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Stress in Rural North Georgia Policing

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Abstract

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by

Robert C. Mason

MS, Liberty University, 2015

BS, Columbia Southern University, 2014

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

There are many operational and organizational stressors in policing. This study was

designed to gain a better understanding of what causes police officers in a rural southern

state mental and physical stress and to determine how best to assist officers when they are

dealing with stress. The purpose of this study was to determine whether organizational or

operational issues cause more stress among police officers in a rural southern state.

Qualitative research methods and the phenomenological approach to obtain data from

participants who have experienced job-related stressors were used. The social construct

theory, a theory of knowledge in sociology, was used for this study. Data were collected

by conducting interviews with 14 current police officers in a rural southern state with a

minimum of two years of experience in rural policing. The in-vivo coding method was

used to code the interview data in MAXQDA software. The study revealed that 13 of the

14 participants attributed organizational issues as their main stress factor. The findings

from this study may result in positive social change for police officers and subsequently

the communities they serve. The police department and the community benefit when

officers are in good physical and mental health. Gaining an understanding of what factors

contribute to officers' stress and determining ways to treat the effects of stress could

contribute to positive social change by having psychologically and emotionally healthy

officers on the street and that could strengthen the partnership between a police

department and the community it serves.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my wife and daughter. I would not have been able to accomplish this goal without my wife's love, understanding, and support. I want my daughter to understand that she can accomplish anything with hard work and dedication. I would like to thank all military, police, fire, and emergency medical services personnel past and present. They are all occupations that are dangerous, underappreciated and underpaid. Lastly, and most importantly, I praise my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for His many blessings. "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13, NIV).

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I would like to thank my dissertation chair, Dr. Lance Spivey. It was a blessing that he accepted my request to be my dissertation chair. His guidance and feedback were exemplary, and I don't know if I could have obtained this goal without him. I will strive to be as good as a professor and mentor as Dr. Spivey. I would also like to thank my committee member, Dr. Tony Gaskew. Dr. Gaskew was firm but fair during this process and made me a better researcher by guiding me to a better understanding of research methodology. Overall this was a very difficult process, which made me very proud to accomplish the goal of obtaining my Ph.D. Thank you, Dr. Spivey and Dr. Gaskew. Finally, I would like to thank my URR Dr. Dianne Williams. I learned a great deal from her during one of my residencies before she was assigned as my URR. That just goes to show that she will assist any student that needs input or guidance about the dissertation process.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Law enforcement officers deal with many stressful situations. The situations law enforcement officers face is organizational or operationally based (Misis, 2012). Organizational stressors consist of issues within the organization such as, but not limited to, lack of training, lack of administrative support, insufficient equipment, and inadequate pay. Operational stressors consist of situations such as, but not limited to; traumatic events, shift work, and violence (Hope, 2016). The law enforcement profession has high rates of alcoholism, substance abuse, suicide, divorce, and turnover rates compared to other professions (Chae & Boyle, 2012). This study focused on organizational and operational stressors in rural police departments in North Georgia, how officers in rural agencies manage their stress, and sought to determine if there are proper protocols in place to assist officers in their time of need.

Rural North Georgia police officers may have to deal with multiple stressors that differ from those of urban and large agencies. Rural police officers have many roles and are responsible for many issues that their urban counterparts do not have to deal with such as calling bingo at the nursing home, performing crossing guard duties before and after school, feeding pets when the owner is out of town, and assisting elderly citizens with grocery shopping (Payne, Berg, & Sun, 2005). However, like the urban counterparts, they must deal with criminal activity as well. Rural law enforcement officers enforce traffic laws and investigate property and violent crimes just as any other law enforcement

officer in America. Not only do they have to deal with criminal activity just as any other officer across this country, but when they do, they usually know the person involved whether it is the victim, witness, suspect, or all three (Huey & Ricciardelli, 2017).

Background of the Problem

There are many operational and organizational stressors in rural police departments (Payne et al., 2005). Rural law enforcement agencies often operate on a tight budget, do not have the proper equipment, do not get adequate training, and respond to calls for service alone with backup several minutes away (Huey & Ricciardelli, 2017). A small budget can also be a contributing factor for the agency not being able to provide proper assistance to officers dealing with stress and other issues. They also must deal with people they know and often people they know well such as family and friends (Oliver & Meier, 2004). During my review of the literature, no studies on stress in rural North Georgia law enforcement, particularly rural North Georgia police departments were found. North Georgia has a much different culture than many other states, and there is a gap in the literature by not including all geographical locations and cultures when researching stress in law enforcement (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Statement of Problem

Officers must deal with internal and external politics, which can be a heavy burden on an officer. A police chief answers to elected officials and a sheriff is elected by the people of the community (Oliver & Meier, 2004). Those two factors alone make the law enforcement profession political and political pressure places a great deal of stress on

an officer (Jarimillo, Nixon, & Sams, 2005). Police officers deal with death, robbery, rape, sexual assault, aggravated assault, child abuse, and many other criminal offenses. It takes a certain type of person to be able to deal with those situations in their chosen profession. They also face the threat of being assaulted or killed every time they put on their uniform (Ivie & Garland, 2011). The problem is how the many stresses of law enforcement affect the officers, how the officers deal with the stress, and what employee assistance programs are in place to assist the officers to deal with the effects of the stress (Donnelly, Valentine, & Oehme, 2015).

Research Questions and Hypotheses

RQ1: What are the main factors that contribute to the stress of rural North Georgia police officers?

$H_0 1$: The main stressors for rural North Georgia police officers are organizational stressors.

$H_a 1$: The main stressors for rural Georgia police officers will be operational stressors.

RQ2: How do rural North Georgia police officers deal with the stress of their profession and what programs are in place to assist officers that are dealing with stress?

$H_0 2$: Officers internalize their feelings.

$H_a 2$: There will be little to no resources available to assist officers dealing with stress.

RQ3: How does stress affect a rural North Georgia police officer physically, mentally, and emotionally?

$H_0$3: Officers will suffer from hypertension, digestive problems, anxiety, back problems, weight gain, sleep disorders, marital problems, and binge drinking alcohol.

H_a3: Stress will affect officers differently depending on the officer's family medical history, gender, time in service, rank, and self-efficacy.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of what causes rural North Georgia police officers mental and physical stress. It was also to determine what is the best way to assist officers when they are dealing with stress. Law enforcement and the community benefit when officers are in good physical and mental health. By gaining an understanding of what the contributing factors are that cause officers' stress and ways to treat effects of the stress could contribute to positive social change (McCraty & Atkinson, 2012). There is a high a high turnover rate in the law enforcement profession (Wareham, Smith, & Lambert, 2015). Another purpose of this study was to determine if the stress of the job contributes to officers leaving the law enforcement profession and seeking another career. There a have been several studies on stress in law enforcement to include some studies in rural law enforcement. No studies were found that specifically addressed stress in rural North Georgia policing.

Theoretical Framework

A social construct is the meaning or connotation placed on something or event by society and taken on by that society with respect to how they look at something or an event (Rudetam & Newton, 2015). Social construct as an idea would be accepted as natural by the society but may or may not represent a reality shared people outside the society (Rudetam & Newton, 2015). Society in this study was rural North Georgia police officers and people outside the society were citizens of the community or anyone outside of the rural North Georgia police organization.

A major focus of social constructionism is to uncover the ways in which individuals and groups participate in the construction of their perceived social reality. It involves looking at the ways social phenomena are created, institutionalized, known, and made into tradition by humans. (Miles & Huberman, 2011, p. 121)

The methodology for this study was the qualitative research method. Many times, qualitative studies are conducted by researchers who have participated or closely observed the topic that is being studied (O'Sullivan, Rassel, & Berner, 2008). Such researchers tend to have the knowledge and interests to design and conduct a sound qualitative study. The researchers use their experiences and insights to design a study to interpret the findings (O'Sullivan et al., 2008).

I chose this methodology because I felt that interviewing the source (law enforcement officers) would allow me to get more information about what causes each

officer stress and how they deal with stress if they attempt to deal with it at all. Law enforcement is a male-dominated profession, and many law enforcement officers will not admit that their job causes them stress because they do not want to appear that they are weak (Bradway, 2009). I have spoken to many law enforcement officers in this area that agree with that statement. However, they also stated that they would be honest with me because I have experienced what they have experienced. They would feel more comfortable talking with one their own, rather than an outsider who has no idea about the stresses of the job.

Questionnaires or surveys would be another qualitative measure to use to obtain information on the study topic. There were no names attached to the interviews or the surveys to maintain anonymity. The key to successful alignment is to make certain that each major element is logically consistent, and fits with the problem, purpose, and other elements of the study (Miles & Huberman, 2011). For example, a qualitative methodology would not fit with a problem that is inherently quantitative (O'Sullivan et al., 2008). It is critical that the research questions, research design, and the methodology align to conduct a study. There should be a flow so that anyone can understand the purpose and the findings of a study.

I used the phenomenological method for this study. When a researcher wants to describe an event, activity, or phenomenon, a phenomenological study is an appropriate qualitative method (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). In a phenomenological study, researchers use a combination of methods, such as conducting interviews, reading

documents, watching videos, or visiting places and events, to understand the meaning participants place on whatever's being examined (Miles & Huberman, 2011). Researchers rely on the participants' perspectives to provide insight into their motivations (Rudestam & Newton, 2015).

Researchers must be aware of the importance of reliability, internal validity, and external validity. Validating a study means showing that the research and the results are well founded and solid (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). For this study, the information came from the people that have experienced stress in law enforcement. The results were based on solid research by information gathered through interviews and surveys completed by the target population. As for ethical concerns of this study, all participants that were interviewed or completed a survey gave consent after being told the purpose of the study and understood the purpose of the study (O'Sullivan et al., 2008.)

Operational Definitions

Command Staff: Captain, Major, Assistant Chief, and Chief of Police (Schmalleger, 2017).

Designee: The highest-ranking person under the chief of police in the chain of command or someone that the chief of police designates for a particular issue or assignment (Schmalleger, 2017).

Effects of Stress: The way that stress affects the body both physically and psychologically (Rose & Unnithan, 2015).

North Georgia: Rabun, Towns, Union, Fannin, & Gilmer Counties. (See Appendix E)

Lieutenant: Highest rank in front-line supervision (Schmalleger, 2017).

Operational Stressors: Stressors caused by incidents that occur while on-duty such as; traumatic events, death, violence, and abuse (Rose & Unnithan, 2015).

Organizational Stressors: Stress caused by actions or inactions within the police department's supervision and administration (Rose & Unnithan, 2015).

Police Officer: Sworn peace officer employed by a police department (Schmalleger, 2017).

Rural: A city that has a population of fewer than 3,000 people. (See Appendix F, G, H, I, & J)

Sergeant: First line supervisor (Schmalleger, 2017).

Social Stressors: Stress that affects an officer's personal and social life (Rose & Unnithan, 2015).

Stress: A state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or very demanding circumstances that may result in physical and psychological health problems (Rose & Unnithan, 2015).

Stress Management: Coping mechanisms used by officers to deal with stress or Employee Assistance Programs put in place to help officers deal with stress and other issues that affect the officer's health and work performance (Misis, 2012).

Limitations

Police officers tend to keep their feelings to themselves and are not known to share what issues they are dealing with outsiders (Lambert & Steinke, 2015). However, I

have over 22 years of law enforcement experience and can relate to what the officers may be dealing with that causes them stress. However, due to my experience, I could have influenced the way that officers responded to the interview questions. It proved difficult to get 14 officers in rural agencies to participate in this study. Many of the law enforcement agencies in this area are only staffed with five to 20 officers, with one to three officers working a shift on rotating schedule. However, I sought to keep construct validity at the forefront of this study. The study must be valid and reliable to help make a positive social change.

Assumptions

Qualitative researchers assume that participants will be honest when answering interview or survey questions (O'Sullivan et al., 2008). However, that is the issue with any case study or research method. I did my due diligence to ensure construct validity throughout this entire study. I have many years of experience interviewing suspects, victims, and witnesses. The participants of the study were not treated like any of the above; however, if I felt that they were not taking the process seriously or providing false information purposely, I would have stopped the interview.

Significance of the Study

Law enforcement is a male-dominated profession, and many officers feel they must portray a fearless persona (Bradway, 2009). However, police officers experience stressful situations, so it is important to get through that obstacle of persona and obtain valuable data from law enforcement officers about what are the main contributing factors

that lead to stress. The average person lacks an understanding of what law enforcement officers' deals with daily. This study provides insight into a rural North Georgia police officer's life, both on and off-duty. The significance of this study lies in the identification of the main stressors of rural North Georgia police officers and how to assist them in coping with stress.

Another significant aspect of this study is that it may provide insight into why law enforcement officers that suffer from posttraumatic stress syndrome (PTSD). Under the State of Georgia's current workers' compensation laws, psychological disorders (to include stress) are not covered if an officer becomes ill or is unable to work because of it (Georgia State Board or Workers' Compensation, 2013). The results of this study will contribute to positive social change for both law enforcement officers and the community. A physically, emotionally, and psychologically healthy officer is very positive for the community they serve. This study will bridge the gap in other literature about stress in law enforcement as it specifically addresses rural North Georgia policing which has not been studied.

Summary

Stress is a major problem in the law enforcement profession. Law enforcement officers must be to manage their stress and have resources to assist them in doing so. Rural law enforcement officers deal with many of the same issues as their counterparts in urban areas and large agencies. However, they must also deal with some unique stressors that are common in rural law enforcement such as; dealing with people they know, local

politicians and prominent people trying to intervene in investigations, and supervisors and administrators with little training and a low education level. With this study, I sought to identify the main stressors, how officers cope with stress, what, if any, programs are in place to assist officers dealing with stress, and how stress affects an officer physically, psychologically, and emotionally in rural police departments in North Georgia.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Law enforcement is one of the most stressful professions in the United States and around the world. There have been many studies conducted on stress in urban and medium to large law enforcement agencies. There have been minimal studies conducted on small and rural police departments, especially agencies with 20 or less sworn personnel. This chapter is a discussion of the literature on the stressors law enforcement face regularly. There are several categories of stressors law enforcement face with the main factors being organizational and operational. The literature review also presents research that has been conducted to determine the various organizational and operational stressors and the physical, psychological, emotional, and social effects of stress on the officer, their family, and coworkers. Various types of officer assistance are reviewed as well as to why some officers accept the assistance when it is available, and why most officers do not. The chapter also provides a discussion on the same stress factors rural police department's face that their larger counterparts face in large cities and urban areas. However, the unique stressors that rural officers face that officers in large agencies do not are also discussed.

Research Strategy

Literature research was conducted by obtaining peer-reviewed scholarly journal articles from the scholarly online resources. Multiple databases were used such as; ProQuest Central, PsychInfo, Sage Journals, and Thoreau Multi-Database Search. These

databases were searched using terms or words such as *law enforcement, stress, rural, small-town, policing, organizational stress, operational stress, physical effects of stress, psychological effects of stress, treatment for stress,* and *law enforcement families*.

Review of Literature

There are multiple categories of stressors that law enforcement officers are faced with. First, there are organizational stressors, which are issues within the organization (Bradway, 2009). Next, there are operational stressors, which are issues officers face while in the performance of their duties (Goksel, Caz, & Yazici, 2017). In addition, there are social stressors, which are issues that usually occur when an officer is off-duty. There are also often stress issues when an officer is on-duty, and researchers have shown that female officers cope with stress differently than their male counterparts (Bradway, 2009).

