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Perceptions of Law Enforcement Spouses Regarding Officer Safety and Danger

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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

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Walden University
2025

Abstract

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MS, Sam Houston State University, 2018

BA, Sam Houston State University, 2016

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Policing is a stressful and dangerous occupation that is imperative to a functioning society, and stress should be limited to ensure a healthy mind and body. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger, which was lacking in the research. Law enforcement spouses have a significant impact over the stress levels of their loved ones. The work–life balance and work–family conflict theories were the theoretical framework used to relate to the study and support the research. The generic qualitative design was used with semistructured interviews to gather research data to determine the perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger. The research sample included 12 participants who were at least 18 years or older, legally married to police officers in large urban Texas community, and able to read, write, and understand English. Thematic analysis with an inductive process was used to develop themes and analyze the data. The results of this study disclosed the participants felt a heightened state of fear when police officers were injured, had to deal with the public, or during periods of negative sentiment portrayed in the media. Understanding the stressors of law enforcement officers may benefit criminal justice agencies and society by developing opportunities for growth of professionalism in policing. Stress can be compounded by a lack of work–life balance and higher levels of work–family conflict, which demonstrates the importance of understanding the perceptions of law enforcement spouses. Positive social change implications included higher levels of professionalism to assist in positive community interactions and repairing the relationship between citizens and law enforcement.

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Dedication

I want to dedicate this dissertation to Grandma and Grandpa Rose. Although you are no longer with us, I know you would have been proud of me and supporters of this accomplishment.

Acknowledgments

I want to thank my mom, dad, my Aunt Sherry, and Uncle Lloyd for their unconditional support through this process as well as the many friends and family members who have encouraged me to make it to the finish line, especially Micah. I love you all and will always be grateful for your presence in my life.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Since the dawn of policing, the accumulation of stress has been a risk for employees. From acute to chronic stress issues, police officers experience higher levels of stress than the general population (Acquadro Maran et al., 2022; Jetelina et al., 2020). Police officers, firefighters, emergency medical technicians, and military members are all first responders who experience cumulative stress directly related to their profession. First responders risk their lives daily as a part of the profession, accumulating higher levels of stress than other occupations. According to Rodriguez et al. (2024), cumulative stress leads to physical health problems, mental health problems, higher rates of relationship issues, and interpersonal violence. Spouses of first responders also suffer from the accumulation of stress because of constant worry about the safety and dangerous occupation of their loved ones (Landers et al, 2020). Supportive spouses are crucial for a better balance between work and home for police officers, which could contribute to better community interactions and higher levels of professionalism. According to Viegas et al. (2023), a supportive spouse can assist with a healthier marriage, which promotes police officers' mental health.

Police officers experience cumulative stress and their spouses should be recognized as part of the solution to understanding the impact of stress within the law enforcement community. Law enforcement spouses have unique and valuable perspectives regarding officers' safety and danger, and the impact of job-related stress that emanates from the experiences of their loved ones. Police officer spouses experience

stress vicariously through their spouses, which places them in a position to observe and impact the job-related stress in a personal and practical way. The perspectives of law enforcement spouses can be used to better understand and possibly develop programs to combat the negative effects of cumulative stress in law enforcement.

With 18,888 law enforcement agencies in the United States and several thousand active law enforcement officials working within the communities, policing is a crucial part of modern society (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2022). Modern day policing has evolved from when it began in the United States in the early 1800s. Police reform and defunding the police movements have created an additional pressure within criminal justice organizations. The added social pressure on law enforcement has created more stress associated with low morale, resignations, retirements, and nationwide recruiting difficulties (Rodriguez et al., 2024). The 21st century has focused on community policing as an essential function within law enforcement. Effective community policing requires officials to emphasize professionalism and create policies that build relationships within the community.

Community policing focuses on building relationships and trust between police and citizens (Shupard & Kearns, 2019). The underlying concept and key component behind community policing requires partnership building between police and community members (Maurya, 2019). Police officers who follow the community policing model will have more positive interactions and help build the trust that has deteriorated the confidence in policing for many individuals. Large-scale police reform efforts have occurred across the nation, making individual officers feel a personal impact from

negative societal opinions. Cities across the United States have adopted task forces to review and reform policing policies and procedures. The nature of hazardous police duty produces significant stress. Policy reform and review measures create additional stress for police officers and their families, as heightened tensions within the communities continue to rise.

According to Tapp and Davis (2022), there are approximately 53.8 million contacts yearly between U.S. residents and the police. In recent years, many of these contacts have been highly publicized, creating a new dimension of concern for police departments. The rise of social media has made publicized events readily available in real time sequence. The death of George Floyd and subsequent protests sparked nationwide concerns within the community, along with safety concerns for police officers. Police brutality incidents across the nation were repeatedly blasted on the news, and stress levels ran rampant amongst rank-and-file police officers. Despite being a very small percentage of contacts with citizens, the repeated publicizing of such events has resulted in negative social contagion giving the impression of widespread systematic brutality (Helfers et al., 2021). One result of this has been police experiencing a steady increase in lethal ambushes and deadly encounters with the public across the nation, creating worry for the family members, especially spouses (Amendola et al., 2021). Inwald et al. (2011) established an officer's home life is significant for their well-being and is valuable for the community policing model. Spouses worrying about the physical safety of their loved ones inevitably causes strain and stress within the home life.

Policing is a dangerous job that creates several stressors for police officers. Stressors vary from within and outside the organization, and some are difficult to control because of the nature of hazardous duty. Silverman (2022) stated that police officers endure cumulative stress from the very nature of law enforcement. Stress also accumulates from constant exposure to tragedies. Individuals experience acute stress from an event like an automobile accident, death in the family, or divorce, but police officers experience several acute stress events daily (Jetelina et al., 2020). Police officer spouses can suffer from the same stress accumulation that their loved ones bring home, often unintentionally, where if it is not managed or controlled, conflict may become inevitable (Campbell et al., 2022). Understanding how these stressors impact officers daily is important to ensure they not only have a well-balanced home life, but it can have positive effect on community interactions. Exploring how stress affects police officers and their spouses has the potential to contribute to positive social change by providing an understanding of the experiences to address root causes and opportunities for growth in professionalism in policing. Higher levels of professionalism within policing could promote better relationships and positive interactions between police and the community.

Chapter 1 provides a brief overview of the study, with current research on the accumulation of stress experienced by law enforcement officers. Law enforcement spouses suffer because of the stress of their loved ones. The problem statement specifies why this study is important. The need to understand spouses' perceptions of officer safety and danger is imperative to developing a balanced work and family life and can contribute to less conflict at home.

The purpose of this study, which was to explore the perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger, is also described in this chapter. Researchers have understood that policing is a stressful and dangerous occupation but have not explained the importance of the spouse in creating a balance between work and life to help lessen the stress. Insights may be learned from the perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger. Insights could help law enforcement agencies with the health and wellness of police officers. Police officers work in an environment that is full of stress and need relief from the continual organizational stress. Spouses could provide insights into how much stress is carried home and how to create a balance that is more beneficial to professional law enforcement officials. The research question for the study is also provided. The chapter concludes with other key components of the study, including the theoretical framework, nature, assumptions, scope, limitations, and significance.

Semistructured interviews were conducted with interview questions to describe the perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger. The semistructured interviews included open-ended questions to gather information for this study. Interview questions were designed to answer the research question and not lead the participants to any specific conclusion (Kostere & Kostere, 2022). The research question was developed from the gap in the literature to explore the perception of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger. The theoretical framework is related to the work–life balance and work–family conflict theories (Greenhaus & Buetell, 1985; Greenhaus et al., 2003). A brief description of both theories is presented with their use in

this study. Details regarding the nature, assumptions, scope, and limitations of this study is presented for the rationale and significance of the study. Finally, the implications of positive social change are conveyed, followed by a summary.

Background

Policing is considered one of the most dangerous and stressful occupations. The job negatively affects the family life, creating issues with the spouses (Chhabra & Devi, 2023). Police officers' spouses could give unique perspectives into the cumulative stress experienced, especially regarding officer safety and danger. Police officers face daily potential danger and experience several critical and traumatic incidents that could negatively impact their stress levels and their interpersonal relationships. Spouses of police officers experience vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, and secondary traumatic stress through the stress brought home (Foley & Massey, 2021). Cumulative stress, from shift work to a line of duty death, had adverse effects on mental and physical health. Unhealthy police officers were likely to lack professionalism. Having a work and family balance is not easy for first responders because of the nature of the profession, with shift work, overtime, and the need for a 24/7 response. Spouses and their perceptions regarding officer safety and danger were essential in creating a healthy work and family balance.

Police officers are first responders who experience a multitude of stressors due to the nature of policing. It is nearly impossible to eliminate all stress because of the intrinsic nature of the job. Police officers deal with people in their worst moments in life and subsequently, officers suffer from vicarious trauma or compassion fatigue (Foley &

Massey, 2021). Police officers are impacted by stressors that are directly related to the job. Occupational stress within law enforcement comes from many different angles. From negative citizen contacts to dealing with administrative aspects, like shift work, stress often accumulates and spills over into the home life. High levels of stress create negative outcomes in marital satisfaction, especially when the officer uses command and control strategies from the job with the spouse (Tuttle et al., 2018). The spouse could be pivotal in how much stress is absorbed and returned to the community.

Similar to police officer spouses, military members struggle from the adverse effects of cumulative stress. Spouses experienced high levels of stress and challenges from their spouses' military service and reported that it was not easy to be married to a veteran (Oudi et al., 2023). Cumulative stress created strained relationships that were not easy to navigate. Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is commonly associated with veterans, although is prevalent through law enforcement agencies. According to Zerach et al. (2022), PTSD could negatively affect the family environment of the military, police, and other first responders.

Cumulative stress is an issue for the military, police, and other first responders that creates an imbalance of work and home life. The imbalance of work and home life should be further explained to understand how spouses are affected. A career in law enforcement is inherently hard on marriages, with loved ones missing family activities, scheduling conflicts, and work taking priority (Chhabra & Devi, 2023; Xu et al., 2024). A gap in the literature emerged about the experiences of police officer's spouses regarding officer safety and danger. The cumulative stress of law enforcement officials has been

addressed over the last 30 years (Beer et al., 2023). Broadening the scope beyond the last

5 years gave more perspective into the topic and defined the importance of the gap in

recent literature. The experiences of the spouses could add to the accumulation of stress

when police officers go out into the community. A balanced work and life were important

for police officers to have a stress-free environment outside of work. Many aspects of

police stress may be uncontrollable, but the interactions with loved ones at home should

be a safe space, free of work-related stress.

      This study was helpful to understand the importance of how the spouses of police

officers are perceived, especially regarding officer safety and danger. Pollock and

Augusto (2023) explained that when police officers experience disasters, an additional

concern was their loved one's physical safety. Similar feelings were developed in the

spouses concerning critical, traumatic, and catastrophic events. This study explored the

perceptions of law enforcement spouses and how those police officers were affected.

Police officers are the gatekeepers of society and deal with the community members in

their worst moments. Having a stress-free home environment could help officers to make

positive connections with citizens, which is the demand required by society. Over the last

several years, trust in the police has wavered, and law enforcement agencies must

prioritize re-establishing positive community relations. Community policing is a first step

in repairing the needed police and citizen relationships, which are more effective through

less stress and more professionalism.

      Reimplementing community policing policies should be a priority for law

enforcement agencies. Community policing was designed to build trust and partnerships

between the public and law enforcement in a way that traditional or reactive policing could not (Shupard & Kearns, 2019). Community policing used to mean police officers leave the patrol vehicle and walk the neighborhoods to positively interact with citizens. Many officers no longer buy into a community policing model and hide out of public view until called to handle a criminal element. Over the last several years, police officers have taken high levels of scrutiny from the public over actions demonstrated by very few (Cohen, 2021). Many officers do not believe the community is supportive of the profession and do their best to stay out of the spotlight.

Problem Statement

Perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger have not been studied. Extensive research has surrounded the dangerous and stressful occupation of policing, but not the perceptions of spouses living in large urban communities in Texas. Over the last few years, society has clarified expectations and determined actions regarding the relationship between police and the community. Recent media-worthy events, such as the death of George Floyd, have made citizens stand up against police misconduct. Negative media coverage, deserving or not, was a constant stress on police officers. Constant stress was more likely to cause conflict at home with the spouse. The historically questionable history of police and the community has developed into an uptick in community hostility and less police legitimacy (Helfers et al., 2021). Public scrutiny was a concern of law enforcement and their families. Advances in technology have allowed cameras to capture incidents and seemingly no privacy is granted outside of the comfort of home. Poirier et al. (2023) and Paoline and Gau (2023)

reported widespread heightened stress, public scrutiny, and negative media attention for police officers in a "post-Fergurson" environment. This environment was likely to be deflected on police officers' spouses as the overall society views have turned negative towards law enforcement. The millions of contacts between police and the residents prompted the need for professionalism and positive interactions. Names like George Floyd, Sandra Bland, Michael Brown, and Freddie Gray have become synonymous with police brutality and widespread outrage throughout the world.

The George Floyd incident was the catalyst to concepts like police reform and defunding the police. Police officers have been villainized and bear the burden of a small number of negative incidents. Cumulative stress has created the officer to keep their head on a swivel and be in a heightened state of awareness. The majority of police officers honor their oath to protect the citizens and uphold the law and yet are faced with slogans like "all cops are bastards" or ACAB. According to Ritzen (2020), ACAB was conceptualized to focus on the unjust policing system, not the individual. It is difficult for the individual police officer to not feel villainized for the actions of a small percentage of those "bad apples" poisoning the good work of the majority.

Academic researchers, police practitioners, healthcare professionals, and psychologists maintain that policing is one of the most stressful occupations (Purba & Demou, 2019). Policing is dangerous and cumulative stress is a concern for law enforcement officials. Shupard and Kearns (2019) insisted society demands that law enforcement focus on community policing; thus, it is imperative for confidence in policing to be repaired. Professionalism could be negatively affected by the stress that

police officers experience. Law enforcement spouses may experience secondary traumatic stress from their loved ones surrounding officer safety and danger. Additional stress was experienced by police officers when there is a work–life balance conflict. Stressful situations could transfer from the work domain to the home domain or home to work, and experiences would likely be felt within both realms creating secondary traumatic stress for police officer's spouses. Cumulative stress could negatively impact both domains and harm the organization and the community (Thompson et al., 2021). Police officers' spouses may experience additional stress from constantly worrying about their partner's safety and the inherent danger in policing.

Furthermore, policing has its own culture that creates a stressor among officers. The police culture is grounded in a paramilitary mentality that is not conducive to proper coping skills or asking for help (Varker et al., 2023 and Viegas et al., 2023). Police officers with high levels of stress were more likely to have negative interactions at home and within the community. Law enforcement carries the mission of maintaining public safety, and police officers must be in good shape both physically and mentally (Mumford et al., 2021). Unhealthy police officers were less likely to follow the community policing model and create positive interactions with the public. Understanding the accumulation of police stress was essential for carrying out the police mission. More importantly, understanding the perceptions of police officers' spouses could assist in making sure their partners do not walk out of the door in an already stressful state.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger. Spouses of law enforcement who are legally married and work for a large urban community in Texas were interviewed. Stress within policing has been extensively studied (Fuller et al., 2024; Varker et al., 2023). However, little research has been done to incorporate the perception of law enforcement spouses and none specifically regarding officer safety and danger. Few articles have used interviews over statistical methods to gain insights into the lives of police officers and their spouses.

General qualitative methodology was used to gather the perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger. Semistructured interviews were conducted with participants who are legally married to police officers who work in large urban Texas communities. According to Kostere & Kostere (2022), through a conversational interview, a generic qualitative approach seeks to understand the human experience.

Thematic analysis of participants' perceptions resulted in themes related to officer safety and danger. This contributed to understanding stress experienced by police officers and the importance of a balanced home and work life. Understanding the perceptions of the spouses provided clarification for how to reduce stress at home before police officers have citizen contacts. Additionally, this study assisted in creating higher levels of professionalism within policing.

