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# Exploring the Impacts of Workplace Loneliness on Criminal Justice Senior Leaders

Johanna Papa
*Walden University*

# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Johanna Papa

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Review Committee
Dr. Clarence Williamson, Committee Chairperson,
Criminal Justice Faculty

Dr. Karel Kurst-Swanger, Committee Member,
Criminal Justice Faculty

Dr. David DiBari, University Reviewer,
Criminal Justice Faculty

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Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

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Abstract

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Doctor of Philosophy

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## Abstract

This phenomenological qualitative study aimed to explore the impacts of workplace loneliness on senior leaders of various criminal justice organizations. The theoretical framework used was Descartes' views of the self-concept theory, which explained how individuals defined and described themselves within a social context. Using purposive sampling and semistructured telephone, and email interviews of 16 criminal justice senior leaders from the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, this research was conducted to answer the overarching question of this study. Workplace loneliness was a professional hazard. The key findings revealed that at least 87% of the criminal justice senior leaders reported feeling or have felt workplace loneliness at some points in their careers and that it has impacted them physically, mentally, and emotionally. Impacts included, but were not limited to, symptoms of distress, low self-worth, anxiety, headaches, and lack of motivation. Furthermore, the participants confirmed that workplace loneliness also significantly impacted their respective organizations, families, and communities. Also, the results showed that workplace loneliness was linked to senior leaders' decreased productivity, reduced optimal performance, absenteeism, and partial decision making that could influence public policy and administration. Because executive health was reportedly understudied, the organizational cost and other implications of workplace loneliness remain unknown. This study confirmed the need for stakeholders, such as policymakers, organizations, and executives, to scrutinize these impacts and design programs and services best suited to mitigate workplace loneliness, starting with open and serious debates about this highly stigmatized phenomenon.

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# Dedication

To my family and the community, whom I serve and love. Workplace loneliness does not discriminate, so I dedicate this study to all of us.

Acknowledgments

To my family, thank you with all my heart. To my professors and cohorts, I am grateful. To Dr. Williamson and Dr. Kurst-Swanger, thank you for all your guidance.

My deepest gratitude to all of criminal justice senior leaders who participated in this study, for sharing your most intimate experiences related to workplace loneliness.

Table of Contents

# Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The 21st century was the loneliest in emotion history, making loneliness a modern-day epidemic (Alberti, 2018, p. 242). Despite extensive studies on the concept of loneliness, the literature on the impacts of workplace loneliness on senior leaders of organizations received relatively little attention. A study revealed that 52% of senior leaders frequently feel lonely, but researchers have limited knowledge of how workplace loneliness impacts their overall health, social engagements, and positional functions such as productivity, performance, and decision-making (Rokach, 2014). Loneliness also posed a severe and lasting threat to health, equivalent to smoking fifteen cigarettes a day (Matovu, 2017).

A study conducted by Courtin and Knapp (2017) exposed that loneliness has similar detrimental effects as obesity. Furthermore, the study examined the health outcomes related to loneliness and isolation in old age, which the researchers explained that loneliness and isolation were contributing factors of depression and cardiovascular ailments (Courtin & Knapp, 2017). It was critical to know that loneliness and social isolation were two independent subjects. Barbosa, Sanders, and Kokanovic (2018) described loneliness as a subjective experience that is also referred to as an individual's differing perception between the desired and actual levels of social interaction and the consequent feeling of being alone lacking companionship.

Social isolation, on the other hand, referred to the absence or low levels of social engagement, relationships, and overall support (Barbosa et al., 2018). Nevertheless, a study suggested that loneliness and social isolation could result in increased social

exclusion, reduced well-being, and grave impacts on overall health and wellness (Neves, Sanders, & Kokanovic, 2019).

Additional research concluded that loneliness was linked to other adverse outcomes such as high blood pressure, disability, and cognitive decline (Gerst-Emerson & Jayawardhana, 2015). Similarly, researchers agree on the putative effects of loneliness on both mental and physical health (see Beller & Wagner, 2018; Courtin & Knapp, 2017; Gerst-Emerson & Jayawardhana, 2015). Mainly, Beller and Wagner (2018) found that loneliness could make people less resilient to stress, have weakened immune functioning, and avoid healthy behaviors such as exercising.

Specifically, according to Frey (2018), workplace loneliness has increased due to the drastic changes in work environments such as restricted workspaces, narrowly defined job descriptions, and evolving organizational cultures. Frey added that these fragmentations at work have negative impacts on the professional culture and might increase the sense of workplace loneliness, which has significant consequences on the quality of lives as well as the professional and personal well-being of the employees. Generally, workplace loneliness was linked to increased interpersonal conflict at work, a negative impact on performance, and decreased overall health and well-being of senior leaders (Holt-Lunstad, 2018). Zumaeta (2019) explored senior leaders' experiences of workplace loneliness and identified a gap in academic literature.

Zumaeta (2019) posited that the senior managers play significant roles in the organizations and society; however, they have been significantly underrepresented as participants of various research studies. Workplace loneliness might have debilitating

impacts and could restrict a senior leader's ability to perform leadership functions effectively and successfully in his or her optimal capacity.

The unit of analysis for this research focused on the senior leaders of the U.S. criminal justice from various criminal justice organizations−such as police departments, emergency management organizations, and courts−in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area (District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia). Criminal justice senior leaders face a plethora of challenges and risks associated with their occupations. For example, law enforcement jobs exposed police officers at high levels of daily job-related stress, such as life-threatening situations and potentially traumatic events (Ward, 2017). Firefighters and emergency service personnel face similar vulnerabilities and challenges. Furthermore, court judges and clerks have different scopes of work; however, they similarly face substantial risks of stress and burnout because they make consequential decisions daily that might affect the nation's families and communities (Knowlton, 2015). The lack of information and understanding of the criminal justice senior leaders' lived experiences related to workplace loneliness would prohibit stakeholders−such as policymakers, communities, and families−to mitigate, prevent, and manage the negative consequences of workplace loneliness.

In this research, my goal was to increase awareness about the epidemic of workplace loneliness and to explore the impacts of workplace loneliness on criminal justice senior leaders through the analysis available related literature and the data collected from the participants. By exploring these impacts, stakeholders might be able to

understand the prevalence of workplace loneliness, propose intervention programs, and improve leadership effectiveness in public organizations, if found necessary.

Finally, criminal justice senior leaders are under pressure to portray specific roles and project leadership characteristics. This study's framework shaped the explorations of the participants' lived experiences related to workplace loneliness. The theory of self-concept described the aspects of self-perceptions and the roles of individuals in society. In the next section, the background of the study, the problem statement, the theoretical framework, the purpose and nature of the study, and the research questions were outlined. Specifically, the problem statement focused on the literature gap about the impacts of workplace loneliness on criminal justice senior leaders.

## Background

The study of loneliness received recognition around the 1800s right after the uprising of sociability and secularism within the realms of society and politics (Alberti, 2018). In the 19th century, scholars began to study loneliness as an extreme human ideology, from the lenses of mind sciences, economy, philosophy, and politics (Alberti, 2018). This era was essential in the study of loneliness because it was when people realized that the experiences of loneliness were not merely psychological but also physical. Most of the literature available was geared towards the study of loneliness as it related to other mental health issues such as stress, posttraumatic stress disorder, and depression (Knowlton, 2015; Ward, 2017). The study of loneliness also usually examined the older adults' lived experiences of loneliness (Alberti, 2018; van Beljouw et al., 2014). However, it was vital to note that loneliness does not discriminate. It created trouble even

for the younger population, especially those who might have experienced significant changes in patterns of social engagements due to the digital revolution (Caplan, 2007 as cited in Alberti, 2018).

The concept of loneliness in the professional setting and experienced by senior leaders in criminal justice was understudied. Workplace loneliness was a professional hazard (Beller & Wagner, 2018). Relatively, minimal academic literature about workplace loneliness and impacts were available for review and reference.

This phenomenological study was necessary because criminal justice senior leaders were exposed to many risk factors and severe consequences of workplace loneliness. Criminal justice senior leaders were underrepresented in the studies related to workplace loneliness, and there were limited resources available to understand the phenomenon. This research also filled the gap of understanding by examining the impacts of workplace loneliness on criminal justice senior leaders; to encourage the criminal justice community, particularly the senior leaders of organizations, to discuss and take a close look on workplace loneliness openly; and to recommend plausible interventions, programs, and solutions that could potentially prevent and manage the detrimental impacts workplace loneliness.

## Problem Statement

There was a growing concern about the prevalence and consequences of workplace loneliness globally. Numerous studies revealed that loneliness was a modern epidemic and a cognitive state linked to various adverse physical and mental health

conditions such as cardiovascular problems, depression, stress, anxiety, and increased mortality (Beller & Wagner, 2018; Campagne, 2019; Ozcelik & Barsade, 2018).

Workplace loneliness was considered a professional hazard because it has debilitating impacts on an individual's ability to perform at maximum capacity (Zumaeta, 2018). Because loneliness was more overtly experienced in work environments than a personal life context, Campagne (2019) explained that senior leaders of organizations were more susceptible to being lonely because of the pressures of their roles and other contributing factors such as increased social distance, lack of social support, and exhaustion (Zumaeta, 2018). A study showed that 52% of senior leaders frequently feel lonely, but researchers have limited knowledge of how workplace loneliness impacts their overall health, social engagements, and positional functions such as productivity, performance, and decision-making (Rokach, 2014). Zumaeta (2018) emphasized that the pressure of the role was a contributing factor for a senior leader to experience workplace loneliness; therefore, criminal justice senior leaders, who experience immense pressures at work, could be at a higher risk. The literature review found that most mental health and wellness programs available for criminal justice professionals focused on tackling work stress, occupational stress, burnout, and workplace conflict (Knowlton, 2015; Ward, 2017), with limited focus on workplace loneliness. None of the literature found included the perspectives of criminal justice professionals and their experiences of workplace loneliness.

Aside from the health risks, the organizational cost of workplace loneliness was exponential. Workplace loneliness has a significant linkage on occupational stress, which

was found to be a perennial issue at work and has a strong association with higher risks of chronic diseases, including diabetes heart attacks, and obesity (Valentine, Ferebeem & Heitner, 2019). The American Psychological Association (2019) explained that workplace loneliness could lead to prolonged fight-or-flight stress signaling, at which stage it could become chronic. The increased level of occupational stress resulted in extremely high annual healthcare spending, which included $432 billion on cardiovascular-related ailments, $245 billion on diabetes, and $154 billion on lung illnesses (Valentine et al., 2019). Additionally, occupational stress and burnout were associated with absenteeism and presenteeism, which might result in low productivity and decreased performance quality. Equally, the monetary costs of stress-related chronic disease such as workplace loneliness were under-examined.

Lack of knowledge about the criminal justice professionals' lived experiences related to workplace loneliness might have bearings on not only the senior leaders and their organization, but also the public, primarily because criminal justice senior leaders were responsible for leading criminal justice entities and the staff they supervise, as well as to make decisions which might influence how they enforce the law, protect the public, and maintain peace and safety. Because the criminal justice senior leaders' lived experiences related to workplace loneliness were understudied, it was difficult to gauge the prevalence and implications.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand the impacts of workplace loneliness on criminal justice senior leaders from various

organizations−such as police departments, emergency management organizations, and courts−in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. This research was distinct for two reasons: it focused on the impacts of workplace loneliness as a professional hazard, and it explored an understudied and underrepresented population in the organization, criminal justice senior leaders. To do so, 16 criminal justice senior leaders were selected using purposive sampling to participate in semi-structured interviews via telephone and email. Using 11 predetermined open-ended questions, I was able to answer the overarching research question of this study: What are the impacts of workplace loneliness on senior leaders of criminal justice organizations?

The data collected were coded and categorized using both thematic and reflective structural analyses to portray the essence of the participants' lived experiences related to workplace loneliness. The goal of this research is to fill the gap of understanding by examining the impacts of workplace loneliness on criminal justice senior leaders; to encourage the criminal justice community, particularly the senior leaders of organizations, to openly discuss and take a serious look on workplace loneliness; and to recommend plausible interventions, programs, and solutions that could potentially prevent and manage the detrimental impacts workplace loneliness.

## Research Question

For this qualitative phenomenological study, the central question framing this research was *What are the impacts of workplace loneliness on senior leaders of criminal justice organizations?*

## Theoretical Framework

The available literature and previous findings put less emphasis on the study of the criminal justice senior leaders' lived experiences related to the feelings of workplace loneliness. For this research I referred to Descartes' views of the self-concept theory, which described the aspects of self-perceptions and roles of individuals in the society (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). An individual's self-concept was based on personal judgment, assumptions of others, perceptions, and environmental factors (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006). One's self-concept heavily influenced a person's views and beliefs about a situation or other people. These beliefs mold fundamental values, which consequently dictated an individual's actions and decisions.

Lonely people generally have a negative self-concept. Heinrich and Gullone (2006) described lonely individuals as more likely to have a poor self-evaluation and those who referred to themselves in a negative and self-deprecating way. Moreover, people with opposed self-concept held pessimistic views of others and had weaker social engagements (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006). An individual who has a negative or low self-concept was more likely to be lonely due to varying factors such as lack or inability to make deep emotional connections and to establish social relationships (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006).

Therefore, this theory was selected due to its relevance to how an individual view oneself and how these perceptions might impact one's role in the society, including roles in many fields of public service, management, leadership, entrepreneurship, organizational development, and marketing (see Aanstoos, 2018). Notably, a social

connection is one of the humans' basic needs, and when social and emotional connections are lacking or insufficient, an individual might experience a deep sense of loneliness.

I posited that if a criminal justice senior leader develops a poor self-concept, one could be at risk of experiencing workplace loneliness, and subsequently face challenges in performing at an optimal capacity as a leader of an organization. The feelings of workplace loneliness, when chronic, could impact a senior leader's overall health, social engagements, and positional functions such as productivity, performance, and decision-making. The goal of this research was to identify the impacts of workplace loneliness experienced by senior leaders of criminal justice organizations. The literature review in Chapter 3 provided an exhaustive examination of the self-concept theory and gave meaning to the complexities of workplace loneliness and the participants' lived experiences relating to the phenomenon.

## Nature of the Study

The nature of this study used a phenomenological qualitative approach, which was suitable to capture the essence of the criminal justice senior leaders' lived experiences related to workplace loneliness. Ravitch and Mittenfelner Carl (2016) described qualitative research as a study design that allowed the researcher to comprehend and interpret, and reflect on the meanings of individuals, groups, or phenomena derived from personal experiences. This contextualization and reflection provided meanings and understanding of a given phenomenon. Additionally, qualitative research was not linear but interactive and recursive (Ravitch & Mittenfelner Carl, 2016). Thus, this research design was most appropriate in exploring the topic of this dissertation.

Maintaining this focus ensured alignment with the theoretical framework of this research, which was the self-concept theory. Using purposive sampling, semistructured interviews of 16 criminal justice senior leaders were conducted via email and telephone. Using 11 open-ended questions, I was able to identify the impacts of workplace loneliness on senior leaders of criminal justice organizations. Data gathered were coded and categorized in which were analyzed using both thematic and reflective structural analyses in Microsoft Excel.

## Operational Definitions of Terms

*Loneliness*: Referred to the overall concept and more in a personal sense, loneliness was defined as "an individual's subjective perception of deficiencies in his or her social relationships" (Zumaeta, 2019, p. 112).

*Social Prescription*: A referral to one or more support services and community activities to help an individual address various determinants of health such as financial, relationships, social problems, as well as to promote nonmedical interventions that might improve the patients' health behaviors and better management of their health conditions (Drinkwater, Wildman, & Moffatt, 2019).

*Workplace Loneliness*: A type of loneliness experienced in the workplace and was usually treated as a single unitary that varies only in intensity; thus, professional loneliness involves a variety of dimensions (Peplau & Perlman, 1982), which included not only emotional, social, pathological, existential, religious, and environmental dimensions but also an ontological based dimension (Karher & Kaunonen, 2015a; Karhe, Kaunonen, & Koivisto, 2018).

## Assumptions

There were three assumptions in this study. The first assumption was that criminal justice senior leaders would express their honest lived experiences related to workplace loneliness. Secondly, I assumed that the participants would have the desire to reduce, prevent, and manage the impacts of workplace loneliness. Lastly, the assumption was that the information provided would drive future research on workplace loneliness and its impacts on criminal justice senior leaders.

## Scope

Using a purposive sampling of 16 criminal justice senior leaders, the study population was interviewed using 11 predetermined open-ended questions and semistructured interviews. The participants were selected based on the qualifying criteria provided, which required that a participant must (a) be a senior leader within the criminal justice field, including law enforcement, corrections, social services, and emergency responders; (b) have a midlevel management title or higher within the criminal justice organization; (c) have at least 5 years of management experience within the U.S. criminal justice system, and (d) be leading a team and be supervising junior staffs' performance and productivity. The gender and age of the participants were noncriteria in the selection process.

## Delimitations

Because the feelings of workplace loneliness could easily be confused with other emotions such as stress, depression, and other mental health conditions, I relied on the participants to accurately identify their lived experiences related to workplace loneliness

and truthfully answer the interview questions. The participants were encouraged to elaborate on their experiences and to provide examples, as needed.

## Limitations

A potential limitation of this research was the size of the population. Initially, a few potential limitations of this research were identified in which included the size of the population, location, interview methods, and the effect of the stigma surrounding the topic of workplace loneliness. Due to the unexpected series of events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the nationwide social injustice protests and riots, I found it challenging to obtain even numbers of participants from the various criminal justice fields. Instead, the participant pool consisted of 47% were senior leaders in the law enforcement field, 27% were emergency responders, 13% were correctional officers, and the other 13% were social service managers.

The interview methods for this research also changed from conducting interviews via in-person, phone, video, and online to interviews via phone, email, and video chat due to the COVID-19 pandemic social distancing requirements to ensure everyone's safety and security. On the other hand, the subject of workplace loneliness was highly stigmatized, and I was concerned that not enough participants would be interested in participating and freely discuss their lived experiences. Nevertheless, the targeted number of responders and substantial responses to the interview questions were achieved.

## Significance of the Study

This study contributed to the growing discussions of the concept of workplace loneliness and its impacts not only on a personal level but also professionally. I hoped to

encourage open dialogue and continue conversations surrounding the epidemic of workplace loneliness and what the community, policymakers, and organizations could do to alleviate, prevent, and manage the severe impacts of workplace loneliness on criminal justice senior leaders. Notably, I encouraged senior leader participants to voice their lived experiences related to workplace loneliness to identify the impacts and recommend plausible solutions to mitigate the phenomenon.

**Potential Impact of Study on Social Change**

This research can create positive social change because it explored a modern-day epidemic, which has detrimental impacts not only on senior leaders of various criminal justice settings, but also their respective organizations, families, and the communities they serve. Through this study, stakeholders were made aware of the impacts of workplace loneliness, which provided opportunities to recommend services, policies, and programs designed to support criminal justice senior leaders who experienced or are experiencing workplace loneliness.

## Summary

As experienced by criminal justice senior leaders, the prevalence of workplace loneliness posed tremendous concerns about their overall mental and physical health, which found to have direct or indirect impacts on their abilities to lead or perform their duties effectively. Unfortunately, relatively little was known about the criminal justice senior leaders' lived experiences of workplace loneliness in the U.S. criminal justice settings and how workplace loneliness impacts the senior leaders perceived ability to lead. The definitions of loneliness were also very general, making it difficult for the

researcher to distinguish between personal and workplace loneliness. Furthermore, there was limited research about workplace loneliness as the focal point of the study.

This phenomenological qualitative study aimed to understand the impacts of workplace loneliness on criminal justice senior leaders. To understand workplace loneliness and identify impacts, I explored the theoretical framework of Descartes' self-concept theory. Chapter 1 introduced the research problem and the focus of this dissertation. In Chapter 2, I discussed the information found throughout the literature review. Lastly, Chapter 3 tackles the research design and methodology.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

## Introduction

In this literature review, I examined the subject of workplace loneliness and its impacts on criminal justice senior leaders. This report mainly assessed academic literature about loneliness and workplace loneliness, including definitions, meanings, and the potential impacts of loneliness on individuals. More specifically, I explored publications about workplace loneliness in leadership roles. For this research, workplace loneliness, as opposed to personal, was investigated. However, limited studies were distinguishing personal and professional experiences of loneliness. Because of these limitations, I examined literature that explained the general concepts of workplace loneliness, as observed in the discussions in this chapter.

In the next section of this dissertation, the literature search strategies applied to inform readers of the different databases and search key terms used to develop this report were outlined. In the next section, the theoretical framework, I explored the self-concept theory to understand better how one's perception might drive the feelings of workplace loneliness and, eventually, affect criminal justice senior leaders physically, emotionally, and mentally. At the end of the literature review section, the readers would be able to gain more insights about the purpose of this study.

In many cases, the discussions of workplace loneliness made most people feel uncomfortable because of the stigma that being lonely was shameful, embarrassing, and a detrimental state for individuals to be (Wille, Wiernik, Vergauwe, & Vrijdags, 2018). Typically, people avoided or denied being lonely. Being lonely could also be viewed as a

weakness, a quality that most people in power and authority try to avoid and overcome. Senior leaders, specifically, were less likely to admit that they were lonely because the society tends to select leaders who display leader-like, agentic qualities such as assertiveness, compassion, congeniality, and competitiveness (Wille et al., 2018). Additional examples of a leader's traits and behaviors were dominance, responsibility, achievements, and self-assurances (Wille et al., 2018).

Leaders, both men, and women, face pressures to maintain the stereotypical conceptions of the leader role (Wille et al., 2018). People within the organizations often judge their leaderships' effectiveness and potential based on these leadership standards. If a leader showed a high level of communal traits, such as being lonely, the leader could be seen as weak; hence, not leader-like. This research highlighted the criminal justice senior leaders' lived experiences related to workplace loneliness, which unveiled the contexts on how workplace loneliness impacted criminal justice senior leaders' overall health, performance, decision making, as well as how workplace loneliness affected the entire organization, families, and communities. The overarching question of this research was, "What are the impacts of workplace loneliness on senior leaders of criminal justice organizations?"

