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Addressing Work-Induced Stress and Depressive Symptoms in Police Officers

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Walden University
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Abstract

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by

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MA, University of the Cumberlands, 2015

BS, University of Louisville, 2014

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Police officers across the nation face a significant issue as it relates to work-induced stress and depressive symptoms. Specifically, the problem is the lack of preventative mental health services available to officers. This study aims to explore the perceived presence of work-induced stress and depressive symptoms in patrol officers employed by the Field Police Department (Pseudonym; FPD). To gather these data, the potential research participants were offered the ability to take an online anonymous survey. The results indicated that many of the survey participants were suffering from work-related stress and depressive symptoms. The research results further displayed many of the participants utilized poor coping strategies which contributed to their perception of work-induced stress and depressive symptoms. Survey participants reported being unaware of how the department could aid them if they or an officer they knew were seriously struggling. Positive social change is centered on the evaluation, development, and implementation of policies and procedures that benefit the quality of life of all stakeholders. The data collected and analyzed have the potential for positive social change by helping police administrators to develop engagement strategies to effectively teach and monitor the mental resiliency of their officers. This study is useful for the front-line officers as it makes them aware of various signs and symptoms to observe and investigate.

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Dedication

I dedicate this body of work to the never-ending number of fallen first responders who succumbed to the incalculable traumas of this honored profession. Your sacrifice will not be forgotten, and I will continue to honor and pay tribute to the legacy that each of you worked towards. Further, this body of work is dedicated to the men and women of the who selflessly serve the citizens of our city with honor and distinction. Please always remember how you felt when you received the call from your background investigator letting you know that you had been chosen to serve.

Acknowledgments

I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the many individuals who played a part in helping me get to this point. This all began at Louisville Central High School Magnet Career Academy with the help of an assortment of teachers. Many of whom I am still in contact with today. I am forever grateful for the love and support I continue to receive from these amazing people. Anthony (Tony) Robinson (University of Louisville) and Dr. Cherie Dawson-Edwards (University of Louisville), thank you both so much for being a presence and a force in my life. Tony if it had not been for you going to bat for me concerning my scholarship and having a true heart to heart with me then I may not be in this space. I think of you often and I am deeply grateful for your contribution to my life. Dr. Dawson-Edwards, you are an amazing educator and a true social justice warrior. I hope that I am able to provide a similar presence and affect change in the hearts and minds of the people in the way that you have. I cherish our friendship. I want to acknowledge the love and support that I have received from my family and friends. My parents, brothers, cousins, friends, and colleagues have all contributed and pushed me to finish this process. They are truly an inspiration and I am forever indebted to you all. I wish that my Great-Grandmother Letha Pasley could be here to see this great accomplishment. I would love to hear her say one more time how proud she was of "her boy".

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction: Problem Statement

There is an enduring personnel issue in law enforcement and policing regarding depression and suicide in police officers. The problem is the lack of preventative mental health services available to officers, leading to work-induced stress and depressive symptoms (Baka, 2015; Bishopp & Boots, 2014). This problem impacts officers of the Field Police Department (FPD). Researchers have suggested officers who do not receive proactive training to establish positive coping mechanisms have a higher probability of suffering from depressive symptoms (Chopko et al., 2019). Recently, a general body of researchers has attempted to analyze trends in police subculture that lead officers to exhibit depressive symptoms and provide law enforcement executives with reports on the matter (Maria et al., 2018). There have been no methods of implementation outlined that could provide effective social change within the FPD.

Factors contributing to this problem are the police subculture, poor coping strategies that are exacerbated by stress, and depressive symptoms and organizational responses that are not always favorable to treatment. That literature review for this study identified posttraumatic growth, benefits avoidance, and the conservation of resources theory as major themes to the foundation of the focus of other research studies (Leppma et al., 2018). No researchers have conclusively analyzed the impact of work-induced stress leading to depression and ultimately suicide within FPD patrol officers. This study

will fill this gap by exploring and describing how work induced stress leads officers to experience depression.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore and identify the presence of work-induced stress as it relates to depression, specifically those in the Patrol Bureau of the Field Police Department . Because of the negative stigma associated with mental health services in the police subculture, many researchers have focused on what is known as posttraumatic growth, which studies the resiliency of officers to rebound after being involved in traumatic incidents (officer involved shooting, line of duty deaths, etc.) (Leppma et al., 2018). Research regarding how the law enforcement workload combined with poor coping strategies leads officers to experience depression needs to be explored further to reduce the number of police officers who seek suicide as a solution to their depressive symptoms.

Research Question

Research Question: How do FPD patrol officers perceive the presence of work-induced stress?

Framework

The theoretical base for this study will be the punctuated equilibrium theory (PET). Weible and Sabatier (2018) found that PET is focused on defining the issue and setting the agenda for stakeholders. The idea behind issue definition and agenda setting in my research is that through the public discussion of social issues, policy makers are

spurred to address said issues in the policy making agenda. The beauty of this process is that old polices do not have to be thrown out completely, but open room for improvement. This theory involves the court of public opinion which can be seen as the law of the land, especially in the age of technological advancements.

Nature of the Study

This research design will focus on the experiences that patrol officers within the FPD experience on a day-to-day basis. Currently, there is no empirical data pertaining to the FPD that explains this phenomenon. The study will utilize an anonymous online survey that will only be sent out to officers within the patrol bureau.

Possible Types and Sources of Data

1. An anonymous survey will be delivered to patrol officers within the Field Police Department discussing perceived impacts of work-induced stress.

2. Review of Field Police Department employment exit surveys.

3. Review of statistical data gained from prior research.

Limitations, Challenges, and/or Barriers

By using anonymous surveys, the limitation exists that the questions asked may not fully capture the depth of the information being sought. There exists the potential for a lack of participation by the patrol officers. Historically, researchers have documented that police officers are a difficult group to be studied because of their sense of mistrust (Lambert & Steinke, 2015). Obviously, a lack of participation would impact the sample

size and would challenge the credibility of the study. In conclusion, a quantitative study will not address the "how" or "why", which does not fully present the depth of the participant's perspective.

Significance

While these studies are important, they function in a reactionary capacity which helps to legitimize the use of mental health services by police officers; often these same officers who seek or are ordered to speak with a mental health professional would not do so had the traumatic incident not occurred (Lambert & Steinke, 2015). This study will achieve social change through substantive discussion and engagement. The results of the study will provide patrol officers with a working knowledge of the stress that they experience and help them to provide the appropriate terminology. Further, police executives and citizens will benefit by having a healthier and more well-round group of patrol officers.

Summary

Chapter 1 focused primarily on establishing the problem being researched, the purpose of the study, outlined the research question, provided a basis for the framework being used, the type of data being collected, and the significance of the study. Chapter 2 will expand on the pertinent literature in relation to the significance of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This study was developed and initiated to address the perceived presence of work-induced stress and depressive symptoms experienced by law enforcement officers. Depression as a result of work-induced stress is a hallmark of the law enforcement community and is best viewed as an invisible storm that many law enforcement officers struggle through. The visible storms are often easier to work through, due to the fact that those on the outside can see objectively for themselves that you are in need, such as when an officer is in a foot pursuit, when an officer is involved in a physical fight with a suspect and becomes physically injured, or when an officer is working to control and contain a chaotic scene and needs help distinguishing between the perpetrator(s) and the victim(s). It is the invisible storms that officers experience that are often the most traumatic. Invisible storms can be financial instability/insecurity, lack of emotional self-awareness leading to an inability to positively communicate their feelings, stress from changes in the political climate of the agency, changes in front-line command staff, and most prevalent are latent depressive symptoms that manifest in various aspects of their lives. Lambert and Steinke (2015) reported that police officers experience a phenomenon known as benefit avoidance, and that due to the subculture of machoism and negativity towards mental illness that officers fail to adequately confront their depressive symptoms.

Violanti et al. (2016) suggested that repeated exposure to incidents of stress have the potential to cause officers to feel hopeless and subsequently commit suicide. Violanti

et al. (2019) further suggested that interpersonal issues, failure to appropriately address alcohol/substance abuse issues, apathy towards death, and relationship issues with friends and family all work to increase the odds that a police officer will experience depression and suicidal ideations. Violanti et al. (2019) contended that enough research into this issue has not been completed, and the research that exist often conflicts with itself largely due to inconsistencies in responses given by police officers. The purpose of this research is to study and understand the perceived negative effects of work-induced stress on police officers as it relates to the rates of depressive symptoms experienced by police officers, specifically those in the Patrol Bureau of the FPD. The FPD was created in January of 2003. The department was formed through the merger of the old city police (Louisville Division of Police) and the old county police (Jefferson County Police Department). Since merger the FPD has sustained three line of duty deaths, multiple active officers have died in off-duty incidents, and there has been one confirmed suicide by an active duty officer.

For many years after merger the FPD was nationally ranked as one of the best police agencies in the country serving as a training hub for other agencies in the State of Kentucky and Southern Indiana, as well as developing joint task force with the US Marshals, Secret Service, DEA, ATF, and the FBI. However, since 2017 the infrastructure of the department has been crumbling due to questionable leadership, mismanagement of funds at the state level which drastically changed the retirement structure for police officers, changes in employee health insurance plans, lack of pay

raises, and substantially more family-oriented job offers from surrounding agencies. The current climate of the department is questionable and many officers are forced to work exceedingly strenuous amounts of overtime or off-duty to meet their financial obligations. Some families are without health insurance, as the current health insurance premium for officers with a spouse and a child are over $1,000 per month. Many members are forced to join the national guard or reserve military units to gain affordable health care; thereby increasing the workload of officers in the patrol bureau and subsequently the work-induced stress that is felt by these officers.