Organizational Stressors

Organizational stressors are stress that is caused by the organization or police departments. Issues such as lack of promotional opportunities, lack of support from supervisors and administrators, shift work, favoritism, and pay (Jarimillo, Nixon, & Sams, 2005). According to Oliver and Meier (2009), other organizational stressors that are common in small-town and rural communities are boredom, lack of additional officers while on-duty, lack of equipment, limited training, and local political leaders intervening with their decision making while on-duty. Officers in rural communities are often working a shift alone or with one or two other officers on-duty. That issue can

heighten an officer's stress level as they may be put in a situation where back-up is needed, but is not available.

Shift work can affect an officer's social life, sleep patterns, and diet (Mcraty & Atkinson, 2012). Inconsistent sleep patterns can alter an officer's decision-making skills (Mcraty & Atkinson, 2012), which is vital in the law enforcement profession. Officers are often required to make split-second decisions that could result in serious injury or death to the officer and/or the suspect. Research among police officers revealed that organizational stressors have more adverse psychological effects than operational stressors (Mcraty & Atkinson, 2012). According to van der Veldon, Grievink, and Yzermans (2010), organizational stressors are six times more likely to cause stress to a law enforcement officer than operational stressors, and organizational stressors determine psychological distress and well-being at a higher rate than operational stressors.

Organizational stressors are negative factors in an officer's commitment to the law enforcement agency that contributes to a large turnover rate within the organization (Finney, Stergiopoulos, Hensel, Bonato, & Dewa, 2013). For an organization to be successful, they must be able to get employees to buy-in to the organization's vision and mission statements (Finney et al., 2013). They must also ensure a positive work environment to retain officers. A large expenditure for many law enforcement agencies is recruiting and training officers (Wareham et al., 2015). That issue could be avoided by retaining officers by creating a positive work environment (Wareham et al., 2015). Unfortunately, law enforcement administrators place a great deal of emphasis on the

vision and mission statement and not officer job satisfaction (Finney et al., 2013). An officer that lacks job satisfaction will not be a productive employee, which can not only lower the moral for that officer but the entire law enforcement agency. If the moral of the agency is low, the vision and mission statement will not be a priority for the officers. That would drastically impact the effectiveness of the organization (Wolkow, Ferguson, Aisbett, & Main, 2015).

A frequent complaint among rural police officers is that their supervisors fail to communicate what they expect from the officer. Officers feel that their supervisors do not connect with officers that work on the front lines and that regulations change daily (Huey & Ricciardelli, 2017). The changes are not communicated properly within the organization, but the officers are expected to know what the changes are at any given time (Jaramillo et al., 2005). According to Smith (2014), previous research has shown that police officers feel that their supervisors and the administration of the agency will look out for themselves and sacrifice a front-line officer to protect themselves without any concern for the officer and their family.

According to Wareham et al. (2015), a large contributor to organizational stress is the law enforcement agency's culture. Police culture is one that historically officers supported and protected one another (Huey & Ricciardelli, 2017). That can be a positive thing, as police officers have a very dangerous job and being able to depend on their fellow officers during a dangerous situation is comforting. However, when law enforcement officers do something that is unethical, immoral, or illegal, it can put a

serious burden on an officer that witnesses the event. The officer(s) that witness the event may want to follow their moral compass and report the violation, however, they must worry about receiving a pejorative label from their fellow officers if they make the report. Either decision they make concerning the situation may have a negative effect on the officer's professional life whether at that police department or another they may try to obtain employment (Shane, 2010).

Many law police officers believe that the attitudes and behaviors of law enforcement leadership, along with agency policies, do not provide a psychologically healthy environment within the agency (McCormick & Riley, 2016). "Organizational stressors play a crucial role in personnel's mental health and well-being significantly contributing to negative changes in police personnel over time. Chronic exposure to these stressors increases the likelihood of mental health problems" (McCormick & Riley, 2016, p. 20). Stressors within the organization include; conflict with colleagues, administrative issues, and lack of support from supervisors and management (Hope, 2016).

Failure of the agency to recognize psychological challenges of front-line officers leaves many police officers in a position where they feel they have little or no value to the organization. This can lead to what is referred to as *moral injury*. Moral injury is described as an officer having feelings of being betrayed for doing the right thing by a person or persons that that has higher authority within the law enforcement agency (Levenson, 2007). This issue can compromise an officer's moral compass by acting in a

way that violates their morals by doing something that they do not believe is right to appease someone of a higher rank (Lambert & Steinke, 2015).

According to Payne et al. (2005), police officers that work in rural agencies face additional organizational stressors. Everyone knows everyone in these communities and the officers' lives are very transparent. Police officers in rural communities are critiqued on their actions while they are on and off-duty (Payne et al., 2015). Officers in medium and large law enforcement agencies can enjoy a social life without worrying about who is watching them as they have a few drinks at a local bar, restaurant, and many other activities outside of their employment. However, officers that are employed by a small or rural agency do not have that luxury. They are unable to enjoy a night out with friends in the local community or even surrounding areas due to the constant worry of someone calling their chief or sheriff and complaining that the officer was drinking alcohol, dancing provocatively, using foul language, and many other issues (Johnson & Rhodes, 2008). Most workers in other professions do not have to concern themselves with what they do (legal activities) while they are not at work (Payne et al., 2005).

Operational Stressors

Operational stress is stress that police officers face during the performance of their duties (Levenson, 2007). Law enforcement officers face many dangers. They go to work knowing that they might not make it home to their family. There are many operational stressors that police officers deal with, such as death of a fellow officer, homicide, child abuse, sexual abuse, suicides, traffic crashes, domestic violence, natural

disasters, executing search warrants, and hostage negotiations (Ivie & Garland, 2011).

Police officers must always be physically and mentally prepared for situations such as

these while they are on-duty, which can cause stress and mental fatigue. According to

Hope (2016), mental fatigue occurs when an officer experience continuous stress and

they simply get mentally exhausted. Mental exhaustion or mental fatigue can be

extremely dangerous to the officer, fellow officers, and the public. When an officer is

suffering from mental fatigue, it can affect the officer's decision-making process. That

can affect an officer's ability to make life or death decisions. It is crucial that agency

administrators, legal professionals, and policy-makers understand the possible impact of

mental fatigue in situations involving use-of-force.

It is well documented that law enforcement is one of the most dangerous

professions in the United States and around the world, and is also one of the most

stressful and psychologically unhealthy professions (Oliver & Meier, 2009). McCormick

and Riley (2016) stated that there is evidence to suggest 35% of law enforcement officers

who take part in or observe traumatic events experience posttraumatic stress and another

10% suffer from some psychological disorder. Many officers not only deal with issues

that cause long-term stress, but they also deal with acute stress while on-duty (Levenson,

2007). An example of acute stress would be an officer on patrol, observing a robbery in

progress or a car crash occurs in front of them while they are on patrol. They must act

immediately. Most citizens outside of the law enforcement profession have no idea what

traumatic events that officers face on a regular basis. It is very important to educate the

public on law enforcement officers' duties, and the events and decisions they are faced with every day in the law enforcement profession (Wolkow et al., 2015).

Rural police officers must also deal with the issue of working with little to no back-up while they are on-duty. That is extremely dangerous for the officer and the victim of a crime, especially an ongoing crime such as domestic violence, robbery, rape, and assault (Payne et al., 2005). The officer should respond to the scene without back-up for the safety of the victim. That is very stressful on the officer as back-up may take an average of 10 to 30 minutes to arrive depending on the geographic location and where the back-up is coming from because often the backup unit will be from another agency (Huey & Ricciardelli, 2017).

Many officers in rural communities are not as well trained as their larger agency counterparts due to budget constraints (Oliver & Meier, 2004). They also do not respond to criminal activity as often as officers with larger agencies. They do respond to many of the same crimes, but not as often (Oliver & Meier, 2009). That puts a great deal of stress on an officer responding to a violent crime alone not knowing how long it will be before a backup unit can respond. The officer may have knowledge that the suspect is known for resisting law enforcement and is a dangerous person, but they must still respond because the victim may be in a life-threatening situation and their only chance to survive the situation is the police officer on-duty (Huey & Ricciardelli, 2017).

In another scenario, the rural law police officer may respond to a fight with several people involved. If there are several people involved in an altercation, the officer

may have to retreat and wait for multiple backup units in that situation. The officer would not be physically able to intervene in that situation, and the chances of the officer getting seriously injured or killed are high in that situation. That puts the officer in a position of feeling helpless. That puts a lot of stress on an officer who took an oath to protect the citizens of the community; yet they are unable to act (Payne et al., 2005).

Many rural police officers play many roles while they are on-duty. Not only do they enforce traffic and criminal laws, but they also may be called to help a citizen move an appliance or furniture. It is not uncommon for officers in a rural police department to water flowers and collect mail for citizens that are out-of-town or feed a pet while the owner is in the hospital (Oliver & Meier, 2004). Therefore, the culture of a small-town or rural agency is much different from that of a large or mid-size agency. A rural law enforcement officer also responds to domestic disputes, enforces traffic laws, and deals with violent suspects, but urban law police officers rarely feed pets or water flowers (Johnson & Rhodes, 2008).

Social Stressors

Many times, when rural law enforcement officers respond to a call, the victim and suspect are people they know (Oliver & Meier, 2009). Putting someone in jail and taking away their freedoms is a huge responsibility. It is an even harder decision when the officer knows that person. Often, a rural police officer will have to take action against someone they went to high school with or someone that attends the same church as they do (Payne et al., 2005). They may respond to a vehicle traffic crash that involves a friend

or family member. The officer must work the crash scene without taking into consideration that they know one of the drivers, and determine who was at fault by the verbal statements and physical evidence of the crash scene. That can cause a great deal of tension between the officers, the friend, or family member involved in the crash (Oliver & Meier, 2009).

Any traffic violation, criminal investigation, eviction notice, subpoena service, or child custody issue may involve a friend or family member in a rural community. Law enforcement officers in a rural community not only have the stress of dealing with their friends and family, but they also must deal with local politicians' (mayor and city council members) and prominent citizens' friends and family members (Huey & Ricciardelli, 2017). Often, a police officer in a rural community will receive a phone call from a local politician or prominent member of the community asking the officer to dismiss a traffic ticket, and to talk to the district attorney to dismiss a charge. It is not uncommon that they show up on-scene and request the officer not to arrest someone they know. (Payne et al., 2005).

Rural police officers are often considered social outcasts because they had to arrest or cite someone that was within the social circle. That often results in police officers only socializing with other police officers. That is often what creates a police sub-culture (Rose & Unnithan, 2015). According to Roberts, Leonard, Butler, Levenson, and Kanter (2013), job-induced stress has a negative effect on a marriage or relationship. Officers are told not to take work home. That is much easier said than done. Police

officers will often keep to themselves when they are at home, and their significant other feels unwanted. The officer may have no intention of avoiding their spouse; they just do not want to discuss or think about what they observed or dealt with while they were at work.

Effects of Stress

The effects of stress are both physical and psychological. The physical effects on the body including but not limited to; cardiovascular disease, back problems, digestive issues, weight control, and disruptive sleep patterns. Psychological problems include but are not limited to; anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and withdrawal from family, friends, and society (Ellrich & Baier, 2017). Both physical and psychological stress contribute to serious health issues among police officers that could lead to changing careers, early retirement, divorce, alcoholism, drug abuse, and death whether by natural causes induced by stress or by their own hand (Chopko, Palmieri, & Adams, 2012).

Researchers have obtained data that suggest that functional aspects of some police departments are associated with a greater risk of health problems (Maran, Varetto, Zedda, & Leraci, 2015). Varying work hours, rotating shift work, and sleep restriction have been identified as risk factors for suicidal ideation among psychologists, mental health counselors, physicians, and other medical personnel (Wolkow et al., 2015). Approximately 25% of male and female officers that participated in the study were at risk for suicidal ideation. That percentage is much a higher than the rate of 13.5% of civilians

in America. The researchers also reported that law enforcement officers that work midnight or third shift were at a higher risk of suicidal ideation. Officers that work that shift are much more likely to experience suicidal thoughts (Chae & Boyle, 2012).

Organizational and operational stressors also contribute to suicidal ideation among police officers (Chae & Boyle, 2012). The situations that officers encounter while they are on-duty such as; homicides, fatal car crashes, domestic violence, and child abuse have a profound psychological impact on a law enforcement officer. Continuous exposure to death, violence, and abuse are contributing factors that lead to police officer suicides in the United States (Bishop & Boots, 2014). Research has shown that law enforcement officers that are regularly exposed to death and violence often consider those issues just another day at the office. When an officer devalues death and violence, they are at a much higher risk of committing suicide. Those operational stressors may push an officer to the edge of committing suicide, and the additional stressors of organizational stressors such as; lack of promotional opportunities, shift work, poor leadership, lack of administrative support, and organizational politics can push the officer over the edge to commit suicide (Chae & Boyle, 2012).

The many stressors of the law enforcement profession can lead officers to drug and alcohol abuse (Menard & Arter, 2013).

Law enforcement is recognized as one of the most stressful occupations in the United States and around the world. Police officers are continually exposed to critical incidents, they are criticized and stigmatized, and do not always receive

the support from their superiors or the public they serve (Menard & Arter, 2013,

p. 38)

Police officers often miss spending holidays and birthdays with their families.

Crime does not take a break or celebrate holidays and birthdays; therefore, law

enforcement is a 24 hour a day, 365 day a year operation. Those factors significantly lead

to drug and alcohol abuse in law enforcement officers. Officers use drugs and alcohol to

cope with the stressors of the job. The law enforcement culture makes it difficult for an

officer to request assistance in dealing with stress. The officer may feel they will be

mocked or looked at as weak if they seek assistance. That often leads officers to self-

medicate with drugs or alcohol to "drown whatever issues they may be suffering from,"

which is commonly referred to as negative coping (Menard & Arter, 2013, p. 32).

According to Bradway (2009), the law enforcement profession has one of the

highest divorce rates in America. The stress of the job can lead an officer to look for

comfort outside of their marriage. Research revealed that police officers are drawn to

other people within the public safety profession to talk about the stressors of the job

because their spouse is unable to relate to what they deal with at work (Rose & Unnithan,

2015). Therefore, when an officer confides in a person that works in law enforcement,

emergency medical services, or fire services, they create a bond that could eventually

become an emotional bond that could result in sexual feelings. That has a high possibility

of the officer paying less attention to their spouse and having a strong desire to spend

more time with the person in which they have made an emotional and sexual connection.

That issue will often cause additional marital issues and ultimately lead to divorce (Roberts et al., 2013).

Females deal with the same stressors as their male counterparts, but they also deal with stressors of the profession that are unique to women. Law enforcement has been a male-dominated profession since its inception (Buehler, 2017). Females are looked at as the weaker of the two sexes, and it is difficult for them to get accepted into the brotherhood by their fellow law enforcement officers. Females have the additional stress of having to prove themselves worthy of being a law enforcement officer. Women not only have to prove themselves to their fellow officers, but they also must prove themselves worthy to the criminal element of society. Male suspects will often challenge a female officer by resisting arrest or assaulting a police officer before they will challenge a male officer in the same situation. Female officers may have to work twice as hard as a male officer to obtain the same amount of respect from a fellow officer and the community (Bradway, 2009).

