

2022

Lived Experiences of Life Partners of Police Officers Working in Crimes Against Children Units

Maria Beagle
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

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Maria Beagle

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Review Committee

Dr. Jessica Hart, Committee Chairperson, Psychology Faculty
Dr. Sharon Xuereb, Committee Member, Psychology Faculty
Dr. Jane Coddington, University Reviewer, Psychology Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2022

Abstract

Lived Experiences of Life Partners of Police Officers Working in Crimes Against

Children Units

by

Maria Beagle

MS, Walden University, 2020

MA, Argosy University, 2016

BS, Marywood University, 2011

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Psychology

Walden University

November 2022

Abstract

Police stress is an ongoing concern in law enforcement; however, limited research has demonstrated how work-related stress affected life partners of police officers. According to Selye's stress theory, the occupational demands placed on individuals can negatively impact their personal lives and their relationships. Law enforcement officers, especially those working cases that are sexual in nature, experience significant emotional distress. This study sought to examine the lived experiences of the partners of those who work in Crimes Against Children (CAC) units. CAC units include investigative evidence that has been considered traumatic. Specific examination of stress that life partners experience was conducted through five semi structured interviews and interpretative phenomenological analysis was utilized to better understand participants' phenomenology. Transcription instrumentation was used to analyze respondents' answers to open-ended questions and was coded. Findings indicated that the participants all discussed the same themes which were the experience of behavioral change in their significant other, spouse's experience of communication with their significant other, and spouse's experience of change in role model behavior. On this basis, with the understanding of secondary stress posed from one person to another, more supports and services could specifically assist life partners and lead to more positive social change.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to my parents, Peter, and Jo Ann, who are my biggest cheerleaders in all adventures I go on, and I did as you said, I kept “moving forward.” My siblings, Toni Ann, Dominick, and Elizabeth have always been by my side and assisted me in every aspect of my life, I would be lost without them. Finally, I also dedicate this study to my husband, Jarrod, and my daughters, Samantha, and Katherine, who inspire and motivate me to always do my best in every challenge I am a part of. I love all of you, thank you.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. Jessica Hart for seeing me through the entire dissertation process. Without you, I would not have finished my dissertation to my full potential. I would also like to thank Dr. Sharon Xuerub for assisting me further throughout this process. I am beyond appreciative to the both of you for everything you have done for me. I cannot express to you enough how thankful I am to of had both of you support me and keep me going.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Understanding the stress of life partners of police officers who work in Crimes Against Children (CAC) units is essential. Researchers have examined the stress police officers experience (Bourke & Craun, 2014; Brady, 2017; Brimhall et al., 2018; Giorgi et al., 2020; Haugen et al., 2017; Kurtz & Hughes, 2021; Lucas et al., 2012; McQuerrey Tuttle et al., 2018; Queirós et al., 2020), yet few studies explore whether their stress negatively impacts their life partners. This research study examined the following question: What are the lived experiences of life partners of police officers who work in CAC units? The gap in the research is apparent when determining the stress that life partners of police officers exhibit; however, the specific setting that police officers work in can contribute to their stress, as well.

A deeper exploration into the lives of the life partners of police officers can provide greater awareness of officers' non-work environment; however, the data on the experiences of life partners of officers who work in CAC units is limited. Since CAC police officers are often unable to discuss the sensitive nature of work-related evidence (e.g., images, videos, and audio recordings) that they must attend to regarding to children in abusive environments and victims of trafficking, there is often a lack of communication between officers and their spouses (Brimhall, 2018). Additionally, Brimhall et al. agrees confirmed that partners of police officers often worry about their spouses' profession. With more knowledge of how life partners are affected by their spouses' work, understanding the household tension and conflict can be better understood.

Moreover, information regarding burnout rates and work-related stress in law enforcement has been studied (Lucas et al., 2012; Marchand et al., 2015; McQuerrey Tuttle et al., 2018) but despite these studies, the effect that it has on life partners of CAC police officers is limited. Information regarding secondary stress from life partners of police officers remains varied. In this study I sought to explore the perception of life partners who live with individuals working in CAC units. The outcome of the research can benefit both the police officers and their life partners, especially through the lens of secondary stress. Police stress has been studied for several years; however, it continues to be unclear as to how police work stress effects the home setting. This chapter will discuss the background of police stress, understanding the strains of working in the CAC units, limits to understanding stress in the home setting, and seeking out to understand the perceptions of life partners of police officers.

Background

Investigations regarding stress and trauma related to working in an intensive law enforcement program are limited in how work stress affects their life partners. Past research linked stress of working in law enforcement continues to benefit current research on their life partners (Brimhall et al., 2018; Craun et al., 2015; Giorgi et al., 2020; Hakan et al., 2013; McQuerrey Tuttle et al., 2018). Current research examining how police stress can affect the home is essential to better assist officers when they are working and not working. The Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force involves the investigation and prevention of child abuse and pornography, in addition to the investigation of missing child reports (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2018). According to Bourke

and Craun (2014), images pertaining to child pornography that officers view daily are often so unpleasant that officers have a difficult time forgetting those images when they are not at work. The individuals involved with investigating such crimes maintain their positions in the department long enough for their work to influence not only themselves but their families, as well.

Bourke and Craun (2014) conducted a quantitative study examining stress among officers in ICAC units and found that 25% of officers surveyed experienced high to severe secondary traumatic stress (STS) and that officers with higher STS scores, demonstrated a greater correlation of predictor symptoms. Knowing that the images seen in CAC units are unpleasant, police officers are hesitant to share or discuss their work at home. While dealing with the stress of viewing daily images of child abuse, officers have difficulty coping with stress across all settings, including at home. Previous research lacks an understanding of how the stress of working within CAC units may affect officers' life partners.

Life partners are often aware of the environment their partners work in, but they are typically not aware of how they cope with their work stress. Craun et al. (2015) reported that researchers have only recently begun examining police stress within CAC units. Due to increased use of computers and Internet access, many child exploitation investigators must view media depicting child abuse, which creates additional stress, rather than only being exposed vicariously via victims' accounts. Burruss et al. (2017) found that the exposure of sensitive materials leads to increases in secondary trauma among CAC officers. Although the life partners of law enforcement officers are not privy

to the evidence, they are exposed to the work-related stress that their partners experience. Craun et al. reported that there has not been enough research conducted as to the whether the effects of secondary traumatization of law enforcement officers affects their partners, especially the life partners of the police officers working in CAC units; therefore, researchers are unaware of how that stress transfers to the home setting.

Researchers have focused on understanding the stress of police officers and how they cope with the stress daily. Burruss et al. (2017) reported that law enforcement officers are already more susceptible to traumatization due to working child exploitation cases. Furthermore, law enforcement officers take crimes against children personally when they have children of similar ages. Visuals of these crimes can traumatize the officers even more when they inadvertently relate these crimes to their own children. Burruss et al. explained that current research is limited in attempting to understand the connections with current and past work experiences and the coping skills utilized by CAC officers.

Burruss et al.'s (2017) research regarding the effects of secondary trauma from work lacks an understanding as to how that trauma impacts home life. The researchers recommend that future research should analyze how coping skills used by police officers who work in the CAC units. Burruss et al. stated that many officers have reported that they have been unable to sleep through the night. Although it is not reported how irregular sleep patterns has affected their home life, the information is essential when discussing trauma transferring into the home setting. Irregular sleep patterns for police

officers are another area of concern when determining the lived experiences of life partners by possible work trauma disrupting stability at home.

Powell et al. (2014) discussed that law enforcement agencies estimated that there were roughly one million images of child pornography on the Internet in the early 2000s; however, recent investigations and criminal arrests have found that this number is exponentially larger (Powell et al., 2014). The challenge of confiscating pornographic images of internet child exploitation (ICE) continues to be a struggle for law enforcement in their proactive attempts to remove child abuse from the Internet. These depictions have been shown to be psychologically hazardous to those officers as evidence supports that it leads to higher rates of burnout (Powell et al., 2014). Information such as this is essential when determining how the stress from working in CAC units transfers into the home setting and to their life partners; however, the same researchers were only able to locate three studies that have explored the personal impact of ICE investigations. The research conducted by Powell (2014) and her colleagues effectively highlights the necessity for the proposed study.

Powell et al. (2014) confirmed that when the work environment is positive, then the work stress is less severe and concluded that work stressors had an effect on the police officers' physical well-being. Powell et al. explained that further research would be beneficial in possible modifying the caseload for ICE officers to improve their mental health issues. Powell et al. found that ICE workers in a stressful field with intensive caseloads can suffer with psychological issues, physiological issues, and subconscious social restrictions.

Moreover, in Friese's (2020) study that surveyed married couples' levels of stress where one of the spouses is a police officer, the mixed method approach showed a significant conclusion. Friese found that 46% of police officer spouses experienced stress, while 70% of those spouses' experienced items listed as occupational stressors. Those police officer spouses also reported poor coping skills, such as self-care and exercise, while 61% reported drinking caffeine and energy drinks as a method of relieving stress (Friese, 2020). Friese then discussed that each focus group topic covered with the spouses of police officers. The topic of secondary trauma was introduced, and spouses gave specific examples of occupational stories their police officer spouse reported to them. One example that Friese reported was of a spouse who explained their police officer partner discussed a fatal motorcycle accident leading to the officer then selling his bike and never riding again.

Furthermore, physical stress was often reported by the participants in this study. Friese (2020) explained that specific physical components of stress, such as tension in the neck and back and sleep deprivation. Friese reported that sleep deprivation was the most common physical result of stress. Similar reflections from the police officer spouses were reported during the focus groups. Friese reported that spouses stated that they preferred to be alone and not have friends because they believed it was too hard for anyone else to understand their stress. Lastly, Friese reported that hoped this study brings insight and awareness to spouses of police officers in order to alleviate the stress that they experience.

While supporting research (Burrus et al., 2017; Craun, 2014; Craun et al., 2015; Friese, 2020; Powell et al., 2014) explained the effects of stress on the police officers as well as their spouses, the research continues to be limited in specific divisions of the police officers. Life partners of police officers who work in the CAC units have yet to be heard when it comes to the possible secondary stress trauma they may suffer.

Problem Statement

A significant portion of police officers have emotionally taxing and stressful jobs (Bourke & Craun, 2014). They routinely work in settings where they can be overwhelmed by information that can negatively impact their own emotional state and many officers are regularly present at crime scenes, accidents, encounter violent interactions and review evidence. Bourke and Craun (2014) described STS as a phenomenon that continues to plague police officers and compare it to posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) but noted that is caused by indirect exposure of traumatic events or materials. After dealing with such stressors in their work environment, individuals inadvertently take their work-related stress home with them, thus, creating problems within the family system. Due to the lack of research, there needs to be a greater understanding of how these lived experiences may impact their home life.

Understanding police stress will benefit how law enforcement officers recognize that their work stress affects their personal and familial relationships, as described in the Craun et al. (2015) study, which reported that 24% of CAC unit respondents were more distrusting of others' intentions, 14% withdrew from family and friends with limited engaging and lack of communication, 9% experienced inability to talk to others about

work, 7% were more irritable around loved ones, and 5% reported marital and intimacy difficulties. It is unknown what the partners' experiences were from this study. Craun et al. explained that at the same time, 27% and 10% percent of participants reported no change in relationship and improved relationships, respectively. Many officers receive in-the-field training but that training often neglects learning how to cope with the trauma and stress experienced from work. Stressors experienced by police officers continue to be measured but the data does not acknowledge how those experiences are exhibited at home and in the community nor does the available literature determine helpful coping strategies for both the police officers and members of their family.

While researchers such as Craun et al. (2015) and Powell et al. (2014) have previously explored the difficulties experienced by both law enforcement officers and their families in navigating the work-life balance, researchers have only begun to examine how the work-stress from individual and intensive departments (i.e., CAC units) affect officer's familial experiences. Craun et al. discussed that task forces seldom reached out to spouses or significant others with information on how they can help their partners. Although there are studies that demonstrate that working in CAC units negatively impact officers' rate of mental health (Bourke & Craun, 2014), little research informs the field how life partners are impacted. By understanding how life partners' stress is encountered when living with police officers working in CAC units, further studies may be informative enough to determine the best supports available for both the police officers and their life partners.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences of life partners of police officers who work in CAC units, a specific population that has been analyzed. Understanding this specific population has filled the current gap and can assist departments and agencies in creating and providing programs that are specifically designed to assist life partners with the problems they may experience. This may lead to improved adjustment and coping to stress and, in effect, healthier relationships among CAC unit officers and their families. The information gathered from officers' life partners will effectively benefit CAC units and possibly, all members of law enforcement. Learning from the life partners of police officers would directly lead to positive social change by providing information that can lead to improved assistance to this population.

Research Question

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of life partners of police officers who work in Crimes Against Children units?

