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What are the Lived Experiences of Policing Professionals with Self-Reported Alterations to Biological Instinct Alongside Operational Demands?

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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

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Abstract

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Forensic Psychology

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Abstract

Operational demands and training of policing professionals may be a source of conflict leading to a potential increase in risk for both the officer and the general public. Training in a law enforcement academy does not adequately prepare officers for the impacts the career may have on mental health, changes to the biological system, or societal criticism of modern-day policing. The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how policing professionals experience changes in the autonomic nervous system with exposure to trauma in the field, and how self-reported alterations are further impacted due to operational expectations of their department. The theory of social constructivism was used to explore the ways human perception and individual experience are reported; additionally, the theory of constructed emotion was used as a means to discuss and interpret the impact of the biological response the body has to incidents in the field with consideration of training expectations. This study focused on the lived experience of policing professionals and their self-reported alterations to their "fight-or-flight" responses in the field alongside fieldwork and department training procedures. This study was structured as qualitative with 10 semi-structured interviews; used self-selection sampling; and used an interpretive phenomenological analysis alongside methodological hermeneutic interpretations of reported experience. This study may provide understanding of the policing professional experience, and how this experience may be changed through prospective modifications in training through the academy and operational demands, or possible shifts in the cultural aspects of policing that may lead to healthier mindsets and working environments.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this accomplishment to my grandfather, Eric Myers. I am exceptionally grateful for your encouragement, challenge, and wit throughout my life. I am burdened with the sadness that you will never read my work; however, I am incredibly positive that you are feeling my successes alongside me. This one is for you, Grandpa.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables v

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study 1

Introduction 1

Background 6

Problem Statement 10

Purpose of the Study 12

Research Questions 12

Theoretical Framework for the Study 13

Nature of the Study 15

Definitions 16

Assumptions 18

Scope and Delimitations 19

Limitations 19

Significance 21

Summary 21

Chapter 2: Literature Review 23

Introduction 23

Literature Search Strategy 25

Theoretical Foundation 26

Theory of Social Constructivism 26

Theory of Constructed Emotion 27

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts 28
Training of Officers 28
Operational Expectations of Policing Professionals 32
Officer and Public Safety 33
Perceptions of Policing 36
Biological and Psychological Change 38
Mental Health Stigma 44
Mental Health Impacts 47
Therapeutic Intervention Needs 49
Burnout 51
Coping Strategies 54
Literature Review of Methodology 58
Summary and Conclusions 59
Chapter 3: Research Method 62
Introduction 62
Research Design and Rationale 63
Central Concepts 63
Traditions 65
Role of the Researcher 65
Methodology 67
Participant Selection Logic 67
Instrumentation 70

Researcher-Developed Instruments 71
Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection 71
Data Analysis Plan 74
Research Question 75
Issues of Trustworthiness 75
Transferability 75
Dependability 75
Creditability 76
Confirmability 76
Ethical Procedures 77
Summary 77
Chapter 4: Results 80
Introduction 80
Setting 80
Descriptive Statistics 81
Data Collection 82
Data Analysis 83
Evidence of Trustworthiness 83
Transferability 84
Dependability 84
Creditability 84
Confirmability 85

Results....86
Identified Themes....87
Theme 1: Expectation of the Role....87
Theme 2: Operational Demands....89
Theme 3: Mental Health....92
Summary....95
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations....97
Introduction....97
Interpretation of the Findings....98
Theoretical Framework....98
Theme 1: Expectation of the Role....99
Theme 2: Operational Demands....100
Theme 3: Mental Health....101
Limitations of the Study....103
Recommendations....103
Implications....104
Conclusion....105
References....108
Appendix: Interview Questions....119

List of Tables

Table 1. Participants' Policing Role 82

Table 2. Participant Most Recent Employment as Policing Professional..... 82

Table 3. Consolidation of Categories to Form Themes 86

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to understand lived experiences of policing professionals with acknowledgement of operational demands of officers. These operational demands are rooted in training of police, and the resulting requirements are a focal point in the understanding of lived experience and biological response patterns. This study focused on the themes that could have come from lived experiences and perception of biological change while in the field. Policing has stemmed from cultural, social, and hierarchical needs of humankind throughout history with intention of creating order. The United States began its own history of policing in the early 1800s with the development of identified police forces (Potter, 2021). Police roles were developed as a method to combat ongoing disorder observed during urbanization in America. Economic interests propelled a need for social control, leading to more preventative methods of crime (Potter, 2021). The wealthier constituents in early America challenged the need to establish stability and order in the realm of business, and in continuance of the "collective good" (Potter, 2021). These challenges resulted in the development of state funding for the role of policing professionals. At this time, there are approximately 655,000 police officers employed in the United States (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). The roles have shifted over centuries as officers have moved from creation of order to stabilization of crises.

Personality of policing professionals and other professionals in the field has come to the forefront of this research as researchers have begun looking for themes in police

work depicting mental health changes and masculinity complexes. These changes are thematically understood to be resulting from fieldwork as an officer, and the ongoing exposure to traumatic scenarios (Colwell et al., 2012; Landman et al., 2016). Resiliency in policing is often highlighted as researchers further identify potential differences in individual experiences and prepolicing physiological performance (Giessing et al., 2019). Policing professionals undergo changes in training and employment, impacting performance, cortisol levels, and attention in the line of duty. The bystander effect can be interpreted as a precursor to the personality types of policing professionals entering the field. This phenomenon highlights the perceived responsibility of an individual to act or intervene on behalf of someone in distress. This effect entails the individual's sense of responsibility to intervene being greater if said individual believes they are one of few people around to assist someone in distress, and significantly reduced if there is a crowd of individuals within the vicinity of a person in distress (Darley & Latane, 1968). The bystander effect can explain groupthink mentality as a precursor to damaging impacts to a person or group when distress is occurring. Policing professionals are trained to intervene and are expected to intervene in distressing scenarios. Personality of policing professionals can be further reduced to their internalized willingness to intervene no matter the scenario prior to their academy trainings (Giessing et al., 2019; Hakik & Langlois, 2020; Skolnick, 2005).

Policing professionals hold the responsibility of instilling order within the community through the prevention of all levels of crime or misconduct. Law enforcement officers are tasked with establishing stability in the community and across the nation. The

training and standards needed to become a law enforcement officer have been affected by political unrest in recent years, causing shifts in viewpoints on said standards. Before becoming a law enforcement officer, individuals interested in this career must attend police academy training for approximately 5 to 6 months; furthermore, upon graduation from this training, recruits must complete field training and an additional probationary period (Cammerino, 2021). Training is both standardized and specialized to meet the needs of officers seeking roles within differing field operations. The central focus of defensive tactics and trainings is inclusive of the SARA model (whose components are scanning, analysis, response, and assessment; Vander Kooi, 2006). Officers are expected to seek out patterns, collect information and analyze intention, determine methods of problem solving that employ solution-oriented procedures, and determine whether a needed response is or is not effective in application (Cammerino, 2021).

Training is reported to include a primary focus on the operations of the role of an officer, followed by firearms and self-defense training, legal and educational trainings, and courses focused on self-improvement (Blumberg et al, 2019; Caro, 2011). Operations of the officer trainings account for an average of 213 hours in academy while 168 hours are focused on self-defense, firearms, and use-of-force trainings. Additionally, legal education is averaged at 86 hours, and self-improvement comes to approximately 89 hours (Blumberg et al., 2019). Furthermore, 81% of American police academies provide stress prevention training focused on professionalism, integrity, and ethics (Blumberg et al, 2019; Cammerino, 2021). Stress prevention training hours are learned during the self-improvement course, with approximately 40% of this time used for focus on health and

fitness of officers. Mental health training is reported as one of the least intensive courses, totaling approximately 10 hours of academy training (Blumberg et al, 2019; Cammerino, 2021). This training includes education focused on both personal mental health needs and the possible mental health symptoms observed in the general civilian population while on duty. Current trainings for mental health account for less than 5% of averaged academy training (Cammerino, 2021). Academies vary state by state and include various formats for completion to include a residential format, and part-time or full-time formats. The average training length totals 840 hours, allowing officers to gain policing powers in their jurisdiction (Blumberg et al., 2019).

With the current reports on mental health for first responders and the community itself, 10 hours of reported training on mental illness may present in research as controversial. Mental health is frequently aligned with criminal activity for individuals who experienced adverse childhood experiences. A lack of psychological safety in childhood development can lead to impulsivity, risky behavior, and symptoms of trauma, anxiety, and depression (Grinshteyn et al., 2018). This link between mental health and criminology must be a source of education for policing professionals; furthermore, a lack in mental health education may inhibit a policing professional's ability to safely manage a person in distress. The U.S. Department of Justice (2020) reported upwards of 60% of American children being exposed to violence across environments, and close to 10% of those children being documented as victims of five or more violent acts. With research on childhood violence and its impact on development, there is an increased association of externalization of criminal activity amongst individuals who have been victims of violent

crime in childhood (Grinshteyn et al., 2018). Behavioral health needs ultimately developing into adult mental health disparities are often linked to direct exposure to violence in early childhood.

Alongside the increased attention on mental health treatment, and ongoing media depictions of policing in the nation, it is imperative for research to focus on both the mental health of policing professionals and the overlap between operational demands of officers and the training provided to mitigate crisis scenarios in the field. Regulations for officer and public safety are warranted; however, a more direct examination of operational demands stemming from initial training and the ultimate impact this has on policing is necessary. Social implications of this study include a more expansive perspective on police training, support, and regulation. Additionally, this study focused on possible insight as to how the individual officers and the greater public may be impacted by the operational standards set forth for policing, ultimately impacting follow through and safety in the community.

This chapter will cover the rationale as to why exploration of this topic of police officer training and demand is needed, reference literature to reflect such a need in research, discuss the key problem, and further address the study's purpose and focal research questions. The study was pieced together through key components discussed in both the background of the study and the purpose in research itself. This chapter will also directly address social implications and intentions of the research.

Background

With a central focus on safety, officers are trained and equipped to respond in a standardized fashion to threats in the field. Each individual officer is trained to utilize their biological patterns in such a way that uniformity is observed in police officer response protocol. The operational demands of officers are inclusive of all daily activities an officer is expected and required to engage in while on the job (Fleischmann et al., 2021; Purba & Demou, 2019). Officers are provided with a multitude of training courses in their time in the academy; however, a very small portion of this time is spent learning about the mental health impacts of the career and mental health disparity within the community being policed (Blumberg et al., 2019). An in-depth education on mental health is not reported in these courses, reiterating the lack of self-preservation skills needed for a career in law enforcement, and a policing professional's ability to successfully identify mental health issues in the field to include an ability to ethically problem solve and refer individuals for direct care from the field. Effective skill building for coping with one's own mental health can be a determinant of success in any field. A fund of knowledge is needed to understand the warning signs of mental health decline in oneself and in others. Law enforcement officers are not required to complete courses rooted in resiliency, nor are officers expected to attend or seek out therapeutic resources during employment or upon retirement (Blumberg et al, 2019; Cammerino, 2021). An ongoing stigma appears to be attached to these actions, leading to lower rates of policing professionals being fully supported for mental health shifts occurring as a direct result of the operations of employment (Wood et al., 2017).

Policing professionals are expected to uphold and enforce the law objectively and protect and preserve public order, life, property, human rights, the dignity of others, and liberty. Officers are further required to accurately document field activity and response, prevent crime, create a sense of security in the community, and provide all possible assistance in the field to actively provide rehabilitation, relief, and aid where needed (Fleischmann et al., 2021; Gumani, 2019; Purba & Demou, 2019). Officers can complete solo entry scenarios under operational standards or utilize contact teams to subdue the threat, meaning teamwork and an understanding of protocol are essential to the success of policing professionals. Themes highlighting a culture of masculinity in the police force, and an "us versus them" mentality have been identified in research for law enforcement to demonstrate constraints on policing professionals when it comes to receiving and seeking out appropriate methods of mental health care (Skolnick, 2005).

These operational components of the career are meticulously trained for, creating a standardized response for all policing professionals. The response should be neutral, immediate, and lawful. Policing professionals are expected to neutralize the threat to the public, resulting in a fight-or-flight response activation mandating the officer to "fight," rather than engage in "flight." This cortisol activation process depicts the ways in which an individual's biological system responds to an event, leading to the production of cortisol (Violanti et al., 2017). Violanti et al. (2017) focused on the cortisol activation responses within the human body in research. Policing professionals are required to meet standardized criteria in order to be hired, employed, and considered to be effective in their role. An individual biological response in the fight-or-flight system of the body is

varied, adding to the uniqueness of each individual officer entering the police force. The uniformity in training depicts a requirement in response to active threats towards public or officer safety in the field, rooted in the assumption that this identified response is the safest, most effective means to subdue the threat (Violanti et al., 2017).

Biologically, the individual officer responds internally through the increased cortisol and adrenaline production occurring in the moment of threat. Externally, the individual officer must fall in line with standardized approaches meeting operational demands of the police department. If a police officer's instinct is rooted through the "flight" response, the officer may face an internal battle to extinguish these urges and refocus them into a "fight" response. This response pattern opposes the natural response some officers may encounter when in the field, leading to increased changes in safety, mental health impact, and consistency in meeting operational demands of the department (Violanti et al., 2017).

When moving through training protocol in the academy, police recruits are subjected to a barrage of both physical and emotional challenges. Recruits are encouraged and required to learn the meaning of policing through the lens of camaraderie, safety, and justice. These emerging officers are trained to be self-aware, tactical, and malleable (Blumberg at el., 2019). The qualities taught, worked through, and strengthened in recruits demonstrate their willingness to take positions of power for the intended purpose of radical change for the better for themselves and for the greater public. A successful graduation from the academy depicts men and women of discipline, uniformity, and a wealth of knowledge entrenched in public and personal safety. Officers

have directly faced the challenge of making their way through the academy and training; thereinafter, however, there is no distinguished point along the way detailing the usefulness and requirement of aiding one's mental health (Blumberg et al., 2019). Therapy and other psychological resources are not required, mandated, or necessarily accepted in the policing fields due to continuation of cultural norms within the population itself depicting a less than trusting response to mental health professionals (Skolnick, 2005). Alongside the "toughness" created in these officers, the soft underbelly of each individual is shielded. The operational demands of the department are followed, and adaptation is mandated. Policing professionals are frequently unaware of the shifting impacts these operational demands have on their own biological system (Skolnick, 2005; Violanti et al., 2017).

In reference to these deficits experienced in the policing professions, this study was necessary to assist in recognition of social change needed. Not only are law enforcement officers receiving negative attention in the media and in their communities, they are not receiving the needed supports to process trauma endured, nor are they being provided the opportunity to learn about the preventative measures prior to their experiences in the field. Officers are receiving less attention for the roles they can play in society, and at the same time being spotlighted for their unsafe and systemically rooted responses. This study was necessary for law enforcement officers to receive recognition for the decisions made through a uniform response instilled from the academy, leading to field responses warranting such attention. Their lived experience provided insight into needed change at both the individual and training level while discussing the manners in

which operational demands of the field can ultimately impact the community at large.

Problem Statement

The operational demands of policing professionals depicting their trained and mandated response to traumatic incidents in the field, leading to an increased risk of severe mental health issues for the individual officers, are an ongoing phenomenon in need of research. Operational demands of policing professionals are often paired with the term "stressors" in research; additionally, these demands are typically linked to decision making in the field and safety protocol (Purba & Demou, 2019; Violanti et al., 2017). Decisions must be immediate, often seeming to follow muscle memory from training, resulting in the observed responses in the field on behalf of each officer. These decisions can be helpful or harmful depending upon the officers' ability to enact the appropriately trained response in battle with their own "fight-or-flight" development (Violanti et al., 2017).

Through alteration of the individual's trauma response pattern, a change occurs in mental health resiliency and effective coping mechanisms used naturally to combat physiological shifts in the brain (Papazoglou & Tuttle, 2018; Violanti et al., 2017). Policing professionals are obligated to follow these operational demands, which appear to impact overall mental health after mass trauma exposure. Mental health impairments are often described in the research as formulations of posttraumatic stress disorder, dissociations from reality, generalized anxiety disorder, and major depressive disorder (Papazoglou & Tuttle, 2018; Purba & Demou, 2019). This response may lead to psychological and physical symptoms that increase risk for individual officers in the field

as trauma responses are naturally occurring in the brain per individual, often resulting in dissociation, hypervigilance, increased adrenaline and cortisol production, impulsivity, aggression, and emotional blocking, potentially resulting in inappropriate decision making as clarity and rationality are diminished. Heightened trauma responses for policing professionals may impact physical response in the field, putting the officer and the public at risk of harm (Violanti et al., 2017). Risks are characterized as unnecessary or inappropriate responses to trauma-inducing incidents in the field (i.e., shooting at unarmed suspects, interpreting a scenario as dangerous that may be neutralized, argumentative and aggressive incidents between the self and public being policed, etc.) (Gray & Rydon-Grange, 2020; Gumani, 2019; Violanti et al., 2017).

