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Workplace Stress and Coping in US Virgin Island Police Officers

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Walden University

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Isheba L. James

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

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by

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MSP, Walden University, 2016

MPA, University of the Virgin Islands, 2013

BA, University of the Virgin Islands, 2011

Dissertation Proposal Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Research indicates that policing is one of the most challenging and stressful professions worldwide regardless of the size of the police department, specialty area of service, or even geographic location. This study explored workplace stress and related coping strategies as described by police officers in the U.S. Virgin Islands through phenomenological inquiry. In addition to factors of stress and coping, components of culture and current local challenges received focus in the exploration. The research population consisted of 9 Virgin Islands police officers. Underpinning the study was the demand resources individual differences model and Lazarus and Folkman's stress theory. The research questions addressed how Virgin Islands Police Department (VIPD) officers described perceived stressors in their lived experiences of work from internal departmental sources and from external community or societal sources, as well as what coping strategies VIPD officers described in their lived experiences dealing with stressors in their work from internal departmental sources and from external community or societal sources. While many of the findings mirrored the stress and coping that police describe in a universal sense, of particular interest relative to isolated and post-colonial location were stressors relating to consent decree, rivalry among islands, citizen complaints, and political stressors. The findings may be useful in the process of making necessary rehabilitative changes in U.S. Virgin Islands police services through providing meaningful insights for future reforms supportive of the police force.

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Dedication

I dedicate this academic achievement to my grandparents Bentura and Christine James, my mother Goldine Mathias, and my daughter Zakiyah Venzen. Grandpa I know that you are smiling down on me. This journey would not have been successful without your support. I dedicate this body of work to the law enforcement officers for their commitment in serving and protecting their communities.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the study

Introduction

Workplace stress in policing has emerged as an important focus for psychologists. Identifying the causes of stress and how these stressors impact individuals in police departments is crucial for effective intervention (Bhui et al., 2016). The literature has addressed various factors that contribute to job stress in police officers. Burke (2016) reported that these various factors stem from two primary sources: organizational and environmental. Some frequent examples of organizational and environmental stressors that police face include rotating shifts, extended work hours, required court appearances, and political ramifications of work decisions made, as well as the physical dangers and inadequate equipment for work in the community (Burke, 2016). More specifically, high rates of alcoholism, substance use, divorce, suicide, and mental illness, as well as stress related physical health problems are often experienced (Violanti et al., 2017). The unpredictable work life of a police officer and the constant exposure to stressful events can lead to both physiological and psychological problems. These stressors can also strain marriages, family life and relationships. (Rosenthal & Alter, 2012). The combined organizational and environmental sources of workplace stress for police officers are amplified in the US territories.

All of the US insular areas that are unincorporated territories have similar challenges adapting US Mainland institutions and culture (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2019). The US police model and police culture may not be easily transferable to the US Territories. An examination of workplace stressors of police institutions in the Virgin Islands police force is explored in this research. Unique stressors emerged from

the territorial model and Virgin Islands sociopolitical environment due to the colonial history and the unique cultural context.

Leibowitz (2013) suggests that the unincorporated territorial model as delineated in the Revised Organic Act of 1954 has not seen a “concerted governmental action seeking to any change” (p. 265). The modern US Virgin Islands is a hybrid of the antecedent Danish colonial system and the progressively reformed US territorial system. The Virgin Islands Police is organized within a single tier system and this encourages a concentration of power and conflicts. Based on the 1954 Organic Act, the US Virgin Islands single tier governance structure is within a unicameral legislature. All political power is concentrated at a single territorial level. This is unique since all other territories have bicameral legislatures with secondary tiers to include mayors or traditional chiefs who address local matters. The single tier governance structure means that once a political party or coalition wins power, leadership can take a zero-sum approach and select police leadership solely on patronage and clientelism.

To mitigate against excessive centralization of power and over-representation of leadership from a single district, some governors adopted a redundancy of duplicate deputy police chiefs for each island in order to prevent sole power in a single district. This centralized power means that unlike the Mainland wherein police services operate on multiple tiers with state police, county police, and sheriffs at the local level, all Virgin Islands police services are centralized into one entity: The Virgin Islands Police Department (VIPD).

In a unique way, identity politics is tied to a fluid matrix of race, ethno-insular origins, and quasi “tribal” ties that confound many US Mainland observers. US Virgin

Islanders use the term “clannishness” to describe these familial ties that other people dub as tribalism which most Native Virgin Islanders consider a pejorative term. This sociopolitical variable impacts workplace stress in the police services. Identity conflicts separate Virgin Islanders based on ethno-insular origin and sometimes even familial ties.

The primary conflict is the St. Thomas versus St. Croix divide. No other US territory is bifurcated into two equally populated electoral districts that are separated by 40 miles of Caribbean Sea. Even more, St. Croix, the southern district, is geographically larger, more rural, and ethnically distinct. Therefore, unlike the other unincorporated territories which may have similar workplace stressors, the US Virgin Islands police leadership must contend with a fragmented or antagonistically divided society with all the attendant pressures that these breed.

At the same time, the political system has served as a rigid constraint that can at times militate against law enforcement agencies splintering but on the other hand, the over centralization has created pressure cooker dynamics that increase workplace stressors. The ethno-insular divide undergirds an internal schism, and within the VIPD the constant internal antagonism has bred resentment, poor morale, and poor discipline.

To exacerbate the ongoing socio-political stressors in the Virgin Islands impacting the police force are the newer fiscal crises and debilitating natural disasters. These stressors are environmental at several levels. Recurrent territorial budget shortfalls have led to insufficient funds for the police force. It is axiomatic in the US Virgin Islands that poor funding, inadequate apparatus, scant training, non-existent support services, and poor pay conspire to discourage even the most committed police officer to stay and serve. This set of stressors applied to the Virgin Islands has been combined with above-normal

numbers of natural disasters. From Hurricane Hugo (September 1989) through Hurricane Dorian (August 2019), the US Virgin Islands police officer has had to remain a first responder to the overwhelming needs of a badly battered territory. The decreasing resources and constant mega natural disasters which always impact the entire territory at the same time has at times fostered a siege mentality. The only meaningful comparison to this immense stressor would be the current Covid19 pandemic that has hit the entire US all at the same time. Based on both cases that were mentioned above, a sense of complete devastation by nature and the failing political support of higher pay and services degrades the morale of police. Worse, these mega natural disasters magnify a sense of powerlessness, vulnerability, and despair. This can impact police officers' family lives, marriages, committed relationships, parental responsibility, and reason to live.

Thus, some of the stressors VI police officers face may be unique depending on the geographic location, politics, crime wave, community, culture, organizational structure, management practices, and even intra-island conflict (Rosenthal & Alter, 2012). The uniqueness of policing, the job-related stressors affiliated with police work, and the potentially severe negative implications for public harm make research in this topic area a high priority, particularly as unmanaged stress in policing affects the health of an officer, organization, and entire communities (Rosenthal & Alter, 2012).

While there are many scholarly articles on police stress in the United States Mainland, there is limited research on police stress and coping in the Caribbean Basin, including the US Virgin Islands of St. Thomas/St. John and St. Croix. In order to add to research and gain a better understanding of the challenges faced by police forces in developing US territories, this study explored the lived experiences of police officers in

the Virgin Islands. Participants from the Virgin Islands Police Department (VIPD) have defined workplace stressors and coping strategies that are unique to them. This focus is timely as the Virgin Islands government has openly stated its difficulty in recruiting and retaining permanent officers (The Virgin Islands Consortium, 2015), a situation that continues to date.

The sections in chapter 1 are introduction, background of the problem, problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions, framework, and significance of the study.

Background of the Problem

A review of literature reveals that both internal and external workplace stress can negatively impact an officer's health (Nelson, 2017; Rufo, 2015; Sharp, 2010). Nelson (2017) reports that criminal activity and social problems have increased over the years which places more responsibility and stress on police officers resulting in workplace stress and burnout among this population. Rufo (2015) also suggests that the daily stressful incidents that occur during patrol can impair an officer's physical and emotional well-being. Sharp (2010) notes that the organizational structure of a law enforcement agency can be overly bureaucratic causing many stressors for police officers. However, most studies were conducted in the mainland US and limited research exists in the Caribbean Basin where challenges with stress may be shaped differently. The research gap is that developing US territories like St. Thomas/St. John and St. Croix have not been a part of the research that explores workplace stress and coping among police officers (Mark & Smith, 2012b; Martinussen et. al., 2007; Sollie et. al., 2010).

These insular territories are all hybrid societies with a level of US institutionalization but local socio-cultural dynamics that impact governance. There is a misperception that policing under the tropical skies is not as stressful as policing in the mainland. Police officers in the Caribbean Basin have the same responsibility as police officers in the mainland though environment and situations differ. Specific factors relative to the differences between mainland demographics, culture, and both distant and recent historical factors, will be presented in following subsections of this section below. Research has indicated that specific demographics can be influential on police stress (Wells et al., 2003).

At present, the VIPD has both internal and external stressors that undermine its ability to reduce violent crimes, and the VIPD faces persistent problems tied to frequent violent crimes and a subsequently hostile public. This research has examined how unique workplace stressors within the Virgin Islands environment impact the VIPD. Documented outcomes indicate a significant number of stressed officers have resigned or engaged in anti-productive behaviors (The Virgin Islands Consortium, 2015), while other officers have been able to effectively cope. The coping strategies used by participants in this research study to handle stressors were explored.

This study is needed to bridge the gap in research literature for addressing a specific locale and culture. As the USVI area post-colonial society, it has contributed to the literature regarding post-colonial policing in developing places and the challenges that this legacy can bring. The study will be useful in contributing information helpful to positive changes within the Virgin Islands police department in the supports provided for officers who may be experiencing workplace stress.

History of the Virgin Islands Police Department

The current VIPD is an outcome of a series of antecedent colonial policing entities that started in the Danish Colonial era (US Virgin Islands Police Department [US VIPD], 2010), and is an important part of the background for this research. From 1671 to 1917, the Danish West Indies hosted several law enforcement entities that created the foundation of the law enforcement culture and system of the modern era (US VIPD, 2010). The Danish colonial policing tradition was authoritarian and extremely repressive. During this period three significant institutions arose. These institutions were listed as the colonial police, colonial military personnel, and the colonial militia that consisted of both European/White colonists and Free Africans.

According to the US VIPD (2010), during the period of chattel slavery colonial policing dealt with the suppression of the majority of the African/Black population. The African colonial militia, or Free Negro Regiment, was an antecedent organization of the police. This “native” police consisted solely of liberated Africans or former slaves as well as free-born Africans or African Danish colonial subjects, all of whom were required to serve as volunteer police to maintain colonial order. A primary requirement was to hunt or suppress active resistance to slavery, particularly grandmarronage, or running away from slavery. Freed Africans resented their repressive role as colonial police, especially when it came to policing their enslaved brethren. So unpopular was this feature that in 1815, the Regiment mutinied, which led to the Freedmen Petition in which members of the militia demanded reforms for the free population (US VIPD, 2010).

Even after chattel slavery was abolished, the Labor Codes of 1849 mandated a repressive regime that controlled the civil liberties, movement, and aspirations of the

majority of the population, especially on St. Croix. The Labor Codes were abolished after the Contract Workers Insurrection, or “Fire Burn,” of October 1878 (US VIPD, 2010). Modern policing did not take place after this period, for many of the Danish police were mainly concerned with keeping the status quo. The Colonial Law of 1906 ensured that the Danish West Indies remained deprived of civil rights and privileges. Therefore, the police were enforcers of a non-democratic society (US VIPD, 2010).

After the Transfer in 1917, the US instituted Naval Rule and continued the Danish Colonial Law of 1906 for an additional 19 years (US VIPD, 2010). During this period, policing was a combination of the US Naval Government, local officers serving them, and Danish colonial law (US VIPD, 2010). Further protests led to the complete civil government with a new Organic Act of 1936 (US VIPD, 2010). Then, through an executive order by the Governor of the Virgin Islands, the contemporary VIPD was established directly out of the Department of Public Safety, and it has since served as the principal law enforcement agency in the Territory (US VIPD, 2010). Through the implementation of Act No. 4964 on January 1, 1985, the VIPD was divided into four subdivisions: the St. Thomas branch, the St. John branch, and two branches on St. Croix. Each of these branches operates on its own budget but shares the common goal of serving and protecting the public (US VIPD, 2010).

As the Virgin Islands became more self-governing, more reforms in the criminal justice system were made that allowed them to do away with many of the colonial practices (US VIPD, 2010). Boateng and Darko (2016) suggested that the best way police agencies in these societies can acquire and sustain legitimacy from public is to decolonize themselves from the negative practices, policies, and behaviors they inherited from

colonial masters. Such changes have had a positive impact on the VIPD. For example, the first police commissioner, Milton A. Frett, organized several bureaus within the police department. Through continuing organizational evolution, the Bureau of Narcotics, Special Operations Bureau, Interpol Telecommunications Network, School Security, Home Fleet Program, and the Marine Unit were established (US VIPD, 2010). These subunits were patterned on US stateside structures to make the Territorial police parallel to best practices on the Mainland (US VIPD, 2010). The changes also created more local job opportunities and allowed individuals to be hired and placed in specialty units based on their experience and training.

The Virgin Islands police department (VIPD) has experienced many changes over time and understanding the history of the VIPD is essential. The culture, environment, social issues, demographics, and other unique factors that may influence policing in the Caribbean Basin are quite different from the law enforcement experience in the mainland. While there are many studies about policing in the mainland, there is limited research on police culture, situational stressors, and external factors that may affect resiliency and coping behaviors among police officers in portions of the Caribbean Basin like St. Thomas/St. John and St. Croix.

Unique Situations Presented in VIPD

Another aspect of important background for this study is understanding that insularism is a unique stressor for Caribbean societies (Leka, Griffiths, & Cox, 2003). All island societies have a level of insularism, or “island consciousness,” in which the world is perceived as centered in one’s island (Leka et al., 2003). At its most extreme, island consciousness resembles a form of tribalism that encourages internal conflict,

fragmentation, and excessive competition within public institutions in a debilitating sense (Nelson, 2017). Within the region, insularism breeds a sense of fragmentation and micro-nationalism so that each island is considered a separate society, and depending upon an island's proximity to another, this can cause significant friction. (Leka, Griffiths, & Cox, 2003) For example, St. Thomas and St. John are geographically close, with only a mile and a half of water separating one from the other. They are considered constituent parts of the single district of St. Thomas/St. John, extending back to the Danish era. Though both islands' cultures are almost identical, there are still some conflicts based on each island perceiving itself as having different needs and interests (The Virgin Islands Consortium, 2015).

However, St. Croix has always been deemed as being very different from St. Thomas/St. John. There is a 40-mile separation of deep open sea between these areas. St. Croix is sometimes seen as the rural hinterland, and St. Thomas is seen as the urban center. Between both districts, there is a difference in linguistic dialect, economic activity, ethnic groups, mindset, and social consciousness. For the outsiders, these differences may be hard to perceive, but for Virgin Islanders, these differences are clear.

