University of the Western Cape
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LEVELS OF STRESS AND COPING STRATEGIES
EMPLOYED BY POLICE SERVICE OFFICERS IN CAPE
TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

UNIVERSITY *of the*
WESTERN CAPE

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Abstract

Policing is widely viewed as an innately stressful occupation, particularly in South Africa where high levels of crime and organisational transformation govern the role of the police officer. There is an assumption that law enforcement is significantly more stressful than other professions, such as nursing and teaching. Compounding this belief are the high rates of suicide, alcoholism, burnout, and absenteeism within the profession. Moreover, the high prevalence of physical and psychological disorders suggests that police officers utilise poor and maladaptive coping strategies to address occupational demands. The purpose of the study was to investigate levels of occupational stress experienced by police officers and the strategies used to cope with stress. The study findings are based on a sample of 104 police officers from six police stations within the Cape Town area. The results indicated that participants have been in the police service for an average of 7.72 years, and have worked an average of 4.8 years at their present stations. The majority of participants are between 26-30 years old (31%), male (75%), married (51%), coloured (65%), constables (45%), Afrikaans speaking (47%), and have a matric qualification (70%). The Spielberger Police Stress Survey and the Brief COPE Inventory were used as data collection tools. The findings indicated that police officers were experiencing moderate levels of stress as an outcome of inherent and organisational occupational demands. Secondly, police officers were more likely to use problem-focussed coping strategies to manage occupational stress than maladaptive strategies. The limited use of avoidance coping strategies was surprising, given the elevated prevalence of both physical and psychological disorders within the police context. The results indicated no significant association between levels of distress and avoidance coping strategies. The potential adverse outcomes of severe stress within this group affect society in general more than stress from most other occupational groups. Addressing persistent stress within the organisation is imperative in ensuring a well-functioning police service, and ultimately, a secure and healthy society.

Declaration

This research and mini-thesis is my own work. Significant contributions and quotations from the works of other people have been attributed, cited and referenced.

Signature:……………………………………….

Date:……………………………………………

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To my family and friends, thank you for providing invaluable support and encouragement throughout my academic career.

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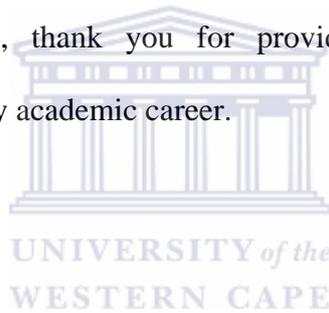
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

South Africa's stability, economic growth, and development are dependent on the motivation, well-being, and productiveness of its police services (Wiese, Rothmann, & Storm, 2003). The significant transformation of the South African Police Service (SAPS), the disbanding of the apartheid regime, and the socio-political turmoil of the past three decades has generated a demanding context in which police officers function (Pienaar & Rothmann, 2006; Gulle, Tredoux, & Foster, 1998). Moreover, the unpredictable nature of law enforcement and the evolving role of the police create a highly stressful occupation (Ortega, Brenner & Leather, 2006; Anshel, 2000).
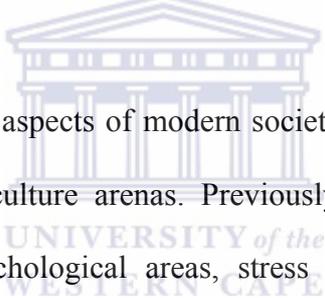
The presence of stress in various aspects of modern society has generated considerable attention in both academic and popular culture arenas. Previously regarded as an individual problem encompassing physical and psychological areas, stress is presently considered a significant societal dilemma (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The law enforcement context is a foremost field of enquiry within the occupational domain. Outcomes of enquiries investigating stress within the policing environment suggest that the profession generates or contributes toward psychological and physical ailments such as absenteeism, alcoholism, post-traumatic stress disorder, burnout, resignation from the service, early retirement, and suicide (Storch & Panzarella, 1996; Burke, 1993). Additional outcomes include high turnover rates, substance use at work, counterproductive behaviours such as purposefully damaging property or performing substandard work, stealing from employers, premature natural death, and a perceived need for counselling (Vagg and Spielberger, 1998).

Occupational stress research and literature has increased significantly in recent years; however, coping literature remains limited in comparison (Beehr, Johnson, & Nieva, 1995), particularly

within the South African law enforcement environment. Moreover, literature suggests that police members are notoriously inept at coping with occupational demands (Pienaar & Rothmann, 2003; Anshel, 2000).

The theoretical framework adopted for the study is the cognitive appraisal theory developed by Lazarus and Folkman. The theory applies a cognitive approach to explore our engagement with the environment and serves as an evaluative process. It emphasises the appraisal of stressful events and the manner in which the appraisals influence choice of coping strategy (Folkman, 1982).

1.2 Motivation

The rationale behind the choice of topic is twofold. Firstly, the high prevalence of reported suicides, divorce, family murders, and substance abuse within the SAPS reinforced the need for a comprehensive understanding of distress and coping within the law enforcement occupation. Secondly, as a previous employee of the SAPS, it was evident that many police officers were overwhelmed with the nature of the work. Moreover, high levels of distress were affecting the psychological well-being of employees. It was imperative that formal research be conducted on stress and coping variables within the police service to thoroughly understand its context within the occupation and to apply it into the development of future interventions.

1.3 Aims and Objectives

The present study has three aims. It firstly aims to measure the levels of stress experienced by the SAPS officers, using the Spielberger Police Stress Survey. Secondly, it intends to determine the coping strategies utilised by officers when managing stress, using the Brief COPE Inventory. Thirdly, it seeks to ascertain whether a significant relationship exists between levels of stress and avoidance coping strategies.

1.4 Hypotheses

The aims lend themselves to the formulation of the following hypothesis:

1. The majority of police officers will score high on the Spielberger Police Stress Survey, indicating high stress levels.

2. The majority of police officers will use avoidance coping strategies as indicated on the Brief COPE Inventory.

3. There is a positive correlation between high stress levels and avoidance coping strategies.

1.5 Significance of the study

Research examining stress and coping within the South African police occupation has received limited empirical investigation, particularly within the Cape Town area. The situation prevails despite alarming reports of police suicides, murders, and psychological disorders within the law enforcement environment. The purpose of the present study is to explore both the levels of stress within the policing environment, as well as to identify typical methods of addressing widespread occupational demands. Successful coping within the police environment generates significant, positive outcomes for the employee, the organisation, and broader community. The significance of the present study is that it aims to inform future interventions geared toward managing the distressing components of policing through effective coping strategies.

1.6 Overview of chapters

The thesis consists of six chapters. **Chapter 2** reviews literature on the South African Police Service, provides a review of stress literature, and discusses coping, with particular reference as to how it relates to police officers. **Chapter 3** provides a detailed description of the research methodology used in the study. This chapter also discusses sampling, data collection tools, and data analysis. **Chapter 4** includes the presentation of the research results. **Chapter 5** provides an

interpretation and discussion of the results, while **Chapter 6** discusses the conclusion of the enquiry as well as limitations of the present study and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Chapter 2 will review (1) the police role and environment, specifically the South African police context; (2) stress literature, including a historical overview of the concept and its numerous perspectives, occupational stress, and police stress; and (3) the theory of coping, particularly in terms of how this concept relates to police officers.

2.1 The South African Police Service

2.1.1   History of the SAPS

The role of the SAPS in South Africa's political history included upholding the apartheid regime and the oppression of millions of South Africans, which consequently resulted in a poor and distrustful image of the police, particularly among black South Africans (Levin, Ngubeni & Simpson, 1994). A lack of police accountability existed, and the apartheid era was ultimately characterised by its inability to develop the police organisation into a responsible one. The constitution established the restructuring of the SAPS at national and provincial level to rectify the challenges faced by the police and extend better control over the country (Rwelamira, 1997).

These changes were accompanied by substantial organisation restructuring, reviewing and redefining the police officer role in the 'New South Africa", and re-establishing police legitimacy (Nel & Burgers, 1998; Nel, 1999). Organisational change ensued following the disbanding of apartheid, which included transforming, re-training and rendering the SAPS accountable to the communities it serves (Levin, Ngubeni & Simpson, 1994).

2.1.2   Organisational Transformation

Significant organisational change generally includes re-creating work processes, establishing systematic forms of organising, restructuring and scaling down, engaging in constant learning and transformation, cultural change, and technological adjustments (Hartley, 2002). Organisation restructuring in the SAPS entailed disbanding divisions and the redeployment of personnel in other areas (Nel, 1999). Moreover, in terms of personnel, recruitment and promotion of black police members increased dramatically. Regrettably, many employees felt these members were often not empowered / trained to manage others (Nel, 1999). Police members often regard this promotion process as devoid of integrity and saturated with external influences from politicians (Violanti & Aron, 1995). Changes in personnel composition also pertain to elevated turnover rates for senior officials, resulting in a profusion of ill-equipped new members (Nel, 1999).

The current perception of the SAPS organisation is no longer one characterised by cohesiveness and consistency, but rather by its inability to support and protect its members. Consequently, police members communicate feeling abandoned by the organisation and encounter substantial anxiety within their present circumstances (Nel & Burgers 1998).

2.1.3   The Police Role

Policing refers to private and government organisations that function to combat and prevent crime, uphold public order, protect all citizens, and maintain and enforce the law through committed personnel and efficient utilisation of resources (Roets, 2003). The definition and classification of police work, as well as the position of police within society, has been under scrutiny from researchers and authors in the field. Furthermore, an exploration into the priorities of the police service and the appropriateness of aspects of their work is underway (Shane, 1980). Botha defines the police role as based on mutual expectations and obligations communicated in the interaction between the public and the police (Johnson, 2001). However, this definition may lend itself to ambiguity as the true nature of the police service continues to remain unclear. This position

attaches itself to policing by consent, crime prevention and law enforcement, which continues to remain the agreed upon manifest function of the police (Johnson, 2001).

Bittner (in Newham, 2001) argues that three distinct areas classify the police role: (1) law enforcement (the primary function), (2) regulatory control, and (3) peacekeeping. In addition, social support offered by police to the community encompasses a considerable proportion of the police role (Shane, 1980). Cumming, Cumming, and Edell debate that control explicitly constitutes the primary function of police officers in an integrative system, while support is a secondary concern (Shane, 1980). Conversely, later evidence renounced Cumming and colleagues claim by pointing to the possibility that the support function of police may equal that of control (Shane, 1980). Botha (in Johnson, 2001) supports this claim by declaring that the police function incorporates both law enforcement and non-crime service functions, with 60 percent of calls to police unrelated to crime, but to personal issues and injuries. Consequently, confusion resulting from the tension between the law enforcement and social service role may ensue as police members have a propensity to adopt one particular course, thereby rejecting the other (Johnson, 2001). Subsequently, countless long serving and traditional police officers experience their new roles to be confusing and even traumatic (Nel and Burgers, 1998). The enormity of the organisational changes may be too much for some, while others may be reluctant or unable to acclimatise to change (Nel & Burgers, 1998). Furthermore, insufficient preparation by management, concerning the magnitude of organisational change, only exacerbates the trauma and anxiety experienced by police members (Nel, 1999).

## 2.2 Conceptualising stress

The conceptual clarification of stress as a consensual definition remains absent from literature on the topic. Numerous definitions exists conceptualising stress as an environmental stimulus, an organism's response to external stimuli, or as the interaction between the environment and person (Melnick, 2002; Sarafino, 2002; Johnson, 2001; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The diverse

theoretical underpinnings of the concept emerged due to stress evolution from several disciplines including psychology, sociology, and physiology (Johnson, 2001; Lovallo, 1997). The disillusionment felt by scientists is reasonable considering past decades have used the term 'stress' to refer simultaneously to a stimulus, response, interaction, and comprehensive combinations of the aforementioned factors (Monat & Lazarus, 1977).

