

2021

## Leadership Influence on Dispatcher Access of Trauma Recovery Resources

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Ariel Place

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
and that any and all revisions required by  
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University  
2021

Abstract

Leadership Influence on Dispatcher Access of Trauma Recovery Resources

by

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MA, Argosy University, 2015

BS, University of Mary Washington, 2010

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Psychology in Behavioral Health Leadership

Walden University

April 2021

APA 7

## Abstract

Emergency dispatchers experience duty-related trauma exposure that can lead to reduced work engagement, compromised employee health, and increased organizational costs. Leadership is crucial in providing guidance and support to first responders following traumatic events. This study's purpose was to understand how one public service organization's (PSO) leaders influence emergency dispatchers' access to trauma-recovery resources. The Baldrige Excellence Framework provided the framework for this qualitative case study. Semi-structured interviews with the public service organization partner site (PSOPS) leaders were conducted and archival data and documents were reviewed and analyzed to gain a clearer picture of PSOPS leaders' personal perspectives of and knowledge about these resources and their workforce's access to them. Results indicate the PSOPS leaders agree there are gaps in their knowledge of resources available to their workforce. The study also found the PSOPS workforce would benefit from resources and improvements could be made by the leadership in connecting their workforce to trauma-recovery resources. It was further discovered the PSOPS has several initiatives being considered to expand accessibility to resources. Study recommendations include providing emergency call outcomes to dispatchers, bi-annual surveys to evaluate workforce needs, and continuing the PSOPS leaders' endeavors to expand available resources to meet their workforce's needs. Social change contribution includes potential for PSO leaders to more effectively influence emergency dispatchers' access to available departmental trauma recovery resources, and thus employ a workforce that is best able to fulfill their job duties to their organization and community.

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## Dedication

This doctoral study is dedicated to all those who have experienced or been impacted by trauma and mental health challenges, especially the brave men and women who serve as first responders, law enforcement, emergency response teams, and the military, as well as the people who support them.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my mother, Deborah, for her wisdom, inspiration, steady support, and encouragement throughout not only my doctoral courses and study experiences, but my entire life. To my brother, Neil, thank you for seeing and knowing me as only a sibling can; you are my rock. To my tribe, Becky, Danielle, Misty, Quinton, Cara, James, and Helena, I am grateful for your unconditional acceptance, enthusiasm, reassurance, and distractions to help me achieve a well-balanced life and irreplaceable bonds with each of you. A special thank you to Lorenzo, who introduced me to the PSOPS that participated in this study, and whose friendship I never saw coming and that I'll never let go of. To my Walden professors and Chair Dr. Frederica Hendricks-Noble, I appreciate your leadership, guidance, and ongoing support. Finally, many thanks to the partner site organization and the leaders there who took part in the study and made this research possible.

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## Section 1a: The Behavioral Health Organization

### **Introduction**

The organization involved in this study, a small rural police department in the United States, agreed to serve as a public service organization partner site (PSOPS) for this doctoral study. Its numerous stakeholders include every member of the community the department serves. The chief of police leads the PSOPS in its efforts to provide public safety and education to the community it serves. Emergency dispatchers provide the service of fielding emergency calls coming into the PSOPS, dispatching the appropriate response team, and/or providing verbal guidance to callers. This section provides an introductory discussion of the practice problem, purpose, and significance, as well as a brief summary of these points.

### **Practice Problem**

Emergency dispatchers chronically experience duty-related trauma exposure (Lilly & Pierce, 2013), which can lead to reduced work engagement, compromised health, and diminished quality of life (Milot & Borkenhagen, 2018). Despite this knowledge, social stigma of mental health and addiction continues to be a significant barrier to employees' willingness to approach leadership for help or access departmental trauma-recovery resources (Attridge, 2019; BC First Responders' Mental Health, 2019). Only 23% of Canadian first responders surveyed indicated they would be comfortable approaching their employers about mental health problems (BC First Responders, 2019). It was unclear what role PSOPS leaders played in addressing the issue of emergency dispatchers' access to the PSOPS's trauma-recovery resources. For the purposes of this

study, the definition of “access” is both the leadership provision of resource information to employees, as well as employee use of available resources. These include everything from employees’ new hire orientation, where available resources are first presented to new hires, posters on display in employee common and break areas, reminders from leadership of the EAP that is available to PSOPS employees, and PSOPS employees physically walking into City Hall to request resources from the Human Resources department, overseen by the city clerk.

An employee assistance program’s (EAP) success depends on leaders’ collaboration with EAP providers (Scully, 2011), and few employees access completely the EAP resources offered to them (Dimoff & Kelloway, 2019). People employed at organizations with fewer than 5,000 employees are the least likely to access mental health resources available through their employers (Levy Merrick et al., 2009). Additionally, the trauma-recovery resources available are often not inclusive enough to address the problems, leaving important areas of employee issues unaddressed (Holgate et al., 2011). One study revealed that of the public safety personnel surveyed, 43-67% indicated they would never or only as a last resort access professional resources or approach their organizations’ leaders for support (Carleton et al., 2020). Another study identified that some leaders are hesitant to speak to personnel they believe are struggling with mental health issues due to fear of being misunderstood or causing harm (BC First Responders, 2019).

Drummond-Smith (2018) warned leadership in hierarchal systems such as police departments to be on guard against blind obedience in their workforces and

recommended such leadership develop work cultures that provide space for employees to have a voice and be heard. However, concern about how leaders might view or treat an employee after learning about their mental health concerns can be a significant barrier to personnel's willingness to approach leaders for help accessing department-offered resources (BC First Responders, 2019). Leadership is often constrained in addressing personnel mental health and other issues, with the tendency to insist upon direct relationships via human resources departments (Holgate et al., 2011).

There are two problems addressed in this study. The first is how the PSOPS presents or introduces employees to the available EAP services to lessen stigma and increase the likelihood of the EAP services being used, such that, what information, if any, is shared between the EAP and the organization. The second problem being addressed is how the specific EAP services are chosen by leadership to determine that they meet employees' needs. Thus, the following practice problem guided this study and warranted further investigation: How does leadership influence emergency dispatchers' access to departmental trauma-recovery resources?

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to understand how the PSOPS leaders influence emergency dispatchers' access to departmental trauma-recovery resources. In this study, I aimed to explore PSOPS leaders' role connecting first responders to available services and resources. The recommendations from this study may be used to help public service organization (PSO) leaders gain insight into and awareness of how their personnel access or do not access department-offered trauma-recovery resources. Additional impact of this

study for PSOPS leaders is that the recommendations from this study may assist PSO leaders in learning about challenges and what they are doing effectively, as well as with designing and implementing evaluations and surveys to learn about what contributes to or gets in the way of employees accessing or not accessing available resources, and allow leadership to decide for themselves if they view these factors as falling within their leadership role.

The Baldrige framework provided the framework for this qualitative case study. The Baldrige framework's purpose is to help organizations explore whether they are operating as effectively as possible, how this effectiveness is measured and determined, and in what ways the organization can improve and change (National Institute of Standards & Technology [NIST], 2017). The sample for this study included the senior leaders of a police department in the United States that offers few formal resources to personnel following traumatic experiences. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with senior leaders, and documents such as EAP services fliers, personnel fit-for-duty policies, and human resources files were reviewed for information. These data were then analyzed using methodological triangulation to gain a clearer picture of the leaders' perspectives on and knowledge about these resources and their personnel's access to them.

### **Significance**

The study's potential value is to inform the PSOPS leaders of their influence on emergency dispatchers' access to departmental trauma-recovery resources, which may improve the PSOPS leaders' effectiveness in influencing emergency dispatchers to access



these services, thus improving the agency's overall efficiency. Unresolved mental health issues in the United States workforce costs employers upwards of \$20 billion each year in work-related EAP claims (BC First Responders, 2019). Such employer costs could be avoided if mental health issues in the workforce are addressed earlier at the lowest levels of care possible. This study may also benefit leaders in similar organizations in knowing how their personnel access or do not access trauma recovery resources. I aimed to explore how PSOPS leaders may be more effectively able to contribute to a work culture that encourages accessing resources, thus contributing to more effective behavioral health organizational practice and leadership. Additionally, through this study I helped explore whether the current trauma recovery resources have been vetted properly to meet the workforce's needs.

### **Potential Contribution to Positive Social Change**

Psychosocial and financial burdens stemming from poor personnel mental health have resulted in many organizations introducing mental health policies, programs, and broad mental health strategies (Dimoff & Kelloway, 2019). This study's contribution to positive social changes includes the potential for nonprofit behavioral health and public safety organization leaders to influence more effectively emergency dispatcher access to available trauma-recovery resources, as well as identify formal resources and benefits packages that may better assist their workforce, as many other organizations are beginning to implement (Dimoff & Kelloway, 2019).

This study may also benefit leaders from other nonprofit behavioral health and PSOs to gain awareness of where there may be areas in their organizations that could

benefit from improved leadership training, clarified processes, improved morale, reduced turnover, and increased individual wellness (Hilal & Litsey, 2020). Additionally, this study may highlight relevant information that can be used for leadership trainings and preventing psychopathology in emergency dispatcher personnel, as a study by Lilly and Pierce (2013) identified that both peritraumatic distress and world assumptions play important roles in predicting post-trauma psychopathology.

### **Summary**

The PSOPS's type, location, services, and overall structure were identified for this study. Preliminary interactions with the PSOPS indicated that selection, collection, and analysis of data regarding the practice problem may help improve organizational policies, raise leaders' awareness of how personnel do or do not access trauma-recovery resources, and contribute to positive social change. The next section discusses the organization's profile, key factors, and the study's background and context.

## Section 1b: Organizational Profile

### **Introduction**

The following practice problem guided this study and warranted further investigation: How does leadership influence emergency dispatchers' access to departmental trauma-recovery resources? Through this study I examined how PSOPS leaders influence emergency dispatchers' access to departmental trauma-recovery resources to assist the organization in considering current practices and potential changes, as well as to contribute to positive social change. This section reviews the organization's profile and key factors, the study's background and context, and a summary of these points.

### **Organizational Profile and Key Factors**

#### **Organizational Profile**

The PSOPS is a small rural police department in the United States with about 50 employees that attend to the safety of the community it serves, according to the PSOPS website. The demographics demonstrate that most employees are Caucasian or Hispanic and male (PSOPS website). The PSOPS focuses on responding to crimes and safety crises as quickly as possible in the community, supporting its mission of enhancing public safety (PSOPS website). The emergency dispatcher team plays a vital role within the PSOPS and is almost the same size as the team of officers (Dispatch/Records Supervisor, personal communications, June 8, 2020; PSOPS website). The PSOPS's strategic vision involves building and maintaining an interactive relationship with the

community it serves (PSOPS website), as well as supporting each member of the PSOPS team (Dispatch/Records Supervisor, personal communications, June 8, 2020).