As noted previously, unlike most traditional police departments in the United States, the VIPD is divided and separated geographically between three islands, St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix, creating organizational challenges with hiring and retaining officers. In addition to geographic separation, there is also the cultural difference between each Island to consider. These factors bring unique work environments that must also take into consideration the hiring preferences, scheduling, assignments, fiscal constraints, and territorial politics of each Island.

An ongoing stressor have been the inability to attract human capital and personnel to the Islands. As the VIPD was reorganized in the modern era, a quasi-nationalist, or pro-Virgin Islander, mentality emerged. This means there was a reluctance to hire non-Virgin Islanders in the VIPD. Even more, there is a great reluctance for St. Thomas/St. John officers to relocate to St. Croix and vice versa. In effect, this constrains the flexibility of hiring the best officers for the jobs available in VIPD (US VIPD, 2010).

A related stressor is the inadequate number of officers, especially those who patrol the streets (The Virgin Islands Consortium, 2015). From 2007 to 2015, the average number of officers in the VIPD was 400, with two hundred officers on St. Thomas/St. John and another 200 hundred on St. Croix. Four hundred police officers may seem like a lot for a total population of 106,400 people, but in fact, VIPD officials have openly reported a manpower shortage based on the needs and demands of this service branch (The Virgin Islands Consortium, 2015). The number of officers currently employed with the VIPD has not been enough to serve, protect, or preserve public peace (The Virgin Islands Consortium, 2015). Recruiting people for the VIPD, with not only its intrinsic pressures but also the dangers inherent to police work, can be a very daunting task and has frequently proven difficult for the VIPD.

As early as 2006, the homicide rates of the Virgin Islands soared and combined with the already established sense of a low-intensity war on the streets (The Virgin Islands Consortium, 2018). Overall crime rates in the Islands have risen to the point that all gubernatorial elections since 2002 have been tied to stopping the ongoing crime wave. Throughout the 2000s and until recently, the per capita homicide rate has been 30 per 100,000 people (McCarthy, 2016). McCarty (2016) reports that this is a higher per capita

rate than in any other US state or territory. Though specific published evidence is not available, there is a cause/effect relation between the variables. It is not known why the homicide rate is so high, but clearly there is a problem that calls for future research. This study explored associated factors that have contributed to the phenomenon being researched. These included exhaustion among officers, and both internal and external workplace stressors that negatively affected the officers' abilities to carry out their duties.

As noted above, the recruitment difficulties are influenced by a quasi-nationalist view and impacted by the insularism within the VIPD that causes officers to seek to work within their own island's communities and resist seeking work in the other districts. Therefore, efforts to fill police department needs for deployment of officers are magnified as a significant internal organizational stressor (The VINO, 2016). Many conflicts emerged in the VIPD from 2007 to 2016 over officers openly complaining about workplace stress based on low morale, stress, and anxiety due to the lack of personnel (The VINO, 2016). Within the VIPD, the challenges have affected the effectiveness of policing in the Virgin Islands and may also impact the officers' emotional and physical well-being (The VINO, 2016).

The USVIPD are currently an extremely stressed workforce (Graham, 2015), with little evidence from the literature that seems directly relevant for relieving the situation. Solie et al., (2017) have reported that while extensive research exists on job stress in policing and the consequences of prolonged stress among police officers in the United States, the dynamic relationships between small geographic areas, insular communities, and crime tend to be overlooked by scholars who live in continental societies (Sollie, Kop & Euwema, 2017). For this reason, distress among police officers in the islands has rarely

been studied. It is not known what factors, internal or external, contribute to workplace stress in the US Virgin Islands or what coping mechanisms are used among the population.

Statement of the Problem

Despite documented difficulties for police employed in the VI (The VINO, 2016), little research directly relevant to isolated, insular, post-colonial law enforcement exists. Thus, the research questions for this study were focused on exploration of the lived experiences of stress and coping in individuals employed by the VIPD. The nature of police work has generally been recognized as one of the most stressful, demanding, and high-risk occupations in the world (Balmer, Pooley, & Cohen, 2014). Research has indicated that police officers are stressed by repeated exposure to situations that are unpredictable, potentially dangerous, and traumatic (Balmer et al., 2014). There are many characteristics that can be established as sources of stress for police officers, including violence, exposure to people in pain, the responsibility of having to protect others, carrying a gun, and lack of administrative support, among other things (Balmer et al., 2014). It is well known that frontline officers in high crime areas such as the inner cities on the United States Mainland identify workplace stress as an organizational and individual constraint on productivity among officers (Rufo, 2015). Research has further indicated that the management style and very nature of the police department can create internal stressors for police offices (McCreary & Thompson, 2006). Police officers who are highly stressed can create problems and become a threat to themselves and their departments (Anshel, 2000). Once an officer's ability to cope has been compromised, he

or she is increasingly vulnerable to physical or psychological damage (Russell et al., 2014).

Between 2007 and 2015, VIPD officers increasingly complained openly about stressors, bringing their plight to public attention (Manning 2009; The St. Thomas Source US Virgin Islands, 2014; The Virgin Islands Consortium, 2015). In the US Virgin Islands, a number of consent decrees (legal judgments from the US federal government entered against the VIPD to ensure constitutional policing), court cases, and public discourses have heightened the need for a better understanding of workplace stressors among police officers, which, among other outcomes, can lead to mediocre performance (The Virgin Islands Consortium, 2015). The consent decrees have cited the Virgin Island police officers due to the use of force by officers, lack of training, and other areas of expected performance with which the police department has not complied (The Virgin Islands Consortium, 2016). More research is needed to understand the unique dynamics of this population and to support developing the improvements that have been required by the courts. This research study has examined both perceived stress as well as coping strategies as described by Virgin Islands police officers in order to fill the research gap and possibly inspire further investigation regarding how to support this population and improve the health and wellbeing of the citizens of the Virgin Islands.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the lived experiences and explore the perceived internal and external workplace stressors of VIPD officers, and explore the sources that contributed to both internal and external perceived stress. A twin objective was to understand the coping mechanisms used by this population when facing

workplace stress. The research gave voice to the unique experiences that exist for the VIPD.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to address the identified gap in the literature relative to the USVIPD which guided the qualitative data collection from USVIPD officers:

RQ 1: How do VIPD officers describe perceived stressors in their lived experiences of work from internal departmental sources?

RQ 2: How do VIPD officers describe perceived stressors in their lived experiences of work from external community or societal sources?

RQ 3: What coping strategies do VIPD officers describe in their lived experiences dealing with stressors in their work from internal departmental sources?

RQ 4: What coping strategies do VIPD officers describe in their lived experiences dealing with stressors in their work from external community or societal sources?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the study was based on the demand resources individual differences model (DRIVE) by Mark and Smith (2008) and Lazarus and Folkman's psychological stress and coping theory (Lazarus, 1990; Biggs, Brough, & Drummond, 2017). The DRIVE model was an excellent tool to support the concepts that were studied. Mark and Smith's model takes different elements of modern occupational stress theories to understand and analyze workplace characteristics, individual differences, and subjective stress experiences and how these factors may influence an individual's reaction to internal and external workplace stressors. This theoretical

framework includes the fundamental elements of the stress process on individuals. The model also takes into consideration effects of different workplace characteristics, individual experiences, coping abilities, competence, and moral judgment. Overall, the DRIVE model proposes that psychosocial stressors are based on perception and individual appraisal. This model was selected because it took into account the multifaceted nature of the research, with attention to systemic, societal, and individual aspects of stress and coping.

Lazarus and Folkman's theory was also an excellent framework in exploring coping behaviors among VIPD officers. This theory was selected because it has been a very "instrumental theory in shaping stress and coping research for decades" (Biggs et al., 2017, p.351). This framework takes into consideration how a person's ability to cope affects the person's relationship with the work environment. There are many workplace rules and restrictions for a police officer and some of the resulting demands can create stress for the officer who is likely to respond negatively. For example, a VIPD officer may be faced with a violent citizen but given the details and restrictions of the consent decree that officer has to be very mindful of how he or she responds to the threat. The limited resources can cause an officer to exhibit unfavorable behavior and as noted in research "unfavorable responses can elicit distress" (Biggs et al., 2017, p.351). The officer's perception of the situation he or she faces determines their ability to cope.

In this research, I focused on the lived experiences of police officers in the US Virgin Islands, along with internal and external factors of perceived stress that contributed to the officers' work experiences. The complexity of the relationship between perceived workplace stress and other unique factors relative to the US Virgin Islands

were given considerable attention to fully understand how these implications can negatively affect officers' health. In research conducted by Sharps (2010), long-term workplace stress was shown to negatively impact physical and psychological health, and to eventuate in negative behaviors. The DRIVE model suggests that certain job demands are associated with physical and/or psychological distress. The model also notes that workplace and personal characteristics can play a role in both job strain and resiliency. Lazarus and Folkman (1990) explained that stress affects people in two ways. Stress can have either a positive or negative affect on individuals based on that person's interpretation of the stressor. Further description of the DRIVE model and Lazarus and Folkman stress theory and its relationship to the study will be discussed in Chapter 2 of this document.

Nature of the Study

A qualitative, phenomenological design was selected to explore the research topic of workplace stress and coping in US Virgin Islands police officers. The phenomenological design was used to gain meaningful insights into the experiences of police officers in the Virgin Islands Police Department. This approach allowed me to give meaning to policing in the Virgin Islands context. Using a phenomenological research approach, I conducted semi structured interviews with the research participants which gave meaning to the phenomenon being researched (Davidsen, 2013). Through this approach the lived experiences of the VIPD were captured.

The key concepts that were explored were external and internal workplace stressors of the Virgin Islands police department and ways in which the participants coped with these stressors. Concepts included: how VIPD officers described perceive

stressors in their work from internal departmental sources, how VIPD officers described perceived stressors in their work from external community or societal sources, coping strategies used by VIPD officers when dealing with stressors in their work from internal departmental sources, and coping strategies used by VIPD officers for stressors in their work from external community or societal sources.

Based on the information received from the Virgin Islands Police Department there are no more than 400 police officers in the Virgin Islands (US VIPD, 2010). Therefore, an appropriate sample size would have been 15 volunteer participants to represent this population with a purposive sample of police officers between St. Thomas/St. John and St. Croix. However, the research included 9 participants. The study identified the various sources of stress for police officers, how they internalized these stressors, and their coping strategies. The participant interviews were recorded. The data collected was then analyzed and coded for reoccurring themes and meaning of the phenomenon that was studied.

Definitions

The following definitions were used in this study.

Coping – The ability to manage a taxing situation or circumstance by minimizing or reducing stress (Wimmer, Janda, Wieselmann-Penkner, Jakse, Polansky, & Pertl, 2002).

External stress – Stress that is caused by outside factors, such as the environment, trauma, injury, relationship, and other circumstances (Health, 2009).

Internal stress – Stress that is related to workplace pressure that interferes with the individual job performance (Liu & Aungsuroch, 2019).

Insularism – The state of being detached or isolated or forming an island (Taglioni, 2011).

Organizational stress – Stress that is caused by the culture of an organization, management style, and daily routine (Stinchcomb, 2004).

Police officer – A sworn law enforcement officer who has pledged to uphold all laws of his or her society (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2017).

Post-colonial – The imposing of a European order on native or enslaved people (Dache-Gerbino, 2018).

United States Virgin Islands (USVI) – The United States of the Virgin Islands consists of the islands St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix, which are unincorporated territories of the United States located in the Caribbean (Dookhan & Sheridan, 2011).

Assumptions

This research assumed the participation of VIPD officers in both districts, St. Thomas/St. John and St. Croix. Another assumption was that all research participants would be forthright and honest in their response. It was also assumed that the research participants had shared similar experiences relative to the research study. Lastly, it was assumed that the participants would be interested and willing to volunteer for the research study. Qualitative research requires honest and willing participation for collection of valid data, and sufficient numbers of participants to ascertain shared themes emerging relative to the phenomenon. These assumptions were unique to my research design.

Scope and Delimitations

This study was phenomenological. The researcher used purposeful sampling to conduct this study focusing on internal and external stressors, and coping strategies that

were used by VIPD as a beginning point for describing the lived experience of a unique work group in a unique environment. Scope of this research was also focused on the period of time during which the research occurred and may not necessarily address other emerging issues that may arise following the study, such as a change in the VIPD based on a newly installed administration.

Delimitation for this study revolved around focus on stressors and coping as described by members of the VIPD. Other aspects of the job were not be explored nor did they receive focus. Another delimitation is that only VIPD officers were be included in the research and other law enforcement officers in the Virgin Islands were not be included. The researcher conducted face to face interviews instead of giving the participants a survey to complete, to best capture the lived experiences of the participants in the study. Both the DRIVE model and Lazarus and Folkman framework were used to examine the different levels of police stress and how officers coped with stressful events. The frameworks that were selected are multifaceted in the relationship between workplace stress, coping, and how work life can impact a person wellbeing (Lazarus, 1990; Mark & Smith, 2008; Biggs et al., 2017).

These delimitations set the necessary boundaries for the research. The delimitations selected also restricted the research method, but it did not reduce the research time. The researcher wanted the focus to be on the selected research population and the phenomenon that was being researched, though some transferability of research findings may be possible to similar other places in the world.

Limitations

Generalizability is limited because the results of this study were limited to the VIPD. The participants were not randomly selected which is a generic weakness of the method selected. The research was limited to face-to-face interviews or skype interviews because of the recent pandemic. There were also limitations of transferability and dependability and it is possible that the research might not be generalized or repeated. Being able to describe the VIPD in rich descriptive detail generated research questions to be followed up in future research, but perhaps using a quantitative or mixed methods approach. The study design did not assess how the organization adapts or changes over time which is another limitation of this study.

Another limitation is that some participants may not have been honest in their answers or may have decided that they no longer want to participate in the study, though every effort to ensure comfort in research participation was made. Another limitation is that the interview process was time consuming, thus limiting participation of some. Some biases existed based on my previous work experience as a law enforcement officer, and this will be addressed in chapter 3. There I will note and explain each limitation in the study process so that the readers understand how and why they exist. This was a new area of research and I wanted to collect data that was rich and detailed and that can be used for additional studies on this phenomenon.

Significance of the Study

The result of this phenomenological study is important because it begins to address the research gap and adds to the existing literature. There are significant studies that were conducted in the mainland on occupational stress among police officers, and

there is no denying that stressors, as well as related coping strategies, exist among this population. However, there has been limited research on stress and coping for police officers in the Caribbean Basin. This phenomenological study has examined the lived experiences, described the perceived internal and external workplace stressors of VIPD officers, exploring the sources that contribute to both internal and external perceived stress, as well as describing identified coping strategies for managing stressors experienced. Being able to gain first-hand knowledge from this population will bring a better understanding of the issues VIPD officers face in the Virgin Islands and the ways in which these issues are managed. The study highlighted and explored elements of stress and coping, components of policing and societal culture, and current local challenges. The findings will be of interest to psychology focusing on isolated and insular, post-colonial communities, and may be useful to the process of making necessary rehabilitative changes in the US Virgin Islands police services.