## Literature Search Strategy

### Databases Used

I conducted an exhaustive literature review using 60 peer-reviewed academic journals, books, and online publications. Upon reviewing these references, I focused on 39 scholarly sources, which included sources from PsycINFO, SAGE, PubMed,

PsycArticles, and Education Source from the Walden University Library. The Google search engine was also used to search for scholarly articles. All publications used in this literature review were peer-reviewed journal articles from 2012 to 2020. The sources of publications listed in the reference section were selected because it met the required criteria such as significant relevance to the topic of loneliness, workplace loneliness, impacts of loneliness, and the criminal justice senior leaders' experiences of workplace loneliness as well as its consequences including mental, emotional, and physical health outcomes. Most of the selected publications were also dated within the last 5 years. During the article selection process, I also ensured that the study provided the theoretical framework to clearly understand the topic of workplace loneliness as experienced by criminal justice senior leaders within various criminal justice settings in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.

### Keywords and Keywords Combinations

The following were some key search terms used in the database search engines: *workplace loneliness, loneliness, isolation, criminal justice professionals, law enforcement, mental health, executive health, leadership, UCLA Loneliness Scale, chronic loneliness, impacts of loneliness, occupational loneliness,* and *professional loneliness*.

## Theoretical Framework

Descartes invoked the concept of self through his famous adage, "I think; therefore, I am" (as cited in Wandrei, 2019). This fundamental confidence suggested that an internal self could shape and mold an individual's being if an adequate environment

were given (Wandrei, 2019). Relating to the social component, an individual's sense of self could also develop through direct interactions with others and their roles within the society. The self-concept theory was first conceptualized as the belief of social identity (James, 1980). Epstein's (1973) research and interpretation of self-concept theory explained that the conceptual self was a multidimensional cognitive representation or theory established by one's own beliefs, desires, and intentions (as cited in Bosacki, 2000). According to Tajfel (1969), the sense of identity was typically developed through group affiliations: building a reputation and self-image. Tajfel) also explained that most people were concerned about how they were perceived and prepared to protect these images and newly developed identities at all costs.

Moreover, according to Brewer and Gardner (1996), the self-concept theory was a model that explained the different ways humans define and describe themselves within a social context. The social connection was one of the humans' basic needs, and when social and emotional connections were lacking or insufficient, an individual might experience a deep sense of loneliness. Despite the growing interest in studying loneliness, there was a lack of clarity and understanding of the subject, perhaps due to a lack of focus when exploring the concept and consequences of loneliness. Wang et al. (2017) explained that there had been a growing awareness and realization among healthcare professionals, policymakers, and communities about the influence of loneliness on mental and physical health, as well as its impact on public policy and administration. However, loneliness was typically examined about other mental health topics such as depression, social isolation, suicidal behavior, personality disorders, and psychoses (Wang, et al., 2017). While

loneliness, isolation, and depression were terms typically used interchangeably, these concepts were related but not synonymous; hence, they must be defined, studied, and measured distinctively.

The self-concept theory has been applied in other fields of studies. For example, researchers Mazar, Amir, and Ariely (2019) conducted a study about the dishonesty of honest people and how the self-concept theory applies. In this research, Mazar et al. (2019) sought to understand how some people would be dishonest to gain or profit off something but would behave honestly to behave dishonestly enough to profit but would behave honestly enough to delude integrity. Intriguingly, the research revealed that when a person was a little dishonest but gained something out of it, it did not necessarily spoil or ruin one's self-view (Mazar et al., 2019). The theory of self-concept applied to this research was that people defined and perceived their acts of dishonesty, or seemingly justified such behaviors without tainting their self-image. From a psychological perspective, people made decisions about whether to be honest, or not sometimes depended on the internal and external rewards, which made acts of dishonesty to be disturbingly common.

As cited by Accenture in 2003 (Mazar et al., 2019), the overall reported U.S. property and casualty insurance was $24 billion a year; the Internal Revenue Service taxpayer fraud exceeds $300 billion annually and employee theft was approximately $600 billion per annum. Mazar et al. (2019) explained that the standard economic model of rational and selfish human behavior was the belief that people consciously and deliberately act dishonestly by weighing the trade-offs of the external benefits and costs

of the dishonest act. Therefore, when a person commits dishonesty, one has already considered what was to be expected or gained, the probability of getting caught, and the magnitude of the punishment. This internalization process of norms and values was a part of the socialization, the evaluation of one's role in society.

Senior leaders might have individual perceptions of themselves, which were influenced by others and environments. If negative, this self-concept could result in undesirable feelings and behaviors, causing a decrease in social interactions (Mazar et al. (2019). If prolonged and persisting, a senior leader might experience a sense of workplace loneliness. Because of the stigma surrounding the topic of being loneliness, criminal justice senior leaders would or could opt to deny or downplay their feelings of workplace loneliness to salvage their reputations and social appearances. If the senior leaders experienced workplace loneliness and chose to downplay those feelings, it is possible their self-concepts be influenced by external and internal factors such as their desired images amongst their peers. The goal of applying the self-concept theory to this study was to assess if self-concept, both positive and negative, influence how the criminal justice senior leaders manage, address, or deal with their lived-experienced related to workplace loneliness.

## Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

Human beings are social animals, with deep desires for social connectedness and belongingness (Hughes, Waite, Hawkley, & Cacioppo, 2004). The lack of disruption of social stability and interpersonal relationships might result in feelings of isolation (Hughes et al., 2004), and eventually become a state of loneliness, which could

potentially impact certain social functions and the overall well-being of an individual. Increased findings show that loneliness was a core part of the socioeconomical cluster, including self-esteem, mood, anxiety, anger, optimism, fear of negative evaluation, shyness, social skills, social support, dysphoria, and sociability (Hughes et al., 2004). Loneliness has also been determined as a contributor to many different health outcomes such as depression, reduced cognitive and immune functions, and mortality (Beller & Wagner, 2018).

According to Holt-Lunstad, Smith, Baker, Harris, and Stephenson (2015), loneliness could increase mortality rate at 21%, and that the mechanisms of loneliness could lead to poorer health. For example, individuals suffering from chronic loneliness might be less resilient to stress, and their immune functions might be weakened (Cacioppo, Caccoppo, Capitanio, & Cole, 2015). It was also less likely that an individual experiencing deep loneliness participated in healthy activities such as exercising (Beller & Wagner, 2018) than one who was not or less lonely. Thus, significant evidence shows that loneliness was not only detrimental to the physical health of an individual but also one's mental health. This literature review would provide an exhaustive review of the research topic.

**Definitions of Loneliness**

According to Martín-María et al. (2020), chronic loneliness is a sense of deep loneliness experienced by an individual for over 2 years. Many researchers have defined loneliness differently but thematically similar. Cacioppo et al. (2006) described loneliness as a mixture of feelings, which was complicated and compounded, that happens when

there were deficiencies in meeting the needs for intimate and social engagements. Campagne (2019), on the other hand, defined loneliness as a subjective experience of perceived social isolation and could only be measured by the individual introspective. Similarly, Zumaeta (2019) and de Jong-Gierveld (as cited by Beller & Wagner, 2018) depicted loneliness as a subjective perception of inadequate personal relationships. Additionally, the Indian Journal of Psychiatry provided several standard definitions of loneliness (Tiwari, 2013) as,

- A state of solitude or being alone.
- Loneliness was not necessarily about being alone. Instead, it was the perception of being alone and isolated that matters most, a state of mind.
- Inability to find meaning in one's life.
- Subjective, negative feelings related to the deficient social relations and a feeling of disconnectedness or isolation.

Moreover, Beller and Wagner (2018) supported previous findings that even those who were socially connected could feel a deep loneliness. On the contrary, some socially isolated individuals were not lonely and, instead, have a sense of contentment in their limited social relationships (Beller & Wagner, 2018). Peplau and Perlan (1981) defined loneliness was the contradicting state when an individual's perception and reality of interpersonal relationships with others differ. For example, if one wishes to have more or deeper interpersonal relationships but do not or cannot have a real-life (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006, p. 698).

As observed in the varying definitions and meanings of loneliness, belongingness, and connectedness were persistent concepts. The strong associations of these concepts support Baumesiter and Leary (1995) claimed that everyone has a pervasive drive and desire to build and maintain positive and meaningful interpersonal relationships, even if it was at a limited level and a smaller circle. However, these relationships could be challenging to attain or sustain in restricted environments such as strictly professional, highly competitive, and continually changing organizational settings such as criminal justice settings. Criminal justice senior leaders typically experience managerial isolation because of the nature of the job (Baumesiter & Leary, 1995) Besides, some administrative work could create separation in a psychological sense because individuals were structurally apart from each other (Zumaeta, 2019).

**Loneliness and Health Impacts**

The American Psychological Association (APA, 2017) explained that when an individual is chronically lonely, he or she is in constant exposure to heightened stress mode, which elevates the levels of salivary cortisol and triggers the release of catecholamines and glucocorticoids. This elevation could result in the activation of the DNA sequences called glucocorticoid response elements, expressed as a function of loneliness. Alberti (2018) explained that the experience of loneliness was also tangible and physical because it was linked to bodily experience; hence, not only experienced psychologically as most people believed it to be the case. These embodied experiences were observed through physical reactions. A recent study described the physical health consequences of loneliness were as detrimental as the effects of smoking and obesity

(Courtin & Knapp, 2017). According to the study conducted by Courtin and Knapp (2017), the most common results of loneliness were depression and increased cardiovascular illnesses. However, this longitudinal study confirmed that though loneliness was an underlying symptom of depression, loneliness was an independent health risk factor (Courtin & Knapp, 2017).

Because lonely individuals often associate interpersonal relationships as harmful and menacing, most social contacts and interactions could be troublesome and, in some cases, traumatic; hence, people experiencing a deep sense of loneliness might choose to distance themselves away from their support systems (Martín-María et al., 2020). When an individual was at a stage of chronic loneliness, he or she might feel that the feelings of loneliness have become something that cannot be controlled, which could result in heightened feelings of hostility, stress, pessimism, anxiety, and decreased self-esteem (Martín-María et al., 2020). Studies also linked loneliness to a decline in cognitive functions and possibly increased risk of dementia (Martín-María et al., 2020). The APA (2017) also added that loneliness could also be a risk factor for Alzheimer's and cognitive decline. A study also linked loneliness to cases of unhealthy behaviors, more reduced sleep quality, and vital exhaustion (Courtin & Knapp, 2017).

**Clinical Significance of Loneliness**

Heinrich and Gullone (2006) conducted a literature review on loneliness as one of the crucial factors of social relationship deficits. The authors urged clinicians and healthcare professionals to focus on the study of loneliness, its consequences, and treatment and shy away from the general study of loneliness in conjunction with the

treatment of other illnesses such as depression. Heinrich and Gullone (2006) divided the review into five sections: (a) Developmental and evolutionary psychology theories, and the nature and functions of social relationships; (b) loneliness as an exemplar of social relationship deficit; (c) definition of loneliness; (d) a review of theories related to loneliness; and (e) methodological and theoretical considerations as well as recommendations for future studies (p. 695). Add summary and synthesis to fully integrate the information from the literature and connect it back to your study.

Heinrich and Gullone (2006) emphasized that human beings were social by nature and that the feeling of needing to belong was a fundamental aspect of one's life to suffice the pervasive desire and maintain a balanced and positive quality of life. The authors also argued that despite the varying levels of belongingness needs of people, satisfying these needs were met usually through consistent, frequent, and positive interactions with others. These interactions help build a sense of relatedness and a demonstration of caring for one's well-being.

Psychosocial theory pertains to the importance of social relationships in human development (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006). Trust, security, a strong sense of self-identity, and a person's ability to develop deep and meaningful relationships (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006) were components of the successful development of social relationships. These components were necessary for an individual to feel socially connected and at ease within the community one belongs.

An analysis was about the social isolation, loneliness, and health in old age highlighted that loneliness and social isolation have health risks consequences that were

as detrimental as the effects of smoking and obesity (Courtin & Knapp, 2017). Social isolation was also found to have strong links to decreased overall health, reduced welfare, increased mortality, mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, and a decline in cognitive functions (Courtin & Knapp, 2017).

According to Courtin's and Knapp's research, out of 128 reviews about the association of loneliness and social isolation with health outcomes, only two did not have negative links. Because the concept of loneliness and depression were overlapping because loneliness was usually a symptom of depression, some researchers have faced challenges in evaluating the relationships between loneliness and other mental health illnesses. Nevertheless, evidence showed that loneliness was an independent risk factor for depression (Courtin & Knapp, 2017).

Based on the reviews of mechanism and causal links of loneliness and health outcomes, Courtin and Knapp (2017) found that some of the physical health outcomes of loneliness include, but were not limited to, decreased healthy behaviors and lessened quality of sleep, physical exhaustion. Thus, Courtin and Knapp (2017) argued that there was relatively little attention in the study of loneliness, particularly in intervention literature. Furthermore, the authors' review revealed gaps in the literature about loneliness, which were inconsistent in defining loneliness and distinguishing between isolation and loneliness (Courtin & Knapp, 2017). There was also no reliable means to measure the level of loneliness experienced by an individual. Ultimately, there was no agreement across disciplines as to the best way to define or measure loneliness (Courtin & Knapp, 2017).

Additionally, research suggests that persons with severe mental illness such as major depressive, bipolar, or schizophrenia spectrum disorders with psychosocial functioning might experience heightened feelings of loneliness than the average population (Dell et al., 2019). It was essential to point out that the association of loneliness and mental health illness was newly explored, and minimal literature was currently available to review. Nevertheless, the research found that loneliness and depression contributed to a lower quality of life (Dell et al., 2019).

Loneliness, notably, reduces one's quality of life because it could lead to social withdrawal and increased vigilance in assessing or reassessing relationships and how to engage with other people. Qualter, Vanhalst, Harris, Van Roekel, Lodder, Bangee, & Verhagen, 2015). The motivation to connect with others as prompted by perceived isolation was called Re-affiliation Motive (Qualter et al., 2015). Failure to reconnect or sustain the motivation to do so could lead to prolonged and chronic loneliness. When a person reevaluates his or her social connection and identifies the negative appraisal of social information, one might experience more significant depressive symptoms and deeper feelings of loneliness.

**Dimensions and Types of Loneliness**

Loneliness was a universal and subjective human experience (Rokach, 2014). It was also linked to the perceived discrepancy of the ideal and actual quality of relationships (Luo, Hawkley, Waite, & Cacioppo, 2012). According to Dell, Pelham, and Murphy (2019), loneliness was multidimensional: emotional and social. Emotional loneliness was insufficient experience of having deep and intimate connections with at

least one other person. On the other hand, social loneliness was the lack of relatedness to another social network structure (Dell et al., 2019). The level of loneliness experienced by an individual was challenging to measure because of the subjective nature and complex dimensions of the topic.

Simply put, emotional loneliness might be experienced after life-altering events in a person's life. Some examples of these circumstances were divorce, death of a loved one, and dissatisfaction felt due to lack of intimacy, either romantic or familial (Dell et al., 2019). On the other hand, social loneliness usually occurs when a person has a change in social settings and loses the sense of community and familiarity. For instance, an individual might experience feelings of social loneliness when a person relocates for work, school, or even military training (Dell et al., 2019). The sudden change of social network and possibly, the inadequacy of the companionship were also contributors of loneliness. If the relocation for work could result in loneliness, then it was safe to say that promotion or change of roles and responsibilities could also be a contributor for a person to be lonely.

According to Tiwali (2013), loneliness has three (3) types: Situational, Development, and Internal. First, situational loneliness referred to the perceived experience of loneliness due to different environmental factors such as socio-economic and cultural milieu (Tiwali, 2013). Like the emotional dimension of loneliness, undesired life-changing events such as a discrepancy in social connection, migration, interpersonal conflicts, disasters, old age, accidents, illness, disasters, or emptiness syndrome could lead to the chronic experience of loneliness.

Secondly, developmental loneliness occurs when there was an imbalance between individualism and connectedness with others. For Tiwali (2013), people have an innate desire to be intimate and have deep connections with others, and in a like manner, maintain a high level of individualism in which enable one to know and develop their real self. When an imbalance was present, an individual might experience a sense of loss of meaning in his or her life resulting in the feeling of emptiness and ultimately leads to loneliness. Some examples of situations that could lead to developmental loneliness include but not limited to individual inadequacies, developmental deficits, permanent separations, social and economic marginality, poverty, a sudden change living arrangement, and physical/psychological disabilities (Tiwali, 2013).

Lastly, Tiwali (2013) argued that living alone does not necessarily mean that a person was lonely because it was not the state of being alone that makes a person lonely, but the perception of being alone, coupled with low self-esteem and less self-worth. A person might also experience internal loneliness due to personality factors, loss of control, mental distress, stress, low self-esteem, feelings of guilt or worthlessness, and inability to cope with emerging situations (Tiwali, 2013).

**Leadership and Workplace Loneliness**

Rokach (2014) agreed with Van Vugt's, Hogan's, and Kaiser's claim that leadership has many varying roles in both groups and individuals. Leadership was an essential resource for groups because it could significantly impact the group's performance. Furthermore, leadership was an individual attribute that enables leaders to influence people and be instrumental in accomplishing their goals. Equally, leaders have

unique characteristics that allow them to shape and build teams, and the leaders' behaviors have significant impacts on their subordinates' morale, productivity, and overall performance level.

Leadership in different organizations has diverse functions; thus, different arguments could be made to the roles of state leaders, businesses, and principals (Rokach, 2014). Regardless, all leaders of organizations carry on significant loads of responsibilities, which were typically highly demanding and could put leaders in conflict with their staff, organizations, community, and even families (Rokach, 2014). Organization leaders were responsible for making critical decisions and implementing the company's visions and practices (Ng & Sears, 2012). Because ultimately, senior leaders make final and strategic decisions that significantly influence organizational outcomes and performance, they must be equipped with necessary skills and characteristics to guide and ultimately shape the organizations accordingly.

To leadership, Shamir, House, and Arthur (1993) argued that most subordinates typically select and follow leaders based on the identities, perceived qualities, and the values they represent (as cited in Ehrhart, 2012, p. 231). The expectations surrounding what an ideal leader and how a leader was supposed to be might pose an enormous pressure for leaders of organizations. Leaders were typically expected to possess distinct personal characteristics and competencies, and any deviation from the norm, such as displaying fewer masculine traits, was often perceived as a weakness; hence, the unbecoming of a competent leader. The experience of workplace loneliness and admission of such emotions, unfortunately, might be regarded as incompetence.

According to Ward (2015), mental toughness was an attribute typically observed in criminal justice professionals, which relates to how an individual tackles challenges, trials, stress, and pressures of the job. Leaders, particularly in the criminal justice field, were usually expected to demonstrate the ability to manage high stress and challenges as a part of the standard element of life with ease and confidence.

Research suggests that in the workplace, isolation, loneliness, and exasperation were everyday experiences by individuals in leadership roles (Rokach, 2014). The anecdote "lonely at the top" was often discussed when the subjects of loneliness and leadership were discussed. However, Sarah Wright (2012) conducted three separate studies of loneliness in managers and non-managers, and empirical evidence shows that loneliness did not differ by managerial status. The study revealed that managers were no more or less lonely than their subordinates and that contributing factors of loneliness in organizational settings where beyond seniority (Wright, 2012).

The researchers also emphasized that the topic of workplace loneliness as an occupational hazard was not a new phenomenon (Wright, 2012). Research suggests that social and emotional connectedness was vital factors in a less lonely environment. Albeit, most work environments do not foster a sense of intimacy, friendship, and emotional connectedness, which were required to build secure social networks, wherein loneliness was less likely to develop (Wright, 2012). Employees in stressful high-level jobs, such as in law enforcement and emergency management, might have different experiences as others in different occupational fields. For example, Chudzicka-Czupala, Stasila-Sierdzka, Rachwaniec-Szczecinska, and Grabowski (2019) conducted an assessment

identify the severity of work-related stress in different service sectors: 61 emergency workers, 92 helping professionals, and 58 knowledge workers. Chudzicka-Czupala et al. (2019) found that law enforcement officers and other public service professionals experience a distinctly higher level of severe stress than laboratory staff members. Thus, social service professionals, regardless of the field, might have a similar level of stress severity.

Most organizations' pyramid structure suggests that the top could be an isolating spot to be in; hence, lonely (Wright, 2012). Notably, senior leaders of organizations tend to receive less feedback and engage in social dialogue with other people, perhaps because personal communication at a higher level was unreciprocated due to unequal status or positions. As Wright (2012) suggested, communication in the hierarchy typically comes from the bottom-up (i.e., from subordinate to managers).

Contrary to the cliché that it's lonely at the top, researchers Bell, Rollof, Van Camp, and Karol (1990) conducted empirical research about the conceptual relationship between seniority and loneliness. Bell et al. (1990) found that there is .12 correlation between organizational loneliness and leadership and that loneliness, surprisingly, was experienced more at the bottom of the hierarchy (p. 49). The small and negative relationship found in Bell et al. 's (1990) study on workplace loneliness and leadership was surprising because loneliness was considered a professional hazard (Zumaeta, 2018), especially for top leaders of organizations due to the pressures of the roles. Senior officials of organizations were known to spend more and longer working hours than their family and friends (Wright, 2012). However, Bell et al. (1990) argued that there was a

strong positive relationship between the hours worked and loneliness. Accordingly, if the work environment was not cohesive and if individuals do not have high job satisfaction, then loneliness was more prevalent amongst people working long hours. However, for individuals with high job satisfaction and those working in less oppressive environments, the link between workplace loneliness and hours worked was irrelevant (Wright, 2012).

A critical point to remember was that the size of an organization matters when observing organizational loneliness and leadership because a small business was not comparable to a large entity (Wright 2012). Similarly, Wright (2012) explained that occupations might also impact the experiences of loneliness in an organizational setting. Wright (2012) compared the loneliness experienced by managers with professional occupations and other occupational groups. The analysis was that of comparison, the economic status of an individual might influence workplace loneliness. To further explain, reduced income and more inferior education status were influential factors in reported loneliness; hence, workplace loneliness was a result of a plethora of influencing factors such as hours worked, isolation, pressures of the role, environment, socio-economic status, and others (Wright, 2012).

**Workplace Loneliness as a Professional Hazard**

Workplace loneliness is a professional hazard, a disease, and a social epidemic (Zumaeta, 2019). In organizational settings, senior leaders are especially vulnerable to workplace loneliness because they are exposed to the pressures of the roles, which may result in a decrease of social engagement, absence of social support, and physical and mental exhaustion. Thus, understanding senior leaders' lived experiences related to

workplace loneliness is essential to examine, mainly because of the critical roles they play in the successes and failures of organizations—however, both the subject of loneliness and loneliness experienced by senior leaders are currently understudied.