Prior to the Coronavirus -19 (COVID-19) pandemic requiring all available energy and focus, the PSOPS's Human Resources Department had been ramping up the organization's strategic vision of developing a more robust employee well-being program (City Clerk, personal communications, April 30, 2020). This endeavor was paused until the opportunity for this study arose. PSOPS leaders indicated a renewed desire to understand how they influence emergency dispatchers' access to departmental trauma-recovery resources (Dispatch/Records Supervisor, personal communications, June 8, 2020). This section will examine the PSOPS's background, discuss public safety, and highlight the emergency dispatchers' roles in the larger organizational context. To gain deeper insight and context into how emergency dispatchers serve as a part of the PSOPS, it is important to understand the organization's current resource-access policies and strategic-planning abilities (NIST, 2017).

### **Key Factors**

The PSOPS offers an EAP to personnel as its primary trauma-recovery resource, though the organization has not established any formal policies or regulations regarding personnel's mental health or well-being. In their role in the PSOPS as professional telecommunicators tasked with answering incoming emergency calls, relaying needed information, and dispatching appropriate response teams to crises, emergency dispatchers experience duty-related trauma exposure chronically (Lilly & Pierce, 2013). A fit-for-duty policy indicates personnel must not affect others' safety negatively, and if they do,

the issue is turned over to a risk-management team to be assessed within local government's fit-for-duty mandate for employment (City Clerk, personal communication, April 30, 2020). EAP posters containing program information and phone numbers are posted in all departments, and they respond to both leadership referrals and self-referrals. The PSOPS's personnel access much of their EAP benefits and other resources through the city and county Human Resources Departments. The following key factors will be discussed: (1) programs and services; and (2) strategic mission, vision, etc.

### ***Programs and Services***

According to the PSOPS website, the PSOPS provides the service of maintaining public safety for the community it serves. It encourages citizens to participate directly in these public safety services through citizen crime reporting, neighborhood watch and a citizen's academy, and employment applications (PSOPS website). The PSOPS urges community citizens to review the most wanted list, press releases, and cold cases, all of which are posted on the organization's website (PSOPS website). Additionally, the PSOPS offers citizens the opportunity to become community partners and provides links to webpages with information regarding issues such as restraining orders, child custody, landlord and tenant issues, neighbor disputes, alarm permits, property and evidence releases, court-ordered registrants, fingerprint processing, animal control, citation corrections, copies of police reports, and officer commendations or complaints (PSOPS website).

### ***Strategic Direction, Mission, Vision, Values, and Governance***

The PSOPS website declares that the PSOPS's mission is "to protect life and property, enhance the safety, trust, and quality of life in our community, and to serve with compassion and courage" (PSOPS website). The organization's strategic direction is to develop an interactive relationship and partnership with the community it serves (PSOPS website; Dispatch/Records Supervisor, personal communications, June 8, 2020). The PSOPS is led by a police chief and regulated and overseen by local, state, and federal government agencies (City Clerk, personal communication, April 30, 2020). These entities require all PSOPS officers and personnel to conduct themselves in a manner that upholds the organization's integrity and the community's safety and well-being (City Clerk, personal communication, April 30, 2020). A state government department that provides governance to the PSOPS discusses investigations conducted by the Office of Internal Affairs, and the state website for the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training provides links to all participating agencies in the state.

## **Organizational Background and Context**

### **Organizational Background**

Emergency dispatchers play a vital role in the PSOPS, resulting in their chronic exposure to duty-related trauma (Lilly & Pierce, 2013). This trauma can lead to reduced work engagement, compromised health, and diminished quality of life (Milot & Borkenhagen, 2018; Everitt & Raczek, 2020). Stigma around mental health and addiction issues continues to be a significant barrier to employees' willingness to approach organization leaders for help or access departmental trauma-recovery resources (Attridge, 2019; BC First Responders, 2019). Additionally, few employees access fully the

resources offered to them (Dimoff & Kelloway, 2019). Organizations with fewer than 5,000 employees, such as the PSOPS in this study, are least likely to have employees who access mental health resources available through EAPs (Levy Merrick et al., 2009). It was unclear what role current PSOPS leaders play in addressing issues around emergency dispatchers' access to departmental trauma-recovery resources. To combat the negative impact of trauma on emergency dispatchers' work performance and health, as well as costs to the organization, it is imperative that we better understand this role.

### **Emergency Dispatchers**

Emergency dispatchers are vital elements of the emergency response structure (Everitt & Raczek, 2020) and play an essential role at the PSOPS involved in this study (Dispatch/Records Supervisor, personal communications, June 8, 2020). Emergency dispatchers chronically experience duty-related trauma exposure (Lilly & Pierce, 2013), which can lead to burnout, depression, and posttraumatic stress disorder, as well as negatively impact their work performance (Everitt & Raczek, 2020). Emergency dispatchers are professional telecommunicators tasked with answering incoming calls; gathering information about the crisis occurring, such as identifying the problem, severity, and location of the caller and/or crisis; providing pre-arrival information to the caller; and relaying needed information to the appropriate parties to ensure a response team is dispatched to the crisis (Everitt & Raczek, 2020). They must possess and demonstrate excellent communication skills, emotional regulation and expression skills, and a calm demeanor throughout every call (Everitt & Raczek, 2020; Dispatch/Records Supervisor, personal communications, June 8, 2020). Emergency dispatchers at the

PSOPS are considered first responders and provide callers with assistance prior to the emergency team's arrival at the crisis scene by giving vocal instructions and guidance while dispatching the team (Dispatch/Records Supervisor, personal communications, June 8, 2020). Dispatchers complete these tasks using industry-standard emergency-dispatch protocols (Everitt & Raczek, 2020).

### **Structure and Leadership**

The emergency dispatchers operate within their own department in the PSOPS's main police department, according to the PSOPS website. The chief of police leads the PSOPS and is supported by two additional leaders, a support services manager, and a lieutenant, as outlined on the PSOPS website. The support services manager oversees the dispatch department, and the lieutenant oversees active and reserve officer forces, also detailed on the PSOPS website. The City Clerk oversees the Human Resources Department for the PSOPS and is housed at City Hall separately from the police department, according to the city's website.

### **Workforce and Operations**

The PSOPS does not currently track employee demographics in their personnel systems, though during the employment application process, individuals may voluntarily self-identify demographics such as race or ethnicity. Some PSOPS employment applications do not ask for demographic information (City Clerk, personal communication, April 30, 2020). During the hiring process, all PSOPS applicants must complete a psychological test in which they are interviewed by a psychologist and answer questions about mental health and related topics (Dispatch/Records Supervisor, personal



communications, June 8, 2020). A current PSOPS employee shared that in completing their psychological test, they answered 700 questions, interviewed with a doctor who asked for more detail about their responses, and then answered an additional 500 questions after the interview (Dispatch/Records Supervisor, personal communications, June 8, 2020).

### **PSOPS Policies for Accessing Trauma-Recovery Resources**

The PSOPS currently does not have policies and regulations regarding personnel's mental health or well-being, such as access to mental-health resources other than the EAP benefits it offers (City Clerk, personal communications, April 30, 2020). PSOPS personnel choosing to self-refer to these EAP services may do so by obtaining contact information from informational flyers posted in each department or by connecting with their supervisors, who can refer them (City Clerk, personal communications, April 30, 2020). The EAP flyers assure personnel that all contact will remain confidential (ACI Specialty Benefits, 2020a) and share that if the employee requires assistance beyond the EAP's offerings, they will be referred to community services where health insurance and the EAP provider may cover some costs to ensure referrals are affordable and appropriate (ACI Specialty Benefits, 2020a).

These EAP fliers (ACI Specialty Benefits, 2020a, 2020b) also detail personnel's access to resources and support for relationship issues, emotional well-being, legal and financial issues, and workplace challenges. ACI Work/Life Services is a subdivision of programs offered to personnel and their family members alike, addressing broader personal services such as pet care, education assistance, and elder care and aging (ACI

Specialty Benefits, 2020a). Additionally, the EAP flyer invites personnel to access a program called *Affinity*<sup>TM</sup> Online that offers 24-hour web access to news, resources, interactive tools, and expert opinions (ACI Specialty Benefits, 2020a).

### **Stakeholders, Suppliers, and Partners**

The PSOPS's numerous stakeholders include individuals in the community it serves. Taxpayers and state and federal funding in the form of grants and annual budget allotments make up the organization's main suppliers and partners, according to the city's adopted budget document for fiscal year 2019-2020. The PSOPS partners with individuals, local schools, county departments, public safety organizations, public health organizations, public education organizations, and, when necessary, other regional or national law-enforcement agencies, according to both the PSOPS website and city website.

### **Strategic Direction**

An organization's strategy provides it with a coherent direction and helps make sense of both its internal and external contexts. Thus, this strategy helps the organization create meaning and purpose as it pursues its chosen strategy. The PSOPS in this study explained that it classifies emergency dispatchers as first responders because they are mentally and physically impacted by their work, at times resulting in traumatic experiences (Dispatch/Records Supervisor, personal communications, June 8, 2020). The PSOPS Dispatch/Records Supervisor explained that trauma can occur when emergency dispatchers paint a picture in their heads of the events taking place as they speak to callers, which can impact them in the same way as if they were physically present at the

crisis scene (personal communications, June 8, 2020). The PSOPS believes emergency “dispatchers need a mental outlet for these transmissions” (Dispatch/Records Supervisor, personal communications, June 8, 2020) while they are expected to “remain cool, calm, and collected while performing their duties” (Dispatch/Records Supervisor, personal communications, June 8, 2020). The organization shared that “agencies around this area have minimal staffing so [emergency dispatchers are] not allowed to leave the console for a break and are expected to pick up the next phone call that comes in” (Dispatch/Records Supervisor, personal communications, June 8, 2020). The PSOPS dispatch/records supervisor shared that their organizational strategy is presently focused on developing mental health outlets for emergency dispatchers so they “know there’s someone designated to them for their mental health needs” (personal communications, June 8, 2020).

The PSOPS city clerk explained that just as they moved into their new role overseeing the Human Resources Department and began to work on developing a more robust mental health and wellness program for PSOPS employees, the COVID-19 pandemic swept the nation (City Clerk, personal communications, April 30, 2020). This crisis demanded the organization shift its focus to more immediate safety and community issues. The PSOPS’s city clerk stated that returning to the goal of developing a more robust mental health and wellness program for its employees is again a high priority (City Clerk, personal communications, April 30, 2020).