Through this research there is a potential implication for positive social change. This research will increase understanding and awareness of work-related stress and the related coping strategies in the VIPD. Outcomes of this study may contribute to psychologists assisting police with coping difficulties and help policy makers to gain a better understanding of what officers face on a daily basis, and thus be enabled to better develop a plan for supporting officers. The ultimate goal is that this study will help the local government and community to have a better understanding of the challenges officers face and build a better partnership between the police, local government, and the community.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative research is to gain an understanding of workplace stress and coping among police officers in the VIPD. Policing has been identified as one of the most stressful occupations in the United States. However, there is limited research that addresses the realities of police stress and police coping in the Caribbean Basin. To build awareness of issues in developing territories of the United States, current research in these settings is required. Policing in the Virgin Islands is unique as its history is deeply rooted in colonial systems, effects of which persist to the present, as well as embedded cultural conflicts that are social realities between the different islands served by one government entity. The study explored the experiences of stress and coping for police officers in the US Virgin Islands of St. Thomas/St. John and St. Croix, making use of the DRIVE model and Lazarus and Folkman theory of workplace stress and coping to underpin the research.

In Chapter 2, a literature review is provided on the concepts of workplace stress, police officer's health, and coping. The literature review will help develop the importance for this research and lay foundations upon which the data collected by this study may be compared and contrasted with data from other geographic areas.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction

The VIPD has encountered a set of internal and external stressors that undermine its ability to reduce violent crimes (The Virgin Islands Consortium, 2015). Despite the efforts made to overcome historic stressors, the VIPD confronts persistent problems tied to incessant violent crimes and a hostile public. The research questions focus on how unique workplace stressors within the Virgin Islands environment impact the VIPD, as well as what coping strategies are utilized for work stressors by VIPD. A significant number of officers have resigned or engaged in anti-productive behaviors, while other officers may have been able to successfully cope (The Virgin Islands Consortium, 2015).

The purpose of the qualitative study was to examine the lived experiences and explore the perceived internal and external workplace stressors of VIPD. A twin objective was to understand the coping mechanisms used by this population when facing workplace stress. The research gives voice to the unique experiences that exist for the VIPD.

As established in the following literature review, the current research is heavily weighted towards Western mainstream scholarship, and little attention has been given to more isolated areas, or to areas heavily influenced by colonization as are both the case in the United States Virgin Islands. To holistically understand and address police stress in the Caribbean Basin, local research has been conducted to explore perceived workplace stressors and coping strategies by officers in their daily work. A phenomenological inquiry was used to examine the live experiences of VIPD officers.

Many research studies have explored concerns around police officers in the United States, but these studies cannot represent or explain the challenges faced by police officers in the Caribbean Basin (Balmer et al., 2014; Frank et al., 2017; Gachter et al., 2011; Rosenthal & Alter, 2012; Rufo, 2015). Researchers such as Anshel (2010) and Leino, Eskelinen, Summala, and Virtanen (2011) explored coping strategies of police officers in the mainland, but none of these studies explore strategies among police officers in the Caribbean Basin. However, I used these studies to gain a general understanding of workplace stress among police officers. Regardless of where the officer resides, stress can affect officers both mentally and physically. Being able to explore stress and coping for police officers in the mainland and stress and coping in the Caribbean Basin allows the researcher to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon being studied. I used a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach to discover the participants' understanding of and insights into the issues as this is the recommended research approach to gain a rich, in-depth awareness of the phenomenon.

Stress exists in many professional arenas. However, policing has been listed as one of the most stressful occupations around the world (Balmer et al., 2014). Some theorists have suggested that stress is a result of the culture of the police organization and the profession itself (Burke, 2016). Reoccurring occupational stress can negatively affect a police officer, and both an officer's physical and mental health can be compromised by it (Frank, Lambert, & Qureshi, 2017). Over time, these stressors can lead to exhaustion, which can negatively affect an officer's ability to perform his or her duty. There is also the potential for an officer to develop negative coping strategies that is discussed further in the literature review.

The experiences of work-related stress have generated many problems which may be amplified in small US territories such as St. Thomas/St. John and St. Croix. To date, one of the research gaps is the minimal attention that has been dedicated to internal and external stressors and the lived experience of police officers in this geographical area. Difficulties for the VIPD have been well-documented, and examination and exploration of factors potentially relevant to these difficulties are warranted. Coping among VIPD officers based on their lived experiences is unique not only due to their profession but also due to the specific stressors of their geographical location. The next sections include literature search strategy, theoretical foundation, conceptual framework, literature review of relevant study factors, summary, and conclusion.

Literature Search Strategy

For the literature review, Psych Info, Psych Articles, and Criminal Justice Journals databases were accessed through the Walden library, and the general search terms *police officers* and *law enforcement officer* were used as the basis of all inquiries. Additionally, other search words such as *police stress*, *occupational stress*, *operational stress*, *colonialism stress*, *mental health*, *psychological effects*, *police coping*, and *resiliency* were used to narrow the results when exploring studies in the Criminal Justice journals. The information from the articles found was used to locate additional sources. Other articles were obtained from the Walden Online Library and ProQuest. I also explored other libraries such as the University of the Virgin Islands Library and the Charles W. Turnbull Regional Library to locate articles that could not be found online.

There was some research in ProQuest that explored the specifics of this research in the mainland and a few studies that were conducted in the Caribbean but no research

exploring this phenomenon in the Virgin Islands. None of the literature directly referred to stressors or coping among police officers in the US Virgin Islands. Therefore, information relative to the mainland is reviewed for general information, along with literature focusing on rural or remote policing from both the US and other areas of the world.

Theoretical Foundation

The following section explains the theoretical underpinnings of the research. A description of a specifically relevant model that supported the qualitative exploration of police work within the VIPD is presented.

Demand Resources Individual Differences (DRIVE) Model

Mark and Smith (2012) have postulated a theoretical construct from different elements of modern occupational stress theories: the demand resources individual differences (DRIVE) model, which was utilized in this study for the analysis of the stress and coping methods of the VIPD officers. Mark and Smith purported that the DRIVE model “tries to account for the role of important individual difference factors in the development of subjective experiences of stress, and in influencing the possible health-related outcomes that result from subjective stressful perceptions” (2008, p. 21). They modified the Job Demands-Resource Model (JD-RS Model) to establish the basics of the DRIVE model. Within the DRIVE model, the individual characteristics of a person and his or her capacity to withstand job demands, cope with stressful conditions, and mitigate against new stressors are linked to the environmental demands and structures (Nelson, 2017). Nelson (2017) explained that this framework includes portions of the demands-Control Support model and the Effort-Reward Imbalance model.

Mark and Smith (2008) asserted that previous stress models were either too simplistic or too complex. The DRIVE model seeks to acknowledge the importance of self-perceived stress as a variable with several key relationships to the work experience. These relationships include how work demands and resources affect job outcomes, which relates to perceived job stress. The level of perceived workplace stress also relates to the outcome of the situation, which then affects the immediate relationship between the two. Then the work resources that are provided play a role in the individual perception of the job stress, which affects an individual's health. Individual differences play a role in the job demands, perceived workplace stress, and job demands outcome (Mark & Smith, 2008). For example, a police officer's perception of workplace stress will impact his or her health, which will also affect how he or she then assesses a situation. The DRIVE model is an excellent tool for understanding occupational stress and its effects in relation to this study's focus on individually experienced levels of stress in the workplace and coping with these in the VIPD where expectations and perceptions are heavily influenced by combined aspects of both governmental and community cultures in addition to the work itself.

The DRIVE model has been applied previously in other research studies similar to this research. The DRIVE model considered that job demand and available job resources have some effect on an individual wellbeing. Studies such as presented by Davey et al. (2001), Noblet et al. (2009), and Jo and Shim (2015) also agreed that job demands, and job resources can affect individual wellbeing. However, other studies that have used this model did not take into account the relationship between the complex factors that this research intends, and thus the research was built upon previous application of the theory

along with the utilization of Lazarus and Folkman's psychological and stress coping theory.

Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping

Stress is a normal part of everyday life. For the law enforcement community, the topic of stress is no different. For decades researchers have been exploring the causes of stress and individual's ability to cope when face with the multi facets of stress. Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transaction theory of stress and coping has been the cornerstone of many of research across different disciplines.

The transactional theory of stress and coping focuses on the different emotions that occur during a stressful event and how individuals respond to these stressors based on their perception and resources. A person's cognitive and behavioral response is a very important factor in this theory. This theory is very useful in this study because it is used to explore how police officers appraise a stressful stimulus and how it impacts their environment and wellbeing. This appraisal process will vary from officer to officer because each person will process a stressful situation differently. Coping among officers will also be internalized differently based on their life's experience and perception (Dai., Frank, & Sun, 2011). Further focus on the previously completed relevant studies will be developed in the literature review that follows.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

A description of the studies related to the constructs of interest and methodology and methods chosen related to the scope of the study is explored in this section. The Virgin Islands Consortium (2018), Manning (2009), Bamer et al. (2014), Anshel (2000),

Frank et al. (2017), Violanti et al. (2017), Swattet al. (2007), Lucas (2012), and other notable studies support the scope of the study.

VIPD and Unique Work Environment Stressors

In law enforcement, some stressors are universal while others are unique to the locale or endemic factors. Police must confront dangerous conditions, violence, lack of personnel and resources, and toxic working conditions in many places. In the Caribbean, where high crime areas have emerged as a permanent enclave in otherwise peaceful societies, police stress has increased (The St. Thomas Source US Virgin Islands, 2014). Police stress can be based on both reality and perception. The US Virgin Islands have been designated as a High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area since 1994 (The Virgin Islands Consortium, 2018). Violent crime has increased, so that now the Virgin Islands has one of the highest murder rates per capita in the US mainland and territories (The Virgin Islands Consortium, 2018). From 2008 until 2018, the homicide rate was more than 30 per 100,000 with gun violence accounting for the majority of deaths (The Virgin Islands Consortium, 2018). Within this environment, police officers confront violence in the society, in their work, and in their personal lives. This has reactively led to excessive force being used by police against civilians (The Virgin Islands Consortium, 2018). Police officers in the Virgin Islands have lacked the necessary resources for decades, but this challenge worsened as the US Virgin Islands government entered a state of rapid fiscal decline beginning in 2008 (The Virgin Islands Consortium, 2015). Poor pay, lack of personnel, improper equipment, lack of facilities, and inadequate firepower emerged as major workplace stressors in the VIPD (The Virgin Islands Consortium, 2015).

Another unique factor in the territorial context is that US federal oversight is viewed as oppressively colonial, affecting both internal and external factors (The Virgin Islands Consortium, 2016). For example, federal entities have imposed federal oversight through a Peace Officer Mandate and Consent Decrees (The Virgin Islands Consortium, 2016). Therefore, these officers have developed a perception that they are profiled as substandard, untrained, unskilled, and inferior by the federal government and the local community because of the ongoing consent decree that has been placed on the Virgin Islands Police Department (The Virgin Islands Consortium, 2016). Further, as a result of this federal regulation, VIPD officers are closely monitored to ensure that no excessive force is used in violation of the US Constitution during policing. The decree also requires departmental heads to engage in remedial activity if officers are found in violation of the document. Beyond the colonial construct of the consent decrees, the current Virgin Islands political system and culture engender extensive nepotism, cronyism, and clientelism, which create a negative environment (Manning, 2009). There is also a lack of organizational assistance and officers to help with psychological trauma, thus such trauma from the workplace or even natural disasters are often suffered alone. There has been a lack of institutional assistance for at-risk officers and a lack of adequate training and counseling (Manning, 2009).

However, unlike the US Mainland, racism based on White versus Black conflicts among police officers does not generally occur. The VIPD is overwhelmingly staffed by people of color, mainly African Caribbean and Latino. Rather than inter-racial tensions, the ethnic conflicts have been inter-island conflicts or conflicts due to insularism, which

can also be ethno-insular (US VIPD, 2010). Ethno-insularism is a stressor that has emerged as an internal organizational problem in the VIPD (US VIPD, 2010).

Perceived Daily Internal Departmental Stressors for Police

Stress among police officers has been linked to many negative outcomes, making the topic of police stress a noteworthy area of study. Literature on police stress explains that “policing has long been recognized as a stressful, emotionally trying, and sometimes dangerous occupation” (Balmer et al., 2014, p. 274). In addition, an officer’s perception of these stressors can highly impact their ability to positively address them (Anshel, 2000). Frank et al. (2017) have reported that unmanaged workplace stress can negatively affect both a police officer and the organization for which they work. These authors based their research on the framework of the job demands resource model which separates variables such as workplace stressors, demands, and the available workplace resources to understand the factors associated with workplace stress among police officers.

Stress generated by departmental processes was studied by Frank et al. (2017) in a province in India via a survey of 827 police officers. Their survey gathered data relative to job demands and resources. Outcomes indicated that role conflict, role ambiguity, role overload, and fear of victimization, increased work stress among police officers in India, another post-colonial area of the world. Organizational support, formalization of roles, and employee input to decision-making, were factors found to decrease work stress among police officers in India. Thus, models of demands and resources in addressing work stress seem supported by Frank et al.’s research, particularly for post-colonial

societies like the Virgin Islands. These researchers also suggested that further exploration of job resources on work stress should be completed.

Suresh, Anantharaman, and Angusamy (2013) explored which job events were perceived as significant sources of stress in police work. “The Police Stress Inventory was developed based on interviews with police staff and experts in police administration in preparation for this study” (Suresh et al., 2013). Two hundred and twenty police officers were randomly selected to take part in the study. The respondents rated the job situations from the least stressful (0%) to most stressful (100%). According to Suresh and colleagues, participants considered the organizational and social aspects of their job to be most stressful, especially round-the-clock duty, lack of time for family, political pressures from outside, and inadequate facilities. Results indicated that stress was due more to organizational factors than to physical hazards. The researchers recommended that police administration take corrective measures for changes within organizations and improvements to training programs (Suresh et al., 2013).

In a descriptive study conducted by Violanti and colleagues (2017), the top five most frequent and highly rated occupational stressors from the Spielberger Police Stress survey were explored. In this research, multiple sources of police work stress were identified. Participants’ top stressors included dealing with family issues, being frustrated when other officers were not doing their job, being forced to make on-the-spot decisions, insufficient manpower, and responding to different felonious crimes (Violanti et al., 2017). Gender differences did not exist in this study, but the frequency and prevalence of stressors did differ between genders. This information contributes to my research because generally there are no gender differences when it relates to police duties. As indicated

by Harvey (2017) opposing views may not exist between female and male officers. However, there may differences in how individuals deal with stressors. The cross-sectional study design for this study introduced limitations for causal inference and generalizability. Another limitation was the use of self-reported surveys and possible bias from the participants, though the survey was standardized and has been used to assess different sources of police work stress (Violanti et al.,2017).

