (McMains & Mullins, 2010).

*Hostage incident:* Any circumstance where individuals are being detained against their own choice, usually by force or threat of force, and the hostage taker is making some type of demand in response to the incident (McMains & Mullins, 2010).

*Negotiator*: One who brings on a result through verbal interaction (Pocket Oxford American Dictionary and Thesaurus, 2010).

### **Assumptions**

The assumptions for this study are clear and direct. The participants in this study were expected to be honest, concise, and open in their interview responses. I assumed that the qualitative research methodology using interview questions was the best practice in determining the data necessary to address the research questions.

The interviews were conducted using the standardized open-ended interview approach where the same questions were asked in the same order to all participants, with follow ups and probes used efficiently, to gain a full and honest perspective from the interviewee (see Patton, 2015). The pragmatic interviewing inquiry method was used by asking efficacious and focused professional questions in order to achieve the acquisition of the data (see Patton, 2015). This questioning methodology provided structured answers to the interview questions to assure that all anticipated data collection was achieved. As needed, follow up questioning was addressed with the participants to assure that all information they were willing to provide could be investigated.

### **Limitations**

The limitation of the study included that the participants felt comfortable enough in their experiences to be open and honest in their responses.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The scope and delimitations of the study are as follows. The scope of the study was quite concise in design and nature. The scope was intended this way by design. The

field of hostage negotiation is a field with a low population. These individuals are usually selected due to their assumed and perceived abilities, followed up with an extensive FBI training program. This keeps the number of hostage negotiators at a low level and not part of the main stream of the law enforcement and general population field. The study and research questions were focused to keep on a direct path to concisely address this focused area of the population in its lens so that they specifically can be helped. Also, hostage negotiation terminology is not known by the general population and thus is disadvantageous to use those not in the hostage negotiation field as participants.

The delimitations are any proposed negative factors in my choice to keep the participants field low in number and focused. The low numbers may limit responses and in turn may limit data; however, as previously discussed, this is by design and is advantageous in the mind of the study designer.

### **Significance of the Study**

The research has many implications for the public policy and administration field by looking at possible ways a hostage negotiator can reduce PTSD symptoms. The hostage negotiators look for possible policy change to enact the most effective post incident debriefing approach, as determined by the study, which can lower short term and long term PTSD symptoms that can lead to serious long term psychological effects. This can result in a better functioning department that will have a positive impact on society. The lower stress levels of the negotiators can also be felt with better attitudes at home, which will resonate with better relations with the community, as the family members dealing with the community will have less stress from home. Lower rates of PTSD can

result in lowered suicide rates among hostage negotiators. This more effective team will have an improved chance of doing a better job for the community. The after effects of my study have possible positive social change implications as more people could be saved by better functioning negotiators and better attitudes by negotiators that will resonate into the community (see Yob et al., 2014). Positive social change can be accomplished through scholarship by researching for better ways to deal with stress, practice by actually attempting a new and better way, and also reflection by negotiators looking at themselves to determine if there is a different and better way than the status quo (Yob et al., 2014).

### **Summary and Transition**

My goal in this study was to understand the best practice debriefing method for hostage negotiators to use to the effect of having lower stress levels and less likelihood of developing long term PTSD symptoms. This study was performed using the qualitative research methodology. Previous work on any similar topic either did not touch on this topic at all, only referenced debriefings briefly, or only discussed best personality qualities for possible hostage negotiators. The results of this study have tremendous positive social change implications. First and foremost, the hostage negotiator can have lower stress, less chance of developing long term PTSD, and less chance of stress induced suicide. The hostage negotiator can then go home less stressed so the family can have a less stressed home where they in turn can have a less stressed effect on the community when dealing with the community. The study results are also applicable to

other law enforcement officers, therefore demonstrating how large of a scale the positive social changes effects can be.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Background**

The following is a synthesis of literature review information based on my dissertation topic. The dissertation topic was related to hostage negotiators' use of post hostage incident stress debriefings. This literature review contains evidence-based information related to this topic.

The overall available literature repeatedly reinforces the general knowledge and expressed gaps in the literature for the topic of how hostage negotiator debriefing strategies affect the negotiator's stress reduction and perception of stress reduction. The current literature is redundant in that numerous researchers have pointed out that debriefings are important in the overall area of stress reduction; however, researchers have failed to look in depth at which strategies may be best equipped to assist negotiators in stress reduction and long term Post Traumatic Stress Disorder risk reduction. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is defined as a diagnosis formed by experiencing or seeing a tragic event where a threat to one's well being is perceived, whereas the stress is not dealt with and can have the long term effect of PTSD symptoms such as flashbacks and constantly thinking about the event (Stockdale, et.al., 2008). Although these feelings of the perceived threat are a good defense mechanism during a threat, they are harmful in the long term when there is no actual threat (Kunst & Winkel, 2013). The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fifth Edition, describes both short term stressors, acute stress disorder and long term stressor PTSD (DSM-V, 2013). Acute stress disorder occurs after experiencing a traumatic event from a few days up to 4 weeks later (DSM-V,

2013). PTSD is a stressor affecting functional impairment and distress for symptomology over 1 month (brainline.org, 2019). The focus of my study was long term, over 1 month stressors, because ongoing problematic issues can and do affect multiple areas of the PTSD affected's life. The rationale behind my focus on the long term stressor PTSD, as opposed to the short term stressor acute stress disorder, is that per the DSM- V, serious long term negative psychological and health issues can persistently occur (brainline.org, 2019; DSM-V, 2013). Suicidal ideations are of major concern as I have seen the effects with coworkers' suicides.

At this point, it is worthwhile reiterating the background information of both PTSD and acute stress disorder. In order for the discussion and background understanding of PTSD to be complete, the *American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders* 5<sup>th</sup> ed. must be referenced in detail. The following criteria for PTSD are applicable to individuals over the age of 6. An individual can be afflicted with the disorder if they experience the "exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence" by themselves going through the act, seeing the act, finding out someone close to them such as a relative or friend had the violent or accidental act happen to them, or experiencing the violent act vicariously through others, such as through first responders, which in this research project would be hostage negotiators (DSM-V,p.143, 2013). The afflicted individual would experience, "flashbacks" involving the incident, dreams involving the incident, "memories" which are negative about the incident, "intense or prolonged psychological distress"... in regards to a reaction involving a remembered stressor involving the past event, or

“physiological reactions internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event(s) (DSM-V, p. 144, 2013). Also present in the afflicted individual is the dodging of bad “memories, thoughts, or feelings”... in regards to the upsetting event, as well as, evading direct behaviors that remind of the event (DSM-V, p. 144, 2013).

Other experienced occurrences are changing the memories of the event to an even more negative scenario, as well as, experiencing a more negative mood involving the remembering of the event such as avoiding certain activities and embarrassment (DSM-V, 2013). Also experienced is the inability to focus, poor attitude, and being emotionally edgy when remembering the traumatic event (DSM-V, 2013). In order to be diagnosed with this disorder, the individual must experience these symptoms for more than 30 days, “causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning”, and is not related to the use of a “substance” such as drugs or “alcohol” (DSM-V, p. 146, 2013).

A second condition worth exploring in relation to post incident stress is acute stress disorder. Per the *American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders* 5<sup>th</sup> ed. information, the background indicators and symptoms are remarkably similar to PTSD other than it is suffered from 72 hours to 30 days (DSM-V, 2013). The main difference between the two afflictions to the length of the disorder and the timing of the disorder ([www.bridgestorecovery.com](http://www.bridgestorecovery.com), 2019).

I focused on PTSD as it is a long term disorder lasting over 30 days. Although acute stress disorder is a serious disorder, I believe the focus of this research should lie on the long term affliction (see DSM-V, 2013). The following information is further

rationale for the PTSD focus. PTSD has the propensity to lead to suicidal tendencies (Violanti, 2004). Acute stress disorder statically does not lead to the development of PTSD (Bryant, 2017). In response to trauma, the National Institute of Mental Health (2019) found that many people develop any number of mental health conditions in the short term until they learn other coping mechanisms. Because there are so many possible mental health short term responses to trauma, I would like to focus additional research on this necessary topic at a later date. This is the rationale for the focused PTSD research direction, which may result in large scale positive social change implications.

Many researchers have pointed out what personality characteristics are necessary to be a good hostage negotiator; however, there is little to no information on debriefing strategies to keep the hostage negotiator mentally healthy. There is also little information available involving direct debriefing strategies, which was a primary focus of this current study.

The theoretical base for this study was Kelley's followership theory. The followership theory is primarily based on an employee following the direction of a leader (Frisina, 2005). The followership theory is centrally based, and in particular interest of this current study, asserts that employees should be self thinkers and act in an according fashion to establish their own salvation in opposition to the benefit of the organization (see Frisina, 2005). The theory also concludes that successful followers have a strong moral background, which ensures that the most appropriate and proper decision is (Frisina, 2005). Hostage negotiators are not superheroes and thus need an appropriate method to discuss experienced stressors from the hostage taking incident (Cambria et al.,

2002). This is where the debriefing process comes in as the debriefing process is necessary to relieve trauma and for hostage negotiators to appropriately work through stressors (Norton & Petz, 2012). I further discuss the followership theory later of this study background.

The followership theory gives the rationale of why negotiators would benefit from identifying the most efficacious debriefing method for hostage negotiators in post critical incident stress debriefings, which can result in better short term and long term mental health and a more closely bonded hostage negotiation team. The research questions are as follows:

RQ1: How do hostage negotiations perceive that after incident hostage negotiation debriefing strategies lower their Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms?

RQ2: Which after incident hostage negotiation debriefing strategies do hostage negotiators perceive as most effective at lowering their Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms?

These research questions were directly appropriate to the followership theory as these questions gave the participants the opportunity to describe and understand how they can effectively debrief and deal with their stressors in a manner best suited to keep themselves mentally healthy and lower their chances of developing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder at a later date. The followership theory was effective in framing the research questions as the followership theory demonstrates the importance in self responsibility of the hostage negotiator in forming methods to effectively deal with their own stress symptoms (see Frisina, 2005). A good negotiator follows agency rules and standard

operating procedures; however, many agencies do not look at best practices for dealing with after hostage incident stress either by using formal debriefing methods or none at all. Many negotiators do not share their stressful feelings in formal debriefings as they feel that if they show weakness, their supervisors will reciprocate by either removing them from being a negotiator or terminate their employment, as evidenced by speaking with fellow hostage negotiators. The followership theory is based on such factors as not blindly following the organizational structure but instead determining what stress reduction method, that is, debriefing method, is most effective in stress reduction and PTSD long term symptom avoidance (Frisina, 2005).

My search strategy included using Walden University library search resources such as Ebsco, criminal justice data base, SAGE journals, and Google Scholar. The terms used included *hostage, negotiator, stress, PTSD, police, and law enforcement*.

Hostage negotiation is a relatively new tool utilized by law enforcement (Vecchi, et.al., 2004). Current hostage negotiation practices and tactics were originally introduced in the early 1970's (Vecchi, et.al., 2004). The hostage negotiation strategy was developed in 1973 by the New York Police Department due to a direct response of the Attica prison riot and the homicides of the 1972 Olympic athletes (Vecchi, et.al., 2004). The Attica, New York prison riot occurred in September 1971 (history.com, 2018). The incident involved over 1200 inmates taking 39 corrections officers hostage (history.com, 2018). The riot concluded when police used force to enter the facility to take control ending in 10 hostages and 29 inmates dying (history.com, 2018). The incident at the 1972 Olympics involved Arab terrorists taking Israeli Olympic athletes hostage to be used as a

bargaining tool for the release of 200 Arab prisoners (McMains & Mullins, 2010). The terrorists repeatedly made threats to kill hostages which they followed through on by killing hostages (McMains & Mullins, 2010). At the end of the incident, police demanded surrender which resulted in the terrorists killing additional hostages and a police officer during the conclusion of the incident (McMains & Mullins, 2010). These two incidents demonstrated to the New York Police Department that a better method to deal with hostage situations was necessary (McMains & Mullins, 2010).

For researchers to realistically understand hostage negotiation best practices for hostage negotiators stress relief and PTSD symptom reduction we must look closer at the implications of additional hostage incidents have had on this practice. To properly understand this we look at historically valid examples through the commonly known standard bearer text of hostage negotiation practices, “Crisis Negotiations: Managing critical incidents and hostage situations in law enforcement and corrections” by McMains & Mullins. The Williamsburg John and Al’s Sporting Goods incident was the first where hostage negotiation techniques were utilized instead of using just force (McMains & Mullins, 2010). During this incident several robbers took employees and customers hostages (McMains & Mullins, 2010). In the police response to the robbery one officer was killed and some were injured (McMains & Mullins, 2010). Instead of using the past practices of force the officers contained the situation and negotiated (McMains & Mullins, 2010). A hostage was released with a message to negotiators, either let them go or all the hostages would be killed (McMains & Mullins, 2010). The hostages then escaped through a wall the owners had previously put up which took away the hostage

takers leverage (McMains & Mullins, 2010). Police negotiation team members continued to negotiate to end in a peaceful resolution in which the hostage takers surrendered (McMains & Mullins, 2010). In 1973 the New York Police Department requested to the FBI that a hostage negotiation curriculum was necessary to assist with proper negotiation techniques, thus a standard curriculum was developed which is utilized current day in training both police and corrections hostage negotiators (McMains & Mullins, 2010).

There are many historical incidents that continue to develop the rationale for current utilization of hostage negotiation techniques which if looked at closely illustrate why hostage negotiators are exposed to a number of active stress inducing situations. Rochester, New York 1981 William Griffin kills his mother and a handy man while also wounding his stepfather (McMains & Mullins, 2010). Griffin proceeds to a bank a robs it while armed with a shotgun (McMains & Mullins, 2010). During the siege he tells police to kill him or he will kill the hostages (McMains & Mullins, 2010). Griffin would not negotiate with the police and instead send a female hostage, Margaret More to the front door where he shoots and kills her (McMains & Mullins, 2010). Griffin then walked in front of a window where he knew snipers were watching and was killed by police (McMains & Mullins, 2010). This is an example of suicide by cop where the hostage taker has a goal that is for the police to kill him (McMains & Mullins, 2010). During a take over and hostage situation a hostage taker took over a police department where multiple hostages were taken by a paranoid schizophrenic (McMains & Mullins, 2010). Due to the dangerous situation police snipers killed him (McMains & Mullins, 2010). Multiple months after this situation hostages reported feeling multiple symptoms which

would later be recognized as PTSD symptoms (McMains & Mullins, 2010). These PTSD symptoms included, "...excessive startled reactions, emotional numbing, withdrawal from their usual activities, reliving the experience either in flashbacks or nightmares, inability to concentrate, and avoidance of situations that reminded them of the incident" (McMains & Mullins, p. 27 – 28, 2010).

It was not until the late 1980's that the importance of hostage negotiation was understood in the prison setting (McMains & Mullins, 2010). There were two incidents, at Oakdale, Louisiana and Atlanta, Georgia where 1570 Cuban immigrant inmates took 126 hostages and after 12 days FBI negotiators were able to peacefully end the hostage situation (McMains & Mullins, 2010). The incident at Waco in 1993 was another hostage incident that lasted 56 days where multiple loss of lives occurred (McMains & Mullins, 2010). In this incident the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms conducted a raid on Branch Davidians where a gun fight then started (McMains & Mullins, 2010). This incident got worse due to negotiators and tactical responders not necessarily communicating about what they were doing (McMains & Mullins, 2010). This gave future negotiators and trainers multiple lessons about the importance of hostage negotiators and tactical responders working together and communicating effectively toward the same goal (McMains & Mullins, 2010). Two Russian hostage incidents are also very important in hostage negotiation practices. On October 23, 2002 an armed group of Chechnian terrorists took over a theater with 979 hostages (McMains & Mullins, 2010). These terrorists had multiple weapons and suicide bombers located throughout the theater to help prevent a tactical response (McMains & Mullins, 2010). Although some

hostages were executed multiple hostages were released showing that negotiation was possible (McMains & Mullins, 2010). Even though negotiation was possible, Russian authorities used gas to conduct a tactical response where 129 hostages died (McMains & Mullins, 2010). Lessons learned in this incident include using time appropriately, dealing with the person in charge, and having an updated idea of the threat level (McMains & Mullins, 2010). The other Russian incident on September, 1 2004 at the Beslan school occurred with Chechian terrorists which again used weapons and suicide bombers in the incident (McMains & Mullins, 2010). These terrorists made multiple violent threats and multiple hostages were killed during the incident (McMains & Mullins, 2010). During this incident Russian authorities improperly released inaccurate information about the incident and demands of the hostage takers which angered the hostage takers (McMains & Mullins, 2010). A lesson learned from this incident includes that due to the preparedness of the terrorists and high violence level, a tactical response should have been avoided and hostage negotiations should have been utilized (McMains & Mullins, 2010). Although there are multiple more hostage incidents that shaped the training and techniques of hostage negotiation practice these cases were instrumental in training and practice development (McMains & Mullins, 2010).

Currently, hostage negotiation techniques are a viable form of resolving a possibly dangerous and volatile hostage or barricaded individual situation in the civilian world and in the department of corrections (McMains & Mullins, 2010). A hostage negotiation has multiple stages that occur in its development (McMains & Mullins,

2010). These states include pre-crisis, crisis/defusing, adaptation/negotiations, and resolution/ surrender (McMains & Mullins, 2010).