These responses are rooted in lived experience and can be used to predict the ways in which officers will react to high-risk scenarios, like mass shootings, in the future. Additionally, lived experience can be used to understand and interpret the possibility of harm that current officer training has on the mental health of law enforcement professionals (Gray & Rydon-Grange, 2020; Gumani, 2019; Violanti et al., 2017). Interpreting the impacts of the lived experience aids in a clearer depiction of negative alterations of mental health for officers who operate under the required operational structure of their department. Although researchers have investigated this issue, the topic has not been explored as the lived experience of members of individual policing professionals who have worked through traumatic incidents with perceived alteration in biological response due to operational demands and standards of policing. Additionally, this topic has not been explored through the lens of the perceived mental health impact

following those field operations alongside the change in biological response patterns. The operational demands of the field are directly correlated with response patterns observed in practice, leading to a need for research to magnify potential harm observed in the field and in the lack of training needed to depict and break down one's own mental health.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how policing professionals experience autonomic changes with trauma in the field, and how self-reported alterations are further impacted due to operational expectations of their department. Furthermore, this study focused on ways to identify how these lived experiences may be connected to operational demands in policing, leading to a possible increased risk in psychological safety through patterned decision making, ultimately compromising physical safety in the field for the officer and public. These findings aid in understanding the current gaps in police officer trainings, and resulting risks to the officers and general public. This study provides insight concerning both mental health impacts of trauma response under demands of operational standards within police departments and how these resulting mental health impacts are associated with training protocol and operational demand. These findings may allow researchers to pinpoint methods of effective training for officers to reduce individual risk of harm for officers and increase general public safety.

Research Questions

RQ-Qualitative (1): What is the lived experience of policing professionals who have experienced traumatic incidents in the field with reference to operational demands?

RQ-Qualitative (2): What is the lived experience of policing professionals who encounter self-reported alterations to “fight-or-flight” responses in the field?

RQ-Qualitative (3): What is the lived experience of policing professionals following the operational demands of their department?

Theoretical Framework for the Study

The theories grounding this study included Vygotsky’s (1978) theory of social constructivism, focusing specifically on the concepts of human perception, and extrinsic and intrinsic motivation relating to individual experiences of law enforcement professionals. This theory was applied with the intention of viewing the operational demands of law enforcement as a social and professional standard relating to motivation to perform accordingly. Vygotsky’s theoretical views were used as a lens to interpret modernized psychological response stemming from trauma endured by policing professionals in the field working within standardized expectations and rules for their response patterns with possibilities of violating innate survival responses, deepening the impact psychologically. Social constructivism amplified narratives of policing professionals through interpretations utilizing social learning theory as a method of analysis to distinguish the narrative patterns in learned behaviors that have been cognitively produced rather than behaviorally ingrained. This lens aligned with personal stories told by policing professionals with patterns in trauma response allowing for a richer understanding of departmental changes that were necessary to protect officers and the public more effectively.

The logical connections between the framework presented and the nature of this study include Vygotsky's theoretical work, which has been used in qualitative research to approach themes and patterns observable in behavioral and cognitive development. This was applicable to the policing professional population with intention of emphasizing trauma response understood as innately experienced and socially decided through operational demands. Additionally, application of Vygotsky's theory offered guidance on ways to facilitate development of operational and organizational boundaries for police departments to better support staff. This theory, though frequently applied in developmental psychology, was used for interpretation of learned behavioral patterns as a result of operational standards for policing professionals. This application method highlighted the possible patterns in narratives when distinguishing survival instincts and operational directives in field response for policing professionals. With knowledge of developmental growth for the individual, the theory of constructed emotion better addressed the research problem with insight on cognition and behavioral response for policing professionals enduring trauma exposure in the field.

In addition to social constructivism, the theory of constructed emotion was utilized to further interpret police narratives of trauma response. The theory of constructed emotion comes from a neurological understanding of experience and perception, allowing for a more in-depth analysis of police officers' perception of events and overall experience. This theory elaborates on the brain and body's instinct to respond to the environment in order to meet the body's needs before the needs are directly recognized (Fridman et al., 2019). This can be seen in the body's "fight-or-flight" system

being activated as a need for the body to ensure safety. This assisted in building insight into the operational stressors present for policing professionals undergoing work within traumatic incidents as the center focus of this dissertation.

Nature of the Study

To address the research questions in this qualitative study, the specific research design included a narrative inquiry approach interpreted through the social constructivist lens for the purpose of identifying meaning in lived experience of policing professionals (Bluestein et al., 2013). This qualitative analysis used semistructured interviews of 10–12 participants with a pattern-matching and cross-case analysis to assist in the creation of meaning within the lived experience of this population. Interpretive phenomenological analysis was utilized to designate whether there are patterns in experiences, and applicable methods of insight to social change in operational standards as a result. Hermeneutic interpretations were utilized to further separate my current experience in the psychology field and understanding of the topic with comparison to self-reported experiences to create a more well-rounded foundation for interpretation of meaning.

This study required recruitment of policing professionals who had actively worked in the field (retired or presently employed) between the years of 2010–present, to complete semistructured interviews. Interview protocols were developed to address the lived experiences of policing professionals under operational standards and traumatic incident response in the field while maintaining psychological safety and ethical standards in interviewing. The resulting data included responses to the policing professional interview questions regarding lived experiences of individual policing

professionals to identify patterns and meaning in these experiences and to understand how operational demand influenced experience and perception. The data were comprised of coded interviews for each participant, with groupings of themes that interpreted patterns in both individual narratives and in the collection of narratives with development of themes for the group.

Definitions

This study utilized various words and phrases with potential for misinterpretation due to the nature of the terminology. The following terms have been defined for use in this study and following discussion.

Fight-or-flight response: This term should be understood as the individual body's response system to stress, trauma, and potential for physical or psychological harm. For this dissertation, *fight-or-flight response* should reference biological response patterns naturally occurring within the body to keep a person alive and safe (Violanti et al., 2017). The fight-or-flight system is that of the autonomic nervous system and should be understood in reference to the terminology of fight or flight in this dissertation.

Policing professionals: Policing professionals are defined in this study as those who have completed a police academy with sufficient evidence to allow said individuals to be sworn in and employed as law enforcement officers through police departments across the nation. This is not limited to a type of police officer, as it can extend into those who have furthered their policing career into detective positions or various other branches of police work.

Operational demands: Operational demands are defined in this study as the daily activities a policing professional is expected and required to engage in while on the job, which further include the uniform response patterns trained for in the police academy (Fleischmann et al., 2021; Purba & Demou, 2019). This may look like procedure and protocol in the field response alongside required documentation, communication, and so forth. For the purpose of this study, operational demands should be referred to as any formal protocol or requirement of a policing professional while on duty. Operational demands referred to are learned knowledge about procedural needs and requirements of the police department, not the professional's interpretation of protocol or the lived experience of said demands. Operational demands are taught in a textbook fashion, whereas lived experience may differ. For this dissertation, operational demands refer only to taught and mandated responses in the field.

*Traumatic incidents: Traumatic incident*s is a phrase utilized in this study to describe any form of crisis response for policing professionals. Mass trauma is often intertwined with the term "collective trauma." This study focuses on discussing mass trauma and traumatic incidents defined as distressing incidents occurring in the field that impact numerous individuals at once. This may include officer response to natural disasters, or cataclysmic events; however, it also includes smaller scale incidents like officer-involved shootings, acts of violence observed by officers in the public or within the department, or other incidents encompassing threat to multiple people at once (Hirschberger, 2018). This study focuses on traumatic incidents for policing professionals as unique experiences in which an alteration in thought processing, daily living, or

professional capacity has been altered. For the purpose of this dissertation, it is important to understand traumatic incidents as individual responses to on-the-job incidents of all sorts, and through a subjective lens unique to each officer.

Peritraumatic stress: Peritraumatic stress refers to emotional distress alongside physiological responses. These responses can result in dissociation. This form of stress may be observed as feelings of helplessness or fear alongside shaking, a racing heat, amnesia, emotional numbing, and so on (Inslicht et al., 2011). When referencing cortisol awakening patterns in various studies, peritraumatic stress will serve as a definitive understanding of trauma response experienced by the officers in the study.

Assumptions

It was assumed that research participants would provide truthful personal accounts of experience in fieldwork relating to mental health and trauma exposure. Research participants were efficient in scheduling to attend interviews and complete the process in its entirety. The qualitative phenomenological research method was adequate in structure for gathering necessary information for future synthesis. It was believed that policing professionals were exposed to traumatic incidents in fieldwork leading to fluctuations in mental health needs. It was believed that operational demands of these policing professionals impacted mental health treatment and officers' ability to successfully seek out treatment. It was believed that operational demands of policing professionals were barriers to safety for individual officers. These assumptions were necessary within the context of the study as operational standards are set expectations with specific protocols in place for policing, ultimately impacting the policing

professionals themselves. Unique lived experiences of officers may be bettered or worsened based upon these standards, depicting a possible mental health crisis within the policing population itself.

Scope and Delimitations

The focus of this study was on lived experience of policing professionals with the intention of better understanding how traumatic incidents may impact the biological system of the officer, and how this impacts safety and mental health. This focus was chosen due to the gap in current research on these experiences alongside current operational standards of policing professionals, and how this may tie into the social change process for safety of officers and the public.

The boundaries within this study included number of participants, current and past experience as a police officer with reference to experience in response to traumatic incidents, and the use of social constructivism and constructed emotion theories. Individual officers who were not trained and actively taking part in employment from 2010 to present were not included. This boundary could have impacted transferability due to timeline and treatment for those who were employed and having experiences relating to the topic in years prior.

Limitations

Potential barriers or challenges when collecting primary data included possible difficulty in recruiting participants for interviews, possible conflict of interest due to my current affiliation with county policing professionals, and reassurance of confidentiality to protect officers from possible stigma in discussion of mental health. A challenge for

me was the separation of roles between clinical work (present career) and my role as a researcher within this population. In order to mitigate interviewer bias or the perception of such issue, I worked to ensure that the participants were meeting me solely as a researcher, not a clinician. My background was not disclosed in order to protect all parties. It was important for interviews to remain unbiased and to remove personal clinical work to reinforce boundaries and unintentional bias in discussion for both parties.

Additionally, a prewritten interview sheet was provided to participants upon arrival prior to the oral interview for written completion; this provided me with the opportunity to draw additional follow-up questions from written discussion and provide clearer information. The use of anonymity was my best method of securing the most meaningful interview data; however, this was difficult to procure due to the nature of the interviews. This required additional steps to ensure that participants felt they could safely and confidentially answer interview questions and fully engage as a participant.

There are limitations in current societal shifts as antipolice efforts and movements have created a controversial space. This limitation was a barrier to obtaining participants due to a potential negative response to research on the matter. Changing curriculum in police academy trainings to account for policing professional needs was a barrier in itself due to the need for partnership in state agencies regulating such decisions, and restrictions in spending. This study focused on the experiences of policing professionals with exposure to traumatic incidents, leading to discussion on initial training and possible themes emerging to describe a need for change. The limitations within this study were

primarily met with a potential negative bias when recruiting participants due to the current political and social climate on policing.

Significance

This study was significant as it filled a gap in understanding by focusing specifically on lived experience of policing professionals involved in traumatic incidents that have occurred under operational demands of their department. The results of this study assist in the creation of meaning through these experiences to better understand and begin the process of social change for this population through greater support and transition of roles, expectations, and department policy. The community will be in need of policing professional roles and supports, allowing this study to provide greater insight and meaning for the roles served by policing professionals and the best possible methods of managing their psychological response to traumatic incidents. This study is helpful as a reference point for social change with specific acknowledgment of policing experience with shaping by current training protocol. The change process was amplified through the possibility of positive supports created or highlighted through open discussion of lived experience.

Summary

There have been numerous research studies conducted on policing professionals to include mental health, operational stressors, and training standards. The limited research on biological response alongside lived experience for policing professionals served as a purposeful study opportunity to better depict the need for mental health training in the academy level of the field. Policing professionals undergo rigorous

trainings to respond to public safety needs while creating a biological response pattern hormonally depicting the officers' ability to perceive and process the incidents they work within. Lived experiences provided researchers with insight on resiliency, training standards, and aspects of operational stressors that create altered response patterns leading to unsafe decision making on a micro and macro level. Understanding the biological response patterns of humans, police officer training, operational expectations of officers in the field, exposure to traumatic incidents throughout the career, and officers' lived experiences as a direct result of these topics provided steppingstones to future research rich in solution-oriented material.

In Chapter 2, a review of the current research is presented with the purpose of providing detailed discussion of how biological response patterns, mental health, and police officer training impacts the safety of both officers and the general public. In Chapter 3, the research methods used for this study will be discussed in more detail. Additionally, Chapter 3 will include information on research design, approach, procedures, instrumentation, and data collection and analysis methods. Chapter 4 discusses the study itself and the data collection process to include the results of the interviewing process for all participants. Identified themes from data collection encompassed expectation of the role, operational demands, and mental health. Chapter 5 discusses the study in its entirety, the processes and procedural steps taken to address phenomena in this study, and the concluding remarks from the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The problem addressed by this study was the operational demands of policing professionals depicting a trained and mandated response to traumatic incidents in the field, leading to a possible increased risk of severe mental health issues for the individual officers through biologically altered patterns of thinking and responding. The purpose of this research was to understand how policing professionals experience operational demands through exposure to traumatic incidents while on duty, and how this experience may pose a potentially greater threat to psychological safety through patterned decision making, likely compromising physical safety in the field for the officer and public.

Officers are repeatedly exposed to critical/traumatic incidents, leading to a heightened exposure to traumatic stress and associated diagnoses. Officers are trained to serve and protect their community through these unpredictable, dangerous, and stressful incidents occurring at any given point in their shift, creating a distinctive subculture in policing (Boothroyd & Doughtery, 2019; Violanti et al., 2017). The concept of a traditional masculine police culture is understood as an accumulation of values, beliefs, language, and expectations of law enforcement officers, creating a sense of loyalty and brotherhood within the field itself (Papazoglou & Tuttle, 2018). Hypermasculinity is used to describe police culture, ultimately suppressing emotional expression and urging group think mentality; on the contrary, police culture does support comradery and brotherhood, creating tight bonds and a sense of safety amongst officers (Newell et al., 2021). The acculturation of officers is often done so with the belief that strength and bravery is

greater than the general population's, becoming a discernible experience of each individual policing professional.

This policing culture has also been associated with cynicism towards the criminal justice system, often paired with frustration with procedures and regulations in due process. This 'resentment' has been depicted as a limitation to policing professionals in the field, as police subculture frequently criticizes legal 'norms', feeding into the 'us versus them' mentality within the criminal justice system (Skolnick, 2005; Steinkopf et al., 2015; Terpstra & Kort, 2016). This 'us versus them' mentality can be observed further in comparison to mental health services being rendered as officers may take the mindset that mental health treatment is a form of reprimand, mental health clinicians are enemies rather than supporters, or that treatment is a direct display of vulnerability that mitigates the cultural underpinnings of policing culture (Papazoglou & Tuttle, 2018; Steinkopf et al., 2015).

Skolnick (2005) has laid the groundwork for cultural understanding of police work, highlighting efficiency, entitlement to authority, and heightened suspicion. Efficiency can be unraveled through isolation and fear of one's possible inability to perform within constraints of the occupation; likewise, this social isolation perceived by officers can be further snowballed into engagement occurring only amongst fellow officers, strengthening the 'us versus them' mentality (Skolnick, 2005). Social isolation is further interpreted and enacted upon through socially defined differences of officers and the general public, meaning the uniform and badge contribute to the overall suspicion experienced by officers. Hypervigilance is observed through perceived threats to the

officers' safety, furthering the suspicion officers have built towards the public (Skolnick, 2005). Mental health treatment is scrutinized by the policing populations due to such cultural norms, ultimately encouraging a more masculine, cynical mindset. Masculinity is at the forefront of the issue, frequently creating barriers to receiving mental health treatment. Cultural challenges instilled within the policing populations have prevented effective assistance in treating mental health needs, often being liked with toxicity in the workplace and more aggressive behaviors observed as a result (Hakik & Langlois, 2020).