The studies described above detail how internal departmental factors produce stress for police, and the general adverse outcomes introduced for police by these factors.

Coping Strategies for Internal Departmental Stressors

Policing comes with a unique set of stressors that cannot be controlled. However, the effectiveness of stress management is important when a stressful situation arises. “Otherwise, the inability to cope with job stress sufficiently would lead to emotional disturbances, mental disorders, unhealthy body and social isolation” (Kamarudin et al., 2018, p. 864).

Policing can have a negative effect when an officer becomes stressed; he or she can experience physical, emotional, and psychological distress. This adverse reaction can increase negative coping behaviors. Some officers may be able to combat these stressful situations effectively, while others may develop harmful coping mechanisms. The researchers used the general strain theory to understand the relationship between problematic alcohol consumption and stress among police officers (Swattet al., 2007).

In another study by Fisher, Kerr, and Cunningham (2019), the researchers explained how mindfulness is essential to managing workplace stressors for police officers. Fisher et al. (2019) reported that mindfulness is a personal resource that has the

potential to help individuals deal with stressors at work, thereby reducing the likelihood that those stressors will result in personal and job-related strain. The research examined workload, organizational constraints, and experiences of incivility, as three of the main stressors that can be found in the workplace (Fisher et al., 2019). Online survey was administered to 251 police officers of different ethnic backgrounds. Mental and physical symptoms of strain, along with job dissatisfaction, were analyzed through hierarchical regression analysis, and Fisher et al. (2019) found that workplace stress appears to be correlated. The researchers suggested that future research should be conducted using a different method, such as direct observation, to better aid in understanding how mindfulness may be utilized with workplace stressors. This research is related to the study in relating officer reactions to workplace stressors and coping and proposes utilizing more direct means of gaining data for understanding these effects in lived experience.

Perceived Daily External Stressors for Police

As noted throughout the research law enforcement is a stressful job. There are so many different scenarios that an officer can encounter during one shift. Therefore, they must be constantly ready to face whatever the day brings. Although stress is a part of life, constant exposure can affect one's physical and emotional wellbeing.

Cubitt and Judges' (2018) qualitative study examined daily external stressors for South Wales police officers to determine if there were any trends in self-reported causation of misconduct among officers. Their research indicated that police officers experienced exceptional levels of job-related posttraumatic stress disorder and other mental health issues. They indicated that their research allowed for a greater

understanding of diverse professional misconduct from an officer's perspective. They found that participating officers, on reflection, frequently identified their behavior being related to issues for which they had sought help, with the related implications that support services positively impact both mental health and the behavior of police officers.

In a quantitative study, Lucas, Weidner, and Janisse (2012) found that differences among police officers and workplace stressors can contribute to perceiving work as stressful. However, the relative importance of the sources of work stress is not well delineated. The extent to which work stress reflects single matches between specific workers and particular job stressors is also unclear (Lucas et al., 2012). The authors reported that one of limitation for their study was that they examined variance components associated with work stress in the original occupational context of policing and that comparison with other occupations might bring further insights.

Coping Strategies for External Stressors

Arnetz, Arble, Backman, Lynch, and Lublin (2012) conducted a qualitative study with urban police participating in a primary prevention program for psychobiological stress response. A volunteer sample of 37 Swedish police cadets received training in anti-anxiety strategies and techniques for performance enhancement in critical incidents. Researchers found that the training groups were useful in helping officers develop problem-based coping strategies. Arnetz et al. (2012) reported that this primary prevention study demonstrated the validity and functional utility of the intervention and enhanced officers' resiliency.

In a quantitative study, Balmer et al. (2014) examined the relationship between resilience, coping style, psychological functioning, and the demographic variables of

gender, age, rank, and length of service in a sample of 285 Western Australian police officers through questionnaires. Regression analysis revealed that resilience was predicted by greater use of rational coping and less use of emotional coping, but psychological functioning was not. Increased age, rank, and length of service were all correlated with significantly lower resilience scores. The researchers also found that significant differences in coping styles were found for all demographic variables. Future research was recommended to explore further different factors that can help promote resilience among police officers. This research may add to the findings of this study with consideration for the context of the isolated VIPD populations.

The following section focuses attention on the context of colonialism as it is a continuing influence for the post-colonial society in which the VIPD operates. Relevant literature will be discussed for the purpose of providing an understanding of embedded societal and policing perspectives that influenced this research of the VIPD.

Colonialism and Stress

Due to the colonial nature of the US Virgin Islands' society, Fanon's (1967) seminal study of perspectives about the colonial condition will be reviewed, specifically how some stressors are based on the intersection of objective and subjective reality (Julien, Sartre, Hall, & Françoise, 2014; Ward, 2013). In order to understand the psychological approach to colonialism and the effects on wellbeing it is important to consider how far back this topic has been explored (Ward, 2013). Fanon posited that colonialism inherently creates environmental stressors through the imposed inferiority complex(es) and national oppression imposed on a subjected people. Fanon suggested that the evolution of self-esteem, self-concept, and being, are heavily influenced by an

oppressive colonizing government, and that colonized cultures are forced to internalize racial and cultural inferiority and to hate themselves. Thus, a mental contradiction emerges among all colonized people, and they struggle to reconcile their humanity and this distorted view of themselves.

Therefore, in Fanon's view, the colonial police force, like other instruments of state power that enforce the colonial condition, may find themselves engaged in repressive activities that they oppose but must support. Also, the police could find themselves misdirecting anti-colonial sentiments towards fellow colonial subjects and be the most ruthless tool of colonial oppression. The colonial police will uphold the colonial status with all of its different laws and policies and at the same time, be oppressed. Even among police officers, their opposition or resistance against their condition will lead to conflict among themselves (Fanon, 1967). The rage against the colonial condition impacts the psychology of the oppressed and creates cognitive dissonance and self-hatred (Fanon, 1967, Ward 2013). This self-destructive tendency is tied to colonialism, and unincorporated territories such as the US Virgin Islands, may be seen as examples of such a system.

While Fanon belongs to the radical left tradition, his emphasis on colonialism is useful if we conceptualize the broader context of the society in which the VIPD functions. The existence of a colonial contradiction informs us that this frontline defense institution may have inherent stressors due to the nature of society and its political status. The US colonial condition does not match the classic colonial structure of the Caribbean but is a current hybridized socio-cultural and political reality. Therefore, a colonial system is still in place. Although to date stress theorists have not made a connection

between US colonialism and its deleterious impact on the VIPD, logical links can readily be seen.

The mixture of a demanding work environment, social pressures, and personal ambitions can create an extremely stressful workplace condition. Two potentially related symptoms of this mix are the tendency for police to use excessive force, and to suffer from stress and fatigue in fighting crime (Rosenthal & Alter, 2012). The VIPD is under a consent decree that requires them to establish an official use of force policy (Shimel, 2018). Also, this mandate requires the VIPD to address poor management, insufficient training, and the inability of Virgin Islands' police to use best practices in addressing a noncompliant civilian(s) without using excessive force (Shimel, 2018). Part of the stressful context is the very political system that regulates and oversees many of the matters in the US Virgin Islands. Unlike Jamaica and other Caribbean societies that have sovereignty or greater autonomy, the Virgin Islands is an unincorporated territory or colony of the US (Nelson, 2017). This objective reality highlights inherent contextual stressors that stem from federal mandates and emphasize that the Territory does not have the ability to control or influence its decision-making processes to as full an extent as possible. In the Caribbean, a number of societies are still colonial in nature, and inherent in this form of underdevelopment is alienation and attendant pathologies (Nelson, 2017). The US Virgin Islands are unique in their colonial status as an unincorporated territory that has state-like features (Shimel, 2018), and a major feature of environmental stress for the VIPD officers has been the colonial condition itself.

Summary and Conclusions

This chapter provides a review of the literature that sets the foundation of the purpose of the research, problem, and why this study is important. Many researchers focus on policing in the United States. However, there were limited studies that addressed the culture of policing in the Caribbean Basin, challenges faced by the population in those areas, and the effects of stress on well-being. It is clear from the literature that internal and external departmental stressors do exist and that coping strategies are unique among individuals. It is also evident that the inability to manage workplace stressors effectively can and will lead to other problems.

As indicated by research, some of the stressors police officers face may be unique depending on their geographic location, culture, etc. (Rosenthal & Alter, 2012). Therefore, this research addressed the gap by exploring workplace stress and coping in the Caribbean Basin, specifically St. Thomas/St. John and St. Croix. It is expected that the outcomes will contribute to a better understanding of job-related stressors affiliated with police work in developing areas.

Chapter 3 provides a description of the research design and methodology that guided this research. A qualitative approach is explained as necessary to understand the lived experiences and dynamics of workplace stressors in the United States Virgin Islands. My role as the researcher, data collection method, participant demographics, and ethical procedures are also outlined in the following chapter.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

In the two previous chapters, the dynamics of workplace stress among police officers were discussed with some focus offered on context specific to the VIPD. Due to workplace challenges, police officers can generally experience a range of stressors, and these were the focus of this study, along with coping. This chapter examines the research design and rationale, role of the researcher, methodology, issues of trustworthiness, and analysis used for the research.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the lived experiences of perceived internal and external workplace stressors in VIPD officers and to explore the sources that contribute to workplace stress. A twin objective was to understand the coping mechanisms used by this population when facing workplace stress. The research gave voice to the unique experiences that exist for the VIPD. Research has indicated that effects of workplace stress can generally interfere with the effectiveness of policing (Gachter et al., 2011; Rosenthal & Alter, 2012; Rufo, 2015). Other research has elucidated coping strategies that police use in response to stress (Anshel, 2010; Leino et al., 2011). The phenomenological design was selected to explore the lived experiences of the participants to determine how perceived internal and external workplace stressors can affect police officers and their ability to cope.

This chapter will explore the research design and the rationale for selecting the design. The role of the researcher, methodology, instrumentation, data analysis plan, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures are described.

Research Design and Rationale

This study was a qualitative, phenomenological study of the effects of workplace stress on police officers and their ability to cope with these stressors. As cited by Farin and Hart (2006) this design was developed by a German philosopher by the name of Edmund Husserl. He believed that external factors around us contribute to our consciousness and individual experiences, and that individuals are always consciously thinking about something and retaining that experience in memory (Farin & Hart, 2006).

The following research questions was used in this research.

RQ 1: How do VIPD officers describe perceived stressors in their work from internal departmental sources?

RQ 2: How do VIPD officers describe perceived stressors in their work from external community or societal sources?

RQ 3: What coping strategies do VIPD officers describe in lived experience dealing with stressors in their work from internal departmental sources?

RQ 4: What coping strategies do VIPD officers describe in lived experience dealing with stressors in their work from external community or societal sources?

The concepts of the study include perceived internal and external workplace stress and coping mechanisms within the frame of occupational stress. These factors were explored to examine more closely the lived experience of VIPD in their unique post-colonial, isolated, and insular environments. A phenomenological approach allows the researcher to explore specific aspects of policing in the Virgin Islands that can provide great insights as to how police culture in the Caribbean Basin might differ to police culture throughout the United States. The phenomenological inquiry allowed me to

investigate and understand the subjective reality of the participants in the study. As noted by Davidsen (2013), phenomenological inquiry allows a researcher to develop a composite of the experience of the individuals' personal stories. Phenomenological inquiry allowed me to collect data from police officers in the Virgin Islands who have experienced the phenomenon that was researched.

Role of the Researcher

Skill in interviewing and analytical observation was necessary in order to successfully complete this phenomenological study. As the research interviewer, I was an observer participant in the research. The participants knew my role as a researcher, and I interacted with the research participants to gather information about the phenomenon being studied.

The lived experiences of the research participants are the main focus of the study and exploring similarities and differences in the perceptions shared by the participants (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). I recorded the interview through note taking and voice recording. Once all the interviews were finished, I transcribed all the data. I also observed and recorded the body language of the participants and any shift in his or her behavior during the interview.

I served as a patrol officer for over a decade in another law enforcement agency. Therefore, there is a possibility that some of the research participants may have met me at some time in their law enforcement career. However, no dual roles or perceived power differentials emerged in this study between myself and the study participants because I have never worked for the Virgin Islands Police Department (VIPD). If an unexpected

dynamic had occurred, or I had previously worked with the participant, the participant would not have been considered for participation in the study.

I may possess some biases as a former patrol officer. Having worked in law enforcement in similar conditions and environments, I consciously endeavored to be objective in relating to the experiences shared by the research participants and kept an interview journal processing my own feelings and reactions to the research data and its collection. I had some idea of the stressors that the research participants reported. However, it was important for me to approach the data collection and analysis in as neutral a manner as possible so that I did not transfer any opinions, views, personal experiences, or perceptions to this research data, but let the data speak for itself.

Methodology

The participants in this research were only selected from the Virgin Islands (St. Thomas/St. John, and St. Croix), working for the Virgin Islands Police Department (VIPD). This selection was made through purposeful sampling. As indicated by research, purposeful sampling is very effective with limited research resources (Patton, 2002). Officers who work for the VIPD were given the opportunity to provide their individual experiences in working within these districts. As noted by Giorgi (1997), using a qualitative method allowed me to gather valuable information from participants in order to better understand the phenomenon being studied. The qualitative inquiry then allowed me to form themes and categories from the information collected (Giorgi, 1997).

Participation Selection

The study sample consisted of a purposive selection of willing volunteers from the VIPD of St. Thomas/St. John and St. Croix Islands. A letter describing the study was

sent to the public relations officer and police commissioner. This letter can be found in Appendix A. A copy of the research flyer was posted in different zones explaining my research and providing participants with my contact information. Once I received the names of participants who are interested in participating in the study, I arranged a date and time to conduct the interviews. Additionally, volunteers who were interested were provided with more information and directions regarding the study. Participants were given the choice to do face to face interviews or interviews via Skype or Teams.

Willing participation in this sort of study is necessary for validity of data, and inclusion of each of the Island departments is necessary for gaining representative perspectives of the VIPD. Other law enforcement agencies in St. Thomas were not sampled in this research because they do not represent the intended research population. Participants were employed by VIPD for no less than two years. Participants included both men and women. The participants that were selected were all over the age of 18, could read, write, and sign, the required consent form. There are no more than 400 police officers in the Virgin Islands, so I was hoping to recruit five officers from each island (St. Thomas/St. John, and St. Croix) for a total of at least 15 participants (Burkholder, Cox, & Crawford, 2016, and Sim et al., 2018).

In meeting with the participants, I emphasized the need for participants to be open and addressed concerns that they had before the process. I provided background information about the research, which was helpful in informing the participants and encouraging their participation. Volunteers who shared a previous work experience with the researcher were not included.

Instrumentation

The data collection instrument for this study was a researcher-produced interview guide that can be found in Appendix C. During the interview, the data was recorded using two digital recorders. This allowed me to keep an accurate record of the information shared during the interview. The digital audio tape also allowed me to listen to the interview as many times as needed during the process of transcribing the information, organizing the data, and completing analysis.

