

ATTITUDES AND OPINIONS TOWARD STRESS-RELATED SUPPORT SERVICES
AMONG POLICE IN A SOUTHERN STATE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

by

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ABSTRACT

Police work is considered one of the most stressful occupations in the world and the high levels of stress associated with police work place officers at high risk for developing mental and physical health problems. Police officers also pose a threat to themselves, their families, and the general public when work-related stress is unresolved; high levels of stress among police can manifest into self-destructive, violent, and deviant behavior. Although stress management interventions have been available to police since the 1940s, the health and behavioral problems associated with unresolved stress have not shown any signs of improvement.

The purpose of this study was to explore and identify (1) how police officers appraise stress-related support services, (2) suggestions they have regarding ways to improve these services, and (3) recommendations for new support services that would help to reduce and better manage work related stress. A pragmatic qualitative research approach was used to guide this study. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposeful sample of 20 patrol officers with at least two years of police experience.

Findings showed that overall attitudes toward support services were positive, but two external factors were identified as major barriers to using services. Distrust toward confidentiality protections with intervention workers resulted in a perceived threat of being deemed unfit for duty by supervisors for using a support service. Similarly, a fear of appearing weak to other officers keeps officers from seeking needed services. However, participants recommended several feasible implications for lowering these barriers and to increasing officers' willingness to using support services if needed.

Most participants endorsed mandatory counseling after a critical incident because a standardized policy would reduce the fear of looking weak and the threat of being deemed unfit for duty. Suggestions for increasing trust in confidentiality protections included allowing police to meet counselors at private and discrete locations, giving officers the option of choosing their own counselor rather than assigning them one, and requiring external intervention workers to conduct “ride alongs” to build rapport with officers and better understand the unique stress associated with police work.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all the first responders and military soldiers who were injured during duty and especially to those who paid the ultimate price and scarified their lives in the line of duty. Specifically, I completed this dissertation in honor of my late grandfather, George Barber, for his service to this country. I am so proud to have a grandfather who served his country as a brave 19-year-old front-line soldier during the Korean war and a decorated solider who refused a purple heart during the Vietnam war in commemoration to his fallen comrades. After retiring as a United States Marine Corps Lieutenant Colonel, he pursued a second career with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), received national recognition for capturing an infamous criminal on the FBI's Top Ten Most Wanted List, and retired as a Special Agent. Although he left me with some extremely large shoes that I may never fill, I strive to serve my community with the valor he did.

Lastly, I am dedicating this dissertation to my stepfather, Jim Brown, who passed away shortly after my dissertation defense. Jim was my first male role model and he introduced me to clinical social work over 25 years ago. He turned an empty plot of farm land into a successful residential treatment facility for troubled juveniles (Tri-Wil) and welcomed me to this extended family with open arms. Although my biological father has always supported me and tried to teach me life lessons through his words, I considered Jim my "dad" because he was an active co-parent through his involvement and actions during the day-to-day interactions and he turned out to be the best "pappy" my son, three nieces, and five nephews could ever ask for.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADOC	Alabama Department of Corrections
APSW	Association of Police Social Workers
CEUs	Continuing Educational Units
CISD	Critical Incident Stress Debriefing
DOJ	Department of Justice
EAPs	Employee Assistance Programs
ERI	Effort Reward Imbalance
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigations
FOP	Fraternal Order of Police
IACP	International Association of Chiefs of Police
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
LAPD	Los Angeles Police Departments
LEFP	Law Enforcement Families Partnership
NIJ	National Institute of Justice
PDHS	Police Daily Hassel Scale
PE	Person-Environment
PERT	Psychiatric Emergency Response Team
POST	Peace Officer and Standards Training
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
PTSS	Post-Traumatic Stress Symptoms

SIT Stress Inoculation Training
SBI State Bureau of Investigations

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

Police work is considered one of the most stressful occupations in the world (Austin-Ketch & Violanti, 2012), with officers having a life expectancy of only 66 years in the United States (Violanti, Vena, & Petralia, 1997). Two common methods of coping that occur when police are unable to deal with the stressful demands of law enforcement work. The most common method is that they internalize stress, increasing the likelihood of health problems (Powell, Cassematis, Benson, Smallbone, & Wortley, 2014). The other is that they “act out” and engage in self-destructive and/or violent behavior (Anderson & Lo, 2011; Mohandie & Hatcher, 1999; Oehme, Donnelly, & Martin, 2012). Although police have access to agency resources intended to help them cope with stress-related problems, there are barriers to using these services (Page & Jacobs, 2011). Common among these barriers are the stigma associated with mental health, the fear of appearing weak to others, and a lack of trust in the confidentiality of service use (Kulbarsh, 2016; Powell et al., 2014).

Over 900,000 police officers are employed in the United States (National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial [NLEOM], 2016). Although the dangerous environments police officers work in put them at risk of serious physical injury and sometimes death, psychological injuries occur at higher rates. Maladaptive stress coping mechanisms such as alcohol abuse can lead to health disparities and other behavioral problems. On average, 143 police officers are killed in the line of duty every year (NLEOM, 2016), with the circumstances surrounding these

deaths usually receiving national media coverage. However, an average of 515 police officers commit suicide every year (Larnerd, 2010). The prevalence of mental health problems is even more alarming. It is estimated that 150,000 police officers (16.6%) have Post Traumatic Stress Symptoms (PTSS), and the majority of these symptoms are concealed from others because of the stigma associated with having mental health problems (Kulbarsh, 2016).

Unresolved stress among police poses a serious threat to individual officers, their families, and the community at large (Aamodt & Stalnaker, 2006; Anderson & Lo, 2011; Oehme et al., 2012). At the individual level, occupational stress among police has been linked to mental health conditions such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and depression (Austin-Ketch & Violanti, 2012; Wang et al., 2010). It is estimated that both PTSD and the rate of depression among police officers is twice as high as in the general public (Menard & Arter, 2013; Wang et al., 2010). The estimated PTSD rate among police is about 18.5% (Menard & Arter, 2013). One study discovered that over one-third (35%) of police officers met the criteria of a PTSD diagnosis (Austin-Ketch & Violanti, 2012).

Police officers with mental health conditions are also at higher risk for engaging in self-destructive behavior such as alcohol and drug abuse (Gorta, 2009; Weir, Stewart, & Morris, 2012). The combination of dealing with the stressful demands of police work, mental health problems, and substance abuse places police at high risk for suicide (Bishopp & Boots, 2014). The estimated suicide rate among police officers is more than double the estimated rate within the general public (Aamodt & Stalnaker, 2006).

Unmanaged work-related stress among police officers can lead to family problems (Hall, Dollard, Tuckey, Winefield, & Thompson, 2010). Police officers rarely have adequate time to spend with their families because of their heavy workloads (Chen et al., 2006). The stressful

demands of juggling law enforcement work with family life is commonly linked to family conflicts and mental health problems (Gerber, Hartmann, Brand, Holsboer-Trachsler, & Puhse, 2010; Hall et al., 2010). Roughly 80% of married police officers will experience a divorce during a career in police work (Dick, 2000). Police officers are at high risk of being violent towards their intimate partners because the authoritative nature needed to survive in this line of work spills over into their personal lives when stress is unmanaged (Anderson & Lo, 2011).

Police officers commit domestic violence at higher rates than members in the general public, a distinction that has been consistent for over two decades (Johnson, 1991; Waters & Ussery, 2007). There is also a relationship between alcohol abuse and violence towards family members. Police officers who abuse alcohol are eight times more likely to engage in Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) compared to police who do not (Oehme et al., 2012). The risk for intimate partner violence is even higher when police who abuse alcohol are struggling with depressive symptoms. Oehme et al. (2012) found that 84.8% of their police officer sample had committed acts of physical violence against their intimate partners when they self-reported depression symptoms and alcohol abuse.

The community at large is at risk of police brutality victimization by police officers with unmanaged stress. This becomes a public safety issue when mental health problems are not addressed in the law enforcement profession (O'Donnell & Stephens, 2001). Police officers who abuse alcohol are four times more likely to physically assault community members compared to police who do not abuse alcohol (Oehme et al., 2012). Unmanaged stress places the public in danger because officers' ability to make crucial decisions is impaired (National Institute of Justice [NIJ], 2009). Police misconduct and health conditions associated with occupational stress also negatively impact the community and create problems at the societal level. Over 26,000

excessive-use-of-force complaints are filed on police officers every year (Hickman, 2006). During the last decade, more than a billion dollars in tax revenue was spent to compensate citizens for police victimization. From 2009-2014, the New York Police Department alone was involved in over 12,000 civil lawsuits, and the City of New York paid out \$446,000,000 in lawsuit settlements for cases involving excessive-use-of-force and civil rights violations (Counter Current News, 2014). Although these reports show the financial burden that gets passed to the taxpayers, they rarely mention the physical and emotional damage that the victims and their families suffer in consequence.

Chronic stress experienced by this population leads to high burnout rates followed by excessive misuse of sick leave, decreased productivity, and high officer turnover (O'Donnell & Stephens, 2001; Powell, et al., 2014). Police officers are required to work extra shifts to meet mandatory staffing requirements. Officer fatigue has been linked to roughly 80% of on-duty traffic accidents (Vila, 2000). Exhaustion has also been linked to excessive use of force (NIJ, 2009). Considering that unmanaged occupational stress poses a danger to individuals, families, and the entire community, the social work profession should work on directing more efforts and resources toward addressing this social problem.

Relevance to Social Work

Police officers are referred to as “public servants,” and this label alone suggests they are an oppressed population. There is an expectation for them to be one-dimensional, to exist solely to serve others, and to suffer alone. During the police academy and field training after graduating from the academy, I was constantly told by academy instructors and field training officers that nobody likes the police until they need the police. This type of socialization leads me to believe that police officers are perceived as expendable and expected to address their personal issues

independently. For these reasons, police officers can be regarded as a hidden population very much in need of social work services to assist them in processing the work-related stress they experience.

All of the mental health and behavioral problems associated with occupational stress are social work issues at the individual, family, and community levels. Enhancing human well-being and helping to meet basic living needs is the primary mission of social work (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 1999). Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory states that safety is the second basic human need and that this need must be fulfilled before emotional needs can be achieved (Huitt, 2007). Police officers dealing with stress and mental health problems are at high risk of compromising their own personal safety (Bishopp & Boots, 2014) and, if unmanaged stress diminishes the quality of officers' lives, it also negatively impacts their friends and families (McCarty, Schuck, Skogan, & Rosenbaum, 2011).

When police officers are unable to take care of themselves, it becomes a social issue because self-care and healthy police forces are needed in order to protect the community (McCarty et al., 2011; Ranta, 2012). Spouses of police officers are at risk of being verbally and physically abused (Anderson & Lo, 2011). Family problems seem to be worse in this population, with an estimated divorce rate of 80%. The smaller percentage of police officers who remain married are likely to experience family conflict (Dreadfulwater, 2014), and advocating for disadvantaged families is a central focus of the social work profession (Cox, Tice, & Long, 2015).

Helping to improve the quality of life among police officers relates to social work on a professional level because of law enforcement's important role in addressing social problems within the communities they serve (Gill, Weisburd, Telep, Vitter, & Bennett, 2014). It is

estimated that police officers spend about 80% of their time conducting social welfare services (Patterson, 2008). In addition, most of these services are provided to the same marginalized groups that social workers seek to help, such as those with mental health conditions, substance abuse issues, involvement in criminal activity, and those community members living in poverty (Cox et al., 2015; Roberts & Brownell, 1999). Social workers and police officers also receive the same types of training to address social problems such as domestic violence, child abuse, and crisis counseling (Patterson, 2008). The social welfare services that police officers are providing suggest they are serving as surrogate social workers.

Forensic social work is at the nexus of law enforcement and social work. Although the roots of forensic social work date back to 1899, a clear definition of forensic social work has yet to be established (Roberts & Brownell, 1999). The main discrepancy when defining forensic social work is disagreement on which types of social services should be conceptualized as “forensic social work.” The National Organization of Forensic Social Work [NOFSW] (2016) defines this term as applying social work principles to issues involving laws and legal systems. NOFSW (2016) also states that social services in civil court systems are integral to forensic social work and cited divorce hearings, child custody cases, and the legal process of terminating parental rights. Other literature in this area does not consider services associated with civil laws to be forensic social work and their conceptualizations are limited to issues that only involve criminal laws (Dean, Lumb, & Proctor, 2000; Roberts & Brownell, 1999). Although there is disagreement on the scope of forensic social work services, there is a general consensus that the most important function of forensic social work is the collaboration between criminal justice practitioners and social workers (Dean et al., 2000; NOFSW, 2016).

The job duties of police are slowly shifting towards a social worker role rather than the

traditional “crime fighting role” (Patterson, 2008). The idea of police social work was introduced in 1918, when August Vollmer, the Berkley California Police Chief, gave a speech titled “The policeman as a social worker” (Dean et al., 2000). His ideas on incorporating social work principles into police work were not commonly accepted and practiced until the community-oriented policing model emerged in the 1970s (Hooper, 2014). Although law enforcement has a long connection with social services, a recent trend suggests formal connections between police and social work specifically. A few examples of this are illustrated below.

In 2002, the Bellows Falls Police Department collaborated with the Vermont Health Care and Rehabilitation Services to implement their Police Social Work Program (Health Care and Rehabilitation Services [HCRS], 2016). This model was implemented throughout the state of Vermont, with services that include mental health and substance abuse screening, responding to critical incidents, assessing social needs, and de-escalating hostile situations (HCRS, 2016). Other states, such as Illinois, have police social work organizations. The Association of Police Social Workers (APSW) is a nonprofit organization that supports social welfare services offered to citizens in Illinois (Association of Police Social Workers [APSW], 2016). Other functions of the APSW are to raise awareness about police social work, to serve as a centralized resource for police social workers, and to identify emerging social needs (APSW, 2016).

The national media focus on tensions between the general public and the police suggests that building trust between these two groups is an identified social need that has not been resolved. Lack of trust between these groups hinders police from effectively providing social welfare services to the community (Nix, Wolfe, Rojek, & Kaminski, 2015). Although police social work services are offered to disadvantaged groups, it is unlikely that these groups will utilize available services if they do not trust the police. Improving these relationships has the

potential to help social workers perform their jobs more effectively, in part, because a major function of police work involves supporting social workers (NASW New York Chapter, 2008).

My experience as a police officer leads me to believe that social workers should intervene and assist police officers with unresolved stress because successful interventions in this field serve the primary mission of social work. This task would be achieved directly and indirectly by improving human well-being through increased public safety, strengthened family units, and fewer health problems among a high-risk population. Payne (1997) stated that social workers seek to help disadvantaged groups. It is argued that police officers are disadvantaged in terms of mental and physical health risks, self-destructive behaviors, and a life expectancy of only 66 years (Violanti et al., 1997).

Stress management interventions among police officers have been considered ineffective (Patterson, Chung, & Swan, 2014; Webster, 2013). However, practitioners and others could draw upon values, skills, and knowledge from the social work profession in order to improve the effectiveness of stress management interventions for law enforcement. A multidisciplinary approach to crisis interventions is common in many fields, where it is used to inform practice. This is true for social work, where learning from clients and other professions that work with clients is a cornerstone of evidence-based practice (Gilgun, 2005). Further, asking police officers about their needs seems intuitive considering that most interventions are implemented and available to police officers according to their assumed needs and wants (Waters & Ussery, 2007). Social workers seek to empower people (NASW, 1999), which could translate into police officers being self-sufficient long after they participate in stress-reducing interventions that are designed for them. Specific strategies that social workers use to help reduce stress-related problems are discussed in the final chapter.

Study Purpose

The purpose of this study was to (1) examine how police officers appraise stress-related support services, (2) identify strategies they believe would improve existing services, and (3) identify new support services they perceive could help in reducing work-related stress. The first purpose is to assess police officers' beliefs and attitudes toward agency resources. This topic is worth exploring because of the shortcomings associated with available intervention services, both internal and external. Police are often reluctant to seek internal services, such as counseling sessions offered by the police chaplain, because most of these chaplains are not licensed professionals and their counseling expertise is often questioned (Powell et al., 2014). However, there are also issues with police seeking help from external licensed professionals because they fear that confidentiality will be compromised (Patterson, 2009).

Although officers resist using both internal and external services, findings from prior research suggest the possibility of increasing willingness to use programs designed for this purpose. Tucker (2015) found that officers are more willing to use available services when they do not have issues with confidentiality or when they do not express prejudicial attitudes towards mental illness. Identifying police officers' attitudes and opinions toward available services could guide policy and training curriculum, and be useful in finding ways to overcome stigma-related barriers to stress-related interventions.

The second purpose is to identify how current services can be improved. This aim is intended to gain insight into solutions to officers' resistance to using available resources and to promote willingness to access such services when needed. Research on the relationship between police and agency resources is scarce (Donnelly, Valentine, & Oehme, 2015). Research that explores officers' opinions about how to improve services has yet to be addressed with the

urgency that it deserves. Preliminary consideration of this topic suggest that police have a broad array of ideas about how to improve access to mental health services in law enforcement. For instance, something as simple as posting relevant information on a bulletin board or, more broadly, a large-scale change such as being able to use services at private and discrete locations is likely to increase officer participation on a meaningful scale.

The third purpose is to identify new support services that could help police officers reduce and manage work-related stress more effectively. Research supports the idea that stress management programs are more effective when multiple service options are available to police (Donnelly et al., 2015; Goldstein, 2006). Multiple service options would give police officers a voice in the program development process because interventions are mainly implemented based on what leadership thinks their officers need rather than directly asking police officers and identifying their reported needs (Waters & Ussery, 2007).

Research Study

A pragmatic qualitative research approach was used to guide this study. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposeful sample of police officers and sheriff's deputies of at least two years' standing who were assigned to a patrol division (n=20). Participants were recruited from five rural police departments, a large municipal police department, and a rural sheriff's office in a southern state. Interviews were conducted at each participant's place of work.

All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim into a Microsoft Word document, and imported into NVivo qualitative data analysis software. Field notes were hand written during the interviews, typed into a Microsoft Word document after each interview, and then imported into NVivo. Descriptive and pattern coding was used as recommended for

“novice” qualitative researchers reflecting the researcher’s skill level (Saldana, 2009). A content analysis was used to interpret the data and as a means to calculate frequencies for theme-building (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Examples of these frequencies include the number of participants who recommended a specific service, specific suggestions for improving a current service, and demographic data of the sample.

Three strategies were employed to enhance the quality of this study. Padgett (1998) recommended leaving an “audit trail” (e.g., through memos and field notes) to increase the trustworthiness of qualitative research. In the present case, memos were used to document important decisions made during the research process, and a rationale is provided for each decision. In addition, Savin-Baden and Major (2013) suggested spending extended amounts of time in the field helps to ensure trustworthiness. Padgett (1998) agreed that this approach can enhance the quality of research; she termed it “prolonged engagement.” Therefore, the next strategy used was working part-time as a police officer for engagement purposes. I started working at the department a few months before my dissertation proposal was approved and worked as a police officer until the study was complete. Additionally, I have been engaged in law enforcement work since 2002. More details about past experiences are discussed in the third chapter. Conducting an internal audit to ensure intercoder reliability was the last strategy employed to enhance trustworthiness in this study. This involved assistance from a former cohort member who is experienced in conducting qualitative research using NVivo software and knowledgeable about police stress. This strategy involved him reviewing my codebook, selecting a random sample (15%) of three interview transcripts, and coding these transcripts in NVivo. Kappa scores were then calculated for each parent code, and the scores ranged between .90 and .97. Since prior research suggested there is substantial agreement when Kappa scores are

higher than .60 (Czodrowski, 2014; Yilmaz & Aktas, 2018), the current study was considered to have intercoder reliability.

Significance of the Study

Only two published studies to date have measured the percentage of police officers who have used intervention services, with the percentage ranging from 16 to 22% (Asen & Colon, 1995; Donnelly et al., 2015). Dick (2000) was the first qualitative study to explore how police culture influences beliefs and attitudes that officers have toward work-related stress. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of 35 police officers who were referred to counseling services. Findings revealed that police officers “normalize” work-related stressors as part of the job and that identifying as a member of the police culture reinforces this behavior. These findings support the idea that the majority of police officers avoid using agency resources, though the study did not examine policy implications for increasing their relevance for this population. My proposed study builds on existing research by exploring possible strategies that would increase police engagement with these services.

Most of the research in this area consists of identifying problems and evaluating the effectiveness of existing interventions. When new interventions are developed, implemented, and evaluated, background information on the development process is often missing and it is unknown whether police officers play a role in the process. It is unlikely that police officers have a voice in expressing their needs and resources to help meet their needs because most interventions are based on what police administrators think their officers need rather than what the officers themselves believe they need (Waters & Ussery, 2007). The present study has given police officers a voice in recommending support services to meet their needs. The study is novel because it seeks to identify creative and effective strategies for stress-reducing interventions

from police officers rather than from their superiors or other parties.

Findings from this study will serve as a bridge between police administrators and scholars in this area of research. Although policy recommendations on stress management programs appear in most research studies, these recommendations are opinion-based and do not offer empirical findings that derive from research data. Therefore, findings in this study follow prior policy recommendations to involve police officers as partners in developing interventions for their benefit. This involvement could lead to effective partnerships between police administrations and researchers in developing policies that guide interventions in this field of practice.

Conceptual Understanding of Stress

Scholars such as Nelson and Quick (1994) argue that stress is the most ambiguous word in the English language. Experts in the field of stress research have been debating the proper definition of this term for decades (Akanji, 2015). An issue with establishing a standardized meaning of stress is the broad and subjective nature of concepts related to stress of all types (Hubbard & Workman, 1999). There are other terms such as “strain” that get used interchangeably with stress, especially in sociology, criminology, and related fields (Agnew, 2006).

Akanji (2015) offers three perspectives on stress that appear in most research-related definitions in this area. The first perspective is called the engineering approach to defining stress. This perspective conceptualizes stress as the environmental or situational stimulus that causes an undesirable experience. This definition can lead to confusion among scholars because the term “stress” refers to undesirable stimuli, which can be used interchangeably with other terms such as “strains” and “stressors.” The next perspective is called the physiological approach. Whereas

the engineering approach considers undesirable stimuli to be stress inducing, the physiological approach views stress as the body's biological response to stimuli as the defining factor.

The last perspective is called the psychological perspective, and this approach integrates the first two approaches. Rather than stress being conceptualized as the stimuli (engineering approach) or the biological response (physiological approach), stress is conceptualized as the process or interaction between the two. This perspective will be used when referring to the term "stress" because it is the most commonly held in occupational stress research and within other disciplines that examine occupational stress in police populations (Patterson et al., 2014).

Occupational Stress

Scholarly research on work-related stress dates from the 1930's (Akanji, 2015). Terms such as job stress and work-related stress are often used interchangeably with occupational stress. The World Health Organization (2016) defines occupational stress as pressure and work demands that cannot be matched with employees' resources, knowledge, and abilities. There are numerous conceptualizations when categorizing the different types of occupational stress. Scholars studying occupational stress in the law enforcement population often define it as anticipated and negative events that stem from organizational structures and job-related problems (Anderson, Litzenberger, & Plecas, 2002; Patterson, 2009). Although terminology differs among scholars when conceptualizing occupational stress, it is widely held that there are two elements of occupational stress to consider. The first type deals with administrative, stress-related issues and the other relates to stress from day-to-day activities when performing job duties. The World Health Organization (2016) uses the term "work context" to describe administrative stress and "work content" to describe stress from daily job duties.

In the occupational stress research involving police officers, the two most common terms

in use are organizational stress (administrative problems) and operational stress (from work-related duties) (Grawitcha, Barber, & Kruger, 2010). These concepts are not always mutually exclusive because stress from daily work activates can overlap with administrative stressors. For instance, in addition to a police officer having to decide whether or not to shoot a suspect wielding a knife (operational stress), firing a “warning shot” to scare the suspect into dropping the knife would not be a feasible option because most departmental policies ban this practice. Limiting discretionary decisions through policy is a form of organizational stress. For the purpose of this study, these two concepts will be used when distinguishing between stress from management problems and stress from performing job duties.

The operational stress in law enforcement work can range from normal daily activities such as managing overwhelming amounts of paperwork, to extreme situations such as using deadly force (Leino, Eskelinen, Summala, & Virtanen, 2011; O'Donnell & Stephens, 2001). Most of the existing literature on occupational stress among police deals with operational stress because researchers primarily examine the impact of critical incidents and shift work on this population. Two common sources of operational stress involve working in difficult environments and high job demands (Chen et al., 2006; Leino et al., 2011).

High job demands relate to the time and energy needed to fulfil job duties. Examples include working overtime during shiftwork, managing large caseloads, and being “on call” when off duty. In addition to responding to life-threatening emergencies, interacting with the public can create stressful and tense situations. Police officers are often under political pressure from sources outside their agencies, such as local government officials, and are publicly criticized and represented by members in the community when performing law enforcement duties (Chen, 2009; Patterson, 2009).

Operational stress can also be exhibited as anticipatory stress of events that might be encountered during everyday law enforcement work. Anderson et al. (2002) measured officers' heart rates before, during, and after shift work and found that they were highest prior to a work shift and also when responding to back up another officer. Correctional officers have reported stress from the anticipated fear of exchanging bodily fluids when working with inmates in prison (Alarid & Marquart, 2009).

Organizational stress consists of problems associated with policies and procedures within departments and governments, such as bureaucracy and lack of resources (Ganster, Pagon, & Duffy, 1996; Grawitch et al., 2010). The organizational structures in law enforcement agencies are designed to be para-military, and supervisors in this profession are expected to be authoritarian towards their subordinates (Ganster et al., 1996). This type of culture creates stressful and hostile working environments (Anshel, 2000). The main sources of organizational stress among police are conflicts with management (Anshel, 2000; Berg, Hem, Lau, & Ekeberg, 2006; Bourbonnais, Jauvin, Dussault, & Vezina, 2007). Exposure to organizational stress can lead to mental health problems and exacerbate existing mental illness (Patterson, 2009; Wang et al., 2010).

Numerous research studies show that most work-related stress comes from experiencing conflictual interactions and relationships with supervisors (Abdollahi, 2002; Chen et al., 2006; Patterson, 2009; Slate, Wells, & Johnson, 2003; Suresh, Anantharaman, Angusamy & Ganesan, 2013). Crank and Caldero (1991) asked police officers to rank a list of job stressors from most stressful to least stressful, and over two-thirds (68.3%) of the participants listed organizational problems as the most stressful part of law enforcement work. An officer in the study stated his biggest source of stress was the 'bullshit' that came from the chief's office. He followed up by

defining ‘bullshit’ as “petty rules and restrictions that keep officers from doing their jobs” (Crank & Caldero, 1991).

Work-home conflict is also part of occupational stress as discussed in police stress research. This type of stress is conceptualized as work-related stressors that create problems outside the work environment (Gerber et al., 2010). A common stressor and complaint among police is that they are never considered as being off duty from the job (Chen, 2009; Dick, 2000; Waters & Ussery, 2007). When staffing is low, officers must work overtime in order to meet the minimum staffing requirements. In addition, many officers have to remain on call at all times in case a major incident occurs. As noted earlier, balancing work and family life is a major source of personal stress that is linked to mental and physical health problems (Gerber et al., 2010).

Stress Management

There are numerous conceptualizations of stress management in this area of research (Kaiseler, Queirós, Passos, & Sousa, 2014). There are also terms used interchangeably with stress management, such as coping. For example, Prati, Pietrantonio, and Cicognani (2011) use the term “adaptive coping” to describe how people directly deal with stress and “avoidance coping” to describe how people desensitize themselves to stress. Holland (2011) used the term “protective factors” to describe ways to reduce stress, while actions that exacerbate stress have been called “maladaptive coping” (Prati et al., 2011).