Literature Search Strategy

Using the Walden University library and Google Scholar, this researcher searched for various topics relevant to this study to include mental health AND policing professionals, fight or flight AND policing professionals, policing professionals AND police culture, policing professionals AND cortisol awakening patterns, police AND training, and policing professionals AND operational demands. Other topics searched were focused on policing professionals and academy standards and expectations, populations worked with as policing professionals and protocol while in the field, and policing professionals experience in the line of duty. All sources utilized for this dissertation were related to the referenced search terms. Studies identified were generally published within the last 5 years, and this researcher made extensive efforts to ensure studies were relevant and current. The most recent research relevant to this study's phenomenon have been utilized and reviewed to ensure an exhaustive literature review was completed; as a result, literature dated greater than 5 years has been included to provide expansive research on this topic. Numerous journals were utilized to include

American Journal of Criminal Justice, Police Practice & Research, Applied Psychology in Criminal Justice, Journal of Crime & Justice, Police Practice & Research, Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology, and many others.

Theoretical Foundation

Theory of Social Constructivism

Vygotsky's Theory of Social Constructivism is the foundation of this study. This theory seeks to explain the humanistic understanding of reality, perception of situation, and the motivations within said reality to illicit change or remain the same. Vygtosky's theory is essential in interpreting police officer psychological response to roles within the career, and further assists in amplifying the need for understanding narrative through the trauma lens. This theory drives the understanding of cultural norms within the learning process, allowing for interpretation of policing culture as an impact on decision making and perception of said decision making. This theory can be further interpreted as a method to discuss the cognitive learning components to culture, communication, and the collaboration between the two in the development of perception (Vygotsky, 1978).

Vygotsky's theory has been used in research to interpret and discuss themes and patterns observable in behavioral and cognitive development. The policing population can be magnified under this theory with intention of viewing trauma response as innately experienced and socially decided through operational demands. Operational and organizational demands with the policing profession can be more closely critiqued when referencing cultural aspects of policing, the communication of cultural understanding, and through the resulting perspective developed by officers through this learning process.

Social constructivism is a foundation in which learned behavioral patterns as a result of operational standards for policing professionals can be observed as a branch of learning, as well as a method of developing a known reality or perception to individual officers. The trauma responses of these officers, discussed through their own sensitivity within experience, can be themed according to their personal awareness of learning under the policing profession and subsequent departmental standards and further understood via patterns in motivation to respond in the field.

Theory of Constructed Emotion

The theory of constructed emotion is rooted in the notion of the brain having a role in development and survival necessary for regulation, learning, and growth. Constructed emotion theory focuses on allostasis, the body and brain's ability to predict upcoming needs and act accordingly (Fridman et al., 2019; Pezzulo et al., 2015). The concept framing this theory can be more thoroughly viewed in the idea that mental events, defined as emotion, perception, action, and cognition, are changed due to allostasis, leading into somatic responses observable in a need for the body to rebalance. Application of this theory has been reviewed and utilized in literature for psychology of policing, and is an applicable source of processing and interpreting the experiences of policing professionals. When used as a model of framing police officer thought processing, theory of constructed emotion can break down the automatic neurological response to incidents in the field and how said incidents may impact the officer or the event itself. Themes introduced within this theoretical perspective can be utilized to seek out more thorough and exhaustive methods of interpreting meaning within lived

experience in this population. Operational demands worked within can be factors identified through narratives of policing professionals, furthering this theory's application in deciphering the functions of an officer's behavior, trained thinking patterns, and noticeable adaption from the body's automatic response in an incident.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts

Training of Officers

There were numerous areas of concern for public and officer safety, and financial investment when breaking down law enforcement training. Police academy trainings can be costly to each state. Investment in each officer can be viewed monetarily, but also though the lens of overall quality and safety. There is a delicate balance in police training that has stirred some negative feedback in research as officers may be viewed as a need for quantity over quality and vice versa. The reality of the matter is that investment in the training of policing professionals is changing and yielding needed feedback for remodeling the system itself. Unqualified policing professionals are a risk to the department, themselves, and the public; for example, regression in community wide trust in police, negative public perception of officers, and unnecessary uses of force are all categorized as negative consequences to less comprehensive training of law enforcement (Caro, 2011).

A training program that is exhaustive in teaching, practice, and replication is what may shape the future of programs and policing for the better. White (2008) discusses the core values of cadet training as encompassing of fitness for duty, initial and comprehensive training protocol, and induction to both department and career

development. Competencies for training are rooted in self-control, discipline, motivation, neutrality, moral and ethical decision-making, problem-solving skills, and performance (Caro, 2011). Training is entirely varied in each role and state due to the diversity in requirements and experience of recruits. There is not currently one benchmark curriculum for academy training or hours for certification required, leaving states to decide what is best for their officers in training. Law enforcement agencies are directly responsible for the outcome of their officers, including professional development and adherence to operational and organizational demands within the career.

Training for policing professionals is routinely described in research as being flawed in the gap between academy and practical exposure to the field (Caro, 2011). There are numerous ways in which training impacts an officer, however, academy is the root of all training for those seeking employment in law enforcement. Though the academy creates a foundation for employment, there are models used by departments across the United States seeking to train officers during a probationary period for police recruits. The most referenced field training officer (FTO) program, the San Jose Model, is utilized as a method to bridge the gap between classroom teaching and in vivo experience. This model specifically seeks to stagger time spent in the program by officers, limits the number of officers enrolled at one time, and diversifies training through the use of multiple types of law enforcement roles being recruited into the program at once (Caro, 2011). This FTO is focused on advancing performance and skillsets for policing professionals as they move into the field.

Caro (2011) presents research describing the scope of training with reference to personality and psychological factors associated with recruitment, how these factors align with academy and field operation, and possible associations of success as a result. Predictive power is referred to in this research as a means to describe recruitment processes of policing professionals and how their individual differences may serve as markers to statistical probability of success in the career. Discussion of formal training in academy should be viewed similarly to that of university, however, the skills learned in academy are less likely to be utilized in the field as it accounts for approximately 10% of knowledge learned and needed for duty (Caro, 2011). The models researched in this study describe a possible disconnect in the San Jose Model and academy trainings, reporting that curriculum may not encompass competencies needed by officers to mirror an effective system. Furthermore, Caro (2011) describes these flaws as potentially associated with cultural and organizational climate differences amongst departments leading to influence in the evaluative process. It is also worth noting that law enforcement officers are equipped with the freedom to train and move state by state. Officers trained in locations where crime is not quite as varied can have an impact on job performance due to a lack of exposure in the field, in academy and field training, and in the operational demands of a department when relocation is noted.

Feedback in training both in the academy in in FTO programs is reported to be fairly limited. Holton et al. (2000) reports transferability of knowledge for officers is to be considered a key factor in successful training. Officers lacking feedback are less likely to have room for growth as training and action becomes solidified. Skills being learned

and practiced are vital to officers as they must be shaped through a supportive organizational system. Feedback between academy and FTO programs are described to be invalidating in performance engagement and enhancement. A knowledge transfer system should be considered in the training process of law enforcement officers as evaluation of knowledge and performance are less regulated when departments lack appropriate training methods (Caro, 2011).

Researchers have found similar evidence in coping skill use and adaption through the academy training process for policing professionals highlighting a lack of effective internal regulation skills had prior to beginning, and taught throughout training (Collazo, 2022). Discussion of a 'crystallization' process occurring for these professionals is noted in research as a prevalent concern due to the limited coping capacities many recruits had prior to their academy training. This crystallization process is described as an experience in which recruits are exposed to traumatic incidents in training that are requiring the use of internal regulation and coping strategies effective for processing situations effectively while continuously being exposed to personal life situations ultimately decreasing and stagnating the recruits' capacity to cope over time (Collazo, 2022; Courtois & Ford, 2009; Patterson, 2016). The brain absorbs information and incidents at the best capacity it can, and begins to have little capacity to manage and maintain emotional fall out surrounding events. This is often correlated with maladaptive coping and factors relating to unemployment due to the dangers presented. Poor emotional coping strategies of recruits in academy is considered to be an area overlooked in the effective training of officers as these individuals are said to graduate and continue to endure stressors that

crystalize one's ability to manage their mental well-being. This lack of training for managing mental health is related to risk factors in the development of posttraumatic stress disorder (Collazo, 2022; Patterson, 2016). Instead of teaching effective coping strategies, recruits are provided with handbooks and regulations associated with operational demands of the job, increasing the severity of experiencing poor mental health in the field.

Operational Expectations of Policing Professionals

Operational stressors for policing professionals have the potential to be viewed through safety needs both for the public and the officer. Operationally, officers are expected to perform, respond, and engage on a level meeting the individual incident's needs while also catering to a greater need for public safety. These decisions are ultimately impacted by the officer's ability to follow protocol, rely on training and education, and effectiveness in predictability of an event or person. The biological system is trained to tell the body whether or not it is safe, leading to the fight, flight, or freeze response pattern. Officers are trained operationally to respond within a protocoled fashion, leading to on-the-spot thinking that can, at times, work against the biological mechanisms of the individual officer (Violanti et al., 2017). The operational needs of an officer are in place for the requirement of safety. Policing fields have continuously sought to protect the public and have begun working to further protect their own officers while in the field. Safety cannot be guaranteed for an officer, often correlated with operational stress observed in mental health decline amongst policing professionals (Violanti et al., 2017).

In a review conducted with focus on stressors for policing professionals, social support from police departments, organizational culture, leadership, and bureaucracy were leading themes (Maran, Magnavita & Garbarino, 2022). Policing professionals within the study reported commonalities to include values orienting towards masculinity and a risk of harassment if resistance is observed, lack of support for symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder, negative leadership impacting emotional state of mind, and perceived fear over bureaucratic decision making (Maran et al., 2022). Stressors for policing professionals amongst these themes are organizational in nature. When comparing to operational stressors, researchers often compare the themes as cause and effect. When leadership is perceived as negative or unsupportive, officers are less likely to seek out mental health treatment for field related trauma due to fears of being harassed, singled out, or having their role challenged (Maran et al., 2022).

Officer and Public Safety

When utilizing camera equipment for safety enhancement in the field, officers have been observed to respond adversely due to possible association with operational demands and potential for increased anxiousness over reprimand. Research centered around on-officer video technology has provided a foundation for future research with reference to the neuro-biological response patterns of officers utilizing such equipment. Ready and Young (2015) report that officers in their study are more aversive to the technology as the heightened sense of safety is unmatched when compared directly to the potential scrutiny of the individual officer's job performance as seen on video. Officers appear to fall within two categories: (1) those who over serve in the field to avoid

reprimand for not doing enough, and (2) those who underserve due to possible overthinking about the observation of their decision making in the field (Ready & Young, 2015). Researchers suggest their findings demonstrate heightened self-awareness amongst officers using on officer-video technology; furthermore, officers falling within the two original categories are reported to internalize civil liability and personal liability more frequently. Officers utilizing video equipment voluntarily displayed greater rates of hopefulness before and after field work, frequently reporting those initial feelings of safety (Ready & Young, 2015).

Police academy trainings require a successful completion of firearms training with the intention of teaching officers how to utilize weapons to protect both themselves and the public. Cumulatively, it is reported that actual 'hit' percentages of police officer involved shootings are below 50% in the field in comparison to more than 90% successful 'hits' in training (Landman, Nieuwenhuys, & Oudejans, 2016). Research depicts percentages of success in policing professionals using deadly force in the field, however, little research is focused on the differences between training and live incidents. The threat of bodily harm to policing professionals in the field is typically linked to intensive anxiety, resulting in shifts in the individual officer's cortisol activation system; furthermore, this activation may be further altered due to trained response versus biological response (Landman et al., 2016; Violanti et al., 2016). The community's response to officer involved shootings adds an additional layer of pressure to the officers, which can lead to stress and anxiety before, during, and after shooting incidents. Changes in decision making as a result of emotional shifts on the spot can become damaging to

public perception of policing, often resulting from a lack of emotional awareness for individual officers.

Policing professionals are taught numerous needed and effective methods for increasing personal and public safety while training for their career in law enforcement. A commonly misunderstood safety issue is rooted in biological response and the human reaction to bodily harm or the threat to bodily harm. Training officers and recruits to utilize weapons begins with the intention of safety, however, attention, interpretation, and behavior are three categories of performance impacting officer decision making in the field (Landman et al., 2016). Neuwenhuys and Oudejans (2012) created a multilevel model depicting these themes with the following understanding: (1) attention redirection from task to threat focused information only, (2) unjustified decision making in the field due to interpretation of threat, and (3) defensive patterns being triggered, leading to sudden shifts in performance. This model can describe the manners in which individual officers responding to critical incidents may inversely perceive suspects as armed when they are not, and the use of deadly force may be used in response to inaccurate interpretations of the incident (Landman et al, 2016).

Increased anxiety in the field creates an inhibited top-down processing for the individual resulting in a sudden decrease in accuracy, unjustifiable decision making due to threat of bodily harm, ambiguity in information processing, and detrimental interpretations for crises that may result in inappropriate officer involved shootings (Neuwenhuys & Oudejans, 2012). Police recruits are trained knowing the training field is simulated and not a genuine threat to the officers' safety, resulting in more accurate use

of force as observed in data. On the contrary, active field response demonstrates much lower rates of successful use of force due to the high anxiety and intensive pressures placed on the officer in the moment. Operational demands and community-based judgment of the officer can be argued as key factors in immediate decision making in the field when aligned with training and protocol expected of each officer. Perception, interpretation, and resulting behavior of the officer does not always coincide with academy-based training protocol (Neuwenhuys & Oudejans, 2012). This presents as an ongoing barrier to safety for the public and the responding officer as emotional decision making may be observed at the forefront of field work in comparison to logical and trained thought processing. Training for officers removes emotional reaction in order to implement consistent and reasonable response; however, the human biological response to trauma cannot be maintained through protocol within the department.

Perceptions of Policing

'Accountability' appears to be a commonly utilized word in media when focused on public perception of policing. With accountability appearing to be demanded by the public in the media, officers are often left in a difficult position when making decisions in the field. Law enforcement officers are expected to make lawful, appropriate, and safe decisions made to protect the public and themselves. The Ferguson Effect, also referred to as the 'de-policing effect', is a phenomenon observed amongst law enforcement due to concerns of damaging publicity (Gau, Paoline, & Paul, 2022). This effect hypothesizes that police are less likely to initiate use of force, engage with the community, or conduct

searches, frisks, and stops because of intensified scrutiny. Furthermore, the Ferguson Effect predicts de-policing will increase crime rates (Gau et al., 2022).

Public scrutiny is an ongoing topic of issue within the field of policing due to numerous issues in the treatment of people of color and methods of force used in the field; additionally, researchers question whether a 'legitimacy crisis' is occurring in the modern century of policing due to continued observation of notorious and polemic decision making on behalf of officers involving people of color (Gau et al., 2022). Accountability of individual officers being questioned appears to have led to the Ferguson Effect taking hold of modern-day policing as officers report fear of negative judgment in assessments (Gau et al., 2022). Gau et al. (2022) determined through surveys completed with policing professionals that external pressures influence response by officers in the field. Researchers found the Ferguson Effect was prevalent in survey answers, correlating with data showing officers perceive media as a cultural environment to which they must exist within. Though de-policing appears to be impacted by fear of public response to police work, officers appeared to continuously report a willingness to carry out their operational demands in the field as trained (Gau et al., 2022).

Carr and Maxwell (2018) reported officer perception of organizational righteousness and integrity considerably impacted officers' trust in the public in areas patrolled, remaining consistent when compared amongst officer age, ethnicity, gender, and rank. Social Exchange Theory can be referenced as a method of explanation when determining the link between internal experience and external conduct in policing (Carr & Maxwell, 2018). Policing professionals' perception of their own organization

regarding effective justice is often paired with attitudes and behaviors of officers as a population. For example, the officers' trust in the people they are policing or the areas in which they are patrolling is linked to the officers' perception of their department's willingness to adequately serve justice and support the policing process in its entirety (Carr & Maxwell, 2018). Officer perception of justice pairs with successful completion of operational demands in the field; furthermore, organizational factors often influence policing behaviors due to structural demands and imposed supports within the system itself (Carr & Maxwell, 2018).

Biological and Psychological Change

Stressors within the field can look different amongst individual officers, however, operational standards remain uniform. These standards can impact the performance of a law enforcement officer alongside awakening cortisol patterns while in the field, ultimately changing the autonomic nervous system (ANS) pattern of response to the body's environment (Hutchinson & Barrett, 2019; Violanti et al., 2016). This pattern has been researched with intention of understanding the mental health impacts of exposure to trauma in the field, resulting in varied results with a common consensus of diminished awakening cortisol patterns for policing professionals who have been chronically exposed to highly stressful incidents (Violanti et al., 2016).