2.2.1 Response Perspective

Response perspectives represent individual reactions to stressors, which may be either psychological or physiological responses, and view it as an outcome (Sarafino, 2002; Sutherland & Cooper, 2000). Psychological responses entail emotions, thought patterns, or behaviour while physiological responses involve increased bodily arousal (Sarafino, 2002). Understood from a physiological standpoint, this perspective originated in the medical field, and emphasises the diagnoses and treatment of symptoms, yet not addressing the root of the problem (Sutherland & Cooper, 2000).
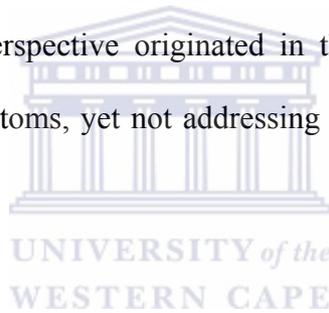
2.2.2 Stimulus Perspective

Stimulus approaches in stress theory have utilised the concept to describe incidents depicted as new, intense, unexpected and comprising (but not necessitating) a reach to the upper thresholds of tolerability (Melnick, 2002). In addition, situations devoid of stimulus, exceedingly relentless stimulation, fatigue-producing and boredom-producing incidents, cognitive misperception or stimuli requesting conflicting responses are each potentially stressful (Sarafino, 2002). Stressors, a term coined by Hans Selye, are environmental events conceived at both individual and organisational levels (Jaramillo et al., 2005; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Selye, 1956). Lazarus and Cohen (in Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) propose three categories of stressors: (1) major changes, often disastrous and concerning a large number of persons; (2) major changes affecting one or few persons and; (3) daily hassles. Both categories (1) and (2) are associated with overwhelming and catastrophic events concerning either large groups of persons or smaller, more intimate clusters

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(Steenkamp, 2003). However, equating cataclysmic and major incidents with environmental stimuli would be to accept a limited definition of stress. While daily hassles are generally far less dramatic than cataclysmic and life-changing experiences, they may play a larger role in influencing health and adaptation as they occur far more frequently (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Stressors assume a stimulus-based perspective on stress and do not account for the variations in individual responses to stress and coping. The transactional approach proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) therefore offers an enhanced and practical model in which to understand individual disparity in this regard.

2.2.3 Transactional Perspective

While both stimulus and response approaches to stress have previously been extensively researched it is the transactional approach to stress that has been emphasised in recent literature (Wrzesniewski & Chylinska, 2007; Sarafino, 2002). Lazarus and Folkman's comprehensive enquiry have made them foremost proponents of the transactional approach to stress (Stroebe, 2000). This theory is eclectic and draws from both stimulus and response-based approaches (Straub, 2002; Johnson, 2001). Lazarus and Folkman's (1984: 19) conceptualisation of psychological stress clarify it as *"…a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the individual as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being"*. The definition emphasises the individual's perception of the relationship between the demands of the situation and the available resources (Stroebe, 2000). In addition, the process entails repeated transactions between individual and environment and emphasises individuals' roles as active agents in manipulating the impact of the stressor through behavioural, cognitive, and emotional strategies (Wrzesniewski & Chylinska, 2007; Steenkamp, 2003; Sarafino, 2002; Straub, 2002; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Each school of thought represents a unique approach and line of reasoning to the understanding and function of stress (Jamillo, Nixon, & Sams, 2005). Moreover, it is futile to allocate a singular,

precise definition to stress, as there is no way to confirm or refute existing definitions (Jamillo et al., 2005). Therefore, using the term stress should not refer to any specific variable but rather to the entire field of enquiry.

2.3 Historical review of stress

The pioneering work of Claude Bernard, Walter Cannon, and Hans Selye demonstrate the foundation of stress research in literature (Jaramillo, Nixon & Sams, 2005; Lovallo, 1997; Selye, 1956).

A historical perspective on the development of stress commences with the revolutionary work of Claude Bernard in the field of physiology. Bernard's research in the early 19th century proposed that both external and internal environments are responsible for maintaining the functions of living organisms (Lovallo, 1997). His declaration that preservation of life is critically dependent on internal equilibrium in spite of a changing external environment acted as the foundation for the current concept of stress (Lovallo, 1997; Selye, 1956).

In 1929, Walter Cannon employed Bernard's research on stress as a basis for advancing our understanding of stress (Lovallo, 1997). Cannon's work not only concerned the maintenance of internal equilibrium, which he termed homeostasis, in the event of environmental change, but also emphasised the impact of psychologically meaningful stimuli on the individual (Lovallo, 1997; Selye, 1956). In addition, his research signified that dysregulation of the system at the level of psychological and sociocultural functioning could adversely affect an individual's health (Lovallo, 1997). Cannon's research supplied the first, indispensable argument that psychosocial stress may be harmful to the individual (Johnson, 2001).

Hans Selye, the third and final pioneer in the history of stress, popularised and formalised the concept by establishing that (1) an individual's body has a similar set of responses to a broad

range of stressors (which he aptly named the General Adaptation Syndrome), and (2) under specific conditions these stressors will adversely affect an individual's health (Sapolsky, 1994). Selye, gaining much of the theoretical foundation for his work from Cannon, acknowledged stress responses as a necessary component of the adaptive process, yet observed that severe, chronic exposure resulted in tissue damage and disease (Selye, 1956; Stroebe, 2000). Selye's General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) is a set of non-specific, physiological reactions to a broad range of harmful environmental agents (Selye, 1956).

The GAS process constitutes three consecutive stages including (1) the alarm stage, (2) the stage of resistance, and (3) the stage of exhaustion. The first stage operates as a fight-or-flight response and activates the body's accessible resources. During the second stage, the body strives to acclimatise to stressor demands and in the third stage (which occurs following severe, long-term exposure to stress) the body's defences ultimately fails (Sarafino, 2002; Johnson, 2001; Selye, 1956). Stress could potentially occur during any one of these three stages, therefore it is unnecessary for all three stages to develop before we classify the syndrome as GAS (Selye, 1956). Selye's theories had gone largely uncontested for several decades; however, researchers Lazarus and Mason have explicitly criticised elements of Selye's position (Monat & Lazarus, 1977). Lazarus and Mason presented empirical evidence substantiating their claims that Selye had exaggerated the non-specificity role in disease production. Mason and Lazarus' theories advocated the perspective that specific stressors could produce specific stress reactions in the body and furthermore surmised that Selye's theory overstated general stress reactions (Monat & Lazarus, 1977). Moreover, Selye's theories undermined the importance of psychosocial processes in stress responses (Sarafino, 2002). While Selye's work may have been criticised by several stress scholars, his research advanced our knowledge of physical reactions to harmful stimuli and acted as a paradigm for later stress conceptions (Stroebe, 2000).

2.4 Cognitive Appraisal Theory

The theoretical framework in which this study is situated is the theory of cognitive appraisal, developed by Lazarus and Folkman.

A discussion on stress and its impact would be futile were the concept of cognitive appraisal theory not mentioned. The theory describes the considerable variance between individuals exposed to the same or similar environmental demands (Sarafino, 2002; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). It utilises a cognitive perspective of the manner in which we engage with our surroundings and emphasises the process as a mental evaluation. During the process, individuals assess situations in terms of (1) its threatening properties toward individual physical and psychological well-being and (2) available resources for confronting the stressor (Stroebe, 2000; Sarafino, 2002; Lovallo, 1997; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).
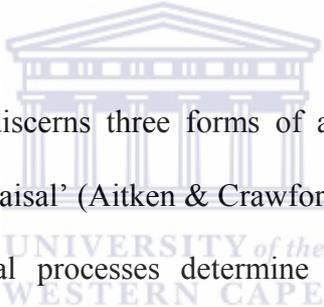
The cognitive appraisal theory discerns three forms of appraisal, namely 'primary appraisal', 'secondary appraisal', and 'reappraisal' (Aitken & Crawford, 2007; Stroebe, 2000; Lovallo, 1997). Primary and secondary appraisal processes determine not only cognitive and behavioural responses to external events, but moreover influence emotional, neurophysiological, autonomic, and endocrine responses (Lovallo, 1997). Thus, the appraisal process of external events determines both the form and extent of our psychological responses and their associated physiological adjustments (Lovallo, 1997).

Primary appraisal concerns individual well-being and entails categorising and evaluating the significance of the situation. Subsequent to assessing the situation in terms of its significance toward individual wellbeing, the stressor is categorised into one of three judgments: irrelevant, positive or potentially harmful (Aitken & Crawford, 2007; Sarafino, 2002; Stroebe, 2000; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Situations categorised as harmful are grouped into harm-loss, threat, or challenge for further appraisal (Sarafino, 2002; Anshel, 2000; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Harm-loss concerns the extent of damages that have already occurred, threat entails the anticipation of

future harm, and challenge refers to the opportunity to accomplish mastery or growth by utilising diverse or unconventional resources to confront the stressor (Sarafino, 2002; Anshel, 2000). The identification of a threatening stressor results in an instantaneous emotional response signalling alarm, which stimulates behavioural, psychological, and physiological reactions (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Lovallo, 1997).

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) consider individual beliefs regarding the external environment and its meaning, as well as commitment to given courses of action, to be imperative factors in individual appraisal of events. The theory emphasises the appraisal of stressful events and how these appraisals influence choice of coping strategy (Folkman, 1982). An evaluation of the potential threat of the situation in terms of accessible coping resources and options constitutes the foremost function of secondary appraisal. Secondary appraisal constitutes a complex evaluative procedure that entails identifying available coping options, the probability that the coping option will accomplish its purpose, and likelihood that the individual can use the strategy successfully (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The two processes, while apparently occurring consecutively, are generally able to function concurrently and are interrelated (Sarafino, 2002; Stroebe, 2000).

The final phase of the appraisal process is reappraisal, the altered appraisal of a stressor due to the reception of new information, which could amplify or diminish the pressures on the individual. Consequently, the impact of stress hinges largely on the outcome of appraisals formulated in our transactions with the environment (Sarafino, 2002).

Lazarus' transactional model of stress, in which the 'cognitive appraisal' theory resides, has three key implications:

(1) Events or situations are not intrinsically stressful or not stressful; individuals appraise and experience them as such.

(2) Our cognitive appraisal of events is dependent on and varies according to changes in mood, health, and motivational state. Our appraisal of events may therefore significantly alter on separate occasions.

(3) Evidence suggests that our responses to stress-inducing situations are similar or the same regardless of whether an event is in fact experienced or imagined (Melnick, 2002; Straub, 2002).

2.5 Occupational stress

Occupational stress refers to individuals' response to work demands beyond their knowledge and ability, and which challenge their capacity to cope (Leka, Griffiths, and Cox, 2003). Moreover, it is the mind-body arousal as an outcome of physical and / or psychological job demands (Pienaar & Rothmann, 2006). Research exploring the etiology and effects of occupational stress have increased significantly in recent years, and is indispensable for two purposes (Straub, 2002). Firstly, most people will experience work-related stress within their line of employment at some point in time. Secondly, occupational stress may be an avoidable or preventable health hazard, and as a result provides opportunities for intervention (Straub, 2002).

Sethi and Schuler (1984) delineate four reasons occupational stress and coping have become foremost issues for organisations: (1) concern for employee health and wellbeing, (2) the economic implications for organisations, (3) legal responsibility on employers to ensure safe and healthy work environments, and (4) organisational effectiveness (O'Driscoll & Cooper, 2002). Mismanaged or ignored occupational stress will generate distress for the individual, and ultimately extend into detrimental outcomes for the organisation (O'Driscoll & Cooper, 2002).

The impact of occupational stress is often short-term and without the provoking of chronic psychological or physical consequences (Straub, 2002; Cox, 1978). However, this is not true for all individuals, and some may endure chronic and continuous work-stress (Straub, 2002; Johnson, 2001; Cox, 1978). Elevated absenteeism and employee turnover rates, loss of productivity, and

expenses in terms of employee health are indicative of the broad health, economic and social consequences of continuously high stress levels (Pienaar & Rothmann, 2006; O'Driscoll & Cooper, 2002; Johnson, 2001).