Framework

The theoretic framework for this research is stress theory. According to Selye (1976), stress is a portion of a human being's daily living experience, even when it relates to trauma and disparate problems. Having defined stress, researchers better understand how stress relates to mental health. Selye determined that all natural and unnatural demands placed on individuals are known as stressors, to which individuals must learn how to cope with daily. Therefore, understanding specific stressors and their triggers can

have a healthier impact on people. It has never been more important to identify these triggers, even though the scientific and medical communities understanding of the connection between stress and disease, the effect of stress is not as easily identified on an individual level (Tan & Yip, 2018). As the understanding of stress becomes more apparent, researchers have succeeded in correlating it with work. According to Lucas et al. (2012), implementing approaches that decrease stress is essential in the workplace to eliminate burnout. Despite these features, researchers have not examined how the assistance of work-based interventions affects the stress that police families experience.

Stress continues to concern those working with officers who project and displace their stress onto their families, friends, and peers. Compared to most other professions, Lucas et al. (2012) asserted that law enforcement officers experience excessive amounts of work-based stress. Additionally, when tasked with investigating child abuse cases and sex trafficking, law enforcement officers are exposed to much more stressful circumstances related to work than many other police officers. Giorgi et al. (2020) explained that the identification and introduction of preventive measures at work (e.g., coping skills, support groups) is just as important as determining which officers have been negatively impacted by the stress of their jobs, which would then allow for departmental supervisors to improve the well-being of their officers. Therefore, determining which police officers are at greater risk of psychosocial stress and how that stress can be transferred to the home setting is essential. Evaluating stress can be explored by understanding the relationship between the perception of the workers' responsibilities and their work environment.

Lucas et al. (2012) explained that certain job expectations produce more stress than other jobs, especially with those tasks that require high demand and low control. For officers who work in CAC units, the stress level of reviewing evidence related to child pornography has yet to be examined in terms of how it impacts their life partners. Schramm et al. (2020) stated that depression is one of the primary causes of work absences among most professions, while work-related stress is described by respondents as the most common cause of depression. With Seyle's theory of stress applied to everyday life, the question remains as to how specific stress can transfer from one's profession to their life partner.

McCanlies (2019) examined the work-family conflict (WFC) between police officers and their spouses, concentrating solely on police officers' families with children to examine the WFC related to childcare. Seyle's stress theory maintains that work related stress applies to everyday life, however, added stress related to police officers with children can induce anxiety symptoms. McCanlies found the anxiety of police officers and their spouses increased when needing childcare. McCanlies also reported that added anxiety for the police officers were related to their spouses working on opposite shifts as them, with limited time of co-parenting their children. This study noted that work-stress, work-related trauma, and exhaustion from the times of shifts can increase the stress the police officers experience. While it is clear that Seyle's stress theory is applied in everyday lives, as well as stress related to careers, the lack understanding was how life partners of CAC unit police officers deal with their stress, if any, on a daily basis.

Nature of the Study

For this research, a qualitative study was used to understand the lived experiences of life partners of police officers working in CAC units. An interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach was utilized. This is a type of qualitative analysis that was used to understand lived experience, as well as the meaning that individuals give to their own life events (Restivo et al., 2019). IPA is beneficial when questions regarding personal insights and experiences have not been evaluated in the past. IPA is a productive method of analysis that can introduce psychosocial dynamics of behavior that offer an understandable interpretation of an individual's point of view (Restivo et al., 2019). Qualitative methodology requires the analysis of non-numerical data that examines experiences, personal narratives, and events. Participants need to have at least five years of living with a police officer who works in CAC units. IPA was utilized in the proposed study to ensure that the lived experiences are explained and understood.

Definitions

Crimes against children: The exploitation of children through photographs, videos and audio recordings (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2018).

Secondary trauma: The emotional duress that results when hearing or listening to another individual recount of their first-hand trauma. (Bourke & Craun, 2014).

Stressors: Stress related to demands put on humans that are both natural and unnatural (Selye, 1976).

Sexual exploitation: Benefiting from purposeful and sexually abusive acts (Craun et al., 2015).

Assumptions

For this research study, all participants are life partners, spouses, and boyfriends or girlfriends who reside with police officers that currently work or have previously worked in CAC units. Participation was voluntary without repercussions for refusing to participate and participants' identities and was confidential. This study included participants from a purposeful, homogeneous sample. Participant narratives was varied. Lastly, it was assumed that participants in this study was giving honest answers about their lived experiences. It was assumed that the life partners have been in a relationship with the police officer long enough to provide valuable insight on the experiences.

Scope and Delimitations

The research study created awareness of the experiences and phenomenology of life partners of police officers working only in CAC units and this study was not meant to increase their vulnerability. This study was limited to life partners who currently live with or previously lived with the CAC unit officer, so it will not pertain to life partners who have never lived with a CAC officer since there is ample research that examines the experiences how the stress of general and nonspecialized police spouses.

Limitations

An anticipated limitation and challenge to this study was that I may inadvertently influence respondents during the interview by asking leading questions. A second limitation was the possibility that the results of the interviews were not generalizable to

the larger population of life partners of law enforcement officers but rather specific to only those who work in CAC units. Another limitation was the possibility that law enforcement officers may not want their spouses or romantic partners to report information that may be deemed as personally damaging; therefore, narratives may not be as accurate as their real-life experiences. Additionally, life partners may fear retaliation from their partner or spouse if they participate in this study. A fifth limitation that that it was not possible to verify qualitative information because it was a self-reported measure and researchers must take participant narratives as truthful.

Significance

Researchers have documented that police officers are impacted by the intensity of their work, which has shown to have negatively impacted their relationships at home (Craun et al., 2015). The gap in research lies in understanding how the stress of working in CAC units directly impacts their life partners. The benefit of this research is to provide greater awareness of this population, in terms of the creation, modification and implementation of support programs for them, which can educate the agencies, departments and legislative bodies that are involved in program and service development for officers and their families. Ultimately, as stress-related problems are reduced in the home, officers may then be better equipped to handle the stress of work each day and provide the highest quality of service to their communities.

If greater social awareness regarding the amount of stress that life partners of police officers experience, there can be a clearer understanding of how to create more effective supports for all members of this study. The significance of this study would

provide a positive social change by assisting police officers and their families by fully understanding and addressing the emotional strain that life partners' experience.

Summary

This chapter offered background information on the reasons for conducting research about the secondary stress exhibited by life partners of police officers. There is a lack of data regarding the lived experiences of life partners of those officers who work in CAC units, which require the investigation of videos, images and reports that contain children in vulnerable states. Selye provided education about how stressors play a major role in everyday living; however, the coping mechanisms for those who work in emotionally draining settings, remains difficult to implement. Research is limited regarding the daily functions of life partners dealing with secondary stress from living with CAC police officers. This study may contribute to assisting police officers and their families in developing appropriate coping skills, thereby allowing them to maintain healthier and supportive relationships while working in stressful situations. Chapter 2 will provide a more in-depth literature review and greater justification for the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Although there are numerous research studies that document the stress of police officers, research pertaining to the experiences of their spouses is limited. Law enforcement officers, especially those working in CAC units, experience a great deal of emotional distress from the cases they work on and due to recurrent exposure to traumatic events, which can have growing chronic effects on mental health. Although current research supports officers often experience a great deal of secondary trauma from their work, data on how that stress affects them in the home setting is also limited. Researchers such as Velazquez and Hernandez (2019), Craun et al. (2015), and Brimhall et al. (2018) have confirmed that police stress tends to spill into the home setting, causing difficulties the police officers, as well as their families. Chapter 2 will examine the research related to the secondary stress of the life partners of police officers. Chapter 2 will also discuss work stress, family stress and secondary stress theory.

Literature Search Strategy

Investigation and relevant support references were collected through the World Wide Web. The Walden University Library provided access to the following databases: ProQuest Criminal Justice, Academic Search Complete, JSTOR, PsycINFO and EBSCOhost. Additional searches included search engines for available journals, such as Google. Search terms with a date range of 2016-2021 included *effects of police work*, *Internet crimes against children*, *Internet child exposure*, *spouses of police offices*, *crimes against children unit*, *secondary stress*, *impact of secondary police stress*, *impact of*

Internet crimes, hazards off Internet crimes, police family stress, Internet crimes, police stress, Selye stress theory and police secondary stress. There are additional seminal works were included beyond the date range that were relevant to this topic.

Theoretical Foundation

Stress Theory

Selye (1976), the first theorist to define stress, asserted that stress symptoms are congruent signs of an illness without fully observing it right away. Selye also determined that stress is present in an individual throughout the entire period of exposure to a nonspecific demand. He defined strain and crisis in a physiological form and developed the term for psychological strain, calling it *stress*. Selye expanded on his theory that there are differences in the stress that individuals experience by attributing that acute stress is formed from the total response to frequently experienced stressors. This research resulted from the theory that the more stress an individual exhibits, the more likely they experience acute stress in their everyday life.

Tan and Yip (2018) explained that Selye attributed stress to everyday life, even nonspecific demands. When stress is so commonly ingrained in everyday life, added stress from work could weigh heavier on an individual. When nonspecific demands occur in a stressful work setting, these demands become more rigorous for the individual, both mentally and physically. Despite the stereotypical physical effects of stress, Selye (1976) determined that not all stress reactions are equal due to differences in individual perceptions and emotional reactions. Selye determined that the association between physical disorders and anxiety validated the psychosomatic theory of disease.

Selye (1976) stated that when individuals are exposed to a stressor, they are surprised at first, then attempt to maintain consistency by resisting the change, and eventually fall victim to exhaustion. Selye concluded that stress is often noticeable through physical features of the body, whereas the stress-producing signs often go unnoticed, which can contribute to long-term illness that is subsequently related to psychological issues. Selye attributed physical ailments with stress-related problems, which was groundbreaking. Prior to studying the phenomenon of stress, Selye found that what was ignored were symptoms related to physical exhaustion, decreases in appetite and level of motivation at work, which he termed the *syndrome of just being sick* (Tan & Yip, 2018). With a better understanding of the effects of stress in everyday life, as well as on overall well-being, the gap lies in determining whether the stress among police officers has an effect on their life partners becomes more noteworthy.

Selye proposed that the human body experiences physical symptoms of stressors. Understanding how stressors are related to both nonspecific and specific demands can assist individuals with learning more appropriate coping skills. Correlating stress theory with that of working conditions and displacement of stress to the home setting becomes useful when investigating the correlation between work and family stressors (Selye, 1976). Stress theory and the studies pertaining to understanding stress, who is susceptible to stress, how to deal with stress and how to identify it is necessary to relieving stress in both the work and the home settings. Selye created a new term, *stressor*, in order to differentiate between stimulus and response and concluded that a stressor is the stimulus and stress is the response.

In this research study, stressors are the marital and familial conflicts show a significant relationship by CAC officers' work stress that occurs at home and the stress response is how spouses react to their partners' stress. Stress is an essential aspect of this proposed study due to the specific role and duties of police officers working in CAC units. Although understanding the stress of CAC officers is important, there will be a greater focus and analysis of how that stress negatively impacts their life partners who live with those officers.

Secondary Stress Theory

The symptoms of secondary traumatic stress (STS) are similar to PTSD; however, STS, "develops from indirect exposure to traumatic material or events," (Bourke & Craun, 2014, p. 587). The traumatic event is not experienced or witnessed firsthand, but symptoms may occur from learning about or listening to recounting of the trauma. STS is also referred to as *secondary traumatization* and *vicarious trauma*.

It is likely that police officers who work in CAC units experience secondary stress, which is also been referred to as *compassion fatigue*. Bourke and Craun (2014) found that 49% of ICAC personnel experienced mild or moderate STS, while 10% and 15% of respondents experienced high and severe STS, respectively. Additionally, respondents who reported high to severe STS, reported increased use of alcohol and tobacco, and engaging in denial of symptoms. This study did not provide an adequate understanding of how working in ICAC units affects their families. Additionally, Craun et al. (2015) found that 4% of ICAC officers reported feeling exhausted when they are home.

Bourke and Craun (2014) elaborated that integrating stress with images and information of trauma causes distress on investigators. Hurrell et al. (2018) defined secondary traumatization as, “Having a direct relationship with a traumatised [sic] individual, whereby you hear about their traumatic experiences,” (p. 636). Hurrell et al. stated that the needs of those officers who investigate child exploitation deserve special consideration. While there is limited awareness as to what causes stress among law enforcement officers, there is still a lack of insight regarding how police officers’ stress transfers to their life partners. Using the trauma symptoms checklist, created by Bride et al. (2004) to measure secondary traumatization, Hurrell et al. found that law enforcement professionals experience higher levels of secondary traumatization than mental health professionals. Hurrell and her colleagues identified that a major concern was raised by several veteran police officers regarding the demands of their work responsibilities, specifically investigating child pornography, were often too traumatizing.

Queirós et al. (2020) explained that there has been increased attention given to the psychological impact that burnout and stress have on the performance of police officers. It is important to note that those researchers explained that law enforcements’ interactions with citizens in the community have been recently scrutinized due to the use excessive force, which contributes to police work stress. Secondary stress is important to consider when discussing how family members are affected by the stress of police officers. The CAC officers with STS will behave “differently” at home, as explained earlier, by suffering with rigors of work stress related to the images and videos they have witnessed. The police officers’ STS appears to possibly lead to stress among their life partners.