### **Funding, Compliance, and Policies**

The PSOPS's fiscal resource-planning process occurs throughout the year, with major decisions being made as one fiscal year ends on June 30 and a new one begins on July 1, according to the city's adopted budget document for fiscal year 2019-2020. The PSOPS is a city-funded program, which also receives one-time grants from various sources for specific causes, as detailed in the city's adopted budget document for fiscal year 2019-2020. The Human Resources Department pays into the EAP available to all PSOPS personnel (City Clerk, personal communications, May 20, 2020) In accordance with state and local policies, PSOPS leaders must ensure all active employees are fit for duty and not impeding on others' safety or health (City Clerk, personal communications, May 20, 2020) PSOPS officers must also complete a psychological test after they are involved in a shooting before they can return to duty (City Clerk, personal communications, May 22, 2020).

### **Summary**

The PSOPS's key factors, background, and institutional context highlight the organization's need to examine how PSOPS leaders influence emergency dispatchers' access to departmental trauma-recovery resources. The emergency dispatcher department operates within the PSOPS and is a part of the PSOPS service of attending to the safety and wellbeing of the community it serves. While performing their critical roles in the PSOPS and emergency response system, dispatchers are both first responders as well as exposed to traumatic experiences. PSOPS leadership overseeing the dispatchers must maintain a fully-operating department, to include attending to the well-being of the dispatchers. The PSOPS leadership has identified strategic direction that is focused on

supporting the emergency dispatchers in their role within the PSOPS. PSOPS leaders influence personnel's access to available trauma-recovery resources, but the details of this influence required exploration and clarification. With this study, I aimed to assist the PSOPS in considering current organizational practices and potential changes, as well as to contribute to positive social change. The next section discusses the supporting literature, sources of evidence, leadership strategy and assessment, and clients and population served in relation to the practice problem.

## Section 2: Background and Approach—Leadership Strategy and Assessment

### **Introduction**

Through this study I examined how PSOPS leaders influence emergency dispatchers' access to departmental trauma-recovery resources. The following practice problem guided the study and warranted further investigation: How does leadership influence emergency dispatchers' access to departmental trauma-recovery resources? The senior leadership of many public safety organizations face challenges in personnel accessing mental health resources, including which resources to provide, a lack of funding for such resources, and associated departmental costs (Carleton et al., 2020). Leadership are often the one constant for personnel who are in need of support, both before and after resources are made available (Kowalski, 2019), yet there are often perceived limitations to leaders' abilities or appropriateness of exploring the mental health of their personnel (Kowalski, 2019).

This section reviews the literature on leaders' involvement in employees' access to resources, EAP benefits, emergency dispatchers' access and barriers to benefits, challenges leaders face in regard to this access, and organizational change. Additionally, this section identifies sources of evidence used and data-collection methods used to explore PSOPS leaders' perspectives on the practice problem. Additional assessment of the PSOPS's leadership strategy, population served, workforce, policies, and procedures were examined more thoroughly as they connect to the practice problem. A summary of these topics is presented at the end of the section.

## Supporting Literature

### Literature Searches

Identifying the gaps in research helps prioritize further research to be conducted and can aid in rallying stakeholders to assist in propelling such study (Carey et al., 2012). I used multiple databases to identify scholarly, full-text, peer-reviewed literature for this study, which included, EBSCO, ProQuest Central, ERIC, Oxford Academic, Ovid, and Research Gate. Most research on the topics of first-responder trauma, police leadership, qualitative research, access to EAP benefits, access to mental health resources, perceptions of stigma, and organizational leadership challenges were collected through the Walden University Thoreau library database.

I used the following key search terms: *first responders, first responder trauma recovery, dispatchers, emergency dispatchers, emergency dispatcher trauma, leadership, barriers, challenges, stigmas, organizational change, mental health resources, police, law enforcement, sheriffs, trauma, help, support, resources, EAP, employee assistance program, and classification*. I occasionally used Boolean searches that included two to three keywords. I also filtered responses by using the full text and peer-reviewed scholarly journals options to narrow the search results.

Initially, I sought articles published from 2015 to the present, but I had to expand the time range as far back as 2003 because of a lack of research on the practice problem. I made exceptions to include studies that provided necessary insight into previous and changing trends in EAP benefits and access to them, as well as other articles that assisted me in defining operational terms used in this proposal. Supplemental literature was

gathered throughout 2019 and 2020, which yielded additional scholarly articles related to portions of the practice problem. Finally, I made an exception to the practice of restricting results to scholarly articles in order to include information from a first-responder mental health organization, which provided detailed and thorough information regarding awareness of, treatment of, and stigmas about mental health issues in the first-responder community.

### **Emergency Dispatcher Work-Related Trauma and Barriers to Accessing Resources**

Emergency dispatchers chronically experience duty-related trauma exposure by responding to tragic events while performing their job duties (Lilly & Pierce, 2013; Kowalski, 2019) and are often the first responders on scene, albeit through telephone or another electronic presence. Emergency dispatchers answer a broad range of challenging calls each day that include structure fires, armed robberies, life-threatening injuries, psychosis, domestic violence, homicide, suicide, vehicle accidents, riots and mobs, officers shot in the line of duty, and even calls that involve the dispatchers' own friends and families (Lilly & Pierce, 2013). Handling such a broad array of stressful incidents, as well as the individuals involved in them, can be emotionally, psychologically, and physically challenging (Li & Brown, 2019). In fact, those working in the law enforcement industry are most susceptible to shorter life expectancy, higher rates of divorce, and long-term sickness than individuals in other industries (Smith and Charles, 2010).

Positive world assumptions, how an individual thinks and views the world and themselves in that world, were found to be negatively influenced and at times fully



shattered in emergency dispatchers after particularly distressing and traumatic dispatch calls (Lilly & Pierce, 2013). Self-worth was found to be higher and depression symptoms found to be more intense in the emergency dispatchers surveyed who reported also having symptoms of PTSD (Lilly & Pierce, 2013). Bethea et al. (2020) identified that Burnout Syndrome needs to be addressed throughout entire teams and that occupation-specific approaches for prevention and treatment should be implemented. Born from long duty hours, high emotional and physical work demands, increased work expectations, and deficient support systems that result in mounting work-related dissatisfaction, Burnout Syndrome has surfaced as a tremendous hindrance to maintaining healthy work environments for individuals in highly stressful professions (Bethea et al., 2020).

Although mental health resources are intended to minimize the impact of trauma exposure (Carleton et al., 2020), few employees fully access the resources offered to them (Dimoff & Kelloway, 2019). Carleton et al. (2020) examined public safety personnel's perceptions of and stigmas toward accessing professional and non-professional trauma-recovery resources, identifying that 43-67% of those surveyed would never or only as a last resort access professional support or leaders in their organization. Further, organizations with fewer than 5,000 employees are less likely to process any behavioral health claims through available resources for personnel (Levy Merrick et al., 2009).

### **Burnout Syndrome, Turnover, and Related Costs to Organizations**

Burnout Syndrome, characterized by exhaustion, apathy, and a decreased sense of personal achievement, has emerged as a tremendous barrier to the maintenance of healthy

work environments for individuals in highly stressful professions such as law enforcement (Bethea et al., 2020). Stress related to work duties, the perception of not having enough time to complete paperwork and other administrative duties, and a chaotic work environment are directly correlated to Burnout Syndrome in personnel (Bethea et al., 2020). EMS system workers also report unnecessary time spent on paperwork and other administrative duties, lack of autonomy over workload, mismatched values between employee and employer, and perception of inefficient teamwork contributing to their Burnout Syndrome (Bethea et al., 2020).

Employee turnover in police departments is a significant issue (Wareham et al., 2015), and the main predictors for job turnover are job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Hilal & Litsey, 2020). National police turnover in the United States is 11% with even higher turnover rates in smaller organizations, as well as organizations located in rural southern areas in municipalities (Wareham et al., 2015). High turnover can reduce workforce morale, increase the workload demand on remaining employees, and contribute to inadequate staffing, potentially resulting in diminished quality of the services an organization is providing (Li & Brown, 2019).

Wareham et al. (2015) explained that turnover costs are much higher for police departments than other organizations. Orrick (2008) explained that losing a qualified candidate in the workforce costs the organization anywhere from one to five times the salary of the employee. Additional direct costs include recruitment efforts, screening and selecting of new hires, background checks, medical assessments, psychological assessments, uniforms and equipment, training of new hires, overtime of staff filling

unfilled positions, and other administrative costs (Wareham et al., 2015). Further, indirect costs can build up, such as reduction of quality of service, reduced productivity, and loss of professional knowledge, skills, and experience (Wareham et al., 2015).

### **Leadership Challenges**

Police leadership operates in a modern world where media and social media have increased the openness and intensity of criticism towards police (Tomkins et al., 2020). Davis (2020) explained that there is now a greater emphasis on personal resilience and well-being in police department work environments due to growing concerns about trauma and stress in policing. Police leadership are therefore being called upon to develop their leadership styles in order to effectively support their staff in a global environment of increasing demand and uncertainty (Davis, 2020). Different police leadership styles can either create challenges for organizations, or promote work productivity and morale (Decker, 2018), Traditional police leadership in the United States has been autocratic in nature, where decisions were made by leaders without much, if any, input from subordinates (Decker, 2018). This does not invite subordinates to approach leaders, such as in the collaborative style of democratic leadership (Decker, 2018).

One important responsibility of leadership is to identify and facilitate solutions to their workforce's problems so they can focus their energy on completing their jobs (Touchstone, 2009). Holgate et al. (2011) discussed the constraints leaders navigate in addressing personnel mental health and other issues, with the tendency to insist on a one-to-one relationship through human resources departments. They discussed the challenge of work and personal issues becoming enmeshed, subsequently adding to the

complexities of leaders supporting and connecting personnel to resources; additionally, the resources available are often less holistic than necessary to address the problems collectively (Holgate et al., 2011). Unfortunately, the real or perceived organizational constraints can prohibit leaders from exploring the mental wellbeing of their workforce (Kowalski, 2019). Even if they are able to push past these constraints, leaders often find challenges balancing the needs of the individuals in the workforce versus the needs of the organization (Kowalski, 2019). Once leadership identify personnel who may need support or personnel seeking support make themselves known, leaders may not know how to speak to employees struggling with mental health issues, sometimes worrying they may make the situation worse (BC First Responders, 2019). West and Murphy (2016) identified the importance of leadership being able to successfully engage with their staff. They further explained the negative impact of this leadership-workforce distance, often resulting in staff believing their leaders only connected with them when something was wrong (West and Murphy, 2016). This can lead to the workforce believing their leadership have little or no empathy for the workforce, nor understand the demands and experiences the workforce continuously faces (West and Murphy, 2016).