### **Framework**

The theoretical base for this study will be Robert Kelley's followership theory. The followership theory is based on an employee following the direction of a leader (Frisina, 2005). The followership theory is based on that followers should also think for themselves and make the best decisions for their own wellbeing (Frisina, 2005). The theory also concludes that successful followers have good morals and values (Frisina, 2005). Also important to the study is that followers that are good contribute to the best interest of the team by not being sheep and by being accountable for themselves and contributing to the best end possible for the team (Frisina, 2005). Hostage negotiators are not super heroes and thus need an avenue to speak about the stress they experienced during a hostage negotiation incident (Cambria, DeFilippo, Loudon, & McGowan, 2002). The stressors are numerous from the hostage taker to the stresses of dealing with obtuse supervisors (Cambria, DeFilippo, Loudon, & McGowan, 2002). The debriefing process is necessary to relieve trauma and work through stressors (Norton & Petz, 2012). The followership theory is basis for this study concept on exploring the concept on giving the negotiators the opportunity to choose debriefing strategies to get the best outcome for themselves and their mental health (Frisina, 2005). Law enforcement officers, who includes hostage negotiators feel comfortable following seasoned officers and not out of touch bureaucrats thus following the followership theoretical logic (Rowe, 2006). The

purpose of this qualitative study is to explore whether and how after incident hostage negotiation debriefing strategies lower PTSD symptoms among hostage negotiators.

The followership theory will give basis for the rationale of why negotiators would benefit from identifying the most efficacious debriefing method for hostage negotiators in post critical incident stress debriefings which will result in better short term and long term mental health and a more closely bonded hostage negotiation team.

### **Research Questions**

RQ1: how do hostage negotiations perceive that after incident hostage negotiation debriefing strategies lower their Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms?

RQ2: which after incident hostage negotiation debriefing strategies do hostage negotiators perceive as most effective at lowering their Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms?

The first theme involved in hostage negotiator stress reduction is the profound issue of multidirectional stress and outsiders presuming that acknowledgment of stress portrays weakness on the behalf of the hostage negotiator. Hostage negotiators experience a wide variety of stressors when participating in a hostage situation resolution (Cambria, et.al., 2002). The hostage negotiator is both a symbol of law enforcement but also a negotiator trying to help the person which can sometimes be conflicting roles (Cambria, et.al., 2002). A previous article by Cambria et.al, that provided interview information from experienced hostage negotiators found that stress comes from more than one direction onto a negotiator, from the hostage taker and also from fellow officers who may ridicule the negotiator as being weak (Cambria, et.al., 2002). These same

researchers demonstrate that there is a very large number of first responders that are affected by PTSD symptoms, which should be of concern to employers (Ruck, et.al., 2013). Hostage negotiators provide a key role in law enforcement and in corrections as their actions have a direct effect on the outcomes of hostage and crisis situations (Grubb, 2012). Hostage negotiators work under extremely stressful situations and one proposed gap worth researching is what strategies do hostage negotiators utilize to cope with the highly stressful situations (Grubb, 2012). This identification of key underlying issues that form a hostage negotiator, such as coping strategies for stress are necessary to investigate due to the great implications on hostage situation survivors and all else that is involved (Grubb, 2012). As Grubb (2010) continues to verify in additional research, most previous literature discusses the importance of selecting hostage negotiators with the correct personalities and previous training, however, previous literature and previous research lacks and is necessary in the area of skill development such as coping mechanisms utilized by the hostage negotiators need to be researched (Grubb, 2010).

The second theme involving hostage negotiator stress reduction is unresolved PTSD precursors. This stress and anxiety can build up on a hostage negotiator. High stress and anxiety built up into PTSD can take a definite mental health toll on a law enforcement officer, including hostage negotiators, leading to prematurely leaving the criminal justice field (Stephens & Miller, 1998). If the stress and anxiety remains unresolved, it can morph into PTSD, alcohol abuse, or even worse, suicidal ideations (Volanti, 2004). Part of being a hostage negotiator is to let the hostage taker talk and speak about their issues. Much of the hostage negotiator's job is to listen as much of the

time the criminals involved in taking a hostage need someone to listen to so that the problem can be resolved (Cambria, et.al., 2002). After listening to the hostage taker for hours or possibly days, the hostage negotiator needs someone to talk to. The hostage negotiator needs someone, non judgmentally to talk to so that they can possibly verbally work through the issues of the negotiation. As Cambria, et.al. notes these issues could include verbal abuse taken during the negotiation from the hostage taker, other law enforcement, or even physical injuries or death sustained by anyone during the incident (Cambria, et.al., 2002). Similarly, a study involving police with military backgrounds determined that coping strategies, such as debriefing techniques, were necessary to lower burn out rates of the officers involved in traumatic events (Ivie & Garland, 2010). In the current format these issues would be attempted to be resolved during a critical incident stress debriefing. Peer support and self coping mechanisms show promise in prior studies of prisoners of war, but those directing that study, Solomon, et.al., indicate the continued research would be suggested in determining the effectiveness of such anti stress related mechanisms (Solomon, et.al., 1999). This peer social support shows promising results in prior studies, however, researchers in those studies indicate that continued research needs to be done in the extent of positive effects of social support on trauma victims (Flannery, 1990). These coping mechanisms can be directly related to dealing with stress on the short and long term which is in the exact realm of the proposed area of research of this dissertation topic. The additional research in the area of formal peer run, peer support meetings would have direct relation to coping strategies which would have a profound implication of future training and policy in regards to successful hostage negotiation from

the local level to the international level. (Grubb, 2010). A study involving employees of the United Kingdom prison service found that debriefing had a large and positive effect on reducing long term PTSD symptoms and stress symptoms (Ruck, et.al., 2013).

Hostage negotiators perform an extremely stressful job under the most dangerous of circumstances (Young, 2016). A gap in the literature is in direct relation to the area of hostage negotiation, as there is minimal prior research involving hostage negotiators (Young, 2016). An area that is imperative for developing successful strategies for hostage negotiations is again pointed out as strategies and tactics to be utilized by hostage negotiators in dealing with stresses and the negotiators' own feelings (Young, 2016). Young's study demonstrates that hostage negotiators have a skill set that allows them to be flexible and work towards utilizing what the situation provides (Young, 2016). The research shows that hostage negotiators can let go of negative feelings and accept the situation as it is during a hostage situation (Young, 2016). This research also shows the negotiators can change plans during the negotiation to arrive at a more positive outcome (Young, 2016). All of these strategies are coping techniques which can also be discussed and dealt with during post incident stress debriefings as this dissertation topic suggests. Gumani (2017) found that most studies on the effects of trauma on law enforcement were done in urban areas and that more needed to be done in rural areas (Gumani, 2017). The study found that police exposed to trauma many times resulted in the officer having a change in mindset due to the trauma (Gumani, 2017). The change in mindset required the utilization of debriefings in order to counter the negative traumatic effects of the

experience (Gumani, 2017). These negative experiences if left untreated seemed to result in later PTSD type symptoms (Gumani, 2017).

Westlund (2015) found that individuals experiencing violent acts are subject to losing touch with relations with others (Westlund, 2015). This loss of relations with others can be worsened by the city environmental experience (Westlund, 2015). The subjects in this qualitatively administered study found stress relief via stress reduction techniques involving experiencing nature (Westlund, 2015). An additional study involving those affected by trauma found that civilians and combat veterans, which law enforcement has very similar traumatic experiences as combat veterans, greatly benefit from trauma treatment, such as debriefing strategies (Jakupcak & Tull, 2005).

Basinka, et.al. (2014) found that the negative effects on long term job stress can greatly inhibit the effectiveness of law enforcement's job performance (Basinka, et.al., 2014). Dealing with stress in the short term has tremendous effects on stopping long term stress development which references the article (Noblet, 2009), (Basinka, 2014).

The third theme in hostage negotiator stress reduction is the necessity of some type of after incident critical incident stress debriefing. Although most hostage negotiations are stressful, some are extremely stressful such as situations involving prisons and also situations involving hostages or barricades in schools (Daniels, et.al., 2010). It is evidence based that hostage negotiations are a very effective means to peacefully end a hostage situation, but there is no one way to negotiate, as similarly there is no one, proven method to debrief which is a direction of this study to determine a possible best practice in stress reduction and PTSD reduction techniques (Grubb, 2010).

After a hostage negotiation incident it is common practice for all involved hostage negotiation team members, supervisors, and administrators to participate in a critical incident stress debriefing to discuss issues and possible emotional stressors with the hostage negotiation team members (McNally & Solomon, 1999). Research by Norton & Petz shows that the critical incident stress debriefings are necessary to discuss stressors and to work through possible psychological issues (Norton & Petz, 2012). These same authors assert that it is the responsibility of the employer to provide a safe work environment or support if something traumatic occurs (Ruck, et.al., 2013). This responsibility should include stepping back from unproductive administratively run post incident debriefings and for administrators permitting peer run, peer support sessions involving the entire hostage negotiation team to ensure an honest and productive anti PTSD discussion. Hostage negotiators, as well as, any other areas of law enforcement make mistakes. We are human and we all make mistakes at some point or another. Hostage negotiators can use the discussion to openly and honestly discuss mistakes to develop strategies for future hostage situations so that they end in successful resolutions (Greenstone, 2007). It is critical that post incident stress debriefings are honest and an area where negotiators feel free to give their true feelings (Greenstone, 2007). This idea of open and honest feedback does not necessarily occur in the current structure of post incident stress debriefings, as previously discussed, as they are attended by supervisors and administrators which limited the openness of the discussion. As the proposed research direction of this dissertation would address this issue by looking to investigate

the possibility of openness and honesty in a formally run, peer run peer support stress debriefing, where no administration is permitted.

The fourth theme involving hostage negotiator stress reduction is the importance of peer support. The research of Norton and Petz also identifies that peer support is very beneficial to reducing stress after traumatic incidents (Norton & Petz, 2012). This discussion with peers is essential to work out anxiety issues as long term effects of unresolved trauma could result in PTSD (Donnelly, 2015). Although formal stress debriefings are an important part of after hostage incident protocol, researchers such as Donnelly, et.al. suggest that the gap in the research requires that more studies need to occur in the area of peer support and different debriefing methods. (Donnelly, et.al., 2015). Hostage negotiation is a team solution and after incident debriefings are necessitated to be team oriented to be effective (Greenstone, 2007). Peer run, peer support would provide a non judgmental arena to work through and talk about stressors without the fear of looking weak by supervisors or of losing their job due to long term stress issues. Prior studies by Ruck, et.al. verify that when correctional employees are debriefed after a traumatic incident, they are far less likely to experience PTSD symptoms in the future (Ruck, et.al., 2013). Noblett, et.al. (2009) found that social support structures are key in determining the method of job stress reduction (Noblett, et.al., 2009). The study found that organization of law enforcement need to place importance on social support techniques in order to have a resulted job stress reduction (Noblett, et.al., 2009). A study by Flannery underscores the importance of peer support for trauma victims, but also

reinforces the concept that this area of study has not been touched on in previous studies thus reiterating the gap in the literature (Flannery, 1990).

The fifth theme of hostage negotiator stress reduction is the adaptation of the followership theory and its importance in achieving stress reduction. The peer run, peer support session occurring post hostage negotiating incident would fall under the followership theory. The followership theory would demonstrate that individuals involved in utilizing a strategy of independent goal oriented thinking to reach the goal of the organization (Goethals, et.al., 2004). This intended goal would be self directed stress reduction, PTSD and suicide prevention, as well as, the reduction of stress that could radiate to the home. The lower stressed hostage negotiators would also feel more trust and cohesiveness with the other hostage negotiation team members as a byproduct of the peer run, peer support meetings. This lower stress and cohesiveness would result in a more effective and better functioning hostage negotiation team, which would be the goal of the hostage negotiators employer. According to the theory the followers may not necessarily agree with the leadership methods and will act themselves to achieve the goal (Goethals, et. al. 2004). The team members in utilization of the followership theory are not sheep to the leaders but would rather take steps to be accountable themselves and work towards the end of making a better team (Frisina, 2005).

In utilization of the literature review thus far, the gap in the literature appears to be that informal team peer support has not been looked at even minimally or possibly at all and that the majority of research is dated. As seen in this literature review, researchers suggest that the gap in the research requires that more studies need to occur in the area of

effects of social support on those suffering from trauma. Peer run, peer support systems is an example of social effects on those suffering from issues related to trauma. The implicit goal is working out psychological trauma without fear of termination, enhancing mental health, and establishing a stronger team through group discussion and bonding. Team cohesion is essential as a hostage negotiation team relies on unquestionable trust between members. This more effective team will effect positive social change in saving individuals involved in a hostage situation and having far reaching positive psychological effects on team members. The proposed research direction, as demonstrated as necessary via this literature review, will investigate peer run, peer support after incident debriefings to insure team honesty and team cohesion. Also in a very serious realm the unresolved issues could lead to PTSD or suicide. If one individual's life is saved then this project is worth undertaking.

What is known is that hostage negotiators are under extreme amounts of stress. It is also known that hostage negotiators have a necessity to find stress reduction strategies to lower stress so that PTSD symptoms are not developed. An often utilized stress reduction strategy for hostage negotiators is to participate in post incident stress debriefings. What is not known is how negotiators perceive these debriefings assist them in their stress reduction. It also not known which after incident stress debriefing methods is most effective in reducing stress.

Qualitative research methodology will be employed in this study as this method demonstrates a depth on honesty by the participants. Qualitative research methodology will produce data that is vast in depth and demonstrates honest answers by the

participants (Patton, 2015). This depth will give the study a realistic and personal view of the emotional experience of the hostage negotiator (Patton, 2015). This honest view will give credibility to the data, as well as, experience based believability (Patton, 2015). The in depth interviewing will be completed via personal interviews.

Many of the previous studies did not touch on the research questions and areas focused on in this study. Most other studies looked at areas such as characteristics necessary to be a good negotiator and not stress reduction strategies utilizing a quantitative approach such as Abrahamsen & Strype. This study, as well as, studies by Basinka, et.al.; Ivie & Garland; and Young were all quantitative studies focusing on background, personality, or coping skill based personality traits which were not particularly relevant to the proposed research questions. Other quantitative studies such as those by Stockdale, et.al.; Jakupcak & Tull; and Kunst & Winkel all demonstrated the need for trauma care or debriefing after an incident but failed to show the depth of a qualitative interview methodology.

The studies that did look at stress reduction only touched on my area which is why there is a gap in the literature. Most of the relevant studies involving stress reduction techniques were qualitative research methodology such as those by Gumani and Westlund. The qualitative studies appeared to get more in depth and provided real data which this researcher believes is necessary to develop this study and assist negotiators with information to find best practice stress reduction techniques. The Westlund study demonstrated a stress lowering technique in detail which genuinely established an emotional description and could reach this studies intended audience (Westlund, 2013).

The Shenton (2004) article verified that when properly completed a qualitative study is very practical in utilization and provides for a well grounded study (Shenton, 2004). Since the Shenton study demonstrates the utilitarian values of qualitative research as a methodology, qualitative research methodology will be utilized as it is a very efficacious and trustworthy method of research (Shenton, 2004). Qualitative research is very effective as the researcher can utilize checks to ensure reliability and accuracy to assure scholars reading the research that the study is accurate (Shenton, 2004).

Personal interviews will be utilized to obtain the personal and uninhibited opinions of the study participants (Patton, 2015). The interviews will be conducted using the standardized open-ended interview approach utilizing the same questions in the same order to all participants. Patton, 2015). Participants will be asked follow up questions when necessary to investigate new data (Patton, 2015). Utilization focused sampling will be used as a limited number of cases, 15 in number (Patton, 2015). The small number of participants will ensure that the interviews will be focused and in depth to obtain useful data (Patton, 2015). The sample number will provide an adequate amount of data to provide multiple opinions to get a vast amount of new data, as well as, enough data to reach a saturation point where no additional data will be obtained (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify best practice hostage negotiator stress debriefings and ultimately use the study's findings to reduce PTSD symptoms. As illustrated in the literature review, there is little to no previous research in reference to hostage negotiator stress reduction debriefings. The majority of the previous research involved personality traits of a good negotiator or the statistical ramifications of law enforcement officers are affected by PTSD but certainly little specifically referencing hostage negotiators. The importance of this study lies in the area that hostage negotiators need a best practice debriefing method to allow them to have lower stress, lower PTSD symptom prevalence, and less chance of becoming suicidal.

In this chapter, I focused on multiple areas in respect to the research topic of identifying best practice debriefing methods for hostage negotiators in relation to lowering the incidence of stress and long term PTSD symptom acquisition. This chapter addresses such areas as research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, the methodology of the study, issues of trustworthiness of the study, and a brief summary and discussion.

### **Problem**

Hostage negotiators are exposed to a high level of traumatic experiences when participating in a hostage situation resolution (Cambria et al., 2002). During a hostage negotiation incident, there are multiple variables and situations that a hostage negotiator addresses. The hostage negotiator makes use of multiple verbal techniques to attempt to

deescalate the emotions of the hostage taker (McMains & Mullins, 2010). Throughout the negotiation process, the hostage negotiator allows the hostage taker to verbally work through the immediate and long term problems of the hostage taker through the negotiator (McMains & Mullins, 2010). This low number of professional negotiators accounts for a 95% success rate in successfully ending critical and dangerous hostage situations (Psychceu.com, 2018).