Experiencing with work-related STS can affect the life partners and their relationship due to bringing their work stress home to their life partners.

Literature Review

There have been numerous studies conducted to measure the stress of police officers and the rigors of their work. Unfortunately, due to technology advancing, the studies of CAC, especially related to cyber abuse, is limited. Another limit to research is examining a better understanding of police officers' life partners and the possible emotional strain they may feel from their partners' work. There are studies available to explain how police work continues to be strenuous in several different forms, though studies are limited on how police work effects the home setting.

Growth of Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Units

Since the 1970s, advancing technology, especially the Internet, has made it easier to acquire child pornography. Although child pornography is not necessarily new to law enforcement agencies, those laws have been recently amended. According to Kenyon (2020), it was not until the 1970s that public outcry increased against child pornography and in 1977, Congress finally recognized the commercial production and circulation of child pornography as illegal. In 1996, the Federal government expanded those laws that made the production of child pornography completely illegal, regardless of whether or not it was for commercial gains, which included its use on the Internet (Kenyon, 2020). Another advancement in technology is live streaming, which has become very popular as it allows viewers to watch videos that are filmed and broadcasted in real time through the Internet and social media.

Due to the growing use of technology and the increasing incidence of crimes committed through the Internet, government agencies determined that a special task force was needed. The main responsibilities of ICAC units include proactive and reactive investigations, the detection and apprehension of ICAC offenders, and provide training to law enforcement agencies investigating Internet crimes against children (Fernandez-Alcantara, 2018). Officers that work in ICAC units are specifically trained to investigate the Internet crimes against children. The ICAC Task Force Program (2017) takes on multiple roles when seeking to conclude abuse cases involved with children, such as, forensic investigation and educating the community. The department continues to grow, attempting to keep up with technology as it develops. Growing forces have been utilized in not only a proactive approach toward combatting child abuse but also by responding reactively toward eliminating the abuse before it spreads through the Internet. Fernandez-Alcantara (2018) stated that ICAC units assist law enforcement statewide by tactical methods. While Internet crimes increase, the agencies formed to fight those crimes work with the local law enforcement agencies to investigate child abuses.

Analyzing the explicit nature of the language used by adults in webcast chatrooms with minors, Kleijn and Bogaerts (2020) determined that specific language patterns are important and relevant within the chat room conversations. Kleijn and Bogaerts reported that in almost two-thirds of cases, there were clear intentions of initiating and engaging sexual conversations with adults posing as children. Grooming is a common form of persuading individuals to partake in sexual activities that the groomer is eliciting. Kleijn and Bogaerts (2020) explained that the grooming happened immediately when contact

was made with supposed minors and in this study one of those grooming techniques occurred when adults tried to convince minors that most minors engage in sexual activity with adults. Because technology has become so advanced, the identity of the perpetrator remained difficult to find. The Kleijn and Bogaerts study illustrated the apparent ease of grooming minors via webcam access. Police officers are continuously trying to apprehend those offenders, while maintaining a stable home setting for them and their families.

Police Work Stress

Stress comes in many forms and is experienced in many different work settings. Liakopoulou et al. (2020) explained that stress is common for police officers, as they often exposed to cases pertaining to violent crimes, child abuse, rape, and domestic violence. Lucas et al. (2012) explained that work-related stress can have negative effects on individuals' body and emotional well-being, that significant exposure to stress at work negatively impacts cardiovascular health and can trigger the onset of depression. The human body has specific responses to work stress that should not be ignored. Understanding the effects of work stress on an individual's well-being is essential in any work environment.

Although studies continue to demonstrate that work stress has a dire effect on the human body and mind, it affects individuals differently. It is important to understand that work stress is not always easy to manage but individuals should be able to recognize when the rigor of their work affects their daily living. Lucas et al. (2012) found that people employ varying stress-management interventions; therefore, officers who work in

CAC units experience stress differently based on external factors respective to individual officers, such as being a parent and relating the crimes they investigate to their children. Due to explorations of work-stress among police, there has been a significant move toward the identification, prevention, and management of stress in police departments in order to improve officers' physical and mental health (Liakopoulou, 2020). While researchers attempt to understand stress and its relationship with work, police officers continue to be studied to determine the need of coping skills. Work stress is completely dependent on the individual and their response to the stressors from either work, coworkers, or the demands from work.

When examining work stress, it is important to understand the demands of the workplace. Although all jobs have certain demands, the term *demand* could be perceived differently among the individuals; therefore, work demands, and work stressors are dependent on the worker. If a police officer who is exposed to child abuse and pornography at work, it would depend on the officer to determine how stressful their work is. Furthermore, Lucas et al. (2012) found that, the relationship between the environment, the workplace and the relationship with others are important aspects to work stress. If a police officer who works in a CAC unit has children of their own, then their perception of the victims may become more personal due to relating the crimes from work to their own children.

Liakopoulou et al. (2020) discussed the importance of recognizing police stress and have shown that occupations like law enforcement entail unique stress factors that expand beyond the demands and resources commonly assessed in occupational stress. As

previously discussed, when police officers view images and videos of children being abused, such stress can lead to additional burnout. Liakopoulou et al. explained that physical effects attributed to stress can have long-term consequences, as well affecting the officer's functioning in the home setting. The same researchers found that frequent exposure to acute, chronic, and mostly unpredictable stress in the work environment has been linked to physical (e.g., headaches, stomachache, backache, ulcers, heart attacks) and psychological (e.g., anxiety, depression, flashbacks, panic attacks) symptoms. The long-term functioning of a police officer can be examined by evaluating them in present day situations. Police work stress continues to peak interests in research due to how officers behave outside of work, as well as aiming to lower burnout rates and maintain functioning officers while on duty.

Griffin and Sun (2017) focused on the effects of invasive work stress and found that leads to a high burnout rate among police officers, which has provided an understanding of how work-related stress can affect an individual's emotional stability and feeling withdrawn. Despite the research that is available on law enforcement burnout, information regarding the burnout of life partners of police officers is limited. It has yet to be determined whether the life partners of CAC officers experience the work-family conflict similarly to their partners.

Linking police officer violence with childhood trauma, Prost et al. (2020) sought to determine whether the link of childhood trauma and alcohol abuse is directly correlated to police violence and among police officers that met the requirements for hazardous drinking, 35.7 percent experienced childhood abuse, 27.6 percent witnessed

intimate partner violence (IPV), and 31.6 percent both experienced childhood abuse and witnessed IPV. This research is beneficial due to understanding that there are added components to police stress that can still affect the home setting. It is essential to first understand the psychological stress police work can be on an officer.

Police Work and Psychological Stress

There are several concerns related to the effects of work stress in law enforcement when examining the impact of psychological stress. Despite availability of services at work, there is still limited willingness to seek out mental health services among police officers (Velazquez & Hernandez, 2019). In examining previous research, Liakopoulou et al. (2020) reported that work-related stress can affect an officer's mental health, including negative emotional distress that affects everyday life. Mental health concerns were not the only negative effects of work-related stress, as the same researchers reported that the pressures of work caused poor work satisfaction and burnout. While mental health conditions, either preexisting or exacerbated by work, continue to be apparent in first responders and their need for treatment goes unwanted and consequently, their mental health declines. Even though it is commonly understood that stress negatively impacts individuals' personal and emotional well-being, police officers have difficulty seeking the necessary supports they need (Velazquez & Hernandez, 2019). With this evidence, there is a gap in understanding the relationship between a police officers' stress from work and how it affects their family unit.

Velazquez and Hernandez (2019) explained that frequent exposure to adverse conditions is an inevitable part of police jobs; however, it can lead to an increased risk of

developing mental health concerns, relating it to the term *cumulative trauma*, as it occurs from involvement with stressful work conditions. Regarding cumulative trauma, recurrent exposure can lead to the desensitization of outward emotions, another sign of declining mental health. Velazquez and Hernandez confirmed that with enough work stress, police officers will exhibit symptoms of depression and PTSD. Understanding the effects of working in an intensive setting can assist researchers with creating awareness of the trauma that police officers consistently experience. As seen from working in environments with daily exposure to stress, mental health struggles can be damaging to the police officer's career.

Researchers have shown the correlation between stressful work environments, pre-existing mental health problems and the development of new mental health issues. Haugen et al. (2017) conducted a meta-analysis of nearly 3,000 published studies and discovered that one-third of all reports found that first responders experienced significant stigma as a barrier to seeking mental health services, which prevented those individuals from receiving the necessary supports to alleviate stress and traumatization. Haugen et al. (2017) found that over 33 percent of participants report experience stigma for their mental health needs. This study also found that over 9 percent of participants reported that they were unable to get support for their mental health needs.

Unfortunately, Haugen et al.'s (2017) study concluded that there was a high probability of first responders with mental health issues abusing alcohol. This study also concluded a positive correlation of PTSD being strongly linked with inability to cope with the stress from work. A major aspect of refusing support and services for mental

health needs is the fear of confidentiality being broken (Haugen et al., 2017). Haugen et al. (2017) concluded that there are more mental health issues that occur without the support needed, due to the stigma surrounded around the necessity of support. This research proves valuable by assuming that many first responders including police officers, have underlying mental health needs that go untreated.

Long-term work in a stressful field makes police officers an “at risk” population. Violanti et al. (2020) explained having immediate access to weapons makes it easier for officers to commit suicide or even murder-suicide. Violanti and his colleagues reviewed a previous study that found over 83 percent murder-suicide offenders were male law enforcement officers and in most of these cases, there was minimal information as to what mental health services and interventions were provided to the officers involved to better help them cope with anxiety, depression and substance abuse related to their work-stress. Researchers continue to raise questions as to how to alleviate police work-related stress and decrease the effect that work stress has in the home setting.

Adding to the long-term consequences work stress has on law enforcement officers, Violanti et al. (2020) stated that alcohol use is viewed as an acceptable way to cope with stress, which is worrisome to their physical and mental health. These same researchers found that police officers were more than four times likely to engage in suicidal ideation while drinking alcohol. Violanti et al. (2020) explained that more long-term studies are necessary to determine the most helpful interventions to better assist law enforcement officers with work stress. These methods could prevent transferring work stress onto their families.

Tehrani (2018) conducted a seven-year study in the United Kingdom specifically on police officers who work as Child Abuse Investigators (CAI), which demonstrated the effect that working with children in vulnerable situations negatively impacted law enforcement officers. Tehrani found that a correlation existed between work-related stress and anxiety or depression. This study also found that in terms of gender, women experience higher levels of those symptoms. Those results suggested that frequent monitoring of officers could be beneficial for their own well-being and that psychological supervision can also help police management identify ways to monitor the long-term effectiveness and well-being of CAIs.

Previous studies have correlated mental health issues related to police stress. PTSD is common among first responders. Marchand et al. (2015) interviewed police officers in Canada who were involved in traumatic cases to determine how quickly symptoms of PTSD are experienced after a traumatic event (e.g., shootings, riots, domestic violence). This study also took into account police officers' history of trauma and psychological traits, while its purpose was to determine how quickly and how long acute stress disorder (ASD) was reported following the traumatic event over the course of five to fifteen days, one month, three months and one year. Marchand and his colleagues found that within the first month following a traumatic event, nine percent of the police officers developed acute stress disorder; however, the incidence of ASD and PTSD dropped to three percent after only three months. As police officers rely on emotional coping strategies, Marchand et al. observed that 32 percent of male police officers who experienced a traumatic event were more likely to experience PTSD if they have

children. It is important to note that although this study's hypothesis was not statistically significant, the researchers believe that prevalence of police culture was responsible for participants' underreporting of symptoms of PTSD and its resulting ASD, which may have negatively impacted their research. The benefits of Marchand et al.'s (2015) study includes understanding the immediacy of PTSD following traumatic events and the importance of the use of coping by those officers.

Mental health concerns continue to be explored in the law enforcement. Despite going through several work-based trainings, first responders do not typically receive trainings on how to deal with death. Regehr et al. (2021) stated that disasters and witnessing human suffering can have a negative mental health impact but frequent and consistent exposure to disasters can have more significant and long-lasting impacts on the mental health of first responders. Regehr et al. found that when an event is more unpredictable, such as the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack, traumatic symptoms can have longer lasting effect. The nature of the disaster is relevant when discussing mental health and trauma and Regehr et al. found that rates of depression and anxiety increased over time among first responders following September 11, 2001, especially when mental health supports were not utilized. Regehr and her colleagues found that there is limited research that analyzed how law enforcement officials experience similar mental health issues while working in the field and that there are only six longitudinal studies analyzing the comorbidity of trauma and ASD. Understanding this gap can potentially assist with recognizing how the mental health of first responders can affect all aspects of their lives.

Questions regarding police officer aggression arise when discussing police work. Kurtz and Hughes (2021) sought to determine if police stress was related to childhood abuse and found that police violence can be highly correlated with work stress, although linking childhood aggression to police violence may prove relevant for future studies. Having experienced prior trauma and abuse in life affects work functioning. With a clearer understanding of how upbringing can affect individuals, especially how they function at work, this information is important when discussing careers that involve greater incidence of traumatic events. Kurtz and Hughes (2021) stated that the relationship between childhood violence and work violence continues to be studied, especially in the police force, and that it is crucial to understand the perspectives of police officers when discussing police violence. The correlation between police work stress and work-related aggression is important. The same researchers also found a correlation between childhood abuse and police violence, which can be helpful when recruiting individuals into the police academy. Emotional stress is highly correlated with jobs related to law enforcement, these studies are beneficial when considering other predispositions to police stress, such as an individual's upbringing.