2.6 Police Stress

McGrath defines stress as a perceived disproportion between social demands and reaction ability, where failure to address demands results in significant consequences (Violanti, 1983). This definition aptly corresponds to conditions applicable in police work: substantial job demands, a lowered response capability, and the prospect of failure (Violanti, 1983). This is likely to result in depressed performance and impaired judgement and decision-making.

SAPS members face unique demands including the struggle of supporting both freedom and societal regulation, as well as policing communities within stringent legal constraints, which may undoubtedly provoke the appraisal of duties as distressing or taxing (Violanti, 1983).

Changes relating to job role structure are intrinsic and frequent in the SAPS, which had undergone significant transformation as an organisation. Moreover, the role of police officer has been redefined within both the organisation and country. These changes influenced the nature of the police officer role, causing role ambiguity and role conflict (Sutherland & Cooper, 2000). Role conflict occurs when an employee experiences confusion regarding contrasting demands or mismatched goals relating to the job (Sutherland & Cooper, 2000), role ambiguity is a lack of clarity about one's role at work, and role overload is the number of diverse roles an individual has to perform and the extent of work required (O'Driscoll & Cooper, 2002).

2.6.1 Dimensions of police stress

Police stress is a multi-dimensional construct, with researchers identifying diverse themes and areas of concern within the police environment. Spielberger, Westbury, Grier, and Greenfield's (1981) enquiry into police stress revealed that most sources of stress could be categorised as organisational or inherent in nature. Cacioppe and Mock (1985) propose that stress experienced

by police officers could be classified into seven broad categories, namely the individual, the nature of police work, peer pressures, management-supervisory difficulties, organisational problems, public/court/political pressures, and the home-social life. Violanti and Aron (1995) contest this categorisation of stressors and establish a group of four salient factors in police stress. It includes organisational practices and characteristics, the criminal justice system, the public, and the specifics of police work itself (Violanti & Aron, 1995). Cooper and Marshall propose six 'stress hotspots' including inherent stressors, role-based stress , stress due to the changing nature of relationships with other people at work, career stress, stress related to organisational structure and climate and, stressors associated with home and work interaction (Sutherland & Cooper, 2000). We can deduce that common themes among these theorists include the nature of police work, organisational characteristics, practices and problems, work-home stressor; and the public.
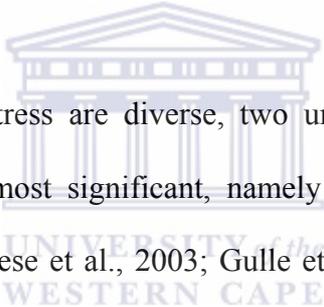
While these spheres of police stress are diverse, two unique stress classifications have been proposed and identified as the most significant, namely inherent and organisational stressors (Kohan & Mazmanian, 2003; Wiese et al., 2003; Gulle et al., 1998; Violanti & Aron, 1995). A tendency to focus explicitly on inherent stressors existed, until research revealed the dynamic and significant influence of organisational factors (Gulle, Tredoux, & Foster, 1998). The following discussion below offers a distinction between inherent and organisational stressors.

2.6.1.1 Inherent stressors

Inherent stressors allude to numerous aspects constituting the very nature of police work (Gulle et al., 1998; Wiese et al., 2003). They are categorised as stressful for at least three reasons: (1) police work within is largely reactive, rather than proactive; (2) it requires police members to fulfil social maintenance duties and (3) includes interactions with persons who generally display immense disregard for police authority (Violanti & Aron, 1995; Crowe & Stradling, 1992). The reactive aspect of police duties requires that police officers assume a continuous state of alertness and have little control over their work schedules. Crowe and Stradling (1992: 149) report that police duties

require officers to *"...hold themselves in a state of continual readiness for the presently unknown, potentially challenging, actions in the public arena which may remind them of their own mortality and other frailties, have limited long-term utility, and for which they will, individually, be internally and externally accountable"*.

Several international studies probing stress in law enforcement suggest that police officers appraise inherent stressors more negatively and intensely than organisational stressors (Kohan & Mazmanian, 2003; Violanti & Aron, 1995). Violanti and Aron (1994; 1995) indicate that the top five police stressors in their study included only inherent stressors. Kohan and Mazmanian (2003) achieved similar results in their research, suggesting that police officers appraise inherent stressors more negatively than organisational stressors.

Local researchers Gulle, Tredoux, and Foster (1998) acknowledge the role of organisational stress in police work, but reported that inherent stressors were perceived as more distressing within their sample. Additionally, Gulle et al. (1998) suggested that the South African police officers are under enormous stress resulting from lack of support from other services, perceived social responsibility, and perceived efficiency/effectiveness, all of which are organisational stressors.

2.6.1.2 Organisational stressors

Organisational stressors include the bureaucratic nature of the police organisation that lends itself to the promotion of stress in officers (Gulle et al., 1998; Wiese et al., 2003). Police work is similar to other occupations in that interdepartmental practices account for a large proportion of work distress (Meyer, Rothmann & Pienaar, 2003; Violanti & Aron, 1995). Factors such as the authoritarian structure of SAPS, lack of resources, insufficient participation in decisions affecting duties, poor administrative support from the organisation, a punishment-centred philosophy, and unfair regulations constitute organisational aspects of police stress (Violanti & Aron, 1995; Burke, 1993).

Schaufeli and Enzmann (Wiese et al., 2003) propose that organisational stressors be classified into two components, namely job demands and lack of resources. Job demands are elements of the occupation that require continual physical or mental effort and are associated with physiological and psychological outcomes. It concerns role ambiguity, role conflict, heavy workload, stressful events, and work pressure (Mostert & Joubert, 2005). Job resources are characteristics of the job that are imperative in reaching work objectives, managing job demands and the related physiological and psychological costs, and promoting personal development (Mostert & Joubert, 2005). Inadequate or poor quality equipment, colleagues not performing their jobs, poor supervision, and inadequate salary represent a lack of resources within the police organisation (Wiese et al., 2003).

A local researcher, Koortzen (1996), found the three most significant stressors in a South African sample to be lack of supervisory and management support, inappropriate sentences handed down by courts, and emotional disconnection to family (Pienaar & Rothmann, 2006).

Meyer, Rothmann, and Pienaar (2003) identified that a lack of resources (personnel shortages and poor salary) accounted for the stressors with the highest frequency and intensity in an Eastern Cape sample. Wiese, Rothmann, and Storm (2003) revealed similar results in their study on SAPS members in KwaZulu-Natal. The results suggested that KwaZulu-Natal police members appraise organisational stressors as more salient and intense than inherent stressors.

Internationally, several enquiries have suggest similar results, which proposes that police officers regard organisational inefficiency, lack of management support and court appearances to be the greatest stressors they challenge (Meyer et al., 2003; Wiese et al., 2003; Cacioppe & Mock, 1985).

2.6.2 Impact of stress

Police stress may affect multiple levels including the individual, the family, the SAPS as an organisation, and the community at large (Nel, 1999).

Stress occurring at individual level constitutes the initiation of the stress process, which could potentially affect other levels. Widespread symptoms among police officials include an increase in substance use, suicide ideation and suicide, extramarital affairs, anxiety, depression, emotional numbness and loss of motivation (Nel, 1999). The following symptoms represent the most salient outcomes of stress, as evident from its impact on the individual and the plethora of research conducted on these issues.

(a) Post-traumatic stress disorder

Nel (1999) asserts that continuous and excessive exposure to traumatic situations with, or without counselling, may eventually result in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Exposure to events involving actual or threatened death, or serious injury, may result in the development of three categories of psychological symptoms: (1) the continuous re-experiencing of the event; (2) the determined avoidance of stimuli related to the trauma; and (3) increased arousal (Jones & Kagee, 2005). Moreover, symptoms of intrusion (in the form of dreams or flashbacks); disturbances in the body's natural cycle; changes in sleeping, eating, or sexual habits; and emotional responses such as crying or aggression may occur (Joseph, Williams, & Yule, 1999; Nel, 1999).

(b) Suicide

Researchers have been ardently debating police suicide as analyses of police suicide rates indicate conflicting outcomes. They range from results proposing police suicide rates as higher than the national average and those indicating the contrary (Violanti, 2004; Loo, 2003; Pienaar et al., 2007). South African suicide rates and studies reveal that SAPS officers are eleven times more likely to commit suicide than the average South African citizen (Meyer et al., 2003), and five times more likely to commit suicide in comparison to police suicide rates internationally (Pienaar et al., 2007). Conceptualising suicide reveals numerous activities and ideas, including suicide completion, overt intention, and suicide attempt, as well as suicide ideation, which represents a salient risk factor for suicide attempts and completion (Swanepoel & Pienaar, 2004; Violanti,

2004). Suicide ideation refers to cognitions concerning suicidal activities and objectives, and is often an early indication of serious suicidal behaviour and psychological disturbance (Rothmann & Strijdom, 2002; Pienaar et al., 2007). It concerns ideas about death, suicide, and severe self-injurious actions and thoughts about suicidal behaviour (Rothmann & Strijdom, 2002).

(c) Burnout

Burnout is the concluding phase of a breakdown in adaptation and a consequence of a sustained imbalance of demands and resources. Enquiries generally neglect the subject in the police context, as revealed by the paucity of research within this occupational group (Mostert & Joubert, 2005). The concept is defined as *"a persistent, negative, work-related state of mind in 'normal' individuals that is primarily characterised by exhaustion, accompanied by distress, a sense of reduced effectiveness, decreased motivation, and the development of dysfunctional attitudes and behaviours at work"* (Schaufeli and Enzmann, 1998: 36). Furthermore, burnout encompasses three specific elements, namely emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and decreased personal accomplishment, which ultimately results in reduced individual functioning (Kohan & Mazmanian, 2003). Burnout outcomes, a combination of psychological, behavioural, and physical symptoms, relate to the individual, but additionally deliver severe consequences to the organisation (Kohan & Mazmanian, 2003; Wiese, Rothmann & Storm, 2003; Burke, 1993; Schaufeli, Maslach & Marek, 1993; Goodman, 1990).

Organisational features contributing to burnout include lack of support, excessive workloads, role conflict and ambiguity, as well as rotating shifts and lack of feedback (Wiese et al., 2003). Additional variables ameliorating or exacerbating burnout levels include work-family conflict and individual coping initiatives (Burke, 1993). The correlation between coping approaches and burnout levels depict that high levels of burnout are associated with poor and withdrawal coping strategies, while low levels of burnout with constructive coping strategies (Burke, 1993).

Wiese, Rothmann, and Storm's (2003) investigation on Kwazulu-Natal police officers demonstrate that elevated levels of avoidance coping initiatives correlate significantly with high levels of exhaustion and cynicism, and reduced levels of professional efficacy, each an integral component of burnout. Mostert and Joubert (2005) confirmed these results by establishing that avoidance coping aided in exaggerating burnout levels.

(d) Spillover

Grzywacz, Almeida & McDonald (2002) acknowledge that spillover, or the degree to which involvement in one domain (e.g. the family) influences involvement in another domain, provides a connection between work and family. The outcome is that occupational stress experienced by one family member may permeate into the home environment; subjecting the family unit to the numerous stress responses of the worker. This may range from a sense of preoccupation to emotional indifference (Nel, 1999).

A high prevalence of dysfunctional relationships exist within the police environment, symptoms include displaced rage and hostility generating diverse forms of violence within the family unit, including family murders and spousal abuse (Nel, 1999). In addition, family members experience elevated divorce rates and an escalation in feelings of anxiety and lack of security (Nel, 1999; Nordlicht, 1979).

Nel (1999) claims that the impact of stress on police officers may result in officers experiencing low motivation, lack of job fulfilment, reduced productivity, poor discipline, disregard for others, corruption, and absenteeism. An additional organisational consequence of stress is a decrease in organisational commitment (Jaramillo, Nixon & Sams, 2005).

2.6.3 Occupational stress and biographical variables

Research exploring demographic differences on occupational stress has not been entirely consistent. Previous research reports diverse stress scores based on ethnicity and gender (Pienaar & Rothmann, 2006).