Pūraitė and Prokofjeva (2019) explained that law enforcement leaders require savvy communication and human relation skills even more so than bravery and physical strength, but that these may be unrecognized and undervalued by leaders themselves. Further, they stressed the importance of leaders being self-aware, empathic, and able to identify and regulate their own emotions while being able to understand the emotional state of their workforce and organization (Pūraitė and Prokofjeva, 2019). Dixon et al.

(2019) iterated that high self-esteem is associated with job performance and job satisfaction, and that leaders who respond most positively during conflict situations are those with high self-esteem, potentially impacting leader-workforce relationships.

Only 23% of the Canadian first responders surveyed stated they would be willing to approach their organizations' leaders to address mental health concerns, and they remain concerned about the stigmas often attached to these issues (BC First Responders, 2019). If employees self-refer to the Human Resources Department or call into an EAP, it is possible their leaders would not be aware they are struggling due to confidentiality laws. Public safety leaders must overcome several challenges to helping personnel access mental health resources, including the question of which resources to provide, the current resources offered, a lack of funding for such resources, and departmental costs of these resources (Carleton et al., 2020). Leaders who have received training on available resources are more supportive of personnel's mental health and more active in encouraging their personnel to access available resources; they are also more willing to access these resources themselves (Dimoff & Kelloway, 2019).

### **Employee Assistance Programs**

Attridge (2019) provided a concise working definition of EAPs as being focused on resolving "acute but modifiable behavioral health issues" (p. 626) and explained why EAPs have grown substantially as employers recognize more globally that workplace mental health contributes to business success. Attridge also pointed out that social stigma regarding mental health and addiction continues to be a significant barrier to workplace mental health. The researcher asserted that the most important leadership factor occurs

when senior leaders become part of the processes and work to cultivate a work culture that is accepting and accommodating of employees who are navigating mental health issues (Attridge, 2019). Further, EAPs' success depends on leaders' collaboration with EAP providers (Scully, 2011).

Milot and Borkenhagen (2018) reported that over one-third of the first responders they surveyed who accessed their EAP benefits reported experiencing job stress, and most of them accessed services for issues unrelated to work. They asserted that significant potential benefits of leaders promoting EAP access for work-related issues include improving personnel's health and work performance and assessing working conditions through EAP providers, thus improving the delivery of EAP benefits (Milot & Borkenhagen, 2018). Triner and Turner (2005) encouraged providing coaching as an EAP resource, explaining that in one organization, doing so removed barriers to personnel accessing their EAP benefits by changing their perception of these services and resulted in the organization offering broader services beyond those related to mental health. Additionally, they explained that offering coaching through EAP benefits made it easier for organization leaders to make referrals to EAP benefits for topics such as increasing skills in areas such as communications (Triner & Turner, 2005) and made it possible for leaders to connect with personnel about accessing the EAP for developmental opportunities.

### **Sources of Evidence**

The primary data source for this study consisted of semi-structured interviews conducted with senior leaders in the PSOPS. Individual interviews explored PSOPS

senior leaders' attitudes toward and responses to emergency dispatchers' access to trauma-recovery resources (Simmons, 2015). The following senior PSOPS leaders were interviewed: the chief of police, support services manager, Dispatch/Records supervisor, and City Hall City Clerk. These interviews with senior leaders allowed for greater insight into leaders' perspectives on the practice problem and helped me determine other data to seek and analyze. See Appendix A for the complete list of interview questions.

Secondary data was also collected from the PSOPS's Human Resources Department to improve my understanding of the organization's etiology, culture, and structure. Internal sources of secondary data included dispatch and Human Resources Department records, policies and procedures, formal and internal correspondence, formal and internal memos, meeting minutes, the organization's website, financial statements, manuals, organizational charts, personnel handbooks, and compliance manuals. I requested these materials and the PSOPS provided approved information voluntarily for the sole purpose of data collection. External data sources included reports and studies from various public safety and first-responder organizations that address organizational leaders' involvement in first-responder access to mental health support resources, news articles, and public websites and social media sites.

Evidence collection and analysis provided appropriate information to address the issue of how PSOPS leaders influence emergency dispatchers' access to trauma-recovery resources. The data provided information that was previously unclear or unknown and was used to inform leaders' decisions, as well as influence emergency dispatchers' access to trauma-recovery resources.

## **Leadership Strategy and Assessment**

Senior PSOPS leaders govern and lead by upholding the organization's vision and mission to protect "life and property; enhance the safety, trust, and quality of life in our community; and to serve with compassion and courage," (PSOPS website, 2020) model integrous behavior, and promote a relationship with the community the organization serves. PSOPS leaders must work within regulations and under supervising entities to develop and implement changes (City Clerk, personal communications, April 30, 2020). Using the working definition of focusing "on a 'people-centered approach' that aims to inspire, empower, and motivate one's team" (Fritzvold, n.d) the PSOPS Records/Dispatch Supervisor identified that the PSOPS leadership governs and leads utilizing a transformational leadership style (personal communication, June 8, 2020).

### **Transformational Leadership**

Decker (2018) asserts that transformational leadership is one of the most favored leadership styles for police chiefs. Transformational leadership is a leadership style in which a people-centered approach helps inspire, empower, and motivate team members. A leader using this approach works collaboratively with their subordinates in an effort to achieve and maintain the organization's shared vision and goals rather than dictating changes that must take place without consulting or soliciting feedback from subordinates. The PSOPS police chief in this study is significantly interested in and actively seeks input from PSOPS supervisors and other subordinates, both formally through monthly supervisor meetings in which each department contributes to discussion agenda items and informally through maintaining an open-door policy for feedback and input



(Records/Dispatch Supervisor, personal communication, May 22, 2020). The PSOPS lieutenant and support services manager who serve directly under the chief are equal to each other and can make command decisions if and when the chief is not present, so all three meet to collaborate at least weekly (Records/Dispatch Supervisor, personal communication, June 8, 2020).

### **Strategy Implementation**

All policy, structure, and resource changes within the PSOPS must be presented to the organization's benefits broker, finance director, the City Clerk overseeing the Human Resources Department, and city manager (City Clerk, personal communications, April 30, 2020). Then the PSOPS negotiators and city attorney sign off on the proposed changes, which finally are sent to the bargaining units and unions for their support or rejection (City Clerk, personal communications, April 30, 2020). Once the unions have committed their support, the proposed change is included in the union memorandum of understanding (MOU) and/or the PSOPS's main policy, and it is considered valid and effective from that point on (City Clerk, personal communications, April 30, 2020). Most organizational changes result from employee complaints or questions about additional benefits and resources, which prompts the finance director to connect with the benefits broker and begin the aforementioned communication chain (City Clerk, personal communications, April 30, 2020).

### ***Key Strategic Challenges***

The PSOPS's change process is lengthy and time-consuming, and there are several steps along the way where it can be fully paused or reversed, which can cause

significant delays in the organization's progress toward its goals. According to an anonymous staff member at the PSOPS, some PSOPS leaders also may experience frustrations and lose motivation for supporting these changes as delays continue and roadblocks arise during the change process.

### **Clients/Population Served**

The PSOPS serves an area of 3.6 square miles and a city population of fewer than 13,000, with a nearly even split of males and females and a median age of 31 years old, according to the city website and the city's adopted budget document for fiscal year 2019-2020. The median household income in the community is \$41,679, per the city's website. Over half of the city's population is White, with almost one-third identifying as Latino, as detailed on the city's website. The unemployment rate is 6.7% and major business groups and service industries include fuel and service stations, county and state pools, restaurants and hotels, and food markets and drug stores according to the city's adopted budget document for fiscal year 2019-2020. Theft and auto theft are the two most common types of crime in the area the PSOPS serves, per the city website. Around 75% of the population in this area is classified as living above the poverty line, as detailed on the city website

The PSOPS obtains information from, engages with, and builds relationships with the population it serves in several ways. The PSOPS's website and Facebook social media page engage the community and offer community members opportunities to interact with the PSOPS and leave feedback, and the PSOPS is seen to respond to public community member posts. PSOPS representatives are frequently available at city hall

meetings, per the PSOPS website, and community members can send private messages to the PSOPS if they choose to do so through the PSOPS website.

### **Analytical Strategy**

I selected a qualitative case-study research design for this study because a process-oriented approach lends the highest quality to the output (Reynolds et al., 2011). Qualitative data provide rich personal information about participants and their individual experiences in a way that quantitative data-collection methods can only do categorically. Qualitative research methods can typically be generalized to other settings and situations and are excellent for providing explanations and an enhanced understanding of accepted concepts (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Many professionals in the field of psychology have determined that a quality research design includes trustworthiness and credibility (Reynolds et al., 2011). This section will detail the research design, method, participants, methodological triangulation data-collection strategy, and efforts that ensured the study contained high-quality research and was trustworthy and credible.

### **Trustworthiness**

Shenton discussed the four criteria from writer Guba that detail what should be considered to ensure trustworthiness of quality qualitative research. Guba, Shenton explained, is a naturalistic investigator who uses this terminology to distance quality qualitative design from the positivist paradigm (Shenton, 2004). These four criteria are considering 1) credibility, rather than internal validity 2) transferability, rather than external validity/generalization 3) dependability, rather than reliability and 4) confirmability, rather than objectivity (Shenton, 2004). If all four of these criteria are

addressed in a qualitative research design, the design can be confidently labeled as having trustworthiness (Shenton, 2004).

### **Credibility**

Like the positivist researcher's criteria of internal validity, the qualitative researcher's criteria of credibility aims to ensure that the study measures or tests what it is actually intended (Shenton, 2004). Two writers, Lincoln and Guba, argued establishing trustworthiness requires ensuring credibility (Shenton, 2004). There are several specific techniques and strategies that ensure credibility, as well as trustworthiness and quality by default. These include utilizing research methods that are well-established in both qualitative investigation as well as general science inquiry (Shenton, 2004), the researcher familiarizing themselves with the culture of the organization to be studied prior to engaging in data collection dialogues (Shenton, 2004), and utilizing sampling of individuals who will be serving as data providers and informants (Shenton, 2004). Additionally, the use of triangulation where the researcher applies different research methods in concert with one another, such as individual interviews as well as review of organization policies and regulations, assists in demonstrating credibility (Shenton, 2004). Using tactics to help ensure honesty in participants, iterative questioning, peer scrutiny of the research project, the researcher's own evaluation of the research project as it develops, and examination of previous research findings in conjunction with considering how the current research project's findings align with these are all excellent techniques and methods that contribute to a research project's credibility (Shenton, 2004). Further, the background, qualifications, and experience of the researcher and thick

description of the phenomenon under investigation are important components of credibility (Shenton, 2004). Most important to bolstering a study's credibility, according to Lincoln and Guba, are member checks, where participants are allowed the opportunity to ensure what was recorded as their participation matches up with what they intended to say (Shenton, 2004). Also included in member checks involves verification of the investigator's emerging theories as the research progresses (Shenton, 2004). Each of these aspects of quality, trustworthiness, and credibility are present throughout the study.

