

CHAPTER FOUR: OVERVIEW OF TRAUMA LITERATURE

4.1 Introduction

This chapter reflects on the trauma literature in terms of the main aims of the current study, namely to explore how trauma experienced by members of the SAPS is constructed. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section engages with the international literature's construction of trauma and stress in relation to law enforcement and policing agencies¹. The discussion focuses on dynamics specific to policing such as ambivalent feelings, addiction to danger and excitement, and the subculture phenomena. Effects of police work on officers, such as alcohol abuse, suicide, marital problems and traumatic reactions is highlighted. Although these variables and dynamics associated with policing are not recognised by the psychodynamic school of thought alone, it is this viewpoint which is highlighted in the discourse. As was indicated in the previous chapter on the history of trauma, psychology's construction of post-traumatic stress disorder as a diagnostic category in the 1980s has influenced the way in which trauma has been viewed ever since. PTSD is accordingly included in the discussion with specific reference to the relevance (or lack thereof) of the diagnosis to the policing community.

The second section explores the way in which psychology in South Africa has constructed trauma. This is done by reviewing empirical studies published in the South African Journal of Psychology (SAJP) over the last three decades. A recent study on trauma as an organisational health problem in the South African Police Service follows the SAJP overview. The latter study is discussed separately because it is one of a kind in the SAPS and has specific relevance to the current research.

¹ At its most general level, the law enforcement population might include any person whose job is primarily concerned with the enforcement of criminal laws and statutes (e.g. police officers, judges, prosecutors). However, this discussion focuses on police departments.

4.2 Trauma and stress in law enforcement agencies

For years the only prerequisite for becoming a police officer was that the person was of a certain height and weight (Reese & Hodinko, 1990). This changed as departments became more aware of the detrimental effects of stress on the members and the liability they incurred by placing unsafe and stressed officers on the street (Kirschman, Scrivner, Ellison & Marcy, 1992). Although psychologists have assisted departments with recruitment and selection since the early 1900s, it has only been in the past ten to fifteen years that police psychologists also began attending to the issue of police stress and its treatment (Reese & Hodinko, 1990).

Law enforcement is an emotionally and physically dangerous job (Anderson, n.d.; Dhillon, 1990; Victor, 1986). In addition, various authors identify it as one of the most stressful occupations worldwide (Anshel, 2000; Lester & Gallagher, 1980; Lester & Mink, 1979; Stratton, 1984). Officers need to exhibit dominance, assertiveness, and at the same time, show restraint and empathy. They must be able to complete their tasks despite provocation, ambiguity, and the ever-present threat of psychological or physical injury (Shusman, Inwald & Knatz, 1987; Silva, 1990). In addition to experiencing job-related stressors such as dealing with unlawful, often dangerous human actions, there is abusive treatment in the workplace and a general lack of social support. Not surprisingly, increased rates of illness, post-traumatic stress, burnout, alcohol abuse and suicide, as well as decreased levels of job satisfaction and job performance are found in research on police members when compared to norms for the general population (Anshel, 2000; Brewer & Wilson, 1995; Nel, 1994; Rothmann & Agathagelou, 2000; Rothmann & Strijdom, 2002).

The literature on the psychological effects of trauma on law enforcement personnel is often based on the historically more extensive military literature. Police officers, like their military counterparts, are exposed to sadism, brutality, hostility and carnage either as a participant, victim or witness (Kopel, 1996). Although police officers are not involved in military combat, several authors (Anderson, n.d.; Kopel, 1996; Violanti, 1997) state that they are exposed to conditions similar to those which

soldiers at war have to face. A continual sense of danger brought about by an unknown enemy, witnessing violence and death, depersonalisation of emotion and lack of public support combine to exacerbate harmful psychological and social consequences.

Bloch (1969); Coleman, Butcher and Carson (1984); Rachman (1978); Solomon (1993) and Tuohy (1968) all point to sociocultural factors as playing an important role in determining an individual's adjustment to combat² situations:

- The more concretely and realistically war goals can be integrated into the values of the individual in terms of "his³ stake" in the war and the worth and importance of what he is doing, the greater their protective effect on him.
- The soldier who is unable to identify himself with or take pride in his group, lacks the feeling of "groupishness" which is a highly supportive factor in maintaining stress tolerance.
- Esprit de corps or morale of the group as a whole also plays an important protective role. When the unit is demoralised or has a history of defeat and a high loss of personnel, the individual is likely to succumb more easily to anxiety and panic. This is especially true if soldiers also lack confidence in their leaders or in the importance of immediate combat objectives.

The police officer is expected to be combat-ready at all times while remaining "normal" and socially adaptive when away from the job (Williams, 1987). The psychological toll for many is great, unexpected, and poorly understood. An important difference between military combat and law enforcement is the intensity and frequency of exposure to trauma. The exposure of police officers to trauma, while generally not as intense as combat, usually occurs for a much longer period of time. The researcher was unable to trace studies on the effects of repeated exposure to trauma of police

² Combat is used in the broader sense to include situations of policing .

³ The literature on law enforcement agencies focuses almost exclusively on male persons. The bias towards males in this chapter is acknowledged as such and is considered reflective of the state of affairs.

officers for long periods of time (as much as thirty or forty years).

Another difference between a war situation and the everyday job of policing is found in the identity of the enemy. In a war situation one normally knows who, and often where, the enemy is. In many situations of policing the danger is not obvious and the officer does not know who is going to attack or where the attack is going to come from. This is often the case, for example, in domestic violence incidents where the police officer is sometimes attacked by the victim acting in defence of the perpetrator. In South Africa most police officers are murdered while off duty, presumably to rob them of their firearms. (According to Mr Charles Nqakula, Minister of Safety and Security, 1570 police officers were murdered between 1995 and 2003 (Azzakani, 2004)). One might argue that the dangers associated with policing may not be that apparent to an officer whilst off duty, which strengthens the point that the source of danger is often not obvious.

Besides the warlike nature of policing, Kroes (1985) identifies job stress as the paramount problem facing police officers today. Job stress may be defined as the occupational pressures or burdens which adversely affect workers (Kroes, 1985). Klobell (1995) defines stress as “a condition that arises when a person experiences a demand that exceeds his or her real or perceived abilities to successfully cope with the demand, resulting in disturbance to his or her physiological or psychological equilibrium” (p.31). In law enforcement, stress often assumes other meanings. For instance, McGrath’s (1992) definition of police stress is a perceived imbalance between what is required of officers and what they are capable of giving, under conditions where failure may have dire consequences. Two important aspects of this definition are the *perceived or subjective element* attached to stress, as well as the *critical or dangerous consequences* associated with failure (Bull, Bustin, Evans & Gahagan, 1983).

A study conducted by Kroes, Margolies and Hurrell (in Kroes, 1985) on job stress associated with policing indicated two principal sources of stress. These are firstly, threats to the officer’s self-image and professional status from the courts, the police

department and the public, and secondly, the officer's isolation from the rest of the community. Some job stressors are common to many other occupations, such as administrative pressures, red tape, having no say in a matter, lack of support for actions taken, job conflict, holding down a second job, inactivity, job overload, shift work, inadequate resources, inequities in pay or job status, organisational territoriality and taking responsibility for people. Then there are stressors unique to policing, such as struggles with courts and the judicial system, a negative public image, racial situations, dangerous situations, injuries, lack of promotion, self-doubts and fear. According to Kroes (1985) even the stressors unique to policing "are not inherent in the nature of police work and can be alleviated" (p.x). He believes many of the stressors that an individual policeman faces can best be dealt with on an organisational level. This factor might contribute to the helplessness that individual members experience, as only the organisation has the ability to alleviate these stressors.

According to Anderson (Trauma response, n.d.), the unpredictability of the job of policing is an added stressor. This means that stress hormones need to remain elevated at some level, a condition referred to by Selye (1976) as the General Adaptation Syndrome. This author states that one of the main differences between the stress experienced by law enforcement personnel and that of occupations such as firefighters and paramedics is the public's response to these groups. Research done by Anderson (Trauma response, n.d.) and Davidson and Veno (1980) found the public mind set to be more negative towards the police. One of the primary goals of law enforcement organisations is to serve the public. Despite this objective, the relationship between law enforcement departments and members of the community is often characterised by tension, suspicion, and animosity (Denyer, Callender & Thompson, 1975; Greene, 1989).

Shift work and midnight duties, which lead to increased health problems and accident-promoting fatigue (Chandler, 1990), are common to professions besides policing, although unpredictability and violence make police work unique. Anderson (n.d.) names *police administration* as the most significant stressor cited by officers which sometimes constitutes the "second wound". She further mentions mixed messages

from police administration, public scrutiny, media misrepresentation of events, the revolving-door justice system and the significant stress associated with the use of deadly force as stressors uniquely associated with police work. The day-to-day exposure to murders, assaults, rapes, child abuse, domestic violence and “man’s inhumanity to man” intensifies this stress-related burden. This view of policing as a highly stressful occupation is echoed by other researchers such as Brown, Cooper and Kircaldy (1996).