Due to possible violent situations performed by the hostage taker, abrupt and volatile changes can occur, so a main focus of the negotiator is to slow down the situation and help the hostage taker be more rationale in their decision making process (McMains & Mullins, 2010). The hostage negotiator is constantly, throughout the hostage situation, informing the hostage taker of results of their actions and proposed actions, both positive and negative, again to guide the hostage taker towards a positive result (McMains & Mullins, 2010). The hostage taking incident or any critical incident can either end in a positive or negative manner. The incident's stress, violence, and possible negative conclusion have short term and long term psychological effects on the negotiator. Hostage negotiators work under extremely stressful situations, and one proposed gap worth researching is what strategies hostage negotiators use to cope with the highly stressful situations (Grubb, 2012). This identification of key underlying personality traits that form a hostage negotiator, such as coping strategies for stress, are necessary to investigate due to the great implications on hostage situation survivors and all else that is involved (Grubb, 2012). Grubb (2010) also verified that most previous literature addresses the importance of selecting hostage negotiators with the correct personalities

and previous training; however, previous literature and previous research lacks and is necessary in the area of skill development such as coping mechanisms utilized by the hostage negotiators need to be researched (Grubb, 2010). The research gap and study direction of finding a best practice debriefing technique is extremely crucial as hostage scenarios are by definition stressful; however, some are extremely stressful, such as situations involving correctional facilities and situations involving hostages or barricades in schools (Daniels et al., 2010). In this study, I aimed to address possible solutions for the hostage negotiator to effectively deal with this stress.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the background and possibility of whether and how after incident hostage negotiation debriefing strategies lower PTSD symptoms among hostage negotiators. There is a multifaceted gap in the literature that I addressed in this study. It is quite evident from the literature review that there is both a lack of current studies and minimal studies on this topic. There is also a repeatedly stressed gap of research needed to be addressed in the peer support area of after incident hostage negotiation debriefings. In this study, I determined if there is a theoretical idea from hostage negotiators as to a best practice direction for after incident debriefing methods. The results of this study can guide future studies in the area of best practice hostage negotiator after incident debriefing methods, including all available best practice options suggested in this study, such as peer run peer supported after incident hostage negotiation debriefings.

Upon numerous extensive literature searches of the literature, both past and present, it is evident that there are in reality no studies addressing the concept of the efficaciousness of debriefing strategies in relation to reducing hostage negotiator stress. There were multiple attempted literature searches, as the searches were utilized through multiple attempts and using multiple combinations of search terms. The gap is further reinforced by stating that hostage negotiators operate in a stressful environment, whereas debriefings are necessary to work through stressors that were experienced in the hostage negotiation (Norton & Petz, 2012).

In order for laypersons to understand the efficaciousness of this study, it must be understood that negotiators are regular people, not superheroes, and therefore they need an avenue to release and relieve stressors as not to develop long term PTSD issues (Cambria et al., 2002). Norton and Petz (2012) provided background information related to hostage negotiators and the fact that they face many areas of stress during a hostage negotiation incident. Norton and Petz also provided background supporting data related to after incident stress debriefings and that these debriefings are an important step to work through stressors and accompanying peer support is very effective in helping to reduce trauma.

There are multiple stressors experienced by a hostage negotiator throughout the critical incident. These stressors experienced by hostage negotiators and law enforcement, if not dealt with appropriately and in a timely manner, can lead to long term stress and possible suicidal ideations (Violanti, 2004). These listed sources reinforce the importance of after hostage incident debriefings, but an in depth look at the

efficaciousness of debriefings on stress and PTSD symptom reduction on hostage negotiators has not been undertaken.

Although hostage negotiators are few in number, hostage negotiators provide a key role in law enforcement and in corrections as their actions have a direct effect on the outcomes of hostage and crisis situations (Grubb, 2012). This key role in law enforcement and public safety is hostage negotiation, which keeps individuals safe in a hostage situation, demonstrates how important this study is as it is imperative for society's safety to keep hostage negotiators in a positive mental health state. The results of this study, if found to be an improved method of stress and PTSD symptom reduction, can then be passed on to general law enforcement as a more appropriate and efficacious tool for proper mental health care. From the results of this timely study, future research will be driven in the area of after incident debriefings, which can also be used in other areas of law enforcement. To address this gap, a qualitative research approach was used.

The problem of hostage negotiators not necessarily having the appropriate stress relieving debriefing scenario is an important sociological problem. The problem of hostage negotiator stress reduction is a relatively new issue as hostage negotiation techniques, particularly FBI developed and NYPD developed techniques, are a relatively recent undertaking (Vecchi et al., 2004). Current hostage negotiation practices and tactics were originated in the early 1970s in response to several hostage incidents (Vecchi et al., 2004). The hostage negotiation strategy was developed in 1973 by the NYPD due to a direct response of the Attica prison riot and the homicides of the 1972 Olympic athletes (Vecchi et al., 2004).

Hostage negotiators are regular people who go through extreme amounts of stress, and they need a stress lowering avenue to lower their chances of PTSD development (Cambria et al., 2002). Many researchers have estimated that there is a large number of first responders who are affected by PTSD symptoms, which should be of concern to employers (Ruck et al., 2013).

In this study, I examined the gap in the literature with the following ideas in mind. These ideas are grounded firmly in the past literature and current literature. Even though these concepts do not address the gap in the literature, they are instrumental in grounding through past evidence the importance of my current study. McNally and Solomon (1999) provided views in relation to the importance of formal supervisor run post incident stress debriefings in dealing with hostage negotiator stress is worth reiterating. Norton and Petz (2012) provided crucial background data in relation to the fact that hostage negotiators face many areas of stress during a hostage negotiation incident. Norton and Petz also provided critical information related to after incident stress debriefings, that these debriefings are an imperative procedural step to work through stressors, and that accompanying peer support is very effective in helping to reduce trauma and is also worth repeating. Cambria et al. (2002) expressed that hostage negotiators received stress from many areas, such as hostage takers, supervisors, and coworkers. This supervisor and coworker induced stress can also be a very harmful stressor. Cambria et al. also demonstrated that hostage negotiators are not supermen and superwomen, and, therefore need an avenue to reduce trauma after an incident. Violanti (2004), a repeated writer on similar topics, dealt with the issue that trauma in law enforcement officers can lead to

PTSD and suicide. Frisina (2005) described the followership theory where it is stated that a good follower will not act unnecessarily as a sheep for the supervisor but will think critically for themselves to achieve an optimal end for themselves and the organization. The followership theory was the theoretical background and theoretical driver of this study. Ruck et al. (2013) found that correctional employees who received post incident stress debriefings after traumatic incidents were less likely to experience PTSD symptoms. With these important and evidenced based concepts in mind, I decided to complete a qualitative study with my parameters to directly and honestly answer my research questions.

The nature of this study as previously stated will be qualitative. Qualitative research will be utilized as it provides data that is in depth and illustrates the true opinions including underlying feelings of the interview participants (Patton, 2015). This in depth point of perception will give the study a personalized view of the true opinions and beliefs of the research participants (Patton, 2015). Utilization focused sampling will be used as a limited number of cases, 15 in number, will be explored in depth to determine possible best practices in debriefing and PTSD symptom reduction (Patton, 2015). The sample number is adequate to find the realistic opinions and ideas of the participants to enable the study data to allow positive social change implications to be achieved. The sample number should be enough to get multiple views and reach a saturation point where no additional data will be obtained (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

The participants will be selected from a pool of FBI trained hostage negotiators. The FBI offers one week long basic trainings to ensure that hostage negotiators receive

the proper techniques and mind set development in order to be effective hostage negotiators. These individuals will be selected from a local city hostage negotiation team. The city team is selected as they get more call outs and thus have more experience to draw on. There is one local city hostage negotiation team that is being looked at for possible participants as they get a larger amount of hostage negotiation call outs as compared to other agencies. This larger amount of call outs is in response to their more dangerous demographics than outside smaller agencies. This researcher will go through the appropriate Walden University protocol to request participants and establish all necessary steps are taken to appropriately complete my study.

The participants will be both experienced and inexperienced, meaning some having been thorough debriefing experience and others not, as to get a broad range of opinions and perspectives. There are many hostage negotiators, especially on smaller hostage negotiation teams that are FBI trained, however, many of these negotiators have never been on a call out for an active hostage negotiation and thus have not been through a debriefing process. These individuals have an important opinion in regards to my study as trainings of scenarios are very realistic, can be traumatic, and usually require an after incident debriefing to assure proper protocol was taken and to insure that everyone involved is both physically and mentally healthy in relation with what had occurred. The qualitative research method, interview method, and sampling size all align in respect to little to no prior research on this topic has been done, so that this new research data will provide new and unique data to assist in working towards achieving positive social change.

## Theory

The theoretical base utilized for this study will be Robert Kelley's followership theory. The followership theory is based on an employee, in this case hostage negotiator, following the direction of a leader (Frisina, 2005). The followership theoretical basis is that followers, employees, must think independently for themselves and make the best decisions for their own wellbeing (Frisina, 2005). The theoretical basis is also encompassed by the idea that good morals and values are necessary to be a successful follower and negotiator (Frisina, 2005). It is imperative and essential to quality hostage negotiation team performance that employees that are following the theory contribute to the best interest of the team by not being sheep and by being accountable for themselves and contributing to the best end possible for the team (Frisina, 2005).

Hostage negotiators are not super heroes, they are regular human beings with weaknesses, and thus need an avenue to speak about the stress they experienced during a hostage negotiation incident (Cambria, DeFilippo, Loudon, & McGowan, 2002). The stressors are numerous and wide in scope, from the hostage taker to the stresses of dealing with obtuse supervisors (Cambria, DeFilippo, Loudon, & McGowan, 2002).

For lay persons, an inquisitive thought may be why is it imperative that stress reduction techniques and debriefing methods for hostage negotiators be looked at in this study. The direct study basic rationale is seen throughout this study and has many inclusive aspects. The first theme involved in hostage negotiator stress reduction is the profound issue of multidirectional stress. A common stressor is hostage negotiators perception that outsiders presuming that acknowledgment of stress, portrays weakness on

the behalf of the hostage negotiator. Hostage negotiators experience a wide variety of stressors when participating in a hostage situation resolution (Cambria, et.al., 2002). The hostage negotiator is both a symbol of law enforcement force and peacekeeper but also a negotiator trying to help the person which can sometimes be conflicting roles (Cambria, et.al., 2002). A previous article by Cambria et.al, that provided interview information from experienced hostage negotiators found that stress comes from more than one direction onto a negotiator, from the hostage taker and also from fellow officers who may ridicule the negotiator as being weak (Cambria, et.al., 2002). These same researchers demonstrate that there is a very large number of first responders, which includes hostage negotiators, that are affected by PTSD symptoms, which should be of concern to employers (Ruck, et.al., 2013). These affected numbers of hostage negotiators, and other first responders for that matter, demonstrate how important this problem is to address lowering stress, lowering the incidence of both short term and long term PTSD symptoms, and possibly thwarting suicidal tendencies due to unaddressed stress and trauma from a hostage taking incident.

The second theme involving hostage negotiator stress reduction is addressing the phenomenon of unresolved PTSD precursors and their short term, long term, and far reaching negative effects. The unresolved and not dealt with stress and anxiety can build up in a hostage negotiator and cause a multitude of short term and long term problems. High stress and anxiety built up into PTSD can take a definite mental health toll on a law enforcement officer, including hostage negotiators, leading to prematurely leaving the criminal justice field (Stephens & Miller, 1998). If the stress and anxiety remains

unresolved, it can morph into PTSD, alcohol abuse, or even worse, suicidal ideations (Volanti, 2004).

Another third theme, peer support and self coping mechanisms show promise in prior studies of prisoners of war, but those conducting that research, Solomon, et.al., indicate the continued research would be suggested in determining the effectiveness of such anti stress related mechanisms (Solomon, et.al., 1999). Similarly, a study involving police with military backgrounds determined that coping strategies, such as debriefing techniques, were necessary to lower burn out rates of the officers involved in traumatic events (Ivie & Garland, 2010). In the current format these issues would be attempted to be resolved during a critical incident stress debriefing. Critical incident stress debriefings are currently the only avenue available for official stress reduction after a hostage negotiation incident, however, unfortunately some agencies fail to offer even any type of debriefing. This is unfortunate and can be extremely harmful for hostage negotiators in the long term. This lack of available opportunities for debriefings is a topic for future studies. The evidence of the importance of debriefing demonstrates how vital my study is to find the preferred and best practice debriefing technique. These best practice debriefing technique strategies can be utilized by hostage negotiators and then possibly other law enforcement adaptation to develop lower stress, lower PTSD symptoms, and lower rates of suicidal issues.

The after incident debriefing process is necessary to relieve trauma and work through stressors (Norton & Petz, 2012). The followership theory is basis for this study concept on exploring the concept on giving the negotiators the opportunity to choose

debriefing strategies to get the best outcome for themselves and their mental health (Frisina, 2005). Hostage negotiators if given the opportunity to choose their best practice debriefing technique will have the best chance of living a long, healthy life. The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore whether and how after incident hostage negotiation debriefing strategies lower PTSD symptoms among hostage negotiators. The results of this study will resonate outward to positively affect all members of law enforcement and their perceived and actual stressors.

The followership theory will give basis for the rationale of why negotiators would benefit from identifying the most efficacious debriefing method for hostage negotiators in post critical incident stress debriefings which will result in better short term and long term mental health and a more closely bonded hostage negotiation team. The better short term and long term mental health attributes will provide for a more mentally healthy hostage negotiator. The more mentally healthy hostage negotiator will have a general more positive effect on his or her family, where in turn, the family will then have a more positive effect on the community than a stressed family member would. This demonstrates the efficaciousness of the positive social change implications.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

Qualitative research methods will be utilized. Qualitative research methodology will be used as it provides the means to develop deep and quality filled data (Patton, 2015). The qualitative research methodology will allow for the data to be honest and fully developed by the participants (Patton, 2015).

### **Research Questions**

RQ1: how do hostage negotiators perceive that after incident hostage negotiation debriefing strategies lower their Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms?

RQ2: which after incident hostage negotiation debriefing strategies do hostage negotiators perceive as most effective at lowering their Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms?

### **Central Concepts of the Study**

Hostage negotiators are involved in a multitude of extremely stressful situations while attempting to successfully terminate a hostage or barricade situation (Cambria, et.al., 2002). While negotiator is attempting to successfully resolve a hostage situation, the negotiator is being exposed to multiple negative stressors. During the attempted resolution of the hostage situation, the negotiator utilizes a variety of verbal and mental techniques to bring the situation to a positive resolution (McMains & Mullins, 2010). Throughout the attempted hostage situation negotiation, the hostage negotiator allows the hostage taker to verbally deal with their real and perceived issues to try to bring the situation to a positive ending through the efforts of the hostage negotiator (McMains & Mullins, 2010). Due to the volatile nature of the irrationality of the hostage taker, extremely fast and violent changes can occur in the hostage situation, thus making it necessary that the hostage negotiators slows down the situation to allow the hostage taker to possibly make more rational decisions (McMains & Mullins, 2010). . During the entire negotiation process, the hostage negotiator is giving the hostage taker constant feedback both positive and negative about the ramifications of their actions (McMains & Mullins,

2010). The hostage taking incident, whether hostage incident or barricade incident will conclude in either a positive or negative outcome. The incident's stress, violence, and possible negative outcome will have the chance of effecting short term and long term negative psychological effects on the hostage negotiator.

The hostage negotiator works under a wide variety of extremely stressful situations (Grubb, 2012). An important gap in the research, which is one worth investigating, is in reference to what debriefing strategies do hostage negotiators use in order to effect a coping mechanism to lower stress and lower the chance of developing long term PTSD symptoms (Grubb, 2012). As Grubb (2010) continues to verify in additional research, most previous literature discusses the importance of selecting hostage negotiators with the correct personalities and previous training, however, previous literature and previous research lacks and is necessary in the area of skill development such as coping mechanisms utilized by the hostage negotiators need to be researched (Grubb, 2010). The topic of finding best practice debriefing technique is extremely vital as hostage scenarios are by definition stressful, however, some are extremely stressful such as situations involving prisons and also situations involving hostages or barricades in schools (Daniels, et.al., 2010). This study aims to address possible solutions for the hostage negotiator to effectively deal with this stress.

The nature of this study will be qualitative. A qualitative research methodology will be utilized to extract data that infers and describes the deep emotional responses of the interviewees (Patton, 2015). The interviewees will be professionally experienced hostage negotiators which will provide for fact based data (Patton, 2015). The

emotionally and experienced based data will provide views and data that provides both emotional depth and credibility (Patton, 2015). The emotion based data will also provide the study with experience based believability (Patton, 2015).

In depth interviewing techniques will be utilized via personal one on one interviews. The personal interviews were selected as the utilized technique as these types of interviews provide for the opportunity to obtain personal and uninhibited views of the study participant (Patton, 2015). The interviews will be conducted using the standardized open-ended interview approach where the same questions will be asked in the same order to all participants, with follow ups and probes used efficiently, to gain a full and honest perspective from the interviewee (Patton, 2015). The pragmatic interviewing inquiry method will be used by asking efficacious and focused professional questions in order to achieve the acquisition of the data (Patton, 2015). Utilization focused sampling will be used as a limited number of cases, approximately 15 participants in total, based of the quality and depth of the data obtained (Patton, 2015). The approximate number of interviewees, 15, will be adjusted and fluid determined by the data received and the perception of if saturation of data is obtained (Patton, 2015). The data obtained will be explored in depth to determine possible best practices in debriefing and PTSD symptom reduction (Patton, 2015). The sample number should be enough to get multiple views and reach a saturation point where no additional data will be obtained (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

### **Participants**

It is based on research evidence that hostage negotiators are quite effective as a means to effectively and peacefully terminate a hostage or barricade situation, however,

just as there is no one way to negotiate every possible hostage scenario, there is no one certain method to effectively debrief all emotional and psychological issues for all hostage negotiators (Grubb, 2010). I will look to locate multiple experience levels of hostage negotiators, some having vast negotiating and thus vast debriefing experience, as well as, new hostage negotiators with little hostage negotiating and debriefing experience. Some of the less experienced hostage negotiators may only have practice scenario experience. The broad range of experience levels will allow for a thorough and data saturated research endeavor obtaining a full range of emotional and psychological experiences. This method of looking at multiple levels of experience in hostage negotiators is based on the fact that there is no one way to effectively debrief for everyone as everyone is different and possesses different needs.