It was hardly surprising that workplace loneliness was understudied, especially as a professional hazard. According to Alberti (2018), the emotional history of loneliness has been neglected in academia because most of the researchers of loneliness were demographic and social historians, not scholars of emotions and theory (p. 243). Additionally, most recent studies of executive health practices provide substantial emphasis on stress management, overall resilience, and other mental health issues such as depression and post-traumatic syndrome.

The World Health Organization declared that approximately 80% of American workers have reported feeling stressed (Kermott, Johnson, Sood, Jenkins, & Sood, 2019). Mayo Clinic conducted a cross-sectional survey of a large group of senior leaders, from January 2012 through September 2016, to assess the impact of resilience on well-being, self-reported stress, and mental health diagnoses (as cited in Kermott, 2019). This survey concluded that those senior leaders with lower resilience had a higher prevalence level of depression and anxiety compared with the than with senior leaders with a higher-resilience unit (Kermott, 2019). The cross-sectional survey on executive resilience to this current study was significant because it sheds light on the risks and vulnerabilities of senior leaders in the workplace. As Kermott (2019) emphasized that the working world was, subject to stress from economic pressures, competition, long working hours, downsizing, tight budgets, overall uncertainty, lack of support, unfair treatment, low

decision latitude, conflicting roles, poor communication, a profound sense of contribution to the society, gender inequality, and workplace bullying. (p. 1)

These consequences of the risks and vulnerabilities in the workplace, as mentioned above, were potential reasons for an individual to experience loneliness in organizational settings. The criminal justice settings could be highly stressful and traumatic and isolating for many criminal justice professionals. Because most senior leaders in the criminal justice professions were seen as people with optimal characteristics to lead groups, and most people seek leaders who have attributes demonstrating sense impartiality, integrity, competence, good judgment, generosity, modesty, and thoughtfulness (Rokack, 2014), a senior leader might not freely express their feelings and experiences of loneliness. Rokack (2014) explained that the social stigma of workplace loneliness, in which a lonely person was viewed as someone with no friends, socially undesirable, and generally unfavorable. Furthermore, there was also a social stigma that lonely people were also less psychologically adjusted, below achievers, and not as intellectually competent as their counterparts (Rokack, 2014). Hence, the participant's hesitation from openly revealing their genuine emotions about and personal account of loneliness were generally expected.

The rise of the digital revolution altered the patterns of the younger population (Caplan, 2007) (as cited in Alberti, 2018, p.243). According to Dawson-Townsend (2019), social participation has been known to promote active and healthy aging and increase the level of social networks and support systems. Specifically, Frey (2018), a physician, wrote an article about workplace loneliness in medicine. Frey (2018)

highlighted how the structural changes, also known as fragmentation, in the medical field, including but not limited to strictly defined job descriptions, limited workspaces, and increased range of practices, raised professional loneliness, which threatened the quality of clinical care.

Huey and Ricciardelli (2015) conducted a study on the relationship between rural police officers and stress. The study revealed a disparity between the role expectations and the realities of general duty police work, which then created occupational stress amongst rural police officers. Occupational stress and other health risk factors were commonly experienced by criminal justice professionals, mainly because they were always in a state of vulnerability and tension.

According to Habersaat, Geiger, Abdellaoui, and Wolf (2015), most studies about the health risk on law enforcement were focused on one specific factor. However, it was more likely that police officers' significant health problems were combinations of risk factors relevant and depending on the area of police work. Habersaat et al. (2015) conducted a study on a self-selected group of 84 Swiss state police officers from the criminal, community, and emergency divisions to assess their personal and organizational risk factors and mental and physical health indicators (p. 213).

The findings reveal those police officers were a heterogeneous population, and those risk factors and health indicators were typically impacted by personal factors and the person's view of his or her job conditions, instead of specific work environments (Habersaat et al., 2015). Currently, U.S. criminal justice professionals were under severe scrutiny from the public. Criminal justice professionals face challenges and pressing

issues such as racial disparities, excessive sentencing, immigration, policing, corruption, and such. Farkas, Matthay, Rudolph, Goin, and Ahern (2019) explained that police officers were scrutinized for using force, which was a contributor to public health issues. Nevertheless, mental health problems experienced by senior leaders in criminal justice received very little attention.

Researchers, from the Organizational Behavior Division of the Academy of Management, conducted a study on executive health concerning essential issues about health, well-being, and safety in the workplace (Campbell Quick et al., 2000). The surprising outcome of this initiative was the comparative inattention of the medical, managerial, and psychological aspects of executive health in which reveals two critical points: (1) If the CEO or the leader of an organization was healthy, then more than likely he or she would be able to also improve the health of others and the organization, as a whole; and (2) On the other hand, if an executive was unhealthy, the consequences might create significant damage and risks not only to him or herself but to others as well (Campbell Quick et al., 2000, p. 34). These negative consequences might be detrimental to the company's growth, its people, and the customers it serves.

According to Tiwari (2013), the impacts of loneliness were reportedly more severe than smoking. Loneliness was also linked to other diseases like Alzheimer's, other dementias, and the decline of the immune and cardiovascular system (para. 2). Loneliness, according to the Indian Journal of Psychiatry, was a disease because it meets the qualifications of a medical model, which were (1) a host, (2) an agent, and (3) an environment. This disease was called pathological loneliness (Tiwari, 2013). There was

an urgent need to study the concept of loneliness and begin serious dialogues to provide public and personal awareness.

Research suggests that as leaders reach the top of organizations, most of them become isolated and detached from their daily contacts and support systems. For example, when one succeeds in the top leadership, his or her peers become subordinates (Rokach, 2014), which typically triggers all sorts of potential supervisor/subordinate conflicts of interests. Despite previous studies' claims that 52% of senior leaders frequently feel lonely (Gupert & Boyd, 1984) and experiencing a pervasive sense of loneliness, researchers argue that not all leaders were necessarily lonely, or lonelier than their subordinates (Rokach, 2014). There was limited information on the socioeconomic costs of being a high-ranking official of an organization and in the public context (Zumaeta, 2019).

**Challenges and Risks of Criminal Justice Senior Leaders**

Loneliness poses severe and damaging implications on someone's quality of life, and it was problematic not only because of the undesirable feelings associated with loneliness, but also due to its linkage with cognitive decline, dementia risk, early mortality risk, and cardiovascular diseases (McHugh Power, Kee, Steptoe, & Lawlor, 2019). Moreover, loneliness has become an independent predictor of functional decline (Theeke & Mallow, 2015), and some studies have linked loneliness to different manifestations of suicidal conduct (Stravynski & Boyer, 2001). According to Theeke & Mallow (2015), loneliness mostly happens in times of life transitions requiring adjustments to consequential new situations, which often require an individual to search

for a real understanding of oneself and, in the process, establish his or her perception of belonging. A change of organizational role might be one of these life-changing transitions. Much was unknown about workplace loneliness experienced by criminal justice senior leaders; therefore, it was critical to understand the impacts of workplace loneliness on criminal justice senior leaders so stakeholders could be guided on how to properly tackle and intervene to help those experiencing the debilitating feelings of workplace loneliness.

Habersaat et al. (2015) explained that law enforcement officers have an increased risk of stress-related physical and psychological problems compared to other professions. Some of the physical problems include heart disease, chronic pain, and insomnia (Habersaat et al., 2015). Besides, some of the psychological impacts of the job include depression, domestic violence, over-eating, and abuse of illegal drugs and alcohol (Habersaat et al., 2015, p. 214). The psychological demands of the job were significantly linked to police officers' health statuses. There were many possible organizational and personal risk factors in the law enforcement field, including lack of institutional support (from colleagues and superiors), limited coping strategies when in stressful environments, and continuous exposure to a wide range of stressful situations.

Other research indicates risk and vulnerabilities that criminal justice professionals face. Grant, Lavery, and Decarlo (2018) explained that caring professionals such as nurses, firefighters, law enforcement officers, emergency medical teams commonly experience compassion fatigue. Grant et al. (2018) added that the high rates of stress and suicide in these fields were very likely due to the lack of satisfaction to belong and

inability to relate, assist, or seek help from others. Stress, fatigue, and trauma were the common risk exposures found on literature related to criminal justice professions.

The mental health stigma was a real concern among criminal justice professionals (Soomro & Yanos, 2018). A study conducted by Soomro and Yanos (2018) examined the predictors of mental health stigma among police officers. The findings revealed that despite having higher trauma exposure and PTSD symptoms in police officers than other professions, the negative stereotypes about mental illness were significantly increased among police officers than the general population. Sarah Wright (2012) argued that although workplace loneliness was considered as an occupational hazard for senior leaders of organizations, empirical shreds of evidence shows that managers were no more or less lonely compared to non-managers; thus, seniority alone was not the sole factor of loneliness at the top. Although workplace loneliness does not differ in managerial status, the enforced hierarchy could lead to social isolation (Gerst-Emerson & Jayawardhana, 2015), a crucial contributor to feeling lonely. Ozcelik and Barsade (2018) added that most people spend most of their time at work, and yet, there was minimal effort given to examining the processes and outcomes of workplace loneliness. The study of how criminal justice senior leaders experience workplace loneliness in various U.S. criminal justice settings was vital because they have broader impacts on their subordinates, communities, and the U.S. criminal justice system.

## Summary

This literature review revealed a wide range of studies on mental health problems and other health risk outcomes related to workplace loneliness. Nevertheless, after a

thorough review, I did not come across any literature directly discussing workplace loneliness as experienced by criminal justice professionals. Unexplored, criminal justice senior leaders, who were pillars of the U.S. criminal justice system, would remain highly vulnerable to the fatal consequences of a prolonged state of workplace loneliness. The consequences of this vulnerability would remain a threat not only to the U.S. criminal justice senior leaders but also potentially to the communities they serve. Furthermore, if not adequately defined, workplace loneliness would remain unevaluated and understudied, leaving everyone vulnerable to its grave implications. This research aims to bridge the literature gap by exploring the impacts of workplace loneliness experienced by senior leaders of criminal justice organizations.

Policymakers and healthcare practitioners have increasingly acknowledged that workplace loneliness has severe implications on people's quality of life, health, and overall well-being: loneliness was a disease, an epidemic that senior leaders of the organization potentially experienced at large. Likewise, there was a vast body of knowledge on the physical and mental health challenges and vulnerabilities that criminal justice professionals face.

This research would serve as a new body of literature and prompt a more extensive and in-depth conversation about workplace loneliness. It would also provide policymakers, health practitioners, and other stakeholders of the U.S. criminal justice system, including senior leaders, employees, and community recommendations on how to address, manage and prevent the impacts of workplace loneliness in leadership roles and

within respective organizations. It is critical to note that although loneliness and isolation were related subjects, these terms were not synonymous.

This literature review highlighted the different facets of the subject loneliness that must be studied more comprehensively. Workplace loneliness does pose not only psychological risks but also both physical and mental issues. Certainly, workplace loneliness was a serious threat to every human being, and this epidemic does not discriminate. The lack of definite meaning and accurate understanding of its impacts increases the threats on senior leaders' overall health risks and vulnerabilities. Without understanding the criminal justice senior leaders' lived experiences related to workplace loneliness, this modern epidemic would remain a silent professional hazard.

In the next chapter, the methods used to examine this research topic was discussed further. Using qualitative phenomenological research and a semi-structured interview approach, I collected the data from 16 criminal justice senior leaders in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. These semi-structured interviews with 11 open-ended questions revealed the impacts of workplace loneliness on criminal justice senior leaders.

# Chapter 3: Research Method

## Introduction

In this chapter, I discussed the methodology of the study. The goal of this qualitative phenomenological research was to explore the impacts of workplace loneliness on criminal justice senior leaders. The subject of workplace loneliness and its impacts were understudied. This unique research addressed the potential impacts of workplace loneliness on senior leaders of criminal justice. I interviewed 16 senior leaders of criminal justice organizations in Washington, D.C. metropolitan area about their lived experiences related to workplace loneliness. The 11 open-ended questions were designed to allow the participants flexibility to expound and probe further.

For this research, a senior leader was described as follows:

- Must be a senior leader within the criminal justice field, including law enforcement, corrections, social services, and emergency responders.
- An individual with a mid-level management title or higher within the criminal justice organization.
- Have at least five years of management experience within the U.S. criminal justice system.
- Must be leading a team and be supervising junior staffs' performance and productivity.

The gender and age of the participants were noncriteria in the selection process. The findings of this research could potentially initiate programs and resources to address the detrimental impacts of workplace loneliness. The overarching research question of

this study sought to answer, *What were the impacts of workplace loneliness on criminal justice senior leaders?* This chapter provided information about the research questions of this study, explained the research design and methods used in data collection, and the researcher's role, methodology, trustworthiness, and ethical procedures.

## Research Design and Rationale

### Research Question

RQ: What are the impacts of workplace loneliness on senior leaders of criminal justice organizations?

### Rationale for Using a Phenomenological Approach

According to Ravitch and Mittenfelner Carl (2016), the research design is useful when articulating, planning, and setting up the foundation of the research as well as the overall approach to link the theory and concepts of the research questions, the data collection methods, and data analysis. To understand the impacts of workplace loneliness on criminal justice senior leaders, the ideal research design to use was the qualitative phenomenological approach−the strategy that researchers often use to identify the essence of human experiences, as depicted by participants, about the phenomenon (Creswell, 2009). When conducting a qualitative phenomenological approach, a researcher is able to understand the participants' lived experiences by studying a small number of or limited participants through a comprehensive investigation to develop patterns and draw relationships and significance (Creswell, 2019). As the researcher, I ensured to set aside personal core principles and beliefs, or experiences to fully understand the lived experiences of the participants related to workplace loneliness.

Additionally, setting a coherent theory and guiding constructs was essential in developing a comprehensive research design because an adequate research design plan must be based on the assimilation of the theories, concepts, goals, contexts, beliefs, and sets of relationships that molds the body of the research (Ravitch & Mittenfelner Carl, 2016).

### Rational for Eliminating Other Qualitative Designs

As the researcher, I reviewed other qualitative designs and found that the phenomenological approach was the most appropriate to capture the lived experiences of the participants related to workplace loneliness. The phenomenological approach allowed me to explore the first-hand viewpoints of the participants, and gauge how they perceive or interpret their lived experiences related to, or knowledge of workplace loneliness. Because there was so much unknown about the concept of workplace loneliness, this research required flexibility in data collection.

## Role of the Researcher

The first step was to create a platform for discussions and encourage people to speak about it and share their lived experiences to understand the phenomenon. The qualitative phenomenological research was selected because it was the most appropriate method to understand and explore a phenomenon from the lens of a specific group of people. One of the most critical roles of the researcher is to protect his or her participants and develop a trusting relationship by promoting the integrity of the research, which could be achieved by safeguarding against misconduct and impropriety that could damage organizations or institutions (Creswell, 2016). As the researcher, I served as the primary data collector and data analyzer. It was also my role to build a rapport and

natural connection with the participants so they could feel comfortable discussing personal experiences related to workplace loneliness by ensuring to set aside bias, preconceptions, and prejudice throughout the research process. Responsibly, I made certain to keep the anonymity and privacy of the participants by assigning unique responder identification codes.

My role in recruiting participants was to send out invitation emails, to post advertisement on social media, and coordinate with institutional review board (IRB) to post on Walden Participant Pool. To ensure that the potential participant qualified to partake in the study, I assessed the participants' qualification and checked if they met the criteria of what senior leaders were for the purpose of the study.

Furthermore, my role in the interview process was to conduct the interview, collect the data by recoding the interview, properly storing the data, provide the participants the informed consent forms, and ensure that all data collected remain confidential, password-protected, stored properly. The interviews were conducted via telephone and email, so the role of the researcher was to ensure that the platforms were available and considered what the participants preferred and most comfortable method to use.

## Methodology

As the researcher, I identified the intent of the study in the purpose statement. The central research question, on the other hand, served as the focus of the study. To answer the research question, I ensured that the methodology and the research design aligned. In this case, the qualitative phenomenological approach was used to understand the impacts

of workplace loneliness on criminal justice senior leaders. This research used semistructured interviews with 11 open-ended questions and a purposive sampling strategy.

To initiate the data gathering, I contacted contact various organizations, including but not limited to law enforcement agencies, courts, corrections, and emergency services in Washington, D.C. metropolitan area to seek assistance in posting ads for participants. I also posted ads for participants on social media platforms, including Facebook and Instagram. Additionally, I posted an ad on the Walden University participant pool. A copy of the ad was shown in Appendix D.

**Instrumentation**

The qualitative phenomenological research design had a flexible structure. As Creswell (2009) explained, through phenomenological study, a researcher is able to draw subjective meanings of their experiences, which then permits a wider review of the phenomenon's complexities rather than narrowing purposes into limited categories. The instrumentation for data collection was semistructured interviews with 11 open-ended interview questions to make sense of the phenomenon. I also conducted a pilot study, with three participants, to ensure alignment throughout this report.

**Semistructured Interviews.** Using semistructured interviews and the 11 open-ended, predetermined, and preconstructed interview questions, my goal was to answer this research's overarching question in which gained insights into the criminal justice senior leaders' lived experiences related to workplace loneliness and to understand how they made sense of this phenomenon. Understanding the importance of delving into the

participants' lived experiences to comprehend the range of perspectives, similarities, differences, and complexities was critical to explore the impacts of workplace (Ravitch & Mittenfelner Carl, 2016). To do so, I used the *customized replication process*, which meant using the same key research questions while seeking to customize each conversation by personalizing the follow-up questions and probes for relevance and deeper context related to the research topic (see Ravitch & Mittenfelner Carl, 2016).

To ensure the alignment of the research questions with the framework of this study, I constructed the questions using the six combinations of different interview questions; thus, making it sufficient to answer the overarching question of this research. According to Ravitch and Mittenfelner Carl (2016), the 6 kinds of interview questions were as follows:

- *Background/Demographic Questions* – These are questions focused on the person's location, identity, personality based on their conceptualization and description of the phenomenon.
    - What is/was your current role in the criminal justice organization?
    - How long have you been in your [senior leadership] role in the criminal justice organization?
- *Knowledge Questions* – A set of questions that require answers based on facts and information about the phenomenon or events.
    - What do you know about workplace loneliness?

- *Opinion and Values Questions* – Questions designed to explore a person's thoughts and beliefs about the phenomenon, lived experiences, and values based on personal accounts.
    - In your own words, how would you describe workplace loneliness?
    - What could you tell me about your lived experiences related to workplace loneliness?
    - How do you think workplace loneliness impacted you as a criminal justice senior leader?
- *Feeling Questions* – These are questions not focused on what the participant thinks, but rather on how an individual feels/felt.
- How do you feel workplace loneliness impacted you as a criminal justice senior leader?
- *Sensory Questions* – A set of questions that require answers based on what they see, hear, touch, taste, or smell.
- How does workplace loneliness impact you physically?
- *Experience and Behavior Questions* – These are questions that highlighted what a participant has done, does or will do.
- How do you manage, address, or deal with lived experiences related to workplace loneliness as a criminal justice senior leader?

**Pilot Study.** Given that I was not a senior leader of a criminal justice organization, a pilot study was significant to have a deeper understanding of the concepts of workplace loneliness from the participants' accounts. According to Ravitch and

Mittenfelner Carl (2016), conducting a pilot study was critical in designing and refining research studies and instruments. Piloting was also used to test the instruments used, refining research questions, generating contextual information, and methods. For this study, I focused on using the rehearsing instruments to fine-tune the research questions and ensure the success of this study, and I also maintained the discipline to avoid asking leading questions or show any bias.

The rehearsing instrument was a valuable strategy that allowed me to practice and test out the research questions, including the flow, clarity, context, and sequencing of the interview process. I rehearsed by conducting mock semistructured interviews with three people, including classmates, friends, and colleagues. The mock interviews also allowed me to practice the interview style and deliver follow-up questions. I did not analyze or transcribe the collected data from the mock interviews but took notes and use the digital voice recorder for reference and review. Through these mock interviews, I was able to see patterns in the interview experience and get feedback from the participants, which was used to revise or enhance the research instruments, as necessary.

## Materials

**Digital voice recording, note taking, and MS Excel.** I initially planned to use various interview methods, including in-person, telephone, video chat, and email. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic's social distancing guidance, I was only able to conduct email and telephone interviews. All email interviews and correspondence were conducted via the Walden University email account. All phone interviews were recorded using a digital voice recording device with an installed transcriber; written notes were

also taken. During the transcribing process, I played recorded interviews to ensure accuracy, validity, and credibility. To analyze the data, I initially planned on using the NVivo qualitative data analysis software but decided on using the Excel Microsoft software instead due to familiarity with the functions and commands. I also read several articles and viewed YouTube tutorials on how to analyze data on Excel for supplemental awareness of Excel functions.

**Literature.** I reviewed existing academic literature as a guide to the research design. The initial review of the literature revealed that much of the studies conducted about loneliness were either linked to other mental health illnesses or elderly experiences. Scarce literature was available with a primary focus on the study of loneliness and its impacts. There was an abundance of research tying loneliness to physical health issues; however, studies about loneliness as a professional hazard, particularly experienced by senior leaders of criminal justice organizations, lacked in-depth analysis and focus. To examine the phenomenon, I focused on and explored the following areas of literature:

- Various definitions of loneliness.
- Loneliness and health impacts both physically and mentally
- The clinical significance of loneliness
- The different dimensions and types of loneliness
- The relationship between leadership and workplace loneliness
- Workplace loneliness as a professional hazard
- Challenges and risks that criminal justice senior leaders face related to workplace loneliness

**Data Sources.** For data sources, I used the collected data from the 16 semistructured interviews with senior leaders of criminal justice organizations in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. In addition, I used academic resources such as PsycINFO, SAGE, PubMed, PsycArticles, American Psychological Association, Google scholarly articles, and Education Source from the Walden University Library. I also reached out to various criminal justice organizations including, but not limited to, the District of Columbia Department of Corrections, District of Columbia Metropolitan Police Department, District of Columbia Housing Authority Office of Public Safety, Virginia Department of Corrections, Arlington County Police Department, Arlington County Sheriff's Office, Prince Georges County Police Department, Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, and Prince George's County - District Court for documents and resources related to workplace loneliness. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 pandemic and nationwide protests about racial injustice, the criminal justice senior leader participants were mostly only accommodating emergency requests. Therefore, I relied heavily on social media postings and the Walden University participant pool, which worked excellently.