Literature Search Strategy

Information pertaining to police officer suicide was acquired through a number of queries involving multiple databases and search engines contained within the Walden University Library database such as ProQuest Criminal Justice and Security database, SAGE Journals, and Google Scholar. Terms and phrases used to locate information within the above-mentioned databases and search engines include *suicide, law enforcement, police officers, burnout, post-traumatic stress disorder, hypervigilance, benefit avoidance, resiliency, compassion fatigue and depression*. The literature search involved the use of peer-reviewed scholarly articles primarily published within the last 4 years. This was done to satisfy the 5-year publication threshold of the dissertation program.

Benefit Avoidance Theory

Prospective police officers, police recruits, and police officers are asked many times throughout their lives why they choose to pursue a career in law enforcement. To friends and family, it is not uncommon to hear them say that they choose this particular career path for the ability to help others, to chase down bad guys, or for the adrenaline rush that comes with engaging in a fresh pursuit. For many officers they may even say that this is all they have ever wanted to do. Undeniably, there is a compelling sense of ownership to protect the community that overshadows any of the above reasons. Unfortunately, many of these individuals are not privy to the behind the scenes issues that police officers combat such as: work-induced stress, adrenaline dumps, emotional and mental fatigue, and repeated exposure to traumatic events. The general public is not immediately aware of mental health issues that affect law enforcement officers, because this side of the business is not "sexy", nor does it par well for police agencies when the news media is questioning the mental health of the officers within the department. Most family members of police officers are not aware of internal struggles that their loved ones face day-to-day because the police sub-culture forbids being weak (i.e. talking to someone about how work mentally affects you) (Kaariainen et al., 2008).

Individuals seeking careers in law enforcement are often not aware that they will deal with on-the-job stress such as what is discussed above. Consequently, they have not been taught positive coping strategies for the inevitable stress that they will encounter. Baum (2012) found that police officers often internalize their emotions to distance

themselves from their work. Officers internalize these distressing emotions and subsequently are ineffective in empathizing with victims (Baum, 2012). Further, Baum concluded that police officers use this distancing technique because the traumatic events they encounter serve to remind them of their own mortality. Colwell et al. (2011) argued that police officers have historically not been proficient at managing stress, and to do so would require officers to expend a large amount of mental and emotional energy. As has been stated in many news articles related to excessive use of force and officer suicides, the officers were under stress that either no one knew about, or the person they told did not know how to help them.

Colwell et al. (2011), discussed the reality of the unavoidable stress that police officers must encounter as a cost of performing their duties. In 1986 Graf conducted a study of 77 police officers in which he determined that over half of them were not positively coping with the stress of their jobs. Anshel et al. (1997), discussed the stigma of seeking out mental health professionals as it relates to the law enforcement subculture. Primarily that officers do not want to be seen as weak or unfit for duty. The police role consumes the officer and they forget that at some point they will no longer be the police. Anshel et al. (1997), not only went on to discuss the prevalence of suicide, divorce, and substance abuse in the police subculture, but also the phenomenon of the "blue wall", in which police officers refuse or fail to notify the correct entity about psychological issues that could impair their partners decision making skills. The benefits avoidance theory was chosen because it centrally aligns with the issue that has plagued many police agencies,

which is that officers do not engage in proper mental health conditioning. Many agencies contract with "Employee Assistance Programs" that are designed to help officers locate resources such as couples counseling, substance abuse therapy, mental health therapy, and even financial literacy courses. However, many officers are ambivalent towards asking for help, which leads to an accumulation of stress followed by an eventual mental crisis.

According to Blue H.E.L.P, an online mental health support website for law enforcement officers experiencing depression and/or suicidal thoughts and their families, there were 228 police suicides in 2019, 174 in 2018, 172 in 2017, and 143 in 2016 (BLUE H.E.L.P. [2020, April, 12]). In contrast, at the time of this dissertation there were 146 line of duty deaths in 2019 (officers who were killed or died as a result of job-related activities), 185 line of duty deaths in 2018, 184 in 2017, and 181 in 2016 (The Officer Down Memorial Page, INC. [2020, April, 12]). The New York Police Department experienced 27 law enforcement suicides in 2019 (BLUE H.E.L.P. [2020, April, 12]). Police suicide affects those new to the profession, those beleaguered by changing policies and public perception, and even those veteran officers in key leadership positions such as assistant chiefs and chiefs. This is a crisis and this study will explore, discuss, and encourage stakeholders to work towards a resolution that will provide for an overhaul of the traditional police subculture that has stigmatized the emotional suffering of police officers.

Phenomenology

Depression and suicide are often considered to be invisible traumas that police officers experience. Because of this, it is critical to allow the participants of this study the ability to state their perceptions about their current mental state and the things that they perceive to cause them mental or emotional anguish. Phenomenology is concerned with the lived experience of the individual as they are experiencing the phenomenon according to Srubar (2005). The phenomenological approach allows each officer who decides to participate in the study the opportunity to provide a succinct and sovereign detail of their experiences or lack of thereof dealing with the stress associated with their profession. This approach allows for this rich deliverance free of any encroachment on the authenticity of the responses that could come by way of a researcher's personal interpretation.

The phenomenological approach gives the officers the ability to tell the world in their own words exactly how their experiences have affected them. Thereby providing reliability and accuracy to those who seek to understand this phenomenon as it is. The qualitative research question in this study examines how FPD officers perceive the effects of work induced stress within their day-to-day job role.

The History of Law Enforcement in the United States

In order to understand the issues that are plaguing American police officers it is critical to understand how the police came to be. Dr. Gary Potter, a professor at Eastern Kentucky University wrote an article in 2013 chronicling the creation and development

of American police agencies. The American model was originally modeled after England

during the early days, in this model a night watch system which consisted of volunteers

patrolled the streets at night and alerted others of danger. The northern states utilized the

watch system while the southern states derived their police agencies another way. Boston

was the first to create a night watch in 1636, followed by New York in 1658, and

Philadelphia in 1700. Issues immediately arose with the watch system because the

volunteers were not all committed to the same principles; many of them were being

punished or seeking to avoid military service. The first day watch would be instituted by

Philadelphia in 1833, and New York ten years later in 1844. During this time the use of

Constables was also very prevalent. Constables were elected officials, who were paid for

serving warrants and other various non-law enforcement functions. With the advent of

the watch system the constable was often tasked with monitoring the activities of the

watch volunteers.

Potter (2013) highlights that the first publicly funded police department was

established in Boston in 1838, with New York instituting its first police department in

1845, many other nearby cities began developing police forces with the all major U.S.

cities having police forces in place by the 1880s. With the development of police

agencies several principles from the past still ring true today: Police agencies are

bureaucratic and funding for them comes from the public dollar. The primary bulk of a

department's forces are sworn members. Every department had its own set of standard

operating procedures that fell in line with federal and state law. Finally, there is a central

governing authority that oversees the actions of the police department. Policing in the southern states began with a different trajectory of development. The southern states had slave patrols who served to catch runaway slaves. At the conclusion of the civil war and with the enactment of the Emancipation Proclamation the slave patrols shifted to begin controlling newly freed slaves. Their primary focus was the enforcement of Jim Crow segregation laws, which served to remind the newly freed slaves that they were inferior.

The industrial revolution in the United States during the 1830s sparked growth in cities that required a system in place to control disorder. According to Spitzer (1979), there was an absence of the presence of any growing crimes trends, yet there was a rapid mobilization of metropolitan cities developing municipal police agencies. American colonies which fostered small communal populations did not require extensive police services, however; urbanized cities with large factories and swelling populations require those willing to maintain order and allow for the conduct of proper business. Thus, we begin to understand that the early formation of police agencies and the roles of these officers were largely drafted, instituted for, and geared toward benefitting businesses and corporations. In a true business model this allowed for merchants to move away from hiring private security and placed the security of their business in the power of the state.

Capitalism must be protected, and when laborers who were strife with inequality and disproportionate economic stratification decided to begin rioting, the true basis of the first modern police officers becomes apparent. These early officers were indoctrinated to believe that in good faith they were upholding the laws of the state, which were

developed and directly benefited the merchants who were creating and maintaining the disparate economical stratification. Officers have been uniquely given the authority to use force to "maintain order" for the "public good". Early officers were taught that those who allow themselves to be drunk in public, to commit acts of vandalism, to riot and strike are ill-bred. Ironically, laws concerning a person being intoxicated in public did not appear until merchants began selling alcohol in public venues. Further, it is even more interesting that rioting and striking were so hastily seen as problematic when just 57 years prior (1773) the Boston Tea Party incident made a similar stand against the ill-treatment towards the colonies by England. So here begins the dichotomy of the police and the citizens they must protect.

Early American policing methods primarily focused on reaction instead of prevention. As urbanization continued to increase the demand for police services, police agencies began to introduce preventative patrols. So begins the routine introduction of police officers into the everyday lives of common citizens. Barkan (2001) detailed how municipal police agencies were used to conduct "strike-breaking" between 1880 and 1900, which created the issue of public employees who were legally mandated to use force against those breaking the laws infringing on the private citizens right to strike for more equitable workers' rights. Bordua and Reiss (1967) commented on several ethical and practical issues faced by local police agencies such as: should the police be a uniformed service, should the police have firearms, and what levels of force are appropriate. As can be seen from today's policing model, police are uniformed, carry an

assortment of weapons, and utilize an evolving standard of force to gain control and compliance.