The individuals to be selected will be from 2 area cities and the local county, to allow that they have been exposed to more experience due to they have more hostage situations than smaller departments. This will be 2 local city teams and the county team, which I, as the researcher and interviewer, have trained with many members before to insure that the interviewees will be comfortable with me and thus have more trust in me than opposed to someone with which they have no familiarity.

The study population is approximately 20 - 24 as this number is fluid. This number moves due to new additions and retirements. The experience level of these negotiators ranges from no experience to 10 years of hostage negotiation experience. A sample size of approximately 15 represents approximately half the hostage negotiation team members which should provide both justifiable and adequate data. Although there

are no general absolute rules for establishing an appropriate and adequate sampling size, this researcher believes that the sampling size of 15 participants will produce a variety of informed and adequate opinions resulting in new data and an amount of new information allowing the saturation level to be reached (Patton, 2015). The fluid sample size, which can be adjusted based on necessity of new information acquisition, will enable myself to have ample opportunity to gain in depth information and highly valuable data that will be utilized in addressing the proposed research problem (Patton, 2015). The small sample size has been historically validated by providing large amounts of new, quality data in previous studies (Patton, 2015). The sample size number should be at a level high enough to get multiple views and reach a saturation point where no additional data will be obtained (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

There will be specific steps required to enact this study. Initially I will contact the local city police agency lead administrator, the police chief, to establish approval to conduct the study interviews. In the initial contact correspondence I have included background information that I have a past repoire with the hostage negotiation team leader via past trainings, whereas, he can attest to my trustworthiness and character. This contact for approval will be completed via phone and emails, whatever contact method is necessary, utilizing the approved Walden University email templates. Once initial agency approval is secured I will then contact the Hostage Negotiation Team leader for team and individual team member interest and approval. Next, the individual study participants will be contacted via email to find if there is interest in participating in the study. I will contact the possible participants and establish trustworthiness and credibility by

emphasizing my past training with them and stressing the fact that I am also a hostage negotiator. This trustworthiness and comradery will establish a greater likelihood of participation and honesty in my study. After the participants agree to take part in the study I will then email all appropriate documentation demonstrating and verifying their agreement to participate, as well as, all paperwork addressing consents and ethical concerns. When all appropriate documentation is received and all appropriate Walden University approvals are acquired then the interviews will take place. I will meet with the interview participants at a location of their choice to establish a comfortable and relaxed environment for the interviews to take place. During the interview, established basic questions will be addressed then specific follow up questions will be utilized to obtain the greatest amount of data. Specific questions will again be addressed in a following table. I will follow up the interview by verbally thanking the participants and also will send out a follow up email to establish my gratitude for their participation. The data will then be coded to find repeated and important themes to establish the basis for the information and relevance of my research.

### **Research Design**

RQ1: how do hostage negotiators perceive that after incident hostage negotiation debriefing strategies lower their Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms?

The interview question for this Research Questions are as follows along with the rationale.

IntQ-Please describe your role as a hostage negotiator? This particular question establishes a base line demonstrating the hostage negotiator's level of topic knowledge.

IntQ-After an incident explain the process of a critical incident stress debriefing?

This particular question establishes a base line demonstrating the hostage negotiator's level of topic knowledge.

IntQ-In your experience please describe the positive and negative psychological after effects of a hostage situation after you were properly debriefed? This question is a direct line of data from the research question.

IntQ- In relation to the last question, what is your perception of both short term and long term stress levels and PTSD symptomology compared to a hostage taking incident or traumatic incident occurring on the job where no debriefing was offered? – This question directly answers part of the research question establishing essential data.

RQ2: which after incident hostage negotiation debriefing strategies do hostage negotiators perceive as most effective at lowering their Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms?

Interview questions followed by the rationale for their utilization are as follows.

IntQ - In your experience, please describe your views on what is the most efficacious after incident debriefing method to possibly allow you to be more honest and open about your stressors from the incident? This question directly answers part of the research question establishing essential data.

Follow up Q – Please describe specifically how this method allows you to be open and honest so that your stressors can be specifically addressed?

IntQ-Describe in your view how might the process of stress reduction be affected by a your preferred after incident debriefing as compared to a method that you find

unfavorable? This question directly answers part of the research question establishing essential data.

Follow up Q – Please describe the theoretical debriefing method of peer run, no administrators permitted debriefing may compare to your most favorable debriefing method? The rationale for this question is to establish evidence for a possible additional research direction to be addressed after this study.

Follow up Q – Looking at all experienced debriefing methods and the previously addressed peer run method, which do you believe would be most efficient and why? The rationale for this question is to establish evidence for a possible additional research direction to be addressed after this study.

IntQ-In your view describe any experiences you have had with team bonding in an after incident debriefing scenario and if the effects were either positive or negative? This question directly answers part of the research question establishing essential data as team bonding may demonstrate applicable stress lowering effects.

Follow up Q – Describe in your beliefs, is there a preferred debriefing method that you would prefer in establishing a more positive team bonding experience? The rationale for this question is to establish evidence for a possible additional research direction to be addressed after this study. Table 1 shows the flow of the research questions, interview questions, and follow up questions.

Table 1

*Research and interview questions*

Research Question 1	
RQ1: How do hostage negotiations perceive that after incident hostage negotiation debriefing strategies lower their Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms?	
Interview questions	
IntQ-Please describe your role as a hostage negotiator?	
IntQ-After an incident explain the process of a critical incident stress debriefing?	
IntQ-In your experience please describe the positive and negative psychological after effects of a hostage situation after you were properly debriefed?	
IntQ- In relation to the last question, what is your perception of both short term and long term stress levels and PTSD symptomology compared to a hostage taking incident or traumatic incident occurring on the job where no debriefing was offered?	
Research Question 2	
RQ2: Which after incident hostage negotiation debriefing strategies do hostage negotiators perceive as most effective at lowering their Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms?	
Interview questions	Follow up questions

IntQ - In your experience, please describe your views on what is the most efficacious after incident debriefing method, or part of a method, to possibly allow you to be more honest and open about your stressors from the incident?	Follow up Q – Please describe specifically how this method allows you to be open and honest so that your stressors can be specifically addressed?
IntQ-Describe in your view how might the process of stress reduction be affected by a your preferred after incident debriefing as compared to a method that you find unfavorable?	Follow up Q – Please describe the theoretical debriefing method of peer run, no administrators permitted debriefing may compare to your most favorable debriefing method?
	Follow up Q – Looking at all experienced debriefing methods and the previously addressed peer run method, which do you believe would be most efficient and why?
IntQ-In your view describe any experiences you have had with team bonding in an after incident debriefing scenario and if the effects were either positive or negative?	Follow up Q – Describe in your beliefs, is there a preferred debriefing method that you would prefer in establishing a more positive team bonding experience?

Prior research shows little to no evidence or discussion, for that matter, in regards to the efficaciousness of debriefing strategies in relation to hostage negotiator stress reduction and PTSD symptom avoidance. The past literature primarily focuses on personality needs of new negotiators in relation to them developing into effective negotiators.

According to the American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders 5<sup>th</sup> ed. must be referenced in detail. The following criteria for PTSD are applicable to individuals over the age of 6. An individual can be afflicted with the disorder if they experience the “exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence” by themselves going through the act, seeing the act,

finding out someone close to them such as a relative or friend had the violent or accidental act happen to them, or experiencing the violent act vicariously through others, such as through first responders, which in this research project would be hostage negotiators (DSM-V,p.143, 2013). The PTSD symptomology affected individual would experience, “flashbacks” involving the incident, dreams involving the incident, “memories” which are negative about the incident, “intense or prolonged psychological distress”... in regards to a reaction involving a remembered stressor involving the past event, or “physiological reactions internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event(s) (DSM-V, p. 144, 2013). Also present in the afflicted individual is the dodging of bad “memories, thoughts, or feelings”... in regards to the upsetting event, as well as, evading direct behaviors that remind of the event (DSM-V, p. 144, 2013). Another symptom is a person changing the memory of an experienced occurrence are changing the memories of the event to an even more negative scenario, as well as, experiencing a more negative mood involving the remembering of the event such as avoiding certain activities and embarrassment (DSM-V, 2013). Also experienced is the inability to focus, poor attitude, and being emotionally edgy when remembering the traumatic event (DSM-V, 2013). In order to be diagnosed with this disorder, the individual must experience these symptoms for more than 30 days, “causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning”, and is not related to the use of a “substance” such as drugs or “alcohol” (DSM-V, p. 146, 2013).

Acute stress disorder is remarkably similar in symptomology to PTSD with its main difference being the length of the affliction. Per the American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders 5<sup>th</sup> ed. information, the background indicators and symptoms are remarkably similar to PTSD other than it is suffered from 72 hours to 30 days (DSM-V, 2013). The main difference between the two afflictions is the length of the disorder and the timing of the disorder (www.bridgestorecovery.com, 2019).

In looking at the research design and to truly understand the importance of the scope of this study, it is imperative that we understand that approximately 15 percent of law enforcement have PTSD (cops.usdoj.gov2019) Imperatively, the real additional issue is that there is an unknown amount that have not yet been diagnosed (www.cops.usdoj.gov, 2019). Dr. Violanti continued in his exclamation of the importance of researching PTSD in law enforcement officers:

Nowhere is this more critical than when officers are faced with the use of deadly physical force. Decisions not to shoot, missed shots, and inappropriate tactics can cost officers or bystanders their lives or leave them grievously injured. It is of critical importance for accurate, rapid decision making in deadly force confrontations despite the fact that they often occur in complex, fast-paced, ambiguous and low-information situations. As difficult as decisions to use deadly force are in themselves, such decisions may only be exacerbated by PTSD. Decisions involving deadly force, albeit critical, are not the only significant decisions that police officers are faced with.

In a 2013 study it was noted that police officers experienced multiple traumatic events through the performance of their duties, over 60 percent of male officers and over 46 percent of female officers (Hartley, et.al., 2013). This same study then noted that over 75 percent of officers reported experiencing trauma within the current month (Hartley, et.al., 2013).

Even more alarming in validation for this study topic, “there are approximately 900,000 sworn officers in the United States. According to some studies –19% of them may have PTSD. Other studies suggest that approximately 34% suffer symptoms associated with PTSD but do not meet the standards for the full diagnosis” (psychologytoday.com, 2018). This statement demonstrates the true depth of this study as it shows a scarily high number of individuals not yet diagnosed with PTSD but demonstrating symptoms which will greatly and negatively affect their lives.

Stress lowering issues for long term mental health is imperative for the long term health of hostage negotiators and their families. The possible positive implications for hostage negotiators and their families and the outward positive effects they will have on society, as well as, positive social change ramifications demonstrate the necessity for this study.

As evidenced in the previous literature, hostage negotiators are not super heroes and therefore as humans necessitate a method to speak about the stress they experienced during a hostage negotiation incident (Cambria, DeFilippo, Loudon, & McGowan, 2002). The debriefing process is necessary to relieve trauma and work through stressors (Norton & Petz, 2012). The followership theory is the evidenced base for this study, as it develops

the concept and explores the idea that giving the negotiators the opportunity to choose debriefing strategies will enable the hostage negotiator to get the best outcome for themselves and their mental health (Frisina, 2005).

The research questions have specific positive social change implications necessary to give hostage negotiators and other law enforcement, for that matter, to have a better chance at long term mental health. The better mental health effects will truly make a difference in so many lives which demonstrates the utility in this study.

This study will be utilized in some areas to possibly find best practice stress lowering techniques through debriefing strategies. Finding best practice debriefing techniques, in the honest opinions of the participant hostage negotiators, utilizing my study, will enable policy makers to develop the best possible debriefing techniques. As previously stated, these techniques, specifically derived from the research question answers, will develop best practice debriefing techniques to allow hostage negotiators the ability to lower stress and not develop PTSD symptoms in the long term. These long term PTSD symptoms in the long term can develop into suicidal ideations (Violanti, 2004).

This debriefing skill set can be ultimately utilized in application toward other law enforcement agencies debriefing standard operating procedures which will also affect additional positive social change outcomes. Again it should be emphasized that, the less stressed negotiator or other law enforcement officers will have lower incidents of suicide and PTSD, be able to do a better job at their employment if less stressed which can save additional civilian lives, and have a better less stressed family life. The less stressed

family behavior will then resonate outwardly into the community. The positive community effect will demonstrate the large possible outward flow of positive social change that is achievable with my study.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations in this study are relatively low in expectation. This low expectation of ethical issues is due to the study will be conducted with consenting adults, not from a protected population. The study participants will be fully notified of any and all Walden University ethical considerations and of any and all solutions to any possible ethical issues. In order to low possible ethical conflicts, I will select hostage negotiators from a different hostage negotiation team from my own. This team will be selected from my local area as to assure that the participants are comfortable with myself as the interviewer, but not on my specific team to insure my fairness and objectivity. With these ethical considerations in mind, again any ethical considerations appear to be generally low in problem expectation.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of the study include the following. An initial limitation is will the participants feel comfortable enough in their experiences to be open and honest in their responses. The perception that the interviewees responses will possibly be used by their supervisors to discipline the interviewees for their honest and possibly anti establishment responses. These limitations will be countered by the comforting that myself also being a hostage negotiator, as well as, my assurance that all responses will be kept confidential.

### **Delimitations**

The delimitations of the study are as follows. The scope of the study is quite concise and direct in design and nature. The scope is intended in this direct manner specifically by design. The field of hostage negotiation is a field with a low population. These individuals are usually selected due to their assumed and perceived abilities. Most hostage negotiators are required to complete an extensive FBI training program. This in essence keeps the number of hostage negotiators at a low level and not part of the main stream of the law enforcement and general population field. The study and research questions were focused to keep on a direct path to concisely address this focused area of the population in its lens so that they specifically can be helped. Also, it is worth reiterating, as discovered in pre dissertation class work, hostage negotiation terminology is not known by the general population and thus is disadvantageous to utilize those not in the hostage negotiation field as participants.

The delimitations are any proposed negative factors in my choice to keep the participants field low in number and focused. The low numbers may limit responses and in turn may limit data, however, as previously discussed this is by design and is advantageous in the mind of the study designer.

### **Conclusion**

Hostage negotiators encompass a relatively low number in the grand scheme of law enforcement professionals. Even though they encompass a low percentage of law enforcement professionals, they provide an important and quite difficult job function that is necessary to keep the general population safe. This low number of professional negotiators account for a 95 percent success rate in successfully ending critical and

dangerous hostage situations (Psychceu.com, 2018). This is a far better success rate than all other methods for ending a hostage situation (McMains & Mullins, 2010). These individuals are human and need procedures to enable them to effectively deal with stressors so that these hostage negotiators can lead long, healthy lives. This study enables myself the researcher to verify best practice after incident debriefing methods so that these best practices can be utilized, as well as, enabling myself to open doors to accomplish further necessary research on this topical endeavor.

## Chapter 4 Results

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I discuss my data collection overview and data analysis procedure as well as my strategy for these two areas. Upon discussing the findings, it is appropriate to first revisit two specific areas that were discussed in prior chapters. The first area to revisit is the purpose of the study. The second area to discuss again is the research questions.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify best practice hostage negotiator stress debriefings and ultimately use the study's findings to reduce PTSD symptoms. As illustrated in the literature review, there is little to no previous research in reference to hostage negotiator stress reduction debriefings. The majority of the previous research involved personality traits of a good negotiator or the statistical ramifications of law enforcement officers affected by PTSD but little specifically referencing hostage negotiators. The previous statements made in regards to the literature review are still accurate and relevant. The importance of this study is that hostage negotiators need a best practice debriefing method to allow them to have lower stress, lower PTSD symptom prevalence, and in accordance with these two issues, less chance of becoming suicidal.

The results of this study can have great positive social change implications. The lower levels of stress and PTSD symptoms ramifications demonstrated by using best practice hostage negotiator stress debriefing tactics can have a profound and resonating effect on the negotiator, their families, and the community at large. The positive study results can then be used by other areas of law enforcement in their adaptation of best

practice debriefing strategies. This study was necessary and timely in an era of PTSD symptoms and law enforcement suicides.

My study involved a one-on-one interview method in order to establish deep and thoughtful interview answers to obtain meaningful data (see Patton, 2015). I interviewed 12 participants ( $N = 12$ ), which provided me with a wealth of data. The following research questions were the basis behind my study and my interviews.

### **Research Questions**

RQ1: how do hostage negotiators perceive that after incident hostage negotiation debriefing strategies lower their Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms?

RQ2: which after incident hostage negotiation debriefing strategies do hostage negotiators perceive as most effective at lowering their Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms?

Prior research revealed little to no evidence or discussion in regards to the efficaciousness of debriefing strategies in relation to hostage negotiator stress reduction and PTSD symptom avoidance. The past literature primarily addressed personality needs of new negotiators in relation to them developing into effective negotiators.