Research Question

What are the perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger?

Theoretical Framework for the Study

This study was grounded in the work–life balance and work–family conflict theories. Although mentioned throughout research, work–life balance was conceptualized by Jeffrey Greenhaus, Karen Collins, and Jason Shaw in 2003, focusing on living a balanced life by less work and more time with family. Work–family conflict was traced to Jeffrey Greenhaus and Nicholas Buetell (1985), who concluded that there is a conflict between the work and family domains that are incompatible. Work–life balance and work–family conflict were used as the theoretical framework in this study to develop themes from the interviews of the participants. Each theme was developed from the consistencies of the participants' perceptions. Work–life balance and work–family conflict were essential in understanding cumulative stress experienced by police officers. These theories are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

A balanced life is essential for human beings to have a complete and satisfactory life. Most individuals desire a healthy and satisfying balance between home and work (Parkes & Langford, 2008). Police officers experience cumulative stress that stems from the dangers of the profession. Cumulative stress throws the balance between work and life off, creating conflict in the home that is transferred into the community. Noor (2004) explained that spouses are often in conflict because a job in law enforcement interferes with perceived home responsibilities, such as a lack of family time. Work–life balance

and work–family conflict are important to all first responders and their spouses in establishing satisfaction within the family.

Police officers work with the community and have constant interactions with citizens. Boles et al. (2001) compared the stressful and dangerous profession of policing with the numerous citizen contacts embedded with criminal activity. A positive work–life balance and less work–family conflict are important for better police and community relations. The theoretical framework of work–life balance and work–family conflict was relevant to understanding the perception of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger. Increased awareness of secondary traumatic stress and how spouses are affected may foster greater work–life balance and less work–family conflict within law enforcement households.

Nature of the Study

The research question in this qualitative study was addressed using the generic qualitative design. Patton (2015) described the generic qualitative research design as a way to make real-world observations by skillfully interviewing participants. The generic qualitative research methodology seeks to understand human experiences through qualitative methods (Kostere & Kostere, 2022). The target population was law enforcement spouses that are legally married to police officers. Semistructured interviews using open-ended questions were conducted to gain insights into the perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger. This design was aligned with the problem statement and purpose of the study as it allowed for participants to answer the interview questions regarding their perceptions into the research question.

Qualitative research methods were used to gather data in this study from semistructured interviews conducted with qualified participants. According to Kostere and Kostere (2022), qualitative interviews are the most common form of data collection in generic qualitative research. Therefore, no other data sources were employed throughout this study. The target population was law enforcement spouses who are legally married to police officers. The sample was limited to spouses of police officers who are employed in large urban Texas communities. Semistructured interview methods were used to explore the perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger. Themes were created based on the data gathered during the interviews.

The generic qualitative approach with semistructured interviews was the research design used to explore the perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger. The semistructured interviews allowed the participants to share these perceptions through conversation to understand their lived experiences (Kostere & Kostere, 2022). Demographic information collected for this study included years of marriage, married before or after the spouse joined the department, spouse's years of service, and spouse's most recent assignment. Other demographics such as age and gender were irrelevant and not collected during the interviews. Additional details regarding specific design aspects are provided in Chapter 2.

Definitions

For this study, the following terms are defined:

Community policing: A proactive problem-solving approach focused on resource mobilization and organizational adaptation that aims to build partnerships and trust with

the public, addresses underlying threats to safety, and adapts to changes in the community (Shupard & Kearns, 2019).

Compassion fatigue: Occurs when police officers or other helping professions had high exposure to traumatized victims without the ability to disengage from their experiences (Beer et al., 2023); a detached state felt when an individual routinely deals with distressed individuals and is often referred to as the "cost of caring" (Davies et al., 2023).

Cumulative stress: Continuous exposure to stress (Jetelina et al., 2020).

Critical incident: A unique event that could overwhelm the officer's emotional resources and may result in a host of deleterious psychological symptoms, such as PTSD; critical incidents include events such as an active shooter, hostage situations, terrorism, serious line of duty injuries, death of a family member, or any other perceived traumatic event (Fuller et al., 2024; Schweitzer Dixon, 2021).

Domestic violence: A pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that one partner used to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner. Domestic violence could be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, psychological, or technological actions, threats of action, or other patterns of coercive behavior that influence another person within an intimate partner relationship (U.S. Department of Justice, 2023).

First responder: Trained persons who respond to an emergency or crisis call: police officers, firefighters, emergency medical technicians, mental health counselors and psychologists, medical staff, doctors, crime scene technicians, child protective service

workers, security guards, first-line soldiers (military members) in combat (Dorfman & Walker, 2007).

Mental disorder: A syndrome characterized by clinically significant disturbance is an individual's cognition, emotion regulation, or behavior that reflects a dysfunction in the psychological, biological, or developmental processes underlying mental functioning (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Mental health: A state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her abilities, can cope with the normal stressors of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community (Maurya, 2019).

Occupational stress: Psychological, physical, or behavioral reactions caused by acute or chronic stressors, occurring during the course of law enforcement duties, that force deviation from normal functioning (Lawson et al., 2022).

Officer involved domestic violence: A form of crime that involved domestic and family violence within police families (Stinson & Liederbach, 2013).

Officer safety: The act of protecting police officers against incapacitating physical, mental, and emotional problems, as well as against the hazards of their job (Community Oriented Policing Services, n.d.).

Operational stressors: Refers to content, such as exposure to danger, threat, and trauma (Acquadro Maran et al., 2022); encompasses stressors that relate to work–life balance, such as overtime, critical incident response, felony arrests, vehicle pursuits, and the overall dangers of the job (Fuller et al; 2024; Tuttle et al., 2018).

Organizational stressors: Refers to context (Acquadro Maran et al., 2022); revolves around the hierarchy of policing and the lack of support within the organization (Tuttle et al., 2018)

Physical health: Normal state of a properly functioning, undamaged organism (Koipysheva et al., 2018).

Police officer: The word "police" was derived from the Greek words *politeuein*, which means to be a citizen or to engage in political activity, and *polis*, which means a city or state; police enforced the law and carried out the policies of the government (Roberg et al., 2015).

Rural area: Area with low population density, open space, agriculture, and natural resource-based industry.

Secondary traumatic stress: The natural consequent behaviors and emotions resulting from knowing about a traumatizing event experienced by a significant other; the stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person (Foley & Massey, 2021).

Stress: Any type of change that causes physical, emotional, or psychological strain (Scott, 2022).

Suburban area: Combination of rural and urban areas; residential neighborhoods with access to city and open spaces.

Traumatic incident: A frightening, dangerous, or violent event that poses bodily or psychological harm or is a threat to one's life and causes an emotional response (American Psychological Association, n.d.).

Urban area: Area that is densely populated; high levels of infrastructure, business, and cultural amenities.

Vicarious trauma: A normal response to dealing with traumatized victims, of hearing or seeing the effect of trauma repeatedly, even though they have not experienced the event themselves (Foley & Massey, 2021).

Work–family conflict: A type of inter-role conflict wherein some responsibilities from the work and family domains are not compatible and have a negative influence on an employee's work situation (Boles et al., 2001)

Work–life balance: The achievement of fulfilling experiences in the different aspects of life that require various resources, like energy, time and commitment and these resources are spread across all the domains (Khateeb, 2021).

Assumptions

The first assumption in this study pertains to the methodology and generalizability. This assumption is participants will provide accurate demographic information and meet the eligibility requirements to participate in the study. Law enforcement spouses legally married to police officers are the only population included in this study. Law enforcement culture is often secretive and has difficulty sharing with those outside of the profession, especially with confidentiality circumstances (Rodriguez et al., 2024). Such concerns could transfer to the spouses, making interviews difficult.

The second assumption is that law enforcement spouses will be truthful about their perceptions. The participants were interviewed and self-reported their perceptions. Several participants were interviewed with no restrictions on age, gender, or sexual

orientation to gather data from the population of law enforcement spouses. Interviews were completed with all participants and analyzed for patterns and themes from the data, then properly coded (Kostere & Kostere, 2022). According to Kostere & Kostere (2022), assuming participants will be truthful during the interview is required; the interviewer must make the participants comfortable and set the stage by being a "cheerful data collector" to build rapport and gather accurate information (p. 39).

Scope and Delimitations

The perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger are examined in this study. There is an abundance of research regarding the dangerous occupation of policing, including the various stressors (Bekele & Mengesha, 2023; Varker et al., 2023). Information was dated for police officer spousal involvement and limited regarding the specifics of officer safety and danger (Friese, 2020; Landers et al., 2020). Police enforcement is a worldwide phenomenon that affects all cultures and individuals. Understanding the perception of law enforcement spouses towards officer safety and danger could contribute to police officers coping abilities. Dealing with cumulative stress is likely to impact levels of professionalism, especially pertaining to community interactions. As such, understanding law enforcement spouses' perceptions could provide a better work–life balance, less stress, and more positive citizen interactions.

The work–life balance and work–family conflict theories (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Greenhaus et al., 2003) were chosen in this study to explain the importance of law enforcement spouses and police officer cumulative stress. Work–life balance theory

discussed the importance of having a balanced life (Kovach, 2023). Work–family conflict was focused on the conflict between work and family (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). More balance and less conflict is imperative for police officers to manage the cumulative stress that is assumed with the nature of the job. Spouses of police officers have unique perspectives regarding law enforcement. The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger. Work–life balance and work–family conflict were suitable theories for exploring these perceptions.

Limitations

Law enforcement culture is typically secretive and does not open up to others outside the group. According to Hofmann et al. (2022), researching law enforcement spouses could be difficult because of the lack of trust and fear of the stigma of needing help that many police officers experience. The generic qualitative study examined a small group of specific participants who have perceptions that were relevant to the research question. Due to the study's limited participant group, regional differences, such as rural and suburban areas and small departments, might have limited transferability outside the limits of this study. The interview guide was used as a tool to provide dependability and consistency in the interview process (Kostere & Kostere, 2022). Another limitation was that many first responder fields, especially law enforcement, are male-dominated fields with female spouses. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (2019) reported that 87.2% of police officers are male. Compared to the general population, such disproportionate numbers are likely not to represent society but are a reality within police officer families.

There was also a potential for underrepresentation within families of different sexual orientations.

A potential bias for this study was my personal experiences as an active law enforcement official and a former police officer spouse. The interview guide was created neutrally to avoid potential bias by asking participants the same questions. I also used field notes to check for bias and ensure that preconceived ideas were set aside (see Kostere & Kostere, 2022). While conducting interviews, I set aside predetermined thoughts and ideas regarding the research question to allow the participants to share their experiences. Participants were guaranteed confidentiality. Informed consent forms were completed, or implied consent was granted before the interview was conducted.

Significance

Understanding the perceptions of law enforcement spouses may inform agencies on how to better handle the cumulative stress experienced by police officers. Officer well-being is vital to thriving communities and officer interactions. Police officers who do not have a balanced home and work life might experience more conflict with the spouse, resulting in more stress. Stressed law enforcement officials could struggle with professionalism and have difficulty ensuring the thousands of citizen contacts are positive. Community policing is a model that most criminal justice agencies have adopted. However, when professionalism is lacking, community policing suffers and the public image of the police decreases. Hence, these implementations for improving officer well-being could help restore citizen and police relationships, create a better public image for police, and reduce the accumulation of stress from a dangerous work environment.

Building trust has been a priority for police departments, especially when relationships have been damaged over fear of police brutality and other noteworthy negative events.

Police officers deal with the public daily, and professionalism is demanded to ensure that citizen and police contacts are beneficial. A positive image is an important aspect of helping develop and maintain good relations with the community (Vaitkevičiūtė & Dobržinskienė, 2022). Police officers who are stressed are less likely to handle themselves professionally. Policing is a dangerous occupation, but a work–life balance is imperative to lowering the stress levels of police officers. Understanding the perception of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger could resolve conflict between work and home life and create a healthier life balance. A better life balance is indicative of positive community relationships, building trust, and developing lasting partnerships. Therefore, this study and understanding of the implications were relevant to social change.

Summary

This chapter described the purpose of this study and the issues related to it. The problem that prompted this current study was the need for more understanding of the perception of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger. Creating a balance between work and life is difficult for many professionals, including police officers. According to Alrutz et al. (2020), first responders have a dangerous occupation and are exposed to traumatic incidents where an accumulation of stress could be taken home to their spouses, creating conflict. Conflict at home creates more stress, making professionalism while dealing with society complicated. This study examined law

enforcement spouses' perceptions of officer safety and danger who are married to police officers working in large urban communities in Texas.

Police officers have one of the most dangerous and stressful occupations. Police officers often bring the job home and accidentally create conflict with their families. An imbalance in work and life could create secondary traumatic stress in law enforcement spouses (Friese, 2020; Landers et al., 2020). Cumulative stress is likely to have a negative impact on the mental and physical health of police officers, creating additional worries for the spouses. Police officers must have a balanced lifestyle to provide protection to society and ensure that the citizens feel safe. First responders are important to society's needs and provide a relevant link to the importance of law enforcement spouses' perception to the safety and danger of the profession.

Chapter 2 presents a literature review and gaps in the information addressing the research problem of this study. The work–life balance and work–family conflict theories are described to address the cumulative stress experienced by police officers and how their professionalism within the community was affected. An overview of the spousal and family issues that exist with law enforcement households are discussed, such as divorce and domestic violence. Occupational stress is explored, including organizational and operational stressors, which are often hard for police officers to control. Finally, the mental and physical health impacts of police officers are established to understand the implications of exposure to a dangerous and stressful occupation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

A career in law enforcement is one of the most stressful and dangerous occupations where police officers suffer various adverse outcomes. Police officers experience unfavorable outcomes that impact their physical and mental well-being and often crossover to the home life. According to Agrawal and Mahajan (2023), negative feelings are often carried over from work to home, causing issues with the spouse. Police officer spouses experience the effects of cumulative stress, leading to secondary traumatic stress, vicarious trauma, and compassion fatigue (Friese, 2020; Landers et al., 2020). The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger. Police officers are part of a group of first responders who are trained to respond to emergency or crisis calls (Dorfman & Walker, 2007). Like first responders, military members have similar stress-related symptoms, especially with active combat situations.

Cumulative stress has also created negative interactions with the public that became highly publicized and developed further problems for the entire criminal justice system. Tapp and Davis (2022) reported millions of yearly contacts between community members and the police. Understanding the accumulation of stress police officers experience, including those within the home life, could assist in developing higher levels of professionalism. With this literature review, it was clear that policing is stressful and dangerous for those who choose the occupation. Several studies were identified that examined the occupational, operational, and organizational stressors that police officers

experience (Galanis et al., 2021; Jackman et al., 2021). Also explored was the abundance of negative mental and physical conditions on law enforcement professionals (Foley & Massey, 2021; Sidhu et al., 2020). Additionally, other studies have identified issues within the families of police officers (Agrawal & Mahajan, 2022; Helfers et al., 2021). However, it is notable that the literature search revealed few studies focused on the perceptions of spouses, especially regarding officer safety and danger.

Agrawal and Mahajan (2023) discussed the implications of cumulative stress on the police officer's family. They explored the importance of balancing work and family to ensure life satisfaction. Spousal tension was only one aspect that police officers experience from cumulative stress, and many struggled with physical and mental health problems. Agrawal and Mahajan administered 450 questionnaires, concluding that stress from policing was carried over to the family through mood and emotions when officers lash out. Similarly, Paoline and Gau (2023) concluded stress also leads to a multitude of problems within home life, including separation and divorce.

According to Viegas et al. (2023), marriage is a societal norm governed by customs, norms, and laws, and there are beliefs about the responsibilities of each person involved in the relationship. Quality of life is important to most individuals. Quality of life has been linked with happiness and well-being, and stressful occupations can negatively impact marriage (Viegas et al., 2023). Most of the cumulative stress of police officers, like irregular work schedules and traumatic incidents, were impactful on the spouse. Campbell et al. (2022) confirmed that first responders in high-stress

environments carry their stress home, and there is a direct impact on their marital relationships.