Both male and female officers are at risk of all the physical and psychological stressors of the law enforcement profession. They are equally at risk to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a result from traumatic events such as; exposure to catastrophic incidents, mass causality incidents, death, child abuse, sexual abuse, and domestic violence (Wolkow et al., 2015). Many police officers suffer from PTSD as result of those incidents, however, under the State of Georgia State Board of Worker's Compensation, PTSD and other psychological disorders or not covered under workers'

compensation. An officer must suffer from a physical injury that results in them suffering PTSD to get any workers' compensation benefits. However, if an officer has PTSD due to repeated exposure to traumatic events, they do not qualify for workers' compensation benefits (Georgia State Board of Workers' Compensation, 2013)

Stress Management

It is very important for police departments to have Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) in place to assist officers dealing with stress or the effects of stress (Maran et al., 2015). However, many small-town and rural agencies have no such programs. Officers need a way to cope and manage the stressors of their job. EAPs are designed to assist officers with professional, personal, and family problems such as; substance abuse, mental health, financial problems, marital issues, and work-place related stressors; all of which could impact the officer's health and work performance. The top priority of EAPs is to assist officers in obtaining assistance for these issues so they can continue to perform their duties effectively and professionally (Donnelly, Valentine, & Oehme, 2015).

People have their own coping mechanisms. Many people within the same profession have similar coping mechanisms (Maran et al., 2015). Many law enforcement officers have a very skewed sense of humor. They often make jokes about subjects that would be inappropriate to most of society. However, most of society does not see, hear, and smell the things that police officers do on a regular basis. According to Bishop and

Boots (2014), research has shown that officers who do not have a way to cope with the traumatic, sad, and disgusting things they encounter regularly, have a higher suicide rate.

Religious coping strategies is another option officers should have available to them. However, they should not be mandatory because not all law enforcement officers believe in or follow any particular religion. Many police departments have a department chaplain that officers can speak with upon request. A law police chaplain is often used to assist officers in delivering death notifications and console the family of the deceased (Ahles, Mezulis, & Hudson, 2016). "There is evidence that the benefits of religious coping in response to stress may differ for those with higher levels of religious commitment relative to those with lower levels of religious commitment" (Ahles et al., 2016, p. 228). Police department administrators should seek out religious leaders from multiple denominations in the community and ask them to participate in an EAP. They would not have to be on staff. They would be on-call or available by appointment (Ahles et al., 2016).

Police departments should have multiple types of EAPs available to employees. Officers should have the option to get assistance from religious leaders, counselors, or psychologists without the fear of repercussion from the agency, supervisors, and fellow officers (Patterson, Chung, & Swan, 2014). Loyd and Bond (2017) suggested that agencies should try to identify recruits with high levels of self-efficacy. Studies have shown that officers with low levels of self-efficacy do not cope with stress very well compared to an officer with higher levels of self-efficacy. The researchers further stated

that police departments should identify officers that display professionalism, empathy for fellow officers, and good interpersonal skills and send them to Stress Management Training (SMT). Many officers would rather get assistance from a fellow officer than an outsider such as a counselor, psychologist, or preacher. However, they must have respect for the officer and trust that he or she will not divulge any issues they may discuss about the events that led to the officer's stress or how the officer and the SMT officer decide the best coping mechanism and/or other treatment the officer may need to seek (Loyd & Bond, 2017).

Summary

Research about stress in policing has been studied many times for many years (McCormick & Riley, 2016). However, there has been little research done on stress in rural North Georgia policing and the stressors that are unique to law police officers that work in rural areas. Law enforcement is one of the most dangerous professions in the world, and it is also one of the most stressful professions as well. Stress can cause physical and psychological health problems if an officer is unable to manage their stress or finds healthy ways to cope with it. Police departments should have programs in place to assist officers with several issues, including stress (Misis, 2012).

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

This chapter includes a discussion of the research method, data collection, coding, and displaying the data of the study. I chose the qualitative research method for this study. Data was collected by interviewing 14 police officers that work in rural North Georgia. They were not required to give their names, their agency, and neither audio nor video was used to protect their identity. My Institutional Review Board (IRB) application for data collection for this study was approved and assigned the Walden University IRB approval #12-05-17-0567527.

A few officers that I discussed this study topic with stated that they would participate in this study, but they would submit to audio or video recording. Those officers were known to me and were not used in the study. However, in this era of law enforcement, officers would be much less likely to communicate the issues that cause them stress if their responses were audio or video recorded. As a previous law enforcement officer, I understand that issue. Many officers have a fear that what they say during an interview about this phenomenon may get back to their supervisors, peers, or the community. Although the chances of that happening are minimal, that was not acceptable odds to the participants.

They were asked to provide their age, gender, race, rank, and time in law enforcement. Questions focused on what issues of their job cause them stress to include

specific events, how they deal with stressors of the job, and if their agency provides resources to assist them in dealing with stress.

Research Methodology

The qualitative research method was selected to study a topic that needs further exploration. Qualitative research is holistic; the goal is to understand the entire picture of the social issue that is being studied. Qualitative research views the bonds within a system or subculture (Miles & Huberman, 2011). This is a personal, face-to-face, interaction with participants and a researcher. It is more about understanding the social environment rather than try to control it. Qualitative research tells a story, rather than displaying numbers that are difficult for many people to understand (O'Sullivan et al., 2008). Finally, it requires consent documentation from the participant and is responsive to ethical concerns of the study (Janesick, 2011).

There are numerous studies of police officer stress in large and urban police departments. For example, researchers have found that stress in policing within large and urban agencies are both organizational and operational (Wolkow et al., 2015) The researchers had the choice of hundreds, and even thousands, of officers within the agency to obtain participants for the study. They also had different races, genders, sexual orientations, ages, experience levels, education levels, and cultures to choose from (Wareham et al., 2015). The cities for this study in which the police departments are located are within five counties within North Georgia (See Appendix E-J). According to the Georgia Peace Officer Standards and Training Council ([P.O.S.T.], 2017) there is a

total of 99 sworn peace officers, full or part-time employed by those municipal police departments, which consist of 92 Caucasian males, 5 white females, 1 Hispanic male, and 1 Asian male, these police officers represent the total population of police officers as described in the definitions. The variables in this study were age, gender, experience, and rank, religion, current assignment, and sexual orientation.

Research Design

The qualitative method of inquiry was used in this study to examine stressful issues that rural North Georgia police officers encounter. The focus of qualitative research is to collect data on a real-world issue or phenomenon that the participants have lived and experienced (Miles & Huberman, 2011). The researcher obtains information based on the participants' perception of the phenomenon that is being studied (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). The philosophy of the qualitative research method is that reality is socially constructed has many meanings (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Phenomenology has been chosen for this study to examine the experiences of the men and women who work for police departments in rural areas of North Georgia. According to Rudestam and Newton (2015), a phenomenological study should consist of small samples of up to 50 participants.

> The goal of qualitative phenomenological research is to describe a "lived experience" of a phenomenon. Phenomenological studies individual's experiences through descriptions provided by the individual. This methodology is used to study issues or a phenomenon that has had little research. (Janesick, 2011, p. 13)

In this phenomenological research, rural North Georgia police officers were interviewed and asked about their experiences as they perceived them.

Phenomenology refers to the participants' perception of the meaning of a situation, rather than what the people's perception is outside of the situation (Miles & Huberman, 2011). The main point is phenomenological investigates what individuals experience considering the phenomenon of this study and how they perceive those experiences.

The objective of phenomenology is the direct investigation and description of a phenomena as consciously experienced, without theories about their causal explanations or their objective reality. In other words, a phenomenological research study tries to answer the question "What is it like to experience such and such. (Miles & Huberman, 2011, p. 142)

A phenomenological study researches how individuals perceived their lived experiences of a phenomenon rather than what someone may perceive about a phenomenon that has not experienced it (Miles & Huberman, 2011). My study aligned with an interpretivist paradigm, one that studies rural North Georgia police officers' lived experiences. The phenomenology method was appropriate for this study because it obtained detailed descriptions of the phenomenon from rural North Georgia police officers who are rarely given a voice in the published scholarly literature (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Social constructionism has influenced the remodeling grounded theory. In an attempt to comprehend the social world, the social construct theory views data as constructed as opposed to created (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Social constructionists construct knowledge and debates that social constructionism is concerned with the nature of understanding and how it is created (Miles & Huberman, 2011). Society is viewed as existing both as a subjective and objective reality. Meaning is shared, thereby constituting a taken-for-granted reality (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Grounded theorists believe people can have reasonable confidence; a common sense understanding and consensual notion as to what constitutes knowledge (Miles & Huberman, 2011). If it is accepted that social constructionism is not based on a relativist perspective, then it is compatible with grounded theory methodology (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017).

Constant comparative analysis ensures that the coding process maintains its progression by constantly identifying similarities and differences among emerging categories (O'Sullivan et al., 2008). Theoretical sampling is collecting further information in the light categories that emerged from previous data analysis (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Theoretical sampling is checking an emerging theory against reality by comparing samples that challenge developing claims (Miles & Huberman, 2011). Theoretical saturation is the process of data collection, and data analysis in grounded theory continues until theoretical saturation has been achieved (O'Sullivan et al., 2008). For example; the researcher continues to sample and code data until no new categories can be identified (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017).

The answers provided by the participants during the interview process were well documented by note taking, using pen and paper to get a detailed explanation of their stress level of that issue within the question. The notes were then transcribed (word-for-word) into a Word document, and the data was inputted into MAXQDA for data analysis and coding. Pertinent information was identified and color-coded by MAXQDA qualitative data software. The information gathered during this study was coded using open coding. Open coding involves reviewing the all the data collected during the study for descriptive categories (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). The data collected was placed into the data analysis software as it was obtained to check for similarities, differences, and saturation.

For this study, rural North Georgia police officers were asked to give their perspective on what causes them work-related stress. Identical questions were asked of all the participants. However, they were given the opportunity to describe any circumstances from their perspective that causes them stress. A positive issue about the phenomenological study method is that the researcher will get a better understanding of how certain officers react to certain situations. I got to hear the perspective of each officer as they perceived things. For example, the first officer may be severely traumatized by observing a dead baby, while the second officer has experienced a similar situation but was not affected nearly as bad as the first officer. The second officer was traumatized because he witnessed a fire destroy a friend's house. (Janesick, 2011).

Participants of Study

Participants consisted of 14 police officers from a rural police department in North Georgia (See Appendix D-I). The participants had a minimum of 2 years of experience working for a rural police department. According to Oliver and Meier (2009) officers with less than two years' experience in a rural or small police department have not experienced enough to provide reliable data. They are typically younger and have the *superman complex* which makes them feel invincible, and nothing can affect them physically or psychologically (Ivie & Garland, 2011).

Officers with two or more years' experience in rural policing have the experience to provide reliable data to the phenomenon being studied. They have experienced much more than those officers with less experience. Not only have they experienced more operational issues such as traumatic events, domestic violence, death, and abuse cases, they also have experienced more organizational stressors such as; internal and external politics, lack of promotional opportunities, inadequate training, and lack of support from superiors (Oliver & Meier, 2009).

In rural-North Georgia, there are ten police agencies in the defined area, which employ 99 police officers. The chief of police was the gatekeeper, notifying their officers of this study and providing them with my contact information if they wanted to participate in this study. I contacted each police chief in rural North Georgia in-person or telephone and explained to them that I was conducting a study on stress rural North Georgia Policing. I identified myself as a doctoral candidate pursuing a Ph.D. from Walden University. I explained the purpose of the study and provided an overview of the

study. An email was sent to the Chief that explained the purpose of the study and provided the Chief with my contact information. Informed consent was obtained during the interview since the interview was conducted during the non-working hours of the participant. The gatekeeper provided this to the potential participants. This ensured that I did not hand-select the participants. If an officer contacted me to participate in this study, I explained the study as I did with the chief and asked if they would like to participate. If they were willing to participate, I obtained their phone number and contacted them to be interviewed at a time and location where they felt comfortable, but not while they were on-duty.

Purposeful sampling was utilized. According to Emmel (2013), this form of sampling is appropriate when the researcher is attempting to gain a better understanding of a topic or issue that has been widely studied on to gain further knowledge on the topic. I am a retired law enforcement officer, and I was wearing plain clothes that any other civilian would wear. If the officer agreed to participate in the study, I set up a time and place that is convenient for the officer to meet and to conduct the interview. I did not know any of the chiefs of police or any of the officers that participated in this study. I did not work with, had not been a subordinate of, or supervised any of the participants of this study.

Measures

The purpose of this study was to identify the stressors placed on rural North Georgia police officers and assistance programs that can assist officers when they are

dealing with stress. In this study, stressors were identified by interviewing officers with a minimum of two years' experience in rural North Georgia policing. The broad research questions to better understand the phenomenon being studied are below; The specific questions for the interview are listed in Appendix C.

Research Questions

RQ1. What are the main factors that contribute to the stress of a rural North Georgia police officer?

RQ2. How do rural North Georgia police officers deal with the stress of their profession?

RQ 3. How does stress affect a rural North Georgia police officer physically, mentally, and emotionally?

Ethical Protections of Participants

The participants of this study were rural North Georgia police officers with two years or more experience who were free to choose whether to participate. The participation in this study was completely voluntary. Plans were in place in case of a severe traumatic reaction. Each participant signed a consent form, and their confidentiality was protected. All files and interview notes were kept and secured in a water and fireproof safe at my home. Only me, my dissertation committee, program director, and Institutional Review Board (IRB) personnel had access to those files and interview notes.

Procedures

The following procedures served as a guide to recruit and inform participants, and collect data;

1. Contact rural North Georgia police chiefs in-person or by telephone and advise them a detailed description of this study. I asked the chief of police to be a gatekeeper for this study. A form letter was provided to the Chief (Appendix A). The letter was also provided to the participants. The letter described the purpose of the study and provided potential participants with my contact information should the potential participant want to engage in the study. All ten police agencies were contacted in the five different counties.

2. Once contacted by officers that are willing to participate, their basic information (name, address, telephone number, alternate phone number, meeting location, and e-mail) was gathered and an invitation letter was sent to them. Their personal information will be kept private and will not be released to anyone other than the IRB if there is an audit.

3. I hand delivered or mailed the participant an invitation letter (Appendix B) to participate in the study.

4. When they decide to participate, the participant was contacted to set up a date, time, and location for the interview. The interview may take up to 2 hours to complete.

5. The participant was given a copy of the letter describing the study and signed the consent form.

6. All participant were asked the questions listed in Appendix C.

7. Data was obtained by taking thorough notes using pen and paper during the
    interview. I transcribed the notes immediately into a Microsoft Word
    document and inputted into MAXQDA for data analysis and In Vivo coding.

8. Information obtained during the interview will be kept in a secure location
    until it is to be analyzed, coded, and displayed. All information gathered
    during this study will be kept under lock and key for a minimum of 7 years.

Data Collection

Data was collected through one detailed face-to-face interview. Initially, the
researcher worked on building rapport with the participant by discussing issues they are
interested in such as football, fishing, baseball, cooking, etc. It is very important to obtain
a rapport with the participant of the study. By doing so, they much more likely to open-
up to the interviewer and provide more in-depth information about the phenomenon being
studied (Janesick, 2011). The nature of the study was described in detail to the participant
and the interviewer shared he has many years law enforcement experience, with a
majority of that time in a rural Georgia police department. This also helped build rapport
between the participant and the researcher. However, the researcher did so in a way as to
not influence their responses to the questions. It was very important that the participants
answer the questions based on their experiences and point-of-view. Information such as;
age, race, gender, education, time in law enforcement, rank, assignment (patrol, narcotics,
criminal investigations, administration), marital status, sexual orientation, and religion

was obtained during a semi-structured face-to-face interview (O'Sullivan et al., 2008).

All participants were given the opportunity to review all information taken from notes

during the interview and after the transcription to verify its accuracy. This information

was provided in person or by email based upon the participant's selection during the

interview. If the participant did not believe that the notes or transcription of the notes was

accurate, this researcher worked with them to ensure their responses and perception of an

event was accurate. Once all issues of accuracy were addressed or if the participant stated

that there are not any issues with either the notes or transcription, the data was inputted

into MAXQDA for analysis and In Vivo coding. Interviews provide a means for

conducting more in-depth exploration of a topic being studied because it allows a

participant to provide more detail and personal experiences regarding the selected topic

(Turner, 2010).