The role of gender in the experience of occupational stress has been deemed a highly relevant variable in exploring variances in the perceptions and sources of stress within the law enforcement context (Pienaar & Rothmann, 2006; He, Zhao & Ren, 2005). Furthermore, the influence of the police agency, as a gendered organisation, cannot be underestimated. Female police officers are often met with resistance and discrimination, may encounter numerous barriers and dilemmas in their careers, and may be subjected to harassment by male colleagues (Greene & del Carment, 2002). Additionally, the external work environment is less favourable to female officers than male (He, Zhao & Ren, 2005). In spite of the potential challenges faced by female police officers, some researchers report similarities between male and female officers' perceptions and sources of occupational stress (Mostert & Joubert, 2006; Greene & del Carment, 2002; Violanti & Aron, 1995). Other studies report that female police officers are prone to experience more stress than their male colleagues (He, Zhao & Ren, 2005). Several researchers refute this finding by stating that female police officers report lower levels of distress and fewer stressful work events in comparison to male police officers (Patterson, 2003) or that no significant difference exists between the two groups (McCarty, Zhao & Garland, 2007).

Pienaar and Rothmann (2006) emphasise the role of ethnicity in levels of distress within law enforcement. Research exploring the role of race in the experience of occupational stress report that white police officers report higher levels of stress compared to their black counterparts. Furthermore, black and coloured police officers generally experience stress less intensely and frequently compared to white and Indian police officers (Pienaar & Rothmann, 2006; He, Zhao & Ren, 2005). Nell (1994) reported conflicting results, which indicated that black officers were

likely to experience higher levels of stress compared to white officers. Other studies report no differences based on race (Violanti & Aron, 1995).

2.7 Conceptualising coping

Psychological definitions and classifications of coping inhabit similar premises incorporating behavioural and cognitive responses to demanding situations (Florence, 1998). White (in Monat & Lazarus, 1977: 8) elaborates by defining coping as *"efforts to master conditions of harm, threat, or challenge when a routine or automatic response is not available"*.

The most significant and widely used description is Lazarus and Folkman's (1984: 141) definition of coping as *"constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person"*. Several ideas inhabit this definition, and it addresses numerous limitations of traditional approaches to coping. The words 'constantly changing' and 'specific' demands' reflect the notion of coping as process-oriented rather than trait-oriented (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). There is a distinction between coping and automatised adaptive behaviour as coping is restricted to events that are appraised as stressful, thereby restricting coping to conditions of psychological stress. These conditions require effort and eliminate automatised behaviours and thoughts that do not necessitate exertion on the individual's behalf (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The initial notion to amalgamate coping with outcome is addressed by defining coping as 'efforts' to alleviate stress, thereby permitting coping to embody numerous acts or thoughts performed by individuals in an attempt to manage stress. Lastly, the use of the term 'manage' evades associating coping with mastery, and can refer to the tolerating, reducing, avoiding or acceptance of demanding circumstances as well as attempts to master these conditions (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Folkman, 1982).

Coping efforts are a reaction to stressful events appraised as harmful, threatening, challenging, or indicating loss (Folkman, 1982). The initiation of appraisals alters the interaction between individuals and their environment by changing the situation and/or by adjusting individuals' perception of it. The generation of new coping strategies occurs through reappraisals (Folkman, 1982). The interdependent relationship between the individual and environment is evident, as each continuously interacts with and influences the other.

2.7.1 Coping Functions

In conceptualising coping, it is imperative to address the uncertainty between coping functions and coping outcomes. Coping functions refer to the aim or purpose a strategy fulfils, while outcome refers to the impact of a strategy (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984) coping functions can be divided into two general themes, namely emotion- and problem-focused coping. The themes differ in overriding importance. Emotion-focused coping relates to adjusting emotional responses to stressors or problems, while problem-focused coping aims to manage or change the problem causing distress (Sarafino, 2002; Straub, 2002; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Folkman, 1982). Both approaches incorporate cognitive and behavioural strategies, and neither is a better or worse strategy than the other. Their value may be determined by assessments of the short- and long-term outcomes of the strategies. Folkman (1982) proposes that short-term outcomes include the degree to which the strategy assists the individual in managing, minimising or mastering the demands of the stressor and managing his or her emotions. Long-term outcomes incorporate morale, health, and social and psychological functioning (Folkman, 1982).

2.7.2 Coping Outcomes

Any discussion on coping outcomes recognises the difficulty in distinguishing between the effectiveness of particular strategies compared to others. Their invariability lies in the level of analysis (physiological, psychological or sociological), time concerns (short- or long-term), and

contextual differences (Stroebe, 2000; Monat & Lazarus, 1977). It is therefore evident that the efficiency or advantage of a specific coping initiative is undoubtedly dependable on the individual's appraisal of the event or stressor (Monat & Lazarus, 1977).

Carver and Scheier (1994) report that literature indicating how coping hinders good outcomes is more prominent than literature exploring good outcomes associated with coping. Although evidence does exist illustrating the benefits of particular methods of coping, these findings are sparse in comparison with those indicating opposing results, These results are evident with the plethora of evidence establishing positive relationships between avoidance coping and distress (Carver & Scheier, 1994).

2.8   Coping strategies

Coping strategies aim to moderate or buffer the impact of stressors on physical and psychological well-being. The effectiveness of different coping strategies varies; some provide short-term relief but are maladaptive in the long run (e.g. substance abuse or denial) (Straub, 2002). The number of coping strategies utilised by individuals vary among theorists, ranging from universal dichotomies to extensive lists of coping strategies and defence mechanisms (Mostert & Joubert, 2005). While the exact number of coping strategies is debatable, Lazarus and colleagues (Cronqvist, Klang, & Bjorvell, 1997; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) have proposed two higher-order categories, namely emotion-focused and problem-focused strategies. Beehr, Johnson, and Nieva (1995) report a bias in the theoretical and applied literature preferring the effectiveness of problem-focused techniques, with little verification to support or discredit this claim. Endler and Parker (1994) suggest a third coping strategy: avoidance coping. While problem- or emotion-focused strategies may assist individuals in addressing stressful events, avoidance coping merely removes the individual from the situation (Pienaar & Rothmann, 2003).

The following paragraphs discuss emotion-, problem-focused, and avoidance coping approaches to addressing stressful demands.

2.8.1 Emotion-focused coping

Emotion-focused coping incorporate cognitive and behavioural approaches aimed at decreasing emotional distress and include activities such as minimisation, emotional social support, acceptance, religion, selective attention, and positive reinterpretation (Sarafino, 2002; Straub, 2002; Florence, 1998; Latack & Havlovic, 1992; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Behavioural approaches include identifying sources of social support, using drugs or alcohol, or diverting attention away from the problem by preoccupying themselves with other activities (Straub, 2002). Cognitive approaches relate to altering the appraisal of the stressor or denying disagreeable information (Straub, 2002). Alternately, albeit on a smaller scale, emotion-focused strategies may also function as a means of increasing emotional distress. This occurs when individuals deliberately attempt to mobilise him or herself for action, or when they engage in self-blame or self-punishment as a means of acutely experiencing their stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Emotion-focused strategies are generally utilised when individuals experience their situations as hopeless, with little or nothing to alter their circumstances, or when coping resources or skills are insufficient or inadequate to address the stressor (Straub, 2002). They are a means of altering the interpretation or experience of a situation without changing the actual situation, in essence a coping mechanism comparable to reappraisal (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Self-deception or reality distortion represents a potential characteristic of this coping approach. Often emotion-focused strategies allow individuals to maintain hope and optimism, to refute reality and its implications, and to pretend the reality of the situation is insignificant (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Monat and Lazarus continue that emotion-focused coping may become harmful when it inhibits the promotion of problem-focused strategies, yet alternatively it also functions to preserve a sense of well-being, integration or hope in circumstances that are generally devoid of it.

2.8.2 Problem-focused coping

In problem-focused coping, individuals address the stressful situation overtly by either minimising its demands or by enhancing their ability to deal with the stressor (Straub, 2002). Problem-focused coping strategies allow individuals to define the problem, produce alternative solutions, evaluate alternatives with regard to their costs and benefits, decide among them, and take action (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Individuals are likely to use problem-focused strategies if they experience their situations or resources as changeable (Straub, 2002; Sheridan & Radmacher, 1992; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Proactive coping and combative coping embody the two broad categories of problem-focused coping. Proactive coping refers to the attempt to foresee potential stressors and act in advance to prevent or avoid them, while combative coping refers to a reactive strategy in which the individual responds to an unavoidable stressor (Straub, 2002). Kahn, (in Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) however, suggests two alternative categories of problem-focused approaches, those concerned with the environment, and those concerned with the self. The first category centres on strategies that change or modify environmental stressors, resources or obstacles, while the second emphasises strategies that encourage motivational or cognitive changes, sourcing alternative gratification channels, minimising ego involvement, generating new behaviours relating to coping, and acquiring new skills (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

2.8.3. Avoidance coping

Avoidance coping, a cognitive and behavioural strategy, is the predisposition to evade feeling, experiencing, or thinking about a stressful event by engaging in alternative activities (Levin, Ilgen, & Moos, 2007; Wrzesniewski & Chylinska, 2007). A reliance on avoidance coping is generally associated with less positive outcomes (Levin et al., 2007). Evidence suggests that police officers often engage in avoidance coping behaviour for instantaneous stress reduction (Ortega, Brenner & Leather, 2006; Anshel, 2000). Avoidance coping activities include venting emotions, behavioural disengagement, and mental disengagement (Latack & Havlovic, 1992).

2.9   Scholarship on coping and police officers

Studies investigating the effectiveness of the three strategies reveal similar results. The results reveal that emotion-focused strategies are generally less successful approaches, yet are the most commonly used strategy for addressing stress (Lennings, 1997).

Limited local scientific research exists on the coping strategies utilised by SAPS members. An examination into this domain is essential given the reports that police officers are particularly inept at coping (Pienaar & Rothmann, 2003). The SAPS context provides a unique setting in which to examine coping due to the high crime rate in which officers function and because SAPS members are purportedly coping ineffectively, considering the reported rates of burnout, substance abuse, medical boarding, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicide, high levels of absenteeism and low levels of job satisfaction among members (Pienaar & Rothmann, 2003).

Internationally, Beehr, Johnson, and Nieva (1995) explored occupational stress and coping strategies utilised by police officers and their spouses. The results could not entirely confirm any preference for problem-focused strategies. Their data suggested a negative correlation between problem-focused strategies and work strain; however, emotion-focused strategies demonstrated this association more consistently (Beehr et al., 1995).

Locally, Meyer et al. (2003) investigated occupational stress, coping, and suicide ideation in an Eastern Cape sample. The results identified that female police officers achieved higher scores on emotional support and problem-focused coping, a topic highly debated in this field. Furthermore, job demands positively correlated with emotion-focused coping, which suggests that the higher the job demands, the higher the probability that emotion-focused strategies will be used (Meyer et al., 2003). Alternatively, the results may suggest that the use of emotion-focused strategies increase the perception of job demands.

Wiese, Rothmann, and Storm (2003) examined coping, stress and burnout in South African police members in KwaZulu-Natal. The findings suggested that problem-focused coping results increased feelings of professional efficacy in police officer's work, while avoidance coping resulted in decreased feelings of accomplishment and correlated positively to exhaustion and cynicism (Wiese et al., 2003).

2.10 Variables influencing choice of coping strategy

An investigation of coping is insufficient if the personal factors influencing the selection of coping strategies and the efficiency of those strategies are not explored (Anshel, 2000). Identifying factors influencing coping strategy selection is useful in distinguishing the antecedents of stress sources, coping resources, and outcomes. The foremost factors influencing the selection of coping mechanisms are gender (Ortega et al., 2006; Straub, 2002; Florence, 1998), age (Ortega et al., 2006; Anshel, 2000), ethnicity and socioeconomic status (Straub, 2002), social support (Straub, 2002), rank (Ortega et al., 2006) and selected personal dispositions (Straub, 2002; Anshel, 2000; Florence, 1998; Sheridan & Radmacher, 1997).