Law enforcement and policing in the United States has undergone several philosophical changes. Walker and Katz (2008), point out that the first of these is known as the political era (1840-1930), which largely saw to the development of modern police agencies. Issues during the political era plagued police departments because of their interconnectedness with local politicians, poor pay and benefits for officers that made them more susceptible to bribes, and lack of centralized leadership within police agencies. Many of these issues were in theory corrected when police agencies shifted to the professional model (1930-1980). O.W Wilson and McLaren (1972), published a book titled *Police Administration* in which he argues that the professional model of policing focused on officers who were no longer controlled by politics (in theory), the command of the police department was more visible and centralized, officers were transitioned from foot patrols to motorized patrols (which should in theory remove them from citizen contact unless they are in a law enforcement capacity), officers received more rigorous educational and physical training and police officers were being selected based on merit and not bribes.

A central issue that arose out of the professional era was the "Us vs. Them" mentality that many police officers have towards the citizens they protect. A third model of policing evolved known as the Community Policing Model (1980-Current), the community policing model is focused on relationship building between the police and the

community, improvement of the quality of life of citizens, seeks to implement proactive policing strategies and aims to reduce the communities fear of the police.

History of Police Training in Kentucky

Focusing more intently on Kentucky and even more specifically on Louisville, it is important to understand how the effort for formal training was developed. According to the Kentucky Department of Criminal Justice Training (DOCJT) the first recorded basic law enforcement training session occurred in July of 1969, this course was three-weeks in length and was voluntary. In 1971 the basic class was increased to six weeks (participation was still voluntary). In 1972 an incentive was developed for municipal police officers whose agencies mandated all of their officers to undergo the training provided by the DOCJT, the fund is known as the Kentucky Law Enforcement Foundation Program Fund also known as KLEFPF. In 1986 the basic course was extended to ten weeks. In 1998 a physical fitness standard was developed known as the Peace Officer Professional Standards (POPS). In 1999 the basic course was increased to sixteen weeks. In 2017 the first three-day course known as a "Post Critical Incident Seminar" is taught and is specifically geared towards officers and dispatchers who have experienced a critical incident. In 2018 the DOCJT extends the basic course to twenty weeks, and subsequently develops a wellness program centered on peer support and counseling.

According to the Louisville Metro government website the Louisville Police Department (LPD) was started in June 9, 1806 with five officers, and these officers were

compensated at rate of $62.50 per month. Fifty years later the Commonwealth General Assembly formerly passed an act that recognized and established the police department. The department grew from six officers to 52. The Jefferson County Police Department (JCPD) was established in February 1868 with officers receiving compensation in the amount of $40 a month. The JCPD received authorization from the Kentucky Law Enforcement Council to begin conducting annual in-service training in 1971, and its own basic academy training in 1999 (The LPD never formed its own basic training academy, all officers were sent to the state academy for training). In January 2003 the city and county police agencies merged to form the current Field Police Department (FPD). The FPD continued utilizing the training academy created by JCPD and is one of two agencies in the state which maintains its own academy (Lexington Police Department also maintains its own academy).

The development of a "Post Critical Incident Seminar" block of instruction was new for the state academy. At the current time the FPD was already discussing this with recruits, however; the conversation was geared towards officer safety and how the unfortunate events may have been prevented. The focus was not on pre- or post- incident mental resiliency. Nor was there an inherent focus on psychological resiliency during the academy training to prepare new officers for life on the streets. In fact, it is only recently that police executives have begun to shift their gaze onto the lifestyle factors and accumulated stress that may have contributed to officers being involved in critical incidents. This new paradigm takes into account the extenuating circumstances that often

challenge police officers during the mere seconds that have the propensity to change their lives forever.

In 2015 the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) office sent a published set of case studies to Congress to provide an insight into the current mental health status of the nation's law enforcement officers. Congress followed up by creating the Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act of 2017; which tasked the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) with maintaining a constant check on the mental health of the nation's law enforcement officers. The DOJ is responsible for submitting a case study style report to Congress that focuses on providing in-depth reviews of programs designated to address the mental health of the nation's law enforcement officers. A primary understanding of the law is that the work performed by police officers has the potential to result in "higher rates of heart disease, divorce, sick days taken, alcohol abuse, and major psychological issues such as acute stress disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety disorders" (Copple et al, 2019). The DOJ's 2019 report utilized 11 police agencies with varied department operational sizes, demographics, and resources. Below are several of the agencies that mirror the department size, demographics, and resources available to the FPD. Within each case study the reader is exposed to the various strategies employed by each agency (recruitment, retention, prevention of crisis episodes, response to crisis episodes, etc.).

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department Case Study:

This Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department (CMPD) is responsible for a patrol area that is roughly 438 square miles, is divided into 13 patrol divisions, and has a sworn operating strength of approximately 1,972 officers. In contrast the FPD is responsible for a patrol area that is roughly 399 square miles, is divided into eight patrols divisions, and has a sworn operating strength of approximately 1,200 officers. Both agencies were developed through a merger of two existing agencies. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department provides a focused and holistic approach to the welfare of its sworn personnel. The department utilizes a peer support team, a staff psychologist, an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), provides chaplain services, multiple wellness programs, and a retired officers program. The peer support team is comprised of senior officers who are professionally trained and primarily respond to officers who are involved or witness a critical incident. A member of the peer support team will make contact with an involved officer at the initial onset of the event, again later in the week, and then follow-up contact as needed. The peer support team is available to all officers and contact with the team is confidential and voluntary.

The department staff psychologist provides a similar resource equivalent to what is offered by the peer support team. The difference is that the staff psychologist is more thoroughly trained and has a technical background in dealing with mental health issues. The staff psychologist for this department also conducts yearly check-ins with detectives who work in specialty units such as homicide, crimes against children, and other units

that could expose officers to traumatic events (Copple et al, 2019). The staff psychologist

is not a long-term solution for officers, but rather an immediate in-house resource that

can gauge the needs of an officer and provide them direction towards a permanent

solution. The EAP is developed with the idea of early detection, streamlining the officer

to the proper resources, and getting the officers needs resolved efficiently. The EAP

offers six free counseling sessions, each session thereafter cost the officer $70. On

average it takes 22 sessions for a mental health issue to adequately be resolved (Copple et

al., 2019). To offset this issue the department is working with a local mental health

organization that offers additional visits to officers at a reduced rate of $20 per visit. The

EAP offers a wide range of services to officers; however, the majority of these services

are limited to consultations and referrals rather than permanent problem solving.

The chaplain program consists of 14 chaplains and is composed of three primary

religious backgrounds (Christianity, Islam, and Judaism). The department has developed

a system whereby the chaplains are assigned to specific divisions and develop a rapport

with the officers there. Further, the chaplains take part in ride-a-longs with officers, eat

lunch with officers, respond to the needs of retired officers, as well as respond to the

scene of critical incidents. The department also implements a retired officers program

aimed at aiding officers in transitions from an active status to a life of retirement. The

department provides resources to retired officers and also allows retired officers to aide in

the assistance of officers involved in critical incidents, recruit graduations, and presenting

discussions on common concerns of retirement for other officers who may be nearing that

phase of their career. The department has 300 retirees who are actively participating in the program, although participation is still considered to be low.

The CMPD is aware that all stress perceived by officers is not merely work-induced, but that outside stress also has the potential to negatively impact an officer. For this reason the department has worked with the city to institute a financial and personal wellness plan. The financial wellness plan aims to encourage officers to make efficient and pertinent financial decisions. The department has observed positive responses from officers when they have surveyed them concerning the perceived benefit of the financial literacy training. The city wellness program gives officers access to a host of benefits with the only requirement being a annual health checkup. Officers are given access to 17 free gyms which provide aerobic and strength equipment, physical fitness and nutrition counseling, personal health coaching, several city employee specific health centers located throughout the city, and a reduction in insurance premiums if officers meet certain health goals/requirements.

Dallas Police Department Case Study:

Dallas Police Department (DPD) is the 9th largest police department in the U.S., covers roughly 385 square miles, employs over 3,300 sworn officers, and serves over 1.3 million citizens. In 2017 the department responded to 24,847 calls for service. According to Coppel et al. (2019) the DPD has utilized a mental health program since before the ambush of its officers on July 7, 2016 in which 5 officers were killed, 9 were injured, and 2 civilians were also injured. This attack placed a tremendous strain on the department's

in-house psychological services. The DPD developed a relationship with the Center for Brain Health at the University of Texas at Dallas. The approach taken by the Center is focused on mindfulness and resiliency training. The approach taken by the Center is derived from theoretical/scientific knowledge and research, as well as context gained from ride-a-longs and interviews conducted by the researchers. A comprehensive pilot program was developed and launched. The course is 12 hours long, taught over 4 weeks in 3 hour blocks, and utilizes a number of learning method. Between January and August of 2018 the DPD conducted 7 mindfulness classes and provided a pre and post assessment. The DPD reports that of the 101 participants surveyed there was a statistically significant reduction in "mind wandering, alcohol use, organizational police stress, and negative mood and feelings" (Coppel et al, 2019).

The DPD also incorporated an innovative course known as Strategic Memory Advanced Reasoning Training (SMART) in conjunction with the mindfulness class. SMART is a cognitive training program that is aimed at developing an officer's ability to "quickly filter incoming verbal and sensory data, determine meaning and action based on those data, and then flexibly use the information gathered for rapid and agile decision-making" (Coppel et al, 2019). The DPD conducted a pilot study with 74 officers ranging from the Chief of police down to the rank of Senior Corporal, with the instruction block totaling 9 hours and spanning the course of a month. The researchers of the SMART study contend that the officers showed "statistically significant improvements in complex reasoning and strategic attention as well as decreases in self-reported symptoms of

depression and stress" (Coppel et al, 2019). The DPD feels that based on the statistical evidence training focused on cognitive performance is an important addition to the training that police officers receive. Coppel et al. (2019) also detail a leadership program that has been in place since 2008. The Caruth Police Institute is embedded within the DPD and develops the department's leaders to be holistic and instills a progressive mindset.