Occupational stresses, such as shift work, and operational stresses, such as critical incidents, have adverse effects on the mental and physical health of police officers (Agrawal & Mahajan, 2023; Toh & Cho, 2023). Police officers have experienced depression, PTSD, anxiety, burnout, suicide ideation, and cardiovascular disease as a result of dealing with the occupation's high-stress levels and dangers (Paoline & Gau, 2023; Toh & Cho, 2023). Occupational and operational stress are often taken home to the spouse, creating further problems for the mental and physical health of police officers. Police officer stress coupled with the safety and danger is a concern for spouses, which further disrupted the work and home life. Concerned spouses lead to additional stress for police officers that create more physical and mental health issues. Police officers get stuck in a cycle of work stress to home stress that creates a continuous loop of cumulative stress. The spouse could break this vicious cycle by creating a safe space with less stress. Understanding the spouses' perceptions and how they were affected by secondary traumatic stress, vicarious trauma, and compassion fatigue could lead to a better home life for police officers.

Included in this chapter is a researcher review on the perception of law enforcement spouses and how police stress impacts the home. The concepts of the theoretical framework, the work–life balance and work–family conflict theories, are included in this review. Occupational stress for police officers is explored, verifying how stress negatively affects law enforcement spouses. Studies related to police officer stress

and their spouses are also presented. Qualitative research designs were used to describe the perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger.

Literature Search Strategy

For this literature review, I searched the Walden University online library for relevant peer-reviewed journal articles. The literature review in this study was conducted in two major domains, namely spousal and family issues and law enforcement stressors. The primary key terms used in each search included *law enforcement*, *police*, *cops*, and *officers.* The first domain of spousal and family issues included the key terms *spouse*, *wife*, *wives*, *husband*, *couple*, *couples*, *family*, *families*, *marriage*, *marital*, *married*, *work–family conflict*, *work–life conflict*, *work–life balance*, and *work–family balance.* The second domain of law enforcement stressors included the key terms of *safety*, *danger*, *risks*, *stress*, *burnout*, *suicide*, *and professionalism.* The search terms *military*, *veterans*, *soldiers*, *armed forces*, *first responders*, *firefighters*, *paramedics*, *emergency services*, and *EMS* were also included. The following academic databases were used: Criminal Justice Database, APA PsycArticles, APA PsycBooks, APA PsycExtra, APA PsycInfo, ERIC, and SAGE Journals. The Walden University Library's EBSCO Discovery Service, formally Thoreau, Multi-Database Search tool was also used. A search through Google Scholar concluded the literature search strategy to exhaust all available research. Articles published in the last 3–5 years were used to ensure the most recent articles were located. This literature review yielded 129 articles for review that were relevant to the research question. Many articles were cross-referenced, and once no new or relevant articles were located, the literature review was concluded.

During the literature review search, I kept detailed notes in a search log template provided by Walden University. Trends and themes that emerged from the literature were identified, including the cumulative stress experienced by police officers, mental and physical health conditions, and the effects on the spouse. The search term *partner* was excluded from the literature review search because it was associated with an emerging theme of intimate partner violence and how law enforcement officers respond, which was discovered to be irrelevant to this study. Individual searches were conducted to locate additional relevant articles: Criminal Justice Database (six articles); APA PsycArticles, APA PsycBooks, APA PsycExtra, and APA PsycInfo (four articles); ERIC (zero articles); SAGE Journals (six articles). A total of 84 different journals were used during this literature review, but five had multiple articles. *Police Practice & Research*, *Police Quarterly*, and *Policing: An International Journal* had seven relevant articles, and *Police Practice & Research: An International Journal* and *Police and Society* had five. It was also important to note that most of the articles were focused on police agencies outside of the United States, and few focused on police officers working in Texas. The result was a literature review based on 129 articles regarding spousal issues and cumulative stress in first responders, primarily focused on police officers. In the following sections, I discuss the literature review, which was used in this study to understand the perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger.

Key terms were searched individually and with various combinations using filters to improve article searches. Searches were conducted that reflected dates from 2019 to present. Searches were refined to scholarly, peer reviewed journal articles with full text

documents available. An exception to the above-mentioned filters was research about work–life balance and work–family conflict theories to gather the origins of the theory and historical data pertaining to this study for the theoretical foundation.

Theoretical Foundation

According to Ravitch and Carl (2021), developing a theoretical foundation for a literature review helps influence and shape the entire study. This study used a theoretical foundation of the work–life balance and work–family conflict theories. "Work–life balance is defined as an individual's perception of how well his or her life roles are balanced" (Poulose & Dhal, 2020, p. 169). The work–family conflict theory focused on the movement of stress or strain between the work and home domains (McCanlies et al., 2019). Both theories concentrated on the interactions between home and work and are imperative for law enforcement officers and their spouses. More balance and less conflict at home could help police officers focus on work related stresses that are out of their span of control. According to Agrawal and Mahajan (2022), Work–life balance and work–family conflict might assist in developing mentally strong and healthy police officers to deal with the cumulative stress from the job, manage volatile situations professionally, and be better gatekeepers to society.

Work–Life Balance

In the 1800s, Welsh labor activist Robert Owen was given credit for coining and advocating the concept of a balanced workday (Bryant, 2022). Owen believed it was important for the human body and mind to get 8 hours of work, 8 hours of recreation, and 8 hours of rest per day to be productive (Bryant, 2022; Kovach, 2023). Work–life balance

was officially conceptualized in 2003 by Greenhaus, Collins, and Shaw to focus on a balanced life through less work and more family time. Work–life balance has become increasingly popular as companies have established remote working policies amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Police officers do not have the option to work from home, but it is feasible to get 8 hours of play and 8 hours of rest. Having a proper work–life balance is essential in law enforcement due to the high level of cumulative stress that exists. Work–life balance could help the struggling police officer focus on the spouse and ensure that needs are met.

Poulose and Dhal (2020) and Rohwer et al. (2022) explored the necessity for a work–life balance for police officers. It is exceptionally important for police officers who are responsible for safeguarding the nation to have a proper work–life balance and provide appropriate services to the community (Sandhya, 2024). The primary roles in one's life are work and everything else. The imbalance of these roles is a concern for everyone, yet challenging to achieve (Poulose & Dahl, 2020). Organizations that focus on ensuring work–life balance is achieved have higher levels of career commitment (Poulose & Dahl, 2020). Higher levels of career commitment for police officers could help assist in eliminating stress. Rohwer et al. (2022) examined the effect of shift work and changing schedules on a police officer's work–life balance, identifying a relationship between stress and work–life balance, and work–family conflict. According to Rohwer et al. (2022), an imbalance between work and family creates an accumulation of stress in police officers that lead to burnout, suicide ideation, sleep disturbances, cardiovascular diseases, and mental health issues.

Work–Family Conflict

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) developed the work–family conflict concept after expanding on the work of Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, and Rosenthal (1964) regarding interrole conflict. According to Greenhaus and Beutell, work–family conflict contributed to the incompatible pressures between the work and family domains. Like balancing work and life, a conflict-free lifestyle is essential for police officers. The home and work domains often overlap, and it is challenging for police officers to not bring the work home to the spouse. When police officers take their work home, the spouses often experience secondary traumatic stress because of the dangerous occupation of law enforcement (Friese, 2020). Officer safety is a continuous concern of police officers and their spouses, creating an imbalance and conflict between work and home.

Frank et al. (2022) and Islam et al. (2020) examined the impact that work–family conflict has on police officers. Frank et al. concluded that adults have two domains of family and work that blend together peacefully until conflict is introduced. Conflict for police officers comes in many forms of occupational and operational stressors that create mental and physical health issues. Islam et al. concluded that the cumulative stress that police officers experience harms their physical health and family life, causing work–family conflict. The work and family domains interrupt one another with conflict and create dissatisfaction (Islam et al., 2020). Work dissatisfaction among police officers could cause serious issues, including job performance, turnover, and negative interactions within the community (Islam et al., 2020). Understanding work–family conflict and

having a work–life balance was imperative for law enforcement officials to ensure a less stressful working environment.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

Research is needed to explore the perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger. Police officers experience cumulative stress from the profession that can be transferred to their spouses through secondary traumatic stress, compassion fatigue, and vicarious trauma (Foley & Massey, 2021). Police officers have similar experiences with stress and the need for balance between home and life as other first responders and military members. All first responders risk their lives to provide public services to the community and cumulative stress should be understood. Understanding the cumulative stress that police officers experience and how it is translated to their spouses is vital for law enforcement. Friese (2020) and Landers et al., (2020) provided current research on the law enforcement profession and how spouses are affected. Specific research on the spouses' perceptions of officer safety and danger is limited in the literature, but there may be a correlation between law enforcement stress and spousal conflict.

Police officers need to balance their work and home life to reduce the spousal conflict. Spousal conflict is an additional stress for police officers that will take their focus away from being professional and managing through high-stress incidents with the public (Agrawal & Mahajan, 2022). Although many police officers try to separate their home and work lives, those who talk to their spouses report less stress and higher marital satisfaction (Bonner & Brimhall, 2022). The cumulative stress resulting from the police

job has shown to develop inappropriate behaviors, including aggression, because of what is expected from law enforcement (Asiimwe et al., 2023). In reviewing the literature, several themes were identified. The literature review included several articles that focused on the spousal and family issues police officers face, occupational stress, and the mental and physical health of police officers. The goal of this literature review is to provide an exhaustive review of current articles regarding the perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger. An in-depth review is necessary to justify the need for this study.

The generic qualitative approach was the qualitative methodology selected for this study. Semistructured interviews with open-ended questions were utilized to gather the perceptions of the target population, law enforcement spouses. Qualitative methods were appropriate to answer the research question and understand the participants' human experience (Kostere & Kostere, 2022). Law enforcement spouses have a unique perspective into officer safety and danger, which has not been thoroughly explored.

Spousal and Family Issues

Martial relationships are universal across cultures as an important aspect of human life regardless of the occupation, although different challenges occur (Lin et al., 2022). Law enforcement, first responders, and military organizations have similar cultures, including distrust of those outside of their own work culture. Other first responders and military spouses experience similar stressors as law enforcement spouses. Several articles expanded on the spousal and family issues that police officers experience. Friese (2020) concluded that the cumulative stress experienced by police officers harms

those closest to them. Police officers often have difficulty leaving their jobs at home, creating distance and conflict with the spouse and family. Policing is an institution that promotes long work engagements and takes officers away from their spouses and families (Asiimwe et al., 2023). Military spouses experience similar periods when deployment occurs, and their spouses are in active combat zones for long periods. Relationship issues, family discord, marital problems, separation, divorce, and domestic violence are common issues experienced by police officers. Asiimwe et al. (2023) reported that 62% of police officers acknowledged having issues between work and home that strain the marriage. Casas and Benuto (2022) provided a clear relationship between work and family life, proving a connection that stress from one aspect can affect the other.

Of the 129 articles reviewed, four articles focused specifically on the spouses of law enforcement officers. Campbell et al. (2022), Friese (2020), Landers et al. (2020), and Viegas et al. (2023) conducted studies on law enforcement spouses. Two qualitative, one quantitative, and one mixed-method study were conducted to focus on law enforcement spouses and how policing impacts their lives. Secondary traumatic stress, the cumulative stress from repeated exposure to traumatic events, was a focal point on the relationship between police officers and their spouses (Campbell et al., 2022; Friese, 2020; Landers et al., 2020). Exposure to traumatic events is one of many law enforcement stressors, but can create a significantly higher burden on the spouses and quality of family life. Each article reiterated that a career in law enforcement is inherently dangerous, but none focused on the specific perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger.

Relationship Issues and Family Discord

Although the spouses suffer secondary traumatic stress, other family discord is created from the cumulative stress experienced by police officers. Agrawal and Mahajan (2022) directly relate the occupational stress of the policing job as a disturbance to family life, creating issues within the relationship and family discord. Discord can interfere with the quality of life for the police officer's family members while causing harm to relationships (Helfers et al., 2021). Besides the dangers that police officers face from the inherent nature of the job, shift work and overtime mean they have less time with their families. Many officers are absent during important events and holidays because of their schedules, creating more family issues. Strained relationships create additional stress that the police officer experiences before walking out the door and beginning the workday. Many times, the cumulative stress of policing gets carried home to the spouse. According to Agrawal and Mahajan (2023), police officers inadvertently created conflict in the home when they lashed out from the stress and strain that they experience from the job.

Demou et al. (2020) reported the family problems experienced by police officers are one of the many issues related to bad mental health. Disruption of family life, impact on family relationships, family difficulties, and relationship quality were common terms cited within the literature regarding the family of police officers (Landers et al., 2020; Otu & Otu, 2022; Pooley & Turns, 2022). Law enforcement is a dangerous career that creates various spousal and family issues that add to already high levels of cumulative stress within the family domain. Positive relationships within the family could enhance the quality of work by lowering stress levels for first responders, which is essential to

daily operations. According to Rojero (2022), police officers must prioritize their family because many spouses believe that the job comes before the family, causing issues that can lead to marital problems, separation, and divorce.

Marital Problems, Separation, and Divorce

Police officers face trauma from the job, creating stress that is difficult to leave behind when returning home to the spouse (Collazo, 2021). When stress comes into the home, police officers face marital problems that turn into separation and divorce. According to Majani et al. (2023), marriage is a relationship that takes communication, conflict resolution, cooperation, and empathy between partners for success. It has been reported that the symptoms of police stress are directly related to problems within the marriage, mainly when focused on traumatic incidents that police officers experience (Bonner & Brimhall, 2022; Landers et al., 2020; Pooley & Turns, 2022). Collazo (2021) stated that when officers do not cope with the stress of the job, it can lead to marital dissatisfaction. Trauma and PTSD could increase marital conflict, causing the quality of the marriage to deteriorate over time, leading to higher divorce rates (Majani et al., 2023). Unfortunately, problems within marriage and unhappy relationships lead to officers separating and divorcing. Casas and Benuto (2022) reported that police are not the only first responders who have marital problems; stress has been associated within all first responder couples, creating poor marital interaction and satisfaction. Otu and Otu (2022) reported that divorce rates are a concern among the law enforcement community and are often reported as high in number compared to the general population.

Similar to police officers and other first responders, military members' families experienced unique challenges because of the legal protections that are in place (Lin et al., 2022). Military marriage is still considered sacred and sanctioned by legality within, making adultery illegal. Even with such sanctions, military members have high divorce rates as do other first responders, such as police officers. Although adultery may not be illegal for other first responders, the act of unfaithfulness creates problems at home that contribute to an imbalance between work and home. Such an imbalance will add to the cumulative stress experienced by police officers. Bisht et al. (2020) reported that low marital satisfaction among military personnel results from deployments and relocations. Marital satisfaction is important for soldiers to have a mentally healthy foundation to serve and protect the country, similarly to police officers serving and protecting the community. Military members' service and law enforcement provide parallel services that involve protecting and serving and individuals must be physically and mentally healthy to provide the highest quality services.

Domestic Violence

Another cited concern within the literature related to police stress is domestic violence (Bonner & Brimhall, 2022; Friese, 2020; Paoline & Gau, 2023). Domestic violence is a problem that occurs in every culture and profession. Repasky et al. (2020) grouped both domestic violence and police suicide as issues that stem from the occupational stress of policing. Committing domestic abuse goes against the nature of being a police officer because they must enforce the law while protecting the citizens. Law enforcement is a noble profession. Police officers should be setting the example and

be held to the highest standard involving domestic violence. Many jurisdictions have strict arrest policies regarding domestic violence, and police officers are not exempt. Often underreported in the past, domestic violence within the law enforcement community is a growing concern, and many departments have developed zero-tolerance policies.

Studies have shown that officer-involved domestic violence within police officer homes is 25%–40% higher or 2–4 times more common than in the general population (Asiimwe et al., 2023; Schweitzer Dixon, 2021). Domestic violence within the police officer's home is concerning due to the access to firearms and the potential of homicide-suicide incidents. According to Rojero (2022), police officers experienced displaced anger and frustration that results from the paramilitary organization and a lack of control at work. Such displacement was often used against the family without the officer realizing what was happening. Domestic violence could stem from the cumulative stress that first responders experience at extraordinarily high numbers. Another contributing factor to domestic violence was the high levels of alcohol and substance abuse within the law enforcement community. As later mentioned, police officers often suffer from alcohol and substance abuse, coupled with negative coping skills, that can increase the risks of domestic violence situations.