2.10.1 Gender

Sources of stress and coping strategies vary considerably between male and female police officers, even in response to similar stressors (Anshel, 2000). Straub (2002) concurs that a common gender difference is that men typically engage more with problem-focused strategies, while women rely more on emotion-focused strategies. Hanninen and Aro (in Florence, 1998) investigated the coping mechanisms used by Finnish men and women when confronted with stressful events. Their results mirrored similar findings to Straub, in that women were more inclined to employ emotion-focused strategies. Conflicting results suggest that gender may have little to do with coping style, and that available resources and socioeconomic status may be better predictors of the type of coping strategy used (Straub, 2002).

2.10.2 Personal dispositions

Personal characteristics may influence receptiveness to stress, the interpretation, and response to stressful events, and the degree to which addressing stressful events results in chronic stress and burnout (Anshel. 2000). Personal dispositions most strongly associated with coping include self-esteem, optimism, coping style, hardiness, extraversion, neuroticism, self-confidence, and perfectionism. The abovementioned dispositions shape an officer's appraisal of stress and consequent coping processes (Anshel, 2000).

2.10.3 Socioeconomic status and ethnicity

International scholars Billings and Moos (1981) identified that individuals of low socioeconomic status, and therefore predominantly ethnic individuals, tend to rely less on problem-focused strategies than individuals with high socioeconomic status. The experiencing of circumstances as hopeless and the perception of little or no control may relate to persons of low socioeconomic status, thereby reducing the utilisation of problem-focused strategies (Straub, 2002; Billings & Moos, 1981). Coyne and Gottlieb (in Pienaar & Rothmann, 2003) assert that race and culture may also influence the nature and context of the stressor, the available coping responses and emotional reaction of individuals, as foremost cultural scripts encourage self-reliance, social support and religiosity as significant coping methods.

2.10.4. Social support

The aforementioned factors relate to an individual's inherent resources for addressing stress. The subject of social support, an external resource, concerns companionship with others that expresses emotional concern, material support, and open communication about a situation (Straub, 2002). Burke and colleagues (1996) inserts that social support is the positive social relationships with people including partners, colleagues, friends, or family. It conveys love and caring, a sense of belonging to a network of persons, and value among related persons (Florence, 1998). The level and quality of social support individual's receive is often positively associated with the experience

of stress and ability to cope (Straub, 2002). Support from within the organisation positively correlates to employee well-being, and minimises negative occupational consequences, such as stress, psychological disorders, and job dissatisfaction (Mostert & Joubert, 2005; Thompson, Kirk & Brown, 2005).

International researchers Thompson and colleagues (2005) identify that support from within the work context is especially necessary to women officers, the vast minority in any policing environment. However, both males and females benefit from social support systems in the workplace, which buffers against the three dimensions of burnout (Mostert & Joubert, 2005). Poor social support is an independent predictor of distress, absenteeism, and psychological distress and morbidity in employees (Tennant, 2001).

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The methodology chapter provides a discussion on the methodology used to investigate police officers' perceptions of stress and coping strategies. This refers specifically to the sampling method, data collection instruments, and statistical techniques applied.

A descriptive, quantitative research design characterises the framework in which the research is applied. It emphasises the quantification of constructs and employs variables to describe human behaviour (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Furthermore, the research design includes generating accurate and reliable descriptions of observed data and examining potential relationships between diverse phenomena (Leedy, 1997).
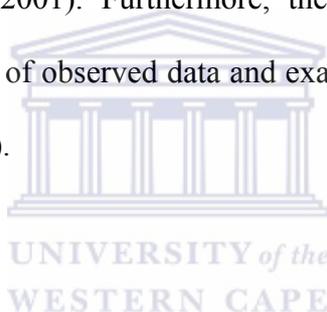
3.2 Research Design

The research design was a cross-sectional survey design (Neuman, 2003; Fink & Kosecoff, 1985). Creswell (2003) describes survey designs as quantitative accounts of attitudes, opinions, or trends of a population, gained by investigating a sample of that population. Researchers then proceed to generalise about the population based on the sample results, which describes the status of particular situations, illustrates change, and forms comparisons (Creswell, 2003; Fink & Kosecoff, 1985). Surveys remain a popular social research tool and incorporate administering an instrument to a sample of participants (Babbie & Mouton, 2001).

3.3 Participants

The selection of a non-probability, purposive sample of SAPS members from six randomly selected police stations within the Cape Town area comprised the sampling phase. The stations

included Brackenfell, Grassy Park, Kuils River, Mitchell's Plain, Nyanga, and Parow police stations. Police members participating in the study were required to meet several criteria which included being a uniformed member and serving in the police service for three years or more. The majority of participants are between 26-30 years old (31%), male (75%), married (51%), coloured (65%), constables (45%), Afrikaans speaking (47%), and have a matric qualification (70%).

3.4 Data Collection Tools

Often studies exploring occupational stress use self-report measures to determine the extent of psychological strain experienced (O'Driscoll & Cooper, 2002). Administering the self-report questionnaire consisted of participants completing two instruments, and a demographic survey, incorporated into a single questionnaire package. The first segment of the questionnaire package requested non-identifying biographical information of the participant. The second measure was the Spielberger Police Stress Survey (Spielberger, Westbury, Grier & Greenfield, 1981), and the third was the Brief COPE inventory (Carver, Scheier & Weintraub). The covering letter of the questionnaire package clarified to participants (1) the nature of the study, (2) assured confidentiality and anonymity, and (3) offered further assistance to members post-participation should they require it.

3.4.1 Demographic questionnaire

Obtaining demographic data from participants constituted the foremost aim of the questionnaire, and included collecting data on variables such as gender, age, language, race, marital status, education, rank, years at present station, and years in service.

3.4.2 Spielberger's Police Stress Survey

The Police Stress Survey, developed by Spielberger, Westbury, Grier, and Greenfield in 1981, determines perceptions of stress among SAPS members. The survey is one of the most cited measures in this field, and demonstrates reliable psychometric properties when used on a South African sample (Johnson, 2001; Gulle, 1998). The sixty-item measure, founded on the work of Kroes, assesses occupational stress among police officers by requesting that participants rate possible stressors on a scale of 0-100 (0 = no stress; 100 = intense stress), and the frequency with which they occurred in the past month and year (Johnson, 2001; Gulle et al., 1998). Vagg and Spielberger (1999) comment that stressors perceived as very intense and occur with high frequency are more likely to generate greater strain, thereby contributing to the progression of stress-related disorders. Furthermore, any measure that fails to recognise the significance of stressor frequency may either underestimate or overestimate a stressor's importance (Vagg & Spielberger, 1999). Moreover, Kasl (1998) argues that assessments of both intensity and frequency are more likely to be a true reflection of the participants' experience (Vagg & Spielberger, 1998).

Factor analysis of the Police Stress Survey reveals diverging results. Gulle and colleagues (1998) reveal a five-factor structure: (1) interrelations with / imbedded in / lack of support from other related services/criminal organisations/departments/sources (alpha = 0.90), (2) inherent stressors (alpha = 0.84), (3) perceived social responsibility (alpha = 0.85), (4) career path (alpha = 0.65), and (5) perceived effectiveness / efficiency (alpha = 0.67). Martelli and colleagues' factor analysis of the survey exposed a two-factor solution signifying that most items could be classified under either organisational pressure (alpha = 0.95) or inherent stress factors (alpha = 0.94), and an overall alpha coefficient of 0.97 for the measure (in Johnson, 2001). A further three factor solution was also generated indicating that most items under organisational pressures could be divided into either administrative/professional pressure or lack of support subscales (Johnson,

2001). This study will emulate the two - factor solution established by Martelli and colleagues, namely inherent and organisational stressors.

3.4.3 Brief Coping Orientations to Problems Experienced (COPE) Inventory

Numerous measures assessing coping exist and are in widespread use, including the Ways of Coping, Multidimensional Coping Inventory, the Coping Strategies Inventory, and the COPE inventory (Carver, 1997). Each of these instruments assesses both problem- and emotion-focused strategies, while also engaging with dysfunctional and adaptive coping responses (Melnick, 2002; Carver, 1997). The COPE inventory (Carver et al., 1989) was constructed from the then available literature on coping, partially from Lazarus and Folkman's model of coping and Carver and Scheier's model of behavioural self-regulation (Carver, 1997). The original COPE consists of 15 scales, each with a distinct conceptual emphasis. Each scale comprised four items of the sixty-item measure, a matter which Carver and his colleagues later identified as demonstrating substantial redundancy in item content and excessive time demands (Carver, 1997).
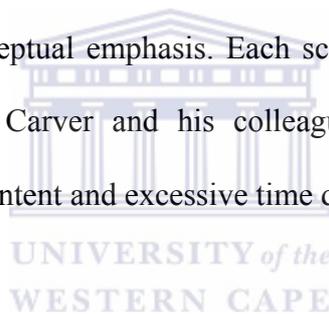
Carver and colleagues developed the Brief COPE to minimise time demands on participants and thereby increase the quality of the data received from participants. It consists of 28 items, measuring 14 subscales. Strong factor loading from previous factor analyses, item clarity, and meaningfulness to participants guided the authors in reducing the original 60-item measure into 28 items (Carver, 1997). The constructs measured in the Brief COPE Inventory include (1) emotion-focused strategies (acceptance, emotional support, humour, positive reframing, and religion); (2) problem-focused strategies (active coping, instrumental support, and planning); and (3) dysfunctional coping strategies (behavioural disengagement, denial, self-distraction, self-blame, substance use, and venting). Alpha reliabilities for the scales range from .50 to .90, which indicates that their reliabilities meet or exceed the value (.50), considered minimally acceptable in this regard (Carver, 1997). The items in the measure are arranged according to a contextual and retrospective format and response choices range from 1 (I haven't been doing this at all) to 4 (I've

been doing this a lot) (Carver, 1997). Participants are required to grade each coping statement according to this rating scale.

3.5 Procedure

The researcher obtained permission from the SAPS Head Office to conduct research on police members in the Cape Town area. Choosing this area was largely dependent on its consistence of vastly diverse communities, particularly in terms of crime levels, resources, and job demands. Scheduling meetings with station management allowed the researcher an opportunity to discuss the nature of the research and the role of participants. Station management therefore played a significant role in allowing the researcher to access participants. The involvement of unit commanders assisted in the administering of the questionnaire package to the various components. The researcher made requests to participants to complete the questionnaires in a given period and the packages were collected on the proposed due date. Informing participants of ethical issues, such as anonymity and confidentiality, constituted an important, and necessary, aspect of the research process.
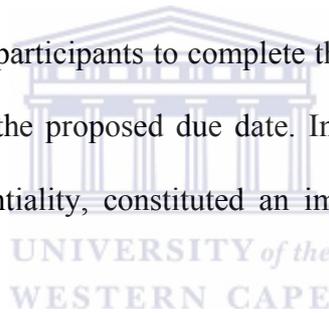
3.6 Ethical Considerations

It was necessary to uphold and maintain ethical considerations during three stages of the research process: (1) in the recruitment of participants, (2) during the measurement procedure, and (3) in the circulation of the research results (Huysamen, 1994).

Voluntary participation, anonymity, confidentiality, and informed consent governed each participant's participation in the research process. Keeping questionnaires in a secure location ensured the safety of completed questionnaires and participants' identities. Attached to each questionnaire was a consent form informing participants of their rights, guaranteeing anonymity, confidentiality, and the option to discontinue their participation should they decide to.

Made available to participants following the completion of the questionnaire was further assistance and organisational support systems offered at the SAPS, in the form of the Employee Assistance Services.

3.7 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using the SPSS computer package. The statistical analysis included examining the psychometric properties of the instruments used and establishing reliability coefficients, obtaining descriptive results, and examining potential correlations between the various scales. Mean and standard deviation scores were calculated for stress and coping subscales, and correlations betweens the subscales were explored. Additionally, t-tests and ANOVA was used to determine whether statistically significant differences existed between biographical variables and stress and coping scores.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

This chapter presents the research results. It opens with a short discussion on the internal consistency of the instruments used, and then presents the findings as classified according to the three hypotheses.