Chandler (1990) cites various studies which question the hypothesis that law enforcement involves greater stress than other occupations (supported by Lester & Gallagher, 1980; Malloy & Mays, 1984) and agrees there is little pure empirical research on law enforcement stress. However this author predicts that data will eventually be discovered to support a higher incidence of psychological stress symptoms in law enforcement personnel compared to the general norm. Bonifacio (1991), writing from a psychodynamic viewpoint, criticises attempts which aspire to categorise police stress for not directly addressing officers’ *ambivalence* toward those aspects of the work that cause them stress, or for not taking into account the capacity of the work to make officers feel powerless or omnipotent. According to him, any attempt to understand stress in police officers that does not take into account the intense feelings of hate and pleasure caused by the job cannot claim to account for the phenomenon. He agrees that the organisation and management styles are sources of stress for police officers. Bonifacio further concedes that the criminal justice system, the public, racial hostility and crises contribute to police stress. However ultimately stress is an emotional experience, “and the policeman’s emotional experience of the work will have a great deal to say about its stressing qualities” (Bonifacio, 1991, p.128). The psychodynamic view on police stress includes the police officer’s emotional experience of the job of policing. These emotional factors are not readily identifiable or measurable through research. More importantly, unlike the other stressors, it is difficult to alleviate these stressors and impossible to prevent them (Bonifacio, 1991). The idea that police stress is the result of unconscious conflicts, motivation and anxiety is not a popular view among the police community, for it hints at pathology and instability among police members. Jacobi (1975) believes that

“emotionality and emotional disturbance are anathema in the police culture” (p.93) which possibly explains why police officers and organisations are particularly reluctant participants in the psychological research process (Brewer & Wilson, 1995).

Implied in the topic of police stress, trauma and the negative impact of these on officers are the possibilities of the treatment thereof. The literature indicates that reactive psychological interventions in law enforcement communities are hampered by various factors. Police officers have traditionally avoided seeking therapy or help (Fay, n.d). Officers are by nature suspicious of psychological professionals who are often seen by them as the enemy (Benner, 1982). Officers have a reputation of not easily trusting people (Silva, 1990) and trauma exacerbates an officer’s ability or desire to trust (McCunn & Pearlman, 1990). Police members are concerned that mental health professionals who work for a police department will align themselves with the administrators who provide them with a job (Benner, 1982). Further, the issue of confidentiality is murky at best and varies from agency to agency (Super & Blau, 1997). Another possible explanation for officers’ reluctance to seek help might be found in their belief that their role in society is paternal, in other words, that they must take care of others without expecting to be taken care of themselves (Beijen, 1995).

Violanti (1997) mentions another factor relevant in treatment programmes, that of pathogenic models or ascribing a sick role to members. According to him, pathogenic models can politically legitimise an organisation’s efforts to deal with trauma among its members. He states that although many of the employee assistance programmes, which have been initiated to support officers exposed to stress and trauma in their working environment are worthwhile, “they sometimes serve as facades for organisations to demonstrate that they are ‘doing something’ about trauma”(Violanti, n.d., p.3). The organisation may fear liability issues, or may be pressured to fulfill contract demands by unions. According to Chandler (1990), training, like reorganisation, can create the illusion of progress while producing confusion, inefficiency and demoralisation: “When something goes wrong, a training programme can be established to ‘take the heat off’ but may not properly address the immediate

problem” (Chandler, 1990, p.195).

The next section focuses on dynamics and variables which are considered to be specific to policing, namely the “police personality”, ambivalent feelings, addiction to danger and excitement, and the subculture phenomena. These dynamics associated with policing are not recognised exclusively by the psychodynamic school of thought; however, this viewpoint is adopted in the discussion as it forms the theoretical foundation for the current research.

4.3 Dynamics and variables specific to policing

4.3.1 The “police personality” as variable

The predispositional personality approach to studying police officers suggests that officers are born and not made (Lefkowitz, 1977), while the occupational view maintains that officers’ personalities are produced by their experiences on the job (Wilson, 1968). Wilson and Braithwaite (1995) state that the ambiguity in research results to date prevents any conclusion as to the origin of the police personality. The specific traits linked to tenure within the police occupation include authoritarianism (Carlson & Sutton, 1975; Dalley, 1975; McNamara, 1967; Skolnick, 1966), dogmatism (Teasley & Wright, 1973), conservatism (Dalley, 1975; Teasley & Wright, 1973), and cynicism (Niederhoffer, 1967). Each of these traits has important implications for the manner in which a police officer will typically deal with situations.

Several studies have explored the locus of control of police officers and its relationship to their attitudes (Lester, 1987; Lester, Butler, Dally, Lewis & Swanton, 1982). Locus of control measures an individual’s generalised belief about the source of control of important life outcomes (Rotter, 1966). Individuals with an internal locus of control believe that they personally control what happens to them. On the other hand, individuals with an external locus of control believe what happens to them is largely a result of others’ actions, luck, or fate. The research on locus of control/attitude relationship clearly suggests that officers with an internal locus of

control express more positive attitudes (i.e. higher job satisfaction and stronger organisational commitment) levels than those with an external locus of control.

According to Bonifacio (1991) police officers have the opportunity to actualise their unconscious wishes through the reality of their job. For instance, they can fulfill the expectations of their ego ideal by becoming a policeman. Since the reactions of police officers to becoming the man (or woman) of their fantasies varies according to the unique makeup of each person, the personality changes caused by these reactions will also be highly individualised rather than universal: “There must be changes in a man’s personality caused by police work, but the nature and extent of the changes are going to depend on each man’s psychological makeup” (Bonifacio, 1991, p.149).

4.3.2 Ambivalent feelings as variable in policing

In order to gain insight into the stress suffered by police officers, it is important to understand the impact of ambivalent feelings directed at policemen from the public and the organisation on the one hand, and ambivalent feelings experienced by the policemen themselves on the other hand. The psychodynamic view is that stress in police officers (and everyone else for that matter) is a byproduct of conflicts (Freud, 1920/1955b). When a person has mixed feelings, particularly opposing ones, they struggle for dominance. This conflict is perceived unconsciously and sometimes consciously as anxiety.

Public recognition and admiration are as important to the police officer as they are to everyone else, perhaps even more so: “The police officer really does want the public to love him because he views the citizenry as an important source of personal gratification” (Bonifacio, 1991, p.44). People who choose police work as a career do so in part because being an officer satisfies their vocational needs and their personal need to be recognised as valuable and meaningful (Preiss & Ehrlich, 1966; Symonds, 1972). Van Maanen’s (1977) field study found that recruits chose police work because they saw it as meaningful. He found meaningful work to be a more important motivation than job security or money. When policemen speak of being of assistance

to others, they mean using their power and strength to help the powerless and the weak (Bonifacio, 1991). In this context the desire to help others is actually the byproduct of the wish to be identified by the individuals themselves and others as brave, powerful and virtuous. The public's feelings toward the police officer may thus constitute a source of pleasurable satisfaction or severe stress.

The public's feelings toward the police are ambivalent, and is reflected in the media portrayal of police officers as either an omnipotent, benevolent parent or an incompetent, malevolent one. Since police officers have the legal power to regulate and "punish" the behaviour of civilians, civilians will of necessity feel powerless in comparison. This unequal relationship recapitulates civilians' childhood relationship with their parents with all the unconscious fantasies attached to it (Klein, 1946; Guntrip, 1968; Fairbairn, 1941/1952). This view on the nature of police-citizen interactions is consistent with theories in social psychology that relate conflict between groups to differential power (Apfelbaum, 1979).

The public's ambivalence creates an considerable amount of stress for police officers who must deal with the citizen's reaction to their unconscious image of the officer as a good or bad parent. A study by Homant, Kennedy and Fleming (1984) quantifies the victim's view of the police officer as malevolent rather than incompetent. The important factor in this study is that victims viewed police not as helpless but as bad. The inability of the police to protect them caused them to regard police not as impotent, but rather cruel. Bonifacio (1991) believes that this perception is due to the primary ambivalence all citizens feel toward police. "Police are admired as omnipotent protective parents until they fail; then they become cruel, punitive parents" (Bonifacio, 1991, p.29). Merbaum (1977) found that an unaccepting social environment can increase a soldier's vulnerability to post-traumatic stress. Thus, the higher the levels of perceived hostility from the community, the higher the police officer's vulnerability to trauma-related conditions.