Interview questions were constructed to elicit responses to the research questions. The interview questions were based upon scholarly research and my experience. After all the interviews were completed, I transcribed the audio tape of the recorded interview sessions utilizing Nvivo that allowed me to gather insight from the collected data and explore emerging themes. As suggested by Rudestam and Newton (2007) the Nvivo program is useful in coding patterns and storing data which makes the data easily accessible for analysis.

Researcher-Developed Instrument

I developed an instrument based on the organizational police stress questionnaire developed by McCreary et al., (2006) and scholarly work of Zundel (2010). The research study took into account police stress as expressed by Zundel (2010) and factors of organizational stress based on the questionnaire developed by McCreary et al., (2006). The instrument that was developed took into account personal past professional experiences, literature review, and factors relevant to policing in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Face validity was established by making sure the interview questions were consistent with the research questions.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I collected the data through interviews and note taking. The data was collected from 9 VIPD officers who had been on the force 2 years or more. VIPD officers from all districts in the Virgin Islands were considered, Thomas/St. John and St. Croix.

The interviews took place either in a conference room at the public library or a central location of the participant's choice. Given the existing pandemic, electronic interviews were also an option for participants who expressed the need for social distancing. However, none of the research participants selected this option. Interviews were expected to last no more than sixty to ninety minutes and were recorded using a digital audio recorder and note taking. Interviews were conducted during a 6-week time span. Semi-structured open-ended questions were asked to research participants to gain insight in the phenomenon being studied. The interview and the demographic questions are listed in Appendix C and D. Demographic information was collected just before each interview began. There was also an option for a follow-up interview if anything was unclear about any of the information collected from a participant. However, this option was not needed.

Additional announcements about the research study were made to try and recruit more than the nine research volunteers had already signed up. The flyer was posted also on the announcement boards in the various zones. However, the entire United States including the Virgin Islands was experiencing a pandemic (COVID-19) which demanded social distancing and so volunteers were reluctant. I also had to decline two volunteers because of a previous shared work interaction. I contacted the police department to make

sure that the posters were still posted and, in some instances, reposted so that individuals could be reminded that the interviews could be done electronically.

The participants who agreed to be a part of the study were given a full explanation of the study and research steps so that they had a better understanding of the research process. Research notes were examined thoroughly, and research participants were given the opportunity to review what was recorded. The summary or findings of the study was shared with the research participants. In addition, each participant had the opportunity to ask follow-up questions or share their comments or concerns. Information was uploaded into the NVivo software for organizing themes and coding.

Data Analysis Plan

There is connection between the research questions that aims to give meaning to workplace stress and resiliency among Virgin Islands police officers. Data was gathered from interviews with the research participants that explored workplace stress and coping among VIPD officers. I was open to all information shared by the research participant and recorded and analyzed the data (Glasser, 2008). It was important for the research participants to be open and honest during the interview. I was also aware of any response bias throughout this process so that it did not impact the findings in a negative way. The objective was to explore the lived experiences of the participants.

The data was then organized using the NVivo program. Themes and codes were categorized using this software. Once the data was recorded it was uploaded into the NVivo software so that existing themes could be coded and organized, and theoretical concepts could be explored. This software was excellent for identifying similarities in the data collected and allowed for easier coding. Observations can also be made using this

software to support the research. For discrepant cases I asked the participants to clarify their responses or provide examples that could better refine their analysis of the phenomenon being studied. During the interview I reinstated information that the participant had shared to determine accuracy. I also shared the findings with the participants after the study as a means of member checking the information.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is very important because it defines the openness in the phenomenon being researched (Baskarada, 2014). When credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, are established, this equates to the trustworthiness that is important in the data collection process (Baskarada, 2014). To guide uniformity in this study and to ensure that the methods and findings used in this study can be applied to other studies, an interview protocol was established. I made sure to retain accurate records of the interviews with the research participants and encouraged them to be open and honest during the entire process.

Credibility

To develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being researched I conducted interviews until saturation was met. I wanted to ensure the richness of the research. In addition to recording the interview I also kept an observation record of the setting and non-verbal communication of the research participant. The credibility of the research was also based on the participants being completely honest during the process. Participants were asked to give examples of certain statements they made for further clarification (Korstjens & Moser, 2017).

Transferability

A purposeful sampling was used to elicit the lived experiences of police officers that work for the VIPD in St. Thomas/St. John and St. Croix. External validity was established through the shared lived experiences of the research participants (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). The thick description can be applied to other settings. Transferability is obtained when the information collected represents issues that were discussed in literature review as it relates to internal and external departmental stressors for officers. The information collected can be generalized for other populations.

Dependability

I made sure that the research process was correctly used for the research design selected (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). The data recorded was not based on my viewpoints; instead it was based on the rich data collected from the participants. There was transparency throughout the research. This means that the research can be audited by other researchers yielding the same result. The research can be repeated.

Confirmability

Confirmability is established when the results of the study can be confirmed by other researchers (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). I confirmed the experiences conveyed in interview by making sure that the interview questions were the same for each research participant, and by asking for examples. Other researchers should be able to confirm the same findings as well.

Ethical Procedures

All documents relative to the research were submitted with the Walden University IRB application for review and approval. The research was not conducted until full approval from the institution. IRB approval numbers were recorded once obtained.

A formal letter of cooperation was transmitted to the police commissioner of the Virgin Islands police department and his designee. The letter included a brief description of the study and purpose. A copy of the interview guide was also made available. Once permission was granted by the VIPD, I began recruitment. Flyers with my contact information were posted throughout the different zones so that interested individuals could contact me directly.

Participation in this study was voluntary and followed an informed consent process (see Appendix C). Participants were given the opportunity to terminate their participation in the research at any time. A copy of the signed agreement was made available to each participant. Any concerns or questions that the participant had regarding the research were answered in an honest manner. There was no anticipated conflict of interest for me conducting the study, nor anticipated harm associated with the participation in this research, though the interview process was acknowledged as having potential for uncovering distress. Participants had the ability to cease participation in this study at any point without repercussion of any sort.

Each participant's confidentiality was protected, and access to identifiable information was limited to me. The data recorded was not discussed with anyone other than the participant. All files, documents, audiotapes, and transcripts associated with the study were stored in a locked cabinet or lock box in my home where they will remain for

a minimum of five years. After the five-year period all documents will be shredded. Only the dissertation chair or assistant chair and I will have access to the transcripts if results need to be validated.

Summary

Chapter 3 provided an outline of the research design, methodology, and instrumentation that was used in the research. Ethical procedures have also been explored in chapter 3. This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences and coping behaviors of VIPD officers. The response and analysis from the interviews and direct observation of this phenomenological inquiry will be provided in chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis and explanation of results from the semi-structured interview questions that guided this study. The purpose of the qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences and explore the perceived internal and external workplace stressors of VIPD officers and the sources that contribute to both internal and external perceived stress. As reported by Burk (2016), there are two primary sources of workplace stress: organizational and environmental. These two primary sources of stress are no different for this research population. The research participants reported some frequent examples of organizational and environmental stressors such as extended work hours, political ramifications of work decisions, safety issues on patrol, and other factors that coincide with Burk (2016).

A twin objective was to understand the coping mechanisms used by this population when facing workplace stress. As noted by Lazarus and Folkman, it is important to understand a person's ability to cope (Biggs et al., 2017). The research gave voice to the unique experiences that exist for the VIPD. Face-to-face interviews granted me the opportunity to collect the information shared by the research participants and to analyze this data to discover themes associated with their lived experiences as a VIPD officer. The interviews focused on the participants' lived experiences as a VIPD officer, the value placed on their perceived internal and external workplace stressors, and coping mechanisms used to address what the participants shared. The collected data were examined, and the relevant information was retained. The central research questions to be answered in this study were as follows:

RQ 1: How do VIPD officers describe perceived stressors in their lived experiences of work from internal departmental sources?

RQ 2: How do VIPD officers describe perceived stressors in their lived experiences of work from external community or societal sources?

RQ 3: What coping strategies do VIPD officers describe in their lived experiences dealing with stressors in their work from internal departmental sources?

RQ 4: What coping strategies do VIPD officers describe in their lived experiences dealing with stressors in their work from external community or societal sources?

This chapter also provides a description of the research setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and the study results.

Setting

The volunteering research participants were police officers who were employed with the Virgin Islands Police Department (VIPD). The VIPD is located in the United States Virgin Islands, which consists of the islands St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix, which are unincorporated territories of the United States located in the Caribbean (Dookhan & Sheridan, 2011). St. Thomas and St. John are geographically close, with only a mile and a half of water separating one from the other. St. Croix has always been deemed as being very different from St. Thomas/St. John. There is a 40-mile separation of deep open sea between these areas. St. Croix is sometimes seen as the rural hinterland, and St. Thomas is seen as the urban center. Between both districts, there is a difference in linguistic dialect, economic activity, ethnic groups, mindset, and social consciousness. For outsiders, these differences may be hard to perceive, but for Virgin Islanders, these differences are clear. The VIPD is divided and separated geographically between three

islands, St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix. Participants on each island were given the opportunity to meet either at the public library in a conference room, central location of their choice, or electronically because of the current pandemic. The participant ranks included officer and sergeant.

The participants reported that organizational challenges such as lack of support from upper management and manpower shortage impacted their experiences as officers. In addition to lack of equipment, working long hours, political influence, poor pay, safety issues on patrol, nepotism, and other poor working conditions were concerns.

Demographics

Due to COVID-19, the availability of police officers was limited. The original proposed sample size was 15 participants, but it was reduced to 9 participants. There were three female police officer and six male officers that were interviewed for this study. A strong attempt was made to recruit more officers. Three additional participants contacted me and expressed their interest in participating in the study. However, when a follow-up contact was made the officers had changed their minds about participating in the study. The reduced number of participants was not a disadvantage to the research because saturation had been met. The research participants offered no new variations in the data collected.

The nine research participants were equally divided between all three islands: St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix. Among the participants three (33%) were female and six (67%) were male. All the participants shared the same ethnicity. Participant's age ranged varied between age 30 through 59 years old. Among the participants there were seven (78%) officers and two (22%) sergeants. In terms of the years participants worked for the

VIPD, two (22%) had worked for 4 years, one (11%) had worked between 5 to 9 years, three (33%) had worked for 10 to 14 years, and three (33%) had worked between 25 to 30 years. In terms of frequency of missed work in the past 6 months, four (44%) reported missing no days, one (11%) reported missing 1 to 2 days, one (11%) reported missing 5 days, and three (33%) reported missing 6 to 7 days. Police officers of a supervisory status were not included in this study.

Table 1

Description of Participants Demographic Information

Participant Number	Gender	Age Range	Years		Island	Race
			Employed	Patrolled		
P1	Female	30-39	5-9		STT	Black
P2	Female	50-59	25-30		STJ	Black
P3	Male	40-49	10-14		STJ	Black
P4	Male	50-59	25-30		STX	Black
P5	Male	40-49	10-14		STX	Black
P6	Male	50-59	25-30		STJ	Black
P7	Male	40-49	4		STT	Black
P8	Female	30-39	4+		STT	Black
P9	Male	30-39	10-14		STX	Black

Key: St. Thomas (STT), St. John (STJ), and St. Croix (STX)

Data Collection

The themes that were developed from the collected data allowed for the exploration and evaluation of lived experiences by the research participants who were employed by the Virgin Islands Police Department (VIPD). There were a total of nine research participants. A strong attempt was made to recruit more officers. Additional participants contacted me and expressed their interest in participating in the study. However, when a follow-up contact was made three officers had changed their minds regarding participating in the study. Some of the prospective volunteers did not feel comfortable with the interview being recorded, while others expressed that the constant change in their work schedule due to the pandemic made it difficult for them to commit to a time to be interviewed. Despite the ongoing challenges with COVID-19 the nine research volunteers remained committed to participating in this research. The interview protocol that was discussed in chapter 3 was completed with all nine participants, who answered all of the demographic and interview questions.

The interviews were conducted over a six-week period in a centralized location of the officer's choice on their off-day. Before each interview session, a consent form was given to the research participant to read and ask questions if needed. The main concern for participants was whether their identity will be revealed. Each participant had ten minutes before the interview began to thoroughly review the consent form, ask questions, and sign the form before the interview began. Participants were informed that each interview session would be recorded and that the interview would last up to one hour. The research participants were asked nine demographic questions and fifteen semi-

structured interview questions that allowed them to articulate relevant concerns, stress, trauma, and coping.

Participants were specifically informed that their identity would remain confidential. I ensured that no data was included that could possibly reveal the identity of the participants. I assigned a numerical number for each participant which also represents the order in which I interviewed them. Participant's names or badge numbers were not included. All measures were taken to conceal the identity of each participant.

Living in a small close-knit community may have contributed to restrain participant involvement. The intended sample size was 15 participants, with five participants from each island, or as many participants as was required for saturation. However, it is noted that in this study, the lower number of nine participants appeared to meet the requirement of saturation of information being received. The interview process lasted for several weeks and during this period there were no new themes or information that was observed.

The current pandemic brought challenges to the interview process because everyone, including the researcher, had to wear a mask. This made it difficult at times to understand what was being said, and repetition was sometimes required. As individuals were urged to maintain distance from others for management of Covid-19, this may have restricted participants' involvement.

Data Analysis

A careful review of the literature section was conducted before the interview process began. The literature review provided meaningful and applicable research findings that explore the lived experiences of other research participants, officers, work

related stressors, coping strategies, common characteristics, and reoccurring findings.

Vaismoradi, et al., (2016) reported that themes are essential in creating and understanding the data analysis, in particular with phenomenological inquiries.

Each participant interview was digitally audio recorded then transcribed using the Nvivo2020 software. The transcriptions were then manually reviewed for accuracy and coded with contextual content to the two main nodes, stress and coping. Then multiple subcategory nodes were created relating to the interview questions as content was read and coding was refined within the nodes. Refinement of coding resulted in two main nodes with several subcategories. This process exhibited how often the relationships between related nodes, patterns, and themes occurred within the phenomenon that was explored.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is very important because it allows for the necessary openness in exploring the phenomenon being researched (Baskarada, 2014). When credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, are established this ensures the trustworthiness which is important in the data collection process (Baskarada, 2014). To ensure that the methods and findings used in this study can be applied to other studies, an interview protocol was established. This uniform method allowed me to keep track during the data collection process both within and between interviews.

The responses from the research participants revealed that many of them experienced stressors in their work from both internal departmental sources and external community or societal sources. The characteristics of a phenomenological inquiry granted me the ability to examine the circumstances from the participants' viewpoint

(Giorgi, 1997). There were three main themes that emerged from the participants responses: (a) political stressors, (b) organizational stressors, and (c) emotion focused coping. Among these emerging themes were various subcategories. Some of these themes were previously noted in the literature review but many of the themes were derived directly from the unique set of research participants that were interviewed, which may add new perspective to the research. Trustworthiness in a qualitative study is very important to ensure the quality of the research. Therefore, reliability in the form of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability must be highly considered.

