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Officers' Perceived Safety After a Law Enforcement Line of Duty Death

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MS, Walden University, 2013

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Every year, several line of duty deaths occur among law enforcement personnel in the United States. Risk factors, community influences, types of violence, and diverse calls for service could affect an officer's perception of safety. Given the number of line of duty deaths, officers' perceived safety is an important avenue for further research. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore whether a line of duty death affected the perceived safety of officers in small, rural police departments in the state of Texas. A social constructivism perspective was used to understand the world in which the participating officers lived. The three research questions addressed the meaning of perceived safety, calls for service that affected perceived safety, and how a line of duty death affected officers' perceptions of safety. A criterion sampling process was used to select 10 officers, who elected either an oral or a written interview. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the data. The eight identified themes encompassed participants' definitions of perceived safety and how these related to their lived experiences, the types of calls for service that altered participants' perceived safety, and how hearing about a line of duty death affected the participants' perceived safety when on calls for service. This study's results foster positive social change and provides recommendations to leaders who might be encouraged to secure resources to increase officers' effective coping skills, both physically and mentally, which could, respectively, increase officers' perception of safety and ability to manage emotions after hearing of a line of duty death.

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Dedication

This research is dedicated to the men and women who risk their lives daily to protect their communities.

To my husband: Thank you for spending endless days and nights encouraging me, having conversations with me about police work, sharing research with me, and challenging me to be the very best. I could not have done this without your love and support. I am honored to be your wife and proud to be a "police wife."

Austin and Adalyn, this one is for you! Always know your father and I believe in you, love you, and will be your biggest supporters. Never forget that with a little hard work and determination, you can accomplish even your biggest dreams!

To my family and friends: Thank you for standing beside me and in me. Dad and Mom, I will never forget your encouraging words and the silent prayers. I am the women I am today because of you two. Nicole, you are truly an amazing editor, and I am so thankful for your talent. Kristy, my giraffe, thank you for standing by me and not letting me give up. Jonathan, thank you for being one of my biggest cheerleaders through this.

To all the law enforcement families: Remember that we bleed blue together and we are an unbreakable family, standing and supporting that blue line no matter what.

Finally, to the men and women who put on a badge, gun, and Kevlar vest: My prayers for protection and safety are with you. Thank you for your fearless and courageous spirits, along with the active choices you make daily to lay your lives on the line to protect the innocent. You are our HEROES.

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I will forever be grateful for the lessons I have learned from you all, and I will aspire to also make a lasting mark on future students and professionals as I embark on new adventures and future research projects.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Background

According to Chris Cosgriff, founder of the Officer Down Memorial Page (ODMP, 2021), "when a police officer is killed, it is not an agency that loses an officer, it's an entire nation" (para. 2). In the United States, in 2019, 146 officers were killed in the line of duty; from January 2020 to April 2020, police forces suffered 47 line of duty deaths (ODMP, 2020). In recent years, law enforcement officers have been targeted and attacked by individuals as a result of factors including disregard, negative perceptions, and hate of law enforcement personnel (Clifton et al., 2018; Kachurik et al., 2013). Multiple cases of officer ambushes, assaults, and line of duty deaths have increased the significant stress that officers already experience because of their role in law enforcement (Clifton et al., 2018).

According to Clifton et al. (2018), a number of high-profile cases in 2014 served as a catalyst for a significant increase in targeted attacks and ambushes on police personnel. In 2014, Officer Warren shot and killed Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. Officer Warren was not indicted, which incited riots around the United States. Following this event, other attacks, ambushes, and line of duty deaths ensued. That same year, multiple New York police officers were assassinated, and multiple Pennsylvania state troopers were ambushed (Mueller & Baker, 2014). The targeted attacks and ambushes on police personnel continued in 2015 and 2016. On July 7, 2016, five police officers were killed, and nine others were injured, in an attack carried out by Micah

Johnson in Dallas, Texas (Young, 2016). Ten days later, another violent act was directed at police officers in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, resulting in three deaths and multiple injuries (Visser, 2016). These killings are only a few recent examples of line of duty deaths, attacks, and ambushes against police officers. The Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Office of Partner Engagement (2017) reported that police attacks, killings, and ambushes increased between 2015 and 2016, along with other types of violence directed toward officers.

Extant research has shown that different types of violence that police officers encounter are based on the increasingly hostile and deadly environments they face (Clifton et al., 2018). Schouten and Brennan (2016) defined multiple types of police violence as either affective or predatory violence. These types of violent acts can occur in different settings and for many reasons, which may be out of an officer's control. Targeted violence against police officers, and the manner in which these acts are carried out, is of great importance when evaluating an officer's perceived safety on a call for service (Borum et al., 1999). In this hostile environment, the question of officers' perceived safety, coping skills, and safety strategies is worthy of exploration (Clifton et al., 2018).

Police departments, along with state and county police agencies, can vary in terms of the number of officers employed and the number of miles covered when responding to calls for service (Daly, 2004). Training also varies. In the United States, all officers must complete an average of 402 hours of basic police academy training and 141 hours of field

training as part of basic training (Daly, 2004). These numbers vary from state to state; credentials can differ due to state, county, or federal requirements and ranking and case assignment systems (Daly, 2004). Lazaros (2016) noted that larger suburban departments tended to have more extensive resources and could implement more progressive training than other departments. This finding suggests that smaller departments may have stricter budgets, which limits their ability to afford training. In addition, small, rural agencies can have slower backup response times because backup officers have longer distances to travel, making such calls dangerous (Martin, 2014). In addition to being dangerous, slow police response times could affect community members' attitudes toward police officers (Lee et al., 2016).

Consequently, leaders of large and small departments have mounting concerns about problems with training, community members' attitudes, and response times. At the same time, they are concerned about increased violence and attacks resulting in line of duty deaths or severe injuries. The focus of this study was whether a line of duty death influences the perceived safety of police officers in a small, rural Texas agency. The study findings may provide useful knowledge that department leaders can use to train officers. Educational opportunities can expand an officer's knowledge of different topics, including situational and community factors, social disorganization, and the use-of-force continuum. This information can provide officers with an increased sense of safety when on calls for service (Cihan, 2014; Lazaros, 2016). Such training can better prepare police

for responding to calls for service, possibly improving police response times, officer safety, and community safety (Cihan et al., 2012).

Problem Statement

Since 1971, there have been 24,180 line of duty deaths among the law enforcement community in the United States (ODMP, 2020). In the last 10 years, 1,719 officers were killed in the line of duty, with 910 of those deaths occurring in the last 5 years (ODMP, 2020). In 2018, 166 officers were killed in the line of duty, and in 2019, 146 officers lost their lives in the line of duty (ODMP, 2020). These line of duty deaths and acts of violence included those caused by vehicular assault, 911-related incidents, vehicular pursuit, assault, drowning, and automobile crashes, with the leading cause being gunfire (FBI, 2020; ODMP, 2021; Office of Partner Engagement, FBI, 2017). As of November 2019, 35 officers had been killed by gunfire that year, the Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted Program reported, with all but one declared accidental (FBI, 2020). From January 2020 to April 2020, 13 officers were killed by gunfire (FBI, 2020). Such violent acts are classified as either predatory or affective violence toward police officers (Schouten & Brennan, 2016).

Officers are being attacked and killed by offenders with diverse demographic characteristics, ranging from juveniles to adults and across a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Clifton et al., 2018). According to the FBI's Office of Partner Engagement (2017), 86% of those who had assaulted an officer had a prior criminal history, while 56% were known to a local police department or sheriff's agency. Additionally, 28% of

these individuals had expressed a desire to kill an officer before carrying out the attack (Office of Partner Engagement, FBI, 2017).

Texas is the second-largest state in the United States, covering approximately 268,820 mi^2 (696, 240 km^2), with 254 counties containing 28,701,845 residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Texas is the largest continental U.S. state with many rural police agencies. Texas had 80,095 full-time and reserve peace officers with active and current credentials to practice in 2019 under the Texas Commission of Law Enforcement (TCOLE, 2019). Since 1976, approximately 1,965 Texas peace officers have been killed in the line of duty, including 1,238 by gunfire (ODMP, 2020). In the past 10 years, 163 officers in Texas have been killed, 46 by gunfire (ODMP, 2021). Since 2018, 26 officers have been killed in the line of duty (ODMP, 2021). From January 2019 through April 2020, 26 officers were killed in the line of duty, including nine by gunfire (ODMP, 2020). Gunfire is one of the leading causes of line of duty fatalities and is categorized as a lethal and deadly use of force toward officers (ODMP, 2021). It is one of the types of violence police officers encounter on calls for service. These acts of violence are referred to as *predatory violence* and *targeted violence*, whereby officers are intentionally ambushed or entrapped in order to cause death or severe harm to the officers (Borum et al., 1999). Given the number of line of duty deaths directly tied to gunfire, how an officer's perception of safety changes after hearing of or witnessing a line of duty death is an important avenue for further research.

Clifton et al. (2018) defined stress as the relationship between an officer's environment and their perception of that environment. A majority of researchers, as well as individuals, recognize the hazardous nature of policing and that it is a highly stressful occupation (Clifton et al., 2018). The increase in the number of purposeful violent and deadly ambushes on officers in recent years may increase their stress levels, which may decrease their perceived safety. Swanson et al. (2012) discussed how various factors could increase officers' levels of stress, resulting in mental problems, physical health issues, and lack of motivation. Lack of motivation at work and increased stress due to deadly encounters further challenge officers' perceived safety and may interfere with their ability to keep others safe (CITE). Clifton et al. reported that ineffective coping strategies and a poor support system were associated with emotional problems and decreased perceived safety on a call for service. In this context, research on officers' perceived stress arising from knowledge of line of duty deaths of peers is warranted.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine whether a line of duty death of an officer in one police department affected the perceived safety of officers during service calls in a small, rural Texas police department. Researchers have extensively studied large suburban departments focusing on perceived safety and how to increase or decrease such safety based on types of violence experienced, backup response times, and additional training (Clifton et al., 2018). These studies included departments in Dallas, Baltimore, New York City, Baton Rouge, Cleveland, Chicago, and South

Carolina (Clifton et al., 2018). These departments have more extensive budgets to invest

in research and training that are not required by state mandates but rather are options for

officers and departments. Further, a larger department has a budget that allows

identification of hazardous incidents or where training is lacking regarding backup

response times; types of violence in specific areas; and steps that can be taken, over and

above officer recertification requirements, to reduce the incidence of violence or death

through advancement of knowledge for the local demographic area.

Robinson et al. (2016) reported that officers who experience a line of duty death

secondhand can suffer from posttraumatic stress, regardless of their level of involvement

in the incident. Best et al. (2011) explained that identification of a critical incident

depends how an officer perceives the incident and thereby creates a critical response.

This stress can inadvertently affect how officers interact with the public, respond to calls

for service, and provide backup to other officers on calls for service (Lee et al., 2016),

illustrating the significance of the impact that a line of duty death may have on surviving

officers.

The type of violence officers experience, directly or indirectly (i.e., affective,

predatory, and targeted violence), can add to the stressors they face (Schouten &

Brennan, 2016). Martin (2014) discussed how better training could enable officers to

more effectively combat negative stressors or reactions; however, department budgets

and mandated training often interfere with such additional training, which is not

necessarily required. Nevertheless, researchers should explore the views of officers

concerning line of duty deaths to gather data on their reactions to such experiences—not only for officers' mental health and wellness but also for their efficacy and competency (Kachurik et al., 2013). Such research should include smaller, rural departments.

Most extant research on this topic has focused on larger, suburban police departments, effectively ignoring smaller, rural departments. Kachurik et al. (2013) explored officers' perspectives after a line of duty death, and Willits (2014) identified how a department's organizational structure and officer training affected the physical safety and perceived mental safety officers experienced. Best et al. (2011) noted that how an organization responds to a critical incident influenced how an officer processed the critical event. Willits (2014) described how an officer's perception of safety could decrease after acts of violence against police and line of duty deaths based on how the officer's department handled the situation, an effect possibly resulting from the organizational structure within that department. Organizational structure includes managers, training departments, and supervisors who facilitate training and support of other officers within an agency (Willits, 2014). As a result, organizational structure and how a department responds to a critical incident, along with the investment the department puts into supporting an officer, can affect the officer's perceived safety. This knowledge about organizational structure and support and its impact on officers' perceived safety is important, but it might not fully applicable to smaller departments. Police departments, along with state and county policing agencies, vary with respect to the number of officers employed and the distance officers must cover when responding to

calls for service (Lee et al., 2013a). Lee et al. (2013b) discussed how police response times on calls for service could increase or decrease the positive effects policing had on a community and the community's views about police officers. Police response times to calls for service also include response times of backup officers. Small, rural agencies often have slower response times because backup is further away, requiring officers to travel longer distances, thereby exposing officers to greater danger (Martin, 2014).

Officers' basic training to obtain their credentials as licensed police officers also varies among states, and minimum requirements for each state may not be the same for all officers. Martin (2014) addressed how larger agencies tend to conduct their own in-service basic training academies, whereas smaller agencies employ officers with preservice training. Preservice basic training for police recruits often takes place at local colleges as part of criminal justice programs, thus saving money for small departments (Martin, 2014). Larger departments with greater resources can better implement more progressive training beyond that required by their states (Lazaros, 2016). These educational opportunities include expanding officers' knowledge of police culture, community policing strategies, and advanced organizational structure within departments (Lazaros, 2016). Consequently, Daly (2004) observed that police training programs are not equal because funding plays a large role in program quality.

In this study, I examined structural disadvantages inherent in small, rural departments resulting from lack of training due to budget restraints and slow backup response times; both issues may influence an officer's perceived safety. As prior research

has shown, training increases an officer's perception of safety. Advanced training is training above and beyond the that required by an officer's department or state and addresses in depth secondary stressors, hazardous duty scenarios, de-escalation, violence against police, and how to manage calls of service. However, in the case of lack of training, department leaders could implement a stronger organizational structure to support officers and their families after a line of duty death, which could increase officers' perceived safety and mental and physical health (Lazaros, 2016; Willits, 2014). In addition, online training, grant-funded training, and sending one officer to training so they can come back and train the rest of the department are alternatives for small, rural departments that also increase the organizational structure of departments (Lazaros, 2016).

Most researchers have focused on larger, suburban departments, such as Dallas, New York, and Cleveland, with few targeting the impact a line of duty killing has on the perceived safety of police officers in small, rural agencies (Clifton et al., 2018). Research has shown that officers might believe that their experiences were critical; however, their reactions to such incidents varied based on how they interpreted and coped with those experiences (Best et al., 2011). Thus, my aim in this study was to address the gap in extant literature regarding how indirect involvement in a line of duty death affects the perceived safety of officers in small, rural Texas departments. I conducted this research because of the number of officers killed in the line of duty in Texas, Texas's large geographical size, and the large number of police agencies in the state (2,750, covering

254 counties). I examined whether, and how, the death of an officer altered the perceived safety of other officers employed at departments within a 40-mi (64-km) radius when responding to calls for service. Studying the phenomenon within this radius provided insight on the effects of perceived safety during calls for service in smaller Texas police departments.

Research Questions

RQ1: What does perceived safety mean to a police officer?

RQ2: Does the type of a call for service alter a police officer's perceived safety?

RQ3: How does a line of duty death affect an officer's perception of safety when on a call for service?

Theoretical Framework

I conducted the study using a social constructivism perspective to interpret the subjective meaning of the data and to understand the world in which the participating officers lived. Social constructivism is a social development theory conceived by Vygotsky (1929), who theorized that people learn through social interactions and the cultural context within which they share lived experiences, which may be similar or different (Gado, 2017). In keeping with Kachurik et al. (2013), the beliefs, rationales, and effects associated with a line of duty death could vary drastically from one police officer to another. I used an ontological approach to decipher multiple realities that reflected the lived experiences of individual officers (Bain et al., 2014). Each officer viewed their safety and their fellow officer's death in a different light, placing personal meaning on

the event (Bain et al., 2014). Additionally, I used the framework to evaluate the phenomenon of officers' perceived safety and whether a line of duty death affected officers' perceptions.

Nature of the Study

I used a qualitative design to understand the research themes and interview questions. According to Creswell (2017), a paradigm and perspective are a researcher's basic beliefs and guidelines regarding a project. I conducted a qualitative study to answer the research questions (RQs) and probe the phenomenon of whether a line of duty death changes other officers' perceived safety when on calls for service. Creswell (2017) asserted that phenomenological researchers explore the common meaning behind an incident that several individuals have experienced. Such researchers attempt to understand overall common threads, thus clarifying the phenomenon while describing it as a universal experience.

The phenomenon observed in the current study was specific to officers who learned about a line of duty death within a 40-mi (64-km) radius of their beats. I evaluated the themes of participants' experiences, along with how those experiences affected their perceived safety and interactions with the public (Sozer & Merlo, 2013). I identified common themes and assembled a composite description of relevant areas. A phenomenological researcher provides a cluster of meanings that significantly define a theme (Barrett & Janopaul-Naylor, 2016). Evaluating this phenomenon in a small, rural

Texas department could generate knowledge that helps the leaders of other departments to make necessary adjustments to improve their officers' perceived safety.

Eliason (2011) maintained that the line of duty death of any officer indirectly influences many officers, regardless of their law enforcement roles. Using a phenomenological design, I gained valuable information from the firsthand experiences, safety concerns, and new apprehensions that affected the officers in the study. This knowledge of local and adjacent departments provided information on how the personnel of rural Texas police departments viewed perceived safety after a line of duty killing and addressed a gap in the literature. Perceived safety was defined as how an officer characterized and perceived their safety while on a call for service. The study showed that their behaviors might be due to lack of perceived safety derived from the death of an officer killed in the line of duty. Creswell (2017) suggested that qualitative RQs are a way to achieve a better understanding of a problem, making a qualitative approach appropriate for the current study.