According to Anderson (n.d.), officers are powerless in many situations and to acknowledge this is painful. Like the victim, police officers rely on defence

mechanisms, such as denial and dissociation to prevent them from feeling overwhelmed by powerlessness. Police officers not only try to deny their emotions, they also present themselves as tough and powerful, in a real sense superior to the civilian victim or violator with whom they deal. The “tough cop” persona (Skolnick, 1966) enables them to project any feelings of helplessness and vulnerability onto the victim and to maintain their authority over the violator. Besides enabling officers to project their feeling of helplessness, being tough is mandated by their peers who tell them in no uncertain terms that only toughness and emotional detachment are acceptable (Skolnick, 1966). This persona often “becomes” who they are and besides the obvious toll on their internal world and relationships, they are perceived by the civilian victim as being indifferent or hostile (Bonifacio, 1991). This in turn sets the vicious circle in motion.

Helplessness is one of the most frightening and painful feelings anyone can have, but for police officers it is even more distressing since they see themselves as being powerful and therefore immune from feeling helpless (Bonifacio, 1991). They cannot permit themselves to feel helpless if they are to continue believing that they can handle anything in the street that comes their way. Consequently officers must avoid the anxiety caused by empathic emotional reactions and feelings of helplessness by removing these feelings from their conscious mind. They do this by using the defence mechanism of numbing (Kroes, 1976) and consciously assume an emotionally detached position in dealing with situations. According to Bonifacio (1991), police officers’ special status and power in the streets are very real and thus their grandiosity is not a purely intrapsychic state because their external environment continually validates their self-concept of being superior. “The concrete validation of the policeman’s grandiosity in the street can only be described as ultra-seductive” (Bonifacio, 1991, p.122).

Another important source of recognition and admiration is the organisation. Promotion, commendations and higher salaries are emotionally important since they symbolise the department’s approval of officers by rewarding them for being “special” (Bonifacio, 1991). However, an unexpected source of ambivalence toward police

officers comes from the police department itself.

Police officers constantly receive mixed messages from the department that they find perplexing and difficult to content with. On the one hand, they are continually reminded that they are part of the cream of the crop of applicants, that they are expected to perform their duties with utmost professional skill and that the rigorous training they undertook has prepared them to handle any difficulty. On the other hand, they are told not to question orders, that they cannot think for themselves and that they need close supervision to keep them from messing things up. The policeman's unconscious reaction to this "double bind" is identical to anyone who finds themselves in a trap: anxiety. In psychological language a no-win dilemma is called a double bind (Bateson, 1960). As Kirshman (1986) puts it:

The individual officer is caught in a bind. He/she literally has the worst of both worlds. He/she is both powerful and powerless, possessing ultimate authority on the street and minimal authority within the organisation. The inherent risk of initiating discretionary street activity, therefore, leaves the officer vulnerable to criticism and discipline from administration, middle management and the public (p.457).

People become anxious when they feel helpless in the face of a threat. A typical response to anxiety created by a double bind is emotional withdrawal. According to Bonifacio (1991), police officers' stress represents their feelings of distress in trying to cope with anxiety.

Using a questionnaire based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Lefkowitz (1973) surveyed the needs of police officers and found that police placed greatest importance on self-actualisation and security. The data suggest that police officers are concerned with achieving all their potential and attaining self-reliance, while simultaneously being concerned with protecting themselves from physical and financial danger. Police work presents a large number of possibilities for making mistakes, and an officer is bound

to make a wrong decision from time to time (Muir, 1977). Any mistake an officer makes is enough for the department to react with hostility and punishment for failing to be perfect. Conversely, anything that is done well is regarded as unexceptional: the officer is expected to do everything well (Bonifacio, 1991). The realisation that the department does not regard them as an individual with particular personal attributes, but as virtually identical to all other officers at their rank, creates stress for officers because this distorts their identity (Bonifacio, 1991).

The police officer is likely to have ambivalent feeling toward the job of policing. The job's potential for fulfilling the ego ideal's expectations is extremely seductive. However, the nearly universal experience of policemen is the staggering amount of misery and degradation that run rampant in the street, and the lack of real power they have to do anything about it. For many situations that police encounter there is no frame of reference, and this lack leads them to lose their equilibrium (Davidson, 1979). The feeling of uselessness and the sense of being immersed in meaningless suffering is clearly a psychically painful experience, particularly when officers unconsciously see the job as a vehicle to satisfy the demands of their ego ideal. In psychodynamic terms, officers' feelings of powerlessness and of being trapped in meaningless suffering are terrible blows because they constitute their failure to live up to the expectations of their ego ideal.

4.3.3 The dynamics of addiction to danger and excitement in policing

“You have never lived until you have almost died, for those who fight for it, life has a special flavour the protected will never know” - Cigra - SAPS Special Task Force Motto (Servamus, August 2003,p.7)

Addiction to highly stimulating and dangerous encounters has been explored by several authors (e.g. Kolb, 1984; Solursh, 1989; Van der Kolk, 1987) and policing is generally associated with exciting and dangerous situations. As is common with addiction the “highs” are frequently followed by a “downer” mood which borders on numbing (Kolb, 1984). Van der Kolk (1987) discusses an addiction to traumatic re-

exposure and theorises that an endogenous opiate release could account for the calm upon re-exposure to stress that is reported by many traumatised persons. Van der Kolk (1989) states that increased physiological arousal of traumatised persons decreases their ability to assess the nature of current challenges, and interferes with the resolution of trauma. Such persons have difficulty in making calm and rational decisions and tend to rely on instant action rather than thought. Kolb (1993) hypothesises that arousal of intense emotional response to traumatic events leads to hypersensitivity and impaired potential for habituation and relearning.

The psychodynamic explanation for a policeman's love for the job is the ability of the work to gratify powerful wishes and fantasies which are incredibly potent and part of the addictive quality of policing. Violanti (1997) mentions that the intensity and frequency of exposure to trauma by police officials increase the probability of addiction to the work and heighten the residual effects of trauma. He states that trauma addiction may be a result of physiological and psychological processes that increase the need for exciting or dangerous activities. The residual impact of trauma may be the result of separating from the police service, diminishing stimulation from police activities, and loss of social support from a cohesive police culture.

Violanti (1997) says it is necessary to consider the wider implications of policing experiences, including the risk of becoming addicted to traumatic incidents and carrying the effects of work experiences beyond the point of separation from police work. He mentions that police officers spend much of their careers preparing for the "worst possible case scenario" and as a result may become occupationally and personally socialised into approaching situations with considerable suspicion. This defensive stance towards life activities can become an obsession and a liability for officers (Gilmartin, 1986; Skolnick, 1966; Williams, 1987). Bruner (1957) mentions an example of this "perceptual readiness" of police as being the tendency to see violence in the world around them. A consequence of learned defensiveness is that it is not uncommon to find a proportion of what Wilson (1980) refers to as "action junkies", that is, officers who are addicted to high risk behaviour. Police work is mostly routine, but it is also interspersed with acts of violence, excitement and trauma.

Some officers become addicted to this excitement and cannot function effectively without it.

Grigsby (1991) states that “combat rush” is a conditioned emotional response to trauma. While war is frightening and traumatic, combat may be characterised by periods of intense pleasurable stimulation. Violanti (1997) states that these experiences may be reinforcing, leading persons to seek out similar trauma. Solursh (1989) views the “rush” experienced by traumatised persons as a response to dullness and boredom in life. Police work is often described as utterly boring except for those very intense traumatic experiences. An interesting hypothesis by Gilmartin (1986) alleges that adrenaline addiction may be a result of learned behaviour. The author suggests that police work creates a learned perceptual set which causes officers to alter the manner in which they interact with the environment. Statements by officers that “cop work gets into the blood” are provided as evidence describing a physiological change that becomes inseparable from the police role. The interpretation of the environment as always dangerous may subsequently reprogramme the reticular activating system and set physiological consequences into motion. This is interpreted by the officer as a feeling of energisation, rapid thought patterns and a general speeding up of physical and cognitive reactions (Gilmartin, 1986).

Gilmartin (1986) adds that police work often leads officers to perceive even mundane activities not from a neutral physiological resting phase, but from a state of hypervigilance, scanning the environment for threats. Once such a hypervigilant perception has become a daily occurrence, officers alter their physiology daily without being exposed to any threatening events. Thus, officers may continuously be on a physiological “high” without stimulation. This is a pleasurable state to be in, full of energy and vitality. It is obvious that a continual state of this psychological high might lead to a state of burnout.