Allostasis is an understood functioning in which the brain and body engage in automatic response to meet the body's needs to rebalance and restore homeostasis. The ANS, immune, and endocrine system work together to illicit needed responses from the body in the moment of need, aiding in the survival process (Fridman et al., 2019).

Internal predictive models of the world are reported to be shaped by individual experience in one's own body. This can be correlated with the body's patterns within the ANS and endocrine system, leading to predictable responses observed in people over time. These patterns are then impactful for daily functioning, adding to shifts in biological processing and cortisol awakening patterns ultimately changing worldview and decision making in the response to environmental stimuli (Fridman et al., 2019; Hutchinson & Barrett, 2019; Sterling & Laughling, 2015). Allostatic dysregulation is linked directly to policing professionals with increased risks to PTSD, obesity, metabolic syndrome, and cardiovascular disease (Fidman et al., 2019).

Perception of threat in response to field work for officers is considered to impact biological systems to help the individual officer cope with the stressor presented. This is observed through cortisol awakening patterns in the body; however, policing professionals are often trained to respond within set standards of operation detailing most effective methods of enhancing safety for the officer and public. These training standards can be used in place of the individual officer's fight-or-flight activation system, requiring biological adaption in the field while on duty (Violanti et al., 2017). Patterned consistency in response to high stress incidents on the job have been observed to have impacted the functioning of policing professionals' experiences biologically. These changes for officers' internal system functioning can be viewed through the idea of an 'affective niche'. The perception of threat through current and past experience, as well as one's working culture in policing is a formula for compromise to one's affective niche. Peritraumatic stress is linked to greater rates of development of posttraumatic stress

disorder due to hypothesized deficits within the regulation process of the brain. Cortisol responses within the paralimbic structures of the brain can be sites of prolonged threat activation (Inslicht et al., 2011). When referenced alongside an officers' need to present as regulated for their operational standards in practice, officers can quickly be overlooked as direct threats to themselves through biological pattern changes impacting physical and mental health in the long term (Fridman et al., 2019).

Cortisol awakening patterns in policing professionals have been studied for a variety of needs, including comparisons to heightened cortisol and sleep quality. Cortisol release patterns are characterized by regeneration in the sleep cycle, allowing for an awakening response to naturally occur with each sleep period. When sleep patterns are interrupted, cortisol is reported to decline, leading to partial regeneration and potential side effects like lethargy and negative states of distress (Daly et al., 2011). Researchers have shown sleep quality can impact the officer's cortisol levels, leading to additional suggestions that sleep quality is associated with psychological distress (Fekedulegn et al., 2018). Research examining cortisol patterns alongside job strain have demonstrated interaction between poor sleep quality and reduced levels of cortisol secretion; additionally, research has further shown reduction in psycho-psychological response alongside reduced cortisol patterns (Rydstedt &Devereux, 2013). Unhealthy sleep, alongside heightened job stress can be a direct correlate to lowered cortisol secretion, leading to psycho-psychological diminishing for each individual. Additionally, cortisol secretion patterns are reported to increase during sleep, creating the highest levels of cortisol in the body in early mornings. The cortisol awakening response is further linked

to chronic stress, circling back to the occurrence of peritraumatic incidents leaving cortisol pooled in the body (Inslicht et al., 2011).

When tested alongside physical activity during leisure periods, officers reporting less physical activity and poor sleep quality were more likely to demonstrate poor levels of cortisol secretion. Dysregulated cortisol patterns are definitive of psychological distress, lack of emotional control, and difficulties with fatigue (Fekedulegn et al., 2018). When paired with current research on cortisol secretion, trauma accrued in field work, and family-life conflict, officers are set for operational expectations frequently amplifying internal dysregulation. Operational stressors to include shift length and time of day or night are associated with chronic stress for policing professionals. Additionally, reduced secretion of cortisol is indicated in research amongst policing professionals working night shifts for extended periods (Fekedulegn et al., 2012). Stress patterns in cortisol secretion imply physical and mental health deficits are risk factors of operational standards within the policing field when sleep quality diminishes, and when officers are expected to perform at high standards for greater lengths of time (Fekedulegn et al., 2012; Fekedulegn et al., 2018).

Reality Based Training (RBT) models used to assist law enforcement officers in learning methods are both mandated operationally and educational are utilized in academy trainings to prepare law enforcement professionals for lethal encounters. RBT models is split into sections for learning mental and emotional management, and stress management for crisis scenarios. The ultimate goal in an RBT model is to develop resiliency in the face of traumatic incidents (Broomé, 2011). In a focused attempt at

training future law enforcement professionals to follow operationally defined steps in a traumatic incident that may require lethal force, these simulations are also a source of disinhibition to ones' natural aversion to kill another human being. The training aims to increase the likelihood the officer will survive a lethal encounter, and further focuses on training future officers how to alter their current thought and emotional patterns when in high stress scenarios (Broomé, 2011). The RBT model was studied by Broomé (2011) through lived experience of several officers reporting their experiences in the simulation with regard to emotional, psychological, and physical responses to threats activated in the training. Automaticity and efficiency were key components to the training model as it seeks to alter the individual officer's self-awareness and reaction space. Perceptual distortions, shifts in coordination and physical ability and vigor, and emotional regulation when exposed to lethal force scenarios for cadets in training are reported to be associated with stimulation of the autonomic nervous system (Broomé, 2011). Through the RBT simulations, participant reports aligned with those of officers who have experienced line of duty lethal encounters to include similarities in psychomotor shifts and responses in perception and cognitive change after the incidents.

Autonomic nervous system changes occurring due to exposure to RBT programs and similar simulations are often documented in research as being similar to those experiences of seasoned police professionals who have experienced 'real world' versions of said simulations. These similarities can be viewed as potentially lifesaving in the realm of training as cadets are placed in situations demonstrating individualized experience alongside educational and operationally trained protocol. Cadets exposed to RBT models

in their academy experience are reporting psychological shifts in the time of distress and after the incident has ended. Perceptual distortions in these trainings are described to be rationale for cadets learning to adjust to their own consciousness, leading to shifted understanding of external stimuli. For example, a cadet experiencing time speeding up or moving incredibly slow, or cadets reporting difficulty keeping track of a suspect due to the feeling of being trapped and having to refocus (Broomé, 2011). The ANS secretes stress hormones when an individual is experiencing extreme vulnerability. Rigidity and quicker thought processing are reported during this secretion period which is when education and training is a key component to regaining safety in the field. RBT programs may be used in training to shift the biological patterns naturally occurring for each cadet whether it be positive or negative.

Fight, flight, freeze, and posture are the four responses any human may have when presented with extreme vulnerability, activating the cortisol awakening patterns of the ANS. Cadets in training are exposed to such experiences through RBT models, usually demonstrating natural responses to field work. This is an area in which training can be used to shift the individual cadet's biologically understood survival mechanisms. When enacted, the ANS may psychologically change a person's consciousness to become vigilant, rigid, and rapid (Broomé, 2011; Fekedulegn et al., 2018). Operational demands of an officer trained to respond to lethal scenarios can be observed in such RBT models as fight, flight, posture, and freeze are mandated to become a fight mentality with intention of destabilization and regaining safety both individually and publicly. Broomé (2011) further reports cadets experiencing 'automated' responses to traumatic incidents in

RBT simulations , demonstrating biologically trained survival skills, as well as changes to cadet emotional regulation and psychological absorption of action planning in the moment of distress.

Mental Health Stigma

Mental health care for policing professionals is reportedly strained due to the stigma associated with care within the cultural norms of policing, overall concern with confidentiality, failure to express and recognize mental health disparities for oneself, and in a belief that mental health professionals will not 'understand' (Jetelina et al., 2020). Hakik and Langlois (2020) report detrimental and negative outcomes to mental health treatment when specifically viewing assistance through the policing culture. Reports have demonstrated fear and ostracization within the law enforcement population through research on mental health treatment and police culture's openness to difficulties being experienced as a direct result of operational and organizational demands of officers. Mental health stigma has continuously been researched as a pertinent hindrance to officers receiving appropriate care, causing additional trauma and suffering for policing professionals (Hakik & Langlois, 2020; Jetelina et al., 2020). There has been a continuous pattern reported in policing culture of being perceived as 'weak' if one is to seek out proper supports for their mental health. Subcultures within the umbrella of policing have differing perspectives on receiving help. For example, inferiority in one's ranked position within the police force can dictate level of care sought out for psychological distress. Officers who do not work on the 'front line' in the field are less likely to seek out mental health services due to a commonly held belief that officers'

psychological distress is not as intensive as others, leaving an image of weakness (Newell et al., 2021).

Policing professionals often respond to mental health crises in the community, requiring some level of understanding of mental health and the decision-making needed to help civilians receive care while protecting the community. Policing professionals working alongside the barriers and obvious inadequacies of the mental health system are often challenged with the reality that mental health stigma is always at the forefront of most fields. The comparison between policing and treatment facilities is also discussed in research as an issue creating another barrier to successful mental health treatment. Officers report care for mental health is frequently inefficient, damaging, and discouraging, furthering the stigma attached to treatment seeking itself (Newell et al., 2021). Officers engaged in operational demands of the occupation are often exposed to mental health related calls, and the need for assistance in discovering appropriate care. Occupational aspects of policing can often include referrals and direct involvement with mental health facilities for civilians; additionally, researchers have reported officers may observe the stigma associated with said facilities due to police work performed, resulting in further avoidance of mental health treatment (Newell et al., 2021).

In a study conducted in the United Kingdom, researchers specifically focused on mental health intervention as a role of policing professionals with interest in understanding the officers' experiences. Results demonstrated a generalization in experience, illustrating a frustration with the gaps in mental health care and policing; additionally, researchers stated the reluctance experienced by various community

agencies in the aid of mental health care proved to be a barrier to successful service for policing professionals in the field (Marsden et al., 2020). Accessibility, appropriately tailored resources, confidentiality, and stigma appear to be common themes reported amongst officers as barriers to receiving and seeking out mental health care (Hakik & Langlois, 2020; Jetelina et al., 2020; Newell et al., 2021).

Operational stressors are often correlated with psychological distress to include anxiety, stress, negative perception of self, and depression (Fleischmann et al., 2021; Gumani, 2019; Violanti et al., 2017). These mental health observations correspond with exposure to trauma in the fieldwork of officers, and within operational demands of the career itself. Suicide, alongside posttraumatic stress disorder, is prevalent in the policing communities, and serves as a reminder that mental health is impacted by the occupational stressors of policing professionals, often resulting in harsh and inappropriate views of oneself when compared to police culture. Police culture continues to echo a masculine response to on-the-job traumas accrued, habitually presenting itself as suicidal ideation, substance use, psychological distress, and burnout in the career for officers (Carleton et al., 2018; Collazo, 2022). Violanti (2018) describes the policing culture as a form of institutional challenge and bullying, and reports this as a means of preventing effective care for the population. A continuous fear of being labeled as ‘weak’ is reported across studies on policing professionals when tied to receiving mental health treatment for trauma symptoms. Additionally, work-related traumas are commonly reflective of operational demands placed on officers and the consistent push to operate physically and mentally in unison and nonstop (Carleton et al., 2018; Violanti et al., 2018).

Mental Health Impacts

There are two components to mental health impacts for policing: the perceptions of police response to mental illness and the perception of treatment for policing professionals themselves. Perception of mental health is a key component to the understanding of policing and operational demands within policing. Policing professionals are often tasked with responding to incidents within the community centered around mental illness or crisis. These tasks are weighted in officer training, perception of response needed, responsibility to adequately assist, and the cost to the officers' own mental health in response to these incidents. Mental health is impacted on both ends of the process, whether it be positive or negative in result.

Without effective or intensive training on methods of working with a person with severe mental illness, officers are left at a loss on effective management or practice. The perception of the mental illness may be a negative factor in policing when left to the untrained professional. A practice referred to as 'dumping' has been described in policing as an action in which officers initiate transjurisdictional transportation of problematic individuals (Marsden et al., 2020). This is an action in which officers have been observed to transport difficult individuals, including those with severe mental illness, to locations outside of the officer's area of responsibility. This action can be best understood in perception of mental illness and capacity to instill effective change or provide necessary care. This practice can be aligned with the possibility of intensified symptomology due to a lack of access in needed care, potentially leading to aggravated behaviors and the addition of risk (Marsden et al., 2020). An officer responding to an incident in which an

individual suffers from severe mental illness is presented with multiple options, including the possibility of arrest. This fails to address the issue, and may further intensify the perception of mental illness due to the unending cycle in which a person does not receive necessary care. This also leans into the responding officers' perception of individuals frequently responded to in the field. A person with repeated 911 calls may be viewed negatively by responding officers due to the lack of change and potentially worsening condition, further limiting the officers' ability to respond to other crisis scenarios they may naturally deem to be 'more important'. Officers have reported less than adequate training in mental health, and how to assist in decision making or collaboration while in the field (Marsden et al., 2020). This lack of training may be a source of perception, and must be noted as such.

Perception of mental illness is intertwined with the officers' perception of the mentally ill, their perception of what it means to suffer from or empathize with those suffering from mental illness, and the impacts within the social realm of inadequate care of those with mental illness. Perception of policing can be altered when linked to treatment of those with mental illness, or the lack thereof. Themes within the research conducted by Marsden et al. (2020) depict a space for training versus experience of officers with mention of decision making capacity in mental health emergency. Officers within this study reported there is a lack of training that allows for adequate response to mental health needs in the field, while also referring to the 'on-the-job' experience being needed to better prepare the officer for future responses. Perception of response is in need of magnification as a result. The responding officer's perception of capacity to assist can

be a determinant of outcome in policing. Select officers within the study further reported some self-exploration and research of mental health in their free time to better address gaps in knowledge (Marsden et al., 2020).

Therapeutic Intervention Needs

Policing professions are often linked to posttraumatic stress disorder, major depressive disorder, substance use and abuse, suicidal ideation and completion, and other forms of intensive mental health disorders that impact daily living. Researchers estimate approximately 18% of women and 15% of men in policing careers develop posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) due to the continuous exposure to traumatic incidents. Additionally, it is estimated that the risk of suicide is 28.2/100,000 for men and 12.2/100,000 for women. With the ongoing exposure to career based traumas, policing professionals are frequently facing long term deficits in coping, ability to manage and regulate their needs and emotions, and an increased risk of maladaptive coping strategies may lead to unemployment, mental illness, or even death (Collazo, 2022).

There are numerous forms of treatment for trauma and complex trauma, though there is little evidence directly supporting policing professionals involved in specific intervention with effectiveness. Treatment for trauma focused disorders are often inclusive of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy (TF-CBT), eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR), and prolonged exposure therapy (PE). Many of these interventions have been described to have been altered in some form to accommodate adults within the policing profession in order to directly address the issues presented. For example, TF-CBT was developed for children

experiencing complex trauma and sexual abuse, however, with some changes, TF-CBT is shown as an effective form of treatment for policing professionals seeking to process traumatic incidents in a more in depth and individually tailored method (Collazo, 2022).

Adaptions to this treatment intervention in the research to include treatment of officers included an emphasis on rapport building due to the stigma associated with mental health treatment and the cultural context of masculinity and shame surrounding treatment in the profession. Policing professionals possess a 'suspicion' with clinicians, making rapport a focal point for policing professionals (Collazo, 2022). This adaption is further focused on clinician engagement with cultural components of policing to include an understanding of the language, tenets, and values policing professionals hold. Due to the flooding of cortisol in the autonomic nervous system after exposure to traumatic incidents, clinicians are trained to recognize and educate policing professionals on their individual responses to field work. The rapport building phase may be much longer than other methods of treatment, however, adaptions made are set to focus on empathizing, building security, and validating the policing experience (Collazo, 2022; Fekedulegn et al., 2018).

TF-CBT is then adapted to emphasize psychoeducation on trauma and the brain relating to policing field work and exposure to trauma. This allows space for officers to use a form of storytelling that aligns with the culture of policing to emphasize acts of bravery and discussion of management of stress. Clinicians further utilize relaxation, and affect expression and modulation to help develop a sense of understanding of self and a new method of connecting emotion to the physical body. Coping skills are taught to the

officers, leading towards processing the traumas endured in the field. Adaptions to interventions are frequently made between populations in need, however, there is a gap in knowledge on treatment most effective at treating the trauma endured by policing professionals. Treatment is often avoided, leading to less opportunity for research within the population itself. Adaptions like those made in TF-CBT seek to support and validate the policing experience as it is uniquely encompassing of many forms of trauma.