Definitions

Advanced training: Training above and beyond state mandated training or recertification courses that an officer must take to maintain their status as a police officer.

Affective violence: Unintentional violence fueled by a situation.

Beat: The territory or area that a police officer patrols.

Call for service: A call that goes to a police officer from their dispatch department regarding an incident in which someone in the community needs assistance.

Critical response: A strong emotional response to any single line of duty event.

Entrapment ambush: An intentional plan to entrap police officers to assault or kill them.

Deadly force: Police use of force that results in an assailant's death (Lord, 2014).

Informal social control: Informal rules or boundaries set by a neighborhood or group to control the people in that area (Sampson, 2011).

Firsthand experience: Personal or professional knowledge of an officer.

Line of duty death: A death that occurs while a police officer is on duty after responding to a call for service as a result of an assailant using lethal force against the officer.

Neighborhood characteristics: Higher rates of poverty, housing instability, and unemployment factors that can lead to reduced informal social control, increasing criminal behaviors (Lee et al., 2016).

Perceived safety: The level of safety an officer feels or perceives to be present when responding to a call for service.

Police response time: The time it takes a police officer to respond to a call for service after the dispatch department sends the call to the officer (Cihan et al., 2012).

Predatory violence: Purposeful violence against police.

Situational factors: Factors that change an initial situation depending on how the incident develops.

Social disorganization theory: A theory that explains disruptions of neighborhood police response times and patterns (Cihan, 2014).

Spontaneous ambush: Unplanned acts of violence against police that turn into ambush situations.

Targeted violence: Violence toward police officers.

Training: Exercises and instruction that officers are required or encouraged to attend to maintain their peace officer credentials.

Use-of-force continuum: The level of force an officer is supposed to use, depending on the situation the officer enters (Lord, 2014).

Assumptions

The following assumptions were vital to the credibility of the research. I assumed that the police officers in the study would share their lived experiences and answer all questions honestly and openly. I allowed each officer to select the type of interview they would participate in and guaranteed their privacy and confidentiality. I assumed that participating police officers experienced situations that affected their behaviors or decisions on calls for service. I also assumed that these officers would find value in this research project. Finally, I assumed that the results of this research could potentially effect social change by informing managers about the merits of departmental training on safety and stress management. I made these assumptions after reviewing the literature and considering assumptions of researchers in similar projects.

Scope and Delimitations

In this research, I used a qualitative phenomenological methodology with 10 participants from multiple police departments. Creswell (2017) recommended that there should be three to 13 participants in a qualitative study, with the saturation level occurring between 10 and 12 participants. My goal was to obtain seven to 10 research participants. Participants did not have firsthand experience of a line of duty death, which would consist of knowing a killed officer personally or professionally. These officers were within a 40-mi (64-km) radius and shared their lived experiences about the study phenomenon.

The rationale for using a qualitative phenomenological methodology was that it facilitated my exploration of the lived experiences of officers after a line of duty death. I used this method to evaluate the perceived safety an officer felt when responding to a call for service after learning an officer was killed in a line of duty death. In keeping with Creswell (2017), I used the phenomenological research approach to understand and explore the underlying and common meaning of similar phenomena and experiences. According to Sozer and Merlo (2013), an officer interprets events and phenomena differently depending on whether they are associated with a smaller or larger department. Research suggests there are many different reasons why officers from different departments interpret events differently. Backup response times are a crucial component of officer safety and police performance (Lee et al., 2016). Response times are also associated with department size and the distance backup must travel on calls for service.

Additionally, neighborhood characteristics, economic factors, and demographic indicators—which could alter response times and overall perception of safety—are tied to the threat an office may encounter on a call for service (Lee, 2014). Gibbs et al. (2018) indicated that areas of higher poverty often have higher officer assault rates. The overall phenomena and lived experiences of officers could differ because of these factors and the differences between urban and rural departments. This qualitative approach revealed common themes based on the RQs that were directly associated with the phenomenon; however, the themes came from small, rural departments because that was the gap in literature identified in the literature review.

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

Limitations of this study included my ability to analyze the results and recruit individuals who met the criteria to participate. The answers to the study's RQs, which asked whether an officer reacted differently to a call for service after a line of duty death, could differ among participating officers; one participant may have responded to the questions based on salient factors, whereas another may have incorporated extraneous factors. According to Gutschmidt and Vera (2020), police culture is often associated with honor, bravery, strength, assertiveness, and solidarity. In addition, suspicion, alertness, and distance from civilians are traits that Gutschmidt and Vera mention in connection with police culture. An officer's personal belief relative to overall police culture can also vary because their mental health is often rooted in their own perception of bravery, suppression of emotions, and how they associate humor or negative feelings with certain

events. Considering this, a participating officer might have felt that if they answered the questions truthfully, they would demonstrate a lack of ability to handle emotions; therefore, they may have answered the questions differently to avoid appearing vulnerable or weaker than others. According to Paton and Violanti (1996), emotional reactions are salient in police culture because this population tends to value a sense of invulnerability. Additionally, the way officers process emotions, calls for service, violence toward police, demographic concerns, and the camaraderie of others might have limited the answers they provided to interview questions so that they could maintain their feelings of bravery, strength, and honor.

The study findings cannot be generalized to other settings. A limitation entailed accessing participants from multiple police departments within a 40-mi (64-km) radius of a line of duty death. It also took longer for small, rural Texas departments to return the questionnaires to me and set up interviews because of the lack of officers on shift during set times. Gutschmidt and Vera (2020) discussed how officers are often distant from civilians and can be skeptical of individuals asking questions, making it more difficult for officers to voluntarily answer questions about safety, feelings, and beliefs from strangers whose motives they do not understand. For this reason, confidentiality was of the utmost importance, and one reason I believe that the participating officers did answer the interview questions. I selected 10 departments within the relevant geographic area and sent emails to them explaining the importance of confidentiality and how this would be maintained.

Significance

I provided authentic research to contribute to the gap in literature regarding how the perceived safety of police officers in small, rural Texas agencies could be affected by a line of duty death within a 40-mi (64-km) radius of where they worked. Research indicates that perceived safety may increase through increasing training, reducing backup response times, and improving mental health awareness and community policing in suburban departments. However, I identified a gap regarding small, rural departments. What was quickly noticed was that even though officers are mandated to attend training to maintain their licenses, leaders often lack the budgets needed to incorporate advanced training in areas such as types of violence, demographic components, economic issues, mental health, and de-escalation techniques, which have been tied to increased perceived safety in officers.

For the purposes of this study, I focused on the phenomenon of whether a line of duty death affected perceived safety among officers in small, rural Texas departments. In keeping with Gibbs et al. (2014), determining how officers view a line of duty death can show how officers think and how leaders can better serve those officers. Gibbs et al. (2014) suggested that when an officer feels supported by upper management after a line of duty death, it could improve the officer's perceptions of the department and police culture they currently work in. This research may effect positive social change because participants' responses may enable local police department leaders to develop an increased understanding of how officers are impacted by line of duty deaths in

surrounding areas. This increased understanding could help leaders find funding for more advanced training, which could increase the perception of safety in areas such as backup response times, how to respond to different types of violence, and how to read and become more aware of the social demographic needs of the population served.

My goal was to provide leaders and researchers with more information on how to support officers. The study showed the impact of a line of duty death on officers, which can help enlighten and educate departments and provide the information they need to increase awareness and training. This is in alignment with the overall goal of a police department: for all officers to go home safely after their watches end.

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

My goal in this study was to address the gap in the literature regarding how a line of duty death affects the perceptions of safety of police officers from small, rural agencies. Related topics included response times, types of violence, and advanced training and how this increases safety and officers' perceptions of safety while on calls for service. These topics are explored in the literature review to provide a rationale for the study and guidance about officers' increased or decreased perceived safety after a line of duty death. More evidence-based information about how a line of duty death impacts the perceptions of safety of officers may help surrounding departments increase perceived safety, which may positively influence social change.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this study, I examined how a line of duty death might influence the perceptions of safety of police officers in small, rural Texas police departments. With research showing how line of duty deaths affected large suburban departments, there was a noticeable gap in the literature regarding small, rural departments, especially those in Texas. Best et al. (2011) reported how line of duty deaths fell into a larger category of line of duty events outside the normal events or situations that officers experience. Such situations consist of critical incidents, violent situations, threats of termination and assault, and other events that cause an officer to experience emotional distress (Best et al., 2011). The types of violence an officer experiences and other risk factors derive from police response times, neighborhood characteristics, departmental organization, lack of training, and dynamics of calls for service. In conducting this literature review, I explored and evaluated all these types of violence to determine the areas of greatest concern. Each issue can directly affect the perceived safety of officers responding to calls for service (Best et al., 2011), and the emerging themes should be evaluated in further research.

For this study, an officer's perceived safety corresponded to the level of safety that the officer believed to exist. Additionally, I explored areas and experiences that alter an officer's perception of safety because of the more recent dangerous and deadly situations officers find themselves in. When officers understand the different types of intentional and unintentional police violence, and engage in community policing strategies, their perceived safety may increase when on calls for service (Sozer & Merlo,

2013). Research indicates that positive involvement by communities can alter society's negative perceptions of police and, in turn, provide a level of safety for officers that is not present in some settings (Sozer & Merlo, 2013). These altered societal perceptions may increase the likelihood that police will be seen as allies rather than threats, thereby decreasing violent acts committed against officers. This factor may influence an officer's perceived safety and should be explored to determine key factors and areas for further research (Gibbs et al., 2014).

Literature Search Strategy

In this literature review, I searched for books and peer-reviewed journal articles through the Walden University online library. Key terms included the following: *perceived safety*, *officer safety*, *line of duty death*, *small, rural police departments*, *deaths in small, rural police departments*, *Texas police departments*, *deaths in Texas small, rural police departments*, *effects of line of duty death in small, rural departments*, *type of police violence*, *violence toward police*, *ambush risk factors toward police and back up times*, *response times*, *neighborhood characteristics*, *mental health of officers*, *social disorganization theory*, *use of force*, and *training*. When evaluating types of violent situations, I used the following search terms: *intimate partner violence*, *traffic stops*, and *calls for service involving drugs and alcohol*. To research types of violence toward police officers, I used the following terms: *affective verses predatory violence*, *targeted violence*, *entrapment*, and *spontaneous ambushes*. I used the following academic databases: EBSCOhost, PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, ERIC, SAGE Journals, Criminal

Justice Database, ProQuest One Academic, , and SocINDEX with Full Text. I also used

Walden University Library's Thoreau Multi-Database Search tool. I focused on articles

published in the last 5 years, though I included a few articles from the last 7–10 years.

Many articles were cross-referenced, and once I could no longer locate new or relevant

articles, I concluded the literature review.

Theoretical Foundation

I used qualitative phenomenological methodology to explore the lived

experiences of officers after a line of duty death. In addition, I conducted the study using

a social constructivism perspective to subjectively interpret similar phenomena

experienced by officers. I used thematic analysis to determine emerging themes. In

conducting this qualitative study, I evaluated the phenomenon of whether, and how, a line

of duty death altered officers' perceived safety when on calls for service. The rationale

for using social constructionism was based on the study's focus on the lived experiences

of the officers and how these experiences affected their perceived safety. These

experiences may vary drastically from officer to officer; therefore, exploring the lived

experience of each participant is vital (Kachurik et al., 2013). I chose an ontological

approach to translate the multiple realities of participating officers and reflect their lived

experiences (Bain et al., 2014). A phenomenological researcher provides a collection of

meanings that significantly define a theme (Barrett & Janopaul-Naylor, 2016). To better

evaluate how an officer's death affects the perceived safety of other officers in small,

rural Texas police departments, I explored contributing factors through the literature review process.

<div style="text-align:center;">**Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts**</div>

Risk Factors Contributing to Police Violence

Talavera-Velasco et al. (2018) reported how risk factors for police could result from different obstacles causing stress while an officer is on a call for service, influencing the officer's mental health. Lee et al. (2016) discussed how police response times could create a level of stress for officers. Demers (n.d.) showed how it was difficult to compare response times because of the nature of service calls, the distance between officers, and multi-priority calls. Neighborhood characteristics can contribute to the risk of violence and line of duty deaths through an officer or department's rapport with neighborhoods along with how specific demographic groups in neighborhoods view police interactions (Lee et al., 2016). However, social disorganization theory and social control elements can be used to either weaken or strengthen this relationship, leading to officers answering calls for service in a more or less dangerous environment than before (Gibbs et al., 2018). Advanced training for officers is crucial for increasing their ability to handle stressful situations and awareness of their mental health; with this training, they may learn how critical incidents can affect their perceptions of safety while on calls for service (Scantlebury et al., 2017).

Response Times

Response times are a crucial component of police performance. Lee et al. (2016) reported that quick responses played a key role in police effectiveness and the quality of work officers could do while on calls for service. In addition, quick police response times resulted in officers and citizens not becoming victims of violence, creating safer environments for both groups (Lee et al., 2016). This finding can be associated with improved rapport with neighborhood characteristics and the overall idea of social disorganization theory.

Police response times also depend on the type of call, time of day, and area in which a call for service occurs. For small, rural police departments, where a limited number of officers are on call, the possibility of an officer injury may be higher because fewer officers are present and response times are longer (Lee et al., 2016). Demers (n.d.) found it was difficult to compare response times of police departments because of call classifications and multipriority call distribution systems. Classifications can differ between police jurisdictions because each department uses its own codes, making it more difficult for an outside agency to understand the level of emergency behind each call (Demers, n.d.). Demers posited that if there were a more uniform classification for calls for service, response times might decrease because all internal officers and outside departments would understand the codes and urgency of calls. However, Covington et al. (2014) explained that when multiple officers answered a call for service, the officer threat continuum increased because of the potential for lack of communication among officers.

Research has shown a lower risk of officer attack when only a single officer answers a call for service.

The level of violence at a scene and possible entrapment, spontaneous or otherwise, may place officers in dangerous and life-threatening situations (Schouten & Brennan, 2016). Despite that finding, Lee et al. (2016) said that when police responded faster, they increased the public's satisfaction with the police, creating safe havens for officers. Lee and Gibbs (2015) defined a police officer safe haven as a neighborhood that is stable, especially one in which officers form relationships with inhabitants and are seen regularly patrolling. Despite the possibility of safe havens for police, Covington et al. (2014) expressed concern that having more officers on calls for service increases the chances of a police attack. However, Lee and Gibbs (2015) mentioned that when police had an overall good rapport and relationship with a community, police attack rates decreased, regardless of other factors.

Neighborhood Characteristics

Lee et al. (2016) addressed how neighborhood characteristics could interfere with police response times, because some areas posed a greater danger than others. Characteristics of neighborhoods range from socioeconomic factors to racial and ethnic components (Gibbs et al., 2018). The components and characteristics of neighborhoods can differ even when their actual demographics are similar (Gibbs et al., 2018). Studies have shown shorter police response times in lower income areas and areas with large minority populations (Lee et al., 2016). Lee et al. explored how police response times

increased in areas considered disadvantaged, which resulted in higher arrest rates.

Evidence from Lee (2014) showed that economic factors and demographic indicators

could dictate police response times, which, in turn, could alter an officer's safety on a call

for service.

Social Disorganization Theory

Using social disorganization theory, researchers have been able to predict that

when a neighborhood has higher rates of poverty, housing instability, and unemployment,

its informal social control is lowered, which increases crime (Sampson, 2011). Such

neighborhoods tend to have higher rates of delinquency and criminal behavior because of

a lack of community willingness to contribute to social control, making response times

longer because of political biases against police (Lee, 2014). Research indicates that

social control is higher in more affluent and economically stable areas, thereby giving a

greater sense of safety to officers (Sampson, 2011). This finding shows that some

environments may be less biased and dangerous than others for officers responding to

calls for service (Lee et al., 2016). Cihan et al. (2012) used multilevel analysis to show

that even though social control was lessened, police response times were shorter in

disadvantaged areas—and arrest rates were higher—regardless of threats to officers.

Gibbs et al. (2018) found that weakening in social control increased crime, creating a

dangerous environment, including an increase in police assaults. Cihan (2014) used social

disorganization theory to show that disorganization, poverty, immigration concentration,

crime rate, and housing instability led to greater police presence and shorter response times.

Gibbs et al. (2018) discussed how higher poverty areas had higher rates of assault on police officers. Elevated rates of criminal and delinquent behavior increase police presence and the potential for assaults (Gibbs et al., 2018). Caplan et al. (2014) stated that the influence of specific environmental and socioeconomic factors was sparsely supported by empirical data because of the diverse nature of seemingly similar community settings. Research indicates that a higher level of criminal behavior increased the likelihood of police attacks, but police assaults might decrease if an officer had a good rapport with the community (Gibbs et al., 2018; Lee & Gibbs, 2015). This issue creates an environment in which police presence is higher than in other places, with a corresponding higher number of assaults on police (Caplan et al., 2014).

Trainings

According to TCOLE (2019), an individual must meet basic requirements to hold a peace officer license in Texas and become commissioned. The individual must first meet the basic requirements for enrollment and licensure set forth by TCOLE. They must then complete a basic licensing course and pass the state licensing exam (TCOLE, 2019). The final stage is to be appointed as an active officer by a law enforcement agency and start the probationary period in that agency. These basic requirements are mandated in Texas and must be met before an officer can be commissioned. Research has shown that large suburban departments have more opportunities for advanced training because their

budgets are greater than those of small departments (Lazaros, 2016); this advanced

training empowers officers with a more in-depth knowledge base when on calls for

service.