4.3.4 The subculture or group phenomena as variable in policing

Many authors speak of the existence of a police subculture, a closed mini-society

where officers maintain a sense of strong cohesion, a code of silence and secrecy, and dependence upon one another for survival (Neiderhoffer, 1967; Reiss & Bordua, 1967; Skolnick, 1972; Westley, 1970; Wilson 1973). According to Violanti (1997), the police subculture resembles military subgroups where teamwork is necessary for survival against the enemy. Coleman et al. (1984) describe identification with the combat unit as a highly supportive factor in maintaining stress tolerance and claim that the stronger the sense of group identification is, the less chance that the soldier will “crack up” in combat.

According to Van der Kolk (1987), identification with the peer group fosters a primitive narcissistic gratification and a sense of power. Johnston and Bachman (1972) found the military to foster self-esteem and a sense of efficacy in many young males, possibly by providing them with strong role models and group support. The army, particularly in combat, maximises the impact of peer group cohesion. Moses (1978) showed that in Israeli combat soldiers groups cohesion was largely a function of early life security, and its disruption was directly related to the development of PTSD. Fox (1974) also sees the loss of group cohesion as a major contributor to the development of PTSD.

In clinical observations of World War 2 combat soldiers, Lidz (1946) and Fairbairn (1952) compared those who developed chronic PTSD with those who did not. They both concluded that men with persistent symptoms has disrupted early family relationships and were prone to develop intensely dependent relationships with a single person. Both found that war neuroses developed after disruption of such a relationship. These buddy or “dyadic relationships have the capacity for magical thought to mitigate the danger of catastrophic anxiety through the creation of a lack of separateness between self and object” (Modell, 1968). Fox (1974) further found that soldiers with PTSD reacted to the death of a friend as a narcissistic injury rather than an object loss. In other words, they had experienced their friends as extension of themselves rather than as separate individuals.

Membership of the police “family” or fraternity is a highly gratifying emotional

experience in which officers see themselves as belonging to an exclusive group of men who are braver, smarter, stronger and more self-reliant than the civilian population they serve. “By virtue of his membership in this fraternity, the police officer feels he is someone very special” (Bonifacio, 1991, p.39). The police officer derives enormous gratification from his sense of belonging to his select fraternity and comes to define his self-worth in large measures from feeling accepted and supported by fellow officers. “Since his self-concept is intimately connected to his membership in the police fraternity, the worst emotional experience a cop can have is to be ostracized by brother officers” (Bonifacio, 1991, p.63). A serious stressor for police officers is hostility between brother officers and the feeling that the fraternity itself is a deception; “the cop feels that he cannot trust all of his fellow officers to come to his aid if he were in danger” (Bonifacio, 1991, p.67). When officers no longer feel part of this interpersonal web of protection it is as if they have lost an integral part of their personality (Tuohy, 1968; Violanti, 1992).

The powerful role of social support in ameliorating distress, particularly in groups with a strong, cohesive identity, is acknowledged (Tuohy, 1968; Violanti, 1997). Social interactions with supportive groups after a traumatic event is important to reduce psychological symptomatology (Green, 1993; Green, Wilson & Lindy, 1985). Lindy, Grace and Green (1981) first described this function as the “trauma membrane” effect, where a network of trusted, close persons serves to protect traumatised persons from further distress. Lin (1982, 1983) and Lin, Woelfel and Light (1985) found that strong social ties, which resulted from association with others of similar characteristics, lifestyles and attitudes were successful in ameliorating distress. According to Kazak (1991), this near-group social context is an important element in recovery from distress. Boman (1979) states that a cohesive social network helps to reduce the effects of trauma stress.

Ottenberg (1987) suggests that members of dissimilar groups who experience trauma do not feel a sense of connectedness and therefore do not cope well with the traumatic event. Young and Erickson (1988) found that victims who experience isolation from strong cultural ties had an increased vulnerability to traumatic stress disorder.

Separation and loss of support from the police group may serve to increase the already heightened physiological and psychological state associated with post-traumatic stress disorder (Violanti, 1997).

Other than the existence of a police subculture, much of the work in police organisations is done by small groups. According to O'Brien (1995), there are two kinds of relationships within groups, namely informal relationships that develop between people in a group (normally grounded in patterns of liking or attraction between people) and formal relationships that are generally codified and imposed on a group. These formal relationships include, for example, rules about assignment of persons to positions in terms of certain qualifications; authority relationships between positions (the chain of command); and allocation of tasks to position (O'Brien, 1995).

Group performance is determined by both member resources and the structure of the group (O'Brien, 1995). Obviously a group performs best when its members have the capacity to deal with the task required of them. Effective groups contain members with adequate levels of ability, motivation, and salient personality characteristics. However, the personal resources of group members may not be utilised if the group structure or organisation does not allow members to use their resources or capacities fully. An immediate reaction to lack of ability utilisation is job dissatisfaction (O'Brien, 1995). If dissatisfaction is prolonged the employee experiences stress or strain. This strain is the personal tension that arises from a feeling that one's behavior, actual and potential, is not under control. Persistent and high levels of strain eventually lead to employee believing that his or her behavior is largely determined by external factors and not by internal factors. An external locus of control has been shown to be a significant factor in determining both physical and mental health (Lefcourt, 1976).

Following the discussion of dynamics and variables specific to policing, the focus shifts to the effects of police work on police officers, namely, alcohol abuse, suicidal thought and suicide, marital problems and traumatic reactions. These effects of or reactions to police work are again discussed chiefly from the psychodynamic viewpoint.

4.4 The effects of police work on officers

As indicated in the previous sections of this chapter, the literature indicates policing to be a stressful and traumatising occupation. The question then arises: what are the effects of this on police officers? Lazarus and Folkman (1984) describe two major response strategies which people use to cope with stressful experiences: problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies. Problem-focused coping includes interpersonal efforts and actions that aim to modify or eliminate the source of the stress and so channel resources to solve the stress-inducing problem. Emotion-focused coping involves the attempt to reduce or manage the emotional distress associated with, or prompted by, the stressful situation. Problem-focused forms of coping are more likely to be used in situations where people believe that constructive actions are possible with respect to the stressor. Emotion-focused coping is generally more likely to be employed in situations where people believe that little can be done to alter the events of the situation and it is perceived to be uncontrollable (Scheier & Carver, 1987).

An issue that frequently emerges in discussions of coping is whether some coping strategies are more effective than others (Jarrett, Ramirez, Richards & Weinman, 1992). There is, unfortunately, no simple answer due to factors such as values, stage of experience and specific context. Traditionally, emotion-focused coping (particularly defence mechanisms such as denial) was viewed as pathological and maladaptive. Kopel (1996) argues that emotion-focused coping may be extremely useful in helping the person maintain a sense of well-being, integration or hope under conditions otherwise likely to encourage psychological maladjustment. But the majority of studies indicates that even if emotion-focused coping aids in maintaining emotional balance, the lack of use of problem-solving strategies appears to have negative implications for mental health (Billings & Moos, 1981; Mitchell, Cronkite & Moos, 1983; Solomon, Mikulincer & Flum, 1988). It follows that police officers who perceive their working environment as uncontrollable will generally most likely utilise emotion-focused coping with dire implications for their mental well-being.

One of the basic tenets of the psychodynamic model is that there is almost always more than one cause for someone's overt behaviour. Police officers' behavioural response to the emotional impact of the job is the product of the interaction of their personality's strengths and weaknesses as well as the actual influence of the emotional experience of being a police officer. This may explain why some officers' behavioural reactions are adaptive and others' are not. The emotional impact of police work is complex and powerful, sometimes more powerful than the officer's psychological defences to cope with it. When the ego's defence mechanisms fail to keep threatening impulses, thoughts and feelings in check, then the individual's behaviour changes in response to the potential intrusion of these unwanted thoughts and feelings into conscious awareness (Freud, 1920/1955b). These behaviour changes, or symptoms, are maladaptive in dealing with external reality to the point where they jeopardise the person's psychological and physical well-being.

4.4.1 Alcohol abuse as a consequence of policing

The abuse of alcohol among policemen is reported to be widespread (Dietrich & Smith, 1986; Kroes & Hurrell, 1975). The first police employee assistance programmes initiated in the 1950s in the United States of America, were Alcoholic Anonymous programmes (Reese, 1995). A reason given for the high degree of alcohol abuse among police officers is the influence of the police subculture to drink as a sign of one's masculinity (Babin, 1980; Kroes, 1976). While such peer pressure is obvious, placing the blame for alcohol abuse only on peer pressure is a rationalisation designed to relieve individuals from being aware of more distressing reasons for their reliance on alcohol, reasons such as painful or frightening thoughts and feelings (Bonifacio, 1991).