As previously discussed, as evidenced in the previous literature, hostage negotiators are not superheroes and therefore as humans necessitate a method to speak about the stress they experienced during a hostage negotiation incident (Cambria et al., 2002). The debriefing process is necessary to relieve trauma and work through stressors (Norton & Petz, 2012). The followership theory was the evidence base for this study, as it

develops the concept and explores the idea that giving the negotiators the opportunity to choose debriefing strategies can enable the hostage negotiator to obtain the best outcome for themselves and their mental health (Frisina, 2005).

The research questions have specific positive social change implications necessary to give hostage negotiators and other law enforcement the opportunity to have a better chance at long term mental health achievement. Finding best practice debriefing techniques, in the honest opinions of the participant hostage negotiators, can enable policy makers to develop the best possible debriefing techniques. These techniques, specifically derived from the research question answers, can be used to develop best practice debriefing techniques to allow hostage negotiators the ability to lower stress and not develop PTSD symptoms in the long term. These far reaching PTSD symptoms in the long term can develop into suicidal ideations (Violanti, 2004). This debriefing skill set, as described by hostage negotiators in the interview process, can be outwardly applied to other law enforcement agencies debriefing standard operating procedures, which can also affect additional positive social change outcomes. Again, the less stressed negotiator or other law enforcement officers will have lower incidents of suicide and PTSD, be able to do a better job at their employment if less stressed, which can save additional civilian lives, and have a better less stressed family life. The less stressed family behavior can then resonate into the community and thus demonstrate the large possible outward flow of positive social change that is achievable with my study.

The research questions and interview questions were designed to establish credibility of the interviewees as well as to look beyond the everyday thought processes

of the interviewees to a place where they could be truly honest with themselves, with no supervisors around, to specifically deal with underlying understandings and feelings about the after incident hostage negotiator debriefing process and its positive and negative after effects.

### **Contextual Premise of the Study**

The nature of the approach of the study was derived from the underlying tone and direction of the topic. In order to find the true, honest, and deep inner feelings of the participants, a one-on-one interview style was necessary and effective. Data were collected at two local police agencies due to my professional familiarity with these two entities. These two interview occurrences happened on two separate timeframes at two separate places. On Day 1, I went to a local police department to conduct interviews in a small Pennsylvania town. On Day 2, I went to a city in eastern PA to complete a second set of interviews. The demographics for these interviews are displayed in Table 2 for demonstration purposes.

Table 2

#### *Participants' Demographic Distribution*

Groups	<i>n</i>	%
Female	2	17
Male	10	83

### **Participant Anonymity and Interview Protocol**

Adhering to the protocols established via Walden University's Institutional Review Board approval number, 03-29-19-0098963, I was not required to establish anonymity as the hostage negotiator team leaders knew of the participants. However, as a courtesy to the interviewees and their privacy, I adopted a procedure of anonymity in tracking my data and for demonstrating my findings. To establish this anonymity, I referred to the interviewees by number, Interviews 1 to 12 instead of by name.

The interviews were conducted using the standardized open-ended interview approach where the same questions were asked in the same order to all participants, with follow ups and probes used efficiently, to gain a full and honest perspective from the interviewee (see Patton, 2015). The pragmatic interviewing inquiry method was used by asking efficacious and focused professional questions in order to achieve the acquisition of the data (see Patton, 2015). Utilization focused sampling was used as a limited number of cases, 12, were explored in depth to determine possible best practices in debriefing and PTSD symptom reduction (see Patton, 2015).

The interviews ranged in time frames from 5 minutes and 45 seconds to 29 minutes and 50 seconds. These time frames confirmed the knowledge base for the interviewees as the lower time frames reflected less experienced hostage negotiators and the longer time frames reflected more experienced hostage negotiators.

Although there are no general rules for establishing an appropriate sampling size, I believed that the sampling number of 12 produced adequate opinions, new data, and a saturation level of new information (see Patton, 2015). There was an original request for a sample size of 15; however, one had another professional obligation and two others

chose not to respectfully participate. The small sample size enabled me to have ample opportunity to gain in depth information and highly valuable data that could be used to address the research problem (see Patton, 2015). The small sample size has also been historically validated by providing large amounts of useful data in past studies (Patton, 2015). The sample number was enough to obtain multiple views and reach a saturation point where no additional data were obtained (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Data saturation was established.

This chapter will continue with the discussion of the findings of my study. The paper will discuss specific areas as the coding process and theming, results, data collection, data analysis, and evidence of trustworthiness. This discussion entailed details about the descriptive data including information on the Sample and Population, research sites, participant demographics, dates, times, length of interviews, and information pertaining to transcripts. The writing included details on setting such as personal or organizational conditions that influence the participants and their views on the topic. The demographics of the participants will then be discussed in relation to the relevance of the study. These topics will be followed up with the results of the study and a summary of the findings of the study.

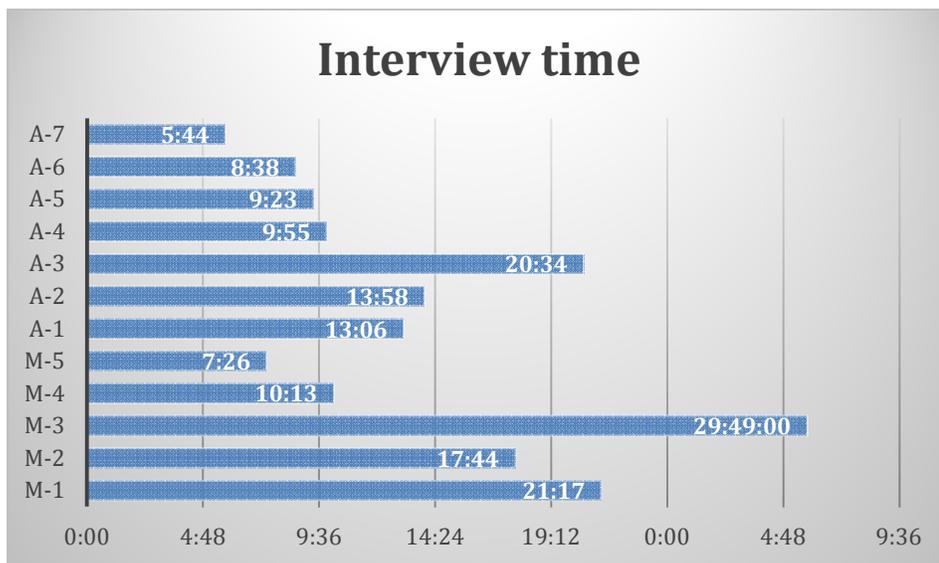


Figure 1. Participant interview times.

Table 3

*Interview Statistics*

Interviewee	Date	Time	Pages
M-1	4/12/2019	21:17	18
M-2	4/12/2019	17:44	15
M-3	4/12/2019	29:49:00	25
M-4	4/12/2019	10:13	9
M-5	4/12/2019	7:26	6
A-1	4/15/2019	13:06	11
A-2	4/15/2019	13:58	12
A-3	4/15/2019	20:34	17
A-4	4/15/2019	9:55	9
A-5	4/15/2019	9:23	9
A-6	4/15/2019	8:38	8
A-7	4/15/2019	5:44	5

**Data Collection, Coding Process, and Theming**

The interview and data collection process were all done to exact specifications to the approved IRB steps. The participants were obtained through hostage negotiation teams that I train with and with referrals from team leaders I train with. The initial contacts were made via email with the hostage negotiation team leaders. This initial contact is in letter format, emailed, describing my study, my background, general background of the study, and possible implications of the study. The individuals interviewed are my peers that I have experience training with as a hostage negotiator via role play training days. The team leaders scheduled the interview dates and times of which I was in agreement. At the start of the interview I briefly described my study and implications of the study, as well as, went over the letter of consent so that the participants understood the implications, it was voluntary, and that any other questions could be answered. All Walden University consent procedures have been articulated in draft form and were distributed to study participants.

The data was collected on two separate occasions. The first occasion was on April 12, 2019 at a local police department. In this instance 5 hostage negotiators from a local county hostage negotiation team were interviewed. The interviews were conducted in face to face, prewritten and preordered questioning format. All data was collected in a manner involving qualitative research methodology. Each interview was conducted in a singular method in an iterative, one on one, and personal manner. The office provided for the interviews was quiet and secluded which made for an optimal interview area which was conducive to a comfortable interviewing environment. The interviews were done in

succession, ranging from approximately 5 minutes to 30 minutes until all 5 were completed. One individual opted out of the interview due to a work obligation.

The second occasion was on April 15, 2019 at a local police academy. In this instance 7 hostage negotiators from a local city hostage negotiation team were interviewed. The interviews were conducted in face to face, prewritten and preordered questioning format. All data was collected in a manner involving qualitative research methodology. Each interview was conducted in a singular method in an iterative, one on one, and personal manner. The office provided for the interviews was quiet and secluded which made for an optimal interview area which was conducive to a comfortable interviewing environment. The interviews were done in succession, ranging from approximately 5 minutes to 30 minutes until all 7 were completed. Three individuals opted out of the interviews due to personal reasons.

### **Descriptive Data: Sample and Population**

The sample utilized will be looking at hostage negotiators with multiple levels of experience in negotiations is based on the fact that there is no one way to effectively debrief for everyone. Although there are no general rules for establishing an appropriate sampling size, this researcher believes that the sampling number originally anticipated to be 15, actually 12, will produce adequate opinions, new data, and a saturation level of new information (Patton, 2015). The small sample size enabled myself to have ample opportunity to gain in depth information and highly valuable data that can be utilized in addressing the research problem (Patton, 2015). The small sample size has also been historically validated by providing large amounts of useful data in past studies (Patton,

2015). The sample number should be enough to get multiple views and reach a saturation point where no additional data will be obtained (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Qualitative research methodology was utilized as this provided in depth and honest answers to directly address the research question.

The study population was 12 as some of those invited declined to participate, however this was not an issue as the data being received appeared to have reached saturation. This population number moves due to new additions and retirements. The experience level of these negotiators ranged from no experience to 10 years of hostage negotiation experience. A sample size of approximately 15 represents approximately half the hostage negotiation team members which should provide both justifiable and adequate data. Although there are no general absolute rules for establishing an appropriate and adequate sampling size, this researcher believes that the sampling size of 15 participants will produce a variety of informed and adequate opinions resulting in new data and an amount of new information allowing the saturation level to be reached (Patton, 2015). The fluid sample size, which was adjusted based on necessity of new information acquisition, enabled myself to have ample opportunity to gain in depth information and highly valuable data that will be utilized in addressing the proposed research problem (Patton, 2015). The small sample size has been historically validated by providing large amounts of new, quality data in previous studies (Patton, 2015). The sample size number should be at a level high enough to get multiple views and reach a saturation point where no additional data will be obtained (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

### **Descriptive Data: Research Sites**

There were two research sites utilized in my research procedure. The first site used was a local municipal police department in eastern PA. The agency was very accommodating in providing a private, quiet room to conduct the face to face interviews.

The second research site was a local city police academy in eastern PA. The room provided was private and somewhat quiet.

### **Descriptive Data: Demographics**

The participating personnel had a wide range of demographical backgrounds. The balance was approximately 80 percent males and 20 percent females. The city team represented about 60 percent of the participants, whereas, the county team represented approximately 40 percent of the study participants. The experience levels ranged from approximately just around 1 year experience to over 15 years experience as a hostage negotiator.

In all of the interviews the data was recorded utilizing a Phillips hand held digital recorder, as well as, I took limited notes by hand. My method of data recording was exact as I had previously stated the research plan would entail.

The only unusual occurrences and anomaly were the individuals that opted out. From previous doctoral classes I expected some would not participate. I was surprised, however, at the number of those who opted out.

### **Data Analyses**

The analysis of data began well before the interview process. I had predetermined codes established from the theoretical concepts and the literature review. These codes

included eight predetermined codes: peer friendly, necessary, debriefings do not happen, topic not studied prior, stress, PTSD, suicide, and long term mental health. This precoding is necessary and helpful in your research by looking to concepts attributed to the extensive and exhaustive literature review (Saldana, 2016). The later research questions found additional codes but not a largely numerous amount probably due to the focused area of the questions and topic, as well as, the refined and finite individuals who are actually hostage negotiators. The latter coding then overwritten the precoding as the interviewees provided deep and unexpectedly emotional data that is discussed later in this chapter. Depending on how the data is coded, many codes were seen numerous times, however, the number of codes is not an established guideline and is only dictated by the individual study (Saldana, 2016).

As for data analysis, I chose to code and theme by hand personally. I coded and themed in an inductive manner by looking first to my interviews to find repeated and stressed ideas and views. “One of the most critical outcomes of qualitative data analysis is to interpret how the individual components of the study weave together” (Saldana, 2016). The frequently utilized terminology and ideas of my participants were code weaved, which is a method to analyze and link key concepts together in meaning (Saldana, 2016). I utilized the descriptive coding method, which “summarizes in a word or short phrase – most often a noun – the basic topic of passage of qualitative data” (Saldana, 2016). Descriptive coding was appropriate for “beginning qualitative researchers learning how to code data...with a wide variety of data forms” (Saldana, 2016).

After attempting to analyze the data by hand on multiple occasions, to in fact inductively determine the exact scope of my research, I decided to utilize a data analysis software package. I purchased and installed Nvivo 12. For Nvivo 12, as a process I uploaded my transcripts and coded via the software. Here I looked for themes and by visualizing the data, as opposed to only coding by hand, I was able to gain a deeper vision of my data. After coding I then looked to different visualization tools in Nvivo 12 with word clouds, charts, and diagrams to further in my data analysis and understanding.

For the actual coding process, I first played the digital recordings of my interviews repeatedly over and over again for two reasons. The first was to get an idea about an overlapping and reoccurring codes so that I could mentally code weave the data. I also listened over and over to assure that I personally transcribed the correct verbiage. For example, when looking at the research question 1: how do hostage negotiators perceive that after incident hostage negotiation debriefing strategies lower their PTSD symptoms? I found some quotations that allowed me to code weave similar thoughts. A common response was that there is “not a stress debriefing, only a tactical debriefing” where the only thing discussed is “essentially what worked and what didn’t work...not is everyone ok mentally”. If an after incident stress debriefing is done, it is done on the informal effort of the negotiators, “in an informal process”. In developing code for these statements we see codes such as not stress, tactical, and mental health. These are key codes as the interviewees continuously brought up that administration was not interested in our mental health and only interested in meeting policy in having a meeting. Administrators didn’t care, one, if there was a critical incident stress debriefing and

certainly didn't concern themselves with whether a meeting was productive or not, didn't matter. These statements reinforce the presumption that after incident stress debriefings are needed. Ultimately I found 8 predetermined codes, these codes included 8 predetermined codes peer friendly, necessary, debriefings do not happen, topic not studied prior, stress, PTSD, suicide, and long term mental health. After the interviews were coded, codes of not a stress debriefing, only a tactical debriefing where the only thing discussed is essentially what worked and what didn't work...not is everyone ok mentally. If an after incident stress debriefing is done, it is done on the informal effort of the negotiators, in an informal process. In developing code for these statements we saw codes such as not stress debriefings, only tactical debriefings, and needed for mental health. The nodes established by these codes are Longterm hostage negotiator mental health processes, hostage negotiator frustrations, and necessities to lower stress. As the codes are looked at inductively either by hand coding or by utilizing the Nvivo 12 software, the codes were fluid and dynamically changed throughout the process to its ultimate codes that were used in this chapter.

The codes and nodes were determined by transcribing and reviewing the 12 detail oriented face to face interviews. Most of the interviews provided similar answers regardless of which hostage negotiation team was being interviewed. This overlap in interview responses demonstrated many things such as the necessity of the research, the avoidance of this topic by administration, and the importance of this research topic for the affected hostage negotiators. These factors then become more clear as the data for

each individual research question is specifically presented in the following section, as well as looked at more closely in Nvivo 12.

Utilizing Nvivo 12 the themes began to present themselves. Debrief, incident, mental, negotiator, stress, and team were terms selected by the software program Nvivo 12, however, this is a tool to be utilized. I used this tool to further investigate and interpret so that I the researcher could determine in depth and profound themes.

In looking at common word usage and translation into themes the following clarified this. We see that incident, debriefing, and negotiator are words utilized the most. The word incident is used 204 total times, debriefing 193 total times, and negotiator 164 total times. Teams was spoken 152 total times, talking 149 total times, stress 76 total times, effects 61 total times, experience 57 total times, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder 48 total times, negative 46 total times, and positive 43 total times. These specifically mentioned words translate into codes and themes in a fairly direct method. The themes that emerged were debriefing, incident, mental health, negotiator, stress, and team. Incident, debriefing, and negotiator were used commonly as these terms described the common labels and actions that hostage negotiators participate in. The terms spoken of teams, talking, PTSD, stress, negative, and positive had more direct meaning. By looking at the interviews, it was seen that these hostage negotiators repeatedly and directly stated they wanted after incident stress debriefings, many times the debriefings do not occur. The hostage negotiators repeatedly stated, in no uncertain terms, they wanted peer driven, peer attended, with no administrative involvement so that many will attend and interact. These peer driven, peer attended debriefings then translated into being best practice

debriefing methods. The words team and talking correlate into team members helping each other on a transactional level which then translates into lower stress, team bonding, and positive relations and interactions. These positive relations and interactions directly translate into team bonding and peer friendly relations which are also heavily relied on codes.