4.1 Internal consistency of measures

Anastasi established particular criteria pertaining to the internal consistency of instruments, namely that a reliability coefficient higher than 0.75 is indicative of suitable reliability (in Johnson, 2001). Table 1 illustrates the Cronbach alpha coefficients for the Spielberger Police Stress Survey and Brief COPE Inventory. The reliability coefficient results for the Spielberger Police Stress Survey is comparable to results achieved by previous authors and suggests acceptable reliability. The alpha coefficient achieved for the measure is 0.95, while alpha scores for the organisational and inherent subscales are 0.95 and 0.92 respectively. The coefficient results are comparable to those established by Gulle et al. (1998) and slightly lower than the coefficients presented by Johnson (2001). The reliability coefficient scores for the Brief COPE Inventory are lower than those reported for the Spielberger survey, yet are still above the standard criteria suggested by Anastasi (in Johnson, 2001). Alpha coefficients for the measure are .88, while avoidance coping (α = .75), emotion-focused (α =.75), and problem-focused coping (α = .84) reliability coefficients are slightly lower.

Table 1: Internal consistency of measures

Instrument	N (items)	Alpha
Stress		
Spielberger Police Stress Survey	60	.94
Organisational Stress Subscale	30	.95
Inherent Stress Subscale	30	.92
Coping		
Brief COPE Inventory	28	.88
Avoidance Coping Subscale	12	.75
Emotion-focused coping subscale	9	.75
Problem-focused coping subscale	7	.84

4.2 Stress

Hypothesis 1: The majority of police officers will score high on the Spielberger Police Stress Scale, indicating high levels of stress

Table 2 represents the mean and standard deviation scores for the most intensely perceived stressors. It identifies that the stressors ranked most intense were predominantly organisational in nature, while inherent stressors encompass a smaller component of this group.

Table 2: Most intensely perceived stressors

Stressor	Mean	Std Dev
1. Inadequate salary	76.45	26.55
2. Fellow member killed in the line of duty	75.29	26.34
3. Exposure to battered or dead children	71.85	24.55
4. Excessive paperwork	68.92	27.58
5. Poor or inadequate supervision	67.01	26.02
6. Insufficient manpower to adequately handle a job	65.96	27.12
7. Inadequate or poor quality equipment	65.82	26.84
8. Demands made by family for more time	65.54	29.37
9. Lack of recognition for good work	63.91	26.73
10. Fellow officers not doing their job	62.40	28.69

Table 3 identifies the stressors that were ranked least intense by the sample and includes the items such as "working a second job", "strained relationships with non-police friends", and "periods of inactivity and boredom".

Table 3: The least intensely perceived stressors

Stressor	Mean	Std Dev.
1. Working a second job	28.79	31.72
2. Strained relationships with non-police friends	39.64	29.86
3. Periods of inactivity and boredom	41.21	25.75
4. Assignment to new or unfamiliar duties	42.67	25.12
5. Performing non-police tasks on the job	44.59	29.52

Table 4 illustrates the most frequently occurring stressors for the sample, all of which are organisational in nature. "Fellow officers not doing their jobs" and "inadequate salary" are stressors occurring most frequently for the sample.
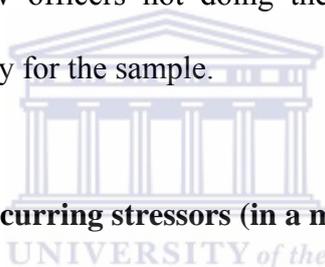
Table 4: The most frequently occurring stressors (in a month)

Stressor	Mean	Std Dev.
1. Fellow officers not doing their jobs	8.04	13.33
2. Inadequate salary	7.21	9.81
3. Excessive paperwork	7.19	8.18
4. Inadequate support by supervisor	5.82	6.93
5. Insufficient manpower to adequately a job	5.70	3.37

Table 5 indicates the mean and standard deviation scores for both stressor intensity and frequency within the sample. It suggests a moderate intensity score of 57.75 and a frequency score of 4.34.

Table 5: Stressor intensity and frequency scores

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Stressor Intensity	57.75	14.27
Stressor Frequency	4.34	1.38

4.2.1 Comparing means

Tables 6 and 7 illustrate the contrast of demographic variables against stress intensity and frequency means using mean comparisons, t-tests, and one-way ANOVA. The demographic variables under investigation are gender, language, ethnicity, rank, marital status, and level of education.

Table 6: Demographic data and stress intensity scores

LEVELS OF STRESS: GROUPS						
	Intensity	Std Dev.	N	F	P	Statistically significant differences were found between male and female participants.
GENDER				2.96	.01	
Female	64.53	12.29	26			
Male	55.48	15.01	78			
ETHNICITY				2.85	.04	Statistically significant differences were found between Coloured participants and other ethnic groups.
Black	60.72	16.12	23			
White	61.35	12.22	14			
Coloured	55.85	14.88	67			
MARITAL SATUS				0.69	.59	There are no statistically significant differences between participants based on marital status.
Married*	59.4	16.25	58			
Single*	56.13	14.27	46			
LANGUAGE				2.64	.04	Statistically significant differences were found between IsiXhosa-speaking participants and other language groups.
English	57.88	13.53	36			
Afrikaans	56.46	15.16	48			
IsiXhosa	63.01	14.66	20			
EDUCATION				1.32	.26	There are no statistically significant differences between participants based on level of education.
Grade 10/11	47.98	11.71	2			
Matric	56.08	15	73			
Post-matric dip.	63.58	14.85	22			
University degree	55.75	1.5	3			
Post-grad deg	58.37	12.22	3			
RANK				2.92	.02	Statistically significant differences were found between constables and captains in comparison to other ranks
Constable	53.17	16.65	47			
Sergeant	64.96	11.99	18			
Inspector	61.2	12.34	28			
Captain	54.57	8.41	8			
Other	62.36	16.0	3			

*Divorced, single, and widowed participants' scores were combined into the 'single' variable. Living together and married participants' scores were combined into the 'married' variable. This allowed for a more comprehensive analysis of demographic variables.

Table 7: Demographic data and frequency scores

LEVELS OF STRESS: GROUPS						45
	Frequency	**Std Dev.**	**N**	**F**	**P**	
GENDER				.225	.639	There are no statistically significant differences between participants based on gender.
Female	4.39	1.18	26			
Male	4.32	1.78	78			
ETHNICITY				.309	.819	There are no statistically significant differences between participants based on ethnicity.
Black	4.62	1.48	23			
White	4.29	1.24	14			
Coloured	4.26	1.79	67			
MARITAL SATUS				.841	.502	There are no statistically significant differences between participants based on marital status.
Married*	4.47	1.75	58			
Single*	4.19	1.56	46			
LANGUAGE				.785	.74	There are no statistically significant differences between participants based on language.
English	4.21	1.43	36			
Afrikaans	4.33	1.87	48			
IsiXhosa	4.26	1.17	20			
EDUCATION				2.10	.086	There are no statistically significant differences between participants based on level of education.
Grade 10/11	4.17	.33	2			
Matric	4.23	1.69	73			
Post-matric dip	4.12	1.31	22			
University degree	6.72	1.40	3			
Post-grad deg	5.26	1.17	3			
RANK				1.24	.297	There are no statistically significant differences between participants based on rank.
Constable	4.28	1.76	47			
Sergeant	4.62	1.32	18			
Inspector	3.97	1.43	28			
Captain	4.81	2.19	8			
Other	5.79	1.53	3			

*Divorced, single, and widowed participants' scores were combined into the 'single' variable. Living together and married participants' scores were combined into the 'married' variable. This allowed for a more comprehensive analysis of demographic variables.

Table 6 reveals several statistically significant differences based on the demographic variables gender, race, language, and rank. Female police officers scored statistically higher stress intensity scores than male officers ($p < 0.05$). Coloured police officers achieved significantly lower stress scores than other ethnic groups ($p < 0.05$). Xhosa-speaking officers scored significantly lower stress scores compared to other language groups ($p < 0.05$). Additionally, police officers ranked as constables and captains also scored statistically significantly lower stress scores in comparison to

other ranks (p<0.05). Table 7 indicates that the demographic variables under investigation have no statistically significant influence on the frequency at which participants perceive stressors to occur.

4.2.3 Organisational and Inherent stress subscales

A two sample *t*-test was used to determine whether there was a significant difference between the organisational and inherent stress subscale mean scores. The results of this analysis, presented in Table 8, showed that there was a statistically significant difference between the two on both intensity and frequency scores (p<0.05).

Table 8: t-test examining organisational and inherent stress means

		Mean	Std. Dev	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower	Upper	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Intensity	2.02	9.63	.95	.16	3.90	2.15	103	.034
Pair 2	Frequency	.66	1.26	.124	.42	.91	5.4	103	.000

4.3 Coping

Hypothesis 2: The majority of police officers will use avoidance coping strategies as indicated on the COPE Inventory.

Table indicates that the most frequently used coping strategies by the law enforcement sample. The results reveal that participants were more likely to use problem-focused strategies to address stressful events and least likely to use avoidance coping strategies.

Table 9: The most frequently used coping strategies

Coping strategy	Mean	Std Dev
1. I've been concentrating my efforts on doing something about the situation I'm in.	2.96	.98
2. I've been trying to come up with a strategy about what to do	2.93	.92
3. I've been taking action to try and make the situation better	2.92	1.00
4. I've been thinking hard about what steps to take	2.88	1.02
5. I've been looking for something good in what's being happening	2.84	.95
6. I've been trying to see it in a different light.	2.83	1.01
7. I've been accepting the reality	2.82	.98
8. I've been trying to find comfort in my religion.	2.76	1.07
9. I've been doing things to think about it less.	2.75	.97
10. I've been praying or meditating.	2.74	1.07

Table 10 shows the least used coping strategies. It indicates that the use of alcohol or drugs are least frequently used by police officers as a method of managing demanding occupational situations.

Table 10: The least frequently used coping strategies least frequently used

Coping strategy	Mean	SD
1. I've been using alcohol or drugs to help me.	1.38	.81
2. I've been using alcohol or drugs to make me feel better.	1.47	.86
3. I've been giving up the attempt to cope.	1.51	.82
4. I've given up trying to deal with it.	1.61	.79
5. I've been blaming myself.	1.67	.87

Table 11 indicates the mean and standard deviation scores of problem-focused, emotion-focused and avoidance coping strategies. It reveals that participants are more likely to use problem-focused coping strategies when addressing stress and least likely to use avoidance coping strategies.

Table 11: The mean and standard deviation scores of emotion-focused, problem-focused, and avoidance coping strategies

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Emotion-focused coping	2.51	.63
Problem-focused coping	2.63	.71
Avoidance Coping	1.88	.49

Table 12, 13, and 14 represent the results of the comparison of coping strategies across various demographic variables. Additionally, tests of statistical significance were conducted to determine whether mean variances across demographic groups were statistically significant.

Table 12 reports statistically significant differences between participants on emotion-focused coping and rank. Sergeants scored significantly higher on the use of emotion-focused coping in comparison to police officers of other rank ($p < 0.05$).