Burnout

Organizational and operational expectations for policing professionals are reported to have been more significantly researched in the last decade with research demonstrating impacts on overall work performance, inappropriate use of force, burnout, suicide, and work-family conflicts (Queirós et al., 2020). Patel et al. (2017) refers to burnout from occupational stress as a pattern of behavioral responses observed in individuals challenged to conduct and carry out roles requiring knowledge and skills that may not be adequately matched with the individual's present expertise level. Operational roles for officers are often paired directly with crime, death, and moral suffering in research; moreover, occupational stress is described as hazardous when aligned with burnout rates as officers experience high stress levels that psychologically impact overall functioning (Queirós et al., 2020). With specific regard to burnout in helping roles, observation of emotional exhaustion, greater errors in the field, depersonalization, and fatigue are reported.

Burnout due to occupational stress is a continuously studied phenomena, often highlighting work-family conflict when specifically examining the policing populations.

Family functioning is commonly impacted as a result of policing careers, with high rates of domestic violence being observed in officer homes, leading to greater rates of divorce (Naz et al., 2016). Operational stressors being researched internationally continue to yield significant correlations with police officer family distress; additionally, this distress is reported to be more commonly experienced by officers with lower rank than that of officers who have been established within the field for years (Naz et al., 2016). Researchers continue to compare lack of experience in early years of policing alongside police culture, increasing likelihood of operational stress being experienced across environments through ongoing adjustment to the field (Naz et al., 2016; Papazoglou & Tuttle, 2018). Unmanaged workplace stressors can be brought to the home environment. This can result in family conflict due to spousal concern of safety for the officer, lack of ability to engage in social interactions due to job stress and need, and fatigue. Officer wellbeing is stated to diminish when presented with family conflict and operational stress, causing increasing rates of inappropriate methods of coping (Queirós et al., 2020).

In addition to burnout within the context of operational demands within the field, secondary trauma is a prevalent issue apparent for law enforcement officers. Exposure to crisis incidents while on the job is an expected outcome for officers, however, officers are also exposed to secondary trauma as their organizational structure frequently aligns officers with discussion that is repeatedly focused on criminal and immoral behaviors observed by others in the field. Secondary trauma and burnout are both contenders for exacerbated mental health with law enforcement officers; furthermore, the concept of compassion satisfaction has been researched more frequently in the last few years for

officers to demonstrate a difference in perspective of severity of traumatization and motivation to continue within the career itself. Compassion satisfaction reflects fulfillment for each individual regarding personal reward alongside professional stress (Gray & Rydon-Grange, 2020). It is evident each individual responds neurologically to challenge, stress, and emergent incidents uniquely, thus rendering difficulty in research as generalizations cannot be made to describe the response of all policing professionals under duress of their field work.

Present research provides insight as to how policing professionals are impacted through operational stressors over time, depicting commonly observed coping mechanisms, personality changes, fatigue, sleep difficulties, rigidity with personal family needs because of overprotection, and various other trauma rooted symptoms (Gray & Rydon-Grange, 2020). With multiple layers of trauma occurring for the policing population, research has framed compassion satisfaction as a resource more inclusive of the optimism within the field. Psychological flexibility is referred to as the method in which an individual can more appropriately balance demands across environments while bringing a non-judgmental awareness to themselves (Fleischmann et al., 2021; Gray & Rydon-Grange, 2020). When related to trauma endured as a police officer, psychological flexibility can be definitive of success to those who repeatedly endure operational stress in the field.

Self-compassion is described as an individual's ability to be reflective of one's own trauma with the addition of empathy towards oneself (Fleischmann et al., 2021). Research depicts self-compassion in a multitude of studies; however, policing

professionals have been understudied for this topic. Self-compassion in the field of policing is a controversial topic due to a stigma dictating weakness in mental health discussion or a gravitation to one's mental health needs, often lessening the self-compassion officers provide themselves (Fleischmann et al., 2021; Papazoglou & Tuttle, 2018). Psychological distress is commonly shunned in the policing fields; furthermore, harbored fears of diagnoses causing severe limitations to officers' field work proves to be impactful when deciding whether mental health treatment is worthwhile (Papazoglou & Tuttle, 2018). Avoidance of effective psychological assistance results in use of maladaptive coping, increasing frequency of substance abuse, depression, and severe anxiety within law enforcement careers (Fleischmann et al., 2021; Papazoglou & Tuttle, 2018).

Coping Strategies

Maladaptive coping mechanisms are frequently observed alongside exposure to trauma. These coping mechanisms can lead to substance abuse and heightened difficulty with anxiety and depression. Personality development is reported to alter when negative life events are experienced, which can be predictive of anger and hostility shifts, neuroticism, and changes in ability to regulate emotionally during conflict (Leigh Wills & Schuldberg, 2016). Exposure to traumatic events is stated to be a contending factor to personality change within the policing population, often correlated with skepticism, psychopathology, and changes in beliefs about mortality (Leigh Wills & Schuldberg, 2016). Operational and organizational stressors are reported to have significantly differed results when compared amongst genders in the police population, with female officers

reporting greater stress than male officers (Collazo, 2022; Leigh Wills & Schuldberg, 2016). Reported stress variants can be indicative of personality traits, with observable change in empathy, self-control, well-being, and openness. Though personality adapts over the life span, policing professionals' exposure to traumatic incidents are far greater than the general public, leading to the increased risk of development of posttraumatic stress symptoms and an inevitable shift in personality (Leigh Wills & Schuldberg, 2016). When combined with the cultural aspects of the police population, mental health is easily overlooked and untreated. Maladaptive traits, like substance abuse, are correlated with posttraumatic symptoms in policing professionals and are identified as a form of behavioral avoidance (Mrevlje, 2014).

Mindfulness amongst policing populations is a growing field of study, with intention of highlighting the positivity in work and personal life balance (Fleischmann et al., 2021). Mindfulness is used as a tool to reduce anxiety and depression symptoms commonly caused by operational or organizational stressors of one's life and career, leading to more effective methods of coping with the inevitable. Research is relatively new in the areas of policing and mindfulness, leveraging very little in objectivity for the topic. The concept of nonjudging has been utilized in research as a potential replacement of the act of self-compassion for policing professionals due to the protective factors associated with nonjudging (Fleischmann et al., 2021). Operational and organizational stressors for policing professionals appear to be mitigated more observably when policing professionals are nonjudging of themselves and their actions on the job when compared to the need for officers to practice acts of kindness towards themselves to decrease

traumatic impact of field work; additionally, nonjudging is considered to be a powerful form of mindfulness in the psychological field (Fleischmann et al., 2021).

Ability to cope with ongoing stressors is a phenomena encompassing all types of populations, and should be viewed as one's own ability to self-reflect, regroup, acknowledge or accept a situation, or as a form of resiliency. Coping looks different to each individual and can be effective or maladaptive in nature. Exposure to traumatic incidents on a repeated cycle has not been connected to higher prevalence in development of posttraumatic stress disorder for policing professionals, however, a lack of initial coping skills when entering academy and the field has been tied to a great risk of its development. Not only does the ability to cope with stress in personal and professional environments impact mental health, it impacts overall safety. Policing professionals are taught how to manage multiple situations in which negative outcomes are to be expected and accepted even though academy does not have a dedicated method or structure of teaching coping skills to recruits. Invulnerability is a theme observed in research relating to coping skills and policing culture (Colwell et al., 2012; Newell et al., 2021). Researchers have discussed masculinity alongside the push for officers not to engage in mental health services, however, training for officers often highlights the theme of control and confidence. When compared accordingly, themes appear to overlap across research to demonstrate a potentially negative teaching style that instills a false confidence in policing professionals while simultaneously ill equipping them to cope with stressors being faced (Colwell et al., 2012; Leigh Wills & Schuldberg, 2016; Newell et al., 2021).

Colwell et al. (2012) discuss invulnerability of policing professionals as a key component to observations of resiliency in the field. Additionally, the confidence is described as a manner by which officers are able to shift their world view and adapt to expectations of negativity. This renders officers with two options: survive or process. Traumatic incidents occur frequently for officers, requiring a healthy skill set of coping mechanisms. Survival mechanisms are necessary in field work, though these skills appear to often be in place of processing moments of vulnerability. When trained, officers are provided with operational demands in protocol for response to incidents. This training requires adaption in a natural survival skill set to accommodate regulations within the department. Changes in the 'fight-or-flight' complex can be viewed as a safety concern, and when compared to cultural components of policing, there is a gap in healthy coping mechanisms for the exposure experienced (Colwell et al., 2012; Fridman et al., 2019; Hutchinson & Barrett, 2019).

Officers are trained to have composure and a sense of control in field work. This expectation can be changed in traumatic incidents when officers realize they may lack control in areas unexpected to them. This shift can be related to emotion regulation and effective manners of coping with traumatic incident exposure, leading to a greater risk to low self-esteem due to potential feelings of shame or fear by policing professionals (Colwell et al., 2012; Perloff, 1983). This perspective of inadequacy in coping with one's emotions and loss of control can be a factor related to shifting worldview and a relationship with development of posttraumatic stress disorder. A culture of invulnerability is associated with developing symptoms of mental health disorders,

however, officers with healthier acceptances of vulnerability and safety are described to be less frequently diagnosed with PTSD. World view is considered to be a risk factor associated with PTSD and is found to be negative in position when officers are not taught basic manners of coping with life and work stressors. This lack of coping skill use is detailed in officers who display a sense of invulnerability alongside blows to their psyche when field work is associated with failure or fear (Perloff, 1983).

Literature Review of Methodology

There has been an exceptional amount of research focused on policing, the cultural aspects of policing, and the problems that continue to be publicized about policing itself. Research has often yielded information on mental health of policing professionals, expectations and demands placed on policing professionals and their outcomes, and aspects of policing that have been impactful to the community. In the last decade of qualitative research a change has emerged as research has begun to focus on individual experience of police work and its overall validity (Fulambarker, 2020). The proposed study is focused on the concept of the fight-or-flight response of policing professionals alongside their training expectations from academy and department specific demands. There appears to be a major lack of information in research pertaining to the experience of policing professionals in this area, and there continues to be a need for a deeper understanding of the possible impacts. This researcher seeks to provide a voice to participants willing to share their experience through a qualitative research methodology with the intention of gaining a meaningful understanding of their lived experience and possible alterations to biological response.

Summary and Conclusions

This study's intention was to focus on operational demands of policing professionals and the ways in which mandated and trained response for incidents in the field may impact mental health for officers and the public. This impact was highlighted in the connection between academy training and the body's automatic response to a situation, the change in response as a result of training, and how safety is at risk as a result. Connections in literature for policing are often found in the topics and themes of mental health, perception, and operational and organizational stressors. These themes can be broken down into subthemes to include the split between officer and civilian responses to policing. An overarching theme apparent in policing is mental health, tying together the concepts of coping strategies or lack thereof, burnout, cortisol patterns impacting behavior, safety and operational standards of conducting oneself in the field, and in the overall perception of police work.

The stigma associated with mental health treatment is observable for both the civilian aspects of police work and for officers themselves. Receiving mental health treatment for officers is often correlated with the cultural norms noticeable within the profession, leading to avoidance and reduced discussion of need. Opinion of mental health needs can frequently be intertwined with an officers' perception of said need, impacting the treatment received or avoided. Circumventing psychological care is correlated with changes to cognition which often include increased risk for anxiety, depression, PTSD, and the development of personality disorders. These risks are followed by the most common maladaptive method of coping: substance abuse. Mental

health is not trained thoroughly for in context of what mental illness may present as in the realm of criminology or basic needs, nor is it adequately addressed for individual officer experience. Policing is not a field saturated with encouragement for inclusion of psychological service, leading to additional damages to the officers.

With reference to the depth of literature on policing, mental health, and the overlap between the two topics, the gap in current literature with reference to biological response under operational demand was apparent. This study filled the gap in the literature through the focus on the lived experiences of officers who are able to discuss and distinguish aspects of operation, training, response, and perception of the experience as a whole. This study aided in the research of potential reform, the need for advocacy of basic human rights, and the possible expansion of training protocol for policing and psychological care of policing professionals.

Policing is an intensive career field that places individuals in positions where safety must be prioritized due to the nature of the job itself. Officers are tasked with specific guidelines and regulations for operating in the field, leading to a multitude of needs that are often unmet. Officers are frequently placed in unsafe incidents with intention of instilling safety. As a result of this role being fulfilled over time, the officer is at risk of burn out, fluctuation of mental health needs, public scrutiny and additional impacts to mental health, physical and psychological damage, and increased risk of use of maladaptive methods of coping. Perception in policing is a narrated experience unique to each officer, allowing for evidence to be discovered in form of meeting needs. The use of interviews for policing professionals with emphasis on personal experience allowed for

more saturated interpretation of response to trauma incidents and self-awareness. Policing is a profession in need of attention, potential reform, and delicacy in interpretation. This is a topic rich in literature, however, the discernment between operational demands and the body's biological response to its environment have not been adequately researched together. Chapter 3 discusses the methodology of this study and how it was utilized to fill this gap in the literature.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

This qualitative study proposed the need to observe and rationalize the perspectives of policing professionals regarding lived experience within the realm of traumatic incidents and ongoing themes of masculinity and avoidance in seeking out appropriate mental health care. Additionally, the research proposed a new look at operational demands possibly leading to significant risk to the officer and the public due to set standards of policing and training interfering with the biological system detailing one's fight-or-flight response in the field. The operational demands of policing professionals depicting their trained and mandated response to traumatic incidents in the field, leading to an increased risk of severe mental health issues for the individual officers is an ongoing phenomenon in need of research. Operational demands of policing professionals are often paired with the term 'stressors' in research; additionally, these demands are typically linked to decision making in the field and safety protocol (Purba & Demou, 2019; Violanti et al., 2017).

In this chapter, this researcher discussed research design and rationale, the role of the individual researcher, methodology, procedures for recruitment and for the protocol within the study itself, and this researcher's data analysis plan. Discussion focused on the role of the researcher, and potential limitations through biases this researcher may have had. Additionally, this chapter highlighted plausible ethical issues and methods in which these issues were resolved when they were identified. Replication is possible through the detailing in methodology to include participant selection processes, sampling strategies,

and depiction of interview questions will be required for successful completion of this study. Instrumentation was discussed in detail to allow readers to dissect the methods in which data is interpreted and collected. This chapter provided a rationale for participant psychological safety, and the ethical practices utilized to ensure participants are free of harm during their voluntary time spent in this study.

Research Design and Rationale

The phenomena in this study was the lived experience of policing professionals who have experienced traumatic incidents in the field, and their self-reported changes within their fight-or-flight responses as a result of their police training and operational demands while on duty. Consideration of individual officer self-reports on previous fight-or-flight mentality was utilized in the study to further explore the impact police academy and training have on officers in the line of duty.

The research questions for this qualitative study include the following:

RQ-Qualitative (1): What is the lived experience of policing professionals who have experienced traumatic incidents in the field with reference to operational demands?

RQ-Qualitative (2): What is the lived experience of policing professionals who encounter self-reported alterations to ‘fight-or-flight’ responses in the field?

RQ-Qualitative (3): What is the lived experience of policing professionals following the operational demands of their department?

Central Concepts

The phenomena studied included the lived experience of policing professionals who are exposed to traumatic incidents while on duty. Policing professionals were

defined as individuals who have completed a required police training academy for the state in which they are to be employed, completion of on-the-job training, maintained U.S. citizenship, aged 21 and older, and completion of both physical and background testing. Additionally, policing professionals are defined further to be those who have taken an oath to uphold the law, protect community members' lives, and to protect property while in uniform provided to them from within their precinct of employment (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022).

This study further focused on self-reported alterations to fight-or-flight responses, and the operational demands of policing professionals. Mental health changes encompass an individual's psychological and emotional wellbeing to include the ways in which one thinks, acts, and feels alongside the self-reported alterations to one's biological instincts (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2022). In this study, mental health was focused on responses to trauma, depression, personality, and anxiety disorders. The fight-or-flight system was a key concept to this study frequently referred to within the scope of mental health impacts, defined as cortisol activation process affecting an individual's biological system and resulting behavioral response (Violanti et al., 2017).

Operational demands of policing professionals were defined as daily activities an officer is expected and required to engage in while on duty (Fleischmann et al., 2021; Purba & Demou, 2019). Officers are required to accurately document field activity and response, prevent crime, create a sense of security in the community, and provide all possible assistance in the field to actively provide rehabilitation, relief, and aid where needed (Fleischmann et al., 2021; Gumani, 2019; Purba & Demou, 2019).

