THE UTILIZATION OF EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS IN LAW ENFORCEMENT: BREAKING THE STIGMA

by

Kristi Shalton

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

2023

THE UTILIZATION OF EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS IN LAW ENFORCEMENT: BREAKING THE STIGMA

by

Kristi Shalton

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

2023

APPROVED BY:

Larry D. Anthony, Ph.D.
Committee Chair

David A. Conn, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Fred Newell, D.M.
Department Chair for Public Safety and Administration

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this grounded theory study is to not only describe and understand what current resources exist for officers after experiencing a critical incident during the course of their job duties and responsibilities, but to also develop an understanding of their unique needs and how the stigma that often coincides with the desire to ask for assistance from such resources, affects officer mental health and wellness and ultimately, their ability to effectively and efficiently do their job. The theory guiding this study is grounded theory, a methodology first used in the 1960s by Glaser and Strauss, which incorporates interactionism and descriptive statistics and seeks to construct theory about issues of importance in peoples' lives. The purpose is to examine the availability and effectiveness of such Employee Assistance Programs for officers at the Town of Culpeper Police Department in Culpeper, Virginia. Data collection was obtained through anonymous surveys of patrol and command-level officers to support current research showing that mental health and wellness programs and resources for police are in need of improvement.

Keywords: Employee assistance programs, critical incident stress, law enforcement

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my three amazing children—my eternal motivators in life and reason for working so hard; and to my parents, for always believing in me and having my back, even when my endeavors seem way out of reach. Dad, I know you're looking down smiling!

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to Chief Chris Settle, Deputy Chief Timothy Chilton, and the hard-working officers of the Culpeper Police Department, without whom this research would not have been possible, and to the members of my committee, for their invaluable guidance and many hours of dedication to this dissertation.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Abbreviations and Acronyms

ASPEP – Annual survey of public employee and payroll

BJS – Bureau of Justice Statistics

CISD – Critical Incident Stress Debriefing

CISM – Critical Incident Stress Management

COPS – Community-Oriented Policing Services

CPD – Culpeper Police Department, Culpeper, Virginia

CSLLEA – Census of State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies

DOJ – Department of Justice

EAP – Employee assistance program

FBI – Federal Bureau of Investigation

IACP – International Association of Chiefs of Police

ICISF – International Critical Incident Stress Foundation

LEO – Law enforcement officer

LODD – Line of duty death

OPM – Office of Personnel Management

PSP – Professional peer supporter

QMHP – Qualified Mental Health Professional

UCR – Uniform Crime Report

VAPSA – Virginia Peer Support Association

WHO – World Health Organization

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

While employee assistance programs (EAP) have been utilized in the workplace in the United States for many decades, it is only in recent years that the often-sensitive nature of critical incident stress affecting those in the law enforcement profession has been recognized. Law enforcement officers inherently experience unique stressors that many other professions do not, thus creating the need for specific resources. Research suggests that EAPs have existed within the field of law enforcement in the United States since the early 1940s, but these programs and resources that exist within the policing community have been highlighted in recent years as more emphasis is being placed on officer mental health and wellness, as it relates to job performance. According to Attridge (2019):

> Worldwide, common mental health disorders affect more than 300 million people and a majority (70 percent) of these people are employed. Most mental disorders are mild or moderate in their level of impairment and clinical severity, which allows most of these people to work. This translates into about 15 percent of the total workforce who have a milder form of mental disorders and another 5 percent who suffer from a more serious mental or psychiatric disorder (p. 622).

Training standards, policies, and best practices for law enforcement officers and their employing agencies throughout the United States are constantly evolving as legislation and the political climate can vary from year to year. Researching the availability and effectiveness of employee assistance and support programs that are readily accessible to these individuals, especially after a critical incident, as a means of understanding how officers and law enforcement professionals can effectively manage the daily stressors of their job, is essential.

Employees suffering with stress at a workplace try to withdraw themselves from stressors in terms of high turnover and absenteeism from work (Daniel, 2019). This can result in poor performance, waste of operational resources, and create other obstacles for a productive workplace. Understanding the stigma that often surrounds officers' perceptions of seeking the services of these programs is crucial.

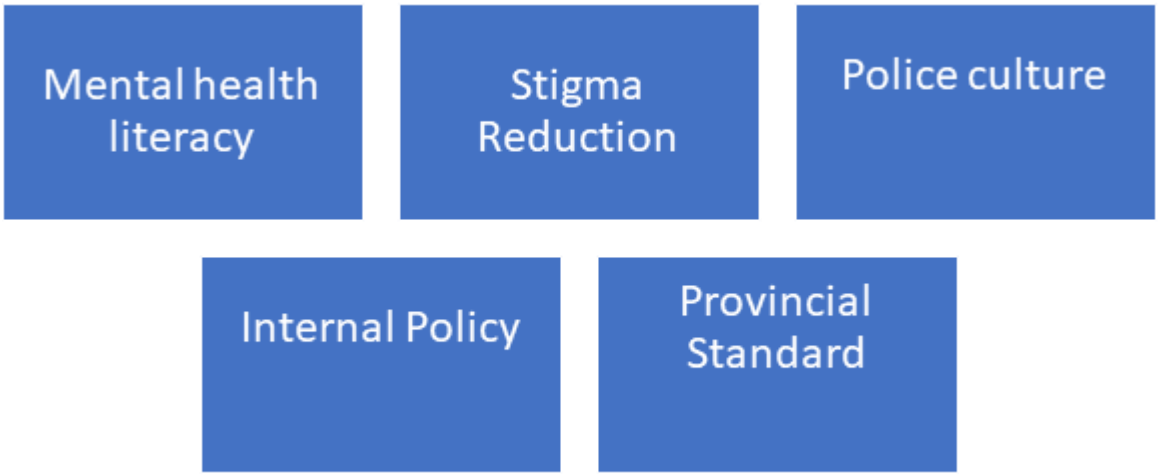
Background

While there has been significant focus in recent years on the importance of increased training and overall efforts to better equip law enforcement officers to deal with the daily stressors that are unique and inherent to their profession, there are often questions as to whether these programs have a real-world impact on officers and their lives, as well as on their departments or agencies. No matter the department size or what level of government (federal, state, or local), officers face daily, unparalleled stressors that many other professions will never encounter. Law enforcement officers have historically been required to perform many functions within the scope of their jobs, which often equates to protecting and serving the public in the role of a social worker, guidance counselor, and impartial peacekeeper (Craddock & Telesco, 2022). While on their surface these roles do not sound especially taxing, they often come with a hefty emotional price tag. Police are front-row witnesses to horrific atrocities including catastrophic natural disasters and mass casualty incidents and are often the first to arrive on the scene of vehicular deaths and trauma, child abuse and neglect, and acts of domestic violence (Craddock & Telesco, 2022).

There has been a steady stream of research conducted over the last several decades pertaining to the psychological impact of critical incidents on law enforcement officers, dating back to the early 1980s. Early research in this area focused on salary, shift work, administrative

hierarchy, job-related conflicts, and crises that occurred within the scope of the job of policing (Craddock & Telesco, 2022). Although the literature has evolved significantly, stress levels and the overall well-being of police officers have traditionally been associated with various physiological factors such as lack of exercise, high blood pressure, and elevated cortisol levels (which can lead to weight gain, headaches, irritability, and other health issues) due to grueling shift work, as well as other factors inherent to a high-intensity profession, where individuals sometimes experience low-levels of control (Milliard, 2020). As a result, the majority of research on stress and its impacts on officer mental health and wellness has primarily focused on the physiological factors and the overall importance of health and fitness programs. Increasing rates of post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, and other mental health issues and disorders arising after stressful, critical incidents, however, have recently led researchers to look at other stressors that are intrinsic in the policing profession, and often, what can be improved upon (Milliard, 2020). She suggested five areas to improve the legitimacy and risk management programs.

Figure 1 Improvement areas



Note: Model developed by Millard (2020, p.4). From Utilization and impact of peer-support programs on police officers' mental health. *Frontiers in Psychology*. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7381167/

It is important to identify what is currently working and how sworn officers deal with critical incident stress, what can be improved upon, as well as practical methods to implement positive changes in police culture to break the stigma associated with officers asking for help after a traumatic event from information gained through this research.

Situation to Self

Mental health and wellness among law enforcement officers has been at the forefront of current events, literature, and research for the last several years for good reason. Law enforcement officers are expected to protect and serve their respective communities but often, seem to avoid taking care of themselves. As a professional working in the criminal justice field, the motivation for conducting the research study is to better articulate why stigmas associated with asking for help in working through a particularly traumatizing event or incident exist for this specific population, and what employee assistance programs and similar resources can improve upon to allow officers to more freely utilize these services to improve themselves without the fear of being labeled.

The study's primary philosophical assumptions consist of epistemological principles, in that truth, belief, and justification are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for knowledge of facts. In this study, officers' perceptions, and their experiences with critical incident stress while on the job, are likely to guide and/or influence their beliefs about the effectiveness of their agency's EAP and mental health resources. Similarly, a constructivism paradigm is most relevant

in that its primary goal is to understand a specific phenomenon from the experiences or angles of the participants.

Problem Statement

Although they have existed since the 1940s, employee assistance programs across the country tend to vary greatly and the overall problem seems to be law enforcement officers' lack of utilization for critical incident stress endured while on the job. Some EAPs and resources can be external, where an officer is referred to a specific doctor, support group, or organization that has little affiliation to his or her employing agency, while others can be internal, where resources and assistance can be found by walking a short distance down the hall of their office building. Mental health services are typically underutilized among law enforcement, and the trends in officers' care-seeking attitudes and behaviors may point to a surprising willingness to engage with mental health services and may be instructive for improving the accessibility of services (Hofer et al., 2021). Both internal and external EAP programs have evolved significantly since their early days of implementation and still exist today, but addressing mental health within the law enforcement profession comes with its own particularly unique set of hurdles that cannot be discounted when examining these programs and resources. This is an area of research that has only begun in more recent years, as the necessity for the implementation of officer wellness programs has been acknowledged. Although EAPs have long been known to be "good for business" in the private sector, historically, many law enforcement officers do not trust the confidentiality of EAPs and resources often available to them for fear that seeking assistance with harm their job (Goldstein, 2006). These programs have been established within law enforcement communities with the intention of assisting officers and civilians employed by police departments and law enforcement agencies in dealing with emotional, often traumatic

events, stress management, and a wide range of other topics that frequently creep up in the policing field, but there is often an extreme reluctance to utilize what is available (Goldstein, 2006). A program being established and then merely existing on paper (like in policy or an agency's General Orders) is an initial step but offering and subsequently promoting and encouraging officers to take advantage of such programs, however, can be a difficult task. In many police departments and law enforcement agencies around the country, there exists a negative connotation associated with an officer asking for or seeking assistance after being involved in a particularly stressful or traumatic incident. Current literature and research deem the stigma of law enforcement officers needing to be "tough" in all circumstances to be very real, meaning it is not always easy (and can sometimes feel impossible, depending on the circumstances within an employing agency) for an officer or law enforcement professional to come forward and admit they are struggling on some level.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this grounded theory study to is understand critical incident stress and the stigma surrounding law enforcement officers and how they correlate to the effectiveness and utilization of employee assistance programs for the sworn officers at the Town of Culpeper Police Department. At this stage in the research, employee assistance programs will generally be defined as any mental health and wellness initiative, program, or resource that exists to combat the stressors inherent to policing. The theory guiding this study is grounded theory as it involves the meticulous application of specific methods and processes but assists in the development of the relationship between law enforcement officers' seeking help for critical incident stress, why many do not, and the overall effectiveness of these programs. Glaser and Strauss are recognized as the founders of grounded theory, which incorporates interactionism and descriptive statistics.

Significance of the Study

It may seem as though the implementation of an EAP that is specifically designed for officers could help solve these issues, but it is certainly not always that simple. It is true that if officers feel that the professionals they are seeking assistance from truly understand the nature of their work and are in tune with their particular needs that they may feel more comfortable in disclosing their account of the event(s), but it still does not solve the issue of working past the initial stigma of seeking and accepting the help in the first place. Milot (2019) states:

> Increasing the degree of worker familiarity with EAPs could reduce perceptions of stigma and increase utilization rates. Such activities might involve the effective communication of information pertaining to the functioning and uses/potential benefits of EAP counseling services, emphasizing them as a confidential and non-judgmental resource to help address personal problems and attain well-being (p. 13).

Existing research shows that having programs and resources that are clear about their confidentiality and are easily accessible are more likely to be successful, but that command staff should also be promoting the idea that seeking the help of an EAP or private therapist does not signal that an officer should be labeled broken or in need of fixing, but rather acknowledges that the psychological strain of working as a law enforcement officer may cause family problems or trigger other issues (Kirschman, 2001). It is necessary to further examine critical incidents and psychological trauma (often long-term) that can be particularly detrimental to officers' overall well-being, as well as job performance, and ultimately, how that correlates to their willingness to seek help. Critical incidents involving any use of force, especially the use of deadly force, the death of civilians, or other catastrophic disaster, can all be extremely harmful to an individual's mental health, whether immediately after the event, long-term, or both, so establishing programs

that are accessible and truly set up for an officer to better cope with the emotional and psychological trauma, as well as break the barrier of remaining "tough at all times," is absolutely essential. Promoting trust, understanding, and a more positive police culture goes hand-in-hand with the establishment and implementation of these programs. It is not enough to simply have an EAP available if it is not promoted, and/or encouraged within the department. Even the best wellness programs will not attract police officers if they fear that taking part can or will be used against them (Careless & Zemlock, 2022).

Peer support programs are a unique tool that often coincide with internal employee assistance programs established within police departments and other law enforcement agencies across the United States. These programs, though newer than traditional EAPs consisting of just counseling with an external provider, can offer immediate assistance to an officer after experiencing a traumatic event or critical incident, such as a violent assault, gruesome vehicular accident, or active shooter event. While many models of such "in-house" programs show promise of success, obstacles still exist such as an overall culture of reluctance to seek help, and/or denial that help is actually needed (Goldstein, 2006). This is common throughout police culture in the United States, where many officers report feeling the need to always appear "tough" or have the ability to get through any trauma with ease. In many areas across the country, departments are working closely with mental health professionals to reverse this culture and the stigma associated, in order to encourage the utilization of such assistance programs to better the well-being of not only the individual officer, but of the department or agency as a whole. To understand the potential for success, however, it is necessary to understand what these types of programs and resources can offer and just how they can help in real-world settings. Many agencies are beginning to develop initiatives or hire outside consultants to

develop programs specific to that particular agency, in order to figure out how to best implement the benefits to its officers, so studying and researching these is crucial. Often, acknowledging that the stigma exists is the first critical step for employing agencies and command staff.

First responder-specific employee assistance programs have different needs and goals than those comparable to established programs in the corporate or business world due to the great variation in the overall nature of the professions. The law enforcement culture of aversion to mental health assistance has existed for many years and is still very present in many areas around the country and is often the reason behind officers' hesitation to capitalize on the services available. Police officers and first responders may see themselves as independent or feel that there is a constant need to be in emotional control, no matter what critical incident(s) they may respond to during the course of their duties (Wilcox, 2021). Many officers, especially those who are not new to the job, may feel that reaching out or accepting assistance is a sign of weakness. This often causes these individuals to feel extremely reluctant to seek professional help, even when it may be clear to others, like family members or friends, that they really need it (Wilcox, 2021). A large part of this problem stems from the long-standing stigma surrounding the law enforcement profession that all officers should be able to navigate any situation thrown at them, no matter how stressful or traumatic, simply because it is a part of the job. Research suggests that this stigma is often caused by perceptions of officers themselves, as many have been conditioned to be strong, self-reliant, and fearless. Many still believe that asking for help or acknowledging that they are struggling, however, is an admission that they are not those things and fellow officers may think they are not able to handle the responsibilities and pressures of the job (Long, 2019).

Research Questions

1. How are EAPs utilized in your agency?
2. How have EAPs and resources offered to officers within your agency evolved since you began employment with the agency?
3. How can EAPs help break the mental health stigma surrounding officers?
4. How do critical incidents affect the mental health of officers?
5. How did you respond to a critical incident while on the job?

Definitions

1. *Employee assistance program (EAP)*- A voluntary, work-based program that offers free and confidential assessments, short-term counseling, referrals, and follow-up services to employees who have personal and/or work-related problems. EAPs address a broad and complex body of issues affecting mental and emotional well-being, such as alcohol and other substance abuse, stress, grief, family problems, and psychological disorders. EAP counselors also work in a consultative role with managers and supervisors to address employee and organizational challenges and needs. Many EAPs are active in helping organizations prevent and cope with workplace violence, trauma, and other emergency response situations ("Assistance Program," 2021).

2. *Stress* - The means by which the body's coping mechanism adapts to external stimuli and changes in the surrounding environment. Different people will experience varying symptoms based on their degree of stress and their body's natural response (Davis, 2023).

3. *Law enforcement officer* - Individuals responsible for keeping the peace, preventing crimes, and serving the communities in which they work; these individuals are generally vested by the legislating state with police power or authority (Blanco, 2017).

Summary

Employee assistance programs have existed in the United States for multiple decades and were first implemented as a means of coping with the reduction in productivity that occurred due to individuals' consumption of alcohol while on the job in the 1940s. While this was the norm during that period, employers recognized the need for certain employees to obtain additional assistance if they wanted to continue their employment with the company or corporation. EAPs have certainly evolved a great deal since then and have become extremely prevalent in the fields which present some of the most highly stressful careers that an individual can attain—namely, that of a law enforcement officer. Today's EAPs and wellness programs are widespread and include training and development, individual counseling and psychiatry, financial planning, marital counseling, and even the permitted use of gym time and physical exercise during many shifts in some departments and agencies. Only in the last 20 years have law enforcement executives and professionals begun to recognize the absolute need for these programs, as the rates of officer suicides and officer-involved shootings have been on the rise in many areas of the country. The purpose of this research is to discover how effective these programs are for the men and women that serve their communities daily, especially after a traumatic event occurs.

Private organizations in the corporate world have long embraced the notion that EAPs are "good for business" because employees struggling with substance abuse or other mental health problems or issues are generally not productive employees, and are certainly not effective police officers, as is the primary focus of this research. Obtaining assistance helps not only the individual employee that may be silently suffering, but also the organization/department as a whole (Goldstein, 2006). It is already known that one of the most stressful jobs is that of a law enforcement officer, yet many of these individuals express great reluctance to use EAPs

(Goldstein, 2006). The scope of this research entails examining the *why* of that concept and seeks to determine what improvements can be made to ensure that our nation's officers are truly able to obtain the resources that so many can benefit from or are already in desperate need of. It is also important to analyze the police culture that exists in employing agencies around the country, but also at the local level for the purposes of this study, to determine just how prevalent the negative connotation associated with recognizing the need for, and ultimately asking for assistance, is. Additionally, it is vital to analyze how such programs and resources potentially assist in the reduction of retribution after an officer does decide to seek help from an EAP or similar resource. In short, these programs will only work and be successful in the future if police command-level staff enable them to, and the research conducted at the Town of Culpeper Police Department, based on epistemological assumptions, examines this phenomenon as well.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The Literature Review provides additional, supporting information on critical incident stress inherent to the policing profession, as well as how the evolution of employee assistance programs specific to law enforcement have been implemented to help break the stigma associated with officers' utilization of resources and EAPs subsequent to a traumatic event. Existing literature on the presence of critical incident stress among police officers, as well as the overall effectiveness of existing assistance programs, is analyzed to compare how officers with the Town of Culpeper Police Department handle critical incident stress, what resources are currently available, and what areas need to be improved. A high-level understanding of critical incident stress and trauma and how it correlates to employee assistance programs is essential in order to determine the benefits of these programs for our nation's law enforcement officers.

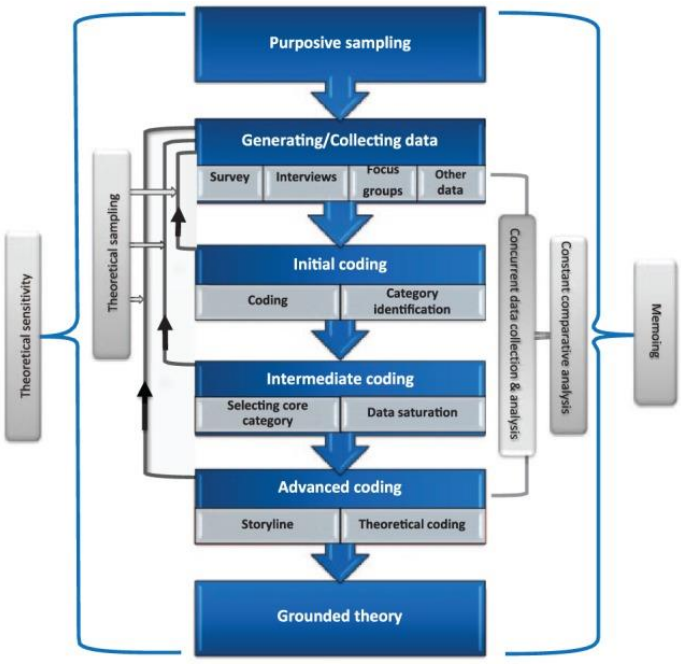
Approximately 80 percent of the sources and references utilized are from peer-reviewed journals, articles, and online publications, while approximately 20 percent comes from empirical, quantitative data obtained by state and federal databases. The research also seeks to expand knowledge upon what is already being done and services being offered to sworn law enforcement officers employed by local-level agencies in the Commonwealth of Virginia, and how police culture and breaking the stigma associated with officer mental health and wellness is directly correlated.

Theoretical Framework

The goal of all research is to advance, refine, and expand a body of knowledge, establish facts and/or reach new conclusions utilizing systematic inquiry and disciplined methods, whereas the research design itself is the strategy or plan used to answer specific research questions underpinned by philosophy, methodology, and methods (Tie et al., 2019). Although widespread definitions for theoretical framework exist, this can best be defined as an explanation of the way things work. The source, size, and power of those explanations vary, but they all link the research back to an attempt to understand some phenomena (Collins & Stockton, 2018). Although researchers and scholars have varying perspectives on the use of theoretical framework in qualitative research, the use of theory in qualitative approaches generally includes clarification of epistemological dispositions, identification of the logic behind methodological choices, building theory as a result of research findings, and a guide or framework for the study (Collins & Stockton, 2018).

The theoretical framework of this qualitative research study utilizes grounded theory. Glaser and Strauss are recognized as the founders of grounded theory, incorporating interactionism and descriptive statistics while working together in a study examining the experience of terminally ill patients who had differing knowledge of their health status (Tie et al., 2019). Grounded theory research involves the meticulous application of specific methods and processes, and while this type of research study often commences with a variety of sampling techniques, purposive sampling followed by concurrent data generation and collection and analysis is likely the most common (Tie et al., 2019).

Figure 2 Research design framework: Summary of the interplay between the essential grounded theory methods and processes



Note: Model developed by Tie, Y.C., Birks, M., and Francis, K. (2019). Grounded theory research: a design framework for novice researchers. *SAGE Open Medicine*, 7.

Grounded theory in qualitative studies not only assists in identifying the logic behind methodological choices, but also allows for flexibility in comparing and contrasting qualitative and quantitative research to existing literature on a specific subject. In this research, existing knowledge of how EAPs have historically been utilized by different employers, along with previously formulated ideas about the complex phenomenon of stigmas associated with mental health resources and law enforcement officers is further examined to determine how improvements can be made in the future to improve the culture of policing overall.

Related Literature

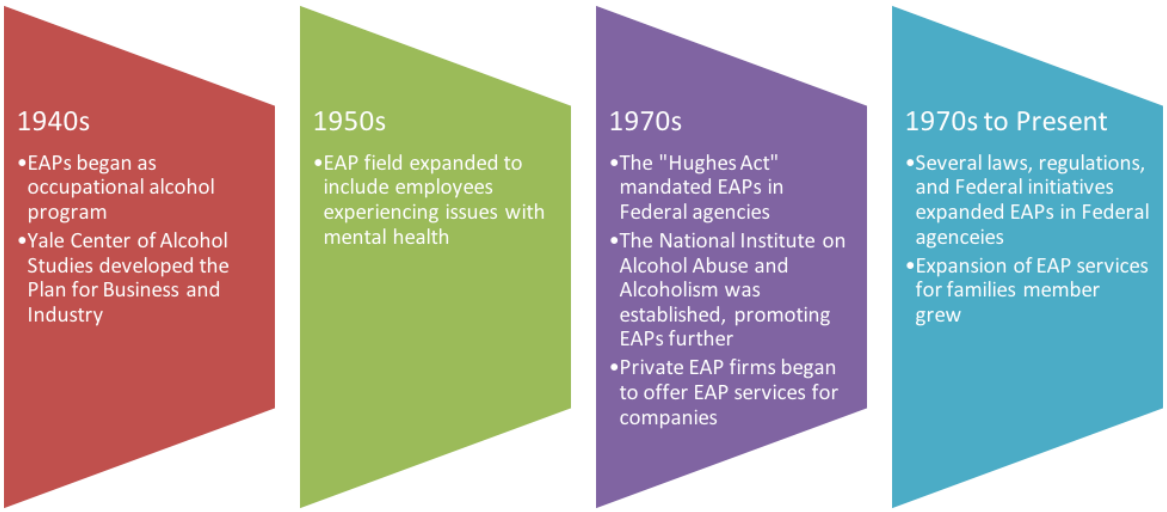
The main purpose of conducting a thorough literature review is to gain an understanding of the existing research and debates relevant to a particular topic or area of study. Examining

related literature that encompass existing mental health and wellness resources and employee assistance programs available to law enforcement officers is critical in order to obtain data that fills in the gaps of existing research. The main sources of literature utilized for this study consist of peer-reviewed journal articles and online publications, though empirical data from federal governmental sources are also examined. The resources extensively detail both employee assistance programs and their evolution, as well as critical incident stress management (CISM) programs that are being utilized across the country, specifically for law enforcement officers and agencies. While many of these sources reference the importance of the existence of employee assistance programs as a whole and reflect the increased need for mental health resources for law enforcement professionals, there exists a gap in knowledge about what is currently working at the local level to reduce the stigma associated within the men and women that carry a badge and are tasked with protecting the life and property of citizens in the communities in which they serve.

This research analyzes employee assistance programs currently being utilized throughout United States' law enforcement agencies, quantitatively, as well as the effectiveness of such programs at the local level of law enforcement, through qualitative measures. The United States has three national data resources that collect law enforcement employment statistics along with other information. The FBI, U.S. Census Bureau, and the Bureau of Justice Statistics' (BJS) data collections programs have different purposes, data definitions, respondent universes, and data collection procedures, and this research will examine and evaluate the statistics from many sources (Banks et al., 2016). Executive Branch agencies operate under the Executive Office of the President within one of the 15 Cabinet departments, or as an independent agency with a top official who is nominated by the president and confirmed by the U.S. Senate, all of which house

additional sub-agencies, bureaus, divisions, and commissions. There is not a definitive number of agencies that fall under the Executive Branch, but the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) advises that every Executive Branch agency has an employee assistance program, as a result of a federal mandate in the 1970s ("Assistance Program," 2021). Although not specific to law enforcement, there is a clear evolution of EAPs in the United States.

Figure 3 Evolution of employee assistance programs in the U.S.



Note: Model developed by The Office of Personnel Management (2021). From Employee Assistance Programs. *Office of Personnel Management*. https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/worklife/employee-assistance-programs/

As of 2016, law enforcement in the United States is made up of about 18,000 federal, state, county, and local agencies. Each agency has varying legal and geographical jurisdiction(s), ranging from single-officer police departments to those with more than 30,000 officers (Banks et al., 2016). The most common type of agency that exists in the United States today is the small-town police department that employs 10 or fewer officers. The decentralized,

fragmented, and local nature of law enforcement in the United States often makes it challenging to accurately count the number of agencies and officers (Banks et al., 2016).

Quantitative data obtained from national law enforcement data sources and entities often heavily relied upon for quantitative studies and is often used as a means of justifying how or where a specific program or initiative is working. These primary data sources provide comprehensive information about the nature and scope of law enforcement employment in the United States and are extremely beneficial to understanding the scope of this research but are not the total picture. The FBI, for example, collects data on the number and type of law enforcement employees as part of its Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program, whereas the Census Bureau collects data on all government agency employees, including police agencies, as part of its Annual Survey of Public Employment and Payroll (ASPEP) (Banks et al., 2016). The Bureau of Justice Statistics collects law enforcement employment data through its periodic Census of State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies (CSLLEA). These three sources provide information about the number of sworn and non-sworn officers at the state and national levels and do provide a "big picture" understanding of just how large the scope of this research could potentially be if every department or agency was polled about their specific EAPs. These sources, however, vary in the type of information they provide about law enforcement employees and in the number and size of law enforcement agencies that report the information (Banks et al., 2016). The sheer number of law enforcement officers in the United States today does inflict limitations on this research. It would not be possible (nor practical) to obtain qualitative information from every individual law enforcement officer in the country in reference to their feelings and opinions on whether EAPs at their agency are actually beneficial, or whether he or she has ever personally sought assistance from an agency program. The research ultimately seeks to encompass

individual perspectives from law enforcement officers and agencies (through the utilization of focus groups, when possible, surveys, as well as national quantitative data), but the focus is primarily on sworn law enforcement officers in the Culpeper Police Department, located in Culpeper, Virginia.

Mental health issues and the effect of the continuous trauma on law enforcement officers are extremely real. While there has been focus on increasing training and efforts to better equip law enforcement officer to deal with the daily stressors that are unique to the profession, there is often a question as to whether these newly established programs (and concepts) have a significant impact on officers. Typically, stress levels and the overall well-being among police officers have been associated with various physiological factors, such as lack of exercise, high blood pressure, and elevated cortisol levels due to grueling shift work, as well as other factors inherent to a high-intensity profession where individuals sometimes experience low-levels of control (Milliard, 2020). As a result, the majority of research on stress and wellness among police officers has primarily focused on these physiological factors and the importance of health and fitness programs (Milliard, 2020). However, increased rates of PTSD and other mental health issues among law enforcement has led researchers to look at other stressors that are inherent in the policing profession, and often, what can be improved upon (Milliard, 2020). This research seeks to answer just that.

Comparing federal and state policies to existing policies and initiatives in the Commonwealth of Virginia, as well as obtaining information on what programs and education about stigmas associated with officers seeking assistance is essential to this research and will show that there is still significant improvement that needs to be made. In addition to PTSD, other mental health issues that present as common among first responders are major depressive

disorder, panic disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, social anxiety disorder, and vulnerability to alcohol use disorder. As such, the focus of this research will primarily highlight and examine the effectiveness of proactive mental health programs and initiatives in the policing community which focus on stigma reduction (Milliard, 2020).

While abundant literature exists about employee assistance programs' evolution in United States since the early 1940s, many are unaware that these types of programs originated as a means of coping with the reduction in productivity occurring due to individuals' consumption of alcohol while on the job. Although this was somewhat commonplace during that period, employers recognized the need for certain employees to obtain additional assistance if they wanted to continue their employment with the company or corporation. EAPs in the United States have evolved significantly since their early years and have become extremely prevalent in the professions that are inherently most stressful—namely, that of a law enforcement officer, as is the primary focus of this research. Today's EAPs and employee wellness programs and initiatives are widespread and can vary depending on location, but typically include aspects of training and development, individual counseling and psychiatry, financial planning, marital counseling, and even include physical fitness. Many law enforcement professionals and criminal justice researchers recognize the absolute need for these programs, as officer-involved shootings and even officer suicides have been on the rise throughout the country. It is known that these programs exist on some level in just about every occupation, but understanding their effectiveness regarding how they can help break the stigma of law enforcement officers utilizing such resources after a traumatic event, is critical.

Understanding critical incident stress is fundamental when examining how stigmas among law enforcement officers relate to employee assistance programs. A "critical incident" has been defined as a stressful event that is so consuming that it overwhelms existing coping skills (Kureczka, 1996). Every year, police officers experience intense, traumatic events that can have serious, long-term consequences for them, their families, and their departments. Research has shown that critical incident stress affects up to 87 percent of all emergency service workers at least once in their careers (Kureczka, 1996). He suggests that agencies can do a number of things to help their personnel deal with this stress: (1) develop a critical incident response that addresses the likelihood of psychological injury with the same attention as that of physical injury; (2) design policies and standard operating procedures for officers involved in critical incidents; (3) mandate visits to a mental health professional for any officer involved in a critical incident; (4) furnish pre-incident stress education and training; and (5) designate and train peer support officers. While this is certainly relevant, these potential remedies of assistance do not specifically address the notion that many officers, at all levels of government, are often ashamed to ask for help, or are afraid of retribution or harm to their job if they do make an admission of struggling with the after-effects of being involved in a traumatic incident.

A former Baltimore County, Maryland firefighter developed a highly influential intervention for emergency responders in the wake of critical incidents in the early 1980s, which is still utilized today. Jeffrey T. Mitchell created Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) to help emergency responders quickly recover from a traumatic incident. CISD, sometimes referred to as the Mitchell Model, is a formalized seven-phase group discussion pertaining to a critical incident, disaster, and/or traumatic experience of a first responder (Malcolm et al., 2005). This was later further developed into the modern-day strategic Critical Incident Stress Management

(CISM) training, which is a collaborative, multi-faceted approach to crisis intervention, which includes a continuum of care for first responders that is utilized throughout the country. As CISM continued to be developed and expanded upon during the 1990s, over 350 crisis response teams were created. The International Critical Incident Stress Foundation (ICISF) was established and is composed of these teams. ICISF members are trained to understand the basic physiology and psychology of stress, stress management, and traumatic stress, and especially how they pertain to first responders' inherent trauma experienced while on the job. Knowledge about traumatic stress allows CISM members to facilitate the appropriate CISM component in the acute crisis phase (Malcolm et al., 2005). CISM programs specific to law enforcement and first responders that are currently implemented across the country all contain 10 core components.

Figure 2 Core components of Critical Incident Stress Management

TABLE 1. Core Components of CISM

Intervention	Timing	Activation	Goal	Format
1. Strategic planning	Precrisis phase	Crisis anticipation	Set expectations, improve coping, stress management	Groups, teams, organizations
2. Demobilizations and staff consultations	Shift disengagement	Event driven	Inform, consult, and allow psychological decompression; stress management	Large groups/ organizations
3. Assessment of need	Anytime postcrisis			
4. Defusing	Postcrisis (within 12 hr)	Symptom driven	Symptom mitigation triage, possible closure	Small groups
5. CISD	Postcrisis (1–10 days, 3–4 weeks mass disasters)	Symptom or event driven	Facilitate psychological closure, triage, symptom mitigation	Small groups
6. Individual crisis intervention 1:1	Anytime anywhere	Symptom driven	Symptom mitigation, return to functioning, referral if needed	Individual
7. Family CISM	Anytime	Symptom or event driven	Foster support and communications, symptom mitigation, closure if possible, referral if needed	Families/ organizations
8. Community and organizational consultation				
9. Pastoral crisis intervention	Anytime	Symptom driven	Mitigate "crisis of faith," assist in recovery	Individuals, families, group
10. Follow-up referral	Anytime	Symptom driven	Assess mental status, assess needed care	Individual/families

Note. CISM = Critical Incident Stress Management; CISD = Critical Incident Stress Debriefing. Adapted from Everly and Mitchell, 1999 (p. 21); Everly and Langlieb, 2003.

Note: Model developed by Everly, G.S., Flannery, R.B, and Mitchell, J.T. (2000). From *Critical incident stress management (CISM): A review of the literature. Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 5(1), 20-40. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1359-1789(98)00026-3

Programs and resources involving CISM models of crisis intervention for first responders can be effective in the management of stress and the psychological impacts subsequent to trauma, but penetrating police culture and addressing the stigma often associated with officers seeking assistance is a phenomenon that needs to be further expanded upon prior to examining the effectiveness of such programs and resources. Research describes several cultural

characteristics of police officers: (a) pride and perfectionism, (b) rigidity, (c) emphasis on bonding between officers, (i.e., an “us vs. them” mentality), (d) development of language unique to the profession, (e.g., using dispatch codes), and (e) focus on safety and security, both at work and at home. Although police culture cannot be explained in a list of themes, research studies addressing this closed culture concur that the same cultural forces that create the effective role of an officer often work to destroy the same officer: being process and action oriented, structurally organized, cohesion and loyalty, rigidity, a “code of silence,” and a sense of duty (Malcolm et al., 2005). It can be particularly challenging then to enter this closed culture as an outsider and ask officers to divulge personal information that reflects the human vulnerabilities their occupational role often works hard to repress or deny (Malcolm et al., 2005). The culture within a police department or agency can absolutely affect an officers’ work performance and acceptance or reluctance to obtain the assistance they may need after a critical incident, which is why the promotion of such programs from command-level staff becomes crucial.

In a related 2018 study that interviewed representatives from 110 law enforcement agencies in order to further examine how occupational stressors have changed in recent years, the most frequently cited stressors involved day-to-day enforcement activities that put officers in potentially dangerous situations (Saunders et al., 2019). In addition to this, administrative burdens, shift work, family and relationship challenges arising from the job, and the overall state and/or strain on community-police relations in recent years were also noted. According to Saunders et al. (2019):

> Respondents reported that officers experience increased fear and stress due to recent changes in the socio-political environment, which is characterized by strained police-

> community relations, increased scrutiny associated with the 24-hour news cycle, and the ubiquity of personal recording devices and sharing videos on social media. However, the generational shifts in the workforce and efforts to destigmatize mental health care has also changed the landscape of police stress for the better (p. 35).

Related literature, along with this study, shows that indeed, the exposure to potentially traumatic experiences and events is higher for law enforcement officer than the general public, and over the course of a career, a law enforcement officer is likely to be exposed to many risks, potentially dangerous behavior, and traumatic events that may affect them in the short-term, long-term, or a combination of the two. They may be exposed or come in contact with deceased persons, be exposed to significant risks to their safety and physical health, witness violent interactions and respond to natural disasters, and manage the results of traumatic events such as traffic accidents or crimes against children (Saunders et al., 2019). One particular survey mentioned within the research cited the top three stressors in law enforcement being directly related to on-the-job violence, responsibility for an officer-involved shooting, a line-of-duty death of a fellow officers, and survival of a physical attack (Saunders et al., 2019).

Figure 3 Traumatic event exposure among law enforcement officers in the United States over time

	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015
Officers Killed*	55	51	55	56	41
Officers Assaulted*	46,695	56,054	57,546	53,469	50,212
Homicides**	21,606	15,586	16,740	14,789	15,192
Violent Crime**	1,789,792	1,425,486	1,390,745	1,246,248	1,160,664
Rape**	97,470	90,178	94,472	84,767	94,717
Traffic Fatalities***	37,221	37,409	43,443	22,273	22,441

Note: For officers killed, homicides, violent crime, rape, and traffic fatalities, the number presented identifies events, not the number of officers who were exposed. Indeed, one officer may have been exposed to multiple events of a certain type whereas another may never encounter any of these during the course of his or her career.