The DPD Employee Support Program is similar to EAP program utilized by CMPD with several exceptions: officers who receive 4 complaints in a 12 month period resulting in an internal affairs investigation are referred, if an officer receives 3 instances of verbal or written counseling in a 12 month period they can be referred, if an officer receives 3 use of force complaints in a 24 month period they can be referred, any criminal activity complaint that is adjudicated results in a referral, and 3 unexcused absences from training/work/court within a 12 month period will trigger a referral. The ESP referral last for a maximum of 90 days, and can be completed within 30 days depending on the assessment of the employee's supervisor. The employee, the ESP team, and the employee's chain of command develop an assessment plan. Every 30 days a follow-up assessment is completed to ensure the officer is on track. Initially the ESP was located in the internal affairs building and as such the ESP being underutilized. The ESP was moved to the personnel department and subsequently officers began utilizing the ESP. The DPD ESP is a progressive service and seeks to provide preventative and reactive care. The ESP offers multiple work-life balance seminars that cover a wide range of

holistic topics. According to the ESP they have seen a dramatic increase in the number of officer's participating in the seminars and further the city has seen an increase in spending on ESP services from $4,000 in 2005 to $80,000 in 2017.

The DPD psychological services office is comprised of 3 staff psychologists who routinely participate in the hiring process by way of 2 psychological screens during the pre-employment hiring process. The staff psychologist's conduct yearly screenings of officers involved in various specialty unit as well as meeting with officers on a voluntary basis to discuss their needs. The psychologist office is off-site, is not identified as DPD, and provides an unlimited number of counseling sessions to officers.

Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department Case Study:

The Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department (IMPD) was created in 2007 after the merger of Indianapolis Police Department and the law enforcement division of the Marion County Sheriff's Office. Indianapolis is ranked as the 17th largest city in the U.S., has a population of approximately 863,000 and has a patrol area of approximately 364 square miles. The department's sworn strength is just slightly over 1,600 officers. IMPD created the Officer of Professional Development and Wellness (OPDW) and implemented a training program that begins during the basic academy and continues throughout an officer's career. The program offers mentoring for new officers, resiliency training in the academy, counseling, suicide prevention, health care, financial literacy training, military transition support, and family support. The OPDW is available 24/7 to officers and their immediate family. To save on cost the OPDW utilizes EAP counselors

and psychologists. The OPDW is supplemented by the Police Officer Support Team (POST) which is comprised of 30 officers broken into teams of 10, each team is on call for a month at a time, and all members are volunteers.

The department has a limited wellness program that allows officers to utilize the gym at the training academy and provides a yearly health screening (lack of interest on behalf of officers). The department is currently working to gain more of a buy-in from its officers concerning their physical fitness. The IMPD has a strong military transition program that provides officers and their families who are deployed with resources and support during the tour of deployment. When an officer returns the unit mobilizes and provides the recently deployed officer with a mentor, monitors the officer readjustment back to work and home life, and ensures that the officer is aware of any benefits they may be entitled to through the VA.

Conclusion

The development of policies and procedures regarding officer mental health resiliency are beginning to become more of a cultural norm as the topic of officer suicides continues to become an approachable topic of discussion. In the existing research studies regarding work induced stress and officer suicide, researchers have primarily been concerned with investigating the individual officer's perceptions, the existence of programs in agencies, and the efficacy of the programs in these agencies. However, no study of this nature has been conducted with the FPD. There is a significant gap in the research as it pertains to the unique stressors that FPD officer's experience.

The literature review provided a thorough explanation to studies that are similar or directly linked to the outcome variable of officer stress, measured by the officers perceived level of stress. There was no identified empirically based data analysis on the perceived work-induced stress level of police officers by FPD, or any other major metropolitan police agency nearby.

A qualitative methods approach was used in this study to explore and describe how the perception of work induced stress experienced by police officers has the potential to lead them to experience depression or have suicidal ideations. The methodology of this qualitative methods study is discussed in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore and identify the presence of work-induced stress in police officers, specifically those in the Patrol Bureau of the Field Police Department (FPD). I will use an anonymous, qualitative survey to collect current data and assess the general impact of work-induced stress on patrol officers. In this chapter, the setting, research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, methodology, threats to validity, and issues of trustworthiness will be discussed.

Setting

The purposive sampling technique of homogenous sampling was used during the study within the FPD. The FPD is a full-service law enforcement agency, employs over 1,000 sworn officers and provides police services for over 620,118 residents (U. S. Census Bureau, 2017). The sample was comprised of sworn law enforcement officers, who are currently employed by the FPD, and work in the patrol bureau. The focus was to gain information surrounding each officer's perception of how they are affected by the stress of their job role.

Research Design & Rationale

In this qualitative research study, the research question is as follows: How do FPD patrol officers perceive the presence of work-induced stress? The central phenomenon of the study was the impact that work-induced stress has on the mental health of patrol officers; more specifically, the potentially depressive symptoms that could be present due

to accumulated stress. The change, which is the mental health of the patrol officers, was investigated through the perception of FPD officers in the patrol bureau and reviewing current literature. A qualitative study provides the ability to directly gather information from patrol officers regarding the perception and significance of work-induced stress in relation to depression in the patrol officers.

Role of the Researcher

At the time of this study, I am an active law enforcement officer with approximately 5 years of law enforcement experience. I have worked for a smaller department (50 or fewer officers), and currently work for a large department (1000 or more officers). I have primarily spent my time in the patrol bureau and have spent a year on the Honor Guard. In the capacity of an Honor Guard member I travel throughout the region and attend law enforcement funerals (generally line of duty deaths). While I actively work as a patrol officer, I did not use my departmental affiliations to influence participation. I maintained the anonymity of all participants by utilizing an anonymous online survey and the data was broken down to show the findings of the effect of work-induced stress on patrol officers. No compensation was offered to the participants. All participation was voluntary.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic: Qualitative

The researcher utilized purposive sampling to provide research participants with the ability to provide feedback and understand the impact of work-induced stress and

how it relates to the qualitative research question. The use of purposive sampling was justified through work completed by Ravitch and Carl (2016) because there is a need to recruit specific officers who can provide detailed accounts as it relates to the core concept of the qualitative research question. Based on this logic the target of the researchers recruitment efforts were officers employed by FPD officers in the patrol bureau. Officers in specialty units such as homicide, domestic violence, fatal traffic collision reconstruction, etc. have not been asked to participate because of the potential for their lived experiences to skew the results. The researcher believes that a more elaborate study would need to be conducted to capture the depth of the work-induced stress that officers in the specialty units undergo.

The Field Police Department has approximately 600 officers in the patrol bureau. There is no prior data on the mental health of the officers employed by the Field Police Department . The concept behind the survey to conduct an original study with the participation of the patrol officers that will serve as a platform to establish Standard Operating Procedures for handling officers who may or may not be experiencing depressive symptoms.

<div align="center">**Instrumentation**</div>

Data collection will be collected by the researcher using a semi-structured anonymous survey. The survey was pertinent to this study because the lived experiences of the patrol officers are central to the discussion surrounding the perception of work-induced stress that the officers knowingly and unknowingly undergo. Police officers have

a long history of demonstrating passive resistance to academia, especially when the

research is focused on the mental health of police officers. For this reason the survey will

be anonymous. By providing officers with the ability to provide answers anonymously

and in-depth the assumption is that the data will be substantially more reliable.

The anonymous survey (Appendix B) for the qualitative portion of the study

consists of demographic information followed by an assortment of survey questions that

are designed to capture pertinent information. The demographical informational is

important to adequately describe the sample. The information collected includes the

participant's division assignment, years of law enforcement experience, race, age, and

highest level of educational attainment. The research question was evaluated using the

survey questions. The focus of the survey is the participants perceived impact of work-

induced stress as it relates to the participants own behavior.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The FPD's Chief Office was contacted to determine if the department would

allow their officers to be solicited for the study. Members of the chief's office expressed

interest and provided a letter of cooperation (Appendix A). Research participants were

selected based on their status as a sworn officer with the FPD and assigned to a patrol

division. An email document was sent out to the sworn members of the FPD, more

specifically an email was sent out to the patrol officers of the FPD. The email served to

notify possible participants of the potential to participate in the study as well as the nature

of the study. The survey tool will be given to the researcher and for ease of access all

participants were provided with a paper copy of the survey. The surveys were available for a period of 30 days which provided each patrol division approximately 160 working hours to respond to the survey request.

Participants were provided a statement of informed consent, possible implication's, explanation of the study, as well as the purpose of the study could be located within the initial e-mail. The explanation of the study made clear that no participant would be compensated for completing the survey, and further that all participation was voluntary and such participation could be revoked by the participant at any time.

Data Analysis Plan

Patrol officers work a rotating schedule so that in a two week work period each officer should work four days in the first week and three days in the second week for a total of eighty hours. For this reason, the data from the anonymous, qualitative surveys will be collected for a period of four weeks. QSR International's software tool, NVivo, along with Microsoft Word was used to help analyze the data collected with the surveys. In the analysis, the discrepant cases were used as a means of describing the inclusive impact perceived by all participants of the study. To describe the lived experiences of the participants the researcher used the phenomenological analysis. The researcher will use the similarities and differences gained from the responses to provide an in-depth understanding of how the participants perceived the presence of work-induced stress.