### **Methodological Triangulation**

Methodological triangulation occurs when a researcher applies multiple research methods in concert with one another and allows the element of cross-checking (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012). Triangulation was demonstrated in this study through semi-structured interviews combined with information gathered through both primary and secondary data collection and analysis. This triangulation provided a multifaceted view of the study topic and increase the study's credibility, research methods, and results (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012). Evidence collection and analysis provided deeper insight into PSOPS senior leaders' perspectives on emergency dispatchers' access to trauma-recovery resources, challenges and barriers regarding leaders' impact on such access, and organizational changes in relation to the Baldrige key factors.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Qualitative research acknowledges that neither the researcher nor those being researched are blank slates (*tabula rasa*); thus, they bring their own unique viewpoints, perspectives, and biases into the researching relationship (David, 2015). The

constructivist viewpoint explains that meanings are extracted from experiences so that individuals construct subjective meanings of objective realities (David, 2015). In this study, I assumed the scholar-consultant role and took seriously the tasks of protecting privacy, minimizing harm, and respecting shared experiences in research, recognizing each participant as an expert on their own experiences. As the scholar-consultant I was a qualitative researcher and cognizant of the potential for reflexivity, an awareness that researcher presence can impact research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). As the scholar-consultant, I was the researcher and part of this study. I had no personal connection to the PSOPS, and recognize that subjectivity is possible because of human nature. As the scholar-consultant, I maintain responsibility for adhering to qualitative research best practices throughout the development of the study design, methods, and analysis.

### **Data Collection**

Qualitative research aims to understand why people act, think, behave, and feel the ways they do, and often explore perspectives of participants involved in a study (Hammarberg et al. 2016). In-depth one-on-one interviews are one of the most common qualitative data-collection research methods (Bhat, n.d.). This method provides specific and precise insights into people's beliefs and motivations (Bhat, n.d.) and captures real-life experiences (Hammarberg et al., 2016). They also offer some flexibility, as these interviews can be conducted via platforms such as Zoom videoconferencing, which is both cost-effective and renders geographical obstacles nearly obsolete (Archibald et al., 2019). The constructivist epistemological view insists that knowledge is constructed through intentional interaction with the world (Ültanır, 2012), such as through qualitative

research. In this sense, the research study was meant to facilitate my interaction with participants to gather data that was used to construct knowledge regarding PSOPS leaders' perspectives of their influence on personnel's access to available mental health resources.

As the primary data-collection instrument, I developed semi-structured interview questions in alignment with the research question and with the intention of encouraging leaders to provide a better understanding of their perceptions and viewpoints (see Appendix A). I also developed an interview guide to use during the semi-structured interviews so I could take handwritten notes to document key information, clarify information, and indicate post-interview follow-up that may be needed (see Appendix B). A separate interview guide was used for each interview, and I used an analytic journal to document notes while I reviewed archival data.

### ***Archival Data***

Archival data, classified as secondary data sources, provided a significant amount of information for this study. Archival data can change day to day and was collected for years 2019-2020 through a review of public and organizational documents to promote an understanding of PSOPS's etiology, culture, and structure. The following sources provide these archival data:

- The PSOPS website and Facebook social media page
- EAP benefits fliers posted in all PSOPS departments and available to all PSOPS employees (City Clerk, personal communications, April 30, 2020)

- The employee handbook made available to all PSOPS personnel (City Clerk, personal communications, April 30, 2020)
- Fit-for-duty requirements (City Clerk, personal communications, April 30, 2020)
- The municipal code, administrative code, and charter where memos, communications, policies, regulations, and other documents about PSOPS governance and oversight are located (city website)

### **Research Process**

The Baldrige framework served as this study's framework and anchor (NIST, 2017). The Baldrige framework's purpose is to help organizations explore whether they are operating as effectively as possible, how this effectiveness is measured and determined, and in what ways the organization can improve and change (NIST, 2017). I applied this integrated systems-based approach to explore the workforce key management and leadership area, more specifically, the workforce climate, workforce environment, and workforce benefits and policies subcategories (NIST, 2017).

The first phase of research included collecting and reviewing secondary data sources to answer the Baldrige framework (NIST, 2017) questions regarding the workforce and PSOPS leaders' influence on personnel's access to mental health resources. I used a qualitative journal to document and organize notes regarding secondary data and documents reviewed, as well as questions that arose from reviewing the secondary data and/or knowledge gaps. Following up on such questions arising from a review of secondary data sources is essential to the qualitative process (Ravitch & Carl,



2016) and assisted me in filling gaps in knowledge and gaining an improved understanding of PSOPS leaders' influence on personnel's access to trauma-recovery resources. Such review of secondary data sources as they relate to the Baldrige framework aided me in continually developing semi-structured questions for interviews with PSOPS leaders.

### ***Coding***

Williams and Moser (2019) discussed the importance of coding and categorizing data in ways that served the study's purpose. In this study, data analysis included coding, categorizing, and theme-finding to identify patterns. A theme is constructed of categories made up of codes (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Starting with the smallest element, a data set's codes, attributes, ideas, or qualities are assigned words or short phrases as their ciphers (Ravitch & Carl, 2016) to cut out fluff and leave what is most important. Next, categories are developed to organize codes that share attributes, meanings, or intents (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Like codes, each category is labeled with a word or short phrase. Beyond categories, themes are developed and sourced from one or more categories; they can be either directly observable (manifest) or underlying (latent) (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Likewise, I used coding and categories developed from the data to identify themes and patterns.

### ***Procedures***

I developed semi-structured interview questions during this study's prospectus-formulation and approval process. Walden University's institutional review board (IRB) approved the primary data-collection strategy of interviewing PSOPS leaders. I collected

secondary data for approximately six months in preparation for conducting interviews with PSOPS leaders. I fine-tuned and adjusted the originally approved interview questions during the secondary data-collection and review period to fill in knowledge gaps related to PSOPS leaders' perspectives of personnel's access to mental health resources in relation to the Baldrige framework (see Appendix A for the final interview questions).

Next, an interview guide was developed to help document notes properly and to serve as a prompt during interviews with PSOPS leaders (see Appendix B for the interview guide). I emailed Walden University's IRB informed consent forms to each PSOPS leader who plans to participate in the semi-structured interview process. The form contained a prompt for the potential interviewee to reply with "I consent" if they agreed to be interviewed. Each PSOPS leader responded with "I consent" before I began collecting primary or secondary data.

Preparation for the semi-structured interviews with PSOPS leaders took one week, and I conducted interviews via the Zoom video-conferencing tool due to COVID-19 precautions in place at that time. I used a digital voice recorder to ensure I captured interviewees' speech and tone as accurately as possible. I tested the digital recorder on each day of the interviews and was prepared to reschedule the interview if the digital recorder was found to be defective.

I used interview guides in conjunction with the final questions during the interviews with PSOPS leaders. I coded each interviewee's name and position for confidentiality purposes. At the beginning of each interview, I reminded the interviewee

that the interview is voluntary, that I had made every effort to ensure anonymity for the interviewee, and that I had printed and used a new interview guide for my notes and additional questions for each interview. I asked follow-up and probing questions as needed to gain further insight into topics of interest. I summarized and reflected data collected back to the interviewee to ensure data collected was accurate, I offered the interviewee the opportunity to provide additional information and ask questions, and then I thanked them for their time and contributions to the study.

I transcribed the interviews manually as they are recorded using the digital recorder, then I reviewed and used them to inform the results section of the study through qualitative thematic coding and analysis. Interview responses also contributed to the study's organizational profile and organizational assessment sections. As a means of member-checking, I offered interviewees the opportunity to review their interview transcripts for errors and provide corrections and/or clarifications as needed.

I continued to obtain secondary data throughout this process because I had gained the PSOPS's permission to review internal documentation that is publicly available through Internet searches and was sent to me by PSOPS leaders, as well as information documented in formal emails, the organization participation agreement, in addition to the service order agreement.

### ***Ethical Research***

As a researcher, I am responsible for ensuring the study was carried out ethically, protecting the qualitative research's credibility, and protecting participants and the PSOPS. I used qualitative ethical best practices in the development of the research

design, method, processes, and analysis. Additionally, I provided the PSOPS with documents in preparing for the study, including the approved prospectus that describes the study, model, and framework to be used. The PSOPS's chief of police and I reviewed and signed a partner organization agreement and a service order agreement. This study was designed with me fulfilling the role of a scholar-consultant in order to explore the approved practice question and make recommendations based on results from the primary and secondary data gathered. I presented the study, prospectus, signed forms, and application to collect data to Walden University's IRB prior to any data being collected, and they were approved. The IRB then provided an informed consent letter that I sent to each interviewee with a request for them to reply with "I consent."

I maintained participants' anonymity throughout the study, as the PSOPS has been de-identified; the state location has been masked; and individual participants' names, titles, and positions were masked and kept confidential. This strategy contributes to creating a trust relationship between me and PSOPS, which is vital for obtaining sensitive organizational information for this study.

### ***Data Storage and Protecting Privacy***

Confidentiality involves protecting participants' privacy and I invested significant thought into how and what participant information I disseminated (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In contrast to confidentiality, privacy pertains to information that was shared at all with anyone, even if I inadvertently obtained this information. For example, if an interviewee left their home address on a form, even if asked not to do so, I ensured this address was not shared with anyone or documented anywhere because it is not a part of

the data being collected for the study. To ensure privacy, I kept all research data locked up and unavailable to anyone other than myself. I protected the confidentiality of information interviewees' share with me during the semi-structured interviews. These data were only used in the analysis process for the study's purposes and were shared with others for any other reason.

### ***Minimizing Harm***

Several efforts to minimize harm are present in the research design. The IRB reviewed the proposed research prospectus, ensuring ethical processes followed and that all efforts were taken to minimize or eliminate potential harm to participants. I obtained informed consent from interview participants involved in providing data for the study.

### ***Respecting Shared Experiences***

Everyone is an expert in their own experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I was aware of my own biases and opinions and kept them separate from my data collection and analysis, remaining aware that each participant contributed their own wisdom and knowledge to the research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). My role was to allow participants space to share their own experiences and perspectives without being judged or compared to mine.

## **Summary and Transition**

The literature pertaining to the proposed study's practice problem indicated significant challenges for leaders seeking to influence personnel to access available trauma-recovery resources in order to address the organization's and individual workforce members' well-being. Additionally, leaders tasked with addressing workforce

members' well-being face many other challenges and barriers. The literature suggested that public safety leaders are more effective at positively influencing personnel to access available resources when such leaders have been trained on available resources, coaching is available as part of the resources, and the workplace culture is accepting and free of stigma associated with accessing these resources.