The simplicity of the codes and themes is profound and enlightening. It is unfortunate that administration of law enforcement agencies can not see or do not want to see what looks blatantly obvious from the front line staff. The extensive outcry from the hostage negotiators is not heard or is ignored. Interviewee A-3 verified this:

No, I think that I hope this works for you because I think there's a huge need for the powers that be, communities, whatever, the world, to understand that PTSD can happen in a single moment you step out your door, or it can be a cumulative affect. And I think that cumulative effect is ignored a lot. You don't have to be a soldier overseas to get PTSD. It can happen to a trauma nurse. It can happen to someone who works in animal rescue. Their mind is tortured by many things, and we need to stop that torture. We need to understand that those here in the States, or back at home, or not just in combat are dealing with it, and they're not being helped, which in the longterm makes not only their body broken but their brain, their heart. So I'm glad you're doing that.

Whatever the case may be it is apparent that those like myself, those with front line experience and able to do research have the responsibility to take steps to change these policies and directly start the positive social change process.

Debriefing was a major theme as the interview questions and research questions revolved around best practice debriefing strategies. The interviewees repeatedly discussed debriefing strategies that do not occur, poor debriefing strategies, debriefings that just do not happen, and ultimately best practice peer run debriefing strategies.

The theme of incident was also paramount when discussing the best practice debriefing strategies research questions, in that all debriefings would follow an incident. The incident would be a hostage taking incident. The incident could have minimal traumatic impacts on the negotiators or could be extremely traumatic.

The theme of mental (health) was also important in relation to the research questions. The research questions revolving around best practice debriefing strategies would have the ultimate impact of better short term and long term mental health. The better mental health has social change implications as its positive effects will resonate out into the community.

The theme of negotiator was also very important when looked at in regards to the research questions. The research questions relate directly to hostage negotiators in attempting to locate best practice debriefing strategies.

The theme of stress directly related to the research questions as best practice debriefing strategies will directly impact and produce less stress for hostage negotiators. The less stressed hostage negotiators will have less stress long term, lower levels of PTSD, and lower chances of suicidal ideations.

The theme of team also directly related to the research questions. The research questions discuss best practice debriefing strategies. Multiple interviewees believe that

best practice debriefing strategies are peer run and peer driven. Peer run and peer driven debriefings will result in the nodes of peer support and team bonding to result in lower stress levels.

*Table – 4– Codes prior to Nvivo 12 utilization*

Codes – “negotiators”, “difficulty”, “personal”, “trust” and “peers”
Translate to Themes --- Negotiators find difficulty with trust of debriefing with administrators.
Negotiators find no trust that there will even be a debrief.
Negotiators find trust and relief in peer debriefs.

*Table -5- Word counts for common words*

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
incident	8	204	1.87
speaker	7	194	1.77
debriefing	10	193	1.77
negotiators	11	164	1.50
think	5	154	1.41
teams	5	152	1.39
talk	4	149	1.36
going	5	126	1.15
like	4	121	1.11

knows	5	120	1.10
just	4	116	1.06
question	8	110	1.01
things	6	106	0.97
people	6	104	0.95
one	3	97	0.89
get	3	87	0.80
hostage	7	85	0.78
stress	6	76	0.70
work	4	70	0.64
way	3	68	0.62
time	4	67	0.61
really	6	66	0.60
kind	4	64	0.59
okay	4	63	0.58
effects	7	61	0.56
right	5	58	0.53
experiences	11	57	0.52
guys	4	57	0.52
describe	8	56	0.51
need	4	53	0.48

interview	9	53	0.48
something	9	51	0.47
done	4	50	0.46
help	4	49	0.45
coming	6	49	0.45
happened	8	48	0.44
ptsd	4	48	0.44
first	5	47	0.43
good	4	47	0.43
involved	8	46	0.42
negative	8	46	0.42
feel	4	43	0.39
positives	9	43	0.39
may	3	42	0.38
make	4	41	0.38
situation	9	41	0.38
back	4	40	0.37
long	4	40	0.37
lot	3	39	0.36
mean	4	39	0.36

*Table – 6 – Assigned codes with Nvivo 12 utilization*

Name	Files	References
Administrative structured debriefing is negative	1	2
Bad repercussions	7	28
Best practice debrief	10	46
Calm	3	9
CISM	6	21
Debriefings do not happen	6	12
Difficulty dealing with trauma	10	32
Extreme stress	8	26
Longterm mental health	9	25
Mental Health	9	36
Necessary to heal	10	47
Needed for mental health	11	35
Negotiators	6	33
Not deal with problem	8	19
Not stress debriefing	6	12
Peer friendly	6	24
Personal feelings	10	36
Protect yourself mentally	10	29

PTSD	7	21
Stress debriefing	12	48
Suicidal ideations	4	8
Tactical Debriefing	9	22
Team bonding	9	21
Topic not studied prior	3	3
Tough guy	7	12
Trust teammates	11	48
Trust your peers	11	49

*Table – 7 – Themes developed by codes*

A : debrief	B : incident	C : mental
2	4	1
5	0	0
1	1	1
3	13	3
0	2	1
2	5	2
1	2	2
2	5	2
1	3	3
3	5	1

1	4	2
2	1	2
1	5	3
1	4	1
1	2	2
1	3	2
1	2	1
1	3	3
3	7	2
0	2	1
7	3	0
2	1	1
0	1	0
0	1	0
5	3	4
5	3	3

D : negotiator	E : stress	F : team
0	2	8
5	3	15
2	2	5
3	3	2

0	0	1
3	3	10
1	4	6
3	2	7
3	3	12
6	4	12
4	3	11
4	1	10
0	1	4
0	2	2
2	1	10
3	2	14
2	2	7
4	3	8
4	2	10
1	0	1
3	1	17
2	2	12
0	0	2
0	0	1
6	3	18

6	3	19
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*Table 8 – Research questions translated into deductively introduced ideas*

RQ1: how do hostage negotiators perceive that after incident hostage negotiation debriefing strategies lower their PTSD symptoms?
Words and Codes used RQ -1– incident, debriefing, negotiator, talking Post Traumatic Stress – transfers into needed for mental health and protecting yourself mentally
RQ2: which after incident hostage negotiation debriefing strategies do hostage negotiators perceive as most effective at lowering their PTSD symptoms?
Words and Codes used RQ-2– teams, talking, stress, PTSD, positive effects, experience- transfers into the long term wants and beliefs of necessary to heal, longterm stress reduction, peer help, team bonding

### **Findings**

RQ1: how do hostage negotiators perceive that after incident hostage negotiation debriefing strategies lower their Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms?

Specifically addressing the research question 1, is the following interview questions. Interview Question-Please describe your role as a hostage negotiator? This particular question establishes a base line demonstrating the hostage negotiator’s level of topic knowledge.

Interview Question-After an incident explain the process of a critical incident stress debriefing? This particular question establishes a base line demonstrating the hostage negotiator’s level of topic knowledge.

Interview Question-In your experience please describe the positive and negative psychological after effects of a hostage situation after you were properly debriefed? This question is a direct line of data for the research question.

Interview Question- In relation to the last question, what is your perception of both short term and long term stress levels and PTSD symptomology compared to a hostage taking incident or traumatic incident occurring on the job where no debriefing was offered? – This question directly answers part of the research question establishing essential data.

The specific research question addressed the underlying theme of this research topic in looking at how the front line, hostage negotiators feel in relation to after hostage taking incident debriefings effect possible long term PTSD symptom development. This question and subsequent interview questions sought to develop a rationale and basis for their opinions, followed by honest and direct views on after incident debriefing utility and effectiveness. The data revealed an unexpected honesty and depth addressing the need and efficaciousness of after hostage taking negotiation incident debriefings, specifically the want and necessity of peer run, peer support debriefings.

In specific discussion of interview questions, negotiators interviewed had strong and honest opinions. The hostage negotiators stressed, without any disagreement, that debriefing s are a necessity in dealing with stressors on the short term so that these stressors do not develop into long term PTSD symptoms including suicidal ideations. Interviewee A-1, a Critical Incident Stress Management responder who helps other deal with after incident stress, related in support in the necessity of after incident debriefings to help with long term mental health. He has to go out of role as a negotiator, even if he is

hurting, to help his fellow negotiators. Negotiators tend to “compartmentalize” their problems and not initially deal with the problems. A negotiator has to resist bad coping skills like drinking alcohol and look to “a learned healthy coping mechanism” such as after incident debriefing. A-1 continued on and also stressed as a team, peer driven debriefings work as the best option as “we have to take care of our own”.

Interviewee M-2, stated that negotiators tend to “compartmentalize, put things in a box”.

Interviewee M-2 continued to elaborate that unfortunately in the past there were no debriefings and in order for him to deal with stressors, “he would go for a motorcycle ride or drink alcohol and just go to sleep”. Interviewee M-2 continues on and provides some excellent and thought provoking insight from a seasoned law enforcement officer. Those on the outside might think these experienced law enforcement officers would only grow cold but as Interviewee M-2 interjects you can see the depth and the honesty on his interview.

I'm able to, or at least I try to, put things in a box. For example, I know I'm going to a crime scene, and I know it's going to be horrible, however, when I get there, the person that's dead is no longer a person. That person is evidence. That's my evidence. That's what I'm focusing on doing. That person is not a human being in my mind, because if I think of a person or a child or a victim, and look at that in an emotional standpoint, I'll never survive this. So these people are evidence.

This quotation showed how without debriefings or on any given day these individuals working in law enforcement have to develop coping mechanisms for

themselves. Most hostage negotiators have another job responsibility which is in some realm of law enforcement so this relates to us all.

Interviewee M-2 goes on to reinforce the importance. For himself a peer debriefing strategy is his best and healthiest coping mechanism. Interviewee M-2 discussed a sorrowful and difficult local case where he had difficulty dealing with the trauma, which directly correlated with the trauma that a hostage negotiator goes through.

I had a hard time with that. It was hard because you're thinking this 14 year old brilliant student, and I had a hard time with that case for a long time. But at a certain point, once you talk about it, it's gone. I didn't talk about it with anybody. Eventually, I sat down, talked to my wife, talked to other people about it... Nothing I could do about it. I had no control over that. There was a lot in that case that mirrored my life. It was really weird. But if you don't talk about it, you're going to try to deal with it in other ways and it's not, generally speaking, good ways to deal with it.

Some of these coping mechanisms are unhealthy and can lead to further mental health problems. Interviewee M-3 elaborated on the topic of how important having a debriefing is by pointing out in the past there were no debriefings, which is unfortunately still a trend today in some departments, but with no debriefings officer's dealings of stressors is "like night and day". Interviewee M-3 added, "historically nothing ever bothers you, you are macho, drink it off but now mental health and PTSD and suicide prevention have all become the cloak that has been lifted". "The cloak that has been lifted", indeed, which is a great driver for myself to continue to research the importance

of after incident debriefings, as it is important to my brother and sister negotiators, so that they can bring their stress out into the light and get the help they need to be healthy.

My interviewees continued to reinforce the importance of debriefings after a hostage taking incident. Many times the debriefings don't happen which again is quite troubling. Sometimes they are very informal, per interviewee A-4, "sometimes at an office or in the truck...sometimes they have a big organized debriefing but a lot do not go". The interviewee, A-4 goes on to describe an incident where someone related to a team member shot themselves in the head and killed themselves. They had a meeting with a Critical Incident Stress Management person there to help guide them through the traumatic event. The interviewee A-4 stated "it was good, it was hard, a lot of alpha people there who didn't want to talk" since supervisors were there. The interviewee A-4 continued to discuss how effective informal, peer attended debriefings are, "almost all were talking about it and it makes it easier, as far as, fucked up things are going to be, what you see or hear, or what happened in the end...I think going and being able to talk about it with people who aren't going to judge you or who kind of understand it" is the best way. To reiterate, these interviewees stress how important a debriefing is to long term mental health. Many only want to talk to other negotiators, on their team, as they will understand and not judge. Outsiders may not understand or judge.

As for Research Question 2: which after incident hostage negotiation debriefing strategies do hostage negotiators perceive as most effective at lowering their Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms?

Interview Question - In your experience, please describe your views on what is the most efficacious after incident debriefing method to possibly allow you to be more honest and open about your stressors from the incident? This question directly answers part of the research question establishing essential data.

Interview Question-Describe in your view how might the process of stress reduction be affected by a your preferred after incident debriefing as compared to a method that you find unfavorable? This question directly answers part of the research question establishing essential data.

Interview Question-In your view describe any experiences you have had with team bonding in an after incident debriefing scenario and if the effects were either positive or negative? This question directly answers part of the research question establishing essential data as team bonding may demonstrate applicable stress lowering effects.

The interviewees brought up some common ideas that were related to codes. The county emergency response team has no formal debriefings. The county team has no formal process and all answer to the interview questions basically went in one standard direction. The county emergency response team instead informally meets, usually at a diner for a late night breakfast, meets after a hostage situation, “just negotiators”... and talk it through, such as the situation was “really tough” and “it hit close to home” which could be a sign to keep an eye on the affected hostage negotiator or negotiators.

The common direction was that informal, peer run, peer support debriefings were the best method. Interviewee M-2 stated, it is most effective to “talk to people who were there with you, they care about you” and then added “talking with your team members is

most effective , they know you and you can take their advice because they know you”.

Interviewee M-3, added it is a best scenario to have peers helping you and knowing someone is really ok as, “the difference between a person saying I am ok and meaning it or bullshitting it” is by you knowing them. Interviewee M-3 continued, “And when someone tries to BS you, you call BS, and it's cool, you don't get into a confrontation. You realize that it's coming from a professional spot and a caring spot. So that's that”. These statements reinforced the node and importance of peer support.

In addition, interviewee M-4 spoke of a difficult and traumatic incident in discussing the node of peer support. The conversation involved a barricaded hostage situation that had to be resolved tactically by a usage of force by the police.

At the end of that incident, well the ending of the incident, the tactical guys wound up using bean bag rounds and other tactics to take him down and I felt like I lost. I felt like I didn't do my job, I felt like I didn't complete my mission that I was sent there to do. I was hurting for that a little bit and the most important thing out of that day, my boss at the time Tommy, pulled me aside and said "Dude there's nothing better you could have done, there's nothing different you could have done." As a team everybody meeting up and me knowing that they had my back and I had the support of everybody, made all the difference in the world to me. That I was like, you know what, I guess I couldn't have, because these guys are telling me I couldn't have and I trust them, I believe in them and that team atmosphere is what gets you through it. It's ultimately 100% if we didn't have the management that we have by our leaders and we didn't have the team mindset of

the negotiators, we'd fall apart. So it absolutely keeps it together... Had I had not had that talk with Tommy, if he wouldn't have pulled me aside and talked with me, it would have been a hundred times worse for me that night... Just talking about it. Just knowing you have the support of your teammates. Knowing that if you do make a mistake, because we all make mistakes in things, you're not going to be judged by them. I can take criticism from anybody on my team, not just the boss, I can take that and grow from it.

Interviewee M-1 believed the best method is informal debriefings and states their team utilizes informal breakfasts at diners, after an incident, to talk things out.

Interviewee M-4, told a heartfelt story where he negotiated with a person in a domestic hostage taking incident. It went on for hours and in the end the person was shot, nonlethally, by police. He felt that he lost and it hit him hard. The informal debriefing process helped him, "I felt like I lost, like I didn't complete my mission"...the most important thing that day was the team leader pulled him aside and said there was nothing else that could be done...you did a good job". That simple statement from the team leader made all the difference to him. He went on to talk about the importance of the informal breakfast meeting, "at the peer debriefing the team told him they had his back and supported him, that peer support made all the difference in the world". He went on to talk about his peers, "he trusts them and he believes in them, and that got him through it". Without this peer support, he would have sat at home all night drinking alcohol and thought about the incident "over and over and over". This is a powerful statement as to

the powerful, positive implication and positive social change implications for the utilization of peer run, peer driven after hostage incident debriefing methods.

The city hostage negotiation team had some different experiences and views but the ending point was the same as the county team. Interviewee A-1, who is a Critical Incident Stress Management debriefer, believed that peer run debriefings is the best method when confronted with Research Question 2. The interviewee A-1 states “the best answer is chatting with friends”. Interviewee A-3 states that during an incident, “your intentions were to save lives”...during a debriefing you need “opening up and accepting you can be hurt...makes you stronger for the next one”. During a peer debriefing “you have to be able to release your emotions”. Interviewee A-4 stated that formal debriefings are not the way to go as “structured gets a negative connotation people won’t go”. Interviewee A-4 continued stating “you have to get it out...eventually it will catch up to you”. Interviewee A-4 then references their idea of best practice debriefings, “if more relaxed...distracted from being a (formal) debriefing would be more effective...peers talking, people would not think it’s a formal debriefing and get more out of it”. Interviewee A-4 sums it up “coming together and eating is very effective...a friendly environment...divided up by negotiator and no other people there”. This last statement was the only difference of opinions on the topic, interviewee A-4 believes debriefings are more effective and more comfortable if only the negotiation team is present. Interviewee M-2 again added some profound dialogue in defense of the effectiveness of a peer debriefing strategy,

I think the easiest way to get through something like that is to talk to people that were there with you. They're the people that are on your team. They are the people that care about you the most. They are the people that want you to succeed. They want you to continue to do what you do at the level you're doing it.

Interviewee A-3 believed that all members of law enforcement at the incident, negotiators or not, should be at the debriefing. This is just an opinion of who they would be more comfortable with. This disagreement aside they all agree, utilizing multiple past traumatic experiences, that peer run, peer supportive after incident debriefings is the best practice scenario.

### **Needed education and Training**

From the data, it is evident that new after hostage taking incidents debriefing strategies need to be a focus of change. The administration need to first mandate that there is in fact a debriefing protocol. Once this is established, the protocol must include specifics in line of best practice debriefing methods. The best practice debriefing methods must include no administration or supervisory presence, as well as, the debriefing must be peer run, peer driven after incident debriefing strategies in order for hostage negotiators to have the best chance to stay mentally healthy.