Another reason cited for alcohol abuse among police officers is the failure of psychological coping mechanisms to protect the officer from specific occupational stressors. The psychodynamic approach sees the police officer's reliance on alcohol as a response to the failure of coping devices such as cynicism to ward off anxiety and painful emotions (Bonifacio, 1991). In this respect alcohol acts as an anaesthetic to

kill emotional pain. Alcohol also acts as a sedative which depresses the nervous system and “calms the nerves”. The officer’s need to reduce his level of emotional excitement and vigilance against danger is critical since he does not want to take his mind set and emotional mobilisation home with him (Bonifacio, 1991). A third characteristic of alcohol is its ability to induce euphoria and it seems that for some policemen there is a need to continue the action after work with the use of liquor. As their reliance on alcohol to prolong pleasure grows, so does the potential for physical and psychological dependence.

4.4.2 Suicidal thought and suicide as a consequence of policing

Evidence worldwide indicates an increase in suicide among police members (Janik & Kravitz, 1994). Studies report that police officers have higher suicide rates compared to the suicide rates of the general population (Wagner & Brzeczek, 1983) and those of other professions (Helmkamp, 1996). According to McCafferty (1992), suicide of police members could largely be ascribed to stressors at work. Factors that may cause distress include authoritarian structure, lack of participation in decisionmaking, poor interpersonal relationships with supervisors, lack of administrative support, unfair discipline, unfair promotion and the nature of police work. Irregular working hours, poor working conditions, constant fear and trauma have also been found to make police members more susceptible to suicide (Maynard, Maynard, Mccubin & Shao, 1980; Rothmann & Strijdom, 2001). Further more, shift work, the dangers involved in police work and low salaries seem to be related to stress and suicidal tendencies (Kruger, 1996; Lott, 1995). Janik and Kravitz (1994) found that marital problems and job suspension were important contributing factors to a police officer’s decision to attempt suicide. Supportive families can buffer and diminish the occupational stresses that police officers experience (Graf, 1986; Rogers, 1976). Alcohol abuse accelerates police members’ isolation from both family and administrative relationships (Rothmann & Van Rensburg, 2002). Suicidal behaviour may be considered a domain of psychological disturbance and is associated with potentially poor mental and/or physical health outcomes.

The literature on suicide in the police is sparse. According to Bonifacio (1991), this is primarily because police departments wish to protect the image of their officers, and fellow officers wish to protect the reputation of their dead colleagues and the insurance benefits for their families. Friedman (1967) explains suicide among police officers as the displacement of aggression toward the self. However, this explanation is seen as too simplistic for such an over-determined act (Danto, 1978; Heiman, 1977). The effects of the job are more intricate than merely providing the license to use lethal force. It is possible that the feelings of helplessness and empathic pain brought on by the officers' job of "being in the street" may exacerbate feelings of inadequacy that were already present in their personality, causing overwhelming feelings of self-loathing. Thus suicide may be an attempt to cope with very strong feelings of helplessness and emotional pain (Farber, 1968). Hendlin (1963) lists seven unconscious motives for suicide, one of which is suicide as a demonstration of strength, courage and mastery. As they are overcome by witnessing misery and human degradation about which they can do nothing, and when cynicism and alcohol are unable to manage these feelings of self-hatred for feeling impotent, then suicide may become the next and last coping device to restore some semblance of self-esteem (Bonifacio, 1991).

For officers for whom the job of policing has been a source of great pleasure and who cannot let go of such intense pleasure, there might be no ethical and moral restraints on either their impulses or their behaviour. These officers might feel that they have gone over the emotional edge and cannot return to being the more moral but less satisfied men they were before they became policemen (Bonifacio, 1991). In psychodynamic terms, their id has overwhelmed their ego's capacity to maintain a balance between external reality, the id and the superego. The id is now too powerful for the ego to restrain and the superego must rely on the harshest means possible to regain its position. The only way this can be accomplished is by destroying all of the self. A third motive for suicide given by Hendlin (1963) is to retaliate for feeling abandoned by loved ones. In this case the suicidal individual seeks revenge by leaving loved ones as they feel they have left him: in pain. Friedman (1967) and Danto (1978) concluded that marital troubles were the precipitating factor in the majority of the

suicide cases they studied.

4.4.3 Marital problems as a consequence of policing

One function of the family unit is to provide social support to its members. The job of policing places heavy burdens on the family of the police officer. Traumatic experiences while on duty and the emotions that follow cause a genuine disruption of emotional attachment in police families (Scaturro & Hayman, 1992). Blank (1983) has observed that persons involved with trauma in their lives often devote considerable amounts of psychic energy to dealing with such traumas. This leaves the person devoid of energy to direct towards career and marriage. Police officers often reflect that they do not want to bring the “badness” of their work into their homes and as such “contaminate” their loved ones. This may lead to distance between marriage partners and a general lack of understanding and communication.

There is almost unanimous agreement in the literature that the job of policing imposes considerable stress on the family unit. Perhaps the most significant stress described in the literature is the change in the police officers’ self-disclosure and emotional involvement with their family (Blau, 1994; Hageman, 1978; Maynard & Maynard, 1980; Parker & Roth, 1973; Reiser, 1978). Two explanations are given for the officers becoming emotionally distant from their family. The first explanation sees their detachment as a defence against feeling pain and helplessness brought about by witnessing tragedy and human degradation in the street. The officers perpetuate their denial of feelings and take it home with them. According to Bonifacio (1991), these men “permit hostility to be their only emotion and malignant cynicism to be their only way of seeing in the world” (p.175). This obviously impinges on a healthy marital relationship.

The second explanation for officers becoming emotionally detached from their family is that the family cannot compete with the job in providing emotional gratification. The street (the job) is more exciting and more pleasurable than the mundane role of husband and father offered by the family. The behaviour that results from each of

these two explanations is, for all practical purposes, identical. Whether the policeman is recoiling from his failure to be the all-powerful, virtuous hero required by his ego-ideal or whether he is in love with the work because it gives him so much pleasure, his behaviour at home is aloof, indifferent, contemptuous and hostile.

In a study of stress in police families Maynard and Maynard (1982) found that over half of the wives of police officers interviewed indicated that their impression was that officers do not think that marriage and families are important, and nearly three-fourths of the wives said their husbands feel police work is more important than their marriage and families. What is interesting is that the officers saw themselves as being involved with their families. They did not perceive how important their work was to them, although it was very evident to their wives. Their lack of awareness of how much gratification they received from the job is most likely due to the defence mechanism of denial (Hageman, 1978). According to Bonifacio (1991), it is difficult for any man to feel consciously at ease with the feeling that he receives an intense gratification from his job that his family cannot ever provide him. “That rush, that feeling of being completely energized in preparing to deal with danger is sensually invigorating and addictive” (Bonifacio, 1991, p.77).

Yet, Chandler (1990) cautions against what he calls “myths on the subject of the effects of police work on families”(p.126) and says much of the information published on the subject has been anecdotal (e.g. James & Nelson, 1975; Webber, 1976). Chandler (1990) is concerned that this false belief may have a negative impact on police families.

4.4.4 The effect of traumatic experiences on police officers

Trauma can be defined psychodynamically as “the overwhelming of the ego’s capacity to manage the threats from the external environment, the id, or the superego” (Bonifacio, 1991, p.178). According to him, it is safe to assume that police officers who have witnessed or have been directly involved in tragedy have suffered psychological trauma and reacted by becoming emotionally numb, detached from

loved ones, and easily provoked to anger. Feelings of being overwhelmed by the enormity of a catastrophe may have a significant impact on the officer's self-esteem. The officer's feelings of omnipotence and invulnerability are shattered by these overwhelmingly painful experiences.

What Anderson (n.d.) calls the almost universal experience of policemen once they hit the street, namely, the staggering amount of misery and degradation that exists and the lack of real power to do anything about it, has been mentioned previously. These experiences of misery and horror, and the feeling of impotence to stop or prevent them, lead police officers to two conclusions. The first is that being a police officer has destroyed their faith in the dignity of the human race. Human beings are too corrupt, too cruel, too self-degrading to deserve care or protection (Kirkham, 1974). The second conclusion is that their efforts to bring some sense of justice and order to the street are meaningless (Eisenberg, 1975). The officers' feeling that they are stuck in a moral inversion has a profound impact on them (Bonifacio, 1991). This often further impacts on their isolation from the community.

As discussed in chapter three, since 1980 the experience of trauma has become almost synonymous with the psychological construct of post-traumatic stress disorder. The discussion of PTSD is included in the literature section since it has such an important impact on research that has been done on the diagnosis of traumatic stress. The diagnosis of PTSD became critical to trauma work and trauma literature both internationally as well as locally. As was mentioned earlier, a diagnosis of PTSD is the only way through which trauma is "quantified" and "acknowledged" within the SAPS. As post-traumatic stress disorder is an often political and controversial diagnosis (Van der Kolk, 1987; Young, 1995) this practice is critically engaged with and challenged within the framework of this dissertation.