Understanding the graphic material that police officers are exposed to is crucial when discussing how stress can cause secondary stress disorder. Parkes (2020) examined the prevalence of graphic materials that police officers investigate and found that more than half of the respondents had worked investigations containing sexually graphic and violent images. This study also found that 83 percent of the participants reported seeing still images of sexual offenses and 84 percent reported communicating with sexual

offenders (Parkes, 2020). Parkes concluded an important aspect of working in a field to which police officers are exposed to sexual offenses, coping skills should be maintained and expected, in order to avoid stress in the officers' home environment. Parkes' study demonstrates the relevance of how often police officers are exposed to sexually graphic material, as well as the expectation to maintain emotional stability.

The Effects of Police Work on Marital and Family Stress

The symptoms of STS and PTSD are similar, especially at face value and the stress from traumatic experiences at work can spill into the home setting, as well. When a law enforcement officer experiences excessive stress, their physiological health is affected (Craun et al., 2015). The same researchers suggested that police officers' partners placed more focus on how work has added additional stress in their relationship and the officers themselves cited their partners' reactivity to their jobs as causing additional stress on their work performance. The researchers then concluded that the officers who focused more on their partner's levels of affection were more resistant to improving their negative interactions.

STS is more common with police officers who have families when working with child victims. Craun et al. (2015) determined that individuals who exhibit higher levels of protectiveness tend to have higher levels of STS, which negatively affects the home setting, such as poor communication, distrust of others, being unable to talk about their experiences at work, problems pertaining to intimacy and less time spent with children. After exposure to child victims at work, police officers see their own children as potential victims themselves. This exacerbates to stress at home and by frequently viewing their

children as victims rather than having a feeling of giving their children a safe place. Although the research can educate their readers on the possible negative effects of working in an increasingly stressful environment, it is not conclusive in terms of how much of an impact it has on the family of the police officers.

Work-Family Stress among Non-CAC Officer Families

Suppressing emotions and emotional disengagement is common among police officers. Brimhall et al. (2018) indicated that the most common coping strategy reported by police wives that their partners used was “keeping things to self.” As explained by Brimhall et al., officers’ wives experienced stress from observing their husbands not communicating, although they were visibly stressed from work. Nguyen et al. (2020) found that when a spouse in a marriage experienced increased demands in their lives, communication becomes limited and poor, causing stress in the relationship.

Communication continues to be a main area of concern when discussing successful marriages, even when work stress is apparent. Brimhall et al. (2018) explained that the officers’ spouses want them to have a healthier mindset at both home and work and over 80 percent of respondents stated they were in a committed relationship. When reporting their partners’ levels of attachment, Brimhall and his colleagues found a significant portion of the partners of police officers perceived their significant other as securely attached, communication was described as constructive, whereas respondents who felt as though their relationship was not as strong, failed to answer the question. This study suggested that law enforcement officers would benefit from supports that could encourage them to speak more openly with their spouses and seek support for mental

health needs. The results of this study implied that even with the best intentions, when police officers keep their feelings from their spouses, it unintentionally impacts communication negatively. Brimhall et al. stated that law enforcement officers could benefit from learning how to engage in healthier ways and suggested that other interventions, such as group therapy, would benefit the officers with openly discussing their emotional distress caused by work. The results of Brimhall's study further supports that the lack of communication between law enforcement officers and their partners can have a detrimental effect on marital relationships.

Further discussing how police work affects marriage and family, Karaffa et al. (2015) assessed 82 police officers and 89 spouses of police officers and found that the biggest cause of perceived level of conflict was work-family conflict (26 percent and 24 percent of respondents reported medium and high levels of marriage conflict, respectively). Pertaining to work-family conflict, there are two important aspects in this study: first, Karaffa and her colleagues also found that it was difficult for participants when their spouse had to choose between the responsibilities of their job and their families; second, one-third of participants reported that their partners took their work-related stress out on family members. Nguyen et al. (2020) explained that when instances of work-related stress is apparent in a spouse, their ability to problem-solve in the home setting becomes difficult, leaving a poor effect on the marriage. Though work is necessary to maintain a stable home setting, work stress can leave a negative effect on a marriage if not appropriately communicated. Karaffa et al. reported that the majority of spouses expressed pride with their partners' career choice (86.6 percent of respondents),

66.3 percent of those respondents would still choose to marry a police officer and only 23.5 percent had reservations about their partners' jobs in law enforcement. This disconnect in communication that exists between the officers and their spouses was apparent in this study. This study is essential for the proposed research because of how apparent police stress is in the home and in the relationship.

Karaffa et al (2015) conducted a qualitative study on study found that the participant's perception proved to be beneficial, which demonstrated that several of the spouses felt as though their police officer partner yells very often at home. Moreover, these researchers found that many of the spouses reported their ability to communicate their feelings with their partners; however, the officers were not often able to communicate their feelings to their spouses. Karaffa and his colleagues found that officers reported that their job is the reason that they do not express emotions as much as they should and although not all officers have reported this belief, it is important to note that the perception of even one participant can illustrate the culture of police work.

McQuerrey Tuttle et al. (2018) studied the spillover of work stress into the home setting and found that the demands of police work contribute to stress, as well. McQuerrey Tuttle et al. (2018) found that emotional spillover from work was a predictor negative marital functioning or even failed marriages. McQuerrey Tuttle et al. also concluded that with the proper supports and services for police officers and their families, family conflict becomes more manageable.

Adding to stress is the animosity between police officers that is experienced at work. Hakan Can et al. (2013) sought out to examine police stress and causes of police

stress. Hakan Can et al. (2013) explained that past studies have demonstrated that police officers have projected their work-related stress caused by coworkers and any frustrations experienced at work onto their families. Hakan Can et al. concluded that aggression, especially the animosity created by police supervisors, at work can lead to aggression at home. Such studies are essential in examining the negative affects work stress has on officers and their families.

Moreover, a study was conducted specifically to measure the emotional stress of police officers observed by their spouses. Roberts et al. (2013) recruited 17 police officers and their wives, who are not officers, to participate in the study. This study required each married couple to independently complete the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment test. The purpose of this study was to measure emotional irregularities upon each officer and their wife. The couples each completed diaries they had to fill out daily as part of the study as well (Roberts et al., 2013). This study showed similarities between the police officers' and their wives' answers, showing a consistency in the results of the participants' answers.

Roberts et al. (2013) found similarities from previous studies to their research, which found that the police officers reported more negative emotions that they reported that their stress was work related. Roberts et al.'s stated that police officers and their wives report that when the officers report negative emotions, they do not react from them at home, whereas when their wives report having negative emotions, they do react from them. Roberts and her colleagues found that officers' wives were able to identify when their police officer husbands were stressed from work but that those wives were less

likely to show affection towards to their police officer husbands even though their spouses were not affectionate, assuming that decreased affection is related to stress. This study is significant when discussing the effects of police work shifting into the home setting. One limitation from this study is understanding how officers who work in CAC units possibly bring their stress home to their spouses.

Domestic violence is closely related to secondary stress from work related insensitivity. Meffert et al. (2014) conducted a study on 57 police officers and their spouses and partners. The purpose of this study measured domestic strains and violence that may occur in the homes of police officers. Meffert's study conducted a baseline assessment by having the police officers and their partners complete a self-assessment questionnaire measuring their stress. After 12 months, those same respondents were instructed to reassess their previous levels of stress experienced at home. Meffert et al. found that PTSD and secondary trauma were seen among both assessments. The results of this study are beneficial when discussing police stress affecting the home setting as secondary stress of spouses and partners was significantly higher 12 months after the first self-reported assessment. The first hypothesis of correlating police stress to trauma was not confirmed as per the perception of the police officers (Meffert et al., 2014). This study's hypothesis of correlating greater secondary trauma from police work to relationship violence as per the spouses and partners was significant. Meffert et al. also found that spouses and partners related their police officer spouses' stress to the work they do. This study relies highly on determining if CAC unit police officers transfer work

stress into the home setting, supporting the hypothesis of police officers being involved in domestic violent relationships.

Even though it is apparent that work-family conflict exists in the police force, researchers have measured the conflict through different methods. Amendola et al. (2021) examined a constructive way to measure WFC for law enforcement officials, which sought to create its own scale to measure spousal and family stress for families among police officers. Amendola et al. used two focus groups, which consisted of eight to ten spouses of police officers. This study tried to measure three aspects: traits of the job that conflict with family life, signs of excessive work and effects of the officers' stress on the family. Each dimension being studied would have its own number of questions being asked of the participants (Amendola et al., 2021). The result of the study confirmed that the best way to measure the important aspects mentioned earlier was to include three dimensions that include absorption, emotional-based WFC and culture-based WFC. According to Amendola et al., WFC scales were constructed but there have not been scales specifically constructed to measure police officer families. This study explained that although the police officers may not be in-tuned to how their work stress affects their families, the scales would be beneficial to assist them on how to better understand. The next step in the process, as explained by Amendola et al. (2021), is to create more qualitative data to incorporate in with the scales. This study continues to be constructed, even with the first step being concluded, more questionnaires and data processing continues to ensure that the proposed scale measures police families' perceptions and interpretations appropriately. Amendola et al.'s study is useful when examining the lived

experiences of life partners of police officers by allowing for myself to identify which dimensions may be more useful to construct in the interviews.

Work-Family Stress among CAC Officer Families

As Internet child pornography has become more prevalent, investigations continue to grow in the forensic field, as well. A study conducted by Stewart and Witte (2020) that sought to determine if investigating child pornography would impede their parenting styles, found that participants experienced secondary traumatic stress when investigating online child pornography in ICAC units. Participants had to have at least one child between five and eighteen and currently be employed by an ICAC unit. The researchers explained that there is limited research to determine if secondary traumatic stress from work transfers to the home setting, especially in regard to parenting. It was hypothesized that parents with higher rates of STS would more frequently monitor their children's Internet usage; however, the opposite was determined, which Stewart and Witte theorized that the STS experienced from working in ICAC investigations caused more avoidance among fathers. To corroborate this finding, Ali et al. (2018) found that when a parent is not affectionate toward their child, their child reports feelings of inadequacy and rejection. Stewart and Witte (2020) explained that working in the field did not eliminate positive parental engagement and warmth at home and that officers explained that investigating child pornography often made them more engaging with their children in a positive manner. This study, however, did find that the participants were more guarded with their children's exposure to the Internet and that they monitored their younger children's Internet usage more frequently and that parents monitored their

daughters' Internet usage more often than their son's Internet usage. Stewart and Witte explained that a concern with this study was the possibility that over exposure of working in child pornography investigation can cause desensitization to the dangers of the Internet.

In Brady's 2016 study, a survey was given to full time employees who work in ICAC units in order determine rates of STS and burnout among the full-time employees (FTE). It was determined that male FTEs were less likely to experience STS if they felt that they were supported by their families, as well as having appropriate coping skills. From this study, it is possible to assume that police officers that do not communicate, are less likely to feel supported due to limited knowledge of their feelings from their life partners. This study also found that if FTEs considered their work overwhelming coupled with especially young ages of victims, then STS was high. Brady also found that respondent STS was higher among those who were more spiritual. Although there are aspects of police work those researchers cannot control, such as the age of the victims, law enforcement agencies can use this information to support their employees. It is essential to know this information when discussing the stress among life partners of CAC investigators. When interviewing life partners, this information can be helpful when asking questions regarding support for one another.

Summary

This chapter discussed the workplace stressors that police officers face in the field, especially exposure to trauma; however, there is a noticeable lack of insight on how detrimental that stress is on life partners of police officers who work in CAC units.

Additionally, psychological stress and its physiological impact was examined, and the influence of burnout and compassion fatigue were applied to marital and family stress. This chapter clarified that although many studies have been concluded about work stress, there still lacks an understanding of how work stress affects life partners of police officers.

Chapter 3 will discuss this study's methodological approach and discuss the benefits of phenomenological research when gathering personal experiences and interpretations. By interviewing the life partners of CAC officers, this study's aim was to provide firsthand narratives and a greater understanding of how that work-related stress also affects officers' families. Obtaining the lived experiences from the life partners of CAC unit officers was essential in the pursuit of relieving the marital strain and family stress among those who work in CAC units. Chapter 3 was to reinforce the importance of gaining personal interpretations of individuals who may live in an environment suggestive of STS disorder.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of life partners of police officers who work in CAC units. This chapter was to discuss the methodological procedures of purposeful sampling, semi-structured participant interviews and coding strategies for displaying data. NVivo would be the main coding software program due to its high validity. Principles of trustworthiness would be examined, which includes discussion of credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and reflexivity. This chapter will also discuss ethical concerns and potential biases that may be encountered during the interview process. The data obtained through qualitative measures would assist readers in understanding how the work-based stress of police officers in CAC units impacts their life partners' well-being.