In this research study, the goal was to assess the impact of work-induced stress on patrol officers within the FPD using the research question as a guide. The survey has 21 items, featuring some demographical questions, questions that are close ended as well as open-ended questions. The demographical questions help to provide a rich understanding concerning the gender, age, race, education level, rank, and marital status of the participant. This demographic information provides data that allows for delineation of the similarities and differences between each participant. The close-ended questions cover various topics such as an officer's attitude about their work, event occurring at work, how each officer's deals with stress, a section pertaining to the officer's health, and a section pertaining to issues and officer may be having at home or at work. During the data analysis the researcher will search for recurring themes which will provide context to the lived experiences of the participants.

The researcher will read through the collected data several times to familiarize himself with the responses. It will be important to revisit research objectives to ensure that there is alignment in the way that the data is represented. Initially the researcher will look for repetitive broad ideas and concepts stemming from the responses. Variables such as age, rank, years of service, and positive or negative questions will be coded to structure and label the data. Once the coding process is complete the researcher will address the recurring theme(s) and this will serve to identify patterns within the collected data. The first section of the survey focuses on demographic information and asks participants to respond to the following questions:

Demographic Questions:

1.   What is your Gender: - Give choices here: M/F/Gender non-conforming/ Transgender man (FTM)/ Transgender woman (MTF)/ Decline to answer

2.   What is your age: 21-29/30-39/40-49/50-59, 60+, Decline to answer

3.   What is your race: AA or Black/ White or Caucasian/ Asian or Asian American/ American Indian or Alaska Native/ Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander/Another race/ Decline to answer

4.   What is your ethnic group: Hispanic/Latino, Non-Hispanic/Non-Latino/ Decline to answer

5.   Highest level of education: High school/ College/Graduate school/ Decline to answer

6.   How long have you been a sworn police officer:

7.   What is your current rank: Officer/Detective/Sergeant/Lieutenant or above/ Decline to answer

8.   Did/do you serve in the military: Yes/No/ Decline to answer

9.   Do you have routine contact with suspects: Not at all/ at least once per week/ more than once per week

10.   What is your marital status: Single/Married/Divorced/ Decline to answer

The participants will then be asked to respond to the second section of the survey which features close-ended questions relating to the perceived presence of work-induced stress.

All responses will be close-ended using either a response of yes or no.

Work Attitudes:

11.   I enjoy the work that I am tasked to do with FPD?

12.   I perceive the work that I am tasked to do with FPD as being stressful?

13.   I have experienced depression working for FPD?

14.   Stress from being an FPD officer has caused me to lose interest in things that I would normally enjoy?

15.   The work I have been tasked to do as an FPD officer has caused me to contemplate suicide or harming myself?

16.   The work I have been tasked to do as an FPD officer has caused me to have recurring dreams, nightmares, or distressing thoughts.

The final section of the study features open-ended questions and focuses on the officer's perception of stress and coping strategies, while also ascertaining the officers knowledge of available services provided to FPD officers:

<u>Stress/Coping:</u>

17.   In your role with FPD what type of events have caused you stress?

18. During stressful events in your role with FPD, how did you feel? Did you decide to talk to someone about the event, if so to whom (friend, fellow officer, licensed therapist, etc)?

19. What are your coping strategies to offload your stress (smoking, drinking, fitness, sexual intercourse, shopping, family time, etc), and how do your coping strategies help you to feel better?

20. If an FPD officer that you are close with told you that they had thoughts of harming themselves briefly explain what you would do or what advice you would give them.

21. Do you believe that FPD has adequate services in place for officers dealing with work-induced stress and depression? Briefly explain.

The 11 survey questions explore the qualitative research question of the study.

Threats to Validity

The findings of the study could not be generalized due to the lack of an experimental design. Threats to external validity were mitigated by using documentation and vivid descriptions, and because the researcher utilized a known tool to conduct the survey other researchers can replicate the study. The researcher was not interested in establishing causal relationships therefore any threats to the internal validity were mitigated. Saturation will be established after continuously observing established themes throughout the qualitative data collection.

Issues of Trustworthiness

To address the issue of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were addressed using the following validation techniques: triangulation, thick description, and reflexivity.

Ethical Procedures

The *Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subject of Research* (1979) highlight several ethical considerations that were pertinent to the study: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. Every participant in the study was provided all necessary information which allowed them to make an informed decision concerning their participation. Every participant was afforded the same level of protection against coercion and false promises. Harm was effectively minimized to the participants while the researcher was able to maximize the benefits of this research study. The researcher ensured in the study that all of the participants were treated fairly and equally. No participant was discriminated against or received preferential treatment regarding their race, sex, sexual orientation, rank, or educational attainment. Each participant was informed through the informed consent disclaimer that any participant could discontinue participation at any time during the survey. The identity of all participants was protected.

All data collected will be retained on a password-protected, encrypted external hard drive for five years following the conclusion of the study. The data will be made available for examination upon formal request. Once the final study is accepted, the agency from which the sample was taken will be given a copy of the results. The

researcher will also make the final results available to participants, so long as a formal request is received. Before beginning the study, permission will be obtained from the Walden University Institutional Review (IRB) Board to conduct the study. Permission via a letter of cooperation from the FPD's Chiefs Office will also be obtained to serve as a written agreement of access to FPD officers to solicit them to serve as research participants.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the methodology chosen for the study. This qualitative study consisted of purposive sampling to ensure that participants were properly selected, and that each participant was afforded the ability to complete the anonymous, qualitative survey online. Further, this chapter focused on the analysis of the collected data while also taking into consideration the threats to validity and issues of trustworthiness. In conclusion, the final portion of this chapter focused on the permission to conduct the study which was again provided by the Walden University IRB. In the next chapter there will be discussion about the results of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and identify the presence of work-induced stress in police officer as it relates to depression, specifically of those in the Patrol Bureau of the Field Police Department . The study was directed by one qualitative research question: How do FPD patrol officers perceive the presence of work-

induced stress? In this chapter, the results of the study will be discussed. The chapter will begin with a discussion of the data collection process followed by the qualitative analysis. The chapter will conclude with an overall summary of the chapter.

Demographic: Qualitative

The FPD is a medium-sized law enforcement agency within the Midwestern Region of the United States. At the time of this study, the patrol divisions comprised approximately 716 sworn law enforcement officers. The anonymous online survey was sent out via the departmental email server to officers in the eight patrol divisions on October 2, 2020, in total there were seventy-nine submitted online surveys. Initially the survey would be open to participants until October 30,2020, however; data saturation occurred on October 17, 2020 after receiving 79 completed surveys. The completion rate was 100%. For analysis purpose $n = 79$. The years of service for the participants ranged from one year to 20+ years, with the average years of service being between 5-10 years. The age of the participants ranged from 21-59, with the average age being 30-39. Of the 79 participants, approximately 82% were White, 17% were Black or African American, the remaining 1% were either Asian or Asian American, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, Another Race, or Declined to Answer. Approximately 70% of the participants attended some form of Undergraduate college. Approximately 10% of the participants attended Graduate school. Approximately 20% of the participants listed their highest level of education as High School or declined to answer.
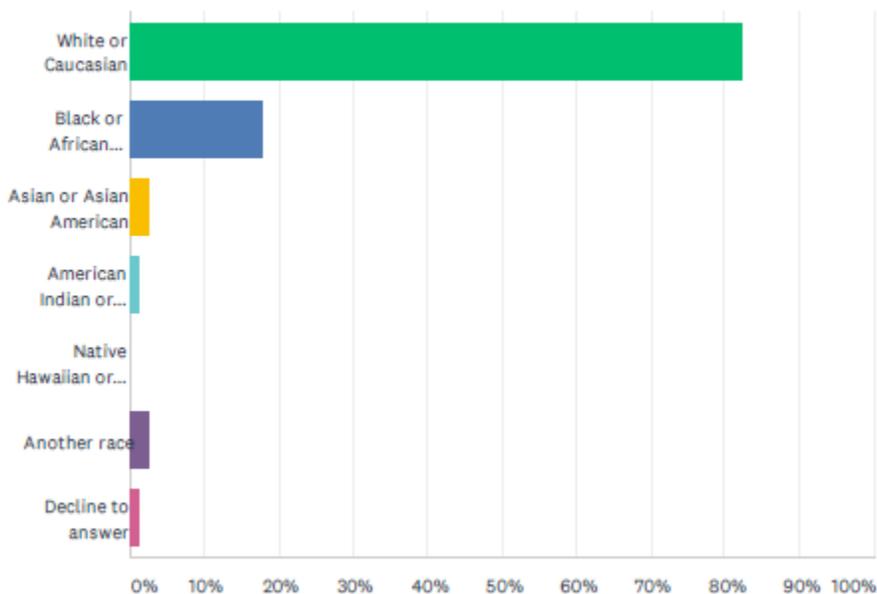
Figure 1

Demographic Question: What is your Race?

1.2	0.	1.	2.	17

82	2.5
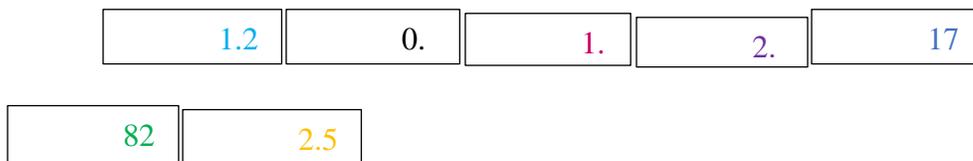
Q3 What is your race?

Answered: 79   Skipped: 0

Data Collection

On October 2, 2020, a recruitment email (Appendix A) was sent out to the sworn members of FPD by a designee of the FPD chief's officer. The recruitment email specifically targeted sworn members who were currently assigned to one of the patrol divisions. A copy of the informed consent statement was attached to the recruitment email. The email directed prospective participants to an anonymous, online survey

(Appendix B) hosted by SurveyMonkey.com. The participants were directed to further explore the informed consent, possible implications, and an explanation/purpose of the research study. Each of the participants provided electronic informed consent to participate in the research study by clicking to begin the survey. The data collection period ended on October 19, 2020.