One of the most interesting and profoundly thought provoking aspects of the data is the interviewees explicit out cry for help. The powers that be don't necessarily hear the cry for help, dealing with trauma, that these law enforcement officials need. For instance, Interviewee A -2 stated in reference to long term effects of not dealing with trauma,

And sometimes you second guess yourself. And I think the longterm effects are, like there are certain incidents that have occurred at various parts of this city, and I know exactly where they were, and I don't drive down those roads. I intentionally don't drive past those places, because I don't want to have a flashback of what occurred.

Interviewee A- 2 continued,

When you have a chance to breathe, when you have a chance to sit down, you have a chance to think about everything that just occurred, and kind of replay it in your mind 100 times so then you can't go to bed, and the first thing you think of in the morning when you get up, and the last thing you think of before you fall asleep and things that you think of all the time... cops are cops. They're not gonna say they're having a problem, or talk to a shrink, a psychologist and they're talking to you about this critical incident, what's going through your mind, and what are you feeling, what are you thinking, you're gonna be like, "I'm fine, I'm fine. Getting the fuck out of here, I'm fine, leave me alone." Even though it's gonna be haunting you for a long time.

Interviewee A-3, who besides being a hostage negotiator, also had vast military and combat medic experience. He discussed his own PTSD and how not dealing with trauma destroys people,

Well, I know I... I myself suffer from it from all the years I was a medic, the things that I've done in the street, some of the attempted rescues where I have

rescued someone, but they end up dying later, one of them two years later... Just put it to me in different term...

I had a guy shot right in front of me eight times only about 10 feet away, and then my partner and I had to treat him while he was still dying on our backboard put in our rig. And not a thing was done for us two medics. And there's no doubt in my mind that regardless of whether you're in it all the way, whether you participate, or whether you don't participate because it's weird for you to talk about stuff maybe on the first times you're debriefed, you're still going to benefit from that attempt

Interviewee A-3 goes on to stress how dealing with such trauma as hostage negotiators deal with is very dangerous if not properly dealt with. Interviewee A-3 expressed how important and necessary it is for hostage negotiators, or other trauma affected individuals, to properly and effectively deal with traumatic events, such as through a debriefing where their hostage negotiator brothers and sisters come to emotionally help them,

To me it's like cleaning your brain versus there's an issue with the fabric where your brain is like a piece of fabric. It's a moment after... It's like a game in a way, some horrible game, and you need to clean your uniform afterwards. And that's part of what you're sort of doing. You're freshening your brain up for the next incident. So if it can be viewed that way that everyone comes, it's just understood. Everyone comes, and you come in support of all those who might have been affected more. And it's not because they may be new at it. He may be the guy

that's finally had his 50th call like that and really needs the other brothers and sisters to come.

Interviewee A-3, went on with a deep, emotional expression of how this study is necessary in helping those in law enforcement affected by trauma. He goes on to thank me for taking on this endeavor and looking to engage those who develop policy to establish a best practice debriefing methodology,

No, I think that I hope this works for you because I think there's a huge need for the powers that be, communities, whatever, the world, to understand that PTSD can happen in a single moment you step out your door, or it can be a cumulative effect. And I think that cumulative effect is ignored a lot. You don't have to be a soldier overseas to get PTSD. It can happen to a trauma nurse. It can happen to someone who works in animal rescue. Their mind is tortured by many things, and we need to stop that torture. We need to understand that those here in the States, or back at home, or not just in combat are dealing with it, and they're not being helped, which in the longterm makes not only their body broken but their brain, their heart. So I'm glad you're doing that.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

The issue of credibility in this research is a non issue. I, as the interviewer and research designer have credibility as an experienced and respected hostage negotiator have credibility and the respect of my participants as we have previously trained together. The participants had credibility as experienced and respected hostage negotiators, as well as, law enforcement officers. Many in law enforcement will not open up to outsiders,

however, since I am a fellow hostage negotiator, which they have experience with, I was able to have their trust for an open and honest interview procedure.

The issue of transferability of the research is very favorable in the optics and reality. This benefit of best practice hostage negotiator debriefing strategies can be transferred to all other areas of law enforcement and other situations where debriefings are necessary.

The issue of dependability is also favorable as these study results will last the test of time. The best practice debriefings strategies will help hostage negotiators indefinitely as human behavior has not changed historically and will most likely continue to be dependably predicted to stay relatively and predictably similar.

The issue of confirmability, that is that the ideas in the participants' answers were theirs and not driven by the researcher, is not relevant. The researcher took great effort in not leading in any answers and with staying on the preapproved, scripted interview questions.

### **Summary**

In my research I found some important data that is essential to long term hostage negotiator mental health, lower stress, lower chances of developing PTSD symptomology, and therefore less chance of developing stress and PTSD induced suicidal ideations. This study was conducted via a structured, predesigned face to face interview questions. I would argue it borders on an ethnographical approach as seen in the heartfelt cries and pleas for a best practice, peer driven debriefing method and in some cases any debriefing method. Unfortunately, after incident stress debriefings are not

offered all the time and on many occasions not offered at all. This is quite disheartening as it most definitely will lead to long term mental health issues for the hostage negotiators. It was also found that many times hostage negotiators will not attend mandatory, formal, and administratively run debriefings due to intimidation perceived by having the bosses there and also due to machoness of the law enforcement officers, whereas they won't admit they have an issue. If they somehow do attend, the negotiators are reluctant to display perceived weakness in front of bosses in fear of losing their job or their weapon.

The followership theory was the basis for this study concept on exploring the concept on giving the negotiators the opportunity to choose debriefing strategies to get the best outcome for themselves and their mental health (Frisina, 2005). The followership theory is based on an employee following the direction of a leader (Frisina, 2005). The followership theory is based on that followers should also think for themselves and make the best decisions for their own wellbeing (Frisina, 2005). The theory also concluded that successful followers have good morals and values (Frisina, 2005). Also important to the study is that followers that are good contribute to the best interest of the team by not being sheep and by being accountable for themselves and contributing to the best end possible for the team (Frisina, 2005). As the results of the study conclude, hostage negotiators if given the opportunity have the ability to determine best practice after hostage incident debriefing methods. This enables the hostage negotiator to develop a debriefing strategy that gives them the best opportunity to have a healthy mental status, a better family life, do a better job at their employment, and be a better contributor to

society. All of these positive outcomes resonate outward into the society to effect wide spread positive social change.

In addressing RQ1: how do hostage negotiators perceive that after incident hostage negotiation debriefing strategies lower their Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms? The predominant answers reflected that after incident stress debriefings indeed have a positive effect on lowering stress and the possibility for long term PTSD symptoms.

In addressing RQ2: which after incident hostage negotiation debriefing strategies do hostage negotiators perceive as most effective at lowering their Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms? The overwhelming response was informal, peer run debriefing sessions.

The answer that was repeated over and over is that peer run, peer support in an informal setting is their preferred debriefing methodology. This informal peer run support is likely to have more people attend as administration is not present. It is an environment that invites honesty and openness as peers are generally supportive and permit a relaxed atmosphere where negotiators can work out psychological issues incurred during the hostage negotiating incident. As stated by the interviewees, the interviewee A-4 continued to discuss how effective informal, peer attended debriefings are, “almost all were talking about it and it makes it easier, as far as, fucked up things are going to be, what you see or hear, or what happened in the end...I think going and being able to talk about it with people who aren’t going to judge you or who kind of understand it” is the

best way. This is assuredly an area that I am driven to do further research after the acquisition of my doctoral degree.

As one interviewee stated, it is a fitting ending to the findings section, “The cloak that has been lifted”, indeed, which is a great driver for myself to continue to research the importance of after incident debriefings, as it is important to my brother and sister negotiators, so that they can bring their stress out into the light and get the help they need to be healthy.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore whether and how after incident hostage negotiation debriefing strategies lower PTSD symptoms among hostage negotiators. The gap in the literature addressed was both a lack of current or minimal studies on this topic and a repeatedly stressed gap of research in the peer support area of after incident hostage negotiation debriefings. The gap was reinforced by stating that negotiators operate in a stressful environment, whereas debriefings were necessary to work through stressors that were experienced in the hostage negotiation (Norton & Petz, 2012). It was understood by negotiators that they are not superheroes, and they need an avenue to release and relieve stressors as not to develop long term PTSD issues (Cambria et al., 2002). The stressors experienced by hostage negotiators and law enforcement, if not dealt with, can lead to long term stress and possible suicide (Violanti, 2004). These sources reinforced the importance of debriefings. As evidenced through the extensive and exhaustive literature review, it is evident that not addressing these stressors through effective debriefing strategies can lead to hostage negotiators having long term stress issues, PTSD, and possible suicidal ideations. The implications of this study resonate far as the results of this study can and should be applied to all areas of law enforcement personnel. To address this gap, a qualitative research approach was used.

In regards to the conclusion section, it is necessary to take into account the assumption of PTSD development likelihood and the possibility of those involved in the study already having this condition. In this section, I discuss the DSM-V rationales for

acute stress disorder and PTSD diagnosis as well as some of the interviewees' self-perception of PTSD symptomologies. A few of the individuals admitted some of the underlying conditions and honestly admitted to having PTSD either from their law enforcement experiences or their past military experiences. As Interviewee A-1 stated in reference to PTSD oriented self-destructive patterns, he had prior to developing better antistress coping mechanisms:

Whereas, the law enforcement culture at least when I started and 100% the military culture when I was in, stressed really bad coping mechanisms. One of the, as you can see I got chew in my mouth, I smoked cigarettes. I used to drink like a fish. Those are all things I learned in the military for coping mechanisms, and early police work. I do not drink anymore. I haven't had a drink in 5 years. And, that's because I began to learn healthy coping mechanisms. But, law enforcement and historically in the military, would kind of teach the macho drive it all, just drive on, just drive on who gives a shit, drive on. Smoke a cigarette, drive on. So you pick up a lot of bad habits. Those do not work. And, that just continues the exact problem we're talking about, rather than the outwardly self-destructive, it now becomes inwardly self-destructive.

Interviewee A-3, a hostage negotiator, past combat medic, and street medic elaborated further about his negative experiences that he cannot let go of and its implications on his PTSD symptoms:

Well, I know I... I myself suffer from it from all the years I was a medic, the things that I've done in the street, some of the attempted rescues where I have

rescued someone, but they end up dying later, one of them 2 years later... Yeah. I think, like I said, I haven't had the opportunity to be involved in many debriefings. As a matter of fact, some of the most horrific things I've ever been involved in nothing was done. You went right back to work. I had a guy shot right in front of me eight times only about 10 feet away, and then my partner and I had to treat him while he was still dying on our backboard put in our rig. And not a thing was done for us two medics.

Again, some of the interviewees mentioned PTSD symptoms and their concern for PTSD symptom development. Although none of the interviewees specifically mentioned how they may have been specifically diagnosed, if they were specifically diagnosed, it is worth reiterating in this study for clarify in relation to the overall understanding of the study.

To truly understand the importance of the scope of this study, it is imperative that we understand that approximately 15% of law enforcement have PTSD; however, the profound issue is that there is an unknown number who have not yet been diagnosed (www.cops.usdoj.gov, 2019). Violanti continued in his exclamation of the importance of researching PTSD in law enforcement officers,

Nowhere is this more critical than when officers are faced with the use of deadly physical force. Decisions not to shoot, missed shots, and inappropriate tactics can cost officers or bystanders their lives or leave them grievously injured. It is of critical importance for accurate, rapid decision making in deadly force confrontations despite the fact that they often occur in complex, fast-paced,

ambiguous and low-information situations. As difficult as decisions to use deadly force are in themselves, such decisions may only be exacerbated by PTSD.

Decisions involving deadly force, albeit critical, are not the only significant decisions that police officers are faced with.

Even more alarming is that

There are approximately 900,000 sworn officers in the United States. According to some studies –19% of them may have PTSD. Other studies suggest that approximately 34% suffer symptoms associated with PTSD but do not meet the standards for the full diagnosis. (psychologytoday.com, 2018)

This statement demonstrates the true depth of this study as it shows a high number of individuals not yet diagnosed with PTSD but demonstrating symptoms that will greatly and negatively affect their lives. In a 2013 study, Hartley et al. noted that over 60% of male officers and over 46% of female officers experienced multiple traumatic events through the performance of their duties. Hartley et al. then noted that over 75% of officers reported experiencing trauma within the current month.

After a traumatic incident is experienced, a short-term stress related issue some experience is acute stress disorder. If the trauma and stress are not effectively dealt with within 30 days after the incident, PTSD can be diagnosed. In looking at acute stress disorder, per the *American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders* 5<sup>th</sup> ed. information, the background indicators and symptoms of acute stress disorder are remarkably similar to PTSD other than it is suffered from 72 hours to 30 days (DSM-V, 2013). The main difference between the two afflictions are the

length of the disorder and the timing of the disorder (ww.bridgestorecovery.com, 2019). PTSD is a long term disorder lasting over 30 days (brainline.org, 2019; DSM-V, 2013). The following information is further rationale for the PTSD focus. PTSD has the propensity to lead to suicidal tendencies (Violanti, 2004). Acute stress disorder statically does not lead to the development of PTSD (Bryant, 2017). In response to trauma, the National Institute of Mental Health found that, many people develop any number of mental health conditions in the short term until they learn other coping mechanisms (nimh.nih.gov, 2019).

In order for the discussion and background understanding of PTSD to be complete, the American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders 5<sup>th</sup> ed. must be referenced in detail. The following is criteria for a PTSD diagnosis and are applicable to individuals over the age of 6. An individual can be afflicted with the disorder if they experience the “exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence” by themselves going through the act, seeing the act, finding out someone close to them such as a relative or friend had the violent or accidental act happen to them, or experiencing the violent act vicariously through others, such as through first responders, which in this research project would be hostage negotiators (DSM-V,p.143, 2013). The afflicted individual would experience, “flashbacks” involving the incident, dreams involving the incident, “memories” which are negative about the incident, “intense or prolonged psychological distress”... in regards to a reaction involving a remembered stressor involving the past event, or “physiological reactions internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of

the traumatic event(s) (DSM-V, p. 144, 2013). Also present in the afflicted individual is the dodging of bad “memories, thoughts, or feelings”... in regards to the upsetting event, as well as, evading direct behaviors that remind of the event (DSM-V, p. 144, 2013). People with PTSD also can alter reality of experienced occurrences and change the memories of the event to an even more negative scenario, as well as, experiencing a more negative mood involving the remembering of the event such as avoiding certain activities and embarrassment (DSM-V, 2013). Individuals with PTSD also experienced is the inability to focus, poor attitude, and being emotionally edgy when remembering the traumatic event (DSM-V, 2013). In order to be diagnosed with this disorder, the individual must experience these symptoms for more than 30 days, “causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning”, and is not related to the use of a “substance” such as drugs or “alcohol” (DSM-V, p. 146, 2013).

The nature of this study was qualitative. Qualitative research was utilized as it provided data that truly reaches deep into the personal emotions of the interviewee (Patton, 2015). This depth gave the study a personalized view of the emotions and experience based professional views to give credibility to the data, as well as, experience based believability (Patton, 2015). The in depth interviewing was completed via personal interviews. The personal interviews were used to obtain the personal and uninhibited views of the interviewee (Patton, 2015). The interviews were conducted using the standardized open-ended interview approach where the same questions were asked in the same order to all participants, with follow ups and probes used efficiently, to gain a full

and honest perspective from the interviewee (Patton, 2015). The pragmatic interviewing inquiry method was used by asking efficacious and focused professional questions in order to achieve the acquisition of the data (Patton, 2015). Utilization focused sampling was used as a limited number of cases, possibly 5 – 10, were explored in depth to determine possible best practices in debriefing and PTSD symptom reduction (Patton, 2015). The actual sample number of 12, was enough to get multiple views and reach a saturation point where no additional data was needed to be obtained (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I, as the researcher and interviewer, had the necessary trust of the interviewees as I am also a hostage negotiator and I have trained with the interviewees in the past.

The following will concisely summarize my study's key findings. In my research I found some important data that is essential to long term hostage negotiator mental health, lower stress, lower chances of suffering from acute stress disorder, lower chances of developing PTSD symptomology, and therefore less chance of developing stress and PTSD induced suicidal ideations. A key finding through the interviews and reinforced via the literature review is that unfortunately, after incident stress debriefings are not offered all the time and on many occasions not offered at all. This is quite sad as it most definitely will lead to possible short term stress issues such as acute stress disorder, long term mental health issues for the hostage negotiators such as PTSD, and possible long term development of suicidal ideations. This need for debriefings is illustrated in the interview with Interviewee M-2, "there were other times where I came home from a crime scene and I drank a little bit, just to go to sleep, because I couldn't fall asleep". Interviewee A-1, who has combat experience and is also a Critical Incident Stress

Management team member added, “the longer you have untreated PTSD, it starts to become a victimization where guys start to turn against society. They start to think that everybody's against them, that nobody understands them. So it's a very dangerous thing”. Interviewee A- also emotionally added, “It absolutely destroys people”. This emotional plea by a seasoned police officer, hostage negotiator, combat veteran, and critical incident stress management team member reinforces just how important this study is and what the implications can mean to society.

It was also found that many times hostage negotiators will not attend mandatory, formal, and administratively run debriefings due to intimidation perceived by having the bosses there and also due to the self perceived toughness and feeling macho of the law enforcement officers, whereas they won't admit they have an issue. If they somehow do attend, the negotiators are reluctant to display perceived weakness in front of bosses in fear of losing their job or their weapon. This fear by law enforcement of being honest in front of administrators is demonstrated by an answer by Interviewee A-4, “And the biggest things with, especially with police officers or law enforcement or any first responders in general with a gun, you're worried that if you say something's affecting you, they're going to take your gun away”. This fear by hostage negotiators and law enforcement is felt throughout departments as implied weakness, it is believed, will result in loss of weapon, loss of job, or loss of the privilege of being a contributor on a hostage negotiation team.