Traditions

Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social constructivism, focusing specifically on the concepts of human perception, and extrinsic and intrinsic motivation relating to individual experiences of operational stressors of policing professionals who respond to traumatic incidents was the defined research tradition for this study. Additionally, the theory of constructed emotion was utilized as a method to interpret and understand perception within the body's instinctual responses to environmental stimuli. These traditions highlighted the multiple perceived 'realities' observed in individual response to interview questions with expectation of individual interpretation and experience, how the body may have naturally responded and awareness of such interaction, providing a more exclusive and cumulative thematic review process. Constructivist traditions focused more closely on the social disparity amongst responses rather than singular viewpoints that stunt the researcher's ability to interpret deeper meaning behind data collected. This provided more effective research as projected interpretations of data were likely to be closely aligned with experience, allowing for identified themes to be stronger in rationale versus limited due to lack of inclusion.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher for this study, the role was one of participation. This researcher was able to direct ask predetermined and approved questions within a qualitative interview to gather data. This researcher was engaged within this study as an interviewer. Additionally, this researcher was able to take data collected from within each interview to create necessary themes to better describe the lived experience of policing professionals

facing trauma in fieldwork. Alongside themes, this researcher analyzed subcategories that were equally as important in highlighting research needs of the phenomena itself.

This researcher had some forms of affiliation with county and metropolitan police units which may present as a challenge. This researcher does not work for these institutions directly, aiding in separation of roles; however, it was an important challenge for this researcher to undertake to ensure there are no power dynamics or dual relationships present. To mitigate potential interviewer bias or the perception of such issue, this researcher worked to ensure the participants were meeting this researcher in only the role of a researcher, not as a clinician. This researcher's background was not disclosed in order to protect all parties, ensuring confidentiality. It was important that interviews were not inclusive of personal clinical work to reinforce boundaries and possible unintentional bias in discussion for both parties.

Additionally, a prewritten interview sheet was used to provide to participants upon arrival and prior to the oral interview for written completion; this provided this researcher with opportunity to draw additional follow up questions from written discussion, and provided clearer information. The use of confidentiality was this researcher's best method of securing the most meaningful interview data. Participants were not required to present full legal names for participation, and were identified simply by assigned numbers in data collection to further increase confidentiality and a sense of anonymity for participating policing professionals (i.e. Participant 1, Participant 2, etc.). This researcher required the use of the camera for the participant as body language will be included in data collection. The option of a web platform eased participant willingness

to contribute to the study, however, the preferred method by this researcher was to conduct face to face interviews in a neutral and predetermined setting that changed with each participant to reduce overlap and increase confidentiality in the study itself. Confidentiality was maintained as participant identity was not and will not be released or recognized within the department. Acknowledgement of this researcher is not considered to be problematic at this time in practice of confidentiality.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

For the planned research design, this researcher needed to recruit policing professionals who had actively worked in the field, retired or presently employed, between the years of 2010-present, to complete semistructured interviews. Age was not considered to be a factor in recruitment as this study aimed to assess policing professionals' lived experience in field work considered to be traumatic alongside operational demands in place. Operational demands have shifted in police work throughout its structure, leading to a timeline for population of interest rather than age. 2010 to present will provide this researcher a more concise method of identifying themes in narrative responses as era of policing will overlap for operational demands in the field. This also provided opportunity to this researcher to identify potentially conflicting themes through narrative inquiry that provided insight on past and present policing regulations taking place prior to 2010.

This study encompassed the use of probability sampling, specifically using self-selection sampling. This sampling method was chosen as it directly correlated with the

goal of utilizing volunteers for data collection and participation in this study. This sampling method relied heavily on individuals who voluntarily choose to engage in this study after receiving publicized need for participants. This sampling strategy was most effective as it served a first come first serve foundation within boundaries created for inclusion, leading to effective saturation and ability to ensure bias in participant involvement was limited.

To address the research questions in this qualitative study, the specific research design included Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) interpreted through the social constructivist and created emotion lens for the purpose of identifying meaning in lived experience of policing professionals (Bluestein et al., 2013). This qualitative analysis used semistructured interviews of 10-12 participants, or until saturation occurred, and utilized pattern matching and cross case analysis to assist in the creation of meaning within lived experience of this population. Interpretive phenomenological analysis was utilized to determine whether there were patterns in experiences, and applicable methods of insight to social change in operational standards as a result. Through the use of IPA, the study sought to interpret narrative exposition from participants and a possible deeper meaning to self-reported responses (von Eckartsberg, 1991). Interview protocols were developed to address the lived experiences of policing professionals under operational standards and traumatic incident response in the field while maintaining psychological safety and ethical standards in interviewing.

Participants were be recruited through emailed participation recruitment fliers/survey monkey links approved through the university prior to study start date.

These emails were directed to policing professionals in Western United States (California, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Utah) police departments to ensure participant access was manageable for the research proposed in the study. The email was sent to policing professionals employed within these areas with an associated method of requesting to participate, and snowball sampling was encouraged to ensure saturation was met. Details of the study were provided in this email, allowing participants to voluntarily commit to the study process and contact this researcher through a predetermined email address or phone number in which this researcher could prescreen volunteers for qualifications met to engage within the study, and provide further details on interview scheduling and location. Consent was required by each volunteer to participate in the study. This information was also posted on social media via 'anonymous' posting for Nevada policing pages.

Participants were collected and recruited at random within an identified timeframe of 30 days. This researcher was able to schedule all interviews within the first 30 days. This researcher chose participants in the study based upon a first come first participate model in which volunteers were interviewed as they came in. All participating officers were treated equally, no matter their experience or length of time on the police force. The use of 10-12 participants provided this researcher with lived experiences of varied individual officers, providing enough information in discussion to distinguish patterns and themes in report, and to further identify areas in which lived experience was greatly varied. The use of 12 or less participants provided a greater guarantee for saturation alongside reduced limitation in data collection.

Instrumentation

Data collection included the use of one-on-one interviews between this researcher and participant, observation sheet completed by this researcher to describe body language observed in interview, preapproved interview questions and prospective follow up questions, and audio-tape recording of interview for additional assistance in analysis and thematic review. The interview questions included prompts required to retrieve data saturation with focus on the initial research questions:

1. What is the lived experience of policing professionals who have experienced traumatic incidents in the field with reference to operational demands?
2. What is the lived experience of policing professionals who encounter self-reported alterations to 'fight-or-flight' responses in the field with reference to standardized academy training and operational demands of police departments in the field?

Interview questions were written to provide the most well-rounded response elicited from the participant while providing neutral tone and verbiage to reduce any formation of shifted response in the participant.

The interview forms were researcher created with reference to prior research on lived experiences to ensure commonality while also producing new and effective methods of extrapolating data from participants shedding light on the identified phenomena of this study. The observation sheet included preapproved notes for each participant as follows: overall affect, body language per question answered or declined in the interview itself, and notation on tone of voice. This was researcher produced and

aided in the saturation of data as perception of body language interpreted by this researcher will be useful in addressing possible emotional responses in discussion, strengthening response types. Audio recording was completed and transcribed using NVivo by Lumivero platform for transcription purposes. This audio device was discussed and consented to prior to interview start with participant. The device further allowed for anonymity as there was no visual representation of the participant. Participants were labeled with an identified number rather than use of legal names. Alongside consent, participant audio recordings will be stored for 5 years after publication of this study. After the 5 years, all recordings will be erased to ensure complete confidentiality.

Researcher-Developed Instruments

This researcher was the primary instrument in this qualitative study. Data was obtained through the use of semistructured interviews with an end result of a collection of narratives providing information on possible themes relating to policing professional experiences in the field. This researcher utilized a preapproved set of questions that was formatted for interviews to allow for the greatest potential in saturation of data. Through a hermeneutic inquiry, this researcher worked to maintain self-awareness that required documentation of any biases that occurred in the interview process. Hermeneutic inquiries require the researcher to maintain a balance between personal biases and attitudes related to the phenomenon within the study (Bevan, 2014).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Participants were recruited via email blasts for policing professionals and use of snowball sampling with the study description utilizing a Survey Monkey link allowing

for this researcher to be notified of a participant volunteers seeking participation. This Survey Monkey link included criteria needed for policing professional involvement in this study to include the following criteria:

- Policing professionals who have actively worked in the field, retired or presently employed, between the years of 2010-present
    - Policing professionals must have completed a training academy for the department in which they were employed
    - Age 21 and older as this is the standard associated with completed training in academy
    - U.S. citizenship
- Participants must be residents of western United States (California, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Utah)
- Participants must speak the language spoken by this researcher: English

Upon recruitment for participation, this researcher verified all criterion were met before scheduling an interview time and location. To ensure that criteria were met, this researcher requested for participants to state which department they are or previously were employed within, as well as the location of the training academy attended. Badge numbers were not utilized in order to increase confidentiality. Interviews conducted in person utilized varied locations to protect participant identity. Participants who opted for interviews via web application utilized Zoom, a HIPPA compliant source. These interviews were recorded through the Zoom platform, and were transcribed via NVivo.

Participants who declined informed consent, did not meet criteria for inclusion, or declined the use of recording were thanked for their willingness to participate and excused from participation.

Participants were provided with informed consent prior to an interview beginning. Participants were asked to verbally review the informed consent document with this researcher prior to the beginning of the interview. This researcher required participants to verbally consent at the start of interviews as these were recorded to ensure participants were in agreement to participation. Informed consent was directly provided with a preapproved consent form that discussed the intention of this study, how the interview was structured and why, any implications of inclusion or risks to participation, and how involvement may benefit future research. Informed consent also detailed referrals for psychotherapy services in the event of any disclosure in interview creates a mental health crisis and a need for support.

Data was collected through semi structured interviews in which participants were asked to discuss and answer questions relating to their lived experiences as policing professionals. Interviews were audio recorded so this researcher was able to create and analyze transcripts, identify possible themes, and clarify any possible misinterpreted discussion from the initial interview utilizing the NVivo by Lumivero platform. During the interview, this researcher took notes to ensure the researcher remained focused on a formal discussion that allowed the participants to feel safe in disclosure, heard, and understood. Clarifying questions were asked as needed during the interview and noted in order to create flexibility in the process and ensure my own biases were not used in

interpretation of data. At the end of each interview, this researcher reviewed any questions in need of clarification, and provided a debriefing of the information shared to ensure quality and accuracy was maintained. Participants were reminded of referrals and options for treatment in psychotherapy, and were reminded of their confidentiality in the interview. Additional follows ups were not required of participants for this study.

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis for this study included the following steps:

- Creation of transcripts alongside this researcher's notes and observations for the interview for each participant. Audio recorded interviews will be forwarded to a HIPPA compliant transcription service and further checked by this researcher to ensure accuracy.
- Documentation of any unclear information from the interview and how this information may or may not be used in analysis.
- Documentation of any gaps in the interview process.
- I will need to read each transcript in its entirety.
- Creation of codes for any themes or patterns recognized through hand coding (NVivo by Lumivero platform) by this researcher or qualitative software appropriate for use.
- Organization of themes and patterns alongside a description of participant experiences reported.

Research Question

RQ-Qualitative (1): What is the lived experience of policing professionals who have experienced traumatic incidents in the field with reference to operational demands?

RQ-Qualitative (2): What is the lived experience of policing professionals who encounter self-reported alterations to 'fight-or-flight' responses in the field?

RQ-Qualitative (3): What is the lived experience of policing professionals following the operational demands of their department?

Issues of Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness in this study, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and creditability are utilized.

Transferability

Transferability references the degree in which this study's information can be applied to and utilized within other studies or literature. This will be a representation of external validity for the study. For this to be plausible, this study represents transparency in research methods including participant selection criteria, instruments used and their value in interpretation and data collection, procedures for completion, and how the study has been formatted. These details allow readers to build applicable replications of this study.

Dependability

Dependability is a representation of this study's findings being representative of consistency and duplicability for future studies. I did this by providing a detailed audit of themes and codes utilized for interpretation of data collected, and I further provided

interview questions utilized in the study to collect said data. This transparency in data collection and process aided in representing confirmability. This confirmed the alignment between research findings and the data collected and presented. Readers were able to observe an alignment in materials and interpretations of data that allow for additional credibility in the study. This reiterates the believability of the study itself.

Creditability

Credibility was established through the use of saturation, met through the observance of similarities being reported in interview questions. Credibility represented internal validity for the study. Additionally, interview reports unlike the 'norm' in responses were included to ensure data analysis is accurate and representative of the collected data.

Confirmability

Bias is an ongoing dilemma in qualitative research. This will be mitigated using confirmability in this study. I used reflectivity to address potential biases had before and after data collection. This was a reflective space in which I needed to exercise neutrality, while also acknowledging my own values and experiences. Through understanding of preconceived ideas of the subject, and in reference to how collected data may impact me as the researcher, I reduced the possibility of bias in analyzing collected data. There was not guarantee in removing bias completely, however, reflectivity allowed space for myself to seek understanding of personal thoughts and beliefs and how these viewpoints can negatively impact interpretation and analysis of data. If bias was present,

confirmability, dependability, transferability, and creditability would have noticeably dictated these errors, furthering the trustworthiness of analysis in this study.

Ethical Procedures

Ethical procedures in this study were the core of validity and reliability. Researchers have battled the ethical dilemmas of their own research for decades, highlighting the possible risks participants may encounter through involvement. Prior to conducting this study, it was important this researcher was able to evaluate the risks to participants in comparison to the benefit of the study as a whole. In this study, ethical considerations weee most heavily focused on psychological safety as this researcher was seeking in-depth discussion with participants about exposure to traumatic incidents, personal understandings of the participants' mental health, and opinion on the protocol in place for operational standards that may or may not have impacted the individual experience in stated incidents. The IRB provided criterion in which vulnerable populations were better protected in studies and freed of possible harm.

Summary

This study was qualitative, and included the use of a semi structured interviews conducted in person with this researcher or via Zoom. This study was analyzed through Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism and the theory of constructed emotion. These theories enhanced interpretation and analysis of lived experiences of policing professionals through ongoing discussion and a lens focused on social emotional experiences. These theories in combination were helpful in creating an encompassing analysis of experiences to include the methods by which personal narratives were aligned

with research questions for this study. Methodological hermeneutics used within an IPA approach further enhanced this study's resulting discussion as it provided a more thorough understanding of the narrative reporting of policing professionals' experiences while taking into consideration this researcher's current understanding of the psychological field and practice. This ultimately reduced bias in interpretation. This qualitative study proposed the need to observe and rationalize the perspectives of policing professionals regarding lived experience within the realm of traumatic incidents and ongoing themes of masculinity and avoidance in seeking out appropriate mental health care. This research proposed a new look at operational demands that may lead to significant risk to the officer and the public due to set standards of policing and training interfering with the biological system.

Participants were policing professionals who voluntarily contributed to this study. These participants were identified through predetermined criterion assessing for completion of a police academy training, and employment at any point as a policing professional from the year 2010 to present. This allowed for more accuracy in data analysis due to the modernization of policing and how policies and trainings have been updated in the last few decades. Inclusion of officers under these parameters allowed for this study to focus on current issues arising under hypotheses centered on lived experience and biological response patterns of officers.

Transferability, dependability, confirmability, and creditability were accounted for through measures documented in ensuring confidentiality, accuracy, and replicability of the study. Alignment was observable as the purpose of this study mirrored applications

used to recruit participants, ethically conduct and complete the data collection and documentation, create an accurate thematic review that was interpreted by peers in a similar manner under theoretical lenses utilized, and through the use of approved instruments.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how policing professionals experienced autonomic changes with trauma in the field, and how self-reported alterations are further impacted due to operational expectations of their department. The research questions addressed in this study were as follows: (1) What is the lived experience of policing professionals who have experienced traumatic incidents in the field with reference to operational demands? (2): What is the lived experience of policing professionals who encounter self-reported alterations to 'fight-or-flight' responses in the field? and (3): What is the lived experience of policing professionals following the operational demands of their department? To address these research questions, semistructured interviews were conducted with policing professionals to address experience with their autonomic nervous system. This chapter addresses the data collection process to include the timeline of data collection, the demographics of the data collected and the results of the qualitative interviews.