Officers were dispatched to the residence of a county commissioner about a

domestic disturbance between the commissioner and his wife. Upon arriving at the scene,

the officers observed the county commissioner, his wife, and three of their children. Upon

further investigation, the officers learned that the commissioner threatened to kill his wife

with a handgun and fired a shot into the floor of the residence. The initial officers were

prepared to arrest the commissioner for domestic violence. They were unaware that the

sheriff had been notified of the situation. The sheriff showed up on-scene and directed the

officers to take the handcuffs off the commissioner and that he would handle the

situation. The officers made it clear that the commissioner should be taken into custody

and charged with domestic violence. The sheriff took the commissioner from the scene and released him a few hours later with no charges. Later that same day, the commissioner located his wife and killed her with a handgun. The initial responding officer received the call of the homicide, and his life was altered forever. The commissioner and his wife were the mother and father of this researcher.

That is why the researcher believed that interviews were the best way to obtain data and information about events that have caused the officer stress. That could not be done through questionnaires or surveys for this study; notetaking was used to compile the answers to the interview questions. The notes were transcribed immediately after the interview into a Microsoft Word document by the researcher. The interviews were not video or audio recorded to protect the identity of the participating officer or agency. Obtaining detailed information and actual events that officers' have experienced is the best way to close the gap in the literature and other studies. There have many studies done on stress in law enforcement in many variations such as homicide detectives, narcotics officers, and patrol officers in rural and urban areas. However, there are no studies on stress in rural North Georgia policing. The information gathered in this study can close the gap in the literature by comparing this study to others of the same phenomenon, but in other locations and populations (Carcary, 2009).

Data Analysis

Once the data was obtained through detailed note-taking during face to face interviews and transcribed into a Microsoft Word document by the researcher, the

information was input into MAXQDA, by the researcher. The software analyzed the interviews for themes and trends that were found in each interview. This researcher began to obtain an understanding of the phenomenon of 'Stress in Rural North Georgia Law Policing.' Reading the in-depth notes taken during the interviews and gaining an overall sense of the information obtained by the participants assisted the researcher to understand the meaning of the participants' experiences and perceptions. The first step is the initial understanding of what type of information the data are conveying (Miles & Huberman, 2011).

The next step is to identify and list information in the interview notes that have specific relevance to the phenomenon being studied. In this study, the researcher was attempting to identify statements to understand what causes stress in rural North Georgia police officers and how stress affects their health, personal life, job performance, and overall wellbeing (Miles & Huberman, 2011).

MAXQDA is the qualitative data analysis software that was used for this study. MAXQDA software can analyze, code, and display the data. This software can code text such as field notes which will fit this study because there will be no audio or video of the interviews. MAXQDA can analyze the detailed notes taken by the interviewer. The data was coded and displayed in multiple tables. Particular events that caused the officer stress were written out by the researcher so readers of this study can fully comprehend what types of situations rural Georgia law enforcement officers deal with and how it affects the officers.

Finally, labeling the information identified to understand the phenomenon better. For this study, the researcher labeled meaning units in the form of 'psychologically sensitive expressions.' The expressions represent the emotions, perspective, and feelings of how the participants experienced the phenomenon of this study. The information and psychological meanings were then placed into 'ordinary' language so the 'ordinary' person could understand or comprehend the results of the study (Miles & Huberman, 2011).

Verification and Validation of Findings

For this study to be reliable and valid, the findings of this study must be verified. Verification is common in qualitative studies. Verifying the results of a study keeps the spirit of qualitative research intact (Janesick, 2011). Triangulation is the method this researcher used. In qualitative research triangulation involves cross-checking multiple data sources and collection procedures to evaluate the extent to which all evidence converges. Qualitative analysis of text is often supplemented with other sources of information to satisfy the principle of triangulation and increase trust in the validity of the study's conclusions. here are various approaches a researcher can use to address validity (quality/rigor/trustworthiness) and reliability (dependability), in qualitative studies, the most popular include: triangulation of information among different sources of data, receiving feedback from informants (member checking), and expert review. Member checking is the process of verifying information with the targeted group. It allows the stakeholder or participant the chance to correct errors of fact or errors of interpretation.

Member checks add to the validity of the observer's interpretation of qualitative

observations (Simon, 2011). The purpose of multiple sources of data is corroboration and

converging evidence (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

During the data collection process, the researcher constantly updated the

MAXQDA software after the participant approved each interview and transcription. This

allowed the software to compare the interviews. Saturation was an important factor in this

study. Saturation refers to the data that is collected. Through the use of the MAXQDA

software, the researcher was able to identify when there were not any newer trends

emerging from the interviews. At that point, the researcher completed one-to-two more

interviews to verify that the saturation occurred. Saturation allows the researcher to stop

data collection (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2017).

Credibility refers to the believability of the findings and is enhanced by evidence

such as confirming evaluation of conclusions by research participants, the convergence of

multiple sources of evidence, control of unwanted influences, and theoretical fit

(Creswell & Miller, 2000). Maximum confidence in the believability of conclusions

comes from support provided by participants' agreement, analysis of multiple sources of

data, others' interpretations, and prediction based on relevant theoretical models. As

such, credibility is related to construct validity, uncovered by evidence revealing that the

construct being studied is the same one theory presumes exists. The concept of credibility

is also close to the idea of internal validity as used in quantitative designs (Carcary,

2009). This researcher developed an audit trail to provide an account of all research

decisions and activities throughout the study. This researcher maintained a detailed log of all research activities, maintained research journals, and documented all data that iwas collected and analyzed throughout this study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). All the data collected, field notes, transcribed interviews and data files were placed in a locked water and fireproof safe as it is obtained to maintain its integrity. All information gathered during this study will be kept in that safe for a minimum of 7 years.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The goal of this study was to determine the stressors of policing in rural North Georgia. Specifically, the objective was to determine whether the stresses of the profession had an impact on the officers' mental, physical, or emotional health, which could have a negative impact on their work performance and their interactions with the public. Narrative interviews allowed me to gather data from the participants point-of-view and experiences and obtain an understanding of unique situations that caused stress to the participants. This qualitative research method is characterized by addressing issues related to the singularities of the field and individuals investigated (Miles & Huberman, 2011). Narrative interviews are a powerful method for use by researchers who form a group into a class. They allow the deepening of research, the combination of life stories with sociohistorical contexts, making the understanding of the senses that express beliefs and values that motivate and justify the actions of the respondents (O'Sullivan et al., 2008). The use of narrative is an advantageous investigative resource in qualitative research, in which a narrative is a traditional form of communication with the purpose to serve content from which the subjective experiences can be transmitted (Miles & Huberman, 2011).

The research questions that were addressed are as follows;

- What are the main factors that contribute to the stress of a rural North Georgia police officer?

- How do rural North Georgia police officers deal with the stress of their profession
  and what programs are in place to assist officers that are dealing with stress?

- How does stress affect a rural North Georgia police officer physically, mentally,
  and emotionally?

Interviews were analyzed using MAXQDA software. MAXQDA software serves to

provide insights into qualitative data sets without suggesting interpretations (Miles &

Huberman, 2011). Based on a content analysis, the researcher can draw conclusions

about the respective object of research (e.g., interview data). Software tools for

qualitative data and text analysis allow for easy sorting, structuring, and analyzing of

large amounts of text or other data and facilitate the management of the resulting

interpretations and evaluations (Miles & Huberman, 2011).

Setting

Purposeful sampling is the most common sampling strategy (Creswell & Miller,

2000). In this type of sampling, participants are selected or sought after based on

preselected criteria based on the research question (Miles & Huberman, 2011). For

example, the study may be attempting to collect data from police officers in a particular

city, county, or geographical location. The sample size may be predetermined or based on

theoretical saturation, which is the point at which the newly collected no longer provides

additional insights (Miles & Huberman, 2011). Narrative interviews were conducted for

this study as that style of interviewing allowed the researcher to gather data from the

participants' perspective of unique situations that encompass rural North Georgia policing.

The volunteer participants were all police officers in rural North Georgia with a minimum of 2 years' experience in rural North Georgia. All interviews were conducted when the police officers were off duty. The narrative interviews were conducted at multiple locations due to the officers participating in this study were from 10 different police departments within five different counties in North Georgia. However, the locations were not at their respective police departments to protect their privacy. The interviews were conducted at locations where officers felt comfortable, and their privacy would be protected. I used a pen and notebook to take detailed notes of the participants' responses. Audio and video recording devices were not used to help protect the participants privacy and allow them to be more comfortable and willing to participate in the study.

Demographics

There was a total of 14 total police officers that participated in this study. The participants were 13 Caucasian males and one Caucasian female. There is one Asian male and one Hispanic male within the demographics of the ten police departments, but they did not contact me to participate in the study. It was not a disadvantage to this study; However, I would have liked to have gotten a perspective from a police officer of a different race. Unfortunately, there were only three different races out of all ten police departments and their personnel in this study. One hundred percent of the participants

were Caucasian, and of those, 93% were male, and 7% were female. A letter was emailed to the chief of police of all 10 agencies. Police officers from six of the police departments contacted the researcher (60%). However, police officers from 5 of the 10 agencies, (50%), participated in the study. Out of the possible 99 officers that are employed by those 10 agencies, 21 officers contacted this researcher. Of those 21 officers (21.2% of the possible participant pool), 14 (14.1% of the possible participant pool) participated in this study. Saturation was reached after the 11th interview by the common emerging theme of stress caused by the police department and city administration; resulting in organizational stressors being the main cause of stress of the participants.

Data Collection

All 14 participants read and voluntarily signed the consent form. The interviews were conducted over a 10-day period. The participants were given a 10-minute grace period to make sure they completely understood the consent form and were able to ask the researcher any questions regarding the consent form and the study. They were all made aware that their identity would be kept anonymous. They would not be audio or video recorded, and they would be listed as participant and 1,2,3, and so on. The instruments used by the researcher during the interview were a pen and a notepad in which detailed notes were taken. Again, no audio or video was used to protect the participants' privacy and allow them to feel more comfortable and open up more than they may have if audio or video was used.

All the interviews lasted approximately one hour. All participants answered all the interview questions and appeared to be very comfortable talking to the researcher. The topic of the study appeared to be very important to all the participants. When each interview was concluded, I asked the participants to look at my notes taken during the interview to confirm the accuracy of the notes. They all did and confirmed the notes accurately portrayed their responses. The participants were advised that when the notes were transcribed into a Microsoft Word document that I would email that document to them for further confirmation that the data collected was a correct representation of their responses.

All the participants were asked the same following questions:

1. What type of shift do you work?

2. How many additional officers are on shift while you are working?

3. Do you feel that you have the support of the agency's administration?

4. Do have the equipment to do your job safely and effectively?

5. Do you receive adequate training?

6. Do you feel that you receive adequate pay?

7. Do you feel that you have the support of the community?

8. Do you feel that you have the support of your supervisor?

9. Have you ever had the mayor, council member, commissioner, or prominent citizen try to influence your decision about an incident you were involved in?

10. Have the aforementioned ever had influence on the outcome of a criminal or traffic offense?

11. Have you ever arrested or cited someone that you know?

12. How do traumatic events affect you?

13. Have you ever been to an incident where someone you knew suffered serious physical injury or death?

14. How do you deal with witnessing a traumatic event?

15. Is there an adequate chance of promotion within your agency? If so, is promotion based on your capabilities or "who you know"?

17. How does your job affect your personal life?

18. Have issues off the job (shift work, irregular sleep patterns, stress) affected your health?

19. What do you consider to be stressors of being a rural law enforcement officer?

20. Is there a protocol in place to assist you if you suffer from stress?

21. If so, what are they?

22. If not, do you think there should be and what type of assistance you think would be beneficial?

23. Is there anything that you would like to add a to this interview that has not been covered?

24. Is there are a specific incident that caused you a great deal of stress?

Data Analysis

After the interview notes were transcribed into a Microsoft Word document, they were verified by the participants as a true and accurate representation of their responses. Once the participants validated them, the data was entered into the software program MAXQDA for data analysis and In Vivo coding. The data was broken down into several different concepts. First, the software analyzed whether organizational or operational stressors placed more stress on the officers. Next, the software broke down the different components of operational and organizational stressors. Organizational included such things as but not limited to supervision, administration, promotional opportunities, lack of training, lack of or outdated equipment, and favoritism. Operational stressors included but not limited to traumatic events such as; death, sexual assaults, domestic violence, assault, child abuse. It would also include constantly witnesses the sad side of life such as homeless people, abused women afraid of leaving their marriage for various reasons, and advising an unexpecting family that a loved one has died (death notification). The software also analyzed social factors. That would include how do all aspects of the job affect their social life. Interviews were analyzed using MAXQDA software. MAXQDA software serves to provide insights into qualitative data sets without suggesting interpretations. Based on a content analysis, the researcher can draw conclusions about the respective object of research (e.g., interview data). Software tools for qualitative data and text analysis allow for easy sorting, structuring, and analyzing of large amounts of

text or other data and facilitate the management of the resulting interpretations and evaluations.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The participants revealed that they experienced both operational and organizational stressors that affected them professionally, personally, and socially. Using the phenomenological study approach allowed the researcher to understand the participants' experiences from their perspective (Creswell & Miller, 2000). According to Miles and Huberman (2011), the reliability of a qualitative study focuses on four main issues which are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Purposeful sampling was used for this study. Participants are selected or sought after based on preselected criteria based on the research question. For example, the study was collecting data from police officers in a particular geographical location. The sample size may be predetermined or based on theoretical saturation, which is the point at which the newly collected no longer provides additional insights (Miles & Huberman, 2011).

Saturation is a term taken from physical science to represent a moment during the analysis of the data where the same themes are recurring, and no new insights are given by additional sources of data (Janesick, 2011). Saturation in qualitative research is a difficult concept to define but has come to be associated with the point in a qualitative research project when there is enough data to ensure the research questions can be answered (Janesick, 2011).

Credibility

Credibility was established by taking detailed notes and having the participants approve the accuracy of the notes before the participant and researcher departed the interview location. Also, the participants reviewed the transcribed notes when they were placed in a Word document for accuracy a second time. I worked over 20 years in law enforcement and experienced many of the experiences conveyed by the participants. Credibility was further established when several participants shared the same professional issues that caused them stress. Data saturation can establish credibility (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Transferability

Transferability is a very important part of trustworthiness. According to Miles and Huberman (2011), transferability is obtained when a researcher studies the same phenomenon in similar organizations. This study met that criteria as all of the officers were employed at a rural North Georgia police department with many of the same stress factors. That lead to saturation in this study.

Dependability

The purpose of a qualitative and phenomenological study is to focus on a specific issue and obtain data from participants that have experienced the phenomenon being studied, which in this case was the stress of rural North Georgia police officers. Several results of this study were consistent and reached saturation after interviewing 14 participants.

Confirmability

I only used participants that met certain criteria. The criteria for this study was that the participants had to have a minimum of 2 years' experience working at a rural North Georgia police department. Confirmability is established when people outside of the required criteria can understand the subject matter (Miles & Huberman, 2000). Confirmability was established in this study by the previous research of literature, taking detailed notes, having the participants approve the accuracy of the notes, transcribing the interview into a Word document and having the participants approve the accuracy of their responses for a second time before the data was analyzed using the software program MAXQDA.

Research Question 1

What are the main factors that contribute to the stresses of a rural North Georgia police officer?

Thirteen of the participants stated organizational issues caused them most of their stress. Just one participant responded that operational issues were the main cause of stress for him/her. However, the officers that have more stress caused by organizational stressors also suffer stressful events from operational issues. Table 1 shows the percentage of officers that are affected by organizational stressors compared to operational stressors.