The initial portion of the survey collected demographical information from participants. The participants were then asked to respond to six close-ended survey questions that sought to collect data on the perceived work attitudes of the participants. The "Work Attitude" questions were placed in this exact order:

- I enjoy the work that I am tasked to do with FPD?

- I perceive the work that I am tasked to do with FPD as being stressful?

- I have experienced depression working for FPD?

- Stress from being an FPD officer has caused me to lose interest in things that I would normally enjoy?

- The work I have been tasked to do as an FPD officer has caused me to contemplate suicide or harming myself?

- The work I have been tasked to do as an FPD officer has caused me to have recurring dreams, nightmares, or distressing thoughts.

Following the "Work Attitude" section, participants were directed to the 5 open-ended survey question. These questions focused on the perceived stress/coping strategies of the participants. The "Stress/Coping" questions were placed in this exact order:

- In your role with FPD what type of events have caused you stress?

- During stressful events in your role with FPD, how did you feel? Did you decide to talk to someone about the event, if so to whom (friend, fellow officer, licensed therapist, etc)?

- What are your coping strategies to offload your stress (smoking, drinking, fitness, sexual intercourse, shopping, family time, etc), and how do your coping strategies help you to feel better?

- If an FPD officer that you are close with told you that they had thoughts of harming themselves briefly explain what you would do or what advice you would give them.

- Do you believe that FPD has adequate services in place for officers dealing with work-induced stress and depression? Briefly explain.

The 11 survey questions target the qualitative research question.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the qualitative survey was manually analyzed. Data collected from responses one through ten provided basic descriptive statistics and an overall representation of the sample. Next, data collected from responses eleven through sixteen were analyzed to give an overall perspective on the participants' perceived

perception of work-induced stress and depressive symptoms as it relates to the participants' role with FPD. Finally, data collected from responses seventeen through twenty-one were analyzed manually to search for frequently used words, phrases, and patterns. The responses that are present in this section have been unaltered and will contain some grammatical errors. For each question containing narrative a response codes and themes were developed.

Survey question eleven (Q11) assessed the participants perception of enjoyment with the work they are tasked to do. Approximately 79% of the participants stated that they do enjoy the work that they are tasked to do. The remaining 21% stated that they do not enjoy the work that they are tasked to do. Survey question twelve (Q12) assessed the participants perception of the work that they are tasked to do as being stressful. Approximately 85% of the participants perceived the work that they are tasked to do as being stressful. The remaining 15% did not perceive the work that they are tasked to do as being stressful. Survey question thirteen (Q13) assessed the participants perception of experiencing depression while working for the FPD. Approximately 64% of the participants responded that at some point they had experienced depression while working for the FPD. The remaining 36% stated that they had not experienced depression while working for the FPD.

Survey question fourteen (Q14) assessed if the stress of being an FPD officer has caused the participant to lose interest in things they normally enjoyed. Approximately 59% of the participants had experienced a loss of interest in something they normally

enjoyed as a result of being an FPD officer. The remaining 41% stated they had not lost

interest in things they normally enjoyed as a result of being an FPD officer. Survey

question fifteen (Q15) assessed if the work that the participant has been tasked to do with

the FPD has caused them to contemplate suicide or harming themselves. Approximately

8% of the participants stated that the work they are tasked to do as an FPD officer has

caused them to contemplate suicide or harming themselves. The remaining 92% stated

that the work they are tasked to do as an FPD officer has not caused them to contemplate

suicide or harming themselves.

Figure 2

Work Attitude Question: I enjoy the work that I am tasked to do with FPD?

Q11 I enjoy the work that I am tasked to do with FPD?
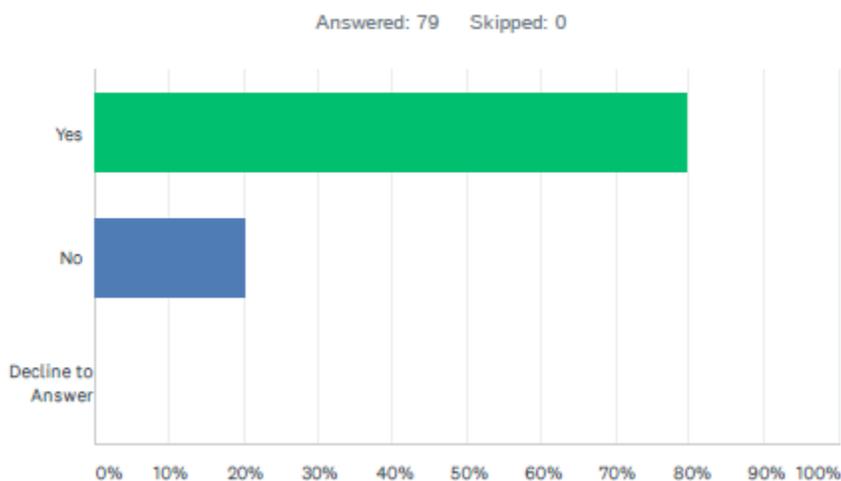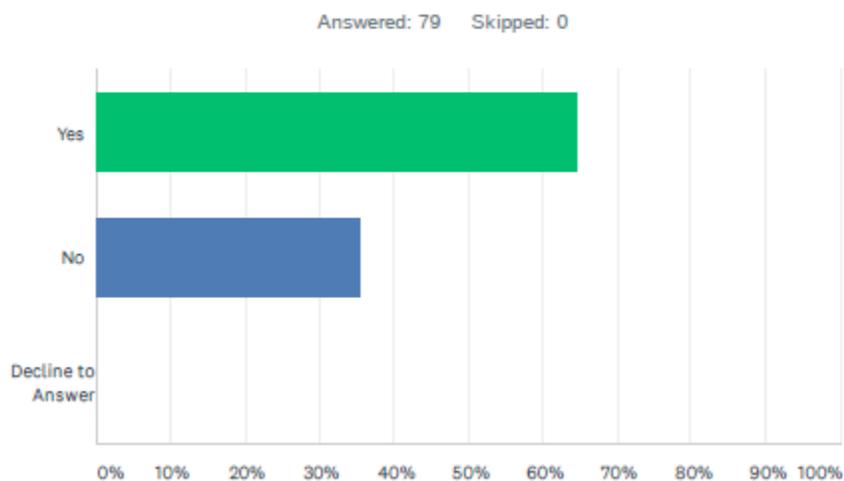
Figure 3

Work Attitude Question: I perceive the work that I am tasked to do with FPD as being

stressful?

Q12 I perceive the work that I am tasked to do with FPD as being stressful?

Answered: 79   Skipped: 0
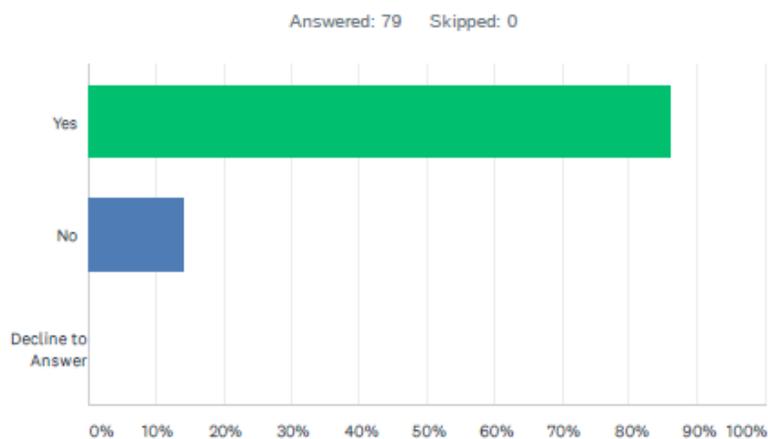
Figure 4

Work Attitude Question: I have experienced depression working for FPD?

Q13 I have experienced depression working for FPD?

Answered: 79   Skipped: 0

Survey question sixteen (Q16) assessed if the work that the participants have been tasked to do as an FPD officer caused the participant to have recurring dreams, nightmares, or distressing thoughts. Approximately 74% of the participants stated that the work they have been tasked to do as an FPD officer has caused the participant to have recurring dreams, nightmares, or distressing thoughts. The remaining 26% stated that the work they have been tasked to do as an FPD officer has not caused the participant to have recurring dreams, nightmares, or distressing thoughts.

Survey question seventeen (Q17) asked participants to list what events caused them stress in their job role. Participants listed a number of varying stressors such as traumatic events (officer involved shootings, officer injured/killed in the line of duty, homicide scenes, serious/fatal vehicle collisions, scenes involving children who have been neglected or killed, civil unrest, etc.), issues with upper command, manpower issues, and calls for service. Themes developed from participant responses were work and psychological. The subthemes of work are "upper command", "staffing", and "conditions". The subtheme of psychological is "traumatic events". Participant 5 responded "More recently have off days revoked and working 11-12 days straight on 12 hour days and having vacation time severely limited when we can take it. Runs we make sometimes have an effect on us", and participant 8 responded "active shooters, shootings, dead children, vehicle pursuits, riots, aggressive suspects, poor pay, poor leadership, constant attack and criticism from own city government". Participant responses were

coded and placed into each respective theme, resulting in some participants being represented multiple times across various themes/subthemes.