4.4.4.1 Post-traumatic stress disorder as diagnostic category: A critical overview

*To give a name to a thing is as gratifying as giving a name to an island,
but it is also dangerous:
the danger consists in one's becoming convinced that all is taken care of
and that once named the phenomenon has also been explained
(Levi, 1992, p.126).*

The core issue of post-traumatic stress disorder is the inability to integrate the reality of particular experiences and the resulting repetitive replaying of the trauma in images, behaviours, feelings, physiological states and interpersonal relationships. Since its first inclusion into the DSM-III, this psychiatric classification has been surrounded by controversy: “The DSM-III PTSD diagnosis was not a result of careful factor-analytic studies of the symptom picture of people suffering from ‘traumatic neuroses’, but a compilation of symptoms that were arrived at on the basis of literature searches, scrutiny of clinical records, and a thoughtful political process” (Van der Kolk, McFarlane & Weisaeth, 1996). Taylor (1998) states that PTSD is not the clear-cut diagnostic entity it was sometimes wished to be. Many studies have reported high rates of what is described as comorbidity. For example, Breslau, Davis, Andreski and Petersen (1991) reported that 80% of respondents showed indications of other disorders, including depression, anxiety states, conduct disorder, substance and alcohol abuse. The general population study of Kessler, Sonnega, Bromet and Hughes (1995) confirmed that PTSD occurs more often in those who have had a previous psychiatric disorder. Interpretation of these findings is complicated, for the diagnostic differentiation of these different conditions is not clear-cut (Taylor, 1998). Some of the symptoms of depression overlap with those of the PTSD syndrome, others with anxiety states. Taylor (1998) mentions that premorbid motivations clearly influence the rate of self-exposure to traumatic events and the vulnerability to PTSD.

PTSD is but one aspect of traumatisation and does not constitute the focus of this study, but because of its relevance in the realm of medical boarding in the SAPS it is

important to note that the literature indicates various difficulties with regard to diagnosing police officers with this disorder (Anderson, n.d.; Evans, 1987; Kroll, Habennicht & Mackenzie, 1989; Weiss, Marmar, Schlenger, Fairbank, Jordan, Hough & Kulka, 1992). The diagnostic criteria of post-traumatic stress disorder as described in DSM-IV are often lacking in the case of police officers' exposure to traumatic incidents. A police officer may witness, in one week, more trauma than most people see in a lifetime. Not only is it qualitatively different but it is also quantitatively different. The first DSM-IV criterion for post-traumatic stress disorder states that the person's response to the event must involve intense fear, helplessness or horror. Police officers are generally the first responders to a crime scene and have been trained to dissociate from or suppress their emotions in order to endure the scene. Theoretically, in most cases, police officers will not fulfill this first criterion. They are mostly trained to respond behaviorally and not emotionally. They have to take control and handle the scene: police officers usually do not have the option of displaying intense fear, helplessness or horror. According to Van der Kolk, McFarlane and Weisaeth (1996), dissociation at the moment of the trauma appears to be the single most important predictor for the establishment of chronic PTSD.

PTSD is classified as an anxiety disorder in the DSM-IV. A distinction between "normal" and "pathological" anxiety is often necessary for diagnostic purposes. Interestingly, Kaplan and Sadock (1991) note that "pathological anxiety is differentiated from normal anxiety by the belief of patients, their families, their friends and the clinician that pathological anxiety is, in fact, present"(p.389). This adds an element of *subjective, societal judgement* to the diagnosis of anxiety disorders. Anxiety tends to produce confusion and distortions of perception, not only of time and space, but of people and the meaning of events (Kaplan & Sadock, 1991). This fact further complicates the study and diagnosis of anxiety disorders.

Although the world is a violent place to live in, the potential threat of trauma on an individual level has to be denied or the anxiety might become overwhelming. Tuohy (1968) found that most soldiers, on their arrival in Vietnam, had a sense of invulnerability - that anyone but themselves was likely to get killed. In order to carry

on living from day-to-day, humans have to believe that they have a measure of control over their lives. When something happens to shatter that belief they are disillusioned and the trauma highlights the fact that one is vulnerable and actually has limited control over one's life. This may lead to intense feelings of helplessness, anxiety and aggression. When people feel that there is nothing to be done about these feelings, they individual feel more out of control and the spiral carries on until depression sets in. The result is a feeling of extreme helplessness and anxiety. Frankl (1959) suggests that feelings of vulnerability emerge because the possibility of dying results in an acute awareness of the limitations of human power in ensuring one's own safety and survival. One may thus debate the normality of "normal" anxiety versus the abnormality, or unreality, of "pathological" anxiety.

According to existential thought anxiety is not an affect amongst other affects such as pleasure or sadness (May, Angel & Ellenberger, 1958). It is rather an ontological characteristic of humans, rooted in their very existence as such. It is not a peripheral threat which people can choose to ignore, for example, or a reaction which may be classified beside other reactions. Rather it is always a threat to the foundation, the centre of one's existence. Anxiety is *the experience of the threat of imminent non-being* (May et al., 1958). In his classical contributions to the understanding of anxiety, Kurt Goldstein (in May et al., 1958) emphasised that anxiety is not something we "have" but something we "are". Anxiety is the subjective state of the individual's becoming aware that his or her existence can become destroyed, that people can lose themselves and their world, that they can become "nothing". This understanding of anxiety as ontological illuminates the difference between anxiety and fear. The distinction is not one of degree nor of the intensity of the experience. To a greater or lesser degree, anxiety overwhelms the person's awareness of existence, blots out the sense of time, dulls the memory of the past, and erases the future - which is perhaps the most compelling proof of the fact that it attacks the centre of one's being. Anxiety can be understood only as a threat to *Dasein* (being) (May et al., 1958).

Summerfield (1999) states that the discovery of trauma as an international humanitarian issue has sociocultural roots and calls post-traumatic stress disorder “the flagship of the medicalised trauma discourse”(p.1450). An editorial in the Journal of the American Medical Association (1995) notes that it was rare to find a psychiatric diagnosis that anyone liked to have, but that PTSD was one of them. Many researchers feel that the PTSD diagnosis does not, however, even begin to describe the complexity of how people react to overwhelming experiences (Van der Kolk, McFarlane & Weisaeth, 1996; Young, 1995). Thus the diagnosis of PTSD presents unique problems. Research by Van der Kolk (1987) suggests that many trauma victims who show a semblance of normal functioning are in fact suffering from profound constriction in their involvement with others and a reduced capacity to modulate feelings.

Young (1995) questions the truth or timelessness of the facts that are currently associated with PTSD and says these cannot be divorced from “the social, cognitive, and technological conditions through which researchers and clinicians come to know their facts and the meaning of facticity” (p.10). He further argues that the DSM-III created conditions for the emergence of a collective traumatic memory which is beyond biography and anecdote and continues by saying that the generally accepted picture of PTSD and the traumatic memory that underlies it is mistaken. He claims that the disorder is not timeless, nor does it possess an intrinsic unity, but that it is glued together by the practices, technologies and narratives by which it is diagnosed, studied, treated and represented, as well as by the various interests, institutions and moral arguments that mobilised these efforts and resources.

Although the criterion of an “unusual” traumatic event is excluded from the DSM-IV (APA, 1994) diagnosis of PTSD, the idea of severe trauma as unusual remains in contemporary psychiatric thinking. Young (1995) offers many arguments against the “truth” of post-traumatic stress disorder and raises questions about the diagnostic criteria. The traumatic event is defined as “outside the range of usual human experience” and “would be markedly distressing to almost anyone”. Young states that “almost anyone” is misleading and argues that Freud and Rivers (1920) make a similar

point when they contrasted “the psychological vicissitudes of civilian soldiers during World War I with the sang-froid of professional soldiers and mercenaries”(p.124). It is further argued that the meaning of “unusual” human experiences is contingent on culture and subgroups within a culture.

McFarlane and Van der Kolk (1996) state that the notion that post-traumatic stress disorder occurs as a normal response to an abnormal condition implies that people usually have control over their fate, which these authors call a “decidedly optimistic position”(McFarlane & Van der Kolk, 1996, p.26). According to Young (1995), PTSD is a disease of time in that the disease’s distinctive pathology is that the past (memory) relives itself in the present, in the form of intrusive images and thoughts and in the patient’s compulsion to replay old events. Without this temporal-cause relation (etiological event → symptoms), PTSD’s symptoms are indistinguishable from syndromes that belong to various other classifications:

This relation has practical implications also, since it is the basis on which post-traumatic stress disorder qualifies as a ‘service-connected’ disability within the Veterans Administration Medical System. A service-connected designation is a precondition for getting access to treatment and compensation (Young, 1995, p.7).