Table 1.

Organizational Stressors Compared to Operational Stressors

	Number of Participants	Percentage
Organizational	13	93%
Operational	1	7%

Theme 1: Administration

Within the organizational stress factors, 13 of the participants stated that the police department and city administration was the largest factor contributing to their stress. The city administration would include everyone from the mayor and council members. The police department administration includes all supervision from sergeant to the chief of police. Participant 5 stated

Council members have shown up on the scene of criminal investigations and take advantage of their authority and try to take over the investigation by telling the officers what to do and how to handle the investigation. What really pisses me off is that the chief doesn't support us and lets the council members do whatever they want. It's hard to do my job when my chief is such a pussy when it comes to standing up to the council members who are fucking up the crime scene. I want to do my job like I am supposed to, but I am not able to when the chief is a joke and is scared to tell the council members to get out of the crime scene and allow his officers to do their job. It seems the chief could take some time and educate the council members how their presence at a crime scene could jeopardize the case.

How can someone lead a department when they don't have the balls to do the right thing? All of the officers on my shift think that the chief is job scared and will do whatever the mayor and council tell him to do. The chief needs to grow a pair and allow us to do our job without any political influence. We need a chief that's not just going to be a puppet for the mayor and council (personal communication December 28, 2017).

Participant 1 stated

I get very little support from the city administration and my supervisors. My sergeant goes along with whatever the chief says no matter how ridiculous it is, and the chief goes along with whatever the city administrations wants him to do. I feel like I have no voice in this department. They never ask my opinion on anything that has to do with the police department. If I make a suggestion, they just look at me like I'm an idiot. I'm tired of that bullshit. All they want me to do is clock in and clock out and do what I'm told. I became a police officer to make a difference in the community, but I haven't been able to do that because the chain-of-command wants things to stay the way they are and they are very content by doing things the way they have always been done. If I here 'that's the way we've always done things around here one more time, I'm gonna fucking puke (personal communication, December 27, 2017)

Participant 8 has been very frustrated with the city administration for many years:

I do not have a problem with the chief. We've had four different chiefs in the past

five years. Each time a chief was let go or resigned, I was made interim chief of

police. At one time I was interim chief for 11 months. Each time the city

advertised to hire a new chief of police, I applied for the job. I was told that I did

a good job by the city manager and the mayor while I was interim chief, but I was

never chosen for the position. During the application process, I was told by

multiple council members that I would get the job, but I never did. When the last

chief of police was hired, I talked to the city manager about what I could do to

make myself a better candidate. The city manager told me that he did a good job

for knowledge that I have, but I wasn't knowledgeable enough for a permanent

position to lead the police department. I could not understand why I was being

told that I was doing a good job and then not get the position and especially

getting told by the city manager that basically I'm not smart enough to do the job.

That made me feel like shit, and I felt that the city manager was basically calling

me a fucking retard (personal communication, December 23, 2017).

I followed up on this issue and asked Participant 8 why he/she did not consider that a lack

of a promotional opportunity. Participant 8 stated

I would probably think that if the city manager and other city officials did not

micromanage the police department. The mayor told the police officers what

streets to patrol and where they should not run radar because only local folks

travel those roads. I feel that a chief was not at the department long enough to

promote anyone because as soon as the chief did not play by the administration's

rules, they were not the chief much longer (personal communication, December

23, 2017).

Table 2 below shows the main organizational stressors of rural North Georgia police

officers.

Table 2.

Organizational Stressors of Rural North Georgia Police Officers

	# 1 Stressor		# 2 Stressor		# 3 Stressor	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Lack of Training	6	43%	5	36%	4	29%
Administration	12	86%	1	7%	1	7%
Shift Work	5	36%	4	29%	3	21%
Salary	7	50%	5	36%	2	14%

Theme 1.2: Lack of Training

Lack of training was another theme that contributed to organizational stressors.

According to the P.O.S.T. (2017), a peace officer must complete a minimum of twenty

hours of continuing education units (CEUs) each calendar year. Of those twenty hours,

the only required training is firearms requalification and use of deadly force. Participant

11 stated:

Training is free at GPSTC (Georgia Public Safety Training Center), but the chief

will not allow any officers to go there because the department still has to pay for

gas, food, and over-time for someone to cover the shift. This is a small

department, and I would think that the chief should get off his fat ass and cover an

officer's shift so they could go to GPSTC to get training. GPSTC offers online

training for enough training to get the required twenty hours except for firearms

requalification. We go to the sheriff's office for that, and we only do the standard

State of Georgia qualification course. We are a small department, and we should

get all the training we can because I am the only officer at a call most of the

time." (Personal communication, December 28, 2016)

Theme 1.3: Shift Work

Most police officers work a shift, and they often rotate shifts. Shift work can often

cause an officer a lack of sleep or sleep insomnia. That can cause an officer mental and

physical fatigue. Mental and physical fatigue can cause an officer to make bad decisions

in times when a decision has to be made in a matter of seconds (Hope, 2016). Participant

9 stated "shift work would not be so bad if it was consistent. We are a small agency, and

we often have to cover shifts for the officers when they are sick or take a vacation. Our

patrol schedule is four days on and four days off with 12-hour shifts. I work from 1800

hours until 0600 hours. I can't remember the last time that I had four days off in a row. I

either have to cover for another officer or work over until the oncoming officer gets to

work for whatever reason. We don't get paid overtime, we get comp- time, but the real

kick in the balls is that I never get a chance to use my comp-time because we are so short

staffed and if we don't use it by the end of the year, we lose it. When I first got into law

enforcement, I couldn't wait for dispatch to send me on a call. Now, I hope the radio

stays silent all night because I am just fucking exhausted every time I go to work"

(Personal communication, December 29, 2017).

Theme 1.4: Salary

All too often small-town police officers are underpaid and have to work a second

job to be able to pay their bills (Payne et al., 2005). Participant 6 stated

> The pay here is shit. I've been working in this department almost five years, and I
>
> make less than $14.00 an hour. After taxes and insurance, I don't bring enough
>
> money home per week to pay the bills, and I don't live a high-class lifestyle. I live
>
> in a trailer and drive a 1994 pick-up with over 250,000 miles on it. My insurance
>
> went up thanks to Obama. I do work on the side with my daddy. We cut trees and
>
> do some yard work. I get off at six in the morning and then meet my dad at seven.
>
> I only have an hour between jobs. I work with my daddy until lunch and then go
>
> home to get some sleep before going back to work a six that evening. I'm as tired
>
> as a buck during the rut because it seems like I never stop working. Sometimes
>
> after dark, I'll go to a place where I can park my patrol car out-of-sight and fall
>
> asleep (personal communication, December 30, 2017).

Research Question 2

How do rural North Georgia police officers deal with the stresses of their profession and

what programs are in place to assist officers that are dealing with stress?

Unfortunately, there was a reoccurring them when it came to how officers deal

with the stresses of their profession and if they were any programs in place to assist the

officers in dealing with stress. All 14 participants stated that they deal with stress

internally and in their own way. Not one of the participants felt they could go to either

police department personnel or city administrators without fear of ridicule or being told

they need to find another job. They felt that police officers are expected to be able to deal

with everything that the job entails and they would be considered less of a man or woman

if they sought help with dealing with stress.

Theme 2: Dealing With Stress

Twelve of the participants deal with stress in their own way. Two of the

participants have seen medical professionals for assistance dealing with stress caused by

being a police officer. Participant 10 was the only participant to list operational stressors

as the main source of stress, and was one of the two participants that sought professional

medical help. They work for different police departments and have two different

insurance coverages. Participant 10's insurance did not cover mental health counseling.

He/she felt they needed the assistance and paid for the treatment themselves. Participant

10 stated:

> I was working one night when a call came out about a domestic dispute. When
>
> dispatch gave me the location of the call, I knew who it was immediately. My best
>
> friend had been having trouble with her piece of shit husband and was planning
>
> on leaving him. While I was on the way to the scene, dispatch advised that a
>
> neighbor called and said they heard gunshots. I stopped just before getting to the
>
> scene and waited for my back-up to arrive. We went to the scene once my back-

up got to me. The first thing I saw was that cock sucker laying in the yard. He had

a gunshot wound to the head and a pistol lying next to him. I have to be honest, I

didn't give two shits about that motherfucker, but I knew my best friend was dead

inside the house before we even went in. Sure enough, he had shot her before

killing himself. That was the most difficult thing I have faced as a police officer.

My department did not offer any type of counseling for me, so I took sick leave to

grieve and see a professional counselor that I had to pay for (personal

communication, December 28, 2017).

The participants that stated they deal with stress themselves have a variety of

ways that they try to manage their stress. Some have healthy ways of dealing with stress,

and others have rather unhealthy ways of dealing with their stress. Participant 9 stated "I

go to the gym at the end of each shift if possible, and I try to run at least 2 miles on my

days off (Personal communication, December 28, 2017). However, Participant 4 stated "I

drink beer and fuck whores, so I don't have to think about the bullshit at the police

department" (personal communication, December 26, 2017).

Participant 3 stated:

I had a lawsuit filed against me and the city for alleged excessive use of force.

The incident was investigated by GBI (Georgia Bureau of Investigations) shortly

after the shooting. The body camera video and the GBI investigation cleared me

of any wrongdoing. I stopped a vehicle driven by the suspect because I got

information from a reliable confidential informant that the suspect had heroin and

illegally obtained hydrocodone. I located the vehicle and justifiably stopped it based on probable cause from the information I got from the confidential informant. I notified dispatch of the traffic stop and the location. The suspect got out of the vehicle and refused to get back in the vehicle after I told him several times to do it. The suspect charged at me when I tried to get my pepper spray out of the carrying case on my duty belt. He took my pepper spray away from me and sprayed me in the face and started hitting me in the head. I pulled my Glock and shot him. I had no idea if he was shot or ran off for approximately one minute because I could not see shit. I immediately called for back-up, and several officers responded to the scene. The suspect was lying on the ground with a gunshot wound to the right leg, and I was leaning against my patrol car trying to catch my breath and get the pepper spray out of my eyes with a water bottle I had in my car. The suspect was arrested and taken to the hospital by the rescue squad where he was treated for non-life-threatening injuries before he was taken to the county jail. A large quantity of hydrocodone was found in his vehicle along with 4 grams of heroin and a stolen pistol. Many people in the community were calling for me to be fired and arrested for shooting a person that was unarmed. The city would not release the video because they were already looking to the future and they believed a lawsuit would be filed because he got shot and was not armed at the time I shot him, even though GBI cleared me. The GBI showed city officials the video of the incident and other information they obtained during their

investigation, which clearly showed that I didn't do anything wrong, but they

would not release the video to the public. I didn't get put on paid administrative

leave; I was assigned to work in dispatch not only during the investigation but

until a federal judge dismissed the lawsuit. That took 14 months. I had to work in

dispatch for 14 months and was never offered any counseling or psychological

assistance. I felt I was being punished for something for political reasons and the

mayor knew that I did nothing wrong. It wasn't until the lawsuit was dismissed

that the video was released to the public. Once the video was released, the

community fully supported my actions. I believe that the city felt if they released

the video before it was taken before a federal judge, it may not have been allowed

in court, but the city attorney was told by many other lawyers and the district

attorney that the video could be released because it would have no impact on a

possible federal jury pool because federal court was in Atlanta, GA, but he told

the city not to release the video. I believe I was stuck in dispatch and the whole

situation was handled poorly because the city was more concerned about a lawsuit

than me, even though they knew within days that I was justified in shooting him

(Participant 3, personal communication, December 26, 2016).

I asked participant 3 why he/she would not consider this issue an organizational stressor

and participant 3 stated:

It is an organizational stressor. The city administration fucked me big time. But,

you asked me if there was any protocol in place to help me deal with stress, and I

told you this because it tells you that there is nothing in place to help me when I am dealing with stress. They didn't offer any kind of help and didn't give it to me when I asked for it. I had to deal with the stress myself. I didn't want to worry my family, but I was worried as hell for a long time. I couldn't eat or sleep right for a good while. The only thing I figured I could do to help myself was to pray to God and ask Him to get me through this. I know it was going around my elbow to get to my ass by telling that long story, but that's the best I know how to tell you how I deal with the stress of my job" (personal communication, December 23, 2017).

Although all 14 participants deal with the stress of the job internally, they all have various methods of dealing with the stress such as; fishing, golf, and spending time with family. One participant stated that they deal with the stresses of the job by dating as many people as they can without getting into a serious relationship. The participant stated they enjoy the sex, but do not want a serious relationship because they have a hard time dealing with their own problems, and do not want to worry about the problems of another person.

All 14 participants stated that they were not aware of any program in place to assist them if they were in need of assistance for dealing with stress from the job, or anything else for that matter. Participant 5 recalled a situation where an officer within the department went to his immediate supervisor and asked for some assistance in dealing with a traumatic event he/she witnessed while they were on-duty. That particular officer was the first officer on the scene of a suicide. The person had shot themselves in the head

with a shotgun inside of a barn. The person that committed suicide was the responding

officer's brother-in-law (personal communication, December 23, 2017).

Participant 5 stated:

 The responding officer was "shook up" after responding to that call. He/she also

delivered the death notification to the decedent's wife, who was the responding

officer's sister. The responding officer took some personal time off work to help

his/her sister deal with the situation. However, they were never able to properly

deal with the incident. Participant 5 was present when the officer asked his/her

immediate supervisor for some assistance in dealing with the incident. The

supervisor told the officer 'death was part of the job and that if he/she could not

get over it, they should find something else to do because they won't make it in

law enforcement very long' (personal communication, December 28, 2016).

Theme 2.1: No Officer Assistance Program

All 14 participants stated they would like to have a support system in place to

help them if they needed assistance dealing with stressful events. However, all of them

would prefer that the assistance was a licensed professional counselor or psychologist. "If

you ask for help around here, everyone will think you're a pussy and can't handle the

job" (Participant 14, personal communication, December 31, 2016). They would not feel

comfortable approaching a supervisor or police department administrator. They would

like someone else, such as human resources personnel, to be the gatekeeper between

them and the professional assistance they may seek. In addition, they would like the city

to ensure there would be no repercussions for seeking help when they need it. The reoccurring theme was that there was no assistance program in place for any of the police officers that participated in this study, and they would like to have a program in place to assist them when they need help.

Research Question 3

How does stress affect a rural North Georgia police officer physically, mentally, and emotionally?

Theme 3: Overweight

All 14 participants have been affected by stress either physically, mentally, or emotionally. Eight participants suffered from hypertension or high blood pressure, only one participant was diagnosed with hypertension before becoming a rural North Georgia police officer. The other seven participants attribute stress and an unhealthy diet to their high blood pressure. All seven stated that their physician advised them that stress and their diet, which led them to be overweight, were most likely the contributing factors of their hypertension. They stated they eat a lot of fast food because of its convenience and the fact that they often have to eat in a rushed manner because they are subject to call anytime while on-duty. Many of the agencies in this study may only have one or two officers on duty at any given time, so they cannot call out for a meal because there are no other officers to answer calls while they eat. None of the agencies that the participants worked for had a gym or workout facility for the officers.

Theme 3.1: Divorce

An astounding 11 out of 14 participants have been divorced at least one time since they have been a police officer. Five of them were divorced because they had affairs with other public safety personnel whether they were police officers, paramedics, dispatchers, or firefighters. Those five stated that their spouse at the time did not understand what they went through every day at work and the person they had an affair with was people they worked with on a regular basis and what started out as a friendship turned romantic after a period of time. They further stated that they simply started talking about issues that occurred at work and eventually realized that both spouses did not understand when they were in a bad mood or just didn't want to talk and they eventually looked to each other for companionship, which led to a sexual relationship. The other six experienced a similar situation, as their spouses did not understand what they dealt with at work. They did not want to talk to their spouse about what they experienced or just wanted time to themselves, and their spouses could not understand. That eventually led them to drift apart and get divorced.