Credibility

Credibility is defined as the intended criteria in which the value of the study should be considered (Beck, 1993). The theoretical foundation that was established in chapter 2 was used as a guide, as well as the interview questions. The interviews were conducted until saturation was met in order to have a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being researched. In addition to recording the interview I also kept an observation record of the setting and non-verbal communication of the research participant. The credibility of the research was also based on the participants being completely honest during the process. Participants were also asked to give examples of certain statements they made for further clarification (Korstjens and Moser, 2017). Each interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim in order to establish credibility. Each transcription was also thoroughly reviewed for accuracy before the data was coded. As a former law enforcement officer, I have a keen understanding of many of the experiences that the research participants shared. The use of journaling was also helpful in further analyzing the participants body language, feelings, and ideas as they shared

their lived experiences. I also believe that my past profession as a law enforcement officer helped the participants in feeling comfortable when sharing their lived experiences. The overlapping of themes, professional experiences, occurrences, and shared emotions allowed me to further establish credibility in the study.

Member checking was also another step in my data collection to improve credibility and validity in the study. The transcripts were shared with the research participants before I completed the data analysis ensuring credibility of the data collected. The participants were also encouraged to elaborate on certain statements that were made for further clarification if necessary (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). However, none of the participants requested changes or corrections to the transcript.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the decision of whether the findings can be generalized or applied in another setting (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). To do this I offer a detailed description of my sample, research participants, and methods used in this study. A purposeful sample was used to elicit the lived experiences of police officers that work for the VIPD in St. Thomas/St. John and St. Croix. External validity is established through the shared lived experiences of the research participants (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). The thick descriptions collected in this study can be applied to other settings. Transferability was also obtained when the information collected represented the issues that were described in the literature review as it relates generally to internal and external departmental stressors for officers. A detailed description of the participants experience is provided in the data analysis. Having a thorough description of the participants' experience allows for the reader and other researchers to use the information in other

settings. The information can be generalized for other populations in similar environments.

Dependability

The semi-structured interview questions that guided the interview were appropriately used for the research design selected (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). The data recorded was based on the lived experiences of the research participants and not the viewpoint of the researcher. There was transparency throughout the research. This means that the research can be repeated for similar results.

Confirmability

Confirmability is established when the results of the study can be confirmed by other researchers (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). Each research participant was given the same demographic and interview questions. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and reviewed for accuracy. Another step in this process was member checking. To ensure validity of the data, the transcripts were shared with the participants so that they could validate what was transcribed and provide me with feedback. I also explored relevant research and supporting documents.

Results

Besides the nine demographic questions, there were four research questions, and fifteen interview questions that guided the research. Based on the participants' response there were four emerging themes that supported the four central research questions: (a) internal stressors, (b) external stressors (c) coping with internal stressors, and (d) coping with external stressors. There were also several subthemes that emerged from the four main themes.

Research question 1. How do VIPD officers describe perceived stressors in their lived experiences of work from internal departmental sources?

To better understand the participants' experiences there were eight related interview questions. The interview questions are question 1, question 2, question 6, question 7, question 10, question 11, question 12, and question 13 (see Appendix C). The participants' responses to these interview questions revealed that lack of support from management and supervisors, having to work on desk duty, manpower shortage, lack of equipment, nepotism, sexism, poor pay, report writing program, and the difference of the disciplinary matrix and equipment between the three islands, are some of the factors that causes the most stress from internal departmental sources.

Theme 1: Internal Stressors.

Theme 1 Internal Stressors was how participants expressed situations in the work environment that led to internal stress. There were various factors that caused stress for police officers. Some of these stressors were internal to the workplace while some stressors were external. The constantly changing work shift and irregular work hours were two of the factors. Very often and quickly an officer's work schedule could change, and, in many instances, officers were compelled to work more than eight hours a shift. The change in the work schedule could be a result of a case, arrest, investigation, court, someone calling off, and a shortage in manpower. Participants outlined different instances in which they felt considerable organizational stress.

Participants complained that the long, excessive, hours could be very stressful and leave little to no time for a personal life. Lack of support from management was also another factor that some participants described as perceived organizational stressors.

Other participants reported that having to do desk duty caused them the most discomfort and stress. Participants also indicated that supervisors tended to believe when citizens made complaints against officers before even investigating the complaint. Other stressors included having to deal with the attitudes of their colleagues, sexual harassment where participants reported that it was difficult to get promoted if you were not willing to sleep with your supervisor, lack of equipment and apparatus, favoritism, and difference in the disciplinary matrix among the three islands. Participants also reported that stress in policing was innate and so once you put on your uniform it was expected that you would experience stress.

Trust and building positive relationships with your colleagues were considered equally important. Officers shared that there was a lot of mistrust with management and failed promises which had caused officers to isolate themselves from each other. These stressors can negatively affect an officer's mental wellbeing and willingness to continue service. Some participants felt that VIPD was being run based on favoritism instead of professionalism and further shared that there were "Too many internal conflicts" (P4). One participant even expressed that they were "currently looking for another job" (P9). The following excerpts are from the research participants, further supporting this theme. One research participant was reluctant to answer this question.

Researcher: What issues in your current position cause you the most discomfort or stress?

P1: It is hard to pinpoint one area, but I would say working with different personalities. You expect stress from the public but not so much from colleagues.

P2: Working around my colleagues.

P3: Whether you are working in the office, patrol streets, or wherever, it is stressful. Once you put on your uniform it becomes stressful.

P4: Working in the office and having to deal with a lot of paperwork.

P6: My issues with the police department are that we do not have enough support from upper management.

P7: Having to deal with the complaints when they come. Also, when I go out on the road to deal with accidents and the citizens begin to give their complaints sometimes it is a bit difficult to determine who was wrong.

P8: Doing patrol because of the lack of support to officers from their supervisors when having to deal with citizens. When citizens make complaints, supervisors tend to believe them automatically and this can be discouraging for an officer.

P9: Doing patrol and having to work long hours.

Speaker: What three incidents or issues constitute your worst working conditions?

P1: Supervisors who take issue personal. Vindictive supervisors. Or other officers who bring their personal issues to work.

P2: The nepotism. The sexism and the racism.

P3: Bad supervisors, poor management, poor working conditions.

P4: Political influence, shortage of manpower, and lack of equipment.

P5: Manpower shortage and lack of equipment

P6: The consent decree because it causes officers to second guess themselves because of the fear of being out on charges. Another issuer would be manpower shortage and lack of equipment.

P7: When I am on the road and an issue arises that causes you to be in the line of fire and not knowing if you will make it back home. Also not having up-to-date equipment is stressful.

P8: The first thing would be the lack of equipment. There were times when I went into work and there was not a unit for me to use so I had to just sit in the office and wait for an available unit. The other incident would be officers not coming to assist you when you are dealing with a situation if they don't like you. This goes against the policy and if you complain you get called a whistleblower. There are a lot of personal issues among the officers. The other issues as I mentioned previously is when supervisors would believe a citizen complaint without fully investigating the complaint they made against the officer.

P9: The first thing would be the consent decree, the second would be lack of support from supervisors, and the third would be poor pay.

Even though many reported that their experiences working with VIPD had been very stressful many of them were still willing to continue service with the VIPD and even further willing to complete the 20-year mark to be considered a career officer. Some participants reported that they had already invested so many years in the police department that it would only make sense to stay until they have reached their full retirement. Below is table 1 that depicts the main theme and subtheme of this section.

Table 1. Participants response to Internal Stressors.

Main Theme	Subthemes	Total Response	
		n	%

Internal Stressors	Patrol	6	66
	Lack of Support from Upper Management	7	77
	Infrastructure	5	55
	Differences in the Disciplinary Matrix	9	100
	Negative Attitude	7	77
	Equipment	5	55

Research question 2. How do VIPD officers describe perceived stressors in their lived experiences of work from external community or societal sources?

To better understand the participants' experiences there were seven related interview questions. The interview questions were question 1, question 2, question 8, question 9, question 11, question 14, and question 15 (see Appendix C). The participant responses to these interview questions revealed that having to do patrol, the consent decree, political influence, safety issues on patrol, the merit system, working with a hostile community, personal conflict among colleagues, and the small island geography were some of the factors that cause the stress in their work environment from external community or societal sources.

Theme 2: External Stressors.

Theme 2 External Stressors is another recurring theme that was revealed through analysis of the participants' responses to external workplace stressors. Police officers reported undergoing various levels of stress due to political influence, citizen complaints,

the consent decree, merit system, and in some instances even sexism. Some participants made hints that there were additional details that they wanted to include but was afraid of possible retaliation by management.

Although the Virgin Islands Police Department is one police department it is divided among three islands, St. Thomas/St. John, and St. Croix, there seemed to be a difference in the disciplinary matrix, policies, equipment, and other concerns based on the research participants' responses. In some instances, participants also reported that "nepotism exists" (P2). These concerns, as reported, have become a stress issue for some officers while other officers felt that although political differences existed between the islands it did not directly affect them. When participants were asked if they perceived the St. Thomas, St. John versus St. Croix rivalry as a stressor within the VIPD the following statements were made:

P1: For me personally it does not cause a stressor. However, I have heard colleagues complain and say that St. Croix got more or better equipment than St. Thomas and if they were in St. John they would complain and say that St. Thomas officers got more or better equipment than they got. Each district is unique.

P2: Yes, I do. There is a lot of nepotism between the islands, St. Croix gets everything, St. John gets nothing, and St. Thomas just gets what they get. Even though it is one police department each island do their own thing, nothing is uniform.

P3: Yes, I do. However, I do not allow it to affect me.

P4: Yes, the disciplinary matrix is not distributed fairly among the three islands.

P5: Yes, things are different depending on what island you are on.

P6: Yes, there always seems to be a bias in the police department where St. Croix always gets treated different. Better equipment, different rules, and ways of doing things.

P7: I think so. St. Croix do their thing and we do our own thing as well.

P8: I do. Because even though the policies exist things are done differently throughout the different islands.

P9: Yes, St. Thomas officers are always comparing with St. Croix officers.

When asked “How does the ‘born here’ mentality impact occupational stress with the VIPD”, participants offered the following statements:

P1: It can create a stress in the sense where individuals are not treated based on a merit. Individuals who were not born in the Virgin Islands may be treated as an outsider. So, it can be stressful, can be an issue, and can cause favoritism and even nepotism.

P2: For me it is horrible because I was not born here. It can create a stress in the sense where individuals are not treated based on a merit.

P4: Officers like me who was not born here would have it difficult to be promoted. You would have to wait a very long time to be selected for the promotional exam.

P5: Officers who are not born in the Virgin Islands get treated different sometimes by the public and police department.

Table 2*Participants Response to External Stressors*

Main Theme	Subthemes	Total Response	
		n	%
External Stressors	Consent Decree	3	33
	Rivalry Among the Islands	8	88
	Citizen Complaints	6	66
	Political Stressors	7	77

Research question 3. What coping strategies do VIPD officers describe in their lived experiences dealing with stressors in their work from internal departmental sources?

For research question 3 there were three related interview questions. The interview questions were question 3, question 4, and question 5 (see Appendix C). The participant responses to these interview questions revealed that exercising, taking time off, calling in sick, requesting sidebar conversation to discuss issues, becoming resilient, and mindfulness, were some of the coping strategies used when dealing with internal departmental stress.

Theme 3: Coping with Internal Stressors.

Theme 3 Coping with Internal Stressors represents the stress management techniques used by VIPD officers in attempts to reduce or eliminate negative emotion responses to internal work-related stress. How individuals coped with similar stressors could be very different. Many participants reported emotion focused coping while dealing

with workplace stressors, while others chose different coping strategies as demonstrated in the statements below.

P1: Workplace stress to me is a mindset. So, if you control your mindset, I think this would help in reducing stress.

P2: I just try to keep to myself, pray, and meditate.

P3: I try to put my mind elsewhere, get a hobby, or pick something that I would look forward to doing at the end of the day to motivate me throughout the day.

P4: I exercise and run on the track.

P5: I exercise.

P6: I am almost retiring so I honestly don't allow the stress to bother me. I simply focus on my end date which is my retirement in a few weeks.

P7: Sometimes when I am off, I would go to the gym, or the beach. I also try to walk a lot and relax on my days off.

Some other coping strategies or methods for dealing with workplace stressors are indicated through the excerpts below:

P1: I would normally request a sidebar conversation to discuss dislikes or other issues. I would share my concerns and they would share theirs so that we can come to a mutual agreement in most cases. And in cases where it's not mutual understanding, I would agree to disagree.

P5: I take vacation often when I feel stressed.

P7: Don't focus on the gossip and just stay in my lane. Basically, focus on the task at hand and not getting involved with the various cliques around the department. Staying out of the drama.

P8: To be honest I have a nonchalant attitude. I just try to follow the policy and do what I have to do. I try not to get too involved in the politics.

P9: I take days off often.

One research participant also indicated that having a mental health professional to talk to can be beneficial in overcoming workplace stress.

P8: Provide counseling for the officers. This is something that they do not do, and officers need resources like counseling especially after a traumatic experience and not just when it is disciplinary. Just like how officers listen to other people issues we need to talk about ours as well.

Table 3

Participants Response to Coping with Internal Stressors

Main Theme	Subthemes	Total Response	
		n	%
Coping with Internal Stressors	Physical Activities	9	100
	Resilient Attitude	5	55
	Mental Focus	8	88
	Emotion Focused	5	55
	Coping / Avoidance		
	Time Off	7	77

Research question 4. What coping strategies do VIPD officers describe in their lived experiences dealing with stressors in their work from external community societal sources?

For research question 4 there were three related interview questions. The interview questions were question 3 and 4 (see Appendix C). The participant response to these interview questions revealed that controlling their mindset, seeking counselling services, community involvement, physical activity, and requesting time off were some of the coping strategies used when dealing with stressors.

Theme 4: Coping with External Stressors.

Theme 4 Coping with External Stressors represents the stress management techniques used by VIPD officers in attempts to reduce or eliminate negative emotion responses to external work-related stress. Participant 1 shared that “As far as activities to reduce stress, I am very involved in my community. I participate a lot in sports, special, and social activities.” Other participants also shared similar coping methods such as participating in sports (P3), exercising and running the track (P4), and going to the gym, relaxing, and going to the beach (P7) to reduce external work-related stress. Participants also reported that prayer, meditation, taking time off, controlling your mindset, and even developing a nonchalant attitude can be helpful in trying to manage external work-related stress (P2, P5, P8, P9).

Table 4*Participants Response to Coping with External Stressors*

Main Theme	Subtheme	Total Response	
		n	%
Coping with External Stressors	Mental Focus	8	88
	Physical Activities	9	100
	Time Off	7	77
	Community	1	11
	Involvement		
	Counselling	2	22

Summary

Chapter four provides a description of the research setting, demographics, data collection and analysis, and trustworthiness of evidence. The research data collected from the participants were transcribed using the Nvivo2020 software system. The transcriptions were then reviewed for accuracy and necessary changes were made before importing the transcribed interviews back into the software. The Nvivo2020 software was used for organizing, analyzing, and establishing themes among the interviews of the research participants.