Table 12: Emotion-focused coping and demographic variables

	Means	Std Dev	N	F	P	
GENDER				.425	.275	There are no statistically significant differences between participants based on gender
Female	2.61	.55	26			
Male	2.55	.60	78			
ETHNICITY				.300	.825	There are no statistically significant differences between participants based on ethnicity.
Black	2.53	.46	23			
White	2.58	.43	14			
Coloured	2.56	.65	67			
MARITAL SATUS				1.31	.052	There are no statistically significant differences between participants based on marital status.
Married*	2.69	.53	58			
Single*	2.44	.58	46			
LANGUAGE				.121	.947	There are no statistically significant differences between participants based on language.
English	2.5	.67	36			
Afrikaans	2.6	.57	48			
IsiXhosa	2.52	.49	20			
EDUCATION				.386	.818	There are no statistically significant differences between participants based on level of education.
Grade 10/11	2.77	.47	2			
Matric	2.55	.58	73			
Post-matric dip.	2.63	.63	22			
University deg.	2.22	.19	3			
Post-grad deg.	2.55	.76	3			
RANK				2.99	.022	Statistically significant differences were found between participants who were ranked as sergeant in comparison to other ranks
Constable	2.56	.63	47			
Sergeant*	2.93	.36	18			
Inspector	2.44	.57	28			
Captain	2.20	.41	8			
Other	2.62	.71	3			

*Divorced, single, and widowed participants' scores were combined into the 'single' variable. Living together and married participants' scores were combined into the 'married' variable. This allowed for a more comprehensive analysis of demographic variables.

Table 13 reports no statistically significant differences for participants on avoidance coping across demographic variables.

Table 13: Avoidance coping and demographic variables

	Means	Std Dev	N	F	P	
GENDER				1.87	3.25	There are no statistically significant differences between participants based on gender
Female	1.90	.50	26			
Male	1.88	.49	78			
ETHNICITY				1.49	.221	There are no statistically significant differences between participants based on ethnicity.
Black	1.84	.377	23			
White	1.97	.48	14			
Coloured	1.86	.52	67			
MARITAL STATUS				2.43	.052	There are no statistically significant differences between participants based on marital status.
Married*	2.02	.52	58			
Single*	1.73	.433	46			
LANGUAGE				1.47	.351	There are no statistically significant differences between participants based on language.
English	1.78	.48	36			
Afrikaans	1.98	.52	48			
IsiXhosa	1.83	.39	20			
EDUCATION				1.57	.187	There are no statistically significant differences between participants based on level of education.
Grade 10/11	1.87	.76	2			
Matric	1.89	.47	73			
Post-matric dip.	1.97	.43	22			
University deg.	1.91	2.22	3			
Post-grad deg.	1.23	.16	3			
RANK				.448	.773	There are no statistically significant differences between participants based on rank.
Constable	1.89	.48	47			
Sergeant	1.48	.49	18			
Inspector	1.96	.54	28			
Captain	1.80	.45	8			
Other	1.88	.49	3			

*Divorced, single, and widowed participants' scores were combined into the 'single' variable. Living together and married participants' scores were combined into the 'married' variable. This allowed for a more comprehensive analysis of demographic variables.

Table 14 reports no statistically significant differences on problem-focused coping across the numerous demographic variables.

Table 14: Problem-focused coping and demographic variables

	Means	Std Dev	N	F	P	
GENDER				1.47	.237	There are no statistically significant differences between participants based on gender.
Female	2.76	.70	26			
Male	2.84	.74	78			
ETHNICITY				.976	.407	There are no statistically significant differences between participants based on ethnicity.
Black	2.74	.65	23			
White	2.88	.59	14			
Coloured	2.82	.78	67			
MARITAL STATUS				1.52	.200	There are no statistically significant differences between participants based on marital status.
Married*	2.96	.72	58			
Single*	2.77	.68	46			
LANGUAGE				2.09	.106	There are no statistically significant differences between participants based on language.
English	2.67	.83	36			
Afrikaans	2.97	.67	48			
IsiXhosa	2.80	.65	20			
EDUCATION				.227	.923	
Grade 10/11	2.92	.50	2			There are no statistically significant differences between participants based on level of education.
Matric	2.82	.72	73			
Post-matric dip.	2.81	.81	22			
University deg.	2.42	.49	3			
Post-grad deg.	2.90	.86	3			
RANK				2.25	.069	
Constable	2.83	.74	47			There are no statistically significant differences between participants based on rank.
Sergeant	3.19	.49	18			
Inspector	2.65	.83	28			
Captain	2.42	.53	8			
Other	3.04	.29	3			

*Divorced, single, and widowed participants' scores were combined into the 'single' variable. Living together and married participants' scores were combined into the 'married' variable. This allowed for a more comprehensive analysis of demographic variables.

4.4 Correlation

Hypothesis 3: There is a positive correlation between stress levels and avoidance coping strategies.

Table 15 represents the correlations between stressor intensity and frequency and coping variables. The results indicate no relationship between intensity and frequency scores and coping strategies. Furthermore, it demonstrates that no significant relationship exists between avoidance coping strategies and levels of distress. The results indicate significant relationships between avoidance coping, problem-focused and emotion focused coping ($p < 0.01$).

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Table 15: Correlation analysis

		Stressor Intensity	Stressor Frequency	Avoidance Coping	Emotion-focused Coping	Problem-focused Coping
Stressor Intensity	Pearson Correlation	1	.140	.173	.179	.037
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.157	.079	.069	.712
	N	104	104	104	104	104
Stressor Frequency	Pearson Correlation	.140	1	.066	.152	-.027
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.157	.	.509	.124	.784
	N	104	104	104	104	104
Avoidance Coping	Pearson Correlation	.173	.066	1	.458	.411**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.079	.509	.	.000	.000
	N	104	104	104	104	104
Emotion-Focused Coping	Pearson Correlation	.179	.152	.458**	1	.756**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.069	.124	.000	.	.000
	N	104	104	104	104	104
Problem-focused Coping	Pearson Correlation	.037	-.027	.411**	.756**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.712	.784	.000	.000	.
	N	104	104	104	104	104

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the results provided in chapter four. The enquiry aims is to assess SAPS officers' levels of stress and the coping strategies they utilise to address occupational demands.

Three hypotheses were generated to identify the specific objectives to be measured, which include:

1. The majority of police officers will score high on the Spielberger Police Stress Scale, suggesting high stress levels.

2. The majority of police officers will use avoidance coping strategies as indicated on the COPE Inventory.

3. There is a positive correlation between stress levels and avoidance coping strategies.

Occupational stress is the outcome of an imbalance between work demands and the individual's ability to cope. An exploration of the South African police context demonstrates the distressing environment law enforcement personnel function within. The present study aimed to classify occupational stressors by perceived intensity and frequency thereby generating data on the impact of stressors and the incidence at which these occur (Vagg & Spielberger, 1998). The data reveals that the mean stressor intensity score is $\alpha = 57.75$. The score suggests that police officers perceive the typical occupational stressors encountered within their environment to be stressful and demanding. However, this result does not suggest that SAPS officers are experiencing

their work context or duties to be overwhelming or intolerable. A stressor consistently ranked as least intense by the sample was "working a second job" ($\alpha = 28.79$). This may suggest that the vast majority of police officers consider law enforcement to be their full-time and primary source of employment. The results confirm those established by local researcher Gulle et al. (1998) on a Western Cape sample ($\alpha = 22.44$).

The organisational propensity of the most intensely perceived stressors suggest a lack of support within the SAPS, a challenge resulting in considerable difficulties for personnel. Moreover, the organisation's critical shortage of human and fiscal resources limits police officers' ability to effectively combat crime in a transforming country (Pienaar & Rothmann, 2006; Artz & De Oliveira, 1998). The resource shortage is evident in terms of the unavailability of (adequate) equipment, which is often characterised by feelings of uncertainty and anxiety within the organisation (Pienaar & Rothmann, 2006).

Analysis of the relationship between demographic variables and occupational stress has largely been neglected, particularly within the law enforcement context (Kirkdaddy, Brown & Cooper, 1998). The results of the present study indicate that female police officers' ($\alpha = 64.53$) perceive occupational demands more intensely than their male ($\alpha == 55.48$) counterparts do. Statistical tests of significance revealed that this difference is statistically significant ($t=2.85$; $p<0.01$). Women's experience of gender bias, sexual harassment, and male domination within the SAPS may contribute considerably toward their experience (Morrison & Conradie, 2006; Kirkdaddy, Brown & Cooper, 1998). Indeed, Artz and De Oliveira (1998) observe that the police service was heavily condemned for ineffectively addressing issues of gender and race within the organisation.

Additional variables demonstrating statistically significant differences were ethnicity, language, and rank. In terms of ethnicity, coloured participants consistently reported lower levels of distress ($\alpha = 55.85$) compared to other ethnic groups. Statistical analysis revealed that a statistically significant difference existed between the group's mean score in comparison to other race groups ($f = 2.85$; $p<0.05$). Pienaar and Rothmann (2006) emphasise the role of ethnicity in levels of distress within law enforcement. They specify that black and coloured police officers generally experience stress less intensely and frequently in comparison to white and Indian police officers. Their findings are confirmed by the results of the present study which indicates that white participants reported higher levels of distress compared to both coloured and black participants. Pienaar and Rothmann (2006) suggest that the role of employment equity should not be underestimated in influencing the outcome of the results.
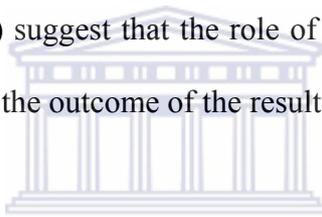
Participants ranked as constables ($\alpha = 53.17$) or captains ($\alpha = 54.57$) generated lower scores compared to those ranked as sergeants or inspectors. These differences were found to be statistically significant ($f = 2.92$; $p<0.05$). The finding that participants ranked as sergeants reported higher levels of distress within the sample is reflected in previous research. The proposed reasoning is that the rank of sergeant encompasses both front-line and managerial duties thereby attracting higher levels of occupational distress (Kirkdaddy et al., 1998). The lower levels of distress reported by constables is confirmed by Pienaar and Rothmann (2006) who report that constables are often not exposed to the demands and lack of support to the same magnitude or for a prolonged period as other ranks.

The frequency of stressful events ($\alpha = 4.34$) emphasises an organisational propensity. This is true in terms of both perceived stressor intensity and frequency (Pienaar &

Rothmann, 2006). The result differs from several international enquiries proposing inherent occupational demands to be more significant within the law enforcement context (Kohan & Mazmanian, 2003; Violanti & Aron, 1994, 1995). It suggests that the influence and role of the police organisation is perceived as more significant and challenging in South Africa. The mean score for stressor frequency ($\alpha = 4.34$) is below the standard score and suggests that while SAPS officers do encounter recurring stressors within the policing environment, the frequency of these events is not overwhelming or impossible to manage.

The degree of stress experienced by employees is dependent on (1) stress appraisal and (2) the effectiveness of the individual's coping strategies (Pienaar & Rothmann, 2003). The results reveal that participants generally do not use avoidance coping strategies to address stressful events, but instead use problem-focussed strategies. Indeed, avoidance coping strategies are least frequently used. These results vary from international enquiries that suggest avoidance coping strategies to be highly prevalent among the sample (Ortega, Brenner & Leather, 2006; Anderson, Litzenburger & Plecas, 2002). The reportedly high incidence of substance abuse, divorce, suicide rates, and the prevalence of psychological and physical disturbances suggest that employees infrequently address occupational demands (Anderson, Litzenburger & Plecas, 2002). The implementation of problem-focused strategies proposes that law enforcement personnel are knowledgeable of coping approaches, and utilise proactive methods in addressing job-related stressors. Hurrel (1995) and Beehr et al. (1995) achieved similar results and observed that police officers use problem-focused coping behaviours more frequently than other coping approaches. However, both researchers reject the assumption that problem-focused strategies consistently reduce individual strain (Beehr et al., 1995; Hurrel, 1995). Hurrel (1995)

proposes that emotion-focused strategies are more reliably associated with strain reduction. Beehr et al. (1995) assert that problem-focused behaviours do manipulate stressor impact; however, emotion-focused behaviours accomplish these results more effectively. They provide conflicting evidence on problem-focused strategies; however, its role within the present study suggests that it may moderate distress in the sample.