Occupational Stress

A significant amount of stress experienced by law enforcement officers comes from the job itself. Friese (2020) concluded that occupational stress or work-related stress is experienced more significantly by police officers because of the psychological strain of

the various stressors. A large portion of occupational stress derived from the unique

culture within law enforcement. The law enforcement culture was often identified as

more negative than positive, and it is difficult for outsiders to gain trust from within

(Foley et al., 2022; Friese, 2020). Common terms describing the police culture included

masculinity, stigma, cynicism, and us-versus-them (Amendola et al., 2021; Duxbury et

al., 2021; Rief & Clinkinbeard, 2021). There was a clear link that showed the specific

culture within law enforcement led to an accumulation of stress. Occupational stress was

divided into two categories, including operational and organizational. According to Baka

(2020), operational stressors were related to the job content, whereas organizational

stressors referred to the job context (Baka, 2020).

Occupational stress in policing has been researched for several years. Several

research studies have used the Police Stress Questionnaire (PSQ), developed in 2006 by

McCreary and Thompson to study the effects of operational and organizational stress in

policing (Bekele & Mengesha, 2023; Edwards et al., 2021; Fuller et al., 2024; Lee & Wu,

2024). The development of a reliable and valid survey designed specifically for studying

police stress, validates the importance of understanding the occupational stress in

policing. Although designed for a Canadian police force, the PSQ has been effective for

many different areas, like Ethiopia, North Carolina, and the United Kingdom (Bekele &

Mengesha, 2023 Jackman et al., 2021; Lee & Wu, 2024). Many of the operational and

organizational stressors used in the PSQ were identified throughout this literature review

as significant stressors in law enforcement. The PSQ has not been used or validated for

law enforcement spouses to identify their perceptions regarding officers' safety and danger.

Operational Stressors

According to Edwards et al. (2021), operational stressors occurred in the field. In other words, operational stressors resulted from experiences that police officers had while they were on duty because of police work (Baek et al., 2021). Operational stressors included critical and traumatic incidents, danger, injuries, officer-involved incidents, and negative public opinion and criticism. Additionally, operational stressors were often out of the officer's control and result from the nature of the job, creating a heavy burden on the first responder. With the onset of community interactions over the last few years, operational stressors have grown as a concern. Spouses can see events involving their loved ones streaming live through social media, which accumulates additional stress within the household. Hofmann et al. (2022) reported secondary traumatic stress, vicarious trauma, and compassion fatigue are easily transferred to spouses because police officers experience an average of 4.16 traumatic incidents per year.

Critical and Traumatic Incidents. First responders, including police officers and military members, experienced more traumatic incidents than most other occupations, with severe consequences (Waddell et al., 2020). Critical or traumatic incidents included violent incidents, exposure to human remains, natural disasters, terrorist attacks, contact with abused children, motor vehicle accidents, and domestic abuse incidents (Foley et al., 2022; Hofmann et al., 2022; Regehr et al., 2021). Studies reported that police officers experienced 10 to 900 traumatic events throughout a career

and even multiple times during a single shift (Collazo, 2022). According to Santa Maria et al. (2021), 90% of police officers in the UK experienced a work-related traumatic event. Repeated exposure to traumatic and critical incidents is not a normal occupational hazard for most people, and the consequences can be dire. Baka (2020) identified high exposure to traumatic and critical incidents will negatively impact the physical and psychological well-being of police officers.

Spouses of first responders have reported secondary traumatic stress and enduring psychological distress because of their loved one's exposure to critical and traumatic incidents (Casas & Benuto, 2022). Military member spouses also experienced trauma from such exposure, especially after their loved ones return from combat. Overseas deployment can be difficult for military families, especially when the loved one returns home with PTSD or injuries. The spouse carried a lot of burdens to get their partner back into a routine that may involve specific care with a return to civilian life. McDevitt (2020) correlated the experiences of post-war military members with the aftermath of trauma in police officers. All first responders and military members and their spouses need to be protected from the stress stemming from post-critical and traumatic incidents.

Many law enforcement agencies have begun programs to look after the well-being of their employees after a critical or traumatic incident. Many agencies have developed critical incident stress management (CISM), critical incident stress debriefing (CISD), or psychological first aid (PSA) programs to limit the negative impacts following critical and traumatic incidents (Tjin et al., 2022). Critical and traumatic incidents are a part of a police officer's life. Statistics showed the amount of critical and traumatic incidents was

well above the average individual and agencies must make an effort to establish healthy coping and mental well-being practices. Rodriguez et al. (2024) reported programs like CISM, CISD, and PSA helped police officers with depression, anger, and PTSD symptoms.

   Danger, Injuries, and Officer-Involved Incidents. Policing is considered one of the most stressful and dangerous professions, and officers are often in danger and injured in the line of duty. A significant stressor for police officers was the fear of being hurt or killed and the fear of hurting or killing another. Paoline and Gau (2023) reported that the top three police stressors are killing someone, an officer-involved death, and physical attacks. It is common for police officers to face injuries while at work and they are three times more likely in the United States to experience a nonfatal work injury (Cheung & Chi-Mei Li, 2022; Poirier et al., 2023). The death of a fellow officer was one of the most significant stressors an entire law enforcement agency can experience. The community, the organization, fellow officers, and the officer's family and friends were all negatively impacted by the death of an officer in the line of duty, and stress levels are increased (Hine & Carey, 2021). All first responders face various dangerous and life-threatening events on a daily basis that adds to the accumulation of stress.

   Military members experience, often life-changing, injuries from combat. Military spouses frequently became the sole caregivers after a serious injury leaves their loved one unable to take care of themselves (Pflieger et al., 2020). Police officers also experience life-changing injuries while on duty that alter the family function. Caregiver burden could develop in spouses of first responders from taking care of their loved one after a serious

injury, and these spouses are more likely to develop PTSD (Senior et al., 2023). Military and first responder spouses know that when their loved ones walk out of the door, they could face an untimely death while on the job. According to McCullough et al. (2023), first responders' spouses had a higher chance of becoming young widows, experiencing severe grief, and being left with family responsibilities like taking care of young children.

Public Opinion and Criticism. Another operational stressor that police officers experience comes from negative public opinion. Negative public opinion could come in many forms, like criticism, anti-police rhetoric, scrutiny, and highly publicized interactions within the community. Recent highly publicized incidents have resulted from perceived police misconduct, like officer-involved shootings, creating anti-police sentiment and 24/7 scrutiny (De Camargo, 2022; Wu & Wen, 2020). Heightened tensions between the police and the public create a large stressor for police officers. Negative media attention, constant criticism, and poor public opinion were stressors that could affect the mental and physical health of police officers (Otu & Otu, 2022; Poirier et al., 2023). Most police officers are not involved in police misconduct or negative public interactions but still experience stress from such incidents. Repasky et al. (2020) identified police and community relationships have often met national attention with calls for reform. National products from police reform include the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice (1967) and the President's 21st Century Task Force (2015).

Dating back to 1991 with the videotaped beating of Rodney King by police from the Los Angeles Police Department, police and community contacts have been a concern

for many communities (Woznaik et al., 2021). More recently, with the prevalence of social media and body worn cameras, several high-profile events have caused nationwide unrest. Police departments have historically been militarized, adopting military-like tactics, training, and weapons (Woznaik et al., 2021). Body worn cameras and a negative public image are first responder stressors unique to law enforcement. Although not exclusive, most media coverage involving other first responders, like firefighters and emergency medical services personnel, was more positive. Military members also receive negative media attention, especially during times of active conflict. All first responder spouses are affected during times of unrest and experience higher levels of fear when there are protests and incidents that can risk the safety of their loved ones.

Many criminal justice organizations have begun to create divisions that deal directly with public affairs and ensure media requests information are answered in a timely manner. Policies that promote transparency to the public are a first step in building trust and improving community relationships. As with many organizations, law enforcement has begun to use social media to run their own media narratives and inform the public on current issues and trends. Although public information is essential within society, it often leads to more fear for the spouse. A spouse may see a media story before any official notification, creating additional worry and stress.

Organizational Stressors

Organizational stressors result from police structure and management practices. Operational stressors were more challenging to control than organizational ones (Poirier et al., 2023). According to Edwards et al. (2021), decisions made by management

discretion and dealing with the administrative side of the police organization were organizational stressors that create the most stress. Effective leadership and management could control organizational stressors. Cho and Park (2021) reported that organizational stressors have more significant negative consequences on police officers than operational stressors. Organizational stressors included the bureaucratic nature of policing, poor supervision and leadership, scheduling problems, and disciplinary issues. Policing is known for its strong culture and community, which "refers to a set of values, attitudes, and norms that are commonly shared" among members that create a "strong bond and fierce loyalty" (Campbell et al., 2022, pp. 1595–1596). Many first responders, especially police officers, believe in secrecy and solidarity as an aspect of the job, which is felt by the spouses and can become an additional stress and conflict within the home.

Bureaucracy. Police organizations are known to be hierarchical and bureaucratic in nature. The traditional rank-and-file hierarchy of the modern police department was a stressor because it can be difficult for officers to develop their professional skills and exercise discretion (Baek et al., 2021). Bureaucracy is another organizational stressor for police officers. Bureaucracy is the administrative side of the organization that focuses on rules and regulations (Acquadro Maran et al., 2022). Likewise, bureaucracy is embedded in police organizations and is a part of the culture. Bureaucracy is a process that strips away police autonomy by making individuals feel "impersonal and impartial through systematic, precise, and rational procedures" (Acquadro Maran et al., 2022, p. 7). The stressor becomes more apparent the lower in the chain of command as individuals do not understand decisions within the rules, regulations, and procedures that often appear to

complicate a situation. Flom (2020) described police autonomy as an individual officer's ability to exercise discretion without compelling supervision. Bureaucracy often does not allow for police autonomy because of strict policies and guidelines.

Poor Supervision and Leadership. Police bureaucracy could create poor supervision and leadership, another organizational stressor for police officers. Management issues within police organizations could develop physical and mental health issues for officers. Cho and Park (2021) reported that officers who experience stress by organizational management are 1.41 times more likely to have indigestion. Common themes reported about organizational practices with policing are "poor supervision," "poor management style," and "poor management practices" (Lambert et al., 2021; Otu & Otu, 2022; Violanti, 2022). Poor leadership leads to poor relationships. Relationships were stronger when officers felt supported by management. Lack of supervisory, which is a known stressor, support was another complaint from police officers from within their organizations (Kaushal, 2020; Otu & Otu, 2022). Ensuring that consistent and supportive leadership is a priority is imperative within police organizations to assist in abandoning some of the stress that can be controlled.

Poor supervision and leadership damages morale thus leading to worse supervisors and leaders. Leaders who hold influence over promotional decisions hold a lot of perceived power over others. According to Asiimwe et al. (2023), promotional decisions were a stress for police officers and spillover to the spouses who are hoping for a change of role for their loved ones. Promotions could change the police setting with a new assignment and allow the officer more time with their spouse as their new schedules

are more family friendly. Organizations should have fair career advancement processes to ensure their employees have opportunities to better themselves and become leaders or supervisors. Continued education and leadership training are also imperative to ensure that the organization works together towards a joint mission and shares values and goals indicative of success.

Scheduling Problems. Scheduling problems are rampant within policing. Most police officers work shift work, which could be stressful by working a different schedule than family and friends. The more time a first responder spends at work, the less time they fulfill their family roles, causing conflict and dissatisfaction (Pasca & Wagner, 2023). Along with shift work, police officers could experience erratic schedule changes, overtime, extended shifts, and shaft shortages. Otu et al. (2021) reported that time-based conflict was a stressor for police officers because shift work and overtime are essential to the job but create conflict at home. McDevitt (2022) reported shift work has been studied and linked to mental and physical health issues in police officers, like circadian rhythm disruption, hormonal imbalances, cardiovascular disease, anxiety, and mood disorders.

Police officers have difficulty with schedules and making a priority for the spouse. All first responders experienced the difficulty of not having personal control over their schedules. According to Baka (2020), there is also very little personal control over individuals' schedules, specific work, and whom they work with, causing additional, unavoidable stress. Kishon et al. (2020) concluded family separation was difficult for all parties, but the impact was profound when there is a longer period, like military

professionals. Most first responders, like police officers, are home after a shift and are not deployed to other countries for extended periods of time.

Disciplinary Issues. Another major source of organizational stress for police officers is the disciplinary process. Officers reported that internal affairs investigations were a compelling source of stress (Jackman et al., 2021). Police officers must be held accountable for their actions, and having a disciplinary process is a vital function of the organization. Perceived inconsistencies and unfair discipline made officers fear the process (Cho & Park, 2021; Otu & Otu, 2022). Fair and consistent disciplinary processes would help alleviate some cumulative stress experienced due to internal affairs investigations. Police organizations could control organizational stressors by creating policies and programs focusing on the areas of concern and high-stress, like bureaucracy, leadership, scheduling, and discipline. According to Santa Maria et al. (2021), internal affairs disciplinary processes could lead to chronic mental health issues within first responders because job-related problems are a very stressful time for those involved.

Mental Health

Police officers face cumulative stress from the nature of the job, and many of these can lead to serious mental health issues. Police officers deal with the distress of seeing terrible conditions and not feeling supported by the administration. Increased risk of developing a mental disorder, like depression, anxiety, PTSD, and suicidal ideation, is reality for police officers compared to the general population (Jackman et al., 2021; Sharp et al., 2022). Violanti (2022) and Violanti et al. (2021) reported in studies regarding law enforcement and mental health that there was a 12% of mental health

diagnosis, 26% of mental illness symptoms, 14.6% of depression, 14.2% of PTSD, and 9.6% for anxiety amongst police officers. A stigma exists that prohibits officers from seeking assistance for mental health issues. Agrawal and Mahajan (2022) stated poor mental health was a cost that the community cannot afford because of the overall performance deterioration. The spouses of police officers also suffered higher levels of mental health issues, like depression, because of secondary traumatic stress from their spouse's work (Landers et al., 2020). Mental health issues often lead to bad coping skills, and the use of tobacco, alcohol, and drugs becomes prevalent. According to Galanis et al. (2021) police officers with increased tobacco, alcohol, and substance abuse problems were likely to have issues within their home lives and cannot contribute to the safety of society.

Mental Health Disorders

According to the American Psychiatric Association (2013), there were several symptoms of diagnosable disorders that first responders display: depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, trauma- and stressor-related disorders, sleep-wake disorders, substance-related, and addictive disorders. Although not often diagnosed officially because of the stigma of looking weak, police officers often displayed symptoms indicative of mental health disorders. Mental health of police officers was not often treated and could become problematic over time. Likewise, mental health disorders were disproportionately high in all first responders, especially PTSD. PTSD was often correlated with military veterans but has become a consistent issue for first responders. PTSD includes indirect exposure for the spouse of first responders as a factor for

vicarious exposure to traumatic events (Dekel et al., 2023). Dekel et al. (2023) reported that military member spouses experience PTSD at 10%–23% rates.

Mental health issues were one of the leading causes of physical health issues, attributing to 13% of diseases, and major depression was the second leading cause of disability (Senior et al., 2023). Police officers were not the only first responders who showed signs of mental health complications. Depression rates in military members was between 23%–26%, which is higher than the 13%–15% the general population faces (Senior et al., 2023). PTSD was a major concern for military members, affecting 4%–17% of veterans impacting their spouses as they are expected to take care of them when they return home from combat (Oudi et al., 2023). Like most first responders, military members were less likely to seek treatment for mental health issues, placing the burden on their spouse. Zerach et al. (2022) reported PTSD in military members, especially combat veterans, has been linked to a negative effect on the family environment, marital discord, and similar symptoms among spouses. Like military members, similar experiences and perceptions of police officers' spouses were expected to develop through secondary traumatic stress.