Setting

I obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board in November 2024. I began data collection for my study in December 2024. Recruitment for this study took place over the course of 48 days with continuous emailing of policing professionals who met criteria for inclusion. The first interview was conducted on December 9th, 2024 with the final interview conducted on January 26th, 2025. Police officers were recruited throughout the Southwestern United States using open-source data on the police

departments' websites to contact individuals. The goal of this study was to complete 10-12 interviews. This study has obtained 10 interviews with qualified candidates. Word of mouth was a successful tool in the interview process as policing professionals were open to sharing the flier with peers who would potentially participate, allowing data collection to be successful. One participant interview was conducted face to face in a community library with a private room. The remaining nine interviews were conducted via Zoom in a private office space. To maintain privacy and confidentiality, interviews were conducted behind closed doors that remained closed for the entirety of the interview process.

Descriptive Statistics

Inclusion criteria was collected in the survey sent prior to interviews being conducted via SurveyMonkey. The information collected included policing roles, most recent year of employment, state(s) employed as a policing professional, and participant contact email for participation. The demographics for policing profession are shown in Table 1 below. The table indicates that 40% of participants served as state police officers, with the remaining 60% of participants being uniformed police officers, detectives, or police chiefs. The range of employment, in Table 2 below, varied with 70% of participants being most recently employed in their role 2021 to present. All 10 participants (100%) were employed as a policing professional in the state of Nevada, with 2 participants reporting that they had completed academy and policing roles in additional states before moving and settling in Nevada.

Table 1

Participants' Policing Role

Variables	Category	*N*	*%*
Policing profession	Uniformed police Officer	2	20
	Detective	2	20
	Police chief	2	20
	State police officer	4	40
	School resource Officer	0	0
	Other	0	0

Note. *N* = 10.

Table 2

Participant Most Recent Employment as Policing Professional

Variables	Category	*N*	*%*
Year of employment	2010–2015	1	10
	2016–2020	2	20
	2021–present	7	70
	None of the above	0	0

Note. *N* = 10.

Data Collection

A total of 10 participants volunteered to participate in the study who were found to meet the set criteria of the study. The Walden University Institution Review Board (IRB) granted me permission to solicit police officers via email to participate in the study. Each interview was conducted utilizing a set list of interview questions, however, the interview was semistructured with intention of exploring experiences as deeply as possible. This allowed for the interviewer to ask a standard set of questions relating to the research question while also being able to ask further follow-up questions throughout the

interview, and provided space to allow discussion to flow more naturally throughout the interview.

Participants were provided a time frame of 60 minutes for the interview, however, some participants opted to continue discussion more thoroughly, leading to some interviews completing closer to the 90-minute mark. Interviews were audio recorded with permission from participants on Zoom, and with a handheld audio device for secondary use in the vent the audio was lost or incomplete. The audio recordings were transcribed utilizing NVivo Transcription software. For accuracy in transcriptions, each interview was reviewed manually alongside the transcription provided by NVivo. Interview transcriptions were then uploaded into NVivo to generate codes, categories and themes based on the participants' responses to the interviews.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, transcriptions form the audio recordings were created using NVivo software, and further reviewed line by line to ensure accuracy. I began coding the data by using short phrases and singular words to describe different data points that were reoccurring. All 10 interviews were reviewed and coded. Coding was done in 3 rounds, with the goal of finding all relevant and necessary data for analysis. Patterns in the coding were then identified, and sorted into 14 total categories. A total of 3 themes were identified from the interviews stemming from 7 categories.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness in this study, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and creditability are utilized. Descriptive validity was achieved as I was

able to obtain permission to audio record each interview by receiving informed consent from each participant.

Transferability

Transferability references the degree in which this study's information can be applied to and utilized within other studies or literature. Transferability in this study was achieved as the researcher was able to describe research methods including participant selection criteria, instruments used and their value in interpretation and data collection, and how the participants met criteria for participation based upon this process. The criteria included being a sworn in policing professional in southwestern United States, being employed within the years of 2010 to present.

Dependability

Dependability is a representation of this study's findings being representative of consistency and duplicability for future studies. Consistency was maintained in this study as the researcher ensured the same set of questions were used in each interview, all expectations were clear and reviewed, and data analysis was inclusive of each interview with nothing removed to ensure quality and accuracy. Thematic analysis was used to identify themes from highlighted codes in the data. Intercoder reliability was used to ensure accuracy in the total data collection process, furthering the dependability of codes and themes identified in this study.

Creditability

Credibility was established using saturation, met through the observance of similarities being reported in interview questions of a total of 10 participants of varied

policing roles and experiences in field work. Credibility represents internal validity for this study. Additionally, interviews were inclusive of all language from participants without filtering to provide accuracy and more clear depictions of meaning and emotion observed and experienced in the interview process, furthering credibility in the identification of themes.

Interviews were conducted utilizing the same interview guide with preapproved questions. Participants were able to interpret their own meaning of each question, provide an answer, and a follow up was made on my behalf when clarity for this study was not achieved. This process allowed for participants to answer questions more in depth and for themes to arise based upon lived experience and perspective, building on overall credibility for this study.

Confirmability

Bias is an ongoing dilemma in qualitative research that was mitigated using reflectivity before, during, and after data collection. There is no guarantee for removal of bias in data collection, however, I was able to take the time to reflect on the goals for this study, the social impact of accurate and complete data collection for the population, and the willingness to seek more distinctive answers for social change. With these thoughts in mind, I was able to remain neutral in interviewing and in coding the collected data. I took personal notes on my own thoughts and beliefs when emotion was apparent in interviews, allowing me to further interpret possible bias before coding data.

Results

Ten policing professionals were interviewed for this study who have reported response to traumatic and stressful scenarios in the field. Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) was utilized with interviews to code data, categorize data, and to determine if themes were emerging from the interviews with intention of finding meaning in the lived experiences of policing professionals. A total of 3 themes were identified from the interviews after IPA was conducted to include expectation of the role, operational demands, and mental health. Table 3 displays the categories that were identified and grouped together to create the dominant themes. Table 3 also depicts the number of participants who contributed to the themes and the total number of excerpts relating to each theme identified.

Table 3

Consolidation of Categories to Form Themes

Theme	***n*** of participants contributing (***N*** = 10)	***n*** of transcript excerpts assigned
Theme 1: Expectation of the Role Reactions to Field Work Academy	10	83
Theme 2: Operational Demands Stress Application	10	86
Theme 3: Mental Health Trauma Response Supports Fight or Flight	10	68

Identified Themes

Theme 1: Expectation of the Role

The first theme identified from the data was the expectations of the role for policing professionals. The theme was constructed from interview questions focused on the roles and responsibilities of policing professionals alongside the lived experiences of these roles. The following interview questions emerged as precursors to data collected on this theme: (a) police officers need to be able to handle conflict. Tell me about a time when you had to resolve conflict with someone; (b) describe what inclined you to become a policing professional; (c) describe your academy experience: training on your own mental health, training on mental health of the public; (c) what is your experience in academy and early training in comparison to current field work? Two categories were created that consolidated to create the theme of expectations of the role that included academy, and reactions to field work.

Expectations of policing roles were examined in response to interview questions with focus on individual lived experiences. This theme was developed after reviewing perception within the body's instinctual responses to environmental stimuli in responses to questions, while referencing intrinsic and extrinsic motivation factors for each individual interviewed. Academy and reactions to field work were commonly discussed in interviews and were found to overlap when assessing for expectations of policing roles alongside emotion.

Participant 1 described expectation of the policing role as stating "it all comes down to trusting your capabilities. If you are lacking and you know you're lacking and

you're in this job, that's going to cause some stress on you". Similarly, Participant 3 stated that "our job is very difficult. They expect us to be perfect 100% of the time". Participant 2 responded in discussion on academy by stating that "this job is super stressful. It's going to change you." Participant 2 also stated: "I think academy gives you a good static way to handle calls" while also following up with "you are better than the training you received, hopefully you know that it's made you better than you think you are in your head so you can handle the situation." Participant 5 discussed academy as a time when "you're also having to almost reshape the way you think about things or handle yourself."

Participant 3 described academy and early training in comparison to present fieldwork as follows: "they [recruits] don't technically know how to implement what they memorize. Like they don't have the experience of how to apply what they've learned to an actual call, but they know the definition of something, but they don't know how to apply it."

Participant 3 further stated that in academy,

> they [recruits] know when they come to us, they're not going to get hurt. They're not going to get shot. They're not going to get stabbed. They're not going to get hurt. They still get the shock factor and the adrenaline. But in the back of their head they know they're not going to get hurt when they come to train. Until you actually get out there and deal with a real person that's holding the gun and not dropping it…. You don't get to experience that feeling

Similarly, Participant 5 stated that "it's really hard to get people through because you have a ton of attrition where they start to see what it's really like, and they decide it's not

for them. That, I mean, it's a difficult job. It's life or death out here." Participants appeared to all commonly make statements centered around this statement, furthering that notion that academy training is a controlled environment, and the reality of the job can be overwhelming to recruits when entering the career.

Participant 2 described reactions to field work as a time when "you kind of have to just, like, override your initial fear, I guess, or apprehension that you might have." There appeared to be a commonality in participant reporting of field work that matched this experience. Participant 3 discussed experience in academy training and current fieldwork as high stakes and stated "if our officers hesitate and don't understand when they're allowed to use force or not, people are in jeopardy. People's lives are in jeopardy." A common connection in lived experience of participants is that of initial training in academy alongside confidence to carry out those demands. The confidence in the field is a factor that can impact safety for the officer and public.

Theme 2: Operational Demands

The second theme identified from the data was operational demands for policing professionals. The theme was constructed from interview questions focused on requirements of fieldwork and response to incidents, as well as the stressors and emotions within policing. The following interview questions emerged as precursors to data collected on this theme: (a) Describe the operational demands you work(ed) under while in the field; Do any of these demands stand out to you?; Were any positive/negative in your experience? Can you discuss your perspectives?; (b) Tell me about a time when you had to resolve conflict with someone?; (c) Describe your experience working in a

situation where you have had to closely follow rules, regulations, and procedures; Can you think of a time within these moments where you felt that your training or regulations required you to respond differently than you personally would have preferred? Two categories were created that consolidated to create the theme of operational demands of the role that included stress and application.

Participants responded frequently with discussion of emotion for operational demands, often depicting frustration as the key factor in carrying out job related duties. Participant 8 described the process of empathy in the role of a policing professional alongside operation demands with the following statement:

> Now, there's some things that are in policy from back in the day too, where there was very particular verbiage that said that we must arrest or we shall arrest. Um, and I talked earlier about empathy. There are times in people's lives where they don't need to be arrested again. They just need a break. And I just think that sometimes that may not have been in the best interest of that person.

Participant 2 reported “I think a lot of my frustration and anger comes from, um, the administrative side of things”, while Participant 1 stated “there's so many freaking cars on the road and not enough troopers. The operational demands are not realistic for us.” A collective experience of policing professionals in this study described the operational demands as unattainable and frustrating, frequently alongside staffing and changes for daily operations. Participant 4 commented that “The turnover there is just insane.”

In relation to the emotion in lived experience alongside motivators in interpretation and analysis, a mutual experience is that of redundancy in policy and the

impacts to the policing professional and the public. Additionally, experience with attrition in the field, difficulty in consistency, and liability were frequently discussed. Participant 7 described policy in fieldwork for an automobile accident as follows:

> You're using the machine to diagram, which gives you pinpoint measurements. But yet they still want you to take physical measurements of something. So you're wasting time out there and it's keeping the road closed for even longer. And another thing they did was they wouldn't allow the troops on the road. So like the regular troopers that weren't in the fatal team, they didn't want them starting to take pictures or start anything on the crash investigation. So that crash, like if I'm getting called at two in the morning for a fatal, and I have to now get dressed, get in my car and get there, they're sitting on that scene. They could have, you know, witness statements done. Start with photos to get that trace evidence that I talked about before, but they didn't want the road troopers doing any of that. So it felt like such a waste of time. Like they could have had so much more done by the time we got there.

Participant 6 described policy in light of the personal frustrations stemming from individual desire to complete the role of a policing officer and being unable to immediately take action due to operational expectations in place: “Um, so what pops in my head first is there's a lot of times in narcotics where we know there's something there. But we have to follow that Fourth Amendment, and we have to send cars down the road knowing that.” Participant 6 further stated that policies, no matter how difficult or

intricate, are in place because they “protect people, not only the trooper but the public as well. Um, so there really has to be a big emphasis placed on following, procedures.”

Theme 3: Mental Health

The third theme identified from the data was mental health for policing professionals. The theme was constructed from interview questions focused on emotion in fieldwork, the fight-or-flight activation for the policing professional, and the methods in which participants coped with career stress. The following interview questions emerged as precursors to data collected on this theme: (a) What are/were the sources of stress in your personal & work life? How you do/did you manage this stress?; (b) Describe a time when you were faced with a stressful situation in the field; (c) What is your experience with fear as a policing professional?; (d) What is your perspective of your own ‘fight-or-flight’ system?; What would you describe your survival system to be? Is it different between professional and home life? (e) Give me an example of a situation when you had to deal with someone who was irate and being hostile with you?; How did your brain want to handle the scenario vs what your training told you to do? Three categories were created that consolidated to create the theme of mental health to include trauma response, supports, and fight or flight.

When compiling categories to identify the theme of mental health, the fight-or-flight system was a frequently discussed topic with a center focus on shift in perception. The majority of participants reported similarly to Participant 10 in stating that “right now, especially because I'm still fairly young to my career, it definitely would be fight” when discussing their personal activation response for fieldwork. The category of fight or flight

appears to acknowledge the change in fight-or-flight activation alongside experience in the field itself, often reporting “fight” as the response type; however, alongside experience, this activation is described differently, alluding to a ‘fawn’ activation or a “fight” activation with a more detailed and controlled mindset. Participant 10 further described their activation changes as follows:

> “You get that tunnel vision and that's the way I see fight for me. Like flight mode. Uh, I get like, locked in and then, like, my mind gets a little foggy. But over time, I've gotten better at it, being able to kind of calm myself down and then realize, like, other options I could do because my mind strictly goes to one.”

Similarly, Participant 1 described he fight-or-flight activation as feeling that “I look normal on the outside, but on the inside, it's like I'm screaming. Like it was the stress. Not just the stress. It was anxiety.” Participant 6 described experience in academy alongside their survival system as follows:

> What we're taught is you are to be polite and professional with everybody, but have a plan to kill them. And it sounds really extreme, but the mindset of that is you don't know anything about the person you're interacting with. You have a responsibility to always be professional and courteous. But first and foremost, you have to be alert and vigilant and prepared to save your life as well as the lives of those around you.

The category of mental health also focused on trauma responses of individual policing professional experiences and the impact this has on field work. A frequent report of personal life mental health needs and use of coping skills were intertwined with

fieldwork and perception in the moment of the incident. Participant 4 described an experience as follows:

> A part of that flight response is because my dad was an alcoholic, and he would get loud and start yelling and screaming and throwing things, and whenever he got that way, I would leave and I'd go to my room and just stay in my room. So now you have this guy who's doing it, which is triggering those childhood memories, but I knew I couldn't go because of the guy in the car and because it's my job.

Being able to filter the impact of traumatic incidents in fieldwork alongside that of personal lives appears to have a shared experience in use of coping: a reliance of family support system and the comradery of policing. Recognition of a problem was discussed by participants as a factor in having adequate support. Participant 2 stated that “I think we need to understand that your brain or your mind is a as a muscle or a part of your body like anything else. Like if you if you have a huge gash in your leg, you're not just going to let it bleed, you know?” Participants mentioned a lack of support in mental health as related to the updated systems for counselors available, and barriers in knowing that your needs entitle you to that support. Masculinity was a category as there was mention of supports being avoided in order to retain reputation. Participant 1 detailed an experience of attempting to receive mental health care after identifying a maladaptive form of coping with the stress and trauma of the career:

> It's like [expletive] impossible to get help on that website. It routes you around to different [expletive]. You called numbers and no one's there. And then it's ‘any

> counseling that you need'. The first three sessions are free, and then they try to refer you out and then they're going to charges. So I'm like, calling for help. And I couldn't get help and I didn't know what to do.

There seems to be a reliance on fellow policing professionals for the mental health supports in place of attaining truly tailored treatment planning from mental health professionals due to these barriers and experiences discussed. Participants discussed the importance of observation in the field for safety of themselves, but also as a support in creating safety for fellow officers who may be overwhelmed or in need of a break. References to chain of command and feeling safe in your team were common as well when discussing mental health as a whole and feeling confident in working through incidents. Participant 2 stated "I think having, um, teammates or sergeants around you to be able to take you out if, if they see that you're like, maybe getting too heated or what you're doing is not effective. Just kind of rotating you out and trying to calm you down. I think it's important."