The analysis of demographic variables and coping strategies generated considerable variation. The influence of gender suggests that female police officers are more likely to engage in emotion-focused behaviour, as demonstrated by mean comparisons. These results could not be confirmed through significance testing. Straub (2002) confirms that female police officers are more likely to engage in emotion-focused coping, Ortega et al. (2006) and Nicholls et al. (2007) reject this assumption, while Cronqvist et al. (1997) suggest no difference among genders in relation to coping. The variability among researchers suggests that context may play a considerable role in facilitating coping choice. Florence (1998) suggests that the work context may complicate coping by limiting employees' responses to stress. The law enforcement environment discourages approaches characterised by emotion, particularly among male employees (Pienaar & Rothmann, 2003). Subsequently, male officers may limit emotion-focused approaches, while female employees experience less inhibition toward the approach.

The results do not indicate a significant correlation between levels of distress and avoidance coping strategies. The use of avoidance coping strategies would likely generate an increase in levels of distress and result in compromised mental health and well-being (Anshel, 2000). Indeed, the results suggest that police officers are inclined to utilise more favorable forms of coping when confronted with stressful situations. However, the

increased use of other forms of coping, does not imply lower levels of distress within the sample. The use of emotion-focused coping strategies may result in elevated levels of psychological distress, while utilising problem-focused strategies demonstrate reduced psychological distress (Violanti, 1992).

Conclusions regarding stated hypotheses

1. The majority of police officers achieved moderate intensity and frequency scores on the Spielberger Police Stress Survey; however, these results do not necessarily suggest that police officers are experiencing exuberantly high levels of stress.

2. The results suggest that police members use problem-focused strategies to address and manage occupational demands. The use of avoidance coping was surprisingly relatively limited, given the seemingly high prevalence of physical and psychological disorders within the police context.

3. No significant correlation could be determined between levels of stress and avoidance coping strategies.

The results of the present study demonstrate that the law enforcement profession within South Africa is moderately stressful and that its dominant stressors emphasise an organisational propensity. The results do not reveal whether police members experience more intense or frequent stress than other occupations. However, the potential adverse outcomes of severe stress within this group affect society in general more than stress from most other occupational groups (Webb & Smith, 1980). Police members who experience chronic stress and are unable to cope are a threat to themselves, their colleagues and organisation, and to the community at large. With this in mind, addressing

persistent stress within the organisation is imperative in ensuring a well-functioning

police service, and ultimately, a secure and healthy society.

Strengths of the Present Study

In researching stress within the police service, the study made use of both stress intensity

and frequency scores. This generates a more detailed understanding of the context in

which law enforcement officers are operating within. Additionally, six police stations

from around the Cape Town area were chosen to participate in the study, allowing for a

more diverse group of participants to be used in the sample.

Shortcomings of the research

A prominent limitation in investigating within the law enforcement context is the

potential for distrust between police officers and researchers. If negotiated incorrectly,

suspicions may influence the integrity of the data. The researcher aimed to reduce

potential distrust by informing participants of ethical issues associated with the research,

including anonymity and confidentiality. Participants were not required to provide

identifying information and participation was voluntary. Clarification of the nature and

purpose of the research occurred prior to participation. Additionally, the researcher

informed participants that the research was independent to the SAPS.

An additional limitation may be the length of the questionnaire package, which included

two instruments and a biographical component. The questionnaire package required that

participants dedicate at least 20 minutes to completing it, which may account for the

lowered response rate. The researcher attempted to shorten participation time by utilising

a shorter version of the COPE Inventory; however, the questionnaire length continued to require that participants devote considerable time to participating.

The subjectivity intrinsic to self-report measures serves as a significant challenge to occupational stress measures (Johnson, 2001). Moreover, these measures depend on participants' ability to recall events. The measuring instruments employed in the study are true reflections of these challenges, particularly the Spielberger Police Stress Survey that requires participants to recall the occurrence of events in a given period.

Recommendations for future research

Recommendations for future research include accessing a larger sample and including more police stations within the Cape Town area. Researchers should also ensure that underrepresented samples comprise a larger proportion of police officers sampled. This includes Indians, police officers speaking Zulu, and women. Future studies may also want to investigate alternative methods of investigating occupational stress, such as interviews and focus groups. A different data collection method may deliver new results or enable the researcher to investigate the phenomenon from a new angle. This may assist in increasing the low response rate received with survey research and allows researchers to gain a more detailed understanding of police stress within the South African context. Additionally, a considerable body of literature exists on 'in the field' police officers; however, little attention is paid to supervisory ranks. Future studies may wish to examine stress within this group.

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APPENDIX A: Briefing form

PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT
UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

My name is Robynn Paulsen, and I am a postgraduate student in the department of psychology, at the University of the Western Cape. My research interest is in the field of police stress and coping strategies used to manage these occupational stressors. The purpose of this letter is to give you an idea of the aim of the study and to request your participation.

The attached questionnaires measure your perception of your occupational demands encounter while performing your duties and the methods you utilise to cope with the stressors. Your participation in the study is voluntary and you will remain anonymous at all times. Your personal details do <u>not</u> need to be included in the study and I, as the researcher, will be the only person allowed to view these questionnaires. I will ensure that these questionnaires are kept in a secure location at all times to ensure your privacy. Your participation in the study will be greatly appreciated and the results, should you request it, will be made available to everyone interested.

The two attached questionnaires should take approximately 20 minutes to complete and your contribution and cooperation is immensely valued. Assistance will be made available for participants requesting such a service following his or her participation in the study.

Thanking you in advance

Robynn Paulsen

My email address, should you need to discuss anything resulting from the participation in the study or require further assistance, is robynn@webmail.co.za.

APPENDIX B: Demographic questionnaire

DEMOGRAHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

A. **Age:** _____years

B. **Gender:** 1_____Male   2_____Female

C. **Home Language**

1.____Engligh   2.____Afrikaans   3. _____Zulu

4.____Xhosa   5_____ (other)

D. **Marital Status**

1.____Single   2.____Married   3.____Widowed

4.____Divorced   5.____Living Together   6.____Separated

E. **Historical racial category**

1____African   2____"Coloured"   3____White

4____Indian   5____Other
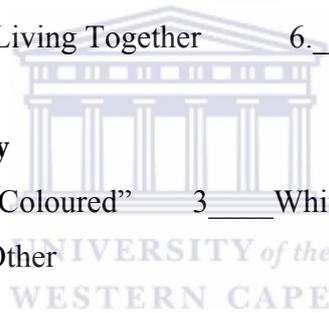
F. **Level of Education**

1____Have not completed high school   2____Matric

3____Post-matric diploma   4____University degree

5____Post-graduate degree

G. **Number of years in SAPS_____**

H. **Rank** _____

I. **Name of police station you are currently serving at _____**

J. **Number of years at this station_____**

APPENDIX C: Spielberger Police Stress Suvery

SPIELBERGER SCALE
Spielberger, Westbury, Grier, and Greenfield (1981)

> **Instructions:** Please rate how stressful each of the following events has been for you, on a scale from 0-100 (0 indicating no stress; 100 indicating extreme stress). Note that a number must be assigned to each applicable event – the larger the number, the more stressful event has been for you. For each event, please circle the number of times the event has occurred for you, in the last month as well as the past year (if the event has not occurred, please ignore the question).

Possible Stressful Event	Stress Rating 0-100	Past Month	Past Year
1. Assignment of disagreeable duties	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
2. Changing from day to night shift	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
3. Assignment to new or unfamiliar duties	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
4. Fellow officers not doing their job	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
5. Court leniency with criminals	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
6. Political pressure from within the dept	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
7. Political pressure from outside the dept	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
8. Possibility of serious injury on the job	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
9. Working a second job	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
10. Strained relationships with non-police friends	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
11. Exposure to death of civilians	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
12. Inadequate support by supervisor	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
13. Inadequate support by dept	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
14. Court appearance on day off or day following night shift	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
15. Assignment of incompatible partner	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
16. Delivering a death notice	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
17. Periods of inactivity and boredom	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
18. Dealing with family disputes and crisis situations	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
19. High speed chases	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
20. Difficulty getting along with supervisors	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
21. Responding to crime in progress	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
22. Experiencing negative public attitudes toward SAPS members	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
23. Public criticism of police	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
24. Disagreeable departmental regulations	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
25. Confrontations with aggressive crowds	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
26. Fellow member killed in the line of duty	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
27. Distorted or negative press accounts of SAPS	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
28. Making critical on the spot decisions	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
29. Ineffectiveness of the judicial system	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
30. Ineffectiveness of the correctional system	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
31. Personal insult from member of public	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+

32.	Insufficient manpower to adequately handle a job	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
33.	Lack of recognition for good work	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
34.	Excessive and inappropriate discipline	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
35.	Performing non-police tasks on the job	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
36.	Demands made by family for more time	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
37.	Promotion or praise	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
38.	Inadequate or poor quality equipment	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
39.	Assignment of increased responsibility	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
40.	Racial prejudices or conflicts	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
41.	Lack of participation on policy-making decisions	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
42.	Inadequate salary	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
43.	Accident in patrol car	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
44.	Physical attack on one's person	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
45.	Demands for high moral standards	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
46.	Situations requiring use of force	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
47.	Job conflicts (by-the-book versus by-the-situation	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
48.	Court decisions unduly restricting police	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
49.	Killing someone in the line of duty	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
50.	Making arrest while alone	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
51.	Public apathy toward police	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
52.	Competition for promotion	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
53.	Poor or inadequate supervision	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
54.	Exposure to battered or dead children	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
55.	Technicalities leading to case dismissal	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
56.	Frequent changes from boring to demanding activities	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
57.	Exposure to adults in pain	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
58.	Possibility of minor physical injury on the job	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
59.	Put-downs and mistreatment of SAPS Members in court	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+
60.	Excessive paperwork	_____	0 1 2 3-5 6-9 10+	0 1 2-5 6-10 11-24 25+

BRIEF COPE INVENTORY

Carver, Weintraub & Scheier (1997)

This questionnaire deals with the different types of coping strategies used by police officers when confronted with stressful situations. Different people cope with situations in different ways and I am interested in how you've attempted to cope with it. Each item in the questionnaire is a statement about a particular way of coping. I want to know to what extent you've been doing what the item states. Don't answer on the basis of whether it seems to be working or not-just whether or not you are doing it. Use the response choices given from 1-4. Make your answers as true for you as you can.

1 = I usually don't do this at all
2 = I usually do this a little bit
3 = I usually do this a medium amount
4 = I usually do this a lot

1. I turn to work or other activities to take my mind off things.	1	2	3	4
2. I've been concentrating my efforts on doing something about the situation I'm in.	1	2	3	4
3. I've been saying to myself "this isn't real"	1	2	3	4
4. I've been using alcohol or other drugs to make myself feel better	1	2	3	4
5. I've been getting emotional support from others	1	2	3	4
6. I've given up trying to deal with it	1	2	3	4
7. I've been taking action to try to make the situation better	1	2	3	4
8. I've been refusing to believe it has happened.	1	2	3	4
9. I've been saying things to let my unpleasant feelings escape	1	2	3	4
10. I've been getting help and advice from other people	1	2	3	4
11. I've been using alcohol and drugs to help me get through it	1	2	3	4
12. I've been trying to see it in a different light, to make it seem more positive	1	2	3	4
13. I've been criticizing myself	1	2	3	4
14. I've been trying to come up with a strategy about what to do	1	2	3	4
15. I've been getting comfort and understanding from someone	1	2	3	4
16. I've been giving up the attempt to cope	1	2	3	4
17. I've been looking for something good in	1	2	3	4

what is happening				
18. I've been making jokes about it.	1	2	3	4
19. I've been doing something to think about it less, such as going to the movies, watching TV, reading, daydreaming, sleeping, or shopping	1	2	3	4
20. I've been accepting the reality of the fact that it has happened.	1	2	3	4
21. I've been expressing my negative feelings	1	2	3	4
22. I've been trying to find comfort in my religion or spiritual beliefs.	1	2	3	4
23. I've been trying to get advice or help from other people about what to do.	1	2	3	4
24. I've been learning to live with it.	1	2	3	4
25. I've been thinking hard about what steps to take.	1	2	3	4
26. I've been blaming myself for things that happened.	1	2	3	4
27. I've been praying or meditating	1	2	3	4
28. I've been making fun of the situation	1	2	3	4