## Procedure for Recruitment and Data Collection

In collecting data, Ravitch and Mittenfelner Carl (2016) explained that a researcher should apply an iterative (rather than chronological and linear) approach. The types and sources of data included data collection memos with documentation of how the research was shifting, changing, and developing over time. In addition to using a recording device and note-taking, I maintained a research journal and a research log. To

ensure that accurate records of all participants were stored, I created a contact summary form using MS Excel. To correspond, I only used the secured Walden University email account.

Upon receiving the IRB approval to interview, I began posting ads on social media and contacted several criminal justice organizations in Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Virginia. I also submitted a request to post on the Walden University Participant Pool. After a week of advertising, the potential participants started emailing about their interests to participate in the study. I then sent an official email invitation to participate with the study information such as the research topic, problem statement, purpose of the study, significance, introduction, background, minimum qualifications, and contact information (see Appendix A) provided a copy of the email content. Once the interest was confirmed and the consent was received, I emailed the 11 open-ended questions. A few of the participants preferred to speak on the phone to provide the answers and discuss further.

The interview structure of this study was designed to last for 45-minutes. Due to the amendment of the interview protocols, the participants were given a week to respond. An extension was given to those who requested. The original plan included determination of the interview location, which included the following criteria:

- A public place
- Conducive to have a meeting
- Equipped with required technical equipment such as outlets, a telephone, a desk, and chairs

The original interview plans also included the following location options:

- Public library
- Conference rooms
- Via phone with video-conference capabilities.

As mentioned, the only option for safely conducting the interview was via phone, video chat, or email. The participants only agreed to conduct interviews via email and telephone. The participation to the study was purely voluntary, and there was no compensation for participating. Provided below was a detailed list of the procedure for the data collection of this research.

**Recruitment within the network.** I submitted a request to the Walden Participant Pool to seek assistance in advertising the study. The process of recruiting within the network was advantageous because it opened the possibilities of "expert recommendations." To avoid any potential conflicts of interest, I did not send advertisements to own professional and social networks. Instead, I sought support from Walden Participant Pool. To stay within the scope of the research, I predetermined the interview questions' parameters, allowing the participants to elaborate on their lived experiences. This process also ensured that both the participants and I remained focused on the agenda and avoid deviating from the subject of workplace loneliness experienced to personal life experiences.

During the phone interview, when the discussion started to shift away from the professional experiences to personal, I reverted to the question and politely encouraged the participants to relate those personal experiences to how it affected their professional

experiences of workplace loneliness as senior leaders of criminal justice organizations. I made notes of the deviation to have a better understanding. Using only the Walden University email address, which was jxxxxx.xx@waldenu.edu, and provided an alternate email, which was LonelinessResearchxxx@gmail.com.

**Recruitment via posters, pamphlets, flyers, and social media advertisements**. I planned on posting ads in public places such as libraries, lavatories, public parks, grocery stores, and other places in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. Additionally, I intended to hand-out fliers near the train stations in Washington, D.C., and Maryland, including the Federal Triangle, Metro Center, and Largo train stations. These selected train stations were convenient and accessible. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and racial injustice protests, I was only able to post on social media such as Facebook and Instagram and the Walden University's Participant Pool platform.

## Data Analysis Plan

According to Maguire and Delahunt (2017), the data analyses were used to comprehend, depict, and interpret lived experiences of people to uncover the essence of a situation or phenomenon. The digital voice recording device used during the phone interviews would have a built-in USB, which would allow me to transfer the interview file directly to a secured laptop from oral to written transcripts. To transcribe and interpret data collected, I used Microsoft Excel to manually input the data, derive common themes, and critical categories.

In Chapter 2, the themes derived from the literature review only serve as organizing principles for the research interview. I was able to derive related and new

themes that emerged from the data collection. Moreover, I managed, stored, and interpreted data as accurately and appropriately as possible. In addition to the themes reviewed, while using the list of research questions as a guide, I identified the common issues, provided a brief description and an explanation about the phenomenon. Furthermore, I added a column for the participants' feedback and any key topics or points.

To maintain organization and efficiency, I assigned a responder identification code to each transcript. For example, Participant 1 was assigned Responder ID as CJ Senior Leader #1; Participant 2 was CJ Senior Leader #2, and so on. The transcripts were organized in different MS Excel spreadsheets and labeled accordingly. The numbers on each line item of the transcripts served as a reference to make it easier to locate specific passages, quotes, or key terms.

**Research Interview Protocols**

The original research interview protocols were amended due to the COVID-19 lockdown, travel, and social distancing guidance. Initially, I planned on selecting settings or platforms that were most appropriate to conduct the interviews. For example, if the interview were a face-to-face or in-person, the setting would have been a quiet but a public place free of distraction. Those places could have been either a private room in a public library or a conference room. According to Ravitch and Mittenfelner Carl (2016), the researcher must consider the following factors when selecting a location to conduct the interview: noise, traffic, the hustle and bustle, and proximity to the participants. The same ideal setting considerations were also planned for when conducting telephone or

video call interviews. However, due to COVID-19, the researcher utilized email and telephone communications instead. The following steps were taken:

1. Interested participant sent an email to inquire about the study.
2. A "Thank You" email and invitation to each interested participant was sent.
3. Confirmed eligibility.
4. The consent form was sent. The participants provided consent.
5. The document with the 11 open-ended interview questions, saved with the corresponding Responder's ID, was sent to the participant. A deadline was given.
6. Once the completed questionnaire was received, the files were saved and adequately organized the encrypted files.

The script, was only used for the recorded telephone interviews, served as a guide from the beginning until the end of every session. The script included the following sections: (1) introduction and background of the study; (2) discussing procedures of the interview; (3) stating the voluntary nature of the study; (4) stating the risks and benefits of being in the study; (4) emphasizing the no compensation rule; (5) discussing privacy (6) providing contact information; (6) obtaining consent verification; (7) proceed with interview questions; and (8) summary including closing remarks.

Before the interview started, I discussed and explained the format, structure, and process of the interview, including how long the interview would take and my role as the researcher. Additionally, I included information about what happens after the interview and set realistic expectations of follow-up contacts. Ravitch and Mittenfelner Carl (2016) recommended that the interviewer makes sure that the participants feel comfortable both

physically and emotionally. Hence, I checked-in with every participant to ensure that they feel physically and emotionally comfortable discussing their lived experiences.

It was imperative to discuss and explain the purpose of the interview to avoid leading or misleading the participants. Before the interview began, I reviewed the informed consent form with every participant. For participants who answered via email, they were encouraged to review the consent form and keep a record prior to answering the interview questions. For participants who interviewed via phone, I confirmed consent before the interview and requested that the participant provide consent on record using a digital voice recorder.

During the phone interview, I began with warm-up questions to start a more friendly and informal conversation, repeating the interview questions as needed to allow the participants to express and expound on their thoughts and feelings while being mindful of staying within the parameters of professional versus personal experiences related to workplace loneliness. The 11 interview questions were designed to be open-ended to allow participants to share their unique professional experiences related to workplace loneliness. Understanding that some questions were difficult to answer, the researcher provided the participants with the questions in advance, so they have ample time to think and be able to articulate their thoughts and feelings about the topic. If the participant became uncomfortable or refused to answer, I suggested that they skip the question(s) or go to the next question. At some point, I gave time-checks to allow participants to gather their final thoughts before the end of the interview. Furthermore, I gave participants an opportunity to leave comments, reflections, and additional questions.

To conclude the interview, I thanked the participant for his or her time, and responses. I noted final observations, including the participant's emotive, tone of voice, and any highlights. Lastly, I sent follow-up emails to thank the participants for their time and participation.

## Issues of Validity and Trustworthiness

To achieve rigor and validity in qualitative research, Ravitch and Mittenfelner Carl (2016) explained that a researcher must follow critical aspects of the research design such as (1) Developing study goals and rationale; (2) Formulating (and iterating) research questions; (3) Developing theoretical frameworks in research design; (4) The focused development of a theoretical framework; (5) Exploring the relationship between research design, methods choices, and writing; and Planning for validity and trustworthiness in/through research design.

There were many ethical problems anticipated in conducting this study because it required collecting data from people. In this research, I interviewed 16 criminal justice senior leaders in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. I ensured to protect the participants' identities as well as not misrepresent their respective organizations, and addressed any concerns that the participants had, such as privacy issues and the credibility of the research. Another ethical issue that I anticipated was during the development and finalizing of the research problem. As a researcher, it was one of my responsibilities to make sure to construct a problem statement that identified a problem that benefitted not only oneself, but also the participants and other stakeholders such as the community, families, organizations, and policymakers. This study addressed issues

about the impacts of workplace loneliness and how it might impact public policy and administration.

To address the validity and reliability of this qualitative phenomenological research, I developed different validity approaches aligned with research questions, goals, and contexts of the study. Establishing the validity criteria: credibility, reliability, and confirmability helped navigate the complexities and challenges in a study. A checklist was used to ensure that I follow the research design plans and intended instruments to collect data.

**Validity Criteria: Credibility**

It was the one of my responsibilities, as a researcher, to account for the nuances and complexities revealed during the interviews. Because of this study's nature, the themes and patterns of the data collection required me to draw meanings and interpretations, potentially creating bias or misinterpretation.

To avoid bias and misinterpretation, I did not collect information about the participants' agencies or criminal justice organizations. Keeping the agencies' or organizations' names anonymous or unknown avoided unwarranted inferences and suggestive language. The participants' responses about their lived experiences related to workplace loneliness did not represent the overall state of their respective agencies.

I also focused on the professional experiences related to loneliness than personal to stay within the scope of this study. Although, this study found that in many cases, the feelings of personal and workplace loneliness often overlap. Nevertheless, I was able to keep the participants' responses within the parameters of loneliness at work.

## Triangulation

To establish credibility, triangulation was used. Triangulation was considered a methodological culmination of combined data sources to achieve greater rigor and validity (Ravitch & Mittenfelner Carl, 2016). According to Ravitch and Mittenfelner Carl (2016), data triangulation was similar to purposeful sampling, where a researcher collected as much data as possible. Data sources were triangulated according to time, space, and person. For this research, data were collected from different individuals, at different times of the day, and from various criminal justice organizations, locations, and spaces.

**Interview Transcripts.** The real-time recording of the phone interviews and transcription were critical during data collection to establish rigor, reliability, and validity in data analysis. I created a user-friendly Microsoft Excel indexing system for the transcripts, which included assigning responder identification number codes, spreadsheets, and individual folders to make it easier to code and categorize based on themes.

**Note Taking**. While transcribing from digital to a hard copy was highly effective, I took in-depth notes during and after the interviews. I wrote down any observations and reflections not mentioned during the interview session. For example, the tone of voice, demeanor, language used, or attitude of the participant were noted and reflected upon for further analysis.

**Documents and Archival Data.** I intended to use existing documents related to loneliness and workplace loneliness from the various criminal justice organizations;

however, I found that these documents were either nonexistent or unavailable. If available, these documents could have been a great source of history, current programs, initiatives, records, public memos, publications, and reports. Instead, the researcher conducted a pilot study with three participants.

**Pilot Study.** To ensure rigor, credibility, and reliability criteria of this study, I conducted a pilot study with three participants in which allowed me to confirm that the study goal, rationale, research question, interview questions, theoretical framework, design, and methodology were aligned. The triangulation method's goal was to ensure that the researcher had enough and appropriate data to answer the overarching research question of this research:

**RQ.** *What are the impacts of workplace loneliness on senior leaders of criminal justice organizations?*

## Participant Validation Strategy

Initially, I wanted to conduct a member check, which was also known as respondent validation or participant validation (Ravitch & Mittenfelner Carl, 2016). The goal of the member check was to challenge the researcher's interpretations and the data collection process. This check-in would have allowed the participants to confirm the accuracy of interpretation based on their interview transcripts. Because these interviews were mostly conducted through email and that the participants wrote their responses, the researcher did not have to inquire validation of the documents' accuracy. The researcher did not change or made edits on the completed questionnaires. Each document was encrypted and saved as is and copied/pasted to the appropriately secured spreadsheet. For

the telephone interview, I used the recorded transcripts to confirm the validity and accuracy of my notes.

**Validity Criteria: Reliability**

Reliability refers to the researcher's ability to replicate the study and attain consistent results if the same measuring device was used (Dantzker & Hunter, 2012). The study of workplace loneliness faced challenges because the nature of the phenomenon changes. For example, a senior leader might feel a higher level of workplace loneliness in the first year in the role and then lesser feelings of workplace loneliness the next. To ensure reliability in this study, I relied on the internal consistency of the data collection and analysis by asking the same interview questions and similarly to maintain internal consistency. I also conducted a pilot study, which confirmed the reliability and replicability of the interview process, as well as data collection and analysis.

**Validity Criteria: Confirmability**

The confirmability, as described by Ravitch and Mittenfelner Carl (2016), was the qualitative equivalence of the quantitative concept of objectivity. The goal of the confirmability was to reach neutrality and freedom from personal biases (Ravitch & Mittenfelner Carl, 2016). Like confirming credibility, I used the method of triangulation to achieve confirmability: Pilot Study, Note-Taking, and Interview Transcripts. Throughout the research process, I continuously challenged confirmability, credibility, and reliability by asking a series of questions, as demonstrated in *Exhibit 3. Validity Questions.*

**Threats to External Validity**

Given that this research only included telephone and email interviews, there were a few external validities considered. These external validity concerns included but not limited to: (1) distracting environment during interviews, (2) technical malfunctions, and (3) conflicting professional and personal identities. To address the external validity concerns on a distracting environment for telephone interviews, I ensured the participants' advance notice of the interview and indicated on the interview guidelines that a quiet and private room was required to avoid any interruptions. To avoid any technical malfunction, I ensured to test the interview equipment such as voice recorder, telephone line, or video camera before the interview. I also made sure to have back-up equipment in case of any malfunctions. Lastly, I highlighted that the nature of the research was sensitive, which required the participants to be in a safe place, where they did not have to worry about other people around them.

**Threats to Internal Validity**

This research focused on exploring the impacts of workplace loneliness on criminal justice senior leaders. Although personal experiences of loneliness might be influential to those feelings, and lived experiences related to workplace loneliness, I kept the parameters within the professional spectrum as much as possible. So, the research prepared a set of interview questions, designed accordingly to fit the framework of this research. The interview questions for this study were listed in the *Appendix section, Exhibit 2.*

## Ethical Procedures

To ensure ethical considerations, standard ethical procedures were followed, reviewed, and approved by the IRB. Informed consent forms were provided and completed by the participants before the interview sessions. The informed consent forms included details about the purpose of the study, expectations of participation, the right to stop the research at any given time, confidentiality agreement, and the study's voluntary nature. Because the lived experiences related to workplace loneliness could be linked to other mental illnesses such as depression, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, suicidal ideation, and negative thoughts or feelings, the participants were advised and encouraged to stop the interview at any point the deemed necessary. If needed, I provided my contact information to the participants so that they could freely reach out to if they need further assistance about the study, or if they have any questions. I upheld the ethical consideration of "doing no harm" principle.

### Privacy and Protection

All data were encrypted and stored securely. To ensure privacy and protect the participants' personally identifiable information, all information was strictly confidential, and all electronic files were stored on my password-protected computer. No one else had access to the files, and all files were password protected. If the dissertation chair or co-chair needed to access the files, I would require the members to sign a non-disclosure agreement. All documents, notes, and journal logs were stored in a locked file cabinet at my residence's office. All communications via email were sent and received through my Walden University email account. There were no data saved on the internet to ensure that

it could not be hacked or altered. The collected data will be stored for five years, as required by the university, before proper disposal of the password-protected USB files and deletion from the hard drive. All paper documents will be burned and destroyed after 5 years. Both the names of the participants and their respective organizations were masked in this study. No demographic details were collected.

**Limits to Confidentiality**

The content of the study participants was strictly confidential. Exceptions are as follows:

- If the participant was a danger to himself or herself, or others, such as serious suicidal or homicidal thinking.
- If the participant expressed that he or she might have abused a minor, the incident would have been reported to Child Protective Services.

**Informed Consent Forms**

An Informed Consent form adhered to the IRB's guidelines and contained the following information: Background, Procedure, Interview Questions, Voluntary Nature of the Study, Risks and Benefits, Payments, Privacy, Limits of Confidentiality, Conflicts of Interests, Questions, and Signatures. The most common limiting factor of studying loneliness was the absence of a measure suitable for large-scale social surveys (Hughes et al., 2004). This form was given and signed before any participation begins. Walden University's approval number for this study was 05-14-20-0763112 and will expire on May 13th, 2021.

**Possible Risk of the Study**

Because the subject of workplace loneliness was not widely assessed, senior leaders of criminal justice might relive or discover undesired lived experiences related to workplace loneliness as well as personal events. The purpose of this research was to explore the impacts of workplace loneliness and delving into the past or present experiences related to workplace loneliness that cannot be avoided. However, the potential risk categories have been fully acknowledged and described and did not exceed the risks of daily life.

**Privacy Risks.** All data and information collected remained strictly confidential. All electronic files, including the USB files, were password-protected as well as saved in a secured laptop. All printed documents, including notes, journal logs, and data with PII, were locked in a secured cabinet in my home office.

**Psychological Risks.** Being in this type of study involved some risks of minor discomforts that could be encountered in daily life, such as reliving undesired life experiences and emotions related to workplace loneliness, fatigue, stress, or becoming upset. This study did not pose risk to the participants' safety or wellbeing. All participants were informed that they could express any discomfort or concerns. If at any point, the participant wanted to stop, the session would have been ended. No participant expressed any discomfort before, during, or after the interview.

**Relationship Risks.** Not applicable. The participants and I had no prior or known relation with each other, both professionally and personally.

**Legal Risks.** Not applicable. The participants obtained any and all information voluntarily; the participants also provided their responses voluntarily. The organizations' or agencies' names remained unknown throughout the study; hence, did not misrepresent the participants or their respective companies.

**Economic/Professional Risks.** Not applicable. I had no involvement with the participants both professionally and personally. As written on the consent form and before the interview, I reiterated the no compensation rule of the research.

**Physical Risks.** Not Applicable. The interviews were conducted via phone and email to abide with the COVID-19 pandemic social distancing guidance and travel restrictions.

### Vulnerable Population

The IRB approval determined that the selected participants were not vulnerable populations. For this research, I interviewed a total of 16 senior leaders of criminal justice who knew of or have experienced workplace loneliness.

### Conflicts of Interest

I did not foresee or experienced any conflicts of interest before, during, and after the study because there were no prior or current relations, both professionally and personally, between the participants and me.

## Reflection of Social Change

The concept of workplace loneliness and the study of executive health were understudied. This study contributed to the growing discussions of the idea of loneliness and its impact not only on a personal level but also in other realms such as in

organizational settings and workplaces. One of my primary objectives was to encourage open dialogues and continued conversations surrounding the epidemic of workplace loneliness and what the community, policymakers, and organizations could and should do to alleviate, prevent, and manage the severe impacts of workplace loneliness. Notably, I aimed to encourage senior leaders, who were, surprisingly, underrepresented in organizations, to voice their experiences of workplace loneliness in their roles. The outcomes considered in this research included, but not limited to increased awareness of the epidemic of workplace loneliness and the impacts on criminal justice senior leaders; design and implementation of prevention and management strategies of loneliness appropriate for senior leaders and their roles; and encourage open discussions and acknowledgment of the need to address loneliness in the workplace.

## Summary

Workplace loneliness was considered a modern epidemic, which might impact everyone regardless of race, gender, religion, political, social, or economic status; hence, it does not discriminate. The subject of workplace loneliness was understudied. Additionally, workplace loneliness, as a professional hazard, and as experienced by criminal justice senior leaders received little to no attention. This research revealed that senior leaders of organizations were highly vulnerable to workplace loneliness. The impacts of workplace loneliness on senior leaders of criminal justice organizations in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area have serious implications not only on senior leaders' physical, emotional, and mental health; but also, on their families and their organizations, and the communities whom they serve. By conducting this study, criminal justice senior

leaders in various U.S. criminal justice system settings were given opportunities to articulate their lived experiences related to workplace loneliness as criminal justice professionals in leadership roles. These shared experiences allowed me to explore the impacts of workplace loneliness on criminal justice senior leaders. Chapter 4 discussed the findings of this research. The next section discussed in detail the introduction of how the interviews were conducted in real-time, following with a thematic analysis of the collected data, and a summary.

# Chapter 4: Results

## Introduction

This chapter discussed in detail the pilot study, the study's setting, demographics of the participants, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and study results. The purpose of this research was to fill the literature gap by understanding the impacts of workplace loneliness on criminal justice senior leaders from various criminal justice organizations—such as police departments, emergency management organizations, courts, and others—through open discussions of their lived experiences. The overarching research question of this study was

RQ: What are the impacts of workplace loneliness on senior leaders of criminal justice organizations?

## Pilot Study

Piloting, as Ravitch and Mittenfelner Carl (2016) explained, is a crucial facet of designing and refining research studies and instruments. During the proposal stage, I did not plan on conducting a pilot study; however, due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on this research, I had to alter the interview process to comply with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's guidelines in which prompted this small-scale version of this study. Furthermore, the protests and riots in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area also prohibited most of the potential criminal justice senior leaders from participating and allotting ample time to meet in person or video call.

I used the piloting strategy during the interview process to refine the research instrument. The data collected was not used as a part of the formal data set because the

pilot study did not significantly change or revise the instruments of this study. Additionally, during the pilot interviews, I engaged in full-length interviews and approached all aspects of the interview as I planned to conduct post pilot interviews. My goal was to examine the data collected in relation to my research questions to check if I was getting the kinds of data needed to answer the overarching research question of this study. According to Ravitch and Mittenfelner Carl (2016), when piloting interviews and looking for patterns in the responses, a researcher might ask the following questions:

- Were there similar responses to or confusion about specific questions?
- Were there particular questions that needed clarification across the pilot interviews?
- Was there any issue with the flow or sequencing of questions?
- Did you ask the right and enough (or too many) follow-up questions?
- What else emerges as you look across participant responses? (p. 93)

I conducted a pilot study with three participants to test the methodology, alignment, interview questions, and the interview flow, protocols, and procedures. Although a pilot study usually consisted of 12 participants (Ravitch & Mittenfelner Carl, 2016), this research only consisted of three participants because I primarily used piloting to help me understand my role as a researcher and hone my interview skills as I prepare for the formal interview. The participants for the pilot study were a colleague, a peer, and a family member. Furthermore, the pilot study also helped ensure that the prepared interview questions were easy to understand and appropriate to answer the overarching question of this study.