The interview questions that were shared with each research participant working for the Virgin Islands Police Department yielded additional insights to police officer-

perceived internal and external workplace stressors and coping strategies used by the research population. The contribution of the research participants led to the development of four emerging themes: internal stressors, external stressors, coping mechanisms for internal stress, and coping mechanisms for external stress. Although the research participants worked for the same police department their perceptions and experiences were slightly different. However, in many cases, they expressed similar concerns.

Research has indicated that U.S. insular areas that are unincorporated territories have similar challenges adapting U.S. Mainland institutions and culture (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2019), and that the U.S. police model and police culture is not easily transferable to the US Territories. This study disclosed that police officers in the Virgin Islands encountered more political, inter-island, and internal stressors versus external stressors. Research participants have repeatedly mentioned that lack of support from upper management caused them the most discomfort and stress.

Chapter 5 will include a more in-depth interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications, and conclusion of the study. Recommendations for future research studies regarding workplace stress and coping for police officers will also be included.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to examine the lived experiences and explore the perceived internal and external workplace stressors of VIPD officers. The theoretical framework was the demand resources individual differences model and Lazarus and Folkman stress theory. With such a theoretical framework, particular attention was taken in the examination of the subjective views of VIPD participants on perceived workplace stressors and institutional sources of workplace stress that contribute to both internal and external perceived stress.

A twin objective was to understand the coping mechanisms used by this population when facing workplace stress. The research gave voice to the unique experiences that exist for the VIPD. There has been no academic analysis on workplace stress for the VIPD, and this omission was temporarily filled with myth and anecdote. This study was conducted to add to the documented literature on workplace stress and coping among police officers in US territories and other insular areas. Police officers in the Virgin Islands have acknowledged that unique internal and external stressors exist for the VIPD (Gilbert, 2020).

This research on workplace stress occurred simultaneously with enforcement of a federal Consent Decree. In addition, as the research began in 2017, the US Virgin Islands and its closest neighbors in the British Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico, experienced direct hits by two mega hurricanes, Irma and Maria. As the research proceeded the societal adversities affecting police work seemed to ebb and flow. These objective realities are not given the type of attention that is needed in relation to the existing

theoretical frameworks on environment and workplace stress. Overtly, the VIPD seemed resilient in 2018-2019 as the research developed. In March 2020, the USVI was forced into emergency mode with a once-in-a-century pandemic when COVID-19 struck. The pandemic tipped the balance to produce a perfect storm of adverse variables for conducting the research. Despite this adverse context, nine VIPD officers were willing to participate. However, historical effects for this research must be considered.

Based on the participants' responses during the interviews four main themes and several subthemes that gave insight into the participants lived experiences, internal and external stressors, coping mechanisms, emotions, and challenges associated with being a police officer with the VIPD. This study found that police officers in the Virgin Islands experienced stressors from organizational sources such as management, the work environment, existing consent decree, lack of support and communication with management, and innate nature of policing. Even more despite a summer (2020) of Racial Reckoning in the U.S. Mainland and the related police brutality protests tied to the Black Lives Matter Movement, the VIPD was unaffected. There was no evidence that the VIPD was concerned about defunding or reorganization as a means of militating against internal police misconduct, abuse of power, and police brutality.

The internal stressors that the VIPD contended were completely homegrown even as external factors tied to the pandemic simply intensified these internal organizational stressors. The paucity of the participants' responses meant that the research had to investigate additional secondary data such as media reports, public statements by political leaders and confidential comments from VIPD officers who did not want to be officially recorded.

Interpretation of Findings

The interpretation of findings is based on the research participants perceived internal and external stressors and their ability to cope with these stressors. The interpretations represent the data collected from the participants and the literature that is presented in Chapter 2. The implications of the findings in this research were documented and supported in previous research studies (Balmer et al., 2014; Burke, 2016, Frank et al., 2017; The Virgin Islands Consortium, 2015). The responses from the research participants revealed factors that cause stress in the workplace. Although the literature in the review represented studies in the United States the findings support that internal and external occupational stress existed for police officers regardless of the location. The findings also indicate that some of the stressors were unique to the geographic location of the study. This study adds new dimension to the stress experience by police officers by establishing scholarly literature on the perception of workplace stress and coping in U.S. Virgin Islands police officers.

As a qualitative analysis this study had to take additional steps to ensure that the modest hints of participants were followed with more information in order to engage in a meaningful exploration regarding police service in insular communities. Extra steps were anonymous interviews and additional written data based on mass media, confidential conversations, and field research. These insights provide only a tentative analysis, but they are necessary to give meaning to the research. The following themes of workplace stress were uncovered, and they deserve notice.

Theme 1: Internal Stressors

The stressor of work environment is multi-layered. The VIPD struggled to maintain a safe, sanitary, and secure infrastructure. The VIPD officers did not elaborate on all the unsafe and unsanitary conditions of their offices and the police vehicles that provide both shelter and apparatus. After more investigation, the apparently simple comments about work environment meant a serious infrastructural deficit. The main headquarters of the Alexander Farrelly Complex and Patrick Sweeny Complex were confronted with physical plant problems. Worse, the Farrelly Complex the headquarters is literally under the jail and whenever there were plumbing problems in the jail the VIPD were the first to suffer. The Patrick Sweeny Complex was no better. The demand for a new fleet of police vehicles was also tied to a need to provide daily “shelter” for mobile street officers. This complaint seemed ubiquitous.

However, beyond the physical space that VIPD officers negotiated, the socio-physical space was difficult. The hostile workplace stress of sexual harassment, misconduct, and fraternization was hinted in the interviews. One research participant shared that sexism existed and that it was difficult for a female officer to get promoted if she was not willing to sleep with her superiors (P2). This inability for a law enforcement institution to check unnecessary intimacy and romantic pursuits have the deleterious dynamic of cultivating internal distrust and division based on gender and sexual orientation. Female VIPD officers indicated outside of the interviews that they must run a gauntlet of predatory supervisors both male and female. None was willing to officially complain or grieve this issue despite the Me Too Movement and the new policies protecting victims of workplace sexual harassment. So great was this concern it suggests that more or new research will be necessary after the pandemic has subsided.

Theme 2: External Stressors

The paramilitary structure of the organization that is split between two rival electoral districts means that decisions are always authoritarian. In the 2020-2021 period, the Commissioner of Public Safety was Crucian (from St Croix) and on loan from the Federal ATF. This subjective or personal characteristic meant that he was seen in St Thomas as an outsider and there was even a public petition by two police unions for his removal. Police Chiefs in both districts were reshuffled several times. This factor worked in an insidious way so that VIPD officers who would have participated in the research were wary, and it appeared by even the comments of the participants that they were fearful that any criticism of workplace stressors would lead to retaliation by the upper brass.

The microscopic nature of small institutions magnifies personnel conflicts and workplace stress. In confidence, some VIPD officers who did not seek to be officially tied to the research intimated that the Consent Decree mandated the promotion of junior officers who were not qualified or properly training in an effort to fill leadership vacancies. These undertrained and unqualified leaders had emerged during the time of this research, and by their very presence undermined the esprit de corps of the lower rank officers. This perception by some officers caused a level of disdain and disrespect for management.

Theme 3: Coping with Internal Stressors

This study also supported solutions to police stress and coping mechanisms themes that were described in the literature review. Even though the participants in interviews indicated their displeasure with the workplace, they all had developed resilient

work attitudes and coping mechanisms. The demand resources individual differences model and Lazarus and Folkman stress theory point to the subjective nature of stress and the ability for a person addressing stress, this case the VIPD officer, to control his/her response to external stimuli. The participants adjusted for the negative physical plant issues by avoidance strategies and finding creative ways of tolerating difficulties.

Theme 4: Coping with External Stressors

Based on the realm of policing research participants will encounter external work-related stressors. Participants shared several approaches to dealing with external stressors that also supported the individual differences model and Lazarus and Folkman stress theory. One apparent approach was a self-affirmed perspective that the community needed the VIPD as a societal defender in the midst of repeated crises. The participants would not explicitly say this but always they suggested that they saw themselves as essential to an insular community that all of them had close family ties. This close familial ties have been a way of coping by asserting the close connection of the USVI police officers with every element of the insular society. This variable may be replicated in other US Territories such as Samoa, Guam, and the Northern Mariannas. This close tie of the Territorial police with the insular community was not neutral as it was criticized by VIPD as also a problem when it came to nepotism, discipline, and favoritism. However, the participants perceived the community in positive terms and expressed emotions that reflect care and respect for the People. This closeness is a form of coping with a society seeking to address a ferocious crime wave.

Coping with an adverse social climate include the personal choices of VIPD and many of them engaged in wholesome activities such as physical exercise, swimming, and

attending church. Other coping behaviors such as festive socializing, volunteerism, and charity were not mentioned by any of the participants, but they have been seen by the researcher. It would be speculative to tie the participants coping mechanism to the observed behaviors of others but there was evidence that non-participants have created activities to reduce stress even if they refuse to discuss them.

The findings in the research revealed that police officers' experiences and perception to stress varies. Coping can also include resistance to perceived injustice, workplace stressors, and organization malaise. As note above during this research VIPD openly called for changes in leadership.

In an article date October 26, 2020 "three police unions issued a letter of no confidence in the police commissioner and requested his immediate removal" (Gilbert, 2020). As indicated by Gilbert (2020) the three police unions include "the Enforcement Supervisors Union, Locals 118 and 119, the Policeman's Benevolent Association, and the Police Benevolent Association Locals 1910 STX."

Cornelius, Charles, and Krigger (2020) noted:

It is important you understand, this action is not one we take lightly. Our loyalty lies with VIPD and our dedication and commitment to the law enforcement profession that safeguards our community," the unions wrote. "We are cognizant VIPD is experiencing an increase response to brazen acts of gun violence; questions regarding its ability to maintain substantial compliance with the consent decree; and the continued exodus of senior personnel to retirement and junior officers to resignation. In addition, there was much trepidation on our part in that if there is no change in VIPD's executive leadership, there will be retaliation

against the leaders of this effort. We do, however, stand 100 percent behind this decision to speak out (para.2).

Coping must include seeking to change the workplace while remaining loyal to the USVI community. Since this open display of dissatisfaction, the VIPD has remained committed to serve. Although, the perceived job stress was moderately high for the research participants the findings revealed that stress and job satisfaction may not be directly related. Participants shared that even though they were experiencing internal and external workplace stressors the majority of the participants (56%) were still willing to complete the traditional 20-years of service to be considered a career law enforcement officer. This research theme explored a new dimension in police officer's perception of stress by categorizing internal factors that caused officers to become overwhelmed and stress. Coping mechanisms shared by the research participants were also explored. The participants reported that being involved in their community, going to the beach, exercising and other physical activities, controlling their mindset, and taking time off allowed them to alleviate some of the stressors. The literature review suggested the use of mindfulness and physical activities as a tool to managing workplace stressors. Surprisingly, a few of the research participants did indicated that controlling their mindset was helpful in managing workplace stressors.

Policing in the 21st century

The VIPD officers viewed their workplace stress as tied to the innate nature of policing. Although, this may be true it is important for me to note that policing in the 21st century is very different compared to policing in the Danish Colonial Era. In fact, during the period of this research the entire United States is under considerable duress and calls

for the reform and in some instances the dismantling of police forces. Even if our very own U.S. territory there is distrust in the police culture which may be reflected in the stressors that the participants reported such as sexual harassment, political stressors, and differences in the disciplinary matrix among the islands. The ongoing challenges not only places stress on the community but also on the police.

Policing is an essential service like fire fighters, emergency medical technicians, and correction officers. It is well known that these services are by their very nature dangerous, stressful, and difficult. The officers' comments on this were logical but what was not always communicated was the heightened level of danger that has emerged during the past five years due to a relentless crime wave. The USVI had the highest per capita homicide rate in the US on a state and territorial basis (McCarty, 2016; The Virgin Islands Consortium, 2018). Guns of all types, especially of military use have become the weapon of choice in the USVI streets. Surprisingly, this fact was understated by all VIPD but in the Governor Albert Bryan's State of the Territory Address 2021, this gun problem was his focus and he admitted that there is a shortage of police officers to meet the crime wave (Bryan, 2021). There can be no miscomprehension on whether the real factors of high homicides, proliferation of high-powered guns, and resultant siege mentality combine to create serious workplace stress.

Limitations of the Study

This phenomenological study provides a significant contribution to the existing literature on perceived workplace stress and coping among police officers. However, it is important to record the limitations in this study that may have been a result of the research design, methodology, or even the interpretations of the research findings. The

study was conducted in the Virgin Islands with only officers employed by the Virgin Islands Police Department. Officers in other law enforcement agencies in the Virgin Islands may have offered different responses to the perception of stress because their duties, responsibilities, and scope of their job differs from the VIPD. However, the study was limited by the number of the research participants and so I was unable to conclude that there are consistent stressors across the islands. In addition, there were no previous studies that examined workplace stress and coping among VIPD officers.

The research method was qualitative instead of quantitative which could also be a limitation because quantitative studies offer more of a quantified data that is easily measurable. Recording the interviews could also be a limitation because some research volunteers changed their mind in participating because they were concerned about being recorded. There was a select sample of individuals who were willing to be recorded. Research participants who were involved in the study may have also struggled with their responses mainly because they were recorded and so there is a possibility that they may have self-censored their responses. This study represents VIPD perspectives at a particular point in time. Should follow-up study not occur at later dates, this may present a limitation.

The study had a total of nine participants who shared their lived experiences as a VIPD officer. However, the experiences of the nine research participants may not reflect the overall opinion of the entire VIPD. Due to COVID-19 participants were reluctant because of the need for social distancing and other issues that impacted them due to the Virgin Islands being placed in a State of Emergency. The results of the study are limited due to the number of research volunteers and participants being reluctant to disclosing

their experiences of stress in the workplace. The entire United States including the Virgin Islands is currently experiencing a pandemic (COVID-19) which demands social distancing and so this may have discouraged the participation of other officers. The total of research participants includes three female officers and six male officers. However, based on the information obtained throughout the interview's saturation has been met. There were no new ideas or themes expressed by the research participants. The research participants were asked the same exact questions and most of the responses were similar and the themes were repeated throughout the data analysis. As discussed in chapter 3 individuals who may have worked with me previously would not be included in the study. Therefore, this was a limitation to the sample size and study because I had to decline two possible participants because of a previously shared work interaction.

Recommendations

The purpose of this phenomenological research was to contribute to the gap in research regarding workplace stress and coping among police officers in the islands. The findings of the research were obtained through the semi-structured interviews with the nine research participants who work for the Virgin Islands Police Department. There were six males and three females that provided valuable insights into their lived experiences as VIPD officers.