This section provided a detailed overview of the PSOPS's vision, leaders, strategy, and stakeholders, as well as the study's sources of evidence, approach to leadership strategy and assessment, framework and design, and analytical strategy. Finally, this section detailed the study's qualitative research process, including its design and framework, primary and secondary data that was used to inform the Baldrige framework's findings, analytical strategies that were applied to all data collected, and the numerous roles I held as a scholar-consultant throughout the study to protect and benefit the PSOPS and its members. The next section of the study proposal provides a review of how the PSOPS supports and influences its workforce and manages knowledge and outcomes.

## Section 3: Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management Components of the Organization

### **Introduction**

It remained unclear what role current PSOPS leaders play in addressing emergency dispatchers' access to departmental trauma-recovery resources or their perception of this role, which is why further study of the following question was warranted: How does leadership influence emergency dispatchers' access to departmental trauma-recovery resources? Through collection, review, and analysis of primary and secondary data sources, this study was used to understand how leaders influence emergency dispatchers' access to trauma-recovery resources. More specifically, I hoped to gain an understanding of the PSOPS leaders' role in influencing and connecting first responders to available services and resources, identify the PSOPS strengths and areas for improvement, and add to existing research literature.

### **Analysis of the Organization**

The PSOPS had been gearing up to increase its focus on personnel mental health and wellness (City Clerk, personal communications, April 30, 2020). PSOPS leaders explained that although some interruptions to this focus could not be ignored, such as a national COVID-19 pandemic, leaders are already reverting their attention back to increasing mental health resources and programs for personnel (Dispatch/Records Supervisor, personal communications, May 22, 2020). Many organizations have been introducing mental health policies, resources, programs, benefits packages, and broad mental health strategies to support their workforces, as all as combat the psychosocial and

financial burdens stemming from poor personnel mental health (Dimoff & Kelloway, 2019).

The police chief, who heads the PSOPS, is particularly interested in improving and increasing mental health and wellness resources for personnel and prioritizes workforce wellbeing, safety, and retention (Dispatch/Records Supervisor, personal communications, May 22, 2020; Police Chief, personal communications, October 2, 2020). The PSOPS and its senior leaders recognize that employee turnover in police departments is a significant issue (Wareham et al., 2015). Hilal and Litsey (2020) explained that the main predictors for job turnover are job satisfaction and organizational commitment, which the police chief and other leaders routinely discuss with each other, as well as those they supervise (Dispatch/Records Supervisor, personal communications, May 22, 2020; Police Chief, personal communications, October 2, 2020).

### **Workforce Environment and Engagement with Staff**

Davis (2020) asserted that leadership theorists highlight the value of approaching leadership as a shared, collaborative, social process. Davis and Bailey (2018) identified that improvements in communication most often result in improved employee relations and employee motivation. PSOPS leaders are receptive to personnel's input, contributing to an effective, supportive workforce environment that is willing to consider feedback (Dispatch/Records Supervisor, personal communications, May 22, 2020). PSOPS leaders maintain daily contact with those they supervise, as well as welcome ongoing input and feedback that they then take to their monthly supervisor meetings (Dispatch/Records Supervisor, personal communications, May 22, 2020).



West and Murphy (2016) warned of the negative impact on the workforce if leadership only engaged with those they supervise when there are issues or discipline that need to be addressed, rather than maintaining an ongoing relationship with the workforce. The PSOPS police chief stated that he maintains an open door policy and interacts with his workforce regularly, such as checking in directly with those he sees in the police station each day, visiting and calling personnel who are out on leave, and engaging in ride-alongs with his officers, yielding constant insight to the overall wellbeing of the PSOPS and those who make up its workforce (Police Chief, personal communications, October 2, 2020). The dispatch/records supervisor shared that, in an effort to engage staff in achieving a high-performance work environment, a PSOPS patrol sergeant is working to connect the organization with a nonprofit that can provide additional emotional support groups focused on law enforcement as a whole, separate from the resources available through the current EAP (personal communications, May 22, 2020).

### **Design, Management, and Improvement of Key Services/Processes**

Evidenced-based policy-making and science are seen as helpful, but not essential or valued, in policing (Neyroud, 2009). Often, the design, management, key services, and key processes being implemented have not been systematically evaluated for effectiveness and are more trial-and-error implementation (Neyroud, 2009). This lack of systematic evaluation leaves an absence of hard evidence for leadership to use in decision making (Neyroud, 2009). However, one strategy to combat this lack of hard evidence, while remaining focused on positive policing improvement and reform, is to clearly define specific goals for improvement, communicate regularly about actions being taken

to achieve these goals, identify barriers and evidence along the way, and continuously assess as a team whether the goal is being supported (Neyroud, 2009).

Monthly Supervisor meetings are held with the PSOPS chief, lieutenant, support services manager, administrative sergeant, patrol sergeants, and dispatch/record supervisor (Dispatch/Records Supervisor, personal communications, May 22, 2020). Each of these meetings features an agenda to which all participants must contribute a topic for discussion, as well as bring evidence and support with them for the discussion of this topic (Dispatch/Records Supervisor, personal communications, May 22, 2020). Past agenda items have consisted of patrol trainee updates; dispatch trainee updates; personnel issues; budget items; departmental wants/needs (new equipment, grants, software, etc.); reports and records retention; and improving organization-wide and department-specific policies and procedures to achieve more effective functioning (Dispatch/Records Supervisor, personal communications, May 22, 2020).

### ***Effective Management of Operations***

Morgan et al. (2017) discussed that compliance with overseeing entities, properly preparing for audits, making proper adjustments following audits can be the main key to police department reform. Internal audits can help inform supervisors in advance can provide time to make positive adjustments before formal audits take place (Morgan, Murphy, & Horwitz, 2017). In 2014 the New Orleans Police Department became a self-monitoring department by creating a data-driven management system that provided valuable insight to leadership by producing performance metrics that spanned across the different department operations (Morgan et al, 2017). Until a department has an

infrastructure in place to support a data-driven management system, defining compliance for operations and identifying each department's role in implementation and monitoring actions is essential (Morgan et al., 2017).

The overlapping of departments in monthly meetings ensures that each department has a representative who brings departmental issues to the collective PSOPS leaders for consideration, which helps prevent any single department from operating within a vacuum (Dispatch/Records Supervisor, personal communications, May 22, 2020). Effective measures can be shared and adopted by different departments, problem-solving occurs as an interoffice activity, and changes in one department are considered relative to their potential impact on other departments and the community the PSOPS serves (Dispatch/Records Supervisor, personal communications, May 22, 2020). Problems can be identified as early as possible with more leaders involved who offer differing perspectives, rather than letting issues go unaddressed and risk escalating into larger, more difficult problems (Dispatch/Records Supervisor, personal communications, May 22, 2020).

### **Knowledge Management**

Knowledge is perceived as an asset, and knowledge management helps a police department serve their community more effectively (Jhingut & Nagowah, 2013). Jhingut and Nagowah (2013) assert that knowledge management helps organizations produce long-term high performance through systematic coordination of people, processes, technology, and knowledge. Effective management processes further enhance the value of knowledge management (Jhingut & Nagowah, 2013).

The PSOPS measures, analyzes, and improves organizational performance primarily at the senior leadership and Human Resources Department levels (City Clerk, personal communications, April 30, 2020; Dispatch/Records Supervisor, personal communications, May 22, 2020). Most PSOPS organizational changes result from employee complaints or questions about additional benefits and resources available to them , which triggers the aforementioned chain of change, ending with bargaining unit and union approval or rejection of the proposed changes (City Clerk, personal communications, April 30, 2020). Community members from the region the PSOPS serves provide the organization with feedback and suggestions through various platforms, as is publicly seen on the PSOPS Facebook page and available on the PSOPS and city websites, and PSOPS' review and consideration of them is important for continual operational effectiveness. Senior PSOPS leaders maintain training records and rosters, and the City Clerk oversees these records for compliance (City Clerk, personal communications, April 30, 2020; Dispatch/Records Supervisor, personal communications, May 22, 2020).

### **Summary**

Employee and community safety are the PSOPS' foremost focus. The organization maintains employee fit-for-duty standards that are required by regional, state, and federal laws, and it enforces local, state, and federal laws applicable to the region where it is located. PSOPS leaders encourage and require input from all departments at each monthly supervisor meeting to ensure departments work in concert with each other and maintain effective functioning both separately and as a whole within

the organization. The next section addresses data analysis, results, implications, and the study's strengths and limitations.

## Section 4: Results- Analysis, Implications, and Preparation of Findings

### **Introduction**

The PSOPS emergency dispatchers engage in intense work of fielding emergency calls coming into the PSOPS, dispatching the appropriate response team, and providing verbal guidance to callers (Records/Dispatch Supervisor, personal communication, May 22, 2020). These calls can be emotionally challenging for the dispatchers, as well as traumatizing in some instances (Records/Dispatch Supervisor, personal communication, May 22, 2020); the PSOPS leadership shared that during the COVID pandemic there had been a dramatic increase in domestic violence calls, suicide calls, and crimes against children (Participant 2, interview, October 2, 2020). Although the PSOPS leadership expels tremendous energy attending to their workforce, PSOPS leadership is limited in their awareness of what resources are truly available to their workforce, or what their own role might be in the process of connecting their workforce to trauma recovery resources (Records/Dispatch Supervisor, personal communication, May 22, 2020; City Clerk, personal communication, April 30, 2020).

The research question that guided this study was: How does leadership influence emergency dispatchers' access to trauma-recovery resources? As a qualitative case study design, sources of evidence included semi-structured interviews with senior PSOPS leadership, in addition to information gathered through both primary and secondary data collection and analysis, such as records and policy review, public information review, and personal communications.

## **Analysis, Results, and Implications**

### **Client Programs, Services, and New Initiatives Effectiveness**

Based on the evidence collected, the PSOPS services go beyond the traditional police department duties to protect the local community. The emergency dispatchers and front-line officers work to prevent and respond to crime, traffic, and crisis calls, according to all interviewed participants, but the leadership is involved in many different services and new initiatives as well. Participant 2 explained that the California Reclamation Districts overseeing flood protection structures and waterways that are present in the majority of California districts is run by a Levee Commission, which the city clerk and chief of police work together to manage. Participant 2 also explained that the city clerk also manages the local elections, handles hiring paperwork, runs the Human Resources department, handles workforce and leadership requests, works with the city manager putting together the City Council agendas and oversees compliance with government codes, and serves as a liaison with the union bargaining units of the PSOPS workforce.