This obviously has fiscal and manpower implications for the Veterans Administration. Kaplan and Sadock (1991) mention that there might also be secondary gain for an individual diagnosed with PTSD, namely monetary compensation, increased attention or sympathy and the satisfaction of dependency needs. Okura (1975) found that post-traumatic syndrome may be complicated by the psychological effects of disability compensation or damage suits, which tend to prolong post-traumatic symptoms.

Critics of the PTSD classification have argued that in cases of delayed onset and chronic PTSD, time and causation usually run in the “wrong” direction, that is from the present to the past. According to Garland (1998), it is easy to see in the clinical picture arrived at in so called “chronic PTSD”, or more recently, “complex PTSD”,

what clinicians in other circumstances might call melancholia.

Although scientific research on post-traumatic stress disorder was largely based on veterans of the Vietnam War, neither the DSM-III, DSM-III-R or DSM-IV identifies war-related PTSD as a subtype of the PTSD classification. Most Vietnam War veterans have delayed-onset PTSD, meaning that the interval between the event and the symptoms may be measured in years. This might influence the research findings (and PTSD diagnostic criteria). More recently Young cites two studies with similar conclusions: McFarlane (1986) studied the psychological effects of a destructive bush fire on fire fighters in Australia, and Alexander and Wells (1991) studied police officers of Scotland who retrieved bodies from an oil rig which exploded in the North Sea. These studies are focused on rapid-onset PTSD where the interval between the identified event and the onset of symptoms is brief.

The results of these studies are similar. The essence of McFarlane's (1986) argument is that people exposed to traumatogenic events can be divided into three categories: *Category 1* consists of people whose responses are distressful rather than syndromal. Given the situations that they face, the experience of distress is normal and part of being human.

Category 2 consists of people whose responses are pathological but are not triggered directly by exposure to traumatogenic events. The effect of exposure was to trigger major depressive disorder and anxiety disorders, and it was these disorders that were responsible for the respondents' PTSD-like symptoms, notably their symptomatic re-experiences.

Category 3 consists of people whose responses coincide with the DSM-III-R description of PTSD, that is, where the event triggers the symptoms.

Young (1995) argues that McFarlane's second category includes two subcategories. *Category 2-A* consists of people whose depression and anxiety disorders are triggered by exposure to the identified events, and the feedback mechanism accounts for their emotional attachment to memories of the event. *Category 2-B* consists of cases of delayed-onset PTSD. These are people whose depression and anxiety disorders are

not triggered by the identified events. Rather, they are triggered (or exacerbated) by events and circumstances of a later period - in the case of veterans, by situations that evolved after they left the combat zone. This includes cases where patients remember experiencing no feelings of distress at the time of the presumably traumatogenic event.

According to Van der Kolk (1987), there exists a tendency to miss the diagnosis of delayed post-traumatic stress syndrome. As Van der Kolk (1987) puts it, most psychiatric illnesses constitute “a clinical kaleidoscope, with an aetiology comprised of numerous pathogenic influences whose interconnections will probably never be entirely understood” (p.186). Van der Kolk is not alone in this view; the diversity and variable character of PTSD manifestations has been emphasised throughout the literature.

Van der Kolk and Ducey (1989) and McFarlane, Weber and Clarke (1993) conclude that people who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder develop biased perception, so that they respond preferentially to trauma-related triggers at the expense of being able to attend to other perceptions. As a consequence, they have smaller repertoires of neutral or pleasurable internal and environmental sensations that could be restitutive and gratifying. This decreased attention to non-trauma-related stimuli adds to the centrality of the trauma.

To conclude, the words of Trimble (1985, p.13) are pertinent:

The aetiology and pathogenesis of post-traumatic stress disorder, in spite of its new suit of clothes, remains, as those of the king in Hans Christian Andersen’s famous story, invisible. ... Ideas in the literature reflect the zeitgeist of the communities in which they are written.

This chapter has so far focused on the international literature on trauma and policing. The following section looks at the way in which psychology in South Africa has constructed trauma. This will be done by examining empirical studies published in the South African Journal of Psychology (SAJP) over the last three decades. Although the

SAJP is an English language journal and sometimes criticised for not truly reflecting the state of South African psychology, this review presents a construction and is deemed meaningful.

4.5 South African psychology's construction of trauma over three decades (1970-2002)

The psychological construction of trauma in South Africa is discussed in the light of an overview of the trauma literature published in the South African Journal of Psychology (SAJP) from 1970 to 2002. Although the South African Journal of Psychology was launched in 1970 by the South African Psychological Association to reflect the diversity of issues in South African psychology, a perusal of the literature indicates a dearth of local research concerning trauma.

From 1970 to 1989 not a single article in the South African Journal of Psychology addressed the issue of trauma. Since it is inconceivable that trauma did not exist in South Africa during this period, one can but speculate about this omission in the light of the politics of the apartheid regime and what has been revealed at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. One possible explanation may be found in the huge political, social and economic divide between South Africa's people during that period. Seedat (1998) states that the deliberate and sometimes unwitting complicity of psychology with apartheid social formations has received limited attention in psycho-historical literature. Seedat did a content analysis of seven journals on South African psychology between 1948 and 1988 and concluded that publications were dominated by conventional topics such as psychometrics, research methodology, industrial and educational psychology. According to him, more recently developed subareas such as community psychology and the psychology of oppression received marginal attention.

The first paper on trauma was published by Perkel in 1990, and was entitled *Mediation of detention trauma via perceived locus of control*. The author aimed to determine post-detention sequelae and the moderating influence of perceived locus of

control in the context of political detention. Results indicated a positive correlation between internal locus of control and reduced post-stress consequences. Two years later, in her article entitled *Countertransference in trauma work in South Africa: For better or worse*, Fathima Moosa (1992) addressed the lack of available literature on the countertransference experiences of therapists engaged in trauma work in South Africa. In this paper the author considers some of the reasons for this omission and presents the results of interviews with 20 therapists engaged in working with individuals traumatised by political violence. In 1994, Vogelmann, Lewis and Segal (1994) published *Life after death row: post traumatic stress and the story of Philip Takedi*. Takedi is a former death row prisoner whose sentence was overturned. This article explores the long-term effects of being sentenced to death, incarcerated on death row and then released. Takedi's experience and responses are said to be illustrative of post-traumatic stress disorder. As the two articles referred to here show, trauma in South Africa in the 1990s was mostly associated with political violence.

In 2000, Nicholas and Coleridge criticised the use of a PTSD diagnosis in defence of criminal behaviour in a paper entitled *Expert witness testimony in the criminal trial of Eugene de Kock: A critique of the posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) defense*. The diagnosis of PTSD was presented as the core testimony in mitigation of sentence in the Eugene de Kock criminal trial. This paper presents the difficulties of diagnosing PTSD for forensic determination, especially in the light of the usually well-publicised symptoms of the disorder. In a 2001 paper, entitled *The relationship between sense of coherence and indicators of secondary traumatic stress in non-professional trauma counsellors* Karen Ortlepp and Merle Friedman addressed personality disposition in the dynamics of secondary traumatic stress in non-professional trauma counsellors. In this study personality disposition is operationalised as a form of global perceptual disposition, namely Antonovsky's Sense of Coherence. Sense of Coherence was found not to be a consistent moderator of the relationship between work-related experiences of the trauma counsellors and the indicators of secondary traumatic stress. Instead, Sense of Coherence emerged as having a statistically strong main effect on the indicators of secondary traumatic stress.

The paper by Eagle (2002) entitled *Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD): the malleable diagnosis?* raises questions about the rigour of psychiatric diagnosis with specific reference to the diagnostic category of PTSD. It is argued that because of the inclusion of the stressor criterion (verifiable exposure to an external event), PTSD is very much located in consensual reality. In addition, because of its application to victims in extreme situations, the diagnosis cannot help but engage with people who are at the receiving end of power abuse. Such characteristics shape PTSD as a somewhat uniquely socially located diagnostic category and bring specific challenges to bear in the employment of the diagnosis. The paper claims that PTSD is not only problematic in its location within a Western, medically-based system of classification, but it has also been drawn upon to serve explicitly political rather than purely clinical agendas. It is argued that the resilience of PTSD offers both problems and opportunities and that the integrity of the diagnosis may ultimately rest on moral as much as on clinical principles. In 2002, Willem Hoffmann published an epidemiological study called *The incidence of traumatic events and trauma-associated symptoms/experiences amongst tertiary students*. The aims of this study were to quantify the number of traumatic events experienced by Technikon Pretoria students in the preceding year and to record the types of trauma symptoms experienced as a result of these traumatic events.