For example, participant 5 represented the theme of staffing because the stressful events for participant 5 involved issues with departmental staffing levels. In contrast, participant 8 represented multiple themes such as traumatic event, upper command, conditions because their responses evoked each respective theme. Participant 15 also evoked multiple themes. Participant 15 stated "the protest surrounding the Breonna Taylor case, the officer involved shooting that placed 2 FPD officers in the hospital. Seeing multiple civilian videos online, flashing guns at police and threatening to shoot police. The worry that someone will recognize me as an FPD officer when I am at home with my family, and I am not fully aware of my surroundings". Participant 15 represented the themes of conditions and traumatic events. 77% participants evoked the theme of traumatic events. 24% participants evoked the theme of conditions. 16% participants evoked the theme of staffing. 22% participants evoked the theme of upper command.

Survey question eighteen (Q18) asked participants how they felt during stressful events in their role with FPD, and if they decided consult anyone. Two themes were developed as a result of this question, resources and psychological. The theme of resources captured who the participant stated they consulted. 46% of participants report speaking with a fellow officer. 46% of participants report speaking with a family member, friend or spouse. 22% of participants report speaking to a professional therapist or peer support team member. 16% of participants report speaking to no one. The theme

of psychological captured the various verbs used to describe how the participants felt. Some participants utilize multiple resources and thus their responses were captured multiple times. Common verbs used by the participants to describe their feelings/emotions during their stressful event(s) are stressed, hopeless, depressed, anxious, angry, and sad. Participant 22 represented the theme of psychological. Participant 22 stated "I feel calm and collected to an extent during the events. But it's after when I snap back. I go back to a place mentally. I call it the unnamed feeling, because I'm mad, sad, scared, alert, and even happy, all at the same time. It's confusing to a lot of people". The responses from the participant show the myriad of feelings/emotions that overcome officers as they work through the stressful event before it occurs, as it unfolds, and after it has ended.

Survey question nineteen (Q19) asked participants to list their coping strategies and their perceived effectiveness. The highest reported coping strategies are listed as exercise, family time, alcohol and sex. Exercise and family time have been grouped as positive coping strategies, while alcohol and sex have been grouped as negative coping strategies. 57% of participants sought exercise as a positive coping strategy, and 42% of participants sought family time as a positive coping strategy. 33% of participants sought alcohol as a negative coping strategy and 14% of participants sought sex as a negative coping strategy. Some participants utilize multiple coping strategies and thus their responses were captured multiple times. Participant 22 stated "I used to smoke but I've stopped(unless I'm in an extremely stressful event). I don't have any alcohol tendencies. I

mainly work out and do little hobbies." Participant 76 stated "Since starting here I drink at least once a day and on my days off heavily. I usually work off duty in an attempt to keep myself busy (20-30 hrs a week). Participant 50 stated "Sexual intercourse, Blade & Bow, Exercising". For the purposes of this study the researcher did not perform an in-depth review concerning substance abuse, alcoholism, or the number of officers who constantly must be working (on-duty or overtime) to avoid their negative coping strategies.

Survey question 20 (Q20) asked participants to briefly explain what they would do or what advice they would give to an officer who confided in them about having suicidal ideations. The responses were divided up into 4 types of resources. 78% of participants stated that they would speak with the officer. 22% of participants stated that they would speak to a commanding officer about the incident. 70% of participants stated that they would refer the officer to professional treatment. 6% of participants responded that they would do nothing or were unsure of what to do. Participant 27 stated "I would ask the officer to meet me outside of work to discuss why they are feeling that way without any distractions that come with the work place. I would follow help with them over the next days and weeks to see if their making progress. If they are getting worse I would tell their supervisor what is going on with them". Participant 27 like many other participants captured important concepts in their response such observing the need for privacy, the immediacy of the situation, the need for follow up care/treatment, and the possibility of reaching out to a commanding officer (generally as a last resort)

Participant 7 had a very interesting response that captured multiple concepts as well. Participant 7 stated "It would be heartbreaking. I definitely wouldn't let them go until I made them get some help. I would probably notify another close officer to help talk with them. It's a tough call because they are trusting you. I would feel like dragging them somewhere as you would do an involuntary hospitalization but this is a friend who is trusting you. That's tough. Maybe also call a close family member so they can take certain steps that I can't. I guess I would have to risk my friend hating me for a little while. It would be much better than the alternative". This response captured the need for privacy, the importance of being able to sympathize with the officer, the internal struggle that another officer may face because they are trying to conceptualize how they might want to be treated in a similar circumstance, and also the need to retain the friendship beyond this incident.

Two themes were developed for Q20 the first being Referral, with two subthemes: Departmental policy and treatment. The second theme developed was emotional intelligence and there were four subthemes: sympathy, empathy, fear, and privacy. Participant responses were coded and placed into each respective theme, resulting in some participants being represented multiple times across various themes/subthemes. 37% of participants stated that if an officer confided in them about suicidal ideations that they would reach out to a commanding officer, staff psychologist, or some other department sponsored options. 78% of participants stated that they would refer the officer to speak with an outside professional. 90% of participants used words or phrases that

aligned with the participant sympathizing with the officer. This appeared to be one of the first steps that most participants saw as a way to show support. 10% of participants used words or phrases that aligned with empathetic viewpoints. These particular participants had prior personal experience dealing with suicidal ideations or severe depression. Although only 15% of participants used words or phrases that aligned with protecting the privacy or confidentiality of the officer in crisis. It is clear that most participants would only reach out to a commanding officer as a last resort due to the potential for job disruption and lack of confidentiality.

Participant 30 represents the above themes. Participant 30 states "I feel as if a professional resource may be the best course of action, such as a reference to EAP (after talking in detail if applicable and possible) – supervisors and other coworkers would not be ideal as that could cause an immediate disruption in working, and that could send things in a worse direction". Further, participant 58 provided a very thorough and complex response. Due to the length, the response from Participant 58 has been shortened. Participant 58 stated "I would try to get through to them the importance of taking some type of leave, such as a stress leave to talk to someone and get under a doctors care to help them because without helping themselves we can't begin to help others. If they declined this and remained in denial I would then go to my CO or directly to their CO and provide the relevant information so that they can immediately be removed from the street and encouraged/mandated to talk to someone and get some help". The responses from participant 58 is one that is repeated throughout the survey.

Participants believe that speaking with a professional will be beneficial, most participants would opt for the officer in crisis to maintain their dignity and confidentiality and speak with the professional on their own terms, and most participants would only reach out to a commanding officer or departmental personnel as a last resort.

Survey question 21 (Q21) asked participants to state if they believed that the department had adequate mental health services in place and to briefly explain their rationale. 69% of participants responded that they felt the department had adequate services in place. 24% of participants responded that they felt the department did not have adequate services in place. 7% of the participants responded that they were unsure if the department had adequate services in place. Reponses with explanations were coded and placed into two themes: benefit avoidance or benefit seeking. Participant responses were coded and placed into each respective theme, resulting in some participants being represented multiple times across various themes. The theme "benefit avoidance" was derived from repeated codes such as: not easily available, best help is officers, out-of-pocket cost, issues with confidentiality, and other responses such as seeking help is soft. The theme "benefit seeking" was derived from repeated codes such as: peer support is very helpful and accessible, multiple services setup and functional, tools are available, Doctor is adept at speaking to people, open but also maintains client privacy.

Participant 59 represents both themes. Participant 59 stated "I do, I believe Dr. Freville is very adept at speaking to people, very open, yet private. I think the main hurdle is in policing is that people who normally save lives and are the hero have a

difficult time recognizing and understanding when they themselves are in crisis. The tools are available but people fail to take advantage for the stigma still attached to seeking out help and because people in this profession don't know how to ask for help". Participant 59 illustrates they know of at least one resource offered by the department, they recognize that many officers have an issue breaking away from the "hero complex", they understand the presence of benefit avoidance due to the stigma attached to a "broken officer".

Participant 4 represents the benefit avoidance theme. Participant 4 stated "No, my co worker who was also involved in the shooting has been dealing with it over 2 years now and when he told work they took all police powers away and hes been riding a desk for a year. All because he told the higher ups he was having mental issues with the shooting". The concerns deduced from participant 4's response align with many other statements from other participants concerning confidentiality, lack of trust/comfort in the departments policy as it pertains to officers who report psychological trauma, feeling as though the command staff does not care or they will retaliate against an officer who expresses psychological trauma. Participant 20 also represents the benefit avoidance theme. Participant 20 stated "I don't know. We have a peer support team but I've never utilized it or heard much about what they do or how they do it. One thing that is definitely detrimental is our shitty insurance. I know that is probably a deterrent to some from seeking help because it would end up costing them a fortune". Participant 20 brings up new concerns such as uncertainty about the resources available and the function of

each resource, as well as the significant financial impact that seeking outside help for a psychological traumatic incident could potentially bring about.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

As discussed in Chapter 3, the evidence of trustworthiness as it relates to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability the researcher utilized: triangulation, thick description, and reflexivity. Survey participants were able to complete the online survey with complete anonymity. Survey participants could respond to the survey at their leisure and survey participants spanned multiple ranks, ages, and years of service with the department. Data received from the participants was analyzed and described to provide context to the participants responses. The research steps have been described multiple times to ensure the research path is clear and concise. Lastly, the research was consistently aware of his involvement with the law enforcement profession and his position within the participating agency. The research sought data from the participants to understand the social issue from their respective conceptual lens.

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the qualitative study and presented the findings from the online anonymous survey. 79 (n=79) participants completed the online anonymous survey assessing the perceived work-induced stress experienced by FPD patrol officers. Survey questions 11-16 assessed the "Work Attitude" of each participant. Based on the results of this section the following can be interpreted: FPD officers perceive their work to be stressful. Overall, FPD officers enjoy the work that they are tasked to do. FPD

officers report experiencing depression as a result of the stress of their job task. Some FPD officers report that as a result of their job task they have experienced a loss of interest in things they once enjoyed.