Scantlebury et al. (2017) found that educating officers about mental health

problems was a valuable tool; however, the evidence for this claim was sparse because

these trainings are produced by either mental health professionals or officers with

advanced mental health training, which is rare outside large departments. Scantlebury et

al. discussed how police were usually the first to get to a crisis involving someone who

might have mental health issues. Nevertheless, if police receive more advanced training

on how to handle crises and mental health problems, officer safety may increase, along

with the safety of other individuals involved. Other training opportunities include the use-

of-force continuum, social and community factors, and community policing strategies to

use when on calls for service (Cihan, 2014; Lazaros, 2016). Such training has been

shown to increase officers' awareness of their surroundings and understanding of how to

deal with offenders attempting to become violent or assault officers (Cihan et al., 2012).

Use of Force

Officers can use multiple types of lethal and nonlethal force (Lord, 2014). When

officers are in their basic police training, they learn the differences between these types of

force and the use-of-force continuum. The level to use depends on the situation, and

determining the level is practiced in academies (Lord, 2014). The use-of-force continuum

is important to all police officers when they engage with violent offenders, risky

situations, individuals with mental health issues, and traffic issues, when force may be needed. However, it is vital for officers to understand and learn how to apply the use-of-force continuum because its application could incite different responses from individuals on calls for service.

Training with various weapons and de-escalation techniques is one approach that may reduce the number of police assaults and increase the safety of officers and assailants. When weapons are involved, one crucial objective is to determine whether a weapon is present or only reported as present (Lee et al., 2016). Additionally, the date and time of day when an incident occurs may influence call for service times. Later in the evening, situational factors relating to alcohol or drug use (of which an officer may be unaware) can be involved (Roman & Reid, 2012). Roman and Reid (2012) explained that alcohol and drug consumption was greater on weekend nights after 6:00 p.m., increasing the likelihood of domestic violence and the danger for officers on calls for service. Lee et al. (2013a) reported that when weapons were involved in an incident, police response time and use of force by officers increased.

Options with less than lethal force must be exhausted before deadly force is employed, which officers learn in training sessions. These alternatives are taught at academies and learned during an officer's probationary period. Lethal or deadly force is force intended to cause death or serious bodily injury (Texas Penal Code, 2018). If an officer believes that deadly force should be used to protect themselves or someone else, and no other use of force will eliminate that threat, lethal force may be used. However, if

an officer does use lethal force, their department should have a protocol in place to care for both the officer and the victim or assailant.

Summary of Risk Factors

According to Talavera-Velasco et al. (2018), many factors can increase a police officer's risk of danger and reduce their perceived safety. Contributing factors—such as response time, neighborhood characteristics, and overall community satisfaction—are tied to officer and civilian safety and officers' perceptions of safety while on calls for service. Additionally, training in excess of normal state standards and force training are imperative for increasing an officer's perception of safety (Lord, 2014). Researchers should attempt to understand these risk factors to show how each directly and indirectly affects large departments. Even with the abundance of research reviewed, little to no research considered an officer's perception of safety after a line of duty death, and no research related to small, rural police departments. Therefore, I examined critical incidents that officers encounter, and violence during these incidents, to identify more themes in literature tied to line of duty deaths rather than risk factors.

Police Reactions to Critical Incidents

According to Best et al. (2011), police reactions to critical events depend on prior situations encountered. What makes an incident critical is how an officer reacts to it— by providing a critical response (Best et al., 2011). During such an experience, an officer's threat perception is the catalyst for whether they provide a critical response. Paton and Violanti (1996) reported that emotional reactions are seen as salient in police culture

because of the values and sense of invulnerability common among police; stigma might become attached to an officer based on any intense reactions they display toward an experience. Paton and Violanti defined emotional reactions as those outside the range of normal activities that a police officer experiences while on a call for service.

Research has brought multiple vague events to the attention of police culture so that they create emotional reactions. These include line of duty events that create a personal threat to an officer, lead to the death of the officer, or lead to a depressing or disturbing confrontation from which the officer experiences no personal threat (Best et al., 2011). Such critical incidents include the death of a child and fear of termination, shooting, charges, severe injury, or line of duty death (Best et al., 2011).

Zoellner et al. (2002) defined multiple categories of reactions an officer could experience that varied in intensity. Extreme reactions—depersonalization, derealization, and disorientation—occur during and after a critical line of duty event (Zoellner et al., 2002). Less extreme reactions include altered sense of time, tunnel vision, memory loss, and inattentional deafness (Zoellner et al., 2002). Ozer et al. (2003) reported that peritraumatic dissociation would occur at the time of an incident and acted as a strong predictor of possible posttraumatic stress disorder. Best et al. (2011) conveyed that even though these reactions were identified, the actual events causing these reactions differed for every police officer.

Research indicates that the leading cause of critical responses for police officers is a feeling of fear, helplessness, or horror during line of duty events, along with the

frequency with which an event occurs for a particular officer (Best et al., 2011). Thus, the more frequently an incident occurs to an officer, the more likely the officer is to become reactive and go from rational to intuitive decision making during a critical incident (Best et al., 2011). According to the reviewed research, no specific incident creates an emotional reaction from an officer, an no specific incident changes an officer's perception of safety; definitions of "emotional reaction" are broad, and the term is used vaguely to refer to overwhelming feelings and inability to cope (Best et al., 2011). The frequency of events, officers' sense of invulnerability, and officers' perceptions of critical line of duty events mean that the phenomenon of emotional reaction is unique to each officer.

Officer Deaths and Violence Against Police

According to the FBI (2020), statistics for officers killed and assaulted are listed in two ways: accidental and felonious. In 2019, 35 officers were killed using a handgun during felonious assaults, while 34 deaths were classified as accidental (FBI, 2020). Accidental deaths occur when there is no intent to kill an officer (FBI, 2020). These acts of violence can be classified as affective because they relate to circumstances occurring during an incident (Schouten & Brennan, 2016). Acts of felonious violence are intentional and predatory (FBI, 2020). These acts are intended to kill or seriously harm an officer, regardless of the circumstances (Schouten & Brennan, 2016). Predatory violence has different stages, evaluated in this study. The different types of violence that police officers experience are vital to define. I questioned whether officers' perceived safety

would be affected after violence against another police officer caused a line of duty death.

Affective Versus Predatory Violence

Talavera-Velasco et al. (2018) stated that there are many different types of situations and violent acts that can alter an officer's safety on a call for service. Affective and predatory violence are the multiple classifications created that explain the violence officers may experience in the hazardous environment police work creates (Schouten & Brennan, 2016). Schouten and Brennan (2016) explained that many acts of police violence are unplanned events that depend on the situation an officer and individual are in. Affective violence, or emotional violence, occurs because of the emotional state an assailant is in when encountering the police (Schouten & Brennan, 2016). These incidents are emotionally driven, and police can face dangerous situations because the nonofficer's decision to become aggressive can occur within seconds (Schouten & Brennan, 2016). Wright and Benson (2011) said that intimate partner violence (IPV) is one of the leading causes of officer assault, and such calls for service could be among the most dangerous because of the emotions at the scene between victim and perpetrator. These emotions derive from the relationship between the victim and perpetrator and situational factors in such a relationship that led to a domestic violence call (Lee et al., 2013b). In addition, traffic calls and calls for service to individuals under the influence of drugs or alcohol have situational risk factors that quickly lead to aggressive behavior toward police because offenders do not want to go to jail or victims do not want offenders arrested

(Covington et al., 2014; Lichtenberg & Smith, 2001). For these reasons, affective violence creates a dangerous and possibly deadly situation because the emotions tied to it can drastically change, which in turn creates an environment in which victims and perpetrators feel threatened and thus fight against what they perceive as the threat—the police (Cihan, 2014).

Predatory violence, or targeted violence, is planned violence against officers (Schouten & Brennan, 2016). This is based on hate or resentment of a specific officer or a public event or on personal animosity that a person holds toward police (Schouten & Brennan, 2016). Kaminski (2008) mentioned that offenders perceive police officers as suitable targets because offenders have little regard for the lives of officers or have higher motivation to flee than to comply with laws. This can also be culturally driven by social norms, demographics in an area, and overall belief systems in a culture (Schouten & Brennan, 2016). Borum et al. (1999) explained that earning membership in a club or gang is another reason not to comply with laws that results in predatory violence against police. Entrapment is a kind of predatory or targeted violence and creates serious and deadly situations for officers. Some individuals will plan an attack on officers by entrapping them in a place so that they are defenseless and unaware the attack is about to occur (Schouten & Brennan, 2016). Entrapment, predatory violence, and spontaneous violence are outward demonstrations of an individual's anger, rage, and pure hatred for the justice system that also establish publicly their belief system (Borum et al., 1999). Regardless of the violence an officer experiences or why an act of violence occurs,

officers must be vigilant and trained to make fast decisions to not only keep themselves

safe but also ensure the safety of others nearby (Lord, 2014).

Affective Violence

Affective violence includes acts usually unintentional in nature but fueled by the

situation faced by an officer and individual (Schouten & Brennan, 2016). Schouten and

Brennan (2016) explained that road rage or traffic situations are areas of concern

regarding unintentional violence toward officers. Lichtenberg and Smith (2001)

explained that traffic stops are among the most dangerous situations, depending on

factors such as time of day, weather, and whether an offender has consumed alcohol or

drugs. Active warrants for prior criminal behavior are another reason these calls of

service are among the deadliest (FBI, 2006; Lichtenberg & Smith, 2001). Violence

caused by alcohol and drugs can alter a person's cognition, enabling them to make

decisions they may not have made if sober (Schouten & Brennan, 2016). Domestic

violence calls are already among the deadliest for officers (Schouten & Brennan, 2016),

but mixing drugs and alcohol with IPV creates an explosive and violent environment in

which individuals can go from calm to aggressive within seconds, turning that violence

toward officers to keep their partners out of jail (Roman & Reid, 2012). These are the

main areas of affective violence for police officers, and each of these topics will be

explored separately in the following subsections.

An officer usually experiences no threat unless a 911 call is categorized as deadly;

however, once the officer arrives at the scene, the individual for whom service was called

can feel threatened, increasing the level of threat for the officer (Wright & Benson, 2011). Roman and Reid (2012) mentioned that time of day and time of week influence the danger to officers of calls for service. In turn, individuals fight back to preserve themselves, others, or property, resulting in violence toward officers. These three situations can seem calm and uneventful yet quickly turn violent and deadly. Schouten and Brennan (2016) discussed how immediate stressors, provocation by others, and outside stimulus could create dangerous environments. These calls for service can result in officers defusing situations or escalating them into aggressive attacks on officers, resulting in harm or line of duty death, thus making these calls unpredictable (Schouten & Brennan, 2016). As a result, these three categories of incident represent the most dangerous kinds of affective violence, and officers' perceptions of safety decrease while on these calls. As a result, officers' perceptions of safety after learning about a line of duty death, which have been the subject of little research, is worthy of examination.

Interpersonal Violence. Wright and Benson (2011) completed a multilevel analysis and found that domestic violence was a neighborhood factor contributing to social disorganization theory. Domestic violence calls occur most often in disadvantaged and higher immigration neighborhoods; however, community factors do not necessarily influence IPV (Wright & Benson, 2011). Domestic violence most often occurs interracially and between individuals of opposite genders (Lee et al., 2013b). Domestic violence can also be influenced by situational factors, such as the time at which an event occurred (e.g., daytime, weekday, or weekend; Wright & Benson, 2011). Factors such as

race, gender, socioeconomic issues, socioeconomic status, household instability, and other service calls can influence the level of danger on a call for service. Covington et al. (2014) stated that serious assaults on officers during IPV calls usually occur in situations in which individuals other than victims call 911 for help.

IPV occurs in all neighborhoods around the world (Wright & Benson, 2011). Wright and Benson (2011) reported that community conditions did not necessarily influence IPV, but neighborhood characteristics and structure did contribute. Community-level processes and conditions influenced factors such as street crimes, but the researchers were unsure whether they affected IPV (Wright & Benson, 2011). The researchers determined that community crime initiatives affected crimes in public (Wright & Benson, 2011). If the control of violence is not a shared value falling under such a community crime initiative, IPV rates may be higher but underreported (Covington et al., 2014).

In turn, these rates may be influenced by neighborhood factors. IPV is directly tied to neighborhood factors and can be tied to a neighborhood's structural characteristics, such as race and economic makeup (Lee et al., 2013b). IPV can also be the result of drug and alcohol use, which creates dangerous situations for officers (Wright & Benson, 2011). Wright and Benson (2011) found that structural characteristics affected the values of the community, increasing or decreasing IPV. In addition, violence typically occurs more at the end of the week and in evenings (Roman & Reid, 2012). Considering these factors, IPV calls for service can be among the deadliest an officer answers because

the inhibiting factors of the violence and the perceived threat a victim senses of a loved

one being taken away can create hostile, violent, and lethal circumstances for all

individuals involved (Wright & Benson, 2011).

Traffic. According to Lichtenberg and Smith (2001), traffic stops are among the

most dangerous situations an officer can be involved in because of the multitude of

different factors surrounding the officer. An officer's safety on the side of a highway or

road can create risky and deadly circumstances based on the time of day, weather, line of

sight, and drivers operating other vehicles on the road (Lichtenberg & Smith, 2001).

Lichtenberg and Smith said that it is not uncommon for a routine traffic stop to escalate

to a violent and deadly situation. However, little research shows a direct correlation

between traffic stops and police assaults resulting from stops (Lichtenberg & Smith,

2001). Cihan (2014) demonstrated that traffic and police violence could alter police

response times, possibly leading to situational factors. These situational factors can

inadvertently affect officer safety when backup officer response times are lengthened by

traffic (Cihan, 2014; Cihan et al., 2012). These assaults are viewed as affective violence

because there is no planning in the violent act toward the officer. These acts of violence

occur either during a traffic call or because an officer cannot reach their partners because

of traffic (Lichtenberg & Smith, 2001).

Drugs and Alcohol. Affective violence directed against police officers is also

associated with the use of drugs or alcohol by assailants before officers reach the scenes

of calls (Covington et al., 2014). Often affective violence occurs unintentionally but

receives stimulation from situations such as IPV and situations involving drugs and alcohol (Schouten & Brennan, 2016). Roman and Reid (2012) discussed the common tie between domestic violence calls and incidents related to drugs and alcohol, which also have a significant domestic component. These calls are more common in the evening and weekends because drugs and alcohol are used at higher rates during these times (Roman & Reid, 2012). According to Covington et al. (2014), individuals who have recently consumed alcohol are more likely to assault a police officer, as are individuals in their own homes, which officers commonly encounter when visiting homes on domestic violent calls. Wright and Benson (2011) addressed the intensification of IPV or domestic violence through the use of substances, which increases the risk to police and victims. Alcohol and drugs are significant contributing factors for many crimes and violent acts because consumption of these substances often lowers offenders' inhibitions (FBI, 2020; Stetser, 2001).

Predatory Violence

Purposeful violence against police is predatory violence (Schouten & Brennan, 2016). The FBI (2020) defined acts of felonious violence against officers as those that are intentional and predatory in nature and meant to cause harm or death. This type of violence entails creating a plan and methodically preparing for the time at which the plan is carried out (Schouten & Brennan, 2016). The methodical preparation time may be long or short with the overall goal of the event being to harm or kill police officers and possibly civilians (Schouten & Brennan, 2016). The goals can be those of either the

perpetrator or someone else creating the plan on behalf of the perpetrator. Borum et al.

(1999) stated that earning gang membership by demonstrating loyalty is a major reason

for predatory violence. Expressing revenge, anger, or dissatisfaction with justice are also

reasons for predatory violence directed against police (Borum et al., 1999).

Targeted violence includes multiple kinds of purposefully violent and deadly acts

directed against police. Kaminski (2008) stated that individuals motivated by their own

illegal behaviors and desire to avoid jail perceive police officers as suitable targets.

Entrapment ambushes and spontaneous ambushes are the two leading kinds of targeted

violence into which officers walk without realizing (Borum et al., 1999). Unlike affective

violence, predatory violence lacks concrete causes other than the underlying motivation

to harm or kill an officer. Everyone planning these attacks has a different purpose and

reason for their attack. The FBI (2006) found that a perpetrator who assaults a police

officer is usually in good health but has a criminal history. Stetser (2001) reported that

offenders who assault or attack officers have often used drugs or alcohol recently,

lowering their inhibitions. Borum et al. (1999) argued that criminals who engage in acts

of targeted violence against police usually have some form of hate, resentment, vendetta,

or cultural belief driving them, which officers in these situations may be unaware of.

Multiple types of attacks fall under the category of predatory violence, including

entrapment and spontaneous ambushes (Borum et al., 1999). Covington et al. (2014)

indicated that the situations creating the most violent environments for officers are those

initiated by officers. Borum et al. (1999) explained the differences between entrapment

and spontaneous attacks. The main differences are in motivation and how the violence occurs (Borum et al., 1999). Kaminski (2008) associated acts of targeted violence with economic depression, whereas Kent (2010) found that racial income inequity drove offenders to be more violent toward police. Motivation can include a variety of factors, including social demographics, culture, religion, and the beliefs of individuals. Attacks are most common in groups with the highest densities of individuals with criminal backgrounds (Kaminski, 2008). Roman and Reid (2012) discussed the results of an FBI study from 2006 that suggest that the death rate of officers from assaults and attacks is higher from Thursday to Saturday.