Suicide

Suicide is becoming a topic all too familiar within the law enforcement community. Studies reported that suicide among police officers is higher than among the general population, with lifetime suicide ideation ranging between 6.4% and 25% (Quarshie et al., 2021). Thoen et al. (2020) reported that the cumulative stress from the job place police officers at a larger risk of death by suicide, specifically 3.5 times greater

than other occupations. Thoen et al. also reported police officers are 2.4 times more likely than death by homicide. Suicide has become a global phenomenon that occurs everywhere with no immunity, including those involved in law enforcement (Saputra et al., 2022). Spouses of law enforcement officers were left picking up the pieces of their lives when a police officer commits suicide.

The topic of suicide carries a stigma shrouded in secrecy. Many organizations, including law enforcement and the military, do not make the facts known about suicide among active members. Suicide is a serious topic that claimed the lives of more police officers than line-of-duty deaths each year (Rodriguez et al., 2024). Many prior military members go into law enforcement once their service is completed. Individuals with prior military in law enforcement have a 1.5 times higher chance of dealing with PTSD, suicide ideation, and dying by suicide (Schweitzer Dixon, 2021). Military and law enforcement spouses have an extremely difficult time dealing with a suicidal partner. The stress of constantly worrying about your loved one harming themselves needs to be considered during organizational wellness programs. Mental well-being has become a topic of growth, with many departments developing psychological services and peer support programs to assist employees and spouses through difficult times.

Physical Health

Along with mental health issues, police officers face physical health issues resulting from the cumulative stress. Common physical ailments police officers reported included heart disease, hypertension, obesity, digestive disorders, and insomnia (Galanis et al., 2021; Li et al., 2022; Violanti et al., 2021). Bonner and Brimhall (2022) reported in

their study of police officers that over 75% dealt with obesity, and more than a quarter

had hypertension, which is a contributing factor to cardiovascular disease. Physical health

issues could result in premature mortality in police officers, with a reported average age

of on-duty deaths resulting from heart attacks at 46.5 years (Liakopoulou et al., 2020;

Violanti et al., 2021). Beer et al. (2023) concluded that police officers died 7 years earlier

than the general population. Police officers suffered insomnia at higher rates than the

general population, often because of the inherent stress associated with policing.

Mumford et al. (2021) reported that 51% of police officers suffer from a lack of sleep

compared to 26%–40% of the general population. The spouses of police officers also

suffered from the bad physical health of their loved ones, especially when a premature

death occurs.

Summary and Conclusions

Law enforcement is a stressful and dangerous occupation that creates high levels

of cumulative stress. Spousal and family issues, occupational stress, mental health, and

physical health were concerns for police officers due to the nature of the job. Law

enforcement spouses experienced secondary traumatic stress, vicarious trauma, and

compassion fatigue through their spouse, creating work–family conflict (Agrawal &

Mahajan, 2023). Work–life balance and work–family conflict are imperative for police

officers to deal with the cumulative stress and dangerous occupation of policing. The

perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger have not

been clearly established. Due to this gap in the literature, this study focused on the

perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding the cumulative stress within law

enforcement. Understanding how the spouses of police officers felt about officer safety and danger could help create a work–life balance conducive to productive and professional gatekeepers of society. Other first responders and military members had similar experiences to police officers, with a common pattern of cumulative stress for the spouses.

Work–life balance and work–family conflict theories grounded this study as the theoretical framework. Both theories focus on a separation of home and work lives. Work–life balance refers to achieving a balanced life through less work and more family time (Greenhaus et al., 2003). Work–family conflict refers to the interrole conflict between work and home (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Fostering work–life balance and mitigating work–family conflict is essential for reducing the stress of police officers and creating a safe space at home. Understanding the perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger could further expand how police officers can have more balance and less stress between work and home.

The research design in this study was the generic qualitative approach. Chapter 3 provides the research design and rationale with the theoretical foundation of work–life balance and work–family conflict of this generic qualitative study, along with how the participants were identified, the interview questions, and the data collection process. The research question is explained along with the methodology that best fit this study. In addition, the role of the researcher, trustworthiness, and ethical procedures are discussed.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

This study's primary purpose was to explore the perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger. The generic qualitative approach was used to gather the perceptions of law enforcement spouses through semistructured interviews. Chapter 2 revealed that first responders, especially police officers, have spousal and family issues, occupational stressors, mental health, and physical health issues because of their dangerous occupations. The spouses of first responders are prone to experiencing secondary traumatic stress, vicarious trauma, and compassion fatigue because of their loved one's experiences (Friese, 2020; Landers et al., 2020). The experiences of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger were imperative for the spouses to handle the cumulative stress of the job properly. Creating a work–life balance with less conflict between work and home was the beginning of helping spouses handle stress. Unattended stress is dangerous for police officers as they work within the community and have daily interactions with citizens.

Chapter 3 consists of four major sections, including Research Design and Rationale, Role of the Researcher, Methodology, and Issues of Trustworthiness. The Research Design and Rationale section states and defines the concept of the study, identifies the research tradition, and provides the rationale for the chosen tradition. The Role of the Researcher section defines and explains my role as an observer-participant. This section also reveals personal and professional relationships between me and the participants, including how to manage biases. The Methodology section identifies the

participant selection logic, the instrumentation sources, the procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection, and the data analysis plan for each type of data collected. The Issues of Trustworthiness section covers the trustworthiness and ethical procedures used in the study.

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Research Design and Rationale

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Research Question

What are the perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger?

Central Concept

The purpose of this study was to understand the perception of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger. Law enforcement is a dangerous profession where police officers experience cumulative stress that adversely affects their spousal relationship (Friese, 2020). Understanding that law enforcement spouses carry secondary traumatic stress, vicarious trauma, and compassion fatigue through their partner's stress is imperative to lessening work–family conflict and creating a better work–life balance for police officers. As the research problem demonstrates, community expectations, citizen hostility, and police legitimacy have faltered over recent events (Helfers et al., 2021). Less stress and conflict with better work–life balance could assist police officers in having a higher level of professionalism as they have daily citizen contacts. The specific focus on work–life balance and work–family conflict theories was used to understand the perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger and how to assist their loved ones in handling the daily stress of policing.

Research Tradition

The qualitative approach was chosen for this study. The generic qualitative approach was used to understand human experiences (Kostere & Kostere, 2022). The human experience explored in this study was the perception of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger. The lack of research on law enforcement spouses made generic qualitative research an appropriate approach to explore the perceptions of law enforcement spousing regarding officer safety and danger. Quantitative research would not provide the rich data to understand the human experience in the way qualitative research provides. Kostere and Kostere (2022) explained qualitative research focuses on words and language instead of numbers and measurements to fully understand the participant's experiences.

The most common qualitative research approaches are case study, ethnography, phenomenology, narrative, and grounded theory. Although all qualitative research is descriptive, the methods for approaches are different (Crawford, 2020). The goal of this study was to understand the perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger. Case study and ethnography look at the interactions of a bounded unit (Crawford, 2020). The desire to live and participate within the culture of law enforcement spouses did not exist, making ethnography inadequate as an approach for this study. Phenomenology, narrative, and grounded theory qualitative designs use interviews as the primary data collection. Phenomenology design addresses a specific phenomenon, and narrative design focuses on individual stories within the specific phenomenon. Grounded theory focuses on theory development, which is different from the purpose of this study.

Rationale for the Chosen Tradition

The chosen tradition for this current study was the generic qualitative approach. Although similar to phenomenology, the generic qualitative design focused on the human experience. The generic qualitative approach was practical for answering the questions about the perceptions of officer safety and danger from the viewpoint of law enforcement spouses. Semistructured interviews were conducted to explore the perceptions of the participants through qualitative data. The goal of this study was to gain an understanding of the experiences of law enforcement officers' spouses regarding officer safety and danger. The rich descriptions from the participants' interviews were collected, analyzed, and interpreted to understand the perceptions of law enforcement spouses' regarding officer safety and danger.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in qualitative research designs is to be a primary data collection instrument (Crawford, 2020). Trust was built with participants through conversations. With conversations and trust building, my role as the researcher was as an observer-participant. As an observer-participant, I did not engage in activities with the participants but conducted interviews to gain their unique perceptions and experiences of law enforcement spouses (Crawford, 2020). I was not a full participant or a full observer. A full participant would have full access to the research participants and a full participant would not be involved in conducting interviews.

As an active law enforcement official, the separation of roles as a researcher was imperative. Remaining cognizant of any potential conflict is essential, especially if

participants were aware of preexisting roles and as an experienced law enforcement official. In the interview setting, there were no relationships between the participants and me, or any type of power differential. According to Withrow (2014), the researcher should not attempt to influence the outcome of the interviews due to professional and personal bias regarding the topic. No participants were coerced into interviewing due to potential power differentials, and an option was allowed not to participate or withdraw data from the study (Stangor, 2015). I kept a researcher journal and notes throughout the research project to document thoughts and experiences and an ongoing account of the study's rationale (see Crawford & Lynn, 2020). Journaling continued throughout the data collection process.

The main principle of ethical research is to "do no harm" to the participants, including psychological harm (Withrow, 2014). Interviews were conducted in a comfortable setting for the participants. Each participant was granted privacy, and confidentiality was established through informed consent forms. Implied consent was granted for all online interviews. Informed consent provided information to the participants in advance and at the beginning of the interview to establish the nature of the study and any potential risks (Patton, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and approved this study (#08-02-24-1031485) to ensure that all ethical standards and U.S. federal regulations are met.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

According to Kostere and Kostere (2022), a generic qualitative dissertation should have a sample size of 8–15 participants. This study included spouses married to police officers from large urban communities in Texas. All participants were married to a police officer who worked for a police department in a large urban community in Texas, allowing for multiple agency involvement. To participate in the study, participants had to be legally married to a law enforcement official. There were no restrictions regarding the sexual orientation of the marriage. Spouses who are active law enforcement officers and married to a police officer within the community were not excluded.

Purposeful sampling was used to identify and recruit participants with the experience and willingness to share (Kostere & Kostere, 2022). Snowball sampling was used to identify any additional participants. Snowball sampling involves using current participants to gather additional and relevant contacts that would have additional perspectives regarding the study (Patton, 2015). Purposeful and snowball sampling were the best ways to find relevant participants with unique perspectives to share and gather rich information for this study.

Participants met the identified criteria as a law enforcement spouse legally married to a police officer working in a large urban community in Texas. Additionally, participants had to be 18 years or older and able to read, speak, and comprehend English. Participants also needed to be willing and able to complete an informed consent form to be eligible to be interviewed for this study. Implied consent was granted to participants

who did not have face-to-face contact throughout the study. Inclusion criteria were included on the recruitment flyer and verified by me before any interviews were conducted. Participants who did not meet the basic requirements were excluded from the study. Participants were recruited with a flyer over social media platforms like Facebook and LinkedIn. Interested participants contacted me through the social media application or the provided email address. Kostere and Kostere (2022) identified data saturation as a common practice in qualitative research studies. Data saturation was met when participants were interviewed, and no additional data were identified regarding the research question.

Instrumentation

The primary data collection instrument was through semistructured interviews. I used an interview guide with preset questions and follow-up prompts during the interviews (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Semistructured interviews allowed each participant to have a unique path of information from the conversation between the researcher and interviewee (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The interview guide ensured that specific questions were asked of each participant with the ability to guide the conversation to gather accurate data about the research topic. The interview guide included several questions that were developed to gain insight into the perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger. The initial email about the study guide informed the participants of the interview process, the sessions were recorded, and notes were taken. Information was presented again at the beginning of each interview to inform the participants of the interview process.

The interview guide was used to guide the semistructured interviews and provide an open dialogue between the participant and me (see Kostere & Kostere, 2022). The questions were developed to gather the perceptions of the participants, and the conversation was not led because of researcher bias. The interview questions were aligned with the topic and focus on answering the research question (Kostere & Kostere, 2022). The interview guide (see Appendix A) consisted of 11 questions that I developed to gain insight into the perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officers' safety and danger. The interview guide allowed for 45–60 minutes with each participant. Following the interview guide and protocols that were set forth established the content validity of the study.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Participants were recruited through purposeful and snowball sampling. Recruitment flyers (see Appendix B) were posted on social media platforms. Snowball sampling was used to locate additional participants through interested responses from the recruitment flyer. Each interested participant was provided with an eligibility checklist (see Appendix C) as an initial screening tool. Data were collected through semistructured interviews that lasted approximately 45–60 minutes. All interviews were conducted and data were gathered solely by me. Participants were given the option to meet in person or online, via a virtual meeting platform such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams, for the interviews to provide opportunities for the safest environment for everyone. Post-pandemic protocols have made online options a normal way of interacting with each other and provided a secure and comfortable setting for the participants. In-person

interviews would have been conducted in a private meeting room that is convenient and comfortable for the participants. However, all participants opted for online interviews, which I conducted from the privacy of my home office. Participants were able to choose a physical location that was comfortable to complete the interview.

Data Analysis Plan

Qualitative inquiry attempts to illuminate the meaning of how and why human beings make sense in the world (Patton, 2015). After the semistructured interviews were complete, thematic and inductive analysis began for the research question. The focus of the analysis was to look through the lens of the research question and use the interview questions as a guide (Kostere & Kostere, 2022). Thematic and inductive analysis focused on the perception of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger. Pre-existing categories do not exist for thematic and inductive analysis, and data immersion was ensured to develop themes and codes. Inductive analysis was used to identify labels, words, or phrases from the interview transcripts. According to Ravitch and Carl (2021), thematic analysis involved looking for relationships, similarities, and differences in the data to develop themes and codes.

As the sole person responsible for collecting the data for this study, I transcribed each in-person interview verbatim and reviewed each transcript for accuracy. I then emailed each participant their transcript to allow review for accuracy and check for errors. Any mistakes were corrected before starting analysis. Furthermore, before beginning the analysis, I set aside all preconceived ideas to analyze each interview individually (see Kostere & Kostere, 2022). Thematic analysis followed the step-by-step

inductive analysis of Kostere and Kostere (2022) for the generic qualitative approach. Each interview was reviewed and assessed individually, highlighting sentences, phrases, or meaningful paragraphs. All the highlighted data were reviewed through the lens of the research question to ensure that it was relevant to the study. Unrelated highlighted data were set aside and stored separately for future review. The meaningful data were reviewed for direct quotes from each interview to establish codes, patterns, and themes. I completed this step-by-step inductive analysis separately for each interview and then synthesized the collected data to answer the research question.

All data were organized through NVivo (Version 15), which assisted with creating themes. NVivo software can assist in the analysis of the transcripts because of the ability to code large amounts of data text, facilitating depth and accurate analysis of the data (McGill et al., 2022). NVivo can also be used for data storage and management. Kostere and Kostere (2022) stated research collected must be properly stored to protect against loss of data and confidentiality of participants.

Interviews were conducted until data saturation was reached. I reviewed and analyzed each participant's interview, adding the relevant data to answer the research question. All data, even unused or discrepant cases, were reviewed and stored in a separate file for further review before the end of the study. The goal of this research study was to determine the perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger. The study also contributed to the gap in the literature and focused on affecting positive social change.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a qualitative term used instead of the quantitative term validity (Crawford, 2020). Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are the standards for assessing qualitative studies. These four standards develop and assess rigor in the study and should be considered in the early stages of the design. As described by Campbell et al. (2022), to increase trustworthiness, I conducted member checks, allowing the participants the opportunity to correct any errors in the preliminary findings.

Credibility

Credibility is associated with the quantitative term internal validity and is considered one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research studies (Shenton, 2004). Credibility can be established through several provisions. The generic qualitative method was adopted as a well-established approach to conduct the study. Strategies employed in the study included tactics to promote participant's honesty, the "reflective commentary," member checks, reflexivity, and saturation (Shenton, 2004). Each participant was allowed to not participate or withdraw their participation throughout the study. Honesty was encouraged by building a rapport at the beginning of the interviews, reminding the participants that there are no right or wrong answers, and the goal was to seek their understanding into the perceptions regarding the research question. Journaling was used to manage biases regarding the research topic.