Research Design and Rationale

Research Question 1: What are the lived experiences of life partners of police officers who work in Child Against Children units?

The central phenomenon of this study are the lived experiences of life partners of police officers who work in CAC units. As discussed in Chapter 2, there is an abundance of research that has evaluated the work-related stress of police officers; however, there is limited data analyzing how CAC officers' jobs affects their families, specifically, their life partners.

Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) explained that qualitative methods, such as observations, textual analysis, and visual analysis, are often utilized. A phenomenological

approach was used in this study. According to Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014), qualitative methods seek out to find the meaning or interpretation of something. It is important to understand that with the specificity of the phenomenon being researched, the sampling must be purposeful to the research. In qualitative research, participants' values and beliefs are not measured by scales but rather obtained via participant narratives. Utilizing the qualitative research approach gives researchers the ability to give meaning and interpret similar respondent experiences of respondents and allowing them to tell their stories without misrepresentation (Alase, 2017). The researcher also plays an active role in obtaining these experiences through an explanatory action, giving meaning to participants' unique perspectives (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Rather than describing phenomena according to a determined clear-cut system, meaning will be given to data, thereby translating it. I coded the participants' experiences to better help understand their meaning in themes and subgroups.

Qualitative traditions will provide the opportunity to interview participants who live or have lived with police officers who work in child abuse taskforces; therefore, this research requires the interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), a qualitative research approach that investigates a person's perception regarding their life experiences (Alase, 2017). As mentioned by Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014), the main purpose of using the IPA format is to investigate personal experiences. Personal experiences are essential when trying to determine how others perceive certain situations. According to Pietkiewicz and Smith, IPA researchers seek to understand what it is like to be in the participant's place regarding the phenomena. IPA framework consists of formulating

appropriate questions that would allow the participants to specify their own interpretations and experiences on a certain topic. To better understand the lived experiences of life partners of police officers working in child abuse units, the IPA format is the most appropriate. Pietkiewicz and Smith explained that the IPA format is a dual interpretation of the participants' explanations, whereby the process starts by allowing the participant to speak freely after being asked the pre-selected questions. After the interview process was finished, Pietkiewicz and Smith stated that the IPA researcher must make the participants' answers understandable to the audience and by examining the phenomenology of individuals, the IPA researcher must code the participants' responses. The objective of this study is to understand an individual's experiences rather than providing biased and underlying explanations.

Role of the Researcher

To implement a qualitative research design, I was to be aware of the protocols and regulations. As the researcher, I was to be sure to not contribute any biases to the research process, including the interview questions. Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) stated that, in IPA, the researcher cannot have hypotheses about the research. While I have investigated numerous articles and journals on qualitative research, it is my responsibility to explain how the qualitative process applies to this study. As the researcher, it must be known that I have no relationship to the participants but rather, I am a doctoral student who is not married to a law enforcement officer. The relationship between the participants and I was strictly professional during the interview process. When I asked participants questions about the phenomenon, it was my responsibility to actively listen to all details during

interviews. According to Pietkiewicz and Smith, it was the role of the researcher to choose the most appropriate participants for this study. Another duty of the researcher was to be transcribing the participants' answers that are given. The quality of the research design was based on the researcher and all aspects of the interview process are dependent on my level of preparedness.

A flyer with the inclusion criteria for the study was submitted to the participants. The flyer consisted of information regarding the study as well as my information on how to contact me. It included the urgency of needing certain participants that fit the requirements of studying the lived experiences life partners of police officers working the CAC units have. These participants needed to be living with active police officers working in CAC units. If the participants expressed an interest in the study, they emailed this me for further discussion. I was straightforward with potential participants regarding the theme of this research study and its process in order to eliminate any constructs that could disrupt the interview process. Following the completion of interviews, I analyzed all information given from all of the participants who provided the data, which will be obtained appropriately to ensure that the coding process is effective.

Pietkiewicz and Smtih (2014) explained that another goal of the IPA researcher is to ensure that the depth of the participants' answers is reviewed multiple times to ensure that coding is consistent. Additionally, participants must be able to feel comfortable divulging personal information to myself in order for the interview process to be successful. Although participants may find the subject to be invasive and personal, I demonstrated empathy to participants and provided emotional supports so that they felt

comfortable volunteering sensitive information. It was imperative that I am able to eliminate any biases or predetermined notions about the interview process. If participants are aware of any of the biases that I hold, the interviewee may not answer questions honestly since researcher bias can lead to inaccurate data and, therefore, invalidate this study for future research to build on. I was aware of and continually monitor any potential biases by keeping a research journal for self-reflection during the interview process.

Methodology

Sampling

It is important that I recruited participants for this study appropriately. I posted fliers that includes my contact information on social media and in support groups, locally in the Northeast of Pennsylvania for police spouses, with permission from the administrators of those support groups. If individuals are interested, they can contact me directly me via email or cell phone if they are interested. I asked questions related to the inclusion criteria, including some pertaining to their relationship with their life partner police officer, ensuring they live together, to determine whether the candidate should be included in my research study. After determining the participants' fit for this study, I obtained informed consent via email or in person, to have documentation, which allowed myself to ask for additional information and discuss the interview process.

Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) stated that six to eight participants are appropriate for an IPA study, as this sample size will provide an opportunity to examine similarities and differences between individuals without creating flaws in the research. I selected

these participants and interviewed them either in person or via video call. In order to explore the narratives given by life partners of police officers, the sampling must be specific. A non-probability or purposeful sampling method was used. Due to the study's purpose of seeking to explore the lived experiences of a specific population, the required sampling method was purposeful and respective to the research.

Sample saturation should be taken into consideration when determining the appropriate number of participants for this study. Mason (2010) explained that the sample size for a qualitative method is much smaller than that of a quantitative research study. While exploring this population, it is best to be selective, limiting the number of participants used. In what Mason described at the "point of diminishing return," even though more data can be collected, additional data does not always be related to new data that can be analyzed. Although Alase (2017) explained that with phenomenological research, the number of participants can be between two and twenty-five; however, for more consistency, six to eight participants will be interviewed. Although interviews can take more time than expected with relevant information, but ultimately unnecessary, reduced saturation allows for a more consistent interview process and sufficient data collection.

Participants

The participants of this research study were the life partners of police officers who work in CAC units. The participants must currently be in a long-term relationship for at least five years and living with a police officer for at least one year. CAC officers' spouses will not be police officers, which will ensure that roles are not combined. The

life partners included being married to, have a civil union or in a live-in relationship. The appropriate criteria for participant selection were the following attributes: participants who reside with police officers that work directly in CAC units, readiness to contribute to a series of one-on-one interviews and availability within the timeframe of the study. I planned to recruit approximately 6-15 participants that meet the inclusion criteria and until saturation is reached. I would prefer age ranges of the police officers being from 30-50 years of age, for the purposes of having more experience in the police force. It will also be noted how many children they have, for purposes of when I ask their interview questions.

Recruitment Procedures

Participants were recruited from Pennsylvania due to me being from Pennsylvania. Recruitment of participants occurred by contacting CAC units in order to post flyers or have their supervisors email out flyers on my behalf, social media, and support groups. With permission from the police officer officials, information related to this study and this researcher's information was presented in their designated stations. Potential candidates who are interested, contacted me. My contact information was made available to the participants to contact directly via email, social media message, and phone call or text message. After initial contact has been made, assurance that the participants are fully aware of the purpose of the study would be clear. When the participant was willing to move further with the study, I set up an initial screening to ensure that the participant is appropriate for the study. It is essential that I retrieved the participants' email addresses for future communication related to member checking after

the interview. Assuming that the participant is appropriate, they were asked to set up a video call or an in-person interview. Before the interview, I ensured that the participants signed the appropriate consent to participate in this study.

Instrumentation

Interview questions (Appendix A) will pertain to the lived experiences of the partners of CAC unit officers. When implemented correctly, IPA research is not biased, nor does it purposely lead to the intended hypotheses. The questions were open-ended and led to discussions in order to gather as much information as possible. I did not want the participants to feel uncomfortable in any way; therefore, the beginning of the interview process included questions for the interviewer and interviewee to get to know each other, allowing participants to build rapport with myself, recommended by Alase (2017). Alase also suggested that the interviewer should build rapport with the participants and start with some lighter questions that are not necessarily as in-depth as the interview is intended to get. The beginning of the interview started with questions, such as, “How are you doing today,” and “Tell me a little about yourself.” Participants needed to confirm that they will have enough time to complete the entire interview in one session.

The questions from the interview were intended to explore the lived experiences of the participants’ lives while living with their partners. Questions pertaining to their partners’ stress were assumed and furthermore, questions were explored if they believe their stress is related to their partners’ line of work. The interview explored relationship stress, as well as having participants explained situations in which they felt as though

their partners' stress was reflected onto themselves. An important question pertains to how participants felt toward their partners working in CAC units, which allowed their feelings and opinions to be heard, as well as how their partners' work has affected them. The ultimate goal was to identify the experiences of life partners living with police officers working in CAC units.

Data Collection

Informed consent was obtained before the interviews occurred. Participants were made aware of the advantages of participating in the study, as well as its purpose. Individual one—hour interviews will be used to collect data. Interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions being asked in a conversational format. Some questions were specifically meant to keep the interview on topic. Interviews were conducted privately via video call. All interviews were recorded on a digital recording device to ensure that all information have been collected appropriately. If there should have been face-to face interviews, I would have utilized a transcriptionist for a more accurate result with the interview. My preference was to use Zoom as a form of video calling, it automatically transcribes the interview. After each interview was completed, they were transcribed. When unexpected issues arise, such as added information not related to the original question, I investigated them in more detail with additional questions. Structured interviews allowed this interviewer to ask questions in a convenient order, which would be the same from one participant to another. According to Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014), interview questions should remain open-ended to ensure the answers are detailed and rich with information. My interview questions asked for

details of the participants' experiences living with their partner who works in the child abuse units. Another important attribute of the researcher questions that Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) explain is ensuring the questions not only contribute to their experiences but how they make sense of those experiences.

After transcribing the interviews, I sent a copy of the summary to the participants, as part of member-checking. This process allows them to review their answers and change anything they reported earlier. According to Korstjens and Moser (2018), member checking gives the participants the opportunity to correct their interpretations and clear up any misunderstandings that may occur. I ensured that all participants are given the chance to further explain their perceptions if they feel that is needed.

Data Analysis Plan

The steps of an efficient and effective Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) must be constructed appropriately. It is important to note that IPA does not require the formulation of hypotheses but rather understanding and reciprocating the phenomenology of participants through the use of narratives by asking formulated questions during the interview, which are eventually coded and explained by the researchers. Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) emphasized using small sample sizes and preferred six to eight participants, which would make sampling more purposeful and the results more meaningful.

I utilized the IPA's six stages to examine participants' phenomenology. In the first step, I reread the interview notes and transcripts to ensure that the information gathered is accurate from the participants' answers. Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014)

recommended listening to the video recordings over and over again to assist the researcher in immersing themselves in the data. I ensured that each interview recording was viewed several times to ensure my understanding of all information gathered.

The next step entails interpreting recurrent themes from detailed notes that are taken during the interview. According to Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014), it is ideal that the researcher make notes during each viewing to assist with coding. I took effective notes with my observations of the interviews. My notes not only entailed the content of what has been said but also included reflections about the interview process. Pietkiewicz and Smith stated that it is essential for the researcher to highlight distinctive phrases and emotional responses per interview to determine if there is a theme and pattern.

Step three of the analysis process entailed grouping themes that emerge from analyzing notes and entering data from interview into qualitative research software. Such themes included perceptions as to how work stress has affected the home setting. Pietkiewicz and Smith explained that the researcher be making the phrases more specific and less generalized. NVivo was used to uncover patterns, relationships, and themes. Labels were applied to important themes and those themes were clustered, which is the grouping of similar data. Coding and clustering allowed me to reduce data into manageable categorical concepts. When identifying predominant themes, I recognized connections between concepts then concluded the themes effectively.

I planned to utilize NVivo to assist with coding and organizing themes. The fourth stage in the IPA process is seeking out connections among all of the themes. Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) stated that by being able to label the themes into clusters, this allowed

for me to have more of a descriptive label. When patterns were found from these clusters, I moved on to making connections. Transcripts will be precise and verbatim in order to accurately code, so that they can be utilized for data analysis. Trustworthiness in researcher coding is maintained using NVivo coding software. These connections will be a summary to each interview explaining the reoccurring themes, if any, showing the audience how these experiences have been perceived.

The fifth stage of the IPA process includes moving on to the next interview. I repeated all four steps of the IPA process, as accordingly, to each interview recorded. I did not go back to the previous interviews and possibly taint the current interview I coded NVivo was be used on each interview recording, notes will be taken before NVivo and after, as mentioned earlier. When each transcript was completely finished and-coded, I then moved on to the final step of the process.