Summary

The ten interviews that were conducted addressed the research questions for this study and provided insight on the experiences of a policing professionals and their lived experiences from both academy and current field work. The research questions for this study were (1): What is the lived experience of policing professionals who have experienced traumatic incidents in the field with reference to operational demands? (2): What is the lived experience of policing professionals who encounter self-reported alterations to 'fight-or-flight' responses in the field? and (3): What is the lived experience

of policing professionals following the operational demands of their department? An IPA of the ten interviews provided exposed three themes of operational demands, mental health, and expectation of the role. Participants described individual experiences and insights in response to fieldwork and in discussion of academy and field training teachings. The experiences in perception of fund of knowledge, resources available, and ability to rely on your own innate sense of self for safety were noted and found to be of importance in this study.

Chapter 4 described the setting in which the interviews occurred, the descriptive statistics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness and the results from the interviews conducted in this study. The results included three themes that emerged from 3 rounds of coding and data analysis. Chapter 5 will discuss the interpretation of the findings, limitations, recommendations of future studies, and implications.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how policing professionals experienced autonomic changes with trauma in the field, and how self-reported alterations were further impacted due to operational expectations of their department. Furthermore, this study focused on ways to identify how these lived experiences may be connected to operational demands in policing, leading to a possible increased risk in psychological safety through patterned decision making, ultimately compromising physical safety in the field. The literature review presented information on the ultimate impact the connection between academy training and the body's automatic response has in fieldwork, the changes that occurred in response to incidents a result of training, and how safety is risked (Fridman et al., 2019; Hutchinson & Barrett, 2019; Violanti et al., 2017).

Due to the depictions of police trainings and the overall stigma involved with mental health for this population, I was interested in understanding whether the mental health and safety of policing professionals is impacted by the police academy's trainings and requirements for recruits. I created three research questions with the intention of exploring the lived experiences of policing professionals within this topic to include: (1): What is the lived experience of policing professionals who have experienced traumatic incidents in the field with reference to operational demands? (2): What is the lived experience of policing professionals who encounter self-reported alterations to 'fight-or-flight' responses in the field? (3): What is the lived experience of policing professionals

following the operational demands of their department? To study these research questions, qualitative interviews of 10 policing professionals were conducted who met inclusion criteria of being employed by a police department from 2010 to present, were sworn in as police officers, and who were employed in Westen United States departments. The key findings of this study were highlighted in the three themes that developed from interpretive phenomenological analysis which encompassed operational demands, mental health, and expectation of the role.

Chapter 5 will further discuss the three themes of operational demands, mental health, and expectation of the role including the interpretation of these findings. The limitations of the study, future recommendations and implications of the study for social change in the future will be discussed, as well as concluding remarks for this study.

Interpretation of the Findings

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frameworks of social constructivism and constructed emotion were found to have connections to this study. The theory of constructed emotion is based upon a neurological understanding of experience and perception. This theory elaborates on the brain and body's instinct to respond to the environment to meet the body's needs before the needs are directly recognized (Fridman et al., 2019). Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social constructivism uses the concept of human perception, and extrinsic and intrinsic motivation relating to individual experience. Social constructivism aligns with narratives of policing professionals through interpretations used to distinguish the narrative patterns in learned behaviors that have been cognitively produced rather than behaviorally

ingrained. It was found that policing professionals used the foundations of academy to steer the procedural needs of response while also trusting the gut instinct naturally engrained to both problem solve and enhance safety.

Theme 1: Expectation of the Role

The first theme that emerged within the data was expectation of the role. This theme was created based upon the categories of reactions to field work and academy. These factors presented as elements of expectations of the policing role. Policing professionals are taught how to manage multiple situations in which negative outcomes are to be expected and accepted even though academy does not have a dedicated method or structure of teaching coping skills to recruits (Colwell et al., 2012; Newell et al., 2021). Participant 2 described confidence as a factor in response to incidents, and further reported experience in academy as a baseline for all fieldwork; furthermore, Participant 2 highlighted the notion that your academy training is not a true depiction of your policing career and should serve as the academic component to the job.

Participant 3 and Participant 5 both discussed experience in academy and early training as a protected learning environment in which the recruits are understanding that they are not in danger, so the simulations are not necessarily comparable to the expectations an officer will have in the field independently. Perception, interpretation, and resulting behavior of the officer does not always coincide with academy-based training protocol (Neuwenhuys & Oudejans, 2012). Participant 3 followed these themes in discussion of academy and early training by discussing experience as emotionally taxing due the lives at stake if the job is not carried out effectively. The emotional stress

relates to confidence of the policing professional and has been described a s a determinant of safety for the officer due to the potential internal conflicts that arise when in the midst of a critical incident. High turnover rates in the field were also commonly described by participants as recruits would leave early on when finding that the expectations of the roles in fieldwork were not as closely aligned with trainings in academy.

Theme 2: Operational Demands

The second theme that emerged within the data was operational demands. This theme was created based upon the categories of stress and application. These factors presented as elements of operational demands in fieldwork. Organizational and operational expectations for policing professionals are reported to have been more significantly researched in the last decade with research demonstrating impacts on overall work performance, inappropriate use of force, burnout, suicide, and work-family conflicts (Queirós et al., 2020). A common experience shared by participants in this study related to the stress associated with carrying out required aspects of response alongside the natural state of emotion the officer had. Participant 6 referred to the emotional space in policing as frustrating due to a desire to seek justice fully while being limited due to the policies and procedures in place; whereas Participant 7 described the experience as redundant and as a waste of time. Participant 8 was able to describe the experience between operational expectation and the role of the officer as a battle for empathy as the policing professional must carry out the law and simultaneously acknowledge that those actions may not be best suited for the incident.

Skills learned in academy are less likely to be utilized in the field as it accounts for approximately 10% of knowledge learned and needed for duty (Caro, 2011). Though academy teachings are related to about 10% of the knowledge needed to adequately perform the duties of a policing professional, this is the standard in which recruits are provided to enter the field. The safety components within the lack of teaching are both experienced and discussed openly by participants as a common stressor. Participant 2 discussed administrative duties alongside fieldwork as being a source of stress and a reason for high turnover rates within the department. Participants 1 and 2 described experience as frustrating when related to operational needs in the field. Where participants agreed upon the need for procedures, Participant 1 referred to the current operational demands as being unrealistic. The demands of policing professionals are increasingly scrutinized due to public perceptions shifting in the last 5 years; however, these requirements are a key factor relating to officer safety.

Theme 3: Mental Health

The third theme that emerged within the data was mental health. This theme was created based upon the categories of trauma response, supports, and fight or flight. These factors presented as elements of mental health impacting policing professionals in the study. Researchers have discussed masculinity alongside the push for officers not to engage in mental health services, however, training for officers often highlights the theme of control and confidence. These themes appear to overlap across research to demonstrate a potentially negative teaching style that instills a false confidence in policing

professionals while simultaneously ill equipping them to cope with stressors being faced (Colwell et al., 2012; Leigh Wills & Schuldberg, 2016; Newell et al., 2021).

As stated for Theme 1, confidence was discussed as a contributing factor for policing professionals in carrying out the expectations of their role, and in ensuring overall safety in the field. Confidence was also a determinant of mental health for policing professionals. Experience for officers allows for greater feelings of self-control in the field, impacting the fight-or-flight activation. Participant 10 referred to fight-or-flight activation as a tunnel vision that allowed for minimal change or perspective. Additionally, Participant 10 described the changes in activation from a truly survival oriented "fight" to a controlled "fight" in which experience and perception of the situation aided as factors in response. Participant 6 described an overarching thought process of 'have a plan to kill'. In interviewing, this thought processing in the field was meant to provide a foundation to encourage forward thinking and safety, however, Participant 6 described it as more of an overall stressor to mental health and a reason for increased hypervigilance both in civilian and professional life.

Perception that help is available has been a commonality amongst participant experiences. Participant 1 expressed frustration and disappointment in the availability of resources talked about in academy and within the department when in the pursuit of support. Reports of 'knowing' there is support in comparison to finding or wanting the supports and utilizing them were discussed frequently. Discussion on chain of command and the relationships within these roles appeared to impact the likelihood that participants felt confident in seeking out supports. When leadership is perceived as negative or

unsupportive, officers are less likely to seek out mental health treatment for field related trauma due to fears of being harassed, singled out, or having their role challenged (Maran et al., 2022). Participants reported substance abuse, intensive anxiety, depression, and hypervigilance in discussion of emotional responses to field work in this study, further relating to Theme 1's expectation of the role and initial teaching in academy lacking intensive training on personal mental health and coping strategies.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations in this study included the conflict of interest in due to dual relationships, the stigma associated with discussion of mental health, and the need to meet criteria for participation. Due to conflict of interest, I needed to ensure my email blasts were sent to Western United States departments to increase the likelihood that I would be able to interview policing professionals outside of my circle of influence. This was achieved, as this study was completed with 10 interviews. Stigma in participation for a study was a factor influencing participation. Multiple policing professionals expressed concern about anonymity in participation and expressed feeling the discussion would be limited if anonymity was not possible.

Recommendations

There are several recommendations that can be made from this qualitative study exploring the lived experienced of policing professionals with self-reported alterations to biological instinct alongside operational demands. Further research is recommended to explore the experiences of policing professionals both in the academy and postgraduation from academy. Repeating this study with a larger participant pool could be beneficial as

well, though this study was able to reach saturation with 10 participants. Reaching policing professionals in states outside of the Westen Untied States could yield vastly different experiences, and would benefit research. Narrowing down the study to focus on specific forms of field work in comparison to academy training could provide more detailed information for interpretation as well. It is also recommended that research expand to gender differences in training in academy in comparison to fieldwork.

Implications

The results of this study have an implication for positive social change by providing an understanding of the lived experience of a policing professionals assessing for autonomic changes in fieldwork. As discussed in Chapter 4, Theme 1 identified factors associated with expectation of the role as inclusive of academy and reactions to field work. Theme 2 of operational demands was created from the categories of stress and application. Additionally, Theme 3 was presented as mental health, encompassing trauma response, supports, and fight or flight. All three of these themes serve as implications for positive social change due to the application of these themes in creating knowledge and safety for policing professionals.

As discussed in interviews in chapter 4, Participant 5 stated, “you're also having to almost reshape the way you think about things or handle yourself.” Acknowledging the previous and ongoing changes reflected within the individual experiences of policing is a powerful form of social change. Shaping your biological response system is no small feat. Understanding the impact these changes have on the body both physically and mentally can positively add to the supports in place for these professionals. Information

that can be indicative to support, safety, and improving resources for policing professionals and departments have the ability to increase public safety and enhance the lived experiences of policing professionals. This study can provide social change at the operational level for departments to reflect upon how they provide officers with resources, and empower individual mental health care. This study can provide social at a societal level in an attempt to identify how relationships and trust can impact safety in fieldwork for the officer and the public.

Conclusion

Public perception is recent years has impacted the views that may Americans have toward policing. These perceptions alongside the true demands of the role are impactful to say the least. There are various areas of concern for public and officer safety, and financial investment when breaking down law enforcement training. Police academy trainings can be costly to each state. Investment in each officer can be viewed monetarily, but also though the lens of overall quality and safety. There is a delicate balance in police training that has stirred some negative feedback in research as officers may be viewed as a need for quantity over quality and vice versa. Unqualified policing professionals are a risk to the department, themselves, and the public; for example, regression in community wide trust in police, negative public perception of officers, and unnecessary uses of force are all categorized as negative consequences to less comprehensive training of law enforcement (Caro, 2011).

A gap in knowledge was identified regarding policing professionals' experience with operational demands through exposure to traumatic incidents while on duty, and

how this experience may pose a potentially greater threat to psychological safety through patterned decision making from academy and early training. The goal of this study was to attain understanding of these lived experiences alongside the biological response system. The lived experiences of policing professionals were examined due to relationship between requirements for policing roles and the ultimate need for officers to respond outside of what their personal autonomic responses may have been. Furthermore, the lack of information on policing professionals' lived experiences of this phenomenon were motivating factors for this study.

This study interviewed 10 policing professionals asking questions relating to the goal of the study, and revealed three themes of expectation of the role, operational demands, and mental health. The results presented a connection between confidence and experience for policing professionals. These results were attained through the discussion of emotional stressors endured by policing professionals alongside the split-second decision making required in field work. The results also demonstrated that experience could alter the perception of the incident, leading to a more controlled fight-or-flight activation through both knowledge and trust in chain of command. It was further revealed that academy training and independent fieldwork yield vastly different autonomic responses due to the limitations of the academy simulations in eliciting the fight-or-flight response truly associated with traumatic incidents.

In conclusion, this study can aid in filling the gap in knowledge that existed of policing professionals' experience with operational demands through exposure to traumatic incidents while on duty, and how this experience may pose a potentially greater

threat to psychological safety through patterned decision making from academy and early training. This study can further be used as a rationale for the need for further research focused on police training and continued education courses focused on mental wellness.

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Appendix: Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1. Review criterion for participation: policing professionals who have actively worked in the field, retired or presently employed, between the years of 2010-present
2. Describe what inclined you to become a policing professional?
3. What motivated you to serve as a policing professional for this particular region or municipality?
4. What personal qualities and traits do you possess that would make you well-suited for a law enforcement career?
    a. What do you feel is your greatest strength as a policing professional?
    b. What do you feel in your greatest weakness as a policing professional?
5. Do your strengths and weaknesses look or feel different as a civilian in comparison to your role as a policing professional?
    a. What is your experience in the shifting roles between home life and professional life?
        i. Does anything stand out to you?
6. What are/were the sources of stress in your personal & work life? How you do/did you manage this stress?
7. Describe a time when you were faced with a stressful situation in the field.
    a. Anything that stands out to you or continues to stand out for you?

8. Can you provide an example of a time when you had to make a split-second decision?
    a. What was the outcome of this decision?
    b. What do you feel about this outcome? (was it positive/negative/neutral)
9. Describe a time when you experienced a positive emotion in the field.
10. Describe a time when you experienced a negative emotion in the field.
11. What is your experience with fear as a policing professional?
    a. Do you experience lasting impacts? If so, please describe.
12. Explain 'operational demands': Describe the operational demands you work(ed) under while in the field.
    a. Do any of these demands stand out to you?
    b. Were any positive in your experience? Negative? Can you discuss your perspectives?
13. Law enforcement operates 24 hours/day, 7 days a week; are you able to work a variety of shifts and days off, and occasional unscheduled, ordered overtime?
    a. What was your expected schedule?
    b. Did that schedule allow you time to rest from time in the field?
14. Describe your academy/training experience.
    a. What is your experience particular to training in your own mental health?
    b. What is your experience particular to training in mental health of the public?

    c. What is your experience with obtaining resources for mental health while in academy?

15. What is your experience with chain of command?
    a. Describe your emotions in these experiences (positive or negative)
16. What is your experience with frustration or anger as a policing professional?
17. Discuss fight, flight, freeze, and fawn: What is your perspective of your own 'fight-or-flight' system?
    a. What would you describe your survival system to be?
    b. Is it different between professional and home life?
    c. Describe the changes to your fight-or-flight system with your time in the field.
18. When have you had to take charge of a situation to quickly resolve a problem or crisis?
19. Police officers need to be able to handle conflict. Tell me about a time when you had to resolve conflict with someone?
20. Give me an example of a situation when you had to deal with someone who was irate and being hostile with you?
    a. How did your brain want to handle the scenario vs what your training told you to do?
        i. How did you work through the split in emotion?
        ii. Did you carry this emotion with you after the event?

21. Tell me about a time where you have had to provide service to a wide variety of people from diverse racial, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds?
22. Describe your experience working in a situation where you have had to closely follow rules, regulations, and procedures.
    a. Can you think of a time within these moments where you felt that your training or regulations required you to respond differently than you personally would have preferred?
        i. If yes, can you describe the experience?
23. Police officers are often the subject of public scrutiny. Can you describe your experience with this?
    a. How have these experiences shaped your viewpoint of the community?
    b. How have these views impacted your overall wellbeing?
    c. Do you feel there are adequate supports, like therapy, to process these views and changes with?
24. What is your experience of academy and early training in comparison to field work?
25. Can you discuss your perspective on operational demands from academy and how these demands played a role in your daily operations as a professional?
    a. Is there anything that stands out to you or that you have experienced that you would want to see more support for in the academy?
    b. If you could provide advice to recruits with the focus being on fight or flight, what advice do you think would best support the new recruits?

c. What is your experience in academy trainings with comparison to your own fight-or-flight activation in the field?
    i. Did you experience an alteration requiring you to adapt while confronted with scenarios in the field? (provide example if needed)
        1. If yes, can you please describe your experiences?