Swatt, Gibson, and Piquero (2007) grouped officers’ stress-coping mechanisms into internal and external categories, which somewhat parallel negative consequences from stress. To illustrate, officers who use negative external coping mechanisms are likely to engage in deviant behavior and officers who cope through desensitization are more likely to suffer from health problems. These health and behavioral problems can develop and exacerbate over the course of

an officer's career (Veldon, Kleber, Grievink, & Yzermans, 2010; Wang et al., 2010).

Regardless of the terminology used, there is a consensus that coping can be internal and external and that both of these types can lead to either positive or negative outcomes (Waters & Ussery, 2007). Stress management in this study is conceptualized as both adaptive and maladaptive coping responses to occupational stress by way of psychological appraisals and behavior. Although behaviors such as substance use and alcohol abuse are maladaptive, they are commonly used to manage stress.

The two main forms of adaptive coping are called "problem-focused coping" and "emotional-focused coping" (Kaisler et al., 2014). Problem-focused styles attempt to modify stimuli that lead to stress. This goal can be achieved through learning strategies and resources, which can then be used to combat a stressor. Emotion-focused coping aims to reduce stress-related responses by seeking emotional social support from co-workers. Using "black humor" (vulgar, profane, and sexually explicit jokes) is a common and effective emotion-focused coping strategy among police officers (Powell et al., 2014). Because scholars mainly focus on maladaptive coping strategies that police use, extant research on positive coping mechanisms among law enforcement employees is sparse (Lau, Hem, Berg, Ekeberg, & Torgersen, 2006). Nevertheless, there is emerging evidence that positive coping strategies help to relieve occupational stress (Evans, Pistrang, & Billings, 2013).

Research also suggests that trying to cope in positive ways is insufficient in its own right. Patterson (2003) discovered a "reverse buffering effect" in which participants who used problem-focused and emotional-focused coping strategies reported higher levels of stress than those who did not, perhaps because, as the intensity and frequency of stress increased, more efforts were made to relieve the problem. Although Evans et al. (2013) found that emotion-

focused coping was effective, several participants reported not using this coping strategy in order to protect other officers from having to hear about the tragedies experienced in police work.

There are also unhealthy ways of coping with stress. Research shows that the social pressure to suppress negative emotions associated with stress hinders the adoption of effective coping strategies (Adams & Buck, 2010; Amaranto, Steinberg, Castellano, & Mitchell, 2003). Maladaptive coping can lead to poor job performance, social isolation, depression, anxiety, burnout, and increased turnover rates (Anshel, 2000; Powell et al., 2014). Taking frequent sick leave and excessive time off work are common avoidance strategies, a trend commonly referred to as "taking mental health days" (O'Donnell & Stephens, 2001). These sublimated coping strategies can eventually lead to destructive behavior such as suicide, aggression, domestic violence, illegal drug use, and alcohol abuse (Amaranto et al., 2003; Anderson & Lo, 2011; Gorta, 2009; Waters & Ussery, 2007).

It is estimated that only 23% of police officers adopt healthy stress coping mechanisms (Pasciak & Kelley, 2013). In addition, Anshel (2000) contended that police officers are generally not properly trained to cope with work-related stressors. Excessive alcohol consumption is a common method for coping with stress among police officers (Leino et al., 2011). Illegal drug use is also common, although difficult to measure because of the illegal and hidden nature of this activity (Gorta, 2009).

Relevant Theories and Models

General Occupational Stress Theories and Models

Numerous theories and models from the general stress research can help to explain the sources and symptoms of occupational stress. Theories in this area have been around for over 50 years (Brough, Dollard, & Tuckey, 2014). The three most common theoretical models in

occupational research are the Person-Environment (P-E) Fit Model, the Job Demand-Control (JDC) model, and the Effort-Reward Imbalance (ERI) model.

Karasek (1979) developed the Job Demand-Control (JDC) model in which a sense of personal control over work demands is a key factor in moderating occupational stress. The three most common types of job demands are time pressures, employer monitoring, and problem-solving (Beehr, Glaser, Canali, & Wallwey, 2001). When work demands increase, the level of stress increases, particularly when employees lack sufficient resources to meet additional demands (Wu, 2016). Job demands can consist of any type of mental, physical, emotional, or cognitive energy (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). Job control is the level of autonomy and freedom employees have when making work-related decisions (Karasek, 1979). Losing control over one's job has a negative relationship with stress levels, while increased job demands have a positive relationship with occupational stress. This model was later updated to include social support as a buffer against occupational stress (Karasek & Theorell, 1990).

The P-E Fit Model is commonly used in the general occupational stress research when organizational stress is being measured. This model posits that organizational stress results from a mismatch between employers' resources, policies, and cultural norms, and employees' personalities, abilities, and skills. Organizational stress increases as the discrepancy between these organizational and personal characteristics widens (Akanji, 2015). Prior studies have shown that job satisfaction increases when employees perceive that they "fit in" and have a sense of meaning at work (Duffy, Autin, & Bott, 2015).

The Effort-Reward Imbalance (ERI) model differs from the other two types because it focuses on individuals rather than the organizational level. The effort-reward imbalance model posits that negative emotions arise when people feel that they are not fairly compensated for their

work (Wang et al., 2012). Under this model, stress occurs when perceived input or “commitment” becomes greater than the amount of work produced by the employee. The level of stress increases as the discrepancy between perceived input and expected output widens. Output is measured by the rewards for input, which can be internal (e.g., job satisfaction) or external (e.g., compensation). One of the criticisms of this theory is that it is based upon individual perceptions, which makes it difficult to operationalize and measure input/output ratios accurately (Akanji, 2015).

Theories and Models Applied to Police Officers

Although researchers critique this area of research for lacking substantiated theories and models (Abdollahi, 2002; Patterson et al., 2014; Webster, 2013), the Police Stress Model is most often used in law enforcement settings. This model correlates occupational stress in law enforcement work with subsequent health problems (Ganster et al., 1996). Under this framework, health problems can be both mental and physical in nature. The model also organizes occupational stress into two types: organizational (administrative problems) and operational (job duties). The Police Stress Model postulates that a major type of organizational stress stems from conflict with supervisors (Ganster et al., 1996). Bourbonnais et al. (2007) found that 36% of officers feel intimidated by their supervisors. Veldon et al. (2010) found that police who had mental health problems at the baseline of a longitudinal study reported additional mental health problems after experiencing conflict with co-workers.

The concepts identified in the police stress model have been around for some decades. The Police Daily Hassle Scale (PDHS) was developed in the 1990s to measure the types of operational and organizational stress experienced in the profession (Hart, Wearing, & Headey, 1995). The PDHS operationalizes the police stress model, although one criticism is that it does

not include the deviant behavior associated with stress.

One study used role theory to explain the relationship between stress and well-being among emergency responders, but this model shows promise for law enforcement as well. Grawitcha et al. (2010) used a unique theoretical framework that sheds light on occupational stress pathways. The model suggested that role identification, defined as idealistic commitment to police work, has an impact on stress and psychological outcomes. Grawitcha et al. (2010) divided a sample of police officers into three groups based on the job role that each respondent identified with. The “job group” consisted of participants who were mainly working to get a paycheck. The employees who were working for personal rewards, such as advancement and achievement, were placed in the “career group.” Respondents in the “calling group” were motivated primarily by wanting to solve social issues and make a difference. The study concluded that officers in the calling group were less likely to report stress and more likely to experience positive psychological effects. The officers in the job group reported higher levels of stress and negative physiological effects. This theoretical framework, along with empirical findings, showed support for the idea that role identification can impact reported stress levels and well-being.

Although theories are rarely used when examining occupational stress among police officers (Waters & Ussery, 2007; Webster, 2013), they are used in cited research studies that compared occupational stress between police and firefighters. Basińska and Wiciak (2013) used Czapiński’s Onion Theory of Happiness to explain the relationship between occupational stress, well-being, and happiness. This theory suggests that problems in one area of life can create cynicism and lead to problems in other areas of life. Basińska and Wiciak (2013) concluded that police officers were more likely to report burnout and suffer relationship problems compared to

firefighters, who were more likely to report job satisfaction and have healthier relationships.

Brough (2004) compared organizational and operational stress factors and found a significant relationship between traumatic experiences and well-being among police officers and firefighters. Although stress from carrying out job duties produced psychological strain on both groups, the symptoms of trauma were different between them. Officers who reported stress from work-related duties were more likely to experience anxiety and depressive symptoms compared to firefighters who, in turn, were more likely to experience social relationship problems than police. No direct relationship was found between organizational stressors (e.g., not being recognized for hard work) and psychological strain in either of the two groups. However, organizational stress and job satisfaction were significantly related, with participants in both groups being likely to report psychological strains when dissatisfied with their jobs.

Theoretical Framework

Conservation of Resources theory was used as a guiding framework in this study. The main principles of this theory were used as a “lens” when analyzing the data findings. This theory was also used to support the interpretations that were made after moving beyond the descriptive data and making meaning out of the findings.

Conservation of Resources theory has been one of the most commonly used theories of stress and trauma during the last two decades (Hobfoll, 2011). Additionally, this theory has been applied to similar professionals such as firefighters and military members. Findings among a sample of Air Force members showed that the participants were more likely to report high stress and poor well-being after resources were withheld from them (Hobfoll, Vinokur, Pierce, & Lewandowski-Romps, 2012). A study conducted with a sample of firefighters found that social support from supervisors is a resource that buffers against stress and helps to increase job

satisfaction as well (Bacharach, Bamberger, & Doveh, 2008).

The principles of Conservation of Resources theory are threefold. The first one is that individuals experience stress from the threat of losing resources (Sattler, Boyd, & Kirsch, 2014). The four types of resources in the “threat” component are defined as personal, social, material, or energy-related (Hobfoll et al., 2012). Police are trained and socialized into being mentally and physically dominant over others and feel threatened when faced with loss of control at work, home, or in the community (Anderson & Lo, 2011). Conservation of Resources theory states that control over resources is an important factor in stress management (Bacharach & Bamberger, 2007), which helps to explain why police feel pressure to maintain a tough professional persona.

The second principle is that people seek to minimize the loss of resources, recover from losing resources, and acquire new resources (Hobfoll, 2011). This principle helps to explain why police are reluctant to seek help for their problems, and also the need for relevant resources to compensate for the loss. For example, if the stigma of asking for help reduces peer acceptance (a social resource) more than the perceived benefits (access to services), then it would be a bad investment. Applying this principle to police stress provides a useful framework for identifying barriers to using available services (the investment of resources), ways to improve current services (minimizing the loss of resources), and new services that are tailored to officers’ needs (acquiring new resources).

The last principle is that adequate resources act as a buffer and help build resilience to stress (Hobfoll, 2011). Sattler et al. (2014) found that officers who had access to debriefing services were more likely to report high-levels of well-being after a critical incident. This theory will be discussed and connected to the study findings in the last chapter.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Current Trends in Practice

There are unique stress-related characteristics that separate the law enforcement profession from other occupations (Chen, 2009; Cooper, 2012). Police officers are the only members of society with the legal authority to take away freedom and make lawful arrests. Police agencies provide their officers with deadly and non-lethal weapons to help them survive the dangerous environments they work in. While most people attempt to escape violent situations such as neighborhood shootings, police officers are trained and expected to control these life-threatening situations (Chen, 2009). In 2014, it was estimated that 67,641 police officers were assaulted on duty and 19,116 police officers were injured during these attacks (United States Department of Justice [DOJ], 2015). Scholars in this area of research have argued that police officers receive limited moral and material support from their agencies when working in dangerous environments. A compounding stressor is that officers are under additional pressure to follow strict procedural guidelines in these circumstances (Brandl & Strohline, 2003; Newman & Rucker-Reed, 2004).

Police officers are trained and socialized into establishing dominance over others through psychological intimidation, verbal aggression, and physical force (Anderson & Lo, 2011; Prokos & Padavic, 2002). Officers are also under pressure to uphold a masculine identity, thus leading them to conceal their emotions and stress-related problems from others (Dick, 2000; Powell et al., 2014). As mentioned in the previous chapter, internalizing stress-related problems to avoid

being perceived as weak comes at the risk of developing health problems. Survival training also puts police officers at risk of developing physiological problems because maintaining a constant state of hypervigilance can overtax and alter the body's biochemical stress response system (Kirschman, Kamena, & Fay, 2015). Although hypervigilance and aggressive behavior are sometimes needed in law enforcement work, these survival mechanisms can manifest in deviant behavior, mental illness, and physiological health problems (Goodmark, 2016; Kirschman et al., 2015; Page & Jacobs, 2011).

Stress-related Outcomes

Mental Health

Depression and PTSD symptoms appear to be the most common mental health conditions that are examined among police. This population is more likely to suffer from depression compared to the general public (Chen et al., 2006). Whereas 3.2% of working adults have severe depression symptoms (Wang et al., 2012), between 4.5% and 8.2% of police officers do so (Berg et al., 2006; Veldon et al., 2010). Chen et al. (2006) found that 21.6% of police experience moderate to severe symptoms of depression, a share that increases to 75.6% when officers are dissatisfied with their jobs (Gershon et al., 2002). Wang et al. (2010) collected longitudinal data on depressive symptoms among police officers when they first started law enforcement work and then in a follow up assessment one year later (Wang et al., 2010). The results showed that depressive symptoms increase over time. In addition, newly-employed officers without these symptoms at baseline were at high risk of developing a depressive disorder at the one-year follow-up assessment.

The estimated PTSD rate among police is about double the rate of employees in the general public. Although 8% to 9% of non-officers have moderate to severe PTSD symptoms,

the estimated rate for police officers ranges from 16.6 % to 35.3% (Austin-Ketch & Violanti, 2012; Kulbarsh, 2016; Oehme et al., 2012). Menard and Arter (2013) found that 18.5% of the officers in their study met the criteria for PTSD, which is consistent with current research findings. Austin-Ketch and Violanti (2012) estimated that roughly 10% of police officers have severe symptoms of PTSD. Mental health disorders such as this can lead to physiological stress and exacerbate existing health problems (Marchand & Durand, 2010).

Physical Health

Unmanaged stress negatively affects every organ of the human body (Hubbard & Workman, 1999). Police officers with unmanaged stress are at risk of developing numerous physical health problems such as gastrointestinal failure, cancer, cardiovascular disease, hypertension, stroke, ulcers, diabetes, chronic back pain, and sexual dysfunction (Chen, 2009; Gerber et al., 2010; Gershon et al., 2002; Kaiseler, Queirós, & Rodrigues, 2016; McCraty et al., 2009; Shell, 2005). The stressful nature of police work is associated with severe physical health problems that place officers at high risk of early medical retirements and death before retirement (Patterson, 2009; Waters & Ussery, 2007).

Although controversy rages over estimated life expectancy of police officers, scholars agree that they have a much shorter lifespan than the average civilian (Greenhut, 2009; Shell, 2005). Estimates range from 53 to 66 years for this group compared to the U.S. life expectancy of 78.6 years (Murphy, Kochanek, & Arias, 2018, and a 40-year, longitudinal study estimated that the life expectancy among police officers is only 66 years (Violanti et al., 1997). Therefore, prior research shows that even the most conservative estimate suggests a career in police work is expected to take more than 12 years away from an officer's life.

An extensive review of the research in this area hints to the physical health problems associated with patrol work being a contributing factor to the reduced life expectancy among patrol officers. Gerber et al. (2010) found that patrol officers who report perceived work-related stress were more likely to report lower levels of perceived health, decreased use of primary health care, and sleep disturbances. Shell (2005) estimated that between 60% and 65% of police officers are overweight, when using the body mass index measurement guidelines. It is likely that evening and night shift patrol officers are more likely to be overweight than day shift patrol officers and police officers in other divisions because they have less access to healthy food during the later hours. Evening and night shift patrol officers are also at higher risk of being physically injured because critical incidents are more likely to occur at night.

Anticipated stress among police has been shown to increase physiological stress. Anderson et al. (2002) conducted a study that measured police officers' heart rates during patrol work, with the findings supporting the theory that responding to potentially dangerous calls can be a source of anticipatory stress. A sample of 76 police officers wore heart rate monitors during their patrol shifts. The findings showed that the average heart rate increased by 29 beats per minute while responding to potentially dangerous service calls. Also, the study found that the average heart rate increased 41 beats per minute when responding to calls that involved backing up another officer in a potentially dangerous situation.

An interesting paradox is that the same biological mechanisms that help police officers survive dangerous encounters during their shifts also manifest into chronic health problems over the course of their careers. Although high levels of the stress hormone cortisol is associated with health problems (Austin-Ketch & Violanti, 2012), other research suggests that cortisol increases the chances of survival during shift work (Akinola & Mendes, 2012). The authors in this study

conducted experimental research to explain the relationship between cortisol levels and decision-making abilities during potential life-threatening scenarios. Police officers were put in simulated scenarios where they had to make the decision on whether to shoot at suspects who were either brandishing or not brandishing firearms. Cortisol levels were collected before and after the scenarios, and the study found that the officers with higher increases in cortisol from the baseline performed better during the scenarios. Although findings show that higher levels of cortisol improve performance during potential life-threatening incidents, Austin-Ketch and Violanti (2012) found that officers with higher levels of cortisol are more likely to have severe PTSD symptomology. In addition to the relationship between mental and physical stress associated with police work, these stressors are compounded and exacerbated by deviant behaviors that police engage in.

Behavioral Health

Police officers who report engaging in violent behavior are four times more likely to have PTSD and also four times more likely to report dependent alcohol use (Oehme et al., 2011). Alcohol abuse is the most widely studied deviant behavior among this population (Austin-Ketch & Violanti, 2012). It is also commonly considered a social event; a frequently used "code word" for this social gathering is "choir practice" (Waters & Ussery, 2007). It is estimated that 30% of police officers go to "drinking bars" with their co-workers (Gershon, Lin, & Li, 2002). The findings from a longitudinal study concluded that alcohol abuse among police officers increases over the course of a career (Veldon et al., 2010).

The National Institutes of Health (NIH, 2004) estimates that the alcohol abuse rate is 8.46% among adults in the general public. Shell (2005) argues that the alcohol abuse rate is 20%

higher among police compared to the general public. Other studies have found alcohol abuse rates among police to vary between 16.7% and 23% (Menard & Arter, 2013; Oehme et al. 2012). Gershon et al. (2002) showed that 13% of police sometimes consume enough alcohol to forget what they did the night before, while 38% of the participants in this study self-reported that they consume more alcohol than they should.

Alcohol abuse among police officers spills over into family conflict. Police officers who report hazardous drinking are eight times more likely to physically abuse an intimate partner (Oehme et al., 2011). Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) consists of verbal and physical abuse towards an intimate partner. Male police officers abusing their female intimate partners account for most of the IPV in this profession because females only account for roughly 15% of the police officer population (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2009). However, the Baltimore Police Stress and Domestic Violence study had a sample of 1,104 police officers and the findings showed that policewomen were more likely to commit IPV than policemen (Anderson & Lo, 2011). Since police training socializes officers into believing men are superior to women and there is cultural pressure to display masculine qualities (Powell et al., 2014; Prokos & Padavic, 2002), perhaps the policewomen committed IPV at higher rates in order to establish hegemony and to compensate for having feminine qualities.

Obtaining accurate estimates on IPV rates among police is more difficult and less reliable than obtaining estimates on police brutality because police are under more surveillance when performing job duties (Goodmark, 2016). However, several research studies measuring self-reported physical IPV have found consistent results ranging between 7% and 10% (Anderson & Lo, 2011; Johnson, 1991; Ryan, 2000). One study found that among a sample of 853 police officers, over one-fourth of the participants (28.6%) reported physically abusing an intimate

partner (Oehme et al., 2011). Divorce rates among police have also remained steady over the last decade, ranging between 70% and 80% (Dick, 2000; Dreadfulwater, 2014).

Dealing with the stressful demands of law enforcement work can cause family problems. Hall et al. (2010) conducted a longitudinal study among a sample of probation officers and police officers, and self-reported surveys were administered to measure job demands, emotional exhaustion, and family conflict. The same surveys were administered at the baseline and during the follow-up assessment 12 months later. The findings showed that participants who reported having high job demands were likely to report both emotional exhaustion and family conflict. It was then concluded that demanding work expectations have a greater influence on family conflict than being emotionally exhausted from trying to meet the demands. Officers on shift work often miss out on important events, such as family gatherings during the holidays and social events during the weekends. In addition to working non-traditional hours, they also have less time to spend with family due to excessive working hours. Police officers are often mandated to work overtime to meet minimum staffing requirements, and it is also common for them to have second jobs to supplement their family income (Vila, 2000).

During the last 13 years of working in law enforcement in this state, I have seen police officers engage in numerous unhealthy behaviors related to stress. However, most of these behaviors are not discussed in existing research and would be very difficult to obtain accurate estimates on. For instance, I worked over two years at a large municipal police department with over 70 officers and about 20% of my co-workers took their spouses and significant others to “swinger parties.” The majority of health behavior research among police focuses on alcohol use because it is considered an occupational deviance that is socially acceptable among police (Austin-Ketch & Violanti, 2012).

It is difficult to obtain accurate drug use estimates among police, and not much is known about the circumstances and reasons why police officers use illegal drugs (Gorta, 2009). Also, when police administrators do detect drug use, they are often reluctant to share this type of data with the public and with research scholars. Gorta (2009) appears to be the only study to date that examined disciplinary infractions in police personnel files. The author in this study also conducted individual interviews with police administrators, current and former officers who were caught using drugs, and drug interdiction experts. Six focus-group interviews were also conducted among 88 police officers in efforts to explore their knowledge about drug use and strategies that could help minimize this problem. Participants identified seven drugs that police officers were using: marijuana, cocaine, ecstasy, heroin, illegal steroids, ketamine, and amphetamines. Among the officers who were detected by administrators and reported by participants, ages ranged between 20 and 48 years old, and most of them started using drugs several years after beginning police work. Focus group participants provided 64 suggestions on reducing this problem and the common theme among most of the suggestions was that the administrations should be more involved in this issue.

Although prior research has examined smoking habits among police and stated that tobacco use is associated with work-related stress (Kaiseler et al., 2016; McCraty et al., 2009), all the literature that was reviewed on tobacco use among police officers only inquired about smoking tobacco. There was not any literature found on chewing tobacco use. This is being pointed out because, among the five law enforcement agencies I have worked at, most of my co-workers (including myself) preferred chewing tobacco over smoking it.

The only study located that provided tobacco use estimates was conducted 20 years ago. A health and wellness intervention was implemented to examine whether it would reduce

smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, and work related stress among police officers (Richmond et al., 1999). Among the 852 participants who took a pre-health survey and post-health survey six months later, 25.4% of the policemen reported smoking tobacco and 28.3% of the policewomen reported tobacco use. Interestingly, over half of the policewoman who were over the age of 50 years reported tobacco use. Although results from the pre- and post-health surveys showed there was not a significant decrease in self-reported smoking after the health intervention, the percentage of police officers who reported smoking was decreased to 20.2% among the men and 23.1% among the women. Also, survey results showed that there were not significant decreases in self-reported stress and excessive alcohol use. Focus-group interviews were conducted with the participants after the intervention and the authors found that officers were reluctant to use agency support services because there was a high level of distrust and tension between police officers and their administrators. This helps explain why most of the available interventions discussed in the following section tend to focus on officers adapting to and managing environmental stressors rather than administrations working towards changing the organizational conditions that are causing the stress.

Interventions and Available Resources

Research that evaluates stress intervention programs among police dates back to the 1940s (Kooker, 1947). The U.S. Department of Justice has been funding research grants on stress programs among this population for over 30 years (Goolkasian, Geddes, & DeJong, 1986). However, there is an ongoing debate over the effectiveness and strategies that should be utilized during interventions. Some literature argues that developing and implementing programs to help police officers cope with stress may be beneficial (Anshel, 2000; Veldon et al., 2010). Other research suggests that intervention programs implemented within this population are ineffective

(Dick, 2000; Waters & Ussery, 2007). Wang et al. (2010) posits that interventions should be implemented at police academies and the training should focus on resilience building.

Most law enforcement agencies have a development program to help officers cope with traumatic events at work (operational stress), but programs aimed at helping them deal with organizational stress (bureaucratic problems) are lacking (Veldon et al., 2010). The majority of prior studies examine the effectiveness of a single and specific type of program (i.e., debriefing services or wellness education). Research that compares and contrasts the different types of programs is scarce. Among the limited research that compares intervention programs, scholars in this area typically conceptualize stress management interventions as being primary, secondary, or tertiary (Cooper, 2012; Patterson et al., 2014).

Before discussing the three types of intervention programs, it is noteworthy to mention that not all interventions can be dichotomously categorized as prevention-based (proactive) or treatment-based (reactive) because these concepts can overlap. For example, although Alcoholics Anonymous classes focus on treatment to address alcohol dependency, there is also a level of prevention in this program because it involves taking steps to prevent this addiction from exacerbating. Also, prevention interventions can involve treatment. For instance, a team-building intervention could be implemented to prevent employee grievances in the future while also focusing on resolving grievances that have already surfaced. Therefore, rather than labeling interventions as being prevention- or treatment-based, they will be conceptualized as being on a continuum ranging from preventive measures to treatment options.

Primary interventions focus on attempting to reduce stress via organizational changes within the work environment. Examples of this type of intervention include leadership education for supervisors and team building training for non-ranking officers. Secondary interventions

focus more on helping individuals adopt positive stress-coping strategies through making personal changes rather than attempting to modify the work environment. Examples include health and wellness education, cognitive behavioral therapy, and counseling services. The last type of intervention is called the tertiary intervention and this consists of treatment services offered to police after a stress-related problem has already emerged and needs attention. Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) account for the majority of tertiary services.

Primary Interventions

Primary interventions are the most effective but, ironically, administrators implement them the least (Patterson et al., 2014). These types of interventions are based on reducing and eliminating stressful working conditions by making environmental changes. Organizational changes are the most valuable (Cooper, 2003). After reviewing literature on stress management interventions in this area, only a few studies were located that evaluated primary interventions, and all of these studies examined leadership training. Perhaps primary interventions are scarce among the law enforcement population because these types of interventions are based on making organizational changes, and police agencies are unlikely to change due to their para-military and bureaucratic structures (Austin-Ketch & Violanti, 2012). Leadership training focuses on improving communication between police officers and their superiors as a means to creating a more positive work environment.

Biggs, Brough, and Barbour (2014) provided leadership training to a group of supervisors within a police department. Their study compared self-reported stress levels among a group of officers with supervisors who completed a leadership program (subordinate group) and a group of officers with supervisors who did not participate in the program (control group). Both groups completed a survey prior to the program and seven months later after the program. The

intervention consisted of a week-long program based on participatory management. The findings revealed that the participants in the intervention group were more likely than the control group to report higher job satisfaction, lower job demands, and increased well-being.

Other studies found that participatory management was beneficial in reducing stress and increasing job satisfaction (Slate et al., 2003). The job demand-control model mentioned in the first chapter supports that allowing employees more input into decision making increases job satisfaction and productivity, but only when work demands are manageable (Beehr et al, 2001). A similar study among federal probation officers found that participatory management was not effective in reducing occupational stress and turnover intention because a major source of stress stemmed from high caseloads (Lee, Joo, & Johnson, 2009). It appears that these mixed results might be from the interaction effect that management issues (job control) and operational problems (work demands) have on stress-related outcomes (Lucas, Weidner, & Janisse, 2012).