The only paper published in the South African Journal of Psychology concerning the South African Police Service is an empirical survey done in the Western Cape on inherent and organisational stress in the SAPS (Gulle, Tredoux & Foster, 1998). Results show the South African sample to evidence a greater degree of stress than an USA sample. Results indicate that the way in which the police organisation operates in South Africa creates stress additional to the inherent pressure already existing as a result of the nature of police work. This finding indicates a potential area of intervention, and also shows that further research could be conducted profitably.

Editions of the South African Journal of Psychology have published some papers on life stressors (Tyson, 1981; Duckitt & Broll, 1982), work or occupational stressors (Barling & Janssens, 1984; Sparrius, 1992; Ngidi & Sibaya, 2002), and on violence

(Tyson & Turnbull, 1990; Schramm & Shuda, 1991; Turton, Straker & Moosa, 1991; Botha & Van Vuuren, 1993; Gibson, 1993; Duncan, 1996; Rudenberg, Jansen & Fridjhon, 1998; and Govender & Killian, 2001). Some of these articles refer indirectly to trauma (e.g. papers on violence), although the issue of trauma is not specifically addressed. The paucity of research material in the area of trauma over three decades in the South African Journal of Psychology is obvious.

The following study was not published in the South African Journal of Psychology but is included here because it is the most recent study on trauma conducted in the South African Police Service, and thus is relevant to this discussion.

4.5.1 SAPS construction of trauma as an organisational health problem: Recent studies

A recent study (Psychological Services & South African Institute for Traumatic Stress [SAITS], 2001) on the magnitude of trauma as an organisational health problem in the SAPS was conducted in Gauteng province by the Psychological Services (SAPS) with the assistance of the South African Institute for Traumatic Stress (SAITS) and South African and internationally renowned trauma experts. The study explored which incidents are experienced as traumatic by police officials in the SAPS. The study utilised numerous questionnaires as well as focus groups. The results listed 36 traumatic experiences in order of “seriousness”, starting with incidents that are “extremely difficult to cope with” to those that are “easiest to cope with”.

The first five incidents which are experienced as traumatic by police officers in the South African Police Service according to this study are:

1. Mistake causing serious injury or death to a fellow officer
2. Present when officer is killed intentionally
3. Mistake causing serious injury or death to bystander
4. Present when officer is killed accidentally
5. Involvement in case of a sexually assaulted child

This table makes for interesting reading. The high value placed on membership and the value of “groupishness” is obvious. The matter of intent is also perceived as important, in other words, whether something happens intentionally, accidentally or because of a mistake. The issue of responsibility and guilt plays an important role. Other than is normally believed or expected, the threat to a police officer’s own life features relatively low on the list of traumatic experiences (number 6). Following this result, a senior police officer suggested that participants tried to give the right answer, to make a good impression. This remark corresponds with Gottesman’s (1976) finding that police officers have elevated K-scores on the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), which indicates the subject is trying to fake “looking good”. Gottesman suggest that in faking good, police officers may be expressing their view of who they are rather than merely making a conscious attempt to create favourable impression. This finding links to the psychodynamic view that police officers realise their ego ideal through their job. Another possible explanation might be that the real threat to their own lives is denied on a cognitive level.

A further conclusion drawn from the abovementioned study is that detectives form the highest risk group for developing post-traumatic stress disorder. There are various possible reasons for this. One is the obvious difference between detectives and uniformed policemen, namely the visible lack of a uniform on the side of the detectives. One may speculate about the function of the uniform or the lack thereof. During a trauma workshop it was suggested that putting on one’s uniform might simulate putting on war paint, representing protection on an symbolic level. It has been mentioned earlier that the uniform becomes the salient characteristic that the public recognises and thus the community’s perception or reaction to the uniform becomes a variable connected to police traumatic stress reactions.

With regard to organisational stressors impacting on members’ stress levels, the following interesting findings emerged from this study: a very high percentage (73% - 82%) of members indicated that, compared with other jobs with similar pay and educational requirements, the public view police work as lower in status. Of the officers interviewed, 79% to 84% indicated that they are not paid enough for what

they do. A very low percentage (1% - 9%) felt they made an important contribution to society through their work. And only 10% to 18% of respondents could relate to the objectives of the SAPS. Discussing these findings in the light of aforementioned trauma literature it seems obvious that SAPS police officers do not feel valued, important or special in relation to the job of policing; they do not experience a sense of meaning in the work they perform and perceive the work to be meaningless. Finally, they are extremely vulnerable to traumatic stress reactions since this perception means that the organisation's objectives do not perform a supportive or protective function.

These conclusions concur with Rothmann and Van Rensburg's (2002) study on suicide ideation in the SAPS. The results of the study indicate that sense of coherence and generalised self-efficacy are related to suicide ideation of police members. Sense of coherence can be described as the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring and dynamic feeling of confidence that one's internal and external environments are predictable and that there is a high probability that things will work out as well as can be reasonably expected (Antonovsky, 1987, 1993). The definition of sense of coherence includes three dimensions that represent the concept, namely comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness (Antonovsky, 1987, 1993). Comprehensibility refers to the extent to which one perceives stimuli from the internal and external environment as information that is ordered, structured and consistent. The stimuli are perceived as comprehensible and make sense on a cognitive level. Manageability refers to the extent to which individuals experience events in life as situations that are endurable or manageable and that may even be seen as new challenges. Meaningfulness refers to the extent to which one feels that life is making sense on an emotional and not just a cognitive level. In light of all these findings and discussions the high suicide rate in the SAPS is understandable and is possibly even predictable.

The conclusion drawn by the SAPS study on the magnitude of trauma as an organisational health problem was that a high amount of work stress hinders officers' ability to deal effectively with trauma although work stress *per se* does not induce trauma. The study found that the amount of traumatic incidents to which members of

the SAPS are exposed and the trauma symptoms they experience are significantly greater than other police agencies. In the abovementioned areas, the nature of the work in the SAPS is more comparable to peace-keeping forces than to law enforcement agencies. These results are congruent with other findings. Barber (1994) reported that “to be a policeman in South Africa is to spend much of the time acting as a mortuary assistant, picking up mangled bodies ... bodies with their faces shot off by AK-47's ...” (p.2). Overexposure to violence by policemen both as crime fighters and increasingly as victims has led police psychologists to believe that police officers now bear the symptoms of high levels of psychological distress (Kopel, 1996).

4.6 Conclusion

Policing in general, and specifically in South Africa, is an extremely stressful and dangerous job with harmful psychological and social consequences. The important difference between the job stress associated with policing and other occupations is found in the difference in working conditions where failure may have dire consequences. Factors that play an important role in protecting the police officer from the psychologically harmful effects of policing include the worth and importance that officers can ascribe to the job that they do; the degree to which officers are able to identify with or take pride in the group; and, the *esprit de corps* or morale of the group as a whole. Most researchers recognise that *contextual factors* are important in determining the meaning of the traumatic event and in promoting or impeding recovery. It is important to note that the police organisation thus has the potential to function as a protective “trauma membrane” for police officers and so alleviate the harmful effects of exposure to trauma. The police organisation, on the other hand, also has the potential to aggravate the effects of traumatisation on its members.

The psychodynamic perspective considers the emotional impact of police work to be complex and powerful, sometimes more powerful than the officer’s psychological defences. This perspective considers important variables to include dynamics specific to policing such as ambivalent feelings, addiction to danger and excitement and the subculture phenomena. Again, the police organisation is perceived as contributing to

ambivalent feelings, mixed messages and double binds in officers (which *generate anxiety*), as well as having the potential to act as supportive buffer against destructive effects.

Trauma challenges previously held assumptions, beliefs and understandings about the world and oneself in the world, namely the belief in personal invulnerability, the view of oneself in a positive light, and the belief in a meaningful and orderly world. A PTSD diagnosis, which proves to be a political and controversial diagnosis, is the only way in which traumatisation is recognised within the SAPS. Yet the literature indicates various difficulties in diagnosing police officers with this disorder.

To conclude, the fact that police officers often use dissociation as a style of coping in traumatic incidents renders them highly susceptible to *chronic* PTSD. In addition, it is most likely that police officers are extremely liable to *delayed-onset* PTSD (Young's category 2-B), where the depression and anxiety disorders are not triggered by the identified events. Rather, they are triggered (or exacerbated) by events, circumstances and situations that evolved at a later stage. These circumstances often constitute a perceived lack of social support and a lack of meaning ascribed to the trauma. When one adds the following ingredients to the cauldron that comprises policing in South Africa, the concoction indeed becomes volatile: lack of security and stability (continuing transformation process); external locus of control; intense feelings of anxiety; feelings of being devalued and unappreciated; a lack of meaning in the job performed; a lack of support or recognition from the organisation; and a decaying in-group identity.

The next chapter focuses on methodological considerations and sketches the research process.