Entrapment Ambushes. Entrapment occurs when a person is lured or stalked into an enclosed environment for the purpose of controlling them (Borum et al., 1999). Schouten and Brennan (2016) said that these victims are initially enticed into some form of trap or enclosure where an assailant assaults them. Covington et al. (2014) stated that weapons are important components of police assaults, but when weapons are lost or unavailable, offenders can also assault officers using their hands, feet, or other body parts. The choice of weapon is usually methodically considered as part of the overall plan (Schouten & Brennan, 2016). The location is often chosen before the assault and is one the victim cannot easily escape (Schouten & Brennan, 2016).

When an officer is a victim of entrapment, they will not usually know what is going on until the entrapment and assault are about to occur or the assault is already underway (Schouten & Brennan, 2016). Kent (2010) said that the demographic

characteristics of an individual committing an assault influence the individual's belief systems and rationale for entrapment of an officer. The use of planned and goal-oriented assault makes entrapment violence dangerous and likely deadly for officers (Schouten & Brennan, 2016). Entrapment is a sufficient but not necessary indicator of predatorial and targeted violence (Borum et al., 1999). An assailant may stalk a law enforcement officer instead of luring them to a specific location (Schouten & Brennan, 2016). The term "targeted violence" encompasses a wider range of purposeful assaults on law enforcement officers than "entrapment" does (Schouten & Brennan, 2016).

    Spontaneous Ambushes. Unlike entrapment, spontaneous ambushes occur in the moment and usually out of fear. Stetser (2001) stated that drugs and alcohol lower an individual's ability to make rational decisions and increase the likelihood that the individual runs away or attacks an officer to avoid jail. Schouten and Brennan (2016) found that these attacks were either unplanned or did not include a long period of planning. Such attacks occur at the commencement of an encounter and hinge on opportunity (Fachner & Thorkildsen, 2015). Encounters that can lead to these reactive and impulsive acts include arrests, domestic violence situations, drug-related encounters, and mental health issues (Borum et al., 1999). Spontaneous ambushes are in line with affective violence; people do not purposefully plan these events but make quick decisions resulting in assault or death of officers (Borum et al., 1999). However, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, gender, and criminal behavior contribute to spontaneous violence toward police.

Summary of Literature on Violence Against Police

Police officers are injured or killed in the line of duty for many reasons, with no single theme, risk factor, or act of violence dominating the others (Talavera-Velasco et al., 2018). Nevertheless, the themes are associated with the risk factors and types of violence—both affective and predatory—that officers encounter while on calls for service. The factors can lead to dangerous situations for all police in the line of duty; however, most information was obtained by researchers using traditional analysis in large suburban departments. They reported statistically grounded information or explored a specific incident or the characteristics of an officer or perpetrator (Gibbs et al., 2018).

These studies show mixed results because situational and risk factors vary among departments, cities, and states, the characteristics of which differ considerably. Schouten and Brennan (2016) discussed how the individuals officers encounter on calls for service might lack respect for others or just tend toward violence. Covington et al. (2014) pointed out that situations involving drugs and alcohol are more likely to result in violence, whereas Lichtenberg and Smith (2001) stated that traffic stops are among the deadliest calls for service. Wright and Benson (2011) compiled data on IPV and found that domestic violence calls are overwhelmingly the most dangerous because of the mentalities of victims and assailants. Demographic and socioeconomic factors also determine the danger of a call for service; however, even though multiple cities may share similar demographic composites, this finding does not mean they will have the same characteristics within those demographics (Gibbs et al., 2018). Gibbs et al. (2018)

found that differences in characteristics and risk factors create dangerous and risky situations for police officers on calls for service.

The different levels of police violence described by Schouten and Brennan (2016) consist of affective and predatory violence. In this section, I explored different subtypes of these types of violence, such as spontaneous violence and entrapment, and explained how these types vary along with offender mentality. Social structure, neighborhood, and individuals' values regarding police have emerged as leading factors of violence against police officers (Lee, 2014). The beliefs, social norms, socioeconomic status, and demographics associated with an area may influence the community or police violence encountered (Lee et al., 2016). All these acts of violence can turn deadly for officers who operate outside their normal range of experience on calls for service (Best et al., 2011). Paton and Violanti (1996) found that the emotional reactions of an officer to prior calls for service can influence their behavior on each new call, which can decrease their perceived safety on that call. Best et al. (2011) stated that when an officer feels a personal threat, the feeling can alter their perception of safety. Lord (2014) stated that advanced police training can better equip an officer with skills and increase their vigilance, thereby also increasing their perception of safety.

Summary and Transition

Evidence-based research provided some information about police risk factors, violence against police, and police training; however, research is lacking for small, rural departments, and I found no literature for small, rural Texas police departments. What

was known was that police were assaulted and killed in various settings and for many reasons. I questioned whether a line of duty death would affect an officer's perceived safety, which was unexplored in the literature; that is the gap this study contributes to. Each officer's experience was a personal phenomenon. This personal lived experience was one that each officer held alone, regardless of the situation, where they were, or what they were doing when they found out about the line of duty death. The feeling of perceived safety was for each officer to hold under their Kevlar vest and was one that had not been shown in rural police departments, especially in Texas.

In Chapter 3, I describe the research method, design, and rationale of this qualitative phenomenological study and why using a social construction perspective is best for interpreting the subjective meaning of officers' lived experiences. I explain the RQs and why the chosen method best fits the topic. In addition, I address the role of the researcher, participant selection, and how officers participated in the study. The informed consent process and ethical procedures are also provided—in particular, the means of ensuring confidentiality, which was key to the participants answering the questions honestly. Last, the trustworthiness of the study is discussed.

Chapter 3: Research Method

This study's main purpose was to identify whether the perceived safety of officers in small, rural Texas police departments was affected after a line of duty death. I did not concentrate on accidental death because I targeted risk factors encompassing the different types of violence officers experience and how these affect their perceived safety. Chapter 2 revealed that acts of violence against police officers occur either in the heat of the moment or through intentional planning. According to the FBI (2020), acts of intentional violence toward police are felonious in nature and meant to cause harm or death, and it is this kind of violence that I explored in this study. In Chapter 3, I begin by identifying phenomenology as the best research design to examine the lived experiences of officers and their perceived safety after a line of duty death. Next, I explain the rationale for conducting a qualitative phenomenological inquiry. I define the role of the researcher and study participants and describe how participants were selected. I explain the role ethical considerations played along with the informed consent process in ensuring that participants' anonymity was protected. Last, I clarify the thematic analysis of the data and define the trustworthiness of the research.

Research Design and Rationale

The RQs for this study were as follows:

RQ1: What does perceived safety mean to a police officer?

RQ2: Does the type of call for service alter a police officer's perceived safety?

RQ3: How does a line of duty death affect an officer's perception of safety when on a call for service?

I conducted a qualitative phenomenological inquiry using an ontological approach. In doing so, I explored whether an officer's perceived safety changes after a line of duty death within a 40-mi (64-km) radius of their department. Applying the qualitative method allowed for the discovery of a complex phenomenon specifically related to law enforcement officers. Bansal et al. (2018) explained that qualitative research can answer more complex questions because it requires a researcher to interpret data to determine themes, patterns, and insights. For this study, I asked participants three questions and determined patterns using NVivo (Version 12). These nonreducible data were imperative because the lived experiences of these officers would be less impactful without their genuine answers to the RQs (Bansal et al., 2018). After the patterns were interpreted, the data were synthesized, counted, and digitized to provide multiple avenues for others to review (see Bansal et al., 2018).

During this process, I explored the meaning and lived experience of each individual participating in the research (Adams & van Manen, 2017). This method provided insight into the lived experiences of others for the purpose of examining the meaning behind these phenomena for each individual (Adams & van Manen, 2017). For this study, the phenomenon was an officer hearing about a line of duty death and whether this altered the officer's perceived safety on a call for service. None could answer these difficult questions other than law enforcement officers. No officer could share what

another officer had experienced or how their behavior had changed after the line of duty
death.

Answers could vary greatly as a result of factors in participants' lives, such as
family support, faith, relationships, and departmental encouragement. In later chapters, I
share the details and insight I obtained from this qualitative phenomenological research
project to help fill the gap in the literature regarding evaluation of perceived safety of
officers after a line of duty death in small, rural Texas police departments. This research
could provide valuable information to all departments because it could shed light on how
to aid these officers after a line of duty death. Aiding officers could also positively effect
social change within local and state police departments.

Because this study was a qualitative phenomenological inquiry, I used an
ontological approach to value each participant's reality and personal characteristics (see
Creswell, 2017). Kachurik et al. (2013) stated that officers experience the same events in
different ways and translate calls for service differently. I used a qualitative
phenomenological research approach, evaluating each participating officer's specific
phenomenon and lived experience through an ontological lens. This allowed for the
exploration of multiple realities, which could help fill the identified gap in the literature.

Other Methods

A grounded theory inquiry would allow the development of a theory about why a
line of duty death would influence the perception of officer safety (Jamali, 2019).
Ratnapalan (2019) mentioned how new theories would develop when using Glaser's

version of grounded theory, allowing for further research in these areas. Goulding (2005) stated that once a researcher recognizes an area of research, the researcher should engage in that field as soon as possible. The literature is not exhausted until after the research is fully completed. Grounded theory would be a good design to use in future studies. The themes that emerge, along with the data from the research, will create a reference theory. These themes could be researched and broken down, creating new topics to develop and bringing to light new areas of research. Officers might have withheld information while answering questions as participants in this study. I thus protected officers' anonymity in this study to give participants the confidence to answer questions and thus gain valuable information that may otherwise have never been known. Raw, unaltered, and truthful answers are needed regarding the perception of safety after a line of duty death in small, rural Texas departments before accurate theories can be developed.

I considered a narrative approach, because this would be a way for an officer to tell their story, which becomes the raw data for a researcher (Roest et al., 2021). By conducting an interview, a researcher elicits a story (narrated experience) from individuals, providing an oral history about an event. These officers could write down their experiences in a story-like format, including details of their experiences after learning of a line of duty death. The officers' stories become the data, and a researcher then reviews and analyzes the data to determine themes (Butina, 2015). This approach is ideal for a small group of officers who experienced a specific event. This approach would

thus be excellent to use with officers who experience an ambush because of the nature and details of the event.

The ethnographic research design emerged from the field of anthropology and involves examining the everyday experiences of a culture by interviewing members and observing them as a whole (Creswell, 2013). Ongoing participation and observations provide researchers with the information they need to evaluate cultures. Creswell (2017) asserted that ethnographic research makes sense of critical incidents along with every day and surprising cultural experiences and issues in the daily lives of individuals. The focus is on small-scale societies and patterns of actions deemed socially or culturally grounded (Goulding, 2005). Hierarchy and social disorganization may contribute to increases in neighborhood poverty rates, housing instability, and unemployment and decreases in informal social control, all of which may result in crime and violence directed at police (Sampson, 2011). To use this design, a researcher would evaluate a variety of different departments because police culture differs from department to department. The goal of this study was to compare the lived experience of multiple officers serving in small, rural departments. I opted against using an ethnographic design for this reason.

Case study is the most common method of qualitative research because it is used to gather detailed and in-depth information about a subject (Creswell, 2013). A case study researcher collects data from numerous sources, using an explanatory or exploratory aid in the description of the research. A single person, event, or group is explored based on the phenomena they have experienced (Creswell, 2013). Gibson et al.

(2019) explained that an exploratory case study occurs when research is needed to explore a topic and get a general idea of what is happening in an area. A researcher conducting a descriptive case study aims to define or describe a problem. For this study, the problem area of concern was perceived safety after a line of duty death. The overall problem was already defined. However, little to no research had been conducted on small, rural Texas police departments, hence this study contributed to that gap in the literature.

After close evaluation, I determined that the aforementioned designs did not fit or meet my goal. Many of the designs focused on groups, cultures, and experiences. What made phenomenological theory so valuable in this study was it enabled exploration of the lived experiences of many officers from multiple departments and cultures. Also, no one officer in the study knew the others. Because the gap in the literature was large (i.e., literature concerning small, rural police departments in Texas was nonexistent), I wanted to include participants from throughout Texas.

Role of the Researcher

In a qualitative study, the role of the researcher can be extensive because the researcher can be considered the investigator, interpreter, and author of the study (Creswell, 2013). During this study, my role was to choose multiple police departments and interview participants who met the set criteria. I determined the qualifications of the individuals participating in the study, because set criteria needed to be met to ensure the reliability and validity of the research. Once the research was completed and the open-

ended interviews—either oral or written—were over, I evaluated the answers and results using NVivo (Version 12) to reveal emerging themes.

During this process, I had to stay conscious of bias, presumptions, and prejudices. Kelly et al. (2017) explained that reflexivity is critical self-reflection of the background, position, and assumptions that could impact the research process. Considering this, I ensured that I had no relationships with the participants and that they did not know that my spouse was in law enforcement. Additionally, the participants only knew information about me based on the details in the informed consent email, which only included my first and last names, phone number, and Walden University email address. I sought not to share details of my personal life with the participants during phone interviews, and I asked them only the interview questions to keep my identity secure and to ensure their anonymity.

Kelly et al. (2017) maintained that prejudice and presumptions are two areas that need to be acknowledged in qualitative research. I stayed aware of bias and critically reviewed my prejudice and presumptions as I considered the answers the officers provided. I took into consideration all officers' lived experiences and their personal phenomena after a line of duty death. I was careful to not allow personal feelings to cloud the interpretation of the research and themes provided through NVivo (Version 12). Therefore, I used reflexivity, self-awareness skills, and journaling to reduce these biases and keep the research free from negative ideations. In my journals, I wrote any positive or negative feelings I was having along with expressions of self-awareness and respect of

how others might perceive these events. I had to critically examine my own bias in relation to the findings to ensure that the themes provided were obtained strictly through the lens of the officers. My aim was to discover the true lived experiences and beliefs of these officers in an unbiased manner.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

Creswell (2017) recommended three to 13 participants in a qualitative study. This study involved multiple rural Texas police departments, each of which had 12–15 officers. The multiple departments researched were approximately 40 mi (64 km) away from the department where the line of duty death occurred. This geographic location allowed for multiple rural Texas officers to participate in the research. To participate, officers had to not have been directly involved with a line of duty death.

I used a criterion sampling process because of the phenomenon researched and the criteria that needed to be met to have a meaningful sample. The participants had to have been commissioned peace officers in Texas. I included an approximate distance criterion. Police departments could be within 40 mi (64 km) of each other but not closer than 15 mi (24 km) to one another. Last, officers who participated could not have had firsthand experience of a line of duty death. For the purposes of this research, firsthand experience of a line of duty death would entail knowing, personally or professionally, the officer killed. Participating officers also could not have been part of the line of duty event, been on the honor guard, or assisted on the call for service during which the officer was killed.

Duan et al. (2015) explained that purposeful sampling entailed choosing participants based on preselected factors. In this study, the factors were set by these criteria. I used a criterion sampling process to purposefully select participants. Saturation was reached when no other answers could be found from the sample.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I used a phenomenological inquiry with an ontological approach to explore the participating officers' lived experiences of phenomena using open-ended interview questions. The participants answered the questions over the phone or via email to ensure confidentiality. The officers in the study did not know how other officers in their departments answered the questions, because all identity and contact information was protected. Email responses and phone interviews were used rather than in-person meetings to protect the identities of the research participants. I determined that phenomenological inquiry with an ontological approach was the best way to gain the most valuable and truthful data possible.

I emailed prospective participants, using their public work email addresses, within the geographical restriction and explained the nature of the study and the goal of the research. The initial email contained the informed consent form. The email explained the goal of the research, provided the procedure, provided sample questions, provided a time frame, explained the voluntary nature of the study, and provided the risks and benefits of the study. The initial email provided the survey questions to determine whether the officer met the criteria to participate, described whether payment was involved, provided

privacy facts, and described how to contact the researcher to ask further questions. The officers were thanked for their time and service regardless of their decisions to voluntarily participate.

I asked for either a phone number or a personal email address. Once I obtained a response, I called or sent the survey (see Appendix A) and interview questions (see Appendix B). I provided my phone number in the initial email. I used criterion sampling for the participants; the criteria were listed in the informed consent form and survey. I assigned the participants pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. I explained the name assignment process in the initial email.

The officers had the choice of responding to the interview questions in writing or orally. In the initial email, I disclosed how the anonymity of the participants would be maintained and explained that if they felt uncomfortable responding to a question, they could leave it blank or answer the questions over the phone. The interview process was conducted via phone to ensure the anonymity of the participants. Likewise, officers had various schedules; thus, by conducting these interviews over the phone, the officers' work schedules were considered. Once the interviews were completed, I ended contact with participants, except to promise to provide them with a copy of the dissertation, if they desired one.

Data Analysis Plan

Qualitative research offers scope for data analysis from interpretation to description based on arising themes and patterns (Terry & Braun, 2017). My thematic

analysis focused on the officers' lived experiences of perceived safety after a line of duty death. I identified, interpreted, and provided themes within the qualitative data (Sundler et al., 2019). The analytical process of research is usually dictated by the assumptions and epistemology of the research (Bansal et al., 2018). Braun et al. (2021) said that using thematic analysis involved repeated involvement in the data set, thereby creating and identifying patterns. These patterns of data shed light on the RQs and include excerpts and vivid accounts of participants' responses (Braun et al., 2021). These interpretive accounts of the participants' lived experiences and the themes within their responses allow a researcher to go beyond description and rich summary of the participants' own phenomena and lived experiences, creating consistent themes that answer the RQs (Braun et al., 2021).