I sent out three separate email invitations to the pilot study participants. Upon confirmation of the participant's interest to participate, I replied to the participants with an acknowledgment and attached consent form to be completed. Although consent was not required in conducting the pilot study, I still sent out the consent forms to test the flow of data collection and storage. All participants were instructed to respond with the phrase, "I consent" if they were unable to sign the consent forms digitally or had no access to a printer. Upon receipt of each participant's consent forms, I emailed the interview questions with a deadline of 1-week from when the interview questions were received.

The pilot study's data analyses were not required; nevertheless, I created digital folders on a secured laptop and encrypted each file. I used the pilot study in sending out an email invitation for participation, obtaining consent, and distribution of the interview questions, data handling, and storage. Through this process, I was able to identify and determine the best methods to use in organizing files, allowing a methodological and comprehensive way to collect and store data.

The pilot study revealed that the prepared interview questions were appropriate to answer the overarching research question of this study. It also proved that the digital and telephone interviews were effective, even with the COVID-19 social distancing requirements.

## Setting

This study was conducted during a global pandemic, which heightened the social, economic, and political crises in the United States. The sudden change of settings and

situational climate might have impacted the lived experiences of criminal justice senior leaders related to workplace loneliness.

**COVID-19 Pandemic**

The Corona Virus, also known as COVID-19, has affected the lives of many people globally. In the United States, specifically, there was a total of 2.64 million cases and over 115 thousand deaths as of June 14, 2020 (CDC, 2020). In the attempt to stop the spread of the virus, lockdown measures were put in place by the states that included stay-at-home orders, closing of businesses with the exemption of essential entities such as shopping centers, restaurants, pharmacies, and hospitals. The forced isolation was imposed on residents due to the growing numbers of COVID-19 cases and deaths. This mandate disrupted the lives of millions of Americans. Many lost their jobs, closed businesses, and said goodbye to family members. Because of this deadly public health crisis, the states of District of Columbia's., Maryland's, and Virginia's government officials mandated residents to obey the stay-at-home orders or face a misdemeanor charge and up to $5,000 fine or imprisonment of up to 3 months (Sherfinski & Howell, 2020). As a result, I was not able to schedule an in-person interview. Instead, the interviews were conducted via email and telephone conferences.

**Social Injustice Riots and Protests**

Mass protests, demonstrations, and riots cracked nationwide after the murder of George Floyd, a Black man who was killed in police custody in Minneapolis on Memorial Day (Flynn et al., 2020). Thousands of protesters marched in Washington, D.C. Law enforcement officers, emergency services, and first responders prepared for

mass protests and outraged demonstrators. Reports stated that some demonstrators set fires, and stories of looting incidents flooded the social media and news feeds. According to the Washington Post, police arrested close to 5,000 in U.S. cities during the weekend of June 1st (Flynn et al., 2020). Furthermore, several people died nationwide during the unrest and violent confrontations.

The reports of police brutality, unwarranted and excessive use of force against civilians, but more specifically against Black Americans, have outraged many Americans of all ethnicities, ages, classes, and genders. These incidents might have significantly impacted the lived experiences of criminal justice senior leaders related to workplace loneliness. Notably, most protests and riots were focused on defunding the police and criticizing men in uniform.

## Demographics

The sample participants represented individuals who met the eligibility requirements: 47% were senior leaders in the law enforcement field, 27% were emergency responders, 13% were correctional officers, and the other 13% were social service managers (See Table 1). Table 1 showed that 50% of the senior leader participants were females and the other 50% were males. The average years of experience of participants was 14, ranging from 5 years up to 37.

Table 1

*Participant Demographics (N=16)*

| Participants | Gender | Years of Experience | Field in Criminal Justice |
|---|---|---|---|
| Participant 1 | Male | 5 | Law Enforcement |
| Participant 2 | Female | 7 | Corrections |
| Participant 3 | Female | 13 | Social Services |
| Participant 4 | Female | 6 | Law Enforcement |
| Participant 5 | Male | 37 | Law Enforcement |
| Participant 6 | Female | 10 | Law Enforcement |
| Participant 7 | Female | 5 | Emergency Response |
| Participant 8 | Female | 16 | Emergency Response |
| Participant 9 | Female | 6 | Social Services |
| Participant 10 | Male | 30 | Emergency Response |
| Participant 11 | Male | 10 | Law Enforcement |
| Participant 12 | Male | 15 | Law Enforcement |
| Participant 13 | Male | 20 | Corrections |
| Participant 14 | Female | 16 | Emergency Response |
| Participant 15 | Male | 12 | Law Enforcement |
| Participant 16 | Male | 17 | Law Enforcement |

## Data Collection

### Duration of the Data Collection

I sent out at least 10 emails, including social media posts, a day for a span of 2 weeks before receiving email responses from interested participants. As soon as the responders were determined to be qualified participants, emails with the attached consent forms were sent out. The interview questions were emailed upon receipt of the signed consent forms. Every responder was asked to participate in a 45-minute semistructured telephone interview. For those who participated via email, I gave each participant a deadline of a week to return responses with an option to extend. Eighteen percent of the

participants replied within 24 hours, 25% responded within 72 hours, and 57% responded within 5 business days.

**Number of Participants**

Initially, I planned on interviewing at least 15 criminal justice senior leaders from various criminal justice organizations, which included law enforcement, emergency management, first responders, courts, and social services. A total of 30 criminal justice senior leaders responded with interest to participate, but only 16 senior leaders agreed and scheduled to interview. For this research, a senior leader was described as follows:

- Must be a senior leader within the criminal justice field, including law enforcement, corrections, social services, and emergency responders.
- An individual with a mid-level management title or higher within the criminal justice organization.
- Have at least 5 years of management experience within the U.S. criminal justice system.
- Must be leading a team and be supervising junior staffs' performance and productivity.

**Location**

The target location for this study was Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Area, which consisted of Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Virginia. Study advertisements for participants were posted on Facebook, Instagram, and the Walden University Participant Pool. I reached out to several criminal justice organizations in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, via phone calls and emails, to seek assistance in advertising for the

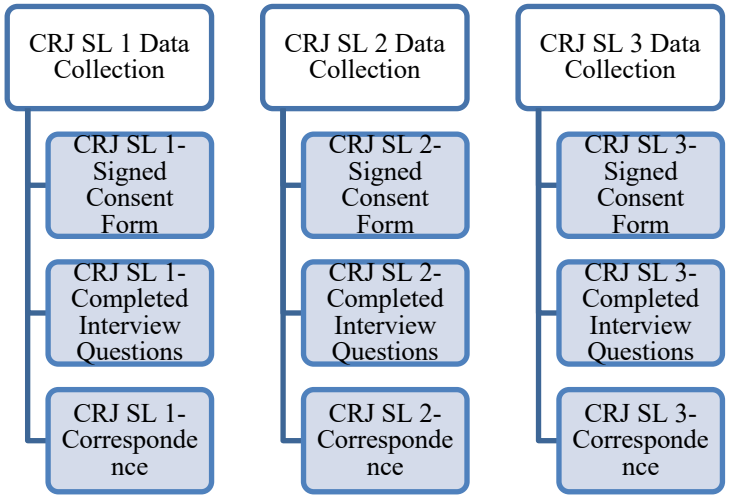
study participant requirements. None of the contacted agencies agreed to advertise the study because they were understaffed with limited work access because of the COVID-19 lockdown. Thirteen percent of the responders were from Washington, D.C., another 13% from Maryland, 61% from Virginia, and the rest from other locations.

**How the Data was Recorded**

All email correspondences were sent from my Walden University official email address. Each participant had individual folders with corresponding Respondent ID, a combination of letters and number values. All files were password protected.

The telephone interviews were recorded using a secured voice recorder with a built-in transcriber. Once the transcription was completed, the transcripts were encrypted and saved to the respective digital folders. Upon receipt of the responses, I organized the files, as shown below, using a secured laptop stored in my home office. The transcripts were saved as a Word format and were stored and organized as the other collected data. Below were a few examples of how the folders were organized:

*Figure 1.* Data recording and filing



The data was recorded using a consolidated Excel Spreadsheet. Each sheet was labeled accordingly: Sheet 1 – Contact List, Sheet 2 – Pilot Study, Sheet 3 – Master Data, Sheet 4 - Questions, and Sheet 5 – Themes and Categories.

The Contact List tab consisted of the Name, Email Address, Phone Number, and Location. The Pilot Study tab had the information and responses of the three pilot study participants. The Master Data tab had the Respondents' IDs and 11 open-ended interview questions with specific answers. I created a master document to keep the consolidated data organized. I also created separate sheets for each question. Lastly, the Themes and Categories tab had a list of emerging themes, both general and sub, comments, and unique ideas. A new worksheet tab was created for each question to make it more manageable to track the emerging themes.

**Variation in Data Collection from Original Plan**

The only difference between the original data collection plan and the actual method used was the in-person semistructured interview. Due to the CDC's COVID-19 social distancing guidelines and the state-regulated stay-at-home order, I was unable to schedule an in-person interview. Instead, I conducted interviews both via email and telephone conference. I also conduct a pilot study to ensure that the new data collection plan was practical and doable.

## Data Analysis

Using the Microsoft Excel file, I analyzed the collected data. I initially planned on using NVivo qualitative analysis software to analyze the data but opted to use Excel instead. However, due to financial constraints due to COVID-19 pandemic, I decided to

use manual hand transcription. To do so, I created a clean copy of the data and accurately transferred the transcripts from the completed document folders into one excel file. I included all notes and insights at the end of every interview and tracked emerging themes and similarities or differences of concerns. The assigned respondent ID consisted of alpha-numeric value (i.e. CRJ SL 1…30) to make it easier to track. All answers for the same question were combined, and any emerging themes were highlighted and color-coded. See Table 2 below for details.

Table 2.

*Color-Coding of Emerging Themes*

| ID | What is your current role in the criminal justice organization? | General Theme | Sub-Theme | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **CRJ SL 1** | Currently I am assigned to the specialty unit in my department as an assistant supervisor. | Law Enforcement | Assistant Supervisor | Duties include supervising several officers, and other supervisory duties. |
| **CRJ SL 2** | Detention Officer | Corrections | Detention Officer | Served over 10 years. |
| **CRJ SL 3** | Serves as a Department Coordinator for Homeless Services | Social Service | Non-Profit for Homeless Services | Shelter, food, laundry, shower, creative workshops, Case Management, Vocational Services, and offer legal services |
| **CRJ SL 4** | I am an EMS Supervisor for Fairfax County Fire and Rescue. As an EMS Supervisor, I hold the rank of Captain II. | Emergency Response | Fire Captain/ EMS Supervisor | Battalion consists of 6 stations and approximately 60 personnel. |

**LAW ENFORCEMENT** **CORRECTIONS** **EMERGENCY RESPONSE** **SOCIAL SERVICES**

Because each question had its worksheet tab, the emerging themes and unique ideas were more natural to point out. Broader or general themes were broken down into subthemes. For example, if the general theme for question 1 was isolation, I created a subtheme for *physical isolation* and *emotional isolation;* and re-read and refined the coding process before finalizing the themes and categories for each question. Table 3 below showed a sample of how the themes and categories were analyzed:

Table 3

*General Themes and Subthemes*

| ID | What is your current role in the criminal justice organization? | General Theme | Subtheme | | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Subtheme Physical | Subtheme Emotional | |
| CRJ SL 1 | In my personal experience I have noticed that as my **responsibilities have increased**, other officers usually do things amongst each other. **Supervisors aren't normally invited** when the subordinates eat breakfast, lunch etc. | 1 | 1 | 1 | Promotion might cause workplace loneliness of hierarchy difference.<br><br>Isolation is experienced both emotional and physical. |
| CRJ SL 2 | Work events or peer activities might occur, but I am **not always invited** which makes me feel alone. Sometimes **I have no one whom I feel would not judge me when I express my feelings or to vent to.** | | 1 | 1 | Not able to express feelings of workplace loneliness due to fear of judgement.<br><br>Isolation is experienced both emotional and physical. |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| CRJ SL 3 | One of the Deputy Chiefs perceived me to be **a threat** to his plans to become the next Chief of Police and **he went out of his way to isolate me and to intentionally stall my progression in the ranks**. He did attain the Chief's position and he effectively stalled me career and went to great lengths to isolate me and within the senior officer ranks. He created a menial job for me in the organization and effectively neutralized me, despite me being of a high rank. **I was cut out of any major organizational decision-making.** | 1 | 1 | High competition at work might result in workplace loneliness by intentionally isolating someone to advance in rank.<br><br>Isolation is experienced both emotional and physical. |

## Evidence of Trustworthiness

To ensure validity and rigor, I maintained consistent methods of data gathering and analyses. I also conducted a pilot study with three participants to ensure that the study's goal, rationale, the research design, methods, writing, the theoretical framework, and the interview questions as it addresses the overarching research question were aligned. Furthermore, I addressed the anticipated ethical problems such as protecting the participants' identities, privacy issues, and developing the research problem.

### Validity Criteria: Credibility

Credibility was the researcher's ability to consider and takin into account all the complexities in a study including emerging patterns that might not always be easy to explain (Ravitch & Mittenfelner Carl, 2016). I followed a consistent methodology to identify emerging themes and patterns of the data collected. As the researcher, my goal

was to draw meanings and interpretations, potentially creating bias or misinterpretation. I ensured to draw meaningful inferences from the data provided by the participants using the established research design and instruments. It was important to link the research findings accurately and clearly with the actual responses of the participants. For this research, I used triangulation, using different data sources within the same method. For example, the participants consisted of senior leaders from various criminal justice organizations: Law Enforcement, Corrections, First Responders, and Social Services. The same interview protocols and interview questions were used in collecting data.

**Validity Criteria: Transferability**

Transferability is a way a researcher can apply or transfer a qualitative context to a broader context while maintaining the richness of its original context or context-relevant statements (Ravitch & Mittenfelner Carl, 2016). To attain transferability, I ensured to provide detailed descriptions of the data as well as circumstances so that the readers could establish their own comparisons based on the information I provided. This process would allow audiences such as fellow researchers, stakeholders and participants to transfer aspects of the study design and findings using different contextual factors and patterns.

**Validity Criteria: Dependability**

Similar to the concept of reliability, dependability in a study referred to the stability of the data (Ravitch & Mittenfelner Carl, 2016). Through consistency, dependability could be achieved. I ensured that I have a well-structured methods of data collection and that the data collected were consisted with this study's overall argument. I

conducted a pilot study to ensure that my research questions answer the core question of this research.

**Validity Criteria: Confirmability**

Confirmability in the study sought to achieve relative neutrality and reasonable freedom from existing prejudice and biases (Ravitch & Mittenfelner Carl, 2016). To ensure confirmability, I remained and maintained objectivity throughout the process. Confirmability was accomplished through neutrality and freedom from personal biases. I used the questions listed in *Exhibit 3. Validity Questions* throughout the research process to continuously challenge confirmability, credibility, and reliability.

**Validity Criteria: Reliability**

I tested the reliability of the research method and design, and the interview protocols and procedures by conducting a pilot study in which confirmed that this research could be replicated because it attained consistent results. The same measuring device was used to interview participants from various criminal justice organizations. The study of workplace loneliness met challenges because the feelings and experiences of workplace loneliness varied depending on the level of knowledge, length of service, and positional functions of the senior leaders. However, the responses of the participants were consistent. To ensure reliability in this study, I relied on the internal consistency of the data collection and analyses. Additionally, I used the same interview questions, methods, and protocols to maintain internal consistency.

**Data Triangulation**

I used the method of triangulation to achieve greater rigor and validity. Using purposeful sampling, the researcher collected as much data as possible from different individuals, at different times of the day, and from various criminal justice organizations, locations, and spaces. The goal of triangulation, using responses from different criminal justice senior leaders, was to reach convergence. The engagements with various senior leaders from various fields in the criminal justice system allowed me to analyze and interpret multiple perspectives that answered the overarching question of this research.

**Interview transcripts.** Initially, I planned on conducting the interviews in various ways, including in-person, phone, video, and email. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic social distancing guidance, I had limited options to interview; so, conducted the interviews via telephone and email only. The real-time recording of the interview and transcription were important in data collection and were critical in establishing rigor, reliability, and validity in data analysis. I created a user-friendly indexing system for the transcripts, which included assigning a number code, page, and a line item to make it easier to code and categorize based on themes. Using the MS Excel, I analyzed and recorded the data. Because the interviews were mostly via email with the attached completed questionnaire, I simply dragged the documents to its corresponding folders, encrypted it, and copied/pasted it. No changes were made to the original copies sent by the participants.

**Note taking.** I took in-depth notes during the interviews, wrote down any unique identifiers written or mentioned during the interviews. For instance, during a phone

interview, a participant changed his tone and voice from upbeat to mellow when he talked about his experiences related to workplace loneliness more specifically. The notes were comprehensive and even included anything that stood out such a change in demeanor or attitude of the participants.

**Documents and archival data**. Initially, I planned on using any existing documents from various criminal justice organizations related to workplace loneliness because I was hoping to find previous studies about workplace loneliness and other records pertaining to workplace loneliness as a professional hazard. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown, most criminal justice public affairs office; therefore, I was unable to look collect any supporting documents and archival data from the specific organizations. No specific company documents related to workplace loneliness were provided and used as supplementary data. The only supporting literature used in this research were 60 peer-reviewed academic journals, books, and online publications. Upon reviewing these references, I focused on 39 scholarly sources, which included PsycINFO, SAGE, PubMed, PsycArticles, and Education Source from the Walden University Library. The Google search engine was also used to search for scholarly articles. All publications used in this literature review were peer-reviewed journal articles from 2012 to 2020.

**Threats to External Validity**

Because the interviews were only conducted via email and telephone, I did not have to address the numerous and anticipated external validities such as (1) distracting environment during interviews, (2) technical malfunctions, (3) conflicting professional

and personal identities. However, I still prepared for other external concerns such as Internet connection, laptop's function and security, and email privacy. During the phone interview, I addressed the external validity concerns on a distracting environment by going to a quiet and private room with a good network connection. To avoid any technical malfunction, I confirmed that the interview equipment (such as voice recorder, telephone line, or video camera before the interview) worked properly. I also made sure to have a back-up equipment and chargers in case of any malfunctions.

**Threats to Internal Validity**

To affirm that the findings were true to the scope of this study, I kept the parameters of the interview within the professional experience of loneliness and not personal. The prepared set of interview questions fit the framework of this research and allowed the participants to stay within the bounds of workplace loneliness versus their personal experiences outside of their roles. To also ensure that the findings accurately reflects the participants lived experiences, I did not make any edits to the completed questionnaires. Instead, I simply copied and pasted the transcripts to the MS Excel spreadsheet for data analyses.

**Protecting Identity and Privacy**

For this study, I ensured that the participants' identities were protected by assigning Respondent IDs accordingly. To protect the identities of the participants' organization and avoid misrepresentation, the names of the organizations and respective agencies remained unknown throughout the study.

To ensure privacy, I encouraged participants to send any correspondences using their email addresses. I also strictly used my official Walden University email address. All correspondences and files sent were password-protected and saved in secured digital folders. The laptop used was kept at my residence my office, secured and password protected.

### Pilot Study to Test Alignment

I conducted a pilot study with three participants to align the interview protocol, interview questions, research problem, and methods. The problem statement identified a problem that benefitted not only oneself, but also the participants and other stakeholders such as the community and policymakers.

### Participant Validation Strategy

Because the participants wrote their responses and directly sent via email, validating the transcripts or a "member check" for accuracy was not necessary. The researcher copied and pasted the answers to the Excel document for analysis. No changes were made to the original completed questionnaires.

## Results

This section outlined the 11 open-ended interview questions to give clarity and answers to the overarching research question of this study. The emerging themes and patterns were also discussed in detail. There was a total of 16 criminal justice senior leader participants for this study. Table 1 showed that 50% of the participants were females and the other 50% were males and the average years of experience of the participants was 14 years.

The first interview question asked *What was your current role in the criminal justice organization?* The goal of this question was to identify the roles of the participants within the criminal justice organizations. For this research, the participant must be a senior leader within the criminal justice with a mid-level management title or higher. As shown in Figure 2, 47% of the participants were senior leaders in the law enforcement field, 27% were emergency responders, 13% were correctional officers, and the other 13% were social service managers.

The second interview question was focused on the length of time participants had been in their criminal justice role. The qualified participants have at least five years of managerial experience within the criminal justice system. The majority of the responders have been in their fields between 10 and 20 years. One participant stated that he has more than 37 years of experience within the criminal justice system.

For Interview Question 3, I analyzed the levels of knowledge regarding workplace loneliness and the years of service of the participants. Figure 3 represents the reponses.

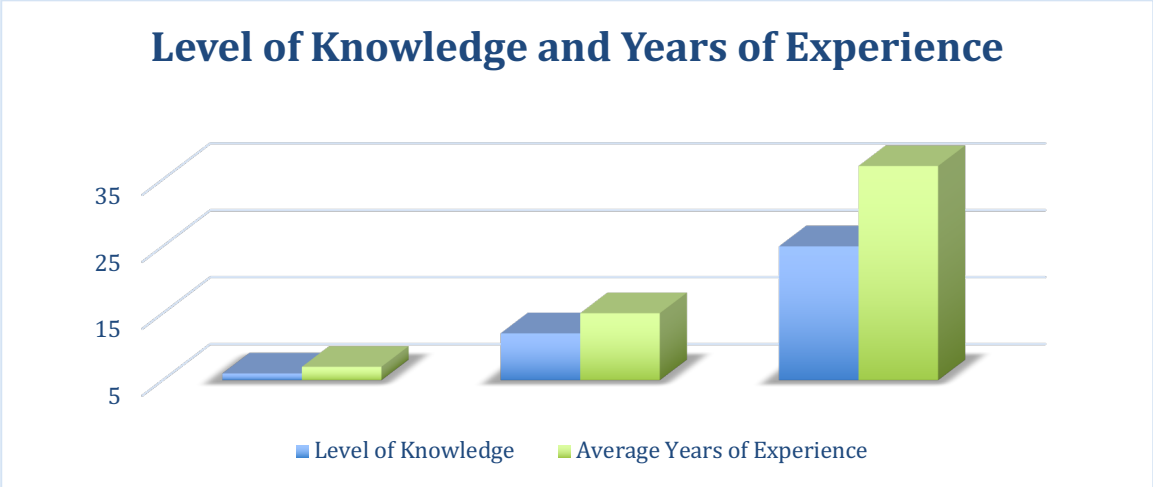



*Figure 3.* Level of knowledge versus years of experience

Based on Figure 3, the responders who indicated that they have little knowledge of workplace loneliness have the least years of experience, serving between 5 to 7 years as senior leaders of criminal justice organizations. Those participants indicated that they have not seen a study directly focused on workplace loneliness. Commonly, the participants explained that most conversations about mental health in the workplace include stress management, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and anxiety. Most of the participants suggested that the study of workplace loneliness was uncommon in the criminal justice field. Notably, CRJ SL 6 explained that academically, he knows knowing about the specific topic of workplace loneliness, while CRJ SL 11 stated that "nothing specific, could only surmise what it referred to". CRJ SL 1 stated, "I am a little familiar with workplace loneliness. It was a topic that has rarely been discussed in my organization". CRJ SL 30 commented, "I honestly do not know a great deal of workplace loneliness. My organization we receive much training with regards to working as a team and in large groups; however, we do not receive any training on when we reach command positions or special appointments where we certainly feel the effects of loneliness".