The evidence collected revealed that the chief of police also fulfills many different roles in addition to his primary role as chief of police. Specifically, Participant 3 shared that the chief of police of the PSOPS serves as the interim city manager, community development director, public works director, and oversees recruitment. Participant 3 explained that the chief of police and other members of the PSOPS are involved in community service projects, such as raising money and rebuilding a local baseball field for the community youth. Participant 3 further explained that the chief of

police frequently engages in community goodwill and outreach, visiting local business to make and maintain connections with them, as well as receive feedback about the PSOPS's services and community presence. All three participants interviewed explained that the 2019-2021 COVID-19 pandemic severely limited the PSOPS's ability to expand the new initiatives they had been planning or had started, but the PSOPS leadership have been looking for creative ways within the safety parameters to resume efforts on these new initiatives.

### **Client-Focused Results**

All evidence collected clearly supports that the PSOPS provides the traditional community public safety services of a police department, as well as many other critical functions. Participant 2 and Participant 3 both shared that the community has a PSOPS that participates in fundraising, improvement projects such as repairing an old baseball field, and maintaining flood protection structures. All three participants explained that the community also has a PSOPS that desires and actively seeks interaction with its community members, both online and in person. Participant 1 and Participant 2 both discussed that community members are invited to apply to participate in the PSOPS Citizen's Academy 8-week course to gain a more thorough understanding of the operations, trainings, and experiences of the PSOPS workforce and the services it provides. Participant 3 explained that the chief of police himself and officers patrolling the community often choose to interact directly with community members by visiting local businesses and accepting invitations from community members to play basketball for a few minutes.



## **Workforce-Focused Results**

The evidence collected confirmed that the PSOPS workforce are frequently exposed to emotionally challenging and traumatic experiences as part of their job duties, as discussed by all three participants. The evidence also details that the PSOPS's sole current trauma-recovery resource is its robust EAP for trauma-recovery resources in place that is available to them, and that this is initially presented to them during their onboarding process as a new hire, as confirmed by all three participants. Each participant also explained that follow up or updates to the resources available to the PSOPS is not currently a formal process of dissemination to the workforce, and workforce members must go to City Hall in person in order to request resources and initiate access of their EAP benefits.

## **PSOPS Leadership and Governance Results**

### ***Theme 1: Leadership Knowledge of Resources***

The data revealed a theme PSOPS leadership has gaps in their knowledge of resources available to their workforce. The evidence collected identified that all three of the PSOPS leaders interviewed do not know how the current EAP was selected for the workforce and were not a part of this selection process. Additionally, two of the PSOPS leadership interviewed reported they do not feel they have a strong knowledge of the details or specific services available to their workforce through the EAP, explaining that these resources are introduced to the workforce during their onboarding as new hires by the city clerk and there is no formal refresher after this. One participant explained:

I know where to find the pamphlet, but as far as the whole process, who you go to, what specific services they have, I really don't know a whole lot about that. It's kind of hard to provide detailed information that might be requested.

Another participant suggested it may be beneficial

if there was a city wide not only training but somewhere that we could go even as department heads to be able to have an outline of the processes that they have and or the services that are provided... in the event that one of my employees comes to me, I can be able to go...to a secure drive and go, okay, well, here is what has already been implemented, it's on our public drive to be able to go right to it and go, yep, okay, here's a list of the resources... as long as it's current and updated.

Each PSOPS leader interviewed stated that they do not know what the efficacy is of the current trauma recovery resources available to emergency dispatchers.

### ***Theme 2: Recognizing When Resources Could be Beneficial to Workforce***

Another theme identified from the data collected is that each of the PSOPS leaders interviewed stated they feel they are moderately able to identify signs in their workforce that their workforce may benefit from connection to trauma-recovery resources and provided examples of signs they have noticed in their workforce members such as uncharacteristic behaviors like self-isolating, irritability, fidgeting, and slow response times in their speech and motor skills. Discussing their leadership position in the PSOPS, Participant 3 shared that "it's been a little untraditional, because I've had to wear many other department hats at the same time," and explained being busy "all day long, it's 100 miles an hour." Participant 1 shared that they feel at times they may be so busy

with their many leadership duties that they may miss some of the signs that their workforce may be in need of support or may be trying to mask their need for resources. One participant also shared that they are concerned they do not have a solid understanding of “whose responsibility is it” to see the workforce member through the resource access process and resolution of the trauma impacted difficulty they are experiencing.

Each of the PSOPS leaders interviewed shared that they feel they are comfortable speaking to their workforce members about their mental health issues, with one leader sharing this comfort lasts “to a point, and then, when do you drop a line and realize I need to find them more professional help, and knowing where to draw that line.” Two of the interviewed PSOPS leaders identified that their workforce members frequently report traumatic responses to not knowing the outcome of emergency calls, such as whether the individuals involved lived, and request information about the resolution of them. Each PSOPS leader interviewed recognized their own role in a work culture that encourages trauma-recovery resource access, with one PSOPS leader interviewed stating “everything said in these four walls stays in these four walls” as a means of promoting trust and confidentiality in leadership-workforce relationships.

One PSOPS leader interviewed shared that they believe the workforce is rather unaware that trauma-recovery resources exist at all in the form of an EAP, and that much of the workforce is “numb to the fact that [the EAP] even exists.” Another PSOPS leader explained that whenever a workforce member does identify as needing trauma-recovery resources, “it’s almost a surprise to them that there are any available, but they’ve been

here the whole time.” Another PSOPS leader identified that their perception of the workforce-resource relationship is that workforce members, and possibly leaders, believe trauma-recovery resources are “only there to use when something bad happens” instead of for prevention of well-being decline or maintenance of positive well-being. This same leader also shared that they believed leaders would more frequently connect workforce members to trauma-recovery resources and these resources would be accessed more frequently if they were able to be accessed without having to search for them or walk into City Hall to begin the process of accessing them.

While each of the PSOPS leaders interviewed celebrated that emergency dispatchers are now formally recognized as first responders, with one leader interviewed referring to them as “heroes in headsets; they talk to everyone on their worst day, no one calls to ask how their day is going,” all three of the interviewed PSOPS leaders agreed they perceive there is still a stigma in the work culture about an employee feeling they are being weak or demonstrating inability to “handle” the duties of their job if they are transparent about being impacted by trauma experienced, even though the leaders themselves do not share this view. Further, one PSOPS leader interviewed shared that the emergency dispatchers have at times battled their perceptions that the public views them as being

clerical, and not seeing them as first responders... that they are a body, here to do the job of a robot, with no need for a debriefing, no need for relief, no need for quick coverage while they recover and gather themselves... it’s a mindfuck, and we as department leaders don’t see them that way, we care so much about them.

This leader agreed that in order to approach their leaders and seek trauma-recovery resources, workforce members have to overcome these stereotypes as well as accept the leaders' efforts to adjust the work culture to encourage access of trauma-recovery resource without fear of stigma impacting their employment or reputation. Another PSOPS leader identified that administrative workers in the department are able to "turn off the city" once they are off shift, but that emergency dispatchers "unwind and have crash moments after the adrenaline wears off." This is in alignment with one PSOPS leader's statement that the emergency dispatchers "go to bed" with their experiences of the calls from their shifts.

### ***Theme 3: Leadership Role in Connecting Workforce to Resources***

Each of the PSOPS leaders interviewed clearly identified that they play a role in connecting their workforce members to trauma-recovery resources. The specific details of each leader's role were different, but all three PSOPS leaders interviewed stated when they notice signs of a workforce member struggling, they as leaders take time to speak one-on-one to the individual in need to explore more about what kind of support or resources the individual may need.

One leader identified that they worry there is sometimes a "lack of follow up" to offers of the open-door policy, or leaders that do not ask their workforce members about their well-being, and shared conviction about their own desire to "reach out to my people" because "they are not feeling they made a difference" while carrying out job duties. Another leader interviewed normalized the need for help by simply stating in their

interview that “help is human,” sharing that they feel dedicated to “getting the workforce the help they need or did not know they need.”

***Theme 4: Initiatives for Resources***

Another theme that emerged from the data collected is that each PSOPS leader interviewed discussed initiatives to increase and broaden the resources available to the PSOPS workforce. Discussing their belief of the PSOPS workforces’ perceptions of the available resources, Participant 3 shared “they probably feel that they need some work, and they need some help.” Participant 1 stated

it sounds like they were trying to do like a support group that was going to be interagency so that they could have different resources, different human resources to provide to people. Pick your flavor, essentially.

Several initiatives for increasing trauma-recovery resources available to the PSOPS emergency dispatchers and other workforce members are being considered and explored by PSOPS leadership. One such consideration is an inter-agency thinktank being developed for shared resources to provide in conjunction with those offered by the police department such as the EAP, and to include resources for emergency dispatcher and “potentially some of their spouses too, if spouses needed any type of support,” as discussed by Participant 1. Participants 2 and 3 also expressed great interest in researching and exploring what resources the local community may already have available outside of the department-offered resources and bridge these for PSOPS emergency dispatchers and other workforce members to be able to access. Participant 2 eloquently stated

I do have the longing to know what our community has to offer that may be available to our employees outside of like the employment factor. So, I know the counties obviously have much more outreach and funding for their citizens. I don't know if our employees would qualify for that, so kind of bridging that gap.

## **Implications Resulting from the Findings**

### ***Organizations***

One major implication resulting from the findings of the evidence collected was that PSOPS leadership cannot connect their workforce members to resources they do not know about. For example, one PSOPS leader interviewed has been in the department for almost a decade and has not had a formal refresher on the available trauma-recovery resources since their orientation as a new hire. The decade long tenure speaks positively to the goal of maintaining workforce retention, but also highlights the gaps in resource knowledge that inevitably grow from time passing without updates to resources being disseminated unless this information is actively sought out by leadership or workforce members.

Another implication is that workforce perception stigma plays a large role in workforce members' access of trauma-recovery resources, and that the PSOPS leadership is aware of this stigma and collectively agree they want to eliminate it. As Participant 2 identified in their interview "mental health topics are a black cloud" that some workforce members and leaders actively work to avoid discussing, choosing instead to try and mask the impact of their struggles and present as fit-for-duty even when they may be struggling, for any variety of personal reasons.

### ***Individual***

A related implication of the findings is that PSOPS leaders' own well-being and possible need to access trauma-recovery resources may somehow impact their roles in connecting workforce members to trauma-recovery resources or being able to see the signs in their workforce members that they may benefit from connection to trauma-recovery resources. Stemming from this, another implication from the findings includes that PSOPS leaders are fulfilling many different roles in addition to their primary leadership roles and, although very happy to serve their community in any way possible, being stretched so thin may prevent PSOPS leadership from being as available as they may otherwise be to their workforce and limit their opportunities to interact with their workforce in ways that would reveal signs their workforce members could benefit from being connected to trauma-recovery resources.