* From Federal Bureau of Investigation's Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted
** From Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reports
*** From National Highway Transportation Security Administration Crash Statistics

Note: Table developed by Saunders, J., Kotzias, V., and Ramchand, R. (1999). From Contemporary police stress: the impact of the evolving socio-political context. *Criminology, Criminal Justice, Law and Society*, 20(1), p. 37. https://scholasticahq.com/criminology-criminal-justice-law-society/

As researchers and policymakers gain a more comprehensive understanding of the types of stressors both experienced and reported by law enforcement officers, three different types of work-related stress have emerged from the literature: (1) operational stress, (2) organizational stress, and (3) external pressure from the sociopolitical context, along with the contextual and individual factors that can affect the way the stress is experienced (Saunders et al., 2019). All of these certainly can be intertwined and have significant relevance to the utilization of EAPs and stigmas associated with asking for help. Additionally, mental health is a growing concern for employers in every field, in nearly every country in the world, not just the United States, and certainly not just for law enforcement personnel. In Canada every year, for example, a mental health issue affects one in five Canadians, and claims associated with mental health issues are one of the fastest growing categories of disability costs in the nation. He describes the impact of psychological health problems as costing the Canadian economy over $50 billion per year, which is forecasted to rise exponentially in coming decades. Employers are keenly aware that mental health and overall fitness for the job in which an employee was hired is essential for not only productivity, but also the success of the organization, and in law enforcement, the success of the community, as well. This article discusses the limitations of previous research on the value of EAPs, new studies that indicate the ability of EAPs to help improve psychological health in the

workplace and reduce associated costs, and what employers should look for when evaluating external EAP providers and measuring their investment returns (Milot, 2020).

Milot describes EAPs as an employment benefit offered at zero cost to employees and their dependents and aims to assist employees in dealing with a wide variety of personal problems that can potentially interfere with their ability to work effectively. Most programs have been set up to enable workers to refer themselves for assistance and, in most cases, supervisors and managers can also refer employees with problematic personal issues that interfere with work performance (Milot, 2020). An EAP is not a solution for all personal problems and ailments, and is most effective at resolving common, short-term problems and mental health issues. This could potentially be seen as a limitation, as severe illnesses or conditions requiring more long-term care and/or psychiatric intervention are generally not addressed through many EAPs. Although numerous programs across North America and their availability continue to evolve, many practitioners believe that this could likely change, and one day become commonplace. His research focuses on Canada's prevalence of the use of external providers and assistance programs for employees, which does vary in contrast to law enforcement agencies' internal programs, but nevertheless, is still extremely relevant and informative. External EAPs have largely replaced internal EAPs in recent decades in Canada, and are privately run by vendors, with professional clinical services provided by a network of affiliate professionals and counselors. The scope of services offered by external EAPs has expanded to include a wide variety of work-life services, with some EAPs offering personal legal and financial guidance, nutritional consultation, elder-care assistance, and more (Milot, 2020). Of course, these services tend to vary greatly depending on employer, but many have begun to

mirror one another as the competition to improve such programs have become fierce. Privatizing care is often beneficial for agencies, and this does occur in the United States, as well.

Milot (2020) argues that employers, insurers, and third-party administrators are increasingly dedicating time, effort, and resources to keep employees and members healthy and mentally well. Many stakeholders believe that offering an EAP as the foundation of a workplace wellness strategy can improve mental health and productivity, help reduce costs associated with absenteeism, and lower health benefit and disability claims. In law enforcement, this can be especially critical, as in addition to these benefits, officers that are able to concentrate and focus more on their shift-specific tasks, will undoubtedly have better decision-making processes and outcomes when a traumatic incident inevitably occurs. While multiple studies have reported improvements in employee mental health and other positive outcomes after EAP use, they have mostly been based on non-experimental research designs that do not include control groups. The incorporation of a control group in an EAP study is challenging, which explains their absence in most studies and evaluations to date. His article notes that the common approach of using a randomized controlled trial is impractical in a service-oriented setting where delaying or modifying services for EAP users for the purposes of creating a control group is not possible or appropriate (Milot, 2020).

In one study highlighted by Milot (2020), EAP users accessed up to 12 hours of clinical counseling sessions per year, provided by an external EAP provider operating in Canada, whereas the control group did not access an EAP at all. The EAP users and the control group were assessed and compared to see if there were changes to mental health and work functioning that could be attributed to the EAP at the six-month follow-up period. The findings, published in

2019, showed at follow-up, employees in the EAP group (when compared with the control group of non-EAP users) reported lower levels of anxiety and depression, lower levels of overall psychological distress, lower work absenteeism rates, and higher work and life satisfaction and overall well-being. These findings provided strong evidence in support of a link between use of the external EAP and improvements in employee mental health (Milot, 2020). This is extremely promising and highlights the importance of utilizing such assistance programs for employees.

Additional research details and attributes increased employee stress on police officers, to their job duties frequently involving split-second decisions, high probability of incidents of violence and chaos, and sometimes, the need to engage, physically, with a subject—all of which can adversely affect an individual's mental and physical health. A study was conducted of 150 officers employed by an urban police department to determine 1) the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and alcohol abuse, 2) patterns of and barriers to mental-health services utilization, and 3) the impact these conditions have on productivity loss (Fox et al., 2012). It was particularly interesting, though not surprising, that among 150 officers, PTSD (24 percent), depression (9 percent), and alcohol abuse (19 percent), were common. In this study, only 46.7 percent had ever sought mental-health services. According to the research, the most frequently cited barriers to accessing services were concerns regarding confidentiality and potential negative career impact. Officers with mental health conditions had higher productivity loss (5.9 percent vs. 3.4 percent), at an annual cost of $4,489 per officer (Fox et al., 2012). The focus of this article contributes to the notion that the need for EAPs is great, primarily due to the extensive psychological trauma that police officers endure throughout the United States, though some officers may not recognize it. Although the focus of the article is primarily on that of sworn officers engaged in the course of their duties in the state of

Connecticut, the research itself can relate to individuals in other states, and those employees that may work for a particular police organization but are not sworn. In corroboration of this, it was interesting to learn that in 2009, over 8,500 Connecticut police officers investigated reports of sexual assault, homicide, and armed robbery, with one in 11 officers being physically assaulted (Fox et al., 2012). Over the course of a career, this work environment, coupled with a culture that values stoicism and self-reliance, may adversely impact an officer's mental health, contributing to high rates of post-traumatic stress disorder, alcohol abuse, and depression, which is the same evidence presented by various other studies and research regarding this subject (Fox et al., 2012). Together, these conditions may contribute to at-work productivity loss, and worse, higher than expected suicide rate among police officers. In Connecticut alone, four police officers committed suicide in 2011, prompting a statewide conference to discuss potential interventions. Since that year, officer suicides continue to rise in every state across the country, as does the absolute need for increased awareness, programs, and training for officers. Research was conducted and surveys utilized, developing the overarching theory that although police mental illness remains on the forefront of so many individuals within the criminal justice field, EAPs are being used, but those efforts simply are not enough. Police trauma and distress continues to run rampant and given the current nature of the climate of society today which tends to turn anti-police once one unfortunate story hits the headline news, more needs to be done for those individuals that put their lives on the line day-in and day-out. Characteristics of the sample population utilized in Fox, Desai, Britten, Lucas, Luneau, and Rosenthal's study, however, can be viewed in Table 1. On average, respondents were 38.3 years of age, with 11.8 years of police service (Fox et al., 2012).

Symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, were frequently endorsed. For example, 30 percent of officers reported having intrusive thoughts or nightmares, and 22 percent reported avoiding situations or places that reminded them of a traumatic event (Fox et al., 2012). With respect to the assessing alcohol abuse, 14 percent of officers believed they should "cut down" on their drinking behavior, and 3.3 percent reported having an "eye-opener" first thing in the morning to get rid of a hangover or steady their nerves (data not shown on chart located below). Of the three conditions assessed, PTSD was the most common (23.8 percent), followed by alcohol abuse (18.7 percent) and depression (8.8 percent). Overall, 40.0 percent of respondents had at least one of the three mental-health conditions (Fox et al., 2012).

Craddock and Telesco noted significant correlations between the number of years of service and traumatic events, traumatic events and post-traumatic stress symptoms, and traumatic events and worldview/perceptions of others (2022). This further supports existing evidence that perpetual long-term exposure to critical incidents and traumatic events, within the scope of the duties of a law enforcement officer, have negative implications that can impact both physical and mental well-being. The culture of needing to "tough it out" among law enforcement officers and members of the military is also supported. According to Craddock and Telesco (2022):

> It was decades after American troops returned from Vietnam that the mental health community openly acknowledged that soldiers deployed into war zones were emotionally traumatized by what they had witnessed and been exposed to. Regrettably, Vietnam veterans with PTSD symptomology did not receive proper mental health services upon their return. It was not until 1980 that the diagnosis of PTSD made its first appearance in the third edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III)

> published by the American Psychiatric Association. Similarly, in the quasi-military world of policing, officers too find themselves exposed to traumatic events, but fear of being labeled as "not tough enough for the job," "weak," or even being declared "unfit for duty" makes it difficult for them to display emotion and admit to experiencing stress in order to safeguard their careers (p. 3).

Consequently, existing literature and research indicate that law enforcement officers suffer from higher-than-average instances of substance abuse and suicide when compared to the general population in the United States. The overall suicide rate in the US is approximately 13 per 100,000 persons, while the number among law enforcement officers is closer to 17 in every 100,000 (Craddock & Telesco, 2022). Similarly, between January 2016 and December 2019, there were over 700 reported current or former law enforcement officer deaths by suicide, and they report that an officer is more likely to die by suicide than to be killed in a line-of-duty death (LODD) (Craddock & Telesco, 2022).

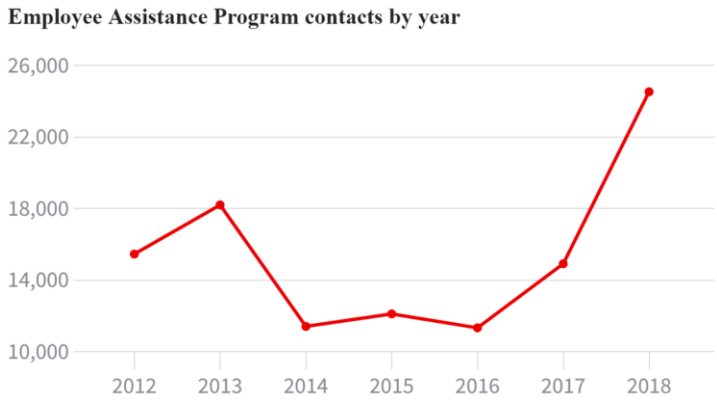
Beyond existing EAPs, the federal government has taken steps in the last five years to ensure the mental health crisis that exists within law enforcement organizations is addressed, however. The Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act of 2017 was based off policies and principles aimed at assessing whether law enforcement agencies and departments across the country have implemented mental health and wellness programs and initiatives, as well as determine what the impact of the implementation of those services has had on the agency's officers and personnel. The Act incorporates a holistic approach to police officers, staff, and their family's mental health and wellness after research indicated a direct correlation between the duties of a law enforcement officer with higher rates of chronic physical illnesses, domestic

incidents, substance abuse, and mental health disorders including depression, anxiety, and PTSD (Craddock & Telesco, 2022). The final report was presented to Congress in 2019 and included information related to services and resources available to both law enforcement officers as well as military veterans. A subsequent report submitted to the Department of Justice (DOJ) later that year provided an overview of several successful and promising mental health strategies and resources that had been implemented in a diverse group of law enforcement agencies and departments throughout the United States, including agencies creating a sense of ownerships and support for the programs (Craddock & Telesco, 2022). The report also included informational summaries of peer crisis response initiatives, like the hotline Cop2Cop, and included pertinent information on the necessary follow-up care and support provided by well-trained fellow officers. The information also acknowledged and detailed that many agencies, as of the date of the report, already had employee assistance programs sponsored by the local government where the agency is located.

Research conducted within the last ten years indicates that there has been a significant increase of police officers seeking help from departmental therapists and EAP programs. The increase in mental health contacts with the community, as well as within their employing police department, also seems to come at a time when officer suicide is especially prevalent as well. According to Smith (2019), Chicago Police Department records show that in 2018, there were nearly 25,000 contacts between department clinicians and department members and their families. The rate of engagement with police counselors that year trumps numbers from any prior year this decade, and it is more than double the number of contacts in 2016. The literature illustrates clinician contact number data from every year, going back to 2010, minus 2011 from which no departmental data could be obtained, (Smith, 2019). Smith further highlights the

necessity of resources and EAPs being made readily available to all members of law enforcement, and that they are currently being utilized to help Chicago-area officers better deal with critical incident stress (2019). To that extent, however, he concedes that much more needs to be done. Former Chicago officers and experts have advised that adding additional therapists to EAP plans is only part of the battle. The bigger task is reducing the stigma surrounding seeking help and supporting officers when they do reach out (Smith, 2019).

Figure 4 Chicago Police Department clinician contact by year



Note: Numbers developed by Smith, P. (2019). Chicago police officers seeking more help from department therapists. *WBEZ Chicago*. https://www.npr.org/local/309/2019/06/13/732068078/chicago-police-officers-seeking-more-help-from-department-therapists

Smith maintains that shared values incorporated into an EAP such as behaviors and agency leadership qualities that prioritize personal and professional growth, community, and compassion for self and others, have a better likelihood at success (2019). He notates this as being the culture of wellness and correlates the importance of officer and community safety and wellness, and the need for the establishment of employee assistance programs. Additionally,

workplace systems, processes, and practices that promote safety, quality, effectiveness, positive patient and colleague interactions, as well as work-life balance, are extremely effective tools in EAPs involving law enforcement officers, no matter the location of the services. This is applicable to officers and criminal justice professionals in any jurisdiction, from rural to urban, and from local to federal.

Much of the research referring to peer support groups and EAPs focus on the stigma attached to officers' desire to come forward and admit to others that they are having a tough time dealing with critical incident stress or other associated trauma(s). Milliard (2020) details this stigma at length and describes how officer suicide rates are much higher than average in Canada. One main reason for these elevated levels of suicide and other mental health issues among police officers, is believed to stem from the stigma associated with seeking help. To address these serious issues, she details in her article how Ontario's police services have begun to create internal peer support programs as a way of supporting their members. Milliard's research explores the experiences of police officers serving as peer-support team members, particularly with regard to the impacts of peer support. In addition, this research also examines the importance of discussing shared experiences regarding a lack of standardized procedures for the administration and implementation of peer support in relation to the Policy Feedback Theory, which says that when a policy becomes established and resources are devoted to programs, it helps structure current activity (Milliard, 2020). Like various other articles on the subject, Milliard details that typically, stress levels and well-being among police officers have been associated with various physiological factors, such as lack of exercise, high blood pressure, and elevated cortisol levels due to shift work, as well as other factors inherent to a high-intensity profession where individuals sometimes experience low-levels of control (Milliard, 2020). As a

result, most of the research on stress and wellness among police officers has previously primarily focused on these physiological factors and the importance of health and fitness programs. Increased rates of PTSD and other mental health issues and disorders among law enforcement officers, however, has led researchers to look at other stressors that are inherent in the policing profession (Milliard, 2020). Milliard's research is straight-forward and extremely informative and supports other findings regarding the necessity of implementation of not only EAPs, but also peer support groups and teams.

Milliard's work is not alone in examining the causes and rates of officer suicide. Miller (2005) highlights how more police officers die by their own hand than are killed in the line of duty every year, specifically mentioning increasing numbers in New York City and other police departments across the United States. He outlines possible contributory factors to officer burnout, depression, and ultimately suicide, and lists identification of risk factors and sensitivity to overt and subtle cues of officer distress as effective means of prevention. Proper utilization of counseling, resources, and availability of referral services are also imperative, but upper-level management must also support these programs and constantly and consistently promote them in order to be effective in the management of critical incident stress in the law enforcement profession.

The United States DOJ's program called Community-Oriented Policing Services (COPS) published research on the creation, maintenance of, and overall success of employee assistance programs for law enforcement officers which provides an overview of several departmental programs, as well as key inherent stressors that are unique to the law enforcement profession. Cities like Milwaukee, Tucson, Dallas, San Antonio, and Charlotte-Mecklenburg were surveyed,

studied, and extensively researched, to put together the field case studies that encompass the publication. All include key learnings, and compare and contrast between departments, detail what is working and what is not, and how programs can be improved upon. Many departments describe the units and services available at length, as well as the candid advantages and challenges of offering the program(s), but the promotion of these programs within each agency seems to be the key.

Phil Keith, the Director of COPS, states that "the mental well-being of the men and women who serve and protect our communities is every bit as important as their physical health and safety. Our nation's law enforcement officers—and their civilian colleagues—hear and see things every day that most of us are fortunate we never have to imagine. The current national climate of distrust in law enforcement and lack of sympathy or fairness for them before the facts are known makes an already difficult and dangerous job mentally and emotionally stressful as well. The continuous attacks without knowing the facts could be an underlying variable to one of the most compelling challenges in law enforcement—hiring and retention—and in general could contribute to low morale in many agencies" (Copple et al., 2019). Additionally, the Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act of 2017 stands as a marker of the growth in understanding of the significance of keeping officers safe, healthy, and well on the job. In addition to tasking the U.S. Department of Justice with making recommendations to Congress on improving officer wellness, it requires the COPS Office to conduct case studies of programs designed primarily to address officer psychological health and well-being. This publication is a report on those case studies, including study of 10 departmental efforts and one national call-in hotline. These studies show a range of approaches to safeguarding the mental health of both sworn and nonsworn employees, current and retired, of police departments and sheriffs' offices

around the United States. Each program studied has elements that can be replicated elsewhere in our ongoing efforts to meet the mental and emotional health needs of even more officers and deputies and their families (Copple et al., 2019). This publication was extremely imperative and key to understanding how peer-support and employee assistance programs are currently working, evolving, and thriving in the United States today. The work and research published corroborates everything the previously mentioned articles do with regard to the nature of the job of policing, as well as the trauma it can, and often does, cause its officers.

According to the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), EAPs are needed specifically for law enforcement officers, whose duties often expose them to both routine acute stress and highly stressful situations that cannot be resolved through regular coping mechanisms. Unless adequately addressed, these situations may cause disabling emotional, psychological, and physical problems. Preparing for, and providing support for the inevitable daily stress, as well as the stress subsequent to a traumatic incident, will assist in minimizing the chances that employee will experience negative physical, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral reactions (2020).

The IACP has long been associated with providing guidance documents and general outlines for model policies for law enforcement agencies, so the article came as no surprise in suggesting that agencies should develop a policy statement that briefly and concisely explains to agency personnel and the public the agency's commitment to the overall mental health and wellness of its employees ("Wellness," 2020). Among various others, the article states that agencies, in developing such policies, should incorporate some of the most important aspects of EAPs to reduce the stress levels and mental health issues so prevalent in law enforcement agencies and organizations today. One of the most important takeaways is that employers should

develop a means of identifying, vetting, and enlisting Qualified Mental Health Professionals (QMHPs). This should include determining whether the QMHP is trained in traumatic incident response and is prepared to provide stress management for multiple employees at one time. Making confidential mental health services available to all employees of the agency and their families as allowed by insurance coverage or agency policy is also extremely important, as is determining whether employees should participate in a periodic, confidential mental health and wellness consultation with a QMHP ("Wellness," 2020).

Additionally, providing EAPs, psychological services, and behavioral health and wellness programs to all agency employees and their families is imperative, and making these programs accessible is equally as important in removing the stigma often surrounding such programs. Overall, the IACP provides a distinguished frame of reference in developing model policies for law enforcement agencies and believes in the success of EAPs at the local level. This extremely informative reference also offers suggestions on adopting policies relating to mental health immediately following a traumatic incident, which is also beneficial. This would ideally entail all police departments and agencies to develop and implement a policy that addresses preparation (i.e. training officers and non-sworn personnel on how to identify and manage stress related to such an incident, potential costs of a traumatic incident and psychological response, etc.), immediate response, and post-incident procedures (which would likely incorporate contacting a previously-identified QMHP specializing in traumatic incident response as soon as possible, and designation of who is responsible for this notification ("Wellness," 2020).

High-impact events, such as the Oklahoma City bombing, the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, the terrorist attacks of 9/11, and various other atrocities tax not only the resources of

civilians and emergency responders, but also those on the front lines themselves everyday (Malcolm et al., 2005). Critical incident stress that stems from a particularly gruesome vehicular accident, for example, is often felt on the same level as these high-impact events for first responders. In a case study involving effects of the Oklahoma City bombing of 1995, immediate and long-term effects on emergency responders included anxiety, depression, suicide, increased alcohol consumption, sexual misconduct, increased divorce rates, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Malcolm et al., 2005). Levels of these anticipated problems, however, were lower than predicted and can likely be credited to a systematic CISM program and available EAP. Oklahoma Critical Incident Stress Management Network helped to manage the harmful aspects of traumatic stress in the wake of that tragedy, and the cooperation and collaboration among multidisciplinary teams of emergency response workers likely contributed to the success of the outcome (Malcolm et al., 2005). The Oklahoma City response followed the CISM model, including CISD for police, and proved that if followed properly, these are effective tools for managing and minimizing the impact of a critical incident, no matter how of a scale that incident is.

Careless and Zemlock (2022) contribute to this area of research by providing some of the latest information and statistics through their collaboration of police chiefs and law enforcement executives, psychologists, and the Director of Strategic Wellness for Lexipol. They argue that the police suicide crisis needs to be highlighted more to raise additional awareness, and that the need for officer wellness programs is essential in addressing the negative connotations associated with recognizing and asking for assistance, especially in the aftermath of a particularly traumatic incident. Building trust and understanding within police departments needs to be a priority, because no matter how good an EAP may be, if an officer feels as though they will face

consequences from their peers or command staff for taking part, the program itself is ultimately extremely ineffective. Although implied, the issue of trust being a key component to breaking the stigma within police culture, is not widely mentioned in additional research. Trust is ultimately what lowers barriers to officer enrollment and allows wellness programs to, quite literally, save lives.

Although police unions are not widely utilized in Virginia, they are extremely prevalent in other areas of the country, and it was particularly interesting that this publication addressed them as a necessary part of the officer wellness and EAP equation. The authors state that obtaining union support and ongoing participation in a wellness program is key to building trust and maximizing the program's chances for success. Doing so ultimately means gaining credibility with the rank and file, which is essential. Again, this is an area of the research that is not widely talked about in other resources, but should be, as it is an important aspect of gaining officer and command staff buy-in.

Beyond implementing and EAP, building trust can be extremely effective in breaking the stigma associated with officers asking for assistance. It is particularly useful in illustrating how encouraging officers to maximize their mental and physical health does not stop with ongoing wellness programs, but how supporting officers' physical and psychological well-being needs to be integrated into everything the agency or department does daily if positive results are to be seen. This is an area that is not widely addressed in other research but makes logical sense. In order to break down obstacles and stigmas associated with police culture across the country, and in Virginia specifically, it is important to promote an open line of communication, peer support, and have command staff embody the very culture they wish to endorse. It is widely known and

accepted that police officers experience high levels of stress daily, even absent a critical incident, so promoting the idea of effectively and efficiently dealing with it in a healthy manner is key.

The potential solution of peer support has been brought to the forefront in the last decade within police departments around the United States. According to the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the goal of peer support is to provide all public safety employees in an agency the opportunity to receive emotional and tangible support through times of personal or professional crisis and to help anticipate and address potential difficulties. Ideally, peer support programs are developed and implemented under the organizational structure of the parent agency. Receiving support from the highest levels within an organization helps a peer support program to work effectively ("Wellness," 2020). As the research centers on the Culpeper Police Department in central Virginia, it is interesting to note that the Virginia Peer Support Association (VAPSA) is a non-profit organization that was formed in 2006 after recognizing the need for training, certification, and maintenance of Professional Peer Supporters (PSPs) in Virginia. Other states do not offer a specific certification as Virginia does, but it demonstrates the acknowledgement that the need has been prevalent among law enforcement officers. The training VAPSA provides, enhances individual peer supporters' resources and training, but also helps to build and maintain viable, successful peer support groups, noting the importance of addressing more than just the stressful nature encountered while on the job.

Law enforcement and emergency services professionals face two general types of stress that are sizable and unique when compared with other professions. The first type of stress is the chronic exposure to trauma, violence, horrific events, and crime scenes, whereas the second type is internal or organizational stress that can be attributed to policy changes, demanding shift

schedules, lack of perceived support from the organization, favoritism in promotional decisions and disciplinary issues, as well as an imperfect legal system (“Peer Support,” 2022). Organizational stress is typically characterized by job context, or the characteristics of the specific agency or department that have a significant effect on a police officer’s daily responsibilities, career prospects, and experience among his or her peers (Saunders et al., 2019). Despite the constant exposure to citizens on what they may feel is the worst day of their lives, issues such as administrative burden, interpersonal conflict, and scheduling are all examples of organizational stress that officers across rank and country identify as primary stressors in their line of work (Saunders et al., 2019). These stressors have been linked to interpersonal discord both within and outside of the workplace, thereby impairing positive health benefits derived from a robust social support network (Saunders et al., 2019).

In addition to these factors, administrative burden has been cited as a primary factor that significantly impacts law enforcement stress. This has been noted in research findings since at least the late 1980s and includes the growing demands in recent years for detailed reports to help support criminal arrests and convictions, increases in documentation requirements as part of increasing accountability standards, and other paperwork requirements that necessitate the investment of an officer’s time and concentration (Saunders et al., 2019). This coupled with already grueling shiftwork and the mandatory overtime and increased frequency of work being experienced in many departments across the country due to current lack of manpower, creates an overabundance of operational stress for many agencies. All of these factors tend to disrupt an officer’s sleep schedule and lead to additional stress by limiting the ability to plan or enjoy time with family members. Organizational culture is also a contributing factor that leads to operational stress in many law enforcement officers, whether they are brand new and just coming

out of the academy, or are well-seasoned, veteran officers. Research findings are consistent with several other studies that have found that inept management, failure to recognize the accomplishments of officers, the provision of too little time to conduct a task, lack of effective communication, and related issues have a negative effect on officer morale and also contribute to feelings of chronic stress.

With all of this, there exists a strong tendency for many law enforcement officers to turn to unhealthy coping mechanisms as many literary sources detail, in order to help cope with their continued exposure to trauma and organizational challenges. Knowing this population is at risk is one thing, but offering meaningful prevention can be a challenge because of the existing law enforcement culture that seems to exist everywhere in the United States ("Peer Support," 2022). Because the culture of law enforcement is exclusive in nature and cynical of outsiders, officers who are struggling with stress related issues often go-it- alone or turn to a peer for support. This cultural factor in law enforcement makes peer support services a natural help-seeking pathway. Peer supporters therefore occupy a support niche that cannot be filled by EAP, health plan provisions or even a police staff psychologist. If peers are trained to offer support, they can be highly functional tools in keeping officers in optimal mental and emotional health. Those who are trained as peer supporters are taught to assess and refer. This often means to self-refer when the officer coming to them for assistance just needs someone willing to listen to them and even problem solve life's challenges. Trained peer support officers that are able to offer their colleagues confidential support is the most efficient and effective pathway to help for officers who are struggling, and one that is currently employed within the Culpeper Police Department. This is preventative in nature and lowers the risk of having to address the problem when it manifests itself in the performance of a law enforcement professional. The Virginia Peer

Support Association states that critical incident stress teams have historically been tasked with providing debriefings and demobilization based on the ICISF model of CISM but have been untrained in the provision of proactive and even responsible peer support services. CISM teams typically do provide specific, focused peer support service when delivering a debriefing, but they are not trained to offer general peer support services to fellow officers ("Peer Support," 2022). A combination of trained peer support officers embedded into a department or agency and existing EAP resources would go a long way in the management of critical incident stress experienced by law enforcement.

In the private sector, organizations often implement employee assistance programs to aid employees experiencing psychological distress, yet many of these EAPs seem to focus on individual remedies rather than addressing the context of the problem, thus rendering them limited in effectiveness (Bouzikos et al., 2022). While many EAPs provide work-based intervention, such as individual counseling aimed at improving employees' emotional and psychological well-being, the problem is often that the presenting psychological health issue may have its basis in work and organizational factors. According to Bouzikos et al. (2022):

> The psychosocial safety climate (PSC) refers to the organizational climate for employee psychological health and safety and encompasses the way management value and prioritize employee psychological health. PSC theory suggests that the corporate climate for psychological health plays a significant role in determining whether a workplace is stressful. Occupational stress is one of the main reasons for mental health injury and may result in additional pressures within the workplace, and without giving appropriate attention to the root cause of distress, such as corporate climate, potential gains in mental

> health due to EAP consultations may be limited, particularly when employees return to a stressful context (p. 3).

This can be readily applied to the law enforcement profession, as well, since the culture of the individual agency, how it interacts with the community in which it serves, and how command staff interacts with patrol officers, can greatly impact departmental climate and how officers feel about their jobs, overall. In the corporate world and private sector, employee assistance programs are most commonly offered by medium-to-large companies and corporations, with roughly half of all workers in the United States having access, according to the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics (Merrefield, 2022). Recent studies show that in the private sector, for every $1 companies put into workplace mental health programs, they get $4 back in increased productivity and better health outcomes, according to the World Health Organization (Merrefield, 2022). Usage rates, however, remain low, despite the statistic of one in five adults in the United States experiencing some form of mental illness. Employees, on average, use assistance programs at a rate of 10 percent or less, according to the Society for Human Resource Management, a trade group (Merrefield, 2022). The Bureau of Labor Statistics used to ask about the number of hours employees used assistance programs in its Survey of Employer-Provided Training, but that survey was discontinued in 1995, so this number is currently unknown (Merrefield, 2022). Although EAPs are related to but distinct from employee wellness programs in the corporate world, which often encourage physical health through efforts such as smoking cessation, weight loss and nutrition programs, EAPs and resources offered to law enforcement personnel often incorporate the two types of programs in order to maximize their effectiveness for officers. Promotion of these services and programs, as well as the continuous promotion and endorsement of positive policing climate and culture can go a long way in empowering law

enforcement officers to feel safe in obtaining the help they sometimes desperately need, despite the critical incidents they will likely continue to need to respond to.

While encouraging and promoting the utilization of employee assistance programs and resources available to law enforcement officers is essential for their ultimate success, one can deduce that changing the police culture from within a department or agency can also be beneficial in stigma reduction. American policing has slowly drifted away from Plato's vision of guardians and Socrates' view of guardian education as expressed in the historic, Plato's Republic, and according to Rahr and Rice, the United States has veered away from Sir Robert Peel's ideal that "the police are the people, and the people are the police" (2015). In a post 9/11-era especially, policing culture in this country has moved toward a mindset more like warriors at war with the people that law enforcement officers are sworn to protect and serve. Despite two or more decades of aspiring to be proficient in effective community policing, law enforcement has drifted off the course of building close community ties toward creating a safe distance from community members, in some cases substituting equipment and technology as the preferred means of gathering information about crime and addressing threats to public safety. According to Rahr & Rice (2015):

> In some communities, the friendly neighborhood beat cop, once thought of as the community guardian, has been replaced with the urban warrior, trained for battle and equipped with the accouterments and weaponry of modern warfare. Armed with sophisticated technology to mine data about crime trends, officers can lose sight of the value of building close community ties (p. 2).

While it is true that improved technology can often be beneficial to policing and provide enhanced safety to officers, Rahr and Rice (2015) accurately detail the culture of many departments and agencies across the country currently. The leadership and command staff often dictates the mindset of the officers, and it can be argued that the idea of being a warrior preparing for battle, rather than a community guardian, can be detrimental to officer mental health and wellness and actually perpetuate the stigma associated with needing to seek assistance after a critical incident. Law enforcement leaders need to recognize that creating stronger human connections and increasing community engagement will lead to improved public safety and more effective crime fighting (Rahr & Rice, 2015). In fact, in many areas of the county, public trust in the police has not improved, and instead, empirical assessments of trust and confidence in the police remained generally unchanged in the last decade. It turns out, communities do not care as much about crime rates as they do how they are treated by the police (Rahr & Rice, 2015).

This phenomenon, known in academic circles as procedural justice, is regularly practiced and understood by effective and respected patrol officers, and the public is able to quickly recognize it when they see it, though neither has likely heard of or used the term (Rahr & Rice, 2015). Both beat officers and citizens would describe procedural justice in action as being a good cop and doing the right thing. Rahr developed a model in 2011 during her time as the King County, Washington Sheriff, to address this phenomenon by simplifying and operationalizing the training of patrol officers. Using the acronym LEED—Listen and Explain with Equity and Dignity, officers are trained to take the time to listen to people, explain what is going to happen and how the process works, explain why a decision was made so the equity of the decision is transparent, and leave the participants with their dignity intact (Rahr & Rice, 2015). This model can be directly related to current community-police initiatives, and again, begins with leadership.

The endorsement of models like LEED and the promotion of positive police culture from within can make all the difference when an officer comes to the realization that they are not ok, or not coping well with critical incident stress that is inherent to the job.

Rahr and Rice (2015) provide an undeniable plethora of support for changing police culture from within an agency, and detail how it all begins at during the hiring process and how academies structure their training. Basic training regimens are often centered around physical skills training accompanied by a steady stream of fear-provoking stories about officers killed in the line of duty. In some areas of the country, academies and agencies still promote an "us vs. them" mentality, with paramilitary structure. Physical control and physical tactics are emphasized over de-escalation and communication skills, where conquering is promoted over serving. Posters and visual aids in classrooms department hallways may often depict skull and crossbones and carry themes related to deadly threats on the lives of officers, with lobbies decorated with displays featuring "tools of the trade," reflecting mementos from previous academy classes with overall themes of warriors, battles, and survival. In agencies and academies where this culture is promoted, and EAPs are not likely to be endorsed, reference to service and the noble and historical role of policing in a democracy is noticeably absent from both the physical environment and training curriculum (Rahr & Rice, 2015). This is an excellent place (and opportunity) to begin to promote the positive changes needed to assist with officer mental health and wellness initiatives, and it begins with leadership.

Summary

Research acknowledges the existence of critical incident stress in law enforcement and details the importance of the establishment of successful employee assistance programs for

officers, as well as why and how they are so effective in dealing with officers' mental health and overall well-being. Policing is an inherently stressful career choice that often comes with split-second decisions, unpredictable schedules and shift work, and more media scrutiny than just about any other profession. Many officers truly go into the profession as new recruits hoping to not only challenge themselves, but also to protect, serve, and improve the communities in which they reside and raise their own families, but often come out mentally and physically changed by the profession. Thus, it is not a surprise to hear that in addition to mental health issues (whether professionally diagnosed or not), many seasoned officers experience higher divorce rates and family problems, exhibit poor eating choices and overall physical health, and even have higher rates of suicidal ideation. Studies highlight that law enforcement officers do not have any easy jobs nor an easy existence in this world, currently. Providing them with the pertinent resources necessary to get them the help when they need it, reinvent the culture within police agencies and departments to promote and accept an officer's willingness to seek and accept that help, and better promote the overall idea of taking better care of themselves so they are able to care for their families and communities, is of critical importance.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

A key objective of this study is to obtain qualitative data to not only support current literature about what resources are available and being utilized within the law enforcement community, but to also fill in gaps about how critical incident stress impacts officers. Anonymous surveys were disseminated during both day shift and night shift roll call meetings at the Town of Culpeper Police Department (CPD) in Culpeper, Virginia. The agency has a current total of 48 sworn law enforcement officers, with 33 participating in this voluntary research study. Anonymous surveys are more likely to yield greater disclosure and more honesty regarding potential stigmatizing or sensitive content, so this methodology was the most beneficial. As the surveys were anonymous, the only demographics collected were the total number of years as a sworn law enforcement officers (whether at CPD or not) and whether the officer's current rank was more closely aligned with that of a patrol officer or a member of command-level staff. This study was conducted during the week of April 2, 2023, and sought to identify not only if officers were aware of EAPs and similar resources available to them, but also how likely an officer with CPD is to seek assistance after a traumatic event they experience while on the job.

Design

In this qualitative study, anonymous surveys containing 15 questions were created seeking to identify whether the officer/participant was involved in a critical incident within the last five years and how they were able to manage that stress. Critical incident, for the purpose of this research study, was defined as an officer-involved shooting, a call for severe child abuse, a gruesome vehicular accident/crash, a death or serious injury or line-of-duty death, or homicide. Taking this into account, the survey also sought to identify whether the officer's response to such

an incident yielded immediate behavioral, physical or physiological, and/or cognitive or emotional reactions. The questions were designed to also identify whether the officer felt as though they would be labeled or stigmatized if they came forward and sought assistance, and whether they felt like they should just "tough it out." The survey also sought to identify whether the participant felt as though current peer support officers, if available, support mental health and well-being (while on duty and not) and whether established EAPs and resources available are effective.

Upon designing research questions that would be able to accurately collect the qualitative data sought from the officers, the principles of grounded theory were kept in mind. A qualitative research approach developed by sociologists in the 1960s, grounded theory is an excellent method of understanding processes of how participants have managed critical incident stress in the past, and how each officer may handle that stress differently, to include whether or not they have sought the assistance of an EAP. Although some similarity was necessary in participation, such as the requirement of being a sworn law enforcement officer, the survey and research design sought to employ as much diversity as possible and is why both command-level staff and patrol officers were both included as potential participants. As often found in grounded theory, qualitative data is best collected in naturalistic settings and primarily consists of observation, interviews, or surveys. Roll call was the best setting to disseminate each survey, as it would not only allow many participants to be included at once but would also allow for all officers to remain in a comfortable, familiar environment with little disruption to their everyday job duties and responsibilities.

Research Questions

1. How are EAPs utilized in your agency?

2. How have EAPs and resources offered to officers within your agency evolved since you began employment with the agency?
3. How can EAPs help break the mental health stigma surrounding officers?
4. How do critical incidents affect the mental health of officers?
5. How did you respond to a critical incident while on the job?

Setting

The setting for the dissemination of the anonymous surveys was within a secure roll-call room within the Town of Culpeper Police Department. Collecting data from law enforcement officers in a setting where they feel comfortable and are most likely to incur the very issues being described herein, was the most natural environment to obtain accurate data. As with many qualitative research studies, focusing on human values and individual experiences in a natural setting is significantly more beneficial than other potential means of data collection and survey distribution.

Participants

As the overarching goal of the study was to obtain information about critical incident stress experienced during the course of duty while employed as a law enforcement officer and how it correlates to the utilization of existing employee assistance programs, the only criteria and mandatory requirement for participation was that all subjects be certified, sworn law enforcement officers within the Commonwealth of Virginia. Although this particular study was convened at and focused on employees of the Culpeper Police Department, if other officers from outside departments were present for training or any other reason or had affiliation with CPD, they would not have been excluded.

The Town of Culpeper Police Department is comprised of 48 sworn law enforcement officers. Of those 48, 33 officers chose to participate in the research study, throughout the course of two days and four different roll call meetings. Age, sex, specific rank and/or job role, and shift worked were not included in order to maintain anonymity, and the only data collected was the number of years participants have been a sworn law enforcement officer and whether they best identify as a patrol officer or a command-level officer.

Procedures

After receiving support from the Chief of Police with CPD to conduct such a qualitative research study during roll call times for both day and night shifts at their office and obtaining formal Institutional Review Board approval, the researcher was present and gave all participants an informational sheet containing all of the elements of an informed consent form absent the signature lines. This included all relevant information about the research study to include the main topic and what participants could expect should they choose to participate, as well as the researcher's contact information. All participants were advised that the study was anonymous and completely voluntary, and that although the 15 questions would likely take less than ten minutes to complete, there would not be a time limit should they want to think about their answers in-depth and take longer than the allotted ten minutes. All potential participants were advised via the information sheet, disclaimer section on the survey itself, as well as the researcher verbally notifying all subjects verbally prior to distributing the survey, that coworkers and supervisors would not have access to fellow officers' answers, and that the only demographics utilized in the final report would be the time employed as a law enforcement officer and whether each individual identified as a patrolman or a member of command-level

staff. This was reiterated so that any answers received would be as honest possible, given the likely sensitive nature (and potential stigmatization) of answers to some of the questions.

The Researcher's Role

In qualitative studies, researchers are often required to clarify their role in the research process, as they are involved in all stages of the study from defining a concept or developing a problem statement to design, methodology, transcription, analysis, verification, and reporting the concepts and themes (Sanjari et al., 2014). Therefore, whenever instruments are involved in qualitative research, a human being will be an integral part of the process, almost always the "instrument of choice" for naturalistic research. According to Sanjari et al. (2014):

> Humans are highly responsive to environmental stimuli, have the ability to interact with the situation, pull together different pieces of information at multiple levels simultaneously, and perceive situations holistically; moreover, they are able to process findings the instant they become available, can present immediate feedback, and feel unusual responses (p. 4).

The researcher's role in this study was strictly survey dissemination and data collection, as no interviews or other need to interact with participants was necessary, especially in order to maintain and preserve anonymity. Upon completion of the 15-question survey, officers placed their responses in an envelope prior to exiting the room, without the researcher seeing the order of completion or if any officers chose to not complete the survey. The researcher maintained participant anonymity by securing and taking the envelope upon departure of each roll call meeting, ensuring no fellow employees from CPD would be able to access any of the survey data.

Data Collection

Interviews are very often considered the most appropriate data collection method to operationalize the methodology chosen in qualitative research studies (Mattimoe et al., 2021). Due to the nature of this study, however, the researcher had serious concerns about further perpetuating any existing stigma, and after obtaining formal Institutional Review Board approval, anonymous surveys were the chosen optimal data collection method. Data was obtained on four different occasions from officers employed by the Town of Culpeper Police Department. Each anonymous survey was completed by a sworn law enforcement officer during roll call of their designated shift. Two different day shift roll call meeting times were utilized for survey dissemination, as were two night shift roll calls in order to obtain data from as many officers as possible that wished to participate.

Interviews

Although no interviews of CPD employees or sworn officers were utilized for this research study, but they can be especially beneficial in qualitative research. Typically, there are three fundamental types of research interviews: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured. Structured interviews are verbally administered and usually include a list of predetermined questions that are asked, with little to no variation or scope for follow-up questions. These are fairly easy to administer and may be of particular use if clarification of certain questions are required or if there exists a likelihood of literacy or numeracy problems with the respondents (Gill et al., 2008). However, by their very nature, they only allow for limited participant responses and are, therefore, of little use if significant “depth” is required for the specific study.

Semi-structured interviews consist of several key questions that help to define the areas to be explored, but also allow for the interviewer/researcher to diverge in order to pursue an idea

or response in more detail (Gill et al., 2008). This interview format is most frequently used in healthcare research, as it provides participants with some guidance on what to talk about and provides for flexibility. If utilizing interviews of CPD officers for this study, semi-structured interviews would have likely been the choice of the researcher, given the opportunity for such flexibility.

Unstructured interviews, however, do not typically reflect any preconceived theories or ideas and are performed with little to no organization on behalf of the researcher. Such an interview may simply begin with an opening question asking participants to talk about their experience(s) with responding to a critical incident while on the job, for example, and then will progress based upon the initial response(s) (Gill et al., 2008). Unstructured interviews can be time consuming and difficult to manage at times, as well as difficult to participate in, as the lack of predetermined interview questions provides little guidance on what to talk about (which many participants may find confusing, unhelpful, or intimidating) (Gill et al., 2008). Additionally, given the sensitive, personal nature of the scope of the study, participants would likely not be very forthcoming with sharing their experiences if they felt like they were already being judged by their peers and/or the researcher.

Surveys/Questionnaires

Surveys represent one of the most efficient and inexpensive research methods available to collect representative, high-quality data from research participants and frequently serve as the backbone used to define the scope and magnitude of many potential problems in various fields of study (Murdoch et al., 2014). According to Murdoch et al. (2014):

> In the United States, large national surveys have been widely used to estimate what proved at the time to be surprisingly high levels of mental illness within the general

> population, physical violence within families, and sexual assault among women. Even the United States Census, which serves as the basis of apportioning Congressional representatives and taxes to each state, is survey-based. Typically, survey data are either collected by interviewers using face-to-face or telephone communication with the participant or via the participant's own self-report (p. 2).

The following survey questions were asked, utilizing voluntary, anonymous surveys disseminated to all sworn CPD personnel that chose to participate in this research study about the utilization of EAPs and how they correlate to officer mental health and wellness, specifically after exposure to a critical incident.

1. How many years of experience do you have as a sworn law enforcement officer?
2. Is your current rank more closely aligned with a patrol officer or member of command staff?
3. To what extent do you currently feel overall satisfaction with your career as a law enforcement officer?
4. Have you been involved in a critical incident in the last five years?
5. Did the incident result in any immediate reactions, (i.e. tunnel vision, loss of or slowed thoughts, sense of time distortion or slow motion, muffled sounds, heightened sense of detail about the incident, or emotional or physical "letdown" within a few days of the incident)?
6. Did the incident result in any behavioral reactions, (i.e., talking almost non-stop about the incident and what you experienced, sudden poor decisions or inability to make a decision, sudden aggression, increase in absenteeism or

a drop in work productivity, difficulty sleeping or nightmares, sudden relationship problems, desire to turn to substances (alcohol, pain medication, etc.), withdrawal from friends or normal activity, feelings of isolation)? Can be immediately following the incident or weeks or months later.

7. Did the incident result in any physical or physiological reactions, (i.e., muscle tremors, nausea, chills, vomiting, hyperventilation, feeling faint, crying, profusely sweating, increased heart rate, fatigue, chest pains, increase in blood pressure)? Can be immediately following the incident or weeks or months later.

8. Did the incident result in any cognitive or emotional reactions, (i.e., feelings of disbelief, dazed, difficulty comprehending the significance of the incident, depression, tension, irritability, tiredness causing you to sleep too much and have less energy, feeling emotionally detached or numb, confusion, change in hobbies or daily routine(s), increase in risk-taking behavior and/or sudden poor judgement)? Can be immediately following the incident or weeks or months later.

9. Following the incident and the presence of any of the above reactions (or others not specifically listed), did you feel as though you should seek help or assistance in working through the significance of the event?

10. Did you feel like you would be “labeled” by your fellow officers (present for the incident or not) and/or supervisors if you were to ask for help?

11. Did you feel like you should just “tough it out” until things improved?

12. Do your peer support officers or supervisors (including chain-of-command) support your mental well-being (while on duty and not)?

13. Do those individuals offer assistance or talk enough about resources readily available to you (and other officers) if you ever need it, (i.e., counseling, support groups, etc.)?

14. To what extent do you feel like established Employee Assistance Programs and/or resources available to you and other officers with the Culpeper Police Department are effective, especially post critical incident?

15. In your opinion, what could be improved upon with the existing Employee Assistance Programs/resources available to you and other officers to make you more likely to reach out for help?

Directions were supplied directly at the top of the survey, asking participants to indicate their responses to each item by selecting or writing in the appropriate answer based on their feelings, opinions, and experiences. These instructions reiterated that their experiences did not need to be specific to the officer's time with the Town of Culpeper Police Department if they were previously employed/sworn as an officer elsewhere prior, and that participants were also able to skip any survey items that they did not feel comfortable responding to or know how to answer. This portion of the survey also stated that this research was not a test, and that there were no right or wrong answers.

The 15-question surveys gave multiple choice answers, with participants simply needing to fill in or check off an appropriate text bubble, except for the last question which was open-ended and allowed for qualitative data based on life experience. The last question of the survey contained four lines in which an officer could express his or her personal feelings of how EAPs

and, specifically, resources available to CPD officers could be improved upon, or what would make them more likely to reach out for assistance after a experiencing a critical incident while on-the-job. Anonymous survey methods like the one utilized with CPD officers, appear to promote greater disclosure of sensitive or stigmatizing information compared to non-anonymous methods, with higher disclosure rates having traditionally being interpreted as being more accurate than lower rates (Murdoch et al., 2014). Additionally, studies suggest that disclosure of sensitive information on questionnaires is enhanced yet more when participants respond anonymously rather than confidentially, implying that anonymous surveys may be the optimal method for accurately cataloging information, especially when it comes to uncovering stigmatization that may or may not exist within a specific environment or culture (Murdoch et al., 2014).

Document Analysis

Document analysis is an extremely valuable research method that has been used in qualitative research for many years. This method consists of analyzing various types of documents including books, newspapers, journal articles, and institutional reports, and can include visual material such as photographs, video, and film (Morgan, 2022). When conducting a document analysis, researchers typically choose between utilizing qualitative and quantitative methods. For quantitative studies, they sometimes conduct content analysis and use numbers and statistical information to make sense of data and begin to try to look for patterns. In qualitative studies, however, the use of statistics is not emphasized, but focuses primarily on how people interpret their experiences and relate them to the specific research topic (Morgan, 2022). Pre-existing data are often used alongside other types of data for triangulation, which is a strategy designed to increase the trustworthiness of a study (Morgan, 2022). Triangulation

assists in determining if the findings of a study are consistent and helps develop a deeper understanding of the subject being investigated. Additionally, researchers often use data from interviews and observations. By using multiple methods to collect information, researchers can confirm their findings across data sets, thereby minimizing the possibilities for biases (Morgan, 2022).

While document analysis of prior research and historical information on the existence of employee assistance programs and the stigmas surrounding their utilization in the policing field began several months before the research study at the Culpeper Police Department took place, Data and document analysis of the surveys and results began approximately one day after the completion of final set of surveys. Organization and analysis of survey results began by totaling the number of participants (33) as compared to the total number of sworn officers employed by CPD (48), showing a total of 69 percent agency participation. Some participants took the Consent form with them, whereas others placed it back into the envelope with their completed survey. Upon initial analysis of the completed surveys, very few surveys contained any skipped items. Three of the 33 surveys did not include an answer to the first question regarding how many years of service the officer had, and two others had skipped over or missed two different answers within the embedded questions. It was apparent upon the initial analysis of the survey documents, however, that there was a good mixture of officers who identify closely with that of a patrolman and those that identify with command-level staff.

Focus Groups

Although no focus groups consisting of CPD employees were utilized for this research study, they can be extremely beneficial and informative to qualitative research studies. The researcher considered the use of this methodology at the onset of the study, as in-person focus

groups have long been the normal for qualitative research. Much consideration was also given to the idea of conducting online focus groups as a means of interacting with CPD officers to gain insightful information and data about their experiences with critical incident stress and the EAPs available to them. In fact, the abundance of personal computers, mobile devices, the internet, and social media has enabled the growth of online qualitative data collection enormously in recent years, and online focus groups are becoming a more popular and accepted method for collecting qualitative data. This type of data collection currently accounts for more than US$1 billion of the US$10 billion in annual spending on global qualitative market research (Richard et al., 2020). This was heavily considered as the research questions were being developed.

Focus groups are beneficial, in that many participants may feel more comfortable talking about their personal experiences if they are with other like-minded individuals with similar backgrounds and/or experiences, but they are not without their limitations. Focus groups lack anonymity, discourage participation from hard to reach and distant populations, and are limited in the number of participants they can accommodate (Richard et al., 2020). Although the number of participants was not thought to be an issue, as the CPD employs a total of 48 sworn law enforcement officers, there was significant concern that those officers who already felt strongly that a negative connotation was associated with seeking the help of an employee assistance program would definitely not be interested in speaking up in front of their colleagues. Ultimately, anonymous surveys were chosen as the preferred methodology for this particular study due to the sensitive nature of the questions.

Observations

Observation in qualitative research is noted as being one of the oldest and most fundamental research methods approaches and involves collecting data using one's sense,

especially looking and listening in a systematic and meaningful way (Moment, 2018). Observations of social settings, specifically educational landscapes, however, are often not what they appear to be, and can be far more complex than they appear on their surface. According to Moment (2018):

> According to studies from the late 1980s, there are three observational procedures for seeing: (1) descriptive observation, involving the observation of everything, wherein the researcher assumes a novice attitude by assuming no knowledge and taking nothing for granted; (2) focused observation, wherein certain entities are deemed irrelevant and thus can be ignored, and the researcher typically concentrates on well-defined, observable entities; and (3) selective observation, wherein the researcher concentrates on a specific form of general entities. Of these three observational procedures, it is only by making descriptive observations that creates heightened awareness in the field (p. 2).

Selective observation was the type of observational procedures employed during the roll call meetings with CPD officers, because the researcher knew that there would not be follow-up interviews or subsequent focus groups that would afford the opportunity to expound on any observations made. In fact, observations during the course of survey dissemination with the participating officers would not necessarily be apparent by design, in order to preserve anonymity. Due to the size of the group/number of attendees at roll call, observations were not necessary to write down, as the researcher wanted to ensure all participants felt comfortable in answering honestly. The primary observation, however, during the course of survey implementation at CPD was how many officers were eager to participate. Upon learning about the topic of officer mental health and wellness programs and how critical incident stress may correlate to the utilization (or not) of EAPs during the recruitment process at each roll call

session, there were no officers that verbally declined to participate, to include the Chief of Police. Although there was no direct interaction with officers about the research study itself, observations were made by the researcher that would lead a reasonable person to believe that this topic is extremely relevant in current times and that all officers were extremely willing to participate and contribute. Several civilian personnel also verbally asked if they were able to participate as well, prior to learning that only sworn employees would be needed for this particular study.

One observation made during the course of the four different roll calls was the seemingly even disbursement of command staff and patrol officers. Although the Town of Culpeper Police Department is somewhat small with 48-sworn law enforcement officers, the mixture of all ranks, as well as the number of male and females in all ranks that were willing to participate, seemed fairly equal. Instructions given prior to beginning the anonymous survey stated that it would take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Although the researcher was not overseeing each participant as they completed the questions, it seemed as if each group finished in less time than allotted, making the researcher question if officers were not filling it out in its entirety or were anonymously declining to participate altogether. Another observation made was that some officers appeared to leave the roll call room with the consent form in-hand, while others did not seem to do more than skim the information. Nevertheless, upon final count, it was noted that 33 of the 48 total officers employed by the department had participated, or 69 percent of the entire office, which the researcher felt was a good percentage to obtain reliable data.

Data Analysis

In all methodologies of qualitative research, but especially in grounded theory research, data collection and analysis require reflection on the part of the researcher, both before and

during the research process, as a means of providing context and understanding for readers (Sutton & Austin, 2015). As a whole, qualitative research seeks to understand why individuals have certain thoughts or feelings that may cause them to act or behave in a certain way. The role of the researcher, therefore, is to attempt to access the thoughts and feelings of study participants, which is not an easy task, as it involves asking people to talk about things that may be very personal to them (Sutton & Austin, 2015). If the researcher attempts to put themselves in another person's shoes and see the world from that person or participant population's perspective, the most important part of data analysis and management is to be true to the participants (Sutton & Austin, 2015). It is the CPD's officers' voices that the researcher is trying to hear, so that they can be interpreted and reported on for others to read and learn from. Although interpretation of the data depends on the theoretical standpoint of the researcher, it is important to remain reflective upon and articulate the starting point for such analysis. In doing so, the researcher can then begin to gain understanding for the participants' experience(s) of the phenomenon in question and can start to think about things that could be pursued in subsequent surveys, interviews, or focus groups to expand the research further (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

Analysis of the data was designed to be conducted as soon as practical upon completion of the survey collection. Each question's responses were to be tallied and a percentage calculated, as it directly related to the total number of participants. Each set of answers would then be analyzed based on whether the survey was completed by a patrol officer or member of command-level staff, to see if responses were distinctly different. Officers were advised they could skip an answer if so inclined, so this would also be taken into consideration when totaling the numbers and nature of responses given.

It is important to note the importance of the qualitative research method known as interpretative phenomenological analysis, which has two basic components: (1) that it is rooted in phenomenology, attempting to understand the meaning that individuals ascribe to their lived experiences; and (2) that the researcher must attempt to interpret this meaning in the context of the research (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Although the researcher may have some preexisting knowledge or even expertise in the subject of the research, successful data analysis involves more than combining this knowledge with simply providing a description of what participants say or how they answer specific survey questions. Interpretative phenomenological analysis is about getting underneath, or to the root of what an individual is saying to try to truly understand the world from his or her perspective (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is extremely imperative in any research study. This is because in order to be relevant, all research must be trustworthy (Adler, 2022). There is a history to the use of trustworthiness as it pertains to the assessment of qualitative methods of research dating back to 1985 when Lincoln and Guba, who developed a set of extensive and detailed criteria for establishing naturalistic inquiry, made a case for assessing qualitative research not with scientific measures such as reliability and validity, but rather, upon trustworthiness (Adler, 2022). Transparency is likely the most important aspect of trustworthiness, because in qualitative research, the researcher is the principal research instrument. Most social science research, whether qualitative or quantitative, whether deductive or inductive, has a theoretical framework and, to be transparent, that framework should be spelled out for the consumers or readers of the research. Even in an inductive study, for example, grounded theory inquiry in which the

investigator is looking to discover something new rather than testing hypotheses, there is an overarching perspective that guides the questions that the researcher is asking (Adler, 2022).

Typically, extended engagement with participants and steadfast observation periods can often add to the trustworthiness of participants and research data as a whole in qualitative studies, but does not necessarily apply in this case, as anonymous surveys were the methodology of choice in order to obtain accurate and honest information from officers. Once complete, however, data obtained from the surveys was to be analyzed multiple times in order to establish patterns. Credibility, dependability, confirmability, and authenticity are all extremely crucial to establishing trustworthiness, especially in qualitative research, which has been established by thoughtful and deliberate planning of specific questions relevant to critical incident stress and law enforcement officers' utilization (of lack of) employee assistance programs. Similarly, reflexivity and honest communication between the research and participants regarding the study itself are also crucial to trustworthiness, and both are significantly demonstrated in this study.

Credibility

Credibility, or confidence in data obtained, is also crucial to qualitative research studies, and is certainly applicable to this study. Although credibility can be determined or assured through a myriad of perspectives during data collection to ensure that the data obtained is appropriate, participant validation is the most critical in this particular research. In fact, there are typically three distinct but related inquiry concerns when examining ways of enhancing the quality and credibility of qualitative analysis: rigorous techniques and methods for gathering and analyzing qualitative data, including attention to validity, reliability, and triangulation; the credibility, competence, and perceived trustworthiness of the qualitative researcher; and the philosophical beliefs of evaluation users about such paradigm-based preferences as objectivity

versus subjectivity, truth versus perspective, and generalizations versus extrapolations (Patton, 1999).

As each survey question was carefully designed to elicit honest answers from officers regarding EAPs and how they correlate to critical incident stress and stigmatization that they may not otherwise feel comfortable talking about with their peers in the room, it was not only important to preserve participant anonymity, but also to ensure that each participant was a sworn officer. This factor alone helped to ensure confidence in data obtained.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability and confirmability are also crucial to qualitative research and are related directly to trustworthiness. Dependability can be demonstrated by proving that findings were established in a study, despite changes to a research setting or a variance in participants that may have occurred. For the purposes of this research study, this means that dependability is confirmed through the utilization of roll call, no matter the day, time, or shift that each officer participated in the anonymous survey. While all surveys were disseminated in the same room both days, participation was requested four separate times, two during dayshift roll call at 9:00AM, and two during nightshift roll call at 6:00PM. The final data set was obtained once officers from all four roll calls had participated, in this case, resulting in 33 of the total 48 sworn officers employed by the Town of Culpeper Police Department.

Confirmability, consequently, can be assured what the data obtained is checked and rechecked throughout data collection and analysis in order to ensure that any results obtained would likely be repeatable or duplicative, if others were to conduct research in the same manner. Identifying codes and patterns throughout the analysis process can help ensure this. This research study of CPD's officers' experiences as they relate to EAPs and critical incident stress

possesses a high amount of dependability and credibility, and the researcher is confident that the data obtained would be able to be easily replicated if conducted again, or at another local law enforcement agency.

Transferability

Transferability can be established in this research study by providing consumers of the data with evidence that the findings could be applicable to other situations and populations. This is directly related to external validity and overall trustworthiness in quantitative research. This factor, also offered by Lincoln and Guba in 1985, does not aim for replicability in qualitative research, but rather, maintains that patterns and descriptions from one context may be applicable to another (Stahl & King, 2020). A goal of this research study is to learn from study extensions that might fit with a subsequent set of circumstances, so that the impact from the original study is not limited. Just as it is valid and important to create new knowledge from emergent discovery-oriented qualitative research, it is also productive to seek understanding from others' systemic qualitative inquiry (Stahl & King, 2020). Consequently, methods and time frames for the collection of data in the original study must be completely and thoroughly described, as well as the entire duration of the field study, as these can greatly influence the degree to wich the completed research may have application- to an additional site or context (Stahl & King, 2020).

Although the researcher is unable to prove that the findings from CPD's officers are applicable to every law enforcement officer in the United States, the utilization of anonymous surveys does provide evidence that it could be applicable in other instances and to similar populations of officers, working in similar agencies and departments. The research study conducted at CPD, coupled with historical evidence and research, suggests a high level of transferability in this particular study.

Ethical Considerations

Many ethical considerations were taken into account when designing the research study along with the specific survey questions asked of participants. Considering the nature of qualitative studies as a whole, the interaction between researchers and participants can be ethically challenging for the former, as they are personally involved in the different stages of the study and therefore is essential to formulate specific ethical guidelines (Sanjari et al., 2014). Voluntary participation, informed consent (in this case, both written and verbal), anonymity and confidentiality, a lack of potential for harm to officers through participation, and results communication were all heavily considered. The researcher understood that some topics related to critical incident stress experienced by law enforcement officers, as well as the subsequent stigmatization that often perpetuates officers to fail to seek or obtain necessary mental health assistance, meant a strong necessity for anonymity. As well documented in previous research and literature, many officers are not honest about how critical incident stress adversely affects them, and therefore confidentiality in order to obtain honesty in survey responses was a must. The implementation of anonymous surveys during a roll call near the beginning of an officer's shift (that he or she is obligated to attend anyway), was the setting chosen due to the lack of potential harm to any officers that chose to participate. It was also likely to yield a higher number of participants, given the controlled setting. All officers were provided with a consent form that detailed that topic of the research study, the lack of potential for harm, how participants and society could potentially benefit from the study, and how personal information would be protected, even though the data collection in this instance was an anonymous survey. Participants were advised verbally, as well as in writing, that participation in the study was voluntary and that their decision to participate or not, would not affect current or future

relationships with their employing agency, and that they were free to withdraw or not answer any question at any time. All participants were also given the researcher's contact information should they have questions after completion or concerns regarding the study itself.

Summary

Qualitative researchers have an immense responsibility, in that there is no statistical analysis in qualitative studies, so it is necessary to evaluate what is observed and then subsequently interpret that information (Sanjari et al., 2014). Likewise, qualitative studies tend to utilize methodologies resulting in text production rather than numerical outputs, with this particular study providing both. Given that a researcher is considered to be the research instrument itself, research design and planning needs to incorporate and account for non-traditional approaches that are often necessary to address certain concerns such as bias and credibility (Sanjari et al., 2014). Although these factors were not an obstacle in this study, had interviews been selected rather anonymous surveys for data collection, participants may not have been as forthcoming and honest with their answers, resulting in different outcome(s). Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are all essential to qualitative research, and considering the significance of personal relations in grounded theory, researchers act as a component of daily events and must therefore be completely aware of their values (Sanjari et al., 2014). This is especially true as there is no control in this natural field, such as the setting of anonymous survey dissemination within the Culpeper Police Department. Although the researcher is unable to differentiate whether every law enforcement agency across the country utilizes EAPs in the same manner as CPD, and whether or not officers feel the same way about associated stigmas as the officers surveyed, transferability is high and all ethical considerations were taken into account.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

Qualitative research studies can be particularly beneficial to an area of study, as was the case with the data obtained about employee assistance programs, law enforcement mental health and wellness and associated stigmas, and the likelihood of an officer reaching out for assistance after a traumatic or critical incident they have experienced while on the job. The number of participants willing to answer the anonymous surveys honestly was unknown during the planning and organizational stages of the research design, but upon implementation, yielded extremely valuable qualitative data.

Participants

Anonymous surveys were disseminated to officers during roll call on four separate occasions, in order to obtain as much agency participation as possible, as suggested by the Chief of Police. It was made known to the researcher that there were 48 sworn law enforcement officers employed with CPD at the time, but participants were not notified this would be occurring during their shift, so the number of participants willing to take part in the research was unknown prior to initiating the study.

During each roll call session, the researcher and research topic were introduced, along with what to expect should an officer choose to participate. Consent forms were also distributed to potential participants, ensuring that all officers understood that participation was completely voluntary and anonymous. The consent form also contained the researcher's contact information, should they have additional questions or concerns afterwards, whether they ultimately chose to participate or not. During the two days and four roll call sessions, a total of

33 of the 48 sworn officers participated in the research study, to include the Chief and Deputy Chief of Police.

CPD also employs a co-responder, who is a civilian that assists officers in the response to calls for behavioral and mental health crises who also completed the survey, although the criteria of being a sworn officer was made known both orally by the researcher and on the paper consent form. Upon the completion of that individual's survey, though, he approached the researcher and advised he was not sworn and not to include his responses, so his survey was destroyed and not utilized. In total, 33 sworn officers participated and turned in their completed surveys, meaning there was 69 percent agency participation. The researcher was advised that some employees were out of town or on vacation and/or were on sick-leave, or else the potential number of participants would have been greater.

Results

Upon preliminary analysis of the 33 completed surveys, it became apparent that the saturation point of the data occurred at 25, meaning that no new or differing data was received, but due to anonymity and how they were disseminated, there was no way to tell this during the course of survey implementation. Most surveys received contained answers to all questions, except for three of the surveys that did not include an answer to the first question regarding how many years of service the officer had, and two others that had skipped over or missed two different answers within the embedded questions. These discrepancies were not discovered until after all surveys were collected and compiled, and therefore, were not corrected.

Research Question Results

Of the 33, 20 participants identified more readily with that of a patrol officer, and 13 with command staff. The survey did not allow for further breakdown of this information to include

specific rank within the department, in order to preserve anonymity. Of the responses collected, 28 of the 33 officers advised that they had been involved in or experienced a critical incident within the last five years during the course of their job duties and responsibilities, which equates to 85 percent of all participants, a number that did not surprise the researcher given the very nature of police work. The mean and median years of law enforcement experience of participants was calculated to 14.5 years, respectively. One officer answered that he or she had less than one year on the job, so for the purposes of this survey, the number 0 was utilized in the calculation of average number of years of experience. Additionally, three surveys contained no information or answer to this particular question, so the total number of years of experience was calculated by dividing by 30 instead of 33, excluding those three officers.

The third question of the survey asked each officer to identify to what extent they currently feel overall satisfaction with their career as a law enforcement officer. 15 of the 33 answered "to a great extent," 12 answered "a lot," 5 answered "somewhat," one answered, "a little," and zero answered "not at all," which directly relates to leadership and current resources utilized and offered by the Culpeper Police Department. Officer satisfaction is not this high in nationwide polls, so this observation was particularly interesting to the researcher.

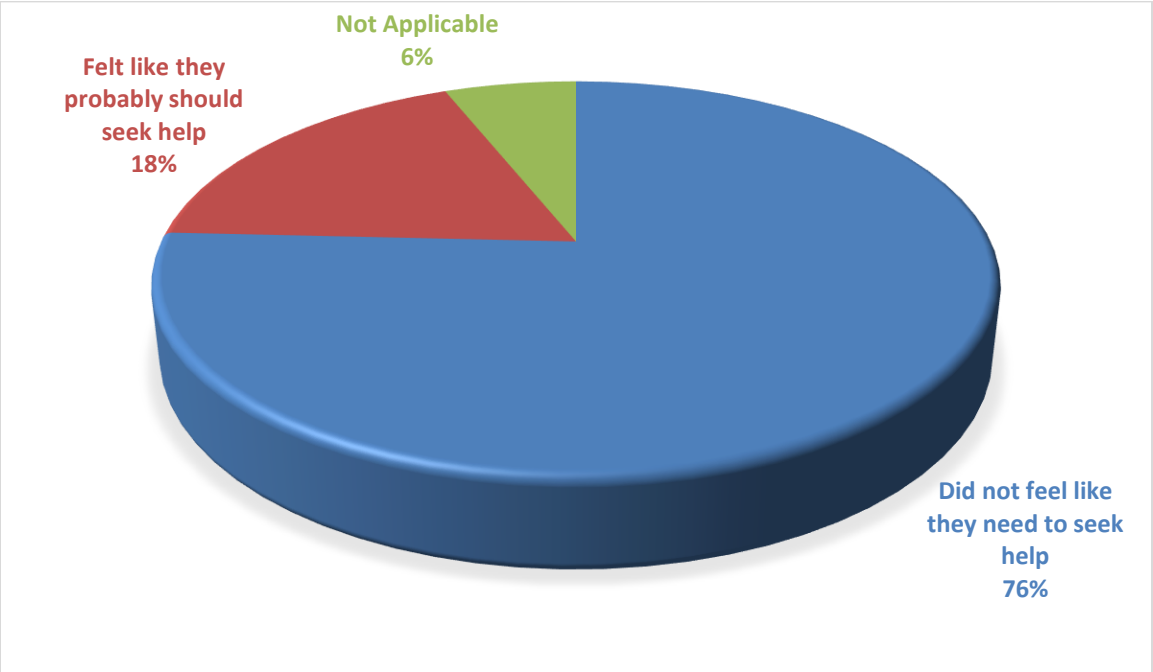
Four questions within the survey contained information about reactions to the critical incident that the 85 percent answered they had experienced within the last five years. 16 of the 28, or approximately 57 percent, advised they had an immediate reaction, defined for the purposes of this survey as tunnel vision, loss of or slowed thoughts, sense of time distortion or slow motion, muffled sounds, heightened sense of detail about the incident, or emotional or physical "let down" within a few days of the incident. 15 advised they did not have any of those reactions and two answered that this question wasn't applicable to them. When asked if the

incident resulted in any behavioral reactions, defined for the purposes of this survey as talking almost non-stop about the incident and what they experienced, sudden poor decisions or inability to make a decision, sudden aggression, an increase in absenteeism or a drop in work productivity, difficultly sleeping or nightmares, sudden relationship problems, a desire to turn to substances, (i.e., alcohol, pain medication, etc.), withdrawal from friends or normal activity, or feelings of isolation, which could be immediately following the incident or weeks to months later, 10 officers answered it did. The majority, however, 22 officers, answered they had not experienced any of these reactions, and two answered it was not applicable to them or the situation.

When asked in another question whether the incident(s) resulted in any physical or physiological reactions such as muscle tremors, nausea, chills, vomiting, hyperventilation, feeling faint, crying, profusely sweating, increased heart rate, fatigue, chest paints, or an increase in blood pressure, 10 answered yes, while 21 answered no. Two participants again answered that it was not applicable to them. When asked about cognitive or emotional reactions like feelings of disbelief, feeling dazed, difficulty comprehending the significance of the incident, depression, tension, irritability, tiredness causing too much sleep and less energy, feeling emotionally detached or numb, confusion, change in hobbies or routines, increase in risk-taking behavior and/or sudden poor judgement, 16 answered yes, while 15 answered no. As before, two answered this question was not applicable to them. Although many had some form of reaction to critical incident stress, the researcher found it particularly interesting that when asked if following the incident and the presence of any of the prescribed reactions (and any others not specifically listed), if the officer felt as though they should seek help or assistance in working through the significance of the event, 25 of the 33 officers answered, “no.” Six participants

answered affirmatively to this question and two advised it was not applicable. This question itself tracks with the idea of stigma and reluctance of law enforcement officers to obtaining the assistance they, sometimes desperately, need. This is further detailed in Figure 7 below.

Figure 7 CPD officers' need to seek assistance following critical incident stress or a traumatic event



When asked if they felt like they would be "labeled" by fellow officers, whether they were also present for the incident or not, and/or supervisors if they were to seek help, an overwhelming 25 of the 28 that answered they had been involved in a critical incident, answered that they did not feel like they would be. Again, this is likely be directly related to the culture of the Culpeper Police Department and is seen as a positive attribute to this particular agency, and one that is likely not always the case at other departments across the nation.

Moreover, when asked if they felt like they should just "tough it out" until things improved, 13 answered "yes," 15 answered "no," and five answered that the question wasn't applicable or that they weren't sure. Although they might not have necessarily felt "labeled," as

the previous question had asked, the numbers for feeling the necessity of being mentally tough and working through the event on their own seemed to be higher and could be attributed to the total number of years of service. As previously stated, the ranges in years of service began at less than one to 38 years. Although the question aimed to focus on how the officer felt after experiencing a critical incident in the last five years, this is a significant difference, and taking into consideration how police culture has evolved and EAPs have seemingly improved over the years, there is no way of knowing what incident(s) the officer taking the survey was recalling. In years past, and certainly when the officers with 20-30 or more years of service began their law enforcement careers, this was the mentality of many, if not all, departments and agencies around the country.

When asked if the current CPD peer support officers or supervisors support the officer's mental well-being while on duty and not, and overwhelming 27 answered "yes," with just three answering "no." Three participants answered that they were unsure at the time of taking the survey. The following survey question asked officers if those individuals offer assistance or talk adequately about resources readily available to them and other officers if they ever need it, (i.e., counseling, support groups, etc.). 29 answered that they do, while just two answered that they do not. Two were unsure of how they felt. When asked to what extent the officer feels like established EAPs and/or resources available to them and other officers with the Culpeper Police Department are effective, especially post-critical incident, only four participants answered, "to a great extent." 14 answered, "a lot," with 12 answering, "somewhat," and three answering, "a little." Zero officers answered, "not at all," which is a positive nod to the culture of CPD. Conversely, there is still obvious work that needs to be done in this area, given the answers to this very question alone.

The final question on the survey was open-ended and asked what could be improved upon, in the officer's opinion, to make them more likely to reach out to existing EAPs and resources that are currently available. While 13 left this question blank, 20 officers elaborated on their thoughts of improvements that could be made to resources currently available to them. The average number of years of experience as a law enforcement officer among the participants that responded to this question was 13.6, with one survey lacking an answer for that question. As this number was slightly less than the average number of years of experience overall, a conclusion could be drawn that the newer officers and those with lesser years of experience were the ones that answered this question and gave their opinions on what needs to be improved with current resources available.

Nearly all answers to the last question offered different suggestions and opinions of how EAPs and the category of officer mental health and wellness could be improved within CPD in particular. Six of the 20, or 30 percent of officers surveyed, advised that more information on how to go about obtaining resources would be helpful, and likewise, knowing more about the programs themselves would also be a beneficial improvement. While many officers took the opportunity to state positive aspects of what is currently offered at the agency-level, other suggestions such as additional exposure to outside providers/private consultants, easier access, more information on what department-provided insurance covers for external resources, more trustworthy peer support, an increase in command staff support immediately following a critical incident, annual reviews of the EAP to raise awareness, quarterly training during roll call on changes to resources available, having someone available to be on-site 24/7 to speak with officers, and access to first-hand testimonials from officers that have recovered from PTSD-induced events were all suggested. Other answers included finding a way to convince officers

that the resources are there for their benefit and should not be feared, promotion of EAP and similar programs by fellow officers or the peer support team rather than command staff, and more local resources specific to law enforcement critical incident stress were also noted. One officer wrote that EAPs appear to be a tool, but not necessarily a good one, as they do not currently have the correct people to assist that can relate to the law enforcement culture. One officer suggested that immediate follow up after an incident would be a determining factor in reaching out for help. Seven of the 20 responses, or 35 percent of all completed surveys, advised that Culpeper Police Department's resources do work to a degree, and are better than what is offered at other agencies and departments locally, but improvements can still be made.

Summary

Survey implementation and participation were deemed successful in this research study. Having 69 percent of agency participation was a significant rate of survey completion, and the invaluable results that the anonymous surveys revealed is particularly beneficial to existing research on EAPs in law enforcement and the stigmatization that often occurs after a critical incident experienced while on the job. Results yielded extremely interesting information, especially with regard to the open-ended question about what could be improved upon with existing resources for officers with CPD. Consequently, results supported previous literature and research on the subject and support the notion that critical incident stress, along with psychological trauma, is real, even though some officers may not recognize it as such immediately after an incident or event.

Further, results to the questions specifically regarding physical, physiological, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral reactions to critical incidents stress encountered while on the job support Fox and other research previously discussed, in that the need for EAPs is definitive

among law enforcement professionals. Over the course of an officer's career, the work environment coupled with a culture that still seems to value self-reliance can, and often does, adversely impact an officer's mental health (Fox et al., 2012). The findings from this study of 33 law enforcement officers at the local level directly reflect this. Although the results suggest that officers employed with the Town of Culpeper Police Department may have more satisfaction with the current mental health and wellness resources offered to them than with other departments or agencies, there is clearly still a strong need for improvement in how those who serve and protect us can be better assisted and work through critical incident stress that the job inevitably brings.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

Unmanaged stress in law enforcement officers has been linked with anxiety disorders, depression, sleep problems, and anger management issues (Saunders et al., 2019). Similarly, suicidal ideation has been linked to both acute and distal effects of stress resulting from the duties and responsibilities associated with policing. Research shows that high rates of officer stress are correlated with low job satisfaction and overall unsatisfactory job performance, as well as high rates of burnout and employee turnover (Saunders et al., 2019). While law enforcement practitioners and criminal justice researchers alike have suggested that police culture itself may contribute to feelings of stress among officers by inhibiting healthy coping mechanisms due to the resulting expectations and social pressures, it is also widely known and accepted that police culture also places a high premium on emotional stability and mental "toughness" (Saunders et al., 2019). While there is a myriad of literature on the stressors associated with a career in law enforcement, some deficiencies, such as the seemingly underutilization of employee assistance programs by law enforcement officers, need addressing. Using anonymous surveys to obtain data from law enforcement officers of differing ranks at the local level can only assist in bridging the gap between existing research on EAPs' effectiveness and what can be done to better address (and ultimately reduce) the stigma often associated with an officer admitting they need help in working through a critical incident or chronic, operational stress.

Throughout the duration of survey implementation in four different roll call meetings, with a total of 33 participants, the presence of critical incident stress, stigmatization or labeling, and the need for improvement in EAPs are all evident within the Culpeper Police Department. 69 percent of total agency choosing to participate, along with the results yielded from the

anonymous surveys, implicate a definitive need for the continued presence of, and improvement on, resources and EAPs to support officer mental health after a critical incident occurs while on the job. With an average of 14.5 years of experience as a sworn officer for each participant, and a 61 percent officer, 39 percent command staff makeup, the anonymous surveys were able to capture that critical incident stress is present in today's law enforcement. While the survey focused on reactions to such stress based on an incident or incidents that occurred within the last five years, it also further pinpointed areas that need to be improved upon in the area of resources offered.

Although the majority of responses, or 45 percent of all officers surveyed, indicated that they did not feel as if they should just "tough it out" until things improved following a critical incident in the last five years, 40 percent of all participants indicated that they did, in fact, feel as though they should. This clearly indicates a presence of stigmatization within the CPD culture, or within law enforcement culture, and that asking for assistance post critical incident somehow correlates negatively for the officer, regardless of rank of prior time on the job. Conversely, the study results indicated many positive attributes for the Culpeper Police Department, as an overwhelming 82 percent of all officers surveyed indicated that peer support officers and supervisors, as well as chain-of-command personnel, support their overall mental well-being, while on duty and not. Likewise, 88 percent of all participants felt as though peer support officers and supervisors offer assistance and talk about resources that are currently and readily available to them and other officers with CPD. This percentage is likely to vary significantly if the same research study were to be duplicated throughout the country and would likely vary based on the size of the agency/department and the budget allocated to policing and criminal justice services. Nevertheless, the data obtained herein supports the 2019 report provided to

Congress that detailed a myriad of successful and promising law enforcement mental health and wellness strategies across the country that included agencies creating a sense of ownership and support for such initiatives from the top police administrative officials down to the patrol officers with "boots on the ground" (Craddock & Telesco, 2022). The results of this study speak highly of the Culpeper Police Department in their efforts to reduce the existing stigma in law enforcement culture of needing to be "tough" and void of emotion in order to be "fit for duty."

Summary of Findings

High-quality qualitative research should formulate criteria that focuses on the worthiness, relevance, timeliness, significant, morality, and practicality of the research topic, and the ethical stance of the research itself to produce relevant findings that make significant contributions to the field being studied (Yadav, 2022). Researchers have suggested that a series of questions that serve as guiding principles are important in assessing the quality of a study and this very concept was utilized in this research, keeping in mind the problem statement and key research questions. Yadav (2022) argues that good qualitative research should be robust, well-informed, and thoroughly documented. This is essential in being able to produce a quality summary of findings from data obtained.

In addition to the need for high-quality research, it is important to note that policy and practice decisions at the agency level are increasingly informed by findings from qualitative and quantitative research. This factor alone makes it imperative to report summaries of findings as accurately as possible. Qualitative research data, such as in this study, is particularly useful to policymakers and agency executives because it often describes the settings in which policies (or employee assistance programs, in this case) will be implemented (Anderson, 2010). Qualitative research is especially prevalent in all social sciences, but almost always involves the collection,

analysis, and interpretation of data that are not necessarily reduced to numbers, though in this study, were calculated by dividing by the total number of participants. Data found herein directly relates to the social world, and more specifically, to the culture of law enforcement in the United States, by further illustrating the concepts and behaviors of people within it (Anderson, 2010).

Summarizing the data obtained from all 33 anonymous surveys, coupled with the researcher's observations on both days of the study and how they correlate to preexisting literature on EAPs, paint a clear picture of the very real phenomenon of critical incident stress that exists within police agencies. While the study was deemed successful with 69 percent of the officers employed with CPD taking part in the study, it also highlighted a few areas that are in obvious need of improvement, which tracks with much of the literature on law enforcement specific EAPs throughout the country. Additionally, the 35 percent of completed surveys that advised that CPD's current resources work to a degree but still need improvement is a significant finding, and one that can be directly related to the efforts of the command staff and decision-makers within the police department, because it means that the EAP and peer support program they currently utilize, is in fact working for many officers. A summary of the findings obtained through the anonymous surveys supports not only the need for law enforcement specific EAPs, especially after a critical incident, but that improvements are still a necessity. This, coupled with existing literature, demonstrates a critical need to develop more comprehensive services for police officers exposed to traumatic events and police stress and implement early prevention assessment along with mental health and wellness strategies that are proactive, rather than reactive in nature (Craddock & Telesco, 2022).

Discussion

Much discussion can be had regarding EAPs and resources available to law enforcement officers around the country regarding their effectiveness in breaking the stigma that exists within police culture in the United States. The importance and relevance of the results of the research conducted at the Culpeper Police Department are invaluable and serve as a direct correlation between officer mental health and wellness, critical incident stress, and the absolute need for EAPs and improvement upon what currently exists. Although only 15 percent of responses indicated that the officer felt as though they would be "labeled" if they were to reach out for assistance from these programs and resources following a critical incident, which is likely a massive attribute to CPD, 40 percent still answered that they felt as though they should just "tough it out," which cannot be negated. Although previous research indicates EAPs and resources for police officers have improved significantly over recent years, the data collected herein, indicate a greater need for continued progress in this field.

The overwhelming presence of adverse reactions to critical incident stress among officers, whether behavioral, physical or physiological, or cognitive or emotional, cannot be refuted. Although this sampling of 33 officers employed by a medium-size agency in the central Virginia is small in comparison to the number of law enforcement officers in the United States, the results are indicative of the need for improvement and seem to track with national trends of officer stigmatization with regard to mental health and wellness, especially following a traumatic or critical incident. 85 percent of officers surveyed indicated that they have been involved in a critical incident in the last five years, which is a high number given that 39 percent of participants identified more readily with command staff and are not likely to be acting in a patrol capacity answering calls for service in the same manner as newer, less experienced officers who

are very often the first on the scene of a call. While management and supervisors may respond as a secondary officer, or to assist in the investigation of a more serious crime or offense afterwards, the primary first responder is usually that of a patrol officer. This phenomenon and how officers answered the anonymous surveys cannot be discounted. This is a prime example of why building trust between patrol officers and command staff is crucial, as much of the research suggests.

Much of the previously obtained research suggests that no matter how good an effective EAP may be, if an officer feels as though they will face consequences or repercussions directly related to their job or job performance for seeking assistance after a particularly traumatic incident they have experienced during the course of their job duties, the program itself is highly likely to be ineffective. As many CPD officers indicated in the open-ended question at the end of the survey, trust is important, and improvements can still be made to lower barriers of officer enrollment and participation in such programs. This is directly related to the Police1 article that surmises that officer wellness programs can save lives and reduce officer suicide rates through trust, open communication, and ultimately, acknowledgement that critical incident stress is in fact real, and that officers should not feel stigmatized by requesting more information on how to obtain services from the many resources available to them.

The researcher was contacted several weeks after the study was complete and informed that the research study's topic generated much conversation and planning between command staff personnel, and it was decided that CPD needed to take steps to further improve their existing EAP resources and mental wellness program, even without seeing the data results. The researcher was informed that beginning in the summer months of 2023, all officers will now be mandated to speak to a clinician on a yearly basis, to help with the compartmentalization that

often comes with critical incident stress encountered on the job, whether they believe they need to or not. CPD command staff is also going to be doing more to promote more frequent visits with the hope of cutting through any existing stigmas already present within the agency and improving officer mental well-being. This can be seen as a massive win for the department and a positive outcome or result of the study.

Implications

The most important outcome of the data collected from the Culpeper Police Department is two-fold. Preliminarily, 85 percent of officers surveyed, no matter their rank or specific job function or duty, have been involved in a critical incident in the last five years. Of those individuals that have experienced some form of on-duty trauma, 57 percent have suffered some form of adverse reaction directly related to their experience, with the highest number of responses indicating cognitive or emotional reactions such as feeling faint, crying, hyperventilation, feeling nauseous, chest pains, and an increase in blood pressure. Likewise, the same percentage indicated they had immediate reactions such as tunnel vision, a sense of time distortion, or heightened sense of detail following the incident. Despite all of this, 40 percent of all officers indicated that they felt as though they needed to "tough it out." This alone indicates a need for change and supports the idea that EAPs, though effective in many instances, still need to be significantly improved upon in order to, in turn, improve officer mental health and wellness and ideally, prevent officer suicide.

It appears much can be said for the current EAPs and resources available to Culpeper officers currently, however, because the data obtained indicates that most officers employed with the agency do feel like current programs are effective, resulting in high rates of officer satisfaction with their job as a law enforcement officer. The data also supports more police-

focused resources need to be established to be even more effective. The results obtained, especially from the open-ended question of the survey, appear to indicate that more command-level interaction about how to obtain services available is necessary, along with a more frequent summary of what the EAP offers, is necessary to further improve on existing resources.

Implications of the results of this survey could have the potential for significant future research on the subject, as the study could be replicated in order to obtain a bigger scope of the issues surrounding existing stigmas among law enforcement officers. Replication is broadly defined as the repetition of a research study, generally among different subjects and/or situations that is commonly conducted in quantitative research with the goal of determining whether the basic findings of the original study can be generalized (Tuval-Mashiach, 2021). Qualitative researchers have historically objected to replication because it can sometimes be deemed incompatible with qualitative research on several grounds, including the context-bound nature of the research itself, as well as methodological and representational limitations (Tuval-Mashiach, 2021). The concept of transferability is often suggested as a goal instead, but both are likely valid pertaining to this specific study regarding the effectiveness and utilization of EAPs by law enforcement agencies. According to Tuval-Mashiach (2021):

> Successful replication is considered a hallmark of good science, as replicating a study strengthens the understanding that an identified pattern or a finding is robust, rather than being an error or an artifact. In this regard, the replicability of a study serves two purposes. First, it adds to the study's validity, because it implies that it can be trusted by other researchers. Second, replication allows for increased knowledge in the relevant field, as it is through the accumulation of studies examining similar phenomena that a body of knowledge is established (p. 366).

Although replication of this study with other police departments or law enforcement agencies around the county is likely possible in the future, the concept of replicability is foreign to the majority of qualitative approaches because interpretation typically serves as the main tool in qualitative research. This is always subjective, so many researchers may feel that there is no point in trying to replicate a study. Although it might be possible to replicate, or yield, at the very least, very similar results, the concept of transferability is likely much more feasible to support the findings of this study.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations were purposely set to only include sworn law enforcement officers working in some capacity with or for the Town of Culpeper Police Department. This inherently meant that all study participants were required to be at least 18 years of age, but likely to be over 21, as is the hiring age for many police departments and sheriff's offices in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Although CPD employs many civilian personnel that work closely with sworn officers and may be exposed to some of the traumatic incidents (or aftermath of) that an officer is, the scope of the study aimed to obtain qualitative data based on the job experiences of police officers, specifically.

An overall appraisal and interpretation of data collected from CPD officers is positive from an agency standpoint, but also supports previous research that there is a definitive need for improvement of services for those individuals that are sworn to serve and protect our nation's communities. Goals and objectives for this research study were met, in that an excellent percentage of officers appear to have answered the anonymous surveys honestly and seemed to reflect upon their experiences while on the job, but limitations do exist in the data.

One limitation that often exists in qualitative research approaches is that sometimes contextual sensitivities are left out, and the research focuses more on meanings and/or experiences. Phenomenological approach, for instance, attempts to uncover, interpret, and understand the participants' experience (Rahman, 2017). Even when sampling is selective and purposive, contextual influence can be overlooked. Additionally, purely qualitative research may neglect the social and cultural constructions of the variables studied. It is for this reason that many governmental policymakers give low credibility to results from a qualitative approach, but rather favor quantifiable data and results (Rahman, 2017). Smaller sample sizes can also be a limitation to qualitative research, and often raise the issue of generalizability to the whole population of the research, thus causing data interpretation and analysis to be more difficult and complex (Rahman, 2017).

One of the limitations of this study that cannot be controlled is size of the agency in comparison to others around the country, as well as throughout Virginia. If data was being collected on a much larger scale, there exists the potential for different outcomes and results. This is largely due to budgets for policing initiatives being set at the local and sometimes state-level, which could directly affect EAPs and resources that are made available to law enforcement officers after a critical incident. The Town of Culpeper appears to have a great amount of support in that area, but data from other areas of the country, or even the Commonwealth of Virginia, could differ greatly. The Culpeper Police Department was chosen for this study due to its seemingly central location within Virginia and its size as a medium agency, but this could also be seen by additional research as a limitation. While considered a medium-sized agency, the number of participants could also be seen as a limitation, in that the sample population may

not represent the experiences and qualitative data obtained from officers employed with a much larger or more urban jurisdiction.

Nevertheless, even though limitations due to previous research in this field are virtually non-existent, especially in recent years with officer mental health and wellness initiatives being highlighted in the news and media outlets, another limitation could be methodological, in that this research study utilized roll call meetings for survey implementation. Despite the research study's goal of having as many officers participate as possible, there it can be said that a limitation exists because many officers were out of the office during the week the surveys were disseminated, and some were unable to participate due to calls for service being of higher priority. All officers that were presented with the research study and asked to participate did, but 31 percent of officers were never able to be approached or informed about the study being conducted. Although likely not significant to the ultimate outcome of data obtained, this could be seen as a limitation because that 31 percent could have very different experiences with Culpeper's EAP and mental health and wellness programs and resources and/or how command staff supports or potentially denounces any stigmas surrounding coming forward to ask for assistance after a critical incident.

Recommendations for Future Research

In previous research, the most frequently discussed stressors among law enforcement officers fell into the operational category, which included stressors such as critical and traumatic incidents and events, responding to and enforcing traffic violations and accidents, responding to calls for service, and other law enforcement-specific duties (Saunders et al., 2019). The next two most common types of stressors were organizational and personal in nature. Organizational stressors include administrative burden, pressure from supervisors or command staff, and shift

work, while personal stressors are typically family and relationship challenges along with financial difficulties associated with law enforcement salaries (Saunders et al., 2019). Additionally, the socio-political context of law enforcement work cannot be discounted, with community/police strained relationships and/or lack of trust and the media's portrayal of police in recent years also being noted as very relevant causes of law enforcement stress.

Building on the findings of this research study along with existing literature and research on the subject, a suggestion for future change and improvement in the areas of EAPs and resources available to law enforcement officers in how best to handle the inevitable critical incident stress that will likely be encountered during a career as a police officer, is worth examining. It is widely understood and accepted that officers and first responders often work in high-stress environments with chronic and/or extreme direct exposure to aversive experiences to include violence, severe danger or human suffering, and tragedy, and as a result of such psychologically traumatizing events, are at a higher risk than other occupational groups and the general public for the development of new or worsening mental health concerns (Lane et al., 2021). PTSD, major depressive disorder, general or social anxiety disorder, and substance use disorders are common in law enforcement officers (both formally diagnosed and not), and future research examining rates of this, both prior to the use of an employee assistance program and after, would be beneficial to this subject area. Examining and re-evaluating the data obtained herein, as well as being able to replicate it around the country at other local departments would also be beneficial to grasp the true scale of how EAPs are utilized or underutilized in the United States.

Research indicates that although the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends evidence-based psychotherapies for the treatment of mood, anxiety, substance use, and trauma-

related disorders, the majority of the general population with mental health disorders delay seeking treatment (Lane et al., 2021). In fact, as little as 7 percent of people with PTSD in the general population will actually seek mental health services to receive treatment following trauma exposure, with the median time to seeking treatment being 12 years following symptom onset (Lane et al., 2021). Police officers are known to be even more reluctant than the general population due to many factors, including the stigmatization that often exists with the notion of seeking assistance. To that end, despite many organizations and agencies implementing programs to support the mental health and well-being of officers, little evidence supports the effectiveness of these programs, largely due to little research (Lane et al., 2021). A recommendation for future research would be studies on factors that influence police officers' behaviors and attitudes towards these mental health initiatives, and ultimately more quantitative data to support the findings. This research is a necessary component to understanding how EAPs and other resources can be more successful in breaking down the stigma often experienced by law enforcement officers around the country.

An additional suggestion for future research would be to conduct more in-depth qualitative case studies of randomly chosen officers around the country, to further elaborate on their experiences and how critical incident stress has affected them, both with and without the utilization of an available EAP. This study did not allow officers to elaborate on their specific rank or specific experience either, which could be viewed as a limitation in and of itself, but a future research study that obtained data from interviews and focus groups could yield even more detailed data on how these resources could be improved. Law enforcement agencies and departments might then be able to better pinpoint their employees' specific needs after a critical incident occurs.

Summary

The research study conducted at the Town of Culpeper Police Department in Central Virginia produced results that were indicative of what previous research indicates and support the researcher's hypothesis that further improvements need to be made in the area of employee assistance programs and resources available to law enforcement officers. This was a topic that was not openly discussed in previous decades, and police culture dictated a need to "tough it out" when officers experienced an incident or scene that was particularly disturbing to them or their colleagues. While this subject was not widely or as openly talked about within law enforcement agencies and departments, research shows that this is no longer the case, and the data obtained from this specific research study also supports that. Although improvements can still certainly be made to police culture, the research indicates it has come a long way.

Interaction was minimal with participants to maintain anonymity, but a clear observation of the importance and relevance of this topic of research was noted. The data obtained from this study included a 61/39 percent mix of patrol officers and command-level staff, which while having the ability to obtain differing results, further supports previous research of the relevance of the subject and need for implementation of EAPs.

Employee assistance programs have existed for decades in the United States but are only now beginning to be more appropriately established and implemented for law enforcement-specific needs. While much more research can be conducted on how to further reduce the stigma often surrounding officers who do choose to reach out and ask for assistance in dealing with PTSD and critical incident stress, the research indicates we, as society, seem to be more keenly aware of what our law enforcement officers experience daily than in previous decades.

REFERENCES

Adler, R.H. (2022). Trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Journal of Human Lactation*, 38(4): 598-602. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/08903344221116620?journalCode=jhla

After the attack: The future of the US Capitol Police. (2021 July 6). *United States Capitol Police*. https://www.uscp.gov/media-center/press-releases/after-attack-future-us-capitol-police

Anderson, C. (2010 October 11). Presenting and evaluating qualitative research. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 74(8):141. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2987281/

Attridge, M. (2019) A global perspective on promoting workplace mental health and the role of employee assistance programs. *American Journal of Health Promotion*, 33(4): 622-629. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0890117119838101c

Axelrod, E.M. (2017). Employee assistance programs: Counseling and psychological services for law enforcement officers. *Police Psychology and its Growing Impact on Modern Law Enforcement*. https://www.igi-global.com/chapter/employee-assistance-programs/165715

Banks, D., Hendrix, J., Hickman, M., and Kyckelhahn, T. (2016 April). National sources of law enforcement employment data. *United States Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics.* https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/nsleed.pdf

Bekker, S. and Clark, A.M. (2018 July 10). Improving qualitative research findings presentations: insights from genre theory. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1609406918786335

Blanco, J. (2017). Police operations: Theory and practice. https://study.com/academy/lesson/police-operations-theory-practice.html

Bouzikos, S., Afsharian, A., Dollard, M., and Brecht, O. (2022 April 21). Contextualizing the effectiveness of an employee assistance program intervention on psychological health: The role of the corporate climate. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(9): 5067. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9099973/

Burke, J. (2018). The employee assistance program: What's it worth? *Educational Consulting, Policing Stress.* https://www.policingstress.com/blog/2018/1/28/the-employee-assistance-program-whats-it-worth

Careless, J. and Zemlock, R. (2022 October 8). Smash the stigma: Building a culture that supports officer wellness. *Police1*. https://www.police1.com/police-products/police-technology/software/cad/articles/digital-edition-smash-the-stigma-building-a-culture-that-supports-officer-wellness-MGEqMS0iRrrOQ847/

Collins, C.S. and Stockton, C.M. (2018 August 30). The central role of theory in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 17(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406918797475

Copple, C., Copple, J., Drake, J., Joyce, N., Robinson, M.J., Smoot, S., Stephens, D., and Villasenor, R. (2019). Law enforcement mental health and wellness programs: Eleven case studies. Washington, D.C.: *Office of Community Oriented Policing Services*. https://nccpsafety.org/assets/files/library/Law_Enforcement_Mental_Health_Case_Studies.pdf

Craddock, T. B., & Telesco, G. (2022). Police stress and deleterious outcomes: efforts towards improving police mental health. *Journal of police and criminal psychology*, 1-10. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11896-021-09488-1

Critical incident stress management. (2021). *Virginia Department of Health.* https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/emergency-medical-services/critical-incident-stress-management/

Csiernik, R. (1999). Internal versus external employee assistance programs: What the Canadian data adds to the debate. *Employee Assistance Quarterly*, 15(2): 1-12. https://archive.hshsl.umaryland.edu/bitstream/handle/10713/4814/Csiernik_Internal%20versus%20external%20Employee%20Assistance%20Programs.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y

Daniel, C.O. (2019). Effects of job stress on employee's performance. *International Journal of Business Management and Social Research*, 6(2): 372-382. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Cross-Daniel/publication/338122818_Effects_of_job_stress_on_employee's_performance.pdf

Davis, T. (2023). Stress management: Definitions, techniques, and strategies. *Berkeley Well-Being Institute*. https://www.berkeleywellbeing.com/stress-management.html

Donnelly, E., Valentine, C., and Oehme, K. (2015 January 28). Law enforcement officers and employee assistance programs. *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies*, 38(2). https://diginole.lib.fsu.edu/islandora/object/fsu%3A277447

Elhart, M.A., Dotson, J., and Smart, D. (2019 June 11). Psychological debriefing of hospital emergency personnel: Review of critical incident stress debriefing. *International*

Journal of Nursing Student Scholarship, 6. https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/ijnss/article/view/68395

Employee assistance programs. (2021). *Office of Personnel Management.* https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/worklife/employee-assistance-programs/

Employee mental health and wellness. (2020 May). *International Association of Chiefs of Police*. https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/Employee%20Mental%20Health%2005-06-2020.pdf

Estep, D. and Allen, R. (2017 September 5). Building a case for comprehensive EAPs in law enforcement agencies. *Change Management: An International Journal*, 17. https://cgscholar.com/bookstore/works/building-a-case-for-comprehensive-eaps-in-law-enforcement-agencies

Everly, G.S., Flannery, R.B., and Eyler, V.A. (2002 September). Critical incident stress management: A statistical review of the literature. *Psychiatric Quarterly*, 73. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1023/A:1016068003615

Everly, G. S., Jr., Flannery, R. B., Jr., and Mitchell, J. T. (2000). Critical incident stress management (CISM): A review of the literature. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 5(1): 23–40. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1359178998000263?via%3Dihub

Fox, J., Desai, M.M., Britten, K., Lucas, G., Luneau, R., and Rosenthal, M. (2012 October). Mental-health conditions, barriers to care, and productivity loss among officers in an urban police department. *Conn Medical*, 76. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4089972/

Gill, P., Stewart, K., Treasure, E., and Chadwick, B. (2008 March 22). Methods of data collection in qualitative research: Interviews and focus groups. *British Dental Journal*, 204: 291-295. https://www.nature.com/articles/bdj.2008.192

Goldstein, D.B. (2006). Employee assistance for law enforcement: A brief review. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, 21. https://www.ojp.gov/library/abstracts/employee-assistance-law-enforcement-brief-review

Gund, N. and Elliott, B. (1995). Employee assistance programs in police organizations. *American Psychological Association.* https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1995-98412-008

Hammond, J. and Brooks, J. (2001 November). The World Trade Center Attack: Helping the helpers: The role of critical incident stress management. *Critical Care*, 5. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC137378/

Heins, M. (2019 June). Employee assistance programs: One more tool at your disposal to support officers' well-being. *Law Enforcement Action Forum*, 26. https://mml.org/insurance/risk_resources/publications/leaf_newsletter/2019-06.pdf

Hofer, M.S. and Savell, S.M. (2021, April 13). There was no plan to get us help: Strategies for improving mental health service utilization among law enforcement. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, 36. https://dukespace.lib.duke.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/10161/23401/2021.There%20was%20no%20plan%20in%20place%20to%20get%20us%20help.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y

Kirschman, E. (2021, July 12). Cops & shrinks: Can you trust your therapist? *Police1*. https://www.police1.com/treatment/articles/cops-shrinks-can-you-trust-your-therapist-dOqXpfZ6t8Q9Dnht/

Kureczka, A.W. (1996). Critical incident stress in law enforcement. *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, 10. https://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/fbileb65&div=13&id=&page=

Lane, J., Le, M., Martin, K., Bickle, K., Campbell, E., and Ricciardelli, R. (2021 July 15). Police attitudes toward seeking professional mental health treatment. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, 37: 123-131. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11896-021-09467-6

Lapum, D. (2018). The maintenance of police officer health through a mandatory wellness program. *Department of Interdisciplinary Technology*. https://vrnclearinghousefiles.blob.core.windows.net/documents/The_Maintenance_of-Police-Officer-Health-through-a-Mandatory-Wellness-Program.pdf

Levenson, R.L. (2007). Prevention of traumatic stress in law enforcement personnel: A cursory look at the role of peer support and critical incident stress management. *Forensic Examine*r, 16. https://web.a.ebscohost.com/abstract?direct=true&profile=ehost&scope=site&authtype=crawler&jrnl=10845569&asa=Y&AN=58617563&h=D3x7KvrgaooUdsvKE37caN2TGZllvZtv72mFiW%2bPd95TrXBjb%2b1vPVrZidN0yXT4WQJrJEyy9faWd%2bFG5et1EA%3d%3d&crl=c&resultNs=AdminWebAuth&resultLocal=ErrCrlNotAuth&crlhashurl=login.aspx%3fdirect%3dtrue%26profile%3dehost%26scope%3dsite%26authtype%3dcrawler%26jrnl%3d10845569%26asa%3dY%26AN%3d58617563

Linton, J.C., Webb, C.H., and Kommor, M.J. (1992 April 1). Critical incident stress in prehospital emergency care. *The West Virginia Medical Journal*, 88(4). https://europepmc.org/article/med/1615641

Long, K. (2019 May 17). Addressing the mental health stigma in law enforcement. *American Military University*. https://amuedge.com/addressing-the-mental-health-stigma-in-law-enforcement/

Lussier, R.N. and Hendon, J.R. (2019). *Human Resource Management*, 3rd ed. Sage. ISBN 13: 9781506360348.

Malcolm, A.S., Seaton, J., Perera, A., Sheehan, D.C., and Van Hasselt, V.B. (2005 August). Critical incident stress debriefing and law enforcement: An evaluative review. *The Author*, Oxford University Press. https://ovc.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh226/files/media/document/ci_cism_for_law_enforcement-508.pdf

Mattimoe, R., Hayden, M.T., Murphy, B., Ballentine, J. (2021 May 10). Approaches of available research data: a reflection on the manual and technological approaches. *Accounting, Finance, and Governance Review*, 27. https://afgr.scholasticahq.com/article/22026-approaches-to-analysis-of-qualitative-research-data-a-reflection-on-the-manual-and-technological-approaches

Maxfield, M.G., and Babbie, E.R. (2018). *Research Methods for Criminal Justice and Criminology*. Cengage Learning. ISBN-13: 9781337091824.

McNally, V.J. (1999). FBI's employee assistance program: An advanced law enforcement model. *International Journal of Emergency Mental Health*, 1(2). https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/11227740/

Merrefield, C. (2022 May 24). Mental health care at work: Roundup of recent research on employee assistance programs. *The Journalist's Resource*. https://journalistsresource.org/health/employee-assistance-programs-mental-health/

Miller, L. (2005). Police officer suicide: Causes, prevention, and practical intervention. *International Journal of Emergency Mental Health*, 7(2). https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/16107042/

Milliard, B. (2020 July 14). Utilization and impact of peer-support programs on police officers' mental health. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7381167/

Milot, M. (2020 February). A researcher's inside look at the impact of employee assistance programs. *University of Maryland Baltimore*, Digital Archive. https://archive.hshsl.umaryland.edu/bitstream/handle/10713/14266/20_Jan_FebMilot.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Milot, M. (2019). Stigma as a barrier to the use of employee assistance programs. *University of Maryland Baltimore*. https://archive.hshsl.umaryland.edu/handle/10713/8515

Moment, A. (2018). Observations in qualitative inquiry: When what you see is not what you see. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 17: 1-3. http://www.uop.edu.pk/ocontents/Lecture%206%20Observation%20in%20Qualitative%20Research.pdf

Moriarty, A. and Field, M.W. (1990 June). Proactive intervention: A new approach to police EAP programs. *Public Personnel Management*, 19(2). https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/009102609001900204?journalCode=ppmd

Morgan, H. (2022 January 3). Conducting a qualitative document analysis. *The Qualitative Report*, 27(1): 64-77. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.5044

Murdoch, M., Simon, A.B., Polusny, M.A., Bangerter, A.K., Grill, J.P., Noorbaloochi, S., and Partin, M.R. (2014 July 16). Impact of different privacy conditions and incentives on survey response rate, participant representativeness, and disclosure of sensitive information: A randomized controlled trial. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 14: 90. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4112969/

Patton, M.Q. (1999 December). Enhancing the quality and credibility of qualitative analysis. *Health Services Research*, 34(5): 1189-1208. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1089059/

Police employee assistance programs: Becoming an informed client. (2013 January 28). *Law Officer*. https://www.lawofficer.com/police-employee-assistance-programs-becoming-an-informed-client/

Policy, data, oversight. (2020). *Office of Personnel Management*. https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/worklife/employee-assistance-programs/

Pollack, K.M., Austin, W., and Grisso, J.A. (2010 April 26). Employee assistance programs: A workplace resource to address intimate partner violence. *Journal of Women's Health*, 19(4). https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/10.1089/jwh.2009.1495

Rahman, M.S. (2017). The advantages and disadvantages of using qualitative and quantitative approaches and methods in language testing and assessment research: A literature review. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 6(1). https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1120221.pdf

Rahr, S. and Rice, S.K. (2015 April). From warriors to guardians: Recommitting American police culture to democratic ideals. *New Perspectives in Policing Bulletin*. https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/248654.pdf

Richard, B., Sivo, S.A., and Witta, E.L. (2020 November 3). Qualitative research via focus groups: Will going online affect diversity of your findings? *Cornell Hospital Quarterly*, 62(1). https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1938965520967769

Rousseau, D. (2021). Critical incident stress management in law enforcement. *Boston University*. https://sites.bu.edu/daniellerousseau/2021/04/26/critical-incident-stress-management-in-law-enforcement/

Sanjari, M., Bahramnezhad, F., Fomani, F.K., Shoghi, M., and Cheraghi, M.A. (2014 August 4). Ethical challenges of researchers in qualitative studies: the necessity to develop a specific guideline. *Journal of Medical Ethics and History of Medicine*, 7. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4263394/

Saunders, J., Kotzias, V., and Ramchand, R. (2019). Contemporary police stress: the impact of the evolving socio-political context. *Criminology, Criminal Justice, Law and Society*, 20(1): 35-52. https://scholasticahq.com/criminology-criminal-justice-law-society/

Smith, P. (2019 June 13). Chicago police officers seeking more help from department therapists. *WBEZ Chicago*. https://www.npr.org/local/309/2019/06/13/732068078/chicago-police-officers-seeking-more-help-from-department-therapists

Stahl, N.A. and King, J.R. (2020). Expanding approaches for research: understanding and using trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Journal of Developmental Education*, p. 26-28. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1320570.pdf

Steinberg, J. (2021 January 25). Police officers' mental health focus of bill moving through Maryland legislature. *Delmarva Now*. https://www.delmarvanow.com/story/news/2021/01/25/police-officers-mental-health-focus-bill-maryland-legislature/6662813002/

Sutton, J. and Austin, Z. (2015 May). Qualitative research: Data collection, analysis, and management. *Canadian Journal of Hospital Pharmacy*, 68(3): 226-231. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4485510/

Swab, J. (2020 March). Critical incident stress management: Perspectives on its history, frequency of use, efficacy, and success. *Crisis, Stress, and Human Resilience: An International Journal*, 1(4). https://www.crisisjournal.org/article/12211.pdf

Tie, Y.C., Birks, M., and Francis, K. (2019). Grounded theory research: A design framework for novice researchers. *SAGE Open Medicine*, 7. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6318722/

Tuval-Mashiach, R. (2021). Is replication relevant for qualitative research? *Qualitative Psychology*, 8(3): 365-377. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/qup0000217

United States Government Manual. (2022). https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GOVMAN-2022-12-31/pdf/GOVMAN-2022-12-31.pdf

Virginia Peer Support Association (2022). https://vapeersupport.org/why-peer-support%3F

What is an employee assistance program? (2021). *Office of Personnel Management*. https://www.opm.gov/faqs/QA.aspx?fid=4313c618-a96e-4c8e-b078-1f76912a10d9&pid=2c2b1e5b-6ff1-4940-b478-34039a1e1174

Wilcox, A. (2021 May 13). EAP for police officers: First responder programs. *Nivati*. https://nivati.com/blog/eap-for-police-officers/

Yadav, D. (2022). Criteria for good qualitative research: A comprehensive review. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, 31: 679-689. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40299-021-00619-0

APPENDIX A

IRB Approval

Date 4-7-2023
IRB #: IRB-FY22-23-1067
Title: Qualitative Study and Data Collection on Law Enforcement Officer Critical Incident Stress and the Utilization of Employee Assistance Programs and Resources from the Town of Culpeper Police Department Creation Date: 2-10-2023 End Date:
Status: Approved
Principal Investigator: Kristi Shalton Review Board: Research Ethics Office Sponsor:

APPENDIX B

Permission Request

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

Helms School of Government

Chief Chris Settle
cc: Deputy Chief Timothy Chilton
Culpeper Police Department
740 Old Brandy Road
Culpeper, VA 22701

Dear Chief Settle,

As a graduate student in the Helms School of Government at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The title of my research project is The Utilization of Employee Assistance Programs: Breaking the Stigma, and the purpose of my research is to explore how EAPs, and other officer mental health and wellness resources, are utilized and what could be improved upon, specifically after a law enforcement officer is involved in a critical incident.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research and data collection at the Culpeper Police Department through the use of surveys. Ideally, it would be beneficial if officers of all ranks would participate.

I would like to utilize anonymous surveys to collect data from both your day and night shift officers, potentially at roll call or another time that would be convenient, within the next few weeks. The data will be used to obtain information about critical incident stress, how officers have responded to that stress subsequent to a traumatic event they have experienced while on the job, their awareness of Employee Assistance Programs and resources available, as well as their views on such programs' effectiveness. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating in the survey, and their responses will remain anonymous. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time. The survey will take officers no more than ten minutes to complete.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please respond by email to klshalton@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

Kristi Shalton
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX C

Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research study. You must be a sworn law enforcement officer in the Commonwealth of Virginia and your participation is voluntary. The purpose of this study is to explore what employee assistance resources and programs are available in your agency, and how likely is an officer who is involved in a traumatic event to utilize these resources. There is no compensation or rewards for participating in this research.

If you agree to participate in this research you will be asked to complete a survey that takes approximately ten minutes. There are no anticipated risks in participating in this research. Records and information obtained in this research will be kept confidential and securely stored in a location assessable only to the researcher. Participants' identities will be kept confidential and known only to the researcher. All records, notes, and recordings will be kept for three years and then incinerated.

APPENDIX D

Research Questions

1. How are EAPs utilized in your agency?
2. How have EAPs and resources offered to officers within your agency evolved since you began employment with the agency?
3. How can EAPs help break the mental health stigma surrounding officers?
4. How do critical incidents affect the mental health of officers?
5. How did you respond to a critical incident while on the job?

APPENDIX E

Participant Survey

You have been selected to participate anonymously in a doctoral research study involving law enforcement officers and employee assistance programs and resources available to you. It will take approximately ten minutes of your time and is completely confidential. Your participation will help gather information and assess the need for improvements in the officer mental health and wellness field. The survey assesses five key components that involve your law enforcement agency: Resources available after a critical incident, stigmas associated with officer mental health and wellness, safety, job performance, and satisfaction.

Please indicate your response to each item by selecting or writing in the appropriate answer based on your feelings, opinions, and experiences. Experiences do not need to be specific to your time with the Town of Culpeper Police Department (if you were employed as an officer elsewhere prior). You may skip any survey items you do not feel comfortable responding to or know how to answer, but you are strongly encouraged to respond to as many items as possible. This is not a test, and there are no right or wrong answers. Please answer each question honestly and place your responses in the envelope when you have completed the survey.

Disclaimer: Your supervisors and colleagues will not see or have access to your answers, and the only demographics utilized in the final report will be time as a law enforcement officer and whether you are an officer or a member of command staff.

1. Please indicate your total number of years as a sworn law enforcement officer: _____
2. Please circle the position with which you are most closely aligned in your department.

Patrol Officer **Command Staff**

3. Please circle which response best represents your satisfaction with your law enforcement career.

Not satisfied | Somewhat satisfied | Very satisfied

4. Have you been involved in a critical incident in the last five years (defined for this survey's purpose as an officer-involved shooting, call for severe child abuse, gruesome vehicular accident/crash, death or serious injury or line-of-duty death, or homicide)?

Yes **No**

5. Did the incident result in any immediate reactions, (i.e., tunnel vision, loss of or slowed thought(s), sense of time distortion or slow motion, muffled sound(s), heightened sense of detail about the incident, or emotional or physical "letdown" within a few days of the incident)?

Yes **No**

6. Did the incident result in any behavioral reactions, (i.e., talking almost non-stop about the incident and what you experienced, sudden poor decisions or inability to make a decision, sudden aggression, increase in absenteeism or a drop in work productivity, difficulty sleeping or nightmares, sudden relationship problems, desire to turn to substances (alcohol, pain medication,

etc.), withdrawal from friends or normal activity, feelings of isolation)? Can be immediately following the incident or weeks to months later.

Yes **No**

7. Did the incident result in any physical or physiological reactions, (i.e., muscle tremors, nausea, chills, vomiting, hyperventilation, feeling faint, crying, profusely sweating, increased heart rate, fatigue, chest pains, increase in blood pressure)? Can be immediately following the incident or weeks to months later.

Yes **No**

8. Did the incident result in any cognitive or emotional reactions, (i.e., feelings of disbelief, dazed, difficulty comprehending the significance of the incident, depression, tension, irritability, tiredness causing you to sleep too much and have less energy, feeling emotionally detached or numb, confusion, change in hobbies or daily routine(s), increase in risk-taking behavior and sudden poor judgement)?

Yes **No**

9. Following the incident and the presence of any of the above reactions (or others not specifically listed), did you feel as though you should seek help or assistance in working through the significance of the event?

Yes **No**

10. Did you feel like you would be "labeled" by your fellow officers (present for the incident or not) and/or supervisors if you were to ask for help?

Yes **No**

11. Did you feel like you should just "tough it out" until things improved?

Yes **No**

12. Do your peer support officers, or supervisors (including chain-of-command) support your mental well-being (while on duty and not)?

Yes **No**

13. Do those individuals offer assistance or talk enough about resources readily available to you (and other officers) if you ever need it, (i.e., counseling, support groups, etc.)?

Yes **No**

14. To what extent do you feel like established Employee Assistance Programs and/or resources available to you and other officers with the Culpeper Police Department are effective, especially post critical incident?

Not effective | Somewhat | Very effective

15. In your opinion, what could be improved upon with the existing Employee Assistance Programs/resources available to you and other officers to make you more likely to reach out for help?

_____
_____
_____