According to the analysis presented in Figure 3, respondents with at least ten years of experience have increased workplace loneliness knowledge. The level of knowledge about workplace loneliness raised significantly as the years of experience in criminal justice increased. A responder stated that workplace loneliness was a "fascinating and emerging area of study" and a common occurrence.

The level of knowledge increased significantly as the years of service increased. Responders who have 15 years or more experience in the criminal justice field have more

experience and knowledge of workplace loneliness. Some participants responded that they were familiar and have adequate workplace loneliness because they have extensively read about it or have personally experienced workplace loneliness. CRJ SL 2 described her feelings of loneliness as a result of isolation and low morale at work. Furthermore, CRJ SL 2 explained that the feelings of workplace loneliness were exacerbated by the lack of support from the higher-ups and the intensifying feelings of being unappreciated. She also mentioned that she was also unable to speak with her loved ones because of the confidential nature of the job. Not being able to speak about her concerns and feelings of loneliness to either co-worker or family made it difficult to cope. As CRJ SL 2 stated, "due to confidentiality issues, you might not be able to talk to your loved ones, and the people at work might not want to listen to your work concerns." Similarly, CRJ SL 10 confirmed that workplace loneliness was prevalent in the policing trade because of the various boundaries one must abide by to maintain professional relationships between supervisors and subordinates.

Some participants have basic knowledge of workplace loneliness because they have read about the topic from peer-reviewed journal articles. CRJ SL 9 indicated that based on what he has read, "workplace loneliness was related topic of interpersonal relationships." CRJ SL 20, on the other hand, has a knowledge of workplace loneliness from personal experience, but mostly from leadership classes that he has attended at work. According to CRJ SL 30, her division receives "much training with regards to working as a team and in large groups; however, [we] they do not receive any training on when [we] they reach command positions or special appointments where [we] they

certainly feel the effects of loneliness." There were many definitions of loneliness, but CRJ SL 9 stated that the most preferred definition was that loneliness was "a psychological state that results from deficiencies in a person's social relationships." This definition, according to CRJ SL 9, was most appropriate because it relates to personal experience in policing, which was that "workplace loneliness has more to do with a person's state of mind versus them physically working and being alone."

The findings suggest, as shown in Figure 4, that 56% of the participants reported feeling sense of workplace loneliness. At least 87% of senior leaders have experienced workplace loneliness at some points in their careers within the criminal justice system.


*Figure 4.* Percentage of senior leaders' lived experiences related to workplace loneliness.

The goal of the fourth interview question was to identify how the participants define workplace loneliness based on what they know and their personal experiences of the subject. According to the participants, workplace loneliness was described as

- A result of perceived feelings of isolation due to varying factors in the workplace.
- Perceived lack of support from colleagues and the inability to share experiences with people at work and even at home due to not feeling safe to express and fear of appearing weak or vulnerable.
- Inability to create meaningful work relationships due to rank/position, stemming from policy enforcement, and confidentiality concerns.
- Failure to adapt to a new work environment, culture, and people. A supervisor might choose to intentionally isolate himself or herself because of personal biases or stressors.

Sixty percent of the participants responded that workplace loneliness was caused by isolation from family and others. All participants agreed that workplace loneliness could be caused by either physical or emotional isolation or both. The feelings of isolation, most argued, turn into workplace loneliness. One responder stated that when a person feels loneliness at work, then the person could also be feeling "feeling cut-off, isolated and unwelcome in a work situation, even though he or she might be part of a team or a large group of workers…or when a worker was feeling lost and alone and not capable of turning to someone to discuss their feelings." Most of the participants echoed the same sentiment that workplace loneliness feels similar to isolation from social

relations. The participants have provided several reasons why an individual could be isolated in the workplace.

- Subordinates were not treating the supervisors or managers as equal; therefore, the subordinates were intentionally isolating the supervisors. For example, a responder stated that his subordinates were intentionally not inviting him to social events such as happy hours, luncheon with the team, or coffee breaks.
- The supervisor separated him or herself from the subordinates to maintain a professional distance and not appear weak. Because a senior leader was expected to demonstrate a certain level of confidence and control at all times, he or she might not consult others or discuss their feelings of loneliness in the workplace to maintain their reputation intact.
- Heavy workload and confidentiality issues might also prohibit a senior leader from building social relations. This could also prevent a senior leader from having ample time to be with his or her family and friends. A participant emphasized that "Work consuming like due to long hours and commitments that take time away from life/family."
- Most of the senior leaders have information privilege that they were unable to share with the team. Some of this information results in critical decisions that could impact the subordinates. Because some subordinates think that the supervisor was intentionally not giving them information, they might take it personally and treat the supervisor as an "enemy," even though the reason for

not divulging information was “due to logistics and administrative responsibilities that come with an increased level in rank,” CRJ SL 26 stated. In many cases, the information was also confidential in which cannot be shared even with spouses or close family members. If the information could be shared, some senior leaders opt not to share with family and friends to frighten them or cause panic. Therefore, CRJ SL 26 explained that “nothing was said, and information was bottled up inside without release.” Hence, defining “workplace loneliness as the feeling of isolation of oneself that was dependent on one’s trust within the dynamics of the environment.”

- Different cultures and backgrounds could also push a senior leader to isolation, which ultimately results in workplace loneliness. A participant, who was a foreigner, struggled to adapt to the new environment and felt like his co-workers did not understand his ways. Another participant stated that as a senior leader, he intentionally did not want to be close to anyone at work due to some personal issues or reasons.

Eighty percent of the participants stated that they do not feel safe expressing their feelings of workplace loneliness. Those who have not personally experienced workplace loneliness also confirmed that it was a subject that they have not heard people talking about. The fear of appearing vulnerable or weak prohibits senior leaders from seeking help in or out of the organization. In some cases, the feeling of loneliness did not stem from work but personal; nevertheless, personal loneliness still has impacted at work such as productivity and lessened level of motivation.

A participant claimed that he experienced workplace loneliness when he started a new job, and he did not feel comfortable discussing concerns with his new colleagues. As CRJ SL 4 stated, “In my opinion, workplace loneliness occurs when you are new to your job and trying to adjust to new work environment/culture, learn your supervisor’s style, and getting to know your colleagues”. CRJ SL 4 also added that he felt alienated at times. One particular reason why another participant hesitated to express his feeling of workplace loneliness to colleagues or loved ones was because of the high competition at work. Additionally, the changes in work culture and having to adjust to new colleagues’ behaviors and attitudes posed challenges in making deeper connections.

Most of the participants stated that they also have concerns sharing information with their loved ones. CRJ SL 6, for example, expressed that his wife was also a police officer and that if he complains about workplace loneliness or feeling isolated, he would appear weak. Other participants claimed that they do not want to worry about their families about work problems; besides, they only have a few hours or less a day to see them.

The participants indicated that they always have to be mindful of how they build relationships with their subordinates and fellow supervisors. A participant from the emergency response field stated that he experienced workplace loneliness when he became a Fire Captain because former colleagues did not see him as equal anymore, and he found himself wanting to decline his promotion. He expressed that his new role as a manager made his work “buddies” feel and act weird around him. Furthermore, he realized that as a supervisor, if he continued to have the same level of friendship with his

coworkers, his subordinates might not respect other fire captains. This participant felt like he had to prove himself, and to find the perfect balance of a firm and reasonable leader has been a challenge. Mid-level managers, in particular, might struggle the most in finding this balance, according to CRJ SL 6.

The fifth interview question was the pivoting point of the interview as it allowed participants delved deeper into their thoughts and feelings about workplace loneliness. For this question, the I organized the responses by the participants' field of work: law enforcement, corrections, social services, and emergency response.

All participants from the law enforcement field had provided at least one situation in their careers when they felt lonely. One participant explained that he noticed that as he gets promoted, and as his responsibilities at work increased, he felt more isolated. The feelings of isolation, according to CRJ SL 1, might have resulted in feelings of loneliness. "Supervisors were not normally invited when subordinates eat breakfast, lunch, etc.", he added. According to the responders, they felt isolated by their subordinates because they were viewed as the "enemy" and that they cannot be trusted. A participant expressed that his subordinates felt like he is no longer "part of the crew" or not on their level.

CRJ SL 9 pointed out a unique experience that resulted in workplace loneliness lasting for several years. This particular participant has been in the force for 37 years. He recalled that he became very close to the Chief of Police at one point in his career, making one of the Deputy Chiefs feel threatened and insecure of his chance to be the next chief of police. So, the deputy went out of his way to isolate CRJ SL 9 and intentionally stalled his progression in the ranks.

Furthermore, the deputy chief made sure that the other deputies as well subordinates stayed away from him. “He created a menial job for me in the organization and effectively neutralized me despite my being of higher rank,” CRJ SL 9 stated. As a result, he was excluded from making major organizational decisions. That was a dark time for this participant because the causes of workplace loneliness came from both his supervisors and subordinates, leaving him feeling lonely for an extended period. In summary, CRJ SL 9 stated, “the five-years that I lived under [workplace loneliness] were troubling times in my life and career, I experienced an intense sense of loneliness.”

Another example of how other superiors and managers caused workplace loneliness was when senior leaders were expected to abide and enforce policies and decisions that they do not support. CRJ SL 10, for example, stated that she was instructed” to instill a decision made from the headquarters, and even though [she] disagreed with the direction,” she had to enforce and obey orders. She added that it made her feel that her hands were tied as “you have to support the decision regardless of your feelings towards it.” Without anyone to talk to or vent to, CRJ SL 10 felt a growing sense of frustrations and heightened feelings of loneliness.

Isolation from both superiors and subordinates could be a tough situation for senior leaders. CRJ SL 29 claimed that he got along with his subordinates and superiors, yet he feels very much alone. He explained that because he was a mid-level manager, his superiors did not socialize with him and neither his subordinates. CRJ SL 29 also revealed that “the good old boy clubs” were very much alive and well within his organization. The lack of belongingness and being a part of the team contributed to the

senior leaders' sense of workplace loneliness. CRJ SL 6 added, "I would assume it refers to the feeling of being alone at work – the perception of having no support from above and a lack of peers at the same level. Additionally, as a middle-management person, workplace loneliness can stem from enforcing policies and alienating those you supervise despite not determining those policies."

In some cases, senior leaders affirmed that they intentionally separate themselves from people at work to maintain unbiased decision-making and professionalism. CRJ SL 30 explained that as a senior leader, he remained "at arm's length from subordinates and other officers" because he was responsible for making "disciplinary decision and remedial measures to correct performance or conduct deficiencies." His role prohibited him from building personal relationships or friendly working relationships with his colleagues. CRJ SL 30 also stated that he took his role very seriously to maintain good order and discipline in his command. However, he noted that he considered his position, in some ways, a form of "institutional isolation" designed to perform and execute duties and expected functions effectively.

All law enforcement participants claimed that during the times they felt workplace loneliness, they did not feel safe to vent either to co-workers, supervisors, or even family. Not being able to vent and process those complicated feelings made, most of them feel lost. Some participants also confirmed that when they were unable to exhibit their feelings, such as anger, frustrations, stress, etc., they feel a deep sense of workplace loneliness. On the contrary, CRJ SL 6 said that he felt short-lived workplace loneliness when he had to accomplish tasks with insufficient guidance. Nevertheless, he highlighted

that he feels “lucky to work for an organization in which [he] perceive has very little workplace loneliness.”

Similar to law enforcement officers' experiences, CRJ SL 2's response supported the initial claim that subordinates were intentionally not inviting their supervisors to attend work events or peer activities. CRJ SL 2, a Detention Officer, argued that although he understood why he was uninvited, it still made her feel alone with no one to express feelings without judgment. The participant did not clarify if she was invited to events attended by other supervisors. Other participants from the corrections field also stated that it is quite difficult to fit time to socialize due to the nature of their work.

Participants stated that it was difficult for them to find people they feel comfortable enough to discuss their feelings of workplace loneliness—the hesitation was due to the fear of rejection and judgment. Some of the participants indicated that because senior leaders constantly have to wear a “mask of strength”, it was not wise to vent or express feelings of workplace loneliness to colleagues in the fear of appearing weak. As CRJ SL 10 explained, “I describe [workplace loneliness] as isolation from social relations due to the position; additionally, leaders, who because of their position, choose not to discuss issues with others so they do not appear weak.”

. One participant from social services- who works for a non-profit organization providing homeless, legal, vocational services, etc. stated that she had not experienced workplace loneliness, or at least she has not recognized it. Surprisingly, she has worked in the field for over 13 years now. Nevertheless, she has not personally experienced workplace loneliness or does not know anyone in the organization who did.

CRJ SL 21 stated that his personal experience with workplace loneliness was directly related to his promotion into a mid-level supervisor. CRJ SL 21 explained that due to his promotion, he was no longer a member of his rank and not yet a member of the senior management team. This transition made him feel like his subordinates do not trust him because he was not "one of the crew," but rather "the management." Eventually, he was no longer invited to outings or dinners with the crew. On the other hand, CRJ SL 21 was also excluded from the higher-ranking officials' decision-making process.

Participants from the emergency response fields- including firefighters, search & rescue, and emergency medical technicians- stated that they work long and unpredictable hours with very little flexibility. CRJ SL 11, a Deputy Chief, described his typical day at work as "extremely demanding, probably requiring 60 hours a week". He said that he usually starts his day at 4:45 a.m. and finishes around 7:00 p.m. for at least three days a week, and he works until 3:00 p.m. for the other two days. He claimed that he rarely has days off because he typically works on weekends and holidays. As a result, he has to continually split between work and family, with no time for friends and self. CRJ SL 11 said that although he has not truly experienced workplace loneliness, the participant was concerned that because he has lost a few friends and does not socialize outside of the fire department, he would be left with no friends when he retires. Other participants echoed similar sentiments about long working hours. CRJ SL 20 said that he spent most of his 16-year career in search and rescue/firefighting in fire stations where he spent 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Consequently, most responders found it challenging to carve out

ample time to socialize and build meaningful relationships outside of their tightly knitted group.

Most of the responders highlighted that despite the long hours and overwhelming workload, physical isolation at work was rare. Because the nature of the job requires teamwork, there were always interactions and group activities. Generally, everyone treats each other like family.

Notably, participants from law enforcement and corrections did not pertain to their organizations as teamwork oriented. Instead, most of the responders from law enforcement and corrections claimed that workplace loneliness was very prominent because most people in the workforce were only looking out for either themselves or their close buddies. The responders from social services, on the hand, said that they feel mostly like a family at work and that they tend to have an inclusive, organized, and regular “happy hours” just to check on each other. CRJ SL 5 even stated that the only rule during their work happy hour was that “no one is allowed to talk about work at all.”

One participant explained that he was used to being around people at work because he typically works with 5 to 15 personnel per day. Although physical isolation was minimal, CRJ SL 20 explained that he experienced workplace loneliness as soon as he was promoted to be the Deputy Fire Chief of Operations. They oversaw all operational and administrative functions of 7 battalions, consisting of approximately 400 staff members. The pressures of the roles and the level of confidentiality regarding personnel issues, disciplines, and transfers made it extremely challenging for him to interact with his colleagues.

CRJ SL 20 explained further that he felt like being intentionally isolated by his subordinates and his superiors, which caused him to feel deep workplace loneliness. He was unable to relate and interact with other chiefs. Due to the sensitive nature of his role and the level of information confidentiality, he was not speaking openly and transparently with his subordinates, especially when his peers were asking him direct questions. Although some of his peers respected his decision to keep confidential information, others took it personally and stopped talking to him. Some people seemed to have resented him for not sharing information, particularly those who have direct individual impacts.

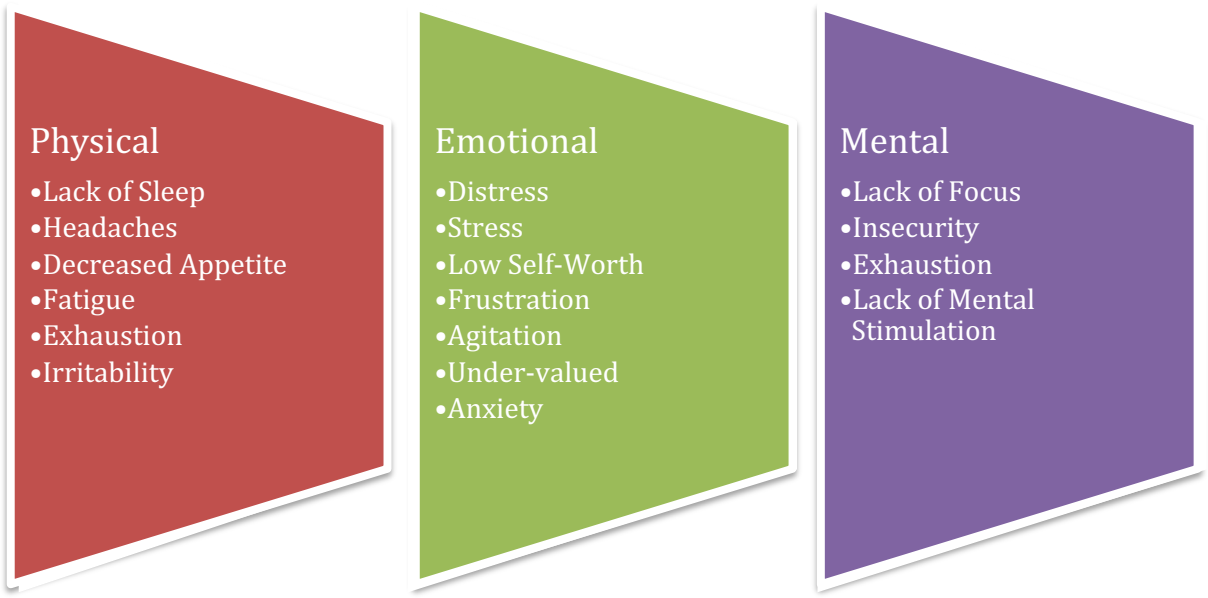
One particular scenario that stood out was when CRJ SL 20's superior gave him a piece of information to test his loyalty. He did not know then that his superior's goal was to check his ability to keep confidential information even if it affects the people he knows. He passed the test and gained his supervisor's respect and trust. However, that situation only widened the gap between him and his peers, which resulted in an increased level and a more profound sense of workplace loneliness. Several participants also noted that since their promotions, the number of friendly peers had decreased significantly; thus, reducing their network of support. For instance, CRJ SL 20 rendered a disciplinary action to one of his peers due to safety violations and unprofessional conduct. Despite having an amicable relationship before the incident, the personnel stopped talking to CRJ SL 20. On top of everything, the leadership principle teaches managers to complain up and to not complain to subordinates to maintain respect in the chain of command and

keep high morale. This process leaves mid-managers at lost and isolated both by their subordinates and superiors.

Overall, the impacts of workplace loneliness were negative for those who have experienced it. For others who have no or limited knowledge, or experiences related to workplace loneliness, the impacts were undetermined. There were also some positive impacts on workplace loneliness. Some participants diverted their focus on achieving their goals, such as pursuing higher education, working out, and activities that created positive changes within their communities.

For Interview Question 6, I categorized the answers into three: physical, emotional, and mental impacts. Some participants noted that, in some cases, it was difficult to identify if the impacts were solely due to workplace loneliness or caused by a variety of factors. For this research, the researcher would only focus on the impacts of workplace loneliness on senior leaders, excluding factors such as personal stress, mental health condition, or pre-existing conditions. Most participants also mentioned that they initially felt the impacts of workplace loneliness, both mentally and emotionally, before experiencing physical impacts. Some of the impacts overlap with one another, as shown on *Figure 5.*

*Figure 5.* Impacts of Workplace Loneliness on Criminal Justice Senior Leaders




Previous responses indicated that most senior leaders do not feel safe expressing their feelings of workplace loneliness for various reasons. The lack of education or discussions surrounding the topic could lead to the bottling of heavy emotions, which could reach a breaking point. The impacts of workplace loneliness on organizations, families, and communities were sounds real, CRJ SL 4 said. She also added that these consequences might come slow and unrecognizable but could be catastrophic. Several senior leaders noted that it might be challenging to detect workplace loneliness on supervisors and high-ranking officials because most were always wearing masks of strength and stability.

A respondent said that due to workplace loneliness, she had made decisions based on emotions and not critical thinking, which might have had severe implications for the organization, personnel, and community. Another response indicated that because their

subordinates typically outnumbered supervisors, the management might not fully execute or enforce policies and mandates to avoid potential confrontations.

Due to workplace loneliness, some senior leaders reported experiencing low morale, resulting in an inability to function at maximum potentials. For example, CRJ SL 9 recalled that his experience of workplace loneliness enabled him to serve his community to the best of his ability and prevented him from contributing to the extent to which he wanted. He claimed to be purposefully "kept off from community committees, banned from sitting on promotional panels, and was transferred to a previously non-existent administrative role."

The situation described above plus other stressors could create job dissatisfaction. CRJ SL 20 explained that when senior leaders were promoted, their network decreases, and if they do not proactively increase their internal and external network, it could result in feelings or experience of workplace loneliness.

When social or support networks decrease, there was a higher chance that exposure to creative expressions, diversity, and innovative ideas also decreases. As a senior leader, he or she needed to be able to brainstorm and collect different perspectives to make the most rational and critical decisions for the organization and the communities he or she serves.

The impacts of low morale and increased job dissatisfaction affect performance and productivity. CRJ SL 21 stated, "unless dealt with, I could see the effects on morale within the organization and, therefore, affecting productivity." A few participants acknowledge that they sometimes want to do the bare minimum because they felt

undervalued and frustrated about how they were feeling at work. Besides, they could delegate tasks to their subordinates and still complete the tasks at hand. However, the harmful effect of this mentality was that the subordinates were left with no effective leadership and managerial support.