I organized data through NVivo (Version 12), which created themes for review. According to Creswell (2017), NVivo can organize data while saving the results in a database. I put the information obtained from the written and verbal questions into the NVivo system and compared it to the answers from the officers. I included excerpts and statements from the participants, allowing the reader to understand these lived experiences through the lens of the officers.

Creswell (2017) recommended three to 13 participants in a qualitative study. Guest et al. (2020) described data saturation as occurring when no additional data are being collected and properties and categories can be created. The goal was to obtain 10 officers to participate, unless saturation were reached beforehand. Once saturation was

reached, I put answers into NVivo (Version 12) to populate the results; after that, I

double-checked the results. Creswell (2017) mentioned that phenomenological

researchers explore the common meaning and themes between participants and answers

from open-ended interviews. I contributed to the gap in literature while providing the

sought for unknown information. My goal was to show whether a line of duty death

would affect the perceived safety of officers from small, rural Texas police departments.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Because qualitative research does not include a metric to test for validity and

reliability, researchers must demonstrate that studies establish trustworthiness using four

categories: credibility, transferable, confirmability, and dependability (Shenton, 2004).

For credibility, I relied on participants to relate their lived experiences after a line of duty

death. I trusted participants to provide credible data. Transferability was established by

ensuring the privacy and confidentiality of participants, which was achieved by coding

participants' interview answers. Participants' information was kept secure; however, the

study is replicable. I either converted the typed responses into a Microsoft Word

document or typed handwritten responses into the document myself to safeguard

dependability. All headings and styles were the same to ensure that once I entered the

data into NVivo (Version 12), the correct themes emerged using thematic analysis.

Throughout the data collection process, I checked and rechecked the data to ensure all

information was formatted correctly. I not only entered the data into NVivo but also

checked the results against my handwritten results to ensure errors were not made and distortions were not found.

Because of the subjective nature of qualitative research, showing reliability and validity was vital to providing ethical and sound research to fill the gap in the literature and positively influence social change. Creswell (2017) indicated that reliability shows consistency in research if completed again. For this study, I used criterion sampling to set forth a specific list of criteria for participants. The strict criteria set forth enhanced the reliability of the research. However, a dilemma could result from the state in which the research was conducted, the number of line of duty deaths in the area, and the level of backup.

Validity indicates whether information received us accurately measured (Creswell, 2013). I used saturation and reflexivity in this research, along with a double check of the research once the NVivo (Version 12) results were in. A comparison of the results showed the validity of the research. Reflexivity was used to maintain a sense of self-evaluation of the research stance and positivity, which could influence the results, altering the reliability and validity of the research.

An ethical concern might arise if an officer inquired about my relationship with an officer or another department. Because I have a husband in law enforcement, I knew this situation might lead to officers modifying answers in a manner they believed was most beneficial to the study. I kept all identifying information other than my name,

Walden University email address, and cell phone number private so that my identity and

the identity of my family could not be disclosed or found.

Additionally, my current employment by, and involvement with, multiple law

enforcement agencies and court environments could create ethical concerns. To ensure

this did not create bias, I did not conduct any research with departments I had had any

contact with or knew any officers from. A small disclaimer on the confidentiality email

addressed this concern upfront, asking participants not to ask questions about personal or

professional involvement with county, state, or local police agencies to avoid

jeopardizing the research. Personal information remained confidential because it might

interfere with the answers provided to the RQs.

Personal bias was an ethical issue that I needed to address. I addressed my bias,

presumptions, and prejudices by using reflexivity, critical self-reflection, and journaling.

Kelly et al. (2017) discussed how the use of critical self-reflection regarding a

researcher's background, position, and assumptions could lead to far less bias within

research. Because I have been to multiple officers' funerals and had family members on

honor guards, this was a necessity. Based on these ethical concerns, journaling and self-

awareness skills were used to set aside biases, especially while evaluating research

results.

Ethical Procedures

I followed the guidelines of Walden University's IRB in conducting the study and

obtained its approval before collecting data (approval no. 04-27-21-0265144). In the

informed consent form, each participant was asked to respond to the initial email with their personal email or phone number before they answered any questions. By responding to the email, they provided their informed consent to participate in the research. An additional step was taken to ensure confidentiality, which was that participants told the researcher how they would like to participate. No identifying information was asked for because of the nature of the questions and the information that could be revealed. The questionnaires were numbered "PO1," "PO2," "PO3," and so on once participants answered the questions. This process ensured the questionnaires and data remained separate and ensured all questionnaires were returned and accounted for.

The interview process was completed over the phone or via email to safeguard confidentiality and make every attempt to work around officers' work schedules. I used this process to eliminate any harm from providing truthful answers to the interview questions. I secured all documents, written or otherwise, using in a double lock system, which was a filing cabinet located in my private office. The interviews were conducted away from departments while officers were off duty. The goal was to aid in maintaining confidentiality and unbiased feelings so that the officers could remain truthful without someone overhearing their answers. I conducted all phone interviews at my home office outside working hours to also ensure confidentiality of officers' answers.

I explained to participants that it was my role to protect their privacy and that their identities would be kept confidential. I explained to each participant that I would not use their personal information, rank, or police department name for any purpose. I

informed the participants that if I were to share this data set with another researcher in the future, I would remove any identifying details to ensure confidently was maintained. I explained that data would be secured via a double lock system in a filing cabinet located in my private office.

I explained the risk of the minor discomfort and how it would interfere with their daily life in the following ways: psychologically, relationally, and professionally. In addition, risks could include stress and revealing personal things about experiences or feeling vulnerable when answering questions; even though I attempted to limit the risk with the survey questions, I ensured that participants knew there was still risk. If participants decided to no longer be involved or wanted to leave the research process, this step was explained in the initial email as follows:

> If at any time you decided you no longer want to participate you just simple do not send your response to the interview questions. If you had already sent the responses, please then send an email to the address, you sent your responses stating, "I no longer wish to participate" and your answers and personal code will be deleted and you will not be asked any further questions. If there are questions you do not feel comfortable answering, simply put NA, for the answer and the researcher will skip over that question.

Four free counseling sessions with a fully licensed therapist were offered. The consent form contained the therapist's contact information.

Summary

Eliason (2011) discussed how the death of an officer would affect individuals regardless of their current police officer status. In Chapter 3, I explained the best research design and identified the best reason a phenomenological study would showcase the lived experiences of officers and their perceived safety after a line of duty death. The rationale for conducting a qualitative phenomenological inquiry, the definitions of the researcher and participants of the study, and how participants were selected were explained. I also examined the ethical considerations and the informed consent process in relation to ensuring the participants' anonymity and confidentiality were protected. Last, the reason I chose a thematic analysis of the data and the trustworthiness of the research were explained to lend depth to analysis of the data. I attempted to fill the gap in current literature while increasing social change in the policing community. In Chapter 4, the results of the research are examined along with the analysis, data collection, and sample of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to examine whether, and how, a line of duty death in one police department affects the perceived safety of officers on calls for service in surrounding small, rural departments in Texas. Risk factors such as neighborhood characteristics, social disorganization, response times, use of force, stress, violence, and lack of training increase an officer's risk on calls for service, influence their mental health, and potentially influence their perceived safety (Talavera-Velasco et al., 2018). Obstacles embedded within the risk factors include types of violence, backup response times, times of shift work, types of calls for service, and line of duty deaths (Best et al., 2011). Schouten and Brennan (2016) indicated that some acts of violence are unplanned because of the vastly different situations officers find themselves in, including those involving affective and predatory violence. Predatory violence, which is purposeful, expands on targeted violence, such as entrapment ambushes and spontaneous ambushes (Schouten & Brennan, 2016). Best et al. (2011) found that officers responded differently to calls for service based on risk, type of call, violence associated with a call, and prior experiences with similar calls.

During their interviews, participating officers identified the meaning of perceived safety; their responses answered the first RQ. The second RQ asked whether the types of calls officers went on altered their perceptions of safety; all 10 participants asserted that these calls altered their perceived safety. In the interviews, the officers referred to dangerous circumstances involving uncertainty and risk factors. Responses relating to

RQ3 demonstrated circumstances and types of calls affecting officers' perceptions of safety. The officers in the study described circumstances that influenced their perception of safety, focusing on a line of duty death and the environment of that death. Critical incidents such as shootings, severe injuries, child deaths, and line of duty deaths as well as the time of day of incidents, prior critical incidents, and perceptions of these events underpinned the five themes that were identified. In conducting this study, I sought to answer the following qualitative RQs:

RQ1: What does perceived safety mean to a police officer?

RQ2: Does the type of call for service alter a police officer's perceived safety?

RQ3: How does a line of duty death affect an officer's perception of safety when on a call for service?

I begin this chapter with a brief description of the setting of the research and demographics of the participants. I review the RQs along with the codes that emerged, thereby introducing the themes I created through the data collection process. The data collection process is explained, including why open-ended questions were used to obtain information about the officers' lived experiences and their perceived safety. The data analysis procedure was important because it created a platform for the coding of the officers' lived experiences. In the Data Analysis section, I describe the thematic analysis I employed using NVivo (Version 12) to gather the themes of the research. Next, I address the topic of trustworthiness in terms of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability; this information is key not only to recreating the study but also to

how this study establishes trustworthiness using these four elements. I present the results

in the form of themes that answer the RQs along with a large list of codes, which I used

to determine themes of the research. I define each theme and support it with excerpts

from the data and from literature congruent with officers' responses. This chapter

includes a detailed discussion of all themes, which are organized according to RQ.

Finally, I describe how these data findings address the gap in literature.

Setting

I conducted the interviews when participating officers were off duty and at

locations of their choosing. I asked for participants' personal email addresses to ensure

confidentiality because departments have access to employee email, and I wanted the

officers to feel as secure and comfortable as possible. The participants received an email

on their public work email addresses. This email asked them to respond using their

private email addresses or phone numbers; their choice determined how the open-ended

questions would be asked. To ensure that the participants were safe and all answers,

written or oral, were confidential, I conducted interviews from my private home office. In

each interview, I asked the 10 interview questions. The participants elaborated as needed.

There were no personal or organizational conditions mentioned at the time of the study

because each officer gave me a time outside work hours to call their number, and I only

called during that time. In addition, the responses to the email were timely, and no calls

had to be rescheduled, which allowed me to conclude that no conditions hindered the

participants from answering these questions, either by email or over the phone. COVID-

19 was not a factor because all interviews took place over the phone or in written form. I secured the data in a double-locked filing cabinet in my home office.

Demographics

According to Creswell (2017), the sample size for a phenomenological study should be 10–12 or as large as needed for saturation of the data to occur. In this study, data saturation occurred after interviewing 10 police officers, because the answers were consistently the same. To participate in the study, each participant had to meet criteria, and their department had to meet a criterion too. The multiple departments researched were approximately 40 mi (64 km) away from the department where the line of duty death occurred. All the participants were commissioned peace officers in Texas and had no firsthand experience of a line of duty death. Firsthand experience consisted of having a personal or professional relationship with the officer killed or having a part in the event that led to their death. In this study, the participants were referred to as "PO1"–"PO10" rather than by their names. No demographic information, including rank, was asked of officers. The informed consent email informed participants that no identifying information would be shared, to maintain confidentiality and ensure that all answers were genuine.

Data Collection

The data collection method for this qualitative study consisted of open-ended questions answered in individual interviews or email responses, which Creswell (2017) found to be an effective way to collect data. Terry and Braun (2017) stated that a

descriptive interpretation of data allows codes and themes to emerge. In this study, I used this method to interpret the 10 participants' answers. Line of duty death and the setting—small, rural Texas police departments—were considered sensitive information. I sent emails to the officers' public email addresses, asking them to respond with their personal email addresses or phone numbers to participate. The departments had to be within 40 mi (64 km) of a recent line of duty death. Participating officers were required to provide consent. The informed consent email included sampling criteria that participants had to meet. Opsal et al. (2016) found that an institutional review board (IRB) provides an ethical framework and considers the risks and benefits for participants, but this could differ from what participants view as risks and benefits. Walden University's IRB approved the interview questions, informed consent email, RQs, and data collection method in April 2021 (approval no. 04-27-21-0265144).

I transferred all email responses into Microsoft Word. If the interviews were in audio form, I used Microsoft Word to type the participants' responses. I formatted questions and answers with different styles so that they were easily identified in NVivo (Version 12). With each participant, I asked all questions in the same format and order. I provided example questions in the informed consent email. I did not deviate from the data collection method originally proposed in Chapter 3. Braun et al. (2021) discussed how consistency within answers to interview questions enables the creation codes, allowing themes to emerge. I organized the results in a data set, which Creswell (2017)

discussed as being an effective way to understand and fully comprehend the set of data, codes, and themes.

During the informed consent process, I explained risk of harm, because the interview questions could elicit uncomfortable responses and harm participants. I included within the informed consent process the risks, benefits, and avenues of management of risks, which Opsal et al. (2016) suggested must be explained to conduct ethical research. I was transparent about the risks and the nature and purpose of the study from the recruitment phase onward. The participants were provided with four free virtual sessions with a therapist if the research led to discomfort or negative feelings after the interview was over. I provided this information to every participant along with the phone number of the therapist so that they could reach out without fear of me knowing. The informed consent form stated that if a participant did not feel comfortable answering any question, they could simply put "no" by the question or say "no" in an interview to skip the question with no further comment.

The interview format involved asking open-ended questions from a guide and allowing participants to elaborate on or clarify any information they wanted to discuss further. Guest et al. (2020) asserted that open-ended questions allow participants to answer questions freely regarding lived experiences without the interference of outside opinion. All 10 police officers participated in the interviews over the phone or in writing. Kelly et al. (2017) suggested that prejudice and presumptions are areas that need to be acknowledged in qualitative research. Therefore, I selected phone interviews and written

responses over face-to-face and video-conference interviews to maintain confidentiality and create a convenient schedule for participants. Participants stated no concerns, and I did not have to reschedule any interviews. Duan et al. (2015) indicated that purposeful sampling is a way to choose participants based on preselected criteria, and I therefore used criterion sampling. No unusual circumstance, rescheduling, or inability to participate was discussed or brought to my attention during the interview process.

Data Analysis

Qualitative research can offer a wide scope for data analysis, which can take interpretive or descriptive form (Terry & Braun, 2017). For this research project, data analysis procedures involved thematic analysis. I reviewed the transcribed data before conducting the analysis using NVivo (Version 12). Braun et al. (2021) said that using thematic analysis involved repeated immersion in data to identify patterns among the data sets. These data patterns include excerpts and vivid accounts of participant responses (Braun et al., 2021). Interpretive accounts of the participants' lived experiences and the codes within their responses allowed me to go beyond description and provide a rich summary of these lived experiences. Participants' own phenomena and lived experiences thus yielded consistent themes that answered the RQs (Braun et al., 2021).

I imported the interview transcripts into NVivo (Version 12). I read the transcripts and became familiar with the data, which allowed me to get a sense of the participants' perceptions and experiences of hearing about a line of duty death. This initial step of

coding revealed general patterns about the officers' operational security, altered perceptions of safety, most dangerous calls for service, and altered safety practices.

I read each line of the data closely. I used NVivo (Version 12) to highlight lines of text that seemed essential to answering the RQs. Braun et al. (2021) mentioned that thematic analysis involves identifying patterns among the data set. I reviewed excerpts from the oral and written responses and have embedded them in the dissertation to demonstrate the significance of the themes (see Braun et al., 2021). The general codes in the data informed my judgment of which lines of text were essential to the RQs. I created a rich summary of the participants' lived experiences and found patterns in the interpretive accounts (see Braun et al., 2021). Each essential line served as a code, or the smallest unit of meaning in the data. NVivo has a manual coding feature that I used to represent each code.

I examined categories, which enabled me to create the codes; themes emerged based on similarities in their meanings. Codes clustered together formed the initial themes, which I refined by combining redundant and overlapping themes. Braun et al. (2021) maintained that recurring themes shed light on the phenomenon under investigation. In this study, participants' responses provided the overall themes answering the RQs. I ensured that each theme, though unique, made sense in forming the narrative of the participating police officers' perceived safety after hearing of a line of duty death. RQ1 had 11 references, RQ2 had 21 references, and RQ3 had 82 references. All 10 participants answered all interview questions and voluntarily expanded on these

questions, which meant that I had an ample quantity of information from which to create the categories. There were 36 code clusters and 110 references that went into the eight themes and provided data to contribute to the gap in literature.

Two themes emerged from RQ1: perceived safety means assumed operational security and perceived safety means heightened vigilance for unexpected dangers. There were 11 references and six categories. The codes that emerged were related to trust, public opinion, security, incidents and threat, and high vigilance. The first theme had eight responses to operational security with four categories. The second theme had two categories and three responses to heightened vigilance. These two themes represented a vast array of knowledge regarding the lived experiences of officers as they relate to operational safety and heightened vigilance. Heightened vigilance also showed up in RQ3, but with different categories regarding line of duty death.

The dangers of circumstances that involve uncertainty emerged in response to RQ2, regarding calls for service that altered the participants' perceived safety. There were 21 references related to dangerous situations. The most frequent response to the theme of dangerous situations indicated that domestic violence was a top concern, with 14 references to domestic violence. Traffic stops and unexpected situations had five references. Weapons and mental health categories had five references. However, these also emerge in RQ3 in relation to unexpected danger, backup calls, vigilance, and operating in the dark.