Secondary Interventions

The majority of intervention research in this area is on secondary interventions. In reference to the previously mentioned spectrum ranging from prevention to treatment, secondary interventions tend to fall between the other two intervention types because these services are aimed at helping clients make personal changes in order to positively adapt to environmental stress that is unlikely to change (Scott & Eber, 2003). The two most common types of secondary interventions are debriefings after critical incidents and educational training on stress management.

Although educational training on positive coping has benefits, from an organizational perspective, this type of intervention has several shortcomings. For instance, it mainly addresses ways to reduce stress-related symptoms rather than the sources of stress. Cooper (2003) termed

this as the “band-aid approach” and argued that there is an implicit assumption that organizations are unwilling to change stressful working conditions and that the alternative is to help individuals focus on building strength and resilience as means to cope with occupational stressors. Findings from a dissertation research study that provided mental toughness training for police officers supports this contention.

Rosmith (2013) implemented a Stress Inoculation Training (SIT) program within a police department to test whether mental toughness training would be effective in reducing both occupational and organizational stress. A control group was designed by randomly assigning participants to receive the training after the program evaluation was conducted among a randomly assigned group of officers who initially received the training. Interestingly, results from pre- and post-stress surveys showed a significant decrease in self-reported organizational stress after the training and also when comparisons were made with the control group.

McCarty, Atkinson, and Lipsenthal (2009) conducted a study to measure the effectiveness of a stress management program called Power to Change Performance. Both the experimental and control groups took a pre- and post-test that measured stress levels and health risk factors. The experimental group completed two days of training on stress and health-risk management, and both groups took the post-test three months later. Although both groups reported improved well-being, the biometrics and self-reported stress in the experimental group were only slightly better than the control group.

Some prevention interventions utilize multiple services in an attempt to enhance stress management. Chongruksa, Parinyapol, Sawatsri, and Pansomboon (2012) examined a program that used educational training and eclectic counseling. Comparisons were made between participants receiving this program and a control group that only received psychoeducation. It

was concluded that the combination of education and eclectic counseling was more effective at reducing stress than psychoeducation.

Available debriefing services after critical incidents are commonly offered over the course of three stages (Waters & Ussery, 2007). The first stage is the immediate response to the incident. The next stage occurs days or weeks after the incident is over, and the final stage involves dealing with the impact of the event months and sometimes years later. Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) is the most utilized debriefing program (Pasciak & Kelly, 2013). Police who experience a traumatic event have the opportunity to talk about it with their peers; the program model suggests using structured sessions (Pasciak & Kelly, 2013). The first session begins within hours of the incident if possible and a trained intervention worker is onsite to moderate the debriefing (Pasciak & Kelly, 2013).

There are mixed results on the effectiveness of this program and other debriefing interventions. Some argue that it is effective in reducing stress and mental health conditions (Campfield & Hills, 2001; Richards, 2001). Other scholars have found that the benefits diminish over time. Kagee (2002) conducted a follow-up evaluation 18-months after a CISD program was completed and concluded that the program was ineffective. Pasciak and Kelly (2013) concluded that debriefing services would not be beneficial to police because over half of the participants in this study perceived that showing emotions to others and appearing vulnerable to peers were both sources of stress. Carlier, Voerman, and Gersons (2000) compared a group of traumatized police officers who utilized debriefings and a group who did not. There were no significant differences between 24 hours and then six months after the incident. However, PTSS were assessed a week after the critical incident and participants in the debriefing group reported higher levels of stress.

There was also a general consensus within this group that the debriefing services were not very effective.

Tertiary Interventions

The main difference between tertiary services and the other two interventions is that tertiary services are more reactive and involve treatment rather than prevention (Cooper, 2003). However, as previously mentioned, there can be an element of prevention in these services because minimizing problems from getting worse is a major goal. Employees who use these types of interventions normally have the greatest need for help because services are usually offered after primary and secondary interventions have failed (Scott & Eber, 2003). Tertiary services are offered via various channels. Administrators can contract services through third party organizations such as counselors at an EAP. They also collaborate with organizations such as local universities and police unions. Research scholars are usually the parties who provide treatment services when interventions are scientifically evaluated.

Services can also be independent of an employee's agency. Such services might be offered when there is a dire need or provided on a continuous basis. Cop2Cop is an independent service that was established in 2000, with the aim of preventing police suicides (State of New Jersey Department of Human Services [NJHS], 2013). All police officers in this country have access to a 24/7 hotline when experiencing suicidal thoughts. A benefit to this program is that the hotline respondents are retired police officers (NJHS, 2013). Research supporting that police distrust civilian intervention workers (Powell et al., 2014), suggests that police experiencing suicidal ideation would be more willing to reach out to a retired officer compared to an "outside" intervention worker.

Other scholars in this area consider Cop2Cop to be an effective program because it simultaneously offers peer support and confidentiality (Waters & Ussery, 2007). It is estimated that this program prevented 187 police suicides between 2000 and 2010 (NJHS, 2013). Although Cop2cop was originally designed to prevent suicide, the hotline operators receive an average of 800 calls a month and most of the calls are from non-suicidal police officers who just want to “vent” about work-related problems (Hershops, 2015).

Intervention Barriers

Even if effective interventions for helping police officers better manage occupational stress exist, they are of little help when social dynamics create a resistance to using available resources (Ganster et al., 1996; Leino et al., 2011). In addition to the police culture influencing occupational stress pathways, certain personality characteristics and socio-demographics are related to stress responses and outcomes. The remainder of this section explains why police culture, individual characteristics, and social demographics deter police from using resources and positively coping with stress.

Individual Factors

Although there is general agreement that police are under high stress, research on the impact of socio-demographics on occupational stress is inconclusive. Wells, Colbert, and Slate (2006) found that female officers have higher levels of stress than male officers, while NIJ (2007) and Lee et al. (2009) argue there is not a significant difference across genders. Lee et al. (2009) concluded that “rookie” and “veteran” police officers have more job strains than police officers with a moderate amount of seniority. Chen (2009) argues that police officers with 11-20 years of experience are more likely to report higher levels of stress. On the other hand, O’Donnell and Stephens (2001) assert that length of service does not predict levels of stress. One

study found a significant relationship between age and stress levels, and revealed that police officers over the age of 50 were more likely to experience stress and mental health problems (Gershon et al., 2002).

There is also debate on whether having a college degree can buffer against stress. Literature indicates that officers with college degrees are better at coping with occupational stress (Auerbach, Quick, & Pegg, 2003). Findings from a meta-analysis showed that there is not a significant relationship between stress and education (Dowden & Tellier, 2004). McCarty et al. (2011) conducted a comparative study between large and small law enforcement agencies. Their findings showed that officers in the smaller agencies reported higher levels of stress, burnout, and health problems compared to those working for agencies within metropolitan cities.

Although police are immersed into the law enforcement culture when they are first hired, many of them already share common characteristics such as “A-type” personalities (Waters & Ussery, 2007). These personality traits are intensified during academy training when they are first socialized into the police culture (Prokos & Padavic, 2002). There are several different types of personality traits that influence levels of occupational stress, mental health, and behavior among police officers. However, research on this topic is limited (Lau et al., 2006; Ortega, Brenner, & Leather, 2007). The few located personality studies among this population grouped personality traits into conscientiousness, extroversion, and narcissism, which are three out of the “big five” personality types commonly used in the psychology discipline (Brebner, 2001; Vollrath & Torgersen, 2000).

Ortega et al. (2007) conducted one of the first studies that examined the relationship between personality types, style of coping with stress, and levels of reported stress. Officers who scored higher on the narcissism scale were more likely to be negatively impacted by

occupational stress. This subgroup also reported higher levels of burnout, conflict with other co-workers, exhaustion, lack of organizational commitment, and reduced job satisfaction. The most commonly-reported stressor within this group was dealing with administrative bureaucracy. Participants in this group commonly reported avoidance strategies and complaining to others as coping mechanisms for managing these job-related stressors.

Lau et al. (2007) was the first study to examine the interaction between the personality traits among police officers. In this study personalities were categorized into eight groups. The entrepreneur and hedonist groups (extraverts with low reported levels of narcissism) were significantly more likely to report lower levels of stress than the other six groups. The insecure and brooder groups (introverts with high levels of narcissism) reported the highest levels of stress.

Hart et al. (1995) also concluded that narcissistic police officers are more likely to report increased stress. This finding is also consistent in the general population (Brebner, 2001; Vollrath & Torgersen 2000). Although higher levels of stress are associated with this personality trait, stress appraisals among narcissists are different compared to the other personality types. Police officers with narcissistic personalities are more likely to report experiencing stress from frivolous issues and less likely to report experiencing stress from serious matters (Lucas et al., 2012).

Cultural Factors

It has been argued that interventions are ineffective among police because of cultural dynamics associated with stress (Waters & Ussery, 2007). Although police are trained and socialized into presenting themselves as authoritative and being in control, they actually have little control over the environments in which they work (McNally & Solomon, 1999). As a result,

they often develop a false identity and portray themselves as being invincible, when in reality they are actually vulnerable (Rees & Smith, 2008). The majority of the research on this topic suggests that stigma and distrust are the main contributing factors.

Police officers often perceive that being stressed out from work is a sign of weakness (Biggam, Power, MacDonald, Carcary, & Moodie, 1997). Page and Jacobs (2011) found that police officers fear that their co-workers will see them as vulnerable if they reach out for help. One of the officers in their study stated he drove 40 miles to get mental health treatment because he did not want the guys back home to see a “chink in his armor.” Police are socialized into having a “tough” outlook on life (Leino et al., 2011). Maintaining a masculine image can create mental health problems because they are not properly trained to cope with mental health issues, and the law enforcement culture discourages reaching out for help (Anshel, 2000).

There is also negative stigma associated with police officers seeking help when addressing work-related problems (Pasciak & Kelley, 2013). Police perceive that they will lose social influence among their peers for admitting to their shortcomings (Powell et al., 2014). Maintaining a "tough" image among peers is an important aspect of police work, and police officers often prefer to uphold this masculine identity at the expense of developing mental and physical health problems (Dick, 2000). They are also socialized by their peers to ignore stress and “plow on” (Powell et al., 2014). An issue that compounds the problem is that physical signs of stress can also get ignored because having these biological responses is also perceived as weakness (Biggam et al., 2007).

Work-related services that fall under Worker's Compensation are not always protected by confidentiality laws (Patterson, 2009; Waters & Ussery, 2007). Police officers have reported fear that they will be “de-gunned” and put on desk duty for using available counseling services

(Amaranto et al., 2003). Also, officers tend to not trust the competence of intervention professionals within and outside of their agencies (Powell et al., 2014). Police have argued that inside professionals are not properly trained to counsel people, while the external certified professionals do not understand the stresses associated with police work (Water & Ussery, 2007). During a qualitative study on stress management among criminal investigators, one participant stated that his counseling sessions ended early because the psychologist was too uncomfortable with hearing about the investigators' explicit experience involving a sexually abused child (Powell et al., 2014).

Police officers also have historically distrusted their supervisors regarding the issue of occupation-related stress (Crank & Caldero, 1991), but policy-guided interventions have been effective in reducing this problem. Amaranto et al. (2003) examined an intervention program that implemented secondary and tertiary services. This program implemented the "Cop2Cop" program six months prior to introducing a stress education and management program. Part of this training covered stigma, cultural barriers, and misconceptions about using intervention services. Six months after the education prevention, calls to the hotline quadrupled (NJHS, 2013). This suggested that the training was effective in reducing stigma and distrust towards the use of intervention services (Amaranto et al., 2003).

Stress-Related Policy

Before discussing stress-related policies in this area of research, there are a few limitations worth noting. Accessing policy manuals at an organizational level was challenging because agencies do not typically make their policy available to the public. As a result, I relied on secondary data such as news articles and information obtained while working as a police

officer and state-level parole officer. Policies being presented in the remainder of this chapter are at the national, federal, state, organizational, and professional levels.

Several of these levels can have overlapping meanings and terms, such as federal and national being used interchangeably. Specific terms will be conceptualized in order to reduce confusion between these levels. The term “federal” refers only to officers working for the U.S. Government and “national” includes police organizations at all governmental levels across the country. For example, the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) is a federal agency that has stress-related policies, but these policies are not enforced at the state level. National policy on the other hand, such as labor law exemptions for emergency responders, apply to all police officers throughout the country.

“State level” refers to policy applied to all police officers who are Peace Officer and Standards Training (POST) certified within the states where they are employed. Therefore, a policy implemented within the Alabama Department of Corrections (ADOC) would be an organizational policy because it would only apply to employees within this state department. The term “organizational” includes policies that are implemented and enforced by specific agencies employing the officers. The professional level includes unions and group memberships such as the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP).

National and Federal Level

There is no existing national policy to date that directly enforces stress-related issues among police officers across the country. However, agencies such as the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) support other law enforcement organizations on a national level by providing services such as research funding and policy recommendations. It is then up to policymakers and administrators at the organizational and professional levels to decide whether or not to

implement these recommendations. Although these types of agencies only make recommendations, departments such as the Department of Justice (DOJ) have the authority to step in and intervene at the lower governmental levels when lack of due diligence is determined. For example, the ADOC has been under federal investigation for the last four years because of safety concerns such as the correctional officer to inmate ratio being dangerously low. This has created a stressful working environment.

Some national policies increase stress and misconduct among police. For instance, although members in other professions are protected by labor laws regarding excessive working hours and compensation rights, other than overtime pay requirements, the Fair Labor Standards Act 29 U.S.C.S. § 201 exempts law enforcement agencies from these laws. Domestic violence gun laws have created barriers to addressing stress-related behaviors. The federal Lautenberg Amendment to the Gun Control Act. 15 - 18 U.S.C. § 925 (1996) prohibits anyone with a domestic violence conviction to legally carry a firearm. A result of this law is that police officers with convictions automatically get terminated from employment because firearm certifications are mandated. This has led to police corruption across the county because law enforcement organizations have been caught covering up domestic violence allegations on their officers to avoid running the risk of being legally mandated to terminate them (Oehme et al., 2011). There are also policies in place that deter officers from seeking treatment services. Under Workers Compensation Laws, after a claim is filed, protected information such as mental health status is no longer privileged to confidentiality (Patterson, 2009).

Although there is not much policy at the national level that addresses stress-related issues among police officers, federal agencies have implemented stress-related policies for federal police officers. Clear and specific policies have been put in action to help federal officers better

manage their stress and utilize available resources. One policy in particular is the FBI's confidentiality protections. When FBI agents seek internal counseling services from departmental employees such as chaplains, there is written policy stating that intervention workers are required to maintain the same confidentiality standards as licensed counselors (McNally & Solomon, 1999).

State Level

All states have some type of policy related to stress management among police officers, and Alabama will be used as an example to illustrate what state lawmakers are doing to address this issue. Therefore, Alabama will be the state of focus, and polices discussed in states outside of Alabama will mainly be at the organizational level (e.g., Los Angeles Police Department). State governments acknowledge the health disparities and behavior problems associated with occupational stress, and policies addressing these concerns range on a continuum from proactive to reactive. In 1995, Pennsylvania was the first state to create a full-time stress management officer position (Central Florida Stress Unit, 2011). One of the primary job duties was reviewing policies and making suggestions for reducing occupational stress.

Policies in Alabama that address the health disparities among police officers mainly focus on treatment rather than prevention. Heart-related health conditions associated with stress in law enforcement work have been so problematic in Alabama that state code has identified it as an "occupational disease," and officers are eligible for compensation benefits when these health conditions occur (Alabama Administrative Code, 1994). There is also a free life insurance policy available to the family if an officer dies from a heart-related condition. POST Officers in Alabama also receive a bonus year towards their retirement for every five years of service. This

policy also applies to police officers at the local level such as city police and correctional officers in the county jails because they are eligible to participate in the state retirement system.

Alabama also has policy in place that exacerbates stress and creates barriers to seeking available resources. There is a “zero tolerance” policy that addresses drug use. If an officer employed with the state fails or refuses to take a drug screen, the penalty is automatic termination regardless of mediating circumstances. Outcomes from this policy are similar to the gun laws for domestic violence. The policy leads to secrecy and resistance to seeking treatment services because it increases the chances of their employers finding out and being legally mandated to terminate them.

One proactive policy Alabama has in place is that stress management training is required during the police academy. It is a four-hour class that covers the unique stressors in law enforcement, strategies for adaptive stress management, and available resources for dealing with stress-related problems. Additionally, this training is available to officers after graduating the police academy. Continuing Educational Units (CEUs) are offered as an incentive to attend this class. However, attendance is at the discretion of the agencies that employ the officers, and most agencies prefer their employees to earn their CEUs through other types of training.

Florida is a front-runner in implementing stress management policy in the law enforcement community. This has been possible due to generous support involving collaborations with multiple entities such as universities and advocacy groups. The Law Enforcement Families Partnership (LEFP) is a program pioneered by Florida State University and victim advocacy groups throughout the state. Rather than having the traditional goal of reducing the negative symptoms associated with stress, such as domestic violence, the

underlying philosophy of the program model is to target the roots of these stress symptoms (Oehme et al., 2011).

LEFP offers educational services that address numerous stress-related problems and barriers to utilizing services, such as cultural changes (e.g. reducing the code of silence), stress management training, and organizational issues (Florida State University [FSU], 2016). The program now offers online training modules to police officers throughout the country. Although there is not any published literature available that has evaluated the program empirically, over 50,000 police officers across the country have utilized the online training and it is estimated that reductions in officer-involved domestic violence have saved taxpayers over a million dollars in law suits and legal fees (FSU, 2016).

Professional Level

Successful programs and policies are contributed to support from affiliates at the professional level (Finn & Tomz, 1997). There are support organizations such as police unions all over the country and even on the international level. The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) is the largest international police association in the world and they have more than 27,000 executive leaders representing 130 countries (International Association of Police Chiefs [IACP], 2012). The IACP focuses on advocacy, training, research, and conferences. There is also a recommended policy manual for police chiefs to use as a template when adding and revising organizational polices. Several chapters in the recommended policy manual pertain to addressing stress management and behavior issues. However, only the table of contents is accessible to non-members.

All sworn police officers in Alabama are eligible for Alabama Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) membership. This organization does not have any specific stress-related polices to assist

their members, but there are some indirect benefits that have the potential to reduce occupational stress. A significant benefit of being a member is that free legal representation is appointed for anyone who is civilly sued or legally arrested over a work-related matter (Alabama Fraternal Order of Police, 2012). This helps increase peace of mind for individual officers because most agencies require them to finance their own legal representation when internal affairs deems them to be at fault concerning a legal matter.

Organizational Level

Most stress-related policies are at the organizational level and they differ significantly throughout the country. In the 1970's, only 20% of organizations had policies that specifically addressed stress (Finn & Tomz, 1997). The issue of concern is that administrators use EAPs as the "go to" service because having it freely available reduces liability on the agency (Pasciak & Kelley, 2013). It is estimated that less than one-third of the law enforcement agencies have specific stress-related policies other than procedures for using EAPs (Oehme et al., 2011). However, there are numerous indirect stress-related policies such as employee grievance procedures, guidelines for addressing conduct, and incentives for positive and healthy behaviors.

Virtually, all law enforcement agencies have policies that govern how officers are expected to behave and the consequences for not meeting these expectations. It appears that organizational policy in this profession is mainly used as a control mechanism rather than a tool to help officers. Among the few agencies that do have specific policies in place (other than EAPs), the majority of policies on stress management programs focus on helping officers make personal changes to adapt to work-related problems rather than administrators working towards reducing stressful working environments (Central Florida Stress Unit, 2011).

Although administrations in this profession are reluctant to change negative environmental conditions, there are policies in place that offer police officers incentives for healthy behaviors and positive conduct. An evaluation study on a police department that offered their employees free gym memberships along with personal and stress training showed that exercise was effective in helping the participants cope with stress (Anshel, Umscheid, & Brinthaup, 2013). Other agencies such as the Northport Alabama Police Department require their officers to take physical fitness tests. There are not any penalties for failing the fitness exams, and as an incentive to promote physical fitness, officers receive an annual 2% pay increase for passing their bi-annual fitness exams. As an incentive to promote positive behavior, Alabama Probation and Parole Officers receive a 2.5% pay increase for satisfactory scores on their annual appraisals. Stress-related policies are growing throughout the country and most of the revisions are aimed at reducing misconduct.

Large metropolitan organizations such as the Los Angeles Police Departments (LAPD) are in the process of reforming this area of policy. LAPD administrators have been working on this reform since March 2016, and the main focus is to reduce the number of police brutality incidents (Mather, 2016). A specific section of this policy requires training supervisors to review training modules on “stress de-escalation.” Research in this area supports that lack of such training is a stressor in itself and limits coping options (Anshel, 2000; Ortega et al., 2007). Policy is also lacking in training police officers about detailed procedures when using treatment services, leading to common misconceptions such as being “de-gunned” and put on “desk duty” for using an available service (Amaranto et al., 2003).

Virtually all peer-reviewed manuscripts in this area of research mention policy recommendations that incorporate some type of training or intervention service. Additionally,

practitioners in the field have been writing manuals on developing stress management policy for decades (Finn & Tomz, 1997). However, administrators rarely implement the policy recommendations that are suggested. Although literature argues that administrations endorse inadequate services in their policies (Pasciak & Kelley, 2013), these contentions are mainly speculations rather than findings supported by empirical data. The following section discusses the methodological limitations and gaps in knowledge that interfere with better understanding this phenomenon.

State of Science

Abdollahi (2002) made a compelling argument when explaining why the state of science in occupational stress research among police officers has been “unprogressive.” A lack of theory and the use of unstandardized instruments were two of the main criticisms. Other scholars argue that stress-related problems are not improving and that the interventions being implemented are not effective (Waters & Ussery, 2007; Webster, 2013). It has been further argued that the dominant methodologies being used are not scientific (Patterson et al., 2014). The main limitations discussed in this section address concerns about underreported survey data, difficulties accessing data, and unreliable research methods.

The accuracy of self-reported data is questionable for numerous reasons. Police officers are notorious for giving socially desirable responses in self-reported research (Austin-Ketch & Violanti, 2012). When interacting with others, police officers are trained and socialized into playing the characters others expect them to be while hiding their true emotions and motives from others (Adams & Buck, 2010). Underreporting deviant behavior is common among this population, especially when researchers inquire about deviant behaviors that are illegal (Gorta, 2009). Furthermore, gaining accurate measurements on the extent of mental health problems is

questionable because police officers consider this a sign of weakness and try to conceal their vulnerabilities from others (Biggam et al., 1997).

There are issues with synthesizing the research in this area because numerous concepts are used to operationalize and measure stress-related variables. A “gold standard” has not been established and dozens of different instruments are being used. The findings from a meta-analysis indicated the Speilberger Police Stress Survey is the most commonly used instrument to measure occupational stress, and it only accounts for 11.7% of the studies that use self-reported survey instruments (Patterson et al., 2014). The other four most commonly used instruments only account for 14.3%. It was concluded that some of the inconsistencies between study findings were because the researchers were using different instruments to measure stress-related variables. Patterson et al. (2014) noted in their meta-analysis of stress management interventions for police officers that only 12 empirical studies were located that used a control group. Some “empirical studies” using control groups conclude that results are significant when statistical findings suggest otherwise. For example, McCraty et al. (2009) evaluated a stress management intervention with a control group among a random sample of correctional officers within a single institution. Group differences were not statistically different, and the post-intervention findings showed that both groups reported better health and less stress. It was concluded that the intervention was successful because cross contamination occurred and members in the experimental group taught the members in the control group about the information that was covered during the training.

Gaps in Knowledge

All of the different concepts used to measure stress have interfered with gaining a basic understanding about this phenomenon because most of the scholars in this area are using

different measures, resulting in lack of consistent findings on the matter. This trend often leads to inconsistent and contradictory research findings (Webster, 2013). Also, most of the self-reported instruments measure variables with dichotomous items when ratio variables might be more suitable. For example, the Police Stress Index consists of a list with potentially stressful events and police officers indicate whether or not they have been exposed to the listed events. Although these instruments can capture whether a given event has been experienced, they do not account for the possibility that these events may have been experienced multiple times, thus missing the possible effects of repeated exposure to these events. Researchers using these instruments automatically assume that stress was produced. This leaves gaps in knowledge because multiple exposures to specific stressful events may contribute to mental health conditions such as PTSD.

There are gaps in our knowledge when evaluating the effectiveness of intervention programs. Most interventions are implemented based on what police administrators think their officers need rather than asking the officers about their needs (Waters & Ussery, 2007). There are not any current studies that inquire about stress-related support services that police officers perceive to be needed but not offered. Additionally, there are no current studies that explore recommended changes that police officers believe would improve the effectiveness of commonly offered support services. Therefore, my research question examines how police officers appraise services offered by their agencies, strategies to improve these services, and new support services that could be beneficial in reducing and managing work-related stress.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

The guiding research question in this study examined how police officers appraise stress-related support services, strategies to improve these services, and new support services that could be beneficial in reducing and better managing work-related stress. This global research question prompted three sub-questions that parallel the study purpose outlined in the first chapter. The first sub-question explores how police officers perceive agency resources, with the aim of identifying opinions, attitudes, and beliefs about these services. Prior research findings have shown that underlying factors such as stigma and distrust contribute to negative appraisals police officers have toward available services (Page & Jacobs, 2011; Patterson, 2009). The next sub-question focuses on strategies that police officers perceive would improve existing agency resources, with the aim of identifying ideas that police have on feasible changes their administrations could make to improve existing services. The last sub-question seeks to identify new services police officers believe would be beneficial in helping reduce and better manage work-related stress. Although problems associated with using current agency resources are well documented, research focusing on the development and implementation of solutions to resolve reoccurring problems has yet to emerge. This gap also seems to exist in police practice as well because it has been argued that police administrations typically implement agency resources while neglecting to take the time to ask police officers about services they need (Waters & Ussery, 2007).

Conservation of Resources theory was used as a guiding theoretical framework. A main principle of this theory is that adequate resources can act as a buffer to reduce stress (Hobfoll, 2011). This framework was used to identify types of intervention services police officers perceive as beneficial resources. Another principle states that the investment in resources is needed in order for people to minimize the loss of other resources and before new resources can be acquired (Hobfoll, 2011). This principle was used to help identify police officers' perceptions on strategies for lowering resistance barriers (minimizing the loss of resources) and increasing willingness to use available services when needed (acquiring new resources).

Research Approach

A pragmatic qualitative research approach was used to guide this study. This philosophy challenges traditional dualisms and focuses on understanding the world through subjective experiences and practical observations in natural environments (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). This approach was used because it is considered the best-suited approach for informing practice (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013), and it centers on helping to improve social conditions (Bryman, 2004). There are several limitations and challenges associated with pragmatic qualitative research. However, the disadvantages can simultaneously be advantages.

This approach does not have commonly accepted methods for conducting research because pragmatic qualitative research focuses on using methods that are best suited to answer the research question (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). This allows researchers to draw on a variety of methods from other traditional approaches (Sandelowski, 2000). Rather than searching from the perspective of an "objective truth," the data analysis plan was to accurately capture and report the diverse values and beliefs that shape how police officers perceive agency resources. A pragmatic approach allows the flexibility to reconstruct participants' subjective experiences and

beliefs into objective meanings (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The stress-related experiences that participants shared were compared to account for individual differences and similarities that were consistent as a collective group.

Pragmatic qualitative research has been criticized for not having commonly accepted standards for ensuring research quality (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003). However, pragmatic qualitative research does require scientific rigor, specifically expecting researchers to document their decisions regarding their choice of methods to ensure appropriate methods are used (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Measures taken to ensure trustworthiness are discussed in detail in the “Quality Assurance” section.