Although the participants expressed their negative experiences related to workplace loneliness, not one participant indicated that workplace loneliness resulted in increased absenteeism. However, some participants said that during those times, when they felt deeply lonely at work, they wanted to get away from work but did not have ample opportunities because of their senior leadership roles.

Most of the participants have stated how passionate they were of what they do and that at the end of the day, they want to uphold their duty to serve to the best of their ability regardless of how they feel. In many cases, they do not want to hint that they were feeling lonely, isolated, or frustrated.

Several participants mentioned that they bring home their feelings of workplace loneliness because they were often unable to separate their work and personal lives due to the nature of their roles. Some participants said that they were lucky to have to support and understand spouses; without them, they would not have been able to get through those periods of workplace loneliness and imposed isolation.

Some participants recognized that their families were impacted when they were stressed or overwhelmed at work. For many of them, it could be challenging to put work behind them when they get home despite earnest attempts to compartmentalize.

Therefore, the families usually become the receiving end of their frustrations, irritability, lack of focus, stress, etc. which then create strained, unhealthy relationships.

The limited or lack of public awareness about workplace loneliness made it especially challenging for senior leaders to vocalize their feelings or lived experiences. The nature of the trade for these senior leaders revolves around public service, so it was in the public's best interest to have open discussions about the impacts of workplace loneliness. As CRJ SL 4 explained, the organization must create a welcoming and inclusive workplace environment for all employees to avoid the detrimental impacts of workplace loneliness. Senior leaders of criminal justice organizations were important facets of public service. The community relies on these leaders to make tough decisions that are consequential to society and its people. These negative consequences could influence decisions and actions surrounding public policies and administration.

The responders provided several ways that help them manage and address the impacts of workplace loneliness. It was interesting that none of the participants stated that their families were a part of handling or managing workplace loneliness. Although, a few participants noted that they were only able to get through workplace loneliness due to the support and understanding of their significant others. Below were the common themes based on the responses provided:

Several participants cited that they try to keep open lines of communication with their coworkers. This topic, they argued, was something that was not typically discussed at work, so it could be challenging to explain to others. Therefore, some senior leaders

might improperly label workplace loneliness and use common mental health issues such as stress, anxiety, depression, PTSD, etc. instead.

CRJ SL 6 emphasized that finding a mentor helped her tremendously over the years. She built a stable relationship with two peers, who were the same rank and roles as her. CRJ SL 6 explained that together, they answer each other's questions, problem-solve collectively, and determine if additional support was needed from their supervising authority. She said that "having those two as constant supports was beneficial."

Others found it easier to find multiple mentors for different types of situations. For instance, a participant said that if she has a unit-specific issue, not positional, she reaches out to 2 other leaders within her unit. This method works to ensure that specific leadership tasks do not overlap and that they stay within their licensure scope.

CRJ SL 26 said that he started connecting with officers from different units. He said that reaching out keeps him connected with other personnel. He also added that he tries "to show compassion, listen to them, ask about home life, and advocate for their needs." CRJ SL 26 believes that building relationships is "bridges and gap that keeps [me] from being isolated from them." He also argued that because of the current political climate and the "tensions of today's issues," people should divert from some of those issues and maintain a primary focus on the mission. This helped the management of loneliness overall. People need to find common ground, CRJ SL 26 reasoned. Similarly, CRJ SL 21 said that through proactively maintaining and building professional support networks, both internal and external, she overcame the impacts of workplace loneliness.

Only one participant reported seeking professional help through counseling. However, the participant did not expound on her experience in counseling, and if it helped her overcome the feelings or impacts of workplace loneliness.

Senior leaders indicated that it could be challenging to take some days off because of the demands of their roles. Nevertheless, they said that taking some time off to decompress was very important and useful. CRJ SL 26 said that he had to force himself to separate from his everyday items to cope by balancing different responsibilities and other interests.

Engaging in activities that promote healthy living was one of the most common ways that senior leaders cope with the impacts of workplace loneliness. Some of the examples provided by the responders were working-out, going for walks, hikes, eating healthy, cycling, martial arts, and taking regular vacations to unwind.

CRJ SL 9 said that finding outlets outside the organization to stimulate his mind has helped him significantly, both emotionally and mentally. Several participants echoed that volunteering in the community increase their sense of value and overall decreased workplace loneliness. For instance, one participant said that he volunteered to his local Rotary Club and other community-based organizations. He described volunteering as therapeutic because it allowed him to “attain a feeling of accomplishment” that he was not getting at work.

Several senior leaders reported that since they felt and experienced workplace loneliness, they have proactively educated themselves on how to deal with it and its impacts. Because they have a better understanding of workplace loneliness and some of

the stressors, they could form and maintain a support network of peers and higher-ranking officers that they could talk to about sensitive, confidential, and organizational issues. CRJ SL 2 reported that she started reading self-help books. While CRJ SL 20 claimed to have attended workshops, read articles about general stress management and leadership. CRJ SL 9 diverted his energy on completing his bachelor's and master's degrees with honors.

Responses to Question 9 were divided into four categories based on the fields within the criminal justice system: Law Enforcement, Corrections, Social Services, and Emergency Response.

Although the law enforcement participants outlined several programs within the organization that might help senior leaders in managing their mental health and wellness, most participants indicated that they were not aware of any existing programs that specifically deal with the aspects of workplace loneliness and its impact. CRJ SL 30 confirmed that this topic has only been mildly discussed within core leadership programs and in general discussions revolving around "being lonely at the top." Below were some of the existing strategies for mental health, as provided by the responders of this study:

Law enforcement participants indicated that there were plenty of counseling services for mental health within their organizations. Life counselors were also available to assist employees with any work-related or personal issues that might negatively impact their professional functions.

CRJ SL 6 stated that every workstation with desktops in her department has a fixed icon to survey employees about various workplace issues such as burnout,

compassion fatigue, stress, etc. She indicated that once the survey was completed, it provides the employee a score, and it provides a link of helpful resourced based on the level of the individual's well-being. These resources range from good (review policies to become more confident in your job tasks) to medium (request time during your shift to visit the self-care room) to severe (seek therapy through the organization's free contract therapy services). While this was not a specific program, it certainly provides numerous resources to help with various issues of well-being, which might include workplace loneliness. No specific mention of addressing workplace loneliness.

The law enforcement participants reported several support mechanisms for officers who were feeling lonely or depressed. Member health and wellness was promoted through mindfulness-based resiliency training. They worked with the National Mental Health Association in the delivery of workplace wellness training to supervisors, developed a gender equity/woman in policing strategy, and expanded and strengthened our Employee Assistance Program and Crisis Intervention Teams. According to CRJ SL 9, his team established a mentorship program for new and experienced officers and staff members. CRJ SL 10 added that the first step in most mental health programs was the diagnosis, then a treatment program would be recommended to employees.

The participants from the correctional facilities stated that although there were some counseling programs at work for mental health, most officers were skeptical and do not use the services because they were afraid of company retaliation. According to CRJ SL 2, "fear that the company would know what the employees stated."

CRJ SL 4 stated that because they work with individuals and their families experiencing abuse and homelessness daily, most employees experience an extreme level of stress and secondary trauma. Thus, as a senior leader, CRJ SL 4 encourages her staff to report to her and speak up if they were bothered by anything at work. So, most of her subordinates turn to her to vent and seek comfort. Fortunately, CRJ SL 4 said that she has a supportive and caring leadership and a team. That is why she has not personally experienced workplace loneliness. Staff was also encouraged to take frequent breaks, have lunch together, walk or drive around to catch fresh air, and clear their minds.

To ensure that employees and supervisors have ample time to unwind, the organization arranges monthly group meetings and agency-wide "happy hour" every Friday. These events also have one strict rule, "no work-related discussions allowed." The idea of the happy hour was to unwind and get to know each other on a more personable level and establish a strong bond.

All of the emergency response participants indicated that there were no specific programs addressing workplace loneliness. There is, however, an Employee Assistance Program, according to CRJ SL 20. These programs were ineffective, CRJ SL 26 argued. He added that "there was peer counseling, but usually that entails those who were lower rank and information or expression from higher-level officers should not be explained to lower-level employees." Hence, there were no programs available specifically to address the impacts of workplace loneliness on senior leaders.

All of the responders recommended having broader and more serious discussions about workplace loneliness experienced by senior leaders and their subordinates. A few

participants confirmed that they have only heard of workplace loneliness through this study. This particular discussion would help upcoming managers as they transition to senior leadership. CRJ SL 1 stated that he strongly feels that being educated about this topic could help a senior leader excel at his or her role. A safe environment was needed to embolden senior leaders to speak up. Without this, senior leaders might not feel comfortable to speak with honesty and confidence.

Other senior leaders agreed that educating everyone about the prevalence of workplace loneliness, either chronically or temporarily, was critical. Normalizing these discussions and being comfortable expressing experiences related to workplace loneliness was just the beginning. Providing reliable resources and various strategies to combat workplace loneliness could undoubtedly make a difference. To encourage every employee to build lasting relationships and work as a team and not rivals.

Although most of the responders have experienced workplace loneliness, most of them were not able to label the feelings or the experience accurately. CRJ SL 9 highlighted that law enforcement officers should be "be provided with the knowledge they need to identify the tell-tale signs and symptoms of workplace loneliness and the negative impact that it could have on an individual, a team, an organization, and the community." Once workplace loneliness was identified, organizations need to ensure they have the strategies to effectively deal with this issue in a professional, non-judgmental, and confidential manner. Employees need to be able to access these tools efficiently and anonymously if they so desire. A third-party provider preferred these

services, so there was no possibility of anyone within the organization of discovering the individual was receiving counseling unless they wished to make it known.

Some of the criminal justice organizations do not have an existing "buddy system." CRJ SL 4 said that her agency was trying to implement a buddy system to help the new employee feel welcome and assist with the socializing process by sharing unwritten cultural norms and expectations of the agency and providing moral support. The buddy and the new employee would commit to a regular meeting schedule to have an informal conversation. To avoid conflicts and intimidation, the buddy cannot be a supervisor nor substitute for training, mentoring, or regular hiring procedures.

Most of the participants who responded to this question cited that this topic gave them a different perspective on what other supervisors could be dealing with as it relates to workplace loneliness. CRJ SL 9 pointed out that the study of workplace loneliness was critical but severely understudied. CRJ SL 1 said that he had observed other supervisors who eat by themselves and never thought that they could be feeling left out or lonely. CRJ SL 6 added that loneliness was more present in her personal life than at work. She divulged a few personal information about her personal life, and she emphasized that although her work environment could also be a lonely place, she felt less lonely at work because she was treated with far more credibility and respect. CRJ SL 6 claimed, "it was at work where I am removed from the constant reminders of society's expectation that I should marry and have children."

CRJ SL 10 marked that the only way for loneliness to be addressed was to understand its causes and reach out for help to assist with the navigation of the demands

placed on leaders. It was difficult not to feel alone, however, utilizing cohorts of the same rank and position could assist with the feeling of loneliness. CRJ SL 29 claimed that employees need to take ownership of their health and welfare. If an employee, regardless of their status, was feeling alone or isolated, these feelings could lead to thoughts of suicide or others, the employee could engage in other destructive behavior. “As supervisors, we need to look out for our employees, get to know them, and their families. Small gestures, such as giving someone a day off to celebrate a birthday (their spouse or child) or anniversary shows we care about them”, CRJ SL 29 continued.

Some participants recommended that the researcher follow-up this study of workplace loneliness as it relates to the following topics: workaholism, lack of talent in leadership positions, or an inadequate number of leaders to handle the workload. The topic of workaholism was more individually focused, while the other two were systemic of the organization’s views/values.

## Summary

In summary, there were a total of 16 criminal justice senior leaders who participated in this study: 47% of the participants were senior leaders in the law enforcement field, 27% were emergency responders, 13% were correctional officers, and the other 13% were social service managers. Fifty percent of the participants were females and other 50% were males. Five years was the minimum years of managerial experience within the criminal justice field. The average years of experience in criminal justice was 14 years and the longest years of experience was over 37 years.

The pilot study was conducted to test the alignment of the methods and study design. The same 11 open-ended interview questions were provided to the 16 study participants and the 3 pilot study responders. The interview questions aimed to answer the overarching research question, “what are the impacts of workplace loneliness on senior leaders of criminal justice organizations?”

The findings revealed, as shown in *Figure 4*, that 56% of the participants reported feeling sense of workplace loneliness. At least 87% of senior leaders have experienced workplace loneliness at some points in their careers within the criminal justice system. The data analyses also revealed that the level of knowledge about workplace loneliness raised significantly as the years of experience in criminal justice increased. The participants derived four general descriptions of workplace loneliness based on their knowledge and experiences:

1. A result of perceived feelings of isolation due to varying factors in the workplace.
2. Perceived lack of support from colleagues and the inability to share experiences with people at work, even at home, is due to not feeling safe to express and fear of appearing weak or vulnerable.
3. Inability to create meaningful work relationships due to rank/position, stemming from policy enforcement, and confidentiality concerns.
4. Failure to adapt to a new work environment, culture, and people. A supervisor might choose to intentionally isolate himself or herself because of personal biases or stressors.

According to the participants, workplace loneliness has severe impacts not only physically but also emotionally and mentally. The physical impacts include, but not limited to, lack of sleep, headaches, decreased appetite; fatigue; exhaustion; and irritability. The emotional impacts, as per the participants, include distress; stress; low self-worth; frustration, agitation, feelings of being undervalued, and anxiety. Furthermore, the mental impacts of workplace loneliness on the participants include lack of focus, insecurity, exhaustion, and lack of mental stimulation.

There were also impacts of workplace loneliness on organizations, families, and communities. Based on the data collected, workplace loneliness impacts the organizations because it might affect the senior leaders' overall performance, productivity, and leadership functions. According to the participants, workplace loneliness impacts their decision-making, low level of morale, job dissatisfaction, decrease in creative ideas and innovation, low productivity, low performance, and even absenteeism.

The impacts of workplace loneliness, the participants argued, were more intrinsic. Because they were often unable to separate their work and personal lives due to the nature of their roles. The families usually become the receiving end of their frustrations, irritability, lack of focus, stress, etc. which then create strained, unhealthy relationships. On the other hand, the communities that the senior leaders were also affected by the consequences of workplace loneliness. The community relies on these leaders to make tough decisions, which were consequential to society and its people. These negative consequences could influence decisions and actions surrounding public policies and administration.

The impacts of workplace loneliness could be managed, addressed, or dealt with by having open communications, reaching out to people, building relationships, counseling, taking some time off, doing community service, and educating or training about the subject and its impacts. Unfortunately, there were currently no existing programs that directly address workplace loneliness and its impact across the examined criminal justice organizations. Therefore, the participants recommended having severe discussions about workplace loneliness, identifying workplace loneliness signs and strategies, buddy system or mentorship, and training or education. Simply put, workplace loneliness detracts from a person's ability to perform at the top of their game, undermining their productivity. Left unchecked, it could lead to workplace absences, increased sick time, aberrant and destructive behavior, or self-harm.

The next chapter would cover the interpretation of findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications, positive social change, and conclusion of the study.

# Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

## Introduction

This qualitative study explored the impacts of workplace loneliness on criminal justice senior leaders. The nature of this study was a phenomenological qualitative approach, which was suitable to capture the essence of the criminal justice senior leaders' lived experiences related to workplace loneliness. The study design permitted me, as the researcher, to comprehend and interpret and reflect on the meanings of the participants' lived experiences related to workplace loneliness. This contextualization and reflection provided meanings, descriptions, and understanding of the phenomenon. The theoretical framework of this research was derived from Descartes' views of the self-concept theory, which explained how individuals define and describe themselves within a social context. Using purposive sampling, semistructured interviews of 16 senior leaders from various criminal justice organizations were conducted. The collected data were coded and categorized based on emerging themes—using reflective structural analyses in Microsoft Excel.

This study was conducted because I identified a growing concern about the prevalence and consequences of workplace loneliness globally. Many studies revealed that loneliness was a modern epidemic and a cognitive state linked to various adverse physical and mental health conditions (Beller & Wagner, 2018; Campagne, 2019; Ozcelik & Barsade, 2018). Research also revealed that workplace loneliness was a professional hazard because it has debilitating impacts on an individual's ability to perform at maximum capacity. According to a study conducted by Rokach (2014), 52%

of senior leaders frequently feel lonely, but researchers have limited knowledge of how workplace loneliness impacts their overall health, social engagements, and positional functions such as productivity, performance, and decision making. The literature review gap found that there were limited mental health and wellness programs focused on workplace loneliness as experienced by criminal justice professionals. Aside from the health risks, impacts on families and communities, the impacts of workplace loneliness, the organization could be costly and could result in heavy financial burden. This research filled the gap of understanding the phenomenon, encouraged open discussions, and recommended plausible interventions, programs, and solutions that could prevent and manage the detrimental impacts of workplace loneliness.

This study found that workplace loneliness has grave impacts on criminal justice senior leaders physically, emotionally, and mentally. The physical impacts included, but not limited to lack of sleep, headaches, decreased appetite, fatigue, exhaustion, and irritability. The emotional impacts, as per the participants, included distress, stress, low self-worth, frustration, agitation, feelings of being undervalued, and anxiety. Furthermore, the mental impacts of workplace loneliness on the participants included lack of focus, insecurity, exhaustion, and lack of mental stimulation.

Furthermore, workplace loneliness has severe impacts on organizations, families, and communities. The senior leaders revealed that workplace loneliness impacts their overall performance, productivity, and leadership functions. The participants also argued that workplace loneliness has, at one point, affected their decision-making. It has resulted

in a decreased level of morale, diminished job satisfaction, inability to construct creative ideas and innovation, low productivity, fall on performance, and even absenteeism.

## Interpretation of the Findings

This portion provided a comparison between the emerging themes from Chapter 2 and the themes and categories derived from the collected data. The comparison between the two sections reveals what findings confirm, disconfirm, or extend knowledge. This section also tackles the findings in the context of this study's theoretical framework, which was Descartes' self-concept theory.

### Themes on Chapter 2 versus Emerged Themes from Data Collected

The literature review in Chapter 2 described humans as social animals, with deep desires for social connectedness and belongingness (Hughes et al., 2004). When the sense of social stability and interpersonal relationships were disrupted, an individual might begin to experience isolation, which, if prolonged, could result in loneliness. When experienced in a professional environment, it is called workplace loneliness. There were several consequences of experienced chronic loneliness. Some of which could impact certain social functions and the overall well-being of a person.

The findings revealed that senior leaders of criminal justice were not exempt from the experience of loneliness. According to the participants, workplace loneliness was common and prevalent in the criminal justice field, but typically unheard or spoken of. The findings also have shown that senior leaders of criminal justice organizations could be systematically isolating, which causes workplace loneliness. The literature review and

the findings of this study pose significant similarities and differences, further discussed below.

**Theme 1: Definition of Loneliness**

Martín-María et al. (2020) described chronic loneliness as a sense of deep loneliness experienced by an individual for over 2 years. On the other hand, Cacioppo et al. (2006) portrayed loneliness as a fusion of complicated feelings when there were deficiencies in achieving the essentials for intimate and social engagements. Campagne (2019) defined loneliness as an independent occurrence of perceived social isolation and could only be measured by the distinctive introspective. Other descriptions of loneliness highlighted the state of being alone and isolated. Loneliness was depicted as a subjective perception of inadequate personal relationships.

The senior leader participants of this study described workplace loneliness because of perceived isolation due to varying factors in the workplace. These factors included (a) perceived lack of support from colleagues; (b) the inability to share experiences with people at work, and even at home, due to not feeling safe to express emotion; (c) and the fear of appearing weak or vulnerable; (d) the inability to create meaningful work relationships due to rank/position, stemming from policy enforcement, and confidentiality concerns and (e), the failure to adapt to a new work environment, culture, and people.

The findings confirmed that workplace loneliness occurred when there was a disconnect between the essential needs of an individual to bond and build meaningful interpersonal relationships. Senior leaders, who feel the sense of workplace loneliness,

were usually isolated from their peers due to many factors. The definitions provided both in Chapter 2 and the findings align in a sense that loneliness, in general, was not always about being physically alone, but the perception of being alone, which could inability to find meaning in one's life. The essence of belongingness and connectedness showed to be some of the most persistent concepts. Isolation or perceived isolation was also an essential key point.

The findings also showed that senior leaders have strong desires to build and maintain positive and meaningful interpersonal relationships with their coworkers, superiors, and subordinates, even if it was in a limited capacity. However, due to the nature of the job, achieving these desires could be challenging to attain or sustain because a senior leader was expected to be strictly professional, highly competitive, and present a confident façade. There were no disconfirming concepts between the literature in Chapter 2 and the findings.

Even those who were socially connected or always working with people (i.e., firefighters, police officers, social service managers) could feel a deep sense of workplace loneliness. The findings revealed that the perception of workplace loneliness and reality could either be the same or different. For example, a participant who claimed to have not personally experienced workplace loneliness believe that loneliness was only a state of mind, not physical. Another participant who experienced workplace loneliness said that it was felt physically, mentally, and emotionally. Thus, the sense of workplace loneliness was a singular experience, and although it could be similar, it was always unique to an individual.

**Theme 2: Impacts of Workplace Loneliness**

Chapter 2 discussed the impacts of loneliness, which included physical, mental, and psychological. According to the literature reviewed, loneliness contributes to many different health outcomes such as depression, reduced cognitive and immune functions, and mortality (Beller & Wagner, 2018). Some additional effects of loneliness were increased mortality and decreased overall wellness (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015). Courtin and Knapp (2017) cited that loneliness has detrimental effects equivalent to smoking and obesity. A person could also experience depression and increased cardiovascular illnesses.

This study's findings showed that the impacts of workplace loneliness on senior leaders were experienced physically, mentally, and emotionally. The physical impacts include, but not limited to, lack of sleep, headaches, decreased appetite; fatigue; exhaustion; and irritability. According to senior leaders, emotional impacts include distress, stress, low self-worth; frustration, agitation, feelings of being undervalued, and anxiety. The mental impacts of workplace loneliness on the participants include lack of focus, insecurity, exhaustion, and lack of mental stimulation.

Workplace loneliness was found to have impacts on organizations, family, and communities. The findings showed that workplace loneliness has impacts on the senior leaders' decision-making, low level of morale, job dissatisfaction, decrease in creative ideas and innovation, low productivity, low performance, and even absenteeism. These consequences pose significant impacts on the organizations, families, and communities that the senior leaders serve.