Last, RQ3 had 82 responses with 22 codes. This RQ created the largest quantity of data, with five themes: feelings upon hearing of line of duty death, increased vigilance about one's surroundings, doubts about the reliability of backup, concerns about the difficulty of operating in the dark, and acceptance of risks as a police officer. The categories highlighted risk factors, operating in the dark, backup, and increased vigilance with regard to how hearing about a line of duty death affected the participants' perceived safety when on calls for service. In addition, job focus and feelings of sadness, frustration, and worry also influenced the themes. Twenty-nine references were tied to feelings upon hearing of a line of duty death, and 26 were related to the feelings of participants. Twenty-one references were to increased vigilance, 10 were about gauging risk in alternative situations, and eight were about how to avoid the same situation in the future. Doubts about backup reliability also scored high, as 14 references were attached to this category, and eight discussed the time backup took to arrive. Operating in the dark was also a theme, with 10 references, and all 10 participants spoke about the difficulty of doing this. However, eight participants mentioned that there are risks of being a police officer and that they have to accept these risks. There was only one possible discrepant case, which was the subcategory of thinking of leaving the profession; no response was negative, and nobody stated they would leave the profession based on other categories, codes, or themes.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness includes credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability (Connelly, 2016). Credibility is confidence in the truth and findings of a study (Connelly, 2016). To establish credibility, participants must provide truthful descriptions of their lived experiences during the interview process. The answers of participants were congruent with reality and data found in the literature (Shenton, 2004). Some of the answers provided by participants repeated insights found in articles regarding officers in large suburban areas. However, the gap in the literature was in relation to small, rural Texas police departments. Each participant agreed to participate in the study and could choose how to respond to the questions.

Dependability is the stability of data over time (Polit & Beck, 2014). Consistent patterns emerge and demonstrate saturation. Reliability belongs to this category because it captures how the data are documented, thereby establishing how the study can be repeated. I ensured reliability by using criterion sampling and producing a list of criteria participants had to meet to participate, which shows consistency in the research (Creswell, 2017). The study can be repeated in other departments, which I suggested because it would provide law enforcement with a more precise account of perceived safety after a line of duty death, which creates dependability in the research. Thus far, little to no research has been conducted in small, rural departments, but the transferability and dependability of the results and how they compare with other studies indicate that further research in this area would benefit the law enforcement community.

Transferability explains how research can be useful in other settings (Connelly, 2016). Line of duty deaths occur in many different departments, for many different reasons, because of uncontrollable circumstances. Similar studies have been completed regarding calls for service and line of duty deaths, yet the answers of officers vary based on a set of criteria and the area in which an officer serves (Shenton, 2004). The themes in the research provide not only in-depth knowledge of line of duty deaths but also other factors departments may find useful to research in greater depth. Some of the larger themes that involve feelings related to officers' experiences, increased vigilance, and operating in the dark could be used in by other departments or to further research in other areas. Likewise, the codes and themes mean the research is applicable to similar fields, such as security or other kinds of first response, because these individuals also experience workplace stress, an assortment of feelings, dangerous calls, work with others, and going to scenes where line of duty deaths occur.

Confirmability is neutrality and consistency of data, which proves how a study could be repeated (Connelly, 2016). I took steps to ensure the confirmability of the study. Confirmability is a component of validity, and Creswell (2017) indicated that received information must be accurately measured to ensure appropriate and reliable data. I not only used NVivo (Version 12) but also rechecked all data and compared it with my handwritten analysis to ensure no mistakes or wrongful data were included in the results. I used saturation and reflexivity to double-check the data, which included handwritten results and self-evaluation. Considering ethics and limitations, I acknowledged issues that

could affect the results with regard to biases and family, thereby establishing the confirmability of the research. After addressing these four areas, I established trustworthiness based on the process and approaches I used to assess the consistency and thoroughness of the research (Shenton, 2004).

Results

Talavera-Velasco et al. (2018) reported how risk factors for police could present obstacles that cause stress, influence officers' mental health, or lead to situations that include environments harmful or deadly for officers. I present the results of this study in this section in the form of the following themes. RQ1 had two themes that emerged from the data, which addressed operational security and heightened vigilance for unexpected dangers. These two themes provided insight into participants' definitions of perceived safety and how these correlated with their lived experiences. The theme of dangers of circumstances that involve uncertainty emerged to answer RQ2 regarding the types of calls for service that altered participants' perceived safety. The five codes this created included traffic, domestic violence, and weapons. In addition, mental health and unexpected situations were reviewed along with the 21 references the participants made to these codes. Five themes emerged to answer RQ3 and provided insight into how hearing about a line of duty death affected the participants' perceived safety when on calls for service. There were 82 references to these five themes, with more than half of the references relating to feelings, frustration, sadness, doubt about backup, and hypervigilance. Table 1 presents the number of supporting participants and the number of

occurrences in the data for each theme. I describe the themes in the following subsections

and break down all three RQs tables in those subsections.

Table 1

Overview of Themes

Theme	No. of supporting participants	No. of occurrences in the data
Association of perceived safety with assumed operational security	7	8
Association of perceived safety with heightened vigilance for unexpected dangers	3	3
Danger of circumstances that involve uncertainty	10	21
Feelings upon hearing about line of duty death	10	29
Increased vigilance about one's surroundings	9	21
Doubts about the reliability of backup	10	14
Concerns about the difficulty of operating in the dark	10	10
Acceptance of the risks	7	8

Research Question 1

For RQ1, two themes emerged based on participants' responses. The first theme

was that perceived safety means assumed operational security. The second theme was

that perceived safety means heightened vigilance for unexpected dangers. In this section,

I explain the participants' responses and how these responses correlate or contrast with

the data in the literature review. I grouped these responses based on similarity, which is also how the level of saturation was achieved. Table 2 summarizes the responses for RQ1.

Table 2

Results for Research Question 1

Theme	No. of supporting participants	No. of occurrences in the data	Code	No. of supporting participants	No. of occurrences in the data
Association of perceived safety with assumed operation security.	7	8	Trust that one is safe	3	3
			Public opinion on police force	3	3
			Operational security	1	1
			Indicated in incident report	1	1
Association of perceived safety with heightened vigilance for unexpected dangers.	3	3	Assume that there is always a threat	2	2
			Higher vigilance than civilians	1	1

The Association of Perceived Safety With Assumed Operational Security

Seven participants said that perceived safety meant that the operations in response to a call for service were assumed secure. PO6 emphasized a "sense of trust" that they were safe. PO3 described perceived safety as the idea of there being "no imminent threat." PO2 said that perceived safety means "that it is probably not going to be safe but pretend like it is." PO1, PO3, PO4, and PO10 said that perceived safety was the presumption of operational security in relation to the opinion of the public about police officers. The participants noted that when the public does not respect the authority of police officers, an operation may become dangerous. PO1 explained, "The idea of the public that it is okay to be violent toward police, [that it] is more socially acceptable to be disrespectful." Lee et al. (2016) discussed how neighborhood characteristics could create environments in which greater harm for police officers exists, which the responses from PO1, PO3, PO4, and PO1 confirmed.

The Association of Perceived Safety With Heightened Vigilance for Unexpected Dangers

Three participants expressed that perceived safety meant increased caution for unexpected situations and heightened vigilance for unexpected dangers when responding to calls for service. PO5 believed that police officers have higher attentiveness than civilians to their surroundings. Their heightened vigilance is a result of police training and experiences responding to calls for service. PO5 shared:

It is different for police than [for civilian] folks. With police, it is the perception

of safe on [calls for service]. We get hypervigilant and train for safety dangers. [I

gauge] how safe I feel in a situation, which can change rapidly.

PO5's response confirmed the findings of Cihan (2014) and Lazaros (2016), who

maintained that advanced training—including on the use-of-force continuum, police

strategies, and social and community factors—prepares officers for responding to calls

for service.

Participants PO8 and PO9 specified that perceived safety was the idea of

supposed security but that a dangerous situation may occur any time. PO8 and PO9 stated

that there is little threat to an officer, in most cases, until they arrive on the scene and

others feel threatened, which puts not only the officer in jeopardy but also bystanders.

PO8 defined perceived safety as "a situation or scene that appears safe but is still fluid."

PO9 stated:

I do not hear the term perceived safety. I hear the term perceived threat. You are

on the scene by yourself, so it is perceived threat. You do what is best for the

safety of [yourself]. You do what you have to do to keep everyone safe, including

yourself.

Research Question 2

Dangers of Circumstances That Involve Uncertainty

One theme emerged from the responses of the participants in connection with

RQ2: the danger of circumstances that involve uncertainty. Responses from all

participants supported this theme and are listed in this section. Table 3 summarizes the responses relevant to RQ2.

Table 3

Results for Research Question 2

Theme	No. of supporting participants	No. of occurrences in the data	Code	No. of supporting participants	No of occurrences in the data
Dangers of situations that involve uncertainties	10	21	Involving domestic violence	9	14
			Involving traffic	3	3
			Unexpected situations	2	2
			Involving persons with mental health problems	1	1
			Involving weapons	1	1

All participants asserted that dangerous calls for service may alter a police officer's perception of safety, stating that any call for service can turn violent or deadly even if it does not initially appear dangerous. The participants believed that calls involving situations with uncertain factors increased their vigilance for unexpected danger. The types of calls for service described this way by participants were those for domestic violence, traffic stops, individuals with mental illness, and situations involving weapons.

Nine participants said their perceived safety was most often altered when calls for service were in response to domestic violence. These nine participants asserted that domestic violence or IPV calls are the most deadly and dangerous because of situational and emotional factors. The participants said that domestic violence cases were often complicated because the involved individual's behaviors may be unpredictable. Wright and Benson (2011) found that IPV calls for service can turn dangerous because victims turn on the officers trying to protect them when the victims realize what action police would take against their partner; PO1, PO2, PO5, and PO6 confirmed this. PO5 stated that in a domestic violence case, the offender and victim may not want police officers to arrive. PO5 added, "With domestics, you may never know who is your enemy." PO6 shared that those being rescued at times become violent:

It is also dangerous because of the emotions that are already present in the situation. This is often when I have seen a victim become an aggressor because of the threat by law enforcement to take their spouse to jail. I have even witnessed kids that become upset about dad or mom going to jail, even though they just witnessed the abuse taking place.

PO1 and PO2 believed that domestic violence cases were dangerous because of the escalated emotions of the people involved. PO1 shared, "It heightened your awareness that something could go wrong. You are dealing with someone's relationships because of heightened emotions." PO6 stated that domestic violence often occurs in a home where the offender and victim are familiar, but police officers are not. PO6

remarked, "Often you are entering into the home of the offender and victim, and they

have the advantage at that point." Wright and Benson (2011) established that race,

socioeconomic factors, and the relationship between victim and offender can make these

situations dangerous.

PO5, PO7, and PO9 shared that stopping a car was a dangerous call for service

that altered their perceived safety. PO7 believed that traffic stops were the most

dangerous calls for service. PO5 articulated that police officers often did not know what

to expect when stopping a car:

> With a traffic stop, you never know who you are walking up on. You have to be
>
> always vigilant. A call can always go south. The driver could have just committed
>
> murder, but you pulled this person over for speeding.

Lichtenberg and Smith (2001) elaborated on officer safety, maintaining that being

positioned on the sides of roads and highways creates risky circumstances. Likewise, the

participants indicated that when a person is intoxicated or is subject to a warrant, the

situation is dangerous because an officer may not know the circumstances they are

walking into.

Research Question 3

Five themes and 82 references emerged for RQ3 from the open and honest

answers of all 10 participants. I used the 82 refences to create the codes; the themes

therefore appeared with the other participants' answers. Table 4 summarizes the

responses relevant to RQ3.

Feelings Upon Hearing of a Line of duty Death

All participants shared that they felt sadness, anger, or frustration upon hearing of a line of duty death. There were 29 references to feelings on hearing of a line of duty death and 26 references to the feelings associated with this. All participants indicated that critical incidents could create feelings of helplessness, horror, and fear. Eight participants felt sadness for the life lost, despite having no personal or professional relationship with the deceased police officer. PO5 said, "Sadness, immediate sadness. It adds a pound to your soul [for] every person who dies." PO5 was the only participant who stated that they experienced problems sleeping and panic attacks as a result of a need to be hypervigilant upon hearing about a line of duty death. All officers noted they had been part of critical incidents that created feelings of sadness, anger, and frustration, and Best et al. (2011) explained that officers can have different reactions to death or critical incidents because of the prior situations they have encountered.

Table 4

Results for Research Question 3

Theme	SP	DO	Code	SP	DO	Subcode	SP	DO
Feelings upon hearing of line of duty death	10	29	Sadness, anger, and frustration over the lost life	10	26	Sadness	8	11
						Anger and frustration	4	4
						Second guessing oneself	3	4
						Thinking of the lost life	3	3
						Questioning how it happened	2	2
						Affected mental health	1	1
						Worrying over safety	1	1
			None, focus on the job itself.	3	3	Veteran officer	1	1
Increased vigilance about one's surroundings	9	21	Gauging the level of risks of alternative actions	8	10	Heightened state of awareness for possible risks	5	5
						Observing the location	2	2
						Observing the involved persons	1	1
						Whether the call was genuine	1	1
			Think of how to avoid the same scenario in the future.	7	8			
			Increasing one's alertness	2	2			
			Worrying over public perception towards officers	1	1			
Doubts about the reliability of backup	10	14	Backup takes time to arrive	6	8	Learned to de-escalate the situation	2	3

Theme	SP	DO	Code	SP	DO	Subcode	SP	DO
			Reliance on the number of backup responders	3	3			
			Developing game plan with backup	2	2			
			Trustworthiness of backup	1	1			
Concerns about the difficulty of operating in the dark	10	10	More difficult to operate at night	10	10	Difficult to operate in the dark	7	7
						No differences in any time of the day	2	2
Acceptance of the risks as a police officer	7	8	Tenured experienced officer	3	3			
			Acceptance	1	1			
			Staying consistent	1	1			

Note. SP = number of supporting participants, DO = number of occurrences in the data.

Four participants noted that they felt sad for the families the deceased officers left behind, especially children. PO6 shared, "My feelings go straight to the family and the kids of the officer. Every loss is a tragedy." Three participants felt sad to the extent that they had second thoughts about staying in the police force. PO9 disclosed, "[I feel] sad. I want to get out. I am done. It is not worth it anymore." Four participants felt anger and frustration when hearing of a line of duty death. PO1 believed that "there is no good reason" for an officer to die on duty. PO3 and PO10 particularly felt anger and frustration when the officer was "murdered" while on duty. PO10 detailed:

Depending on the circumstances, there is a level of frustration and anger. Was it a cold-blooded homicide? Officer [name redacted] was murdered and she was shot in the face. This causes feelings of anger and rage based on the situation. It is because of the false narratives the media is covering this which alters the perception on how the public deals with us.

Three participants reported that they became "numb" to hearing of line of duty deaths after serving for several years. PO7 added that they wanted to keep their focus on their job, not their feelings. PO6 felt sad for the deceased officer's family and expressed that their emotions had become less overwhelming after years of experience in law enforcement:

I also think that the longer that you are in law enforcement you become numb to officers being killed in the line of duty. Younger officers, I feel, have a stronger emotion to line of duty deaths than do senior officers. Younger officers I have seen, and even when I was younger, seem to become angry, yet older officers over time still have emotions about it, yet it's different. It really is like a numb feeling. In my current years of service, the way an officer died has no influence on the way that I respond to a call, but when I was a rookie or still new officer, I think that it would.

Increased Vigilance About One's Surroundings

Nine participants shared that their perceptions of safety were affected by hearing of a line of duty death because they had increased vigilance about their surroundings. An

officer's vigilance is their awareness, which can be affected by many situational factors (Best et al., 2011). Eight participants shared that when they arrived at the locations of calls, they increased their level of awareness by looking for signs of threats and anticipating danger. PO9 shared, "You have a heightened situational awareness. Are there weapons involved? Are emotions high? On these calls, your element of danger is more prevalent." PO9 added that weapons and heightened emotions were often found during "traffic stops," during which ambushes often happened. PO5 spoke about ambushes:

> We now see a lot of ambushes, which makes everyone more aware. We should all have a heightened awareness. Sometimes we get lax, but we should be more safe than sorry. Never park where someone can come up to your car. Make sure your back is against a wall. [Have an] escape route. Remain vigilant.

PO5 said that ambushes present extreme danger because an officer does not realize what they are about to walk into, which creates uncertain circumstances. Officers experience two types of ambushes: entrapment and spontaneous. Both are intentional acts of violence toward officers and—depending on risk factors, time of day, backup response time, and prior experiences—these critical incidents may affect officers' perceived safety in different ways.

Multiple participants shared that they first inspected the area when responding to a domestic violence call. PO4 would drive by the street where the house was located to observe the neighborhood. PO5 confirmed the need to stay alert about potential weapons at the location:

Anything can alter your perception of safety. Domestic, there are about a thousand weapon in kitchen. It depends on where you are and what going on. The person's demeanors [sic] and environment because we are constantly assessing the safety of a call. It [sic] other words, you look in a lot of dark corners.

Seven participants revealed that when they hear about a line of duty death, they increase their attentiveness to safety and how to avoid experiencing the same scenario. PO4 shared that they think of solutions instead of focusing on problems. PO6 perceived that officers should learn from others' "mistakes" so as to avoid them. PO8 did not want to use the term "mistakes." Instead, PO8 stated, "If the details are known, I try to learn from that officer's death so I can avoid similar situations. Not meaning they made a mistake, just trying to avoid a similar situation." PO9 used news about a line of duty death to increase their awareness of potential threats: "It gives you more of a situational awareness. You use every death as a training tool. This way they do not die in vain. You have to learn from every death or they die for no reason." Best et al. (2011) described events such as line of duty deaths as being out of the normal range of activities officers experience, which influences the way officers react to future critical events.