Participant 2 stated in their interview that there is a "lack of empathy associated with mental health," implying that by increasing empathy in leaders support and connection to resources may somehow be improved. Related to this, there are implications from the findings that it may be beneficial for more leadership training be put in place regarding how to identify when workforce members may need more professional help than the leader can provide.

### ***Community***

One implication of the findings includes that the COVID pandemic significantly delayed the development of additional trauma-recovery resources for the workforce to access, some of which had begun being explored before the pandemic but had to be put



on pause until some stability returned to the community. Another implication of the findings is that a continued focus on the well-being of the PSOPS workforce will yield healthy employees best able to serve their community efficiently.

### **Implications to Positive Social Change**

One major implication to positive social change from the findings is that transformation and servant-leadership can, in fact, dramatically impact work culture regarding leadership and workforce members alike in being willing to discuss struggles and the impacts of trauma on their well-being. This may lead to increased normalizing in police department work cultures that needing and providing “help is human,” as concisely stated by Participant 2 in their interview. In turn, police department workforce members may be increasingly willing and encouraged to seek help for trauma recovery earlier in their struggles, and the fear of stigma may be reduced. As Participant 3 wisely stated in their interview, “the observations are there, the conversations are not”; one implication for positive social change from the findings may be that conversations about the impact of traumatic work experiences may become more accepted and even expected in work cultures such as police departments that used to pride themselves on perceptions of being “tough.”

### **Strengths and Limitations of the Study**

#### **Strengths of the Study**

Qualitative case studies provide rich personal information about participants and their individual experiences. Through this study I examined the phenomena present in the PSOPS leadership, workforce, and organization. Qualitative research methods can

typically be generalized to other settings and situations and are excellent for providing explanations and an enhanced understanding of accepted concepts (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). One major strength of the study is that being a very small rural police department, the PSOPS leadership has a richer and more thorough understanding of their workforce members' work experiences as well as their individual well-being and home life.

### **Limitations of the Study**

One limitation of this study is that only the perspectives of the PSOPS leadership were considered, without the opinions of workforce members considered. Another limitation is that public opinion and feedback were not used during data collection, nor available for review regarding community members' experiences interacting with the PSOPS workforce. Additionally, the small police department and family feel of the rural police department that agreed to serve as the public safety organization partner site cannot be able to be generalized to larger departments in urban cities.

### **Unanticipated Limitations or Outcomes**

The PSOPS was discovered to have a blend of transformational and servant-leadership styles combined in a manner that results in a person-centered approach to workforce member well-being care as a means of attending to public safety. I became aware that the PSOPS leadership was very interested in national media attention on policing, and that this pressure from national media is impacting both morale of police departments as well as retention and recruitment of the workforce. Participant 3 explained "policing is definitely difficult and national media attention. So it's hard for

recruitment and retention. Because, you know, not as many people want to be in law enforcement today.” The PSOPS was focused on positively responding to increased public pressure and media attention on policing.

Reviewing and considering local public opinion regarding experiences interacting with police workforce may have provided some insight to signs and signals the workforce is or is not operating in a state of well-being and may benefit from connection to trauma-recovery resources. Examples of this could include community member perceptions of emergency dispatcher and officer irritability and shortness with community members, or recognition of calm and polite demeanors of emergency dispatchers and officers under pressure. Additionally, community member feedback being considered may have debunked PSOPS leadership perception that emergency dispatchers are expected by the public to operate as robots without emotional impact to their well-being resulting from the intensity of their work roles.

## Section 5: Recommendations and Conclusion

### **Recommendations**

This study yields numerous evaluations and recommendations that result from analysis and synthesis of the evidence that was collected. A description of the recommended solutions that will potentially address the problem follow in this section, as informed by the findings discussed in Section 4.

#### **Assessments and Surveys**

Recommendation 1: An initial recommendation from the findings of this study is to develop, distribute, and collect surveys from the PSOPS emergency dispatchers and other workforce members to identify what their needs are. Additionally, emphasis should be placed on making resources available that match these needs and requests for resources to emergency dispatchers in order to promote the best well-being and work productivity. This survey would be anonymous, and the results reviewed by PSOPS leadership to evaluate for potential adjustment to the EAP or other resources available to the PSOPS workforce. Such a survey is recommended to be conducted at least once a year.

#### **Resource Knowledge**

Recommendation 2: It is recommended that senior PSOPS leadership be involved in vetting the options available for the selection of the EAP and other resources being considered to be made available to the PSOPS emergency dispatchers and other workforce members. It is recommended that this vetting process of resource options take place after the aforementioned assessments and surveys exploring the needs of the

workforce have been conducted so that the results of those can be used in the resource selection process.

Recommendation 3: It is further recommended that a shared drive be developed and maintained by the Human Resources department, or a delegate of the Human Resource department's selection, that houses all available resources offered by both the police department and the local community that PSOPS leadership, emergency dispatchers, and other workforce members may access. It is recommended that this database be updated, at minimum, every other month, and these updates disseminated via email to PSOPS leadership.

#### **Procedure Clarification**

Recommendation 4: It is recommended that PSOPS leadership collaborate and clarify whose role it is to inform the PSOPS leadership, emergency dispatchers, and other workforce members of available trauma-recovery resources. It is then further recommended that PSOPS leadership identify when updates to these available trauma-recovery resources be discussed and selected, how they will be disseminated to appropriate leadership and managers, and how they will then be expected to disseminate these updates and information to their workforce members.

#### **Provision of Case Resolution Information**

Recommendation 5: It is recommended that the outcome of calls be maintained and accessible by the PSOPS emergency dispatchers. Not knowing the resolution of calls that come into the PSOPS emergency dispatchers' department was mentioned several times as problematic to the well-being of the emergency dispatchers and leadership alike

during evidence collection. Participant 3 asked the direct question of “What can [the emergency dispatchers and their leadership] do in real time instead of waiting for info Monday morning?” as well as recommending there be a shared drive developed where case resolution information can be reviewed by PSOPS leadership, emergency dispatchers, and other workforce members, hopefully providing some closure. This recommendation is suggested, with the additional detail that these case resolutions all be coded appropriately to uphold HIPPA and community member and workforce member confidentiality.

### **Leadership Training and Support**

Recommendation 6: Emotional intelligence and empathy play a large role in successful and positive police department leadership (Pūraitė & Prokofjeva, 2019; Participant 2, interview, October 2, 2020). It is recommended that PSOPS leadership and managers participate in annual empathy and emotional intelligence courses, much like they already participate in annual sexual harassment training courses required by the state (Participant 2, interview, October 2, 2020).

Recommendation 7: Additionally, it is recommended that PSOPS leadership and management be re-trained annually on the available trauma-recovery resources within the police department as well as in the community, to include the process and any changes to the process of how to connect their emergency dispatcher and other workforce members, as well as themselves, to these resources. A recommended annual supplemental training would include information on signs of the impact of trauma and compassion fatigue, how

to reach out to individuals once these signs are noticed in the workplace, and the potential harm of ignoring these signs or avoiding addressing them.

Recommendation 8: Participant 3 indicated in their interview that as one climbs the ranks in police leadership there are less and less individuals it is appropriate for that leader to connect with and share emotional experiences. This led to the recommendation that PSOPS leadership be involved in an annual Well-Being Summit that addresses leadership compassion fatigue, normalizes and encourages discussions about individual well-being, and serves as a reminder of what resources are available and how to access them provided at each Summit.

### **Recommendations for Future Studies Addressing Similar Topics**

This study was focused on the perspectives of PSOPS leadership. One recommendation for future studies addressing similar topics would be to explore the perspectives of PSOPS emergency dispatchers themselves, as well as the PSOPS frontline officers' perspectives regarding access of available trauma-recovery resources.

Another interesting future study could include asking the PSOPS emergency dispatchers and frontline officers what factors contribute to their decision to approach their leadership, or to not approach their leadership, about their well-being and request connection to available trauma-recovery resources.

### **Dissemination of this Doctoral Study to the PSOPS**

The PowerPoint presentation that was developed for the final oral defense of this study and presented to the study Committee was adapted and presented to the PSOPS itself in a scheduled meeting. This scheduled meeting with the PSOPS was in person and

with individuals who the PSOPS invited to hear about the study, its findings, and the resulting recommendations.

### **Summary**

Though this study I explored PSOPS leadership influence on emergency dispatcher access to trauma-recovery resources. The findings support that the PSOPS leadership interviewed are already actively involved in the well-being of their emergency dispatchers and mindful of watching for signs that their emergency dispatchers may benefit from connection to available trauma-recovery resources. Additionally, the findings of this study include that there are significant gaps in PSOPS leadership knowledge of available resources, a need for more frequent updates and refreshers on the trauma-recovery resources available, and a combined transformational and servant-leadership style PSOPS leadership team ready and eager to address these.



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## Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. How long have you worked for the PSOPS?
2. Can you tell me a little about your role here?
3. On a scale of 1-10, where would you rank your knowledge about current trauma recovery resources offered to staff by your organization
4. Is there anything that would help increase your knowledge and understanding of these?
5. What indicators, if any, have you observed in your staff that trauma recovery resources are needed or could benefit your staff?
6. What is your perception of how your staff feel about the trauma recovery resources available to them?
7. How would you describe your current role in your staff accessing trauma recovery resources? For example, would you describe yourself as “hands off,” very involved, etc, and what would you change about this if you could do so?
8. How would you assess the efficacy of trauma recovery resources made available to emergency dispatchers?
9. How prepared and comfortable do you feel speaking to personnel about their mental health issues?
10. Is there anything else you'd like to share about trauma recovery resources in your organization?

## Appendix B: Interview Guide

Interview Guide | Interviewee PSOPS Title | Date: \_\_\_\_\_ | Time Start: \_\_\_\_\_ | Time End: \_\_\_\_\_

1. How long have you worked for the PSOPS?
  
2. Can you tell me a little about your role here?
  
3. On a scale of 1-10, where would you rank your knowledge about current trauma recovery resources offered to staff by your organization?
  
4. Is there anything that would help increase your knowledge and understanding of these?
  
5. What indicators, if any, have you observed in your staff that trauma recovery resources are needed or could benefit your staff?
  
6. What is your perception of how your staff feel about the trauma recovery resources available to them?
  
7. How would you describe your current role in your staff accessing trauma recovery resources? For example, would you describe yourself as “hands off,” very involved, etc, and what would you change about this if you could do so?
  
8. How would you assess the efficacy of trauma recovery resources made available to emergency dispatchers?
  
9. How prepared and comfortable do you feel speaking to personnel about their mental health issues?
  
10. Is there anything else you'd like to share about trauma recovery resources in your organization?

Follow Up Topics and Additional Notes: