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Exploration of Perceived Stressors Coping and Communication in Law-Enforcement Couples

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EXPLORATION OF PERCEIVED STRESSORS, COPING, AND COMMUNICATION IN LAW-ENFORCEMENT COUPLES

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore how law-enforcement officers and their significant others identify work-related stress, to learn how these couples perceive the resources that have helped them cope with identified challenges, and to understand how couples communicate about these issues. The researcher employed a qualitative approach to data collection, and analysis was completed utilizing grounded-theory methodology.

Seven law-enforcement couples participated in the study. All officers were on full-time active duty and represented various ranks, department size, and job duties. Officers and spouses participated in semi-structured, individual interviews and grounded-theory methodology was used to analyze and interpret data. The resultant model, identified as Negotiating Job Stress through Adaptive Caring incorporated participants' Recognition of Stressors, Self-Awareness, Understanding of Self in Intimate Relationships, and Engagement of Coping Strategies. Findings supported a dynamic and interactive process triggered by one or more aspects of police work, categorized as those related to job duties, organizational and administrative concerns, and larger systems issues, which may both directly and/or indirectly impact the officer and his or her spouse. Initial recognition of job-related stress occurred at the level of Self-Awareness with recognition and Understanding of the Self in Intimate Relationships, in this study, connections with spouses and children. With recognition of stress impacting the self and/or others and subsequently relationships, individuals and couples undertook various individual and relational coping strategies geared towards self-care and support of intimate relationships. These mechanisms are developed and accessed with the anticipation that these will manage the perceived negative consequences of stress at both the individual and
relational levels. Findings from this study expand on the existing literature on law-enforcement officers’ perceptions of job-related stress while also filling a significant gap in prior research by exploring the relational experiences of couples in the law-enforcement community. The current research provides directions for future research with the law-enforcement community, offers relevant information to officers, their families, and police administrators about the perception, impact, and management of job-related stress, and provides guidance to mental-health professionals working with officers and family members.
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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my parents, Sylvia Brodie and the late Angus Brodie, who literally showed me the world and let me know that anything was possible. They gave me their love of reading and learning and continue to encourage me in every endeavor.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Background

According to the most recent report by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, there are nearly 800,000 full-time sworn law-enforcement officers (LEO's) in the United States (U.S. Department of Justice, 2004), and this number is expected to increase between 9% and 17% through the year 2014 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006). With the exception of military duty and firefighting, few professions are likely to claim as many casualties. In a time span of several days in June 2007, the following headlines were reported on a law-enforcement website (Officer.com, 2007):

PRISONER KILLS OFFICER AT UTAH HOSPITAL
GEORGIA DEPUTY SUFFERS FATAL HEART ATTACK
TWO INDIANA DEPUTIES SHOT, ONE FATALLY
MARYLAND OFFICER STRUCK BY CAR DIES

As described by Woody (2005), “a career-based culture both yields benefits and imposes detriments. As a result, in practical terms, an LEO gains benefits from and is protected by the police culture yet is also vulnerable to the risk of adverse effects, such as loss of resources” (p. 525) and emotional, psychological, interpersonal, and physical tolls. Researchers have attempted to address a number of issues relating to law enforcement including, but not limited to, the nature of police subculture, the impact of trauma, problematic behaviors, and ways in which those who serve and protect may benefit from being served and protected. The task of the LEO who successfully pursues this career appears to be finding a balance to what Woody (2005) cited as “presses and payoffs” (p. 525) as a result of participating in the law-enforcement community. This decision, according to Kohan and O'Connor (2002), is not only a career decision but a lifestyle
decision for the LEO which ultimately impacts the officer’s relationship with a significant other.

In spite of the numbers of men and women involved in various capacities in the field of law enforcement, there are relatively few studies which have described the lived experiences of this population. Obtaining information can be challenging to researchers, due to the self-protective nature of law enforcement that often separates officers and civilians (Woody, 2005). Even fewer, yet unpublished, studies (Carrington, 2007; Moore, 2004) have utilized qualitative methods to gain understanding of both the law-enforcement officer’s and his/her significant other’s experiences of job-related stress, perceived impact on the individual and family system, coping resources, and how communication about these issues takes place. The present study was intended to fill this gap through interviews with both members of the law-enforcement couple on these important issues. Gathering information about how law-enforcement couples identify, understand, and discuss these experiences will ultimately help provide psychologists, family therapists, and clinicians with relevant information in clarifying treatment needs of other LEO couples and families as well as directions for future research. For police administrators, findings will assist in guiding prevention, intervention, and training for officers as well as in developing avenues that support healthier work environments.

Interest in pursuing research with law-enforcement couples stemmed from the researcher’s professional experiences working with first responders, including firefighters, police officers, and other emergency personnel, as well as family members of these individuals. Having had opportunities to work in clinical settings including mental-health facilities, substance-abuse programs, and a domestic-violence program led to an
increased awareness of the types and range of issues facing some members of this community. For LEO’s, services often were initiated on mandate, following identification of a problematic behavior that ultimately impacted the officer’s work. For family members in treatment on an individual basis or with their loved one, the identified problem was one that often was reported to be longstanding. Examples of problems encountered in the researcher’s clinical experience included alcohol use, drug use, poor anger management, physical violence, infidelity, and children’s behavioral problems. Many clients easily identified work-related stress of both members of a law-enforcement couple as part of the challenges facing their families while others were unsure as to the potential connection between the LEO’s work, the larger police subculture, which will be discussed shortly, and what members saw as “the problem.”

In addition to these professional experiences, the researcher has a strong personal interest in this area. As the spouse of a municipal police officer for the past twelve years, there is a natural draw towards better understanding law-enforcement families’ experiences. Becoming engaged with other families through this project allowed for a broader lens through which individuals who “serve and protect,” as well as those who support them on a daily basis, could be viewed.

The purpose of this study was threefold: to collect qualitative data to explore how law-enforcement officers and their significant others identify work-related stress, to learn how these couples perceive the resources that have helped them cope with identified challenges, and to understand how couples communicate about these issues. The researcher’s exposure to postmodern approaches, including narrative therapies, in the clinical milieu has highlighted the potential utility of engaging participants
collaboratively in research settings. Thus, male and female narratives of these experiences were elicited through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. As a natural and logical extension of this experience, a grounded-theory approach served as the framework for data collection and analysis.

*Importance of the Study*

The information gained from the study will be of importance to researchers, clinicians, and participants. The study's findings illuminated themes that may help clinicians and researchers understand the stressors facing law-enforcement officers and their families and how couples' narratives of these issues may shape and guide training, supervision, and intervention. Quantitative measures appear to, by and large, access information that is commonly used to categorize, and sometimes to pathologize, an individual's, couple's, or family's experiences. Such measures find common ground in the language utilized, for example, through the use of clinician- or researcher-generated diagnostic categories or labels. This can be highly useful in professional realms, though they, at times, may not accurately reflect the individual person's experience. Through the engagement of participants as co-researchers or consultants, researchers may have more direct access to language, themes, or descriptions that more richly capture the officers' experiences of these issues, ultimately weaving more tightly the stories of law-enforcement families which may support subsequent projects and further analyses.

The researcher's personal experience as the spouse of a police officer as well as professional experience working with first responders and/or family members has guided the current project. Findings will demonstrate how theoretical and clinical approaches can be effectively utilized in furthering understanding of how these issues emerge and
impact individuals and families in work and treatment settings. Utilizing participant narratives in research seemed to be a natural extension of a postmodern approach that denotes challenges to the idea of the professional-as-expert. This style more effectively fits an ethic of care in which professionals can strive to facilitate a sense of agency in participants rather than assuming that there is a “right” way to be in relation to others and in the world. This stance is also supported by Boszormenyi-Nagy’s (1986) ethically-based contextual approach. Although primary applications of the contextual approach is helping couples and families find equitable resolutions to interpersonal problems, its guidelines can also aid the researcher in regard to interacting with participants.

Boszormenyi-Nagy discussed relational ethics as one of four dimensions of relating and highlighted the need for consideration of “the equitable distribution of the benefits and burdens of all partners to a given situation” rather than having the professional determine “who or what is right or wrong” (p. 173). This is also compatible with the ethics of inquiry into participants’ lived experiences. Boss, Dahl, and Kaplan (1996) described a less hierarchical approach in qualitative research in which collaboration between researcher and participant is valued. In the current project, the researcher’s awareness of officers’ (and possibly partners’) employment in and value for hierarchical systems may have influenced the extent to which participants engage in the collaborative process described above. The researcher’s efforts to prepare participants from initial contact with this approach served to address this potential concern to maintain the integrity of the narrative inquiry.

Boszormenyi-Nagy advocated for the examination of issues of justice and introduced multidirected partiality as a key concept. Stemming from the professional’s
willingness and ability to have a sense of her own responsibility in the system and in relation to others, this stance allows for the development of collaborative and empowering relationships within families and between families and larger communities and systems. Such collaboration, grounded in the spirit of postmodern and contextual theory, facilitated a natural curiosity on the part of the researcher to seek out the experiences of the current project’s participants from their positions as the experts on their own lived experiences. The collaborative approach allows all voices to be heard, a critical component for positive change in a society that continues to privilege certain voices and stories over others. Ultimately, the core idea of postmodern thinking within the research setting is that there is no fixed truth. An individual’s truth or reality is one that exists in the context of one’s own and others’ earlier experiences and relationships and the meanings that have been assigned to them. Openness to alternative perspectives and meanings invites critique and the possibility of further paradigmatic shift and, according to Payne (2006), facilitates validation of “local knowledge as of equal legitimacy to scientific ways of knowing” (p. 36). This philosophy supports the dialectical process of moving from either-or to both-and ways of reasoning is suggestive of ways in which elements, constructs, and meanings are defined both by themselves and by their relationships with one another allowing for the participant narrative to support and be supported by other methods of scientific inquiry (Martínez, 1997).

Finally, as a researcher pursuing a project with people, I strove to maintain awareness of the ethics and the potential risks associated with this work. This was relevant for the researcher as well as participants. Acknowledgement of the potential discomfort associated with interview questions was important. These are discussed
elsewhere, under Informed Consent and Participant Debriefing. The importance of the study and potential benefits for this project’s participants was discussed as part of the consent and debriefing processes. The goal of engaging individuals in collaborative consultation in research was to facilitate greater understanding of the stories that "illuminate complex interactional patterns" (Roberts, 1994, p. 231). Penn and Sheinberg (1986) noted that "if there were no 'family therapy,' and we only consulted with family systems, families might come to feel less labeled, less ill, less crazy, and so on" (p. 103). Such consultation appropriately acknowledges participants as the experts regarding their own experiences and asks them to share their stories from the "front lines" of law enforcement. This is what I believe to be the core of understanding from within the conversation (Anderson, 1997).

Another area in need of attention in the current project was that of boundaries. Boss, Dahl, and Kaplan (1996) noted that "the boundaries between when we are doing research and when we are doing therapy are more blurred in doing phenomenological inquiry than when we conduct positivist research" (p. 88). Though Boss and colleagues discussed the phenomenological approach, this statement is applicable to other qualitative inquiry methods. Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, and Liampittong (2006) engaged qualitative health researchers in interviews to investigate the blurring of researcher-participant boundaries. Three boundary issues were addressed: 1) Issues associated with being a professional qualitative researcher, 2) research and therapy, and 3) friendship and research. Professional-role issues included researcher self-disclosure, development of rapport with participants, and need for support and debriefing. In these interviews, the researchers described their use of self-protective strategies when self-disclosing to
research participants about personal experiences related to the topic under study. They also identified a range of emotions experienced throughout the research, and the authors highlighted potential negative outcomes for researchers, including physical, emotional, and safety issues.

The question of research versus therapy was also explored by Dickson-Swift and her colleagues (2006). Study participants highlighted confusion about being placed in a therapeutic role by their interviewees. Some also acknowledged the “unintentional” therapeutic value of the interviews for the participants they worked with while others reported that their interviews may have actually been harmful, resulting in need for therapeutic intervention. Other themes that emerged were length of the researcher-participant relationship and the nature of the relationship. This latter point was the third boundary issue identified by the researchers. Participants described challenges in managing these new relationships as well as ending their relationships with their study participants, acknowledging that friendships emerged in response to the time they spent developing trust and rapport. Kegan (1982) echoed this in relation to clinical work; however, it is also appropriate to the field of qualitative research. He described this as a “predicament” for the participant, noting “the intensity of the greeting, the difficulty in separating, the feeling of having been so close and not quite understanding what it means…something to do with trying to figure out how it can be that one both has one’s own space and is not alone” (p. 285). This latter point underscores the potential for therapeutic benefit in the collaborative nature of qualitative study. Recommendations were made for researchers, research supervisors, and human-subjects-review boards to have protocols in place for disclosure, rapport, clarity around therapy versus research,
strategies for leaving the research relationship, and management of professional boundaries. The researcher’s attention to these boundaries and protection of participants was initially established with the support of the University’s Institutional Review Board and maintained through ongoing reflection and dialogue with the mentor.

As will be discussed in the literature review, a significant number of studies have been undertaken with the LEO as the focus of research. Few have expanded this lens to include the LEO’s understanding of how this work influences other aspects of life, in particular ways in which the nature of the job impacts significant others and children. Even fewer studies have included family members in research or explored how these issues are approached in couples, and there is a dearth of literature employing qualitative methodology to glean information in participant voices and within their lived experiences. The current study was aimed to fill this gap -- to further recognize the daily stressors facing families, the potentially unique stressors of individuals actively employed in law enforcement, and how a strengths-based perspective can target aspects of resiliency and coping in this community.

Definition of Terms

For purposes of this study, the definition of law-enforcement officer (LEO) was “an employee, the duties of whose position are primarily the investigation, apprehension, or detention of individuals suspected or convicted of offenses against the criminal laws of the United States, including an employee engaged in this activity who is transferred to a supervisory or administrative position” (U.S. Department of Justice, 2000).

Other key terms in the current study are “stress” and “coping.” The initial definitions of each served as tentative ideas while recognizing that participants’ storying
of these experiences may illuminate other meanings. As discussed by Creswell (2003), and in the spirit of qualitative research, the inductive and evolving methodological design may facilitate exploration of multiple meanings of these terms. To provide an initial framework for this project, stress was defined as “an imbalance between environmental demands and individual resources” (Stinchcomb, 2004, p. 261). Coping was defined as dealing with and attempting to overcome problems and difficulties (Merriam-Webster, 2005).

Research Questions

Exploration of the narratives of active male and female law-enforcement officers along with their significant others was undertaken with the following research questions as guides:

1. How do law-enforcement officers and their significant others understand the nature and impact of job-related stressors on individual members and relationships within the family?

2. What are key factors in coping with identified stressors?

3. How do couples communicate about the LEO’s work and work-related stress?

These research questions served as the framework for data collection and also for the interview questions (Appendix G). The original research questions remained as anchors throughout this study and were not changed during the data collection process. It was anticipated that analyses of data from each interview would expand, clarify, or change the questions during the process of research. In keeping with the spirit of qualitative inquiry, participants were able to “define the phenomenon in question rather than the researcher defining it for them” (Boss, Dahl, & Kaplan, 1996, p. 91). For example, while the
researcher sought participant experiences of stress, it was important to enquire as to how
interviewees define and understand stress. Allowing the process to remain fluid and
evolve across the course of the study aided in minimizing the risk of influence by the
researcher’s assumptions or preconceived ideas about the individuals’ experiences.

Delimitations and Anticipated Limitations

This study was confined to interviewing active law-enforcement officers and their
significant others. The researcher used Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) grounded-theory
methodology to illuminate themes about stress and coping while striving to remain aware
that there are inherent limitations in our abilities to fully grasp all of the complexities and
movements in the real world. Such are the challenges in psychological research;
however, Henwood and Pidgeon (2003) specifically discussed the inherent dilemma of
qualitative methodologies. They noted that this dilemma develops out of a “simultaneous
commitment on the one hand to scientific process and realism…and on the other a form
of constructivism…that involves the researcher in the creative and interpretive process of
generating new understandings and theory” (p. 134). In response to this tension, they
recommended a constructivist revision of this approach that supports qualitative
researchers’ utilization of their theoretical sensitivities and reminded that such
sensitivities may be “vision-creating or vision-blinkering, depending on a complex mix of
individual, structural, and cultural conditions (p. 135). Martínez (1997) captured the
essence of these challenges of the approach by suggesting that

[W]hen we speak of “objectivity” of data, we can take this to mean only their
reproducibility within a scientific community that shares a common series of
hypotheses and concepts. This provides the basis for communication and
agreement, but it does not imply that the data are independent of the operations of the observer or of his or her interpretative categories; that is, they are not something absolute, but rather relative and provisional, yet useful. Therefore, to speak of full “objectivity,” would be impossible and absurd, like applauding with only one hand. (p. 65)

Thus, the role of the researcher as the primary instrument in collecting data may influence the type and extent of data collected, analysis of the information, and ultimately how the findings are integrated and reported. Additional influences on the outcome and utility of the present study includes sample selection and sources of data. The researcher’s involvement in the law-enforcement community enabled her to make initial contacts and to use “snowball” or word-of-mouth as recruitment methods. The benefits of this approach included utilization of the connections within the law-enforcement community to increase responsibility to the request to participate in research and also to reduce potential biases in accessing only researcher acquaintances. This approach also has disadvantages. As noted by Nelson and Allred (2005), this may compound study biases. Browne (2005) highlighted the possibility that the approach may favor participants who are more socially connected with other members of the community and thus exclude those not in friendship groups. Browne’s writing also captured the significance of the researcher’s background in such an approach, noting that “where snowballs begin [with the researcher] can be significant to the formation of the sample creating particular exclusions and boundaries” (p. 52). The use of single one- to two-hour interviews as the primary data source also has its limitations. Morrow (2005) advocated for multiple data sources to enhance richness, breadth, and depth of the information
sought. While several types of data in addition to the interview were utilized (e.g. observation, field notes, participant checks), the researcher maintained attention to how her individual perspective and use of the interview as the point of data generation influenced the research process and the findings.

Additionally, participants in the present study were self-selected, and data was gathered exclusively from participants. Participants may have underreported or over reported their experiences, and, as Creswell (2003) noted, individuals vary in their abilities to reflect, express, and articulate experiences. Furthermore, these experiences are likely to be influenced by the rank of the officer. For example, patrol officer duties are likely to include more street-level experiences while sergeants may have a combination of these as well as administrative tasks. Officers with higher rank may also have significantly more years in an agency and families that have been engaged with the community for a longer period of time than patrol officers. Another consideration is that of location of research. Participants were affiliated with various-sized agencies in the larger metropolitan area of a northeastern state in the United States. These issues were likely to influence the findings and to potentially limit whether results may adequately capture the range of experiences of all ranks of LEO within and across varied communities. Attention to these factors were maintained throughout data collection, analyses, and presentation of findings.

Efforts to address the above influences and limitations can be found in Chapter III, Methodology, in which fuller discussion of methodological considerations and trustworthiness are presented.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Stressors in Law Enforcement

Previous researchers have illuminated various sources of stress in the field of law-enforcement. Some have described the profession as uniquely stressful while others argued that LEO’s do not experience stress at any higher levels than in other types of careers. Stinchcomb (2004) suggested the possibility that police stress is highly glamorized and publicized. This may create a self-fulfilling prophecy or be viewed as an occupational status symbol. In contrast to the above findings, Hart, Wearing, and Headey (1995) found that LEO’s reported less overall distress and greater well-being than those in other occupations and the average person in the community under study. Patterson (2003) identified life events as a stronger predictor of distress than work events.

Physical Risks

One of the more well-known stressors associated with law enforcement is that of the potential for physical danger. The headlines which opened this writing represent the most dramatic examples of physical risk for LEO’s. As noted by Woody (2006), dealing with individuals breaking the law is a daily event, and, thus, “danger is an ever-present companion for the LEO, meaning there is a constant stimulus for stress” (p. 98).

According to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund (NLEOMF, 2007), there have been more than 17,000 law-enforcement officers killed in the line of duty since recording of this information began in the late 1700’s. This includes 1,649 killed between 1997-2006 with 145 killed in 2006. More than 62% of line-of-duty deaths were the result of officers being shot or killed in auto accidents. While the U.S. Department of
Justice cited a decline in line-of-duty deaths since the 1970’s, the dangers facing LEO’s remain and become evident in statistics on officer assaults and injuries. The NLEOMF reported an average of 56,292 assaults per year resulting in approximately 16,138 injuries to LEO’s annually. However, as Stinchcomb (2004) pointed out, most officers will move through their careers without experiencing such high-impact events, for example, firing their weapons or participating in a high-speed pursuit.

Systems Issues

Loo (2003) described the criminal-justice system as a potential source of pressure through the time LEO’s must spend in court appearances, as well as demands associated with being cross-examined and negative perceptions of the system’s management of lawbreakers. Challenges in resolving potentially conflicting demands or expectations between and within individual agencies, corrections facilities, departments of parole and probation, and the court system may trigger increased stress levels and ultimately problematic behavior (Woody, 2005).

Community Perception

LEO’s may experience public suspicion, disdain, and perceptions of apathy from the communities they serve (Woody, 2006; Loo, 2003). Summarized neatly by Woody (2006), these experiences may contribute to the subculture that “constructs a protective barrier between the law enforcer and the public” (p. 98), yet they also contributes to a divide. Borum and Philpot (1993) highlighted the potential for such a schism to contribute to and be exacerbated by an in-group-out-group or us-and-them mentality, ultimately impacting personal interactions. On the other hand, Kirschman (2007) discussed the phenomenon of communities perceiving LEO’s as public property.
Kirschman cited her own experience of being shown a home by a real estate agent who noted one of the benefits was having a police officer next door.

Organizational Stressors

The gap described above may occur not only between law-enforcement members and those not in such positions but also within the ranks. Stinchcomb (2004) made the distinction between what she terms “episodic, street-level stressors visibly associated with police work and the chronic organizational stressors that lurk obscurely behind the scenes” (p. 260). Rather than the incidents making headlines, such as those which opened this writing and the statistics cited above, Stinchcomb (2004) argued for attention to “organizational management practices” (p. 263) as a greater source of “persistent and prevalent” (p. 263) stress for LEO’s. Hart et al. (1995) referred to organizational versus operational experiences, with the former of greater importance in determining officer’s level of “work hassles and uplifts” (p. 145). Agency administrators may develop goals or procedures which do not adequately address the realities facing the patrol officer on the street or recognize the pressures inherent in his or her decision-making (Janik & Kravitz, 1994; Johnson, Todd, and Subramanian, 2005). Woody (2006) described an “ambiguous framework in which discretionary decisions are made,” (p. 97) referring to the need for LEO’s to make discretionary and rapid decisions while on duty, and these are subject to scrutiny by higher-level supervisors and administrators. Several researchers (Morash, Haarr, and Kwak, 2006; Stinchcomb, 2004; Woody, 2006) highlighted that the rigid hierarchy and bureaucracy that exists in many agencies limits lower-level involvement and results in decreased sense of control, destruction of personal initiative, and stress. Additional sources of stress stemming from the organization were cited as lack of
consultation and communication, inadequate administrative guidance and support, and lack of sufficient feedback (Stinchcomb, 2004). Kirschman (2007) suggested that, in addition to these factors, officers may also experience dealing with poor equipment, unfair workload distribution, favoritism, and limited family-friendly policies.

Building on studies in the various fields of health, sports, clinical, and industrial/organizational psychology, researchers have proposed that a proactive stance is needed in creating a healthier work environment to possibly combat some of the organizational stressors cited above. Changes in organizational health may serve to increase productivity, decrease absenteeism, decrease employee turnover, decrease recruitment and training costs, reduce medical-care expenditures, increase safety compliance, increase organizational commitment, and improve job satisfaction (Cropanzano, Rupp, & Byrne, 2003; Cullen & Hammer, 2007; Lloyd & Foster, 2006; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Scandura & Lankau, 1997). Following their synthesis of research on the link between healthy workplaces and employee health and organizational improvements, Grawitch, Gottschalk, and Munz (2006) found that these domains are mutually influential and recommended the following five areas as focal points for employers: Work-life balance, employee growth and development, health and safety, recognition, and employee involvement. Kegan (1982) suggested that, in order for organizations to be able to “encourage, recognize, or support development beyond the institutional...[they] would have to have an interest in a kind of self-exploration, open-systems information seeking, and possible reconstruction of its goals, practices, and criteria” (p. 244). Such changes, while desired by officers, need to be initiated at the administrative level. Consequently, it is hoped that increased understanding of how organizational stressors directly impact
LEO's and, secondarily, their significant others will facilitate change in administrators' awareness, management, and resolution of these important issues.

**Discrimination**

Several authors have also highlighted increased diversity within law-enforcement agencies as a natural progression away from the historically white-male dominated nature of the profession. Sklansky (2006) identified several areas in which diversity may be expressed, which include

*Competency effects* (ways in which minority officers, female officers, and openly gay and lesbian officers may have distinctive sets of abilities), *community effects* (ways in which the demographic diversity of a police department may affect its relations with the community it serves), and *organizational effects* (ways in which the workforce diversity may affect the internal dynamics of the department itself). (pp. 1211-1212)

Each of these effects will emerge in the following, brief discussion on discrimination as potential sources of stress for minority groups within law enforcement.

Toch (2002) acknowledged rapidly occurring change in this area and interactions among diversity, perceptions of equity and fairness, and acceptance and promotion of change. In his study utilizing interviews, focus groups, and surveys, Toch found that, while discrimination ranked low as a source of stress, race relations were identified as a source of stress by over half the respondents and by two-thirds of Black respondents. Both White and Black respondents identified race as an issue they believed had factored into decisions about advancement. Findings by Morash, et al. (2006) suggested another perspective – that bias against officers' racial, gender, or ethnic group was a significant
and important predictor of stress. Officers in this study further reported that they spent “considerable time and energy dealing with and helping other officers deal with prejudice and bias” (p. 35). Kirschman (2007) highlighted challenges for officers of color “in a culture that tends to stereotype minority races as criminal.... [with] the symbolic assailant in our collective cultural minds...a minority male, usually black” (p. 233). She noted the complexity of multiple roles being juggled by the minority officer with seemingly competing allegiances and the experience of being marginalized in the communities in which they live.

Similar findings emerged in consideration of gender relations in Toch’s (2002) work with more than half of female respondents reporting incidents of discrimination two-thirds reporting gender as a barrier to advancement. Kirschman (2007) acknowledged that policing remains dominated by men and that discrimination and harassment may have simply taken more subtle forms in response to increased scrutiny of more blatant incidents. In spite of this, Kirschman provided evidence of improvements in the field in an effort to bridge the gender gap, including greater access to appropriate equipment (locker rooms, fitted bullet-proof vests), positions once reserved for their male counterparts (K9, SWAT, motorcycle units), and active efforts to advance women in the profession.

In her text, Kirschman (2007) also included potential challenges facing gay and lesbian officers in the form of “virulent stereotypes” (p. 237). She discussed the stereotypes of the police officer, many of which are consistent with the notion of manliness. For women and gay men, such stereotypes may easily undermine self and others’ perceptions of the officer as competent. Henneman (2006) discussed the positive
steps that larger departments have taken towards supporting gay and lesbian officers. These include active recruitment and promotion of gay and lesbian officers, securing benefits for partners, and increasing involvement in the community.

In addition to the above issues facing minority officers, the older police officer may also experience challenges based on perceived age discrimination. Utilizing data from more than 402 officers, Redman and Snape (2006) found that perceived age discrimination impacted officers' sense of job satisfaction, life satisfaction, power and prestige of the job, and affective and normative commitment. Pascarella (2005) discussed the impact of age-restriction policies in law enforcement from historical, legal, and safety perspectives. While he argued that age-based discriminatory policies may be cost effective and support public safety, such decisions must be made in consideration of available police performance measures, be reviewed on a continuous basis, and be agency specific.

Consequences of Stress

Traumatic stress. Woody (2006) identified a "constant stimulus for stress" (p. 98) in the work of the LEO. There may also be exposure to traumatic stress as first responders. Such events may include witnessing violence, threats of violence to self/others, exposure to severe accidents and injuries, and being injured in the line of duty. Toch (2002) specifically addressed officers' experiences of incidents that involved the death of a child and suggested these to be some of the most difficult experiences during their law-enforcement careers. These experiences have the potential to set the stage for development of symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder. These symptoms are likely rooted in alterations to the normal functioning of the stress-response system.
(the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal or HPA axis) (McKeever & Huff, 2003; Rothschild, 2000; Yehuda, 2001). Changes in this system may trigger and maintain mental-health symptoms such as hyperarousal (Solomon & Heide, 2005), phobias, anxiety and panic disorders, depression (Moskowitz, 2004; Rothschild, 2000; van der Kolk, 2001), psychological and somatic dissociation (Scaer, 2001) as well as cognitive problems such as memory impairment and interference (Bremner, 2005; Lindauer, Olff, van Meijel, Carlier, & Gersons, 2005; Rothschild, 2000; Scaer, 2001; van der Kolk, 2001).

Substance use. Researchers have focused on substance use within law enforcement from several viewpoints. The first is a cultural perspective. Obst, Davey, and Sheehan (2001) suggested that new recruits are inducted into a subculture of alcohol consumption which may impact individual consumption. Their longitudinal study generated findings supporting this hypothesis with results indicating that 6% of recruits displayed risk of alcohol dependency on day one at the academy with this figure rising to 13% at 6 months and 16% after 12 months. Recruits were more likely to report both having a drinking problem and not being able to stop drinking at the 12-month mark than when they were initially assessed. A second perspective is the relationship between stress and alcohol use. In their research with more than 120 Canadian LEO’s, Kohan and O’Connor (2002) found that job stress was primarily associated with negative affect and alcohol consumption. A review of literature conducted by Dietrich and Smith (1986) indicated variability of reported incidences of alcohol problems among LEO’s, ranging from 2% to 30% with serious drug problems as high as 10%. These authors concluded that substance use may be facilitated by both cultural aspects (socialization with peers) and as a coping response to stress factors. Utilizing a sample of 500 officers, Violanti,
Marshall, and Howe (1985) found that stress had a strong positive effect on alcohol use as did failure of cynicism as a coping response. A third viewpoint is that of self-medication, occurring not necessarily in response to stress but in response to shift work. According to Kirschman (2007), due to the disruption of regular sleep patterns, LEO’s may overuse alcohol and sedatives to get to sleep and caffeine and other stimulants to stay awake. A fourth issue is that of the interactions among trauma exposure, PTSD symptoms, and substance use. There have been a number of studies identifying high rates of comorbidity of PTSD and substance abuse. Sonne, Back, Zuniga, Randall, and Brady (2003) referenced the National Comorbidity Study to cite that 26.2% of women and 10.3% of men who were dependent on alcohol also met the criteria for PTSD. Brown, Stout, and Mueller (1996) found PTSD to be the most common co-occurring diagnosis among treatment-seeking substance abusers.

Researchers have also sought to identify the role of trauma exposure on PTSD on substance abuse. Stewart (1996) determined that the presence of trauma exposure, including assault, as well as PTSD may increase the risk of alcohol problems. She also noted that greater severity of the trauma may be linked to the level of severity of alcohol problems. There have also been studies developed to test hypotheses regarding the potential link or mediating factors between these two phenomena of trauma exposure and substance problems. Although various types of trauma have been studied, researchers have cited the self-medication hypothesis as one possible factor in substance use. Sharkansky, Brief, Peirce, Meehan, and Mannix (1999) observed that individuals with PTSD reported greater probability of using drugs or alcohol when in situations that include unpleasant emotions, conflict with others, and physical discomfort. Stewart
proposed a bi-directional model in considering alcohol use as a response in the form of self-medication to quell current PTSD symptoms and also as a way to deal with long-term anxiety resulting from intoxication and withdrawal effects.

*Suicide.* Several researchers have focused work specifically on stress-related issues in law-enforcement cohorts. In an older study, Violanti, Vena, and Marshall (1986) cited police suicide rates as three times higher than other municipal workers. In a more recent study, Violanti (2004) highlighted the complexity of the interactions among traumatic police-work exposure, posttraumatic-stress-disorder (PTSD) symptoms, and alcohol use and how these may influence suicidal ideation among LEO’s. Data were collected utilizing the Scale for Suicide Ideation (SSI), Impact of Events Scale (IES), Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT), and CAGE, which is a brief instrument whose name is derived from one key word (cut down, annoyed, guilty, eye-opener) in each of the four questions that comprise the tool. Analysis using a multiple logistic regression model resulted in findings that persons dying, the homicide of a fellow officer, and other miscellaneous disturbing incidents significantly increased PTSD symptom scores as well as alcohol use. Officers with more severe PTSD who also had increased alcohol use were found to have ten times the likelihood of suicide ideation than officers with lower trauma levels. Berg, Hem, Lau, Loeb, and Ekeberg (2003) completed a study of more than 3,200 Norwegian police officers and found separated/divorced marital status, subjective health complaints, personality traits of reality weakness, anxiety, and depression as significant predictors of serious suicidal ideation in this population. Janik and Kravitz (1994) supported Berg et al.’s (2003) findings on the dimension of relational issues, noting that an LEO’s marital problems as well as
suspension from work were contributing variables in the decision to attempt suicide. Of interest in Berg et al.'s study, low job dissatisfaction was observed to elevate the risk of ideation relating to harm to self but only when associated with increased levels of anxiety and depression.

According to statistics cited by the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ), the national suicide rate for police officers (18 per 100,000) is higher than that of the general population (11 per 100,000). Suicide among LEO's is a complex issue, for a number of reasons, including the interplay between and among the LEO and the various systems of which he or she is part, as well as the way in which data are collected, analyzed, and presented. Loo (2003) argued that agencies have historically lacked adequate and comprehensive data collection on officers who complete suicide and highlighted the influence of stigma and misclassification. Other potential considerations supporting the hypothesis that completed acts are underreported include religious and insurance reasons, perceptions of family response, and reflections on the LEO's department (Janik & Kravitz, 1994).

Several researchers have noted the importance of evaluating suicide rates in context (Hem, Berg, & Ekeberg, 2001; Loo, 2003). This context must consider larger systemic moderating variables, some of which reflect national and cultural differences, including societal values, attitudes and legislation, and others which define the specific job responsibilities of the LEO. A systematic review conducted by Hem et al. generated inconclusive results. That is to say, results did not support the idea that the police suicide rate is higher than that of other occupational groups. Loo's meta-analysis of studies including police suicide rates was undertaken with several goals in mind, including
clarifying rates as higher or lower than comparable populations, examining the role of outlying cases, reviewing the relationship between rates and time periods studied, and exploring rates based on type of police force. Findings in Loo’s work suggested a bias in reporting, limited sampling, significant effects of outliers, and use of shorter time frames (less than 10 years), which resulted in inflated rates. He also identified higher rates in regional police forces than in both federal and municipal forces and also higher suicide rates in the Americas and Europe when compared to Caribbean, Asian, and African regions, though sampling of the latter three was limited. Loo ultimately concluded that suicide rates for police in the Americas are not significantly different than that of the appropriate comparison group, one that is matched along demographic variables. An analysis of New York City police officers’ suicide rates between 1977 and 1996 demonstrated similar findings, describing rates that were equal to or lower than the resident population (Marzuk, Nock, Leon, Portera, & Tardiff, 2002). Kirschman (2007) provided further evidence and cited data that suggest that, when police officers are compared to white males between 21 and 55 years of age (representing the majority of LEO’s), LEO’s are 26% less likely to take their own lives than are their civilian peers.

As the above discussion suggests, there are a number of issues that emerge in data collection, analysis, and presentation of findings which can significantly alter public perception of suicide in this occupation. This deserves bearing in mind when faced with the statistic presented in the beginning of this section. In this researcher’s opinion, such information has the potential to both illuminate the need for adequate assessment, prevention, and intervention while also conveying powerful messages about suicide to officers, loved ones, and the general public.
Physical health. In addition to mental-health issues, stress-related consequences and lifestyle choices secondary to stress (e.g. alcohol use, poor diet) may also influence officers' physical health. In general, exposure to chronic stress, including cases of PTSD, may contribute to potentially negative health outcomes, including muscle pain, gastrointestinal problems, skin problems, and alterations in the immune system. Individuals with existing respiratory problems may experience a worsening of these symptoms during stress. For the LEO who is frequently exposed to various stressful situations, including chronic organizational stress, there are indications that the body's response to such exposure may set the stage for longer-term health complications. In particular, increased rates of and risk factors for cardiovascular disease in various law enforcement samples has been documented (Franke, Collins, & Hinz, 1998; Ramey, 2003; Violanti, Andrew, Burchfiel, Dorn, Hartley and Miller, 2006; Violanti, Vena, & Marshall, 1986). Ramey, Franke, and Shelley (2004) also suggested that officers with increased risk for cardiovascular disease are also at increased risk for stone formation within the kidney or ureter. Violanti et al. (1986) also found elevated rates of cancer, including cancers of the digestive organs. Garbarino, Beelke, Costa, Violani, Lucicci, Ferrillo, and Sannita (2002) suggested a potential pathway to this issue. They provided an overview of the health implications of shift work via several pathways, including interference with timing of food intake and processing resulting in problems with gastrointestinal functioning including the potential for chronic gastritis, gastroduodenitis, peptic ulcer and colitis. These researchers also identified stress associated with shift work as a contributor to increased risk factors for heart disease and hypertension as well
as alterations to a normal sleep-wake cycle, which were cited to contribute to more severe sleep disturbance and chronic fatigue.

*The Family Experience*

As described above, a number of factors have been identified in the literature as impacting the LEO including the potential for physical risk, competing systems and organizational demands, and public/community perceptions. Several researchers have also explored how these influences impact the LEO's significant others. As noted by Johnson, Todd, and Subramanian (2005), those who marry LEO's are marrying into not just the officer's immediate family but also the extended family of the department, as well as a work subculture creating similar expectations of adherence to the values and beliefs of this community. As Kirschman (2007) noted, police families are subject to public scrutiny along with the LEO and may “feel like an unpaid representative of the police department... [who may] bear the brunt of listening to negative opinions about cops or to parry questions about the latest police scandal” (p. 21). Kirschman also noted that children may experience stress as members of a police family. While younger children are usually proud of this and the envy of peers, adolescence may pose a different set of challenges when developmentally the teenager and his/her friends are in the stage of challenging authority figures. The LEO's shift work may create absences during after-school hours, leaving a significant other tasked with supervising, meal preparation, homework, and shuttling children to their own weekday activities as well as during weekends where family time becomes even more limited in already time-constrained schedules.
Borum and Philpot (1993) described various demands of membership in police organizations citing strong competition with primary relationships for time and commitment. These researchers specifically addressed the influence of stress on officers’ intimate relationships, noting the potential of such variables to create significant problems for the couple including a) triangulation, b) carryover of work attitudes (e.g. hypervigilant, authoritative, cynical, and/or protective stances) into the family, c) job-related problems (fears of safety, presence of weapons in the home, irregular schedules), and d) problematic behaviors such as displacement of aggression, alcohol abuse, and marital infidelity. Further discussion of violence in police families is presented in the next section. Roberts and Levenson (2001) utilized laboratory interaction sessions to observe marital interaction in police couples as a way to begin to understand influence on the larger family unit, specifically assessing whether “the emotional cost of work, as indicated by measures of job stress and exhaustion, is related to patterns of emotional responding that have been shown to predict…and ultimate marital dissolution” (p. 1054). Results of the study showed job stress to be more toxic to the couple’s interaction than physical exhaustion, as evidenced by both members showing signs associated with predicted marital distress and dissolution.

Roberts and Levenson (2001) described increases in variables such as cardiovascular arousal, negative affect, emotional distance and disconnectedness, and decreases in positive affect. In their study of policewomen, Thompson, Kirk, and Brown (2005) found that work stress spilled over into the family environment in terms of family cohesion and conflict through emotional exhaustion and implicated the role of negative mood in these outcomes. They suggested that negative mood may contribute to less
positive perceptions and withdrawal from family interactions. Findings also included significant positive associations of both role overload and role ambiguity (when performance expectations are unclear) with emotional exhaustion, each of which was reduced with supervisor, but not peer, support.

Violence in Police Families

In the available literature, rates of intimate partner violence in police families have varied. Neidig, Russell, and Seng (1992) observed that 24% of police officers reported use of violence against their significant others. In another study by the same authors (1992) using the Conflict Tactics Scale, which identifies specific violent behaviors, both officers and wives reported physical violence in 37-41% of relationships. Miller (2007) suggested that the rates of officer-perpetrated domestic violence may be difficult to accurately identify for several reasons. He noted that there may be potential for higher rates of violence to be offset by lower rates of reporting by fellow officers due to fears of retribution and ostracism because of ‘blowing the whistle’ on a peer. This echoes an earlier writing by Lott (1995) who identified these as associated risks of reporting peer misconduct and that fear of reprisal may serve as “sufficient punishment” for the whistle-blower. Miller (2007) also noted the possibility that underreporting occurs also because of awareness that repercussions for the LEO may be perceived as more serious than for an average citizen and may include turning over one’s weapons and eventual dismissal from employment for the perpetrator.

Johnson, Todd, and Subramanian (2005) specifically addressed violence in police families and hypothesized that a number of mediating factors could explain the relationship between work-based exposure to violence and domestic violence in LEO
relationships. Utilizing a survey measure, the researchers assessed burnout, authoritarian spillover, alcohol use, department withdrawal (detachment from work) as mediating factors. Results indicated high significance of external burnout, defined as “detachment and hardening of emotions,” (p. 7) and authoritarian spillover, described as an LEO’s inability to leave the job at work. Gershon, Tiburzi, Lin and Erwin (2005) found that officers accused of interpersonal violence were more likely to be members of a minority, be working in the field of law enforcement more than seven years, and be working in a high-crime area. These findings may have links to those identified in the study by Johnson et al. (1995); however, these were not explicated.

Kirschman (2007) summarized colleague’s ideas about LEO’s risk for domestic violence as follows: “cops have guns and will use them; they are accustomed to using verbal and physical force or the threat of it to get citizens to do what they want; and they know how the legal system works and where the battered women’s shelters are” (p. 165). This researcher’s experience of working with battered wives and girlfriends of LEO’s has attested to this statement and the unique risks facing these women.

Throughout this writing, much has been made of the nature and impact of stress emanating from one’s role as a law-enforcement officer. This writer acknowledges that, for many families there are a host of other stressors that are experienced on a day-to-day basis, irrespective of the nature of one’s employment. These may include, but are not limited to, financial stress, parenting issues, health issues, and time-management problems. As such, the goal of this project is to better understand how this particular type of work influences the individual and family dynamics while acknowledging the role of these other issues. As noted by Janik and Kravitz (1994), “stress emanating either from
work or from the home can establish a vicious cycle of demands and frustrations that will at best lead to deterioration in functioning and at worst become superimposed on preexisting psychological impairment” (p. 270). This writer will argue that this applies not only to the LEO but to a significant other as well as to children in a family system, yet many officers and families have developed and utilized resources in order to manage their daily lives in response to job-related stressors. These are explored in the next section.

*Role of Individual Coping*

Researchers have explored coping strategies specific to LEO’s and have identified styles and types of coping ranging from intrapersonal to interpersonal. For example, as part of their 1995 study, Hart and colleagues found that police are likely to use both emotion-focused coping as well as problem-focused coping. Emotion-focused coping may be described as efforts to deal with or manage one’s emotional responses. Problem-focused coping referred to efforts to directly manage or deal with the situation. Of interest, their findings indicated that emotion-focused strategies were maladaptive; that is to say, strategies engaged to manage emotional responses increased work hassles while problem-solving strategies were associated with an adaptive response resulting in work uplifts. Patterson’s (2003) study did not support these findings. In research with over 230 LEO’s in the northeastern United States, problem-focused coping actually increased distress associated with work events. Patterson hypothesized that the increase in distress when using problem-focused strategies may result from trying to use this in situations that have no solution. This is somewhat similar to the study conducted by Violanti et al. (1985) who noted that failure of a coping response may have deleterious effects.
Patterson did find that emotion-focused coping was an effective buffer between life events and distress. In a study with more than 1,500 LEO’s in the United Kingdom, Ortega, Brenner, and Leather (2007) observed that certain personality traits were associated with a tendency to utilize one approach over another. These researchers identified neuroticism – “the tendency to experience negative thoughts and feelings of insecurity and emotional distress” (p. 46) – as being associated with emotion-focused coping while a coping approach and conscientiousness were associated with use of problem-solving strategies. Other researchers have produced similar outcomes. Hart et al. (1995) noted that personality traits of neuroticism and extraversion were strong predictors of psychological distress and well-being and, to some degree, predicted use of coping strategies. Haisch and Meyers (2004) described a higher risk of PTSD in those who were less agreeable, less extroverted, less conscientious, and more neurotic, and noted that LEO’s with higher scores on the PK (PTSD – Keane) and PS (PTSD) scales of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2 were more likely to use substances, behavioral and mental disengagement, denial, focus on emotions, venting, and not being planful as coping strategies. In addition to the two types of coping strategies (emotional and problem-focused) described above, Hart (1995) incorporated seeking social support into his study and identified this as having both emotion-focused and problem-focused components. Results of this study suggested that seeking social support in response to field-work events was effective in reducing distress, though the mechanisms by which this occurred were not identified.

Burke (1998) described two factors, escapist coping and active coping, in his study of almost 400 LEO’s. He found that LEO’s using escapist strategies, which
included “withdrawal, sleeping, anger-catharsis, and alcohol and drugs” reported more work-family and psychosomatic problems. Those who used active coping, defined as “talking to others, problem solving, minimize concerns, and physical exercise” had greater levels of job satisfaction, but no relationship was found with work-family or psychosomatic problems. Toch (2002) discussed sources of work satisfaction among LEO’s and noted that this intrinsic factor was quite high within the police profession. Toch did not explicitly examine officers’ acknowledgment and reflection of courses of satisfaction as a coping mechanism; however, as in Burke’s (1998) study, certain coping mechanisms may provide a link to the mediation of job-related stress. Toch identified sources of work satisfaction among LEO’s as helping citizens, effectively using interpersonal skills, receiving positive feedback from citizens, and receiving peer-group support.

Iwasaki, Mannell, Smale, and Butcher (2005) studied the role of leisure as an adaptive response in LEO’s and other emergency-response personnel. The researchers sought to determine what contributions leisure would make over and above those found in general coping and what types of leisure would be most effective. Findings indicated that relaxing leisure most strongly predicted effective coping with stress. Specifically, increased frequency and increased enjoyment of relaxing leisure was also determined to predict better adaptational and mental-health outcomes. Better mental or physical health was found when participants engaged in greater frequency of social and cultural leisure and greater enjoyment of outdoor recreation. It was interesting to note that Iwasaki and his colleagues did not observe physically active leisure to be associated with such outcomes; however, they advocated for balance between physical and non-physical
leisure which may have different short- and long-term outcomes. This is in contrast with Burke’s (1998) study, cited above, which included physical exercise in active coping with positive results on the dimension of job satisfaction which may be a dimension of well-being.

This writer attempted to find available literature on other aspects of coping including use of humor and spirituality in law-enforcement settings. Only two recent studies that specifically looked at the role of humor were located. Kerckhànen, Kuiper, and Martin (2004) attempted to test the hypothesis that a greater sense of humor would predict better physical health and workplace well-being. They utilized self- and peer-report and physiological measures. Not only was this not supported; results indicated that higher humor was significantly related to more smoking, higher body-mass index, and higher overall risk for cardiovascular disease. An additional sample also revealed higher humor associated with increased alcohol consumption though the nature of the relationship of these variables was not explored. An additional, yet unpublished, study explored the use of gallows humor within this profession. Findings indicated that almost all the officers in the sample (97%) had used this type of humor and that use and appreciation of this type of humor was associated with group cohesion and other adaptive styles of humor, yet was also associated with maladaptive styles including other-aggressive and self-deprecating humor.

There were no studies located to specifically elucidate spirituality and/or religion as a potential coping resource of LEO’s; however, several researchers working with the military have assessed this construct as a coping mechanism. Niederhauser, Maddock, Le Doux, and Martin (2005) evaluated whether a community-based wellness program
would decrease unhealthy and increase healthy behaviors. Though the results were nonsignificant, the researchers found a positive trend in use of spirituality as a coping strategy pre- to post- intervention. In their study with senior military and government civilian leaders, Maddi, Brow, Khoshaba, and Vaitkus (2006) explored how hardiness (emphasizing individual resources) and religiousness (focusing on supernatural belief system), with spirituality as a component of both, compare in their relationships to depression, anger, coping, and social support. The researchers observed that hardiness has the larger and more comprehensive negative relationship with depression and anger, and positive relationship with coping and social support than did religiousness. However, when hardiness is low or absent, religiousness may have a positive effect. Based on these results, Maddi et al. suggested that the source and direction of spirituality may play a role in outcomes and indicate potential sources for intervention.

This researcher hypothesized that engagement of both humor and spirituality as resources may have components of the strategies noted above, including emotion-focused, problem-focused, social support, and aspects of leisure. The current study afforded opportunities to explore these in greater detail with participants where such resources were identified.

Resilience and Coping in Couples

The literature has offered several avenues for further exploration of coping mechanisms utilized by the individual LEO but has not provided direction on how law-enforcement couples work, interact, and utilize resources in ways to effectively manage job and other stressors. For this, a brief review of the concepts of resiliency and coping
in couples and families will be presented with the goal of considering how these themes may be adapted to and defined by members of the law-enforcement community.

Resilience has been defined in a number of ways that, in general, suggest a capacity to cope with stress. Walsh’s (2006) definition more accurately captures resilience as an active and interpersonal process: “The capacity to rebound from adversity strengthened and more resourceful...an active process of endurance, self-righting, and growth in response to crisis and challenge...forged through openness to experiences and interdependence with others” (pp. 4-5). Simon, Murphy, and Smith (2005) highlighted the nature of the interplay between individual family member’s resilience and that of the family unit noting that these are mutually influential. Rutter (1999) expanded on this, indicating the need for any discussion of resilience to incorporate awareness of both multiple risk and protective factors that may be involved. He encouraged consideration of a number of factors in an assessment of resilience: the level of risk, individual sensitivity (including genetic influences) to risk, patterns of social interaction within and outside the family system, the role of individual and group characteristics in negative and positive chain reactions, and ways that people process experiences. Patterson (2002) agreed with Rutter on the need to focus on the family as well as the role of larger systems in the interactions of demands and capabilities.

A number of authors have described several protective processes that can serve to facilitate a family’s ability to manage demands or risks. Patterson (2002) identified cohesiveness which represents a balance between separateness and connectedness. Walsh (2006) expanded on this idea to include larger organizational patterns which she described as “family shock absorbers” (p. 83). For Walsh, this included flexibility in a
family’s capacity to balance change and stability as well as mobilizing resources.
Another involves communication processes which are comprised of both affective and
instrumental communication (Patterson, 2002). Walsh identified keys to family
resilience in the realm of communication as clarity of messages, open emotional sharing,
and collaborative problem-solving. As this forms the core of one of the current research
questions, communication in couple relationships will be expanded upon and explored in
the next section. These authors also reflected on the need for families to engage in a
meaning-making process which taps into a family’s larger belief systems about their
identity, rituals, how beliefs are organized and shared, and how members assess stressful
events and perceive resources. Patterson and Garwick (1998) made explicit the
connection between meaning-making and coping by suggesting that alteration of the
meaning of a situation is a coping strategy employed when demands exceed capabilities.
This latter point speaks to the role of attributions in how families experience themselves
and others and how they function in the face of stressors.

Awareness of the law-enforcement couple nested within their extended families,
social networks, and varied local communities centered on schooling, spiritual practice,
and leisure invites further exploration of the social world of which they are part and how
both individual and relational dynamics may influence the attributions and perceptions
described above. Alfred Schütz (1962) described the structure of the social world in
terms of “others” including predecessors and successors, with whom one does not share
time or physical access, contemporaries with whom one shares time, and consociates who
share time and space. Schütz’s description of contemporaries captures the essence of
close relationships:
Sharing a community of space implies that a certain sector of the outer world is equally within the reach of each partner, and contains objects of common interest and relevance...the other's body, his gestures, his gait and facial expressions, are immediately observable,...as symptoms of the other's thoughts. Sharing a community of time...not only of outer (chronological) time, but of inner time - implies that each partner participates in the on-rolling life of the other, can grasp in a vivid present the other’s thoughts as they are built up step by step. They may thus share one another’s anticipations of the future as plans, or hopes or anxieties...mutually involved in one another’s biography; they are growing older together; they live, as we may call it, in a pure We-relationship. (pp. 16-17)

Schütz also described the “general thesis of reciprocal perspectives” as “the interchangeability of the standpoints and that of the congruency of relevances” (p. 12). Although he acknowledged potential challenges to the theory by nature of individual biographies, Schütz supported the idealization of both interchangeability and congruency with the goal of standing on common ground providing foundation for various forms of communication, shared knowledge, and shared experiences. Schütz’s ideas are particularly relevant in the present research as they relate to the we-relationships within the law-enforcement community that may serve to distance from out-group members, including significant others. Woody (2005) described the “protect and serve” credo of law enforcement as a cornerstone of a police subculture that, while dedicated to public service, mandates conformity to both cultural and subcultural tenets. The oft-referenced “thin blue line,” “blue code,” “blue wall,” and “blue curtain” conjure powerful images of those who stand behind the barrier and “the others.” This researcher believes that
intimate partners, wives, and husbands may find themselves in limbo, somewhere between the us and them yet also part of what Schütz termed a pure We-relationship.

Laing, Phillipson, and Lee (1966) also explored the nature of dyads and described several dimensions along which the oneself and another develop some form of a we-relationship. The first, interaction, occurs with at least two people and a common situation. The second, interexperience, Laing et al. described as a mutually influential process during which each person’s behavior is mediated by each’s experience of the other, and each’s experience is mediated by the behavior of the other. The third dimension is interperception. Experiences (direct perspective) emerge through each’s interpretation which is based in one’s familial and cultural history (what Schütz would view as individual biographies) and each person’s perceptions of the act. Laing et al. also noted that, as this process occurs, each is considering the other’s views of an issue (metaperspectives) as well as each’s view of the other’s view of each’s view of an issue (meta-metaperspective). Agreement on the meaning assigned to a behavior is indicative of optimal communication while disagreement results in disruptive communication and “misunderstanding and failure of realization of misunderstanding” (p. 13). With the researcher’s focus in the current project on how each member of a law-enforcement dyad experiences and perceives various issues (the LEO’s job, stress, coping) as well as how the couple implicitly and explicitly acts and interacts around these issues, will illuminate the communication process described by Laing and his colleagues. It is the striving for understanding of the law-enforcement couple’s experiences that forms the crux of the current project’s research questions and guides this study’s qualitative approach.
In their study of couples, Graham and Conoley (2006) sought to identify the role that marital attributions (the meanings individuals attribute to spousal behaviors) play in the relationship between stressful life events and marital quality. Results suggested that negative attributions were linked with lower marital quality in the presence of accumulated life stressors. Couples who made positive attributions did not experience lowered marital quality, and the researchers indicated that this may serve as a protective factor, buffering potential negative effects of stressors. In a longitudinal study with couples, Bodenmann, Pihet, and Kayser (2006) found similar results using dyadic coping as one variable associated with marital quality. This was described by Bodenmann et al. as “a process on the dyadic level in which the coping reactions of one partner take into account the stress signals of the other partner” (p. 486). In this study, more positive dyadic coping was associated with higher marital quality while negative dyadic coping was linked with negative marital quality for both men and women. Gender differences were found as follows: Women’s own as well as partner dyadic coping was predictive of marital quality while men’s own dyadic coping, but not partner dyadic coping, was predictive of marital quality. These differences were echoed in the findings of an earlier work by Lev-Wiesel (1998) who described marital quality being enhanced by wives’ appreciation of their husbands’ coping ability, but that husbands’ perception of marital quality was uninfluenced by this variable. Rempel, Ross, and Holmes (2001) explored how trust, defined as “the confidence an individual has in a partners’ willingness to be responsive to the person’s needs, even when they conflict with the partner’s own preferences” (p. 58), guides the public expression of private attributions within relationships. Rempel et al. highlighted potential differences in private (individual
cognitions) and public attributions (those which are communicated) and suggested that such differences may vary as a function of level of trust, e.g., high, medium, or low-trusting couples. Research findings indicated that high-trust couples had more consistent attributions across private and public domains which were generally more positive and likely to have global impact. Medium-trust couples demonstrated more negative and global attributions than the high-trust couples though Rempel et al. hypothesized that such couples, while experiencing insecurity and doubt, also want to actively engage to resolve challenging relational issues. Low-trust couples were found to have disparate private and public attributions, inferred by the researchers as reflective of emotional distance and the perception that attempts at resolution may be futile. Of interest, these findings were independent of relationship satisfaction, thus contradicting some of the findings described above. The researchers summarized the potential importance of communication of attributions towards conflict resolution, increased mutual understanding, and negotiation of meaning.

Attributions as well as interindividual and intraindividual coping approaches may, as noted by these researchers, be influenced by the nature of the stressor as well as gender roles and partner expectations. In light of LEO’s often being viewed as protectors and adhering to a possibly stereotypic (and often male) image of strength and power, self-assessment and partner views of LEO’s capacities of coping will, in this researcher’s opinion, influence expectations within the couple and family system.

Couples’ Communication

One of the areas for exploration in the current study is how LEO’s and their significant others communicate about the officer’s work, stress, and approaches to
coping. A foundation for this aspect of the research can be found in the literature regarding communication in close relationships. A number of authors have explored various aspects of couples and marital communication, including both verbal and nonverbal, especially in ways communication may influence satisfaction and quality of relationships.

Gottman and Porterfield (1981) focused their research on the nonverbal behavior of married couples noting that verbal statements have the potential to have multiple meanings as well as the idea that nonverbal behaviors may be more difficult to mask. In this study, the researchers sought to determine whether marital satisfaction was related to competence in understanding nonverbal communication. Findings indicated a positive relationship between marital satisfaction and nonverbal competence when the husband was receiving his wife’s nonverbal cues. Results also indicated deficits in husbands’ receipt of nonverbal cues in dissatisfying marriages.

In their study of heterosexual couples in their first marriages, Sullivan, Pasch, Eldridge, and Bradbury (1998) failed to find a significant relationship between positive behaviors and level of satisfaction, but discovered that negative behaviors were found to differentiate among satisfied and distressed groups. Sullivan et al. also explored the association between social support behavior and marital outcomes and determined that the distressed couples were significantly less positive and more negative in their interactions on a social support task. Julien, Chartrand, Simard, Bouthillier, and Bégin (2003) assessed the contributions of both negative and positive communication to the quality of heterosexual, gay, and lesbian relationships. Findings indicated that relationship quality is sensitive to co-involvement of partners on a conflict task,
individual behaviors on a support task, and perceived help following the support task irrespective of type of couple. Julien et al.'s study seemed to generally support the findings of an earlier work by Gaelick, Bodenhausen, and Wyer Jr. (1985). Utilizing a conflict task, Gaelick, et al. (1985) studied patterns of emotional communication and how couples' perceptions of each other's communication behaviors were related to relationship satisfaction. Regarding emotional communication, Gaelick et al. found that partners mutually reciprocated the emotion they perceived their partners to convey, but that actual reciprocity occurred only with hostility. Men perceived hostility when their partners did not express love, and women interpreted lack of hostility as an indicator of love. Positive feelings identified as love were not significantly associated with an individual's own or partner's satisfaction; however, women's satisfaction varied with hostility. Dissatisfied women were more likely to perceive negative feelings being conveyed and were perceived as more hostile by their male partners. The researchers suggested that this may be accounted for by misperception of a partner's expression of this emotion or that the present study employed only conflict tasks.

There has been a great deal of attention given to demand-withdraw behavior in couples, especially as this has been found to differ between couples with a violent male partner and nonviolent couples (Babcock, Waltz, Jacobson, & Gottman, 1993; Berns, Jacobson, & Gottman, J., 1999; Holtzworth-Munroe, Smutzler, & Stuart, 1998). Current research on marital communication by Vogel, Murphy, Werner-Wilson, Cutrona, and Seeman (2007) provided evidence for a wife-demand/husband-withdraw pattern during discussion of wives' issues as well as findings indicated that importance of topic was associated with spouses withdrawing less. These results were similar in research
conducted by Eldridge, Sevier, Jones, Atkins, and Christensen (2007) since wife-demand/husband-withdraw was overall greater than husband-demand/wife-withdraw and was also greater with wife-chosen topics. Furthermore, greater demand-withdraw behaviors were observed with greater distress during discussions of relationship problems. Similarly, Stanley, Markman, and Whitton (2002) noted that partners both report that males tend to withdraw more than females, but that, when partners report that neither member withdraws, they also reported less negative interaction.

Focusing on the role of communication in work-related stress, Crossfield, Kinman, and Jones (2005) examined the role of interpersonal communication in the crossover process of occupational stress into family life of dual-career couples. Couples responded to questions relating to the nature of dialogue about work and attitudes and beliefs about partner’s work. They were asked to identify frequency of work-related discussion as well as the degree to which the interactions were focused on positive and negative events. Additionally, congruence of couple’s perceptions about work, topics of discussion, and communication behavior were assessed. The majority of couples were found to discuss work almost daily or daily. For women, when discussions were perceived to be low in understanding and helpfulness, such discussions were related to higher levels of anxiety about their own and partner jobs and depression related to their own jobs. Approximately half of men and women identified discussing predominantly negative issues with very few (11% of men and 7% of women) reporting positive events as the primary focus of discussion. The most commonly discussed topics were issues with colleagues and one’s boss, nature of the work, level of satisfaction, and career plans. Of greatest interest to this researcher were the findings regarding communication behaviors
under work-triggered stress. The overall pattern of communication for women was outwardly focused, e.g., talking a great deal, becoming tearful and emotional while male behaviors were described as more inwardly focused and engaged in withdrawal behaviors (distancing from others and going quiet), becoming irritable, and losing interest in other activities. Comparison of self-report and perceptions of partner behavior were largely congruent except on the tendency to talk a lot about stress (men self-rated more highly than female ratings of male partners) and tendency to become quiet when stressed (women self-rated more highly than male ratings of female partners). Although the current study will be focused on law-enforcement, work-related issues and how these impact families, this researcher acknowledges there may be unique experiences for the family with the dual-career couple, especially as these relate to a partner’s work-related stresses and demands, time together, scheduling (including working around children’s needs), accessing leisure activities, and the potential for increased financial stability with two incomes.

This researcher proposed that communication in law-enforcement families may influence management of occupational stress and perceived abilities to offer and receive support within the family system. Unfortunately, there are few and unpublished research studies that have specifically focused on communication in LEO families. However, several authors have addressed this in texts written specifically for this community. Stone (1999) suggested that officers learn good communication skills to help their families understand what is happening in their work lives. This, she noted, may include the officer sharing that he or she is not yet ready to talk or just noting that the workday was difficult. Expanding on this, Matsakis (2005) focused specifically on
communication in her suggestions for coping with stressful events. Matsakis recommended the following for officers’ partners: 1) Partners should not “push” the LEO or themselves to talk, 2) avoid the extremes of saying nothing or sharing everything at once, 3) partners should let their loved ones know if they feel they have said or heard enough in a caring way, and 4) both the partner and LEO should ask how each may be supportive of the other. In her text dedicated to LEO families, Kirschman (2007) described ways in which communication may shift when relational problems are afoot. She noted a communication style characterized by criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling and cited this as one of several warning signs of a troubled marriage. This appeared to summarize a study by Gottman and Krokoff (1989) in which dysfunctional patterns of defensiveness, stubbornness, and withdrawal (also cited in Crossfield et al., 2005 and discussed within a demand-withdraw framework above) characterized relationship deterioration over time.

The stressors inherent in the profession of law enforcement, some of which were noted in the literature to be chronic, may present hurdles to be overcome by couples and families in this community. The literature regarding resilience, including effective coping styles and protective factors, and communication provided a solid foundation within a strengths-based framework on which to explore how LEO’s and their families successfully meet, manage, and adapt to challenges. This study was built on this construct utilizing participant perspectives on their own strengths and mechanisms of coping specific to members of this community.
Interventions

Based on the stressors identified in the literature, as well as potentially negative implications of these factors (burnout, substance use, suicide ideation, negative health outcomes, and interpersonal problems), a number of researchers have made recommendations and explored interventions for members of this community.

Violanti (2004) recommended trauma-exposure interventions to aid officers in dealing with not only low-frequency, high-impact incidents but also incidents that may be routine as a first responder, for example seeing severely injured or dead bodies and witnessing violence. Stephens and Long (2000) conducted a study to assess whether higher social support in the workplace would buffer the relationship between traumatic stress and psychological or health outcomes. The most significant findings indicated that the higher levels of perceived ease of talking about the trauma or positive communications about work with peers are associated with a weaker trauma-strain relationship. This study highlighted the need for “balance between the beneficial effects of talk about distressing experiences and the harmful effects that these communications may have” (p. 422) as well as consideration of the source and level of such support and provision of training to accommodate such needs. Kirschman (2007) recommended that officers be screened for risk factors for trauma-related symptoms to direct support where needed rather than mandating interventions for those who may not be in need.

Suicide-prevention training (Violanti, 2004) was also recommended. This would require a proactive stance towards the controversial issue and could include improved police entrance screening assessment measures including suicide prediction (Violanti, 2004). Hem et al. (2001) recommended assessment of relative risk of suicide at different
career stages as well as assessment for predisposing traits such as personality structure, stressful life events, and psychological and physiological problems. LEO's are often psychologically tested prior to employment, yet there is a dearth of literature as to potential benefits and detriments of periodic screenings which would provide a link to intervention, if necessary. Moriarty and Field (1990) highlighted inherent challenges in traditional intervention programs. Two major concerns were identified. The first centered on the historically reactive nature of departments in response to problems. They contended that intervention typically has not taken place until job performance is seriously impacted. A second concern was the nature of the intervention provided, usually a recommendation for involvement with an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The authors disagreed with the voluntary nature of such programs and instead recommended a proactive stance to EAP programs to tackle both of these issues. One strategy advocated was involving officers with EAP during their probationary periods to receive assessment and support during a period identified as highly stressful in resolving "conflicts between expectations and the reality of the job," (p. 157) and adjusting to the subculture and stressors unique to law enforcement. The second suggestion was to mandate EAP assistance once problems are identified as a condition of maintaining the officer's employment. Moriarty and Field (1990) acknowledged that mandating services is a risky proposal given the historically voluntary nature of EAP's as well as the likelihood of resistance by officers who may perceive a conflict "with the position of poise, strength, and authority" (p. 158) embedded in their identities. As the authors noted, the risks associated with delayed intervention or no intervention have the potential to be catastrophic for the officer, his/her peers and family, administrators, and the larger
community in which the officer serves. Woody (2005) made several suggestions for the psychologist working with the officer including helping the LEO:

Recognize any tendency to illogically characterize people, and develop ways to test a particular person’s trustworthiness, understanding, and support...Understand and manage organizational dynamics, demonstrate effective job-related performance according, and move toward leadership...[and] improve problem-solving skills, which includes increasing an LEO’s confidence in the ability to define a problem, consider options, and make a trusted choice among one of several courses of action. (p. 527)

While a number of researchers have offered interventions with the unique needs of the LEO in mind, others have expanded the lens of treatment delivery and explored benefits to family interventions and ways to provide effective and competent services. Woody (2006) offered suggestions specifically for the family therapist in delivering interventions with the LEO. Several themes emerged in these recommendations. He identified the need for therapists to work with LEO’s within the police subculture while supporting healthy interpersonal interactions with those outside of this community. Woody described the need to tailor the intervention plans to assist officers balance the values and attitudes of the police subculture with other relationships. An earlier article by the same author (2005) stressed the importance of openly recognizing and accepting the LEO’s decision to work in law enforcement. Woody (2006) noted this to be in contrast to an either-or approach that counteracts cultural influences, thus undermining the LEO’s career choice and creating a barrier to accessing coping or adaptive abilities, including the potential utility of peer-assistance, self-help programs, and strategies that
emerge out of the positive values and attitudes espoused by the police subculture. Patterson (2003) and Burke (1998) stressed the need for interventions to consider the number of stressful life events an officer experiences and not focusing exclusively on work-related situations.

Engaging family members in understanding their roles in the LEO’s primary social system was also identified as an initial focal point for the couple or primary relationship, if applicable. Lastly, Woody (2006) suggested family therapists consider lowered fees or pro bono services for LEO’s in accordance with organizational ethics codes (AAMFT, 2001; APA, 2002) encouraging members to devote some of their professional work in endeavors that contribute to society. Borum and Philpot (1993) recommended conjoint therapy with law-enforcement couples, which is congruent with Woody’s (2006) suggestion of the marital dyad as the focal point. The authors advocated for special attention to the initial stages of treatment including development of rapport and enhancement of motivation through validating and normalizing the presenting problem. They cited the importance of understanding the worlds of the LEO and his/her significant other and gaining an “insider’s view” which may facilitate a commitment to the therapeutic process. Borum and Philpot described a particular focus in treatment as reducing triangulation. The authors applied this concept, developed by Bowen (1978), specifically to the LEO relationship and noted it may occur when the department or job becomes a “third party...used to stabilize the relationship between the spouses” (p. 126). Other recommended goals in treatment include strengthening the couple boundary, increasing intimacy, increasing positive feelings and behaviors, motivating members for change, teaching communication skills, and negotiating for more time for the couple.
Kirschman’s (2007) text, entitled I Love A Cop: What Police Families Need To Know and Matsakis’s (2005) book, In Harm’s Way: Help for the Wives of Military Men, Police, EMTs & Firefighters, both address issues in the profession from the perspective of a loved one and include an overview of inherent stressors, myths and realities, and make many recommendations to enhance awareness, understanding, and self-care. Both texts also provide discussion of the issues of children in families where a loved one is in a high-risk profession, an area that generally has been lacking in the extant research literature.

Woody (2005) advocated for attention to the need for interventive psychological services though, like Moriarty and Field (1990), seemed to also support preventive and proactive care through wellness training to develop and maintain skills essential to physical and psychological survival. However, Stinchcomb (2004) argued that the standard response of the clinical intervention and coping models may mitigate the impact of stress, but may do little to combat some of the sources inherent in a military-type organization. The interventions described above, as secondary and tertiary responses, clearly focus on the individual and his/her family. Stinchcomb (2004) discussed the tendency for agencies to view an officer’s experience of stress as an “individual disorder rather than an organizational dysfunction” (p. 268), which places accountability and intervention on the individual instead of the system thus seeking “individual solutions to organizational problems” (p. 269).

Stinchcomb (2004) noted the primary prevention in the form of elimination or reduction of sources of chronic organizational stress is lacking. Morash et al. (2006) argued that, even if officers effectively utilize coping skills, the burden of working
towards reduction and/or elimination of workplace conditions that contribute to stress falls squarely on the shoulders of the department. Hart et al. (1995) advocated for greater attention to ways of improving organization health, and Woody (2005) identified several changes already in motion at the larger systems level that he believed will ultimately improve performance standards and, one may hope, reduce some sources of organizational stress. These include upgrading educational requirements, increasing monitoring and regulation of training programs, and improving racial/ethnic/gender diversity throughout law-enforcement communities. Stinchcomb (2004) advocated for a "primary stress prevention strategy that targets chronic organization stress" and noted that such a plan would require "administrative dedication, self-reflection, and risk-taking...translated operationally into three key ingredients – commitment, participation, and action" (p. 271). She acknowledged challenges to this model including potential lack of support by administrators and organizations as well as the relative ease of continuing on the same path of blaming the individual officer, "the system," or "the job." For psychologists working with LEO’s and their families, there also needs to be a striving towards balance between empowering the individual and the family to effect positive change while acknowledging the organizational stressors over which the LEO may, indeed, have little control. Counseling, clinical, and family psychologists are likely to be working collaboratively with those on the “front lines” rather than administrators. In response to this, Hart et al. (1995) suggested inclusion of organizational psychologists to intervene at the systems level. Given Kohan’s and O’Connor’s (2002) findings that job satisfaction was associated with positive affect, life satisfaction, and self-esteem, addressing ways to increase positive experiences and levels of satisfaction from the
individual will undoubtedly reverberate through the many systems of which the officer is part.

**Literature Review Summary**

While there is some debate as to whether law enforcement is uniquely stressful, the presence of potential stressors has been acknowledged throughout the literature. Stressors associated with the career and lifestyle of the LEO include risk of physical danger, impact of shift work, negative public opinion and confrontation, perceived problems with the criminal justice system, and chronic organizational stressors. Other life events were also noted to be potential sources of stress for the LEO and have the potential to be exacerbated by or to contribute to work-based stress. The literature has also indicated a number of possible negative outcomes to these stressors, including mental-health problems (PTSD, burnout, depression, apathy) and physical health (fatigue, muscle pain, headaches, gastrointestinal, and cardiovascular) complaints. Interpersonal challenges may also face the LEO and his/her family due to the myriad of issues that impacts the work-family dynamic. These may have direct effects, such as shift-work, officers being on-call and secondary effects of partner responses to the LEO’s experience and presentation of a stress reaction. Prevalence of substance abuse within the law-enforcement community, while variable, point to the need for further analysis of this issue, with consideration of how mental, somatic and interpersonal problems interact with this behavior. Researchers have also produced somewhat mixed and sometimes contradictory results on the issue of coping. Emotion-focused and problem-focused strategies have received attention as well as how personality traits influence choice of coping. Common themes of the need for effective individual, family, and organizational
interventions emerged. The issues identified in the literature served as a guiding framework in the search for and development of new themes in the present study. It should be noted that the literature review was completed prior to data collection and analyses. While previous studies provided a strong foundation on which to begin data collection and analyses, the researcher found that reflecting on the review and re-reading of published studies helpful in contextualizing the participants’ narratives, especially in the area of couples’ communication.

Most of the extant literature has been focused on the LEO’s experience of his or her work and how these impact the individual across a number of dimensions, including work performance, stressors, and physical health to name a few. There has been little attention to the LEO’s perspective on the ways in which these experiences influence intimate and family relationships. Significant others have also not consistently been included in research studies beyond quantitative self-report measures and may provide valuable information on aspects of the LEO’s work that are sources of stress and strength within families in the law-enforcement community. Researchers who have explored coping have typically focused on an intradepartmental level and have not expanded this lens to include the world beyond the officer and immediate family members. Collaborative dialogue with LEO’s and their significant others has (a) illuminated the nature and impact of job-related stress, (b) helped identify themes in coping, and (c) explored how LEO couples communicate about these issues. It is anticipated that the study’s findings will serve several purposes. The first was of direct benefit to LEO’s and their families through normalization of their experiences and recognition and support of resilience and coping strategies. A second anticipated use of the study’s findings will be
to contribute to awareness of and interventions for job and family-based sources of stress. Third, findings will hopefully serve as guidelines for law-enforcement administrators in addressing potentially problematic organizational issues while encouraging a proactive stance towards organizational health.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Characteristics of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is defined by Creswell (2003) as an approach that allows investigators to explore constructivist and/or advocacy/participatory perspectives. Constructivist perspectives include how humans view the world and construct meaning out of their experiences that emerge in social and historical contexts. Advocacy and participatory perspectives may be political, collaborative, issue-oriented, or change-oriented. Methods of inquiry, such as ethnographic, phenomenological, and narrative may be utilized. Other approaches in qualitative research include case study and grounded-theory methodology. Although each methodology has its own defining characteristics, researchers utilizing one or more share common goals of developing descriptive and interpretive data about experiences of individuals and/or groups regarding some phenomenon of interest. In this project, this phenomenon may be defined as the experiences of stress and coping of an active law-enforcement officer and his/her significant other. The present study was based on qualitative data collection and qualitative analyses. The qualitative research in the present study was not based on quantitative measures, mathematically-based models, or statistical analysis, thus distinguishing it from a quantitative or mixed-methods approaches.

Grounded-Theory Methodology

Described by Glaser (1992), “the grounded-theory approach is a general method of analysis linked with data collection that uses a systematically applied set of methods to generate an inductive theory about a substantive area” (p. 16). It allows researchers to
develop a theory of a process, action, or interaction grounded (hence the name) in participants’ views of their lived experiences in social contexts (Fassinger, 2005). Creswell (2003) noted the hallmarks of this design as the recursive nature of data collection and analysis as well as theoretical sampling of different groups to maximize similarities and differences among categories. Rafuls and Moon (1996) highlighted the recursive approach, noting that analysis of data, to be discussed shortly, is undertaken almost immediately after initial data are collected. This allowed an iterative process to emerge that facilitated development of concepts, categories, properties, and relationships of the phenomenon of interest (Fassinger, 2005).

An emergent theory in this approach should meet the criteria of parsimony and scope. The goal is thus to account for as much variation of behaviors and experiences of persons in this study (scope) with as few categories as possible (parsimony) (Glaser, 1992). The researcher collected data through multiple techniques that tapped self-perceptions of participants with concurrent analyses of information for themes, patterns, and categories to develop an integrative theory about how law-enforcement officers and their significant others understand the nature and impact of job-related stressors on individual members and relationships within the family, develop and utilize coping strategies, and discuss these issues within the couple dyad.

Selection of Participants

To be eligible for participation in the research, participants needed to a) be on full-time active duty in the field of law enforcement, b) have completed at least one year of active duty, c) be involved in a relationship of at least two years duration with a significant other. Inclusion of full-time members only was based on the researcher’s
decision to gather data that would represent the largest membership in the national law-
enforcement community with greater numbers of full-time (almost 800,000) versus part-
time officers (46,000) (Reaves, 2007). Completion of at least one year of active duty
increased the likelihood that officers have completed core training and probationary
periods while allowing for a greater range of exposure to varied job duties that could best
capture the role of the officer in his/her community. The goal of including couples who
had been together for at least two years was to allow members to have had time together
that would allow for the development of a commitment to the relationship which
hopefully increased openness to exploring the impact of the officer’s job on each member
of the dyad. It was not necessary for couples to be legally married or cohabiting to be
eligible for participation. The initial goal for sample size was ten couples. Sampling
ceased when I, in consultation with the project’s mentor, determined that theoretical
saturation of each category was reached. Josselson and Lieblich (2003) noted that
individuals have unique narratives or stories; therefore, the kinds of categories or
properties presumed to be inclusive of all experiences are innumerable. However,
theoretical saturation may be reached when “(1) no new or relevant data seem to emerge
regarding a category; (2) the category development is dense,…[and](3) the relationships
between categories are well established and validated” (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p.
188). This “continuing assessment of adequacy” (Wertz, 2005, p. 171) resulted in
persistent review of data and the decision to cease sampling at seven couples. Table 2
provides demographic data of each participant.
Method of Recruitment

The participants in the present study were comprised of a convenience sample. Male and female officers were recruited through word of mouth, based on the researcher’s involvement in the law-enforcement community in Northern New Jersey. The researcher outreached to potential participants utilizing a recruitment script (Appendix B) with attention to the potential for conflict of interest due to the researcher’s spouse’s involvement in law enforcement. The researcher also employed “snowball” sampling and requested that participants consider recommending other potential participants for the study. All potential participants were provided with a phone number for the principal investigator and were asked for verbal consent for a brief phone screening to determine eligibility and to set up a time for a personal interview. A script for the initial contact is included as Appendix C.

Informed Consent

Each participant received either an Informed Consent Form for Law-Enforcement Officers (Appendix D) or an Informed Consent Form for Significant Others (Appendix E). As directed by the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB), this form included the researcher’s affiliation, purpose of the study, a description of the research procedures, a description of survey instruments to be used, a statement of the voluntary nature of participants’ involvement, the procedures that will be used to maintain participant privacy and information regarding the confidentiality of data, a statement of anticipated risks and benefits to participants, contact information for the researcher and mentor, procedures regarding audio recording, and a form for acknowledging participant receipt of document. Informed consent was reviewed at the outset of each interview, and
participants had opportunities to ask questions and to obtain clarification on any issues prior to the start of the interview. When participants agreed to proceed, each signed two copies of this document with one kept on file by the researcher and one provided to the participant. As recommended by Miller and Bell (2002), consent was ongoing throughout the research process and was reviewed and/or renegotiated in collaboration with participants.

Role of the Researcher

As noted by Boss and colleagues (1996), it is critical to acknowledge the role and influence of the researcher engaged in qualitative research. Hill, Knox, Thompson, Williams, Hess, and Ladany (2005) suggested that there are multiple sources of potential bias in this type of investigation. These include demographics and theoretical orientations of the researcher as well as beliefs and values about the topic. Charmaz (2003) echoed such sentiments, highlighting how the researcher’s relationships and interactions with participants, in addition to “disciplinary and theoretical proclivities,” (p. 85) shape and influence “collection, content, and analysis of data” (p. 85). James and Platzer (1999) also identified the need for self-reflection which highlights the importance of stating explicitly the feelings, beliefs, values, and responses that the researcher brings. Dahl and Boss (2005) highlighted the importance of the capacity for self-reflexivity, self-questioning, and ongoing dialogical processing with those involved in the research throughout the project and suggested a degree of flexibility to allow for adaptations and changes to the research as a result of this process. As I invited men and women to share their stories with me, I tried to maintain awareness of how my story, experiences, and
view of the world influenced my inquiry and analysis of the information shared in the study.

For over nine years, I worked in various agencies in New Jersey providing clinical and support services to culturally diverse individuals, couples, and families who have experienced interpersonal violence, substance-related issues, and mental-health problems. I also had the opportunity to work in New York State with adults with chronic mental health issues and often concurrent substance abuse. In this setting, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to work in a forensic capacity with sexual perpetrators as well as with clients involved in family court. My current position in a university-based behavioral health program allows me to work directly with law-enforcement personnel through a peer support program and officer- and family-focused groups. Each of these experiences afforded me new perspectives on systemic issues regarding assessment, treatment, and legal issues.

Throughout my work as a therapist, I have endeavored to be aware of and to understand the lenses through which I view the world and my clinical work. These lenses are shaped by both my personal as well as earlier professional experiences. I am 36 years old and have a master’s degree in Counseling Psychology. I am currently in my sixth year of doctoral studies in a Family Psychology program in which I am in clinical training in family psychology and family therapy at Seton Hall University in South Orange, New Jersey. My theoretical and clinical model is integrative, utilizing primarily a constructivist framework. I was born in Scotland and spent my early years aboard cargo ships on which my father served as captain. Having accepted a new job opportunity, my parents decided to move our family to a middle-class community in Northern New Jersey.
when I was seven. My parents are of primarily Western European descent. My father was born in Scotland and can trace his ancestry throughout Scottish history. My mother, although born in Wales, is biracial (of both Welsh and Mexican descent). I have been married for eleven years to a White, American man of European descent. My spouse is presently a captain in a small-sized municipal police department and has completed seventeen years of full-time active duty.

As noted above, these personal experiences in tandem with professional experiences working with officers, their families, and representatives of the legal system were the impetus for the current project. They also shaped and influenced researcher preconceptions and assumptions about how law-enforcement families identify and experience stress as well as how they manage and cope with stress. I am acutely aware of my own fears regarding my spouse's safety and assume this to be a natural response to the nature of the work. I also recognize that job-related demands have changed as he has moved upward through different positions in his work. Stressors that directly impacted me earlier in his career were his shift work, which included rotating eight-hour shifts on a four-days-on and two-days-off schedule as well as frequent unavailability on weekends and having to work on many holidays. Current stressors associated with his position include a need for his availability during off-hours, resulting in interruptions in our home life through phone calls or his being called out to assist other officers, as well as changes in his job responsibilities over which I believe he perceives he has little control. As a dual-career couple, I believe we are continuing to develop our coping strategies to manage job-related stress. My spouse has a strong social network with other officers who, I believe, can understand and share his experiences. These officers also share
leisure activities, including family events. Having relationships with other partners and spouses has also been a support for me as well as our having discussed issues with friends and family members who are highly supportive of my spouse’s work and our relationship.

Another of my preconceptions is a tendency to believe that women are more likely than their male counterparts to identify the importance of connection and relationships as well as to effectively utilize interpersonal resources. Such beliefs have emerged out of my experience in my family of origin, current partnership, and peer relationships, as well as in professional settings where many male clients share stories of growing up in families where the dominant messages for boys and men were about independence, prioritizing the work role and identity, and limiting emotional expressivity. Given that the field of law enforcement has traditionally been a male-dominated profession replete with stereotypes of the male officer, it would be interesting to pursue how female officers understand these experiences, how male partners of female officers view stress and coping within their families, and how gay and lesbian couples confront and cope with stereotypes.

The above represent several preconceptions and assumptions that I have tried to attend to throughout the research project. The process of uncovering assumptions and prejudices is one that, in my opinion, is ongoing. As such, issues that have previously been out of conscious awareness may surface while one is engaged with participants. In my clinical experiences, awareness of these usually begins with a strong emotional reaction. I have also recognized the experience of my internal dialogue being fraught with judgments or disbelief, limiting my ability to be open and empathic at times. With
the researcher as the primary tool of data collection and analyses, it follows that internalized preconceptions and assumptions may impact the research process. Awareness of the influences of these attitudes on data collection, interpretation, and presentation is critical in the qualitative approach. When these issues emerged, utilizing support and debriefing was critical in decreasing the risk of narrowing the lens through which participant stories can be heard. Accessing support from the project mentor will allow for consistent feedback and multiple perspectives to challenge assumptions. The use of field notes also documented and made explicit the researcher's experiences. Reflections on these notes throughout the process aided in identifying and clarifying preconceived ideas. Field notes will be discussed in more detail in another section.

*Data-Collection Procedures*

A number of sources were utilized to gather data in this project. These included semi-structured interviews, transcripts of interviews, participant notes on transcripts, and the researcher's field notes. Each will be discussed in more detail below.

*Semi-Structured Interviews*

The researcher reviewed interview transcripts as data collection progressed, so that questions could be added or deleted, based on analyses, to enhance data collected in subsequent interviews. Charmaz (2003) highlighted how concurrent data collection and analysis influences decisions about data collection resulting in potential shifts in the direction of inquiry with participants. Field notes also served as a source of data throughout the project. Utilization of multiple sources of data is one means of enhancing trustworthiness of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The primary method of data collection was in-depth, individual interviews conducted separately with active law-
enforcement officers and their significant others. Individual interviews were determined to be optimal due to the nature of the issues under exploration and to allow for both members to discuss their experiences in a way that may decrease self-censoring. All interviews were conducted by the researcher. Each participant was asked to participate in one face-to-face interview that lasted between one to two hours. Interviews were conducted in a mutually agreed upon location that was private and quiet including researcher’s and participants’ offices. A schedule of questions was utilized to provide a framework to initiate and maintain dialogue between the researcher and participant (Appendix G). Although only the researcher had access to the printed questions, each conversation was flexible enough to allow both researcher and participant to follow up on questions and to pursue insights as they emerged. Modifications, additions, and deletions to the research questions were documented, along with the rationale for this decision, in the field notes.

Field Notes

Charmaz (2003) highlighted the importance of situating data in context through “describing the situation, the interaction, the person’s affect, and [the researcher’s] perception of how the interview went” (p. 88). This was accomplished, in part, through the use of field notes. These notes served as opportunities to reflect on my experiences as the researcher through all of the phases of participant recruitment and interviewing as well as during debriefing, data analyses, and data presentation, which will be presented in the following sections. Documenting my thoughts and feelings in response to participants and their narratives immediately following the interviews was central to later debriefing as well as a step towards enhancing trustworthiness by making my own
experiences explicit or, as Elliot et al. (1999) would advocate, “owning one’s perspective” (p. 220). Notes were labeled with participant identification codes for ease of reference. Furthermore, being an active observer of my own role in the process highlighted potential difficulties as well as areas of success, thus allowing for the systematic and recursive analysis that is the hallmark of grounded-theory methodology.

**Participant Debriefing**

Participant debriefing was explained to individuals in the informed consent as well as before the beginning of the interview. Prior to the interview participants were reminded that, if they experienced discomfort as a result of the questions or dialogue, they could elect to end the interview, with the option to reschedule at a later date or to terminate their involvement with the research project. The researcher maintained attentiveness for any verbal or nonverbal indications of distress throughout each interview. Participants also had opportunities to debrief post-interview, i.e. to share their experience of the interview and to discuss thoughts and feelings about the process. Each participant was offered information about accessing professional resources and also received a list of resources designed for and experienced in working with LEO’s and their partners/families at the end of each interview (Appendix H).

**Transcriptions and Feedback**

Each interview was audio recorded with written consent and later transcribed by the researcher. As highlighted by Charmaz (2003), recordings and transcriptions of interviews allowed for in depth reviews of data while creating opportunities to develop insights and generation of additional codes. Each participant received a hardcopy of the transcript for review and was asked to make written notes or additions to the transcript
which were then incorporated into the data. Transcripts were returned by 12 participants. In these cases, any further notes or additions to data were documented on the appropriate transcript. Participants were also encouraged to make contact with the researcher by phone to clarify points of interest that emerged however none chose to do so.

_Anonymity and Confidentiality_

In this study, anonymity was not guaranteed because participants met in person with the primary researcher. However, any information provided through the interviews was kept in confidence. Participant identities were not revealed to anyone other than the researcher throughout the study, and all identifying information such as, names, departments, towns, were changed to protect individual privacy. Recordings of interviews were labeled with an alphanumerical code, and all names and other identifying data such as names of towns and departments were deleted from the transcripts. All records (audio files, compact-discs, transcripts, signed consent forms) were kept in a locked cabinet to which only the researcher had access. Electronic data was stored only on a USB memory key and secured utilizing Password Protect USB software. All records will be stored for a period of three years, after which they will be destroyed.

_Researcher Debriefing_

The researcher conducted all interviews with the participants. It was critical for the researcher to maintain awareness of and to pursue dialogue in debriefing with the project’s mentor on an as-needed basis regarding the impact of the research process on herself. Field notes and journals were utilized by the researcher in the debriefing process.
Data Analysis

One of the hallmarks of grounded-theory is the concurrent nature of data collection and analysis as the researcher began to review data after the first interview. Data was analyzed and coded as delineated by Strauss and Corbin (1990). The goals of using coding to develop a grounded-theory are threefold, according to these authors: (1) as a way to build theory, (2) to enhance rigor in the research process and to minimize the influence of researcher bias, and perhaps most importantly, (3) to “provide the grounding, build the density, and develop the sensitivity and integration needed to generate a rich, tightly woven, explanatory theory that closely approximates the reality it represents” (p. 57). Analyses of data involved the three major types of coding central to grounded-theory methodology, open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Each is described below in accordance with the model proposed by Strauss and Corbin along with how the researcher utilized this framework in analyzing LEO and SO interview data.

Open Coding

Strauss and Corbin (1990) defined open coding as a way in which data are broken down, examined, compared, conceptualized, and categorized. This required close review of transcribed interviews. Each transcript was read several times with the goal of gaining a sense of the participants’ experiences in their entirety. This allowed for reflection on the narrative in a cohesive fashion. The researcher initially worked independently to undertake a line-by-line analysis to identify phenomena and to create descriptive, conceptual labels. Efforts were made to remain as close as possible to the participant narrative and languaging of each’s experiences. As Charmaz (2006) indicated, this process can be particularly useful in early in-depth interviews to “identify implicit
concerns as well as explicit statements” (p.50). An example of this is Ed’s statement about his work:

And the problem is that because of what I do and because of my rank right now as a patrolman, it’s like I have four bosses so, they’ll all tell me different things that they want to have done not knowing what the other guy has asked me to do.

Table 1 provides the line-by-line coding of this statement.

Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Statement</th>
<th>Researcher Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>problem is because of what I do and because of my rank as a patrolman, it’s like I have four bosses so, they’ll all tell me different things that they want to have done not knowing what the other guy has asked me to do</td>
<td>Perceiving problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being impacted by rank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Having multiple supervisors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Receiving different information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supervisors not knowing other requests</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The researcher maintained responsibility for final determination of the schema to be used for further analyses with the awareness that “what stands out from the text depends on [the researcher’s perspective]” (Dahl and Boss, 2005, p. 74). Having completed a comprehensive literature review prior to undertaking this project presented some challenges throughout the initial coding as the researcher recognized her tendencies to start grouping phrases and data into the categories, for example types of stressors, that were located in the extant research. In the above example, this LEO’s statement seemed to fit with the results of one particular study (Stinchcomb, 2004) that discussed
communication problems within administration as an stressor for officers. It was important to bear this in mind while also trying to challenge whether this larger category truly captured this officer’s experience. Acknowledging the tendency to categorize early on, while putting preconceptions on hold, at these early stages of analysis, was useful in avoiding becoming closed off to alternatives and other perspectives that subsequent participants shared.

Efforts were made to generate in vivo codes, which are words and phrases the participants use, in order to weave participant language into the analytic process. Concepts were then grouped into broader, yet provisional, categories which allowed for effective management of the large quantity of data. Based on the above example, the researcher began to consider the broader categories of supervisory communication as well as the wholeness of the participant’s experience as an administrative stressor. The wholeness of the statement planted theoretical seeds about the influence and interaction of the LEO’s rank, how communication occurs within and across rank and how LEO’s perceive the communication, for example, lack of communication, miscommunication, mixed messages.

*Axial Coding*

If the role of open coding is the breaking down of data, axial coding may be considered as the process by which data are put back together to make connections between a category and subcategories. As Strauss and Corbin (2008) explained, “open coding and axial coding go hand in hand” as “analysts...automatically make connections...that come from the data” (p. 198). This was accomplished through use of the paradigm model. The paradigm model, as presented by Strauss and Corbin (1990),
has six features: (1) the phenomenon or what the data are referring to; (2) causal conditions, the events that lead to the phenomenon; (3) the context, which provides dimension to the phenomenon (context is comprised of the properties of the phenomenon as well as the conditions in which strategies are engaged to respond to it); (4) intervening conditions, e.g., those which act to either facilitate or constrain the action/interactional strategies taken within a specific context; (5) actions undertaken to respond to the phenomenon; (6) consequences which are comprised of those outcomes involving people, places, and objects and may be the result of action or inaction. These six features are included in a graphic representation, or logic diagram, that shows the nature of the relationships among categories and also relate the categories to the phenomena. This process represented a shift from identifying categories to developing what Dahl and Boss (2005) termed “psychological insight” (p. 74) into the participants’ experiences. Again, using the example above, the researcher placed this aspect of the participant’s story within the model to better understand how this experience (being a patrol officer with four supervisors who communicate different information without knowing what the others have already directed) was identified as a trigger to a stress response, in this case “an anxiety type of feeling” resulting in “trouble sleeping” and then lack of sleeping contributing to “floating through the day.” The participant later provided information about his responses to the phenomena of stress, including adaptive responses such as creating realistic expectations, exercising, seeking feedback from spouse, and requesting support from supervisors. While recognizing these as healthful resources, the participant also recognized his use of maladaptive mechanisms like “binge a little bit” and periodic alcohol use along with consequences to these self-initiated interventions. As this
was one of the earliest interviews, sketching tentative diagrams of participant experiences around the core research questions allowed for understanding when new data fit with or contradict the emergent theory. The surfacing of consistency or variations in the data deepened and helped constrict the theoretical framework. Any proposed relationships that were supported throughout the data became the underpinnings for a grounded-theory through reduction and synthesis of information. This was the foundation for selective coding.

**Selective Coding**

The third type of coding represents a number of steps toward integration of the data into a cohesive theory. Strauss and Corbin (1990) advocated that researchers formulate and commit to a story line. I began with my thoughts on what I saw as the main issue emerging from the narratives of law-enforcement couples and then found and named categories that were broad enough to fit the story. The properties and dimensions of this core category, which helped organize the categories around the core while enriching the story line were developed. Continuing the example from above, in response to the identified stressor of receiving multiple, mixed messages from supervisors, Ed attempted to negotiate this through various means including communication with supervisors, communication with his spouse, and both healthy and unhealthy self-soothing mechanisms. Recognizing the impact of job stress on family members, Ed also engaged in strategies to mitigate potential negative effects. I assert that this demonstrates Ed’s efforts to manage directly the source of stress while adapting and using strategies that reflect both self-care and care for his family members. This example represents Ed’s narrative of his identification and management of job-related stressors in
context of his own and family's functioning. The participants' stories provided rich data from which key categories were generated and the core category developed. The core category that emerged from the data was negotiating job stress through adaptive caring which will be discussed in detail in Findings (Chapter IV).

This ultimately set the stage for grounding the theory. The researcher generated hypotheses about the categorical relationships through further writing and review of the data which helped determine whether the hypothesis in question could hold for the participants' experiences. Strauss and Corbin (1990) described patterns as "repeated relationships between properties and dimensions of categories" (p 130) and noted the importance of identifying these patterns and of grouping data to underpin specificity. Theoretical memos helped ground the theory or validate identified relationships. These memos were statements of the relationships among major categories and related the major categories to the central phenomenon as well. These statements were reviewed in tandem with the data to assure that the theory was applicable to most cases and to explore potential reasons for cases that were a poor fit for the theory. The researcher also explored any gaps in existing categories with review of data that could have enriched the category. As recommended by Rafiuls and Moon (1996), the results of the study are presented as an integrated set of hypotheses about how law-enforcement officers and their significant others understand and communicate the nature and impact of job-related stressors and availability and use of coping resources. As noted by Annells (1997), utilization of Strauss and Corbin's (1990) method ultimately allows for the infusion of participant voices into and representation in the construct-as-theory while making the presence and influence of the researcher explicit throughout the process.
Presentation of Findings

Descriptions and backgrounds based on information presented by participants are outlined, utilizing pseudonyms and de-identified information. Synopses of each person’s experiences facilitate locations of meaning as well as data that may stand in contrast to the generated theory. Dahl and Boss (2005) highlighted the importance of including “what the phenomenon under study is and what it is not” (p. 78). Matrix displays were generated to present cross-case findings and incorporate quotes from participant narratives that exemplify identified themes. Utilization of matrices facilitates analysis across cases and is utilized to enhance generalizability and to generate richer understanding and explanation of emergent themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). With the awareness that the researcher is the primary tool in qualitative research, a report on the primary researcher’s experiences of data collection and analyses was made along with hypotheses regarding potential researcher influence throughout each phase of the project.

Trustworthiness

As qualitative researcher Morrow (2005) noted, not only should research be grounded in a substantive theory base and appropriate paradigm but also in what she termed “transcendent criteria for trustworthiness” (p. 250). In grounded-theory methodology, trustworthiness refers to concepts that might parallel issues of reliability and validity in quantitative analyses. Subsumed under the umbrella of trustworthiness are issues of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), these are considered to respectively parallel standards of internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity in quantitative research. The current study was designed to address these issues.
Referencing Goetz and LeCompte (1984), Rafuis and Moon (1996) defined credibility as "the authenticity of representation that exists between what researchers believe they observed and that which was actually observed" (p. 78). Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified a number of ways to enhance credibility, the first being a proactive stance. Activities to be undertaken include prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation. The authors advocated for researchers to learn the culture of the participants as a first step in engagement that will ultimately aid in the development of trust as well as in detecting researcher and participant distortion. Morrow (2005) echoed this philosophy and described "contextual grounding" as important in understanding "the meanings that participants make of their experiences" (p. 253).

My long-term relationship as a spouse of a police officer has allowed me to be embedded in aspects of the law-enforcement subculture. Within the professional arena, having worked within a strengths-based perspective throughout my clinical career, I have collaborated with clients, including a number of first responders, on their uses of positive social-support networks as well as in learning about client experiences of how their religious affiliations have been part of their journeys toward recovery from such issues as trauma and substance abuse. Having the opportunity to engage clients in couple and family therapy has further highlighted relational issues facing men and women. My awareness of the subculture and language associated with the law-enforcement community had set a foundation on which to develop trust with participants, which I believe fostered engagement with participants throughout the interviews and facilitated their openness to participation throughout the project from interview to feedback and in collaboration on the final stages of writing.
This latter point leads to Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) advocacy for persistent observation, the purpose of which is to add salience to the process; in other words, “to identify those characteristics and elements in the situation that are most relevant to the problem or issue being pursued and focusing on them in detail” (p. 304). The immersion of the researcher in all aspects of this project allowed for identification of themes and development of depth regarding the data.

Triangulation is another key component to credibility and may be understood as seeking points of intersection among varied sources and methods (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Morrow (2005) challenged the term, noting it may imply three points rather than innumerable potential sources of data. Morrow recommended the use of multiple data sources to “achieve adequate variety in kinds of evidence” (p. 255) and cited potential limitations to a single data source. Although the current project involved several types of data, including the interview, transcripts, participant observation, participant checks, and field notes, all of the data emerged from one interview with each participant and was viewed through the perspective of the researcher only. The researcher’s full involvement in every aspect of the research process supported consistency in data collection and analyses while acknowledging the inherent limitations of viewing the data from her perspective. Ongoing conversation with the mentor during data analyses served to monitor the research progress, emergent themes, and changes in inquiry while also providing support to the investigator in assessing values and biases that may be influencing the process.

Finally, Lincoln and Guba (1985) discussed negative case analysis as part of the check for credibility. They acknowledged that there is an inherent rigidity to insistence
that all cases be accounted for without exception. Strauss and Corbin (1990) would likely agree, noting that finding evidence of differences and variations and taking a closer look at data that may not support the original research questions “adds density and variation to the theory” (p. 109). This will require my reporting unexpected findings, another way that researchers are encouraged to make visible potential biases that could influence credibility (Hill et al., 2005).

This last issue is especially important since the researcher was hearing, reading, documenting, and analyzing data through her experiences as a significant other of an LEO. This was one of the factors that influenced the way in which partners discussed experiences with me in a way that differed from dialogue with LEO’s. As such, it was reasonable to expect that partners may share information that is discrepant from one another. These instances ultimately provided a foundation for richer description of how members incorporate experiences of stress and coping into their lives and have the potential to suggest ways in which the LEO mediates the impact of these experiences into personal life.

Transferability in qualitative research is said to parallel external validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Throughout this project, the researcher has endeavored to fully share the way in which the project was developed and how the data were collected and analyzed. It has also been critical to provide wide-ranging, rich, and thick descriptions of the participants’ experiences not only of the phenomena of interest but also of the process itself. Transferability may be determined most appropriately by another researcher or user of the data.
Issues of dependability, like reliability, rested on ongoing, careful monitoring of the research design and processes. As defined by Trochim (2002), dependability connotes the importance of the researcher’s role in accounting for the ever-changing context within which research occurs. With the role of the researcher as the constant throughout the research process in this project, the potential for researcher influence was monitored throughout. This ongoing review aided in striving for greater intersubjective verification (Rogers, 1961) and ultimately enhanced the scientific utility of the data. As noted by Meloy (2002), qualitative research requires personal rather than detached engagement, thus “it requires multiple, simultaneous actions and reactions from the human being who is the research instrument” (p. 145). Developing an “audit trail” is one way to reduce risks to dependability. Presenting my brief personal and professional history, documentation of the process via field notes, and reflexive journaling are some of the keys to meeting this standard in this qualitative project.

The last hallmark of trustworthiness is identified as confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmation and corroboration of the results was undertaken through the use of the aforementioned audit trail. Crediting Halpern (1983) with the categorization of the audit trail, Lincoln and Guba encouraged maintenance and review of several forms of information. Raw data was part of the audit, which was comprised of audio recordings. Other information reviewed was data reduction and analyses products, including the project’s field notes, data reconstruction and synthesis products (notes made on data analyses, documentation of emergent themes, and final report), process notes (documents relating to issues of trustworthiness and methodological issues), and materials relating to intentions and dispositions (reflexive journals and researcher biography).
To summarize, trustworthiness is to qualitative findings as reliability and validity are to quantitative findings. Efforts have been made throughout the project to enhance the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The researcher’s professional and personal experiences with the population of interest, immersion in data collection and analyses, use of varied data sources and documents, and ongoing dialogical interaction with the mentor and participants each served in ensuring trustworthiness of the theory developed as part of this research project.

Project Summary

This project was based on grounded-theory methodology to explore how law-enforcement officers and their significant others understand the nature and impact of job-related stress on the individual as well as the family. The researcher also explored the development and use of coping strategies in response to identified stressors. Finally, the researcher investigated ways in which LEO couples communicate about the officer’s work, how each experiences work-related stressors, and the couple’s perception of relational needs that may support coping and resiliency. In-depth interviews were the primary source of data. Findings are presented using a matrix incorporating participants’ quotations which capture the emergent themes. Results of the project are anticipated to contribute to the professional literature by furthering qualitative exploration of both male and female narratives of these experiences while also (a) normalizing and providing helpful information directly to other LEO’s and their partners, (b) generating useful information that may be incorporated into assessment, training, and intervention for members of the law-enforcement community, and (c) providing agency administrators
with information that will aid in addressing and managing sources of organizational stress
while promoting organizational health.
CHAPTER IV

Findings

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings that emerged from the data collected by the researcher through the use of individual interviews and grounded-theory methodology. The law-enforcement couples were recruited through the researcher's connections as a spouse of a police officer utilizing word-of-mouth and snowball sampling. All participants who made contact or who were contacted by the researcher were eligible for participation. The participant population was comprised of seven couples who were scheduled for individual interviews over a three-month period.

The findings in this chapter include several components. Although members of each couple were interviewed separately, within-case analyses will be presented with the couple as the case. These analyses will demonstrate the development of themes relevant to the individual narrative while also highlighting both similar and discrepant aspects of individual narratives within a systemic framework. The presentation of each case follows the order in which each couple was interviewed (e.g. Couple A first, Couple B second).

Additionally, demographic data are presented for each case to provide additional context for each couple as well as in a demographic chart (see Table 2). This information includes age, ethnicity, length of relationship, family composition, and educational level. For law-enforcement officers (LEO's), additional information will include length of service, rank, and department size while for SO's information on employment outside of the home is stated.
Also incorporated into this chapter are analyses focused on development of the core category and the major categories and subcategories which highlight predominant themes and patterns that emerged as a result of the interviews. These are organized based on the initial research questions targeting areas of job-related stressors, coping, and couple communication. These are also presented in a separate matrix (see Tables 3 through 7). Incorporated into each matrix are participant quotes that exemplify each theme while effectively capturing the essence of the participants' lived experiences.

Participant Profiles

A total of seven couples participated in this study. Each member was interviewed separately; however, demographic data and within-case analysis will be presented for each couple to best highlight individual narratives within a relational context. Researcher experiences of each will also be presented to elucidate the changing lenses through which data analyses proceeded.

Demographics

A number of themes emerged from the demographic data that were collected from the participants. All identified their relationships as married, and all had at least a high-school education. All of the participants in the current study were at least 30-years-old, and the average age of the sample was 38-years-old. LEO’s were also typically older than their SO’s with a range from one to nine years age difference. As can be seen in Table 2, the sample also represents a range of LEO ranks and department sizes as well as the number of years of law-enforcement experience held by the officers. Length of years as law-enforcement personnel ranged from five years to 22 years with an average length of employment in the field of almost 15 years. Data are presented in Table 2.
### Table 2

**Demographic Chart**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Couple</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Yrs as Couple</th>
<th>Educ</th>
<th>LEO Years on Job</th>
<th>Title/Rank</th>
<th>Dept Size</th>
<th>SO Work Status**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>&quot;Peter&quot;</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Sergeant</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>F/T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>&quot;Sally&quot;</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Patrol Officer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>&quot;Ed&quot;</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Patrol Officer</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>&quot;Karla&quot;</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>College</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>&quot;Rob&quot;</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Patrol Officer</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>&quot;Hannah&quot;</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>College</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>&quot;Todd&quot;</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sheriff's Officer</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>&quot;Karen&quot;</td>
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* Small <50; Medium 50-500; Large >500

** Significant others who are identified as not presently working include those who are on leave from regular full- or part-time employment as well as those currently not employed outside the home.
Couple A – “Peter and Sally”

Demographics

Peter is a 41-year-old male of Caribbean descent who has been working in the field of law-enforcement for the past 14 years. He is currently working in a small-sized department, has the rank of Sergeant and has completed 2 years of college. Sally is a 40-year-old White female with a high-school diploma currently working full-time in an office job. This couple has been married for 19 years and have 3 children, ages 10, 13, and 15.

Within-Case Analysis

As part of the Recruitment Script (Appendix B), the nature of the study and focus of the interview were discussed with Peter. During the meeting with Peter, and following the reading of the introductory statement, he expressed concern about whether he would be an appropriate participant since he stated he could not identify any stress, defining this concept as “psychological pressures that you’re unable to let go of or deal with in a perceived normal manner.” Peter stated that he believed that most people deal with some degree of stress but also felt that he was less vulnerable than others to the impact of these issues. Furthermore, while Peter was able to identify several areas of his work that were “challenging,” he did not necessarily feel these were stressful. He described the unpredictability of the work, periodically dealing with serious injuries or death, and shift work as primary issues. However, he also identified these as sources of motivation to be ready to face such challenges. Peter described the following:
I don’t know that I necessarily look at it as a stress as much as I look at it as a kind of a make-sure-I-stay-on-my-toes kind of thing, make sure I’m alert, make sure I keep myself prepared, my equipment prepared.

In meeting with Peter, the researcher chose to specifically ask about discrimination and harassment as an officer of color. Peter acknowledged the potential for this to occur both in his work and in dealing with the community. However, he identified that this is a factor he has not paid attention to or experienced and noted:

What I’m saying is that there are so many things that could be said behind my back. In a police department, that happens quite often where it is just constant talking behind, and maybe it’s in every workforce. But if it was there, just the race issue, it certainly was not brought directly. It was not put in my face and has also not really been my experience in most of my life.

Peter also recognized the impact of these challenges on his loved ones. Peter discussed how his shift work in particular has created challenges for his wife, Sally, specifically in maintaining primary responsibility for their children, often shuttling them to various school and social activities when Peter is unavailable. He also described Sally’s discomfort when she is home alone when he is on an overnight shift resulting in her having difficulty sleeping without him there. Although Peter knew that his children miss him at times from their activities, he seemed unsure if they had fears about his safety, noting “I wonder if they really ever stop to think about the danger aspect of it. I mean, anytime they’ve ever really seen me, it’s marching in a parade. Now that I’m in [new department] they do see me in uniform very rarely.” He also described their children as “shielded or sheltered” to some degree about the risks associated with police
work and noted that the children do not generally watch the news which allows Peter and Sally to choose what and how much to share about police-related issues in the media. The couple continues to strive to balance this shielding with educating their children about “the bads of the world” and safety issues, especially with Peter’s duty weapon in the home.

Sally had a similar perspective as Peter regarding stress. She agreed that most people have stress in their lives and described self-awareness of her own stress. Sally noted that her anger is a good indicator of her stress and described “nitpicking,” making “smart remarks,” or being “short with someone.” When asked to reflect on awareness of Peter’s stress, Sally was able to easily articulate Peter’s quietness and some disruption in his sleep as an indicator. This paralleled Peter’s self-description as he acknowledged his tendency to be quieter and more reflective about critical events such as the death of a young person and that such events may also create short-term changes in his sleep pattern. Sally’s perceptions of Peter’s job-related stress paralleled his descriptions and focused on cases in which individuals died, cases of family violence, and also cases involving young people and the elderly. Peter and Sally differed somewhat on their perceptions of the impact of job-related stress on her and, to some degree, on the children. Although Sally did identify difficulties trying to keep the children quiet when Peter is trying to sleep while on a midnight shift and acknowledged her role as primary caretaker, she identified much more clearly her fears about his safety and being concerned “all the time,” especially with his involvement in a specialized tactical unit, wondering “what’s gonna happen today or you hear something on the news,…and he’s getting dressed, and it’s one of those like ‘Oh great’…and you’re not even talking to him
for hours and hours and hours.” While Peter felt his children may not be considering safety issues, Sally perceived that all of their children and especially her son have some concerns and felt that questions such as “Where’s daddy?...What’s he working?...When’s he coming home?” were based in possible fears about the nature of the work.

Both Sally and Peter identified a number of coping strategies to manage their identified challenges and stresses. Individual coping mechanisms for Peter were identified as efforts to maintain a strong boundary between work and home. Peter noted “I think I’ve always been fairly good at keeping home home and work at work.” Additionally, Peter also described efforts to “stay sharp.” This discussion emerged out of the interviewer’s curiosity about perceived risks associated with police work and how he copes with this part of his job. While Peter described his work in a “very quiet department” he acknowledged emerging crime in surrounding communities which periodically and significantly impacts his community. As such, he noted challenges “to keep yourself from being complacent” and, as mentioned earlier, focuses on training and readiness to actively lessen the risk of this occurring. As described above, Peter also utilizes a positive outlook to manage daily challenges and noted:

I think it’s partly because I just see a bigger picture in life. My main focus is the people in this house, and I go to work, and I kinda have the attitude that it is what it is...I’ve had a good career so far. But I’m not one that tends to concentrate on the problems.

This final comment was exemplified by Peter in his discussion of several members of command staff who engage in “badmouthing” senior staff. Peter described his decision to not become involved with this behavior and to defuse any situation where subordinate
staff participate in “undermining [a senior staff’s] authority.” His perceived that “ability to control” aspects of his daily work seem to support this positive outlook, as well as his appreciation for this job opportunity. He stated:

    So, I look at this job like I hit the lottery. I really do. I have an associate’s degree getting benefits and compensation than those who are super schooled individuals sometimes don’t have. So, it makes me realize to shut up and realize the gift you have.

Sally also identified a number of individual coping strategies including use of prayer and ensuring she makes time for herself, especially when she recognizes that her anger is an expression of stress, and, therefore, she needs to “go away... have five minutes.” Both Peter and Sally rely strongly on physical exercise to manage challenges and strive to maintain a regular schedule of working out, though not necessarily together. They each also described efforts to prioritize time as a couple to attend to the marital relationship and talked about sharing leisure activities, planning time away together, and having a routine of spending time alone and watching the news after the children have gone to bed. Peter acknowledged some challenges in following through because of the family schedule and discussed the implications for his relationship:

    You go home, kids have this sporting event, that sporting event and this activity.
    But we try to force alone quality time. We talk about--we don’t always get the chance to do, but we talk about going away for a weekend or we talk about just trying to get time for just the two of us to go out to dinner.

Sally agreed while also describing the importance of having family rituals including dinners together, certain holidays, and “family movie nights.” The couple also described
the importance of their social supports. Both Peter and Sally described spending time with friends as important and described positive relationships with other LEO families and those who are not in that field. Sally specifically identified having a female friend who can relate to LEO-specific issues about safety concerns as her spouse is in the military. She also described having neighbors, friends, and extended family members that can help with the children when needed, though there has been less need for this now who their children are older and that their oldest can supervise the younger ones for brief periods of time. Having flexibility at work was a key component in Sally’s social supports. She described having a supervisor who is also a parent who allows her to leave work briefly to attend to a child’s appointment or to change her schedule to accommodate her family’s needs if Peter is unable to be there.

Support and comfort within the marital relationship were also explored as potential coping mechanism. Peter and Sally described a number of ways that each felt the other was able to provide support and comfort including in concrete ways such as maintaining household or parenting tasks. As Peter described:

It comes in different ways, I think; whether it’d be a meal cooked or something as simply as her getting up to make me a pot of coffee. I mean, sometimes it’s just those little things that say, Okay, everything’s alright.

He also described valuing Sally’s acceptance of the “nature of the beast” in terms of his lack of control over aspects of the job such as his shifts, being called out or working holidays. Although the shift work was described as both as possibly difficulty, Sally depicted the benefits as Peter’s availability to the children at times of the day when she is
working and felt that his attending to the children’s needs in her absence was a source of support not just directly to the children but also for her.

One of the research questions targets the dynamic nature of couple interaction and deals directly with communication in law-enforcement couples. Peter and Sally both described challenges in communicating about job-related stress. As noted above, Sally had identified that Peter often becomes quiet in response to stress. Sally described efforts to talk with him about what has happened at work when she notices this change. She noted:

When he comes home, and I ask him if anything’s wrong, he says “No.” And then like a week later, he’ll tell his other buddies or he’ll tell other people, and then I’m like, “I just asked you that like in a week ago. I’m here for you and you’re telling everybody else.”

In discussing Sally’s comments, she was able to reflect feeling bothered by Peter’s initial lack of openness and also the possibility of Peter’s feeling “more comfortable with [others], who are in the job or in a position that they’re in and I’m not.” Sally did describe increasing openness once there is some distance from the event or in his responsiveness to questions she asks if she has overheard part of the story from his conversation with someone else or on the news. “He’ll be open a little more, but, yeah, once it opens, it’s open. So, the questions are there, and they’re answered and everything.” While Peter acknowledged that talking about cases that have bothered him is important because he needs to “let it out,” he also identified the difficulties in discussing work with his wife, potentially due to perceived lack of understanding or perception that Sally may not be able to help in some way. Peter stated:
And you come home, you talk about it, and there really is very little that, I think, your spouse, unless she's trained in some sort of capacity, there's really very little that your spouse can even say to you. I mean, what can she really say to--I don't even want to say make things better, but to perhaps help you cope with that picture. I don't know that there is.

While Peter identified some need to share information with his spouse, he may not consider how his lack of sharing impacts Sally. This is, however, consistent with Peter's desire to maintain a fairly strong boundary between his professional and personal lives.

Researcher Experience

I had known Peter and Sally for the past 14 years through my spouse and had periodic, yet infrequent, contact with them around the holidays or events that mutual friends would invite us to. I initially contacted Peter about the study and later Sally to ensure that both had enough information before proceeding with scheduling meeting dates. Although I was fairly comfortable in meeting with Peter and Sally, having met them several times in the past, I was still initially somewhat anxious about beginning data collection. I wanted to adhere to the interview questions while also beginning to assess if and how they were appropriate, both in supporting participant storytelling while eliciting needed information.

Since Peter and Sally were the first couple participants in the study, these initial two interviews set in motion a reassessment of the questions and greater consideration of the language used by me. What struck me immediately about Peter, given his initial statement about not perceiving that he has any stress, was his outlook and perspective and how these were key components of how he perceived stress or, more appropriately for
him, challenges. I started to consider how participants might incorporate their own understandings of how personality structure and self-perception could influence understanding, experiences, and management of stress. I also recognized this officer’s experience of his job as a job rather than the complete definition of who he is. I obtained the sense that this job was a means to an end to support his family while meeting value needs to do “what’s right.” Additionally, this participant had worked in two different departments. This gave me an opportunity to hear about his experiences at each, suggesting a broader base of experience within which to contextualize what was currently happening for him. Sally appeared closer to the emotional experience of life married to a police officer, as demonstrated by her ability to easily articulate both her own and her children’s concerns. Both Sally and Peter might suggest that job-related stressors have a stronger impact on her at present, potentially due to working full-time and maintaining household and primary caretaking activities with their three children. In reflecting on the couple’s communication style in relating to work issues, I noticed Peter and Sally engaging in a demand-withdraw style of communication. Both members described aspects of Sally’s questioning and Peter’s quietness as hallmarks of this, yet resolution and open dialogue occur following a period of time, possibly when Peter has had time to process a work incident more fully himself or with peers. This couple espoused a family-first philosophy. Again, with both members sharing this value system, each seems able to consider how stress, coping, and communication work for their family, both as individuals and in marital and parent-child interactions. Prioritizing their children’s needs and happiness provides a common goal that allows Peter and Sally to work on together in spite of the challenges this couple has identified.
Couple B – “Ed and Karla”

Demographics

Ed is a 36-year-old White male who has been working in the field of law-enforcement for the past 13 years with the last 9 spent in a medium-sized department. Ed is a Patrol Officer and has a college degree. Karla is a 35-year-old White female with a college degree. She is presently on family leave from her full-time professional job, but plans to return in the future when their two-year-old son begins school. Ed and Karla have been married for nine years and have one child.

Within-Case Analysis

In initially discussing the research project with Ed over the phone, he had some concerns that his job duties may not “fit” with what the researcher was looking for. Ed described his position as the training officer as largely administrative and thus representing a shift from previous duties on patrol. The researcher had no reservations about Ed’s eligibility for the research given the range of duties that law-enforcement personnel have and the potential benefits of representation of as many duties as possible. The researcher assured Ed that he met the eligibility criteria and that his perspective was valuable, and he agreed to proceed. Ed identified stress in personal terms, describing its impact on him, including feeling “overwhelmed,” “trouble sleeping,” having “an anxiety type of feeling,” and “thinking about work when I’m off.” He was able to easily identify sources of stress in his job. Several of these stemmed from his having multiple supervisors. Ed described:
Because of what I do and because of my rank right now as a patrolman, it's like I have four bosses. So, they'll all tell me different things that they want to have done not knowing what the other guy has asked me to do.

He elaborated on this issue of the challenges of having several supervisors, noting that their lack of communication with one another is often purposeful due to personality conflicts, perceived past slights, or "animosity" stemming from the ways in which officers receive promotions not necessarily based in a merit system. Ed observed that this lack of communication, disconnection, and lack of clarity in communication among supervisory and command staff have resulted in his being the "go-between" among them. Ed also described his job duties as periodically stressful due to what he perceives as unrealistic deadlines and anxieties associated with scheduling and delivery of training.

Ed reflected on his rank as a factor in many of these issues. Given the paramilitary structure of law-enforcement, the hierarchy of ranks is ever-present in police agencies. Ed described his efforts to be tactful in confronting supervisors about problematic areas such as deadlines, his need for concrete support, and commitment to having staff meet training expectations while at the same time not wanting to be perceived as complaining. Ed also recognized his own personality style as influencing these issues. When asked what he might to promote change, he stated he felt he could probably be more assertive noting:

If I was to be like, "Well, that's not really my responsibility. That's not exactly what I'm doing here," I think that would probably be a lot more helpful because it would reduce my workload. But it's not the personality that I am.
As an instructor, he frequently finds himself teaching other officers of higher rank who have more years of experience and reflected:

I find, when you teach in front of your peers, especially at the rank of a patrolman which I am, and sometimes you have sergeants, lieutenants, and captains sitting in the room, people will question or sometimes they're just like--they'll give you a hard time because they can at that point.

In addition to Ed’s descriptions of how stress impacts him personally, he was also asked how these issues might affect his work. Ed quickly identified periods of decreased motivation and productivity. These issues were also noted to be secondary to fatigue following disrupted sleep when preoccupied with work-related matters. He described awareness that these issues have the potential to impact his relationship and used the examples of having difficulty relaxing when he has time off or using police language with his family. Ed informed that Karla is easily able to observe this tension and also quickly picks up on his police language when she confronts him on statements such as “What’s the general layout of the day?” or “Disregard that.” Although their son is young, Ed recognized the potential for issues to affect his child, mostly in relation to his wanting to take a nap when he comes home from work and feeling this ought to be time he should spend with his two-year-old.

Karla’s identification of Ed’s work-related stress mirrored his own descriptions, suggesting that Ed has chosen to engage in open communication about the administrative and organization issues that face him on a daily basis. In addition to Ed’s difficulties sleeping or being preoccupied with work, Karla noted his being somewhat quiet, short-tempered, or seeming unhappy. Though less concerned about safety issues, Karla
described feeling “worry about him having too much stress and internalizing it.” Like Ed, Karla alluded to how personality characteristics influence stress responses and perceived control and stated:

It’s hard, because he is always somebody who likes to do everything to the best of his ability. He likes to give a 100%. And sometimes tasks are given to him where it’s impossible to give a 100%. And he’s harder on himself than, I think, anybody else.

Karla described Ed’s ability to speak with her about the issues he faces at work and her own efforts to listen yet alluding to a sense of helplessness in not being able to “fix” the issues. Rather than the job directly impacting her, Karla noted that Ed’s mood or fatigue may compound her own stresses of the day in dealing with a toddler resulting in periodic “bickering,” though they strive to “separate those things” and understand the source of the difficulties.

Like Peter and Sally, Ed and Karla described utilizing both individual and relational resources in managing job-related problems. Ed discussed efforts to maintain a work-home boundary and how this may benefit the couple. Yet he maintains awareness of how challenging this has been for him. Similar to Peter, Ed also cited the importance of physical exercise in relieving stress and elaborated:

The ability to try to maintain some kind of physical fitness regimen. Maybe four to five times a week, you know, different things. Sometimes it will be weights or just running or something like that. And it’s just an escape for 45 minutes, and... that’s how I get rid of [stress].
Of note, Ed has a fitness facility at his work, making it convenient for him to access this resource.

Ed also identified less healthy outlets for his stress and prefaced this aspect of the conversation with his perceived “need to be honest with you.” He first described “binge eating” noting a tendency to overeat during the night when he cannot sleep. He finds this to be comforting and stated it helps him return to sleep. Ed also discussed his alcohol use.

I won’t say on a daily occurrence, but like on a Friday night or something like that. Yeah. Do I find it relaxing? You have maybe three or four beers and just kinda like nod off or whatever, yeah. So, I’m not gonna say that I don’t do that, but I try to keep it to Friday or Saturday night.

Of note, Ed initiated this dialogue regarding these behaviors and seemed to recognize them as unhealthy outlets. This was apparent in his statement about needing to be honest about his alcohol use and desire for the researcher to perceive his sense of control over the frequency and quantity of use. His willingness to discuss his overeating was clearer as he verbalized negative consequences as weight gain. In reflecting on the interviews, the researcher recognized Ed as the only participant to discuss active engagement in potentially harmful behaviors. It is unclear to what degree this reflects increased self-awareness and greater comfort with the researcher that may have differed with other participants.

Karla also identified ways she tries to manage stressors including “internalizing,” avoiding difficult issues, or waiting for it to go away, though she recognized that these issues typically resurface. She described proactive means of stress management.
including exercise and relational resources. Both Karla and Ed described the importance of having support from friends and family. The couple has several friends within the law-enforcement community, and Ed often spends time with peers from work. Karla noted that she will generally speak with female friends, though not necessarily just with other LEO spouses.

I know that there is a clan of wives, cops' wives, and we're always together, and we're very friendly with each other. But I am that way with some of the wives, but I wouldn't say that it consumes me or my friendships. I think I am kind of scattered with the women and friends, and I could pretty much talk to any of them.

Karla also has a close relationship with her mother who is a strong source of support and extended family members who offer babysitting services or invite them over for a meal.

Both Karla and Ed described themselves as spiritual. Though both utilize prayer, Ed seemed to be more aware of how his belief system and prayer function as a source of support and coping mechanism.

I also do believe that there is some stress relief in the fact that, when I am having a hard time, in a prayer I will say, like, just help me get through this time, you know, point me in the direction I need to go...whether it's the fact that you're just saying it, recognizing it yourself, but you do sometimes, or I sometimes feel like there is some form of stress reduction and believing that there is a higher power out there that--do the right thing and there is...harmony in this world.
In exploring how support and comfort are given and used within the marital relationship, Ed and Karla were able to discuss these openly. Ed identified concrete support from Karla including her currently being a stay-at-home parent, running their household, managing their budget, and being primarily responsible for their son. He also said he receives assistance from Karla in his work duties, noting he will ask her to review lectures, presentations, or some writing and appreciates her responsiveness to his requests to do so. Karla was able to recognize Ed’s appreciativeness for her support while also crediting Ed with attentiveness to her needs in getting a break from childcare duties. Both discussed an awareness that they needed to prioritize time as a couple. Karla astutely noted the impact of having a baby on the marital relationship.

I think in the beginning we were realizing that, if you let a baby, the baby will just run your life and run your marriage, and it will just be that and that’s it. And then we both noticed that we missed our time alone.

They now try to call on extended family or a babysitter, so they can have quiet dinners or go away for the night.

There seems to be fairly open communication between Ed and Karla regarding job-related stressors based on observations of consistency between their narratives and use of similar language in describing particular experiences. Karla described a shift in their communication when Ed’s role in his police department changed and noted:

The things that he probably can’t communicate to me ‘cause I wouldn’t understand. So—and a lot of times, he didn’t tell me things when he was on the road ‘cause he didn’t want to upset me. Or make me nervous or more worried than I already was.
Karla reflected on an increase in the couple's communication about day-to-day matters, now that physical safety is less of a concern, while also wanting Ed to talk more about what is happening. Karla perceived Ed's hesitancy or delay in talking about it as part of his belief he should be able to handle issues by himself. Both Ed and Karla described her communication towards him in the form of advice giving, especially reminders to maintain a family-first attitude. Ed identified this as a "reality check," noting that Karla will tell him to "keep your eye on what's important anyway" and remind him that he is not solely responsible for the department. "She'll say like, 'If you never go to work tomorrow, [the department] isn't gonna skip a beat, it's gonna keep on going.' And that's so true." Both Ed and Karla shared an appreciation for each other's willingness to discuss job issues while there is also room for each of them to address ways they can more fully support one another through this communication.

Researchers Experience

Ed and Karla were recruited through word-of-mouth. One of my spouse's co-workers knew them personally and thought they might be interested in the project. I received their contact information and reached out to Ed initially. He stated he had discussed the project with his wife and that both were interested in assisting the researcher. Following the first sets of interviews, the research questions were slightly re-ordered to better reflect moving from intrapersonal issues (self-awareness, individual coping) to relational issues (other-awareness, the law-enforcement community). This re-ordering, and I believe my increased comfort with the process, allowed for what I perceived to be a more cohesive narrative. Both Ed and Karla seemed relaxed and very much at ease throughout their interviews and were open in responding to questions,
including elaborating on issues with minimal prompting. I found myself somewhat surprised at how well Karla seemed to understand the organizational stressors that her spouse experienced. I also appreciated her ability to reflect on how these stressors have changed as a result of changing assignments, something that I mentally noted for future interviews. I was relating strongly to these experiences watching my spouse’s stressors change as his job duties have shifted along with higher rank and departmental changes.

Ed was very open in sharing not only his personal experiences but his views on the profession as a whole. He had highlighted his perceptions of emerging trends in officers having increased education and greater focus on physical health. Although these issues initially seemed to stray from the question at hand, it became evident that these statements tied into organizational issues in that officers of different ages may have had different experiences in training and background depending on when they entered the profession. Related to this, I found myself taking personally, and feeling irritated, by his statement about officers getting on the job right out of high school and being handed a badge and a gun, that officers with education and other life experiences may be better suited “to think” about the decisions they make. Though I agreed with his theory, I felt myself getting protective of my spouse who entered the profession at 19 years old. Attentiveness to and acceptance of this reaction allowed me to utilize his perspective in framing questions about how this might play out between older and younger officers while being supportive of the participant’s disclosure.
Couple C – “Rob and Hannah”

Demographics

Rob is a 36-year-old White male who has been working in law-enforcement for the past 14 years. He has completed some college and is presently a Patrol Officer in a small-sized department. Hannah is a 30-year-old White female with a college degree. She is presently on family leave from her full-time professional job, but plans to return in the future. This couple has been married for three years, and they have a four-month-old child.

Within-Case Analysis

Rob identified stress as “life’s complications” and “life’s annoyances” echoing earlier interviewees who suggested that stress in an inherent part of the human experience. In recognizing how stress impacts him directly, Rob identified muscle tension and that his “mind is always running” though he clarified that these stressors occur in response to deadlines or training issues rather than as triggers in day-to-day dealings with the community. Rob mentioned exposure to serious accidents with injuries and death as potentially stressful, though further dialogue revealed a shift in this perspective over the years he has worked.

I think early on in your career it affects you ‘cause you it’s not something that you’ve seen or maybe not even are expected to see as people. But once you do, I think you just--I feel in the 14 years I’ve become numb to all my--or maybe they’re compartmentalized or something. I think it’s become easier as I’ve been on longer.
Rob utilized the following as an example of the ways in which trauma scenes affected him early in his career.

I would go to a trauma scene, and I would have difficulty eating lunch after I’ve been on a call like that, or maybe even for a few days, or I guess I was nauseous, and you’re replaying what you saw, but that doesn’t really happen to me anymore.

Hannah described stress as a source of anxiety resulting in sleep disruption and less of appetite. She also was able to articulate recognition of stress in Rob, describing him being “more on the quiet side” and seeing “anger in his eyes.” When asked to elaborate on Rob’s anger, Hannah described changes in his facial expressions and how he communicates with her “or him not speaking” about it. Unlike Rob, Hannah noted that she felt exposure to “fatal” was something that would “bother” him and that he would “keep it inside, or at least he does not bring it home to me.” Of interest, Hannah told the researcher that Rob has been open about his decision to not share about certain incidents. “He says ‘I don’t even tell you half of the stuff that I’ve seen or that I’ve done,’ [though] he does mention that he’s very used to seeing bodies and blood.” She also described his transition to a new role at work within the past year. This occurred at the same time as the birth of their first child resulting in stress secondary to fatigue and adjusting to new responsibilities both at home and at work. Hannah denied feeling that Rob’s job created any significant stress for her and reflected on her family background as the reason for this. She came from a family of law-enforcement personnel including her father and three brothers. She did identify his current regular shift as being challenging, especially in making plans with other people when he is often unable to attend. Also he gets home late which wakes her up and forces her “body [to be] on his schedule.”
Several of the coping mechanisms identified by the first two couples were echoed in Rob and Hannah’s narratives. Both identified physical exercise and personal self-care as integral to their well-being as well as was their connection to their spirituality. Both discussed their use of prayer and dialogue with God. Rob elaborated on this.

Just comfort and speaking to God and maybe ask Him to give you strength, knowledge, courage, whatever it is that you need to face what you have to face and ask Him for Him to watch over my family and friends, and just the comfort in knowing that there’s someone greater—a greater person than us that’s there for you.

Like earlier LEO interviewees, Rob described efforts to keep work and home separate, noting, “I leave work at work. I always have. Now I have 45 minutes of windshield time before I come home. And by that time I would have already forgotten about work.” Hannah shared using distraction such as watching television as well as use of aromatherapy or taking baths as helpful in stress management while Rob attends to physical needs through regular chiropractic visits and other physical-health-care needs.

Both identified numerous relational resources. For Hannah, having family members in law-enforcement was identified as helpful as she is very close with her mother and brothers. Talking regularly with them as well as having her mother visit and spend time with the baby were described as supportive and comforting. Hannah also described having good relationships with coworkers. Although she was on leave at the time of the interview, she has maintained these relationships and described them as “very close” and often discusses parenting issues. Rob described several relational resources that are supportive including peer relationships with friends he has had since childhood as
well as good relationships with coworkers with whom he often shares gallows humor. While other interviewees referenced the use of humor in telling spouses funny stories from work, Rob specifically identified this as a mechanism with LEO peers stating, “Yeah, well, cops tend to joke about things,...tend to use humor to overcome the things that we deal with...things that maybe the average citizen is not gonna see in their lifetime.”

Both Rob and Hannah described positive interactions in their marital relationship as a primary source of support and comfort. In addition to both verbalizing appreciation for the other’s active involvement with parenting duties, physical affection with each other, and spending time together engaged in leisure were noted as important. Like Ed and Karla, Rob and Hannah seem to have different levels of communication about administrative or organizational stressors than the critical incidents that LEO’s have described choosing not to share. Hannah noted, ”definitely about his department, he’ll talk to me about...He tells me everything about that...We’ll take a 45-minute car ride, and all he’ll talk about is work.” But regarding more serious incidents like car accidents, “he says it’s not something that he wants to put in my brain, that I should be thinking about.” Through continued dialogue about this issue, Hannah felt that this was protective of her as well as self-protective of Rob in not having to go through the experience again with a retelling of the story. Both described Hannah’s use of questions as a way to facilitate communication about less-serious topics than “fatais.” Rob expressed an interest in “somebody that’s not a police officer’s point of view of what we deal with or trying to see what she’s trying to process of what we do.”
Researcher Experience

Rob and Hannah were contacted directly by the researcher. I had known Rob for several years through another law-enforcement family and had met Hannah several times prior to the interviews. Due to a change in childcare arrangements, Hannah had the couple's three-month-old daughter with her. I asked Hannah about her comfort level in proceeding with her baby and whether she felt she could focus. She responded that she wanted to proceed. While I was coordinating my forms, I had the opportunity to make observations that suggested the child would not be overly disruptive to the participant or the research process. During the final 10 minutes or so of the interview, the baby started to fuss, so the participant held her, but did not seem distracted or concerned.

Throughout both interviews the participants seemed at ease and open in discussing the LEO's work, their relationship, and the challenges of having an infant in their lives. I started to think about my own relationship and how being child-free has its own assumptions about the meaning of family, organization of priorities in our lives, as well as how the unique joys and challenges of couples who are parents intersect with stresses in law-enforcement, for example having a weapon in the home where children are present.

What was especially interesting about this interview was how I had anticipated Rob to be in identifying stress and emotional responses. I had frequently heard about Rob through other officers and their family members and their descriptions of him as both the consummate professional, yet perennially dissatisfied and angry. Though this had not been my experience with Rob, I had heard enough stories to this effect that I assumed they had some validity. As I listened to him in our conversation, it became
apparent as to the sources of this dissatisfaction and anger when he was with a different
department while in the early stages of his career and how recent transitions in his life
could be supporting a more positive outlook.

Couple D – “Todd and Karen”

Demographics

Todd is a 31-year-old White male with 5 years experience in law-enforcement.
Todd has some college experience and is presently working as a Sheriff’s Officer in a
large-sized department. Karen is a 31-year-old White female with a graduate degree.
Karen is currently working full-time in a professional position. The couple has been in
their relationship for over two years and married one month ago. They have no children.

Within-Case Analysis

In asking Todd to define stress, he stated that this may be “anything that’s causing
issues in your life and causing the problems.” He easily identified self-awareness of
stress including being short-tempered, getting quiet, and being forgetful. Karen’s
narrative supports the accuracy of his self-assessment. Todd noted that his department is
facing layoffs and that he knows he will lose his job in less than two months. Todd
expanded on his feelings about this, noting that his concerns are “not even as much as the
layoff but the way the department handled the layoff.” He described his perception that
the agency knew about this process for a significant period of time before notifying him
and stated he continues to have difficulty getting “straight answers out of anybody” about
what is happening. Compounding these events is Todd’s assertion that the agency has
not been supportive in attempting to advocate for alternative employment either
internally or with other agencies. He spoke of many LEO’s in command positions likely
having strong connections with other potential employers in law-enforcement, yet he perceived there to be little effort by supervisory staff to utilize these resources to help those who are facing termination. Karen closely echoed this sentiment and wish that the agency. She stated:

They should be more supportive, especially, for all the work that Todd did for his department. And, actually, I’m kind of like disappointed in these people because he was always there; he helped everybody. And, now, he needs a little bit help, and I think they should be more, like, supportive...maybe help him with finding a job or like be straight, like tell him straight that he’s gonna be fired like right now, it’s--the situation is not really clear.

The researcher suggested that the loss of one’s job might be the most serious stress an officer can face, especially given that training is quite specialized. Todd agreed and described his position as even more focused because of his role as a dog-handler. As such, not all departments have a K9 division which has the potential to limit where else he is able or willing to go following his layoff. He also cited having a canine partner as rewarding, yet another potential source of stress and described:

Everything I do with him, I had to be extremely careful because at any time with people close to me. He could bite,...and, if he bites people, obviously, he’s gonna have problems. You don’t want him to get jammed up for something that you, as a handler, should be able to control.

In context of his loss of employment with that particular agency, Todd may also face the loss of his partner, a significant source of distress for him and his wife. The secondary effects of the layoff have also created financial stress for this couple who have several
significant financial commitments in the coming year which had to be reassessed. Todd identified how these events have "emotionally" affected him and Karen and influenced their tendency to be more short-tempered with each other: "I think she gets upset easily, the similar type of thing. We may snap at each other quickly. Karen described her own worries about this situation and about Todd: "I worry about him more because I know he's stressed out, and I know he wants the best. And he's such a good person, like he's such a hard worker. It's not his fault that he's losing the job." Todd also described difficulties focusing at work and forgetfulness, which he attributes to preoccupation about the layoffs. Administrative issues were also described to be a source of frustration and stress. Todd discussed having two supervisors, one of whom is not in the division where he works and the lack of consistency and communication problems between these supervisors and between a supervisor and him:

It gets a little bit annoying 'cause it's whoever feels like taking the supervisor position for whatever you're doing at that day. I just had an instant where I took a couple of classes, night classes this week. They said they wouldn't give me time, and then they blamed each other, and then they came back and blame me and said, "You didn't go through your chain of command." and I'm like, "Whoa. What is my chain of command this week?" It is miscommunication...and no communication.

Being split amongst divisions also creates problems in accessing equipment. Todd described supervisors often passing-the-buck in relinquishing equipment from their division to support his job duties.
In addition to the above stressors, Karen added her fears about his safety, noting the inherent dangers of police work. She described efforts to balance this worry with her trust in his decision-making and ability to perform his job well, that "he would think about me and family first before, like, he would put his life in danger."

In spite of these stressors, Todd articulated his ability to distract from current challenges by being at home with his wife, spending time with their dogs, and watching movies together. He is also striving to focus on the positives and is anticipating spending time with his wife's family. Karen is also looking forward to this, but related to Todd's fears about how they might perceive him now that he may be unemployed. Karen stated that he has wondered aloud if her parents will have concerns about his ability to support his spouse. Both members also discussed how supportive his family has been throughout the past several months, especially his mother and sister, whom they describe as good listeners, and also in concrete support through offering to make meals. When asked about other social supports, Todd identified having both LEO and non-LEO friends and that his work colleagues who are also facing layoffs have been particularly supportive in understanding what they are going through together and networking for possible jobs. Karen noted that her female friends have been highly supportive by listening and helping her remain positive and hopeful about the future. Todd also cited the use of prayer throughout the day as important in decreasing worry thoughts. Karen described herself as "very religious" and discussed her active involvement with organized religion.

And I'm Catholic so I believe in God. And I know that He always helps me. So I'm trying to go to the church because that--I guess it's helping me...[the priest]
knows everything and he’s supportive too. He talks to me that everything is going to be fine, and we’ll work it out.

Regarding communication between Todd and Karen, both seem to try to talk about the serious issue of the layoffs while at times avoiding the issue, possibly to not create further worry or distress. As Todd described, “I try and tell her as much as I can. Sometimes I think I’d say too much because she hasn’t needed to hear all the bickering that goes on back and forth.” Todd also described increased efforts to share with Karen, noting that in the past he has delayed telling her an important fact to avoid unnecessary worry; however, this triggered an argument. As Todd put it: “That’s a real showstopper right there.” He also recognized that it would not be “fair ‘cause this [layoff] can directly affect her.” Karen also acknowledged her own tendency towards quietness, especially in response to the layoff issue: “I just try not to talk too much because, when I talk a lot, then I get upset, and I don’t want him to get upset, too.” The researcher asked Todd to share his thoughts on discussing other work issues with Karen, and he, like other LEO’s, stated he may share that there was a trauma, but would not discuss details because he perceives it to be “hard for someone else to deal with” who is not in the field.

Researcher Experience

Todd and Karen were introduced to me through my spouse who had participated with Todd in some past trainings and with whom he has maintained contact due to common interests. I contacted Todd directly. He informed that he had discussed the project with his wife and that they were both willing to participate. During our phone conversation Todd informed that Karen had immigrated to the United States four years ago and was experiencing some anxiety about her command of English. Karen was very
open in discussing her concerns with me and I offered her feedback that I noted her to be very articulate and easily understood, and, that if she needed clarification of any question or was unfamiliar with a word or phrase, I could offer assistance in any way possible. Karen verbalized that she felt she could stop the interview to ask questions or seek clarification and agreed to proceed. This interview was somewhat unique in that following the interview, I provided positive feedback as to her English skills and her ability to express her thoughts clearly. This led to further dialogue in which Karen described her challenges in sharing personal information due to her cultural and family background. I applauded her efforts in doing so, especially as this was the first time we met. She did not link this in her descriptions of communication in the marital relationship, though in subsequent analysis it became apparent that, while Karen may seek information and communicate effectively with Todd, she is less likely to share her emotional experiences, especially at this particularly stressful time in their marriage.

In meeting with Todd, he quickly identified his impending layoff from work as a primary stessor. This experience was in stark contrast to the job security cited by officers in earlier interviews. Of note, the participant stated explicitly that it was not so much the layoffs (“it happens”) but the way administration handled this. He also seemed somewhat embarrassed about the couple’s need to make changes/adjustments to their finances as a result of the layoff. This was noticeable in his lack of eye contact and dropping his voice barely above a whisper. Although Todd seemed to be accepting of the situation and to be proactive in taking steps to find a new job, I listened to his and Karen’s stories with sadness, but also admiration at their resolve and hopefulness.
Couple E – “John and Dory”

Demographics

John is a 44-year-old White male with some college experience and over 14 years working as an LEO. He is a Sheriff’s Officer in a large-sized department. Dory is a 43-year-old White female with a high-school diploma. She is currently working two part-time jobs totaling full-time employment outside of the home. Dory and John have been married for 21 years and have three children, ages 10, 16, and 20.

Within-Case Analysis

John defined stress as “kinda like a lot of pent-up nervous energy, having a hard time dealing with certain things.” On inquiry he clarified “pent-up” as “aggression and nervousness.” Like other participants, John went on to share his awareness of stress, in part, by his behaviors. John discussed acting differently in stressful situations, especially interpersonal interactions, which he identified having a “shorter temper” or being “agitated” and “quicker to judge” both with his family as well as in his professional life in dealing with members of the community. In her interview, Dory stated that she recognizes John’s increased stress quickly in his approach with her and their children. “I know a lot of times he comes home, and he takes it out in all of us.” She also supported John’s self-assessment of being short-tempered and reported that, when he is under stress, he “yells at [their children] for every little thing” or will be very quiet. Several aspects of his work were noted to be potential sources of stress, including calls of a person with a gun. John also noted that his stress level will change depending on whether he is initially responding alone or with a partner. Furthermore, John noted that he does not work with the same shift members all the time. Though there is a core group of officers, several
others rotate through the schedule, and he is less familiar with these officers. He described them as somewhat less predictable in terms of how they handle calls due to decreased familiarity. As a Sheriff’s Officer, John described his job as primarily patrol. However, given that these officers work throughout their county, John noted there may be pressures that his supervisor put on him and jobs he gets assigned that, although he is trained to do, may be less familiar such as staying with a prisoner at the hospital. This then becomes more stressful than tasks he undertakes daily in his patrol work. Again, a related aspect was possible lack of familiarity or less knowledge about a particular sector of the county. This also influenced John’s working relationships with municipal officers and varying levels of comfort, perceived respect, and degree of communication with peers in other departments. John discussed one town in particular, noting “they tend to like hold grudges against us all the time because they feel that we’re invading their territory and stuff” and cited this as a longstanding issue between the two agencies.

Though John is not on shift work, he did identify being regularly on the midnight-shift. When asked about this assignment, John noted that he and Dory made this decision together since there was a pay differential. This increased salary was considered important for the family at this time due to his oldest child’s enrollment in college. In spite of this benefit, John cited the challenges of having different sleep patterns than other household members, difficulties getting enough sleep in mornings when the children are home, with the summer being especially challenging. Dory noted she strives to keep the children out of the house, often using her mother for assistance with children’s activities while John is sleeping. While John is on straight midnights, he does often work weekends which impacts his availability for his family and the children’s activities.
When asked to reflect on how his mood and short-temperedness emerge in his family relationships, he recognized that, in particular, he has more arguments with Dory and she, in turn, becomes “more agitated” with him. Of interest, John noted this increase when he began midnight tours and cited poor sleep as the source. Dory agreed with this assessment; however, she alluded to the possible change in job duties having some impact, moving from a less stressful role to patrol. These marital arguments were noted to impact the couple’s youngest child. John reported observing her to become “upset,” or “it bothers her” during these incidents.

John did verbalize appreciation for Dory’s role as primary caretaker due to his work and that, in spite of her own full-time work schedule, she also maintains responsibility for their home and children. “She has to deal with more than she usually would if I was around”. John also recognized that his wife has concerns about his safety at work and cited a line-of-duty injury that brought these realities to life for his family. John advised that he recognizes Dory’s fears in her questions about where he worked on a given shift, again referencing areas of the county that are perceived to be higher-risk than others. John’s perceptions are in-line with Dory’s narrative. She stated “Yeah, I’m afraid something could happen,...but really out in the road,” highlighting again the change in risks associated with his newer role as a patrol officer. Both observed that their youngest daughter openly expresses her concerns he will get hurt and frequently asks questions about his job. Like other officers in this study, John denied threat of injury or death as a source of stress, in spite of his injury.

Both John and Dory discussed outlets for their stress. For John, like a number of other participants, involvement in exercise was cited as important to reduce stress. John
also discussed going to sporting events with peers and with his children and spending time with the other officers on his shift. Work peers were noted to be a source of support, not just in discussing job-related issues but also in relating to periodic marital conflict. “I guess they have the same problems as communications with their wives. I wouldn’t know for sure, but my guys say how they argue with their wives and stuff like that.” The couple also spends time with other LEO couples, especially those on John’s shift. Like other LEO’s who are parents, John and Dory also try to prioritize time as a couple without their children. John noted that the couple had recently returned from a weekend away which he said they both enjoyed. When asked about supports outside of his department, he described having good relationships with his parents whom he frequently talks to about his work, more so than with Dory. John elaborated on his thoughts as to this difference.

Well, my mother asks me more like what happens at work, maybe because she’s worried more. I’m sure [Dory’s] worried too. I mean, I just get the feeling that it’s easier to open up towards my mother more. [And] they still live in [a town where I often work], so they wanna know like what’s going on. Did anything happen in the neighborhood, stuff like that.

John also often discusses his work with his sister, who is married to an officer and who works in a civilian role in a police agency. He stated he believes his sister to have increased understanding about the job and also that she is familiar with many other officers and command staff he knows.

Like John, Dory uses her mother as a primary support and described her as “a good listener.” She also has other social supports through female friends at her jobs and
other mothers whom she has connected with through her involvement in the children's activities. However, Dory indicated that she does not necessarily share the extent to which the lack of communication in her marital relationship saddens her. Dory was tearful in describing coping by being alone, talking to herself, and crying and expressed that she would be comforted if John could communicate and talk to her more.

Both members discussed their spirituality as supportive. John described the role of spirituality in his life and his use of prayer as a resource. “Well, I guess you’re kinda like looking for guidance. Maybe saying your prayers that you don’t get hurt or something like that.” While both acknowledged challenges to attending religious services, Dory described efforts to attend and described listening to sermons as “relaxing.” She also noted that she is active in her children’s religious education and that this has helped her maintain this connection to organized religion.

Although this couple has a number of coping strategies in place, both identified problems in their communication. As John noted, “I never talk to her on what happened to that work….which I’m sure is not a good thing.” John identified two areas where he felt communication was lacking. The first, in response to critical incidents, was familiar to the researcher through the other LEO participant narratives.

Oh, I really didn’t tell her too much about what happened that night when we got hurt at work. I just told her the basics, but I didn’t get into like how fast we were driving to chase the car and stuff like that. I won’t tell her like when we pull our guns out and stuff like that.

The second, he attributed to Dory’s responsiveness. John seemed to perceive that Dory was simply disinterested in discussing job-related issues, and, therefore, he would
not initiate dialogue. Dory was very open in discussing lack of communication with her spouse; however, she identified very different reasons for this than disinterest. She described his mood and attitude creating distance in their relationship. She was hesitant to approach to avoid his short-temperedness stating, “Usually, I don’t want to talk to him when he’s in a bad mood.” While both John and Dory described infrequent communication about his work, Dory did identify periods when John has been able to talk more, possibly when an incident is “bugging him more….He’ll just come out and say something, and then we’ll start talking, but otherwise…he don’t say anything….He keeps to himself.” John also identified some efforts to share with Dory, however, usually “the funnier things or the less serious stuff.” For this couple, each member’s perceptions of the other have limited the openness to dialogue and has created some degree of disconnection in the marital relationship. In spite of this, both members discussed their desire to change this interaction. John and Dory both demonstrated a willingness to look at their own roles in the conflict and disconnection. This was indicated by areas of agreement, for example, both recognizing changes in John’s mood secondary to fatigue from being on constant midnight shifts and Dory’s increased parenting and household responsibilities. Both described expectations of the other to initiate communication and uncertainty as to the other’s responsiveness as an inhibiting factor in taking this first step. This seems to be the keystone in creating a more satisfying mode of relating for this couple.

Researcher Experience

John and Dory are extended family members of a friend of the researcher, though we had not met prior to their engagement in the research process. I made contact initially with Dory who assisted in coordinating both interview dates due to John’s shift work.
Both John and Dory seemed moderately anxious during the initial stages of their interviews and showed increasing comfort as the meetings progressed. For example, John was observed to be perspiring in spite of the cool temperature of the room, and, in her interview, Dory fidgeted in her chair, played with a mat that was on the table, and laughed nervously from time to time. This interview was the first interview that seemed to suggest significant gaps in communication between the members, a much different experience for me in uncovering the conditions under which this occurs and the patterns that John and Dory follow in their interactions.

As we were discussing perceived support, Dory became quite tearful and described John's putting down of her work as "not a real job." Dory seemed quite hurt since she relayed enjoying both of her jobs not just for the work, but also the social interaction with other women, many of whom are also parents. Dory seemed to exude a sense of pride about her work and also about providing for her family, but was feeling wounded by John's statements about not making enough money. Although in John's interview, I had the sense that he recognized her hard work and validated that she had only one day off a week, Dory was clearly having a very different experience. I found myself having a strong emotional reaction in this moment Dory and I shared, not only sadness for what I interpreted to be a sense of loneliness for Dory and her experience of disrespect and invalidation her but also anger at John. I very much viewed this interaction through my lens of a female researcher and recognized the influence of my own background and values in accessing both John's and Dory's perspectives in such interactions. Following the interview in providing resources, I took extra time in validating Dory's courage in speaking with me about personal issues and revisited parts
of the interview in which she described her mother as a support. I encouraged her to
consider seeking counseling and provided resources and guidance on how to obtain
referrals.

Couple F – “Curt and Ashley”

Demographics

Curt is a 41-year-old White male with a high-school diploma who has been in
law-enforcement for 15 years. He is working as a Patrol Officer in a large-sized
department. Ashley is a 32-year-old White female with a college degree and is not
presently working outside the home. The couple has been married for seven years and
has two children, an eight-month-old and a six-year-old.

Within-Case Analysis

As with the other participants, Curt was initially asked to define stress. He
described stress as “an emotional reaction to daily activity” and recognized his own
experience of stress through feelings of anger and frustration and through becoming
fidgety or agitated. Ashley agreed with this assessment in describing stress as anything
that causes “headaches…turmoil…character changes” and observations that Curt may
withdraw or have some physical complaints such as migraines. Ashley’s self-assessment
of her own stress reaction was similar in describing short-temperedness and headaches.

Curt identified several duty-related sources of stress. These included any case
involving maltreatment or abuse of a child. Though Curt did not provide an example,
Ashley relayed a case that was particularly difficult for him and may be one that he
reflects on during those types of calls. Another duty issue described was one noted to be
inherent to police work. Curt discussed periodic challenges in dealing with members of the community and noted:

If you go to a call and you’re try to be polite to them, and tell them, “Listen, calm down, talk to me. Let me find out what’s going on. Then getting cursed at or they just don’t wanna listen. Sometimes they just don’t listen and that can get frustrating. You’re trying to do your job, and now these people are getting you really pissed off because they don’t listen to you and you’re trying to work with them. They just don’t care.

In discussing his contact with the community, Curt also discussed the pressures he faces by time constraints for each call. He felt this limited the extent to which he could be empathic with complainants or victims and felt this resulted in his being more “callous.” This also had led to virtually no breaks between calls and just “going from job to job.” He tied this into an organizational problem in understaffing. In her interview, Ashley expanded on the impact of this department not having enough staff in noting that officers have been ordered to work double-shifts in short periods of time. She also added her perception that dealing with language barriers may also be challenging for Curt given the cultural diversity in areas of the community where he works.

Curt also described a number of significant administrative and organizational stressors which he described as “the most stressful part of my job.” One of these, related directly to patrol duties, is lack of appropriate or working equipment to effectively perform his job functions, and, as Ashley pointed out, being financially responsible for some personal equipment. Although state-mandated trainings are attended to, he indicated lack of availability for other types training and significant delays in being re-
certified in needed areas. Curt discussed his perception of problems in how his agency is managed. He indicated problems with supervision in several areas such as supervisory staff not consistently following standard operating procedure but his needing to follow commands outside of the policy because of the chain of command. Additionally, Curt described a similar experience to that of Ed in that he has several supervisors who relay conflicting messages. Officers were noted to simply follow the command of the most superior officer thus creating frustration and, because of rank and the nature of paramilitary structure, an inability to question. Curt relayed the following as an example: “You say, ‘Listen, there’s a Chief’s order out on doing it this way.’ And now I’ve been told to do it this way. You can’t tell the captain, ‘Well, the Chief’s order says this.’ Because then you’re being arrogant.” Curt attributed the breakdown in the chain of command as “arrogance on their part...who wants the big ego, leader type thing [though] not all of them are like that.” He also described problems with “micromanagement” by supervisory staff. Curt relayed instances in which he and other patrol staff have been effectively managing a call, getting necessary information, and then a supervisory staff member arrives and “starts barking orders at you. And he messes everything up.” Ashley also reflected on organizational issues noting that the “politics” within his department seem to foster a lack of trust in the administration and create a “skewed opinion of people that he’s been friends with going up through the ranks.”

One larger-systems issue also emerged in this interview. The media was identified as a trigger for John feeling “very agitated” as he perceived news programs or newspapers to be re-spinning stories and not giving police a “fair shake.” He noted that the media have frequently not interviewed police and perceived that the media are
invesed in selling the story and making money, creating a degree of cynicism and overall mistrust of the media by law-enforcement personnel.

Curt described efforts to maintain a work-home boundary in response to job-related stressors. “I’ve been doing it long enough where I can kinda like turn it off, like once I leave work, I’m like a little kid out of school. It’s like yay, no more school.” However, he did acknowledge, though, that situations at home can trigger changes in his mood. He reflected on minor incidents that upset his wife, and he might think “What are you getting so upset about... I had a guy last night that was shot or something” and noted that “that, for some really weird reason, that triggers me to be in a bad mood.” He also verbalized an awareness of spillover of authoritativeness into his home life: “I’m so used to talking to people, like do this and do it now. I’m expecting to be followed” while recognizing that this may not be effective at home, especially with his young child, “and then I catch myself. Hey, listen, I’m not a cop. I gotta talk to him like a dad.” Curt also identified cues from his son that help him recognize when he is engaged in this approach.

He’ll look at me like his eyes will get huge... like, uh-oh, daddy is mad now. And typically he normally starts doing what I tell him to do. But when—yeah, it’s like a certain look that he gives me. And I realize, uh-oh, I’m actually scaring him and that’s not cool.

This approach may also trigger periodic arguments with Ashley whom, he noted is able to confront him by saying “don’t talk to me like I’m somebody on the street.”

Like John and Dory, who identified financial benefits to his work on straight midnights, Curt and Ashley also identified benefits to this same schedule. Both felt that this allowed Curt to be more available during the day to assist with their baby and some
household duties. This couple also met when Curt was already on this schedule, so they have identified this as a normal part of their family schedule. Recognizing the positives in this aspect of his work has been helpful for the couple. Additionally, Curt described watching television as a way to relax, though he noted a conscious effort to select programs that are “totally unrelated” to his work, and also playing on the computer or playing video games. Although he does not currently exercise, Curt recalled feeling better when he was going to the gym regularly. Curt addressed the importance of maintaining this, but cited scheduling challenges as a barrier. Curt also feels supported by his family members who he described as “very pro-cop and religious,” though, as with Ashley, he does not share detailed information about specific work issues. Because of Curt’s statement about his family’s religiosity, the researcher followed through on this aspect. He described himself as non-practicing in formal religion, but expressed a desire to have that be “more part of our [family] life.” He related that he has been active in exploring his spirituality and values.

I do think [religious upbringing] provided a firm background for my beliefs and stuff. I believe there’s a God, but sometimes you’re like - is there or isn’t there? You see things around you...I think it supports me in a way that makes me wanna do things the right way...help your fellow man, that type of stuff...It’s very private for me.

Ashley echoed these sentiments, noting her religious upbringing, but disconnection from formalized religion in her adult life. She too maintains a sense of spirituality through dialogue with relatives who have passed to “keep them included in my life.”
Curt also discussed peer support, noting that he and peers from work will “goof around” and e-mail each other and that they are also available for venting.

Oh, we’re constantly complaining. I don’t think there’s cops that don’t complain to each other. I think it is because you get it off your chest. I guess it could be bad too if you ever had to get too much and you constantly get wound up with it.

Ashley also noted the importance of peer supports, finding resources within the law-enforcement community through other police wives: “[People outside of law-enforcement] don’t know what it’s like to get a phone call at 4 o’clock in the morning...and you’re husband’s a cop and he’s not home...[other police wives] can empathize with it.” Ashley also felt that her family and also Curt’s family have been very available to them for support, especially as they reside near and work in the community where he is employed. Therefore, they may have greater understanding of the issues facing this community.

Both members described mutual support in parenting, the comfort of spending time with their children, and the predictability of family routines, which Curt noted to be in contrast to the unpredictable nature of his work. Like other couples, they also try to have time alone and ask for extended family and neighbors’ support in babysitting.

Curt and Ashley’s communication patterns emerged as similar to other cases. When asked how they communicate about job-related stress, Curt responded simply, “I don’t talk to her about it” and then described more fully his desire to again maintain the professional-personal life boundaries rather than being primarily motivated by a desire to “shield her from the job or, like, the horrors.” Ashley disagreed with aspects of this
noting times where she has confronted Curt on his withholding information, and he has stated that he has not wanted to worry her.

Like I just found out last week that--from like two years ago that he ended up doing something, and this other guy, this other officer did something, and I was like, “Why didn’t you ever tell me about that?” Then he goes, “Well, it wasn’t pleasant.”

While she acknowledged Curt’s desire not to worry her or upset her, she relayed that she generally feels more worried when she perceives him to be “hiding something.” Curt also described perception of understanding as a key component to his willingness to disclose work-related information:

I find myself if I’m hanging out with another cop, even if he’s from another town or something, you talk about the calls to each other. I guess ‘cause they understand. Well, I guess a lot of times I just don’t talk to her about it ‘cause I don’t think she’ll understand. She doesn’t--she’s not a police officer, she wouldn’t understand what it feels like to go through a door after a guy or chase somebody. He also described fears he may be perceived to be “bragging about the job.” However, Curt said that he will sometimes share his involvement in a critical incident, but in general terms, yet is much more likely to share complaints about administrative issues. When asked if Ashley asks for information or questions his work, Curt felt that, if he chose to share, she would listen, but that she may not continue to pursue him “cause she doesn’t want me to relive it or think about it.” Both seem to have clarity on their own and their spouse’s expectations for communication, and these appear realistic given the openness
with which they talk about why dialogue is lacking or felt to be important in their relationship.

Researcher Experience

Curt and Ashley were referred by one my spouse’s co-workers who is their neighbor. I initially contacted Curt and later contacted Ashley by phone to describe the study. At the outset of his interview, Curt was concerned about confidentiality; therefore, we reviewed Informed Consent again, and I also verbally provided the safeguards in place to ensure that identifying information would not be shared. I also offered to shred the transcript and erase recordings following final completion of the project rather than the three years described in the consent document; however, he declined. Once we discussed confidentiality further, he appeared more comfortable and agreed to proceed with the interview.

This was the first LEO I was interviewing from a large-sized urban department and thus anticipated different information than I had previously learned from earlier officer-participants. In spite of different rates and types of crime facing officers in his department, administrative issues continued to be more prevalent than daily task issues. I was quite caught off guard when Ashley relayed a particularly difficult case her husband worked since I had worked with the family as their therapist. I recognized myself being brought back quickly to that case and some of the feelings I had, including recollection of the family’s feelings about law-enforcement and the larger legal system. I do not think my experience in that moment impacted the interview as I think I was able to use her example to reflect on the overall theme of challenges for officers with cases like the one she discussed. Utilization of field notes was particularly useful in this interview to revisit
this case in context while being reminded that officers, as well as the communities they
serve, are often deeply impacted by the cases they work.

Both Curt and Ashley seemed comfortable in discussing stressors as well as
aspects of their marital relationship. As in several other interviews, I was impressed with
the level of communication while also recognizing the couple’s desire for some change in
this area. Ashley, in particular, was able to articulate well the differences in perceived
control between on-the-job tasks and administrative issues. This has been helpful in
understanding sources of stress for this community and has clear implications for
intervention which will be discussed in the next section.

Couple G – “Bill and Lisa”

Demographics

Bill is a 44-year-old White male with a high school diploma who has been in law-
enforcement for 22 years. Bill is currently working as a Captain in a medium-sized
department. Lisa is a 46-year-old Hispanic female who has also completed high school.
Lisa has been working as an LEO for the past 20 years. She is presently a Sergeant in a
large department and plans to retire within the next several months. Bill has an adult
daughter from a prior relationship, and the couple has two children together, ages seven
and nine.

Within-Case Analysis

Bill’s definition of stress was anything that could trigger “tension” which he was
able to recognize through cognitive, behavioral, and somatic indicators. He described his
thoughts racing, gastrointestinal problems, changes in his blood pressure, along with
disrupted sleep and frequent pacing. Bill also recognized he has general difficulty
relaxing on days off and on vacations. When asked about work-related stressors, Bill described the following:

You know it's funny. I talk about it all the time with the guys. It's not the job itself. It's not like people will say, "Oh, cop!" And you're on SWAT, and you work narcotics. Oh, my god, the stress of just being out there. That's when I'm at my best. That's the part I love the most. That's easy for me. I work the best under that kind of, where people would call that as being stressed. That's not stress for me.

Bill identified all of his work-related stressors as stemming from organizational issues. He described issues relating to his supervisory capacity along with both longstanding and more recent departmental issues. Bill discussed a "babysitting" role associated with his position and that this results in his supervisees frequently coming to him with both personal and professional problems. Though he expressed a desire to be able to manage these issues, there are some aspects over which he has little control. One example is a recent budgetary problem and the decision by administrators to lay off some officers. Bill elaborated on concerns about subordinate officers at risk for losing their jobs and feelings of high frustration at not having answers from "the top" to be able to share information and answer officers' questions. According to Bill, frustrations with these organizational issues have resulted in periodic difficulties focusing at work and noticing that his mind wanders. They also impact his relating with his family at times. Like most of the other officers in this study, Bill recognized a tendency to have less patience and "snap at [the children] more." Lisa affirmed this awareness, describing Bill as "cranky...grouchy...moody" and confirmed that their children have "picked up on it,"
especially in response to recent departmental problems. Bill also described a meticulousness with his work that does not translate into household duties, and thus the latter does not get addressed in as timely or completely as he, or Lisa, would like. Bill also recognized the challenges of the nature of his work might pose to his family as he is always on-call. He described getting called out in the middle of night, thus interrupting his spouse’s sleep with both not knowing the type of call it is until he gets on scene. Additionally, Bill talked about the disruption to family events. Most poignantly, he described his absence from his oldest daughter’s life and that “our relationship is horrible right now between the two of us. But it’s because--and I guess maybe I was selfish. I don’t know, but I was so wrapped up in doing my thing.” Bill’s ability to reflect on this loss and share his regrets seemed linked to a shift in his efforts to better balance his work and family lives.

Bill reflected on experiencing some degree of stress associated with having a spouse in the field also. Though an LEO, he also is a spouse of an LEO, and thus relayed similar fears about his spouse’s safety: “When she first got on [warrants], I called her 30 times that day, like she was a little kid. Well, you know if you go here to do this and you know if you do this to do that.” Bill also described experiencing jealousy in regards to his wife’s male colleagues earlier in their careers. This was a new perspective not previously identified by other participants. The researcher asserts that this has the potential to be a more common experience of male significant others in light of the lower rates of female officers in the field. Consequences of this include the decreased likelihood that male LEO’s will be partnered with female officers and thus that female officers are more likely to be in units or on teams with male colleagues.
Lisa described her stress as “anything that takes me out of my norm mentally” and recognizes she is stressed when she experiences headaches, poor concentration, and, like Bill, when she is short-tempered with others. Lisa described her work-related stressors as somewhat different to those of her spouse in that both job duties and administrative issues were difficult at times. She described some frustration in dealing with disrespect from the public who “think they can talk to you any way they want and you have to sit there because you’re law enforcement. And for the most part, yeah, you do. But it wears on you,...having people talk to you that way.” Reflecting on her time in a different position, Lisa also described challenges with her schedule that often conflicted with her ability to meet her children’s scheduling needs. Regarding administrative issues, Lisa described her agency as highly political and expectations that officers participate in activities outside of their regular work hours. She related that officers who did not participate in supposedly voluntary activities were subsequently faced “with one of the worst posts or you got the job that you have to stand up for eight hours.” Given the paramilitary structure of the organization and the politics described by Lisa, there seem to be covert messages about expectations for officers that the members are aware of and little room to question these expectations without consequences. For an organization that prides itself on dedication, commitment, and loyalty, the researcher suggests that this references not only an officer’s stance towards service of the community but also to the department. Noncompliance thus may easily be perceived as disloyalty to the brother/sisterhood that is often viewed as the core of the law-enforcement family.

Since Lisa was the only female and Hispanic officer interviewed in this project, the researcher explored perceptions and experiences of discrimination and harassment.
Lisa described working in an ethnically diverse department and community and related that she had “never” experienced a negative work environment or difficulties with the community in response to her being an Hispanic officer. She actually described positive responses as follows: “Actually, the community embraced me. When they saw me, they were like, ‘Oh, we got a Latin girl here who’s a supervisor here on the streets.’ As a female officer, however, Lisa described experiencing critical remarks from some individuals in the community as well as challenges with some colleagues. Lisa reflected on being a female officer as follows:

For women in particular, law enforcement, especially going back about 10 years, it was horrible. You were treated like you needed to be in a skirt and in a courtroom, and that’s where you were good for. So, it was hard. It was hard. It’s almost like you had to prove yourself all the time.

Although she reflected on some improvement, she described still experiencing some of these issues towards the end of her career, especially when she became a supervisor:

“They knew I worked the streets. I had more time on the streets than some of them did. But there were still the few that didn’t wanna accept a woman supervisor to them.” Lisa identified that her ability to cope with these pressures was her focus on her family: “You know what? You’re not important. What you think of women in police, it doesn’t matter to me. What matters to me are my kids.” Lisa’s experiences are similar to those found in the most recent study of female officers by Seklecki and Paynich (2007) who noted that statements putting down women were one type of frequent sexual harassment that female LEO’s experienced. Lisa also described how her work influenced her view of parenting:
I didn’t want to have kids because I saw so much ugliness. I saw so many ugly things out there. I saw how children are hurt by teachers, by parents, but I just saw so much of that. I was, like -- I don’t wanna bring kids in this world. It’s horrible. That’s how I used to see it.

Lisa described her change in perspective due to her religious practice. However, she said that her delay in parenting was a “cost” associated with her job. She recalled initial fears about sharing her pregnancy with supervisors. She agreed that seeing how other female officers were treated stating, “they were punished” when they became pregnant. These observations influenced her feelings. On the other hand, Lisa also described her advocacy with a supervisor for a more family-friendly schedule and succeeded in obtaining a day-shift position to better support her need and her family’s schedule. Like Bill, Lisa described experiencing some degree of worry and fear about his safety, especially as a member of SWAT who is likely to have increased involvement in critical incidents.

Both Bill and Lisa identified a number of individual- and relational-coping strategies to manage stress. Bill discussed using physical exercise as a stress reliever, though he admitted this is a quick fix that works on physical tiredness rather than “mentally feeling better.” Lisa also utilizes physical exercise through dance. Though neither could identify other individual coping mechanisms, both discussed their anticipated retirement in the next few months (for Lisa) and within four years (for Bill). Although both talked about loving their jobs, each maintains an awareness of this as a positive transition in their lives. The researcher suggests that this positive outlook and a
sense of hope that other activities will be fulfilling are coping strategies that the couple was not consciously aware of.

Both Bill and Lisa described the importance of keeping family as their priority and the role of their relational supports. In their respective interviews, both expanded on the importance of being with their children as a source of comfort and a reminder as to what is truly important in this family’s life together. As Lisa succinctly said: “I’m a mom first. I’m a cop second.” This family-first mentality really came to the fore last year when the couple was dealing with Lisa experiencing a serious illness. Both Bill and Lisa described overwhelming support of their work colleagues, who also comprise their friend-network, during this time including the donation of sick time to attend to family needs and throwing a party to help them “decompress.” Lisa’s mother also stayed with the family for a time to provide support and assistance in both concrete ways (cleaning, making meals, tending to the children) and also as a source of comfort for both members that she would be available when the one of them was not, thus providing a sense of security and maintaining the routine of the household when so much else was unpredictable. They also described the use of their religion and faith as especially supportive during this time. Both Bill and Lisa shared their use of prayer individually, as a couple, and with friends. Like other couples, both desired to spend more time engaged in formal activities like going to church.

The couple also seemed to have a different style of communication than other couples. Although they were the only dual-law-enforcement couple in the study, their descriptions of their communication processes suggest that the openness, ease, and comfort of such dialogue is directly related to a perceived understanding by the other
person because of their experiences in the same job. As Bill described his perception of talking to an SO who is in the field in comparison to a civilian:

And if I'm talking to her, she's not gonna ask me a hundred questions 'cause she knows it. She's just gonna know the people whose name I'm mentioning...what I'm talking about...certain terms I use. [Instead of] why do you do this? Or why would that happen? And she knows how, why it happened, so it makes it a lot easier to just air it out, get it out, and it's over. Instead of having to stop and explain because, if I have to do that, I would just say forget it. Oh, the hell with it. I mean, you know, I'll just forget it. Nothing happened. I'm done.

Both described the other's ability to listen and offer words of encouragement to "hang in there" or "don't let it get you down." They described appreciating this, though they find this difficult to do at times. Neither Bill nor Lisa could identify how both being in the field could hinder or be problematic in terms of their communication. While this may not hold true for other dual-LEO couples, it represents some contrast with single-LEO couples and may be a source of further exploration in future research.

*Researcher Experience*

Bill and Lisa were recommended for participation in the study by my spouse, who had worked with Bill several years ago on a specific project. Though they maintain periodic contact, my spouse and Bill have not had a supervisory relationship and are not currently working together. I was excited to meet this couple for several reasons. Both are active officers, and Lisa would be able to provide a perspective of a female LEO. Bill was also the highest-ranking officer participating in the study, and I initially hypothesized that this would provide additional, meaningful data for the project.
During their respective interviews, both Bill and Lisa were very much at ease and were able to clearly articulate their experiences at work as well as the perceived benefits and challenges of both being LEO’s. Each spontaneously offered examples of these and described openly difficult and highly personal family issues they have faced in the course of the past year that had significant implications for their professional and personal lives.

Although each reflected issues that paralleled the experiences of other LEO’s and SO’s, there was a clear difference in the frequency and level of communication between Bill and Lisa that was notably absent in other interviews. Both members were able to explicate this clearly noting their comfort and trust levels were due to them both working in the same field and in the same community, allowing for familiarity with the individuals in each other’s professional circles. Given the demographics of the rest of the sample, I also wonder if age and length of time on active duty may also have influenced these differences. Bill and Lisa were, on average, the oldest couple participating and respectively had seven and five years more experience on the job than the next senior officer.

I felt a sense of pride in Lisa’s accomplishments as a woman in her field and appreciated her reflections, including initial ambivalence, on how she chose to become a mother while also continuing to participate in what I viewed as a demanding career. While I think there are unique aspects of law-enforcement that influence this experience, including exposure to family violence, the “ugliness” described by Lisa, I think aspects of this capture a generally female experience of balancing family and career and the perceived “cost” of choosing motherhood.
I also felt heartened by Lisa’s description of a tradition of having a higher-ranking female LEO give a newly promoted female LEO her sergeant’s bars for her uniform. In personal conversations with both female and male officers, I had previously heard stories of competitiveness, jealousy, and disconnection among female LEO’s and the impact this had on perceptions of women in the field, opportunities for female LEO’s, and the availability of support. I speculated that this experience may mirror that of other women in male-dominated fields and may have particular implications for women of color.

Overview of Emergent Model

The emergent model elucidating adaptation to police-job stress of the seven participant couples is presented in Figure 1. The model is represented as a flow chart in which the participants’ Recognition of Stressors, Self-Awareness, Understanding of Self in Intimate Relationships, and Engagement of Coping Strategies interact to respond to identified job stressors. This dynamic and interactive process is triggered by one or more aspects of police work which may both directly and/or indirectly impact the LEO and his or her spouse. Subsequent consequences and responses are presented via mutually influential pathways. Participants initially recognized the impact of job-related stress on themselves which was identified as Self-Awareness. They also were aware of the impact on others, in this study specifically spouses and children. This construct was labeled as Understanding of the Self in Intimate Relationships. With recognition of stress impacting the self and/or others and subsequently relationships, individuals and couples undertake various individual and relational Coping Strategies. These mechanisms are developed and accessed with the anticipation that these will manage the perceived negative consequences of stress at both the individual and relational levels.
Figure 1. Emergent theoretical model of how law-enforcement couples negotiate police-job stress through adaptive self and relational caring.
Each of the following sections will contain greater detail the themes that emerged from the participant narratives, development of the major categories, and how these weave together to support the main story of the research, identified as negotiating of job stress through adaptive caring. Theme charts will be utilized in each section to provide an overview of the major categories accompanied by quotations that best summarize the participant experiences. A Summary Theme Chart is also available as Appendix I.

Core category: Negotiating job stress through adaptive caring

In the present study, the core category is Negotiating Job Stress Through Adaptive Caring. This central construct is created by the interaction of Recognition of Stressors, Self-Awareness, Understanding of the Self in Intimate Relationships, and Engagement of Coping Strategies. This category represents how both individual and relational processes occur in response to identified job stress.

Throughout the interviews, participants narrated their experiences of recognizing, understanding, managing, and communicating about law-enforcement job stress. All of the interview data supported a dynamic process linking each of these areas. Components of this process, including cross-case themes, supported the development of major categories underpinning the concept of negotiating job stress through adaptive caring. An overview of the themes and their interactions are represented graphically in Figure 2.
**Figure 2.** Identification, impact, management, and communication of law-enforcement related stress within a relational context.
This core category served to capture the process by which both LEO and SO participants identified law-enforcement job stressors and engaged in specific strategies in direct response to those challenges. Participants’ stories revealed awareness about the influences of job stress on the self as well as family members and how interventions for self and relational care were undertaken or striven for to try to mitigate the impact of reportedly negative work issues. The concept of negotiating emerged and was supported by participants’ devising varied strategies to improve the likelihood of adaptation to the identified stressor. In considering the nature of risk associated with the officers’ duties along with exposure to critical incidents as part of the job and larger organizational and systems issues, the researcher ultimately decided that the concept of negotiation of job stress best represented the process of engaging resources to manage or cope with the issues described above. None of the officers described situations in which they felt they were able to directly impact sources of job stress; thus, the concept of resolving job stress seemed an unlikely or realistic option for the LEO’s. Negotiation also best captured this as an ongoing process in response to stressors that are likely to persist throughout the officer’s career. The term caring was qualified with the concept of adaptive to represent the participants’ adjustments to the environments. It should be noted that, while some responses may seem constructive or protective, they may actually represent maladaptive behaviors (e.g., alcohol use, avoidance). However, from within the participants’ narratives, such responses may be perceived as effective in the short-term along with recognizing the need for healthier responses.

The participants’ abilities to reflect on what have been or could be effective and ineffective for the individual as well as one’s relationships gave rise to the idea of
negotiating challenges as an active and ongoing process which supports resiliency in law-enforcement families. The major categories under the core category included Recognition of Stressors, Self-Awareness, Understanding of Self in Intimate Relationships, and Engagement of Coping Strategies. Each of these captured the range of themes that emerged within cases and also across cases. These are exemplified in Tables 3 through 7.

*Recognition of Stressors*

A major focus of the current project were the individual and couple responses to stress, specifically law-enforcement job stress. A first step in understanding these phenomena was to gain insight as to how participants define stress. Recognition of stressors encompassed two constructs including individual definitions of stress and, more specifically, identification of police-job-related stress. Asking participants to define stress allowed both the researcher and participants to have a foundation on which to explore more deeply the impact of experiences with a common yet participant-driven language. Incorporating these definitions allowed participants to identify and discuss how their resources may aid in helping them negotiate stress and, therefore, adapt to situations in ways that are viewed as self-supporting and beneficial to family members. Each participant defined stress, and twelve out of fourteen participants described at least one of three components. The first was identified as some type of event. Participants described these in various ways as "pressures," "very little, tiny things that can just trigger me," "life's complications...life's annoyances." While all of the participants were able to describe the precipitant to stress and even acknowledged that life can be inherently stressful, most accessed this definition through their own emotional
experiences or consequences to experiencing stress. Thus, the second component (emotional responses) and the third component (behavioral changes) reflect Self-Awareness and are discussed fully in the next section. Table 3 provides quotations that exemplify some of the participants' definitions of stress.
Table 3.

**Theme Chart: Definitions of Stress**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Quote</th>
<th>Researcher’s Reaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definitions of Stress</td>
<td>Psychological pressures that you’re unable to let go off or deal with a perceived normal manner.</td>
<td>Assumption that there is a normal way to deal with pressures. Identifying that pressures are internally generated – possible implications for self-blame.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anything that causes me anxiety or confusion...feeling tense.</td>
<td>Recognition of emotional consequences to stress, addressing emotional, cognitive, and physical areas.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life’s complications...life’s annoyances.</td>
<td>Alludes to acceptance of life as having stressful moments; sense of acceptance.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Following researcher-participant dialogue regarding general understandings of stress, law-enforcement officers and their significant others were asked to identify specific law-enforcement job stresses. All of the participants were able to identify one or more that were described in the literature review. All of the identified stressors could be grouped according to three major levels within policing.

**Daily job duties.** The first was stress related directly to job function. For purposes of this study, these were duties directly relating to community service and involvement reflected most commonly in the functions of patrol officers as well as specialized units such as rapid deployment, K9, and special weapons and tactics (SWAT) teams. Both LEO’s and SO’s acknowledged that a career in law-enforcement brings with it an inherent degree of risk, and all appeared to accept this as part-and-parcel of this career choice. For all of the SO’s, concerns about the potential for physical danger was a source of stress and often a source of persistent worry, though there were indications that the nature of the concern may shift depending on the LEO’s duty. Curt and Lisa specifically described challenges in dealing with members of the community who were perceived to be disrespectful of the officer in spite of efforts to be helpful. This appeared to be linked with a sense of unpredictability as to how individuals may respond to officers arriving to a call even when they are the ones who have requested assistance. Ed, who primarily functions in an administrative capacity, no longer spends time in street patrol. His spouse noted that, although this concern is still present, “I don’t worry more about the safety as much now.” Other spouses remained clearly concerned about these issues. Dory explained “I’m afraid something could happen. In a courthouse, yeah, cause
something could happen but really out in the road.” Sally related her family’s experience of having Peter deployed in response to the terrorist attack of 9/11/01:

Oh, all the time, like, what’s gonna happen today or you hear something on the news. When 9/11 happened, they got called out, and he had to work [a location] when 9/11 came. So we’re watching that on news, and he’s getting dressed, and it’s one of those like “Oh, great.” He’s like ”Think I’ll be able to call you” and it’s one of those--you’re not even talking to him for hours and hours and hours. Yeah, there’s always concerns.

Additionally the SO’s, more so than LEO’s, were able to identify that this may also be a stressor for the couple’s children who were described as asking specific questions about the parent’s job and “what if something happens” to the LEO-parent. Frequent questions such as “where’s daddy” and “when’s daddy coming home” were perceived by the spouse to be questions seeking assurance that the parent was safe. The dual-law-enforcement couple, Bill and Lisa, also expressed they had concerns about the dangers facing the other and noted that, because of their direct experiences in the field, they seemed to have less generalized fears. This was exemplified in Lisa’s discussion:

I know the people that he’s talking about, the job that he’s doing. He gets up at 4 o’clock in the morning sometimes to go do a SWAT call. He always lets me know once the job is over ’cause he knows I worry. Yeah. Oh, yeah, always. I don’t think there’s ever been a time where he hasn’t called. You know what the job is and you also know the risks.

Specific fears about one’s own safety were not described as a source of stress for LEO’s; however, they discussed the unpredictable nature of the work as a challenge.
Peter described this as the stress of “not knowing,” but felt this acted as a motivator to maintain preparedness and avoid “complacency.” This was also linked to challenges in doing tasks outside of one’s job description, tasks that are inside of one’s duties, but infrequent, or in unfamiliar geographic areas. John described periodically needing to cover other departments duties which are not routine for him: “Sometimes you could be assigned to like a hospital stay or something like that. And you’re not—we’re not used to doing hospital stays...with prisoners.” Collaborating with other departments was also noted as challenging at times based on the LEO’s familiarity or perception of other officers. John also noted:

You get along with certain towns better than the other towns. You’ll feel more at ease when you’re working with people that you know better than strangers. Certain towns tend to like hold grudges against us all the time because they feel that we’re invading their territory and stuff.

Critical incidents. All of the officers in the current study discussed the stress associated with certain kinds of cases. Although critical incidents were recognized by all of the officers as an inherent risk associated with their profession, these are considered to be outside of the norm of daily duties and thus were discussed by LEO’s as unique experiences. LEO’s discussed cases with serious injuries and deaths, especially of young people, and noted that these were situations that impacted them in different ways including disrupted sleep and mood changes that manifested often in short-temperedness with an SO or the couple’s children. In describing an accident early in his career, Rob elaborated:
A young man got run over by the train on his way to school. Yeah, it bothered me. It's just one of those--you see this kid, 17, 16 years old, and you look at him and it's a life lost. And then it's just one of those--the gore of it affecting me that night. And also just the, again, like the life lost.

Cases involving family violence, especially child-abuse, were also frequently cited as sources of anger, sadness, and frustration. Rob, early in his career, described awareness that exposure to frequent domestic violence in the calls he was receiving was starting to impact his view of marriage. He recalled the image of two parents physically fighting on Christmas Day while their children stood by crying and reflected “Why would I want to get married if that is the end result? That came home with me and started to affect my personality.”

Ashley stated that she knew of a case in which her spouse was the first responder to an infant who had died and noted that this call had created anxiety for Curt in responding to cases of family violence for almost two years after. She described:

And so he ended up picking the baby up and trying to do infant CPR. So, I mean, that really, really bothered him. For probably a good four days, he wasn’t sleeping well ‘cause he was shaken up. He was shaking. He was pale. And he was just like, “I have a horrible job.”

Officers advised that the awareness of a “life lost,” “the gore,” and families in crisis were most challenging while SO’s hypothesized that the LEO’s are affected most in reflecting on their own families and children.

*Scheduling.* Another area that was described as challenging was that of scheduling. Only two of eight LEO’s interviewed were currently on shift work, and two
officers worked the same shift but straight midnights. These four couples cited a number of benefits for their families in having these routines including the availability of the LEO to assist with commitments during the day, including taking children to school or picking them up, and allowing for time apart. Rob discussed:

I mean, that was one of the reasons why I accepted my new position. I knew what I feel this would be a better life for [my daughter]. She won’t have to tip-toe around inside the house when I’m sleeping during the daytime if I was on a midnight shift. So, I should be able to make her games or whatever sports she may be involved in a lot easier. I’ll have weekends off. I think this would be much better for her.

Curt described how his midnight shift serves his family in several ways:

For us, it actually works out very well - first of all, I snore like a train, so she gets some sleep. When I come home, I can help her during the day a little bit which really isn’t that much, ‘cause by the time I get home in the morning, I’m so tired. And it gives her some alone time at night.

Couples also noted challenges to these schedules including the LEO’s inability to be present for family events and children’s activities. Peter expanded:

And, of course, it proves challenging because, of course, I don’t work a Monday through Friday schedule. Most of the kids’ activities are on Saturday, Sunday, so, unfortunately, I do end up missing a lot of what they have.

Similarly, Rob noted that “when I was going through three shifts and working midnights and things like that, your family is affected because there’s a lot of family functions or social calendar things that you just can’t make.” Sally recognized the importance of
family rituals and expressed challenges in consistency due to the LEO’s schedule: “It’s hard ‘cause we like to do dinner together as a family. That’s kind of our bonding time.”

During midnight tours, LEO’s acknowledged significant disruption to their sleep resulting in fatigue and secondary consequences including mood changes, decreased motivation, and difficulty focusing at work. John described:

It’s a little more stressful to work at nights because your sleeping patterns are different. And then, when I first come home from work, I try to sleep while the kids are in school, but sometimes you don’t get enough rest as you need because, especially during the summer when they’re home all day, and that usually brings up your stress level a little bit.

Rob reflected on gastrointestinal problems when he worked midnights on a different post than where he was currently and noted, “I feel healthier not working three shifts. I just—I eat more regularly. When I work at the midnight shifts, you almost have like digestive problems. Your organs almost hurt, and I just feel healthy and normal now.”

Scheduling issues were also noted to effect SO’s directly in that they were then primarily responsible for running the household including children’s needs. For parents working during the day, both are often home in the evenings. For these families, a single parent would frequently be solely responsible in the evenings and often on weekends while LEO’s were on duty. Peter recognized this dynamic and stated, “Although I never minded that rotational schedule, it proves challenging. I mean, it puts some added pressure on her to run around and make sure she gets the kids everywhere they have to be.”
Organizational communication. As has been noted in the extant literature, organizational issues are a significant source of stress for LEO's. Participants in the current study shared similar perceptions and cited these as more problematic than challenges associated with day-to-day work tasks. This was the case irrespective of position or rank. The most frequently discussed problem was that of communication between and among LEO's. Several officers described having multiple supervisors or frequently changing supervisors resulting in various communication problems. LEO's relayed that they often received mixed messages, leaving expectations unclear and gaps in the chain of command. Ed described:

And the problem is that, because of what I do and because of my rank right now as a patrolman, it's like I have four bosses. So, they'll all tell me different things that they want to have done, not knowing what the other guy has asked me to do. We have a standard operating procedure that we're supposed to follow for certain things for basically everything. And it's really not followed because you have one supervisor to tell you, "This is the order up. This is how you supposed to follow this." Then you have a captain say, "No, that doesn't work, do it this way." And you have to really basically follow the orders of who your superior officer is at that time. We always have different guys.

At times there may be no communication, thus leaving supervisors frustrated with their inability to relay information to subordinates. This results in mistrust in command staff's willingness or capacity to provide needed support. Bill described this as particularly stressful: "And because I can't get answers from the top, I can't give them the answers. And that drives me absolutely crazy."
Negative morale. LEO's also described in-fighting, "department bashing," and lack of respect for command staff as frustrating and potentially impacting younger officers. Peter described the following:

And you have--when they're looking at their lieutenant who they know is messing things up because the younger guys sometimes know the job better than the supervisors, when they see their own lieutenants are the ones creating the problems, and then the lieutenants who do nothing but bash the chief and bash the upper echelon, I think that tends to sour you a little bit. Constant badmouthing, constant messing things up. A case will come in, and they just haphazardly do it, and then there's a lot of younger officers who have little to no respect for the lieutenants.

While officers were able to acknowledge their realistic expectations regarding job duties, all described greater chronic stress stemming from organizational issues such as communication problems and morale than from critical incidents or other direct community contact.

In spite of these organizational issues, the LEO's in this study were also able to identify colleagues and leadership styles that were working effectively and, for those in supervisory capacities, a desire to model professionalism and respect for the rank. As Bill noted, "He's the chief, and that's it. I respect the rank, but I don't necessarily respect the man." Peter described his efforts to both model and actively intervene in negative interactions among officers noting:
I try to stay away from it the best I can in doing that. I have my lieutenant, I have myself; I have four patrolmen and one dispatcher. So, I can control what we talk about on a day-to-day basis within our squad when we’re together.

*Legal system issues.* Larger-systems issues were also indicated, though to a lesser degree than organizational issues. Officers cited the potential for legal consequences when members of the community may be suing law-enforcement personnel. The role of technology and second-guessing by supervisors and media were linked with some of these concerns. Public perception was noted only in response to influence of the media who were generally perceived to not be pro-law-enforcement. LEO’s and SO’s discussed the proliferation of stories on television and in other media which seemingly paint broad brushstrokes over the whole profession. Ed described the following:

I think right now one of the top police stresses that, I guess, we all feel to a certain extent is that the way the media takes the story and twist it just so more people view and listen to the story, but they don’t really care about getting the facts.

He noted that, while he tries to be accepting of the media role, he also finds it challenging to move past the negativity and perceived imbalance of positive versus negative coverage such as “Oh yeah, the cop saved the cat on a tree today with the story of caught on a tape, three guys beating up on someone.” Curt echoed these sentiments noting:

They’re so like liberal in their reporting which you know you’re not gonna get a fair shake. I have to tell you that the media—-we don’t like the media ’cause it’s all
re-spun. Because the people, the news people, they don't care. It is gonna report whatever sells. They wanna make money on their story.

All of the participants were able to identify at least one source of job stress and articulate clearly how such triggers impacted both the officer, the spouse, and where applicable, the children. Quotations capturing these experiences are presented in Table 4. Although all of the officers discussed trying to maintain a work-home boundary, which will be discussed in greater detail shortly, both the officers and spouses expressed varying concerns about how these stressors were not limited to the officers' shifts and had the potential to be damaging to oneself and loved ones as well as being fed back into the professional realm by contributing to changes in work performance.
Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme Chart: Sources of Law-Enforcement Job Stress</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Duty Stress</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unpredictability</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Critical incidents</td>
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this kid, 17, 16 years old, and injuries perceived as part of
you look at him and it's a life job, but may still impact;
lost…the gore of it affecting me most officers considering
that night. impact in short-term with

I think early on in your career it some form of resolution
affects you 'cause you it's not over time.
something that you’ve seen or
maybe not even are expected to
see as people. I feel in the 14
years I’ve become numb to all
my--or maybe they’re
ability to integrate may
compartmentalized or
have more positive
something.

Family violence

Sometime you get a call, it LEO’s who are parents may
involves a child or something be especially impacted by
that gets to you a little bit… child-abuse cases in relating
whenever you get a child that’s to safety and protection of
abused or not taken care of their own children.
properly.

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The things that bother me the most are the type of calls that affect children and family. It bothers me when you hear domestic violence cases; it bothers me when you hear child-abuse cases.

Officers reflecting on their own relationships; in personal/clinical experiences, researcher aware of frequent feelings of frustration for LEO’s returning frequently to same families with ongoing violence and possible lack of understanding as to why women stay in abusive relationships.

Why would I want to get married if that is the end result. That came home with me and started to affect my personality.

Shift in officers’ view of how realistic healthy relationships can be with repeated exposure to domestic violence.

Scheduling [Court] always ends up on my days off. And they might give it to me at 4:00 in the afternoon, so it’s like, “Oh, my God. What am I gonna do?” I get out in the

Needing to attend to work issues outside of designated shifts. Less days off further impacting officers’ ability for self-care and time to
morning, and I gotta be back here at 4:00 on my day-off, so my whole day is screwed.

There's a lot more like family functions going on in the weekend. You have to miss more than you would if you had like a regular dayshift or something like that.

I feel healthier not working three shifts. I noticed that I feel stronger. In the gym, I have more energy. I just feel better. When I work at the midnight shifts, you almost have like digestive problems. Your organs almost hurt, and I just feel healthy and normal now. 

attend to personal commitments. Scheduling impacting officers' time with family, missing family and children's activities. Reflecting on impact of shifts on physical health. Supports research about shift work and physical problems. Officers may be feeling, but also functioning better, when not on shift work. Consider whether consistent shifts, even if midnights, perceived as less damaging than rotating.
Organizational Stress

Poor Communication

- They'll all tell me different things that they want to have done not knowing what the other guy has asked me to do. Lack of communication among multiple supervisors, creating frustration for officers, and being in the middle.

- Well, the patrol captain doesn't talk to the detective captain...because they don't talk, they just, at that point, won't even come up or discuss. Poor communication among supervisor staff creating distance and disconnections and using avoidance as coping mechanism.

- And it gets a little bit annoying 'cause it's whoever feels like taking the supervisor position for whatever you're doing at that day. Command staff taking limited responsibility.

Lack of Support

- I think the most stressful part of my job is probably the department itself, not having the utilities and the things needed to Concrete supports lacking even with basic equipment needs; consider how this may impact service delivery
do the job. and safety of LEO's.

We really have no training at our department. Under training perceived to be unsupportive. This may create potential for legal implications if training is not current.

I guess not even as much as the [incident] but the way the department handled it. Feeling unsupported by department. Expectations not being met.

**In-Fighting**

When the younger guys see supervisors are the ones creating the problems and then supervisors who do nothing but bash the chief and bash the upper echelon, I think that tends to sour you a little bit.

Supervisors not supporting command is poor modeling for younger officers. May be creating cynicism even early in officers' careers.

You're either a Hatfield or a McCoy. And if you're the one sitting on the fence in the Officers feeling caught in the middle and may have difficulties maintaining
middle, they’re just both taking objectivity due to constant shots at you until you fall on pressures.
one side of the fence.

But because of the in-fighting Lack of respect can and people not getting along undermine the hierarchy and with each other, we constantly chain of command take steps back.

Unrealistic Demands

You have to go there, talk--get Impact on volume of calls on scene, talk to the people, find on officers’ ability to out what’s going on, determine comprehensively do job.
if whether or not you have to arrest the people or there’s just gonna be a report. You got 20 minutes to figure it out.

And sometimes tasks are given Spouse perceiving demands to him where it’s impossible to be unrealistic based on give a 100%. LEO’s sharing information Systems Issues about work.

Potential for Legal
I’m trying to produce what I Officers aware of potential have to, so that the department for getting sued if tasks are
is covered, ... so that if we get sued, I can show them that they were trained in this area and stuff like that.

K9 safety, and if he bites people, obviously, he's gonna have problems ... legal issues. You don't want him to get jammed up for something that you, as a handler, should be able to control.

Negative Media

I do get very agitated in watching the news. It just sets me off. You're not gonna get a fair shake.

Officers perceiving the media to not represent police well. Source of anger for officers even if not their department. Suggestive of the camaraderie.

And I don't know if you follow the newspaper, but if [my department] isn't in the newspaper for something Departments frequently in the media may face greater divide among officers-communities. Perception of
negative every week or two, it's the department changes as careers progress which may trigger cynicism.

what's going on.

But you just do that one stupid thing in the wrong person's video on it whether it's taken out of context or they're clipping out what they want to pull from that story and all that five years of work or ten years of work can be ruined in two minutes.

The role of technology -- videos in cars, videophones.
The media supporting second-guessing of officer decisions and actions taken out of context. Need to consider benefits to technology as well.
Self-Awareness

In the present study, the focus was on both individual and couple negotiation of law-enforcement job stress. Each component of the dynamic process of negotiating these issues is centered within the individual, particularly thoughts and feelings that may shape understanding, motivate behavior, and support change or, in this case, adaptation. The most relevant constructs of Self-Awareness included recognition of personal stress response and beliefs about police work.

Personal Stress Response. Most participants personalized their definitions of stress, incorporating awareness of stress in contexts of individual experiences or feedback from others highlighting observable changes in the person. Participants utilized words like “anxiety,” “confusion,” “overwhelmed,” and “tense.” Through the interview questions, both LEO’s and SO’s easily identified not only an awareness of their own experiences of stress but also that of their loved ones through observations of a change in mood and facial expressions. A third component identified by participants included behavioral observations or changes such as: “I just start yelling or screaming,” “character changes,” “he’ll be asleep all day,” and “I’m louder.” The phrase short-tempered came up frequently throughout both LEO and SO narratives. This which captured how stress impacts emotional functioning and behaviors in contexts of relationships.

In summary, the participants’ definitions of stress varied, yet all respondents alluded to some change from an individual’s sense of ease or calm. All participants except for one were able to define stress as having one or more emotional, cognitive, physical, or behavioral components, and most seemed to attach negative connotations to the word. Furthermore, each participant defined stress in ways that suggested negative
experiences, consequences, or changes to the individual and/or the relationships with the partner as well as children. These were identified as part of the construct of The Self in Intimate Relationships to be discussed shortly.

Beliefs About Police Work. Both LEO’s and SO’s were able to identify a number of beliefs about police work and the meanings of involvement in the law-enforcement community. As will be discussed shortly, each participant identified a general belief that police work is potentially and inherently dangerous. There was an overall acceptance by participants of this as part-and-parcel of this career choice. With the focus of the project on negotiation of and adaptation to stress, the researcher also chose to highlight participant narratives about positive and enjoyable aspects of police work. These attitudes and values respectively influenced capacities to focus on benefits to the career choice and perceptions of support outside familial relationships.

To explore this area, the researcher specifically included in the interview the following question: What are three of the most positive aspects about being involved in the law-enforcement community? Sally and Dory did not identify anything uniquely positive about being married to LEO’s that may be different than other families; however, the remaining 12 participants identified a number of benefits.

LEO’s related positive feelings about the financial security afforded by working in law-enforcement. Peter even admitted that, at times, he felt “we make too much money.” Rob described satisfaction in knowing he can provide comfortably for his family and that he did not “have to have a second job to make ends meet.” A related aspect of financial security was that of benefits. As Peter noted, “I have an associate’s degree getting benefits and compensation than those who are super schooled individuals
sometimes don’t have.” Rob reflected that “I think we get compensated fairly—fair for what we do, and we have health benefits which most Americans don’t.”

Most officers cited job security as important. While most were able to include this in their list of positives, the tenuous nature of this for some was most evident in the case of Todd who openly discussed the serious ramifications of his department’s layoffs to himself and his family. Although unpredictability was cited as a potential source of stress for LEO’s, and in the context of safety concerns for SO’s, most officers acknowledged that part of this unpredictability was not having to face the same tasks each day, allowing them to meet interesting people and interacting with the community in different ways.

A related aspect of community involvement included helping others and making a difference in others’ lives. Several LEO’s also articulated that helping others, in addition to supporting the community, allowed them to feel good about themselves. Almost all of the LEO’s and SO’s identified this as one of the positives in this career choice: “liking the feeling from doing right thing,” “being at the right place at the right time and doing the right thing is very rewarding,” and “helping people...contributing to a better society, a better sense of good and help maybe the weak or people that can’t stand up for themselves or defend themselves.” This seemed to reflect a core component of LEO’s value system and, hopefully, would be a motivating factor in the officer’s career choice. SO’s also affirmed the value of their loved ones doing community-service-oriented work. Both LEO’s and SO’s described a sense of pride in being associated with police work. Another common theme in response to this question was the sense of community. LEO’s described “brotherhood” and “camaraderie” with others in the profession. Both LEO’s
and SO’s described a mutual respect among LEO’s towards each other and family members. Hannah noted:

If I’m ever in a jam or I need help and I’m out somewhere, if you tell another police officer from another town that your husband is on the job or a police officer, I feel like you get good treatment because of that.

Even for officers who identified challenges in the sense of community in their own department, they related their connections to officers throughout the larger community and an understanding that there is a sense of support. Ashley described: “It’s nice to know that he can go to any police station and he was like their brother, even though there’s not a brotherhood in [his department].” These participants’ experiences also highlight how beliefs about police work in terms of career and sense of community can lay the foundation to begin to negotiate certain job stressors and manage these effectively.

Personal beliefs about the benefits to this career choice will be revisited as an active coping strategy for law-enforcement couples.

*The Police Identity.* As discussed in both the introduction and literature review, the police subculture supports and encourages a collective set of beliefs, values, and expectations. The oft-referenced “thin blue line,” “blue code,” “blue wall,” and “blue curtain” conjure powerful images of those on the inside of this community and “the others,” also known as civilians. Woody (2005) described this as a career-based culture with a continuum of benefits and risks. Seven of eight LEO’s in the current study discussed efforts to find the balance between their roles as police officers and other roles such as husband, father, and friend. This construct emerged consistently in context of participants’ efforts to maintain a work-home boundary, to be discussed in greater detail.
later. Several LEO's in this study reflected on not only their efforts to "leave work at work" but also to recognize that being in law-enforcement does not solely define who they are. This was also an opportunity for officers in the study to reflect on and incorporate ideas about changing trends in policing. Ed expanded on this noting:

Because number one, you’re not seeing every cop smoke non-stop, you’re not seeing every cop eat horribly, you’re not seeing every cop take the stress and turn it into those things of smoking, eating, drinking, you know what I mean? You can see the younger cops who are coming out. They’re so into health, they’re so into fitness, you’re not--getting rid of that stereotype of the cop directing traffic on the corners whose 300 pounds that’s all out a shape. And I just--I hope it’s a trend of the future. Unfortunately, I think it has changed a little bit of the type of cop that you get, maybe in a negative way or some people from the old school will say, “Well, they were true blue.” Cause their whole identity was a cop, where nowadays, I’m just saying, well, the new guys they’re gonna hire are more in it for the job aspect like I’m coming to work and I’m collecting a paycheck. This is a professional work experience.

As was alluded to in this participant’s narrative, this changing perception or identity has the potential to create some disconnect or “rift” between officers who identify as “true blue” and those who recognize the role as an LEO can be part of who they are but does not define them entirely. Several officers discussed the impact of changing educational requirements and the hiring of officers who have chosen law-enforcement following their involvement in other careers (including the military) as influencing LEO’s abilities to
utilize varied life experiences to enhance their job performance and view the world outside "a gun and a badge."

*The Self in Intimate Relationships*

At the center of this study is the LEO-SO partnership. Each member of the couple represents the self in context of many relationships - to the spouse, their children, and extended family. This continues to work, school, neighborhood communities, each of which is nested in larger contexts of the social and political milieus. For purposes of the current study, the researcher focused primarily on the marital relationship while incorporating questions on perceptions of parenting relationships. The most salient aspects of the Self in Intimate Relationships are recognition of another’s distress, awareness of relational consequences to job stress, maintenance of the work-home boundary, and subscription to a family-first philosophy. Each of these implicates components of relational care through recognition of how job stress negatively impacts others and expressed desire to intervene to lessen or limit potentially negative outcomes.

*Recognition of Another’s Distress.* The researcher-participant dialogue regarding how job-related stressors influence individuals and relationships in their families began with questions about SO’s awareness of the LEO’s stress. Karla noted that Ed tends to be “more short-tempered than normal or quiet at times.” Other SO’s closely echoed Karla’s description. Dory stated that John gets “crabby and doesn’t talk,” and Hannah noted that Rob is “Maybe more on the quiet side, but I can see the anger in his eyes.” Participant narratives revealed clear awareness of emotional and behavioral changes in their spouses and how these, as well as their own stress responses, influenced the marital relationships as well as in relating with children.
Awareness of Relational Consequences to Job Stress. All of the LEO’s were able to recognize that their SO’s were influenced either directly through job issues, such as scheduling or awareness of potential for danger, or indirectly through exposure to the officer’s stress reactions. Peter described several ways in which his job directly influences his spouse and children:

Although I never minded that rotational schedule, it proves challenging. I mean, it puts some added pressure on [Sally] to run around and make sure she gets the kids everywhere she has to be. She is not a big fan of my not being here overnight. So, she sometimes has trouble sleeping while I’m on my work on my midnight shift. And, of course, it proves challenging because, of course, I don’t work a Monday through Friday schedule. Most of the kids’ activities are on Saturday, Sunday, so, unfortunately, I do end up missing a lot of what they have.

Peter’s awareness of these influences on his family members was consistent with other narratives; however, there was less awareness by LEO’s of how spouses were influenced indirectly by the job through exposure to the LEO’s stress reaction. Five of seven LEO’s including Peter, John, Curt, Rob, and Todd each believed that they were, at times, somewhat able to limit overt stress reactions and that there were times their spouses may not have noticed they were experiencing mood changes or challenges managing work issues. This was in contrast to the SO’s general belief that they were easily able to tell if the officers were experiencing stress related to their jobs. This had implications for the ways in which the LEO’s chose to manage a particular stressor, in some cases engaging in initial avoidance or perceiving to protect the spouse from the issue. It also highlights the role of communication. All of the SO’s were able to identify nonverbal signs of
distress or recognition of the LEO’s avoidance. These may have influenced communication about the issue at hand.

Both members also identified instances in which there was mutual recognition of the LEO’s stress response. Each was able to share how this spillover impacted marital and parenting relationships. Curt reflected on feelings of guilt in approaching his young son in ways that paralleled his communication style at work by giving “orders” or being “too loud than it should be” resulting in recognizing that he was scaring his child.

Ed summarized his experience of cumulative stress and his spouse’s awareness of its impact:

I think in the beginning, when, again, I was new to this type of work, I had a very hard time figuring out like how to satisfy everybody at the same time. And now, I think three years into it, I guess I’ve just gotten better at being able to schluff off the stuff that I just don’t see relevance to. And, although that may not be the correct way, it was the best way I could deal with it because too much stress was coming on with me at the time to the point where my wife is saying, “Just go back to patrol.” She’s like, “Just go back because you’re taking this home,” and we had a newborn and stuff like that. It was supposed to be like the happiest time, and here I was, sitting there, working at home on my computer and stuff like that, doing silly stuff which really is not what I ever got into law enforcement for. It got to a point where I just had like, I was working 10 or 15 hours extra every week.

Ed also recognized how at times police language may be indicative of work spillover into his family’s interactions:
I asked her in the morning, I said, “What is the general layout of the day?” And she just turned to me and said, “What is the general layout of the day? What are you, at work? Is this a meeting?”

The participants were thus able to articulate how spouses and children were being indirectly impacted by job stress through exposure to the LEO’s reactions as evidenced by mood changes such as irritability and behavioral cues such as withdrawal or yelling at the children. These are highlighted through respondent quotations in Table 5.
Table 5. Theme Chart: Impact of Law-Enforcement Job Stress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Quote</th>
<th>Researcher’s Reaction</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On the LEO</td>
<td>You start to feel overwhelmed.</td>
<td>Officers identifying emotional, cognitive, behavioral implications to job-related stressors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I guess he’s more short-tempered than normal or quiet at times.</td>
<td>Consider how each can impact work effectiveness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Just not as social as usual, shorter with his answers or just not happy in general.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I get forgetful a lot... in the last month.</td>
<td>Two LEO’s made similar statements specific to changes in job performance; demonstrating insight as to how stress can impact mental alertness and functioning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pent-up nervous</td>
<td>energy... aggression and nervousness, stuff like that.</td>
<td>One participant’s identification of aggression and having significant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On the SO

Safety Concerns
She’s constantly worried about just the danger aspect of it, the nature of the work.

Because like he’s a police officer, and obviously it’s a dangerous job, so I always worry about him.

They don’t know what it’s like to get a phone call at four o’clock in the morning, and he’s not home.

Primary Caregiver
That rotational schedule, it proves challenging. I mean, it puts some added pressure on [wife] to run around and make sure she gets the kids everywhere she has to be.

implications for the community and also for relationships in the family.

Spouses’ awareness of potential for danger in police work. LEO’s and SO’s alluding to some degree of chronic worry about risks to physical safety.

SO’s living with “the startle” of calls when officer is at work.

Both working and non-working spouses taking on most responsibility for household and childcare; related also to officers who are on shift work or 2nd/3rd
Sleep Patterns
She is not a big fan of my not being here overnight. So, she sometimes has trouble sleeping while I'm on my work on my midnight shift.

Spouses’ discomfort with being home alone while spouse at work. Spouse experiencing decreased sense of comfort/safety.

It was like—it's kind of like my body is on his schedule. He's walking in the house at 1:00, so then I'd be up for, like, an hour. Spouse body clock, routines as disrupted as LEO’s — consider whether spouses experience same consequences in response to varying schedules.

On the Children

LEO Absent
It might bother them that I'm not at a particular sporting event or a particular event at school.

Recognition that children may be impacted when parent not available for activities.

Safety Concerns
The little one will tell me what happens if something happens to Daddy.

Children having awareness of potential for danger. Parents recognizing children aware and making decisions
We just went to the shooting range a couple of weeks ago with [children] and did the safety stuff with them. Just so that they know what he does, just let them know how dangerous it is.

He’s not allowed to have any toy guns.

Parents choosing to educate children about guns; giving them concrete information with experiences.

Parents actively choosing non-violent toys. May decrease potential for child’s comfort in handling weapons yet possibly peaking interest at the same time.

We talk to him what a gun is.

“If you ever see this in anybody else’s house, don’t touch it.”

“Oh, I know.” But you can tell it to a six-year old, and he’ll

Personal safety concerns of having weapon in the home and access to weapons in others homes. Parents being
say, “I know, I know, I understand.” But then when he’s presented with it in somebody else’s house without a parent in that room, you never know what’s gonna happen.

Adjust to schedule

Yeah, so it’s just--it’s just hard on--with like when he’s tired, and you could see he’s tired, and then the kids are like off the wall. And you can’t keep them quiet.

I tried bringing [child] to my mother’s, so he could sleep.

You have to learn to be flexible if you had to work Christmas. Well, Christmas--the 26th is Christmas for us. We just change it.

Irritability

When he’s stressed, he yells at the girls for every little thing.
temperedness; mood

But when--yeah, it's like a
certain look that he gives me.
And I realize, "Uh-oh, I'm
actually scaring him," and that's
not cool.

affecting how LEO's are
talking to their children.
Considering impacts on
children.
Maintenance of the Work-Home Boundary. In the present study, seven out of eight couples had at least one member (the LEO or the SO) specifically discuss efforts to maintain a boundary between work and home. For these officers, the work-home boundary represented a conscious decision to attempt to separate their personal and work lives. LEO’s in particular described the ability, or at least efforts, to compartmentalize professional and personal aspects of their lives. This was perceived by all LEO’s to be beneficial to themselves as well as family members, and consequently, was also considered to be perceived as a coping strategy for the LEO’s. Most described a philosophy of “work is work and home is home.” They, however, acknowledged challenges in maintaining this, especially following critical incidents or significant organizational issues. Throughout the interviews, officers were able to identify under what circumstances this boundary was more rigid (particularly gruesome incidents) or more open (when something funny happened).

Most of the LEO’s in this study described relational motivations for maintaining this boundary. While LEO’s perceived they were generally effective at “turning it off” to leave stressful situations at the job, further self-reflection and observations by SO’s indicated that this was not only unrealistic, but that it impacted communication and willingness to offer and receive mutual support. Many identified a protective stance in not sharing particularly gruesome or vivid details about an event, not wanting a loved one to think about such scenes, or worry about the officer’s involvement in such situations. Todd noted that Karen “doesn’t need to know cause it’s hard to deal with. I think it will be hard for someone else who’s not in the field.” John echoed this sentiment: “She probably wouldn’t want to hear about stuff like that…like kids that were burned in fires.
and things like that” and added “I won’t tell her like when we pull our guns out and stuff like that.” Such statements reflect concern and caring for loved ones, yet also may represent assumptions about a spouse’s capacity to manage or take interest in this information. The researcher asserts that this may also be self-protective of the officer in not having to re-experience certain events and may aid in compartmentalizing memories or narratives. Furthermore, the researcher observed that none of the couples were residing in the communities where the LEO worked. This was articulated by almost all of the participants as supportive of maintaining separateness of professional and personal realms. Two officers who had once lived where they worked described their feelings that they were “never really off” because of living in that community. The researcher asserts that LEO’s often feel “on” and when residing in the community where they work, and they, along with their SO’s, may be reminded more quickly about work issues in response to hearing sirens as this then not only involves their community, but also colleagues and loved ones. Additionally, for these officers, there may be the potential for their departments to have greater access to them on-call because they are local, increasing callouts, working colleagues visiting the off-duty officer and subsequently blurring this boundary and potentially impacting family members. Several of the officers in this study had thirty-plus minutes of commuting time, or “windshield time,” which was noted to be helpful in maintaining this boundary through time to decompress, but also increasing physical distance from the job as they get closer to home.

*The Balancing Act of Marital Communication.* One of the areas of exploration in the current study is that of marital communication in law-enforcement couples. Communication was discussed and analyzed in the context of its potential resources in
coping as well as how both content and process in these couples potentially effected changes as to the impacts of the particular job stresses.

All of the couples in the study described communication as important to their own well-being as well for the health of the relationship. Sally noted: “I think he needs to [talk], ‘cause, if he bottles it up, then it just builds and builds, and then he’s like a time bomb.” There were also variations on the degree to which communication was desired or actually occurred. Rob informed “I don’t talk about what I do at work. I don’t really involve [Hannah] in my work.” Other LEO’s described efforts to use a similar strategy. Peter noted:

I think I’ve always been fairly good at keeping home home and work, at work so I tend not to bring—as a matter of fact, that sometimes maybe even a fault that sometimes I don’t think about what goes on at home at work, nor do I really even come home and talk about work when I get there.

Peter’s and John’s comments were interesting in that they reflect a sense that, although this boundary may be working in positive ways for them, there may also be relational challenges that result from a more rigid boundary including limited communication with the spouse and subsequently less outreach for and availability of marital support. John described:

Probably talking about it more [could help deal with stress]...and a lot more to [my wife] ‘cause I never talk to her on what happened to that work which I’m sure is not a good thing. Maybe the lack—probably the lack of interest in some of the things that we do, she might not wanna hear.
The dual-LEO couple, Bill and Lisa, described a much more open stance regarding communication about work-related issues. Bill described how having a spouse in the field supports openness, noting “I think, had she been someone else probably, I wouldn’t, but I know that she’s been there, and she’s seen it, and it’s kind of a way to decompress a little bit just to get it out.”

All of the participants identified a desire to maintain or increase communication about these issues, and each related his or her perception about actively trying to do this with their SO. As was noted earlier, almost all of the SO’s recognized that stress was impacting the LEO when observing him/her to be more quiet than usual. The researcher reflected on these observations during interviews with the SO’s, and each described less talkativeness and efforts to engage the LEO in dialogue about this behavior. Sally acknowledged her frustration when Peter denies that anything is bothering him yet she knows he is discussing with his peer group.

As noted above in discussion of the home-work boundary, regarding content of dialogue, participants described LEO’s choosing not to share details, that may be perceived as gruesome, with their SO’s but acknowledging extraordinary incidents in general terms. Rob expanded on this:

I may tell her something funny that happened with the guys that I work with. But as far as like calls and things that I’m sent on, I don’t really bring home and discuss it, unless it’s completely out of the ordinary. If it’s something bizarre, funny, I’ll share it with her. If there’s a— if it’s something extraordinary, if it’s something out of the ordinary, maybe a car chase or something like that that I was involved in, I’ll come home and tell her about it. But just a day-to-day going on,
an ambulance call, or DV, or any other things I’ve told you about, we don’t talk about it. We don’t talk about those things.

Peter noted:

And we get fatal accidents of young people, and you come home and you talk about it just for the sake of letting it out to someone. And then you move on. I mean, it’s kinda like you have to go.

The LEO’s seemed to adopt a protective stance in not wanting loved ones to have “that picture.” This researcher hypothesized that this may also serve as self-protective while also maintaining the work-home boundary that many officers discussed. Several LEO’s described greater likelihood of communicating about colleagues’ personal lives or administrative issues. As Hannah stated:

I know all the gossip through the department just like any work has their gossip. I know about everybody, I know about everybody’s families, that he will tell me about. Anything other than that, he will not, ...not in terms of the day to day.

Todd described experiencing some conflict about what to share and identified, “Well, I try and tell her as much as I can. Sometimes I think I’d say too much because she hasn’t needed to hear all the bickering that goes on back and forth.” Yet another officer, John, described mutual dialogue on a major work-related decision:

Like when I changed my shifts, we had a conversation. Would she be okay if--not me being home every night or having to sleep alone with the kids and everything, like for protection, and she gave me support, whatever I wanna do.

Couples also described their desire to be open with their children about various issues relating to police work. Two SO’s, Sally and Ashley, discussed being proactive about
discussing gun safety in their homes, and Peter viewed some of his work experiences as opportunities for dialogue with his children:

But I also try to, especially with the kids, interject some stories that affect people their own age that they could kind of associate with so, they can kinda relate with the story that they’re getting. So, if I could make some kind of, I guess, lesson for them, I’ll bring it home.

Themes that emerged regarding communication in the marital relationship are identified along with participant quotations exemplifying each in Table 6.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Quote</th>
<th>Researcher’s Reaction</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less disclosure about critical incidents</td>
<td>And we get fatal accidents of young people, and you come home and you talk about it just for the sake of letting it out to someone. I wouldn’t share with her. I guess if something happens that doesn’t happen weekly, monthly, or yearly for us, something that’s a major event, I will share it with her. Because I know that she doesn’t wanna hear like the more grotesque stuff that you see and everything out there.</td>
<td>Officers recognize need to express challenging or extraordinary situations in some way. Officers are less likely to share routine or mundane events. Likely that spouse may initiate dialogue if aware of event through media or alternative source. Officers wanting to protect spouses from images.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SO’s Interest in Job Issues</td>
<td>I said I wanted to not like--not that I like those stories</td>
<td>Spouses recognizing that LEO’s are trying to protect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue with children</td>
<td>I also try to, especially with the kids, interject some stories that affect people their own age that they could kind of associate with.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LEO's trying to find appropriate ways to share about work. Developing life lessons for children based on their experiences.</td>
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<tr>
<td>but I'm interested in those stories, and he says it's not something that he wants to put in my brain that I should be thinking about.</td>
<td>them, though maintain interest in hearing about situations their loved ones deal with. Goal maybe finding balance – clinical implications.</td>
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Based on the above, it became apparent that communication levels in law-enforcement couples varied based on several factors. These included the degree to which officers’ perceived their spouses’ to be interested in discussing work-related issues, the content of the communication, and the officers’ motivations to communicate about specific issues. John and Dory represented a point on the communication continuum where there seemed to be little communication about any work issues and that a lack of communication was fostering distance and disconnect in the relationship, although both expressed a desire for increased communication and recognition that this could improve their overall relating. At a different point, Bill and Lisa, the dual-LEO couple, had very open communication regardless of the content of the material and described this as a key aspect of the effectiveness of their marital relating and relationship quality. The remainder of the couples seemed to cluster around a mid-point represented by more satisfaction than dissatisfaction with the level and type of communication with SO’s generally desiring more frequent, more consistent, and varied content of the communication from the LEO regarding work-related issues. LEO’s seemed more satisfied than SO’s with how much and what they were communicating, though they expressed awareness of their own and spouses’ desires to continue to improve this area to support one another and the marriage.

Subscription to Family-First Philosophy. All of the participants in the current study espoused the importance of prioritizing their families. This value may be linked with LEO’s efforts to maintain a work-home boundary and indeed may be the motivation or foundations on which this boundary has been put in place. The researcher also suggests that this is closely linked with officers’ desires to integrate multiple identities as
peace officers, husbands/wives, and fathers/mothers. However, while these interact, the family-first philosophy seemed to capture more accurately a stance that LEO’s have consciously decided to adopt. LEO’s and SO’s described the need to remember “what is important” and that “my main focus is the people in this house.” Officers highlighted decisions to move to another department or a more challenging shift based on financial need alone, recognizing the ever-increasing cost of living, and once having children, that these expenses and possibly college required a reassessment of the family’s financial needs. John described:

Well, actually, my eldest daughter will start in college, so, we had extra money for work at midnights. That was one of the factors. And I talked to [my wife] first to make sure everything--if she was okay with it, and she said the decision was totally up to me.

Officers also found examples of taking different positions (or not accepting positions in spite of a pay difference) in order to have a schedule that would better fit their spouse’s or children’s’ needs.

While participants discussed this family-first philosophy as a personal value, all but one of the couples espoused this as a philosophy they had in common within the relationship. This philosophy was also discussed by the participants as a response to work-related stress. This was observed to support both individual and relational caring through personal attitudes, marital communication, and responding to children’s needs. It is also closely tied to coping that supports adaptation to and mitigation of job stress.
Engagement of Coping Strategies

Exploration of coping and resiliency is easily accessible in the literature on marital interaction and family functioning. However, qualitative research with law-enforcement couples along these dimensions is lacking. The researcher strove to incorporate questions that would tap into these resources with the assumption that each member has both individual and relational resources at his or her disposal in response to the job-related stressors identified. All participants appeared able to easily identify several resources along with ideas of potential resources they may be able to access. Individual strategies included adherence to personal values and beliefs, active participation in spiritual and/or religious activities, physical exercise, and focusing on positives. Relational strategies included perception of spouse support, prioritizing couple-time, use of humor, and accessing social supports.

Personal Values and Beliefs. Both LEO's and SO's described several personal values and beliefs including perceived importance of a work-home boundary and adherence to a family-first philosophy. These were discussed in detail within the construct of understanding the self in intimate relationships; however, they also represent coping strategies used by couples to negotiate job-related stress.

Active Participation in Spirituality/Religious Activities. The literature had not identified how religion and spirituality are used as a resource in law-enforcement families. As described earlier, researchers have touched on this process with military families. Although religious affiliation and spirituality were not originally part of the schedule of questions, the researcher incorporated this into a set of demographic questions to allow participants to reflect on this. All of the participants identified a
formal religious affiliation, yet most described being inactive in organized activities. A number of participants cited scheduling challenges in going to services due to shift work, sleep schedules, and other commitments. John described that “with a schedule, it’s hard to get to church and everything with all the activities going on, on weekends and everything like that.” Both Ed and Karla agreed that “we don’t get there ‘cause we are always busy.” Others reflected on conscious decisions to move away from formalized services due to negative experiences or perceptions. Ashley expanded on this noting, “It probably wasn’t the best experience going to a [denominational] church every Sunday. I just don’t think it was—like, I sort of feel and felt then that it was sort of, we need your money.” Many expressed a desire to increase their involvements in religious activities. Sally noted, “We don’t go as often as we should to church and to--not study it but be involved more” while Curt stated “I think that’s just laziness on our part, not going to church. I wish that was more part of our life.” All, however, were able to identify a spiritual sense of self and linked this with such concepts as faith, values, and beliefs. Curt described:

I’m Catholic, but I guess you would say I’m a non-practicing Catholic. I don’t go to church, that type of thing. I believe that--I would say I’m more spiritual than anything. I kinda believe that there’s a God; sometimes I don’t think there is a God. I think it supports me in a way that makes me wanna do things the right way...help your fellow man, that type of stuff.

The use of prayer was frequently cited as important, and participants tended to focus on guidance and prayers for the LEO’s and loved ones’ safety. Rob described:
Just comfort and speaking to God and maybe ask Him to give you strength, knowledge, courage, whatever it is that you need to face what you have to face and ask Him for Him to watch over my family and friends and just the comfort in knowing that there's someone greater—a greater person than us that's there for you.

Only one of the couples described regular involvement with formalized religious activities as a dyad. Although participants described individual, personal relationships with God or a religious leader, participation in formal activities may also serve to expand one's sense of community, social support, and opportunities for mutual sharing between the couple and among other family members.

Given that this is a new concept for the research literature with this population, further analysis of how religion and/or spirituality can directly impact law-enforcement families is warranted.

Physical exercise. Almost all participants referred to regular exercise as an integral part of stress management. At the time of the interviews, most were exercising regularly at a gym, and several were involved with leisure activities that were physical in nature. Rob stated, “Physical exercise seems to help relieve stress for me. Hockey is a tremendous workout and working out, running.” Sally noted how this helps her cope:

And I mean, I take the classes, and I’m just like—you take the classes, and it’s like you…leave there, and you’re like so drained and like, I don’t know. I feel so much better after I leave there and come home.

Of interest, several LEO’s had gym facilities at their headquarters and noted ease of working out during lunch or after work. In light of departments needing to monitor
budgets closely, having a gym may not be entirely feasible. However, administrators may consider the potential cost-benefits to allowing access to a facility or liaising with facilities for reduced rates for officers. This conveys powerful messages about the importance of physical health for the individual officer which ultimately may impact rates of absenteeism, job functioning, longevity, and the cost of medical benefits. The researcher also contends that officers choosing physical exercise as part of a healthy lifestyle also serves as a model for new recruits, younger officers, as well as his/her own children. Several officers conveyed their perceptions that attention to physical health was increasingly common as part of the police subculture and noted that physical fitness is a major focus in many police academies, in addition to academic and tactical training. For those participants who identified physical exercise as important, none were participating with their spouses. Since all but one couple had children in the home, couples may experience challenge to utilizing this resource together due to differing work schedules and ensuring younger children have supervision. Consequently, this study suggested that this may represent an individual coping mechanism adapted in response to stressors that trigger preoccupation and physical tension.

_Focusing on Positives._ The current study illuminated a number of job-related stressors facing both the LEO and his/her spouse and children. Along with identification of these stressors and recognition of how these impact individuals and their relationships, each participant was asked to identify positive aspects of life within the law-enforcement community, either as an officer or as a loved one. This was described in detail in Self-Awareness along with participant quotations, but will be reviewed here in context of coping.
All of the LEO’s identified one or more stressors relating to their work; however, they were also able to describe several positive aspects of their work. Similarly, two-thirds of SO’s could identify benefits that were specific to their spouses’ involvements in police-work. These consistently centered on six main areas. Both LEO’s and SO’s described concrete benefits including good pay, health benefits, and for seven of eight participants, job security. LEO’s also described variety in their work, especially meeting different people. Both LEO’s and SO’s referenced a sense of altruism, a sense of pride about duty, and perceived camaraderie. Participants’ capacities to focus on the positives represent an adaptive mechanism to negotiate job stress. Both LEO’s and SO’s appear to have internalized the belief that, in spite of significant job-related stress, including duty issues and more chronic organizational problems, there remain an overall commitment to the job and a capacity to recognize and enjoy the benefits that are part of the police officer’s career choice.

Perceived Spouse support. LEO’s discussed a number of ways in which they felt they were being supported by their spouses. The most frequently cited, indeed by all male LEO’s, was the willingness of their wives to attend to household and children’s needs. John stated he felt “she has a tougher day with the kids. She has to deal with more than she usually would if I was around.” Ed was observed to share a similar perspective:

She’s home with [our son] all day. Just the fact that I come home in a house that’s in a good shape and every thing’s--I mean, every thing’s basically done. When I come home from work, it’s like playtime for me and [our son] and stuff like that. So, it’s very nice, and I respect it.
Although this was noted by both members to periodically create some frustration for some of the wives, this seemed to generalize to an overall smooth running of the family’s routines. As Peter described:

And she does the major share of driving everybody around, making sure everybody’s dressed. I mean, it’s kind of our roles. And, of course, we’ve had some arguments about the fact that she feels that that’s all she does, but that’s kinda the period of the life that we’re in right now.

LEO’s also described their spouses as generally accepting of the challenges associated with their work as well as receiving support around their decisions to move into different roles, shifts, or departments. Rob stated:

I was engaged to somebody once before that wasn’t familiar with what a police officer’s life is about and wasn’t used to the scheduling and I found that relationship to be a lot more difficult. My wife is just—she completely knows the life that comes with a police officer. It’s just—she’s great, and she’s just very, very easy, understanding.

Officers thus described both concrete and emotional supports that their spouses are able to offer. All of the spouses agreed that these were ways in which they were able to support their loved ones, at times out of necessity, for example, adapting to varied shifts and call outs. While this overall reflects respect and appreciation for the spouse’s support, it also reflects a mutual caring through the trust and willingness to be available and try to maintain a consistent environment for the LEO as well as the children.

*Couple-Time.* Six out of the seven participating couples had children. Each couple commented on discussions and efforts to prioritize “alone quality time” for the
marital relationship including going out together or making sure they spend time together after the kids have gone to sleep each evening. Participants were easily able to identify purposeful discussions about this need and efforts to be proactive in ensuring time specifically for each other in addition to other types of family rituals. Karla noted:

We just saw what worked, and I think in the beginning we were realizing that, if you let a baby, the baby will just run your life and run your marriage, and it will just be that, and that’s it. And then we both noticed that we missed our time alone.

Karla’s spouse, Ed, echoed this sentiment and described:

I’d like to think every once in a while, especially now that we have a baby and stuff like that, we do get that once or maybe twice a month where we get to go out, the two of us. I guess if you want to call it a date. We just get some alone time to connect.

For the law-enforcement couples in this study, discussing and prioritizing couple time demonstrated relational caring that generally supported or was believed to be beneficial to the marital relationship. Though this was not in direct response to a particular job stressor, each couple described it as important for the couple both individually and in support of relational health.

Use of humor. The use of gallows humor among LEO’s was cited briefly in the literature. Many of the current participants described discussing incidents with coworkers in a humorous way, making jokes as a way to deal with these experiences. Rob stated he thought most officers had a “morbid sense of humor” and acknowledged that someone outside of the law-enforcement community would be unlikely to find the conversation or jokes amusing: “I think cops tend to use humor to overcome the things
that we deal with. It is definitely used to deal with things that maybe the average citizen is not gonna see in their lifetime.” Given the data that emerged from the narratives about couple’s communication, the researcher suspected that to participate in gallows humor with a loved one then could open the door to further dialogue about critical incidents or details that LEO’s overwhelmingly felt that their SO’s ought not to be exposed to, thus providing additional motivation to keep this in-house. For the LEO, using humor in peer groups is likely to serve several purposes in addition to it being a coping strategy. This may also serve to build or reinforce camaraderie with peers and may demonstrate support and caring within this community. It may also present an opportunity to process the incident, possibly clarifying tactical issues without the formal structure of a debriefing. Of interest, the use of humor was also highlighted in the narratives about couple communication, specifically in uncovering the circumstances under which officers share about their work with their SO’s and the content of those disclosures. Many LEO’s and SO’s talked about the sharing of funny stories or “lighter” issues in their communication about the officers’ work. Hannah highlighted this to likely be a more frequent occurrence than in sharing serious incidents, noting “if he finds something funny that happened at work or something that he thinks he did that was funny, he would definitely share it.” This highlights how the content of communication may influence the degree of disclosure, thus impacting the efficacy of communication as a general coping strategy.

*Accessing Social Supports.* All of the participants in the current study identified social supports as a main component in management of stress and coping in their lives. Talking with friends and family members such as parents or siblings was cited most frequently. Both LEO’s and SO’s found that siblings and parents were strong sources of
support, not just in speaking with them but also in knowing that these members were available by “just loving me for being their brother or their son” and being aware of their support for law-enforcement in general. As one LEO noted, “I’m pretty fortunate, my family, they’re very pro-cop.”

Family members were also noted to be able to provide concrete support in the form of childcare, assisting with meals, and problem-solving around a specific job-related issue. Most couples noted that they had peer supports both within and outside of the law-enforcement community. LEO’s in particular cited the ability to talk about work events more comfortably with others in the field whom they perceived as more likely to understand a situation and with whom they may not have to respond to what they perceived as irrelevant questions. LEO participants identified experiences of this dialogue with peers. Curt noted that “most of the time, if I say anything to anybody, it’s to another cop, and we’re out, hanging out or whatever and [say] I had this call once, and you go back and forth.” John described having closer relationships to peers he works more frequently with noting “you hang out with the other guys, but you tend to be closer with the ones you work with for four nights and stuff like that.” This researcher commented to several participants that there appeared to be less need to “fill in the blanks” with other LEO’s, and many felt this statement captured that experience.

Quotations that best exemplify coping mechanisms and resources are presented in Table 7.
### Theme Chart: Coping Mechanisms and Resources

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<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Quote</th>
<th>Researcher’s Reaction</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual Strategies:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal Values/Beliefs</td>
<td>I think I’ve always been fairly good at keeping home home and work at work. I’m not living, dying, eating, breathing blue. This is a job. And I’m putting my eight hours in, and I’m walking out the back door.</td>
<td>LEO’s striving to not allow intersection of professional-personal work lives. Through dialogue there is awareness and recognition that this is not always accomplished or even a realistic expectation. Also, consider how job-home issues can be mutually influential, not just unidirectionally.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work-home boundary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family-First Attitude</td>
<td>Remember what’s most important, your family. I mean, our lives are the kids upstairs, and that’s really it.</td>
<td>Philosophy supports recognition that officers have multiple relational roles in addition to identity as an LEO. This also may support efforts to maintain the work-home boundary.</td>
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</table>
But, again, I think it’s partly because I just see a bigger picture in life. My main focus is the people in this house, and I go to work, and I kinda have the attitude that it is what it is. This quote represents family-first but also the LEO’s reflection on his personality through a capacity to see beyond the immediate situation and contextualize his experience.

I’m a mom first; I’m a cop second This participant succinctly states the priorities of her roles which also supports the importance of her parenting role.

Use of humor I think cops tend to use humor to overcome the things that we deal with, [and civilians] certainly wouldn’t think it was funny. It is definitely used to deal with things that maybe the average citizen is not gonna see in their lifetime. LEO’s describing use of gallows humor with peers; may also serve as building camaraderie, informal debriefing mechanism.
So, I try to keep my work stuff to a minimum in the house unless I'm making a joke about something or somebody she knows from work or something like that.

I’ll call her, and I’lI’ll say, “Alright. I’m still alive.”

It’s a morbid sense of humor. You know, “Okay, I’m still alive. You’re stuck with me for a little while longer. I’m still here.”

There is some stress relief in the fact that when I am having a hard time, in a prayer I will say, like, just help me get through this time, you know, point me

Tying into the work-home boundary as well as the ways LEO’s are able to relate work issues with SO’s.

Using humor with an SO; however, this also indicates awareness and sensitivity to the SO’s concerns, possibly anticipating the need to allay these fears.

Prayer functioning as stress reliever. Possibly acts as mechanism for acceptance and positive self-talk.
in the direction I need to
go.

Just comfort and speaking to God and maybe ask Him to give you strength, knowledge, courage.

Requesting guidance from higher power. Officers may feel less isolated if higher power is with them to guide.

I pray through the day, ask and talk to God. I think it will let you just get the stuff out, the stuff that’s bouncing around in your head.

Dialogue with God as comforting and helping decrease rumination.

Physical Exercise It’s just an escape for forty-five minutes.

Using exercise to get away and decompress from work day.

Just gives me a chance to unwind.

I still play quite a bit of hockey

Maintaining physical exercise, but also spending time with peers who share
And it provides a pretty comfortable life for me, for myself and my family. Financial security identified as important. Only LEO's identified this as a positive -- consider how this may tie in to male identity as provider.

There is something egotistically lifting about doing a CPR save on somebody or something. I mean you feel good about yourself at the end of that day.

Officers recognize they make direct impact on others' lives while also secondarily feeling good about themselves.

The feeling of just doing a respectable job, doing a job that I could come home and be proud of, that my kids could look up and say, "Oh, he's got a good job, and he's doing a good thing."

Officers feeling sense of pride in the work that they do. Seems to fit in with value system of community service, helping others, upholding the law.
I think I’m proud of my husband that he does what he really likes.

You’re usually pretty tight with your co-workers.

I would say some of the camaraderie that can be developed in this job, I find to be very rewarding. And I’d like to say in my current job, I can look at least at five of my co-workers and say, “You know, what? These guys I could count on if, God forbid, the worst thing happen to me tomorrow."

Relational Strategies

Spouse Support

My wife is home with our son all day. Just the fact

Spouses also feeling sense of pride in association with LEO and community.

Sense of brother/sisterhood which alludes to sense of family.

Feeling supported by colleagues. Recognizing importance of trust and comfort in knowing supports available.

This quote was echoed several times through the
that I come home in a house that’s in a good shape and every thing’s—I mean, every thing’s basically done. When I come home from work, it’s like playtime for me and my son and stuff like that. So, it’s very nice and I respect it. She runs the house. If you let a baby, the baby will just run your life and run your marriage, and it will just be that, and that’s it. And then we both noticed that we missed our time alone. But we, he, especially, always wants to make sure we have our alone time. 

Couples frequently identified need for alone time, even if this was a few hours to a few days. Most seemed proactive in taking steps to include this in their routines, and, even when things get bus. There is awareness this is important in maintaining the marital relationship.
We try to go out, like, without the kids once in a while. Like out to dinner or to the movies and something while my parents or her parents watch the kids.

Use of Social Supports

She listens, and she helps me, and she’s supporting me too. She will say, “It’s gonna be good. Don’t worry. You have friends, so you’re not alone.”

Me and my wife went out a couple of times with the guys and their wives.

Spending time with other LEO families. May also serve to build sense of community.

Some of us are in the same boat, and some of us aren’t. But then my one girlfriend’s husband was in...
Iraq for two years. fears about physical safety.
Conclusion

The exploration of how law-enforcement couples identify, cope with, and communicate about job-related stress involved the participation of 14 participants (7 couples) from 30 to 46 years of age. All of the LEO’s and their SO’s participated in individual, semi-structured interviews conducted by the researcher. Findings from the participant interviews supported within-case analyses of the narratives relevant to the key research domains including identification of police-work-related stress, description of the impact of stressors on individuals and familial relationships, availability and use of coping resources and strategies, and communication about job-related stress. Findings also included feedback on the researcher’s experiences within each phase of the project including recruitment, interviews, and data analyses. The final section of the chapter encompassed presentation and discussion of the findings that emerged from analyses of the data and the most prominent cross-case themes.

The within-case analyses of the participants’ narratives provided rich and inclusive accounts of both individual and relational experiences and helped to identify themes as they emerged and expanded throughout each story. Both LEO’s and SO’s disclosed challenges associated with their involvements in the law-enforcement community. These included direct, work-related duties, administrative issues, and larger-systems problems. Participants described how these affected them individually and as a couple and they also reflected on how they perceived some of these issues affecting the couples’ children. In response to these issues, participants identified intra- and interpersonal coping strategies and discussed how they communicate with each other about the LEO’s jobs and attendant challenges.
After each within-case analysis, the researcher utilized field notes to detail aspects of the researcher’s experience during the interview and data-analyses processes. The researcher incorporated a multi-level approach in compiling field notes. Attention was given to the researcher’s contact and reactions to the participants, emotional reactions to the interviews, and assessment of how personal and professional experiences were shaping and guiding data analysis. Acknowledging her own experiences as the spouse of an LEO allowed for awareness that there may have been a different sense of affiliation with the SO’s. Also, the researcher’s family-systems theoretical background and clinical experience in working with first-responders played additional significant roles in the conceptualizations of each participant’s experience and in shaping the lens through which data analysis occurred. Throughout each step of the process, the researcher continuously compared categories, themes, interpretations, and summarizations with the transcripts as a way to both remain close to the data while assessing how these factors were influencing the development of the theory.

The final section of this chapter included an overall analysis of the participant narratives across the project. These findings reflected the themes that emerged throughout the data. These included job-related stressors such as risk of physical injury, exposure to injuries/deaths, dealing with family violence, and scheduling issues. While SO’s relayed primary concerns about their spouses’ safety, LEO’s described administrative and organizational stressors as much more troublesome and chronic in nature. Themes were identified throughout LEO narratives that highlighted significant problems with communication both within and across ranks. Officers cited lack of communication, miscommunication, and mixed messages as problematic across cases.
and irrespective of the officer's current rank. Unrealistic demands and expectations were also cited as sources of stress in several agencies. LEO's also indicated larger-systems issues including the potential for lawsuits and negative media as potential sources of stress. These issues may contribute to the "blue wall" that is perceived to separate LEO's from civilians. All of the SO's interviewed in this study, while acknowledging fears of safety, were able to describe the nature of organizational stressors and most expressed concerns about the toll that such stresses placed on their loved ones. A number of themes highlighting the impact of such stresses also emerged. For the individual, physical symptoms, mood changes, and shifts in interpersonal relating were indicators of stress while structural changes in response to scheduling also occurred and resulted in SO's becoming primary caregivers to children and the LEO's absences from various family events. Coping strategies and resources were numerous and included individual mechanisms such as exercise, distraction, and self-soothing as well as relational pathways including spousal support, dialogue with colleagues, extended family, and friends. Maintaining a home-work boundary, family-first philosophy, acceptance and positive thinking were also noted. Faith-based practices also emerged within each case with most citing use of prayer and belief in a higher power as sources of support and comfort. Couples also provided a rich database in which to explore their communication styles and patterns in relation to job-related stress. While the single-LEO couples identified a mutual desire for increased levels of communication, most were engaged in limited communication about day-to-day duties, especially details of critical incidents, with expanding communication about administrative and personnel issues. The dual-LEO couple described a mutual openness and consistent dialogue regarding their respective
jobs. The cross-case analysis also included theme charts reflecting each domain (nature of job-related stress, impact of job-related stress, coping strategies, and communication). Charts also included quotations from both LEO and SO-participants’ narratives that exemplified the theme along with researcher reactions to each. These charts assisted in identifying the most relevant themes that best captured the core experiences of law-enforcement couples in negotiating job stress through adaptive caring as seen in interaction of Recognition of Stressors, Self-Awareness, Understanding of the Self in Intimate Relationships, and Engagement of Coping Strategies.

Based on the individual interviews with fourteen members of law-enforcement couples, findings emerged that indicate the following relationships among job-related stress, coping, and communication in this group. There are a number of duty, organizational, and larger systems stressors that impact both LEO’s, their SO’s, and their children on individual and relational levels. In spite of these stressors, law-enforcement couples have significant coping resources and strategies at their disposals, and they actively engage these both proactively and reactively in response to stress. Furthermore, law-enforcement couples consistently express a desire for open communication, and, while they do not always achieve this, they recognize its importance and can identify needed changes in this area. Perceived gaps in communication may be linked to the LEO’s assessments of the levels of understanding the SO has about the nature of police-work. For example, when LEO’s perceive an SO can relate to or understand what he/she is attempting to relay, the officer will be increasingly likely to share about work-related issues.
CHAPTER V

Discussion

Introduction

This chapter contains a discussion of the previous literature, development of the research questions, summary of findings, researcher’s experiences, contributions of the current research, limitations and recommendations for future research along with implications in both the clinical and administrative arenas. The brief review of the extant literature provides a summary of relevant research on job-related sources of stress, impact of stress on individuals and families, resiliency and coping, and couple communication within law-enforcement families. Discussion of previous research highlights the link to the development of the research questions that formed the core of the present study. Each question will be reviewed along with most salient findings that emerged from the data analyses. Incorporation of the researcher’s experiences clarifies the lenses through which concurrent data collection, analyses, and writings were viewed.

Ways in which the current findings add to the current body of research on stress, coping, and communication in law-enforcement couples will follow along with limitations of the study and recommendations for how future research may address these issues while working towards advancement of the theory. This chapter concludes with a presentation on the applicability of the findings to both clinical practice and law-enforcement administration.

Summary of Previous Research

Research with law-enforcement officers has emerged out of recognition of various stressors that are inherent to the police profession, though some researchers have argued
that policing may not be uniquely, or more, stressful than other professions, including those in the human service field as well as other types of first-responders (Hart, et al., 1995; Patterson, 2003; Stinchcomb, 2004). One of the more well-known and highly publicized stressors associated with law enforcement is that of the potential for physical danger (Matsakis, 2005; National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund, 2007; Woody, 2006). While all the participants acknowledged this, it was identified as a primary source of stress by spouses.

Researchers cited several organizational stressors including officers’ decision-making under persistent scrutiny from command staff and administration (Janik & Kravitz, 1994; Johnson, et al., 2005; Woody, 2006) and also a rigid hierarchy and bureaucracy that limits lower-level involvement, decreases sense of control, and destroys personal initiative (Morash, et al., 2006; Stinchcomb, 2004; Woody, 2006). Lack of consultation and communication, inadequate administrative guidance and support, and lack of sufficient feedback (Stinchcomb, 2004) were also noted. Officers may also experience dealing with poor equipment, unfair workload distribution, favoritism, limited family-friendly policies (Kirschman, 2007), and discrimination (Kirschman, 2007; Morash, et al., 2006; Redman & Snape, 2006; Toch, 2002). Larger legal-systems issues were also cited. These included pressures associated with court appearances and overall negative perceptions of the system’s management of lawbreakers (Loo, 2003). All of the officer-participants and almost all of the spouses in the present study recognized one or more of these organizational and larger systems issues as impacting the LEO and both directly and indirectly affecting family members.
The impact and consequences of the above stressors on the LEO are varied. For officers who experience exposure to critical incidents, there exists the risk of the development of posttraumatic stress symptoms (Bremner, 2005; Lindauer, et al., 2005; Moskowitz, 2004; Rothschild, 2000; Scaer, 2001; Solomon & Heide, 2005; van der Kolk, 2001). Researchers have also focused on substance use among LEO’s. Hypotheses regarding triggers for substance use included use as a stress-management strategy, as a form of self-medication in coping with trauma symptoms and as a mechanism to cope with shift work (Dietrich & Smith, 1986; Kirschman, 2007; Kohan & O’Connor, 2002; Obst, et al., 2001; Sharkansky, et al., Stewart, 1996; Violanti, et al., 1985). Suicide among LEO’s receives significant attention in the media. While some researchers propose that these rates are higher than other municipal workers and also the general population (Violanti, et al., 1986), several argued that suicides among LEO’s are equal to or lower than their civilian peers (Kirschman, 2007; Marzuk, et al., 2002). Others cited inconclusive results (Hem, et al., 2001; Loo, 2003). Physical health, specific to LEO’s, has also been researched. Increased rates of and risk factors for cardiovascular disease in various law-enforcement samples has been documented (Franke, et al., 1998; Ramey, 2003; Violanti, et al., 2006; Violanti, et al., 1986) as well as kidney stones (Ramey, et al., 2004) and digestive problems (Garbarino, et al., 2002; Violanti, 1986).

Several authors have considered the impact of policing on law-enforcement families, acknowledging that those who marry LEO’s are marrying into not just the officer’s immediate family but also the extended family of the department as well as a work subculture reinforcing similar expectations of adherence to the values and beliefs of this community (Johnson, et al., 2005; Kirschman, 2007). Demands and stressors
associated with membership in police organizations were found to have potentially problematic influences on primary relationships through a) competition for time, b) triangulation, c) carryover of work attitudes (e.g. hypervigilant, authoritative, cynical, and/or protective stances), d) job-related problems (fears of safety, presence of weapons in the home, irregular schedules), e) negative interactions, f) negative mood, and g) problematic behaviors such as displacement of aggression, alcohol abuse, and marital infidelity (Borum & Philpot, 1993; Gershon, et al., 2005; Johnson, et al., 2005; Kirschman, 2007; Lott, 1995; Miller, 2007; Neidig, et al., 1992; Roberts & Levenson, 2001; Thompson, et al, 2005).

While research on coping specifically within LEO families is limited, a significant number of researchers have focused on the role of various types of individual coping responses during distress (Burke, 1988; Hart, et al., 1995; Ortega, Brenner, & Leather, 2007; Patterson, 2003). Other researchers have highlighted leisure (Burke, 1988; Iwasaki, et al., 2005), use of humor (Kerckhaken, et al., 2004), and spirituality (Maggi, et al., 2006; Niederhauser, et al., 2005). Most of this work supports the concept of mutually influential pathways between and among individual family members, the family unit, and larger systems as families seek to find a pathway through mazes of demands and capabilities (Patterson, 2002; Patterson & Garwick, 1998; Rutter, 1999; Simon, et al., 2005; Walsh, 2006). Other researchers have targeted the role of marital attributions in the relationship between stressful life events and marital quality (Bodenmann, et al, 2006; Graham & Conoley, 2006; Lev-Wiesel, 1998; Rempel, et al., 2001).

There is a similar dearth of research in the area of communication in law-enforcement families; therefore, couples research has provided some foundation for the
present study. A number of authors explored various aspects of couples and marital communication, including both verbal and nonverbal, especially in ways communication may influence satisfaction, quality of relationships, and support behavior (Gaelick, et al., 1985; Gottman & Porterfield, 1981; Julien, et al., 2003; Sullivan, et al., 1998). There has also been a great deal of attention given to demand-withdraw behavior in couples, especially as this was found to differ between couples with a violent male partner and nonviolent couples (Babcock, et al., 1993; Berns, et al., 1999; Holtzworth-Munroe, et al., 1998). Current research on marital communication suggested more frequent wife-demand/husband-withdraw patterns during wife-chosen topics (Eldridge, et al., 2007; Vogel, et al., 2007) and less negative interaction in the absence of withdrawal behaviors (Stanley, et al., 2002).

Research Questions

This research study was designed to explore participant experiences with the following questions as a framework:

1. How do law-enforcement officers and their significant others understand the nature and impact of job-related stressors on individual members and relationships within the family?

2. What are key factors in coping with identified stressors?

3. How do couples communicate about the LEO’s work and job-related stress?

These research questions were developed in response to the researcher’s interest in the experiences of law-enforcement officers and their significant others in dealing with the challenges of this profession. As the wife of a police officer, I have experienced a number of stressors firsthand throughout my marriage. For the first several years, these
included dealing with shift work, often spending holidays without my husband, and managing fears about his safety. I also realized that the challenges facing my husband in his work have shifted over the years as he has gained rank and taken on different responsibilities. As he has experienced these changes, my own perspectives have similarly altered. I have found myself reflecting and sharing these perspectives mostly in dialogue with other cop-wives, people who have asked me whether I feel afraid for my husband, and also from time-to-time in defense of the law-enforcement community.

What I have come to realize is that my husband and I have consistently striven for balance in our lives, choosing to accept the negatives with the positives about his work while maintaining a commitment to openness in and prioritizing of our relationship. Though this has worked most of the time, I am certain that other law-enforcement couples and families can attest to the bumps (perhaps hills and, sometimes, mountains) that rise up from the road. As a couple, we know quite a few other law-enforcement families, some of whom seem to function very well and with the additional responsibilities of having children while others seem to frequently struggle individually as well as in their relationships. Yet others have ended their relationships altogether.

Given the media attention surrounding law-enforcement including line-of-duty-deaths, domestic violence, and speculation of rampant divorce rates and alcoholism, I set out to better understand the impact of this line of work, better known as “The Job,” on officers and their loved ones while hoping to uncover the components of coping and communication that support resiliency and growth in these families.

Each of the research questions emerged through several lenses, including researcher’s experiences as a systems thinker and practitioner as well as aspects of social
cognition and organizational and developmental psychology. These are not distinct
categories however each will be discussed briefly to illuminate how they have guided the
research process.

Utilizing a systems framework was critical in the present study. Both members of
each couple bring to their relationship cultures, values, and beliefs that have been
cultivated in their respective families of origin. This process remains dynamic as each
negotiates these areas in the context of the marital relationship as well as, for some, the
parent-child relationships. Additionally, through the work of the LEO, the couple also
has membership in the law-enforcement community which, as noted in the literature
review, has its own unique language, culture, and set of expectations for both the LEO
and his/her SO. In light of the researcher’s choice to interview officers working in
municipal and urban departments (as different from correctional settings), attention was
given to the interaction between the legal system and the communities they are serving.
Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological model was a useful concept to keep in mind in
understanding these nested circles and degrees of influence on the individual and impact
of the individual on the varied systems of which he/she is part. These mutual influences
set the stage for developing questions that accessed relational processes including how
job-related stress impacts relationships, how communication about stressors occurs, and
availability and use of relational resources in coping with such challenges.

Exploration of several processes in social cognition was valuable in developing
the interview questions. The goal of several questions was to have participants consider
the perspectives of their spouses and children. This was particularly useful in exploring
the experiences of the self in relation to the other and also perceptions of shared realities.
or divergent views. As mentioned in the literature review, there are a number of stereotypes of the police officer. The researcher considered how the ever-present image of the LEO and attendant stereotypes may influence participants’ experience of stress, coping, and communication. Kunda (2001) defines stereotypes as “cognitive structures that contain our knowledge, beliefs, and expectations about a social group” (p. 315), in this case police officers. Stereotypes such as masculinity, physical strength, emotional control and infallibility have the potential to create narrow, and potentially unrealistic, expectations for the officer, his/her family, the police agency, and the community as well as significant conflict when these cannot be met or upheld. As noted earlier, Kirschman (2007) described such stereotypes of LEO’s as “virulent” (p. 237). Interestingly, one definition of virulent is as follows: “Capable of causing disease by breaking down protective mechanisms of the host” (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000). As the definition highlighted, these have the potential to challenge, and at worst, fracture one’s resiliency. Throughout the study, the researcher attended to participant experiences that seemed to stem from or challenge these stereotypes, especially those which seem to challenge emotional expressivity. Ultimately, this allowed the researcher to discuss with participants potential barriers to communication as a coping strategy as well as how talking with others has been helpful in managing identified stressors, especially emotional responses to critical incidents.

Initially, the researcher wondered how the nature of job stressors may change across the career span of the LEO, thus focusing on a developmental perspective. This led to consideration of the interactions among changing job duties, shifting positions in the paramilitary hierarchy, and the participants’ positions in their individual life cycles. The
piece of the puzzle that was set aside was that of the family life cycle. The researcher had not developed ideas about how the life cycle of the family may be influenced by job-related issues and vice versa. Maintaining a relational focus throughout the data collection and analyses processes allowed the participants to make these connections.

Drawing on the field of organizational psychology, several researchers have discussed potential stressors associated with the field of law-enforcement and how these may impact individual work and agency performance. Irrespective of the debate as to whether this type of work is uniquely stressful, there seems to be a general acceptance that law-enforcement is laden with some degree of risk and thus has the potential to create stress for the officer. The researcher became curious as to what sources of stress are present on the job from both the LEO’s and SO’s perspectives. This became the first research question but also guided a number of interview questions about perceptions of potential for change, whether towards resolution or mitigation, in the police agencies where participants were working. Again, the importance of the SO’s perspective was based in the researcher’s assumption that while families may experience stress, and potentially deleterious, consequences relating to the job, that family stress and distress will also impact the LEO with the potential for negative impact in work performance. It is here that the connections among family psychology, systems theory, and organizational psychology become clear. The identification of professional police relationships as brother/sisterhoods allows this community’s individuals, administrators, and organizations to develop and access the tools that are available to families for growth and protection of their members and thus the healthy functioning of the family unit. The work of Boszormenyi-Nagy (1986) has particular relevance in the idea that “members of
each new generation have to receive responsible care from members of preceding

generations” (p. 166). Additionally, Minuchin’s (1974) reference to a need for a “power

hierarchy” (52) is relevant for police organizations given the command hierarchy and

structure already in place. Those in rank and career longevity in police agencies (earlier
generations) have a “commitment to responsible care” (Boszormenyi-Nagy, 1986, p. 166)

and need to maintain awareness of “interdependency and operating as a team” (Minuchin,

1974, p. 52) which, this researcher asserts, will not only effect change at the

organizational level but will expand this system to care within communities served and

also to personal relationships. The key to this process is mutuality of commitment which

can only occur with an openness that Kegan (1982) described as a willingness to engage

in self-exploration. This again represents the mutually influential pathways that link the

individual to various systems and connect the systems to each other. Considering the

paramilitary structure of police organizations, accessing information about relationships

and communication in both professional and personal realms was deemed to be critical in

recommending top-down changes to improve organizational health.

As was expected, the research base on law-enforcement stressors was broad. As

noted above, researchers have focused and debated as to the sources, nature, and very

existence of unique stressors facing officers. The literature also provided a number of

interventions in the form of trauma-specific treatment, suicide prevention, and guidelines

for therapists working with this community. What was noticeably absent from the

literature was the resiliency of this community. I began to wonder how other officers and

families were functioning effectively in spite of the potential risks and stress. What are

the internal as well as external resources that are used? This question evolved within a
strengths-based framework and in recognition that LEO’s must be viewed in the contexts of their relationships and couples in the contexts of the law-enforcement and larger communities of which they are part. The role of communication in this dynamic cannot be overstated. For example, how do couples recognize and communicate they are experiencing stress? What role does communication have in resolving or managing challenges? The research questions have developed out of the researcher’s curiosity and have built the framework within which to explore the participants’ experiences. The following section summarizes the outcomes of this inquiry.

Summary of Findings

Research Question One. The first question proposed in this study was a two-part question intended to explore how law-enforcement officers and their significant others understand a) the nature and b) impact of job-related stressors on individual members and relationships within the family. All participants were able to describe at least two and, in many cases, several distinct job-related stressors. All of the stressors could be grouped into three major categories, all of which had been previously identified in the extant literature. These included issues in daily work functions, the organization, and larger systems. Regarding specific job duties, LEO’s acknowledged the unpredictability that is inherent in their work, though many found this to be something they enjoyed and a motivator in staying prepared for whatever may occur at a call. All significant others in the current study cited the potential for physical danger as an inherent stressor in being married to the LEO. This supported Woody’s (2006) discussion of physical risks as a source of stress. Officers also noted that exposure to severe injuries and deaths were challenging, especially those involving children and young people, along
with dealing with frequent family violence and child abuse cases. This was highlighted in previous researchers’ discussion of exposure to critical incidents as one source of stress (Woody, 2006). Toch (2002) identified child deaths as potentially one of the most difficult encounters an LEO may experience in his/her career. Scheduling issues, including shift work, were also cited as potentially stressful for the LEO. The primary result was in sleep disruption and secondary fatigue. However, they occur also in relation to the LEO’s family experiences and perceived added pressure on SO’s to be the primarily responsible members in managing household and childcare duties. The relational component was addressed by Kirschman (2007). However, most also identified benefits to their particular shifts or rotating schedules such as increased availability to family during the day, a pay differential, and variability in supervisors. All of the officers in this study described greater challenges in administrative and organizational realms. There were highly consistent with the extant literature. Each of the eight LEO’s described personal experiences of these issues and included such stressors as poor leadership models, miscommunication, unrealistic demands, politically driven decisions, and, in the case of the female LEO, harassment. These findings echoed the work of previous researchers (Janik & Kravitz, 1994; Johnson, et al., 2005; Morash, et al., 2006; Stinchcomb, 2004; Woody, 2006).

The implications for police agencies and organizations are significant given the paramilitary, top-down structure of the work environments. There exists the potential for such problems to perpetuate without awareness, acknowledgement, and proactive measures to effect change. This researcher asserts that new recruits and younger officers may be exposed to models of cynicism and poor communication. The irony is that this
may look quite similar to the families in crisis that officers frequently respond to in the course of their duties. The researcher maintains that the cynical, frustrated, and possibly angry officer who is dealing with the public may have difficulty finding his or her way out of or effectively managing these challenging interactions and parallel systems in both the workplace and in personal life.

For SO’s in this study, the most frequently reported source of stress in being affiliated with law-enforcement was the concern for their loved ones’ safety. Most described an ever-present sense of worry. Spouses also expressed concerns about the emotional toll on the officers as a result of the administrative issues. As one spouse astutely noted, the day-to-day job tasks are more likely to be an area of the job where LEO’s perceive a greater sense of control versus the issues that go on inside headquarters. The researcher also suggests that the day-to-day duties are largely transient experiences focusing on one call, one incident, and one shift rather than the chronic and persistent stress associated with larger agency or departmental pressures. Furthermore, officers are trained to perform duties such as building searches, dealing with domestic-violence calls, and managing medical emergencies. The researcher is almost certain that officers are not receiving courses at the academy on how to manage incompetent supervisors or quell in-fighting among subordinates. Larger systems issues were identified as less stressful than duty- and administrative-type issues, though they remained a potential source of stress. These included the role of the media including newspapers and television, largely perceived as unsupportive of law-enforcement. Several officers also reflected on advancements in technology that have contributed to being “second-guessed” and being under more public scrutiny, including from members
of the public. The potential for legal consequences was also described and emerged often in reference to training issues.

The initial component of the core category was identified as negotiation of job stress (as opposed to resolving job stress). This supports what this researcher asserts is a perceived lack of control over the events that trigger law-enforcement being contacted including, but not limited to, medical emergencies and criminal activity. None of the participants discussed a desire or perceived ability to make changes at this basic level. Although a police presence may have a deterrent effect as well as having roles in crime prevention, the very nature of the job is largely reactive, thus requiring officers to respond to events that are happening or have happened. Officers seem to recognize this as an inherent part of the work, and virtually all of their training is oriented toward tactical operations to react and respond. As such, officers have reasonable expectations that that their training will match the job duties. In both personal and professional experiences, this researcher has learned that officers generally have a good idea about what the job entails on a tactical level prior to making this career choice. Consistent with the researcher's experiences, the current study's participants illuminated greater concerns about the chronic organizational stressors, which is consistent with the extant literature. Again, this may be an area over which officers perceive little control to directly impact, change, or resolve and thus finding ways to adapt and negotiate such challenges becomes the key to healthier professional and personal functioning.

All of the participants in the study were able to describe how job-related stressors affected them emotionally, cognitively, and/or behaviorally. Most participants recognized their own stresses through feelings of frustration and anger which often
resulted in being short-tempered, irritable, or withdrawn in relationships with others, including family members. Several also described having physical symptoms such as gastrointestinal complaints, headaches, or muscle tension. For LEO’s, stressors were described frequently as having the potential to impact work performance through decreased concentration, focus, and motivation. Fatigue secondary to the officer’s schedule was also noted to have similar effects. SO’s were noted to have increased responsibility for household and childcare due to the LEO’s schedule and, because of frequently being the only parent home during evenings and sometimes on weekends. For the family unit, the LEO’s absences from family events, children’s activities and holidays were sources of sadness and frustration. Both LEO’s and SO’s were able to identify impacts not only for themselves but for their spouses as well as the couples’ children for those who were parents. Participants easily articulated this awareness and expressed care and concern for how others were impacted, either directly or indirectly, by the job or consequences of stress.

Research Question Two. The second question in the current project was gauged to explore the availability and use of coping resources in law-enforcement couples. This question captured the researcher’s desire to explore the resiliency of law-enforcement families and their capacities to not just deal with stress but to grow as a result of such experiences. Coping strategies were identified as individual, relational, and faith-based. Most LEO’s described efforts to maintain strong boundaries between their work and home lives. The decision to keep “work at work and home at home” carried over into the couple’s communication which will be reviewed shortly. This seemed to have a protective factor for both the LEO and the SO. Additionally, participants described their
uses of humor as a coping strategy. For LEO’s, use of gallows humor was often cited in connection to dialogue with colleagues while they recounted funny stories or “lighter” anecdotes when utilizing humor with SO’s. The use of this type of humor with LEO’s was consistent with previous research by Coughlin (2002) and Kerkkänen, et al. (2004). However, in the latter study, the researchers did not find benefit to use of this as a coping mechanism. Almost all the participants described the importance of physical exercise as a way to manage stress, even temporarily. The researcher asserts that, for LEO’s, this may directly impact the ability to more effectively carry out work duties that require physical fitness, thereby decreasing the potential for stress in this area. Officers who had access to fitness facilities at their jobs seemed to utilize this resource more frequently and more consistently. This supported Burke’s (1998) work in which physical activity was related to job satisfaction which may be part of overall well-being. Each participant was able to describe ways their spouses could offer comfort and support through assistance with household tasks, participant in co-parenting and prioritizing alone time for the couple. There were three couples whose members seemed to have a philosophy that life has inherent stressors. Both the LEO’s and SO’s in these couples seemed to have a sense of acceptance about work-related challenges that appeared to serve as a coping strategy though was not necessarily identified as such by the participants. These particular participants generally seemed to focus more on the positive aspects of both their work and personal lives and had a clear sense of hopefulness that they will continue to thrive as individuals and as a family regardless of the challenges, stressors, or potential risks associated with the LEO’s career. In addition to having philosophies in common, all of the couples also described utilization of social supports. Participants described ways that
extended family members, neighbors, other LEO families, and friends have provided support to the LEO couple through material supports, but mostly through care, love, and a willingness to be available to these families. Of note, participants related the strong impact of their social supports, especially during difficult times. These supports seem to be core components for these families, both individually in peer, parent, and sibling relationships, but also among couples, irrespective of whether they are also in the law-enforcement community. In response to whether participants could identify positive aspects about being involved in law-enforcement, all but one participant discussed a number of benefits to this career choice including camaraderie, being able to help others, pride in the job, and financial security. These findings were consistent with aspects of Toch’s (2002) work. He identified sources of work satisfaction among LEO’s as helping citizens, effectively using interpersonal skills, receiving positive feedback from citizens, and receiving peer-group support. The final aspect was that of faith and religion as a resource. This had not previously been explored in the extant literature. Almost all of the participants identified some aspect of this as a source of comfort, support, and guidance in their lives. Many were actively and consistently using prayer. All noted challenges in attending formal services, though they desired to be more active in the area of organized religion.

The incorporation of the exploration of availability and use of coping resources in this study allowed for an increased awareness that law-enforcement couples, while recognizing and experiencing a number of job-related stressors, are able to identify and use a number of different coping strategies to manage challenges. Furthermore, most participants were able to identify potential pathways to coping that, although they were
not currently using, these were ones they could engage in as needed. Through their narratives, the participants demonstrated capacities to adapt to the identified police-work stressors in a way that supported self-care and care for spouses and children. This became the theory grounded within the data.

Research Question Three. The third question in this study led to investigating communication between the LEO and his/her significant other. The role of communication in relation to the topic and potential mediation of job-related stress had not been explored in earlier research with this population. This question allowed exploration of how dialogue occurs specific to the areas of the LEO's work- and job-related stress. For six out of seven couples, communication patterns were fairly similar. SO's expressed some frustration that LEO's provided only limited information about their daily work in spite of their questions and requests for sharing. SO's recognized that LEO's were more likely to share specific details with work colleagues. They often did not find out more information until significant time had elapsed from a particular event. LEO's described a protective stance towards their loved ones in not wanting to share gruesome details, not wanting to worry them, and not wanting to keep complaining about the same issues over and over. This was also noted to support the work-home boundary that was of great importance to the LEO's in the present study. Both LEO's and SO's noted that there were increased communication and sharing about departmental or personnel information in comparison to day-to-day duties. Bearing in mind that the primary impact of the job on SO's was the presence of persistent concerns and fear, LEO's decisions to share what might be perceived as safer aspects of the work, what occurs inside headquarters versus what happens on the street, may serve to provide
information while avoiding furthering these fears. Unfortunately, several SO’s noted that the lack of information, the not knowing worsened these fears rather than alleviating them. The dual-LEO couple’s communication was somewhat different in that their dialogue regarding both administrative and duty-related issues were very open and seemingly honest as evidenced by their sharing similar awarenesses of each other’s duties and concerns. Both felt this was due to an increased level of perceived understanding of the other due to their involvements in the same field and, more specifically, in the same community. Additionally, both noted that this understanding allowed for decreased need for explanation or clarification due to a shared language, subculture, and awareness of the type of structure and procedures that are in place. Talking with this couple highlighted the possibility that perceived degree of partner’s understanding may be one of the gateways to communication in law-enforcement couples.

Only one participant, Karen, reflected on the impact of culture on expectations and the process of communication. Although Karen discussed this in her debriefing with the researcher specific to the new experience of sharing personal issues with individuals outside the family, she had not reflected on this within the framework of marital communication. Though not explored explicitly in the current study, the researcher acknowledges that each individual is bringing with them to the marital relationship communication styles and experiences from their families of origin that are nested within each family’s cultural background.

As recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1990), the paradigm model was used as a guide to explore relationships among the categories that emerged from the data collected. This allowed the researcher to move from line-by-line coding to the
development of categories closely linked to the participant narratives. The paradigm model provided a framework to elucidate the nature of the relationships among the questions described above while relating them to the phenomena, in this case the identification, impact, management, and communication of law-enforcement-related stress within relational context. The interconnections among these areas supported the concept of negotiating job stress through adaptive caring. These relationships were presented graphically in Figure 2 to demonstrate how law-enforcement stressors impact individuals, relationships, and family members, how stress-management skills and coping resources, including communication, are engaged to mitigate the impact of stress and to support individual and relational health.

Clinical Implications

Through collaborative dialogue with LEO's and their SO's, this qualitative study (a) illuminated the nature and impact of job-related stress, (b) helped identify themes in coping, and (c) explored how LEO couples communicate about these issues. These findings are applicable to clinical treatment with individuals, couples, and families.

Responding to calls, dealing with the community, and acceptance of the physical risks are some of the routine aspects of police work. However, all of the officers described experiencing challenges at certain points in their career with critical incidents and cases such as serious accidents, significant injuries or deaths, and child abuse/family violence. Assisting officers in effectively managing acute stress responses may aid in reducing the risk of long-term mental-health consequences. Clinicians are recommended to routinely educate LEO's about critical-incident stress and to thoroughly assess for symptoms of PTSD. Although the present study was focused on law-enforcement
couples, the researcher asserts that there may be clinical applications for other first responders including firefighters, emergency medical services personnel, as well as military personnel. Each of these professions involve varying degrees of personal risk, exposure to injuries/death, and absences due to shift work and deployments. Utilizing a family-systems perspective in future research with other first-responders may further the current theory while clarifying and expanding on the needs of these communities.

All of the LEO-participants in the current study identified administrative and organizational issues as overall more stressful than those associated with daily job tasks. As participant Ashley noted, these may be aspects of the LEO’s job over which the officer may perceive a decreased sense of control. For the clinician, exploring with the officer perceived locus of control (Rotter, 1954) may help contextualize frustrations or anger with the particular agency while normalizing these experiences.

Participants described the importance of both intrapersonal and relational resources in coping. Clinicians are advised to adopt a strengths-based perspective, recognizing that these resources, in tandem with the LEO’s resiliency, can help better manage organizational stressors even if he or she is limited in effecting direct change at these levels. For clinicians engaging LEO’s in individual treatment, the contextual nature of these findings can also aid the LEO in strengthening family relationships through increased awareness of how job-related stress may directly impact the SO and children (e.g., scheduling and shift work resulting in time away from family events and activities, increased responsibility for spouse, safety concerns) as well as how work issues affect families through their impacts on the LEO (e.g., fatigue, short-temperedness, withdrawal). Understanding the style of communication in LEO couples has direct
implications in the treatment milieu. Clinicians working with these couples must consider how the officer’s communication style is likely to be adaptive, beneficial, and necessary in effectively performing job functions. LEO’s are in positions of authority and, to carry out duties, make requests in the form of commands and demands and may question in the form of interrogation. Officers have reasonable expectations that others not question this stance and respond to their requests and questions. These ideas may not translate well or be as effective in an officer’s personal life. In working with these families, it will be helpful for clinicians to validate and support these skills and this mindset while also helping couples recognize the challenges of making this shift at the end of a tour. Additionally, all of the couples in which only one member was an LEO in this study described limited sharing of day-to-day work experiences. This study’s findings can aid clinicians in helping couples to better understand the roots of the LEO’s decision to not disclose certain information and thus begin to help them find ways to give and receive information in ways that remain protective while also facilitating understanding and mutual support.

Organizational Implications

As noted above, all of the LEO’s in the current study indicated that they experienced challenges with organizational issues at some point(s) in their careers. For one officer, this was the primary reason he left one department to go to another. Officers described a variety of concerns under this umbrella including problems with equipment, training issues, inconsistent use of policy and procedure, miscommunication and lack of communication among leadership. The researcher suggests that these issues directly impact the agencies, the individual officer, and the communities served by law-
enforcement agencies. Given the paramilitary structure of law-enforcement, administrators and command staff may be challenged to obtain information about these types of problems from lower ranks. This was supported by participant statements about reporting to their immediate supervisor and being unable to challenge these orders or commands originating with the chief. However, the law-enforcement unions are integral in giving voice to member concerns and are vital in effecting top-down change in these departments and agencies. Another option is for the inclusion of psychology staff that can assist in identifying department-specific areas for improvement and tailoring organizational interventions to meet such needs. These findings will serve as guidelines for law-enforcement administrators in addressing potentially problematic organizational issues while encouraging proactive stances towards organizational health.

Researchers Experiences

The researcher's experiences were documented through the use of field notes throughout the project. These notes reflected aspects of the recruitment process, observations during the interviews, the researcher's reactions to participant narratives, and thoughts and reactions to concurrent data analyses. The recruitment stage was initially challenging since this began in early December. Many couples noted they had various commitments leading up to and through the holiday season, and others would be away during this time. As the researcher identified the need for interviews to be spaced to allow for transcription and analysis, participants were able to be scheduled around holiday commitments and celebrations with the bulk of meetings being scheduled for the month of January. Out of 10 couples who were contacted, only one was deemed ineligible. The first couple had learned of the research through word-of-mouth; however,
at outreach it was determined that because the officer was retired so they could not participate. Although a second LEO wanted to participate, when I contacted his wife, she verbalized discomfort with the idea of discussing marital issues and fears that, if she and her spouse were to discuss these, even in separate and confidential meetings, that they would “definitely get divorced.” A third couple contacted the researcher at the close of the study, and it was too late to invite them to participate. Out of 10 couples who were contacted or who made contact with the researcher, seven ultimately participated in the study. I expected greater initial discomfort with the idea of participating in the research, especially as it tapped into what some may have perceived as personal issues in their marital and family relationships. I was surprised at the willingness of almost all potential participants to move into the process with me.

There were few complications with the interview process. Two were rescheduled close to their original dates due to LEO’s being called in to work. Participants were consistently on time and seemed genuinely interested in the project itself through questions about its development and the researcher’s interest in this community. Several participants seemed slightly anxious in the early stages of their interviews; however, they were observed to be increasingly comfortable as the meetings progressed. I feel confident and comfortable in my interviewing skills and endeavored to use both verbal and nonverbal techniques to support information-gathering while creating and maintaining participants’ sense of ease. This project created unique challenges and opportunities for me as the researcher. The nature of the qualitative-research process invites researchers to become immersed in the world of the participants. My marriage to an LEO, along with my previous full-time work in a law-enforcement-focused mental-
health program, have certainly not left me wanting for extended contact with this community. These experiences have sensitized me to potential issues facing law-enforcement families. I believe these have supported my commitment to and investment in hearing and understanding the participants’ experiences. During interviews, I found myself experiencing several processes. While attending to the participants, I was connecting themes to earlier narratives while also recognizing similarities to LEO experiences I hear at work and parallels in my personal life with my husband. I was able to reflect and organize these more coherently after the interviews on the drive home or to work which often took 30 minutes or more. I appreciated this time to emotionally decompress following an interview. As Rob noted, this is one of the benefits of “windshield time.” I also made the effort to utilize field notes immediately on my return to home or the office to capture these thoughts and experiences quickly.

Contributions of Research

The exploration of stress, coping, and communication in law-enforcement couples has provided evidence that, although there are numerous stressors in the field of law-enforcement subsumed under job duties, administrative/organizational, and larger systems issues, law-enforcement officers and their significant others develop and utilize effective coping strategies in direct response to job-related stress. Furthermore, the data provided insights as to how these various issues are perceived to impact law-enforcement families on individual and relational levels while prompting consideration about ways in which communication mediates such influences.

The majority of the extant literature about job-related stress is focused on LEO’s only and many were based on quantitative methodologies to find common variables in
this profession. Encouraging LEO's to explore their unique definitions and perceived underpinnings of job-related stress has provided a depth and richness to this issue that has been lacking in much of the earlier research. While many of the identified stressors echoed earlier research on potential stressors such as physical risks (clearly explicated by SO's as a source of their stress), organizational practices (including harassment), and larger legal-system factors, several issues emerged in this study that have not previously been explored. The first, and most obvious in response to Todd's and Bill's experiences, is that of the changing financial climate facing some departments. While there is acknowledgment that law-enforcement is integral to the safety and protection of communities around the United States, especially in the wake of terrorist acts on domestic soil, budgetary constraints are resulting in lowered staffing or lack of expansion in forces. This resultant job insecurity has ramifications not only for the officers, but also for those who continue in the ranks and the communities they serve. These consequences have not been identified in earlier literature and, while they have received only cursory mention in this study, they warrant further attention. A second contribution of this research is that it highlights the potentially changing sources of stress as officers move through different ranks and positions in the field. All the officers in this study reflected on periods of transition and that their involvements in multiple roles and activities had the potentials to foster different demands and sources of stress. The range of ranks and years in the field represented in this project has provided a starting point for further analysis of how such factors influence LEO's and loved ones.

Kirschman (2007) argued that the "virulent stereotypes" (p. 237) of police officers persist. This study’s researcher supports this assertion, noting that the stereotypic and
masculine traits of strength and independence imply that emotional expression is to be controlled or inhibited and that relational needs are secondary. Given the openness to identifying emotional reactions, as in the participants’ definitions of stress, the results of this study implied a doorway through which to begin to more fully validate and pursue a dialectical process of being strong and connected with emotional responses and expressions.

As to the relational issue, this study provides crucial information in understanding the experiences of LEO’s in the contexts of their relationships. Prior researchers have viewed this through a narrower lens, creating a boundary around the job and the interaction between the LEO and identified stressors. Expanding the research focus to explore an LEO in context of his/her work and intimate relationships highlighted the complex interactions between and among individuals and the systems of which they are part. Inclusion of SO’s in this exploratory dialogue served numerous purposes. Spouses were able to provide validation of the LEO experience while also offering new (and possibly somewhat more reflective) perspectives on job-related stress and its impact on the LEO. Exploring the LEO’s perception of how job-related issues impact the world beyond him or her to include loved ones, a spouse and children, increased the flexibility of this once rigid boundary of the LEO and The Job. Although children were not included as participants in this study, the researcher’s decision to incorporate a question to both LEO’s and SO’s about their observations of how children may be impacted by the nature of the job or other related stresses encouraged a more inclusive picture of the LEO’s worlds and highlighted the need for greater attention to “cop-kids.”
Focus on communication in law-enforcement couples has been notably absent from the research projects with this community. Most participants described communication about job-related stress as challenging at times. All of the couples in which only one member was an LEO identified less communication than desired in their marriages and described such factors as protectiveness, perceived lack of understanding, and withdrawal in these interactions. Targeting this aspect of interaction likely validated frustrations and concerns while supporting and ultimately encouraging participants’ communications about these issues. Though beyond the scope of the present study, it would be interesting to learn from the participants if beginning this conversation with the researcher triggered couples’ discussions about their communications or more in-depth dialogue regarding stress and improved coping. Given the degree of openness of communication in the dual-LEO couple, further exploration of these types of couples may serve to better highlight this discrepancy between dual-LEO and one-LEO couples.

A vital, yet basic, contribution of this research is ensuring that law-enforcement personnel and their families continue to receive attention to their needs, including supporting sites of resiliency and expanding avenues for coping. Communities rely on police, as well as other first-responders, to protect, serve, and rescue when needed, yet there are few resources in place to actively identify and respond to the specific needs of this community. This research provides some additional pathways to explore in moving towards this goal. Ensuring access to the results of this study through publication, workshops, and in-service presentations will facilitate this increased awareness with law-enforcement communities and mental-health providers.
Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

This study had several limitations including issues in recruitment, data collection and analytic strategies, and researcher’s experiences. Participants in the present study were recruited through the researcher's personal involvement in the law-enforcement community through word-of-mouth and “snowball” techniques. Although this allowed for ease of access to members of this community, participants may have been more socially connected with other members of the community and thus exclude those not in friendship groups.

Participants were also recruited from a large metropolitan area of a northeastern state in the United States. Thus, the findings may not adequately capture the experiences of LEO's from other regions in the United States or internationally. Future studies should explore similarities and differences regionally. To participate in this study, participants were asked to be on full-time active duty for at least one year. These eligibility criteria created a number of exclusions that may impact the applicability of the theory to other LEO populations. Full-time status excluded part-time members of the community, who according to Reaves (2007) represent 46,000 officers versus 800,000 full-time members nationwide. As noted above, one couple who was recommended to the researcher was deemed ineligible because of the officer's being on disability following a line-of-duty injury and thus no longer active. Based on this researcher's experience in working with wounded officers, this population faces unique stressors which require attention that was beyond the scope of this study. Research with wounded officers and their families would likely yield valuable data. It is, therefore, unclear if these findings can be extended to part-time LEO's or officers who are no longer considered on active duty. Additionally,
all of the LEO’s in the present study were affiliated with municipal or county departments. There were no officers who had a history or who are currently working in correctional facilities such as county jails and state and federal prisons. The researcher suggests that there may be unique stressors for this group given the consistent close proximity of corrections officers with offenders and the nature of the physical environment of this work. Dialogue with these officers and their families in future research may illuminate specific needs and resources of this community.

Efforts were made to include officers of diverse backgrounds. In this study, there was one female Hispanic LEO and one male Caribbean-American LEO. Though their contributions to the research were invaluable, the experiences of these two participants may not reflect the experiences of other cultural groups. Of note, all of the SO’s who participated were White, and all participants were in married, heterosexual relationships. Previous research has suggested that female, ethnic minority, and gay/lesbian officers may face unique stressors in the forms of harassment and discrimination. Therefore, future researchers should include participants of diverse backgrounds to explore in greater depth challenges and resources facing these members of the LEO community.

An additional limitation of the study is the source of data. All information was gathered in one, semi-structured interview. Thus all data were based in the self-reports of participants. Participants may have underreported or over reported certain experiences and varied in their abilities to articulate these experiences. Future researchers may incorporate additional participant-sources of data, such as journals and couple interviews which would allow for direct observation of marital interactions and communications. It is also recommended that researchers engage the participants over a longer period of
time. Most of the participants were recruited through word-of-mouth and had very limited or no prior contact with this researcher. Therefore, the interviews were often the first time the researcher and participants met. There may have been some reluctance or hesitancy to share fully about personal issues in both individual and marital lives. It should be noted that while this presents an inherent challenge to qualitative research, participants can be expected to be self-protective and selective in information-sharing with someone they have just met which, this researcher suggests, is adaptive.

All data analyses were completed by the researcher resulting in one lens through which each aspect of the research process was viewed. Thus, the researcher's experiences, described in more detail above, may have influenced data collection and analyses. At about the eighth interview, I started to recognize feelings of fatigue and a decrease in the level of excitement in anticipating the interviews. This changed as I approached the final two interviews as these were with the dual-LEO couple. I noted a greater expectation of unearthing new data with this couple and in addition, having an opportunity to interview a female LEO who was also Latina. As noted earlier, reflections on these experiences helped me recognize that being completely immersed in the law-enforcement community through my full-time work, the current research project, and also in aspects of my personal life may have impacted my ability to more effectively attend to the participants in the later interviews. Additionally, participant affect was captured only in the researcher's field notes in reflections on the interview and in review of the audio recordings. The transcripts did not reflect laughter, tearfulness, or periods of silence in the interviews, thus limiting the researcher's ability to identify more clearly moments of incongruity between verbal and nonverbal communications.
Closing Remarks

This research project has involved exploring the nature and impact of law-enforcement job-related stress on both officers and their significant others. Participants openly conveyed their stories of resiliency and coping while identifying areas for change and growth in their relationships. Although these couples face a number of stressors associated with being an LEO or the spouse of a police officer, they have access to and utilize both intrapersonal and interpersonal resources to decrease the risks of these stressors negatively impacting their families. Communication was identified as one important mechanism through which this occurs. LEO’s suggested that levels of understanding by their SO’s were some of the controls for the extent of disclosure about duty-related issues.

In our communities, we rely on our law-enforcement personnel to “serve and protect.” They do so at great personal sacrifice to themselves and their families, in some cases giving their lives. They are often viewed as embodiments of strength and courage though are not impervious to the effects of increasing levels of violence in their communities, increasing and sometimes competing organizational demands, and broader systems issues including the larger legal system and public image. It is incumbent upon clinicians, researchers, and police administrators to attend to the needs of these officers and their families, so that they are also served and protected.
References


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November 27, 2007

Pamela J. Fackina M.A.
29 Canterbury Road
Ringwood, NJ 07456

Dear Ms. Fackina,

The Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board has reviewed the information you have submitted addressing the concerns for your proposal entitled "Exploration of Perceived Stressors, Coping and Communication in Law- Enforcement Couples". Your research protocol is hereby approved as revised through expedited review. The IRB reserves the right to recall the proposal at any time for full review.

Enclosed for your records are the signed Request for Approval form, and the stamped original Consent Forms. Make copies only of these stamped forms.

The Institutional Review Board approval of your research is valid for a one-year period from the date of this letter. During this time, any changes to the research protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to their implementation.

According to federal regulations, continuing review of already approved research is mandated to take place at least 12 months after this initial approval. You will receive communication from the IRB Office for this several months before the anniversary date of your initial approval.

Thank you for your cooperation.

In harmony with federal regulations, none of the investigators or research staff involved in the study took part in the final discussion and the vote.

Sincerely,

Mary F. Ruzicka, Ph.D.
Professor
Director, Institutional Review Board

cc: Ben Beitin Ph.D.
APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

The researcher will make initial phone contact with law enforcement officers based on existing personal relationships with members of this community. The following oral script will be utilized at initial contact with all potential participants:

Hello - My name is Pam Fackina from Seton Hall University.
If the researcher is making contact: I'm calling to talk to you about participating in my research study.
If a potential participant has been referred: Thank you for calling me. I appreciate your interest. How did you learn about the study?
I would like to tell you a little bit about the project. This is a study about law-enforcement couples. As the wife of an officer, I am interested in exploring how law-enforcement officers and their significant others understand and discuss the nature and impact of job-related stress and also looking at how individuals and couples are coping with these stressors.

My spouse is Captain Ken Fackina of the Wanaque Police Department. Have you ever had a working relationship with Captain Fackina? Are you currently in a subordinate or supervisory relationship with Captain Fackina in any of the law-enforcement roles you participate in (e.g. work at the police academy, involvement in specialized teams such as emergency response)?

If yes, the researcher will advise of the potential for conflict of interest and advise the officer that they may not participate in the project.

If no, the researcher will proceed to discuss the project as below:

If you decide to participate in this study, you and your significant other would be asked to participate in one in-person, individual interview which would last approximately 1 to 2 hours. I would like to audio record your interviews which will be later transcribed by me. You both would also be asked to review a copy of the transcript for accuracy.

Participation is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you would like to participate, we can review your eligibility and also schedule a time for me to meet with you to give you more information. If you need more time to decide if you would like to participate, you may also call me with your decision.

Do you have any questions for me at this time?

If you have any more questions about this process or if you need to contact me about participation, I may be reached at 862-377-1042.

Thank you.
APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT ELIGIBILITY FORM

Once potential participants have been recruited, the following script will be utilized to review the project and determine eligibility:

Thank you for your interest in being considered for participation in this research project. Again, this project has been developed to better understand how law-enforcement officers and their significant others view stress related to police work and also to explore ways men and women in law-enforcement families talk about and deal with these stressors. You and your spouse or partner would each be asked to participate in one separate, in-person interview about your experiences of stress and coping.

- Would you be interested in participating in this project?

If no: Which aspects of the project would make it difficult for you to participate? I appreciate your getting in touch to discuss this and get more information.

If yes: There are several questions that I would now like to ask you to ensure that you meet the eligibility criteria for this study:
- Are you or your partner currently on active duty in the field of law enforcement?
- How long have you or your partner been in this job?
- Are you presently involved in a relationship of at least two years duration?

If the person qualifies, the primary researcher will discuss a mutually agreed upon time and location for the interview.

If the person does not qualify, the primary researcher will advise him/her of reasons for ineligibility.
INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR LAW-ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS

Current research with law-enforcement officers has indicated that there are several sources of stress experienced by men and women in this field, for example physical risks and administrative issues. This study will expand on this topic to consider how these stressors are experienced by significant others and how law-enforcement couples cope with and communicate about job-related stressors.

Researcher Affiliation
Pam Fackina is the primary researcher. She is conducting this research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Ph.D. in Family Psychology in the Department of Professional Psychology and Family Therapy in the College of Education and Human Services at Seton Hall University in South Orange, New Jersey.

Purpose
The purpose of this study is to explore how law-enforcement officers and their significant others understand the nature and impact of job-related stress, how individuals and couples cope with identified stressors, and how couples communicate about these issues.

Duration
The interview is anticipated to last approximately 1 to 2 hours. Participants will also be asked to review a transcript of the interview and will have an opportunity to make notes and/or changes to this document as well as to discuss this with the researcher to ensure that experiences are accurately portrayed. Once the researcher has reviewed the transcripts with participants, along with any changes made as determined through discussion about the manuscript, participants will receive a final phone call to acknowledge completion of involvement in the study.

Procedure
All data will be gathered from officers and their significant others via individual interview with the researcher, Pam Fackina. Interviews will be conducted in-person and separately with each member of the couple. Meetings will take place in a mutually agreed upon location that is private and quiet such as a space in a local public library, a private office at Seton Hall University, or in a private room in the officer’s department.

Participants will be asked about current job responsibilities, perceptions of stress, and how each deals with these issues. The following are examples of some of the questions that will be asked:

- How do participants recognize when they are experiencing stress?
- What do participants see as job-related sources of stress?
- Do participants think [identified stressor] affects their significant other? If so, how?
- How do participants define comfort?
- What helps participants deal with stress?
How do participants and significant others talk about the job?
What do participants think the department can do to help officers better deal with stress?

All participants will receive a list of support resources that have been developed specifically for law-enforcement officers and their families.

Voluntary Participation
Participation is completely voluntary, and participants are under no pressure to respond to the request to be involved in the study. There will be no negative consequences if a decision is made not to participate, if participants choose to end participation at any time, or if participants wish to reschedule an interview. This project is not affiliated with an officer-participant’s department or any other law-enforcement agency or department.

Anonymity and Confidentiality
In this study, anonymity will not be possible because the researcher will meet with all participants in person. However, any information provided through the interview will be kept in confidence. Identities will not be revealed through the study, and names will be changed to protect participants’ privacy. Audiotapes of interviews will be labeled with a numerical code. Any names (participants or others and also department names) will be deleted from the written transcript. The researcher will disclose voluntarily, without participant consent, information that would identify him/her as a participant in the research project only under the following circumstances: there are indications of current issues of child abuse, or elder abuse in the participant’s family, or that a participant is at risk for physical harm to himself/herself or to someone else.

Participants will receive a hardcopy of the interview transcript which will be mailed to the home or, if requested, an alternative location (for example a post office box or office). It is recommended that participants consider secure storage of the transcript while it is under review as well as who may have access to the transcript in the home or office as this may inadvertently compromise confidentiality.

Interview
Participants will be asked to participate in an individual, in-person interview which will last 1 to 2 hours. Although the researcher will have some general questions about participants experience of stress and coping, the discussion will be flexible enough to allow for additions or elaborations on what would be helpful for the researcher, and families who may benefit from this research, to know about these issues.

Use of Audio Tapes
As noted above, during the interview, participants will be audiotaped. Each completed tape will be coded with a number to protect confidentiality. The tapes will be stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s office. Access is available to the researcher only. Participants will retain the right to review the audiotapes and may request that the tapes be destroyed on completion of the study. If this request is not made, tapes will be stored for a period of three years and then will be destroyed.
Records
All interview tapes will be transcribed by the researcher. Transcribed records of interviews will be kept in a locked cabinet to which only the primary researcher has access. Transcripts will be stored separately from tapes. Participants will have an opportunity to review his or her transcript and to provide clarifying or additional information. Electronic data will be stored only on a password-protected USB memory key. The project supervisor, Dr. Ben Beitin, at Seton Hall University may be asked by the researcher to review portions of records in support of analyzing the information for purposes of this study only. All records will be stored for a period of three years and then will be destroyed.

Risks
The current project is expected to present minimal risk to participants. The probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the project are not greater, in and of themselves, than those ordinarily encountered in daily life. Participants retain the right to choose to end the interview at any time with the option to reschedule at a later date or to end involvement with the research project with no negative consequences. Participants will have the opportunity to speak with the interviewer about the experiences of the interview. Should participants need assistance in obtaining support, the researcher will discuss how to access EAP or insurance and will also provide a list of easily accessible resources.

Benefits
The current study may not provide any direct benefit to participants in the process. There is no monetary compensation for being involved in this project. However, involvement may help other law-enforcement personnel, families, and supervisory staff understand the nature and impact of job-related stressors and ways to prevent, minimize, or intervene to address these. Even though interview transcripts will not be shared with anyone, participants are free to discuss the experience with those who are supportive as a member of the law-enforcement community, for example, a trusted partner, family member, friend, religious advisor, and workmates.

Contact Information
If there are any further questions or concerns about the study or if participants would like to learn about the results of the research, requests may be made to Pam Fackina, c/o Department of Professional Psychology and Family Therapy, College of Education and Human Services, Seton Hall University, 400 South Orange Ave., South Orange, NJ, 07079 or by calling (862) 377-1042. Participants may also contact the research advisor, Dr. Ben Beitin, at this same Seton Hall address or by phone at (973) 275-2856. Participants may also contact Dr. Mary Ruzicka, Director of the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board at (973) 313-6314.

Copy of Consent Form
Participants are asked to sign two (2) copies of this form. The researcher will keep one on file, stored in a locked file to which only the researcher has access. The key will be
held separately from audiotapes and records to protect a participant’s privacy. One of the signed copies will be for participants to keep in case there are any questions about the study.

With the assistance of participants in this study, mental health and law-enforcement professionals may be able to get a better understanding of how men and women understand stress and coping in the law-enforcement community. This exploration will hopefully help to identify themes that will ultimately support law-enforcement families through focused assessment, prevention, and intervention.

Consent to participate in research project:

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APPENDIX E

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR
SIGNIFICANT OTHERS OF LAW-ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS

Current research with law-enforcement officers has indicated that there are several sources of stress experienced by men and women in this field, for example physical risks and administrative issues. This study will expand on this topic to consider how these stressors are experienced by significant others and how law-enforcement couples cope with and communicate about job-related stressors.

Researcher Affiliation
Pam Fackina is the primary researcher. She is conducting this research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Ph.D. in Family Psychology in the Department of Professional Psychology and Family Therapy in the College of Education and Human Services at Seton Hall University in South Orange, New Jersey.

Purpose
The purpose of this study is to explore how law-enforcement officers and their significant others understand the nature and impact of job-related stress, how individuals and couples cope with identified stressors, and how couples communicate about these issues.

Duration
The interview is anticipated to last approximately 1 to 2 hours. Participants will also be asked to review a transcript of the interview and will have an opportunity to make notes and/or changes to this document as well as to discuss this with the researcher to ensure that experiences are accurately portrayed. Once the researcher has reviewed the transcripts with participants, along with any changes made as determined through discussion about the manuscript, participants will receive a final phone call to acknowledge completion of involvement in the study.

Procedure
All data will be gathered from officers and their significant others via individual interview with the researcher, Pam Fackina. Interviews will be conducted in-person and separately with each member of the couple. Meetings will take place in a mutually agreed upon location that is private and quiet such as a space in a local public library, a private office at Seton Hall University, or in a private room in the officer’s department.

Participants will be asked about current job responsibilities, perceptions of stress, and how each deals with these issues. The following are examples of some of the questions that will be asked:

- How do participants recognize when significant others are experiencing stress?
- What do partner-participants see as job-related sources of stress that impact them as the officer’s significant other?
- How do participants define comfort?
What helps participants deal with stress associated with his/her job?
How do participants and their significant others talk about the job?
What do participants think the department can do to help officers and their families better deal with stress?

All participants will receive a list of support resources that have been developed specifically for law-enforcement officers and their families.

**Voluntary Participation**
Participation is completely voluntary, and participants are under no pressure to respond to the request to be involved in the study. There will be no negative consequences if a decision is made not to participate, if participants choose to end participation at any time, or if participants wish to reschedule an interview. This project is not affiliated with an officer-participant's department or any other law-enforcement agency or department.

**Anonymity and Confidentiality**
In this study, anonymity will not be possible because the researcher will meet with all participants in person. However, any information provided through the interview will be kept in confidence. Identities will not be revealed through the study, and names will be changed to protect participants' privacy. Audiotapes of interviews will be labeled with a numerical code. Any names (participants or others and also department names) will be deleted from the written transcript. The researcher will disclose voluntarily, without participant consent, information that would identify him/her as a participant in the research project only under the following circumstances: there are indications of current issues of child abuse, or elder abuse in the participant’s family, or that a participant is at risk for physical harm to himself/herself or to someone else.

Participants will receive a hardcopy of the interview transcript which will be mailed to the home or, if requested, an alternative location (for example a post office box or office). It is recommended that participants consider secure storage of the transcript while it is under review as well as who may have access to the transcript in the home or office as this may inadvertently compromise confidentiality.

**Interview**
Participants will be asked to participate in an individual, in-person interview which will last 1 to 2 hours. Although the researcher will have some general questions about participants experience of stress and coping, the discussion will be flexible enough to allow for additions or elaborations on what would be helpful for the researcher, and families who may benefit from this research, to know about these issues.

**Use of Audio Tapes**
As noted above, during the interview, participants will be audiotaped. Each completed tape will be coded with a number to protect confidentiality. The tapes will be stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s office. Access is available to the researcher only. Participants will retain the right to review the audiotapes and may request that the tapes
be destroyed on completion of the study. If this request is not made, tapes will be stored for a period of three years and then will be destroyed.

Records
All interview tapes will be transcribed by the researcher. Transcribed records of interviews will be kept in a locked cabinet to which only the primary researcher has access. Transcripts will be stored separately from tapes. Participants will have an opportunity to review his or her transcript and to provide clarifying or additional information. Electronic data will be stored only on a password-protected USB memory key. The project supervisor, Dr. Ben Beitin, at Seton Hall University may be asked by the researcher to review portions of records in support of analyzing the information for purposes of this study only. All records will be stored for a period of three years and then will be destroyed.

Risks
The current project is expected to present minimal risk to participants. The probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the project are not greater, in and of themselves, than those ordinarily encountered in daily life. Participants retain the right to choose to end the interview at any time with the option to reschedule at a later date or to end involvement with the research project with no negative consequences. Participants will have the opportunity to speak with the interviewer about the experiences of the interview. Should participants need assistance in obtaining support, the researcher will discuss how to access EAP or insurance and will also provide a list of easily accessible resources.

Benefits
The current study may not provide any direct benefit to participants in the process. There is no monetary compensation for being involved in this project. However, involvement may help other law-enforcement personnel, families, and supervisory staff understand the nature and impact of job-related stressors and ways to prevent, minimize, or intervene to address these. Even though interview transcripts will not be shared with anyone, participants are free to discuss the experience with those who are supportive as a member of the law-enforcement community, for example, a trusted partner, family member, friend, religious advisor, and workmates.

Contact Information
If there are any further questions or concerns about the study or if participants would like to learn about the results of the research, requests may be made to Pam Fackina, c/o Department of Professional Psychology and Family Therapy, College of Education and Human Services, Seton Hall University, 400 South Orange Ave., South Orange, NJ, 07079 or by calling (862) 377-1042. Participants may also contact the research advisor, Dr. Ben Beitin, at this same Seton Hall address or by phone at (973) 275-2856. Participants may also contact Dr. Mary Ruzicka, Director of the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board at (973) 313-6314.

Copy of Consent Form
Participants are asked to sign two (2) copies of this form. The researcher will keep one on file, stored in a locked file to which only the researcher has access. The key will be held separately from audiotapes and records to protect a participant’s privacy. One of the signed copies will be for participants to keep in case there are any questions about the study.

With the assistance of participants in this study, mental health and law-enforcement professionals may be able to get a better understanding of how men and women understand stress and coping in the law-enforcement community. This exploration will hopefully help to identify themes that will ultimately support law-enforcement families through focused assessment, prevention, and intervention.

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APPENDIX F

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

The following questions will be asked at the initial stages of the interview however for ease of data collection, the researcher will document verbal responses to the below questions.

1. How old are you? ______
2. How do you describe your ethnicity/culture? ____________________________
3. How do you describe your current relationship status:
   ___ Married
   ___ Partnered
4. How long have you been in this relationship? ____________________________
5. Do you have children? ___Yes  ___No
   How many? ____________________________
   How old are they? ____________________________
6. What is the highest grade of school you have completed?
   Completed high school ___
   Some college ___
   Completed college ___
   Some graduate school ___
   Completed graduate school ___
7. How do you identify your religious affiliation, if any? _______________________

LEO'S ONLY:
How many years have you been on the job? ____________________________
What is your current rank? ____________________________
What is the size of your department? ____________________________
How many hours a week do you typically work? ____________________________
Are you on shift work? ___YES  ___NO
If yes, how are your shifts scheduled? ____________________________

SO'S ONLY:
Are you working outside the home? ___YES  ___NO
If yes, what kind of work do you do? ____________________________
How many hours a week do you typically work? ____________________________
Are you on shift work? ___YES  ___NO
If yes, how are your shifts scheduled? ____________________________

Address for mailing transcript:
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

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APPENDIX G

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Introductory Statement (to be read to all participants):
This research has been developed to better understand how law-enforcement couples understand the nature and impact of job-related stress and also to explore the availability and use of coping resources to manage identified stressors. If at any time during our meeting today you become uncomfortable, you have the right to discontinue the interview and either to reschedule the interview for a later date or to withdraw from the project.

You will have an opportunity to process your experiences of the interview with me if you wish. You will also be asked to review the transcript of this interview for accuracy. Information shared in this interview will remain confidential with the following exceptions. If in the course of our meeting you indicate that there are current issues of child abuse, elder abuse, or that you are at risk for physical harm to yourself or to someone else, I am bound to intervene to ensure your or another individual’s safety through referral for treatment and/or report to the appropriate authority. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin?

QUESTIONS FOR LEO:
- How many years have you been a police officer?
- What is your current rank?
- How many hours a week do you usually work?
- Does your work include shift work? If yes, how are your shifts scheduled?
- How do you define stress?
- How do you recognize when you are experiencing stress?
- What do you see as job-related sources of stress?
- How do you think that [identified stressor] affects you?
- How does it affect your work?
- How long have you been with your significant other (SO)?
- Do you have children? If yes, how many and how old are they?
- Do you think [identified stressor] affects your (SO)? If so, how?
- How does it affect your relationship?
- Do you think it affects your children? If so, how?
- What helps you deal with stress?
- What do you think you can do to better deal with stress?
- What can your significant other do?
- How do you define comfort?
- What are some ways that you give and receive comfort from your SO?
- How do you define support?
- How do you recognize that your SO is supporting you?
- How do you and your SO talk about your job?
- Describe how you discuss the stress associated with work.
• What are some of the ways you and your SO talk about dealing with challenges of your work?
• What can your supervisor do to better assist you with stress?
• What can your department do to better assist you with stress?
• What are three of the most positive aspects about being involved in the law-enforcement community?

QUESTIONS FOR LEO’S SIGNIFICANT OTHER:
• How many hours a week does your SO usually work?
• How do you define stress?
• How do you recognize when SO is experiencing stress?
• How do you recognize when you are experiencing stress?
• What do you see as sources of stress in your SO’s job?
• How do you think this affects him/her?
• How do you think that [identified stressor] affects you?
• How does it affect your relationship?
• Do you think it affects your children? If so, how?
• What helps you deal with stress?
• What do you think you can do to better deal with stress?
• What can your SO do?
• How do you define comfort?
• What are some ways that you give and receive comfort from your SO?
• How do you define support?
• How do you recognize that your SO is supporting you?
• How do you and your SO talk about the job?
• Describe how you discuss the stress associated with work.
• What are some of the ways you and your SO talk about handling the challenges of the work?
• What do you think his/her supervisor can do to support your SO? To support your family?
• What do you think the department can do to support your SO? To support your family?
• What are three of the most positive aspects about being involved in the law-enforcement community?
APPENDIX H

RESOURCES FOR LAW-ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL

COP 2 COP

- Hotline: 1-866-COP -2COP
- Website: http://ubhc.umdnj.edu/cop2cop/main.htm
- E-Mail: cop2cop@umdnj.edu
- This program is administered by University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ), University Behavioral Healthcare (UBHC) to provide crisis intervention services to the law-enforcement community 24-hours a day/7-days a week. It is staffed by retired officers who are licensed Clinical Social Workers, known as Cop Clinicians, and specially trained Mental Health professionals, along with volunteer retired officers who are trained as peer supporters. Services offered include peer and clinical support services, clinical assessments, referrals, and critical incident stress management.

International Association of Women Police

- Website: http://www.iawp.org
- IAWP is a professional organization dedicated to the support and hiring of women in policing. The organization holds annual conferences and also offers resources related to the specific needs of women in the field.

National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives

- Website: http://www.nobleatl.org/
- NOBLE is a professional organization dedicated to the unification of Black Law Enforcement Officers at executive and command levels.
- The Organization serves its mission through research, taking an active role in legislation, liaising with other organizations, actively addressing racism in the field of criminal justice, developing communication techniques for increasing sensitivity to the needs of the black community, and facilitating the exchange of information and sharing of concerns of black police executives.

National Latino Peace Officers Association

- Edwin Maldonado, East Coast Vice President, Post Office Box 2534, Plainfield, NJ 07060
- Website: http://www.nlpoa.com
- The NLPOA is the largest Latino Law Enforcement Organization in the United States, with members representing Chiefs of Police, Sheriffs, Police Officers, Parole Agents, and Federal Officers at the local, state, and federal levels.
- The specific purposes of the organization are to eliminate prejudice and discrimination in the criminal justice system; particularly Law Enforcement, reduce community juvenile delinquency and lessen citizen tension in predominantly Latino communities.

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Law Enforcement Wellness Association, Inc.
• Phone: 541-935-2594
• Website: http://www.cophealth.com
• E-Mail: cophealth@aol.com
• This organization provides relevant resources for officers including peer support and suicide prevention training, articles and books.

New Jersey Fraternal Order of Police
• Phone: 609-599-1222 (Headquarters)
• Website: http://www.njfop.org
• E-Mail: Info@NJfop.org (General Information)
• The FOP is comprised of active and retired law-enforcement officers of all ranks and branches of government. Members work side by side to improve the profession and serve the public through a commitment to monitoring working conditions of law-enforcement officers and the safety of those they serve through education, legislation, information, community involvement, and employee representation. The Website offers links to various lodges, associations, legal resources, state and federal sites of interest.

New Jersey State Policemen's Benevolent Association, Inc.
• Website: http://njspba.com/
• Phone: 1-888-4NJSPBA (Main Office)
• The PBA has over 350 local chapters throughout the state representing municipal, county, state, and federal employees. The Website offers links to local chapters, various law-enforcement sites, U.S. and New Jersey government agencies.

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RESOURCES FOR FAMILY MEMBERS

Loveacop
Website: http://www.loveacop.org; offers a closed e-mail discussion list for spouses, both women and men, of current, former and retired law-enforcement officers with the goal of bridging the gap between isolation and community. The list works to provide a secure forum by which spouses can trade their secrets of coping, develop new friendships, and partake in the give-and-take spirit in the community.

Police Families
Website: http://www.policefamilies.com; the purpose of this Web Site is to provide law-enforcement families and underserved law-enforcement communities with essential psychological information and improved access to family support services. It offers online educational workshops, a section “Just for Kids,” chat rooms, message boards, and family resiliency resources.

Police Wives
Website: http://www.policewives.org - offers on-line information and resources for law-enforcement families.
Police Wives Online
Website: http://www.policewivesonline.com; PWO is an organization, established in April of 2005, dedicated to offering support and resources to the wives, families, and significant others of law-enforcement officers. PWO's goal is to provide police families with the most up-to-date resources, including links to a variety of subjects, and articles written by psychologists and experienced police wives. It also offers public and private/verified message boards for members to reach out to other men and women who understand the unique lifestyle of a police officer's wife.

Wives Behind The Badge
Website: http://www.wivesbehindthebadge.org; developed and is maintained by a group of police wives who offer support for other police wives.

BOOKS:
I love a cop: What police families need to know (Revised ed.), 2007, by Ellen Kirschman
In harm's way: Help for the wives of military men, police, EMTs & firefighters, 2005, by Aphrodite Matsakis
### APPENDIX I.

**Summary Themes Chart**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Quote</th>
<th>Researcher's Reaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definitions of Stress</td>
<td>Psychological pressures that you’re unable to let go off or deal with in a perceived normal manner.</td>
<td>Assumption that there is a normal way to deal with pressures. Identifying that pressures are internally generated – possible implications for self-blame.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anything that causes me anxiety or confusion...feeling tense.</td>
<td>Recognition of emotional consequences to stress, addressing emotional, cognitive, and physical areas.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life’s complications...life’s annoyances.</td>
<td>Alludes to acceptance of life as having stressful moments; sense of acceptance.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Sources of Stress**

**Duty Stress**

| Unpredictability | But things pop up every now and then to test you. So, the stress of not knowing, I | Though this does not reflect LEO concerns about safety, the variability of day-to-day |
guess, what five minutes may be a source of
from now will bring.
pressure.

I always try and take the Not taking for granted that
necessary precautions. I go routine details will be
to work with a vest...even if predictable.
I'm doing...traffic.

I guess it's more like a Acknowledging the
reaction for us. We just react unknown. Unpredictability
to the situation. You really and variability of job
don't think what could requires reaction to events.
happen.
Officers may not be able to
fully prepare for every
event.

Critical incidents Exposure to deaths and
It's just one of those--you see injuries perceived as part of
this kid, 17, 16 years old, job, but may still impact;
and you look at him and it's a most officers considering
life lost...the gore of it impact in short-term with
affecting me that night. some form of resolution
over time.
I think early on in your career it affects you 'cause you it's not something that you've seen or maybe not even are expected to see as people. I feel in the 14 years I've become numb to all my— or maybe they're compartmentalized or something.

**Family violence**

Sometime you get a call, it involves a child or something that gets to you a little bit... whenever you get a child that's abused or not taken care of properly.

The things that bother me the most are the type of calls that affect children and family. It bothers me when you hear domestic violence cases; it

**Compartmentalization**

versus numbing; active use of skill versus avoidance. Ability to integrate may have more positive outcomes.

**LEO’s who are parents may be especially impacted by child-abuse cases in relating to safety and protection of their own children.**

**Officers reflecting on their own relationships; in personal/clinical experiences, researcher aware of frequent feelings**
bothers me when you hear of frustration for LEO’s child-abuse cases. returning frequently to same families with ongoing violence and possible lack of understanding as to why women stay in abusive relationships.

Why would I want to get Shift in officers’ view of married if that is the end how realistic healthy result. That came home with repeated exposure to me and started to affect my domestic violence personality.

Scheduling [Court] always ends up on Needing to attend to work my days off. And they might issues outside of designated give it to me at 4:00 in the shifts. Less days off further afternoon, so it’s like, “Oh, impacting officers’ ability my God. What am I gonna for self-care and time to do?” I get out in the attend to personal morning, and I gotta be back commitments. here at 4:00 on my day-off, so my whole day is screwed.
There's a lot more like family functions going on in the weekend. You have to miss more than you would if you had like a regular dayshift or something like that.

I feel healthier not working three shifts. I noticed that I feel stronger. In the gym, I have more energy. I just feel better. When I work at the midnight shifts, you almost have like digestive problems. Your organs almost hurt, and I just feel healthy and normal now.

Organizational Stress

Poor Communication  They'll all tell me different things that they want to have done not knowing what the
  Lack of communication among multiple supervisors, creating

Scheduling impacting officers' time with family, missing family and children's activities.

Reflecting on impact of shifts on physical health. Supports research about shift work and physical problems. Officers may be feeling, but also functioning better, when not on shift work. Consider whether consistent shifts, even if midnights, perceived as less damaging than rotating.
other guy has asked me to do. frustration for officers, and being in the middle.

Well, the patrol captain among supervisor staff doesn’t talk to the detective creating distance and captain... because they don’t disconnections and using talk, they just, at that point, avoidance as coping won’t even come up or mechanism.

discuss.

And it gets a little bit Command staff taking annoying 'cause it’s whoever limited responsibility.
feels like taking the Subordinates unclear as to supervisor position for hierarchy; chronic lack of whatever you're doing at that consistency in knowing day.

Lack of Support I think the most stressful part whom to report to. Concrete supports lacking of my job is probably the even with basic equipment department itself, not having needs; consider how this the utilities and the things may impact service needed to do the job. delivery and safety of LEO's.
We really have no training at our department. Under training perceived to be unsupportive. This may create potential for legal implications if training is not current.

I guess not even as much as the [incident] but the way the department handled it. Feeling unsupported by department. Expectations not being met.

In-Fighting

When the younger guys see supervisors are the ones creating the problems and then supervisors who do nothing but bash the chief and bash the upper echelon, I think that tends to sour you a little bit.

Supervisors not supporting command is poor modeling for younger officers. May be creating cynicism even early in officers' careers.

You're either a Hatfield or a McCoy. And if you're the one sitting on the fence in the middle, they're just both officers feeling caught in the middle and may have difficulties maintaining objectivity due to constant
taking shots at you until you fall on one side of the fence.

But because of the in-fighting and people not getting along with each other, we constantly take steps back.

Lack of respect can undermine the hierarchy and chain of command.

Unrealistic Demands
You have to go there, talk--get on scene, talk to the people, find out what's going on, determine if whether or not you have to arrest the people or there's just gonna be a report. You got 20 minutes to figure it out.

Impact on volume of calls on officers' ability to comprehensively do job.

And sometimes tasks are given to him where it's impossible to give a 100%.

Spouse perceiving demands to be unrealistic based on LEO's sharing information about work.

Systems Issues
Potential for Legal I'm trying to produce what I Officers aware of potential
have to, so that the department is covered, so that if we get sued, I can show them that they were trained in this area and stuff like that.

K9 safety, and if he bites people, obviously, he’s gonna have problems...legal issues. You don’t want him to get jammed up for something that you, as a handler, should be able to control.

Negative Media

i do get very agitated in watching the news. It just sets me off. You’re not gonna get a fair shake.

for getting sued if tasks are not handled appropriately.

Specialized units maintaining increased awareness of potential.

Officers perceiving the media to not represent police well. Source of anger for officers even if not their department. Suggestive of the camaraderie.
And I don’t know if you follow the newspaper, but if [my department] isn’t in the newspaper for something negative every week or two, it’s what’s going on.

But you just do that one stupid thing in the wrong person’s video on it whether it’s taken out of context or they’re clipping out what they want to pull from that story and all that five years of work or ten years of work can be ruined in two minutes.

Impact of Stress

On the LEO

You start to feel overwhelmed.

I guess he’s more short-

Officers identifying emotional, cognitive, behavioral implications to
tempered than normal or quiet at times.

Just not as social as usual,
shorter with his answers or just not happy in general.

I get forgetful a lot...in the last month.

Two LEO's made similar statements specific to changes in job performance; demonstrating insight as to how stress can impact mental alertness and functioning.

Pent-up nervous energy...agression and nervousness, stuff like that.

One participant's identification of aggression and having significant implications for the community and also for relationships in the family.

On the SO Safety Concerns
She's constantly worried about just the danger aspect of it, the

Spouses' awareness of potential for danger in police
nature of the work. work. LEO’s and SO’s alluding to some degree of
Because like he’s a police officer, and obviously it’s a dangerous job, so I always worry about him.
They don’t know what it’s like to get a phone call at four o’clock in the morning, and he’s not home.

Primary Caregiver
That rotational schedule, it proves challenging. I mean, it puts some added pressure on [wife] to run around and make sure she gets the kids everywhere she has to be.

Sleep Patterns
She is not a big fan of my not being here overnight. So, she sometimes has trouble sleeping while I’m on my work on my midnight shift.

SO’s living with “the startle” of calls when officer is at work.
Both working and non-working spouses taking on most responsibility for household and childcare; related also to officers who are on shift work or 2nd/3rd shifts.

Spouses’ discomfort with being home alone while spouse at work. Spouse experiencing decreased sense of comfort/safety.
It was like—it's kind of like my body is on his schedule. He's walking in the house at 1:00, so then I'd be up for, like, an hour.

On the Children

LEO Absent

It might bother them that I'm not at a particular sporting event or a particular event at school.

Safety Concerns

The little one will tell me what happens if something happens to Daddy.

Spouse body clock, routines as disrupted as LEO's—consider whether spouses experience same consequences in response to varying schedules.

Recognition that children may be impacted when parent not available for activities.

Children having awareness of potential for danger.

Parents recognizing children aware and making decisions to protect.

Parents choosing to educate children about guns; giving them concrete information with experiences.
that they know what he does,
just let them know how
dangerous it is.

He’s not allowed to have any
Parents actively choosing
non-violent toys. May
toy guns.
decrease potential for child’s
comfort in handling
weapons yet possibly
peaking interest at the same
time.

We talk to him what a gun is.

“If you ever see this in anybody
Personal safety concerns of
else’s house, don’t touch it.”
having weapon in the home

“Oh, I know.” But you can tell
and access to weapons in
it to a six-year old, and he’ll
others homes. Parents being
say, “I know, I know, I
proactive regarding
understand.” But then when
education about safety.
he’s presented with it in
Recognizing that child’s age
somebody else’s house without
influences what is shared.
a parent in that room, you never
know what’s gonna happen.
Adjust to schedule

Yeah, so it's just--it's just hard
on--with like when he's tired,
and you could see he's tired,
and then the kids are like off the
wall. And you can't keep them
quiet.

I tried bringing [child] to my
mother's, so he could sleep.

Families having challenges
to manage children, so that
LEO can sleep during the
day.

Using supports to help in
managing children.

You have to learn to be flexible
if you had to work Christmas.

Well, Christmas--the 26th is
Christmas for us. We just
change it.

Recognizing work impacts
holidays. Children may
celebrate at different times,
so parent can be there.

Irritability

When he's stressed, he yells at
the girls for every little thing.

But when--yeah, it's like a
certain look that he gives me.
And I realize, "Uh-oh, I'm
actually scaring him," and that's
not cool.

Both LEO's and SO's
describing tendency to short-
temperedness; mood

affecting how LEO's are
talking to their children.

Considering impacts on
children.
Communication:

Less disclosure about critical incidents: And we get fatal accidents of young people, and you come home and you talk about it just for the sake of letting it out to someone.

Officers recognize need to express challenging or extraordinary situations in some way.

I wouldn’t share with her. I guess if something happens that doesn’t happen weekly, monthly, or yearly for us, something that’s a major event, I will share it with her. Because I know that she doesn’t wanna hear like the more grotesque stuff that you see and everything out there.

Officers are less likely to share routine or mundane events. Likely that spouse may initiate dialogue if aware of event through media or alternative source.

I said I wanted to not like—not that I like those stories but I’m interested in those stories, and SO’s Interest in Job he says it’s not something that he wants to put in my brain that Spouses recognizing that LEO’s are trying to protect
I should be thinking about them, though maintain interest in hearing about situations their loved ones deal with. Goal maybe finding balance – clinical implications. LEO’s trying to find appropriate ways to share about work. Developing life lessons for children based on their experiences.

Individual Coping:

Personal Values/Beliefs
I think I’ve always been fairly good at keeping home and work at work. LEO’s striving to not allow intersection of professional-personal work lives.

Boundaries

I’m not living, dying, eating, breathing blue. This is a job. Through dialogue there is awareness and recognition that this is not always accomplished or
the back door. even a realistic
expectation. Also, consider how job-
home issues can be mutually influential,
not just unidirectionally

Family-First Attitude  Remember what's most important, your family.

I mean, our lives are the kids upstairs, and that's really it.

But, again, I think it's partly because I just see a bigger picture in life.

My main focus is the people in this house, and I go to work, and I kinda have the attitude that it is what it is.

Philosophy supports recognition that officers have multiple relational roles in addition to identity as an LEO. This also may support efforts to maintain the work-home boundary.

This quote represents family-first but also the LEO's reflection on his personality through a capacity to see beyond the
I'm a mom first; I'm a cop second and contextualize his immediate situation and experience.

This participant succinctly states the priorities of her roles which also supports the importance of her parenting role.

Use of humor

I think cops tend to use humor to overcome the things that we deal with, [and civilians] certainly wouldn't think it was funny. It is definitely used to deal with things that maybe the average citizen is not gonna see in their lifetime.

Leo's describing use of gallows humor with peers; may also serve as building camaraderie, informal debriefing mechanism.

So, I try to keep my work stuff to a minimum in the house unless I'm making Tying into the work-home.
a joke about something or somebody she knows from work or something like that.

Using humor with an SO;

I’ll call her, and I’ll say,

“Well, I’m still alive.”

It’s a morbid sense of humor. You know,

“Oh, I’m still alive.

You’re stuck with me for a little while longer.

I’m still here.”

Spirituality/Religion

There is some stress relief in the fact that when I am having a hard time, in a prayer I will say, like,

just help me get through this time, you know,

point me in the direction I need to go.

Prayer functioning as stress reliever. Possibly acts as mechanism for acceptance and positive self-talk.

Requesting guidance from

Just comfort and speaking to higher power.
God and maybe ask Him to give you strength, knowledge, courage. Officers may feel less isolated if higher power is with them to guide.

I pray through the day, ask and talk to God. I think it will let you just get the stuff out, the stuff that’s bouncing around in your head. Dialogue with God as comforting and helping decrease rumination.

Physical Exercise It’s just an escape for forty-five minutes. Using exercise to get away and decompress from work day.

Just gives me a chance to unwind.

I still play quite a bit of hockey Maintaining physical exercise, but also spending time with peers who share leisure.

Focusing on Positives And it provides a pretty comfortable life for me, Financial security identified as important. Only
for myself and my family. LEO’s identified this as a positive – consider how this may tie in to male identity as provider.

There is something egotistically lifting about doing a CPR save on somebody or something. I mean you feel good about yourself at the end of that day. Officers recognize they make direct impact on others’ lives while also secondarily feeling good about themselves.

The feeling of just doing a respectable job, doing a job that I could come home and be proud of, that my kids could look up and say, “Oh, he’s got a good job, and he’s doing a good thing.” Officers feeling sense of pride in the work that they do. Seems to fit in with value system of community service, helping others, upholding the law.

I think I’m proud of my
husband that he does Spouses also feeling sense
what he really likes. of pride in

You’re usually pretty tight with association with
your co-workers.

LEO and
community.

I would say some of the Sense of brother/sisterhood
comaraderie that can be which alludes to
developed in this job, I sense of family.
find to be very Feeling supported by
rewarding. And I’d like colleagues.
to say in my current job, Recognizing
I can look at least at five
importance of trust
of my co-workers and and comfort in
say, “You know, what? knowing supports
These guys I could available.
count on if, God forbid,
the worst thing happen
to me tomorrow.

Relational Strategies

Spouse Support My wife is home with our son This quote was echoed
all day. Just the fact that several times through
I come home in a house the project. SO’s
that’s in a good shape
and every thing’s—I
mean, every thing’s
basically done. When I
come home from work,
it’s like playtime for me
and my son and stuff
like that. So, it’s very
nice and I respect it. She
runs the house.

identified themselves
as supporting in this
way while LEO’s
appear to have
appreciation and
respect for their
spouses’ roles. All
of the non-LEO SO’s
in the study were
female so consider
gender roles and
expectations in
carrying out these
responsibilities.

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<th>Couple-Time</th>
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<td>just run your life and run your marriage, and it will just be that, and that’s it. And then we both noticed that we missed our time alone. But we, he, especially, always wants to make</td>
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Couples frequently identified need for alone time, even if this was a few hours to a few days. Most seemed proactive in taking steps to include this in their routines, and, even
sure we have our alone time.

when things get busy.

There is awareness this is important in maintaining the marital relationship.

We try to go out, like, without the kids once in a while.

Like out to dinner or to the movies and something while my parents or her parents watch the kids.

This also engages social supports to help couples with children.

Use of Social Supports
She listens, and she helps me, and she’s supporting me too. She will say, “It’s gonna be good. Don’t worry. You have friends, so you’re not alone.”

Use of friends to cheerlead, helping in maintaining hope during stressful times.

Me and my wife went out a couple of times with the guys and their wives.

Spending time with other LEO families. May also serve to build sense of community.
Some of us are in the same boat,
and some of us aren’t.        For the SO’s, finding others
But then my one               who can relate.
girlfriend’s husband was      Relating a
in Iraq for two years.        connection with
                               military families and
                               alluding to fears
                               about physical
                               safety.