Transferability

Transferability is associated with the quantitative term external validity or generalizability and focuses on determining if the results apply to other groups (Shenton, 2004). Transferability was promoted by describing the contextual factors of the study for outsiders to understand. Thick descriptions of the participants' interviews were provided by using direct quotes and capturing detailed descriptions of the participants' perceptions as law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger.

Dependability

Dependability is associated with the quantitative term reliability, which can be achieved through a solid research design (Ravitch & Carl, 2021; Shenton, 2004). Dependability was established by devoting sections to the research design and implementation, details of data gathering, competing reflective appraisals to evaluate the process, and conducting audit trails (Shenton, 2004). The research question was answered, and detailed methods were provided, allowing another researcher to repeat the process. Data gathering and the findings were checked for accuracy by printing and reviewing the transcripts and allowing the participants to review for errors.

Confirmability

Confirmability is associated with the quantitative term objectivity (Shenton, 2004). Throughout the research project, challenges to personal biases were acknowledged and explored by admitting predispositions regarding the research topic. According to Ravitch and Carl (2021), confirmability is established by mediating biases and prejudices through structured reflexivity, no matter the personal or professional relationship of the

researcher to the study. Each step was reflexive to minimize the impact of researcher bias and be transparent and forthcoming about potential personal influences on the study.

Ethical Procedures

All prospective participants completed informed consent forms or give implied consent to provide information regarding the study and interview and determine if they would participate (Cox, 2020). Each prospective participant chose to be in the study or decline participation without coercion. Participants were made aware that this study was separate from professional roles as law enforcement officials. There were exclusion criteria for any individuals with whom I had a relationship. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point. Walden University IRB guidelines and steps were followed to ensure the research study complies with the university's ethical standards and all U.S. federal regulations regarding ethical procedures.

The IRB process and approval ensured that the treatment of human subjects is imperative to ensure that all participants are placed at minimal risk. The informed consent disclosed enough information to provide the participants with enough knowledge to determine their willingness to participate (Cox, 2020). Participants were also informed on how this study will contribute to social change. Participants were recruited once IRB approval had been achieved. Participants who responded to the recruitment flyer via social media platforms or through the Walden University email were sent the eligibility checklist and informed consent to complete. Implied consent was obtained from participants who have not met face-to-face. If any participants had chosen to meet in

person for the interview, they would have signed the consent form before the interview begins. All participants were guaranteed confidentiality and privacy throughout the process. Online and in-person interviews were conducted in a quiet and private setting where the participant was comfortable sharing their experiences.

All data were stored on a password-protected USB flash drive. I had exclusive access to the raw data to ensure confidentiality for each participant. No personal details were shared throughout the research project, and only quotes from the interview transcripts were used to answer the research question and share the perceptions of the participants. Pseudonyms were used for any results to further protect the participants' identity. The data were stored and archived according to Walden University standards of 5 years. Files were backed up on a personal password-protected computer that will be kept inaccessible to individuals other than me.

Summary

Chapter 3 discussed the purpose, research design, and rationale of this study, to explore the perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger. The research method employed for this study was the generic qualitative approach. The generic qualitative approach seeks to understand the human experience through qualitative processes (Kostere & Kostere, 2022). Recruitment of participants occurred over social media platforms, such as Facebook and LinkedIn. The goal was to recruit 8–12 law enforcement spouses willing to share their perceptions regarding officer safety and danger. Snowball sampling was used to identify any additional needed participants.

Data were collected through semistructured interviews until saturation was achieved. Data were analyzed with thematic and inductive analysis, using NVivo to assist in developing themes. Each step of the research study was reflexive to ensure biases are addressed and set aside. Walden University IRB standards and procedures were followed to receive approval before the recruitment process begins.

Chapter 4 will be a presentation of the study findings. The data collection and analysis process are detailed in the study. Evidence of trustworthiness and the assurance of ethical procedures are presented. The results from the interviews on the research question are reported in detail from the participants' responses.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The qualitative study aimed to examine the perceptions of law enforcement

spouses regarding officer safety and danger. In this study, one-on-one, semistructured

interviews were conducted with purposely selected participants to gather their

experiences and perceptions regarding officer safety and danger to address the research

question. The research question for this study was the following: What are the

perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger?

This study was designed to gain insight and increase the understanding of the

perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger. Research

indicated that policing is a dangerous profession with high levels of stress, but the

insights of law enforcement spouses was not apparent. The police officer's spouses'

perceptions may influence the understanding of stress and the importance of a balance

between work and home life. Understanding police officer stress levels may help in

having more positive citizen contacts and higher professionalism within policing. The

research question was explored through the lens of 12 spouses married to law

enforcement officers in large urban Texas communities. With the results of this study, I

intend to inform law enforcement agencies of the usefulness of understanding the

perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger. Police

officer spouses' perceptions could assist in lowering the overall stress levels experienced

by their loved ones. Generic qualitative interviews were used to explore the perceptions

of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger. This chapter presents the findings in detail from the interviews conducted with the participants.

Chapter 4 is presented in seven sections: (a) Setting, (b) Demographics, (c) Data Collection, (d) Data Analysis, (e) Evidence of Trustworthiness, (f) Results, and (g) Summary. Each section leading up to the results and summary describes the steps and methods used to collect and analyze the data for this study. Procedures were followed as planned, and data collection occurred through semistructured interviews via Microsoft Teams. The thematic and inductive analysis was used to develop codes, patterns, and themes. The analysis led to six themes that emerged from the participants' perceptions. Trustworthiness was achieved through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The final sections provide a summary of the research and answers to the research question.

Setting

The study participants were law enforcement spouses. Each participant was legally married to a police officer from a large urban community in Texas. Each participant was given the option to meet in person or online for the interviews. All participants opted to use Microsoft Teams as the platform for the interviews. The interviews were not video recorded for the participants' privacy and confidentiality. The interviews were audio recorded to complete the analysis and ensure the participants' responses were documented accurately. I used a private office in my home to collect all the data, and participants were located in a place of their choice. Additionally, no other individuals were present in my home during the interviews. Interviews were scheduled

and attended individually to ensure the privacy of each participant. Interruptions did not occur throughout the interviews.

The interviews occurred on the Microsoft Teams platform. Each interview was scheduled, and an invitation was sent to each participant through Microsoft Teams. In case a participant was not familiar with Microsoft Teams, I sent each participant instructions from my Walden University email account to their provided email address. Each interview was scheduled for 1 hour and attended as scheduled. Introductions were performed at the beginning of each interview, and each participant verified they received the informed consent and wished to continue participation. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions before and after each interview meeting. There were 12 interviews conducted during August 2024 and September 2024.

Demographics

Recruitment flyers on social media platforms were used to connect with potential participants. Twenty-four interested participants emailed me regarding the recruitment flyer. Each interested participant was emailed a response that included the informed consent for additional details regarding the study. The final sample consisted of 12 participants that replied to the informed consent form and scheduled a time to be interviewed. Each interview was allotted a 60-minute maximum but were completed in less time. Interviews were conducted through the Microsoft Teams platform and audio recorded. The interviews were not video recorded. All participants were informed their and that their spouses' identities would remain anonymous to protect the integrity of the research. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants for the process of data analysis to

ensure confidentiality. The details of participants' demographics and characteristics are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

Participants Demographics and Characteristics

Participants	Years married	Married before or after joining department	Spouses' years of service	Spouses most recent assignment
P1	10	After	15	Uniformed
P2	20	Before	36	Administration
P3	4	After	30	Uniformed
P4	16	Before	15.5	Administration
P5	12.5	Before	11	Uniformed
P6	26	Before	17	Administration
P7	16	After	25	Administration
P8	23	Before	17	Administration
P9	15	Before	6	Uniformed
P10	0.4	After	5	Uniformed
P11	32	After	40	Uniformed
P12	20	Before	10	Administration

The 12 participants had various years of marriage to their police officer spouse, from 0.4 to 32 years. Five of the 12 participants were married before their spouse joined the department. The participants' spouses also had various years of service, with 5 to 40 years of law enforcement experience. Half of the participants' spouses worked in a uniformed capacity, like patrol or gang units. The other half worked in an administrative function where they did not have as much regular citizen contact. The participants all had various experiences and shared their perceptions regarding officer safety and danger.

There were no exclusion criteria for participants who had prior law enforcement experience. Participants were asked if they had prior experience and what that experience included. The details of the participants' prior law enforcement experiences are outlined in Figure 1. Fifty percent of the participants had no prior knowledge of law enforcement

before their spouses. The other half had a variety of experiences, including being an officer, dispatcher, court reporter, military, or other law enforcement family members. Only one participant had been a police officer themself.

Figure 1

Participants' Prior Knowledge of Law Enforcement
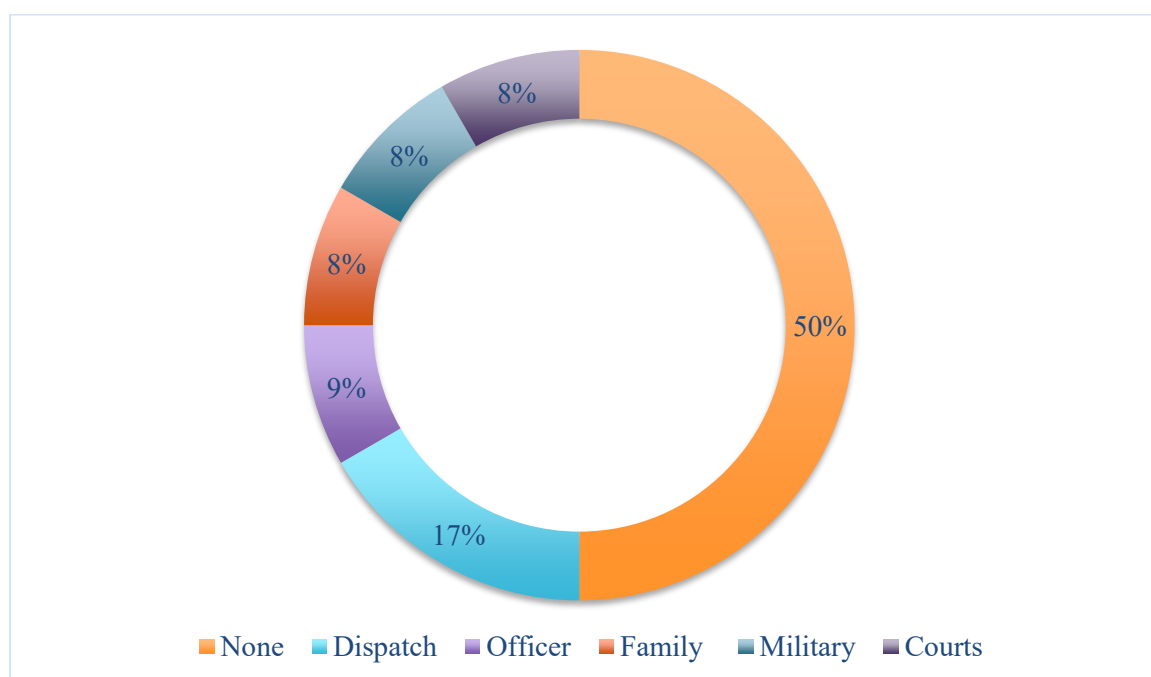
Data Collection

Approval for this study was obtained by Walden University's IRB. The recruitment flyer was posted on social media platforms, including Facebook and LinkedIn. The recruitment flyer was posted on my personal social media accounts on August 20, 2024 and September 2, 2024. Participants were given the option to communicate through private messaging on the social media platforms or directly to my Walden University email account. All participants expressed interest through email and

were emailed the informed consent forms. After informed consent was received, participants were scheduled though Microsoft Teams within their availability.

Interviews were conducted through Microsoft Teams from my home office with no other individuals present to ensure privacy and confidentiality. Participants were able to choose a physical location that was comfortable to complete the interview. I did not inquire about the specific location of the participant during the interview. All participants were asked 11 questions from the interview guide. The first four questions were introductory questions to build rapport with the participants and develop the demographics. The participants were advised that their answers did not bear right or wrong conclusions and their perceptions were vital to the study. Participants were advised that emotional responses could be elicited from any question and answering was optional. All questions were answered by all participants without issues or disregard.

Transcript review and member checking were conducted through an online format or phone conversation, through the participants choice. All participants who responded to any concerns used email as the preferred online format of communication. Three participants returned their transcript for minor corrections and all changes occurred before data analysis occurred. Interviews were audio-recorded through the Microsoft Teams application and using a cell phone. Cell phone audio recordings were deleted after ensuring Microsoft Teams were reflective of accurate interview depictions. I also took handwritten notes to ensure the accuracy of the data. Transcriptions were performed with the Microsoft Teams application and reviewed for accuracy. Transcripts were locked on a

password-protected device after completed and announced to each participant individually upon member checking (see Table 2).

Table 2

Participants Interviews and Member Checking Dates

Participants	Interview	Member checking
P1	08/27/2024	09/07/2024
P2	08/27/2024	09/07/2024
P3	08/28/2024	09/02/2024
P4	08/29/2024	09/07/2024
P5	08/29/2024	09/07/2024
P6	09/03/2024	09/08/2024
P7	09/03/2024	09/09/2024
P8	09/05/2024	09/10/2024
P9	09/05/2024	09/10/2024
P10	09/06/2024	09/12/2024
P11	09/06/2024	09/12/2024
P12	09/11/2024	09/13/2024

Data Analysis

As described in Chapter 3, data analysis was conducted using a thematic and inductive analysis. The data analysis and outcomes were based solely on the data obtained from the participants' interviews. Other researchers might identify different themes as the established analysis is an interpretation of the findings. I used Kostere and Kostere's (2022) step-by-step analysis to complete the data analysis. The data analysis process was determined before the interview process. The thematic and inductive analysis was the most appropriate method to identify codes, patterns, and themes from the interviews to discover repeated patterns of data (Kostere & Kostere, 2022). The data analysis process began with reading the transcripts several times to be immersed in the data. The interview transcripts were then uploaded into NVivo to assist in collecting and

processing the data. NVivo assisted in highlighting data that were related to answering the research question. Each highlighted section was assigned codes that were arranged into patterns or themes. Unrelated highlighted data were set aside to be reevaluated in the future. This process was completed for each interview transcript with setting aside preconceived ideas of themes (Kostere & Kostere, 2022). After analyzing all interview transcripts for codes, patterns, themes, I synthesized the data for a summary of the results.

The analysis focused on identifying codes, patterns, and themes from the participant's interviews. The first-round analysis identified codes or meaning units that I highlighted intuitively (Kostere & Kostere, 2022). Fifteen codes were originally identified while individually reviewing each transcript. These codes included communication, criminals, date night, death of a police officer, home, injuries, natural disasters, negative sentiment, phone call, shift work, stigma, support, traffic stop, training, and uniform. The 15 codes were then reviewed to look for patterns in the data. From the patterns, six themes emerged that were directly related to the research question. The only code that was determined to not be relevant to the study was "natural disasters," which did not relate to the research question. Table 3 illustrates the identified codes from the participants' interviews and the associated theme numbers that were further explained.

Table 3

Codes and Associated Themes

Codes	Theme
Communication	Theme 4
Criminals	Theme 5
Date night	Theme 4
Death of a law enforcement officer	Theme 1
Home	Theme 2
Injuries	Theme 1
Natural disasters	N/A
Negative sentiment	Theme 6
Phone call	Theme 1
Shift work	Theme 3
Stigma	Theme 6
Support	Theme 2
Traffic stop	Theme 5
Training	Theme 2
Uniform	Theme 6

All transcripts were reviewed twice through the NVivo application to determine all codes and themes were identified. Fifteen codes were identified from the transcript review. One code was not relevant to the research questions and set aside to review. The remaining 14 codes were reviewed and placed into categories that became the following themes: (a) on-the-job injuries and death, (b) proper training, equipment, and support, (c) scheduling issues, (d) communication, understanding, and enhanced family time, (e) individuals coming in contact with law enforcement, and (f) negative perceptions of law enforcement. The thematic and inductive analysis occurred on each transcript until and identified the codes, patterns, and themes to determine the results within this study.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Evidence of trustworthiness was achieved through the four standards of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These four standards

developed and assessed rigor in the study and were considered at the early stages of the design. According to Campbell et al. (2022), member checks are conducted with each participant to allow for transcript review and provided with the opportunity to correct errors in the preliminary findings.