Doubts About the Reliability of Backup

All the participants confirmed that hearing about a line of duty death influenced how they thought about their backup, and they expressed how crucial police backup response times are for police performance. The participants generally had doubts about depending on backup when responding to calls for service. Six participants emphasized

that backup took time to arrive, stating that response times depended on the call for service and the area in which it occurs. PO5 reiterated, "The time it takes for backup [to arrive] is drastic." PO5 stated that response times may result in more officer injury. PO4, PO7, and PO8 shared that they knew backup would not immediately arrive, which was why they learned how to de-escalate the situation rather than engage in attacks. PO4 also described de-escalation: "When you know backup is miles and miles away, you learn how to talk to people and slow the situation down to your pace."

PO1 shared that backup often arrived 10–15 min after being called for. For the participant, 10–15 min could be risky. PO1 shared that they thought of "alternative" approaches to calls for service when they were alone. PO2 similarly stated that what was necessary was "having the right game plan, in order to survive, until my backup to arrives." According to PO8, having backup changed the "dynamics of the scene" such that they felt safer working with more officers than when they were alone. PO6 said:

> Obviously, individuals always feel safer in numbers than when alone. This is true for officers as well, and if you have backup or a partner, then you might feel more comfortable about the situation. This is basic survival for animals as well, and the reason why many travel in packs and herds. Survivability increases with numbers.

Concern About the Difficulty of Operating in the Dark

Seven participants reported that their perceived safety was influenced by operating in the dark, especially at night, but multiple participants shared that their perceived safety remained the same regardless of the time of day. Seven participants

indicated that it was harder to operate at night than during the day because unexpected dangers were more difficult to see in the dark. PO8 stated, "During daylight hours, it's easier to observe people's actions. At night, it's harder to see threats that are approaching you." PO3 shared that it was harder to hit targets in the dark than in bright places. PO9 emphasized that the time of day was not necessarily a factor that altered perceived safety, but lack of lighting was. PO9 stated, "People use the shadow to their advantage. Well-lit area versus dark. Lighting has a lot to do with safety."

For PO4 and PO7, time of day did not change their perceived safety. They proceeded with caution at all times. PO4 shared, "I treat every call like if it was day or night. I like to keep everything consistent." PO5 was the only participant who said that police officers needed to always remain vigilant and that "comfort level" when responding to calls for service should not go up, regardless of how much experience they had in law enforcement. PO5 shared:

> With years of working in darkness, your perceptions of safety does not change, but your comfort level does change when you should not be that comfortable. It starts to become your normal. You may start getting careless because you are just normal to working in the dark.

Acceptance of the Risks as a Police Officer

Seven participants perceived that hearing of line of duty deaths and the dangers of calls for service were parts of their roles as police officers and that their perceived safety was no longer altered by hearing of line of duty deaths. PO4 stated that the key to coping

with dangers was to "stay consistent" regardless of the news they heard, including news of line of duty deaths. PO4 believed that consistency could increase the safety of police officers, because their safety practices become habits. PO1 perceived that death, regardless of one's profession, is inevitable. PO1 revealed that they had accepted that information:

> I have a different idea of death because my wife died of cancer and this took 14 months. So my perception of death and the feeling this brought me, I made peace with the idea that everyone would die and you do not have a choice of when. So once you accept that, it frees you from the idea of not being on the earth.

> PO2, PO3, and PO6 disclosed that they were tenured and experienced officers;

their perceived safety was thus unaffected by what they heard from others. PO6 conveyed:

> New officers have been told of all of the horrible things that can happen to them while in the academy, and they are programmed to that way of thinking. So, when they see line of duty deaths, they respond differently, and their perception changes depending on what they have seen. Senior and more tenured officers see a whole different perception and react totally different.

Summary

In this chapter, I described the study results. I interviewed 10 officers from multiple rural Texas police departments about the impact of hearing of a line of duty death on their perceptions of safety. I analyzed the interview data thematically using

officers' statements and lived experiences along with their own definitions and perceptions of line of duty deaths and perceived safety. Analysis revealed 110 references, multiple codes, and eight themes.

The majority of the participants thought that perceived safety means an assumed operational security, and three participants thought that perceived safety means heightened vigilance when on a call for service. The themes confirmed the results of Best et al. (2011), who found that police officers react to critical incidents in different ways based on their prior experiences. The way an officer responds to a critical incident may also be linked to whether the officer has received advanced training (Scantlebury et al., 2017).

Assumed operational safety was linked to officers' trust that they were in control of a situation, including their thoughts about the predictability of people's actions and the favorability of public opinion about the police force. Neighborhood characteristics, types of calls for service, and backup response times were also tied to officers' perceived operational safety (Gibbs et al., 2018; Wright & Benson, 2011). Heightened vigilance was associated with an officer's presumption that a threat may arise at any point during a call for service, which Lee et al. (2016) also described, finding that the characteristics of an area along with the beliefs and norms of civilians in that area influence officers' perceived safety in conjunction with their prior experiences in all aspects of calls for service.

The participants generally believed that all calls for service can lead to unexpected situations and that uncertainty about incidents makes situations dangerous. However, traffic stops and domestic violence were perceived as the most dangerous calls for service. Wright and Benson (2011) discussed the influence on domestic violence of many different factors, such as race, drug and alcohol use, and social norms. Lichtenberg and Smith (2001) discussed and confirmed that one of the most dangerous situations an officer can be in is on the side of a highway or road. The majority of participants believed that these calls for service entailed situations in which the involved individuals' behaviors were highly unpredictable. This belief was held by all participants. The review of the interviews showed that some areas—such as types of violence, risk factors, and prior situations officers have been in—were of more concern than others, which was tied to officers' previous experiences on other calls for service (Best et al., 2011).

Upon hearing of a line of duty death, participants' perceived safety was altered in relation to their feelings, increased vigilance, perceptions of backup response, and the time of day of operations. Multiple sources confirmed these factors, and no risk factor was a single contributing reason for violence against officers or line of duty deaths (Best et al., 2011). The participants were generally sad, angry, and frustrated about the lost life of a fellow police officer and how the death might have been avoided. Many scholars who have advocated for more advanced training have confirmed these feelings (Sozer & Merlo, 2013). Scantlebury et al. (2017) argued that training about mental health problems is a valuable tool for any officer. Cihan (2014) and Lazaros (2016) mentioned that the

use-of-force continuum, along with social and community factors, all lead to policing strategies that better prepare officers for critical incidents. However, Talavera-Velasco et al. (2018) indicated that different critical incidents can increase a police officer's risk of danger and reduce their perceived safety; therefore, advanced training above minimum state requirements should be evaluated.

Night operations were perceived as more difficult than daytime operations because of the difficulty of taking action in the dark. Lee et al. (2016) and Demers (n.d.) noted that operating in the dark and dependability of backup influence the safety of officers. The officers had doubts about the dependability of backup, especially because they often experienced backup taking some time to arrive. However, Covington et al. (2014) refuted these findings, stating that increasing the number of officers on a call for service creates a more dangerous situation because of the multitude of beliefs officers hold. However, seven participants shared that the longer they had served in the police force, the more they had accepted that danger and death were parts of the job.

The results of this study provide insights that fill the gap in the literature. I further explain the results in the next chapter. I center the discussion there on how the results do or do not answer the research questions and how the results contribute to bridging the gap in research on perceived safety. In the next chapter, I also consider implications and limitations, make recommendations, conclude the study, and provide possible feedback.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to examine whether, and how, a line of duty death in one department affects the perceived safety of officers on calls for service in surrounding small, rural police departments in Texas. Using concepts associated with social constructionism, I analyzed risk factors for police, obstacles related to stress and violence, officers' mental health, and their definitions of perceived safety. In addition, neighborhood characteristics, backup response times, lack of training, and social disorganization theory were evaluated because these potentially influence officers' perceived safety during calls for service (Talavera-Velasco et al., 2018). Other hazards associated with these risk factors and obstacles are the types of violence officers encounter, and all participants identified scenarios they had experienced while on calls for service.

Since 2015, 910 officers in the United States have been killed in the line of duty (ODMP, 2020). When an officer dies in the line of duty, either accidentally or affectively, the effect on fellow officers is often an increase in perceived stress (Swanson et al., 2012). The resulting mental and physical health issues related to perceived stress, including reduced motivation and numbing (Swanson et al., 2012), negatively impact an officer's perceived safety when responding to service calls (Clifton et al., 2018). Although researchers have extensively examined correlations between officers' perceived safety and the types of violence experienced, backup response times, and advanced training, they have focused on populations in major metropolitan areas (Clifton et al.,

2018). The problem I addressed in this study was that it was not known whether, and how, the death of an officer in the line of duty affects police officers of nearby small, rural communities in Texas.

Texas is the second-largest state by area in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). With incorporated towns and cities ranging in population from 19 (Los Ybanez) to 2,320,268 (Houston; U.S. Census Bureau, 2019), the sizes and available resources of the state's police departments vary greatly (Lazaros, 2016). Training above minimum state requirements that is positively associated with perceived safety (Cihan, 2014; Lazaros, 2016) may be unavailable in smaller police departments.

Social constructivism provided the guiding framework for this study. I employed phenomenology to elicit themes from the lived experiences of 10 police officers. These officers where from multiple rural police departments in Texas to answer the following RQs:

RQ1: What does perceived safety mean to a police officer?

RQ2: Does the type of call for service alter a police officer's perceived safety?

RQ3: How does a line of duty death affect an officer's perception of safety when on a call for service?

Two themes emerged in response to RQ1 and provided insight on the meaning of operational safety and heightened vigilance. These themes agreed with the findings of Best et al. (2011) and Paton and Violanti (1996), who considered how police culture and emotional reactions might be attacked and how officers view operational safety. Best et

al. indicated that police react to critical incidents in different ways depending on prior experience. The dangers of circumstances that involve uncertainty emerged as the singular theme in response to RQ2; participants identified circumstances they encounter that they believe are dangerous. Finally, RQ3 elicited five themes, which corresponded to 82 references related to how a line of duty death affects an officer's perceived safety on calls for service. The first theme provided 29 references related to feelings upon hearing of line of duty death, and the second theme had 21 references connected to increased vigilance about one's surroundings. Doubts about the reliability of backup had 14 responses, and concerns about the difficulty of operating in the dark had 10 references. Finally, acceptance of the risks as a police officer had eight references, with the majority of participating officers stating that risk and its acceptance was just part of the job. This finding confirmed that of Zoellner et al. (2002), who stated that officers could have more or less intense reactions to hearing of a line of duty death depending on their prior experiences. Schouten and Brennan (2016) explained that offenders can entice an officer into a particular situation to harm or kill the officer, and staying vigilant and aware of their situation can help an officer avoid such scenarios. In this chapter, I interpret the findings and discuss how the results correlate or contrast with existing research. In addition, I discuss the limitations and implications of the results and provide recommendations for future research.

Interpretation of the Findings

The key findings from this study were eight themes that were elicited from the lived experiences of 10 police officers working in multiple police departments in rural Texas. Interpretation of the findings through the lens of social constructivism, as developed by Vygotsky (1929), allowed for descriptive interpretation of the lived experiences of the participants. These findings contribute to the gap in literature and yield recommendations for families, organizations, departments, and others.

Research Question 1

Association of Perceived Safety With Assumed Operational Security

This study contributes to the current literature by defining perceived safety from the perspective of police officers. A majority of officers in the study expressed that they understood perceived safety to mean that the call they were responding to was secure. PO6 identified perceived safety as a "sense of trust," whereas PO2 stated that perceived safety meant "that it is probably not going to be safe, but pretend like it is." Although several researchers have identified factors influencing an officer's perception of safety (e.g., Best et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2016; Scantlebury et al., 2017; Talavera-Velasco et al., 2018), none have defined perceived safety from the officer's point of view. Seven officers in this study identified that perceived safety of a call meant the operation of being a police officer and the assumed security they felt on the call. However, PO3 originally defined perceived safety as the idea of there being "no imminent threat" but later defined "imminent" to mean direct. Best et al. (2011) indicated that police officers

react to critical incidents in different ways, depending on prior experience, which concurred with these participants' views of perceived safety. During the study, all participants identified that threats are different for everyone, but that public perception of police can either increase or decrease an officer's safety. Lee et al. (2016) indicated that neighborhood characteristics, demographics, and social factors influenced officers' views on safety during calls for service. PO1 confirmed Lee et al.'s (2016) statement, explaining that the view of the public is that it is okay to be violent toward police, a notion that is acceptable to many communities and demographics.

Defining an officer's perceived safety is important for multiple reasons. First, law enforcement careers are associated with increased stress, which may impact an officer's mental or physical well-being (Clifton et al., 2018). Increasing an officer's perception of safety may decrease their stress, thereby positively impacting their well-being. Second, some officers in this study emphasized the importance of maintaining a consistent level of perceived safety regardless of the situation, but others associated this with being hypervigilant. There were 24 references to hypervigilance in response to RQ1, and hypervigilance is also treated as its own theme in relation to RQ3. Schouten and Brennan's (2016) findings agree with PO9's statements, adding that there are different classes of violence and that certain incidents elicit greater levels of threat. In keeping with Talavera-Velasco et al. (2018), incidents that officers are a part of can either decrease or increase their perceived safety. FBI (2020) statistics show that officers are killed and assaulted in multiple ways, either by accident or because of criminal activities

tied to neighborhood characteristics, risk factors, demographics, types of calls, and how officers perceive risk at calls. PO5, for instance, cautioned that carelessness may result from an increased comfort level resulting from a sense of normalcy or routine that may put an officer and others in danger. Decreasing an officer's perceived safety may encourage heightened vigilance, therefore keeping officers and those they protect from harm. These paradoxical outcomes resulting from increased or decreased perceived safety warrant further study and will be discussed in detail in the Recommendations section.

Association of Perceived Safety With Heightened Vigilance for Unexpected Dangers

A second theme related to officers' definitions of perceived safety as heightened vigilance for unexpected dangers. Three participants expressed that perceived safety meant increased caution in unexpected situations and attentiveness to surroundings greater than that of civilians. Best et al. (2011) stated that an officer will perceive critical incidents differently based on prior experiences, but all officers attributed their heightened vigilance to these prior experiences. The FBI (2006) stated that situations often turned violent because officers had more power than offenders. PO5 explained that an officer's training prepares them to anticipate unexpected dangers, which supports research by Cihan et al. (2012), who found that training was an effective way to increase officers' awareness of their surroundings. Lord (2014) stated that increasing officer training above state standards also increases perceived safety of officers. In addition, Scantlebury et al. (2017) found that training affects an officer's perception of safety: Advanced training equips an officer to deal with specialized situations, including dealing

with individuals with mental health issues, thereby increasing the officer's perceived

safety (Lord, 2014).

Research Question 2

Dangers of Circumstances That Involve Uncertainty

The dangers of circumstances that involve uncertainty emerged as the singular

theme, with 21 references, in response to RQ2, which asked whether the type of call for

service alters a police officer's perceived safety. This finding lends support to the

abundance of research identifying factors influencing an officer's perception of safety.

The FBI (2006) discussed how the performance of officers in a situation varies based on

their experiences of similar situations. These factors mirror those found in the analysis

and include domestic violence (Wright & Benson, 2011), traffic stops (Lichtenberg &

Smith, 2001), mentally ill individuals (Scantlebury et al., 2017), and situations involving

weapons (Lee et al., 2013a). Notably, participants in this study did not mention drugs or

alcohol as factors contributing to perceived safety; Covington et al. (2014) identified

these substances as influential factors contributing to violence against officers responding

to service calls based on the area policed.

A majority of the participants in this study agreed that domestic violence calls

were the most likely to negatively impact their perceptions of safety. Kaminski (2008)

explained that density of crime is a risk factor for domestic violence calls becoming

dangerous for officers. Borum et al. (1999) described domestic violence as a situational

factor that can lead to spontaneous ambush, violence against a responding officer that is

unplanned and usually motivated by fear (Schouten & Brennan, 2016). Participants'

experiences generally supported these findings. Some participants said they believed that

domestic violence situations decreased their perceptions of safety because a victim often

becomes an aggressor when faced with the arrest of the offender. Kent (2010) stated that

racial inequality could be a factor in violence against police; however, no participant

noted many racial issues, and participants stated that they always stayed hypervigilant

because they just never knew how quick a call could go from calm to dangerous. Other

participants associated the decrease of perceived safety with the escalated emotions of the

people involved in domestic disputes or with unfamiliarity with surroundings in which an

offender has an advantage.

Some participants identified traffic stops as a frequent situational factor

influencing perceived safety. PO5, for example, noted that the driver of a vehicle

involved in a traffic stop may have just committed a crime of which the officer stopping

them is unaware. Schouten and Brennan (2016) affirmed the affective nature of violence

against police during traffic stops. The initial reason for such a stop, a traffic violation,

becomes a catalyst for violence if the offender feels threatened. In addition to the

unknown characteristics of offenders, Lichtenberg and Smith (2001) observed that traffic

stops are notoriously dangerous situations for officers because of the potential risks

associated with standing on the side of a road or highway. Roman and Reid (2012) stated

that working in the dark also makes such calls more dangerous for officers. However, the

potential for accidental death during a traffic stop was not noted by participants in this study as a factor contributing to a decrease in perceived safety.