Epistemological Framework

During the process of completing the coursework in my PhD program, I reviewed and analyzed a wide range of literature on epistemological views about the nature of knowledge and theories of knowledge. However, I was unable to identify with an “epistemological camp” or specific viewpoint such as a constructivist framework. I grappled with the opposing perspectives I had towards conceptualizing criteria that constitutes knowledge because there seems to be an infinite number of factors, conditions, and circumstances surrounding the generation of knowledge.

Staller (2012) argued that regardless of the qualitative research paradigm being used, it should be consistent with a researcher’s integrated theoretical worldview. My worldview evolves around pragmatism. This worldview parallels my epistemological view because I assume that rather than having a general set of ideologies that govern the nature of knowledge and how to go about generating it, I consider any piece of information to be a form of knowledge if it has practical and applicable value. For example, although the placebo effect leads people to report

positive intervention results when sugar pills are disguised as treatment variables, their false sense of reality towards the intervention falls within the realm of knowledge because they personally believed the placebo had positive benefits.

My epistemological framework ranged between objectivism and subjectivism during the study. Objective frequencies on the participants' explicit responses were calculated to quantify the findings. Also, knowledge was subjectively generated because I used my experience as a police officer as a framework to assist with making meaning out of the objective findings when interpretations were made.

Researcher Role and Reflexivity

My role as a researcher in this study was to (1) collect data via semi-structured interviews, (2) examine the data using a content analysis, and (3) apply the findings to plausible implications for informing social work and police practice. It is also worth noting that I had a dual role as a police officer during the study. Although being a current police officer during this entire study had numerous benefits, I spent time journaling and reflecting on cognitive biases I have toward this research topic. This reflection also included how working in six different law enforcement agencies has shaped the way I perceive stress in police work. Although biases are acknowledged as a shortcoming in qualitative research, it is part of the qualitative inquiry process (Padgett, 2008).

Creswell (2013) recommends that researchers reflect on potential biases that they may have that stem from values and experiences that shape their qualitative research studies. Therefore, I will discuss some of my biases toward this study and strategies that I employed to offset them. On a conscious level, my personal values did not seem to create any biases toward this study. However, my past and current experiences did have a significant impact on this study.

My role as a researcher and current police officer are deeply intertwined. I have been working in law enforcement for almost half my life. I started my career in 2002 as a 19-year-old correctional officer. I was involved in a prison riot the month after graduating from the corrections academy and that event changed the course of my life. The riot team marched in and regained control of the prison. They saved my life that day and my career goal since this incident has been to pay it forward and to help improve the quality of life among this population because I saw a great group people who battled with problematic mental and physical health conditions, addiction, and other deviant behaviors.

During the last two decades, I have had co-workers commit suicide in their 20's and die from heart attacks in their 40's. I have also witnessed them get arrested for rape charges, domestic violence, assault cases, drug crimes, and burglaries. These types of experiences have shaped my opinion that work-related stress is the common denominator to these deviant behaviors and health disparities.

I also recognize that my personal dealings with work-related stress during the last 17 years have influenced this research study. I have been involved in numerous life-threatening emergencies such as an officer involved shooting, two prison riots, and several high-speed vehicle pursuits that ended in violence. Additionally, I have witnessed dozens of incidents where people suffer helplessly from gun violence, domestic violence assaults, and fatal traffic accidents. These stressful incidents have been compounded with "day-to-day" stressors such as working midnight shifts in patrol as a single parent and being responsible for supervising 272 probationers/parolees when the national caseload average is 139 (NIJ, 2005).

I am confident that these experiences are the primary reasons why I am prescribed medication for physical and mental health conditions, and I am somewhat skeptical that this

could have been prevented by accessing support interventions earlier in my career. Prior to collecting data, I wrote memos acknowledging my reservations about participants having positive opinions toward police administrations offering effective support services. However, I made cognitive efforts to approach this research study with an open mind. Surprisingly, my position has changed because the participants I interviewed during the study had more positive attitudes toward support services, and they were also more optimistic towards changes that would reduce the resistance to using services.

My role as a police officer probably impacted my sample and the quality of data that were collected. Most of the participants in the study would probably have declined to participate if I would have been a civilian researcher without police experience. Also, the participants were probably more comfortable being interviewed by a current police officer; this likely impacted responses to the interview questions. This is evidenced by over half of the participants (80% n=16) being comfortable enough to self-disclose having mental health conditions or being prescribed psychotropic medication, because I did not ask any questions about their mental health conditions. Additionally, all the profanity and police jargon that the participants used during the interviews suggest that they perceived me as more of a police officer than a researcher. To offset the issue of having participants give me socially desirable answers and tell me what they thought I wanted to hear, I was frank with them and told them exactly what I wanted to hear. I told them that I wanted their honest opinions during the interviews because my goal is to give them a voice that leads to policy implications and more effective support services.

Current police experience did impact my research design and research questions. My second research question (changes to improve current programs and services) was developed based on barriers I have seen and personally experienced that deter officers from using available

services. In my experience, police officers (including myself) struggle with asking for help, and in my opinion, most police would prefer dealing with the consequences of not seeking help over the discomfort of having to reach out and ask for help.

My experience as a police officer also impacted the data analysis. I am skeptical about some of the programs that were suggested to be effective during the interviews. Although some of the suggested program changes and new suggested programs might not be effective, I believe having programs available does give officers peace of mind even though available services are rarely used. To offset this bias, a content analysis was conducted to answer the research the questions because, while conducting this analysis strategy, explicit narrative data were coded based on the answers to the questions that were asked, rather than interpreting and coding narratives based on what I thought the participants were communicating. In efforts help explain why the findings from the content analysis occurred, I used my police experience as a “lens” for interpreting the findings. Lastly, to ensure that these biases had minimum impact on this study, an internal audit was conducted to ensure intercoder reality.

Study Design

An exploratory study design using qualitative methods was used to examine the research questions guiding this study. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted among a purposeful sample of 20 police officers who were assigned to a patrol division and had two or more years of experience. The IRB protocol that was approved by my university stated that 20-30 interviews would be conducted; I stopped after the 20th interview because saturation was reached. A content analysis was conducted for the purpose of identifying positive and negative appraisals toward stress-related support services, strategies to improve these services, and new support services that could be beneficial in reducing and managing work-related stress.

Data Collection

Site and Subject Selection

All data were collected from one large urban county and one rural county in a southern state. Participants in this study represented a large municipal police department with over 300 sworn police officers; five small police departments with less than 10 officers; and a rural sheriff's office with less than 10 sheriff's deputies. All data were collected at the sheriff and police departments where each participant was employed. The sampling criteria used to operationalize eligibility consisted of police officers and sheriff's deputies who worked in patrol and had at least two years of police experience. For simplicity purposes, when referring to the officers who participated in the study, this will also include sheriff's deputies.

The patrol division is considered the "backbone" of police work, and most police officers are required to work in patrol for at least two years before they are eligible for requesting a specialized position. The decision to recruit patrol officers is because this group is more likely to experience work-related stress from conducting shift work compared to the officers and administrators in specialized positions (Gerber et al., 2010). Patrol officers also have the additional stress associated with shift work, such as mandated overtime (Vila, 2000).

Recruitment Procedures

Recruiting procedures for the small agencies were the same. Eligible participants within the rural county were recruited from the same county as the police department at which I am employed. After gaining permission from my police chief, I recruited and interviewed participants during my scheduled evening shifts among the officers who were working during the evening shift and after work among the officers who were on duty after midnight. Therefore, all participants were on duty while data were collected. Malone (2011) argued that financial

incentives and convenience are critical when recruiting candidates for participation in qualitative research that involves interviews. Malone (2011) further states that eligible participants are less likely to participate when the financial incentives are less than their hourly pay rate. This allowed me to maximize my response rate because the participants were at work getting paid and the interviews did not cost them any personal time.

Recruitment procedures were slightly different within the large agency because I did not know which patrol officers had at least two years of experience, and also because there were about 150 eligible participants at this agency. Therefore, I made contact with the police chief and he sent out a group email to the entire patrol division advising them about the study. He advised all of the eligible participants to contact me if they were interested in participating. The email also contained an attached participant recruiting script (see Appendix A) explaining the purpose and study procedures. The recruiting script did not mention that I am a police officer with over 15 years of law enforcement experience and the police chief only introduced me in the group email as a graduate student. Not knowing that I am a police officer is probably the reason why only two officers contacted me and volunteered to participate. Among these two recruits, one later declined because she took an extended leave from work after having surgery.

The other recruit suggested that we schedule an interview right after the morning shift change because that is usually the slowest time of the shift. Therefore, I showed up a few minutes before shift change and met the participant. He advised me that he got permission from his supervisor to work as the desk officer for that shift because he did not want to worry about being dispatched to a call during the interview. This was an ideal location to conduct the interview because entrance doors stay locked and the desk officer has to press a button to let

everyone in and out. Therefore, I contacted the night shift supervisor and gained permission to recruit eligible participants and interview them while they were working on the desk.

On three separate occasions, I left straight from work and reported to this agency while I was still in uniform. I introduced myself to the desk officer working each of these nights, informed them about the study, and asked if they wanted to participate after confirming they had at least two years of experience. All three officers agreed to participate. The purpose of recruiting participants after my shifts while still in uniform was to increase my response rate. The police chief did not mention that I was a police officer when he sent the department email advising officers about the study, and it is likely that more than two officers would have agreed to participate if my police experience would have been mentioned.

Instrumentation

Individual semi-structured interviews were used as the data collection instrument during the study. Not having specific guidelines gives researchers the autonomy to use knowledge and intuition during the interview process (Kvale, 1996). Participants were given a Semi-Structured Interview Protocol to look over for a few minutes before each interview started (see Appendix B). The protocol contained nine questions that covered three topics related to each of the three research questions. Follow up questions were then asked to gain a deeper level of understanding and to get clarification when needed. The protocol also included an introductory section inquiring about parts of police work they considered stressful and resources available to help them better reduce and manage the stress.

The first topic explored attitudes and opinions toward these services (first research question). The next topic addressed the second research question by inquiring about suggestions on improving the current services. Follow-up questions were based on whether the participants

perceived the services to be beneficial. Among the participants who reported negative attitudes toward the services, the question was framed in terms of what would have to change before the services would be considered effective. When participants reported being satisfied with services, the question was framed as changes that could make the services even better.

The last topic was discussed to inquire about recommendations on new services that would be beneficial in helping officers reduce and better manage stress. The protocol also contained a conclusion section so participants would know ahead of time that I planned on summarizing my interpretations on their overall perceptions toward work-related stress and support services. After participants either affirmed or clarified the interpretations, they were asked whether there was anything else related to the research topic that they wanted to mention. This concluding question was helpful in providing valuable insight to the research topic because I gained new perspectives on this topic. For example, Participant 10 concluded the interview by stating that police administrations should focus more on improving the officers' home lives because it has a significant impact on their work lives and job performance.

Data Analysis

Data Organizing

All of the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim into a Microsoft Word document. Transcripts, along with the field notes taken during and immediately after the interviews, were then imported into Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) software. Although Version 12 of QSR International's NVivo was the QDA software used, I also printed and coded all the transcripts by hand using colored pens and highlighters. Savin-Baden and Major (2013) recommend using this procedure for researchers with limited experience in qualitative research because it helps them better understand the underlying process of qualitative inquiry. This

procedure was beneficial in terms of gaining a deeper understanding within the data and it allowed the opportunity to view the data from another viewpoint.

Data Coding

Creswell and Plano-Clark (2010) recommend creating pre-codes and categories based on the current literature prior to collecting qualitative data. Three categories were created prior to collecting data, and each category directly related to a research question. The first category was labeled “Service Appraisals” and the three sub categories were positive, negative, and neutral perceptions toward agency resources. The next category “Service Improvement” consisted of strategies for improving existing services, and the third category “New Services” accounted for new services that participants perceived to be beneficial. Each of these categories ended up being used as parent codes that directly related to the research questions. See Appendix C for more details on the precoding procedures.

Descriptive coding was used in this study for several reasons. This type of coding is considered useful when organizing explicit and specific language in data (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Since I have limited experience in qualitative research, descriptive coding was used because it is recommended for “novice” qualitative researchers (Saldana, 2009). Rather than coding data based on what I believed was going on, data were coded based on what the participants explicitly told me. The main reason this coding method was used is because this type of coding is considered quantitative in nature (Bernard, Wutich, & Ryan, 2016), and after graduation, I plan on using the objective and “concrete” results in this study to gain support from police administrations and implement intervention services.

Data Analysis Strategy

A content analysis was conducted to quantify and describe the data. A content analysis is useful when examining data and calculating frequencies that certain things occur (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The “seven big steps in content analysis” explained in Bernard, Wutich, and Ryan (2016) were used as a guide while conducting the data analysis. The first two steps (formulating a research question and selecting a unit of analysis) were conducted prior to the decision to conduct a content analysis.

The third step involves creating a set of codes. The initial codebook had three codes that were created from the three categories listed in precoding procedures (see Appendix C). Each of these codes addressed a specific research question, and the other codes centered on these three. The finalized codebook consisted of seven categories, 13 codes, and 36 subcodes. Refer to the Descriptive Code List in Appendix D for a brief description of these categories, codes, and subcodes. The codebook details inclusion and exclusion criteria for each code, an example of data that fit into each code, and a brief explanation on how each code related to the research question(s).

The fourth step was conducted during the coding process and external audit. It consisted of coding a sample of data and fixing issues associated with inconsistent codes and intercoder reliability. Although I was the only coder during the study, a recent PhD graduate with qualitative research experience assisted with the internal audit and coded a sample of data (15%) to ensure intercoder reliability. The external audit procedures are discussed in more detail in the next section.

Two major coding issues surfaced during the coding process. As previously mentioned, the first three codes directly related to the research questions and centered on perceptions toward

formal support services that police administrations offer. It became an issue during the coding process when I noticed that a substantial portion of the coded data did not fit into the first three codes because the participants' perceptions were on informal support from their co-workers and supervisors rather than formal support affiliated with police administrations and guided by policy. For example, Participant 20 discussed the benefits that his co-workers get from prayer meetings held by a midnight shift supervisor right after they break from muster at the beginning of each shift. This type of data does not fit into the first code (attitudes and opinions toward support services) because the prayer meetings are not affiliated with the police administration and are not guided by policy. To offset this inconsistency, the code "Informal Support Services" was created to account for support that is not guided by policy.

The other issue that came up during the coding process was that, when participants were asked about services that would reduce stress, a large portion of their recommendations were not policies and services directly aimed at reducing stress. For example, Participant 7 recommended all officers get a take home car because it would eliminate the stress of forgetting duty gear at home and the hassle associated with carrying assigned equipment and personal items back and forth between his personal vehicle and patrol car. Although police administrations have policy on take home cars, the policy does not relate to reducing stress. Therefore, the code "Indirect Administrative Policies and Services" was created to account for policies and services that indirectly help officers reduce and better manage work-related stress.

After I went back and revised the codes and coding criteria, I recoded the sampled data (three transcribed interviews) and applied the finalized codes to the remaining data (step five). The sixth step involved creating a case-by-variable matrix and the last step consisted of analyzing the matrix at the appropriate level of analysis. Three case-by-variable matrices were

created and each matrix depicts findings from a research question. The case-by-variable matrices are discussed in more detail in the following chapter and are located in Tables 1-4.

Data Interpretations

Although the main purpose of the study was to identify and describe perceptions that police officers have toward support services, an underlying purpose was to make sense and add meaning to the descriptive data findings. After the content analysis is presented in the next chapter, the descriptive findings are put into context by presenting a case example and linking the details of the case to the data findings. The case example details an officer-involved shooting that occurred at the police department where I work. Details of the case are discussed from the account of the officer directly involved (Participant 7), officers who responded to the incident (Participants: 1, 8, 11, 14, and 17), and myself because the incident occurred less than an hour before Participant 7 and I were scheduled to conduct an interview for this study. I found out about this incident right after I arrived at my police department to set up for the interview. The interview was postponed to a later date and I reported for duty so there could be an available officer to answer service calls that came in from dispatch.

Interpretations and conclusions were also made by drawing on strategies for moving beyond descriptive qualitative data as discussed in Staller (2015), and the tactics for generating meaning in Chapter 11 of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). Additionally, my personal experience during the last 17 years working as a correctional officer, probation/parole officer, and police officer will be used to support some of the interpretations and conclusions that are made. Also, conclusions are made in the last chapter by triangulating data findings, prior research, and personal experience in police work.

Quality Assurance

Three strategies were employed to ensure quality in this study. Savin-Baden and Major (2013) suggested that spending extended amounts of time in the field helps ensure trustworthiness. Padgett (1998) agrees that this approach can enhance the quality of research and she termed it “prolonged engagement.” Therefore, I reached out to a local police chief, explained my situation, and the city council approved my request to work on a part-time basis. I was hired as a police officer five months before the dissertation proposal defense and plan on working at this agency until graduation. Working at a police department was helpful in the development of my interview protocol. I received good advice and feedback from my co-workers on the types of questions to ask and it was also beneficial with regard to brainstorming ways to design this research study.

Padgett (1998) suggests leaving an “audit trail” to increase trustworthiness in qualitative research. Memoing is a type of audit trail similar to journaling. This process is straightforward because there are non-specific guidelines on how memoing should be conducted (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008). On March 24, 2017, I started memoing after a committee member explained the benefits of using this analytic approach. Although all of the information is the same, two memo journals were used. The only difference between the two journals is the way they are organized; one memo is in chronological order and the other is categorized into five topics.

The first category includes the field notes that were taken during and right after each interview. The label “administrative memos” was used to categorize communication with committee members and involved parties such as the police chiefs who approved my research requests. The label “stressful encounters at work” was used to journal stressful experiences such

as the night I discharged my firearm during the execution of a felony warrant because two pitbulls attacked me. I documented all revisions that were made from the original dissertation proposal approved by the dissertation committee and categorized these changes as “proposal revisions.” The last category is labeled “process memos” and it includes a rationale for each important decision during the research process and my thoughts on issues that came up, how they were addressed, and progress made during the study.

A peer examination/external audit was conducted and kappa scores were calculated to ensure intercoder reliability. Savin-Baden and Major (2013) caution against using external auditors who are not familiar with the research topic because a lack of understanding about the general topic creates difficulties when analyzing and interpreting the findings. Therefore, I selected a recent PhD graduate with a basic understanding of my research topic and trends that go on in police work.

Since intercoder reliability is often poor during the initial coding cycle (Hruschka et al., 2004), prior to coding the data, the auditor reviewed the codebook in detail and in May 2019, he provided feedback on coding criteria that seemed unclear. During the following week, revisions to the codebook were made in efforts to clarify uncertainties. Hruschka et al. (2004) also mentioned several characteristics that interfere with reaching a desirable kappa score; two of these characteristics were present in my codebook. The first issue is having segments of raw data that overlap with multiple codes, and the other issue is having more than 20 codes. In efforts to offset these limitations, the codebook was organized into three sections and the codes within each section did not appear to overlap with each other.

The auditor randomly selected an NVivo transcript and coded it into the first section of codes. The same procedure was used for coding data into the other two sections of the codebook.

The desired kappa scores higher than .60 was selected during this study because it is commonly accepted that kappa scores between .61 and .80 are considered to have substantial agreement (Czodrowski, 2015; Yilmaz & Aktas, 2018). The auditor coded all the sampled transcripts on the same day (June 2019), and then he assisted with calculating kappa scores (via NVivo). The kappa scores for each code ranged between .705 and .992.

Ethical Considerations

I did not encounter any major ethical concerns during this study. The research study protocol was approved by the IRB at The University of Alabama on March 18th, 2018 (see Appendix E). The approved informed consent form is listed in Appendix F.

Four measures were taken to protect the participants' confidentiality and anonymity. First, the IRB approved my waiver request allowing participants to check a box on the informed consent form rather than requiring a signature. Second, having the contact information of the licensed psychologist on the informed consent form provided a level of privacy to the participants because they could have contacted the psychologist discreetly without my knowledge. Third, all participants' names and other personal information were de-identified. The names were replaced with an assigned number between 1 and 20, and other identifying information such as the agencies that participants worked at were removed from the transcripts. Lastly, the audio recordings were deleted after the interviews were transcribed.

Although participants in the study did not receive any significant benefits, findings from this study have potential to benefit other police officers and the entire community. This will be the first study to date that interviews police officers on ways to improve existing support services. This has potential to guide the development of more effective programs and services. These programs and services could help lower PTSD and alcohol abuse rates. It could also lead

to a healthier police force if the study findings are effective in helping police reduce and better manage stress.

The general citizenry could potentially benefit from the study as well. Public safety is compromised when efforts are not made to help reduce work-related stress among police (Austin-Ketch & Violanti, 2012). Reducing police stress and alcohol abuse would likely lower lawsuits and police brutality cases because stress and alcohol abuse are linked to violence and excessive use of force (Oehme et al., 2012). Effective stress management services would save taxpayer dollars in the long run because it would help reduce turnover and work-related police accidents (Vila, 2000). Officers with improved mental health would be more effective in making better decisions and protecting the community (O'Donnell & Stephens, 2001). In sum, the benefits of improving the quality of life for police officers and increasing public safety in the communities they serve outweighed the slight risk that participants might have experienced some emotional discomfort during the interviews.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The central focus of this study was to (1) explore how police officers appraise stress-related support services, (2) identify program and policy changes they believed would improve these services, and (3) inquire about new services they perceive to be needed but not offered. Between April and September of 2018, semi-structured interviews were conducted among a convenient sample of 20 participants. The length of the interviews ranged between 17 and 81 minutes. The sampling criteria consisted of police officers and sheriff's deputies who were assigned to a patrol division and had at least two years of police experience. Participants were recruited from one large urban county and one rural county within a Southern state. Participants represented a large municipal police department with over 300 sworn police officers (n=4), a rural sheriff's office with less than 10 deputies (n=4), and five small police departments with less than 10 officers (n=12).

Demographics Characteristics

The demographic data collected during the interviews consisted of age, gender, race, rank, highest level of education, years of police experience, and prior military and/or firefighting experience. These demographic characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant #	Age Group	Race/Sex	Education	Rank/ Title	Police Experience	Prior Military
1	21-29	WM	HS	Officer	2-5	No
2	30-39	WM	HS	Officer	2-5	Yes
3	21-29	BM	Bachelor	Deputy	2-5	No
4	21-29	WM	HS	Officer	2-5	No
5	30-39	WM	HS	Officer	6-10	No
6	30-39	WM	HS	Officer	6-10	No
7	21-29	WM	Associates	Officer	2-5	No
8	30-39	WM	HS	Asst. Chief	11-15	No
9	21-29	WM	HS	Officer	2-5	No
10	40-49	WM	HS	Officer	16-20	Yes
11	40-49	WM	HS	Officer	16-20	Yes
12	30-39	WM	Bachelors	Officer	11-15	No
13	50-59	WM	Associates	Officer	Over 20	No
14	50-59	WM	HS	Chief	Over 20	No
15	21-29	WF	HS	Deputy	11-15	No
16	30-39	WM	HS	Deputy	6-10	No
17	50-59	WM	HS	Chief	Over 20	No
18	21-29	WM	Masters	Officer	6-10	No
19	50-59	WM	Bachelors	Deputy	11-15	Yes
20	30-39	WM	Masters	Sergeant	6-10	No

In terms of education, most participants did not have a college degree (n=13). Among those with college degrees, the highest level of education consisted of an associate's degree (n=2), bachelor's degree (n=3), and master's degree (n=2). Both participants earned their masters

from the same criminal justice program during the same year, and they also both worked at the same large municipal police department.

In terms of rank, most participants were not supervisors (n=16). Among this group, the majority were police officers (n=12) and the others were sheriff's deputies (n=4). The police supervisors (n=4) consisted of two police chiefs and an assistant police chief at the small police departments; there was one police sergeant employed at the large municipal police department. The participant's ages ranged between 23 and 55 years old. Most participants were under 40 years old (n=14); the other participants were in their 40's (n=2) and 50's (n=4). Years of police experience ranged between two and 29 years. Most participants had 15 years of experience or less (n=15). All participants with over 20 years of police experience (n=3) were employed at one of the small police departments.

Four participants had prior military service and one participant experienced combat during war. Participant 2 was an infantry soldier in the Army who fought during the Iraq war in 2003. Two participants had second jobs as firemen. Participant 7 was employed as a fulltime firefighter. He continued his employment as a police officer in efforts to maintain his police certification with the goal of being promoted to an arson investigator at the fire department. Participant 4 is a fulltime police officer who works as an assistant fire chief at a volunteer fire department.

In terms of gender and race, participants were predominantly White males (n=18). Although only one Black male and one White female participated in the study, there were only two Black officers and one female officer employed within the rural county that participants were recruited from. Their perspectives on the additional stressors associated with conducting

police work as a minority are discussed towards the end of this chapter in the “demographic differences” section.

Current Support Services

Since stress-related support policies and services varied across the different agencies that participants were employed at, the variations across agencies will be briefly explained in this section. The large agency was the only department that directly offered stress-related support services. Although the sheriff’s office did not directly provide services, there is a bulletin board in the main lobby of the department that lists stress-related support services within the community. However, these services are also available to the general public.

Although none of the small agencies directly offered support services to their officers, these administrations do address the aftermath of critical incidents on a case-by-case basis. If administrative-level supervisors think that any of their officers might be in need of stress-related support, they will offer to connect these officers to outsourced services. For example, Participant 19 made a comment about his agency not having a policy that guides support services after an officer-involved shooting. His son also works at this agency and he used an officer-involved shooting that his son experienced as an example. Participant 19 stated, “like in my son’s case, they said they would send him somewhere if he wanted but nobody made him go and there is not any type of policy on this issue right now.” Participant 14 is a police chief with 29 years of police experience working within four rural police departments and a rural sheriff’s office. He discussed how all the agencies he worked at have a similar approach to connecting officers with professional help after a critical incident. Participant 14 explained:

They have always said it was there, but as far as having a program set up, I don’t think we had anything like that. As far as a program, they would get us some type of counseling after an incident if we needed it.

Occupational Stress

All 20 participants were asked what they considered to be the most stressful part of police work. The data were coded based on the three most commonly used conceptualizations of police stress (operational, organizational, and work-family conflict) that were discussed in the first chapter. It is noteworthy to mention that these concepts are not always mutually exclusive because stress from daily work activities (operational stress) can overlap with administrative stressors (organizational stress). For instance, in addition to a police officer having to decide on whether or not to shoot a suspect holding a knife (operational stress), firing a “warning shot” to scare the suspect into dropping the knife would not be a feasible option because most departmental policies ban this practice. Limiting discretionary decisions through policy is a form of organizational stress.

Operational Stress

The most common response in terms of operational stress (stressors related to performing job duties) concerned the “unknown” factors associated with responding to service calls with a potential element of danger and not knowing what is about to happen (n=5). The stress associated with these “unknown” factors ranged from routine activities such as a traffic stop to calls where officers are already aware that they are responding to a threat. Interestingly, all five of these participants perceived that not knowing what is going to happen produces more stress than dealing with a crisis when it happens.

The other most common response related to dealing with the general public (n=5). Among these participants, two of them mentioned the stress associated with being held to a higher standard than members of the community and the constant surveillance they receive from the public.

There were also two participants who mentioned the resentment and hatred they receive from the public. Both participants were employed at the same rural police department.

Participant 10 stated that having to arrest the same people “over and over” again was the most stressful part of being a police officer. Although this participant did not explain why he considered this stressful, Participant 9 discussed his opinion on why police officers get “burned out” and the frustration associated with arresting the same person multiple times:

Mostly, they get disheartened. They come in expecting to save the world and they are gung-ho about it. They do that and then realize that bad guy you put in jail for beating the shit out of his wife is out of jail and he is beating her ass again. The same people get arrested over and over again and they don't see the result of justice. Some people go into police work thinking I'm going to put the bad guys in jail and they are going to stay there forever but it don't work like that. They are all gung-ho about it. They got the thin blue line shirts and they realize I am putting all these people in jail and it is not making a difference. They get disheartened about it and it takes them out.