Credibility

Credibility was established by using the generic qualitative method as a well-established approach to conduct the study. Member checks, reflexivity, and data saturation were tactics employed to promote the participant's honesty (Shenton, 2004). I verified each participant's willingness to continue at the beginning of the interview. The first several minutes were used to build a rapport with each participant. Throughout the interview, I reminded participants there were no right or wrong answers, and the goal was to learn their perceptions regarding the research question. Journaling was used throughout the study to manage potential researcher bias.

Transferability

Transferability was focused on being able to apply the results from the study to another group (Shenton, 2004). The steps outlined in Chapter 3 for transferability were followed without deviation. Thick descriptions of the participants' perceptions were described through direct quotes. The descriptions ensure outsiders were able to understand the context of the study.

Dependability

Dependability and reliability were achieved through a solid research plan (Ravitch & Carl, 2021; Shenton, 2004). Dependability included establishing sections to the

research design and implication before the study began. Data gathering, reflective appraisals, and audit trails were completed to ensure dependability. Details of the research process ensured the research question was answered, which would allow for another researcher to repeat the process. All data gathering and findings were checked for accuracy by allowing the participants to review all transcripts for accuracy before the data analysis began.

Confirmability

Confirmability was achieved by being aware of personal biases and preconceived notions throughout the data collection. All biases and prejudices were mediated through structured reflexivity, no matter any pre-existing relationship that may have occurred. Each step of the data collection and analysis was reflexive to ensure any researcher bias was addressed through transparency.

Results

The 12 spouses of law enforcement officers who participated in this study shared their perceptions regarding officer safety and danger. The participants, as seen in Table 1, were all married to police officers who worked in large urban communities in Texas. A range of marriage times was from 0.4 to 32 years of marriage with the law enforcement spouse. The law enforcement officers had been employed as police officers from 5 to 40 years. Five of the participants were married to the law enforcement spouse before they became police officers, leaving seven who married after they had joined their respective law enforcement agency. The research question that guided this study was:

What are the perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger?

This section discussed the codes, patterns, and themes that emerged and contributed to answer the research question. Six themes were identified until data saturation was complete. The six themes were on-the-job injuries and death, proper training, equipment, and support, scheduling issues, communication, understanding, and enhanced family time, individuals coming into contact with law enforcement, and negative perceptions of law enforcement.

On-the-Job Injuries and Death

All 12 participants spoke about incidents where their spouses had been injured on the duty (see Table 4). Four participants specifically referenced when their spouse had been in a crash on duty and sustained injuries, and three participants referenced injuries from a foot pursuit. P2 conveyed, "20 years ago he was in his patrol car, sitting at a stop light when a drunk driver hit him from behind at a high rate of speed. He has five ruptured discs from that accident. They still bother him today." P5 and P7 relived accounts of their spouses being in a foot pursuit and were injured because of the incident. P5 reiterated, "And so he came home pretty scraped up like has a scar on his elbow from it. And he had some deep road rash kind of scrapes on his arms. And I think his forearms, knuckles, elbows, and knees." P9 described a training injury where her spouse was injured while shooting as a training exercise. A piece of shrapnel that ricocheted hit her spouse in the face during the training exercise.

Table 4

On-the-Job Injuries

Participant	Spouses injury
P1	Crash
P2	Crash
P3	Crash
P4	Wear and tear on body from stress and no sleep
P5	Foot pursuit
P6	Scuffles
P7	Foot pursuit
P8	Crash
P9	Shrapnel ricochet
P10	Fights
P11	Ruptured eardrum
P12	Foot pursuit

Four participants spoke of situations when other law enforcement officials in the community had been seriously injured or killed in the line of duty. P2 recalled, "a day that really resonates with me over the years is when [another officer] was killed, we were actually sitting at dinner." P11 described the feelings and hardship when her spouse lost his partner in a motorcycle wreck. These experiences of injuries and death heightened the spouse's awareness and made them worry about the realities of a profession in law enforcement. P12 summarized, "I mean I know that there are real dangers. The job is a dangerous job." The theme of on-the-job injuries and death was developed from the interview questions (a) "Has your spouse ever been injured on duty? If so, could you explain what happened?" (b) "Have you ever been concerned about your spouse's safety when they go to work?" and (c) "Could you describe what you feel when your spouse leaves for work?"

On-the-job injuries are a part of policing. It was apparent during the interviews that the spouse felt extra stress when their loved one had been injured. Spouses were particularly aware when a law enforcement official had been killed in the line of duty. Although the spouses did not particularly use phrases like secondary traumatic stress, vicarious trauma, or compassion fatigue, the negative impact was obvious through other verbal clues. The voices of the participants changed when they talked about a specific incident that impacted their spouse. Each participant had a story to share regarding their spouse being injured.

Proper Training, Equipment, and Support

Ten participants described various training, equipment, and support as fundamental for officer safety while their spouse was at work. P3 asserted officer safety was "doing everything you can to make sure you are well trained. Have all your equipment working." P2 believed support from the "law enforcement perspective departments, the judicial system, and their commissioner's court or their city council" was imperative to ensuring the safety of law enforcement officials. Five participants made a direct reference to officer safety meaning ensuring their spouse came home at the end of each shift. P10 stressed, "bring my husband home alive please." The theme of proper training, equipment, and support was developed from the interview questions (a) "Could you describe what the term 'Officer Safety' means to you?" and (b) "Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your perceptions of officer's safety and danger?"

Scheduling Issues

Nine participants commented on the difficulties with scheduling regarding their spouse's career in law enforcement. Scheduling issues were centered on the necessity of working shift work, which often includes working nights, holidays, and missing important family events. Participants recalled incidents of spouses working overtime, being on call, or working extra employment as part of their regular part of their lives. Participants conveyed having more balance and less conflict in their marriage was difficult because of scheduling issues. P1 said "We were literally ships passing in the night, I worked day shift, he worked night shift, but even with two children, we always made it work." P4 made a similar comment regarding scheduling, advising "We're ships passing in the night." P12 commented on working different schedules and now that they are on the same schedule it "is a dream come true." The scheduling issues theme was developed from the interview questions (a) "Could you tell me how you manage your spouse's work and regular life to obtain an appropriate work–life balance?" and (b) "Do you believe your spouse's job in law enforcement creates a higher level of work–family conflict?"

Communication, Understanding, and Enhanced Family Time

Ten participants believed communication, understanding, and extra family time were important for more balance and less conflict within the home. P2 said, "Understanding and communication is the most important things in our relationship." P5 conveyed, "I just try to be an anchor for him, so when he comes home, I tell him it's okay not to talk about it. It's okay to put your phone aside and just detach for as long as you

can." P8 made a promise to herself that she would be understanding with the job

expectations, and "I'd never give him any kind of flack for being late because I knew it

was always out of his control." Three participants referenced the importance of a date

night or a designated family time for dinner. P12 described how "you just have to be so

intentional about the time you have together and what you do with that time." The theme

of understanding, communication, and enhanced family time was developed from the

interview questions (a) "Could you tell me how you manage your spouse's work and

regular life to obtain an appropriate work–life balance?" (b) "Is there anything else you

would like to share with me about your perceptions of officers safety and danger?" and

(c) "Do you believe your spouse's job in law enforcement creates a higher level of work–

family conflict?"

Individuals Coming Into Contact With Law Enforcement

Seven participants commented feeling more concerned or worried when their

spouses come into contact with individuals. P9 felt a danger for her spouses was

imminent and stated,

> Anytime you're dealing with the general public on their worst day, which is most
>
> police officers, you don't call the cops on a good day usually. So anytime you're
>
> dealing with people who are in extremely heightened emotional situations, things
>
> can go south for a myriad of reasons.

P8 expressed a concern for not knowing how an individual in trouble will react to her

spouse's presence. P3 specifically referenced the dangers from dealing with an individual

who does not want to go to jail by saying "They're capable of running from you,

attacking you with a knife, even setting their own house on fire, they fight you and even shoot you. They will do anything, so I was afraid for him." P2 felt like the consequences for criminal activity were not as strong as needed to be in today's society and it has changed over time. The changes in society have made the participants feel different when their spouses leave for work. The participants conveyed a certain level of unknown when their spouses must deal with the public. The theme of individuals coming into contact with law enforcement was developed from the interview questions (a) "Could you tell me about the dangers your spouse faces when they go to work?" (b) "Could you describe what you feel when your spouse leaves for work?" and (c) "Have you ever been concerned about your spouse's safety when they go to work?"

Negative Perceptions of Law Enforcement

Several of the participants expressed a recent feeling of unease regarding the negative perceptions of law enforcement, especially in the media (see Table 5). Many law enforcement officials experienced riots and negative contacts with the public that created negative sentiments regarding law enforcement as a whole. These events created higher levels of heightened stress in the participants because their spouses were often easily identified by the uniform and badge. The theme of negative perceptions of law enforcement was developed mostly from the interview questions (a) "Have you ever been concerned with your spouse's safety when they go to work?"

Table 5

Negative Perceptions of Law Enforcement

Participant	Quote
P1	"It would change with, I guess how things were going that year. If you know what I mean, like how things were going on around the world. Most of the time, I didn't worry about him, but then if something happened somewhere else and law enforcement got a bad rap, then things got heightened."
P4	"You know, just the perception of being an officer or police in general has changed. And so there will be times, you know, he'll need to stop by the grocery store on the way home or something and like that and he'll wanna change out of his uniform or something like that, where being fearful of just wearing the badge."
P6	"The mood has changed so much towards law enforcement since he became a cop… I think there's some, you know, bad feelings for cops in general. So that would be the only thing I would worry about at this point."
P7	"That negative stigma with police officers that you're no longer allowed to protect yourselves … that you would be considered … an outcast in society and that kind of thing just because they had to protect themselves."
P9	"I think I feel more unsafe whenever something has happened that is inflammatory in the news."
P12	"If there's a riot, if there's anything going on in the city, you know, officers have to, they're the ones that have to handle it. So I know there are real danger."

Summary

The codes, patterns, and themes that emerged from the raw data from the semistructured interviews collected for this study provided answers to the research question. Each theme aligned with the one research question of this study: What are the perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger? Each of the 12 participants provided their perceptions into their spouse's job in law enforcement, specifically aspects into officer safety and danger. The six themes emerged from the similarities that were discovered from the participant's experiences. The participants identified heightened awareness when an injury or death occurred, when their spouses

had to deal with the public, and when negative sentiment occurred about law enforcement. The participants also associated the law enforcement profession with difficulties to achieve balance and a potential for more conflict. As the spouses were married longer and their police officer had more time on the job, they were able to manage a better work–life balance and have less work–family conflict.

The current chapter provided information and findings aimed at the purpose of the study, to explore the perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger. According to Kostere and Kostere (2022), generic qualitative research seeks to understand the human experience and explore how people make sense out of their perceptions into the research question. The current chapter provided the journey to obtain the research findings for this study. This chapter also provided the description of data collection, data management, and data analysis. Insights were gained on the research setting and participant's demographics. Chapter 5 will discuss the interpretation of the findings, limitation of the study, recommendations, and implications.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter provides the interpretation of the finding, limitations of the study, recommendations, and implications. The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger. Through this study, I sought to determine if the law enforcement spouses' perceptions, specifically about officers' safety and danger, could assist in creating a better home and work balance with less conflict for police officers. More balance and less conflict could directly impact the stress levels of police officers. The findings determined that law enforcement spouses had heightened levels of awareness during times of turmoil within the community, specifically when an officer was injured or killed and when negative sentiment was portrayed in the media. Spouses expressed the understanding of having an appropriate work–life balance to help ensure the safety of their loved ones.

Interpretation of the Findings

This section describes the findings in comparison to the literature review research. The following analysis will confirm, disconfirm, or extend knowledge in the discipline. The results included six themes that were analyzed and interpreted through the lens of the theoretical framework of the study, the work–life balance and work–family conflict theories. All six themes aligned with the literature review. The literature review did recognize additional areas within the research that were not identified by the participants. This study extended the knowledge in the discipline by looking beyond the stress experienced by police officers and recognizing that the spouses are impacted.

On-the-Job Injuries and Death

One of the key findings that emerged from the data was that law enforcement spouses had a heightened level of awareness when an officer was injured or killed in the line of duty. All of the participants reiterated the worry and stress associated with their spouse being injured. Each participant recounted a specific injury and receiving a phone associated with that injury. Some spouses received a call from another law enforcement official regarding their loved one's injury. P2 recalled receiving a phone call from another officer and immediately asked "Oh my God, is he okay?" Edwards (2023) identified a known stressor as "Life-threatening stressors," when law enforcement must cope with a constant possibility of injury or death. According to this study, the spouses of law enforcement officials felt that same stressor.

Whenever a law enforcement officer was killed in the line of duty, some of the participants believed the atmosphere was more difficult to handle. P9 commented "Those are the times where I feel particularly concerned just because I feel like everything is tense." When incidents create tension, it is more difficult to create a proper work and life balance. The less balance within the home, the more conflict is likely to be created. Law enforcement spouses must be able to handle the mental anguish that comes with the dangerous occupation of policing, even during serious injuries and on-the-job incidents.

This theme aligned with the literature review and was verified by the limited research that commented on the spouses' perceptions. Campbell et al. (2022) reiterated that law enforcement spouses experienced symptoms of having trauma from the job brought home by their loved ones. Although the participants did not comment in depth

regarding the specifics of mental and physical health, the literature was clear on the topic. According to Friese (2020), spouses of law enforcement officers experienced high levels of stress that negatively impacted their physical, mental, and family health. The participants did not provide details of mental health concerns about themselves or their spouses. The participants did react through their voices and answering specific questions regarding the injuries their law enforcement spouses had encountered from work.

Proper Training, Equipment, and Support

Another theme that emerged from this study was the need for proper training, equipment, and support. Law enforcement spouses believed officer safety was best achieved by trusting their loved ones were trained and equipped to the best of their ability. Although proper equipment could include a greater expense, P8 commented that no amount of money could be too much spent to ensure their spouse was safe. Proper training, equipment, and support was consistent with the literature review as an essential part of law enforcement. According to Jackman et al. (2021), stress levels are associated with inadequate equipment. Many law enforcement agencies provide training and equipment to their employees, but officers should take responsibility to ensure they are prepared to adequately perform the necessary functions of the job.

Support is imperative from the police officer's organization and the spouse. Officers often feel that they are not supported by their agencies, which creates an additional layer of stress. Half of the participants did not have any prior law enforcement experience before they were married, or their spouse joined the department. Spouses may have a difficult time providing the needed support, especially if the spouse does not talk

about the job stressors. Family support, especially from the spouse, could lower mental health issues that stem from the stress of a dangerous job in policing (Baek et al., 2021). A supportive spouse will help create higher levels of work–life balance, combined with less conflict.

Police officers are more effective with the proper training and equipment. Specific training and equipment are needed for different situations, like dealing with individuals in a mental health crisis. Police officers must also have training to properly use the equipment that is needed. The participants were reassured and felt safer when they believed their spouse was given the tools to do their job. Support is another tool for police officers to be successful. The participants perceived they were supporting their loved one. Organizational support was not confirmed through this study but was identified through the literature review as a stressor for law enforcement.

Scheduling Issues

Police work is a job that requires attention 24 hours a day or shift work. Shift work often created a strain on family life and required police officers to miss important events. Working outside the restraints of a "9 to 5" schedule is difficult to make sure there is a proper balance. Police officers were often required to work overtime, including weekends, holidays, and court time. Nine participants verified that the schedules were difficult, especially in the beginning of their spouse's career. P1 and P4 commented in the earlier years they felt like their spouse and themselves were "ships passing" in the middle of the night. It was important to accommodate having younger kids and sacrifices were made to make the schedules work out. P9 specifically asserted the decision was made for

her to not work and to stay home with kids and homeschool so the police officer spouse could see them outside of working an evening shift schedule.