Research Question 3

Feelings Upon Hearing of a Line of duty Death

This theme had the highest number of references, 29. Participants reported feelings of sadness, anger, or frustration as a result of hearing about a line of duty death. These findings agree with those of Best et al. (2011), who suggested that the most frequent feelings reported in response to critical events by police officers and their civilian counterparts were anger/frustration, sadness/grief, and helplessness. Best et al. defined a critical event as an incident that is "outside the range of normal activity or [that] involves serious threat or loss" (p. 1). All officers expanded on the feelings they had after hearing of a line of duty death, and all associated these feelings with how they responded to calls for service.

Some participants reported feeling "numb" in response to hearing of a line of duty death, and only three contemplated leaving the profession because of these deaths The leading feeling was sadness from all officers. Zoellner et al. (2002) described the reporting of multiple feelings of sadness, loss, grief, and resentment in prior research related to line of duty deaths. Many officers went a step further to discuss how their feelings made them contemplate their own behaviors on calls for service and their beliefs regarding their families and fellow officers' families. Numbness as a symptom of critical response occurring within 24 hours of an incident; participants in this study attributed

feeling numb to their years of service (Best et al., 2011). No officer described feelings of numbness, but several did address similar feelings: anger, frustration over loss of life, and second guessing of oneself. Best et al. (2011) stated that officers can react differently in response to an event, despite sharing overall feelings, because prior events influence their current beliefs. A few participants correlated this with their own mental health. PO6 compared their responses to hearing of a line of duty death after years of service and when they were a new officer. PO6 believed how an officer died affected how rookie officers responded to calls, but veterans were not affected the same way. Symptoms such as emotional numbing are concerning because they may be emblematic of posttraumatic stress disorder (Zoellner et al., 2002).

Increased Vigilance About One's Surroundings

Most of the participants reported experiencing a heightened awareness of their surroundings on service calls after hearing of a line of duty death. This heightened awareness represented a decrease in the officers' perceived safety. All officers spoke about how civilians and neighborhood factors seemed to influence the way they were treated at calls for service. Lee (2014) reported a similar finding, stating that these factors can alter the risk faced by officers because of the community's socially accepted norms regarding police presence. Gibbs et al. (2018) asserted that poverty and socioeconomic stress correlate with officer assault; all officers stated that uncertainty about these factors increased their vigilance when on a call for service. All officers in the study also commented on different types of calls that had increased their own vigilance on a call for

service. Participants described looking for signs of possible threats and anticipating potential dangers, especially during traffic stops or domestic violence calls, where the likelihood of ambush was higher. No single event created this vigilance; however, domestic violence, for this study, was the leading factor. These findings contradict Best et al.'s (2011) assertion that no specific incident creates an emotional reaction from an officer or influences an officer's perceived safety.

Doubts About the Reliability of Backup

All participants agreed that hearing of a line of duty death expanded doubts about the reliability of backup, which decreased perceptions of safety. These findings reinforce results shared by Clifton et al. (2018), who suggested that slow backup response negatively influenced officers' perceptions of safety. Lichtenberg and Smith (2001) attributed to heavy traffic the commonness of slow backup responses to violence toward police during traffic stops in metropolitan areas. Conversely, slow backup responses in rural areas were due to the long distances backup had to travel (Martin, 2014). Although participants in this study did not attribute slow backup responses to particular causes, some participants acknowledged that they knew backup would be slow and had therefore learned to de-escalate potentially violent situations. The officers also indicated that their vigilance was heightened when they knew backup could be far away, which in turn correlated with risk factors such as type of call, operating in the dark, community tone, and overall prior experience.

Concerns About the Difficulty of Operating in the Dark

Another theme that emerged from analysis of participants' responses as a factor influencing officers' perceived safety was concern about the difficulty of operating in the dark. All participants expressed this concern as it related to the time of day. They also expressed this concern with simple responses that suggested that not being able to see, shadows and hiding places, and the fact that more people are home at night are the reasons why operating in the dark is a great risk. This finding bolstered other research suggesting that the potential dangers to officers increase on weekend evenings after 6:00 p.m., depending on the time of year (Roman & Reid, 2012). However, these dangers were attributed to increased alcohol and drug consumption during these times, not darkness. Domestic violence was also a component of this theme because individuals who are consuming alcohol or drugs can create dangerous situations. Wright and Benson (2011) and Lee et al. (2013b) suggested that domestic violence occurs both intraracially and interracially. In addition, race, gender, socioeconomic status, household instability, and alcohol and drugs are all factors contributing to domestic violence. These factors make it dangerous for officers to respond to domestic violence calls (Wright & Benson, 2011). Participants in this study attributed the dangers of darkness to difficulties observing people's actions, observing potential threats, and hitting targets.

Acceptance of the Risks as a Police Officer

A majority of participants expressed that hearing of a line of duty death was an accepted part of their role as police officers. Only three participants stated that they had

questioned being in law enforcement based on these risks, and all stated that they had

increased their vigilance on calls for service. This stoicism may be attributed to the police

culture, in which demonstrations of emotions are salient (Paton & Violanti, 1996). Prior

research showed that stoic self-help is an ineffective coping strategy when processing line

of duty deaths and negatively impacts officers' job motivation (Clifton et al., 2018).

Decreased job motivation was reflected in comments by some participants who expressed

thoughts of leaving police work as a result of hearing of a line of duty death. During these

interviews, not one participant stated they would leave law enforcement based on risk,

but all stated that they had learned from prior experiences, and this had made them

stronger and better officers.

Theoretical Framework

Social constructivism provided the theoretical framework for this study. Social

constructivism is a social development theory conceived by Vygotsky (Gado, 2017).

Vygotsky (1929) theorized that people can learn through social interactions and the

cultural context within which they share experiences. When viewing this study through

the lens of social constructivism, it becomes clear that the police culture, in which

demonstrations of emotions are salient (Paton & Violanti, 1996), plays a significant role

in how officers react to hearing of a line of duty death. This study's participants described

feeling sad, angry, or frustrated at hearing of a line of duty death, yet none admitted to

sharing these feelings personally with friends and family members or professionally with

counselors or fellow officers. The stoic response to hearing of a line of duty death was

best demonstrated by PO7, who communicated a desire to focus on their job rather than on their feelings.

Summary

In this subsection, I discussed the key findings in relation to the current literature. Eight themes emerged in response to the three RQs. I obtained 110 references through the course of data collection, which created the codes mentioned throughout this study. The eight themes identified during data analysis largely confirmed that police officers working in rural Texas police departments have reactions to hearing of a line of duty death similar to those of officers working in urban police departments. However, more research should be done to elaborate on these findings to contribute to the gap in knowledge on this topic, which is vastly under-researched.

<center>**Limitations of the Study**</center>

I employed a qualitative phenomenological study design. Qualitative studies provide contextualized understanding of a population of interest (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, the findings I present here should not be generalized to other populations. Phenomenology relies on the ability of participants to accurately recall past events, including thoughts and emotions (Moustakas, 1995). The noticeable nature of emotional reactions to critical events in police culture reported by Paton and Violanti (1996) and evinced in the findings presented here suggests that participants may not have openly shared their true feelings regarding their reactions to hearing about a line of duty death. However, I provided informed consent forms emphasizing anonymity and

protection of privacy to all participants before beginning the interviews to combat social desirability bias.

This study was also limited by potential researcher bias. Phenomenological research relies on a researcher's ability to focus on the lived experiences of the participants rather than interpretations while gathering data (Moustakas, 1995). Because I have family members in law enforcement and have personally attended funerals of officers who have died in the line of duty, I took careful steps to protect against researcher-induced bias. I employed the practices of reflexivity and journaling to eliminate researcher bias and protect the reliability and validity of this study.

Recommendations

The findings of this study largely supported research found in the existing literature by confirming that officers in small, rural police departments in Texas have reactions to hearing of a line of duty death similar to those of officers in larger urban departments, even when such a death occurs outside their jurisdiction. Even so, I suggest that further research occur in other rural police departments to confirm these results. As noted, phenomenological study designs are meant to provide rich details of the characteristics of a particular population and should not be generalized (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Similar studies conducted elsewhere would strengthen the validity of these findings by confirming the results.

Future research should explore the effects of leveraging perceived safety. Decreased perceived safety was found to increase stress associated with heightened

vigilance and negatively impact physical and mental health (Clifton et al., 2018; Swanson et al., 2012). In contrast, increased perceived safety may cause police officers to become complacent, thereby placing them and those in their charge in danger, as reported by participants in this study. So, future research should examine factors that improve an officer's ability to successfully cope with stress while maintaining heightened vigilance on duty. A randomized, controlled trial would be appropriate to examine the impact of factors influencing stress management techniques, such as additional training.

Finally, participants who self-reported being veteran officers described feeling "numb" when learning of a line of duty death. This is concerning given that emotional numbness is emblematic of posttraumatic stress disorder, according to Zoellner et al. (2002). Therefore, future research should explore the possible long-term effects of exposure to line of duty deaths in veteran officers to identify interventions that might minimize or eliminate effects like those of posttraumatic stress disorder. A longitudinal or cross-sectional study would be appropriate.

Implications

This study contributes to the gap in the literature. The study also has implications for positive social change at the individual, family, and organizational levels, and the established trustworthiness of the study allows its results to be used in a variety of settings. These implications may encourage small and large police departments to implement better mental health protocols; online avenues; backup procedures; and assistance for officers, families, and the communities they serve. Further, I defined

perceived safety from an officer's viewpoint, which may have methodological implications.

Individual

This study has significant implications for individual police officers and the citizens with whom they come into contact. I suggest through this study's findings that the news of a line of duty death of a fellow officer, even that of an officer working in another jurisdiction, impacts officers emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally. Emotionally, participants described feeling sad, angry, or frustrated as a result of hearing of a line of duty death. Expressing these emotions may be considered salient in police culture (Paton & Violanti, 1996), leading officers to turn to ineffective self-help coping mechanisms (Clifton et al., 2018). This study may bring light to these often unexpressed emotions and possibly begin to change police culture so that individual officers feel comfortable seeking help to process grief, guilt, sadness, and anger. Most concerning was that officers described feeling "numb" upon learning of a line of duty death. Zoellner et al. (2002) noted that emotional numbness may be emblematic of posttraumatic stress disorder if no treatment is provided. Posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms—such as anger, hostility, and irritability—may interfere with an officer's functioning or manifest as physical complaints (Zoellner et al., 2002). This study may positively impact officers suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder or prevent others from experiencing posttraumatic stress disorder by bringing to light this symptom in veteran officers so that effective coping methods can be established.

Cognitively, participants expressed thoughts of decreased perceived safety after hearing of a line of duty death. These thoughts included doubts about the reliability of backup, operating in the dark, and turnover intentions. These findings underscored the need for additional support in rural police departments, where resources may not be as readily available as in larger urban police departments. Training above minimum state requirements has been shown to increase perceived safety (Cihan et al., 2012) and equip officers with the knowledge and skills needed to respond to specialized situations (Scantlebury et al., 2017) when backup may be unavailable.

Behaviorally, this study found that some participants reported increased vigilance after learning of a line of duty death. Some participants equated perceived safety with heightened vigilance for unexpected dangers. Although vigilance remains important for the safety of officers and those with whom they come into contact, prolonged heightened vigilance may increase stress and negatively impact physical and mental health (Clifton et al., 2018). Therefore, this study may positively impact individual officers by pointing out the negative health ramifications of prolonged stress resulting from hypervigilance.

Family

This study has positive implications at the family level. Any time an officer perishes in the line of duty, it is tragic for the officer's family. Every officer who participated in this study stated that such a death has a huge impact on the officer, the family of the officer, and the overall law enforcement family and community. What may not be given consideration is the impact a line of duty death has on family members of

officers exposed to this death. The findings of this study indicated that officers may experience feelings of sadness, anger, or frustration. How participants chose to cope with these emotions was outside the scope of this study, but ineffective coping may negatively impact family members. Clifton et al. (2018) reported that ineffective coping methods included stoic self-help, seeking social support (as opposed to professional support), and turning to alcohol or drugs to numb the feelings officers experience after a line of duty death or critical incident. Seeking social support may put undue pressure on family members who are ill-equipped to help an officer navigate negative emotions experienced after learning of a line of duty death. Officers who turn to stoic self-support or substance abuse may also negatively impact family members. By identifying the possible effects that line of duty deaths may have on fellow officers and their families, this study brings awareness to these factors.

Organization

This study may impact small, rural police departments along with other departments in suburban or urban areas because of the transferability and credibility of the data. The themes should be used for future research. Although the findings of this study should not be generalized, the study provides a foundation on which future research may build to improve how small, rural police departments respond to hearing of a line of duty death. The findings of this study indicate that police officers in rural police departments react similarly to those in larger urban departments upon hearing of a line of duty death. However, further research would benefit the police community. Research

relating to Texas border counties, city size, years of service, gender, and rank could all shed significant light and contribute to the literature gap because none of these areas were addressed in the literature reviewed. Meanwhile, rural departments may look to urban departments for programs related to effective strategies for coping with a line of duty death.

Methodology

I reviewed the literature but did not find a definition of perceived safety from a police officer's perspective. I developed such a definition based on the lived experiences of officers and their views on how they defined perceived safety: assumed operational security and heightened vigilance for unexpected dangers. However, risk factors, types of violence, critical incidents, types of call, and how perceived safety varies among officers should be further researched. In addition, these factors will aid in other areas of research, which could also increase the perceived safety of all officers, not just ones in rural departments. Future researchers may use this operational definition to provide an understanding of perceived safety from the point of view of police officers. Research on departments in other parts of Texas or other states could provide a firmer definition of perceived safety along with other recommendations for future practice.

<div align="center">

Recommendations

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Police work is stressful. Often, high-stress situations are unavoidable, and uncertainty is often present. A decrease in perceived safety results in heightened vigilance and increased stress. Additionally, all officers spoke about how every call is

unpredictable, which is why the risk factors of officers and types of violence should be considered. Increasing perceived safety to reduce stress may put officers and civilians at risk. Therefore, I recommend that police departments implement a variety of support systems to increase officers effective methods of coping with the daily stress associated with police work and hyper stressful situations, such as critical incidents. I further recommend that departments implement neutral people for officers to talk to within the department who are properly equipped in critical incidents, line of duty deaths, and how officers' feelings can influence their perceived safety. I also recommend departments ensure officers know that in moments of uncertainty they will be protected, not isolated or embarrassed for their intrusive thoughts, because these feelings and attitudes can directly affect an officer's life, work, and family.

Conclusion

I conducted a phenomenological study and sought to understand how a line of duty death affected officers' perceived safety. I contributed to a gap in the literature by examining the lived experiences of officers working in rural police departments in Texas. The findings of this study indicated that the reactions to hearing of a line of duty death of police officers working in rural departments are similar to those of officers working in urban areas. In addition, the findings showed that all officers had some type of negative reaction to the line of duty death (there were 82 such references). Participants described feeling sadness, anger, or frustration. Their thoughts included doubts about the reliability of backup and concerns about operating in the dark, turnover intentions, and uncertain

situations. Participants practiced heightened vigilance after hearing of a line of duty death

but also stated that they learned from the incident and attempted to change how they

responded to calls for service based on prior experience and the line of duty death.

In addition to contributing to the literature, this study has the potential to

positively impact social change by bringing light to a police culture in which the

expression of emotions is noticeable. Changing this culture may encourage officers to

adopt effective skills to cope with emotions resulting from hearing of a line of duty death.

Likewise, the way departments organizationally respond to these incidents could also

increase perceived safety. Family and individual components were also explored because

of the feelings officers experience in a variety of places, not just at work. Additionally,

this study defined perceived safety operationally from police officers' perspectives,

which may impact the methodology of future research because it is important to

understand perceived safety from this viewpoint.

Finally, officers reported feeling "numb" as a result of hearing of a line of duty

death. This is concerning given that emotional numbness can be a symptom of

posttraumatic stress disorder (Zoellner et al., 2002). I offered recommendations that rural

police departments can adopt to improve the mental and physical health of police officers

and provide additional support while maintaining safety. In addition, this study

recommended ideas for departments to implement for families and individuals, which

may help officers better deal with the feelings they experience after a line of duty death.

Additional resources and research may offer smaller departments ways to boost officers

effective skills for coping with stress. It will also offer supervisors a way to be better

equipped so that they can be more effective at supporting officers, departments, and

families through the process of grief and loss after hearing of a line of duty death.

The most impactful statement I gathered during this study came from PO5, who

stated that a line of duty death "adds a pound to your soul for every person who dies."

The ultimate goal of this study is to create positive social change and provide

departments with more useful ways to support officers, reduce stress, and positively

increase vigilance through coping skills to preserve their mental and physical health.

Increasing officers' perceived safety in this way should help to avoid adding more grief

and heartache to the souls of officers and their community and family members from the

loss of heroes in line of duty deaths.

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Appendix A: Survey

1. Are you a Commissioned Peace Officers in the State of Texas?

2. Have you had first-hand experience of a line of duty death? For the purpose of this research, first-hand experience would be knowing the officer personally or professionally who was killed in the line of duty.

3. Have you been a part of a line of duty event; on the honor guard, or had assisted on the call for service during which an officer was killed?

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. When you think of the term "perceived safety" what comes to mind?

2. Using that definition, what has altered your perceptions of safety while on a call for service?

3. How does the length of time it takes backup to get to you influence your perception of safety?

4. How does the time of day alter the perception of safety you experience?

5. In your experience, what are the most dangerous calls for service?

6. In what ways do these types of calls change your perception of safety on a call for service?

7. When you hear of a line of duty deal what is your initial thought?

8. How does the way the officer died influence the way you respond to call for service?

9. How does the line of duty death alter your perception of safety? If so, how?

10. What feelings did you have after hearing about the line of duty death?