The only specific traumatic event mentioned as being the most stressful part of police work is dealing with an injured or deceased child (n=2). I did not ask either of these participants any follow up questions because they both seemed to get emotional when they answered this question. There was also one participant who stated the most stressful part of police work is having to arrest people he went to school with.

Organizational Stress

Five types of organizational stressors (problems associated with supervisors and administrative decisions) were mentioned. These stressors related to lack of resources, unnecessary policies and procedures, micromanagement, conflict with supervisors, and dealing with politics. Among the participants who mentioned administrative issues as the most stressful part of police work (n=5), over half of were supervisors (n=3).

One of the participants, who was not a supervisor, stated he was not good at writing and that having to submit reports is the most stressful part of his job. This participant described

report writing as an organizational stressor rather than the operational stress of conducting routine paperwork because of the limited feedback he receives from supervisors after submitting reports. Participant 11 explained:

Paperwork, grammar, writing, and stuff like that is not my strong point. At this agency, there is no quality to it. The quality of it, nobody really reviews it. Just when you go to court, you know what you have to do to not look like an idiot in court. I'm always worrying about getting it right or whether it is enough to get a conviction or make me look stupid in court.

The other non-supervisor stated that politics was the most stressful part of being a police officer. Participant 13 explained:

Politics, if you fall out of favor, you are not in the clique. They will screw you over and it has happened to me before. And I have seen it happen to others as well. The bigger agencies from my experience, people were 'jocking' and trying to make you look bad. Say you messed up, people tried to throw you under the bus. If you have seniority and got into trouble, you could lose your day shifts and weekends off and your new assignments would be on crappy shifts like midnights and weekends. I was not in the 'in crowd' and it was bad. If you were not in the clique they screwed with you a lot. If you were not in favor, they would try to run you off. It was bad. In one larger agency, some officers made a false allegation on me and the state came in to investigate. They ended up terminating those officers who lied and tried to throw me under the bus.

When the last participant was asked about the most stressful part of police work, he stated "administrative stuff that gets piled on us." This participant mentioned that he stays abreast with police stress literature, has two master's degrees, and experience conducting graduate-level research. Therefore, I asked him why he thought most of the participants discussed operational stress as the most stressful part of police work. Participant 20 explained:

I think that is the short-sighted stock response because everybody hates dealing with abused kids. Based on the nature of where I work, that does not happen to me very often but what constantly happens to us is the administrative BS.

Also, at the end of each interview, I asked each participant if they had anything else they wanted to add before the interview concludes. Participant 20 brought up the organizational stress issue again and stated:

It surprised me that more officers you interviewed barely discussed the administrative stress. I guess their responses were short sighted because they worked the streets and discussed the things right in front of them. I am more involved in the administrative stress because I am redoing our DUI policy and I deal with them more because I do a lot of training for the new officers. I think if you reduce the administrative stress, it would help with our retention issue.

Participant 14 explained:

To me, the administrative stress is more stressful because police like the adrenaline rush of the job. Making sure everything is done right and everyone is doing it right and the paperwork is done right is what I stress out more than anything because I answer to the mayor, the city council, and the public.

I followed up by asking whether he considered it stressful being off duty and having the vicarious liability of being held responsible for the behavior of the police officers that he supervises. Participant 14 then stated:

Yes, because it is something that you can't control. Guys are going to do that. You can tell them and train them on what to do, but at the end of the day, we are all people who do things differently. For example, I am going to a conference next week and it scares me to death leaving my guys alone for a week. Not that I don't trust them, but normally I am 15 minutes away if I need to help solve a problem and I will be 4-5 hours away.

Participant 8 discussed how micromanagement was stressful in his agency and he disclosed an unpleasant encounter that he had with his mayor:

I washed my truck and the mayor called me out and said not to wash my truck in uniform. I used less than a gallon and just sprayed my windshield off. Things are like that in big cities but they would not care here. I then came into a meeting fuming because he wanted to bitch about some water.

Home-Work Conflict

Stress from home-work conflict related to always being hyperalert; never being off duty; long working hours that take time away from family; and the burden that police work puts on maintaining healthy social relationships outside of work. Four participants stated home-work conflict was the most stressful part of police work, and they all had different reasons why their

jobs created problems outside of work. Participant 6 gave an example of how being hyperalert relates to work-home conflict and why it is stressful:

Even during your down time, you are still hyper alert. Like when you go out to eat with your wife, you are constantly scanning the room to see if anyone has a gun and trying to see if there is anyone you arrested before. Like one time I went to the zoo with my wife and I ran into someone I made a felony arrest on and I literally walked away from my wife. She had no idea where I went, but I did not want to have her seen with me. So being hyper alert and having to remember everybody you arrest in case you run into them on a daily basis and that they are not out to get revenge. It follows you home.

Participant 5 explained the stress of trying to balance a career in police work with family life:

The most stressful part of Police work is life outside of police work if that is even a valid answer. Trying to juggle family life, work, and the career of being a police officer. The schedule we work, especially football season, or anything. I have three kids and I got a divorce. So the stuff outside of work has been more stressful than stuff at work. But it goes hand in hand because, if I was not working here, then it would not be the same. So that is worth mentioning.

Participant 19 mentioned that his career caused problems with his wife and why their problems were exacerbated after his son started working with him at the sheriff's office as a deputy:

The most stressful part of it for me is the family conflict with my wife. She admires what I do, but she also hates it. She does not like it and if anything ever happened to him, she would blame me for it. He is like me and feels like this is something he needs to do. She is more jealous of my time than anything. She wants me to be right there with her when I am not making my money.

Stress Coping Mechanisms

The code "Stress Coping Mechanisms" was created in an effort to better understand the healthy and maladaptive stress coping behaviors that participants engaged in. The sub-code "Healthy Stress Coping Behaviors" was created to identify positive ways participants coped with work-related stress. The sub-code "Maladaptive Stress Coping Behaviors" was created to identify unhealthy behaviors that were used to cope with work-related stress. This sub-code also captures the healthy and maladaptive stress coping behaviors that participants reported their co-workers engaging in.

Healthy Coping Behaviors

Exercise was the most common response that participants mentioned doing to manage stress. The other positive stress coping behaviors were talking things out with co-workers, having hobbies, finding time to relax, and being religious. Participant 10 seemed more concerned with taking measures to ensure work-related stress did not follow him home rather than efforts to manage stress during the hours he was at work. Participant 10 explained:

How do I deal with it? I just deal with it because it is part of my job. I try not to let it affect my family life, but everybody knows that sometimes it does. I usually try to do stuff that helps me relax like fishing and things of that nature.

Participant 9 discussed how he finds entertaining things to do outside of work as a means to balance work and home life:

I think it is a balance. I have two hobbies right now. I like to mountain bike. I go to parks or whatever. I also have a pontoon boat. I've been fishing and swimming. Sometimes when I am off work, I have to make myself get out, relax, and enjoy something not related to the job. It does not consume your life.

I followed up, asking why it is difficult to leave the house during time off work:

I think a lot of that has to do with where we are with our society and officers. Like when Vietnam happened and soldiers came back, they were looked down upon. So now there is so much negativity associated with cops. And we are portrayed as bad guys so much, I don't think that helps with all the stress we go through each day and the stuff we deal with, then we are told by others. We are providing one of the most stressful services in the country. It shapes the way you act with civilians. I have noticed my circle of friends has gotten smaller and smaller. And it has been that I hang out with more officers now than friends from my past and friends I grew up with.

Although Participant 9 did not mention a specific stress coping behavior, he discussed an interesting perspective that helps him from getting "burned out" at work:

I never expected the bad guys to go to jail forever. It don't work like that. To me, I treat it like a game. My goal is to arrest them and their job is not to get caught. For me, I don't take anything personal. You have to know who you are as a person. They are going to try and get under your skin. You have to get a good center to know how you are as a person. People can see when they are pushing your buttons. A lot of officers, especially young officers, you tell them to fuck off and they will be like I am going to show you. You can't

be like that. The department expects you to take some abuse. We learned that in the academy. We are allowed to take a little more abuse than others. And you are suppose to have thicker skin and more common sense than everybody else. You can't be that gung-ho officer and be like I will show you.

Participant 4 explained how "dark humor" helps him cope with stress while he was at work:

Doing this, you have to make jokes. If it is a kid, I will not make jokes. But if it is an adult, I will always find something to laugh about. I have to do that, even if the person is dead. If I would not have done that, it would have bothered me.

Participant 12 discussed how talking about major incidents helps him process these events:

I think it is very good that other people have your back and you are able to talk about it. I think that is the only way to get past anything, to talk about it. My major incidents, I have had more comfort in it because the more I talk about it, the better I am. I have probably had about 5 incidents that really stand out to me and I don't really mind talking about it. I feel like if I talk about it, I get more comfortable with it.

Maladaptive Stress Coping Behaviors

Participants self-disclosed four types of unhealthy behaviors they used to cope with work-related stress. These maladaptive coping strategies consisted of abusing alcohol (n=5), internalizing work-related issues (n=3), tobacco use (n=2), and being aggressive towards others (n=1). Participant 7 stated he has a tendency to take it out on others via verbal aggression when he has a bad day at work. Participant 15 discussed how hiding her emotions from others relates to the internalization of stress:

Personally, I don't want anyone to know my business, I don't like to express my feelings. I don't like to discuss it and I would rather handle it within. How you start the conversation makes a difference on how someone is willing to communicate about it. Women are emotional and have these feelings. I have them but I do not show them.

Participant 14 used an interesting analogy when discussing the process of internalizing stress from critical incidents at work, describing it as a vault that can be locked and unlocked:

If it is a normal stressful day where I had to get some paperwork done or answer some stupid calls and had a lot going on, that is one thing, but if I had a bad day or something like that, it is a totally different matter. The regular stresses of the day are enough, but when you had a bad call and you are trying to cope with that, we are still people behind the badge, and sometimes you have to lock it back in the vault. I have done baby death

investigations and I have seen so much death and destruction and have seen people mutilated beyond recognition. What I have done is built a vault in the back of my mind and I don't bring it out unless I want to.

Participant 2 stated that he drinks several beers at 6:30 am almost every morning when he returns home from work. He then followed up by asking if that meant he has a drinking problem. Participant 16 stated that he did not know of a stress coping mechanism that was better than drinking beer:

For a while, after I got home from work, all I wanted to do was grab a cold beer out of the frig and hold my son. Beer is my coping mechanism and that is what I do. I have heard of several cops developing issues with that over the years but until I find something better, that is what the fuck I am going to use.

He then described his experience watching a close mentor develop alcohol dependency and used the experience as an example to support mandating counseling after a critical incident:

If you have to kill somebody, I think you should because a close personal friend of mine had to kill somebody in the line of duty years ago. I have always looked up to this person as a father figure over the years and to me, I have always looked at him like Superman. He is retired from the military, he is a 'man's man,' and he is not somebody you want to fuck with. He had to get into a shootout and kill somebody and later down the road I saw how it affected him. He would confide in me and he started drinking more and had to go to Bradford because he became an alcoholic. He would not come out and say "hey man, that fucked me up," but it affected him. He still brings it up years later and you can tell it is still on his mind. At that time, he did not have anyone to talk to except me because we were drinking buddies. So I think you should have to talk to somebody if you take a life. It might be a one-time 30 minute session to see if you need additional help, so I think it should be mandated.

Participant 1 shared an interesting perspective on the relationship between internalizing stress, drug/alcohol use, and why these coping strategies are preferred over seeking support services:

A lot of officers drink just to forget the shit that has happened. If you go and seek professional help for it, it kind of makes it more real. And it is like, oh shit, it really did happen. Instead they try not to think about it and they might just have a drink or take a pain pill or whatever you want to do. I know several officers that were addicted to pain medication.

Research Questions

Attitudes and Opinions toward Support Services

The first research question explored opinions, attitudes, and beliefs that police officers have toward stress-related support services that are commonly offered. The support services that were discussed during the interviews include: internal and external chaplains, individual and group debriefing after a critical incident, counseling services, educational training on stress management, suicide prevention hotlines, incentives for meeting physical standards, and a family support program called family night. The positive and negative perceptions that participants had towards each of the services are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Attitudes and Opinion toward Stress-Related Support Services

	Positive Opinions (Advantages of Service)	Negative Opinions (Disadvantages and Reservations toward Service)
Internal Chaplains	Police chaplain understands stress (n=4)	Mistreatment outside of chaplain roles (n=1)
	Comfort in knowing chaplain (n=1)	Fear of looking weak to the chaplain (n=5)
	Preference to discuss religion (n=3)	Distrust in confidentiality protections (n=4)
	Police chaplain likely to empathize (n=1)	Preference not to discuss Religion (n=2)
External Chaplains	More qualified to counsel (n=2)	Lacks understanding in police stress (n=4)
	Avoids looking weak to another co-worker (n=2)	Preference not talking with a stranger (n=1)
	Less risk others finding out (n=2)	
	Preference talking to a stranger (n=1)	
Individual Debriefing	More comfortable in One-on-one dialog (n=5)	Perspective limited to one person (n=3).
	Individual likely to have seniority over most group members (n=1)	
Group Debriefing	Feedback from multiple people (n=4)	Fear of looking weak to the group (n=3)
	Multiple perspectives (n=3)	Group would joke around too much and not take it serious (n=7)
Counseling Services	Preference to see a licensed professional (n=1)	Does not understand police work (n=7)
Educational Stress Training		Distrust towards anonymity and confidentiality (n=9)
	Helps with better managing the “day to day” stress (n=1)	Redundant and boring (n=1)
		Joke around too much during training (n=5)
Family Night Program	Networked family members together (n=1)	Wife was already supportive and did not need this service (n=1)
	Teaches families about police stress and behavioral/personality changes that occur (n=9)	Not helpful cause family lived out of state and could not attend (n=1)
Physical Fitness Incentives	Motivates officers to exercise more (n=11)	The incentives are not enough to motivate officers into exercising more (n=2)
		Some older officer are unable to meet fitness standards (n=1)

Since the positive and negative opinions are side-by-side for each type of service, this matrix format was used to compare the advantages (positive opinions) and disadvantages (negative opinions) for each individual service. After the pros and cons for each individual service were analyzed, the services were compared to each other.

Chaplain services. Two participants self-disclosed reaching out to a chaplain for guidance on a stress-related issue. However, Participant 15 stated that she tried to reach out and speak with a volunteer chaplain, but she was unsuccessful because she left a voicemail and the chaplain never returned her call. Participant 10 stated that he used a chaplain service during the time he was employed at a large municipal police department. He reached out to an external chaplain due to the guilt he felt after using physical force on a juvenile delinquent. Participant 10 explained why he reached out to the chaplain and how a brief meeting with the chaplain helped reduce stress:

It was my first real fight. Physical fight. I used my pepper spray and it had no effect to the guy. He charged me and when he did, we locked up fighting and he went for my gun. I had my hand on my hip to keep the gun in the holster so I had to fight him with one hand. I was able to get him off me and when I did I went for my baton. I was then able to beat him into submission. Several days later, from that night I found out who that kid was. He was a 19 year old kid on medication and I helped him a week or two before. He shaved his head and I did not recognize him the day we had that fight.

I went and saw the Chaplain and he said, 'let me tell you something,' if he would have killed you, at the end of that shift, do you think he would have gone home and taken care of your family?" You know what I said, 'thank you,' because that summed it up for me right there. He was right, just as easily as he said that, I applied the same logic to doing the job. This was in 2003. I can't depend on the bad guy taking care of my family. My mission is to go home at the end of the shift. Regardless of what happens, whether it is a fight, a shooting, a stabbing, no calls at all, whatever it is, we watched each other's back and take care of each other during the shift. At the end of the day we are responsible for taking care of our family, not the bad guy. So that took care of the guilty feelings I had for beating this kid.

Although this was the only participant who disclosed using a chaplain, his narrative offers

support that chaplain services have promising potential to be both efficient and effective when they are utilized.

All 20 participants were asked whether they would prefer speaking with an internal or external chaplain. Internal chaplains were conceptualized as designated police officers and police supervisors who were available to privately speak with any officer who contacted them. The external chaplains were conceptualized as ministers without police experience who volunteered to act in a chaplain role when their services were requested. Surprisingly, more participants preferred an external chaplain (n=7) over preference to use an internal chaplain (n=6). The other participants did not have a preference (n=5) or self-identified as non-religious and stated it would be uncomfortable speaking with any type of chaplain (n=2).

The reported advantages to using internal chaplain services were that police chaplains directly experience police stress (n=4), they are able to empathize with other police officers (n=1), officers prefer speaking to another officer who is religious (n=3), and that it would be more comfortable speaking with a police chaplain they already knew (n=1). A narrative from Participant 6 highlights the comfort of speaking with another officer because of similar experience:

There is a level of understanding being a police officer that others don't understand. Being in this line of work, you have experience with this type of work. It is like a mechanic telling an engineer how to do his job. It is a level of understanding and a level of respect that goes along with it because they have done the same stuff. They have treaded the same mud and spilled the same blood.

However, participants mainly discussed the disadvantages associated with internal chaplain services. Participants reported the fear of looking weak to other police officers (n=5). Participant 14 stated, “the same person you bared your soul to might be the same guy you have

to clear a building with.” Other participants expressed distrust that a police chaplain would discuss what was said during a meeting with other police officers and supervisors (n=4).

Participants also mentioned an additional level of distrust if the chaplain was a supervisor because they feared the supervisor might display passive aggressive behavior and show unfair treatment towards officers who use chaplain services (n=4). Being passed up on specialized positions and promotions were the two types of unfair treatment mentioned. Participant 18 explained why a supervisor with the dual role of being a chaplain created a biased situation:

In departments large enough to have a fulltime position would be fantastic because that would be their fulltime job, but when you have split roles where chaplain services are something you do part-time and have another role such as being the shift commander, then you blur the line on whether they would come to you. Not that they are going to share what you say, just that more of the people would not be willing to go to a chaplain who is in a biased situation.

Four advantages to using external chaplains were discussed. There was a perception that ministers have more experience in counseling compared to internal police chaplains (n=2). Speaking with an external chaplain avoids the issue associated with appearing weak to co-workers (n=2). Participant 14 explained:

In my opinion, I think it goes back to the alpha personality thing where we are all macho and all men, and the first to fight. I believe it messes with your head if you have dark secrets in your head and come across as weak or inferior in front of somebody you have to work with. That officer you bared your soul to might be the same guy you have to search a house with or you are in a barricade with and you don't want him thinking you are weak and don't want to be beside you. It boils down to you don't want to show your weakness to your peers.

Participants also perceived more trust in external chaplain services in terms of confidentiality concerns and less risk associated with supervisors and co-workers finding out (n=2). Participant 11 explained:

I would approach a volunteer preacher before I did a co-worker cause with that A-type personality, it shows a sign of weakness. I would rather it be someone I did not know

such as a volunteer I could possibly trust just a little bit more than a guy I work with who might go in the next room and start laughing or call me crazy.

Interestingly, talking to a stranger was listed as an advantage and disadvantage to using an external chaplain. (n=1). The other disadvantage to using an external chaplain was that they lack a basic understanding about the stress associated with police work (n=4).

Debriefing services. All 20 participants were asked whether they would prefer participating in an individual or group debriefing session after being involved in a critical incident at work. The individual debriefing session was conceptualized as discussing the incident with a respectable senior officer in a one-on-one setting. The group debriefing session was conceptualized as speaking with a group of peer officers who were and were not directly involved in the incident. Almost one-third of participants (30%) preferred group debriefing (n=6), while 20% preferred individual debriefing (n=4). However, most participants (35%) stated they preferred a combination of both the individual and group debriefing (n=7), and 15% did not have a preference (n=3). One participant described how individual debriefing prior group debriefing might be more effective rather than vice versa. Participant 4 explained:

The advantages to participating in a group debriefing session mentioned were getting feedback and perspectives from multiple people. The two disadvantages to group debriefing were the fear of looking weak in front of a group and that the group setting would be ineffective because police commonly joke around and do not take things serious in a group setting. I do think it needs to be the one-on-one thing first then the group. After a stressful situation comes up with me, I want to be left alone for a little bit to think about it, but it would be nice to have someone with me just to be there if I need help with something. So let me just chill, then once I calm down, I'm good.

One participant gave a personal example of how the social dynamics change in group settings when they are "formalized." Participant 1 explained:

In terms of the group setting like we were talking about earlier, there are situations like the shooting we had last month. We all checked with him to make sure he was okay. If we try to have a formal class on it, like we're going to teach you about emotional whatever. I've been to those classes. We don't listen and we don't care. We just laugh

about everything but I'm speaking from personal experience. I've been in classes on having the right mentality at work.

An advantage to an individual debriefing session is that officers might be more comfortable talking in a one-on-one setting (n=5). Interestingly, none of the participants mentioned a disadvantage to using an individual debriefing service. Participant 8 discussed his opinion on why he thinks individual debriefing would be more effective than group debriefing:

If you do it as a group, it is more like a laughing factor. I hate to put it this way, but they could say something and you could say this is fucking stupid and then you got half of the table laughing. When it is one on one, it is not like that. When I talk to my officers, one on one is best. You are not calling them out in front of everybody and making them look like an idiot. They would be more willing to talk to you one on one. They damn sure aren't going to say things in group like pissing the bed because you got scared about something. I think it should be one on one.

Participant 11 discussed why he preferred individual debriefing over group debriefing and shared a personal experience when he debriefed a newer officer after a critical incident:

Individual, the reason I say that is because each person in that incident has a different personality, the way they were raised, and their trigger points for stress are different. If we are in a group and you say something, it might really stress him out. I think the person who goes with should be somebody who has training they can call out and let him go with this guy.

Like with (Participant 7), he turned white as that paper when they told him to call an attorney because he has never seen that before. I had to tell him to calm down because that is a policy everybody goes through. To have a person who has been involved in a shooting, I was able to say 'calm down this is how the shit is going to happen,' Back to the original question, I think it needs to be an individual.

Family night event. During the first interview, I learned about a novel program called family night. Participant 1 worked at the large agency prior to his current agency and he discussed how the program helped reduce stress from work-home conflict. Participant 1 explained:

One program they had that really helped was family night. It was an event where you could bring your entire family and they talked to the family and your loved ones about taking a job that is very stressful and has extremely long hours and that we are going to

need a good support system. It was nice to have somebody tell my girlfriend, who I go home to every day, say that to her, 'they he might be pissed off when he comes home sometimes, cut him a break.' I might have had a day where I almost had to kill somebody and I don't want to be bothered about stuff when I get home. So now, I can go home and when I give her a certain look she knows that I've had a rough day and she will give me a break.

I followed up on the family night program to learn more about it so the other participants could discuss their attitudes and opinions toward this program. A week before each police academy class begins, the large municipal police department holds a reception for the new officers and their loved ones. In addition to the educational training, the loved ones get to take a tour of the police department and have an opportunity to network with each other. Almost all participants (n=18) appraised the program as beneficial. Participant 2 stated the program seemed beneficial because it would give the new officers and their loved ones a better idea on what to expect.

Participant 4 stated:

Sometimes you get home and don't feel like hearing anybody talk because of something you seen that day. That family member might think it is something they did because they just don't know. If they go to that training, they might understand why.

Participant 14 explained his thoughts on why the educational training provided at family night program would have improved his marriage if that type of training was offered when he first started his policing career:

I think spouses would be very responsive to that. I have been doing this since 1989, and for the first several years my wife did not understand why I would come home and be quiet. I did not know how to tell her without hurting her feelings that sometimes I did not want to come home and talk to her. I needed some time to destress. She understands it now, but if she would have been told that years ago, it would have been beneficial to both her and I.

The other two participants had neutral opinions toward the family night program. One participant stated it was not helpful for him because his wife at the time was always supportive towards his career in police work and that it would not have been beneficial to her. The other

participant said it did not help him because he was single at the time his academy class had family night and that his family could not make it because they all lived out of state.

Suicide prevention and support hotlines. Suicide prevention hotlines were conceptualized as support hotlines that required phone operators to have experience in police work. This is the reason why hotline services available to the general public were not mentioned in this study. Most participants (n=18) believed that suicide prevention interventions were ineffective. Explanations on why they were considered ineffective related to comments about the inability to change someone's mind once it is set. For example, Participant 4 stated:

If someone has the mindset to go through with it they are going to do it. That is what is going to happen. Not just cops, but firefighters, EMTs, and first responders. I have been doing it since 2009, and I have already seen way too much. Way more than I ever should have and I have not even been doing it long enough yet. When somebody is past that point, it does not even matter.

It is worth noting that all the participants in the rural county (n=16) knew the former sheriff when he committed suicide a few years ago. This might be a plausible reason why there was such high skepticism towards suicide prevention interventions. However, participants were in favor of support hotlines unrelated to suicide. Participant 11 explained why he thought calling over stress-related issues would help:

As far as calling a cop about stress, I think it would help to a certain degree. It would be like a baker calling and talking about stress, I would be like 'mother fucker, fuck you, you don't know what stress is.' So, it would probably help a little bit about stress because you could talk to somebody who has had, not the same experience, but something similar.

Other examples of supporting comments included, "everybody needs someone to bitch to" (Participant 11), and "I can't go home and bitch to my wife, so having another cop to call would help" (Participant 4).

Counseling services. Although the large police department was the only agency that had an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), three participants within the rural county were

employed at this large agency during the time they graduated from the police academy. All seven participants who had access to this EAP were asked whether they knew anyone who voluntarily used it, and Participant 5 was the only participant who personally knows other officers who have used it. This is likely because he was the only participant to self-disclose using an EAP service.

Participant 5 was very open to discussing his experience with using EAP services. This might be why he was one of the only two police officers who contacted me and agreed to participate in the study when the police chief sent out the email. Participant 5 discussed his first experience using the EAP in detail:

My life is pretty transparent around here because my wife was cheating on me with another officer. Everybody started talking so I said fuck it and put it out there. So I'm transparent now and don't give a shit. At least they know what really happened instead of talking behind my back. That was pretty rough. We were on mid shifts and we would hang out on the weekends together. That was what got me to the EAP in the first place. I won't go off on a tangent, but there have been issues at home that stem from the job and the EAP helps with that. I have been to the EAP for marriage counseling, counseling with a girlfriend, and personal counseling I would say EAP does help if somebody goes and seeks the help. I don't know how much it helps but it has helped the few times I have used it.

He then explained why most police officers do not need to see a counselor or use an EAP service after a critical incident:

I personally know several officers who have used it. I know some of them have used it for marriage counseling, but oddly enough I do not know any who have used it for work-based stressors. Like a call they could not get over, because that is more public in my opinion because there are like five officers on a call. So if several officers are on a call and somebody gets fucked up, they can talk it out. It sucks, you work it out with your friends and you move on with your life. It does not make sense to go see somebody who was not there. It makes more sense to talk to somebody who was there and that is how you deal with those things. So EAP seems to help with outside work issues that may be related to issues related to work, so that is what I have seen and it does work. People probably use it because it is free and counselors are expensive and insurance does not cover them in general so EAP is about the only option if you want to save yourself from breaking the bank.

This presents an ironic challenge to rural police departments. The large agencies have EAP services for debriefing after a critical incident, but officers do not feel these services are needed because they can debrief with the group of officers who were involved in the incident. However, rural agencies do not have these services and these officers do not have a group of involved co-workers to debrief with. Implications to this dilemma will be discussed in the next chapter.