Herein lies the true underlying rationale for the study. As listed throughout the literature review and interviews, for a variety of reasons there may be no after incident

debriefing either due to none being offered or self-imposed by the negotiator. Regardless of why there is no after hostage taking incident debriefing being attended, the results are indisputable and devastating. The necessity of an after incident debriefing is important and efficacious as it provides the opportunity for the hostage negotiator to be healthy mental health wise and have the ability to be an effective professional, lead a long, healthy life, be a caring and involved family member, as well as a positive contributor to society.

In addressing RQ1: how do hostage negotiators perceive that after incident hostage negotiation debriefing strategies lower their PTSD symptoms? The predominant answers reflected that after incident stress debriefings indeed have a positive effect on lowering stress and the possibility for long term PTSD symptoms.

In addressing RQ2: which after incident hostage negotiation debriefing strategies do hostage negotiators perceive as most effective at lowering their PTSD symptoms? The overwhelming response was informal, peer run debriefing sessions.

The answer that was repeated over and over was peer run, peer support in an informal setting. This informal peer run support is likely to have more people attend as administration is not present. As previously noted, hostage negotiators and law enforcement in general will not attend administratively run after incident debriefings. A peer run, peer driven after incident debriefing is very effective in providing a welcoming environment where hostage negotiators will feel comfortable in dealing with their emotions. Interviewee A-4 reinforced the idea that formal debriefings do not work and that informal peer run debriefings are more effective, “you're basically just bullshitting

about it like you would, if you were around a campfire or drinking beer...but for some reason, whenever it's like a structured debriefing, I feel like it gets a negative connotation on it”.

It is an environment that invites honesty and openness as peers are generally supportive and permit a relaxed atmosphere where negotiators can work out psychological issues incurred during the hostage negotiating incident. Interviewee A-3, discussed the necessity for this study. Interviewee A-3 is a police officer, hostage negotiator, and combat medic. Interviewee A-3 has seen the effects of unresolved trauma on his brothers and sisters and discussed why he believes this study and its ramifications are imperative to helping hostage negotiators and others in law enforcement deal with their stressors effectively. Interviewee A-3 in their own words, “Their mind is tortured by many things, and we need to stop that torture. We need to understand that those here in the States, or back at home, or not just in combat are dealing with it, and they're not being helped, which in the longterm makes not only their body broken but their brain, their heart. So I'm glad you're doing that”. This is assuredly an area that I am driven to do further research after the acquisition of my doctoral degree.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

As previously discussed in Chapter 2, many of the previous studies did not touch on the research questions and areas focused on in this study. Most other studies looked at areas such as characteristics necessary to be a good negotiator and not stress reduction strategies utilizing a quantitative approach such as Abrahamsen & Strype. This study, as well as, studies by Basinka, et.al.; Ivie & Garland; and Young were all quantitative

studies focusing on background, personality, or coping skill based personality traits which were not particularly relevant to the proposed research questions. Other quantitative studies such as those by Stockdale, et.al.; Jakupcak & Tull; and Kunst & Winkel all demonstrated the need for trauma care or debriefing after an incident but failed to show the depth of a qualitative interview methodology.

This current study did not look at characteristics necessary to be a good negotiator nor personality traits of a good negotiator such as background, personality, or coping skills based personality traits, as most of the previous studies focused on as noted in the literature review. This study focused tightly on one area and that is best practice after hostage taking incident debriefing methodology. This study does not confirm or disconfirm previous studies as the previous literature did not touch on this particular area. To the contrary, this study extended knowledge to the discipline in extraordinary ways. This study found that it is imperative to have after incident stress debriefings in order for hostage negotiators to effectively deal with stressors so that their feelings are resolved so that the hostage negotiators can lead short term and long term mentally healthy lives. This study also found that in the view of the hostage negotiators, best practice after incident debriefings are best done as peer run, peer support. This peer run, peer support enables hostage negotiators to feel comfortable in their surroundings so that they do share their feelings and can overcome their stressors.

The theoretical base for this study is Robert Kelley's followership theory. The followership theory is based on an employee following the direction of a leader (Frisina, 2005). The followership theory is based on that followers should also think for

themselves and make the best decisions for their own wellbeing (Frisina, 2005). The theory also concludes that successful followers have good morals and values (Frisina, 2005). Also important to the study is that followers that are good contribute to the best interest of the team by not being sheep and by being accountable for themselves and contributing to the best end possible for the team (Frisina, 2005). Hostage negotiators are not super heroes and thus need an avenue to speak about the stress they experienced during a hostage negotiation incident (Cambria, DeFilippo, Louden, & McGowan, 2002). The stressors are numerous from the hostage taker to the stresses of dealing with obtuse supervisors (Cambria, DeFilippo, Louden, & McGowan, 2002). The debriefing process is necessary to relieve trauma and work through stressors (Norton & Petz, 2012). The followership theory is basis for this study concept on exploring the concept on giving the negotiators the opportunity to choose debriefing strategies to get the best outcome for themselves and their mental health (Frisina, 2005). The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore whether and how after incident hostage negotiation debriefing strategies lower PTSD symptoms among hostage negotiators.

The followership theory gave the basis for the rationale of why negotiators would benefit from identifying the most efficacious debriefing method for hostage negotiators in post critical incident stress debriefings which will result in better short term and long term mental health and a more closely bonded hostage negotiation team. This study is reinforced by the followership theory, in that the negotiators can choose the best practice debriefing methodology to ensure that they have the best opportunity for long term mental health. The negotiators have the opportunity to not choose formal administratively run debriefings, on

the rare occasion that they do occur, and instead have peer run meetings which will allow the chosen method on a comfortable debriefing methodology.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The limitations of the study include the following. An initial limitation is will the participants feel comfortable enough in their experiences to be open and honest in their responses. This limitation was overcome as I had a previous relationship with the participants. The participants and I have trained together on previous occasions and thus there was a comfort level which allowed the study participants to be able to answer in an open and honest manner. This open and honest interview forum is an anomaly as normally law enforcement personnel are tribal and not open to speaking to outsiders. Since I am also a hostage negotiator, and I had trained with them on prior occasions, I had a previous reputation and experiences with them which allowed them to be comfortable with me. A second limitation of low sample number could also be predicted by an outsider, however, this was not the case. As previously noted, utilization focused sampling was used as a limited number of cases, possibly 5 – 10, were explored in depth to determine possible best practices in debriefing and PTSD symptom reduction (Patton, 2015). The actual sample number of 12, was enough to get multiple views and reach a saturation point where no additional data was needed to be obtained (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

The study involved personal interviews, utilizing standardized, open ended interview approach using pragmatic interview inquiry. The questions were clear, direct, and effective. The questions were approved by my dissertation chairman and also were

reviewed through out my educational process by cohorts to establish the questions were appropriate. A limitation to my study, in addition to those previously noted, was my previous hostage negotiator experience. This previous experience may have given me biases and expectations toward what I believed the answers to my questions would ultimately be. I took major steps to eliminate this bias, by getting my questions approved by my chairman and by sticking exactly to the scripted questions as to not possibly lead in any of my interviews. This enabled my questions to be answered both open and honestly.

In future studies on this topic area, which I plan to undertake after my degree completion, I would possibly utilize focus groups to determine if that forum will give more robust information. A one on one interview method was effective and reached saturation levels, but quite possibly focus groups would spur random informational outbursts which could lead to uncharted data and new unknown data acquisition. I would also look to use a quantitative study approach utilizing surveys and phone interviews. This use of surveys and phone interviews will enable the study to be larger geographically and obtain a larger data set.

### **Recommendations**

My study was conducted utilizing personal interviews using standardized, open ended interviewing approach and the pragmatic interviewing theory. This methodology worked well due to my previously grounded relationship with the interviewed hostage negotiation teams. This approach worked well as the data provided was deep in thought,

profound, and emotionally based. The data received was like no other data that I was able to discover through a thorough literature review.

As previously discussed, the past literature did little in regards to the topic of best practice after incident hostage negotiation debriefing methods and the chance of developing a debriefing strategy that is efficacious in lowering stress and reducing the chance of developing long term PTSD symptomology. Many of the study participants stated that peer run, peer support based debriefings were the most effective. Due to this assertion, I believe further research is necessary in this area. Additional research on just how effective peer run debriefings are and what peer run method specifically would be the best at both attracting participants and at lowering stress levels thereby reducing PTSD and suicidal ideations.

Agencies can take steps to address this issue forthwith, which demonstrates both the necessity of this study and the willingness of the law enforcement agencies to take steps to address the issue. The law enforcement agencies can take immediate steps by adopting new updated policies that remove administration from after hostage taking incident debriefings. The law enforcement agencies can then empower the hostage negotiation teams to develop internal policy enabling the team members to enact peer run, peer driven after incident debriefings. Safe guards have to be put in place by the administrations of the agencies to verify these new policies are being enacted. Also on a repeating basis, say every year, the administrations of the law enforcement agencies must conduct anonymous surveys to verify and authenticate that these new polices are effective and are working to the level of their intent.

## **Implications**

The implications for positive social change in this study are vast. The positive social change through utilizing the best practice debriefing techniques is in direct alignment with the followership theory by choosing the negotiator's best option for their own wellbeing. Giving hostage negotiators the opportunity to utilize their own chosen best practice method of after hostage taking incident debriefing will allow the negotiator to have lower stress and much lower chances of developing long term PTSD symptomology and suicidal ideations. The lower stress levels will enable the hostage negotiator to live without the stress, guilt, and depression type feelings that would drain them on a daily basis. Instead of having a negative impact, the negotiator will have dealt with these stressors at the debriefing and thus can live in a more positive manner. The hostage negotiator, by living more positively, will be more productive at work and thus possibly save more lives, will be more positive at home, and more positive when off duty and dealing with community members. The hostage negotiator's family members will have a better home life, which will make them more positive, and they will act positive in the community and the positive behaviors will resonate out into the community to establish wide flowing positive social change implications. Also, another positive social change implication is that these debriefing best practice strategies can be utilized by other law enforcement agencies as well as any other professions that use debriefing in their professional duties.

The implications of the study reach the everyday practitioners in the field of law enforcement. Everyday people go to work in law enforcement, ranging from hostage

negotiators to corrections to police officers. These individuals feel large stressors on themselves every single day. These stressors if not dealt with appropriately will take a large toll on these individuals ranging from drinking, drug use, PTSD, up to and including suicidal ideations. For example, Interviewee M-2 stated, “that person is not a human being in my mind, because if I think of a person or a child or a victim, and look at that in an emotional standpoint, I'll never survive this”. This quote shows the emotional toll that everyday criminal justice field experiences has on individuals. Interviewee A-4 goes on to again reiterate the importance of the study goals, finding and utilizing best practice, namely peer run, peer driven after hostage incident debriefing strategies so that the hostage negotiators can appropriately deal with traumas they have endured, “almost all were talking about it and it makes it easier, as far as, fucked up things are going to be, what you see or hear, or what happened in the end...I think going and being able to talk about it with people who aren't going to judge you or who kind of understand it” is the best way.

Through the results of this study, a recommendation would be that, since most departments do not do this and it is the chosen best practice, immediate adoption of peer run, peer support driven debriefings become the standardized operating procedure. As seen throughout my study, in accordance with the Followership theory, negotiators must find a best practice debriefing method to protect themselves as administration has yet to do so. This phenomenon can be seen by looking at the honesty and depth of my interviewees as it was blatantly obvious from the front line staff. See the quote from interviewee A-3 to verify this,

No, I think that I hope this works for you because I think there's a huge need for the powers that be, communities, whatever, the world, to understand that PTSD can happen in a single moment you step out your door, or it can be a cumulative affect. And I think that cumulative effect is ignored a lot. You don't have to be a soldier overseas to get PTSD. It can happen to a trauma nurse. It can happen to someone who works in animal rescue. Their mind is tortured by many things, and we need to stop that torture. We need to understand that those here in the States, or back at home, or not just in combat are dealing with it, and they're not being helped, which in the longterm makes not only their body broken but their brain, their heart. So I'm glad you're doing that.

The action of development and the coordination of best practice hostage negotiation debriefing methodology will give negotiators a well deserved and needed opportunity at long term mental health and a happy life. The better mental health opportunity is well deserved because hostage negotiators, and other law enforcement for that matter are not super heroes and therefore as humans necessitate a method to speak about the stress they experienced during a hostage negotiation incident (Cambria, DeFilippo, Loudon, & McGowan, 2002). This best practice debriefing strategy methodology will give great positive mental health results. Interviewee A-4 may have stated it best, "you have to get it out...eventually it will catch up to you". Instead of it catching up to you, appropriately dealing with the stressors is a best solution for all involved.

The action of development and the coordination of best practice hostage negotiation debriefing methodology has tremendous positive social change implications. The less stressed hostage negotiator will be better equipped mentally to be a more successful hostage negotiator which will in effect save more lives. These less stressed hostage negotiators will not have acute stress disorder, long term mental health issues, PTSD, or long term suicidal ideations as their short term stressors will be dealt with appropriately in peer run, peer driven debriefing sessions. As Interviewee A-3 stated, during a peer debriefing “you have to be able to release your emotions”. By releasing their emotions they can release the stress and move on with their lives in an appropriate manner. These less stressed hostage negotiators will then live less stressed family lives where the family will interact with the community in a less stressed and appropriate method which resonates outward. Lastly, these debriefing techniques can be utilized by all of law enforcement, again resonating positive social change implications outward. This outward thrust of positive social change demonstrates exactly why the ideations behind my study are justified.

### **Conclusion**

Upon designing my study I had a good idea of what I believed I was taking on. I believed by finding best practice debriefing methods for hostage negotiators that the study would have broad reaching positive social change implications. I was right but I didn't know just how right. By conducting my study through qualitative research, I was able to discover just how far reaching the current poor debriefing methods and lack of debriefings ramifications had on hostage negotiators. These individuals need an outlet to

relieve stress and lower the chances for developing long term PTSD symptoms and possible suicidal ideations. If the best practice methods are not adopted then not talking, not showing up for debriefings, and no debriefings at all will continue and in the words of a study participant this will “destroy people”. It is the duty of society to look for best practice debriefing methods to give back to hostage negotiators and law enforcement officers that work to keep us safe. These best practice techniques must be utilized and I, after degree completion, will continue to research, pursue best practice peer driven debriefing techniques, train, and consult individuals on how to look out for themselves and their team members so that they can live long and mentally healthy lives.

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## Appendix A: Research Questions, Interview Questions, and Follow Up Questions

RQ1: How do hostage negotiations perceive that after incident hostage negotiation debriefing strategies lower their PTSD symptoms?

The interview question for this Research Questions are as follows along with the rationale.

IntQ-Please describe your role as a hostage negotiator? This particular question establishes a base line demonstrating the hostage negotiator's level of topic knowledge.

IntQ-After an incident explain the process of a critical incident stress debriefing? This particular question establishes a base line demonstrating the hostage negotiator's level of topic knowledge.

IntQ-In your experience please describe the positive and negative psychological after effects of a hostage situation after you were properly debriefed? This question is a direct line of data from the research question.

IntQ- In relation to the last question, what is your perception of both short term and long term stress levels and PTSD symptomology compared to a hostage taking incident or

traumatic incident occurring on the job where no debriefing was offered? – This question directly answers part of the research question establishing essential data.

RQ2: Which after incident hostage negotiation debriefing strategies do hostage negotiators perceive as most effective at lowering their PTSD symptoms?

Interview questions followed by the rationale for their utilization are as follows.

IntQ - In your experience, please describe your views on what is the most efficacious after incident debriefing method, or part of a method, to possibly allow you to be more honest and open about your stressors from the incident? This question directly answers part of the research question establishing essential data.

Follow up Q – Please describe specifically how this method allows you to be open and honest so that your stressors can be specifically addressed?

IntQ-Describe in your view how might the process of stress reduction be affected by your preferred after incident debriefing as compared to a method that you find unfavorable? This question directly answers part of the research question establishing essential data.

Follow up Q – Please describe the theoretical debriefing method of peer run, no administrators permitted debriefing may compare to your most favorable debriefing

method? The rationale for this question is to establish evidence for a possible additional research direction to be addressed after this study.

Follow up Q – Looking at all experienced debriefing methods and the previously addressed peer run method, which do you believe would be most efficient and why? The rationale for this question is to establish evidence for a possible additional research direction to be addressed after this study.

IntQ-In your view describe any experiences you have had with team bonding in an after incident debriefing scenario and if the effects were either positive or negative? This question directly answers part of the research question establishing essential data as team bonding may demonstrate applicable stress lowering effects.

Follow up Q – Describe in your beliefs, is there a preferred debriefing method that you would prefer in establishing a more positive team bonding experience? The rationale for this question is to establish evidence for a possible additional research direction to be addressed after this study.

## Appendix B: Letter Sent to Experts to Prevalidate Interview Questions

Date

Address to Dr.

Dear Dr....

I am asking for your opinion on my interview protocols to pre-validate them before the study. My study is in reference to best practice after hostage incident debriefing methods.

I am requesting your assistance as you are an expert in this field. I wish to complete my PhD and be a respected contributor in the hostage negotiation research field so I would greatly appreciate your assistance. Can you review and give me your expert opinion?

Respectfully,