In the final step, I determined if there are connections among all of the interviews coded. I compared the notes of each participant, grouping the data in separate groups, if needed. For example, some participants may report more stressed than others, this would be beneficial when discussing the data in the report. Themes that emerged from examining transcripts and reexamining the detailed notes taken during the interview would be documented, and my insights of the data will be discussed; thereby, giving readers the information needed to better understand the lived experiences of spouses of those who live with law enforcement officers that work in CAC units. At this stage of the process, I was able to drop certain themes that were originally noted but now, do not fit in the clusters. As Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) explained, this process is needed to ensure

the researcher has more of a detailed report entailing that there are in fact, patterns in the themes. I presented the results that includes both data interpreted by the software program and narratives excerpts from the interviews, as well as using concept maps of visualized data. According to Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014), it is important to put all themes in the summary, as well as the clusters and final grouping to emphasize what the conclusion is from the researcher.

Trustworthiness

Credibility

To ensure that this study's findings are accurate, several steps will be utilized through qualitative validity and reliability. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) affiliated with Walden University, which consists of reviewers who are not directly associated with this study, reviewed the benefits and costs of this study. To ensure validity, I acknowledged that the most appropriate method for this research process, which is the interview process and protocols.

I utilized member checking as a form of credibility. Kortjens and Moser (2018) explained that member checking is established to ensure that the participants agree with their own perceptions given during the interview at an earlier time. Lincoln and Guba (1985) found that credibility is establishing truth in the research. This process was involved with conducting a two-to-three-page summary of the transcription and sent it to the participants. I relied on two my chair committee members from Walden University to provide me with feedback, as well as the Walden University IRB, who examined and

reviewed this study's research process, methods, and interpretations, which will serve to further ensure credibility.

Other strategies that ensured credibility are *prolonged engagement* which is creating specific questions that will be asked during lengthy interviews that contain follow-up questions to obtain as much information from participants as possible, *persistent observation* consists of the coding of information and subsequent analysis of coded data, and *member checking* such as a subsequent interview after the primary interview has concluded, which allowed the participant to review the two to three page summary of the data and provide the opportunity to confirm whether their phenomenology was interpreted correctly (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). After transcribing the interview, I wrote a two-three page summary of the transcription and then email it to the participants to check for the accuracy of the information from the interview.

Transferability

The transferability in qualitative research is defined by how it can be applied for future examination (Korstjen & Moser, 2018). Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained that transferability allows researchers to demonstrate the validity of their research through reliability. According to Korstjen and Moser, by placing context to the data from participant narratives, this research will become more meaningful to its readers, who may want to replicate this study in other populations. Coding with NVivo will allow for the participants' perceptions and answers be grouped and organized to have better understanding. After the themes have been established with the perceptions from the participants, I established a format that determined if there are patterns and/or

disagreements between the participants. These groups and themes best served to determine if the perceptions fit the hypothesis.

Dependability

Consistency in research findings is reported in detail so that readers can understand how decisions were reached (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The research and interview process remained consistent, creating more dependable results. Submitting this proposal to the IRB for review also provided dependability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained that with dependability, the results are consistent and could be repeated. After approval of this proposal, dependability was further guaranteed by having the data and the research paper examined re-examined by auditors (i.e. two Walden University dissertation advisors), which was better ensure accuracy of this study's findings.

Confirmability

The key point of confirmability is that when data is tested and retested by different researchers, the results and findings of this study will remain the same (Korstjen & Moser, 2018). I demonstrated that information came from data, not from any imaginary narratives nor producing self-serving results. Research findings was supported through unbiased data collection data rather than based on personal beliefs. Although researcher bias and predispositions have been recognized, steps were taken to ensure that results are based on participant experiences related to the phenomenon under investigation. Confirmability was established through the detailed demonstration of how each methodological decision and conclusion will be made (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I utilized manual coding. The results of the coding were documented and reported in this

study. Researchers must avoid any bias or preconceptions of this population during the interview process (Korstjen & Moser, 1985). Results was corroborated by participants. I established precise documentation of data by checking and rechecking it throughout the research process.

Reflexivity

Lincoln & Guba (1985) stated that reflexivity can be achieved by keeping a diary whereby researchers make entries discussing any decision based on the methodology of the research process, why those decisions were made and reflecting on any insights made during the research process in the research paper. A notebook was beneficial for me due to assisting with keeping track of changes, why the changes were made, and if more changes needed to be made. Frequently note taking and tracking the changes allowed me to not be forced to remember changes, the changes would all be documented to clarify certain directions being made.

Ethical Procedures

Research procedures and interviews were carried out safely and ethically. The benefits of observing the lived experiences from participants outweigh the risks of research. The IRB determine this research is compliant with the ethical research standards of Walden University and U.S. federal regulations. Confirmation for gaining access to participants, data and consent forms was obtained, signed and was available for review with the confirmation number of 02-07-22-0723773.

Ethical considerations included confidentiality, informed consent, the right to withdraw from participation and proper data collection with a vulnerable population.

According to National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research (1979), informed consent allows the participants to be privy to all information regarding the research. The participants were also given the opportunity to ask questions ensuring that they comprehend the basis of the study. A signed consent also allows for the participants to show their agreeableness to be part of the research (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). The principle of *nonmaleficence* to participants was employed and potential harms that may be inflicted on participants will be identified and kept limited. Participants were asked to read over and provide informed consent prior to participating in the study. I am ethically obligated to protect their data so that I do not breach confidentiality. Information gathered from participants were kept anonymous and confidential and was communicated to participants in straightforward language. Lastly, participants were informed that they are free to withdraw at any time during the study, until the data starts being analyzed, without repercussion.

I maintain data for safe keeping, based on Walden University standards, and it will be stored for five years. Aliases are used on all documents containing data and narratives as to ensure participant confidentiality. All documents that are kept electronically, and username and password to access these documents. All documents and data that have been collected on paper, will be stored in a safe location, and locked away; only those individuals (i.e., advisors) who have permission by the IRB will be granted access to them. To protect participant information, I only collected relevant identifiers from participants, which will be limited to initials, gender, and age. Consent forms, the

collected participant narratives and the coded data will also be stored in separate locations.

Each participant selected for the study read through the consent and signed off on it. This consent was explained to them regarding what the study entailed as well as other information regarding what is expected of them. If I find information to consist of testimonies that show that harm has been done to a child or elder, as a mandated reporter, I reported this to the appropriate persons. Mandating reporting is necessary to explain to the participants. If there was a testimony of harm to a child or an elderly individual, it is my duty to report this as possible abuse. Though information related to possible abuse is essential to report, according to the Department of Human Services (2021), the reporters could remain anonymous if they chose to do so. In Pennsylvania, the Department of Human Services (2021) explained that failure to report abuse can result in a felony charge.

Summary

Chapter 3 included a discussion of the methods and procedures for this study, as well as the rationale for selecting the chosen phenomenological paradigm. Sampling framework, recruitment strategies and data collection were reviewed. The data analysis plan was explained. The role of the researcher and principles of trustworthiness were discussed. Ethical concerns were also examined allowing for a full understanding of what is to be expected from this study.

Interviews were conducted with life partners of officers from multiple CAC units in the United States. Participants are long-term life partners of police officers. The first

portion of the study occurred either on the phone, email, or social media in order to gather and select participants to interview. After six to eight ideal candidates have been selected, data collection will occur via a second interview. Semi-structured interviews contained open-ended questions in order to determine the level of stress that participants experience and whether they relate that stress to the work of their life partners. Many of the interview questions pertained to participant attitudes, feelings, emotions, values, and opinions of their life partners' work, and how their stress affects their relationships and life at home. After interviews were transcribed, a coding approach was applied to identify specific themes through manual coding and NVivo. After coding was complete, participants were contacted one last time to determine the accuracy of the data.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of life partners of police officers who work in the CAC units. It has already been determined that working in law enforcement can contribute to stress and therefore, continued research could benefit their life partners (Brimhall et al., 2018; Craun et al., 2015; Giorgi et al., 2020; Hakan et al., 2013; McQuerrey Tuttle et al., 2018). The limits regarding studies done on how the jobs of police officers working in CAC units can affect their life partners were lacking. The perceptions and lived experiences of life partners of police officers who work in the CAC units continue to be limited but necessary for social change.

In this chapter, I will not only discuss the data collection and the analysis method, also review the results of the current study will be reviewed as well. A clear outline of the perceptions the participants had during the interview process will be addressed.

Research Question: What are the lived experiences of life partners of police officers who work in Crimes Against Children units?

Research Setting

I reached out to numerous support groups via Facebook. I messaged support groups such as Police Wives and Blue Line Wives with the flyer. One detective that was a member of the group Police Wives had reached out to me and explained that they would give the flyer to their coworkers. She, in fact, is newly divorced but thought the study was very interesting and wanted to support the study. A lead detective that worked with the main contact sent an email to me attaching several other contacts to the email

with the flyer asking to assist with the study. Four participants then contacted me separately from the email thread to participate with the study. One participant was recruited by seeing the flyer from the Facebook group Police Wives. She emailed me explaining that her husband is currently an officer with the ICAC and asked to be part of the study.

Each of the five participants emailed me if they were interested in participating in an interview for the study. The participant replied to the emailed informed consent with the phrase “I consent” to acknowledge that they read the informed consent and would like to participate in the study. The participant replied to the emailed informed consent with the phrase “I consent” to acknowledge that they read the informed consent and would like to participate in the study. After I got the email with the consent for the interview process to be taken place, the appointment was then scheduled via Zoom. Each participant was able to use a device that had the method to join the interview via Zoom. I assumed in all interviews that the participants were alone because they were the only ones on the screen during the time of the interview. There did not appear to be others present nor did there appear to be others nearby talking or engaging during the interview process.

Demographics

The five participants of this study were recruited from all over the United States. Their life partners all work in CAC units and none of the participants knew that one another were participating in this study. This research study did not require an age, a race, a gender, or any other distinguishing factors of a person. Each participant just needed to be living with their life partner for more than five years,-which all participants did. Their

life partner was also required to be currently working in the Crimes Against Children units. This study did not discriminate between internet crimes, nor any other crimes listed.

Data Collection

The study originally called for six to eight participants, but I gathered enough data from five participants due to saturation of data. Saturation is understood as the area in a study in which the collection gets to a point in which no new data or perceptions are being collected (Mason, 2010). I collected all data and information via Zoom. I am better equipped with Zoom to not only record the session, with the participants' permission, but to also record, document, and save the transcript. Each interview took from 45 minutes to 1 hour long. Interviews were recorded with the permission from the participants. The participants understood that personal questions would be asked, and they should be in a place in which they would be alone to freely answer these questions. The participants were also made aware that they did not have to answer any questions they did not want to answer. Each participant verbally stated that they understood and if they felt uncomfortable, they would not answer. I also made it clear that if the interview was uncomfortable for them, they could quit the interview at any time and they again stated that they understood. The interviews led to quite the opposite; the participants engaged so much that some even stated that they were happy they got that chance to be heard. With the recordings, the transcriptions were auto transcribed as well. I did have to review the transcriptions and make the appropriate corrections. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained that keeping a diary or notebook with details, the consistency of methodology with

limited error. I kept detailed notes throughout the coding process that was organized to assist with the establishing themes and subthemes.

When I was finished with the coding process, a meeting was scheduled with each participant. Member checking allows for the participants to check for accuracy in the data obtained by the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). All information was reviewed and confirmed then implemented into the data. Upon finishing the coding process, documenting all of the necessary attributes associated with the study and member checking, I followed IPA credibility protocol and utilized her auditors to review my results and writings.

Data Analysis

Though NVivo was going to be the form of coding, this researcher determined that coding the interviews herself would be the best form of analyzing the data. I determined that hand scoring would be more efficient and allow myself to be more familiar with the data and result in better interpretation of the data. This study used five participants with data showing signs of moderate saturation. Alase (2017) suggested that the transcript should be precise of the initial interview, before the notes and coding begins. I took sufficient notes as I was conducting the interviews while saving the transcripts during the recordings. After completing the interviews, I reread the notes that this researcher had taken during the five interviews. I highlighted the similarities on the Word documents in different colored highlighter that matched each similarity from the other interviews. I transcribed the recorded interviews and printed them. I wrote thorough field notes and transcribed the audio-recorded interviews. Participants' emotional

responses were also recorded. I then created a separate spreadsheet, writing line-by-line answers to each correlating question for coding. Then, I went through the transcripts that I coded and highlighted which appeared essential. These developing patterns led to a more informative account of the participants' experiences. Later, I found it more meaningful to group the codes into themes manually and make sense of the data based on codes and observational data this researcher collected from the participants. After transcribing and coding each data set for themes, I compiled transcript extracts into a file of emergent themes to further develop and organize the analysis. Alase (2017) stated that the researcher should be ensuring that the results are clear enough to allow the reader perception of the participants. The data delivered themes presented in all five interviews and subthemes presented in at least three or more of the interviews, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1.

Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Spouse's Experience of Behavioral Change in their Significant Other	Spouse's Experience of Communication with their Significant Other	Spouse's Experience of Change in Role Model Behavior
Subthemes	Observation of changes in psychosocial behaviors	Observation of more need to speak about work	Noticing overprotection of their children
	Feeling proud of spouse's job		Noticing overprotection of other children

Evidence of Trustworthiness

To ensure that I was following all precautions of trustworthiness throughout this study, the steps of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were

followed. I made notes from each of these steps and followed them to ensure that trustworthiness was being practiced during this study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) supported that there must be truth in the research. Not only were there sensitive details to be mindful of during this practice, but there was also the IPA analysis code to be followed. I showed great sympathy for the study by handling all information with proper care and cautiousness. The participants never appeared concerned with the information they disclosed.

Credibility

As per IPA guidelines, I utilized collecting the data through interviews and then coding the field notes. According to Korstjens and Moser (2018), practicing credibility is ensuring that the information from the participants is accurate and their correct perception. I coded a second time, transcribed the notes, then coded a third time while rereading the prepared transcripts. Then, I moved on to constructing the files of emergent themes that consisted of compiled transcript extracts. This helped me to highlight relevant sections into appropriate files easily. Within each file, I moved the frequency of the theme and then associated each theme with the objective and purpose of this study.

Transferability

After conducting structured interviews, I collected detailed and thick descriptions of experiences from the participants' perspective. The participants varied in age, though all were over 21 years old. The information reflected their personal experiences, concerns, understandings, and perspectives, including what they believed influenced the change in their life partners. As explained by Korstjen and Moser (1985), I was able to

place context to the data from participant narratives. The information I collected is presented in such a way as to allow readers to establish similarity between cases. For transferability, the study results section below includes evidence from literature appropriate to this study and shows simplification of the data to other groups. In the Study Results section, sufficient data are provided to establish similarity between cases to show how the findings might be transmitted. I provide direct participant quotes and a transparent analysis of the data to show transferability among participant similar experiences. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that the researcher should report enough data so there can be connections to the themes from the same data. I believe I was able to accomplish this with the interview data I obtained.

Dependability

To ensure this study's dependability, I followed all steps that aligned with chapter three's outline of the study. I submitted my proposal to the IRB for review and it was approved to be conducted. I also took careful steps to show the accuracy of the methods and language and constructed detailed audit trails that were demonstrated by the auditors. Lincoln and Guba (1985) ensure that by following these steps, the reader is able to review the method and data in the appropriate manner. In this process, the auditors of this study, the chair and committee member, reviewed the results and findings. I made the appropriate revisions necessary to adhere to the university's standings. When the revisions were finalized, I kept the research in a safe location, away from others.

Confirmability

I used Zoom recording and transcription, with participant approval, to record each interview. After saving the transcription, I pasted it onto a Word document to highlight similarities between participants. I often made notes when I would deem it necessary as well as notice commonalities between participants. The Word document included side notes that included any possible biases or perceptions of my own in order to assist my own interpretations of the participants' answers. Therefore, I asked the participants to provide me with feedback on whether my perceptions were correct of their accounts through the process of member checking. This documentation processes should enable anyone to determine if my interpretations and conclusions are observable and that my data is supported and verifiable. In terms of Korstjen and Moser (1985), I had to be sure that any biases and preconceptions were avoided during the interview and second meeting as well as the coding process.

Study Results

The findings support the research question based on the data collected. Themes were generated in relevance to the as well as each participants' perceptions and their quotes. The research question seeks to find the perspectives of the lived experiences of the life partners of police officers who work in CAC units. Their experiences have yet to be determined and explored, which is why this research is important. The semistructured interview questions used in this study were designed to understand the participants' lived experiences. Follow-up questions were only utilized if needed. The purpose was to gain their perception of living with police officers who work in the

Crimes Against Children Units. The questions I asked the participants pertained to how they perceived their life partners' work, if they believed that their partners changed and how they cope. The questions also explored their own coping skills as well. Each of the five interviews took approximately one hour. Through precise data analysis of reading, transcribing, re-reading, and coding the transcripts and field notes that I had conducted three times, I found three common themes and their subsequent subthemes across all data sets as seen in Table 1. In Table 2, I have listed my initial codes that helped constructed the themes and sub-themes for this study. The coding categories started the process of narrowing down which themes were deemed appropriate for this study. By highlighting the responses that best fit into the coding category, I then narrowed the table down further into three themes. Please see page 70 for Table 2.

Table 2.

Coding

Coding Categories	Participant Responses	Subthemes
Psychosocial Change	<p>“Cognizant of him being a male and being Filipino; if he's seen with one of my nieces whose blond hair, blue-eyed”</p> <p>“It's not trusting other people”</p> <p>“He hits a wall and cannot do it anymore”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stress in community • Lack of trust
Relating to Own Children	<p>“A certain case that dealt with a small, very young child and we also had a young child”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relating to family
Acceptance	<p>“Nothing brings him more joy when he'll come home excited”</p> <p>“Compartmentalizing work and homelife”</p> <p>“Rewarding to see that they get these people off the streets.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling proud
Communication	<p>“He would describe everything that happened and whatnot and how they lured him in”</p> <p>“Decompress from work and that is by “joking around””</p> <p>“Sees the department therapist and a positive change afterwards”</p> <p>“Talk when the kids are in bed”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open communication • Feeling better after talking about work
Overprotective	<p>“This is what they need to look out for, please be aware of this”</p> <p>“I think really the like vigilance that he has with our girls.”</p> <p>“You know that's why you don't have Snapchat.”</p> <p>“We don't trust anybody with our kids.”</p> <p>“Where your kids are going, who they're who they're seeing, and who they're being exposed to.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worried for own children • Fearful of children in community • Not trusting

The three themes include Spouse's Experience of Behavioral Change in their Significant Other, Spouse's Experience of Communication with their Significant Other, and Spouse's Experience of Change in Role Model Behavior. The following are the interviews' findings separated by themes and subthemes to indicate the participants' perceptions.

Theme 1: Spouse's Experience of Behavioral Change in their Significant Other

All participants disclosed that their life partners have shown a change since working in the CAC units. The participants all stated that since working in the CAC units that their partners have increased in some hypervigilance as well as other sensitivity in their daily living. Many of the interviews related the vigilance to not only their line of work but having children as well. The participants also explained that their partners' interpersonal skills have changed as well. The participants, again, related this change from working in the CAC units.

Subtheme 1.1: Observation of Changes in Psychosocial Behaviors

A subtheme within this study is the psychosocial changes that the participants would see in their life partners. All participants spoke of specific times in which their spouses' showed instances changed behaviors since being in the CAC units. P1 reported that, "For instance, he's very cognizant of him being a male and being Filipino; if he's seen with one of my nieces whose blond hair, blue-eyed and they at first don't understand or what they're thinking about. He doesn't want to walk next to her and want anyone to think that he has that child for no good reason, like some kind of pedophile." She explained further that when they are in public places, her husband has makes it a point to

point out individuals, especially males, that are with children of different ethnicities with one another and in turn, makes her become suspicious of those around her. P2 stated about her spouse in terms that "It's not trusting other people, so I think that's really the biggest thing. I just think, like the explanation that we have to give them about why we say no to certain things." She goes on to explain that her children have grown to accept their way of life due to their father's grown skepticism of others because of his line of work. P3 reported that her spouse stated that "There was a certain case that dealt with a small, very young child and we also had a young child at that time that was probably that that was probably one of the toughest times for him. Only because I think it what it was hard to turn it off when you come home, and you see almost that same age range of you know you know the victim. That one was really tough for him." She then continues to state that she noticed how much that case had an effect on him and noticed the number of hours he put into that specific case, more than the other cases. P4 stated that when her spouse is investigating, "Then you know, they have their search once, and they do that, and then, you know, filing and doing everything then obviously bringing it back up again when they have to go to court, whether it's a year, a month, several years down the road, just rehashing having to revisit everything that she has already done and put ourselves through it and having to do it again." Finally, P5 reported that "I think that's where he has kind of like there are times in which he feels as though he hits a wall and cannot do it anymore because he has to grade the child pornography pictures."

Subtheme 1.2: Feeling Proud of Spouse's Jobs

Another piece of pertinent perception from all of the participants was their perception of their life partners' work. All participants reported feeling the same when it came to their life partners working the CAC units. Though their reports of their life partners having strenuous jobs, both physically and psychologically, the participants felt as though they were proud that their life partners were part of the reason for getting predators off the streets. Many participants also reported how pleased they were to see the pride on their life partners' faces when they made an arrest.

As previously stated, many participants stated that they were both proud of their husbands/wife for what they do and can see the pride on their faces when they made an arrest and/or closed a case. P1 explained, "Nothing brings him more joy when he'll come home excited which makes me excited that they caught someone and then I'm like tell me about the take down." P3 explained that her husband is very good at compartmentalizing work and homelife, then goes on to say that she believes that is why he is very good at his job. P4 reported that when it comes to her wife working in the CAC unit, "It's difficult and different at times but rewarding to see that they get these people off the streets." P5 explained that working as a police officer and in the CAC unit, she believes this has made him grow as a father. He is more conscious to be involved with their sons, even overly involved with sports and outdoor activities.

Theme 2: Spouse's Experience of Communication with their Significant Other

Another common theme in this study was communication. The participants reported that both the officers and they communicated what they were going through with

not only one another, but family members and supports. Many participants reported that they were very careful to never disclose any information that would be traumatic to others, however, they felt as though with what their spouses would disclose to them, they would often need to unload some of that work stress that was hanging over them.

Subtheme 2.1: Observation of More Need to Speak About Work

Though much of the specific cases, according to the life partners, were not always discussed, such as party names, but the details of the cases would often be discussed by the officers. The officers would tend to unload not only some of the details about the cases, but their feelings related about the cases to their life partners and friends as well. Many of the participants would encourage their life partners to communicate, no matter how graphic it may entail, the case information and their feelings about the case as long as it would help their life partner feel less overwhelmed. If the couple had children in the house, the participant reported that they were very careful to never talk about work in front of their children. They would wait until their children were in bed or not home at all. P2 reported that the only time they were able to talk was when they were in the shower together because of the children being in the house and that being the only private time they had together. P5 reports that though her spouse may not always take his work home with him, he will find way other ways to decompress from work and that is by “joking around” about some of the offenders in order to make light of the situations.

The participants reported that being a listener for their partner feels essential for their line of work and for their relationship. They stated that they can tell when they have good days at work and bad days, therefore, they want to be there for their partner. P1

stated, “He would describe everything that happened and whatnot and how they lured him in, and he was just he'll be proud. And then it makes me happy for him because coming home with something positive like that is just” The participants also reported that they encourage their partners to talk to them about anything to do with work, no matter how graphic it may be. P4 did report that though her spouse does not always communicate to her everything about her work, but when she sees the department therapist, there is a positive difference in her spouse, and she appreciates that. Though it does have a negative effect on the participant, they want to support their partner in any way they can.

Theme 3: Spouse's Experience of Change in Role Model Behavior

The next common theme in this study was how overprotective the officers get with their children and other children as well. All of the participants have children of their own while one often has their young nieces and nephews that come and visit. All of the participants reported that their life partners, while working in the CAC unit, have become more overprotective of their own children, their nieces, and nephews, and even neighborhood children. All of the participants related the overprotection of the children from working in the CAC units.

Subtheme 3.1: Noticing overprotection of their children

As mentioned earlier, most of the participants have children. Of the ones that do, all reported that their partners have become overly protective with their children since working in the CAC units. P1 stated that her spouse is often trying to teach his own children about the dangers of predators and “This is what they need to look out for,

please be aware of this, but they don't go into detail about it.” She stated that their children are often getting harsh lessons about strangers and what could happen to them if they are not careful. P2 had similarities with her interview as she stated that her husband is careful with his daughters and the “I think really the like vigilance that he has with our girls.” This theme continued throughout the interview process. She also stated that her husband preached to their daughters, “You know that's why you don't have Snapchat.” P4 reported that they never have anyone babysit their sons. She stated, “We both were raised very similar together, but we don't trust anybody with our kids.” P4 also stated that her spouse will not even allow anyone else to ride in the car with their sons to their sport games. In the interview with P3, she stated that, “It's upsetting just to know when we happen to live in the same area that he works in, so it makes you think twice about like where your kids are going, who they're who they're seeing, and who they're being exposed to.” The other part of the interviews consisted of how protective the officers can be with other children, even if the children are not their own. P5 stated that her husband may have become overly involved with their sons due to his work. He coaches all of their sports and tries to never miss any of their games. While doing the interview, he was outside playing football with them.

Subtheme 3.2: Noticing overprotection of other children.

To continue with the theme of overprotection, many of the participants discussed how their partners are overprotective of not just their own children, but their nieces, nephews, and neighborhood children. P1 stated that her husband is on high alert all of the time. For example, “A man moved in, and he is older, and he put a sign outside of his

house that said he fixes bicycles, so all of a sudden he's like the pied piper, and all the children are hanging out at his house.” Her husband is very suspicious and tells her that this is not right. P3 stated that her husband always becomes leery of when children are just roaming the streets all hours of the night. She goes on to say that she never wants to be a helicopter parent but why are their parents not watching over them and letting them wonder the streets? P5 reports that her husband has a group chat with the neighborhood group that will often discuss about strange things that may happen in the neighborhood, even if there are individuals that do not look familiar.