Theme 3.2: Anxiety

Nine of the participants suffered from anxiety. They all stated that they had been diagnosed by a physician and were on medication to help with their anxiety. They could not exactly explain how they developed anxiety and did not wish to tell this researcher what they and their physician discussed, but they did say that they did not suffer from anxiety until they became rural North Georgia police officers.

Anxiety is a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease, typically about an imminent event or something with an uncertain outcome. A nervous disorder characterized by a state of excessive uneasiness and apprehension, typically with compulsive behavior or panic attacks (Misis, 2012). Causes of and risk factors for "General Anxiety Disorder (GAD) may include: a family history of anxiety, recent or prolonged exposure to stressful situations, including personal or family illnesses, and excessive use of caffeine or tobacco, which can make existing anxiety worse" (McCraty & Atkinson, 2012, p. 59).

Theme 3.3: Difficulty Sleeping

Nine of the participants had difficulty sleeping. Seven of those nine participants have suffered from depression at some time during their career. All nine of the participants stated that they would just lie in bed and their mind would race, thinking about issues from the job. "I just lay there and think about all the things going on in life, but police department issues are always on the top of my brain, and I hate it" (Participant 1, personal communication, December 20, 2017). Sometimes it was some horrific event they were dispatched to such as a crash, child abuse, death, or a domestic disturbance. However, a majority of the time their mind would focus on other aspects of the job, such as doing something wrong or making a city official upset by arresting someone with influence. The participants stated that most of the time their mind raced as they wondered what they would do to provide for their family if they lost their job for doing the right thing, but not what the administration wanted them to do. Table 3 below illustrates the

health problems the participants described as a result of working in a rural North Georgia

police department.

Table 3.

Physical, Emotional, & Mental Issues of the 14 Participants

	Number of Participates	Percentage of Participates
Anxiety	9	64%
Divorce	11	79%
Hypertension	8	57%
Overweight	13	93%
Suffered Depression	7	50%
Difficulty Sleeping	9	64%

Conclusion

In conclusion, the majority of stress placed on rural North Georgia police officers

is organizational. As stated throughout this chapter, saturation was reached after

interviewing 11 participants due to the reoccurring theme of organizational stress as the

main stressor as a result of lack of support from the police and city administration.

During all 14 interviews, it was very clear that the participants were not happy with the

department or city administration. They felt as if they had no opportunity to make a

difference in the community, which was the was the reason they chose the police

profession. A further conclusion, discussion, and recommendations will be discussed in

chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Recommendations, Social Implications, and Conclusion

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the causes of stress experienced by rural North Georgia police officers based on their personal experiences in the policing profession. This study did the support the findings of other studies that focused on stress in rural law enforcement. Payne et al. (2005) had many of same findings. The article discusses lack of administrative support, low pay, lack of training, and small-town police officers not getting the same respect as their counterparts in larger agencies. Oliver and Meier (2009) also found many similar issues that cause stress in small police departments.

The qualitative method of inquiry was used in this study to examine stressful issues that rural North Georgia police officers encounter. The focus of qualitative research is to collect data on a real-world issue or phenomenon that the participants of this study have lived and experienced (Miles & Huberman, 2011). I obtained information based on the participants' perception of organizational and operational stressors they have personally experienced (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Phenomenology was chosen for this study to examine the experiences of the men and women who work for police departments in police departments of North Georgia. According to Rudestam and Newton (2015), a phenomenological study should consist of small samples of up to 50 participants. The goal of qualitative phenomenological research

is to describe a lived experience of a phenomenon. Phenomenological methods study individual's experiences through descriptions provided by the individual.

This study was done to add to the literature of stress in rural and small-town law enforcement. However, this is the only study that focuses strictly on rural North Georgia police officers. It was also to provide insight into the stresses of working in a rural North Georgia police department. The participants said that small-town politics was the main contributor to their stress as a rural North Georgia police officer, which led to saturation being reached after 14 interviews.

The participants made it perfectly clear that the police and city leadership caused them most of their job-related stress. Many of the participants felt their police leadership would just go along with the city leadership because they are more concerned about themselves than their officers. Police leadership should be the barrier between the officers and politics, not play a part in it. Unfortunately, that seemed to be the theme in rural North Georgia.

Interpretation of Findings

Research Question 1: What are the main factors that contribute to the stresses of a rural North Georgia police officer?

$H_0 1$: The main stressors for rural North Georgia police officers are organizational stressors.

$H_a 1$: The main stressors for rural Georgia police officers will be operational stressors.

The finding of this study revealed that organizational stressors far outweigh operational stressors in rural North Georgia police officers. They are not satisfied with the way they are micromanaged by their supervisors, the department administration, and the city administration. That is very telling about the working atmosphere in rural North Georgia police departments. According to Ellrich and Baier (2017), police officers deal with violent assault and other traumatic events. In rural North Georgia, police officers are more affected by organizational stressors. The participants were very passionate about their responses to questions that were geared towards organizational stressors. Especially Question 9, "Have you ever had the mayor, council member, commissioner, or prominent citizen try to influence your decision about an incident you were involved in?" All 14 participants experienced that issue, and 13 of them rated it as the top stress factor in rural North Georgia policing.

Police officers must be focused while they are on the job. That could be the difference between life and death for the officer and the citizens they are sworn to protect (Goksel et al., 2017). The participants made it very clear there are many times when they are on-duty, and their mind is not on the job because of some organizational issue such as a prominent citizen complaint, supervisors not supporting them, and city officials telling them how to do their job. Rural North Georgia police need the support of their supervisors and city officials. The chief of police or their designee must provide that support and be the buffer between the officers and the city administration. That would allow the officers to focus on their job.

All the participants understood that stress is part of their job, but it was the undue stress that they could not understand and affected them the most. An officer should be shielded from much of the political side of working for a municipality. The police chief and the command staff should do their best to not burden front-line officers with the politics that come with working as a police officer in a small police department. Many police officers feel that the chief of police will not intervene because they are more concerned about their job security and not that of the officers.

The research found that rural North Georgia police officers are concerned with the way that the community views them. Many of the officers that participated in this study felt they were just viewed as glorified security guards because in many instances the community dictates what they can and cannot do. That has a trickle effect where officers from surrounding agencies view them in a bad light because so many restrictions are placed on them. It makes it very difficult to get good qualified officers to work at that agency, and the cycle continues. That issue bothers many of the officers that I interviewed. They would like their agency to be respected by the community and other agencies.

According to Hope (2016), a police officer's stress can often be a result of job satisfaction. Police officers are professionals, and they should not be micromanaged. Although job satisfaction is very important to police officers, they do not consider policing a job; they consider it a career. Career professionals should be allowed to do their duties without worrying about political repercussions and hurting someone's pride.

Many times, a supervisor will not delegate or empower an officer that they believe is smarter than they are because they let their pride ego get in the way. Maran et al. (2015) stated that many times police officers forget about the victim of a crime. They are so consumed with getting credit for solving a case; they will not share information with other agencies and some of their own officers. Police administrators must ensure that the victim is always the priority. The victim does not care if the investigating agency or an agency in the next state recover their stolen property, they just want the crime solved. The participants of this study were very frustrated about this issue. They felt they were kept in the dark, while they believe they could be an asset in solving crimes. One participant was of the belief that you have to know the "secret squirrel" handshake to get information around here. The participant elaborated that you had to be in the "good ole boy" crowd.

Although the research showed that officers suffer from stress from many factors both organizational and operational, a large majority of rural North Georgia police officers that participated in this study get stressed out from their own supervisors, which are supposed to ensure they have a safe and satisfying work environment. According to Wareham et al. (2015), police officers that have a supportive administration have less stress and much better job satisfaction.

Research Question 2: How do rural North Georgia police officers deal with the stresses of their profession and what programs are in place to assist officers that are dealing with stress?

$H_0 1$*:* Officers internalize their feelings.

$H_a 1$*:* There will be little to no resources available to assist officers dealing with stress.

A finding of this study that is very disturbing is that not one of the participants knew of a program in place where they could seek assistance for stress or any other issue that was affecting them mentally, emotionally, psychologically. Patterson et al. (2014) found that having a support system in place for police officers is fundamental to keeping mentally healthy officers. Officers should have a program in place that they can seek assistance without worrying about ridicule or repercussions. Police officers that participated in this study must qualify with their firearm once a year, pass a physical fitness test once a year, but did not have a mental evaluation when they were hired, and they certainly do not have to pass a mental stability (fitness) test once a year. They feel that mental fitness is just as or more important than physical fitness and how well an officer can fire a pistol.

Participants in this study all had to deal with stress in their own way. Two of the fourteen sought outside psychological help while the others all dealt with stress by many other methods. Some methods may be considered acceptable ways to deal with stress while others may not be as acceptable. Participants of this study had hobbies such as fishing, hunting, hiking, and working out at the gym to help them deal with stress. However, a few would turn to alcohol to "drown their stress away," and one liked to have sex with whores to forget his worries.

Research Question 3: How does stress affect a rural North Georgia police officer physically, mentally, and emotionally?

$H_0$1*:* Officers will suffer from hypertension, digestive problems, anxiety, back problems, weight gain, sleep disorders, marital problems, and binge drinking alcohol.

H_a1*:* Stress will affect officers differently depending on the officers' family medical history, gender, time in service, rank, and self-efficacy.

All 14 participants have been affected by stress either physically, mentally, or emotionally. Eight participants suffered from hypertension or high blood pressure with only one participant diagnosed with hypertension before becoming a rural North Georgia police officer. The other seven participants attribute stress and an unhealthy diet to their high blood pressure. All seven stated that their physician advised them that stress and their diet, which led them to be overweight, were most likely the contributing factors of their hypertension. They stated they eat a lot of fast food because of its convenience and the fact that they often have to eat in a timely manner because they are subject to call at any time while on-duty. Many of the agencies in this study may only have one or two officers on duty so they cannot call out for a meal because there are no other officers to answer calls while they eat. None of the agencies that the participants worked for had a gym or workout facility for the officers.

Nine of the participants suffered from anxiety. They all stated that they had been diagnosed by a physician and were on medication to help with their anxiety. They could

not exactly explain how they developed anxiety and did not wish to tell this researcher

what they and their physician discussed, but they did say that they did suffer from anxiety

until they became rural North Georgia police officers. Anxiety is a feeling of worry,

nervousness, or unease, typically about an imminent event or something with an

uncertain outcome. A nervous disorder characterized by a state of excessive uneasiness

and apprehension, typically with compulsive behavior or panic attacks (Misis, 2012).

Causes of and risk factors for General Anxiety Disorder (GAD) may include: a family

history of anxiety, recent or prolonged exposure to stressful situations, including personal

or family illnesses, and excessive use of caffeine or tobacco, which can make existing

anxiety worse (McCraty & Atkinson, 2012).

It was clear during the interviews that the participants perceived stress differently

based on experience and training. Operational stressors seemed to affect officers with less

experience and training more than officers who had additional experience and training.

However, experience and training had no impact on organizational stressors. If anything,

officers with more experience were more affected by organizational stressors than those

with less work experience.

All of the hypotheses were proven except hypotheses two of research question

one. Organizational stressors are the main cause of stress rather than operational

stressors. Twelve of the participants internalize their feelings, with the other two getting

outside help without the city paying for the counseling. There were not any officer

assistance programs in place according to the participants of this study. Many of the

participants suffered from hypertension, anxiety, difficulty sleeping, and were overweight. Stress did not affect officers differently based on their age and experience. However, the way an officer perceived and coped with stress was different depending on their age and experience.

Limitations of the Study

This study was conducted in rural North Georgia. Police officers in other regions in the State of Georgia or other states within the United States may have given different responses. Transferability could be limited in other studies if the research does not duplicate the results in studies in similar settings. Creswell and Miller (2000) stated that a large number of participants are not required for a qualitative study. This study was limited to 10 police departments within five counties in North Georgia (see appendix E-J) due to the financial costs of travel expenses.

Within the 10 rural North Georgia police departments used for this study, there is a total of 99 sworn peace officers. There are 92 white males (92.9%), 5 white females (4.8%), 1 Asian Male (less than 1%), and 1 Hispanic Male (less than 1%). Males accounted for 95.1%, with females only accounting for less than 5% (P.O.S.T., 2017). Those demographics placed limitations on this study. However, the study focused on rural North Georgia, and that represents the racial demographics of that area (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

It would have been ideal to have audio recorded the interviews with the participants of this study or had a stenographer present during the interview. A

professional transcriptionist or the stenographer could have then transcribed the interviews could have transcribed their own work. However, the participants of this study would not allow the researcher to audio record the interview. The participants preferred that only the researcher take notes during the interview rather than being audio recorded or have another person in the room such as a stenographer to further limit the chances of their anonymity being compromised.

This study had 14 participants. White males were the majority of the participant pool with 13 white males participating. There was only one white female that participated. This researcher would have preferred to have more female participants, but only one female contacted this researcher and was willing to participate. According to Bradway (2009), female officers handle stress differently than their male counterparts. This researcher would have liked the opportunity to interview more female officers to validate that literature further.

Recommendations

The study results indicate that the police department and city administration are the main sources of the stress of rural North Georgia police officers. The participants made it very clear during the interviews that they were not satisfied with the administration of the police department and the city government. Lack of communication, lack of delegation, lack of empowerment, and lack of participation in the police department decision-making process is very frustrating to the front-line police officer. This type of management style and work environment will not allow a good

working relationship between front-line police officers and command staff (Rose & Unnithan, 2015).

Policing has changed over the years, yet it appears from these interviews that the leadership styles of rural North Georgia police departments have not. According to Payne et al. (2005), many small towns do not keep up with current innovations and management styles. They are completely satisfied with the way things have always been and the way things are. Just like any other organization, police departments will not succeed if they are not willing to be receptive to innovation, management styles, and technology.

Modern policing management should be less management and more leadership. Leaders can manage, but not all managers can be leaders. Policing has been a paramilitary-style organization since its inception. Police departments must have some semblance of paramilitary structure, but the days of autocratic leadership are over. Wareham et al. (2015) described autocratic leadership as a management style where one person controls all the decisions and takes very little inputs from other group members. Autocratic leaders make choices or decisions based on their own beliefs and do not involve others for their suggestion or advice.

This type of leadership style is only effective in organizations where the nature of work requires quick decision-making. The sole responsibility for the decision and the outcome is with the leader. It is considered to be a flexible leadership style, but some would argue that it is outdated now (Wareham et al., 2015). This researcher would agree that are situations in policing where autocratic leadership would be necessary such as an

active shooter situation or another active ongoing situation where there is no time to get input from others.

The democratic leadership style is a leadership style where subordinates are involved in making decisions. Unlike autocratic, this leadership style is centered on officer's contributions from command staff to the front-line officer. The democratic leader holds final responsibility, but he or she is known to delegate authority to other people, who determine work projects. The unique feature of this leadership is that communication is active upward and downward. With respect to statistics, democratic leadership is one of the most preferred leadership, and it entails the following; fairness, competence, creativity, courage, intelligence and honesty (Wareham et al., 2015). This style of leadership would be recommended for rural North Georgia police departments. A leader should want his or her followers to eventually take their place and be better than they are, and leave the organization better than when they arrived. They should empower their people to be the best they can be, not leave them out of the decision-making process or not listen to their ideas about implementing programs that could benefit the community and the police department.