Overall, FPD officers are managing their stress and depression well. The department has not and is not known for a high rate of officer suicides. Lastly, there are a significant number of officers who are experiencing or have experienced recurring dreams, nightmares, or distressing thoughts as a result of their work. For the 5 open-ended survey questions, the researcher coded the participant responses, subsequently thematically analyzed the codes, and finally developed themes. Important themes developed for this study were benefit avoidance, benefit seeking, referral, emotional intelligence, work, and psychological.

In the next chapter, there will be a discussion of the researcher's interpretation of the findings, the limitations of the study, recommendations, and implications.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore and identify the presence of work-induced stress as it relates to depressive symptoms, specifically of those in the Patrol Bureau of the Field Police Department . An anonymous, online, qualitative survey was sent out to actively employed patrol officers within the FPD. This qualitative study has the potential to guide future policy changes and departmental discussion pertaining to the awareness of perceived work-induced stress and depressive symptoms in patrol officers. The research question explores how FPD patrol officers perceive the presence of work-induced stress and depressive symptoms as a result of their job task. This study was conducted at the end of a period of significant civil unrest that present-day U.S. law enforcement officers had not experienced since the 1960s. A study of this nature has never been conducted for the department, and while there are a number of department sponsored mental health services, there is no known measure of success, usefulness, or failure as it pertains to those services.

For the purpose of this study 79 ($n = 79$) anonymous survey responses were used to assess the FPD's officers perceived impact of work-induced stress and depressive symptoms. The 21-question survey provided that 85% of the participants perceived the work that they are tasked to do as being stressful. Subsequently, 69% of participants responded that they felt the department had adequate services in place. Important themes developed from the survey results were benefit seeking, benefit avoidance, traumatic

events, conditions, upper command, referral and emotional intelligence. In this chapter,

there will be a discussion and interpretation of the findings of the study, limitations of the

study, recommendations for future research, and the implications of this study.

Interpretation of the Findings

As previously discussed in Chapter 2, Violanti et al. (2016) suggested that

repeated exposure to incidents of stress have the potential to cause officers to feel

hopeless and subsequently commit suicide. Further, Violanti et al. suggested that

interpersonal issues, failure to appropriately address alcohol/substance abuse issues,

apathy towards death, and relationship issues with friends and family all work to increase

the odds that a police officer will experience depression and suicidal ideations. These

issues are further compounded by what Anshel et al. (1997) defined as the "blue wall",

which is a figurative way of illustrating the benefit avoidance that is commonly observed

in police officers, especially when the culprit is poor mental health resiliency.

The findings of this research study confirm the findings of many of the studies

completed by Violanti. Seventy-nine percent of survey participants stated that they do

enjoy the work that they are tasked to do. 59% of the participants had experienced a loss

of interest in something they normally enjoyed as a result of being an FPD officer.

Approximately 74% of the participants stated that the work they have been tasked to do

as an FPD officer has caused the participant to have recurring dreams, nightmares, or

distressing thoughts. These figures help to illustrate that for a number of reasons which

would require further exploration, that officers do enjoy the work they are tasked to do.

However, this work is stressful and that it causes a number of officers to lose interest in things they would potentially enjoy if they had not been the police, and they continue to relive the traumatic events even when they are not working.

Limitation of the Study

There are several limitations to this study. The data collected is from one medium-sized law enforcement agency, and the use of one law enforcement agency along with the purposeful sampling method does not allow for the researcher to generalize the data/findings outside of the participating agency. Additionally, it is well documented that police officers tend to avoid responding to surveys, especially those probing into the status of the participants mental health. The online, qualitative survey provided anonymity to the participant, however; it did not allow for follow-up questions or the ability of the researcher to seek clarity in the participant responses. A significant limitation of this study is that it occurred during a period of civil unrest not seen since the 1960s.

Survey participation was gained using the departmental email server, which directed potential participants to complete the online survey. There exists the possibility that because the survey link was sent over the potential participants work email account that this may have had a negative unintended consequence. Lastly, there was an inherent bias as it pertains to the researcher being an active law enforcement officer. The researcher mitigated this bias by ensuring the documentation of participants responses, thematic analysis, and thorough reporting of study results.

Recommendations

For the purposes of this study a small sample size was used in comparison to the number of patrol officers available within the FPD, or on a larger scale when compared to the number of patrol officers throughout the country. To work towards overcoming the limitation of sample size, the future researcher should use more law enforcement agencies of the similar size, or work to get participation from a larger agency. This study focused on the qualitative aspects of work-induced stress and depressive symptoms as it pertains to the perception held by patrol officers. However, through the use of purposeful sampling the researcher was not able to generalize the data. The future researcher should look at conducting an experimental quantitative study to aide in the possibility of establishing correlation.

Implications

Positive social change is centered on the evaluation, development, and implementation of policies and procedures that benefit the quality of life of all stakeholders. The increasing call for social justice reform coupled with the continued discussion surrounding officer use of force will continue to push law enforcement agencies to confront the issue surrounding work-induced stress and depressive symptoms. The findings of this research study support the need for the law enforcement community at large to observe that this ongoing issue does not merely affect the individual officer, but an officer who is experiencing an accumulation of work-induced stress and depressive symptoms is at an increased risk for poor judgement and decision making. Within the

FPD, the results of this study will hopefully move administrators and officers to work towards developing better coping strategies and will move the police administrators to develop a departmental culture that supports and reinforces the importance of mental health and mental resiliency training.

The study results make it clear that patrol officers observe the work they are tasked to do as being stressful. Overall, they enjoy their work, but they are affected by the unintended consequences of their work. In this era of worldwide social change, calls for reform within the criminal justice system, and renewed scrutiny as it pertains to the well-being and sound decision making of our nations police officers, there may never have been a more important time to address the latent effects of police work. The results of this study serve as a foundation for future researchers to dive deeper into this phenomenon and develop long-term cultural changes that will provide for a national model of mental resiliency training for all law enforcement personnel.

Summary

This study was conducted to explore and describe the perception of work-induced stress and depressive symptoms in a midwestern, medium-size law enforcement agency. Data collected provided that an overwhelming numbers of survey participants are suffering from work related stress and depressive symptoms. Some participants report that they are coping well while others are utilizing poor coping strategies to get by. Further, a significant number of participants are unaware of how the department can aide them if they or an officer they know are being overtaken by the stress of the job. The

qualitative data collected has immense value to the department administrators as it sheds lights on the strengths and weaknesses of the current programs in place.

Further, it provides key insights to the current thought patterns of a number of officers within the patrol bureau. This study, while limited by the distrust that many officers have of surveys seeking to understand their mental health, does shine a light on the day to day struggles that many officers silent battle internally. The overall results of this study require police administrators to conduct an in-depth evaluation of the FPD's current policies and practices pertaining to the mental health and depressive symptoms of its officers.

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Appendix A: Letter of Cooperation

Good morning Sir,

My name is Demetrius and I am a patrol officer in the 2nd division. I am currently in the dissertation phase of my Ph.D. journey. My focus is on work-induced stress and depressive symptoms in police officers. It is my hope that I would be able to use our departments patrol officers to fulfill the needs of my study and complete the data collection of my doctoral studies.

The information collected would be completely anonymous and would be available for use by the dept and participants once the final study has been approved. My long term goal is to develop a system of policies and procedures that first responders can adopt to begin early training and implementation in the field of mental resiliency and trauma support.

I have attached preliminary copy of the survey tool that has been given to be me by a published researcher.

I would be happy to speak with you more about this when you have time. I can be reached at this e-mail or by phone at 812.697.0603.

Officer. Demetrius Latham, Jr.

Field Police Department

Second Division

3419 Bohne Avenue

Louisville,Ky 40211

Work Number: 502-574-2478

Looks good. Approved for FPD distribution. Please work with Carol Boyle when you have university approval.

Chief Robert Schroeder

Field Police Department

633 West Jefferson Street

Louisville, KY 40202

502.574.7660

Appendix B: Online Qualitative Survey Questions

<u>**Demographic Questions**</u>

1.   What is your Gender:
2.   What is your age:
3.   What is your race:
4.   What is your ethnic group:
5.   Highest level of education:
6.   How long have you been a sworn police officer:
7.   What is your current rank:
8.   Did/do you serve in the military:
9.   Do you have routine contact with suspects:
10.   What is your marital status:

Please respond to the following questions with: Yes or No.

<u>**Work Attitudes:**</u>

11.   I enjoy the work that I am tasked to do with FPD?
12.   I perceive the work that I am tasked to do with FPD as being stressful?
13.   I have experienced depression working for FPD?
14.   Stress from being an FPD officer has caused me to lose interest in things that I would normally enjoy?
15.   The work I have been tasked to do as an FPD officer has caused me to contemplate suicide or harming myself?
16.   The work I have been tasked to do as an FPD officer has caused me to have recurring dreams, nightmares, or distressing thoughts.

<u>**Stress/Coping:**</u>

17.   In your role with FPD what type of events have caused you stress?
18.   During stressful events in your role with FPD, how did you feel? Did you decide to talk to someone about the event, if so to whom (friend, fellow officer, licensed therapist, etc)?

19.   What are your coping strategies to offload your stress (smoking, drinking, fitness, sexual intercourse, shopping, family time, etc), and how do your coping strategies help you to feel better?

20.   If an FPD officer that you are close with told you that they had thoughts of harming themselves briefly explain what you would do or what advice you would give them.

21.   Do you believe that FPD has adequate services in place for officers dealing with work-induced stress and depression? Briefly explain.