Summary

The results of this study have been clear, they answer the question of, “What are the lived experiences of life partners of police officers who work in the Crimes Against Children units?” The five participants were all spouses of police officers who currently work in Crimes Against Children (CAC) units. The data collected was determined to have three clear themes, two had two subthemes and one had one subtheme. The first theme appeared to show that there was a change in their husband/wife while working in the CAC unit. This change appears to be a negative change while working in the CAC unit and noticeable to the spouses. The second part of the first theme appears to be more positive is the participant’s approval of their spouse’s work. The second theme found was communication and the openness the participant’s spouses are about their work. The participants appear to be positive about this theme and appreciate their spouse’s openness, when they do open up about work. The third and final theme was overprotection, especially of their own children. All participants made this theme to be

apparent from when their spouses started working in the CAC units. Chapter Five will go on to discuss to the results further, the strengths, limitations, and how this will effect social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

This examined the lived experiences of life partners of police officers who work in the CAC units. As mentioned in from previous research (Brimhall et al., 2018; Craun et al., 2015; Giorgi et al., 2020; Hakan et al., 2013; McQuerrey Tuttle et al., 2018), studies have found that police officers continue to exhibit plenty of stress from their work in law enforcement, especially in the CAC units. The gap remained in the research as to how the stress from working the CAC units can affect the home setting, in particular, from the perception of the spouses and or girlfriends/boyfriends. I explored the lived experiences of the spouses of police officers who currently work in CAC units. Structured interview questions were used to answer the following question of: What are the lived experiences of life partners of police officer who work in the Crimes Against Children Units? The results were then gathered and evaluated.

The results formed into three solid themes: behavioral change, spousal communication, and family and social composition. With these three themes: spouse's experience of behavioral change in their significant other, spouse's experience of communication with their significant other, and spouse's experience of change in role model behavior.

Interpretation of Findings

There were three clear themes from the research question of this study. These themes helped to fill the gap in the research regarding the lived experiences of life partners of police officers who work in the CAC units. Chapter 2 discussed why this

study would be beneficial via several articles of literature. This section brings together the findings from the study and literature from chapter 2. The five participants answered the research question regarding their lived experiences and perceptions.

Research Question: What are the lived experiences of life partners who work in the Crimes Against Children units?

Theme 1: Spouse's Experience of Behavioral Change in their Significant Other

This study found that life partners of police officers who work in the CAC units perceive that there is a change that happens when they work in the units. Though all of the participants reported that there are different changes for each of their partners, the change was consistent with a psychosocial change. All of the participants reported that they were able to see how their partners' work was weighing on them and they were bringing it with them to the home setting. Velazquez and Hernandez (2019) confirmed that while working in the law enforcement for a period of time, it can cause a certain amount of depression and PTSD. This study was able to show that spouses of CAC unit officers perceived noticeable changes in their significant partners and related it to their line of work. Haugen et al. (2017) found that first responders are in dire need of support due to mental health issues. With participants reporting that they perceive that though their spouses have become more and more suspicious of others due to their line of work, this have ultimately has interfered with their lives. Some participants have often-reported that the age of the victims can be a trigger for their spouses. Tehrani (2018) found that working as a Child Abuse Investigator (CAI) has heightened anxiety and depression due to the ages of the victims. One participant explained that her wife continuously has

difficulty sleeping and this was never a concern until she started working in the CAC unit. This participant explained how much watching her spouse lose sleep weighed on their homelife. Burress et al.'s (2017) reported that officers working in child exploitation cases mostly reported either irregular sleep pattern issues or lack of sleep due to their line of work. These findings are similar to what the participant reported about her spouse.

Though many of the psychosocial negative attributes were apparent, the participants were clear about their stance on their spouse's work. The participants continuously mentioned how happy they were for their spouses to be getting the offenders off the streets. The participants explained that seeing how hard their spouses work, they feel proud to see their accomplishments. Participants would often bring up how they would think of their own children and then relate it to being grateful that their spouses are in this line of work. The findings assist to the research in such that working in the CAC units can have an effect on a person's psychosocial attributes (Haugen et al., 2017; Tehrani, 2018; Velazquez & Hernandez, 2019; Liakopoulou et al., 2020; Regehr et al. 2021).

Theme 2: Spouse's Experience of Communication with their Significant Other

Craun et al. (2015) asserted that officers do not tend to discuss their line of work so openly. Based on this previous research finding, my second theme came as a surprise to me. All participants reported that their spouses communicate with either them or their friends openly and it shows some signs of relief for them. One participant stated that though her wife does not always communicate openly with her, when she does communicate via therapy, her wife shows improved mood afterwards. Karaffa et al

(2015) explained that in their study, while working in law enforcement, communicating with their spouses became more difficult. Some participants stated that there are times they feel as though they are not always equipped to hear about their spouse's line of work, but they will never turn them away from talking about it. The fact many of the participants reported that their spouses communicated to them about work was deceiving information due to previous research. Brady (2016) found that Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) officers rarely spoke to their spouses about their work due to the officers feeling as though their spouses would have a limited understanding about that line of work. Both parties are careful to make sure that they never discuss anything about work in front of their children. Many of the participants reported that they felt as though they are an outlet for their spouses when their spouses get home from work. As mentioned in Karaffa et al.'s (2015) study, when the married couples were more inclined to communicate, both parties, one being a police officer, reported feeling positive in the marriage.

Theme 3: Spouse's Experience of Change in Role Model Behavior

This study overwhelmingly found that all participants reported that their spouses became overly protective of their own children since working in the CAC units. Craun et al. (2015) found that ICAC officers became more distrustful of others. One participant reported that only their parents are allowed to watch their children due to trust issues. Another reported that sleepovers are not allowed unless they have known the parents for a long time. Reports of being overly involved in sports and other activities are not uncommon as well. All of the participants have become overly careful of who is around

their children and the participants have reported that they attribute that from working in the CAC units. Lucas et al. (2012) found that while working in the CAC units and investigating crimes against children, officers tend to relate the crimes to their own children. Many have stated that their spouses have often thought of their children while working on cases and that often leads to being overprotective as well.

Following the theme of overprotection with their own children, the participants also found that their spouses would be overprotective of other children as well. From being overly protective of neighborhood children to extended family, participants expressed that their spouses always appear to be hypervigilant for children at all times. One participant even stated that her husband keeps a group chat on his phone to maintain a neighborhood watch, making sure that if there is a stranger walking around, everyone is alerted. Craun et al. (2015) confirmed that officers working in the CAC units became more protective and due to being more overly protective, they became less trusting of others. As mentioned prior, these behaviors have never been exhibited prior to working in the CAC unit.

Theoretical Frameworks

Stress theory and secondary stress theory were the theoretical frameworks for this study. In 1976, Hans Selye determined that daily demands that contribute to our mental health are called stressors. In this study, the stressors were related to work and then transferring into the home and community settings. Lucas et al. (2012) confirmed that law enforcement officers experience a high amount of workplace stress, but this study further found that the information from law enforcement spouses perceived that their life

partners bring their work home with them and in turn, can cause stress. This study found that the perceptions of CAC unit officer spouses, were congruent with the notion that their officer life partners not only deal with work stress, but then bring home that stress and have a hard time coping through it. Lucas et al. (2012) found that though certain jobs with higher expectations may conclude more stress, Selye (1976) confirmed that all unnatural demands during everyday life are still deemed stressors and can affect an individual. This study confirmed that spouses of CAC unit officers perceived that not only did their life partners exhibit stress from work related demands, but they were also bringing that stress to the home and community settings.

Limitations of Study

As with most studies, this study had its own limitations. Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) explained that to better understand each participant's full perception, the sample size should be smaller for IPA studies. Though qualitative studies do not always require a large sample size, this study ended up with a sample size of five participants. Due to a small sample size in this study, the results could be argued that they are not transferable enough. I originally wanted a sample size of six to eight participants but with enough saturation from the five participants I had gathered, the results can be observed as limited due to the small sample size. Greater details could have been collected with more probing questions. With more content in perceptions, there could be more themes and subthemes to evaluate and discuss. As Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) have stated, there is no rule as to how many participants are needed in a qualitative study.

Another potential limitation to the study is biasness to the sampling. I specifically chose active police officers' life partners to be part of the study as to have more fluid perceptions. Retired or transferred police officer life partners could have possibly had changed the trajectory of the results. The current participants are more present with their spouse's career in the CAC units. If the sampling were different, the spouses could have possibly less in tuned to remembering when their life partners worked in the CAC units. I purposely chose the current sample of participants whose life partners currently work in the CAC units to get a more present perception rather than a perception that can be labeled from past experiences. Past experiences could have resulted in a study all on its own.

Recommendations

One recommendation for future research would be to use these themes as a guide but measure them before an officer joins the CAC units and while working in the CAC units. Ask the participants about their spouses before joining the CAC units then, as a more long-term study, ask them after they have been in the CAC units for a few years. The departments should then see if the CAC units definitely contributes to the Spouse's Experience of Behavioral Change in their Significant Other, Spouse's Experience of Communication with their Significant Other, and Spouse's Experience of Change in Role Models that this study found.

Another recommendation would be to see if there is a difference between the lived experiences of spouses who live with active CAC unit officers as opposed to retired CAC unit officers. Questions regarding possible post-traumatic stress disorder from

working in the CAC units may be informative to the study. If there is a relationship between post-traumatic stress disorder and working in the CAC units, then there could be enough information and evidence for a systematic shift. This shift could mean more support in the department leading to a healthier workplace which could transfer to a healthier home setting as well.

One could even go on to do a phenomenological study on the children of the CAC unit officers. The recommendation would be that the children would be teenagers, old enough to participate with the approval of both parents and have the IRB approval as well. The perception of the children regarding whether or not they believe their parent who works in the CAC unit is overprotective would be interesting. It would also be compelling to know if the children agree or disagree with the participants of this study on all of the themes regarding their parents who work in the CAC units.

Another study that could be informative for law enforcement would be a qualitative study specifically done on single CAC unit officers. Implications could be assumed regarding the line of work and inability to hold on to a stable relationship. Questions regarding past relationships and the line of work could correlate to the participants perception. In this study, the possibility of the themes may change though changes in behaviors, communication, and relationships with children may remain the same.

Implications

This study concluded important implications for positive social change. An important implication for positive social change would be to follow up with the CAC unit

department leads on the issues of the psychological changes their officers potentially adhere to. Having a mental health professional to follow-up with on site and determine if the officer continues to maintain their mental health on an appropriate level. One participant mentioned that her wife continues to struggle with her sleep patterns ever since working in the CAC unit. Information such as this would be important for the department to know while working in the CAC unit.

Another implication is related to how often the CAC officers communicate to their spouses about their work. The recommendation would be to encourage the police officers working in the CAC units to have group therapy sessions with one another in the work setting. Not only would this limit the officers taking their work home with them, but they would also have more of an outlet at work and not take work home with them. Many of the participants reported that their spouses often felt relieved to be discussing work related issues either with them or with their coworkers, with group therapy in the work setting, this could possibly relieve work related stress and keep work from entering the home setting.

Adding awareness to the line not only the line of work CAC officers does for a living, but also understanding the impact it has on the families as well. Social media has started to create support groups from spouses of police officers, however, there appears to be limited online, group therapy for them as well. It would be beneficial for spouses of police officers to have meetings and therapy sessions to have a place for discussion, venting, and more. This study proves CAC unit officers' work has a direct effect on their

spouses and their homelife. Having a place for their spouses to share their thoughts and feelings with similar parties would be extremely helpful.

Summary

This was meant to explore the lived experiences of the life partners of police officers who work in the CAC units. There was a gap in the research among this branch of police officers and their spouses/life partners. I was able to recruit five participants and interview with structured questions that were based around the research question. The participants openly shared their experiences living with their spouses who currently work in the Crimes Against Children units. These experiences led to three themes which all entailed to changes that the participants attributed from their spouses working in the CAC units. These findings can contribute to future studies that would lead to a much broader and richer basis to assist departments in assuring their officers are getting the support they need while working in the CAC units.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. What are your experiences as the life partner of a police officer working in the CAC unit?

Probe: Tell me how this experience made you feel? (If not directly answered)

Probe: What are your experiences when your partner is stressed from work?

2. What are their coping strategies? How do these coping strategies affect you?

3. Could you describe some situations in which you felt as though your partner was bringing their work home with them? (If not directly answered)

4. Tell me about your experiences regarding your relationship with your partner while they have been working in the CAC unit, both positive and negative.

Probe: Why is the (positive or negative) the most experienced? (If not directly answered)

Probe: Why do you think these experiences are the most frequent? (If not directly answered)

5. If you have been with your partner while they have worked in different settings, what differences did you see in your partner when they worked in other settings?

6. What are your feelings regarding your partner working in the CAC unit setting?

7. What differences have you noticed from when you first were in a relationship to now, that you think were caused by their work?

8. Please explain instances in which you felt as though your partner's work has influenced the children at home, if you have any.

9. I appreciate your time and willingness to participate in the interview. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me that you feel is important for me to know?