Most attitudes and opinions toward counseling services were not positive. There were several comments inferring that police administrations only offer counseling services as a way of reducing civil liability on the agency. For example, Participant 16 stated:

The agencies do not care about their officers. That is 100% cover your ass policy. They don't give a shit about the officer's feelings and just want them to go through the steps in place before they can return back to work. If you have been through a stressful experience like a critical incident, you should not have to go sit down and wait to talk to somebody. To me, that is horse shit.

Participants expressed concerns about distrust in the confidentiality of using a counseling service because of fear that their administrations would find out. For example, Participant 18 stated, "The city is paying for it, how could they not find out?" Another participant mentioned how seeing a private counselor could get back to a police administration if an insurance claim is made. Participant 20 explained:

They play it like it is just for us, but it is open to all city employees. I am not sure how often it is used, but my guess is not very much. I don't feel like they go over there very often. If I have an issue with something, I will pay out of pocket and not even use my insurance because I do not want the department to know. It has not happened to me, but I can't see other people doing it different. I don't think they would hold it against you, but I would not want anyone to know.

Participant 12 also expressed concerns with confidentiality and consequences that could result if administrators found out a service was used:

If you are the agency psychologist, there is nothing confidential. If I come and talk to you on an off day, somebody is going to find out about it and somebody is going to start questioning the ability to do your job, the ability to handle stress, the ability to function as a

police officer. You may lose assignments, you may miss promotions, you might get blackballed because you went and talked to somebody about something that happened. I could go talk to somebody at another agency far away, but if I go talk to somebody at my agency, somebody is going to know.

Changes to Improve Support Services

It is worth mentioning that not many recommendations were made to improve current support services and there are several possible explanations why. Most participants were employed at an agency that did not offer support services (n=16) and they did not know enough about the services to offer suggestions on improving them. Among the four participants who currently worked at an agency that offered support services, they had limited knowledge on where the services were located and how to access them. For example, one participant stated the EAP counseling services were conducted at a place with the name “rivers” in it while his co-worker stated this was inaccurate and that he probably got confused because the counseling center is across the river. Another participant who worked at the large municipal department for over five years acknowledged that he was not very familiar with the services that the EAP offers. He mentioned being unsuccessful after trying to find out more information about the EAP via online searching. He also stated that he vaguely remembered reading something about the EAP when he was issued a policy manual about five years ago.

Although the interview responses related to this research question were less than anticipated, there were novel recommendations mentioned that have potential to improve the effectiveness of current support services and programs. The programs, policies, and services that were discussed include counseling services, chaplain programs, incentives for meeting physical fitness standards, stress management training, family services, and policy guiding critical incidents. These recommendations are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Recommended Changes to Improve Current Services

Type of Support Service	Recommended Changes for Improvement	Frequency
Counseling Service	Allow the counselors to meet officers at discrete locations	5
	Allow officers to choose their own counselor	2
	Require counselors to conduct ‘ride-alongs’	1
Chaplain Program	Implement policy stating that conversations with chaplains are entitled to confidentiality.	3
	Require that external chaplains conduct ‘ride-alongs’	1
Stress Management Training	Offering more prevention training at the police academy	1
Family Services	Conduct events like “family night” more often	1
Physical Fitness Test	Offer better incentives that encourage officers to pass the physical fitness test	2
Critical Incident Policy	Allow officers the option of returning back to work early during administrative leave for critical incident involvement	1
	Allow officers the option of going through a sleep cycle before writing a statement and seeing a counselor.	1

Two recommendations were made on improving chaplain programs. Participant 19 suggested that external chaplains without experience in police work be required to conduct a set number of “ride along” hours with police officers. This “ride along” requirement seems to be a novel suggestion aimed at minimizing the issue associated with officers’ perceptions that counselors do not understand police stress. However, it was not feasible to ask other participants

about this recommendation because it was mentioned during the 19th interview. He also provided a rationale for this recommendation:

I think it is good to have those external people, but it is important that they spend some time out here so they will have the mindset that police go through and what they deal with. It is good to debrief to somebody who has an idea about what you are talking about and what you are going through and at the same time, you have to feel like you can be open and honest with them.

The only other recommendation to improve chaplain services was to implement a policy directly stating that conversations with chaplains are entitled to confidentiality (n=3). These participants believed that a policy aimed at protecting confidentiality would increase trust and willingness to speak with a chaplain.

Three recommendations were made on improving counseling services. The most common suggestion was allowing counselors to meet officers in alternative locations to the counseling centers (n=5). For example, Participant 13 stated, “in my opinion, the agencies should get somebody to come offer the services at the department if somebody needs it.”

Two participants mentioned the freedom of allowing officers to choose their own counselor rather than the current practice of randomly assigning a counselor. Participant 4 explained:

It would be good, some people don't have the money, if the officer had a resource in mind or a specific person they wanted to talk with, the department would pay for that. You might not want to talk with the person they have in mind. You have certain people you have talked with before and they understand you. Don't just ask someone to come in that don't even know you. You might already be going to another person.

Participant 18 gave a similar recommendation:

It would make it a lot easier if we had the option of seeing the counselor we wanted and the city would cover it. Especially, in situations where officers want to talk about sensitive things such as suicide, addiction, and officer-involved shootings. You should make it aware that we are not going to hire counselors based on a low bid and that officers have the options of choosing who they want to see. An officer might also already have a working relationship with a counselor.

The last recommendation to improve counseling services was that the counselors who are contracted to work with police officers be required to conduct “ride alongs.”

Participant 6 suggested that events such the family night program be available more than just one time right before offices start the police academy. When discussing the educational aspect of the program with this participant, he stated, “my wife needed to hear that before I went to the academy.” He then paused for a few seconds and said, “My wife still needs to hear that!”

Participant 15 suggested that more resources are invested during the educational component of police stress at the police academies:

Spend more resources at the police academies on dealing with stress. Before they start grilling you. Have an on-sight APOST program that is better at letting you know what you are getting into. Have services that educates officers on PTSD from an officer’s training experience rather than someone with a PhD who is spoon fed and never got their hands dirty. Confidentiality has to be more serious or you are not going to get any results. There are people with PTSD who exercise, sleep well, don’t smoke or drink and they are fine. That would be more successful at the beginning because that way, you know where you need to go. It is like a recovering addict, they go to where they started when they have a relapse so I think it should be the same way for police officers. Addicts know where to go get free dope, but most police officers don’t know where to go to get free counseling.

Two recommendations were made on policies that guide how long an officer should wait before seeing a counselor after an officer-involved shooting and how much time they should take off work before retuning back. Current policy at the large agency mandates their officers to see a counselor and take a minimum of three days off work before being cleared for duty. Participant 19 recommended allowing the option of returning before the third day because some officers might prefer being around other officers after being involved in a critical incident. This participant also suggested a policy allowing the officer the option of going through a sleep cycle before seeing a counselor.

New Support Services

As previously mentioned in the last chapter, most of the suggestions on support services related to informal channels of support (not guided by policy) and indirect support (agency policy that indirectly helps reduce stress). These types of support are explained in the next section. However, there were five types of new support services and policies that were recommended. These suggestions are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

New Support Service Recommendations

Type of New Service or Policy	Service Details	Frequency
Social Gatherings for Officers	Agency coordinated social functions offered to officers to help them relax, destress, and spend time together outside of work	6
Extend Gatherings to their Families	Agency coordinated social functions offered to officer and their families to help them relax, destress, and spend time together	5
Services for Family Members	Network spouses and “significant others” together so they can develop support groups	5
Mentorship Services	Offer incentives to respectable senior police officers for being available to mentor other officers	4
New Policy on Stress Debriefing	After a stressful incident, allow officers alone time to destress without interruptions from dispatch	1

The most common support service suggestion was for police administrations to offer and to coordinate social functions to help officers relax, destress, and spend time together outside of work (n=6). Participant 18 recommended social functions similar to potlucks they have at work during football games and how it could give the officers with weekends off a chance to attend social functions:

The more fun stuff you could do like events would help. I think it would help keep people involved. During football season, they organize a potluck while the game is going on and we would sit there and watch the game. So we would hang out at the station and watch the game. I think that is good, but it excludes the guys with weekends off. Stuff like that and get together would go a long way.

Participant 11 explained why he recommended agency coordinated social functions:

I can reduce stress without having to talk about stress. Having more department-wide involved activities. Having a cookout or having the guys together for a football game. Just to let all the guys know we are all human, we stand up, and we can all communicate. Other participants also suggested social functions, with the only difference being that

family members and significant others are invited to attend (n=5). One of the police chiefs

(Participant 14) explained his plans for coordinating a family event:

After it cools off, I am going to have a day planned where we can go to the shooting range and work a little bit. Then we will start grilling out and inviting our friends and family to come out. Everyone can bring their guns and bring their games like corn-hole or football. I don't drink at all, but getting away from fighting crime and eating a couple of hamburgers or hotdogs or coming out to shoot at the range during non-qualification time is a de-stressor. We will bring out the old guns and have a little friendly shooting competition. I think that would be good.

Participant 6 explained how these types of family events could help reduce stress and improve the relationship he has with his wife:

Around here, and in small agencies, a lot of police officers do not get out of the house much. You don't hang out in the area that you serve and protect. I rarely leave the house for that specific reason because I'm going to run into the same people over and over again. It might be someone that I have arrested or wrote a ticket to and they might not like me. That is where that hyper awareness kicks in. So probably doing something where you like rent out a bowling alley for the night where officers and their family can just bowl and they don't have to worry about everybody. Stuff where you can do it with your family. That level comfort I have at home is a lot different than work because when I am at work, I'm around people that understand me. They have been there and done that and my wife has not, so she don't understand it like they do. My comfort level is higher at work than home because they mentally understand more than my wife does. So if I could bring my wife around people, she could understand the way I am and the reason my mentality is the way it is.

Participant 4 also suggested inviting family members to these types of social functions, and he stated, "The family members could get together and talk to each other about what goes

on. They could talk about how their husbands or wives come home and deal with things. Getting families together always helps.”

In reference to family involvement, a similar recommendation was starting a program that networks officers’ loved ones together to develop support groups (n=5). Participant 19 suggested that the police academy administrations assist with facilitating channels for networking the families together. His reasoning was that it would have potential for stress prevention if support systems were already in place from building relationships with other police families prior to graduating the academy.

Participant 20 discussed an informal support program that a small group of his co-workers started. They called it the “wife’s club” and the purpose was to set up a support group for the police officers’ wives. Participant 20 then explained why he thought it was unsuccessful:

It turned into a ‘hen party’ pretty quick. There was drama, with female-female relationships, that can be fraught anyways. Some of them thought their husbands were hot shit and by extension they thought they were hot shit and it led to nonsensical drama.

Participant 20 did however agree that a similar support service would be effective if it was supported and coordinated through a police administration. An agency supported program would be different because it would be open to all police families and significant others rather than an exclusive group of “police wives.” Participant 20 stated:

I think the goal for something like that, to bring the families in sounds good. I think it is good for them. They need an outlet too. Like us, we tend to get close with the people we work with.

A novel service recommended was mentorship support from senior police officers (n=4). Participant 15 appeared to be very adamant about the necessity of having trained and certificated officers designated to offer peer support. She then suggested that not providing peer support to officers was a way of setting them up for failure:

Your upper management has been doing police work for a long time and they should know that you should designate someone to get qualified for peer support. Every agency should have that so they can have somebody to talk to. If not, you are setting your employee up for failure. Failure to be a parent, husband, or wife.

Participant 1 provided insight on the social dynamics of receiving mentorship from veteran officers:

I've noticed in my very short time, some of the veteran officers, they typically I guess it's because they have been doing it longer, they're a lot easier to talk to you about these kinds of things and they will start the 'are you ok' conversation. I think the biggest issue with not wanting to show weakness is starting the conversation. So, I guess one way to change things is having these veteran officers start up more of these conversations like I'm having with you.

I followed up by asking if he thought veteran officers initiate these types of conversations because their confidence from years of police work offsets the fear of appearing weak.

He disagreed and stated:

I don't think it's a confidence thing. I think it's the fact that some of these veteran officers have been through some shit and some really traumatic stuff and they know from personal experience how bad is it. And when they see another officer go through something like this, they know 'hey I should go talk to this kid.'

I then asked him what type of attributes would make a veteran officer suitable for mentoring the other officers:

I think it's just having the balls to show that little bit of weakness to offer to speak with others about that. Typically, I noticed it's usually the cops, maybe they haven't been a police officer for that long, but they've been involved in serious stuff. Like there is an officer I know he was involved in a shooting and got shot several times and had to take on several guys by himself. He wasn't much older than me. So I think it is the experience. And I think some of these older officers are father figures because we're around each other more than we are our families.

Participant 12 offered a novel policy recommendation to assist officers processing a stressful event while on duty. The recommended policy would allow an officer "free time" to destress shortly after an incident occurred. Participant 12 explained:

I wish there was a way, after a DV, a fight, or a chase, somebody else could cover your area where you could go somewhere and legitimately sit and collect your thoughts for 30-45 minutes without the fear of being dispatched to a call. I think that would help because people could process it collectively and close it in their minds. I have been at an agency with 2,500 officers and it never happened.

Participant 12 then used an analogy to describe the stress associated with trying to process a stressful incident during work while simultaneously worrying about having to answer other stressful calls that come in from dispatch at any given notice:

You have to be a sprinter jogging around the track waiting for that whistle to blow. You have to constantly be jogging and when you hear that whistle, you have to sprint. Sometimes you sprint six laps and when you start jogging again you don't know if that next whistle is going to be in two seconds, two minutes, or two hours.

Indirect and Informal Support Services

Although the research questions examine attitudes and opinions toward support services that are commonly offered by police administrations, all participants in the study provided responses that were informal (not guided by agency policy) or policies indirectly related to reducing work-related stress. Therefore, two additional codes were created to capture attitudes and opinions toward work-related factors that informally and indirectly related to stress reduction and stress management.

Informal Support Services

The code "Informal Support Services" was created in efforts to capture factors that assisted officers in reducing and better managing stress, but these factors were not directly related to formal policies, services, and programs. Sub-codes were created to account for the type of person who was providing the informal support. The three types mentioned were support from co-workers, supervisors, and administrators. In terms of supervisors providing informal support, the two themes that emerged were the value of mentorship from a supervisor and the peace of mind participants have when their supervisors are readily available to help if needed. For

example, Participant 2 stated, “My chief is going to answer the phone nine out of ten times I call him, and if not, he will call right back.” Participant 1 shared an experience involving a supervisor who met him off duty at a private location because he had some personal problems he needed to talk about. Participant 1 explained:

I needed someone to talk to and tell me everything was okay. Sometimes you just need to be told that everything is going to be okay. He met me privately behind a parking lot where nobody was around and nobody knew we were there. The only people that know about this meeting were me and him and you now.

In terms of officers receiving informal support from their peers, most participants made comments related to how helpful it was in reducing stress when a peer was available to “talk things out.” Participant 6 stated:

I am still learning to deal with stress. I try to talk with another officer and get their point of view. It is easier to be told why I need to do something a certain way. I try to catch it before it gets bad. The guy I talk to has been a cop longer than I have been alive. I talk to him anytime I need someone to talk with.

There were also suggestions on ways that administrations could help officers reduce stress via informal channels. Participant 10 suggested an “open door policy” where an officer could directly express an issue or concern with an administrative level supervisor without having to follow the “chain of command” channels that are explicitly stated in policy manuals.

Participant 17 (police chief) discussed how he informally approaches his new officers in efforts to help minimize the stress that police work can have on their family relationships:

When I hire new officers, the first thing I ask them is what does your wife think about it or what does your mom think about it. That was the first question that was asked to me. They asked if I was married and I said no, so they asked about my mom. Does she get stressed out about whether you will come home from work every day? They wanted to make sure my home life was okay, and I try to do that with my officers now. I will tell them to talk with their wives, make sure everything is okay, and that they are on the same page. There was a guy in (local agency), he fought with his girlfriend every night he was at work. She called his phone a hundred times. Not sure if she thought he was screwing around or was going to get killed.

Participant 8 (assistant police chief) discussed his strategy for helping his officers from “burning out.” Once a month, he volunteers to cover a weekend patrol shift for each patrol officer that he supervises.

Indirect Administrative Policies and Services

The code “Indirect Administrative Policies and Services” was added to account for recommended policies and services that participants perceived to indirectly help reduce and better manage work-related stress. The main reason this code was created was because most of the participants’ recommendations were not directly related to policies and services that are specifically aimed at reducing stress. Most of the responses related to providing officers with better equipment, more time away from work, and increased financial incentives such as raises and additional vacation time.

However, there were feasible suggestions with implications for reducing work-related stress. Participant 18 acknowledged that mandated overtime is necessary and part of police work, but he suggested that it would be less stressful if officers are told about overtime mandates in advance rather than during shift change. He also provided a rationale for this suggestion and explained how it could increase public safety:

We barely make minimum staffing and officers often get mandated to work an extra shift. It is not as bad if you know about it days in advance, but it is bad if you think you are about to go home and are told that you have to work nine more hours. The last thing you want is to protect the city by giving a gun to a disgruntled employee deprived of sleep.

Participant 19 explained how more educational training in general police work can build confidence in decision making while performing police duties and how that can indirectly help reduce stress:

The biggest thing I would say is to offer better training to know what to do in given situations. I have had calls on the streets and not knowing what decisions to make is stressful when I feel like I do not have the resources or I am not sure what to do to

resolve the problem justly. There are many calls you go on where the case falls within the gray area. Training on how to handle these grey areas that come up would be helpful because our department could train us on what to do. We need more training on mental health so we will know what our resources are and what we have the legal right to do with them. When you have confidence in your abilities, your stress level goes down because you know exactly what needs to be done and what is expected of you.

Surprisingly, participants suggested that adding more structure would help reduce stress (n=5). Participant 11 worked at one of the small agencies and was also employed at the large agency for several years. He stated, “From what I have seen with A-type personality people, everybody needs structure. I think that all departments should have more structure. I think all PDs from the largest to the smallest should have more structure and a regimen.” Participant 18 suggested that more consistency with discipline would reduce stress and expressed frustration when commenting about how some officers get reprimanded for small infractions while other officers are not disciplined for major infractions. Participant 14 believes that working in strict agencies is less stressful than relaxed agencies:

Having everyone look the same and act the same and knowing what to expect would help reduce stress. I’ve been in agencies that were relaxed and I’ve been in agencies that were strict, and the strict agencies can be less stressful when you know what to expect.

Implications on informal and indirect forms of stress reduction and management will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Service Threshold

The code “Service Threshold” was created to assist with analyzing factors that promote and increase willingness to use support services if needed and factors that deter officers from using services. The sub-code “Barriers” was created to identify factors that are associated with conditions that create a resistance to using services. The sub-code “Bridges” was created to identify factors that increase willingness to use available support services if needed and confidence that the services have utility.

The religious nature of a chaplain's role was the only factor listed as both a bridge by some participants (n=3) and a barrier by others (n=2). Three participants self-identified as being religious and commented about how they would prefer to discuss religion if they ever used a chaplain service. Two participants self-identified as being non-religious and stated it would be uncomfortable speaking with a chaplain. However, both participants expressed support for chaplain services and made comments about having co-workers who find strength in religion.

Bridges to Support Services

Most of the data findings in this sub-code have already been discussed in the prior sections because program changes and service recommendations were made for the purpose of increasing the willingness to use services when needed. However, some of the data within this sub-code helps explain why service participation would increase if intervention workers had police experience. Participant 12 explained:

My comfort level would be better with someone like you because I could be like, 'that motherfucker pointed a gun at me, you know how it is.' We have a connection, unlike a person in the office like a psychologist holding a clipboard. I can't have that type of almost friendship conversation.

Participant 13 provided a suggestion that also highlights the comfort that police officers have when speaking with people who are able to relate when he explained why counseling services should be similar to the counseling services available to soldiers in the military. Participant 13 explained:

I think it should be like the military. The people talking to you have been through the shit first hand. If you can get somebody like that, more people would be willing to talk, compared to somebody with a PhD saying I have this degree and you should listen to what the fuck I say.

In terms of sociodemographic characteristics, being older and being a senior officer were perceived as bridges. Participant 1 stated that officers "with a lot of time in" are more

willing to use services because they are safer from criticism and retaliation if others find out.

Participant 11 discussed how getting older made him more receptive to stress-related

educational training:

So especially, when you are younger like that, I would say ‘that would never bother me.’ So, did we pay attention to it? Probably not. Would I pay attention to it now? Yes, I would. Being 45, about to turn 46, I would pay much better attention to it.

Barriers to Support Services

Participants were asked to identify factors that deter police from using available support services. The two most common responses related to the fear of looking weak to co-workers and the risk of being treated unfairly if supervisors or administrators find out services were used.

Participant 1 suggested that new officers have higher levels of distrust toward confidentiality protections than the older officers and why newer officers are more afraid to use counseling

services:

I think that was the problem with seeing a counselor because if that psychologist wanted to, he could say you were unfit for duty, and you would lose your job. I would rather just not be okay for a couple of days than to run the risk of losing my job. Especially rookie officers would not seek help because they would be scared of losing their job. As a rookie, they might think that you're not capable of being able to handle their job.

Participant 19 shared an interesting story about his sheriff making them watch a training video on PTSD and why the video content made him more resistant to ask for help:

They talked about how they regretted not coming forward about their marriage and drinking issues. What I got out of it is that these guys went to talk to somebody and they lost their jobs. One guy put a gun to his head and called the supervisor to help talk him down. They all swarmed the place and now he lost his job. Asking for help did not play out well for him and it taught me to keep your mouth shut.

Others mentioned the discomfort of having to ask for help (n=4). A narrative from

Participant 14 highlights the discomfort of asking for help and how help can be obtained without having to ask for it:

I don't know why other than it is a macho man thing that you don't want to ask for help. I have learned over the years that I can just let certain people know what is going on if I need help with something and usually they volunteer to help without having to ask. I think it is just a man thing like you don't want to ask for directions.

Case Example

A case example will be discussed and analyzed in efforts to give context to the content analysis findings. Descriptive findings will be referenced while reviewing facts about the case. Details of the case will also be used to show relationships between codes.

In summary, Participant 7 located a stolen vehicle and an officer involved shooting occurred when the suspect he confronted pointed a firearm at him. Participant 7 was not injured and the suspect suffered two gunshot wounds in the arm. I have personal knowledge of this event during the incident because I have a copy of the bodycam video. I also have personal knowledge about his experience after the incident because I reported for duty after learning what happened and sat with him at the police department for about five hours.

Participant 7 explained that he was psychologically okay with having to use lethal force because the suspect pointed a pistol at him. However, his anxiety and demeanor completely changed after the State Bureau of Investigations (SBI) arrived on scene to take over the investigation. The SBI agent confiscated his firearm and body camera before he had a chance to review the video. He was then read his Miranda Rights, advised to hire an attorney, told to report straight to the police station and not leave until they get there. He mentioned being especially worried because he did not know at that time that those were standard procedures that SBI uses.

Since the local police chief had to stay at the crime scene with SBI, he came up with a novel plan to help Participant 7 destress. The chief got approval from the local sheriff to "borrow" a deputy for the remainder of the shift. The deputy was asked to drive Participant 7 back to the police station and stay with him until SBI got there.

Other than one dispatched call that took less than 20 minutes to clear, I was at the police station with Participant 7 from the time he arrived until SBI showed up four hours later to interview him. I also stayed with him for about two additional hours after the interview. The chief's idea to have the deputy stay with him seemed very beneficial and it probably inspired the four suggestions that participants made about mentorship from senior officers.

Getting a ride back to the police station gave him an opportunity to debrief in a one-on-one capacity with a respected deputy who has over 20 years of police experience. The deputy also took his assignment very seriously. This was evidenced by following Participant 7 outside every time he smoked a cigarette and down the hall every time he went to the restroom. When Participant 7 stood up to answer the phone, the deputy answered it and told him to sit down and relax. We could both tell he was getting annoyed with the phone constantly ringing, so the deputy solved the problem by unplugging it. He also played a mentorship role by sharing "war stories" and similar experiences he encountered.

We had an informal group debriefing session because most of the local officers, deputies, and state troopers stopped by the police station to make sure everybody was okay. I noticed that Participant 7 wanted assurance that he made the right decision because he asked everyone in the group if they would have pulled the trigger. Everyone had a different perspective on the incident, but the commonality was the agreement that using deadly force was justified. For example, one officer told him not to worry because all the investigators used to be street cops and they would have shot him. Another officer stated, "He pointed a gun at you and killing that mother fucker is the only thing I would have done different."

In reference to reservations participants had about officers making inappropriate jokes in group settings, one officer made a joke that I deemed inappropriate. Participant 7 did not know

anything about his defense attorney because he was appointed by a state level police union and when he arrived, an officer said, “I know that guy, I went to his graduation when he finished law school last week.” The joke was inappropriate in the context of the situation and it seemed to exacerbate his anxiety level.

Since I was unsure how long it would take Participant 7 to process the incident and be comfortable with talking about it during an audio recorded interview, I told him to let me know when he was ready to reschedule the interview. About two months later he advised that he was ready and the interview was conducted the following week. He expressed anger during the interview when I asked him what type support services are available:

Nothing. We have no resources available. I was in an officer-involved shooting and nothing was offered to me. I was not checked medically, I was not checked physically, nobody asked if I needed to see somebody. I was not asked ‘how much time do you need off.’ It was when can you come back?

I followed up by asking if he would have talked to a professional if the opportunity would have been offered to him:

Honestly no, I just wanted to go home and talk to my daughter. Since then, would I, yes. I don’t think about it, I don’t feel bad for it, the guy that did what he did paid the price for it. I am not going to sit here at work and claim PTSD. It is what it is. It is a stigma in law enforcement. If you mention that word, you are labeled. They might think you are unfit to carry a weapon. They might make you see a psychologist and see if you are fit for duty. What are you supposed to say during these things? Do you want help, do you need help? It is a double-edged sword, you know.

I followed up by asking if there should be a policy in place that mandates officers to see a counselor after critical incident:

I think it should be mandatory across the board because it takes the personal decision-making away from the individual officer. Not that he is feeling targeted or singled out. If it is across the board then everybody should have to see the psychologist. I think that would be a great idea and more beneficial than they would ever know.

Most participants (85%) were in favor of a policy that required mandatory counselling after a critical incident (n=17). Among the three participants opposed to mandatory counseling, the reasons for opposition were that it should be a personal decision because officers know where they are at mentally and being mandated could cause additional stress. Most of the reasons for supporting mandatory counselling related to offsetting negative consequences associated with having to ask for help such as being seen as unfit for duty and showing weakness to others. Another reason for support was the public safety risk when PTS are not resolved. For example, Participant 1 stated, "I think you should still go see someone and get cleared for duty because he could end up with PTSD and snap on somebody while he's at work." Participant 11 explained how it is also a safety concern for other officers:

The people around you can see it and the people who are trained to see and noticed these things. These are the people you should see to let them ask questions and bring it out of you to get past it so you can get back to your job. The reason I say that is because that is the last thing I want to do is be on a call and clear a house with somebody like that. It worries me because I know he has not had anything. Is he going to hear something and then shot me in the back? That is always in the back of my head.

The last reason for supporting mandatory counseling was that officers are going to say they are okay after an incident when they know that they are not okay. Participant 18 used an analogy to explain his opinion on the best process for clearing an officer for duty after a critical incident:

However, most of the time, an officer would say he was good to return even if he knew he was not good. That would be like a coach and a trainer deciding on when the injured player is ready to return to the field because the player is always going to say he is ready to get back onto the field. The combination of the two is a good mix because the coach, like the supervisor, knows what goes on in the field. The physical trainer, like the counselor, might not know your stressors specifically, but they know more about the human body than a coach. So, I say the experience combined with the physical knowledge might be the best way to get them back into work.