Based on the research criteria of this phenomenological study participants were limited to only police officers of the Virgin Islands Police Department other law enforcement officers in the Virgin Islands were excluded. Future research should include law enforcement officers from other departments in the Virgin Islands. The number of research participants should also be increased to better represent the research population.

It may also be beneficial to include individuals from the management team and first year offices. The nine research participants may not have accurately represented the population in this research. The research findings may have been different with a larger sample size and a more diverse population. Therefore, it would be valuable to the law enforcement community in the Virgin Islands and other neighboring islands to explore the lived experiences of police officers from other law enforcement agencies in the Virgin Islands.

Future Research

This qualitative phenomenological study examined the lived experiences of nine police officers employed with the Virgin Islands Police Department. However, future studies should include other law enforcement agencies in the Virgin Islands and possibly other islands. Including other research participants may help reduce the limitations in the study. The current research only included nine participants which may not represent the views of the VIPD. Themes, such as the differences in the disciplinary matrix, impact of the consent decree, allegations of sexual harassment, and other political stressors should be explored in future research. However, the saturation of data are represented in the results. Future studies should also include more research participants. It would clearly be beneficial to examine the lived experiences of more participants. It may also be useful for researchers to explore a quantitative or mix method approach.

Implications

It is no secret that policing is a stressful occupation. Police officers' actions are always under public scrutiny for their use of force. However, in many instances the internal and external workplace stressors that may impact an officer's action are rarely

considered. This research provided a support for changes in awareness and understanding of work-related police stress and culture, organizational change, and rebuilding of community trust. For change to occur the dynamics of workplace stress and police culture must be fully examined. Stakeholders must work collaboratively with the management team of the police department to find ways to defend against police stress. Police officers are reliant on the management team to create not only a safe but successful stress-free working environment.

One of the top complaints from the research participants was the lack of support and poor communication which was all connected to organizational stressors. Therefore, for change to occur an increase in communication must be made between rank-and-file officers and police management. Effective communication is essential to how police officers interact with the public and how the public responds. However, communication has to be mastered first internally, between management team and officers. The findings in the research revealed that police officers feel alienated and unsupported by upper management. Officers attitude and willingness to continue service is a reflection of the treatment they receive by management and the internal and external stressors in the workplace. A better plan for supporting and helping officers needs to be put in place.

Lastly, this study has an implication for positive social change because it provides the community with a better understanding of the behind the scenes challenges that officers face on a daily basis. Therefore, allowing stakeholders to analyze the problems and work collectively to addressing these issues. A better partnership between the police, local government, and the community must occur to maintain order. Rebuilding trust in the community starts with better management styles. If the police department operates in

a dysfunctional manner, then it will be hard to regain the public trust. Based on the findings some specific improvements would include using a more transactional model for communication, being culturally sensitive, and working on the organizational stressors that the participants shared. Therefore, change must start within the police department to restore the community faith.

Conclusion

The research results generated information that can add to the body of literature on police stress. Although much research has been conducted in the United States on police stress this phenomenon has not been explored in the Virgin Islands. This research can also add to the literature to police officers in the Caribbean Islands and other insular areas. The purpose of this study was to explore and examine workplace stress and coping among police officers working for the Virgin Islands Police Department. The results of this study suggests that police management is the main source of workplace stress for police officers. The colonial and bureaucratic style of leadership will eventually cause more division between management and police officers. Research participants repeatedly expressed dissatisfaction with police management. Participants shared that lack of support from upper management, the consent decree, manpower shortage, long hours, political influence, and other poor working conditions causes them the most discomfort and stress on their job. More research should be done

Policing is constantly changing over time, crime rates are increasing, criminals are becoming more aggressive, the trends in crime no longer represent those of the Danish Colonial era and so the old leadership styles will not be effective to mee the needs of contemporary police officers. The organizational mindset of police management has to

change to reflect the current era we are living in. Leadership activities have to reflect the values of the contemporary police officer. In order for police departments to effectively carryout their mission of serving and protecting they can no longer operate as a corporation organizational approaches have to be upgraded to meet the demands of a contemporary officer and evolving society. Being able to bridge the gap in research while addressing the concerns of this population and providing them with outlets to help them cope with workplace stress will be a positive goal for the Virgin Islands Police Department and the community they serve.

The Virgin Islands Police Department like any other police department is a constant changing organization that requires ongoing self- evaluation of the entire department. Unlike many other organizations the police department has a large number of stakeholders that are involved. As a result, the police department is obligated to appease these stakeholders even if it may cause internal struggles. Transformation of the VIPD requires accountability and transparency even if it means not appeasing the stakeholders. The Virgin Islands Police Department needs to investigate themselves and make the necessary changes as it relates to workplace culture, accountability, policies and practices, training, and other areas that may have contributed to internal and external workplace stressors. If an honest evaluation of the police department is not made, then the experiences of work-related stress will generate many more problems and in a small US territory like the Virgin Islands these problems may very well be amplified.

This research is distinctive because it is the first research to explore workplace stress and coping among this population. The results of this research lead to new discoveries and areas that needs improvement such as communication, cultural

sensitivity, and having a sincere interest in improving the experiences of officers. A proactive approach must be taken by the Virgin Islands Police department to improve the overall function of the VIPD. The colonial and bureaucratic managing style of the VIPD needs to evolve with the constant changes in the Virgin Islands community.

The research questions assisted in exploring and understanding workplace stress and coping mechanisms for VIPD through qualitative interview of participating officers. From the data collected, an explanation of the internal and external factors that contributed to workplace stress for the participants was presented. Recommendations were also made based on the research data. A key offering would be for the police department to provide additional outlets such as professional counseling services outside of the disciplinary counseling services so that officers could discuss job related stressors. Another offering would be to increase transparency, diversity, and accountability throughout the police department. Research has indicated the need for more professional counseling services in police departments. However, many departments fail to provide this service for officers in need. When police officers operate at the peak standard it increases the opportunity to save money, lives, and regain public trust. Working cohesively is the key to a better ran department.

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Appendix A: Letter to the Virgin Islands Police Department

Date:

Name of Police Chief or Public Relations Officer

Address

Dear (Name),

My name is Isheba James, and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am conducting a dissertation study on workplace stress and coping in US Virgin Islands police officers. There are many significant studies that address workplace stress among police officers. However, developing US territories such as St. Thomas/St. John and St. Croix have not been a part of the research that explores workplace stress and coping among police officers. This study is also unique because it will address possible trends of small island geography, traditional workplace stressors, and how these factors impact the mental health of Virgin Islands police officers, and whether culture may play a role in how officers combat workplace stress. This research will provide insight into the lived experiences of police officers across the territory.

I am requesting your assistance and permission to conduct this study within the Virgin Islands police department. All information regarding names of participants and interview responses will be kept strictly confidential. All participants are free to choose whether or not to participate and can discontinue participation at any time. I am also requesting your permission to post my research flyer in the different zones.

I would welcome a telephone call from you to discuss any questions you may have concerning this study. I can be reached at (678) 347-0680 or emailed at isheba.james@waldenu.edu.

Sincerely,

Isheba L. James

Doctoral Candidate

Walden University

Appendix B: Letter to Participant

Date:

Name of Participant

Address

Dear (Name),

My name is Isheba James, and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am conducting a dissertation study on workplace stress and coping in police officers in the US Virgin Islands. There are many significant studies that address workplace stress among police officers. However, burnout among VIPD police officers has rarely been addressed. This study is also unique because it will address possible trends of small island geography, traditional workplace stressors, and how these factors impact the mental health and burnout rates among Virgin Islands police officers, and whether culture may play a role in how officers combat workplace stress. This research will provide insight into the lived experiences of police officers territory wide

Your time is very important to me, and I appreciate your willingness to participate in this research. In order to complete the interview for fully understanding your perspectives of the daily occupational lives of polices officers in the US Virgin Islands we need to meet for about one hour. The meeting can be held in the roll call room at your preferred zone or at a location of your choice and will not require you to do anything with which you are uncomfortable. The meeting is designed to get to know you and learn about your lived experiences as a police officer in the US Virgin Islands. All information gathered during the meeting will be kept strictly confidential.

Please contact me at your earliest convenience to schedule a date and time that we can meet. My telephone number is (678) 347-0680. You can also email me at isheba.james@waldenu.edu. I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards,

Isheba L. James
Doctoral Candidate
Walden University

Appendix C: Interview Guide

Date: _____

Time: _____

Location: _____

Name of Interviewer:

Name of Interviewee:

1. What issues in your current position cause you the most discomfort or stress (i.e. office, patrol, or on the street)?
2. What three incidents or issues constitute your worse working conditions?
3. How do you go about coping with what you have listed in question one and two?
4. What possible solutions could aide in your ability to overcome workplace stress?
5. How often have you called in sick within the past 6 months?
6. Does pay, career incentive programs, and other financial inducement impact your stress level? Based on your answer explain.
7. What are some internal factors in the workplace that can make you feel overwhelmed or stressed?
8. Do you perceive the St. Thomas-St. John versus St. Croix rivalry as a stressor within the VIPD? Explain.
9. How does the “born here” mentality impact occupational stress within the VIPD?
10. Are there any ethnic conflicts within the VIPD? Explain.
11. Have you experienced any workplace stressors that have led to sickness, reduced work schedule, and negative performance? If so, were these stressors internal to the VIPD or external in the community?
12. Does workplace stressors impact your willingness to continue service in the VIPD? Explain.

13. Are you willing to complete the traditional 20-year service to be considered a career law enforcement officer? Explain.
14. Does the small geography of each island create a stressful environment?
15. Does serving in a small police department in each district cause excessive personal conflict? Explain.

Appendix D: Demographic Questions

1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your race?
4. Are you married, divorced, or single?
5. Do you have any children?
6. Are you a sworn peace officer? If your answer is yes, what is your rank?
7. Are you a supervisor? If your answer is yes, how many officers do you supervise?
8. Do you work in a specialty position? If yes, in what area do you work (i.e. DV, SOP, Traffic, etc.)?
9. How long have you been employed with the Virgin Islands police department?

Appendix E: Consent Form

Workplace Stress and Coping in US Virgin Islands Police Officers

You are invited to participate in a research study of workplace stress and resiliency of police officers in the US Virgin Islands. You were selected as a possible participant because of your knowledge and/or experience related to the topic and being employed with the VIPD for at least two years.

Please read this form and ask any questions you may have as you consider participation in the study, using the contact information below.

This study is being conducted by Isheba L. James, Doctoral Candidate at Walden University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to better understand and define workplace stress and coping strategies among police officers in the US Virgin Islands.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in one individual face to face interview in a location of your choice for approximately sixty to ninety minutes. Given the current pandemic, electronic interviews are available for participants who prefer this route of contact. Electronic interviews will be conducted using Skype or Teams and are expected to last between sixty to ninety minutes. All interviews will be recorded using a digital audio recorder and note-taking by the researcher.

Once interviews are transcribed, each participant will have the opportunity to review the interview transcription and clarify any information given. This transcription will be sent to the participants within two weeks after the interview. The process of reviewing the information should generally take fifteen minutes.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with your employer. If you initially decide to participate, you are still free to withdraw at any time later without affecting those relationships.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

There are limited risks associated with participating in this study. The potential benefit of participating in this study may come in the form of informing and supporting positive organizational change. Outcomes of this study may contribute to psychologists assisting

police in coping with difficulties and help policymakers to gain a better understanding of what officers face on a daily basis and thus being enabled to develop a plan for supporting officers better. The ultimate goal is that this study will help the local government and community to have a better understanding of the challenges officers face and build a better partnership between the police, local government, and the community.

In the event you experience stress or anxiety during your participation in the research, you may terminate your participation at any time. You may also decline to answer any questions you consider invasive or stressful. Sometimes interviews like this can bring things to your awareness that may require support and so the Department of Health will be available if you need someone to talk to. You can reach the Department of Health at 340-774-9000.

Compensation:

There is no form of compensation for participation.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. If any report of this study is published, the researcher will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant. Although location and profession of research participants are described in the study demographic information will only be presented as an overall composite description of the study participants as a whole rather than individual description. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researcher will have access to the documents. Interviews will be audio recorded for purposes of providing an accurate description of your experience. All study records will be maintained for a minimum of 5 years.

If the researcher may be known to any of the potential participants, please note that the roles of acquaintance and researcher cannot be combined and that the study participation will be treated entirely separately from any other relationship roles. However, if the role could potentially cause a conflict of interest, the volunteer will not be considered for the research.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Isheba L. James. You may contact Isheba James with any questions you may have at (678) 347-0680, isheba.james@waldenu.edu. The Research Participant Advocate at Walden University is Dr. Leilani Gjellstad; you may contact her at 612-312-1210 or email at irb@mail.waldenu.edu if you have questions about your rights as a participant.

You will receive a copy of this form from the researcher.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have had opportunity to ask questions and receive answers to those questions. I consent to participate in the study.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

Virtual Consent Form

Workplace Stress and Coping in US Virgin Islands Police Officers

You are invited to participate in a research study of workplace stress and resiliency of police officers in the US Virgin Islands. You were selected as a possible participant because of your knowledge and/or experience related to the topic and being employed with the VIPD for at least two years.

Please read this form and ask any questions you may have as you consider participation in the study, using the contact information below.

This study is being conducted by Isheba L. James, Doctoral Candidate at Walden University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to better understand and define workplace stress and coping strategies among police officers in the US Virgin Islands.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in one individual face to face interview in a location of your choice for approximately sixty to ninety minutes. Given the current pandemic, electronic interviews are available for participants who prefer this route of contact. Electronic interviews will be conducted using Skype or Teams and are expected to last between sixty to ninety minutes. All interviews will be recorded using a digital audio recorder and note-taking by the researcher.

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Voluntary Nature of the Study:

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There are limited risks associated with participating in this study. The potential benefit of participating in this study may come in the form of informing and supporting positive organizational change. Outcomes of this study may contribute to psychologists assisting

police in coping with difficulties and help policymakers to gain a better understanding of what officers face on a daily basis and thus being enabled to develop a plan for supporting officers better. The ultimate goal is that this study will help the local government and community to have a better understanding of the challenges officers face and build a better partnership between the police, local government, and the community.

In the event you experience stress or anxiety during your participation in the research, you may terminate your participation at any time. You may also decline to answer any questions you consider invasive or stressful. Sometimes interviews like this can bring things to your awareness that may require support and so the Department of Health will be available if you need someone to talk to. You can reach the Department of Health at 340-774-9000.

Compensation:

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If the researcher may be known to any of the potential participants, please note that the roles of acquaintance and researcher cannot be combined and that the study participation will be treated entirely separately from any other relationship roles. However, if the role could potentially cause a conflict of interest, the volunteer will not be considered for the research.

Contacts and Questions:

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You may print or save a copy of this consent form for your record.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and understand the study well enough to make a decision about participating. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and receive answers to those questions. My reply to your email with the words 'I Consent' verifies that I want to participate in this study.