An assistance program should be implemented in rural North Georgia police departments. All of the participants of this study revealed that their police department did not have any type of officer assistance program to assist officers in dealing with the stressors of the police profession or other issues they may need assistance with. All police departments should have an assistance program in place. According to van der Veldon et

al. (2010), officers who have a mental illness brought on by the stress of the job such as; anxiety and depression are much more likely to be confrontational and aggressive. Therefore, it would be beneficial for the police department and the community to have an assistance program in place to help officers who need it so they can be productive and beneficial to the department and the community.

Another recommendation would be that officers receive adequate training. Officers need to have quality training to be prepared for the many scenarios they face while they are performing their duties. The state or the board that oversee officer training in various states across this country may only require a certain number of hours of training per year. The P.O.S.T. only require 20 hours of training per year for an officer to keep their Georgia peace officer certification valid (P.O.S.T., 2017).

Twenty hours of training per year may keep an officer's certification valid, but may not keep them, the police department, or the city from facing civil liability for lack of training. Kinnaird (2007) discussed a perfect example of liability, the case of Pow Pow v. City of Margate, NJ. In this case, an officer was justifiably shooting at a fleeing felon because the suspect was an immediate threat to society. However, the officer missed the fleeing suspect, and Mr. Pow Pow was struck by one of the bullets intended for the suspect. Mr. Pow Pow sued the officer and the City of Margate, NJ. The claims against the officer were dismissed because the officer was acting reasonably. However, the city did not fare as well. The City of Margate, NJ was found liable because they did not offer adequate training to their police officers. The court (jury) found that the

required annual firearms requalification was not sufficient training. The plaintiff argued that officers do not shoot at stationary paper targets when they are in a real-life situation, and the courts agreed. Police departments should implement some realistic (or as realistic as possible) firearms training into their yearly training schedule.

This phenomenological study gathered data about stress factors in rural North Georgia policing by conducting interviews with 14 police officers from rural North Georgia police departments. Future research should study stress factors from agencies from different geographic locations, more diverse racial and gender demographics, and different size agencies. Bradway (2009) stated that female police officers deal with stress differently than male police officers. They must also deal with the perception that they are physically weaker, and not strong enough to perform the duties of a police officer. They are also much more likely to be physically challenged by suspects out on the street because of that perception.

Bradway (2009) also stated that male officers are physically stronger than female officers, which is a non-factor with all of the less than lethal equipment that officers are issued. Female officers also deal with all of the organizational stressors that male officers do, but they also have to deal with sexual harassment. Male officers deal with sexual harassment as well, but only a small fraction of what female officers endure within the police subculture. Future research should be conducted to compare and contrast how male and female officers deal with the stress of the job and what causes them stress on

the job. Future research on this issue could back up current literature and studies as well as gather more data on this issue.

There should also be further studies on officer assistance programs. Donnelly et al. (2015) stated that policing is one of the most stressful jobs in the world and stressed the importance of officer assistance programs. Future research should attempt to determine how to implement officer assistance programs and how to get officers the assistance they need in such a way that they would not have to be concerned with ridicule or emasculation. Future research should obtain information on how a yearly psychological evaluation would be beneficial to the officer, the police department, and the community. If a yearly psychological evaluation was mandatory just as firearms qualification and a physical fitness test, officers would be able to discuss any issues they may deal with without worrying about any repercussions. Other officers would be of the understanding that they are getting the required psychological evaluation just as every other officer and what is said in that evaluation is confidential.

Additional research should be conducted on police leadership in small-town and rural police departments. The study should have the following research questions;

1. What is the education and experience required to be a chief of police?

2. What is the predominant leadership style?

3. Is the chief of police a merit-based position or are they appointed by the mayor and council?

If police officers are held to a higher standard, the leader of the police department must be held to an even higher standard. They should be better trained and better educated than those they are leading to set a good example and provide proper instructions on how to complete a task and/or directive.

Implications of Social Change

Police officers that are dealing with stress have a difficult time keeping their composure when something minor may irritate them. A police officer must maintain a professional attitude and maintain their composure at all times. People understand that police officers are human and they are going to display human emotions, however, they are held to a much higher standard than most professions. When an officer acts in an unprofessional manner, it causes conflict between the police and the community. It does not matter how many good things that officer has done for the community, they will remember that officer for being unprofessional (McKenzie, 2003).

There is tension all across the United States between law enforcement and the community from a variety of incidents such as; the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO, the death of Freddie Gray in Baltimore, MD, and many others. The community does not trust their local law enforcement to investigate the shootings. They are skeptical of any agency other than the Department of Justice (DOJ) conducting the investigation of a police officer shooting a citizen; they do not know about the stressors that a police officer faces while on the job (Katz, 2015).

Public Relations

The first thing needed to implement social change is transparency. The community needs and has the right to know what the police departments are doing to ensure that healthy and trained officers are working to protect them, not hurt them. According to Swid (2014), police and city leaders need to communicate to the community that they have policies in place to ensure to the best of their ability that police officers are getting proper training and have resources available to them if they need assistance with their physical, emotional, or psychological health. The police department must have a good relationship with the community they serve, and the key to any good relationship is communication.

Social change would imply that a physically, emotionally, and psychologically healthy officer would be beneficial to the officer, the police department, and the community. As previously mentioned, officers who have a mental illness brought on by the stress of the job such as; anxiety and depression are much more likely to be confrontational and aggressive (van der Veldon et al., 2010). Police officers who work for a supportive administration, have leadership that allows them to have input in decision making, and an officer assistance program in place would be much more likely to have a positive relationship with the community. A police officer takes an oath to protect and serve the community. However, they are human beings, and they are going to make mistakes. Officers who are properly trained and physically, emotionally, and psychologically healthy are more likely to make fewer mistakes because they will be able

to focus more on the job while they are on-duty. That would be a positive social change for the community and the country.

Community Partnership

A police department or any other law enforcement agency cannot prevent or solve crime without the assistance of the community. Public relations are the first step in creating a partnership between the community and the police department (Goskel et al., 2017). According to Buehler (2009), the best way to reduce the tension between law enforcement and the community in today's political climate is to create a partnership between to two groups. He further states that the leaders of law enforcement and the community must find some common ground and work together to heal the tension. Both sides need to educate each other on their roles in keeping the community safe. The community leaders should provide insight into the different cultures within the community and the most effective way of addressing issues with different communities within the city. Law enforcement leaders should find an effective way of educating the community on police procedures so they will have a better understanding of how police are officers are trained to handle the many different situations they are faced with while on-duty. That relationship between police and community leaders would allow community and law enforcement leaders to educate their respective followers to have a better understanding of each group as well.

As with public relations, it will only work if police officers are physically, mentally, and psychologically healthy. Community leaders can meet with law

enforcement leaders on a daily basis to discuss better ways to police the community effectively, but if the front-line officers that are the first law enforcement personnel that deal with the public are not healthy, there is still the possibility of conflict between the two groups (Donnelly et al., 2015). Again, having a protocol in place to assist officers in need and a community partnership will result in positive social change.

Conclusion

The data collected during this study provided lived experience from 14 rural North Georgia police officers. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the causes of the stress of rural North Georgia police officers through interviews of rural North Georgia police officers and what they believe to be the main stressor of policing profession in rural North Georgia.

This study was distinctive in that it focused on stress in rural North Georgia policing, which there have been no documented research studies in that geographic location. The research results made it clear that organizational stress is a much bigger factor for a rural North Georgia police officer than operational stressors. Particularly, lack of support from the police department administration and the administration of the municipality.

Participants of this study believe police officers in rural North Georgia have a tough job just any police officer in the country. They are short staffed, their equipment is lacking, and they often work a shift by themselves with the closest back-up being anywhere from 15-40 minutes away. If that isn't stressful enough, they must also concern

themselves with the lack of support from police and city leadership. A police officer working in the mountains of rural North Georgia has to handle many situations alone, and they must be able to completely focus on the task at hand and not concern themselves of any repercussions for writing a prominent citizen a ticket or using an authoritative tone of voice to keep someone out of a crime scene.

The participants of this study also believe officers need to be confident in their ability to handle a wide variety of situations they face while they are on-duty. That is especially true when there are one or two officers on scene to manage or investigate an incident. Well trained officers are more likely to be able to handle a wide variety of situations. That is why it is very important for rural North Georgia police officers to receive adequate training on a regular basis. They are often in situations where they are alone, waiting an extended period of time for back-up, or just have one other officer on the scene with them.

It is very tough for one or two officers to handle an incident where there are multiple offenders on the scene. A well-trained officer will have the knowledge and confidence to handle the situation much better than an officer that receives the minimum training per year. Officers with proper training can de-escalate a situation or have the knowledge to wait to approach a scene until there is sufficient back-up to do so. Those two issues can be the difference between life and death for the officer and the people involved in the incident. There are certain situations such as an active shooter and domestic violence in progress that an officer must go to the scene and take action whether

they have a back-up or not. Again, that is when a well-trained officer is much more capable of handling the situation (Kinnaird, 2007).

Police leadership needs to get away from the autocratic style of leadership and trend towards a more democratic style of leadership that will allow all of the police officers within the department to have a voice in decision making. Police officers are more productive and reflect a more positive image of the police department when they are satisfied with the organization and truly believe the organization supports them (Wareham et al., 2015). Police officers should have the support of their supervisors and command staff if they make a mistake while on-duty. Police officers are human, and they are going to make mistakes (Donnelly et al., 2015). However, they should understand that they will face the consequences of administrative discipline, civil action, or criminal prosecution if they maliciously violate policy, commit a crime, or violate a person's rights.

Police departments should be more of a team rather than a dictatorship. It is important for an officer's self-worth to feel they are a contributing member of the team. All of the police officers within the department have certain attributes that can benefit the organization or team. It is the job of the administration and supervisors to determine what attributes each officer has and use them accordingly. A happy employee or team member is a productive employee or team member (Jarimillo et al., 2005). This approach would be a positive social change for the officer, the police department, and the community.

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Appendix A: Letter and/or email to Police Chief

Police Chief
Address

Dear (Name),

My name is Robert Mason, and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am conducting research for my dissertation which is; Stress in Rural North Georgia Policing. There have been many studies on stress in law enforcement. However, there have been a limited number of studies that focused on stress in rural North Georgia policing. This research will help provide insight into the stressors of rural law enforcement and ways to assist officers who need help dealing with the stressors of the job.

I would greatly appreciate it if you would allow your sworn officers to take part in this study. I realize that privacy is very important to a law enforcement officer. Their name and agency will not be mentioned if the study is published. The interview will last approximately one to two hours and will not interfere with their duties. I will take notes during the interview and avoid using audio or video recordings to protect the privacy of the officer and your agency. The interview is designed to learn about the experiences of a law enforcement officer in rural North Georgia. All the information gathered will be kept strictly confidential. I am not only conducting this study to complete my dissertation, but to obtain data about stress in law enforcement because the State of Georgia does not recognize stress-related illnesses under workers' compensation. I would like to address this issue with the state legislature when the study is completed.

Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns. My telephone number is. You can also email me at and please provide my contact my information to officers that are willing to participate in this study. Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Robert Mason
Doctoral Candidate
Walden University

Appendix B: Letter to Participant

Name of Participant.
Address

Dear (Name),

My name is Robert Mason, and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am conducting research for my dissertation which is; Stress in Rural North Georgia Policing. There have been many studies on stress in law enforcement. However, there have been a limited number of studies that focused on stress in rural North Georgia policing. This research will help provide insight into the stressors of rural law enforcement and ways to assist officers who need help dealing with the stressors of the job.

I understand that your time is valuable, but I would greatly appreciate it if you consider taking part in this study. I realize that privacy is very important to a law enforcement officer. Your name and agency will not be mentioned if the study is published. The interview will last approximately one to two hours. We can meet at a location that is convenient to you so that you will feel comfortable during the interview process. I will take notes during the interview and avoid using audio or video recordings to protect your privacy. The interview is designed to learn about your experiences as a law enforcement officer in a rural area. All the information gathered will be kept strictly confidential.

Please contact me at your earliest convenience to schedule a date and time that we can meet for the interview. My telephone number is. You can also email me at. I look forward to hearing from you.

Robert Mason
Doctoral Candidate
Walden University

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Date_____

Location_____

Name of Interviewer_____

Name of Interviewee (Example) Participant 1

Age_____ Race_____ Gender_____ Marital

Status_____

Sexual Orientation_____ Religion_____

Rank_____ Time in Law Enforcement_____

Current Assignment_____ Size of Agency (Sworn Officers)

_____

1. What type of shift do you work?   Notes

2. How many additional officers are on shift while you are working?

3. Do you feel that you have the support of the agency's administration?

4. Do have the equipment to do your job safely and effectively?

5. Do you receive adequate training?

6. Do you feel that you receive adequate pay?

7. Do you feel that you have the support of the community?

8. Do you feel that you have the support of your supervisor?

9. Have you ever had the mayor, council member, commissioner, or prominent citizen try to influence your decision about an incident you were involved in?

10. Have the aforementioned ever had influence on the outcome of a criminal or traffic offense?

11. Have ever arrested or cited someone that you know?

12. How do traumatic events affect you?

13. Have you ever been to an incident where someone you knew suffered serious physical injury or death?

14. How do you deal with witnessing a traumatic event?

15. Is there an adequate chance of promotion within your agency? If so, is promotion based on your capabilities or "who you know"?

17. How does your job affect your personal life?

18. Has issues with the job (shift work, irregular sleep patterns, stress) affected your health?

19. What do you consider to be stressors of being a rural law enforcement officer?

20. Is there a protocol in place to assist you if you suffer from stress?

21. If so, what are they?

22. If not, do you think there should be and what type of assistance you think would be beneficial?

23. Is there anything that you would like to add a to this interview that has not been covered?

24. Is there are a specific incident that caused you a great deal of stress?

Appendix D: Georgia County Map

Rabun, Towns, Union, Fannin, & Gilmer Counties

Copyright 2005 digital-topo-maps.com
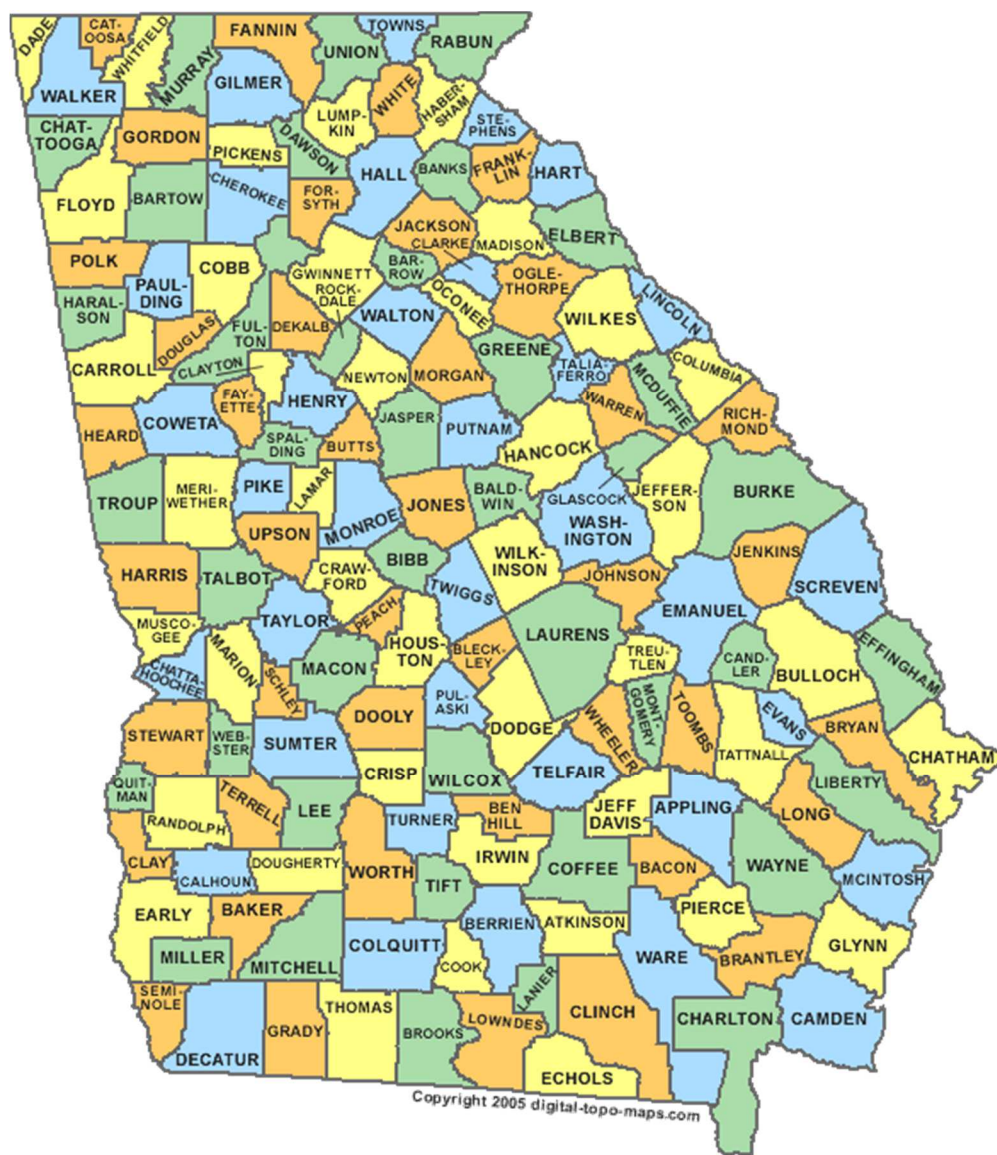
Appendix E: Rabun County, Georgia