The study results confirmed what the literature review concluded regarding police officer work schedules. According to Viegas et al. (2023), the spouses of police officers were negatively affected by irregular schedules of their spouses. Irregular work schedules were linked to sleep cycle issues in the spouses as well as the law enforcement officer (Viegas et al., 2023). The participants in this study were clear that scheduling made a work–life balance difficult and many of their spouses worked overtime or extra jobs to supplement the income. Oftentimes, mandatory overtime programs create extra conflict within the home (Rojero, 2022). Extra conflict could equal higher levels of stress as the police officer goes to work and must work within the community during stressful events.

Having control over scheduling was not always feasible for the participants' spouses. The participants commented that as their spouses' career developed, they had moved into positions that were easier to manage time. Oftentimes, police officer families must make sacrifices pertaining to scheduling, including giving up time and missing important events. Police officers are required to work during times when their families are home. Police officer spouses must pick up the slack when their loved ones are working. Balance and conflict could be difficult to achieve the scheduling issues that are inherently difficult within law enforcement.

Communication, Understanding, and Enhanced Family Time

Communication, understanding, and enhanced family time became an apparent theme from this study. Ten participants commented on the importance of these aspects.

Communication within the household was imperative to a proper balance between work and family within the police officer family. As aligned with the literature review, communication was a huge aspect of creating a proper work–family balance. Campbell et al. (2022) reported that law enforcement spouses were upset by the lack of communication from their spouses, which added to the overall stress associated with the profession.

P2 reiterated the importance of giving her spouse space and being understanding to a sensitive or difficult case. Aligned with the research, this theme was apparent to have an understanding within the marriage to reduce conflict. As conflicts arise, law enforcement couples must make adjustments and be patient through communication and understanding (Viegas et al., 2023). Many of the participants realized part of the job comes home with their spouse, and they have to be understanding that some situations might not be easily talked about. P4 said their faith was imperative to their relationship and communication. Policing at home can create a dangerous imbalance to a marriage and create conflict. Spouses need to feel that the marriage is a partnership, and the police officer should be cognizant to not treat their family like those they encounter on the job.

Communication, understanding, and enhanced family time is essential for a proper work–life balance with less conflict. The literature review identified several negative statistics that are a reality for law enforcement, like high divorce rates and alcohol abuse levels (Edwards, 2023). Including spouses into wellness programs could assist with communication and understanding. The participants identified the necessity of

spending time with their spouse and being intentional to set aside time to focus on the family.

Individuals Coming Into Contact With Law Enforcement

Policing is a dangerous occupation and a significant part of that danger includes the various individuals making contact with police officers. P9 referenced that most people only call the police on their worst day, which creates extreme levels of emotionally heightened situations. Police officers have to be the catalyst for peaceful resolutions when responding to incidents, even when tensions are high. According to Campbell et al. (2022), arresting suspects was part of the job for law enforcement and police officers are often exposed to violent, life-threatening situations in the course of duties. Frequent contact with the public is a reality for police officers.

Another area of contact for police and citizens is during traffic stops. Traffic stops are an ordinary part of policing but are not routine situations. Each traffic stop creates a unique situation that could become contingent for the police officer. Even during a professional encounter, individuals who come into contact with the police during a traffic stop and perceive unfair treatment and leave the situation with a negative perception of the police (Helfers et al., 2021). Three participants commented specifically on traffic stops during this study. Each participant displayed worry and fear knowing their spouse had to do traffic stops. P10 specifically stated, "The number one thing that always scares me the most is traffic stops." Dealing with the public could lead to physical and psychological issues for a police officer. Such issues could bleed into the home and upset the work–life balance. Conflict might arise as the police officer may not have a choice to

conduct traffic stops, and the spouses felt this was a dangerous area that created an extra level of stress within the family.

Although the participants spoke about negative contacts between police and citizens, there are also positive experiences with the community. Building and maintaining relationships within the community is a pillar to establish community policing. Police officers who subscribe to a community policing model should have better relationships with community members. Law enforcement spouses who are aware of community policing practices could help their loved one develop higher professionalism. Spouses should feel less stress if they understand some of the fundamental processes that are vital for police and community relationships. The participants from this study could help their spouses by providing the needed support to have more balance and less conflict at home to ensure their loved ones develop positive community relationships.

Negative Perceptions of Law Enforcement

Nine of the 12 participants in this study had been married for over 10 years and their spouse had been in the police department for over 10 years. Six of the participants commented on a type of negative sentiment that has changed towards law enforcement. According to Helfers et al. (2021), the United States had seen an increased level of community hostility and a decrease in police legitimacy. In 2014, the death of Michael Brown, in Ferguson, Missouri, sparked nationwide concerns regarding police actions within the community. In 2020, law enforcement experienced continued anti-police climates surrounding the death of George Floyd at the hands of police officers in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The death of George Floyd spurred nationwide protests,

demanding police accountability. During this time, the participants commented that they were more concerned for their spouse's safety. P4 reiterated that she felt fear just when her spouse wore the badge because of the perceptions regarding law enforcement.

Unfortunately, the actions of a few have led to the downfall of many. Most police officers go to work to help people and provide safety and security to the public. The literature was clear that the atmosphere has negatively shifted towards law enforcement. Criminal justice agencies must prioritize community relations, professionalism, and lowering the stress levels of police officers. Community policing had been adopted as an effective means of building partnerships between citizens and the police. The atmospheric changes towards police have made community policing a double edge sword and difficult task for many police officers.

In this study, spouses of police officers provided valuable insights into their perceptions regarding officer safety and danger. A work–life balance for police officers is imperative to creating higher levels of professionalism. When police officers are not worried about their spouse and families at home, they can carry less stress and focus on having more positive citizen contacts. All six themes aligned with the research that was located in the literature review. A few concepts in the literature review were not recognized by the participants in this study. Participants did not comment on any aspect of domestic violence as a concern regarding their spouse. The literature review also established a clear link between military member spouses and other first responders, like police officers. One participant commented on having children in the military and created similar feelings as when the spouse went to work. Bureaucracy and disciplinary issues

were also not discussed by the participants. Questions were not specifically asked regarding these themes from the literature review and were not provoked through the interviews with the participants. Additional insights could be gathered from future participants by asking questions related to these specific concepts from the literature review.

Limitations of the Study

The current study was an exploration of the perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger. The limitation of this study was conducted among participants in one geographical area, large urban communities in Texas. Other regional areas, such as rural and suburban areas and smaller communities, could have limited transferability and not be represented within this study. The sample size of 12 participants limits the transferability of these study findings as the perceptions regarding police officers' spouses of officer safety and danger may vary with spouses from different areas. Purposeful sampling may have limited the representation of the population.

The second limitation of this study was all participants were women married to men. Although gender and sexual orientation statistics were not specifically gathered, the participants revealed their spouses were "husbands" throughout the interviews. Men, other sex, or gender identities were not excluded as part of the study but were not located as participants for this study. Men married to women police officers and couples of different sexual orientations could yield different perceptions regarding the research question. Although there were no exclusion criteria regarding the type of relationship as

long as the participant was legally married, no male participants or couples with other sexual orientations were interviewed. Data saturation was achieved with the 12 participants and additional participants were not recruited. Long-term relationships but not legally married were excluded but could have provided valuable insight into the research question. Specific racial and ethnic group identities were not gathered from the participants or relevant to this study. Racial and ethnic group identities among the police officer spouses could provide different perspectives regarding officer safety and danger. The concern of lack of trust and fear for participants to speak to the researcher was unfounded; participants were willing to share their experiences regarding their perceptions regarding officers' safety and danger.

Additional steps were taken to ensure the integrity of this study, including awareness of researcher bias throughout the study. The participants' perceptions were respected and valued no matter the outcome of the results. Trustworthiness was ensured through the steps of creditability, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The transcripts were reviewed and analyzed, and each participant was given the opportunity to review for member checking. The next section will describe the recommendations for further research from this study.

Recommendations

In 2014, President Obama made a nationwide demand for police reform through the creation of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing (Theon et al., 2020). Many local jurisdictions followed President Obama's lead and created individual task forces that focused on police accountability and building trust within the communities.

Recent media-worthy incidents, specifically within minority populations, have demanded transparency and accountability for the actions of police officers. Police officers experience high levels of stress that are heightened during sensationalized public incidents. Spouses of police officers created valuable insight on how to handle the stress and create a better work–life balance.

Many incidents regarding police and the public are video-recorded and live streamed onto a social media platform in real time. Within the last 5 years, police departments have focused on transparency to rebuild police accountability and legitimacy. Making sure the spouses of police officers understand a critical incident could be publicly exposed before an official notification is made. The participants made direct relation to receiving a phone call during their loved one's work shift as a point of stress. Another newer policy for many law enforcement agencies is to release critical incident body worn camera videos within a set amount of time, like 30 days. Each specific department should prepare the officer and the spouse for dealing with the stress that could be associated with the release of body camera footage of a critical incident. An opportunity to include the public for additional training and awareness would also be helpful with stressful situations. There should also be a focus on positive interactions so that the public can verify most police officers are trying to help those in need and without causing harm.

Law enforcement agencies should incorporate police officer spouses in training, especially regarding mental well-being. Spouses of police officers can assist with stress levels by understanding what is happening to create better balance and less conflict.

According to Agrawal and Mahajan (2023), work–family conflict erodes a police officer's life satisfaction. Police officers with less life satisfaction are going to experience higher levels of occupational stress. The spouse is the family member who can change the balance and conflict. Half of the spouses in this study did not have prior knowledge before they married a police officer, or their spouse joined the department. Better inclusion of the spouse in training of police officers will help them understand the occupational stress and how to assist in lowering the levels for their spouse.

Half of the 12 participants in this study had prior law enforcement experience. The other six participants were civilians when they either married their spouse or their spouse joined the department. There was a clear distinction between civilian and non-civilian spouses regarding they initial expression of their police officer spouse's occupation. Civilian spouses took more time to express their pride regarding the profession. Participants that had prior law enforcement experience did not show a lack of pride but just expressed it in a different manner. The distinction was an interesting development as the interviews were conducted. The literature did not provide a variance between police officer spouses regarding their own experiences with law enforcement.

This study could provide groundwork for criminal justice agencies to include the spouses or police officers in training programs, especially regarding stressors and well-being. The participants solidified the importance of having a strong work–life balance with less work–family conflict to assist with stress levels of police officers and impact professionalism levels. Based on the findings of this study, I recommend further study to

understand the perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger.

Implications

The findings of this study contributed to the existing gap in the literature by understanding the perception of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger. The findings suggested that the perceptions of law enforcement spouses were imperative to better work–life balance and less work–family conflict. The findings contributed to the gap in the literature by suggesting the perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger could lessen the stress levels of spouses prior to any citizen contacts. The knowledge gained from this study may assist by changing the levels of professionalism within policing and regain police legitimacy through transparency and accountability. Law enforcement training for officer well-being could be improved by including the spouse. All individuals in society are impacted by policing and feel the negative sentiment that has exploded. Police officers with higher levels of balance and less conflict at home could focus on job stressors out of their control and not be worried about family issues. Higher levels of professionalism within policing might benefit all individuals and create positive social change as police officers are the gatekeepers of society.

Conclusion

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger. I established that law enforcement was a dangerous and stressful occupation that can have severe consequences

within society. A key finding from this study was that police officers' spouses were heightened in awareness whenever an on-the-job injury or death occurred. Additional findings included proper training, equipment, support, communication, understanding, and enhanced family time. Police officers' spouses were particularly informative on scheduling issues that are unique to law enforcement. Finally, the dangers of citizens' contacts and negative perceptions regarding law enforcement had changed over the last several years, making spouses of law enforcement more fearful for their loved ones as they go out into the community to protect and serve. Training within police departments should include the spouses to help create better work–life balance and less work–family conflict. The possibility of incorporating the spouses into training could assist with officer mental well-being and improve professionalism as demanded by societal expectations.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study as an active law enforcement spouse. The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger. The interview will last approximately 45–60 minutes. Your participation is voluntary, and you may choose not to answer any question without explanation. You may also discontinue the interview at any time without disclosing a reason. The interview questions are the following:

1. How long have you been married? Were you married before or after your spouse joined the police department?

2. Did you have any other prior knowledge regarding law enforcement before you were married or before your spouse joined the department?

3. How long has your spouse been in law enforcement and what is their current assignment?

4. Could you describe what you feel when your spouse leaves for work?

5. Could you describe what the term 'Officer Safety' means to you?

6. Have you ever been concerned about your spouse's safety when they go to work?

7. Could you tell me about what dangers your spouse faces when they go to work?

8. Has your spouse ever been injured on duty? If so, could you explain what happened?

9. Could you tell me how you manage your spouse's work and regular life to obtain an appropriate work–life balance?

10. Do you believe your spouse's job in law enforcement creates a higher level of work–family conflict?

11. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your perceptions of officer safety and danger?

Thank you for taking the time to share your perceptions regarding officer safety and danger with me.

Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer
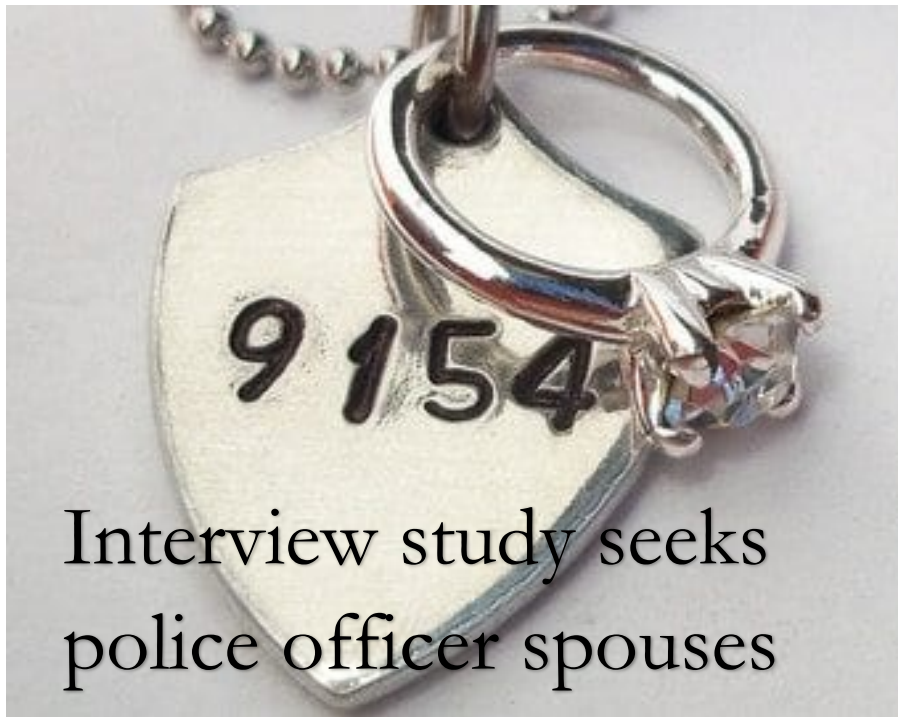
There is a new study about the experiences of law enforcement spouses regarding officer safety and danger that could help police officers have a more balanced work and family life through better understanding the stress associated with the profession. For this study, you are invited to describe your experiences of officer safety and danger as a police officer spouse.

About the study:

- One 45-60 minute interview over online platform or in person that will be audiorecorded (no videorecording)

- To protect your privacy, the published study will not share any names or details that identify you

Volunteers must meet these requirements:

- 18 years or older

- Legally married to an active law enforcement officer in a large urban Texas community

- Able to read, write, and understand the English language

This interview is part of the doctoral study for Heidi M. Rose, student at Walden University. Interviews will take place during August and September 2024.

Appendix C: Eligibility Checklist

1. Are you legally married to an active law enforcement officer who is actively employed with a department in a large, urban community in Texas?

2. Are you at least 18 years of age?

3. Are you able to read, write, and comprehend the English language?

4. Are you able to consent to participate in a research study?