In reference to Participant 7 stating that mandatory counseling would be "more beneficial than they would ever know," when asked to compare the stress between being a

police officer and firefighter, he discussed some stress-related symptoms that might have been minimized if a mandatory counseling policy was in place. Participant 7 explained:

I never had the stress compared to the night I had to shoot someone. I have been nervous in house fires, but it was not bad. The incident was more stressful than all ten years of being a firefighter combined. During the daytime when I am awake I am fine. Subconsciously, at night that is the issue. I will not think about it all day long. When I go to bed at night, I think about it all night. I am fighting for my fucking life. Every night, I'm involved in an officer involved shooting, stabbings, killings, and murder. Just over and over and over. I wake up soaking ass wet and I don't know how to stop it. I don't know how long these nightmares are going to last. That is the biggest issues for me. Sometimes I do not even want to go to sleep. I'll just stay up 24 hours because you don't want to deal with the bullshit when you go to sleep. It would not be that bad, but it is drug out from start to finish when I go to sleep. Before I became a fireman and police man, I considered myself a normal person. Now I dip, smoke cigarettes, drink whisky every chance I get, take Adderall to help stay awake. I say am pretty much fucked. But I don't steal and I only take medicine that is prescribed.

Findings from this study suggest that it is not uncommon for police officers to take prescription medication or abuse alcohol to cope with PTS. Although only one participant self-disclosed a PTSD diagnosis, over two-thirds of the participants self-disclosed taking medication or abusing alcohol to cope with the symptoms of PTSD (n=14). It is possible that this figure is higher because nobody in this study was asked about taking pharmaceutical prescriptions.

Stress-Related Differences across Demographics

Agency Demographics

Although there was a consensus among participants when discussing unique stressors associated with agency size, participants had different opinions on possible reasons why they believed the agency size moderated the work-related stressors. For example, Participant 14 stated officers in small agencies have less conflict with their co-workers because they rely on each other more often than officers at large agencies, and Participant 13 stated it was because there are not enough officers in small agencies to form social “clique” and exclude other officers not in the “clique.” There seems to be a paradox associated with agency size and work-related stress.

Working in a small agency and having “back up” far away produces stress and also buffers against stress because they are confident that competent help is on the way. Participant 11 shared an experience that highlights the selflessness police in small agencies have toward each other:

I would rather get hurt than anybody else. Like in that shoot out with (Participant 7). Me and the chief had an argument for about 90 seconds on who is going to go in that house first. He said, ‘I am the chief and this is my fucking jurisdiction, so I am going in first.’ I said, ‘I don’t give a fuck because you have kids and grandkids at home, let me fucking go and take it in case there is somebody behind this door.’ I want to be the person to get hurt instead of somebody else.

The participants who worked in the large agency described their relationships with co-workers differently. For example, two participants made comments about how their co-workers “stab each other in the backs” and throw each other “under the bus.” One participant stated that if he is on a call with any incompetent co-workers on his shift, he just starts “barking orders” at them so they will know what to do. Another participant made a joke about how some officers are dispatched to a call for backup and how he wished that he could call dispatch and request someone else.

Participant 14 made a valid point when he mentioned that patrol officers in rural areas have the additional stress of being in charge of everything that occurs during a patrol shift compared to large agencies that have specialized divisions to handle specific problems such as murder, rape, and traffic fatality investigations. He then explained the stress of working at agencies with only one officer per shift:

This is a small town and nine times out of ten there is only one person per shift and he is responsible for everything and he is by himself. His back up from another agency is 10-15 minutes away if he needs help and 10-15 minutes is an eternity if you are getting your head bashed in. We don’t have an officer on every street corner like the larger agencies. Cops in these small agencies will jump in their cars and help out on their off days if they hear something important come across the scanner, and that is the way it should be.

Participant 10 also discussed the additional stress of not having specialized divisions when he stated, “In the smaller agencies, there are not specialized divisions and the patrol officers do everything.” However, he had prior experience working at an agency with over 50 police officers and he explained stress associated with having specialized divisions when he stated, “In the larger departments the money making entities are the drug interdiction, patrol division from tickets, and things of that nature. The divisions making the money got special treatment.”

Participant 11 explained how micromanagement within large agencies can be stressful while simultaneously helping buffer against stress:

The paperwork was less stressful at the larger agency because you had a supervisor overlooking it and getting it correct. You knew after you finished the shift, it was done and over with and you did not have to worry about it until you went to court, if you did. And if it was a felony case, you likely did not have to go. As far as the stress there, it was a large agency and you were micro-managed. It was such a large agency, you had to look over officers because it was such a liability. If you were on a call like a murder or something like a big dope case where you had to worry about search and seizure or something like that, you always had a supervisor who was there and you did not have to worry about stuff like that. Here, at a small agency, if you don't have much experience you have to watch out because you know as well as I do with search and seizure there is not a grey area. It is either white or black.

In terms of stress comparisons across different types of agencies, only one participant had experience working as police officer on a university campus. He stated the biggest stressor working on campus was being restricted from making criminal cases and that it was common practice for his university to call the local municipal police department to come out and work criminal cases because it lowered their crime statistics. He was also the only participant who was a police officer in a different state. He stated that the population of criminals in the bordering state is much more dangerous than the current population of criminals he interacts with. He also stated that adjusting to the different criminal laws across states was stressful. The example he

used was recovering over a gallon-sized bag of marijuana seeds during a vehicle search and that the district attorney in that jurisdiction refused to prosecute this case.

Sociodemographic Differences

Since 90% of the participants were White males (n=18), Participant 3 and Participant 15 were asked whether their race and gender impacted their stress levels at work, differential treatment from co-workers, and social interactions with the general public. Participant 3 (Black male) stated:

Personally, I have not. When I got into this field, I have always told myself that ‘you know I don’t see color and that I will always treat people the way they should be treated.’ If you show me respect, I will show you respect. In terms of ‘funny business,’ I have not seen anything personally.

I followed up by confirming that he was referring to “funny business” as racism and he then stated, “Correct, I do not look at things in black and white because the only color I see is blue.”

Although Participant 3 and Participant 15 (White female) were employed at the same agency, she had a completely different perspective on her experiences being a minority. She discussed in detail how being a female officer exacerbates stress and impacts her social interactions with her co-workers and the community:

It is going to be ten times harder being a female than a male anyways. Imagine the hazing you get. Imagine the comments you get. I have experienced sexual harassment from co-workers and citizens. I have had some male officers tell me that females don’t have a place in police work. I have been on DV and stabbing calls by myself. Some females can handle it and some can’t handle it. I have never needed counseling or any type of treatment service from work, but I have seen female officers break down and cry because they could not handle the job.

She later mentioned being sexually harassed at work on a regular basis and stated that it was not uncommon for her to get sexually harassed by females as well. This led into a discussion on barriers to using support services and she explained her perspective on gender differences. She agreed that both male and female officers are resistant to asking for help, but suggested that

pathways to the resistance differ across gender. She believes that females are reluctant to ask for help because most female officers do not like expressing their feelings with others and that males are resistant to asking for help because of the social pressure to portray a masculine image. Implications on reducing the reluctance to ask for help are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore and identify (1) how police officers appraise stress-related support services, (2) suggestions on ways to improve these services, and (3) recommendations on new support services that would help reduce work-related stress. This chapter consists of a discussion on the study results, implications for social work and police practice, limitations of this study, recommendations for future research, and final conclusions. The majority of the results discussed in the prior chapter consisted of objective findings derived from descriptive data and my personal opinions on data interpretations were minimum. Therefore, in this chapter my opinions and personal experiences during police work will be triangulated with the study findings and prior research for the purpose of moving beyond the descriptive data findings, making meaning out of the study results, and strengthening the interpretations that are made. I will also discuss personal experiences during police work in an effort to rationalize and support the potential utility that the recommended implications have. This strategy is also being used because extensive personal experience in the topical area of research enhances trustworthiness (Padgett, 1998; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

Discussion of Findings

Service Use

Several results from the current study support findings in prior research that estimate EAP service use. Although estimates on EAP usage among police officers are scarce (Donnelly et al., 2015), two studies were located. One study used secondary data and found that 11% of

police officers within a large agency used an EAP counseling service (Dick, 2000). The other study included an online survey at the end of a training module; 16.2% of the participants reported using an EAP. In the current study, among the seven participants who were either currently employed at the large agency with an EAP (n=4) or previously employed at this agency (n=3), one participant reported using an EAP service that this agency provided (14.2%). Among all 20 participants who had access to EAP services or similar support services upon request, 15% reported using or attempting to use a support service (n=3). Among these three participants, one used his EAP for marriage counseling. Another participant used a chaplain service after using physical force on a combative suspect and later learning that the suspect was a juvenile. The other participant was not successful when she tried to contact and speak with an external chaplain. Participant 15 stated, “When I worked at that agency, I called that chaplain three times and he did not answer the phone. I called during the designated hours and I was not successful at reaching him.”

Occupational Stress

An unexpected finding was that, when participants were asked what they considered to be the most stressful part of police work, over half (60%) reported an operational stressor (n=12). This finding is inconsistent with decades of prior research showing that police officers are more likely to report higher levels of organizational stress than operational stress (Acquadro-Maran, Varetto, Zedda, & Ieraci, 2015; Crank & Caldero, 1991; Dick, 2000). Perhaps my role as a police officer influenced participants to discuss the glamorized portrayal of police stress when carrying out police duties (Stinchcomb, 2004). This is evidenced by three participants making comments in reference to the danger and excitement in police work being a stressor that “we” tend to gravitate towards. It is also worth noting that the “most stressful part of police work” accounted

for a specific stressor and it is unknown whether the frequency of specific organizational stressors was higher or lower than the frequency of specific operational stressors. Additionally, it is possible that the accumulation of repeated stressors might have a more negative impact than stressors from isolated incidents. that rarely occur.

The two most commonly reported stressors were public tension (n=5) and the “unknown” factors associated with responding to service calls with a potential element of danger while not knowing what they are about to walk into (n=5). Interestingly, all five of these participants stated that not knowing what is about to happen produces more stress than the stress from dealing with a crisis when it does happen. Anderson et al. (2002) conducted a study that measured physiological stress on police officers during shift work and the findings support that responding to potentially dangerous calls can be a source of anticipatory stress. A sample of 76 police officers wore heartrate monitors during their patrol shifts, and the findings showed that the average heartrate increased by 29 beats per minute while responding to potentially dangerous service calls. Also, the study found that the average heartrate increased 41 beats per minute when responding to calls that involved backing up another officer in a potentially dangerous situation.

Although most research on occupational stress in police work focuses on traumatic and critical incidents (Stinchcomb, 2004), only two participants listed dealing with critical incidents as being the most stressful part of police work. Both of these participants reported that seeing injured and deceased children was the most stressful part of police work. Interestingly, a qualitative study that explored stress-related dynamics in police worked also had two participants report that child death cases are the most stressful part of police work (Dick, 2000).

Four-fifths of the organizational stressors reported (n=4) were consistent with prior research. Unnecessary policies and procedures, micromanagement, conflict with supervisors, and

dealing with politics are sources of organizational stress that have been documented in this area of research (Anshel, 2000; Austin-Ketch & Violanti, 2012; Crank & Caldero, 1991; Elias, 2012; Stinchcomb, 2004). An interesting finding that is not consistent with prior research is the one participant who reported lack of supervision being an organizational stressor. Participant 11 stated this was the most stressful part of police work because it was his responsibility to ensure all his paperwork was done correctly and that not having a supervisor sign off on his reports produced a major source of stress on him. Although there was not any prior research located that supported the lack of supervision being stressful, prior research has revealed that working in isolation and having backup far away is a stressor (Page & Jacobs, 2011; Ricciardelli, 2018).

Research Questions

Attitudes and opinions toward services. An unexpected finding was that more participants preferred using an external intervention worker over an internal intervention worker. Conservation of Resources theory supports this finding because resources can be intangible, such as social support and the threat of losing a resource, and can produce stress (Sattler et al., 2014). Upholding a masculine image was described by participants as a resource needed to carry out police work and being perceived as weak for using a support service was identified as a threat to losing this resource. Although there is a risk of others finding out when both internal and external services are used, participants reported that the risk was greater when support services were internal.

Over two-thirds of the participants (68.8%) in the rural county expressed the need to have a psychologist or counselor on retainer (n=11). However, three-fourths of the participants in the rural county reported being able to “talk things out” with other officers or supervisors. A similar finding in Page and Jacobs (2011) was that 62.5% reported a need for more counseling services

and 70.6% preferred speaking with another officer rather than a counselor. The authors speculated that participants might have interpreted the question as counselors in their area, rather than their police agency. Although participants in the current study did not state talking to other officers was preferred over counselors, they implied that they were more comfortable with talking to other officers than non-officers.

Conservation of Resources theory offers a possible explanation on why there is an expressed need for stress-related counseling services when officers report being able to talk things out with other officers and supervisors. This theory contends that having more discretion over the use of resources can help buffer against stress (Bacharach & Bamberger, 2007). Perhaps participants in Page and Jacobs (2011) and in the current study thought that, although they had no intentions to see a counselor, having the service available would be an additional resource at their disposal and that this availability acted as a buffer against stress.

Changes to improve current services. This research question was difficult to explore because most participants (n=16) worked at an agency that offered support services either informally or on a case-by-case basis. This was problematic because most of these participants did not know enough about support services to offer suggestions on ways to improve them. Additionally, among the participants who worked at an agency that had an EAP (n=4), their knowledge about policies and procedures on using these services was minimum. Although these findings were limited, the lack of knowledge about available support highlights the need to provide more awareness about support services. Findings on EAP knowledge and service use were also consistent with prior research.

Donnelly et al. (2015) found that almost half of the participants (56.4%) reported knowing how to access their EAP. Among the participants who were currently employed at the

large agency with an EAP (n=4), two participants reported knowing they had an EAP at work, but they did not know how to go about accessing it. Also, they both stated that they vaguely remembered reading about their EAP when they were issued the agency policy manual during the new officer orientation training. One participant gave inaccurate information about where the EAP counseling center was located. Another participant who had worked at the large municipal department for over five years reported being unsuccessful after trying to find out more information about the EAP via online searches.

The most unexpected finding in this study was that most participants (85%) were in favor of a policy that required mandatory counseling after a critical incident. Only one prior study was located that inquired about recommended changes to improve support services. Powell et al. (2014) conducted a qualitative study to better understand how police investigators perceived support services and the coping mechanisms that they used. Although the job duties of patrol officers are very different from sex crime investigators, the study found that police investigators are also supportive towards mandatory counseling.

New support services. The most common new support service recommendation was that agencies coordinate and host social functions for the purpose of giving officers a chance to relax, destress, and spend time together outside of work (n=6). Female officers are sometimes excluded from social functions outside of work (Prokos & Padavic, 2002), and an agency-sponsored event would offset issues associated with officers feeling excluded. Rose and Unnithan (2015) found that officers who identify with being an “outsider” member from the police culture were more likely to report work-related stressors than officers who identified with being an inside member. This finding suggests that agency-supported social functions would

give officers a chance to build comradery and a sense of group identity would have potential to buffer against stress.

The other two most common recommendations were extending the social gatherings to include their families (n=5) and family support services aimed at networking families together to form support groups (n=5). Youngcourt and Huffman (2005) found that officers are less likely to report stress from work-home conflict when their agencies offer family support services. The least common recommendation was offering incentives to senior and respected officers for providing mentorship to their co-workers (n=4). Although peer support buffers against stress, officers are sometimes reluctant to use this form of support when these types of services are formalized (Powell et al., 2014).

Barriers to Service Use

Two major barriers to using available services were identified in this study. Participants listed numerous negative consequences from their leadership. These consequences included: the threat of termination, being deemed “unfit for duty” and placed on administrative leave, losing shift assignments, being skipped over during promotional opportunities, and not being considered for openings in the specialized divisions. Distrust towards confidentiality protections in EAPs were consistent with prior literature (Goldstein, 2006; Patterson, 2009; Waters & Ussery, 2007). The other major barrier was the fear of appearing weak and vulnerable to peers. Police are socialized by their peers to ignore stress and “plow on” (Powell et al., 2014). Seeking professional assistance for issues related to mental health is considered a sign a weakness in the police culture (Page & Jacobs, 2011; Richmond et al., 1999).

Prior research suggests that mental health stigma is a barrier to using support services (Pasciak & Kelley, 2013; Stinchcomb, 2004; Tucker, 2015). An expected finding that was not

present in the study was that mental health stigma would be identified as a major barrier that deterred police from seeking support services. Only one participant reported mental health stigma as a barrier, and his reasoning was that officers might not want to get professional help because they do not want people thinking they are “crazy.” In reference to the fear of having supervisors questioning an officer’s ability to perform duties after using a support service, there were three comments about PTSD stigma influencing the ability to perform job duties. However, the barrier to using support services was in the context of being considered unfit for duty and the threat of termination rather than concerns about being labeled as having mental health problems.

Stress-Related Differences Across Demographics

Although Participant 15 was the only female represented in the study, she provided detailed narratives on gender differences, and interestingly, some of her opinions on stress-related differences across gender were nearly identical to prior research. For example, she mentioned several additional stressors that are consistent with prior research, such as harassment from male officers and being told police work is not for woman (Jordan, Fridell, Faggiani, & Kubu, 2009; Richmond et al., 1999). Lilly et al. (2009) found that female officers are more likely to report stress when there is some type of emotional connection to a stressor, whereas male officers are more likely to experience stress when they encounter situations that might compromise their social status. Participant 15 stated that although she believed both male and female officers avoid the additional stress associated with seeking help, they had different reasons for using the same avoidance coping strategy. I followed up by asking what she thought the reasons were and she explained:

A man is supposed to be masculine. He is not supposed to cry and do things like that. So if he asks for it, he is going to feel belittled. If he is ashamed of it, he is not going to let anyone know because he is going to want to handle it internally. Personally, I don’t want anyone to know my business, I don’t like to express my feelings. I don’t like to discuss it

and I would rather handle it within. Women are emotional and have these feelings. I have them but I do not show them.

Although this narrative was in the context of stress associated help-seeking behaviors, it supports the findings in Lilly et al. (2009) because she described how stress-related pathways for male officers are linked to social status/masculinity and how the pathways for female officers are linked to emotions.

Participants reported stressors they perceived to be unique to both rural and urban policing. The unique stressors in urban policing were micromanagement, conflict with co-workers, bureaucracy, and favoritism towards the police divisions that brought in revenue (traffic and narcotics). Interestingly, not having specialized divisions was considered a unique stressor in rural police work because patrol officers are expected to carry out duties that require expertise such as murder investigations and cybercrime.

Having back up far away and being seen in public while off duty were identified as the other unique stressors in rural police work. A recent qualitative research study that explored rural police stress also reported having back up far away as a stressor (Ricciardelli, 2018). This study also found other rural stressors that were not reported in the current study, such as more gun owners per capita, large quantities of methamphetamines, large dogs running loose, and the expectation to carry out social services outside the scope of police work. A possible explanation is that participants in the current study did not report some of these issues as being stressful because most of the participants were raised in this rural county and they might have normalized high rates of gun ownership, large dogs roaming loose, and drug use in their community.

Lack of resources was another identified stressor that was unique to the participants who worked in the rural county, and this finding is consistent with prior research (Page & Jacobs, 2011). Both police chiefs interviewed during the current study stated they would implement

formal support services if funding was available. Although only participants working in the rural county reported having limited resources as stressful, they accounted for 80% of the sample. Additionally, none of these participants had access to formal support services. This finding suggests there is a dire need for social workers to advocate for more resources and to assist with the development and implementation of formal support services.

Social Work Implications

Short-Term Implications

A short-term goal is for social work to start building working relationships and rapport with police administrations. Patterson (2008) estimates that police officers spend about 80% of their time conducting social welfare services, and this finding suggests that having working relationships with social workers would reduce some of the stress associated with providing welfare services. These partnerships have potential to benefit social workers in clinical practice and academia. Prior research has suggested that police are reluctant to being interviewed by researchers in social sciences (Johnson, 2013). This is also evidenced by my original response rate being less than 2% before recruits learned that I am a police officer. Response rates would likely increase if social workers in academia build rapport with police agencies. Clinical social workers would also benefit because police agencies would be more willing to share information. For example, I have a working relationship with the social workers at the state level department of human resources. I help them locate people with child support arrearages and when these social workers locate these people and collect arrearages, it reduces the stress of officers having to go out and execute arrest warrants for unpaid child support.

The Psychiatric Emergency Response Team (PERT) that originated in San Diego County, California, is an example of a successful partnership between social workers and police officers.

When police officers or social workers learn about a mental health crisis, they team up and respond to the client's location to assist. (Health and Human Services Agency [HHS], 2019).

Due to the successful partnership between team members, PERT expanded their offered services to include homeless outreach (HHS, 2019).

Long-Term Implications

After partnerships and collaborations are made, a long-term goal is for social workers to assist police administrations with developing and implementing interventions. Although participants in the current study and prior research have found that external intervention workers are perceived to lack a basic understanding about the unique stressors in police work (Powell et al., 2014), social workers are in a unique position to offset this barrier. Police officers seem to have a connection with social workers and several findings from a social work dissertation study support that police officers are comfortable with talking to social workers about work-related problems. Young (2015) interviewed police officers on collaborations in multidisciplinary teams involving child abuse investigations. The study findings showed that police officers made numerous comments about work stressors that were unrelated to the interview topic and the questions being asked. Young (2015) also suggested future research is needed on stress management for police officers because participants were frequently introducing the topic of work-related stress and that being interviewed by a social worker seemed to provide them with an opportunity for stress management.

The barrier of having to ask for help could transition into a bridge to service use if social workers reached out and made themselves available for debriefing services after learning about a critical incident. A social work instructor at my university deserves credit for this implication because she facilitated a group debriefing session after a traumatic incident occurred at the local

probation office. My supervisor at the time was arrested for custodial rape because he was having sex with the men on his caseload. This incident was difficult to process for myself and the other probation officers because we felt betrayed and guilty for not knowing our clients were being sexually violated while we were in the bordering rooms. The social worker had a working relationship with the probation office and already built rapport with the probation officers because she counseled the sex offenders on probation. After the group debriefing session, the probation officers (including myself) made comments about how debriefing with her in a group setting helped process the event.

Since several participants listed tension with the community as a major source of stress, it is recommended that the social work profession intervenes to help improve these relationships. Some of the interventions could include providing diversity training to officers and taking on a mediation role between communities and their police administrations. Police departments have had limited success when targeting females and minorities for recruitment (Jordan et al., 2009). Promoting diversity is a strength of social work and assisting police departments with recruiting more female and minority officers would likely improve community relationships. Lack of gender and racial diversity within police departments is associated with public tension towards the police (Raganella & White, 2004).

In September of 2019, a police officer employed at the large agency was murdered in the line of duty. There was an organized civil protest advocating for more public safety funding in this community. This is the first time in my entire career that I have seen a local community rally behind and advocate for a law enforcement agency. A time-sensitive implication for social workers is to intervene while there is positive traction.

Police Practice Implications

Considering that police work is one of the most stressful occupations in the world (Austin-Ketch & Violanti, 2012), the U.S Department of Justice has been funding research grants on stress management programs for over 30 years (Goolkasian et al., 1986), and stress intervention services have been available to police for over seven decades (Kooken, 1947), police are in dire need of more adequate support services. Findings from this study revealed that participants had a diverse range of attitudes and opinions toward work-related stressors, support services for addressing these stressors, and informal strategies for obtaining support. Therefore, I am recommending that police administrations and stakeholders at the state level use a more comprehensive and holistic approach to stress management interventions. Stress management programs offered to police are more effective when multiple service options are available (Donnelly et al., 2015; Goldstein, 2006).

A holistic approach is designed to account for individual differences and specific needs within each police organization. This approach includes a variety of policies, services, and programs from a multitude of resources in efforts to address the specific areas of stress-management and health-coping behaviors such as physical health and fitness, mental well-being, resilience training, and problem-focused coping. Also, some participants preferred certain services over others and multiple options will increase the chances that officers will use a support service if needed. Additionally, multiple interventions are being recommended because some specific types of intervention services are more suitable for addressing specific stressors. For example, speaking with an EAP marriage counselor about stress associated with family problems might be more suitable than speaking with a stress management officer who is not trained in family counseling.

All three types of interventions are being recommended (primary, secondary, and tertiary interventions). Police administrations should consider implementing primary interventions because this type of intervention is considered the most effective and the least likely to be used (Patterson et al., 2014). Secondary interventions are recommended because there are numerous unavoidable environmental stressors in police work (e.g., actual and perceived threats of violence) and this type of intervention focuses on making personal changes in order to positively adapt to environmental stressors that are unlikely to change (Scott & Eber, 2003). Since police are at high risk of developing numerous severe mental health and behavioral problems such as PTSD, chronic depression, alcoholism, domestic violence, and suicide (Aamodt & Stalnaker, 2006; Anderson & Lo, 2011; Austin-Ketch & Violanti, 2012; Bishopp & Boots, 2014; Gorta, 2009; Wang et al., 2010; Weir et al., 2012), tertiary interventions are especially needed among this population because tertiary interventions focus on providing support after serious problems have developed.

The two main goals of the implications being offered are to help officers develop better coping strategies for operational stressors that are unavoidable and for police administrations to make agency changes aimed at reducing organizational stressors that are avoidable. Administrators open to making organizational changes in effort to reduce stress would also have indirect benefits because officers who perceive that their organizations are not concerned with their well-being are at risk of increased use of force involvement, receiving more citizen complaints, and using excessive sick leave (Tang & Hammontree, 1992). After implications for practice are discussed, I will suggest social work implications in the context of facilitating intervention services and building social capital with police administrations via collaborations and partnerships.

Organizational Level Implications

Short-term implications. The short-term practice implications discussed in this section are in the context of identifying police officers' stress-related needs and developing action plans for meeting the identified needs. A main reason for conducting a needs assessment is because agencies typically offer services based on what administrators think their officers need rather than asking officers what they need (Patterson, 2009). An underlying reason for the assessment is because it would demonstrate organizational support, which is a stress buffer in itself (Tucker, 2015). This section also includes participants' recommendations on simple and economic strategies that could be implemented within a few weeks. For instance, a simple strategy for disseminating current information on available resources could include hanging up a bulletin board with posted information about the services that are available and procedures for obtaining these services.

After the needs are assessed, it is recommended that administrators designate someone to review policy manuals for barriers that have potential to deter officers from using available support services. For example, although substance abuse treatment is an available EAP service, it is unlikely that an officer would use this service if there is a threat termination from a "zero tolerance" drug policy. This type of policy could be revised by adding a clause that protects an officer from termination for seeking voluntary treatment when his or her agency would not have found out otherwise. This also includes reviewing and revising policy manuals with stigmatizing language. For example, participant 14 (police chief) stated he uses the term "counselor" instead of "psychologist" because it sounds less stigmatizing.

Adding more details in policy that outline the authority of internal and external intervention workers would have potential to offset barriers associated with distrust. I agree with

the participants who suggested willingness to use services would increase if there was an explicit policy stating that conversations with intervention workers have the same rights as “attorney/client privileges.” The misconception that counselors have the authority to deem an officer “unfit for duty” was another identified barrier to service use. This misconception has created a barrier to the point where educational training on these types of myths has been included in stress management trainings (Amaranto et al., 2003). An explicit policy stating that counselors do not have the authority to deem an officer unfit might have potential to increase service use. When services are used, this type of policy might also encourage officers to be more open with information shared during counseling sessions. This implication is based on a comment from Participant 5 when he reported being very “delicate” about what was said during his marriage counseling sessions because he was fearful that the EAP counselor would intervene and share information with his administrators if he disclosed anything that minimized his ability to perform job duties.