Both the academic literature and the findings of this study confirm that workplace loneliness has physical, emotional, and mental impacts. According to a study, some people experiencing a deep sense of loneliness might choose to distance themselves from their support systems (Martín-María et al., 2020). This was true for 60% of the participants. The findings showed that most participants were intentionally or consciously isolating themselves because of their roles as senior leaders of organizations. They do so to make sure that they could make individual tough and neutral decisions. The impacts of workplace loneliness on senior leaders of criminal justice organizations reflect the effects demonstrated in Chapter 2. Similarly, most people experiencing workplace loneliness have discriminating feelings of hostility, stress, pessimism, anxiety, decreased self-esteem, loneliness to cases of unhealthy behaviors, sleep deprivation, and vital exhaustion (Courtin & Knapp, 2017).

Alberti (2018) explained that the experience of loneliness was also tangible and physical because it was linked to bodily experience, hence not only experienced psychologically as most people believed it to be the case. These embodied experiences were observed through physical reactions.

Chapter 2 showed that workplace loneliness also has an impact on organizations. Workplace loneliness was considered as a professional hazard. Valentine et al. (2019) stated that workplace loneliness was linked to occupational stress, which was a recurrent issue at work—causing occupational stress, burnouts, absenteeism, and presenteeism. These consequences, accordingly, eventually resulted in low productivity and a decreased

in quality of performance. Thus, the monetary costs of stress-related chronic disease, such as workplace loneliness were understudied.

The literature review showed several adverse impacts of loneliness on individuals, such as increased mortality rate, cardiovascular risks, possibly signs of dementia (see Martín-María et al., 2020). The American Psychological Association (2017) even concluded that loneliness could pose risks for Alzheimer's disease and cognitive decline. The findings did not reveal any of these symptoms or impacts. The participants also did not mention any similarities of impacts as obesity or smoking.

None of the participants indicated on their responses that the feelings of workplace loneliness stemmed from pre-existing mental health issues. Chapter 2 discussed that persons with severe mental illness such as major depressive, bipolar, or schizophrenia spectrum disorders with psychosocial functioning might experience heightened feelings of loneliness than the average population (Dell et al., 2019).

Additionally, Chapter 2 explained that human beings were social by nature and that the feeling of needing to belong was a fundamental aspect of their lives to suffice the pervasive desire and maintain a balanced and positive quality of life (see Heinrich & Gullone, 2006). This was reflected in the findings of this study. Criminal justice senior leaders have strong desires to connect and feel that they belong, but because of their roles or particular influences, most subordinates and other managers intentionally exclude them from work-related events and activities, including happy hours and group luncheons, or even decision-making processes. The lack of a safe place or environment to discuss or vent these feelings often pushes senior leaders into the dangerous corners of

isolation. When these needs were not consistently and frequently achieved through positive interactions with others, they experience workplace loneliness. Trust and security were two concepts that the senior leaders discussed. As they described, these two were often absent in articulating their feelings of loneliness at home and work.

One unique observation I noticed was that both the literature review and the participants' responses had overlapping descriptors of loneliness and isolation. The literature I reviewed from Chapter 2 highlighted explicitly that loneliness and isolation must be studied independently for these two concepts were not the same. Some participants used the terms isolated and lonely interchangeably, which confirmed the reports that were currently no reliable means to measure the level of loneliness experienced by an individual or a standard way to define loneliness (Courtin & Knapp, 2017).

All criminal justice senior leaders agreed that workplace loneliness reduces one's quality of life. A participant said that he now worries about who would be friends with him when he retires from the department. Because of the heavy workload and the long hours at work, he does not have ample time to build relationships outside of work and his significant other. Another participant responded that because he experienced intentional isolation from his superiors and subordinates, he struggled to open up, and eventually socially withdrew. A senior leader at a fire department stated that because she was afraid to appear weak, she has increased vigilance in building connections and relationships.

**Theme 3: Types of Loneliness**

Chapter 2 discussed the different dimensions and types of loneliness. The first type of loneliness was situational loneliness, which referred to the perceived experience of loneliness due to different environmental factors such as socioeconomic and cultural milieu (Tiwali, 2013). Secondly, developmental loneliness occurs when there was an imbalance between individualism and connectedness with others (Tiwali, 2013). Lastly, internal loneliness, which was a result of personality factors, loss of control, mental distress, stress, low self-esteem, feelings of guilt or worthlessness, and inability to cope with emerging situations (Tiwali, 2013). Additional undesired life-changing events such as a discrepancy in social connection, migration, interpersonal conflicts, disasters, old age, accidents, illness, disasters, or emptiness syndrome could lead to the chronic experience of workplace loneliness.

The findings reveal that all three types of loneliness described in Chapter 2 were relevant to how senior leaders experienced workplace loneliness. In Chapter 4, I indicated the various factors contributing to senior leaders' experiences related to workplace loneliness. This section was categorized based on the fields in the criminal justice system, but the findings reveal that workplace loneliness was experienced across the board.

Law enforcement senior leaders, for example, indicated that they felt that workplace loneliness stemmed from (a) isolation from subordinates, (b) isolation from superiors, (c) institutional isolation due to roles, and (d) unable to exhibit feelings or inability to vent. The two of the three types of loneliness described the lived experiences of senior leaders related to workplace loneliness, situational, and developmental. A

promotion to a senior leadership could be considered changes both situational and developmental. The sudden change of environment and placement out of what is familiar could trigger workplace loneliness. For instance, CRJ SL 1 explained that he noticed that, his peers began to isolate him as soon as he got promoted and as his responsibilities increased, which resulted in feeling workplace loneliness.

Furthermore, CRJ SL 9 recalled that deputy went out of his way to isolate him and intentionally stalled his progression in the ranks because of job insecurity. A detention officer shared that her subordinates were intentionally not inviting their supervisors to attend work events or peer activities, which made her feel unwelcome. Isolation from both superiors and subordinates could be challenging for most and could make people feel very much alone. The findings also confirmed that the working world was subject to stress from economic pressures, competition, long working hours, downsizing, tight budgets, overall uncertainty, lack of support, unfair treatment, low decision latitude, conflicting roles, poor communication, a profound sense of contribution to the society, gender inequality, and workplace bullying. (see Kermott, 2019, p. 1)

On the contrary, the participants did not provide any evidence that their lived experiences related to workplace loneliness were related to other life-changing events as noted by the literature in Chapter 2. The senior leaders also did not make connections about current political, social, and public health issues that could have contributed to their feelings of workplace loneliness.

Furthermore, senior leaders were an essential resource for groups and key players contributing to an organization's overall success. Leaders have unique attributes that

could shape the teams' overall morale, productivity, and overall performance. However, if a senior leader experienced chronic feelings of workplace loneliness, the findings reveal that productivity, performance, and other leadership functions such as decision making were affected. Any conflict with their staff, organizations, community, and even families could also add to the factors causing workplace loneliness. Senior leaders of criminal justice organizations make final and strategic decisions that significantly influence organizational outcomes and performance. So, senior leaders must receive all the required assistance and the necessary skills and characteristics to achieve the goals.

CRJ SLs 1, 6, and 9 alluded to senior leaders continually wearing "masks of strength," which referred to the literature presented by Shamir et al. (1993) that most subordinates naturally select and follow primes based on their known identities, perceived qualities, and the presented values. There were high expectations of what a leader must be and admitting to being lonely could be viewed as weak and unfitness to lead. Criminal justice senior leaders were expected to exhibit the ability to manage high stress and trials with ease and confidence.

**Theme 4: Managing, Addressing, or Dealing with Workplace Loneliness**

Chapter 2 discussed that mental health problems experienced by senior leaders in criminal justice received very little to no attention. The Organizational Behavior Division of the Academy of Management conducted a study on executive health concerning essential issues about health, well-being, and safety in the workplace in which revealed that there was a comparative inattention of the medical, managerial, and psychological aspects of executive health (Campbell Quick et al., 2000). This study showed that if the

senior leader were healthy, then more than likely, he or she would be able also to improve the health of others and the organization. On the contrary, if an executive was unhealthy, the consequences might create significant damage and risks not only to him or herself but to others, including families and communities (Campbell Quick et al., 2000).

The responders provided several strategies that help them manage and address the impacts of workplace loneliness, including but not limited to:

- have open lines of communication
- reaching out or finding mentors to partner with
- third-party counseling services
- taking some time off to relax and decompress
- staying active
- volunteering for community services
- education and training on workplace loneliness and its impact.

Both Chapter 2 and the findings confirm that workplace loneliness was a professional hazard that must be addressed. Criminal justice senior leaders were especially vulnerable to workplace loneliness because they were exposed to intense pressures of the roles, which might result in a drop in social engagement, lack of social support, and physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion. To avoid this from happening, the participants have presented a few strategies to manage, address, and deal with the impacts of workplace loneliness.

The findings also confirmed that the subject of workplace loneliness, as a professional hazard, was understudied. Most studies on executive health practices provide

substantial emphasis on stress management, resilience, and other mental health issues such as depression and post-traumatic syndrome. Some participants even alluded to the subject of workplace loneliness being unheard of.

The findings disconfirmed the reports from Chapter 2 people who were experiencing workplace loneliness were individuals with no friends, socially undesirable, and generally unfavorable. Additionally, the participants did not fit the social stigma that lonely people were also less psychologically adjusted, below achievers, and not as intellectually competent as their counterparts (Rokack, 2014).

Moreover, the fields in criminal justice settings could be highly stressful, traumatic, and isolating for many. Criminal justice senior leaders were expected to be equipped with optimal characteristics to lead groups and possess attributes demonstrating sense impartiality, integrity, competence, good judgment, generosity, modesty, and thoughtfulness (Rokack, 2014). Understandably, criminal justice senior leaders were hesitant to openly reveal their genuine emotions about and personal account of workplace loneliness. Nevertheless, the participants shared their lived experiences as openly as possible.

**Theme 5: Recommendations**

Senior leaders proposed several recommendations to address the impacts of workplace loneliness within the criminal justice system and other avenues.

- Broader Discussions About Workplace Loneliness/Education - to have broader and more serious discussions about workplace loneliness to help upcoming and current managers transition to senior leadership. Other senior leaders agreed that

formal training or education about workplace loneliness would encourage informative discussions and awareness.

- Identifying Workplace Loneliness Strategies – Senior leaders of criminal justice organizations do not feel safe to express and seek mental health help. The majority of them were not able to accurately label the feelings of the experience, often confusing the symptoms of isolation, workplace loneliness, and other mental health issues such as depression and PTSD. Counseling could be another way to address the lack of education or training. A third-party provider was preferred for these services to maintain privacy and confidentiality.
- "Onboarding Buddy" or Mentorship – a built-in support system for all employees. Some of the criminal justice organizations do not have an existing "buddy system."

## Data Analyses and Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study was based on the French Renaissance philosopher Descartes' self-concept theory. According to Wandrei (2019), an internal self's fundamental confidence could shape and mold an individual's being if provided a place to grow. The social component of the self-concept theory refers to an individual's sense of self that develops through direct interactions with others and identifies their roles within the society, also called social identity (James, 1980).

The self-concept theory, as explained by Epstein (1973), alluded to the conceptual self as a multidimensional cognitive representation or theory established by one's own beliefs, desires, and intentions (as cited in Bosacki, 2000). Furthermore, according to

Tajel (1969), the sense of identity was typically developed through group affiliations: building a reputation and self-image—making most people concerned about how they were perceived, their images, and identities.

The senior leader participants relate to the descriptions provided above about the self-concept theory. Their feelings of workplace loneliness have impacted how they perceived themselves and have molded their perceived roles in society. Moreover, their lived experiences related to workplace loneliness have directly impacted how they relate or interact with others. As Brewer and Gardner (1996) explained, humans define and describe themselves within a social context. For instance, because senior leaders were expected to portray leadership traits, they were forced to play that role and "wear masks" to protect their image and reputations. Anything outside of that norm was considered a weakness or lessened capacity to lead.

The social connection was one of the humans' fundamental needs, and when both social and emotional connections were absent, an individual might experience a deep sense of loneliness. At work, for instance, senior leaders were isolated from their peers for varying reasons. This lack of interaction caused the emotional and social disconnect. Eventually, the participants felt deep workplace loneliness. The theory of self-concept was applied to this study because of how senior leaders defined and perceived their roles to justify certain behaviors to maintain their self-images. Senior leaders admitted having made some decisions out of emotion and not rationale. Hence, some criminal justice senior leaders have individual perceptions of themselves, influenced by others and their environments.

## Limitations of the Study

A potential limitation of this research was the size of the population. Initially, I identified a few potential limitations of this research, which included the size of the population, location, interview methods, and the effect of the stigma surrounding the topic of workplace loneliness. Due to an unexpected series of events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the nationwide social injustice protests and riots, I found it challenging to obtain even numbers of participants from the various criminal justice fields. Instead, the participant pool consisted of 47% were senior leaders in the law enforcement field, 27% were emergency responders, 13% were correctional officers, and the other 13% were social service managers.

The interview methods for this research also changed. I planned on conducting interviews via in-person, phone, video, and online. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic social distancing requirements, I changed the interview methods and narrowed it down to interviews via phone, email, and video chat to ensure safety and security. On the other hand, the subject of workplace loneliness was highly stigmatized, and I was concerned that not enough participants would be interested in participating and freely discuss their lived experiences. Nevertheless, the targeted number of responders and adequate responses to the interview questions were received.

## Recommendations

Because lonely individuals often associate interpersonal relationships as harmful and menacing, most social contacts and interactions could be troublesome and, in some cases, traumatic; hence, people experiencing a deep sense of loneliness might choose to

distance themselves from their support systems. Based on the findings and the literature review, I would like to urge fellow researchers and scholars to continue to study the impacts of workplace loneliness on other areas of public policy and administration. More specifically, what are the fiscal impacts of workplace loneliness on local, state, or federal government or how does workplace loneliness influence public policy?

This study confirmed that there was very little focus on the study of workplace loneliness despite its severe implications for people, families, organizations, and communities. Research suggested that as leaders reach the top of organizations, the likelihood of being isolated and detached from their daily contacts and support systems were high. As a result, they eventually experience workplace loneliness.

The second recommendation was for scholars to conduct a study on the socioeconomic costs of workplace loneliness. Lastly, some participants recommended that I follow-up this study of workplace loneliness as it relates to the following topics: workaholism, lack of talent in leadership positions, or an inadequate number of leaders to handle the workload. The topic of workaholism was more of individually focused while the other two were systemic of the organization's views or values. For future study, the researcher would also like to recommend that scholars investigate the effects of COVID-19 pandemic on the lived experiences related to workplace loneliness of criminal justice senior leaders.

## Implications

This study's findings showed the implications of workplace loneliness on senior leaders, their organizations, families, and communities. This research contributed to the

growing discussions of the concept of workplace loneliness and its impacts not only on a personal level but also in other areas such as public policy and administration.

**Positive Social Change**

The goal was to utilize this research and spread awareness about the severe impacts of workplace loneliness by encouraging open dialogues and continue conversations surrounding the epidemic of workplace loneliness and what the community, policymakers, and organizations could do together to alleviate, prevent, and manage the severe impacts of workplace loneliness. The senior leader participants of this study confirmed that there was a need to take a closer look at the concept of workplace loneliness. This study provided stakeholders such as policymakers, organizations, and heads of agencies to take a closer look at the impacts and come up with programs and services best suited to mitigate workplace loneliness.

This research created a positive social change because it explored a modern-day epidemic that has potentially detrimental impacts: physically, mentally, and emotionally. The physical impacts included, but not limited to lack of sleep, headaches, decreased appetite, fatigue, exhaustion, and irritability. The emotional impacts, according to the participants, included distress, stress, low self-worth, frustration, agitation, feelings of being undervalued, and anxiety. Furthermore, the mental impacts of workplace loneliness on the participants included lack of focus, insecurity, exhaustion, and lack of mental stimulation.

Workplace loneliness also has grave impacts on organizations, families, and communities. The findings showed that workplace loneliness impacts the organizations

because it might affect the senior leaders' overall performance and productivity and leadership functions, including decision-making, low level of morale, job dissatisfaction, decrease in creative ideas and innovation, low productivity, low performance, and even absenteeism. All positional decisions and actions of the criminal senior leaders have implications on public policy and administration. Through this study, stakeholders would be aware of workplace loneliness and would have an opportunity to develop policies and programs related to supporting the criminal justice senior leaders experiencing workplace loneliness. The participants have provided several examples of how the impacts of workplace loneliness could be managed and addressed.

## Conclusion

Workplace loneliness does not discriminate. Despite the growing interest in the study of workplace loneliness, there was a lack of clarity and understanding of the subject. Senior leaders of criminal justice organizations were understudied in the area of executive health. Workplace loneliness was determined to be a professional hazard, and as such, must be mitigated. Fortunately, there has been a growing awareness and realization among healthcare professionals, policymakers, and communities about the influence of loneliness on mental and physical health and its impact on public policy and administration.

Nevertheless, the subject of workplace loneliness must be studied independently, separated from other mental health-related issues. Senior leaders of organizations have been underrepresented in various research studies. Critically, workplace loneliness might

have debilitating impacts and could restrict a senior leader's ability to effectively and successfully perform leadership functions in his or her optimal capacity.

This research found that over half of the senior leaders of organizations report feeling frequent loneliness. Studies also revealed that senior leaders were more susceptible to loneliness due to the pressures of their roles and other contributing factors such as increased social distance, lack of social support, and exhaustion. Relatively limited information was available about how workplace loneliness experienced by criminal justice senior leaders affects their organizations, families, and communities.

Policymakers also have limited knowledge of how workplace loneliness impacts the senior leaders' overall health, social engagements, and positional functions such as productivity, performance, and decision-making. The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to understand the impacts of workplace loneliness on criminal justice senior leaders. Data gathered would be coded and categorized, which would then be analyzed using both thematic and reflective structural analyses to portray the essence of the participants' lived experiences related to workplace loneliness. The implications for social change would be determined after the data was gathered and analyzed. Workplace loneliness was a modern epidemic and a cognitive state linked to various adverse physical, emotional, and mental health conditions such as cardiovascular problems, depression, stress, anxiety, and increased mortality.

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# Appendix A: Interview Invitation Email

**Subject:** Request for Study Participation: Exploring the Impacts of Workplace Loneliness on Criminal Justice Senior Leaders

Dear Sir/Ma'am

My name is Johanna Papa, a Ph.D. in Criminal Justice candidate at Walden University. I am conducting semi-structured interviews as part of a research study to increase understanding of the concept of workplace loneliness, particularly as experienced by criminal justice senior leaders.

For the purpose of this research, a senior leader is described as follows:

- Must be a senior leader within the criminal justice field.
- An individual with a mid-level management title or higher within the criminal justice organization.
- Have at least 5 years of management experience within the U.S. criminal justice system.
- Must be leading a team and be supervising junior staffs' performance and productivity.

Loneliness, overall, is a modern epidemic and a cognitive state linked to various adverse physical and mental health conditions such as cardiovascular problems, depression, stress, anxiety, and increased mortality rate. Several researchers explained that loneliness is more overtly experienced in the work environment than a personal life context, and senior leaders are more susceptible to be lonely because of the pressures of their roles and other contributing factors such as increased social distance, lack of social support, and exhaustion. Unexplored, senior leaders, who are pillars of organizations, would remain highly vulnerable to the fatal consequences of a prolonged state of loneliness.

The interview will take 45 minutes. Due to the current COVID-19 social distancing protocols and travel restriction, the interviews will be conducted via telephone, email, or video chat. My goal is to capture your thoughts and perspectives on the concept of workplace loneliness and to explore its impacts on criminal justice senior leaders. Your responses to the questions would be kept confidential. Each interview will be assigned a number code and pseudonym to help ensure that personal identifiers are not revealed during the analysis and write up of findings. There is no compensation for participating in this study.

If you are interested in participating, please contact me and suggest a day and time that suits you and I'll do my best to be available. I will then also send you a consent form that provides additional details about the study. Thank you so much and I look forward to hearing back from you.

Sincerely,
Johanna Papa
(202) XXX-XXXX/ JXXX.XXX@waldenu.edu
Researcher at the Walden University

# Appendix B: Interview Questions

Time Duration: 45 Minutes
Date: TBD

**Research Question:** *What are the impacts of workplace loneliness on senior leaders of criminal justice organizations?*

**Interview Questions**

1. What is your current role in the criminal justice organization?
2. How long have you been in your role in the criminal justice organization?
3. What do you know about workplace loneliness?
4. In your own words, how would you describe workplace loneliness?
5. What can you tell me about your lived experiences related to workplace loneliness?
6. How do you think or feel workplace loneliness impacted you physically, emotionally, or mentally?
7. How do you think or feel workplace loneliness impact your organization, family, or community?
8. How do you manage, address, or deal with the experience of workplace loneliness?
9. If any, what are the programs available to mitigate the impacts of workplace loneliness in your organization?
10. What are your recommendations to address the impacts of workplace loneliness?
11. Do you have anything else to add as it relates to loneliness overall?

# Appendix C: Validity Questions

1. How does this research methods align with the guiding research questions?
2. How will the researcher ensure that she interprets and analyzes data accurately and appropriately, while she challenges own biases and assumptions?
3. What the role of the researcher in interpreting the information gathered?
4. What are the roles of the participants in shaping the research?
5. Does the researcher have a hidden agenda, or is the researcher imposing her views upon the data?
6. Will the participant agree that the researcher's interpretation of data?

Appendix D: Social Media Advertisement

Posted on Facebook and Instagram

**PARTICIPANTS NEEDED**

A Doctoral Candidate in Criminal Justice is Looking for Volunteers to Participate in a Research Study.

Title of the Study:
*Exploring the Impacts of Workplace Loneliness on Criminal Justice Senior Leaders*

WHAT: Workplace Loneliness
WHO: Senior Leaders in Criminal Justice Organizations
WHERE: District of Columbia, Maryland, & Virginia
HOW: Telephone Conference, Video Chat, or Email

**Senior Leader Criteria:**

- Must be a senior leader within the criminal justice field, including law enforcement, corrections, social services, and emergency responders.
- An individual with a mid-level management title or higher within the criminal justice organization.
- Have at least five years of management experience within the U.S. criminal justice system.
- Must be leading a team and be supervising junior staffs' performance and productivity.

If you are interested, please contact directly at **202-XXX-XXXX**
and/or email **JXXX.XXX@waldenu.edu** using a private email address.