Sky Valley, Georgia
Population – 316 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011)
Racial Demographics – White 95.48%, Black 4.07%, Other 0.45% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011)
Number of Sworn Officers – 6 (P.O.S.T. , 2017)
Officer Demographics – 5 White Males & 1 White Female (P.O.S.T. , 2017)

Mountain City, Georgia
Population – 887 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011)
Racial Demographics – White 90.83%, Black 0.61%, Other 8.56% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011)
Number of Sworn Officers – 5 (P.O.S.T. , 2017)
Officer Demographics – 5 White Males (P.O.S.T., 2017)

Dillard, Georgia
Population – 223 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011)
Racial Demographics – White 93.94%, Black 0.89%, Other 5.17% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011)

Number of Sworn Officers – 5 (P.O.S.T., 2017)
Officer Demographics – 5 White Males (P.O.S.T., 2017)

Clayton, Georgia
Population – 2,314 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011)
Racial Demographics – White 84.55%, Black 2.77%, Other 12.68% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011)
Number of Sworn Officers – 11 (P.O.S.T., 2017)
Officer Demographics – 10 White Males and 1 White Female (P.O.S.T., 2017)
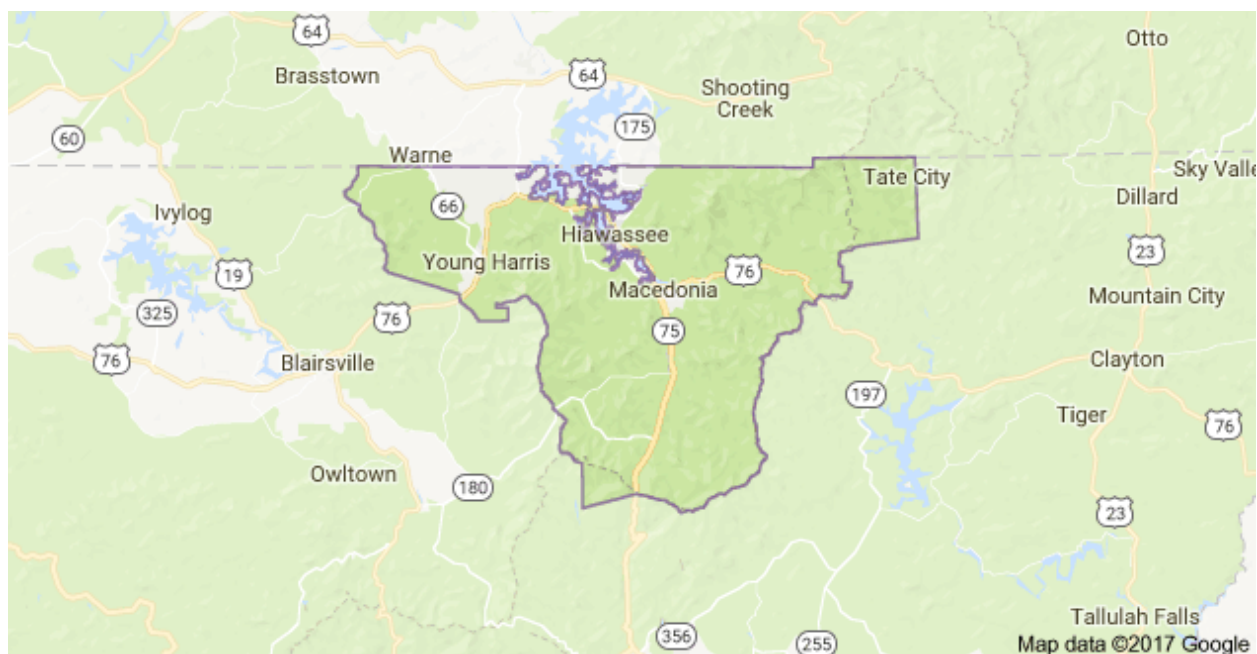
Tallulah Falls, Georgia
Population – 170 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011)
Racial Demographics – White 100% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011)
Number of Sworn Officers – 5 (P.O.S.T., 2017)
Officer Demographics – 5 White Males (P.O.S.T., 2017)

Appendix F: Towns County, Georgia

Young Harris, Georgia
Population – 643 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011)
Racial Demographics – White 96.52%, Black 1.66, Other 1.82% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011)
Number of Sworn Officers – 12 (P.O.S.T., 2017)
Officer Demographics – 11 White Males and 1 White Female (P.O.S.T., 2017)
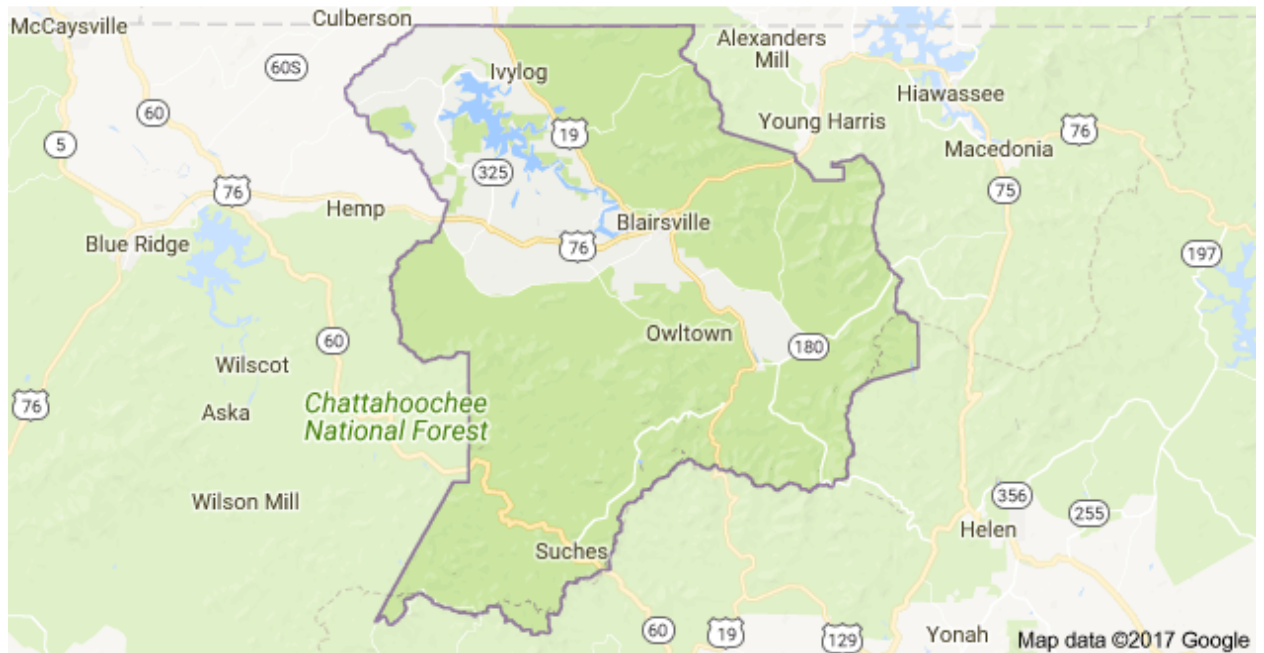
Hiawassee, Georgia
Population – 937 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011)
Racial Demographics – White 95.2%, Black 0.32%, Other 4.48% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011)
Number of Sworn Officers – 13 (P.O.S.T., 2017)
Officer Demographics – 12 White Males and 1 White Female (P.O.S.T., 2017)

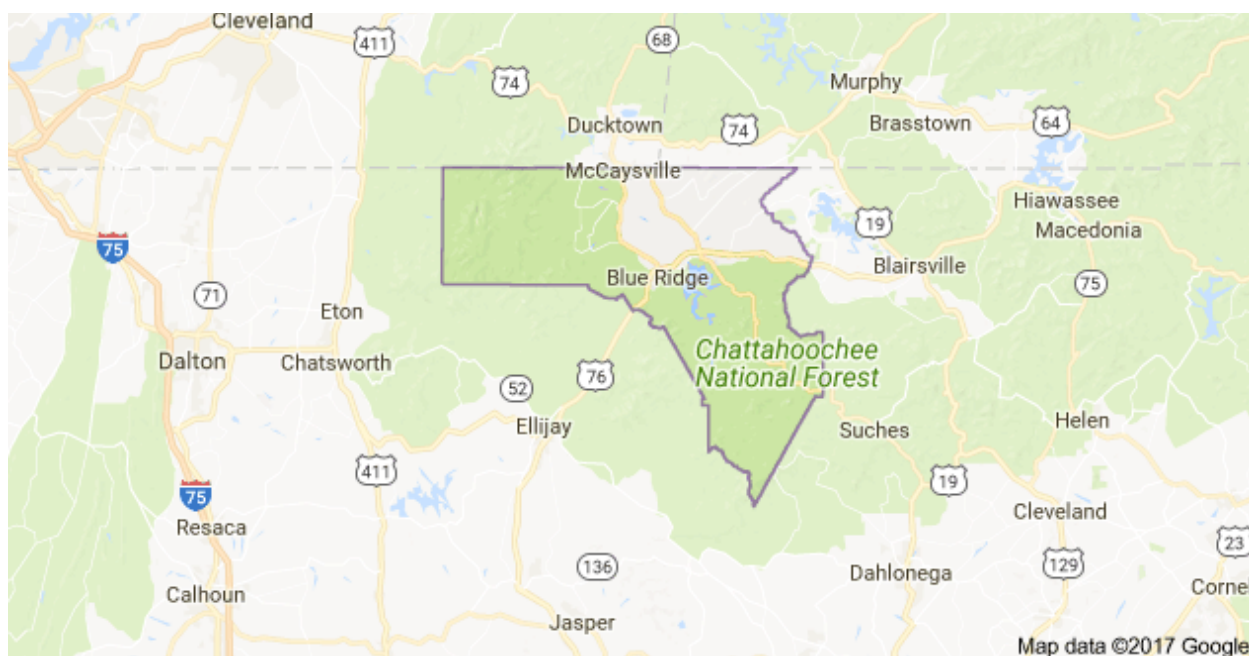Appendix G: Union County, Georgia

Blairsville, Georgia
Population – 712 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011)
Racial Demographics –White 88.5%, Black 4.61%, Other 6.89% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011)
Number of Sworn Officers – 13 (P.O.S.T., 2017)
Officer Demographics – 12 White Males and 1 Asian Male (P.O.S.T., 2017)

Appendix H: Fannin County, Georgia
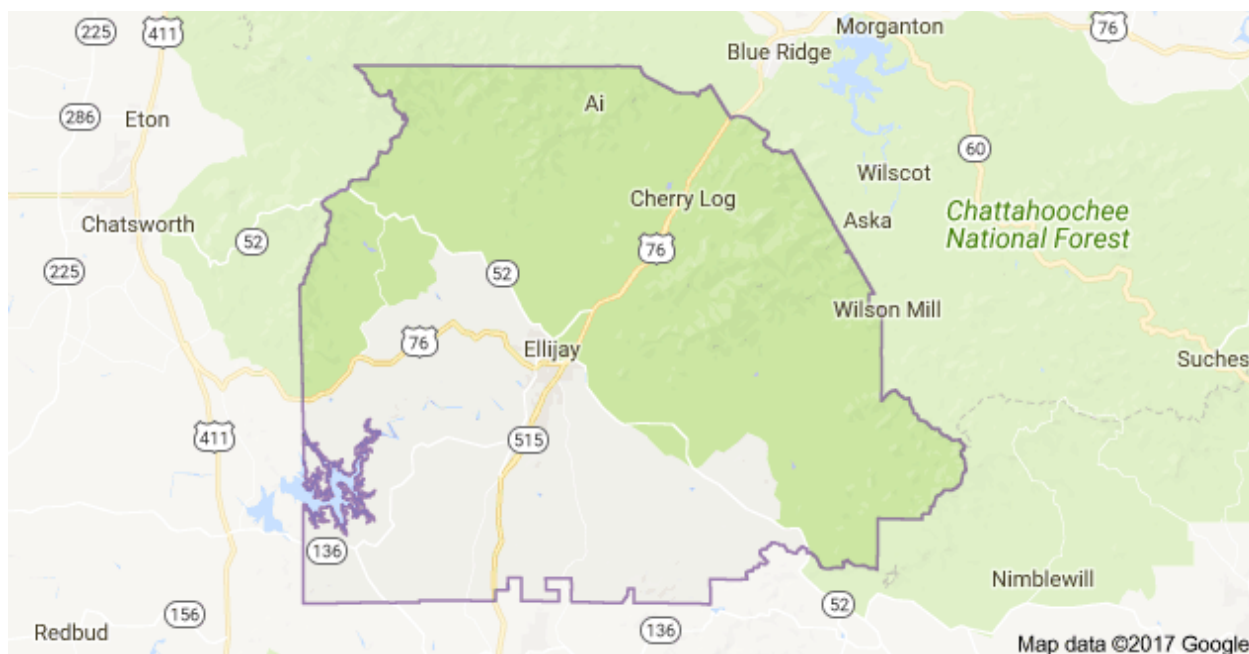

Blue Ridge, Georgia
Population – 1,362 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011)
Racial Demographics – White 98.26%, Black 0.43%, Other 1.31% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).
Number of Sworn Officers – 17 (P.O.S.T., 2017)
Officer Demographics – 16 White Males and 1 Hispanic Male (P.O.S.T., 2017)

Appendix I: Gilmer County, Georgia

Ellijay, Georgia
Population – 1,694 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011)
Racial Demographic – White 81.25%, Black 1.39%, Other 17.46% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011)
Number of Sworn Officers – 13 (P.O.S.T., 2017)
Officer Demographics – 12 White Males and 1 White Female (P.O.S.T., 2017)