There was consensus among participants that offering adequate incentives for meeting departmental fitness standards would motivate officers to exercise more often. The only participant who did not fully endorse fitness incentives stated that most of the older officers would not even attempt to meet fitness standards. Among the agencies that have fitness standards, it is recommended that agencies inquire about adequate incentives that would motivate officers to meet physical fitness standards. This suggestion is being made because all four participants who represented the large agency stated that a t-shirt and eight hours of leave time did not motivate them to exercise more often and try to meet their agency’s fitness standards. In addition to improving physical fitness, this type of intervention would benefit officers in other areas of mental and physical health. Gerber et al. (2013) found that officers who

identified as being physically fit were more likely to report higher levels of mental health and better sleep hygiene compared to officers who did not report being physically fit. This finding suggests that it would be a wise investment to provide officers with resources, such as workout equipment and free gym memberships, to meet their fitness goals. It might lead to reduced on-duty traffic accidents because officer fatigue has been linked to roughly 80% of on-duty traffic accidents (Vila, 2000).

One of the most important findings in this study was that most participants were in favor of mandated counseling after a critical incident. Therefore, police administrations without mandatory counseling following a critical incident should consider adding this to their policy manuals. The reported advantages appear to significantly outweigh the reported disadvantages of mandatory counseling. Three main advantages reported were that mandatory counseling eliminates the reported barriers of looking weak for using a service, the fear of being mistreated by supervisors, and the threat of termination. Other studies have found that officers fear using support services because they believe it puts their careers at risk (Patterson, 2009; Waters & Ussery, 2007). Prior research has also shown that using support services is considered a sign of weakness in the police culture (Richmond et al., 1999).

The two other advantages to mandated counseling were that it could help increase public safety and officer safety. Participants described increased public safety in terms of mandated counseling having potential to reduce the risk of an officer having a violent mental health breakdown from unresolved stress. Participants also perceived that it would increase their personal safety because their co-workers would be better suited to make the crucial decisions that are associated with police work if they visited a counselor after a critical incident.

Two disadvantages to mandatory counseling were reported. The first reported disadvantage was that it might exacerbate stress and the other was that officers should not have to be mandated because they know where they are mentally. Although I do agree with the participant who opposed mandatory counseling because officers know their where they are mentally, I also agree with participants who stated officers are going to say they are okay when they know that they are not okay. In efforts to minimize the unlikely risk of stress being exacerbated during a mandatory counseling session, I would suggest adding a policy that allows officers the freedom of leaving after telling the counselor he or she preferred not to talk about the critical incident. Another implication would be allowing an officer at least one sleep cycle before seeing a counselor because Participant 7 seemed emotional when he stated that, after his officer involved shooting, all he wanted to do was go home and be with his daughter.

Long-term implications. A main goal of the long-term implications is for police administrations to work towards gaining perceived support from their officers. Efforts to reduce organizational stressors are being suggested because this type of stress management approach is rarely used (Patterson, 2009). Parker (2015) found that officers are more likely to perceive support services as beneficial when they report having supportive and trustworthy leadership. This study also found that support services were described as poor and nonexistent when officers reported having unsupportive leadership (Parker, 2015). This finding, along with well documented literature showing conflict with supervisors is a major source of police stress (Acquadro-Maran, Varetto, Zedda, & Ieraci, 2015; Crank & Caldero, 1991; Dick, 2000), suggests that leadership training for police supervisors might help reduce organizational stress and buffer against operational stress.

Although reaching the long-term goal of gaining perceived support from officers could take several years, small gestures such as giving officers access to bodycam software could help show support and eventually lead to reaching this long-term goal. The bodycam example was mentioned because a recent study found that officers mandated to wear bodycams are more likely to report organizational stress (Adams & Mastracci, 2019). A fair compromise would be allowing officers access to the software that decodes the encrypted videos. My police chief had this software installed on the computer in the patrol office and, in addition to the perceived trust and support this gesture had, it was helpful in reviewing video to ensure that police report narratives were accurately described. Furthermore, it eliminates the stress, worry, and humility of asking supervisors to delete embarrassing videos that get recorded, such as the day I forgot to turn off my bodycam before using the restroom.

Since formalizing services (e.g., peer support) was identified as barrier to service use in this study and in prior research (Powell et al., 2014), it is recommended that agencies assist with helping facilitate informal support channels for officers to use. One strategy for creating an informal channel would be assigning two patrol officers to a patrol vehicle for some of the patrol units and having officers rotate between the single and double patrol units. This type of rotation would give all patrol officers time to informally debrief with their peers. This suggestion was inspired by two participants in the current study. Participant 8 stated, “It is better for me to ride and talk and to get stuff off your chest. If you are riding by yourself it is different.” Also, Participant 2 stated that the most difficult transition between military and police work was not having that “battle buddy” always around like he did in the military. Another informal channel with implications is the participants’ suggestions to offer incentives to senior and well respected officers for mentoring other officers. The informal component of mentorship services would be

that mentors could casually provide mentorship to officers without any type of documentation, which has been an issue with formal peer support positions (Powell et al., 2014).

Organizing, coordinating, and hosting social functions for officers is another channel with potential to help officers informally debrief about work-related stressors. Group identity within the police culture has been shown to buffer against stress (Rose & Unnithan, 2015). Additionally, social functions that extend invitations to police families would be a strategy to network families together in hopes that informal support groups will develop between family members. This type of approach also has potential to reduce stress from work-home conflict because having family support services available buffers against stress (Youngcourt & Huffman, 2005).

Since a major barrier identified was distrust and fear of leadership finding out a service was used, it is recommended that administrations set up a third party “review board” to oversee EAP matters and related support services. This would help offset the fear and misconception that police administrations receive a bill for each person who visits an EAP or uses a support service. Another implication that participants suggested was allowing counselors to meet with officers at private and discrete locations. This would offset the identified barrier of concerns that officers might run into people they know if they have to sit in a lobby at a counseling center and wait for their names to be called. Another identified barrier to using external intervention services is the perception that intervention workers are unable to understand the unique stressors associated with police work. An implication with potential to offset this barrier is requiring intervention workers to conduct “ride alongs” with police officers so they can build rapport with officers and see what police stress looks like. It is also recommended that officers are allowed the option to select their own counselor rather than the common procedure of being assigned a counselor.

Participants made comments about officers who might already be working with a counselor or who might already have a counselor in mind. Participants in other qualitative research have made this suggestion (Powell et al., 2014).

Among the large metropolitan agencies without a designated stress management officer, administrations should consider making this a fulltime position. This type of position was first introduced in 1995, and the primary job duties included reviewing policies and making suggestions for reducing occupational stress (Central Florida Stress Unit, 2011). Among the medium- to small-sized agencies with limited funding, implementing a part-time stress management officer position should be considered. Prior research suggests that having an effective stress management officer would have an exponential return on investment. Unresolved stress among police has been linked to high turnover, excessive sick leave, work related accidents, increased lawsuits, decreased productivity, early medical retirement, and public tension (Hurrell et al., 1984).

Since police stress is associated with family problems, mental health conditions, and physical health problems (Anderson & Lo, 2011; Gerber et al., 2014; Austin-Ketch & Violanti, 2012), a long-term goal is implementing an intervention program aimed at improving health and fitness, psychological well-being, and family conflict resolution. Results from body mass index measurements suggest that between 60% and 65% of police officers are overweight (Shell, 2005). A health implication based on this finding is to offer educational training on diet, nutrition, and physical fitness. Mental toughness training has been shown to reduce work related stress among police officers (Rosmith, 2013). It is recommended that intervention services are offered continuously because positive results from interventions have been shown to diminish over time (Kagee, 2002).

State Level Implications

Short-term implications. Most support services are offered at the organizational level and, during the last 17 years of law enforcement work, 100% of the state level intervention services I am aware of are reactive interventions after a serious problem has already emerged rather than proactive efforts to prevent problems from occurring. Examples include early retirement incentives for first responders and life insurance policies for heart related conditions. Implementing state level interventions is especially important to assist police officers working in rural agencies because, among the five rural police departments and rural sheriff's office that participants were recruited from, none of these agencies had formal services available to assist their officers with stress-related needs.

It is recommended that states conduct an assessment to identify stress-related needs that police officers have and to locate where organizational level support services are not being offered to meet these needs. This could be something as simple as pulling out stress-related policies from the manuals and sending them to local police administrators without stress-related policies.

Also, states should conduct assessments at the organizational level to identify administrative needs to assist local agencies with providing support to their officers. Police chiefs who are members of IACP send out their policy manuals to other members to use as a template when creating new policies (IACP, 2012).

States should also consider developing support strategies that can indirectly and informally reduce police stress. This could be assisting local police administrations with reducing organizational issues that trickle down and produce stress on officers and supervisors at all levels. For example, the police department I work at cannot afford to offer health insurance to

the officers. As a result, this agency struggles keeping officers and it puts stress on the local sheriff's department because deputies had to cover our jurisdiction on night shifts during the first two years I was employed there. Since states offer retirement benefits to police officers at the local level and they already provide health insurance to thousands of state employees, it is suggested that states assess the possibility of offering state health insurance to local police.

After the needs are assessed, it is recommended that states look at other states to see what they are doing to combat police stress. Florida is a front-runner in implementing stress-management policy in the law enforcement community. LEFP offers educational services that address numerous stress-related problems and barriers to utilizing services, such as cultural changes (e.g. reducing the code of silence), stress management training, and organizational issues (Florida State University [FSU], 2016). These training services are also online and over 50,000 police officers across the country have utilized the training. It is estimated that reductions in officer-involved domestic violence have saved taxpayers over a million dollars in lawsuits and legal fees (FSU, 2016). This also includes looking at what federal law enforcement agencies are doing to address stress-related issues. For example, when FBI agents seek internal counseling services from departmental employees such as chaplains, there is written policy stating that intervention workers are required to maintain the same confidentiality standards as licensed counselors (McNally & Solomon, 1999). Participants in the current study listed this as a recommended change to increase willingness to use support services if needed.

It is recommended that states develop a plan for increasing the number of officers who receive stress management training. One specific issue of concern is that the small rural agencies are not large enough to conduct in-house training and officers working in these small agencies rarely have opportunities for stress management training. Most police officers are not properly

trained on stress management, and lack of stress management training is considered a stressor itself (Anshel, 2000; Ortega et al., 2007). A simple policy to address this need is making stress management training part of the annual CEUs required for POST certifications. It is unlikely that this policy would be a burden on officers because they are required to complete a set number of training hours each year anyways and they would get CEUs for stress management training.

Long-term implications. Most of the implications at the state level are associated with police academies because state level police organizations only account for a small piece of the state governments and most stress-related support is conducted at the organizational level. Based on participants' comments referencing the stress of trying to interpret the "grey area" of the law when making discretionary decisions in the field, police academies should consider spending more time training officers on better ways of handling this "grey area" of the law. In addition to training curriculum on the law itself, this recommendation also includes more training on guidelines and better ways to making discretionary decisions. This additional training has potential to be a stress reducer on officers because several comments were made in reference to more knowledge about the law building confidence and that increased confidence reduces the stress of worrying about making a wrong discretionary decision.

Another long-term implication is for police academies to address the "hidden curriculum" that occurs during informal training and when socializing new officers into the police culture. Police academy instructors and guest speakers encourage police cadets into displaying overly aggressive behavior to non-police and especially females (Prokos & Padavic, 2002). Addressing this issue would also increase the chances of new officers being more responsive to using support services if needed. This contention is made because during my police academy training, we spent 476 hours being socialized into displaying dominant, authoritative, and hypermasculine

identities, while discouraging us from showing weakness to others and trusting people outside of police work. The remaining four hours were spent on stress management training and accessing available support services. If this trend is common at other police academies, then it seems unlikely that an officer would seek help after adhering to the “hidden curriculum.”

Participants recommended a few family services that could be offered at the police academies. One preventive measure to reduce stress is for police academy staff to facilitate channels for networking police families together and forming family support groups. Another participant suggestion that I also recommend is offering training opportunities to police families. The training curriculum would include educating family members on how personalities change during the course of police work, why officers “shut down” after returning home from a stressful day at work, and warning signs that an officer might be having a serious problem.

Study Limitations

The purposeful sample used to answer my research questions was later identified as a major limitation to this study. Although the research questions focused on formal support services that were offered by police administrations and guided by agency policies, the large agency was the only police department that offered formal stress-related support services, which only accounted for 20% of the participants (n=4) and 14.3% of the police agencies that were represented in this study. Although this was a major study limitation, it highlights a dire need for more social work interventions aimed at assisting with the development and implementation of formal support services.

Another limitation associated with the selected sample was that only one participant reported using an EAP service. This finding helps explain an additional limitation associated with most participants lacking knowledge about formal support services and providing

information about services that were later confirmed to be inaccurate. Since most participants either had limited knowledge about formal services available to them or were employed at an agency that did not offer formal services, participants mainly discussed informal and indirect forms of support that their administrations used. In attempt to somewhat minimize this limitation and maximize the fruitfulness of this research opportunity, I directed additional attention towards better understanding informal and indirect administrative approaches that participants perceived as beneficial.

There were several minor limitations associated with the homogeneous sample. Most participants (90%) were White males. It is possible that policewomen and non-White officers may have different opinions toward work-related stress and support services. This was evidenced by comments from Participant 15 when she discussed the additional challenges she faced when interacting with male police officers and while performing job duties. Also, the sample only represented two counties in a Southern state and the study findings may not be transferable to other states outside of this region. Additionally, the sampling frame consisted of patrol officers with at least two years of experience. Caution should be used when generalizing the study findings to newer officers with limited police experience and officers who are assigned to specialized police divisions outside of patrol.

Although extended time and personal experiences related to the research topic is considered a measure to enhance trustworthiness (Padgett, 1998; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013), being a police officer also created a potential limitation for biased responses. Participants made several comments about how showing signs of weakness can be detrimental to a career in police work. This suggests that participants may have made cognitive efforts to not show signs of weakness during the interviews, especially to another police officer. There is also a possibility

that participants gave socially desirable responses, with an additional motivation to help another police officer. To offset this possibility, I was transparent about the socially desirable responses that I had been hoping for. Participants were explicitly told that I wanted their honest opinions because my long-term career goal was to give them a voice and use the findings to guide the development and implementation of more effective support services and programs.

Future Research

Future research is needed to examine whether results from this study are generalizable/transferable to policewomen, minority officers, and other geographic regions. Also, participants in the current study were patrol officers and future research is needed to examine how police officers in specialized divisions perceive support services. Although the focus of the current study was to examine formal support services guided by agency policy, participants mainly discussed informal and indirect forms of support. Future research should focus on exploring these types of support because they were clearly preferred over formal support services. Since most participants either had limited knowledge about formal services available to them or were employed at an agency that did not offer formal services, a future research study is needed that uses a sample of police officers who are knowledgeable about formal support services. Furthermore, a future study that samples police officers with experience using EAP services would shed light on identifying potential strategies for lowering resistance barriers and increasing service use.

Participants were asked open-ended questions to identify changes that would improve services, recommendations on new services that are needed, and suggestions on ways to increase willingness to use support services if needed. Quantitative survey research is needed to build on these findings and explain whether differences exist across demographics such as race, gender,

and size of police agency. Also, the study findings could be used to develop a pilot program and a future study could employ evaluation research to measure program effectiveness and outcomes.

An interesting finding was that several participants mentioned having the same type of nightmare. The common theme in these nightmares was that they were in an officer involved shooting and something interfered with their weapons discharging. Not all participants were asked about nightmares because this common theme emerged after the eighth interview. An interesting study in future research would be to examine the relationship between nightmares and work-related stress. Findings from this type of study could lead to important policy implications because the constant threat of violence is an anticipatory form of stress among police (Anderson et al., 2002), and persistent re-experiences of a traumatic event through nightmares is an intrusion symptom for a PTSD diagnosis under Criterion B (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Conclusions

The current study explored how patrol officers perceived stress-related support services. These services were framed in the context of formal and policy guided services offered by police administrations and other supportive governing bodies such as police unions. However, after conducting a few interviews, it became apparent that participants preferred more informal and indirect approaches to coping with work-related stress. This preference may be due to both internal and external services having unique barriers that deterred participants from using them. On a positive note, most participants were optimistic towards services being effective if they were used. The findings showed that the identified barriers to service use were mainly related to the external consequences of using services (i.e., perceived weakness), rather than perceived flaws in the services being offered. Therefore, the overall findings from this study suggest that

available services would be used more often if efforts were taken to lower the barriers that were identified.

In the spirit of qualitative pragmatic research and giving police officers a voice in this area of research, three comments that resonated with me during the interviews are worth concluding with. I agree with Participant 10 wholeheartedly when he described how interventions were mainly focused on work-related factors and how successful interventions focused on improving officers' lives outside of work would reduce stress and improve job performance exponentially. Participant 15 spoke volumes when she stated, "Addicts know where to go get free dope, but most police officers don't know where to go to get free counseling!" Although the physical dangers of police work are often discussed and portrayed in the media, Participant 1 made a compelling point when he stated, "Your psychological health is just as important as your body armor!"

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APPENDIX A: Participant Recruiting Script

Recruiting Script

Hello, my name is Brad Barber and I am a graduate student in the School of Social Work at the University of Alabama. I am conducting research that: (1) examines how police officers appraise agency services, (2) identifies strategies they believe would improve existing services, and (3) explores new support services they perceive could help in reducing work-related stress. I am inviting you to participate because of your current experience working as a patrol officer.

Participation in this research includes taking part in a semi-structured individual interview that is expected to last about an hour. Your participation is completely voluntary, and participation or non-participation in this research study will not affect your employment in any way. If you agree to participate, you can refuse to answer questions that you do not wish to answer and you can also stop participation at any time without penalty or repercussion.

This study is strictly for the purpose of research. There is minimal risk associated with participation in the study. There are no financial or physical risk in doing this study. I will not collect any personal identifying information during the study. The interview will be audiotaped and stored in a locked briefcase until they are transcribed into a Word document. Also, the recording will be destroyed after it is transcribed. After the audiotape is destroyed, all of the collected data in this study will be stored in a computer that is password protected and I will be the only person who has access to this data.

If you have any questions or would like to participate in the research, I can be reached at 205-393-9189 or bwbarbaer1@crimson.ua.edu.

APPENDIX B: Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Introduction: Identify work-related stressors and their knowledge of current agency resources

- What do you consider to be the most stressful aspects of police work?
- What types of services does your agency offer to combat work-related stress?

Topic 1 (Service Appraisal): Build on the last section by learning how they rate services

- How effective do you consider service ____? (each specific service)
- Why do you consider this service effective/not effective?

Topic 2 (Service Improvement Recommendations): Build on the first topic by inquiring about perceptions on changes that could help improve existing services

- Have you ever provided feedback and/or contributed to the development, implementation, or evaluation of services? – If so, please explain.
- If you were in charge of improving current services, what changes would you make in efforts to increase the effectiveness?
- Why do you think (each recommendation stated) would lead to improvements?

Topic 3 (New Services): Identify any new services that participants perceive to be helpful in reducing work-related stress

- What new services not currently available, if any, do you think would help reduce work-related stress within your agency?
- Why do you think service ____ (each service listed) would help?

Conclusion: Summarize the main points each participant made, affirm that each summary is accurately depicted, follow up on any discrepancies not affirmed, and ask follow up questions if more clarity or details are needed.

APPENDIX C: Precoding Protocol

Category 1 (Service Appraisal): Attitudes and opinions toward current services (3 themes)

Positive Appraisals

Negative Appraisals

Neutral Appraisals

Category 2 (Service Improvement): Recommendations for improving services

Several themes and subthemes are expected to emerge in this category after the data are collected and analyzed. Listed below are themes and subthemes that are expected to emerge.

Possible Outcomes

Improving trust in maintaining confidentiality

Reducing stigma

Increasing service accessibility

Better rapport between officers and intervention workers

Strategies for Improvement

Incentives for using services

Raising awareness about how to access services

Additional training for intervention workers

Category 3 (New Services): Recommendations for new services that are needed but not offered

Type of Service

Internal and external

Group focused and individual focused

Primary, secondary, and tertiary

Type of need new service would address

Coping with past trauma

Conflict with supervisors

Improving mental health status

APPENDIX D: Code Description

Category 1: Research Questions: Coded data that explicitly answers each research question

- ❖ ***Attitudes and Opinions Toward Support Services (Research Question 1):*** Appraisals on whether current stress-related policies and services were perceived as being effective in reducing and better managing work-related stress
 - ***Subcodes (9)-*** Support services that were discussed during the interviews: internal and external chaplains, individual and group debriefings, individual counseling, educational stress training, family night program, support hotlines, and physical fitness incentives (See Table 2 for more details.)
- ❖ ***Recommended Changes to Improve Support Services (Research Question 2):*** Suggestions on changes to existing services and policies that could improve effectiveness (This also includes suggestions on increasing willingness to use services if needed.)
 - ***Subcodes (6)-*** Service or policy with an improvement recommendation: counseling, educational stress training, services for family members, physical fitness incentives, critical incident policy, and chaplains service (See Table 3 for more details.)
- ❖ ***New Stress-related Support Services (Research Question 3):*** Suggestions on new support services that could help with reducing and better managing work-related stress
 - ***Subcodes (5)-*** Each type of new support service or policy that was recommended: social gatherings for officers, social gatherings for officers and their families, support services for family members, mentorship services, and new policy on stress debriefing (See Table 4 for more details.)

Category 2: Informal/Indirect Support: Data similar to the first category, but do not fit within the scope of the research questions because participant responses are **either** informal types of support not guided by agency policy **or** agency policy that indirectly reduces stress.

- ❖ ***Informal Support Services:*** Informal support (not guided by policies) from other officers, supervisors, and administrators (e.g. mentorship from supervisors).
 - ***Subcodes (3)-*** Role of person providing the informal support: supervisors, administrators and other officers/co-workers
- ❖ ***Administrative Policies that Indirectly Help Reduce Work-Related Stress:*** Recommended policies and services that would **indirectly** help officers reduce and better manage stress. Example: Although additional officers are hired for the purpose of increasing public safety, it indirectly helps reduce the stress of having a heavy workload.

Category3: Occupational Police Stress - These are the most commonly used conceptualizations of occupational stress that are operationalized in police stress research.

- ❖ **Operational Stress-** Problems associated with performing job duties (e.g. responding to traumatic events, exposure to dangerous and life-threatening work environments, and hostile social interactions when interacting with the public)
- ❖ **Organizational Stress-** Stressors related to politics, policies, and social conflict officers have with supervisors and administrators (e.g. bureaucracy, lack of agency support, conflict over the distribution of limited resources, and hostile treatment from superiors)
- ❖ **Work-Home Conflict- Job related factors lead to problems at home:** Work-related conditions that create family problems and negatively impact social relationships outside of work (e.g. mandated overtime, working during major holidays, and the inability to turn off a hypervigilant mindset while off duty)

Category 4: Stress Coping Mechanisms: Positive and negative things that participants report doing to cope with work-related stress.

- ❖ **Positive Stress Coping Behavior:** Healthy behaviors that participants report doing or report their co-workers doing to help them deal with work related stress.
 - **Subcodes (4)-** Type of positive coping: exercise, hobbies, religion, and “dark humor”
- ❖ **Maladaptive Stress Coping Behavior:** Unhealthy behaviors that participants report doing or report their co-workers doing to help them deal with work related stress.
 - **Subcodes (4)-** Types of maladaptive coping: alcohol abuse, internalizing, tobacco use, and aggression towards others

Category 5 : Service Threshold: Factors that increase willingness to use services if needed and factors that increase resistance to service use

- ❖ **Barriers-** Factors that deter police from using available services
 - **Subcodes (5)-** Discomfort in asking for help, distrust in confidentiality and anonymity, fear of unfair treatment from supervisors, fear of being perceived as weak for using services, and mental health stigma
- ❖ **Bridges-** Factors that increase willingness to use services if needed *Subcodes were not created because all the data within this code paralleled to the recommended changes to improve current services (Research Question 2/Table 3).*

Category 6: Stress-Related Differences across Agency Types- Stress-related comparisons

- ❖ **Large Municipal Agencies (>100 Officers) vs. Rural Police Agencies (<10 Officers):** Stress-related differences between police departments with over 100 sworn officers and rural police departments/sheriff offices with less than 10 sworn officers
- ❖ **Police Departments vs. County Sheriff Offices vs. University Police Departments:** Stress-related differences between city, county, and university police agencies

Category 7: Stress-Related Comparisons between Policing and Related Professions:

Comparisons on the similarities and differences between stress-related dynamics in among police, firefighters, and military soldiers

- ❖ *Military vs. Police Stress:* Similarities and differences between police and military work
- ❖ *Firefighter vs. Police Stress:* Similarities and differences between police and firefighters

APPENDIX E: IRB Approval Letter



Office of the Vice President for
Research & Economic Development
Office for Research Compliance

February 8, 2019

Brad Barber
School of Social Work
The University of Alabama
Box 870314

Re: IRB # 18-OR-112-R1 "Institutional Support Services for Stress Management among Police Officers"

Dear Mr. Barber:

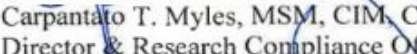
The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your renewal application. Your renewal application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. You have also been granted the requested waiver of documentation of informed consent. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

The approval for your application will lapse on February 5, 2020. If your research will continue beyond this date, please submit a continuing review to the IRB as required by University policy before the lapse. Please note, any modifications made in research design, methodology, or procedures must be submitted to and approved by the IRB before implementation. Please submit a final report form when the study is complete.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Carpanato T. Myles, MSM, CIM, CIP
Director & Research Compliance Officer

APPENDIX F: Informed Consent Form

University of Alabama Informed Consent Form

You are being asked to participate in a research study that is examining attitudes toward support services offered by your agency, strategies you think might improve these services, and new support services that could be beneficial in reducing and managing work-related stress. Most police officers are reluctant to use agency support services and they commonly use maladaptive strategies for coping with stress. The results of this study will show types of new services that are needed and strategies for improving existing services. This study is being done by Brad Barber. He is a graduate student at the University of Alabama and this study is for his dissertation.

Your participation will consist of taking part in a semi-structured individual interview that will last about an hour. Although the interview will be audiotaped, the recording will be destroyed after it is transcribed. All participation is voluntary. Should you become uncomfortable about the discussion, you can choose to leave at any time. You can choose not to answer questions. This study is strictly for purposes of research. Your participation or non-participation in this research study will not affect your employment.

There is minimal risk associated with participation in the study. There are no financial or physical risk in doing this study. If talking about stress causing you problematic distress, free counseling service is available at the DCH Employee Assistance Program [(201 Towncenter Blvd. N. Tuscaloosa, AL; (205-759-7890)].

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board (IRB) is a committee that looks out for the ethical treatment of people in research studies. They may look at the study records if they wish. This is done to be sure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned. If you have any questions regarding the research project, you can contact Dr. Gordon MacNeil in the School of Social Work at the University of Alabama at 348-3939. Also, you may contact Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer at UA, at 205-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066. You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach website at http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html or email us at participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu. After you participate, you are encouraged to complete the survey for research participants that is online at the outreach website or you may ask the investigator for a copy of it and mail it to the University Office for Research Compliance, Box 870127, 358 Rose Administration Building, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0127.

Please check this box if you agree to be in this study. _____

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IRB
CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 3/18/18
EXPIRATION DATE: 3/17/2019